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JANUARY 2012

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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 design Labs Tokyo Japan

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WE ARE THE UK'S FASTEST GROWING AUDIO TITLE!!!

welcome

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The Christmas season means many fine things of course, but for me one highlight is *Hi-Fi World's* Awards issue arriving on the newsstands. Inside this magazine, you'll find the team dusting down our proverbial dinner jackets, popping champagne corks and going on the record about the best products to have come our way over the past twelve months...

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hi-fi world

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verdicts

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

the industry as a whole. Thinking back to the first Awards issue done under my editorship in 2004, and there were lots of SACD players and the odd turntable winning the gongs. Compared to this year's winners – which range from network music players and DACs, to turntables, arms and cartridges, and accessories – it was a pretty homogeneous bunch. I also think the overall quality of the winning products has risen too, as has the value for money offered. In these depressing days of economic austerity, if you've got the funds then any one of our Award Winners will put a wall-to-wall grin on your face.

The latest generation of *Hi-Fi World* Award winners show great engineering depth, with the engineers behind their designs now way past the stage of thinking that all passive components simply sound the same, or that designing things in a staid way is still good enough to pass muster. We have fewer mass market 'hi-fi marketing' companies now (ones doing unremarkable kit and selling it in a fancy way) and more true hi-fi manufacturers who first design and build their stuff in an innovative manner, then sell them. Competition is tougher, standards higher and the market smaller – but prices stay reasonable. Good news, then!

Now though, after eight and half years in the editor's chair, I am moving on to pastures new. It's been an amazing experience to produce *Hi-Fi World*, to meet so many enthusiastic readers, and to do battle with many of them in the letters section every month! I wish everyone involved with this magazine all the best for the future. So long, and thanks for all the... valve amps!

David Price, editor

testing (see 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.



ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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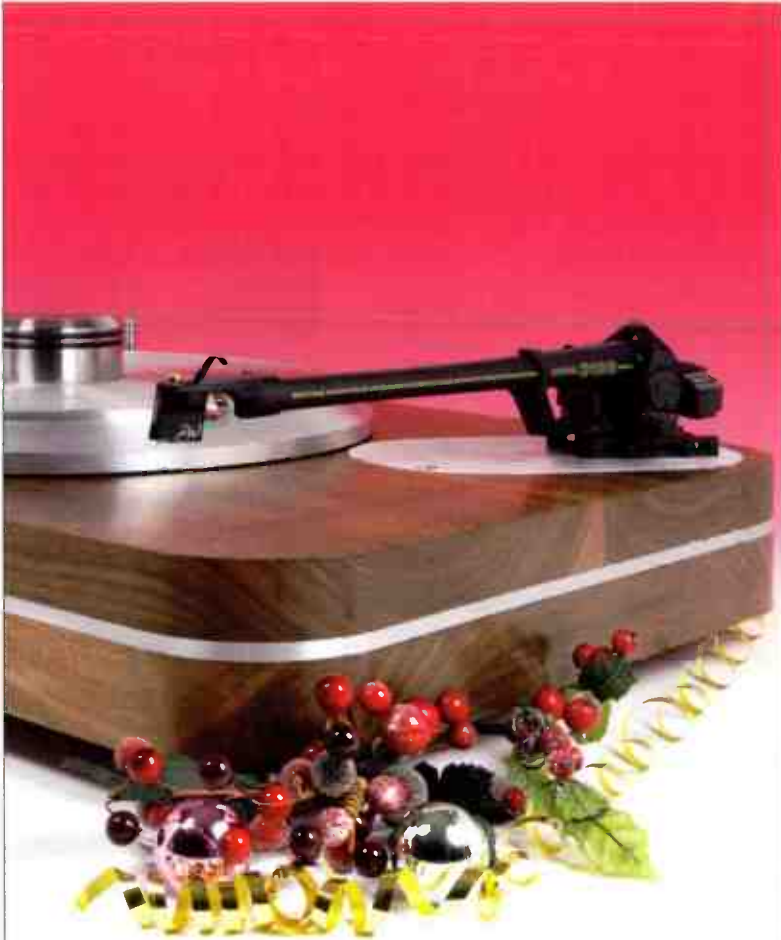
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QAT
AUDIO TECHNOLOGY



a worthy partner

WIN A PAIR OF TANNOY REVOLUTION SIGNATURE DC6T LOUDSPEAKERS WORTH £995 IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!



the November 2011 issue of *Hi-Fi World*...

"For a long time Tannoy has been one of the yardstick performers – it has long championed the use of wideband tweeter technologies and was also one of the prime movers in the shift to coincident drivers, which mimic the idea of a single point in space that radiates all audio frequencies.

By placing the tweeter at the focus

of the bass driver, this means firmer and more consistently focused stereo imagery. This Dual Concentric technology is a key component of the DC6T design, which appears to boast two medium size 150mm pulp cone drive units. But one of the units is indeed a 150mm passive ABR pulp cone bass driver with a rubber surround, pure and simple. The other is a compound unit, with a similar size bass driver diaphragm

and a similar surround, but which has a titanium dome tweeter mounted at its central focus, behind a central waveguide. In Tannoyspeak, this is the Tulip waveguide, a plastic moulding that's vaguely tulip shaped whose role is to control the directivity of the tweeter close to its crossover to help blend in with the bass section of the system. The carefully designed crossover network uses low loss, laminated core inductors and audiophile-grade polypropylene capacitors throughout. It measures 950x202x253mm and weighs 15kg.

Treble is clean, detailed and articulate. Female singing voice is handled particularly well; the slight sharpness and forcefulness adds some colour and variety to the sound, while the same applies to its reproduction of piano. The DC6T is a full-on loudspeaker with a warmth that is unusual for a speaker this size. Bass especially is muscular, with a hint almost of softness that may come as a surprise. This helps deliver a large scale, and relaxed performance, which worked well with Mozart piano concertos. The Tannoy also does a great job with full orchestral material. Overall it is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making. It is powerful and lucid. Tannoy's DC6T is an excellent loudspeaker, one that lives up to the promise on the page. It's a speaker that shows every sign of having been designed by someone who knows his musical onions."

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

**January 2012 Competition,
Hi-Fi World magazine,
Unit G4, Argo House,
The Park Business Centre,
Kilburn Park Road
London NW6 5LF.**

Here's your chance to win a pair of Tannoy's Revolution Signature DC6T floorstanding loudspeakers. This is what Alvin Gold said about them in

RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

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- 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

QUESTIONS

[1] What's a key component of the DC6T design?

- [a] Dual Control
- [b] Dual Concentric
- [c] Dual Coupling
- [d] Dual Capacitance

[2] What shape is the Tulip waveguide?

- [a] daisy
- [b] tulip
- [c] poppy
- [d] cabbage

[3] What grade of polypropylene capacitors are used?

- [a] military-
- [b] audiophile-
- [c] weapons-
- [d] hospital-

[4] Who concluded that the Tannoy is an excellent loudspeaker?

- [a] Richard White
- [b] Alvin Gold
- [c] Debi Silver
- [d] Peter Green

January Competition
Hi-Fi World Magazine
Unit G4 Argo House
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Kilburn Park Rd.
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entries will be accepted on a postcard only

**OCTOBER 2011 TEDDY PARDO TEDDY DAC WINNER:
Mr C. Johnson of Kendal, Cumbria**

news

PERSPEX-TUAL MOTION

Thorens has two new turntables, the TD 2015 and TD 2035. The design of both models is said to have been extensively revised to increase replay quality, the company states. The new TD 2015 uses a solid clear 25mm acrylic plinth, whereas the 33mm plinth of the TD 2035 uses three layers of acrylic that are bonded with a high-performance adhesive. The middle layer is made from crystal-clear acrylic, the upper and lower layers from coloured acrylic (available in red, blue, orange, white or black).

The motor control circuits have been redesigned with new components, and a new slow-start function slowly accelerates the platter to prevent belt-slip. The external motor housing has been redesigned from the ground up and features improved damping, which drastically reduces the effect of vibration and motor noise.

The fitted TP 92 tonearm tube is manufactured from cold-forged aluminium, with a laser vibrometer used to analyse tube resonances. The headshell is also made from aluminium and tightly coupled to the tube for increased stability. Overhang can be adjusted either by sliding the headshell into the desired position on the tube or by adjusting the entire tube in the bearing block. The tube can also be rotated on its axis in order to adjust azimuth. The shape of the headshell ensures that the pick-up cartridge's centre of gravity is always directly underneath the tonearm tube, thus preventing torsional vibrations. VTA can be easily adjusted by loosening the arm collar lock nut and raising or lowering the entire tonearm. The anti-skating force is provided by two ferrite magnets and can be increased or decreased with the help of an adjustment screw. For details, call +41 (0)61 813 03 36 or click on www.thorens.com.



Thorens TD2015



Thorens TD2035

ALPHA MAIL

Furutech's new entry-level line, called Alpha Design Labs, is said to offer "an attractive line-up of quality products with excellent price/performance ratios". The new Cruise Portable Headphone Amplifier is the latest in the line up. It connects direct to your computer via USB or line level analogue, and is said to offer "audiophile performance" from 12 to 600 ohm headphones. Inside it sports gold-plated circuitry on a high quality printed circuit board, outside is a beautifully finished lustrous carbon fibre body with mirror-polish non-magnetic stainless steel end panels. It runs on its internal rechargeable battery, or USB power, or the supplied AC power adapter, both of which recharge the battery, which gives up to a claimed eighty hours from a full charge. The unit measures 65x120x28mm and weighs 198g. Suggested retail price is £375. For more details, click on www.soundfoundations.co.uk.



HEDS UP

Here's an interesting way to get female friends into hi-fi – the Hed Kandi range of headphones, travel speakers and iPhone sleeves. They're an attractive first step into audio, coming in trendy colours with distinctive packaging. They range from the Kandies in-earphones sold in unique 'sweetie' packaging to the over-ear, superlight and hair-friendly Disco Heavens available in four eye catching colours! There's also a plethora of other over-ear designs, each with a distinct look and feel. The Ministry of Sound audio accessories range are available from Play, Amazon, HMV, Littlewoods, or click on www.hedkandi.com.



SPEAKERS R US!

Celebrating its fiftieth anniversary year, KEF has announced its new R Series range of loudspeakers, which seeks to make higher-end audiophile standards of sound reproduction more affordable, the company says. New Uni-Q driver arrays combine with new bass drivers and several other innovations to create a rich, spacious sound image of such accuracy that it approaches the benchmark standards of KEF's Reference Series, it's claimed.

Common to all speakers is a new Uni-Q MF/HF driver array with a braced magnesium/aluminium alloy cone and sturdy, decoupled, diecast aluminium chassis. At the centre of this is a vented tweeter and KEF's 'tangerine' waveguide to help disperse the higher frequencies evenly across a wider angle. The new bass driver is a combination of a massive vented magnet assembly and a large, lightweight aluminium voice coil driving a light, stiff and strong hybrid cone. The cabinets (which come in a choice of classic, polished Piano Black and satin real wood veneer finishes in Rosewood or Walnut) use constrained layer damping panels to prevent vibration. There are nine models including three floorstanders, two bookshelf speakers, two centre channels, dipole surrounds and a powerful 500 Watt subwoofer, and prices range from £600 per pair for the R100 two-way bookshelf to £2,750 for the R900 three way floorstander. For details, click on www.kef.com.



TABLE, TOP

The new Clearaudio Performance SE turntable improves upon its award-winning predecessor, says its maker, with a new chassis that's precision manufactured from High Density Fibreboard wrapped within an aluminium frame, and sandwiched between two layers of aluminium. This "fit-and-forget package" sports the latest Clearaudio Ceramic Magnetic Bearing, the shaft machined from an exclusive new ceramic alloy, allowing a finer polished surface than that previously obtainable in turntable bearings, Clearaudio says. The bearing avoids any point of load and so eliminates bearing friction, wear and noise, it's claimed. The separate motor is entirely isolated from the chassis, driving the precision-machined 40mm thick GS-PMMA acrylic platter via a Clearaudio 'silent belt'. This joint-less silicon based drive belt transfers significantly less noise into the platter than traditional rubber types. The deck is fitted with Clearaudio's Satisfy Carbon Directwire tonearm, which sports magnetic bias compensation, sapphire and ceramic bearings, carbon fibre arm tube and an unbroken run of Clearaudio's own DirectWire from the cartridge to phono plugs. Completing the package is Clearaudio's Maestro Wood cartridge, their top moving magnet design. Vital statistics are 420x330x130mm, and the price is £2,630 all in. For details, call +44 (0)1252 702705 or click on www.audioreference.co.uk.

MICRO MART

Latest in the AktiMate line of powered loudspeakers is the Micro. Designed primarily with the desktop market in mind, this active speaker system has everything you need to make those hours in front of a computer screen all the more enjoyable, the company says... There's an iPod dock concealed in the top of the active speaker, along with a 3.5 mm jack input, plus a USB connection to link directly to the PC. The 2-way system sports a 100mm custom-designed woofer and a 25mm soft dome tweeter, driven by a 40W TI PCM2704 Class D amplifier. Cabinets measure 145x200x240mm and total weight is 6.95kg for the pair. There's a choice of high gloss black, red or white finishes. For more details, contact RedBox Audio Visual on +44(0)7949 910455 or click on www.redboxav.com.





SPIN DOCTORING

Electrocompaniet's new £2,490 EMP 2 is described as "a fully fledged and versatile player with support for all modern audio and video formats and media". That includes Blu-ray in 2D and 3D, CD, SACD, DVD and DVD Audio. Modern video and audio processing in both two channel and multichannel gives excellent picture quality and sonic quality, it is claimed. The EMP 2 is a multiplayer that works perfectly as a player in multichannel set-up and as a two-channel CD/SACD player, Electrocompaniet says. It offers 7.1 phono outputs and stereo XLR balanced outputs. The Qdeo video processor from Marvell is said to give optimal Blu-ray playback, and DVD movies are upscaled to HD format. SACD playback is possible in both stereo and multichannel using the DSD format. The DSD datastream is sent directly from the disc to the DACs for direct transmission to analogue audio. A separate balanced stereo output offers high quality two-channel playback to an existing stereo set-up. Discrete Class A output circuits and "the best DAC available" are used. PCM format is upscaled to 192kHz/24bit before being sent to the DACs; DSD format is direct. For more details, click on www.electrocompaniet.no.

TAKING THE FLAC

Bowers & Wilkins have teamed up with Peter Gabriel to offer a high quality 24bit download of his new album 'New Blood'. The double-disc Special Edition will include a voucher code allowing purchasers to access the digital download via Bowers & Wilkins. 'New Blood' follows in the footsteps of Peter's previous album, 'Scratch My Back', a song-swap project where he covered the songs of others, all to an orchestral backing. This time it's Peter's own extensive catalogue he's chosen to explore alongside John Metcalfe's meticulous arrangements. Great care has been taken in deciding what songs were included on 'New Blood'; it was a case of finding the songs that would be enhanced by the massed strings, brass, woodwind and percussion. The New Blood Orchestra's conductor Ben Foster agrees that the boss's instincts remain sharp. "The orchestra is not a tack-on. These aren't just strings on top of a rock band. This is something rebuilt from the ground up. That's why it's so successful", he said. Members of the Society of Sound music subscription service will be able to download an exclusive version of 'New Blood' entitled 'Half Blood' which features five tracks from the album and five instrumental versions and is not available anywhere else. For more information on Peter Gabriel and Society of Sound visit www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk/sus.



STREAM LINE

Pro-Ject Audio Systems' new Stream Box DS is said to be "a high-quality music streaming client aimed at customers who want to consolidate their digital music sources and enjoy their collection through a convenient, stylish and easy-to-use device". It sports a 3mm aluminium front panel, a 3.5" TFT screen and the simple set-up and navigation controls. Immediately after turning on, the unit can get playing straight away by inserting a USB drive loaded with music or an Apple device to the front or rear USB port.

The Stream Box DS will rapidly find the entire music collection contained on an inserted device and play it back seamlessly; taking advantage of any metadata and album artwork information associated with the files. The Stream Box DS also connects to a network wirelessly or over Ethernet, where it runs off any compliant UPnP Server Software on a computer or dedicated NAS drive. There's also internet radio via the vTuner platform.

The device will recognise and play multiple file formats, including FLAC, LPCM, Ogg Vorbis, MP3, AAC and WMA9- lossless, while the "audiophile-grade" DAC can handle files up to 24bit/192kHz resolution. There is a choice of two outputs, either connecting straight to an integrated or preamplifier via the gold-plated RCA sockets (fixed volume level), or utilising a DAC of choice via the coax S/PDIF digital out. Finally, the overall construction is a heavy, vibration-free and magnetically isolated aluminium housing, the company says. The Stream Box DS comes in a choice of Black and Silver finishes and costs around £699. For more details, click on www.henleydesigns.co.uk.



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Highresaudio is a recently launched high-resolution music download service, and it has just expanded its roster with Universal Music. Among the repertoire are new releases and for the very first time classical masterpieces from Bach, Bruch, Debussy, Haydn, Mahler, Liszt, Vivaldi and others in 24/96 studio master quality from Decca Classics and Deutsche Gramophon. More Genres such as Jazz, Pop and Rock are to follow in the coming months from Universal Music, the company says. Three different download formats are offered, FLAC, AIFF, and WAV, with the average album price costing around £17, with individual tracks from £1.70. For more details, click on www.highresaudio.com.



PRO VISO

NAD's new £499 VISO I Digital Music System is described as "an inspired design combined with some of the most sophisticated audio technologies available". Said to be compact and easy to use straight out of the box with no wires or complicated setup involved, its precision 'ring' design allows you to mount and operate an iPod or iPhone in a completely natural way, the company says. You can take or make a call when an iPhone is in the cradle. Integrated Bluetooth reception allows any Bluetooth enabled device to integrate with the VISO I, including wireless integration of the iPod, iPhone and iPad, as well as Android and Windows-based smartphones and tablets. Virtually any handheld device can stream music to VISO I. There's also an optical digital input that accepts up to 24bit, 96kHz music from external devices and a USB port for software upgrades. For more information on NAD Electronics and other products, visit www.NADelectronics.com.

PLUS ONE

Tivoli Audio's new PAL+ is the DAB-equipped evolution of the original PAL, introduced back in 2002. In addition to FM RDS reception, the PAL+ sports DAB, DAB+, and DMB capability. There's a large display with adjustable backlight, a holder for the full-function remote control, and a top-located control wheel. Round the back is a 3.5mm auxiliary input and a stereo headphone output that is switchable to mono for improved reception of noisy FM stations. A magnetically shielded 6.5cm full-range driver is said to deliver a superbly balanced sound that belies its diminutive dimensions. The PAL+ is on sale now at £249 – for more information click on www.tivoli-audio.co.uk.



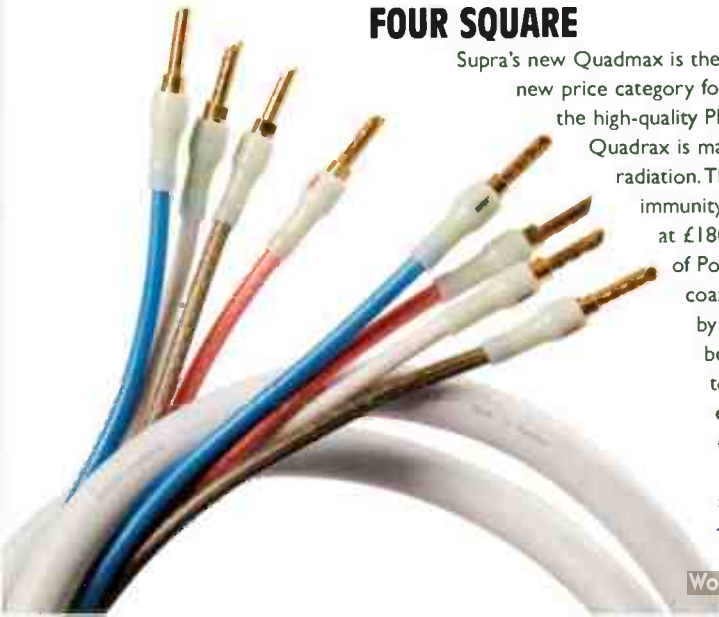
POWER PLUS

No less than one kilowatt is claimed for the new M1 from Anthem. This new mono power amplifier is said to, "annihilate perceptions that Class D amplifiers aren't suitable for high end sound systems", no less! It boasts advanced load monitoring and power factor correction technology to account for fluctuations in mains voltage, even to as low as 120 Volts. Frequency response is load-independent: the difference in response between a 2-ohm load and an open circuit is only a claimed 0.1 dB, and between 4 ohms and 8 ohms there is no change in frequency response at all, Anthem says. It is claimed that the M1 is a true 'double-down' amplifier with 1,000W into 8 ohms and 2,000W into 4 ohms, with total harmonic distortion remaining under 0.1% from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Included in the system is a digitally modelled time constant of the circuit interrupter, which does not trip the instant its maximum current is reached. Similar to slow-blow fuses, this feature allows momentary current surges that do not last long enough to result in excessive heat. The Anthem Statement M1 is available in the UK from Anthem AV Solutions. It has an MSRP of £3,499 inc. VAT and will start shipping in November. For details, click on www.anthemavs.co.uk.



FOUR SQUARE

Supra's new Quadmax is the latest high-end loudspeaker cable from Jenving, and sits in a new price category for Supra loudspeaker cables, between the flagship Sword and the high-quality Ply series. Using Supra's in-house manufacturing technology, Quadmax is made with short pitch twisting for low inductance and low radiation. The Star Quad configuration reduces RF pickup and increases immunity to all types of interference, the company says. Prices start at £180 for a terminated 2m pair. Supra Quadmax is constructed of PolyPropylene insulated Tin-Plated OFC copper using quad-coax construction. The tin contributes to a better sound quality by minimising the skin-effect and making less current jumps between the wire surfaces, the company says. Its resistance to interference makes Supra Quadmax perfect for modern environments where the air is flooded with wireless and digital noise, it's claimed. The special PolyPropylene (PP) insulation is extremely stable and has low capacitance. It is also environmentally friendly. For more details, call +44 (0)7711 939 519 or click on www.supracables.co.uk.





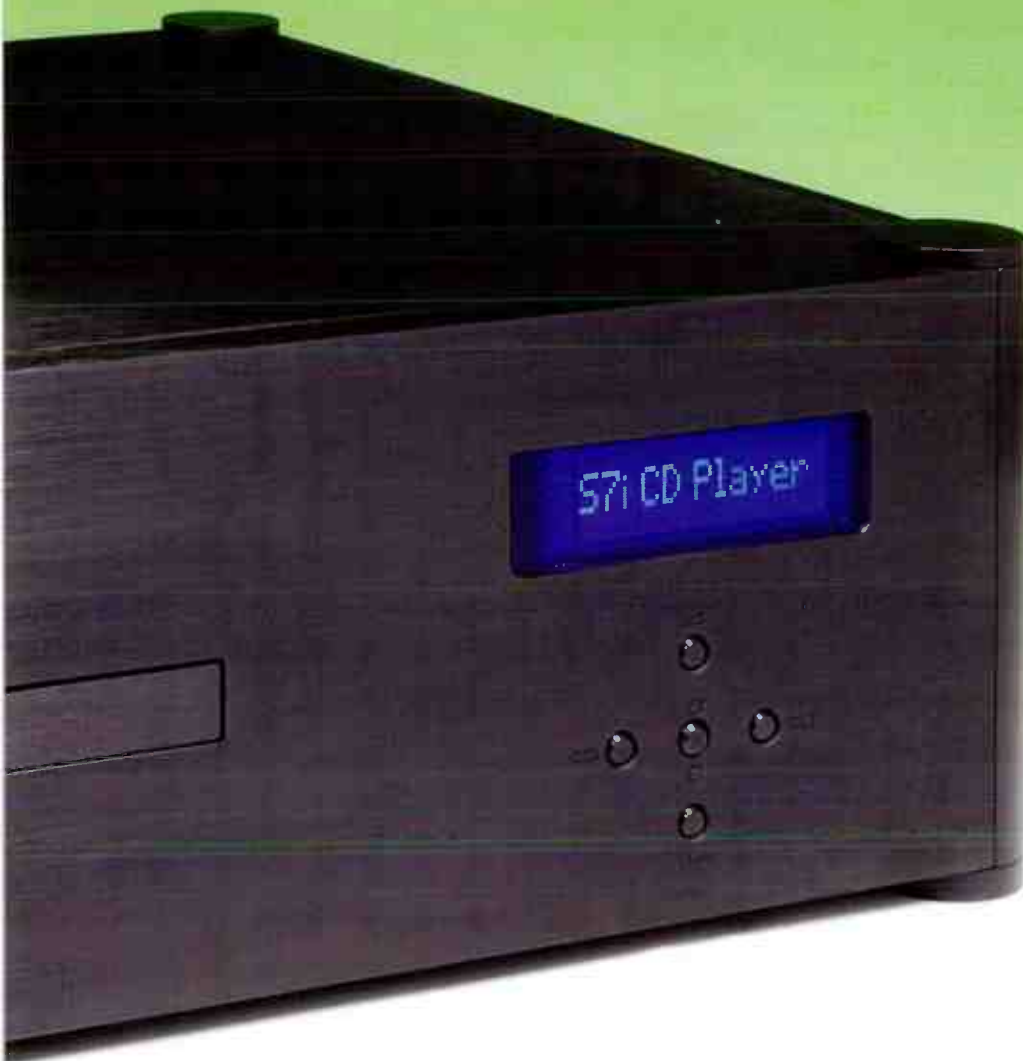
Wadia Think

The new Wadia S7i is a formidable CD player, DAC and preamplifier package, opines David Price...

It was some ten years ago that I happened upon my first DAC preamplifier. I was truly baffled by it – after all, why would anyone want such a thing? We all had perfectly good Compact Disc players, and if you didn't, then you'd just – ermm – bought one. The

preamplifier side of things to me was almost sinful. After all, how could it be any good, and why wouldn't you want to use your own? What a waste of money to put this sort of frippery on a perfectly decent DAC, I thought! Well, things have changed a lot since then...

These days, even yours truly, one of the world's last remaining 'digital deniers' (by which I mean I like vinyl more than digital for most serious listening), has a number of digital sources. I'm running an Esoteric CD transport, an Oppo Blu-ray player and a Logitech Squeezebox Touch



"As should be the case with all esoteric audio products, the Wadia S7i has immense style, character and presence – one that makes ownership an experience in itself..."

network music player through which I play internet radio, and occasionally background music. How did that happen? Three sources when I'd only been running one – a CD player – until fairly recently.

I suppose it is for situations like mine then, that the Wadia S7i has been designed. It would remove at least three of my hi-fi boxes from my system (CD transport, DAC, preamp), giving me back some of my rapidly shrinking listening room space, and offering a superior way to play my Blu-ray soundtracks and internet radio, not to mention CDs. The Wadia is a very pricey product at £14,000, but claims to offer one of the best transports around and of course a DAC and preamplifier of commensurate quality. It is, to use

that gruesome *mot du jour*, what hi-fi marketing people now call 'a digital hub'. In all fairness, the point should be made that buying such a thing would mean you could save money by not having to buy the other components that it replaces.

Enclosed in its back-creakingly heavy (25kg) all-aluminium casework (184x432x42mm) is Wadia's finest optical disc transport which is said to have been designed in collaboration with the Austrian company Stream Unlimited. Wadia co-engineered the 'application-specific' servo system, and the data buffer, firmware and 'critical' transport components. The result, says the manufacturer, is "the lowest measured error correction in Wadia's history"; this means the optical disc mech should be reading

the disc better than its (already well regarded) predecessors, and giving superior sound because the system requires less 'guesstimation' of what's on the disc. Optical transports do precisely this of course; if they can't read the data properly in the first place, they start filling in the ones and noughts by themselves. I found the machine plays Red Book CD, CD-R, CD-RW and FLAC files from CD-Rs.

The DAC side of things, or should I say the 'processing engine', sports two signal processors feeding a programmable gate array. Upsampling is done by the company's DigiMaster 2.5 software; the S7i generates a data rate of 1.4112 million samples per second at 24 bits of resolution. ClockLink jitter reduction provides audio information

extraction from CDs, and there is a choice of three upsampling algorithms which I found were worth experimenting with. Multiple fully regulated digital power supplies are claimed to bring "a measurable reduction in the noise floor". The adoption of additional inductor filtering for both the digital and analog power supplies of the main decoding circuit ensures smooth charging of capacitors and eliminating noise spikes from the ground plain, it's claimed. There is a fully regulated separate power supply for digital processing, clocking, digital to analogue conversion, and the output stage, and every performance component is powered by regulated isolated power traces, the company says. Wadia has also spent a lot of time on the DAC's USB input.

all-metal draw loading arrangement I've ever seen, which cost a mere £12,000 at the time!

SOUND QUALITY

Far be it for me to descend into crude national stereotypes, but – errm, I will! The Wadia sounds very American. I mean this in a positive sense by the way – let me explain. Japanese hi-fi can be precise, clean and clinical – think Denon. Italian audio is often quite exuberant and colourful – think Graaf. British hi-fi is often a sensible, conservative sort of sound that doesn't assault your senses but really fulfils – your Quads or Meridians of this world. By the same token, the S7i gives you the sort of big, broad shouldered, muscularity that you'd associate with... well, Wadia of course. The

unlimited in its scope; the track's fat bassline assaulting both listening room and listener in a way I'd normally only expect when playing the vinyl pressing of this great album, 'Play With The Changes'. Working with this pumping bassline were those gorgeous gliding strings, which the Wadia gave real bite and impact to; they became a lead instrument in the mix, rather than something hanging around in the background to pad things out a bit. Ditto the brass section; that lovely cor anglais (one of my favourite instruments, much under used in my opinion) had a massive, sweeping wash that gave the song even greater scale. Whereas so many CD spinners are the aural equivalent of a small suburban park full of dog walkers, in the Wadia I had the expanse of Red Rock Canyon before me!

Fascinating stuff, then. The S7i set up a vast, chasm-like recorded acoustic, almost as if I'd pressed the stereo wide button on a seventies ghetto-blaster. It seemed to find space out of nowhere, its bass was massive, its midband sweeping, but what of its treble? Well, it was, ermm, fine. Yes, that sums it up, Not bad, just unremarkable. I'd hoped to hear the sort of glistening top end I'd got from the Leema IIS Eco, for example, all delicate filigree detail and shiny, sparkly, silkiness. But instead I got an ever so slightly tamed hi hat sound that was very perfectly pleasant and passable. Still, in truth, the voice that the Wadia S7i presents to the world is a loud, deep one, and it's almost missing the point to bemoan the lack of an extended top end, as that's so obviously and conspicuously not what it's about. Kind of like criticising the aforementioned Mustang for its

"I have no hesitation in recommending it as a very intelligently conceived high end digital source..."

The preamp is effectively a digital volume control with input switching between digital inputs; the range is 50dB in one hundred 0.5dB steps. If the output level is set to maximum, effectively the unit acts simply as a sound source rather than a preamplifier, as there is no digital attenuation. Maximum output voltage can be adjusted via internal switches from 0.3V to 4.25V to match your system's sensitivity.

There's a USB input (up to 96kHz) and an AES/EBU (XLR), a S/PDIF via BNC and one optical TOSLINK.

The unit also has an AES/EBU output via XLR, an S/PDIF via BNC and an optical TOSLINK output.

Analogue outs include a pair of balanced XLRs and a pair of unbalanced RCAs.

The unit is immaculately packaged and presented in anodised aluminium, in a choice of black or silver. A plastic remote controller is supplied as standard, although there's the option of a metal one. Whilst the disc tray has two sturdy metal beams either side of it, the tray itself is plastic, which is frankly a disappointment at this price, and the only blemish on an otherwise perfect copybook. I am minded to remember Linn's late lamented Sondek CD12, which had the nicest

S7i is as American as a 1965 Ford Mustang, parked outside a drive-in movie.

Well, okay, I am exaggerating somewhat, but you get the picture! As CD players (and indeed DACs) go, it's as distinctively different to the likes of Meridian's G0.8 or Esoteric's X-05 (England and Japan respectively) as it can possibly be. Whereas the former has a sweet, clean, refined musicality and the latter startling insight and detail, the Wadia has immense power, slam, punch and general physicality – as digital sources go, this one has got big boots on!

For example, kicking off ('scuse



the pun) with 4hero's 'Morning Child', and the size of the soundstage was vast, the Wadia firmly asserting its presence between the speakers. Indeed it was almost as if it was exerting an invisible grip on the proceedings, making sure the music came out just the way it wanted. Bass was strong and deep and seemingly

high fuel consumption, I guess...

Sade's 'Smooth Operator' only reinforced this picture. Again I was struck by the space between the instruments, with the keyboard part hanging way behind the plane of my speakers but still amazingly well defined – almost as if there was someone really there, playing

it. Another aspect of this was its rhythmic ability; the S7i seemed to be able to pick out the start and stop of instruments like a sharp-shooter, being oh-so-precise about subtle timing information and allowing it to counterpoint other aspects of the mix beautifully. Maybe it didn't quite have the millimetric precision of an Esoteric, but at the same time it seemed to cohere the instruments together better – they were specially, dimensionally, so different yet brilliantly syncopated all the same. The result was a very 'jazzy' rendition of the 'Smooth Operator'; think of Joe Cocker's soulful rendition of 'A Little Help from my Friends' and compare it to the Beatles' original, and that could be the difference in 'feel' between the Wadia and the Esoteric, for example. Timing was excellent then, but it still did things in a relaxed, unforced way, with no sense of the song's fine detail being fired out at you. As such, it makes the Wadia a great late night listening companion, along with that obligatory bottle of Jack Daniels of course!

Moving to some reggae and once again, the Wadia's character was clear to discern – it's a big, easy performer with acres of space, wonderful instrumental separation, smoothness across the board and snappy rhythms. Bass was big and sumptuous in a way that's rare from CD spinners at any price, and the player follows the groove in a very intuitive way. UB40's 'King' sounded sublime, pulling me into the intricate hi hat/snare drum work, digging out that lovely rhythm guitar and floating me on a sea of bass guitar. Vocals – which can sound a little strident and/or 'grey' – were warm and fulsome, and conveyed the delicate, considered, pensive feel of the song in general. The Wadia proved a greatly enjoyable listening companion, pushing the music along in an organic and lucid way. Very un-CD-like, in fact...

A Linn recording of Purcell's 'Sonatas in Three Parts' (Respect Trio) produced a beautiful noise. 'Sonata IV in F Major, Z.793 - III. Poco Largo' showed a deliciously wiry yet fulsome string sound, set within a vast recorded acoustic with excellent stage depth. At this point I elected to try the Wadia as a DAC, and attached a Cyrus transport – it performed superbly, with virtually no difference to this

excellent source of digits, save an ever-so-slightly bigger, firmer bass from the Wadia's built in transport. It's safe to say the S7i is no slouch as far as spinning CDs is concerned, and nor is it bad as a DAC. In fact, it's excellent and bettered only by designs at £5,000 or more, in my opinion. As a preamp, I'd say it's very good, and it makes complete sense to use it as one if you're going to use the S7i's built-in disc drive. If you want a wider range of inputs though, I'd counsel MF Audio's Passive Preamp for optimum results.

CONCLUSION

Want a high end 'digital hub' with a wide range of inputs and outputs, a fine built-in CD spinner and a strong and capable preamplifier? Then this is well worth auditioning. It has an excellent sound and one that's quite different from Far Eastern and/or European rivals. In absolute value terms it's good, but only if you're



specifically looking for this type of product – if it's a simple CD player you seek, then there are some excellent ones which compete sonically for far less money. If the DAC and preamp functionality are just what you need, and obviate the need for you to buy either of the aforementioned, then the Wadia suddenly looks stronger value. I'd have no hesitation in recommending it to those well heeled enough to contemplate purchasing it,

as it's a very intelligently conceived high end digital source. As should be the case with all esoteric audio products, the Wadia S7i has immense style, character and presence – one that makes ownership an experience in itself.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response rolls off above 10kHz our analysis shows, measuring -1dB at 16kHz at -2.6dB at 20kHz. This was the case with both a raised cosine pulse and steady tones, so tonal balance will sound obviously on the warmish side, but players that behave like this are usually liked in subjective terms, Chord's DAC64 being a prime example.

Distortion levels were on the high side, measuring 0.42% at the critical -60dB level, where most players manage 0.2%. This adversely affected the EIAJ Dynamic Range value which measured a poor 97dB. Expensive designs commonly manage 100dB or slightly better, so the S7i is nothing special here. Raised distortion will be masked to some degree by falling response, the latter being most obvious of the two.

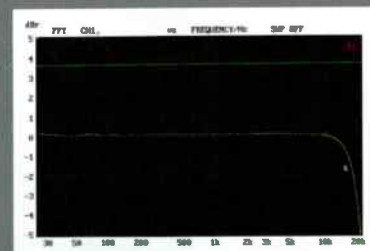
Output from XLR was the same as that from the phono sockets, 2V, and not double as is often the case. All other values were identical via XLR to those measured via the unbalanced phono outputs.

Jitter was low, with signal related jitter measuring a low 20pS from a -60dB, 1kHz tone. Random jitter was very low at around 5pS and low rate clock drift also low at around 10pS maximum. This performance was up with the best.

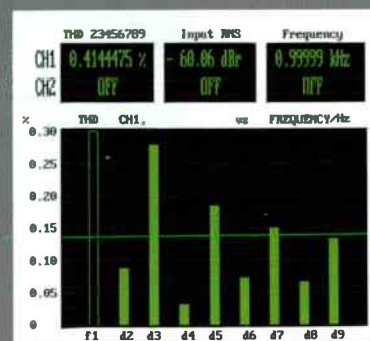
The Wadia S7i is not especially linear, producing twice as much distortion at -60dB than most players, but above and below this level distortion values were not far from the norm so subjectively this will probably have little aural impact. What will be obvious though is its treble roll off. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	
CD	2Hz-16kHz
Distortion	%
0dB	0.004
-6dB	0.01
-60dB	0.42
-80dB	2.8
Separation (1kHz)	113dB
Noise (IEC A)	-98dB
Dynamic range	97dB
Output	2.2V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



VERDICT

Superb 'digital hub' with a fine transport and DAC, plus a strong preamplifier too. Big, bold musical sound but with detail and delicacy too. Only the price detracts!

WADIA DIGITAL S7i £14,000
Musical Design Company
+44(0)1992 573 030
www.mdc-hifi.co.uk

- FOR**
- powerful sound
 - instrumental separation
 - expansive soundstaging
 - design, styling, build
 - flexibility

- AGAINST**
- price
 - plastic disc tray

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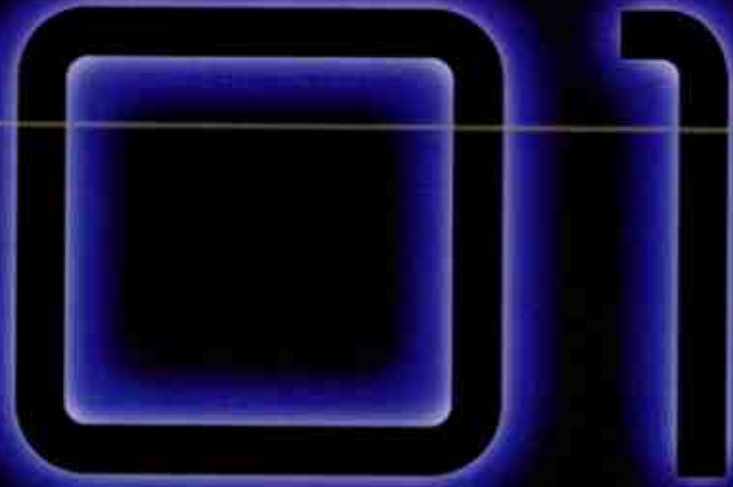


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★ HI-FI WORLD AWARDS 2011 ★



W

elcome to *Hi-Fi World's Awards* special! Here you'll find our favourite products reviewed over the past twelve months. Competition has been tough across a wide range of price points, but after much deliberation we're delighted to bring you what in our opinion are the year's finest offerings in specialist separates hi-fi...

AWARDS 2011	WINNER	
TURNTABLE:	ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE STORM	p18
TONEARM:	ORIGIN LIVE ONYX	p19
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★ **BEST
TURNTABLE:
ACOUSTIC
SIGNATURE
STORM**

REVIEWED: JUNE 2011

Over the past few years, there's never been a dull moment in the wonderful world of the analogue LP. Along with stacks of reissued black plastic appearing on the market, we've got umpteen new turntables to play them on. That means it's a pretty tough market out there, and any winner of this section has got to be special. The German made Acoustic Signature Storm is *precisely* that. At £3,612, it sits closer to the bottom of the company's range, which extends all the way to £16,500 for the Grande Reference (it weighs 200kg, you get the picture)! The Storm is a more moveable 28kg, but still a serious piece of metalwork. Build is superlative, which isn't always the case at this price, with an aluminium base and platter, a precision bearing with sintered bronze inserts and an adjustable arm base able to accommodate 9 and 12 inch tonearms. The deck looks like a shiny spacecraft in miniature, but doesn't sound like it! Instead, you get a wonderfully smooth, even and open demeanour, which couldn't be more different to its 'Storm' soubriquet. Terribly assured, wonderfully refined, beautifully poised, it's innately musical yet mellow. A worthy recipient of the *Hi-Fi World* top turntable award, then.



★ **BEST TONEARM:**
 ORIGIN LIVE
 ONYX
 REVIEWED: AUGUST 2011

We've reviewed a number of excellent tonearms over the past year, from entry level to high end – but one that really endeared itself was the £450 Origin Live Onyx. It's special because it's one of the few successful attempts to make a brand new, clean-sheet budget arm, instead of doing an ever more inventive variation on the Rega theme. The Rega RB251 (and family) is of course superb, but still has its own sound, and frankly this isn't for everyone. The Onyx offers an alternative that's pretty much as good as the Rega in the 'hi-fi' stakes, but it has an easy, smooth, creamy nature to it that reminds you why you're listening to vinyl in the first place. It's relaxed and unforced sounding, and you don't get the impression that the music's being fired at you as with some price rivals. It's essentially a very 'easy listening arm', yet is never boring. Fit and finish is good considering its status as a modestly priced, handbuilt, low volume product – and whilst we'd have liked fancier packaging, at least you know your money's not being wasted on bling! The Onyx is a simple affordable high quality design offering unalloyed musicality at a knock-down price, and as such is a worthy recipient of this year's *Hi-Fi World* best tonearm award.



★ **BEST**
CARTRIDGE:
 BENZ MICRO
 ACE S-CLASS L
 REVIEWED: MAY 2011

This £495 moving coil is the most affordable model in the Benz range to be handmade, and comes in three forms; low (0.4mV), medium (0.8mV) and high (2.5mV) output, coloured red, clear and blue respectively. The L is the recipient of our best cartridge award, but all versions are deserving of high praise indeed. The ACE appellation stands for Advanced Cartridge Engineering; it comes clothed in an acrylic body, partially for greater ease of handling, and also for the damping effect the bodywork is supposed to have upon the arm. The chassis of the cartridge is made of aluminium, and sports a solid Boron cantilever with a very impressive side-bonded micro-ridge stylus. The cantilever is attached to hand wound wire coils. Tracking at 1.75g, the Benz has a wonderful combination of detail and musicality, presenting a very rhythmic yet focused picture of what's in your record grooves. The sound is solid, measured, precise and wholly immersive – the result being a wonderfully satisfying listening experience that shows how truly exotic vinyl can sound. This highly tuned example of the cartridge maker's art deserves all the success it's having.



★ **BEST**
PHONO STAGE:
WHEST AUDIO
PS.30SE
 REVIEWED: JUNE 2011

Phono stages come in all flavours, from rich and creamy to hard and salty. This Whest is very neutral – those seeking a sumptuous sound from their vinyl should look towards one of the many tube based designs on the market, but if you want an even handed, matter of the fact machine that just plays music, this is it. Yes, it's very expensive at £4,500, but we think those running top end vinyl systems shouldn't overlook its amazing incision and grip. It's as if the Whest ekes out information from those low level phono signals almost down to an atomic level – it shines a searching light into the mix and throws the music out at you with forensic precision. Yet the Whest doesn't sound technical and analytical; it's bubbling with emotion and visceral power that makes it as good at new wave guitar crunching as it is for genteel classical piano sonatas. An aural experience akin to standing three rows back from the stage at a live concert, the PS.30 SE gets down to convey the fizzing energy of any musical performance. There's an awful lot of competition in the phono stage market, but this is so good at what it needs to do that high end vinyl thrill seekers can't ignore it – and if it's above your budget then the company has some very capable, yet more affordable designs worth hearing.



★ BEST COMPACT DISC PLAYER:

AUDIOLAB

8200CDQ

REVIEWED: AUGUST 2011

Few silver disc spinners have been more memorable to review than this one – its price-performance ratio is exceptional. Whereas Audiolab CD players have been solid performers since the brand's first design back in the nineties, they've never been special – until now. The 8200CDQ is a preamplifier-equipped version of the stock 8200CD, adding a brace of digital inputs for extra flexibility, and switchable line or variable output levels, so it can drive a power amp direct.

But the *really* clever stuff is in the DAC and digital filter section, which is outstanding; unlike so many rivals it's a clean-sheet affair by one of the best digital designers in the business, John Westlake. It shows – with a powerful, expansive and wonderfully fluid musical performance. In absolute terms it's just a touch tonally dry, but you'll need to put it against designs at five times its price before this is really an issue, so good is the 8200CDQ. An inspired new Compact Disc player and DAC with a super little preamp thrown in – at £949 it's the digital bargain of the year.



★ **BEST DAC:**
DCS DEBUSSY
 REVIEWED: FEBRUARY 2011

2 011 was the year of the DAC. Probably more were released this year than in the whole of the last decade – and there's been a substantial improvement in performance from the budget sector through to the high end. The Debussy falls very much into the latter category, but it's still not anywhere near as expensive as the world's top digital convertors, yet offers almost all their performance. This is why it's got this year's best DAC gong; the £8,000 unit is immaculately presented as you'd expect from dCS, sports a wide range of inputs (including asynchronous USB) and variable output level, and has the company's bespoke 'Ring DAC' inside. The result is a large (but still relatively compact, by dCS standards), immaculately finished piece of high end with a beautifully fluid – and dare we say it – analogue sound that's a pleasure to listen to for hours on end. The new dCS Debussy will wring the last ounce of performance from your Red Book CDs, yet is totally at home with 24/192 from computer sources. Expensive yes, but fine value all the same.

Jade

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SOUND AND VISION



Jade 5 - Oct 2011

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★ **BEST NETWORK
PLAYER:**
NAIM NDX
REVIEWED: OCTOBER 2011

There was a veritable deluge of network music players in 2011. Of the new crop, the NDX is one of the most expensive, but justifies its £2,995 price tag by offering a combination of super sound, easy connectivity, real upgradeability, excellent build and a generally effortless user interface. The NDX can stream audio files, including iTunes libraries, stored on a computer or on network storage, via UPnP. It can play FLAC, WAV and AIFF files up to 24/96kHz resolution, as well as WMA, MP3, MMS, AAC and Apple Lossless (from iPods), and can also play internet radio. It has three control options, the most straightforward being its backlit control buttons operating in conjunction with its smallish green OLED display. Then there's the supplied remote control handset and the free Naim n-Stream iPhone app, which also allows input and volume control of Naim preamplifiers and DAC – this is vastly preferable. Sonically it's not a million miles from the Naim DAC, meaning it has a clean, incisive and very detailed sound, with delicate treble, involving midband and fluid bass. Across all formats it performs extremely well. A highly professional, mature and well rounded product, it brings network music to the mainstream audiophile community.



★
BEST
AMPLIFIER:
CREEK
DESTINY 2
 REVIEWED: MARCH 2011

It's a tough life being a high end transistor integrated, simply because there's competition from a range of decent valve amps at that price, and also some budget pre-power amplifiers too. Then, factor in some capable well established direct competition, and the Creek has its work cut out. It wins no prizes for style or finish – Japanese rivals from Denon and Marantz do better. The Creek doesn't feel as expensive as perhaps it should then, but any doubts about its efficacy are soon dispelled as you switch it on. The Destiny 2 has an almost *supernatural* smoothness; there are few, if any sweeter and more open solid-state amplifiers on sale, which is an amazing claim for something at its price point. It makes music in a wonderfully creamy and liquid way, floating the sound out of the speakers in a lilting way – put simply, it sounds expensive, far more so than it actually is. It's never soft or soggy like many tube rivals, and yet it just doesn't have that mechanical, 'clangy' edge of rival solid-staters. In short, the Creek Destiny 2 is in a gang of one as far as outstanding transistor amplifiers we've reviewed this year go, and a worthy recipient of our best amplifier award.



★ **BEST**
LOUDSPEAKERS:
 MARTIN LOGAN
 ELECTROMOTION
 REVIEWED: OCTOBER 2011

There was a time when electrostatic speakers were the province of the super rich, way beyond normal audiophile budgets. At the same time, they were also difficult to position and had practically no bass. If ever there was a product designed to reverse this state of affairs, it is this one. The ElectroMotions are – as electrostatics go – affordable at around £2,500, easier to place than most, and thanks to their small moving coil bass unit (okay, so strictly they're a hybrid loudspeaker) give a workable low end. They deliver a wonderfully wide and enveloping sound, as you'd expect from those tall mid/treble panels, with an almost unique dark, deep, velvety midband that gives beautifully delicate, filigree detailing. This is smoothly integrated into a sparse but effective bottom end, just strong enough to work larger rooms. Ultimately limited in power and punch, the ElectroMotions are still superb in most small to medium sized UK rooms, and give a listening experience that's practically unrivalled. As such, they're deserved winners of *Hi-Fi World's* 2011 loudspeaker award.

CYRUS

Be sure you hear all of your CD collection



This is a new affordable model from Cyrus R&D called **CD Transport**. It incorporates the latest version of our high-resolution SE2 CD servo "engine". This multi-award winning CD technology is able to read more data "right first time" from a CD than any other system, delivering clearly better resolution. Although similar to the £1550 X series **CD XT**, the new upgradeable **CD Transport** is priced at only £750.

The matching **Cyrus XpD** range of DAC-enabled amplifiers allow you to connect up to five digital and six analogue devices to your system for total flexibility. Partnering the new **CD Transport** with our award winning 6XPd amplifier will create a truly special hi-fi system with many upgrade options for the future.

Tempting winter offer
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World Radio History

★ BEST CABLE:

DPA BLACK SLINK

REVIEWED: JUNE 2011

If ever there was a 'cult' interconnect, this is surely it - Black Slink is known and loved for its distinctively clean and rhythmic sound. Dark, velvety yet highly incisive, it's one of the very best performers at or near the £358 price. This is down to its novel construction - from sixteen individual 0.4mm silver-plated OFC solid cores, insulated with Gore expanded PTFE material. These are arranged into four wound quads of which two are reversed to make the Black Slink non-directional, which are further bound with Gore expanded PTFE material before twisting all four quads and binding them with another layer. A silver plated braid screen is then covered with a glossy flexible polyurethane jacket, to make an unimicrophonic cable that sounds squeaky clean yet musically compelling.



★ BEST SUPPORT:

HI-FI RACKS PODIUM T5 III

REVIEWED: DECEMBER 2011

Hi-Fi Racks deal in wood, solid wood - no MDF or veneer just pure oak, maple, cherry, mahogany and more. In fact, their products look more like furniture than accessories. These £199 oak-based loudspeaker stands have a 185x240mm top plate (and four, stick-on, isolation pads) on three legs. The base features four screw-in spikes which are stout and wide in form, providing a solid fit that settles the stands securely to the floor. These stands free the music, allowing it to breathe while giving a natural tonality. The Podium T5 III features clean, classic lines which provide an ideal loudspeaker platform - they may pass the style test but it's the sound that impresses more.



mail



Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers.

LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS

For more advice see Letters from earlier issues at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/letters

A pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers are on their way to **DEREK NUDD**, Letter of the Month winner in our **DECEMBER 2011** issue.

Letter of the Month

THE MELODY MAKER

Reading Steve Baty's letter in the September issue of Hi-Fi World I was reminded of my meeting and conversation with Ivor Tiefenbrun at the Linn factory back in the 1980s. On being introduced as Professor of music – which I'm not – he was scathing of musicians and their abilities to evaluate high fidelity equipment, but gracious in his observation that I was rather rare among musos in showing any interest at all in the subject.

In Linn's listening room, towards the end of my visit, I was played a recording of a clavichord, a hybrid harpsichord/fortepiano from the late 18thc, obviously using a Sondek LP12 and almost certainly at the highest specification available. I regret I recall nothing of the amplifier but the speakers were, if I remember correctly, Isobariks.

On being asked my reaction I tentatively opined, and I was extremely careful to be as clear and yet understated as possible in view of my earlier bruising encounter with the great man, that the clarity of the reproduction was extraordinarily clear but that I felt my head was inside the sound box of the instrument.

There was a pause, and I felt sick in the pit of my stomach, but his response was surprisingly muted and appreciative. From what I remember he said that it was the leading edges of notes which conveyed the essential character of the music being reproduced which was absent in almost all high-fidelity equipment available at the time. Other aspects, such as timbre and spatial information (stereo image)



The Linn LP12 is a magnificent machine and fully deserves its iconic status, says Mark Knight.

he felt were subservient and in any case covered by other manufacturers.

At this point he asked me what I was using, and again that inner sickness welled up as I listed items in my system at the time: a Trio 2055 turntable, Grado F+ cartridge, Yamaha receiver (amp/tuner) and Spendor BCI speakers on the Spendor supplied stands complete with castors (to assist in Hoovering, you understand; but I did have them connected with QED 79 cable!). His observation was that the system would sound hard (and it did) but that the Spendors were excellent and so prevented it from being a total disaster.

I wrote to Ivor following my visit thanking him for spending time with me, especially as on the day of my visit stocktaking was in full swing, and he replied most courteously and at length (I still have the letter – oh, those lovely days of pen and paper!) outlining his

philosophy on the reproduction of recorded music.

I need not go into details but subsequent events in my professional life bore out Ivor's observations with a vengeance and I decided I had to experience the Linn philosophy in comparison to the equipment I owned at the time.

I sympathise with Steve Baty's view of the approach of Linn/Naim sales personnel during that era. I, too, was told how only a Linn could reveal the presence of the piano in a recording of Tchiakovsky's Sixth Symphony (there isn't one)! As a professional musician being told how to listen or what to listen for is extremely irritating; and it wasn't what Ivor Tiefenbrun had been saying anyway...

Eventually I found a Linn dealer with a sales person who wasn't a total prat, in fact he was sensitive and very patient. Whilst I spent a couple of hours

listening to my receiver and speakers, which I had with great effort taken to the dealer, fed by my Trio turntable and a Linn, my wife went shopping. I had also recollected Ivor saying that the non-enthusiast hi-fi wife was always better than her husband discriminating music reproduction, so her return to the listening room was eagerly anticipated.

And she didn't disappoint. Among the LPs I had taken to the comparison/demonstration (all of which I knew intimately) was that of Beethoven's String Quintet in C, an American (RCA) recording by the Guarneri Quartet with Pinchas Zukerman playing the second viola part. The playing is magnificent but the disc was poor, very thin with little depth in the groove, a severe task for the turntable. Add to that the denser tonal texture in a string quartet that the second viola adds then the infrequency and frustration felt when I did try to listen to this performance at home can be understood.

My wife duly arrived and after reminding me that she was perfectly happy with a wind-up gramophone, especially as she enjoyed changing and sharpening the needles, we settled down to listen to the Beethoven, first on the Trio and then on the Linn. The former was pronounced as "what's wrong with that and sounds fine to me?". Then the Linn (and Steve Baty won't like this) – it's faster, I didn't know the second violin was over there! Aren't the two violas gorgeous, melting together yet each so clear and, the cellist is right bang in the middle! (as he was, as is usual in an American string quartet)...

The salesman's face was a picture, at least what I could see of it behind his hand. I wrote the cheque, packed my gear, the dealer's staff safely secured the Linn in its box and gave me clear and full instructions how to install having offered to do it for me, an offer I refused because I had to get it home and in my system that very day.

Since then I have been a Linn/Naim user. I am now fortunate to have a dedicated music room in which my wife (also a professional string player) and I work and listen. The system is LP12/Lingolttok/Dynavector 17D3Karat recently factory upgraded Naim 32.5 Hi-Cap/NAP250 driving those same Spondors but upgraded to SP1 status by Spondor and all of it supported on appropriate stands (without castors) spiked, and connected via Naim cables, as are all the interconnects.

Listening to music being performed live is central to my work. I train students of university age to become professional performers. They have to trust my judgements and come to rely on my aural and visual analysis to

develop their talent and skills. Some of them have listened extensively to my system and have been able to relate to, and re-evaluate, the principles I strive to represent in classical string playing.

Any questions of pitch stability, location of players or timbral inaccuracy never arise. The issue of image and tonal accuracy I have found depends largely (perhaps not entirely) on how well the system is supported, its environment, and obviously how well the components are matched.

Some say the type of music to be played is a factor but I have to say Bob Dylan sounds wonderful on my Linn/Naim set-up (a not-so secret vice of mine)! It is obvious that a

do the products of Naim Audio. These companies changed the world of hi-fi forever, and for better, and have since surely stimulated and inspired others in the field to strive for comparable standards of recorded music replay. They remain in the highest echelons of products dedicated to serving the music lover in his/her home environment.

**Mark Knight
Bodmin
Cornwall**

**Professor of Violin and Viola
Guildhall School of Music and
Drama, London and The Royal
Northern College of Music,
Manchester.**



Spondor BC1 loudspeakers were upgraded to SP1 status in Mark Knight's system.

would-be hi-fi purchaser of today has a far greater choice of genuine high fidelity equipment than in the 1970s and 1980s, and Linn and Naim have a much tougher competitive market to contend with. I have heard other systems over the years, some of which I enjoyed, some I have found indifferent, others I thought dreadful, but I have never been troubled to think I need to change anything fundamental in my system although, of course, improvements can always be achieved.

I have added a Naim CD player and use a Sony CD recorder for my work, allowing students to hear repertoire or performers that they would otherwise be unaware of and for which the source component, usually my LP12, is, of course, crucial. Radio 3 for classical musicians is also essential; hence I own a Naim NATO1 FM tuner which is simply wonderful.

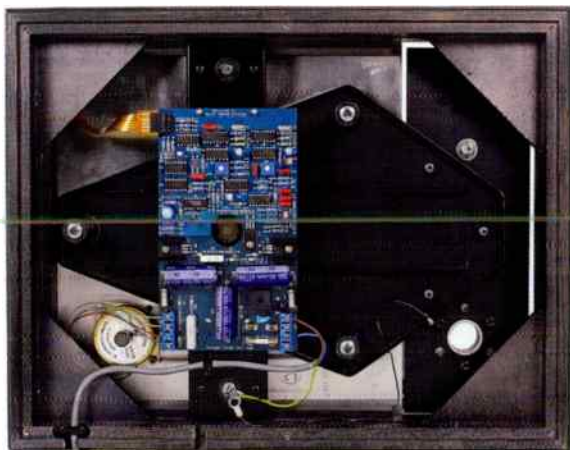
So, Mr. Baty, a fellow professional musician totally disagrees with you. The Linn LP12 is a magnificent machine and fully deserves its iconic status, as

Thanks for your broad, insightful and generous views Mark. We sent them to both Linn and Naim, to cheer them up a bit! As you say, they face far more competition these days; how the market has changed. **NK**

THE MELODY MAKER - SLIGHT REFRAIN

I felt I had to put fingers to keyboard in response to Steve Baty's (in my view) unreasonable letter in the September 2011 edition. Let's get the obvious out of the way. Yes, I own a Linn LP12 c. 1993, Valhalla, pre Circus, Akito and Adikt MM cartridge. This feeds a Creek OBH8SE phono amp, Linn Kairn Pro pre-amp, 2 x LK100s bi-amping Monitor Audio Silver 5s. I also have an Arcam CD73T and Denon TU260L as other sources.

There are a couple of issues I wish to oppose in Steve's anti LP12 rant. Firstly, as far as I'm aware in the LP12's 40 odd years it has undergone very few upgrades. The Nirvana springs and Valhalla power supply in the 80s,



Beneath the modern Linn LP12 lies electronic speed control. Our measurements show it contributes to excellent speed stability., better than that of most belt drives.

the Cirkus bearing upgrade in the 90s, the Lingo outboard power supply also in the 90s and then virtually nothing until the Keel sub-chassis in the last couple of years or so. This hardly seems an excessive number of upgrades. It is my recollection as an avid reader of magazines since the age of 15 (now 49) that it has often been wished by many a contributor that the LP12 was upgraded and recent products from Vivid, and before them the Funk Firm, have been long awaited.

I have had my Linn on cupboards and latterly a wall shelf in two houses and in two different locations within the house. Never under any sound pressure levels have I suffered Steve's claimed 'speaker howling, nor arm bouncing off the record, suspended floor or not! Also during that time I have had it checked twice. Once whilst moving house I had it routinely checked on re-siting it 1994, and once around 2003 when upgrading the cartridge and it had a replacement belt. Hardly regular tinkering or the need to be setup frequently.

I cannot argue that it is the last word in imaging depth or width, nor that it isn't the best defined in the bass either. I am sure any number of others will out do it in all aspects of reproduction. However I have had 18 years of many happy hours of listening to music, which is after all what it's all about isn't it, or have I missed the point?

Steve's anti LP12 rant is as unwelcome as those who insist that the Linn is the only way to go! It isn't! It is just one that many people find very satisfying, as do those who enjoy their Mitchell, Roksan, SME, Project, Avid etc, etc.

If we are going to have critical letters in our hobby then let them at least be based on reasoned argument and not prejudice. The very fact that the LP12 is still going after 40 years, with very little change, is testament to the fact that it must be doing something

well, unless in Steve's arrogance as a classically trained musician the many thousands of us sheep who very much enjoy our LP12s have all been led to the Linn alter and slaughtered to their marketing gods? I don't recall the Alphason lasting this long. Hmmm!

**Andy Troth
West midlands**

Well Andy, I think it's very hard to argue with that. I'm a great believer in that old aphorism "different strokes for different folks", and there are a great many – including our very own Tony Bolton, who own and love their Linn LP12 turntables. Heavens, even Adam Smith has just bought one! There's no doubt in my mind that they do some things very nicely indeed – almost peerlessly, in fact. They're lovely and smooth and gently, beguilingly musical. There are other things that Sondeks aren't as good at, as we all now know – imaging and stage depth being issues. But people aren't stupid, and if they tire of their Sondek sound they'll go elsewhere, whereas others audition the latest 'flavour of the month' and then come back to their Linn. Fair enough. People such as yourself show that the deck can be superb value for money – if you stick with it year on year then your investment pays off, despite the high prices for the LP12 and some of its mods. Few expensive pieces of furniture last as long as your Linn! **DP**

STAGE FIGHTING

I am finding that I am listening to my LPs more and more and to my CDs less and less, and have just become the fortunate recipient of a large LP collection. It is about time I upgraded my arm/cartridge and phono pre-amp, starting with the latter.

Research VT200 driving Gradient SWL 63 bass speakers with a Jadis JF-3 crossover, Audio Research REF-7 CD player with a Jadis JS-1 DAC and a Revox B77 tape recorder.

I prefer valves and considered buying an Audio Research phono stage, but on numerous occasions over the last few years you have strongly recommended the Icon Audio phono pre-amps, particularly the PS3. There is no possibility of my being able to compare the Icon Audio and Audio Research products here. There are several really excellent and enthusiastic dealers in New Zealand, but in such a small market, choice is very limited. Hence your opinion would be much appreciated.

The cost of an Icon Audio PS3 with all the top-line upgrades is less than an Audio Research PH7, but used PH7s are readily available for about the same price. Reliability is very important, as I don't want to be returning items too often from this far-flung paradise.

I'd also much appreciate your recommending a reliable dealer of whichever products you advise.

I agree with your oft-stated sentiments that a good dealer is a Godsend, but from here that is more easily said than done. I paid for an ex-dem Jadis CD player from a well known retailer in London West One over a year ago, and was subsequently told that the unit was irreparably damaged prior to shipment and that my payment plus 100 pounds to cover my costs would be refunded. Over a year later, in spite of numerous promises from the company and numerous e-mails from me [to which they no longer reply] I am still waiting. Perhaps they believe that overseas customers will find it too difficult to pursue them. Have you come across this problem before? Perhaps a reputable publication such as yours should keep a



Audio Research PH7 uses transistors and a tube output stage, plus a tube regulated power supply, like the PH8 shown here. It is very different to the Icon Audio PS3.

I use a LinnSondek/Cirkus/Cetech subchassis, with the original Ittok LV II arm/Asak cartridge and a Lingo preamp. Other equipment is a Fosgate FAP V1 preamp used in 2 channel only, Jadis JA 200 amps driving Quad ESL 63s and Audiosmile supertweeters, Audio

register of such dealers, although I can imagine this could be a legal minefield.

Many thanks in anticipation of any help and advice you may be able to give. all the best,

**Dave Dickson
New Zealand**

Hi Dave. There are some points to bear in mind with the Audio Research PH7. It uses a simple electronic topology where MC gain is fixed and used for MM as well. This means MM gives far too much output. Okay, you are using MC so that probably will not worry you. But low gain for MC and higher noise than the Icon Audio PS3 should, because your Asak has low output. You will have to turn volume right up and hiss will likely be audible, if faint. I would choose the PS3, because it is a better match to your system and because its valve regulated power supply makes it audibly silkier than most rivals, although the PH7 also has such a supply. Note also that the PH7 is basically a transistor preamp with valve output stage, whilst the PS3 is all-valve.

Having made all these observations, editor David Price does like the sound of the PH7 and it is well made, if dimensionally Americana. That is, why make it small when you can make it big! **NK**

Hi Dave. I'm afraid I can't comment on dealers in New Zealand, as I have no experience of them. Best to pick up the phone and speak to them, and see how they deal with you – an enthusiastic, attentive and helpful person on the end of the line is a good indication of things to come...

As for your dispute, perhaps a word with the UK Office of Fair Trading might help you decide where to go next - see them at <http://www.offt.gov.uk/consumer-advice/oft-and-cd/>. It's very difficult for us to keep a register of good dealers, as wherever there are people there are disputes of one sort or another inevitably, and it's impossible for us to act as judge and jury on matters such as these.

As far as the Icon Audio vs. Audio Research phono stages, you're talking two quite distinct types of sound. The former is, as Noel says, all valve and has a very fulsome, sweet nature, with lovely dimensionality – but a slightly soft bass and a marginal loss of treble 'air' in absolute terms. The latter is altogether punchier, more rhythmic and tighter – but less three dimensional and not as subtle a musical performer. It's very 'rock and roll' in the Audio Research tradition, a sort of Naim with valves, if you get my drift. As such, you decide! **DP**

ARC OF A DRIVER

I hope someone can help me with a little ESL-57 project I have? I bought a pair on the strength of David Price's "Ex-Static" article, had the One Thing Audio makeover a few years ago and haven't looked back since. I can definitely see

what all the fuss is about over these much-loved speakers and feel genuine pity for those who haven't had the pleasure, but recently I've noticed the dreaded "arc-ing" effect at moderate to high volumes, so I am now drawn in to the world of tweaking...

Inspired by Quad's latest additions to the ESL range, Alastair Robertson-Aikman's '63 mod and Musikwiedergabe's stand design (and after a speaker toppled forward onto one of my children for the second time!), I've decided to design some new stable stands, with the help of a carpenter/designer friend. By incorporating a strengthened outer frame it should also add some rigidity to the whole speaker. This is where I really need some advice, as you and your team know this speaker inside and out.

The design is still a work in progress, as you can see from the pictures attached (courtesy of Andy Gardiner), these stands will involve new side-rails which extend as legs, a bar resting on the wood at the top of the speaker and, in addition to the pictures, will include a plinth covering the entire under surface of the speaker body.

My main aim is to boost the rigidity of the whole speaker without making any permanent change to the structure. The two vertical structures in the diagram represent tensioning rods (these may be steel cables in the final design), but I am torn between whether these should deliver the force straight down, perpendicular to the top of the speaker (as shown in the diagram) or diagonally backwards, from the top of the speaker down to the back of the new plinth it will be sitting on, which will extend

beyond the back of the speaker, slightly bowing the speaker backwards and giving it an A-frame rigidity.

So my main questions are:

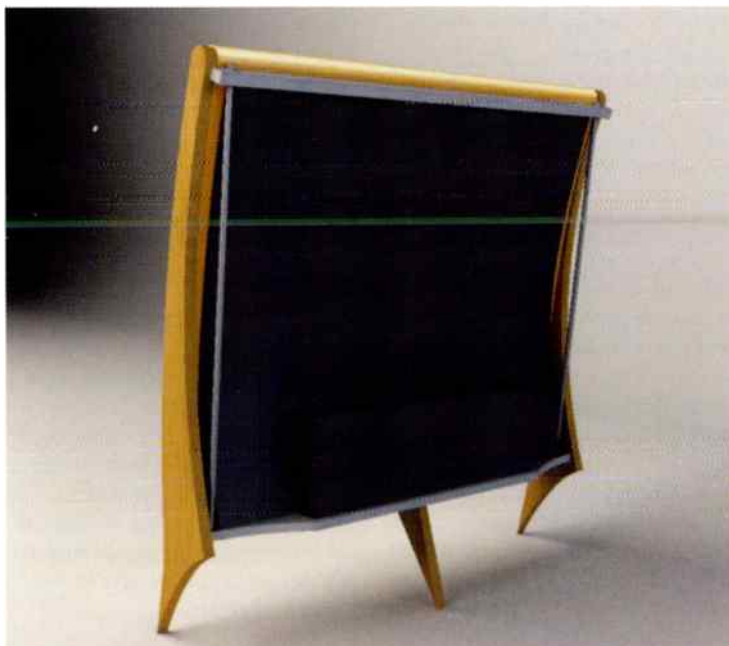
- 1) Which direction of force is better? Downwards through the body of the speaker? Diagonally backwards? Or both directions?
 - 2) Should force be applied across the top of the speaker at all? Or to the side-rails alone, to concentrate on making these dead rigid?
 - 3) Could there be a benefit from some horizontal tension too?
 - 4) Do you see any problems with any of these ideas? (I wouldn't want to make the electrostatic panels go slack!)
 - 5) Will any of this improve the sound or would my whole endeavour be in vain? I look forward to your thoughts on this!
- Dr Anton Bass**

We can't design at a distance for you Anton; this has to be within your skill set if you are to take on such a project. But generally film tension is important and you should not apply any compressive force to the frames. They just need support. Better front-back stability never goes amiss, and I have been surprised in the past with the imaging benefits brought about by improving stability through the use of 25mm MDF (in our KLS9s) and adding sand to a dedicated chamber in Mission loudspeakers. Your stand looks nice and is an eminently sensible idea I believe.

On the matter of arcing, you need to speak to One Thing as obviously there has been some deterioration somewhere in your ESL-57s. They fit secondary



Don't flatten the kids! An elegant new frame for the Quad ESL-57 electrostatic loudspeaker, makes it more stable, says Anton Bass.



New Quad ESL-57 frame looks good even from behind.

protection diodes and these should prevent arcing, so there's a problem somewhere. **NK**

THAILAND HIGHLAND

I bought my first hi-fi system in the last year of the 1980s before moving back home to Thailand from the USA. With a limited budget, most of the fund went to the speaker which the dealer suggested to me then to be the most important piece in the system and the rest can be upgraded later when the fund will be more available.

Quad ESL63 was chosen because of its mid-range sound so real and not as boxy, even though it lacks bass that most people cannot live without. But my taste of music then was more vocal, musical, new age with some jazz or light classical.

I spent almost four hours listening between a Spectral and a NAD amp to seek out whether I could distinguish the difference in the sound. Unfortunately, I could so the fastest up grade was done after digging deep in my pocket to stretch the budget from a \$500 NAD 300W to a \$1,800 Spectral 50W, plus a \$500 Bryston pre-amp.

After I made the payment, my friend's wife (he introduced me to the hi-fi) shook my hand in congratulation that I have stepped into the trouble of never ending realm that will keep seeking how to upgrade the sound quality for the rest of my life, just because I could hear the difference. Therefore, my journey has begun.

Because of the word of my friends wife ringing in the back of my head, I never went anywhere near a hi-fi show room or any event for almost five years. My first tempting was when I've gotten married and went to London for our honeymoon trip. A Meridian 506 CD player was brought back home with me

in 1994 to replace the NAD CD player. And shortly after that a 90W Spectral DMA10 amp and a used Spectral pre DMC12 were replaced within 1996-97.

It is true like the dealer once told me that the speaker would stay much longer than the rest of the equipment and will show more of its potential with the better suited system, even though the ESL63 had kept giving me trouble of arcing this panel and that panel over the period of time and the cost of repairing and fixing them had almost double its original price. But I just cannot find another speaker sound that I like (even if almost every friends and relatives that listen to my Quad always commented that it so flat – no boom boom – and I had stayed with this set of equipment until 2006.

And then Hi Fi World was the major push this time. I first encountered your magazine in 2004 from an air port news stand and became a fan ever since and almost every issue were

bought from the air port terminal vendor. Then one day NK reviewed the Quad new 2805 and 2905. That was how the calm lake of so many years had been stirred.

So the Quad 2905 were bought to replace the ESL63 after 17 years in service (with many panels replacement). The main reason not only just because of NK's review of how good they are over the old Quad but the look of the 2905 itself also (the 989 never came across my mind to replace the old 63 at all because of its look).

That was also about the time that I learned more of another part of the hi-fi, the vinyl and the turntable. From the used hi-fi dealer that I went to sell my ESL63 (have to get rid of it because of the mistress of the houses command – there were two pairs of bulky black TV liked-panels in the room). I had a chat with him of what should I upgrade my almost 15 year old CD to and he ended up lending me the most basic Project turntable with the LPs that I happened to have those albums in CD version to compare the listening to.

My jaws dropped when I ran the turntable and compare the sound that came out from the different source with the same album Oh – wow – ooh were my thought at that moment. I like the easiness of CD and had lived with it for all those years, but the sound from a rudimentary turntable with a very basic cartridge made the CD sound so-oh electronica. The female vocalist that I thought was her real voice sound so machine like. The sound from vinyl shown me the sound I'd never encountered when play the same album in from the CD despite everything else in the system remained the same. The bass sounds deeper and has more impact, the stage sounded deeper and more spacious, the cymbal seem to float in the air rather than some thin bang which made me start a bit irritated



Quad 2905 was bought to replace ESL-63 says Seng. But will it survive life in the clouds?



The Quad II-eighty monoblock power amplifiers are ideal for electrostatic loudspeakers.

when listen to CDs.

Sorry it took quite so long before come up the question that I would like your advice. My current system is Quad 2905 speaker, Spectral DMA 90W and Spectral DMC-12 pre, Meridian CD506 and Meridian MC100w/ MS600 and Clearaudio Champion turntable with a Clearaudio arm. Grado Black cartridge and Graham Slee Gram amp2 phono.

First, my curiosity is over how the sound from MM and MC cartridge will appear in term of character or quality, when described in words? I never have had chance to hear the difference of the two, just read from all reviews that good MC is far better than good MM, but couldn't grasp the difference more clearly except the good MC will be really in the expensive arena. When the time has come, should I just get a better MM or explore into the MC?

Second, my curiosity is in valve amp and pre amp. If I would ever change from solid state to valve, what kind or brand of valve amp-pre should do justice to the Quad 2905? As noted earlier my kind of music largely will be vocal both classical and pop-jazz, instrument like cello, violin, Chinese flute, Gu-zheng, New Age, broad way musical and classical music with a starting to listen to the 70s rock like Led Zeppelin, Dead can Dance, Elvis Costello after acquired the taste for LPs.

My current listening room is with my study/hobby room size about 5.00 x 10.00m, with half of the room for painting desk and another half is for hi-fi system. The speaker is set about 2.20m from the rear wall and approx. 95cm from side window and listening position is in the middle of the room and three quarter while do the painting.

And lastly, my wife and I planned to retire up country on the mountain where the weather is very, very humid in the rainy season whilst the cloud or

fog will run into and through the house. Where we live is in the tropical country, so it too hot to have heater to dry the room and I suspect my Quad would not be able to tolerate that damp (my old ESL63 would arcing one panel every 6 months in my old house as I suspect it may be to damp??) So I would like to ask you that are there any other speaker that will produce the sound as near the Quad and can withstand high humidity??? (I don't like the Magnaplanar and Martin Logan sound at all even they both are ESL.) And in the same price range as Quad would be really appreciated.

I was once drawn into a Hi-Fi show with the sound of a system that its sounded wonderfully to my ear and I thought this would be the one if I have to move one from the Quad ESL2905 and wouldn't have chance to learn more of its detail because there were very crowd audience at that time. And I got lure into the second time at the place that I occasionally went to search

for vinyl but never go further the ally beyond the store that I always go by the sound of the same speaker and learn that the speaker brand is called Sceaana speaker from USA.

Unfortunately, I was shocked and have to rid that off from my mind after learn that the speaker set is starting from \$88,000 to \$ 120,000. This is my first time ever to write something like this to a magazine. So I am not sure how to start and how much should I told about the background before asking the questions and also to write it in English which obviously not my first language make it really too long. But I would be really appreciated if you could enlighten me because I cannot find the answer to my doubt after reading article in magazines and searching with the internet.

Thank you.

**Seng
Bangkok,
Thailand**

Hi Seng. Your retirement home in the mountains, with tropical cloud and rain blowing through it sounds magical. You make me envious, as another cold, gloomy UK winter approaches!

A moving coil cartridge has a more open and spacious sound than an MM cartridge and, in the past, more mid-band detail. Being more expensive their styli have better geometry too, so you get fabulous treble quality and detail. They are truly fabulous to hear, but expensive.

Competition in the MC segment has increased much over the last few years and you can now buy a good MC cartridge like the Benz Micro Wood for around £500 in the UK. However, the more expensive Ortofon are popular and very, very good, especially for classical music. I use an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze out



Tropical highlands like this one in Malaysia avoid the heat but get the rain. But can you use electrostatics here, asks Seng?

of preference, in an SME312S arm. A Cadenza Black (£1600 or 77,000 Thai baht) is less bright and very much like your old Quad ESL-63s in balance and nature. I am sure you would love this cartridge, but be careful! You then need a very good phono preamp and I usually recommend the Icon Audio PS3 at £1500. It all adds up. And of course you should really get a top quality arm like an SME (£2000), and a decent turntable to go underneath it!

If all this sounds too much then the Timestep Evo turntable package comprising Technics SL-1500 Direct Drive (modified with improved control circuitry) fitted with SME309 arm is a great alternative costing £1500. Go to <http://www.soundhifi.com/sl1200/evo.html>.

Electrostatic loudspeakers unfortunately reveal the weaknesses of transistor amplifiers; the two are not synergistic. Your ideal power amplifier is the Quad-II eighty. Designed by Tim De Paravicini (Yoshino EAR) these KT-88 equipped amplifiers have superb output transformers and outperform most rivals. They have a clean, fast and crisp sound as valve amps go and suit Quad electrostatics perfectly, in sonic character and in their ability to drive an electrostatic load. Theirs is a thoroughly modern valve sound, but one that delightfully reveals all the best qualities of valve amplifiers. You will understand what I am saying directly you hear one, so I think you need to find a Quad dealer and arrange a demo.

The early ESL-63 (I owned a pair for many years) had poor protection circuits and could arc. Later models had high voltage breakdown diodes that prevented arcing. Your ESL2905s will have these later diodes and should survive a damp climate, although I could not guarantee it. I have asked Quad to comment.

If you do not like Martin Logans and others then stay with Quads. They are a fine, well developed full range electrostatic. They also have a worldwide dealer network of great experience and you likely have a dealer in Bangkok. Your U.S. Quad dealer obviously loved them and was right about their unique abilities. If you have any more queries write to us because we know about Quad electrostatics and how to get the best from them. NK

Peter Comeau of IAG (Quad) says - The Arc protection diodes have very little to do with humidity. The Arc protection simply prevents voltage transients higher than the displacement the panel can handle.

Excessive humidity is a problem for all Electrostatic loudspeakers as the panels work with a very high voltage in excess of 5000 volts. Each QUAD ESL panel includes a humidity discharge element (different to the over-voltage Arc Protector)



Early Quad ESL-63 had compressor circuit to limit peaks; later models had diodes.

which will reduce any leakage of humidity inside the panel. You can hear it working as a small 'ticking' sound if you put your ear close to the speaker where some humidity is being dissipated.

However, it is not desirable to expose ESL speakers to excessive humidity as breakdowns of the HT charging circuitry may be provoked over a lengthy period of time. We would recommend that you include some method of reducing humidity in your listening room to below 50%. In fact this is desirable not just for the speakers but also for your records as mould growth on LPs can make them very noisy. In a tropical climate Air Conditioning is the best method of reducing humidity effectively.

I suggest Seng contacts the Quad distributor in Thailand who can direct him to a suitable retailer. Here is Thailand distributor's information.

**Contact : Ms.Napalai
tel:+6622042255/+6626657110**

**Everest World Co Ltd.,
18/8 Fico Place, 11th Floor
Sukhumvit 21 Rd., Klongtoey
Nua,
Khet Wattana,
Bangkok 10110
Thailand**

**Peter Comeau
Director of Acoustic Design
IAG Group Ltd**

TWO'S COMPANY

I've been tempted by HFW to upgrade my Technics SL1210MkII that feeds this other system of mine. It all started in

November 2007.

I have a boxed Technics – why not taking the upgrade path? Went upstairs to the hobby room and boxed the belt driven Sansui, which isn't any good, and the Technics was singing a few minutes later. I realised how good it is even in

the original configuration, sporting a simple MM Ortofon Blue cartridge!

Later, I read in Hi-Fi World a second article about further mods introduced in this turntable and the installation of an SME V / Koetsu Red (?) plus the external PSU. As a result, got in touch with Sound Hi-Fi and asked for a quotation. The SME V / Koetsu are clearly out of my reach. Not wanting to go for a lesser upgrade I let the upgrading of my Technics fade into nothingness. Even so I kept sneaking into forums, asked some more questions but none of the answers convinced me really.

Recently you reviewed the new Funk Firm arm and the Sound Hi-Fi Evo SL1210MkII and I thought that my option would be to get my turntable upgraded by Sound Hi-Fi, including the Funk Firm arm and the AT33 which I believe to be an excellent cartridge at a very reasonable price.

I wrote Sound Hi-Fi asking for a quotation and to my surprise got an answer that they do not recommend or install the Funk arm anymore.

Going through Funk Firm's site I found out that installing their arm would allow me not to remove the very interesting VTA adjustment system that all the SL1200 come equipped with. That's the reason why I had always excluded the option for a Rega arm. Their spacer rings system is a pain in the neck and everywhere else. This obsolete VTA adjustment system is the reason why I flogged my last Rega turntable and bought myself a Well Tempered Lab Amadeus.

Now I'm stuck again. having read your very interesting review of the Funk Firm's arm I'm convinced that it would be my best option. On the



Funk Firm FXR arm sings like a canary says editor David Price.

other hand, what lets me slightly down when listening to the SME turntables and arms is their scientific or clinical approach to music. I wouldn't be a particularly happy owner of an SME 10 or 20 with a 309 arm. On the other hand, what attracted me when listening to my Amadeus is the musicality of the presentation it renders and that is why I love my old Garrard 301 too (not the better loved 401). What would you suggest as an arm instead? A Michell or an RB 700? Or should I stick to the Funk Firm new arm and get it installed later after having received the modified SL1210?

**Mario Tulio
Portugal**

Oh boy! Sound Hi-Fi have their own allegiances, for perfectly laudable reasons, and theirs is to – mainly – SME. But yes, I understand that many think SMEs are too clinical and cerebral, and if you're of this view then the Funk will be preferable. I've heard the FXR II directly against an SME V, and the Funk sang like a canary whereas the SME sounded as expressive as a dead parrot! Okay, I'm exaggerating for effect, but the point still stands – there was a big difference in the style of presentation. The SME had good points too, but I think for your tastes you're going to have to go for the Funk arm, and get the Sound Hi-Fi power supply at a later date. Basically, between Mr Cawley (Sound Hi-Fi) and Mr Khoubesserian (Funk) there must be a way for them to sell you their respective wares. Give them a ring and see if you can work it out! **DP**

STREAM OF THOUGHT

I'm in the very fortunate position of having just purchased a small holiday home in France. Consequently, my wife's attention has turned to furnishing the place and mine has turned to hi-fi. After

a great deal of consideration I have come to the conclusion that the only practical solution is to go the digital route and in particular some form of networked system. I will then leave the system in France permanently and update my music files onto a portable USB drive and then onto a NAS drive in the house.

At home I mostly use vinyl and occasionally CDs. My home system consists of Michell GyroDec SE with Origin Live Silver Mk2 arm (rewired to latest spec) and Benz Micro Glider cartridge. This feeds a Lehmann Black Cube with outboard power supply and then a Cyrus Pre VS2, two Cyrus mono Xs and a pair of Wilson Benesch Arcs. The CD player is a Cyrus CD8se with PSXR. Whilst I don't expect to get the same level of performance in France given my budget, I would like to get somewhere near.

My total budget is around £2,000-£2,500 and I do not mind second hand items. My wife is keen on the Naim UnitiQute due to its size and the need for only one box (plus the speakers). We have auditioned this and

been very impressed. However, do you have any alternative solutions (I read the Cambridge Audio NP30 review with great interest). I would prefer to buy separates as this will give me the opportunity to upgrade over time.

The main listening room is five metres square and has a ceiling height of five metres. My musical tastes are fairly eclectic but can probably be categorised as acoustic, alternative and electronica. I'm not really into classical, jazz or R&B.

We are fortunate (in hi-fi terms) that we are well away from our neighbours so good amplification and speakers are essential to make the most of this chance to 'turn it up loud'. I would prefer floor standers but this is not set in stone. The digital route is a new one for me so I look forward to your suggestions and advice.

Shane Jell

I think, given your budget, the Naim UnitiQute is a great place to start. It offers high quality streamed music, network functionality and internet radio. Connect it to a NAS drive via an Ethernet cable and you'll get fine results, which are hard to beat at its £1,500 price point. It has a preamp output so later on you can always add a bigger, punchier power amplifier (Naim or otherwise), or even use a better preamp too and just use it as a network/tuner source box (a role it performs admirably). Meanwhile, you need a pair of reasonably efficient modern floorstanders – we'd suggest you think along the lines of Tannoy's Revolution DC6T (£820) or Monitor Audio's Silver RX8 (£1,050). **DP**

MONSTER ABLE

I have come to own two monster Grant G200 mono blocks. For once Google was no help and I have to ask you to please give me some info on these UK



My wife prefers the Naim UnitiQute server for our house in France ...



...but I prefer separates and wonder about the Cambridge Audio NP30, says Shane Jell.

designed and built big boys? I think they are rated at 200W RMS. Is that even possible with 4 tubes? Anyway, I am keen to know more about these amps. They will be driving vintage KEF 103.2 Reference speakers as well as Yamaha NS1000s. I hope the pics are of help.

Dutch
Los Angeles

Hi Dutch. The Grant G200 was sold mainly in the U.S., not the U.K. You can find info on designer Roy Grant if you Google 'Grant Lumley amplifiers'. So, this being the case we know less than you! If, however, they use four output tubes on each channel, and those tubes are KT88s or 6550s, then the most you can get is 100 Watts, running in Fixed bias and with the HT set very high (this shortens tube life). If there are no bias adjusters then it is an auto-bias design and you can expect 80 Watts with a following wind.

These are quite old amplifiers; I would not expect too much. Your loudspeakers are very good and deserve Quad II-eighties. Try and listen to them if you can. Designed by Tim de Paravicini they have a superb measured performance, right up with the highest modern standards, and great sound quality too, in the 'brisk, speedy' mould. With 80 Watts output they will drive your loudspeakers nicely. **NK**

THE BIG SQUEEZE

Dear Mr Price. I just bought your magazine and read your review of the Logitech Squeezebox Touch, a device I've owned for around 6 months now and I must say how disappointed I was at how misleading and inaccurate I thought your review was. I bought my Squeezebox Touch just before this year's Hi-Fi Wigwam Show, I spoke to two different exhibitors who were using a Squeezebox Touch and who were both very helpful in giving me pointers about how to set up this device together with ideas on where to find out more information on the internet. I must say that my Squeezebox Touch sounds nothing like the device you describe in your review. There are numerous forums on

the internet at which users of the Squeezebox Touch discuss how best to set up this ultimately configurable device. From Logitech's own Squeezebox User Forum to Computer Audiophile and all of the well known Hi-Fi Forums in between. I also found a blog via one forum which offers instructions and the tools to edit the Linux operating system of the Touch. It explains how to set up Squeezebox Server and edit the operating system step by step, without the need for a computer science degree to action the modifications. What the modifications do is disable non essential functions, tweak internal buffers to streamline data flow and disable non essential utilities such as fault logging and other non essential features such as Flickr and anything that interferes with data flow.

So far I have :

- 1. Disabled wi-fi, a known weakness in data flow. Best results are obtained by ethernet connection.*
- 2. Disabled all outputs except digital. I connect my Squeezebox to a Musical Fidelity VDAC which is much more hi-fi than the internal DAC.*
- 3. Set up Squeezebox server on a remote PC so that all unnecessary processing takes place away from the Squeezebox, leaving the Squeezebox to do nothing other than stream data to the DAC.*
- 4. Best sound is had by connecting a*

USB hard drive directly to the USB port and simply streaming the data out to an external DAC.

It is a no-brainer to find most of information I have about setting up the Squeezebox Touch to audiophile standards. Effectively my Squeezebox Touch now acts in exactly the same way as a CD transport. The results of these modifications improve sound output way beyond its intended standard and make it an audiophile bargain.

Reviewing this device in the way you did by unboxing it, connecting it to Wi-Fi and assuming that's all there is to it while at the same time comparing it to previous models does it no favours at all and merely scratches the surface of its potential. Every single audio forum I subscribe to has endless articles and discussion threads on how to get the best out of this device. Using it solely as an audio streaming device and connecting it via a passive pre to my Leak Stereo 20 makes my Klipsch Reference 82s sing like never before via digital music. I haven't used my Micromega CD player for months. By streaming audio, jitter is reduced to insignificant levels and because I'm not using a mechanical CD drive mechanism error correction and other digital streaming issues related to mechanical harvesting are all but gone. A very disappointing article Mr Price that shows a distinct lack of research.

Ian Wright

Hi Ian. The review was not misleading – it was a straightforward and accurate appraisal of the Squeezebox Touch. You're right to point out that it's possible to tweak the unit to let it perform better than in its stock form, but the review set out to assess the Touch as an entry level product for computer audio virgins (just as the Touch itself is designed to be). I didn't want to write a network music



A Grant 200 tube amplifier uses four output tetrodes in fixed bias to deliver high power, but was for the U.S. market.

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The Logitech Squeezebox Touch can be tweaked to improve performance, says Ian Wright.

tweaking feature – it was neither the time nor the place. I am well aware of all the information on the internet about the subject, some of which is excellent. But the review was an entry point into budget computer audio and I didn't want to frighten off many of our readers who regard the subject is impenetrable – it was not the time to start suggesting they get into machine-level Unix programming. It was important to show that the Touch is very easy to use, works well out of the box and won't frighten your family – which is what my review did. **DP**

'LOOS TALK

Early next year I'm planning on what I'm hoping will be my last upgrade. My current system consists of a Sugden Masterclass CD with Rothwell River interconnects, a Sugden A21a amplifier and an ancient pair of Castle Howards hooked up with equally ancient NVA speaker cable. I'm generally quite happy with the sound of my system but I'm keen to make a major step up in sound quality. I have seen and been seduced by the Meridian Sooloos with its lush user interface and the benefits of not having to have vast shelves full of CDs. The Meridian DSP5200 active speakers look attractive and are wife friendly in not requiring equipment racks full of industrial looking metal boxes in my living space. I would welcome your views on the Meridian combination and in particular the DSP5200s.

I am also considering alternatives to this combo. What other alternatives are there to the Sooloos that will give the ease of use and a similar level of sound quality? Whilst my own amp is away being fettled by Dr. Sugden my local hi-fi guru has loaned me a Synthesis valve pre/power combination that sounds absolutely wonderful, although it is a little too hairshirt for my taste in that it lacks remote control and anything other than volume and input selector. My guess is that the Synthesis amps could sound significantly better with different

speakers and cables. Can you suggest amp (preferably integrated) and speaker combinations that will give similar or better results to the Meridians within my circa £12k budget?

Paul Levett

Hi Paul – well, it depends on what you want from life! The Sooloos, particularly when partnered by Meridian's DSP series active speakers, is a lovely, all-in-one, user-friendly solution. It's not a super-tweaky mix and match system. Personally I think the latest generation of Meridian active speakers are really beginning to achieve their full potential, sounding tighter and more musical than earlier designs, but there are so many other ways of doing it. As far as sources go, the new Linn Akurate DS gives superb quality streamed music and has a lovely iPad interface via its Kinsky Desktop software App. But whichever source you use, you could pair it up with an MF Audio Passive Preamp with a pair of Icon Audio 845/11 tube power amps. This would give you an absolutely breathtaking way to drive, say, a pair of Eminent Technology LTF-8b loudspeakers.

This would give a massive soundstage and incredible musicality, but would be bigger and more cumbersome. Substitute a single box – a Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated for example – and it's easier to use with remote control, and plus a sort of 'Sugden on steroids' clarity and bite. Pair up a deep, dark, velvety pair of Quad 2805s and you're in clover, with a classic combination that's more transparent and expansive than the Meridians! Frankly, for this sort of outlay, you need a dealer. Spend a few days travelling around listening to different combinations and see what takes your fancy. **DP**

MORE SOOLOOS

When I first read your review of the Meridian Sooloos music server I thought here at last was a really usable music server, something that could replace my old Squeezebox system that has been in use for the past five or six years. Then as I reread the review I noticed a number of questions that were not addressed.

1. *What is the distinction between the Control 15 and the Media Source 600? The review does not explain that clearly enough for someone who doesn't know the Sooloos series.*

2. *Does the Sooloos server have one hard disc or more? Are they mirrored for safety of your media? To expand a little on this, a hard disc can fail; sometimes they fail unrecoverably without warning - even multiple discs, because they usually come from the same manufacturing batch, can fail quite close together when they are installed in the same machine. I would not be interested in a media server that does not offer at least the following features:*

Multiple mirrored hard discs, at least in a RAID 1 configuration or similar, so that all media is stored on two separate discs

Prominent reporting whenever one



Should I buy a Meridian Sooloos asks Paul Levett?

of the hard discs reports or shows signs of failure or distress. Most modern hard discs can be interrogated to find if they are experiencing read errors; this can be reported to the user as a warning to replace the discs.

Have the ability to automatically rebuild the mirror if one disc has been exchanged for a new one; in other words, if a disc is changed, the server should recognise this and automatically copy all the media from the remaining disc to the new one;

Have the ability to rebuild the mirror onto larger capacity discs; that is, if the original discs are not big enough it should be possible to replace one disc with a bigger capacity disc, wait until the media is automatically copied to the new disc, then replace the remaining old disc with a second larger disc, so that both discs can be changed without losing the media or having to copy it manually

Have a backup facility to another device, e.g. a plug-in USB backup device that can then be taken away and stored somewhere else

It would be nice if the discs could be hot-swappable also, like in some server computers, so they could be swapped without having to stop and open up the media server. Does the Meridian have any of these features?

Also, have you reviewed any of the Logitech media players? They are surprisingly good for low-budget music devices. I have several Squeezebox 3 players (pre the Logitech take-over of Squeeze Devices) streaming music from a Synology NAS box running the Squeezebox server. It provides me with all the features I mentioned above, but without the quality I get from my other Meridian and Musical Fidelity devices. That said, the quality from the Squeezebox players is surprisingly good; you can even here the benefit of HD media (24 bit/96 kHz) compared to CD-quality media.

Keep up the good work.

Kind regards,

Gerard Lardner
Ireland

Meridian say –

All Meridian Sooloos Digital systems include three key elements. They are Storage, Control, and Playback. In the case of Control 15, all three of these functions are combined in to a single product – a combination that makes Control 15 a powerful stand-alone system, and as such the most simple and effective way to communicate what a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System offers. For this reason it is also the most practical Meridian Sooloos product for review in Hi Fi World.



Meridian Media Source 600 complements the Sooloos, say Meridian.

For the more advanced Digital Media System user, a Control 15 may not offer all of the features that their specific installation requires, which is why we produce a wide range of products under the Meridian Sooloos umbrella that can all be used in combination through IP network connection to make systems of almost any size – be it to accommodate larger collections, or multiple rooms each with different audio systems to connect to.

To answer your first question: what is the distinction between the Control 15 and the Media Source 600? As described above, Control 15 may be considered an all-in-one or stand-alone Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System, integrating storage, control, and playback in a single appliance. By comparison, Media Source 600 is a playback only device for a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System. In the case of the review system Media Source 600 can be connected to the same DHCP network as Control 15 to provide an additional independent zone of high-quality audio for connection in to a traditional hi fi system, through outputs on balanced or single ended analogue or S/PDIF interfaces.

Your second question in its various parts all relating to storage lends itself to both a long and a short answer. I shall try to be comprehensive in my reply, but not take up too much of the editor's generosity by keeping the answer concise at the same time.

Control 15 includes a single 500GB internal hard disc drive which is used as primary storage to hold up to round 1000 CD albums in lossless FLAC format. In this particular system configuration, backup would be maintained through a separate third-party storage device, connected either to the same DHCP network as the Control 15, or via USB to a personal computer on that network.

So far this answer only covers the specific system that was the

subject of the review, however where the question is applied broadly to Meridian Sooloos Digital Media Systems in general the answer changes because we also offer a number of products that include multiple hard disc drives – such as Media Drive 600 or Media Core 600 – that by default offer RAID 1 storage with mirrored backup as an integrated feature. These products also include automatic drive recognition features whereby when a replacement drive is loaded in to the product through one of the front panel bays, that new drive will be appropriately formatted by the host product, and have the content from the primary drive copied on to it as a background task requiring no user intervention.

Even in a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System that provides integrated backup of your media library, the option to perform an external backup that can be taken away and stored somewhere else always exists, and we offer free applications for both Windows and Apple personal computers – Control:PC and Control:Mac – from which this process can be managed. We would always recommend that a separate backup such as this be kept at a second location as this provides an extra layer of protection against catastrophic loss. It is also worth pointing out that in addition to being backed-up your collection can be exported for use in other locations or with other music server systems including, of course, your portable MP3 player.

Whatever products make up a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System, they are all always connected to the Sooloos cloud. From here we manage features such as the Sooloos aggregated metadata service – the service that ensures a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System can provide the most detailed and accurate metadata for your music collection – and we also provide

remote monitoring and technical support, so when a hard disc drive does start to show signs of age and fatigue we are able to advise preventative intervention, which helps protect all of our customers' valuable music collections.

I trust this reply has answered the specific questions that prompted you to write. However, I appreciate that they are all somewhat conceptual as the discussion related to Meridian Sooloos Digital Media Systems in general rather than being exclusive to the review system. For further information on the complete Meridian Sooloos digital Media System range I should direct you to our website www.meridian-audio.com, or to your local Meridian retailer who would be happy to help you with your specific requirements if you do indeed think the time has come to replace your old Squeezebox system.

Yours sincerely,
Roland Morcom
Meridian Audio Ltd.

TIME TO SWITCH

I have a WAD KS881 Mk2 amp, built from a kit and now about 14 or so years old. Reading the descriptions of it in previous DIY pullouts from HFW, it does state that the amp should not be switched off and on again in short order.

As someone who uses the amp most days, I do find myself having to decide how long it is going to be before I will again be using it. If within an hour or so, I leave it on, but am aware that this is reducing the life of the valves, or so I gather.

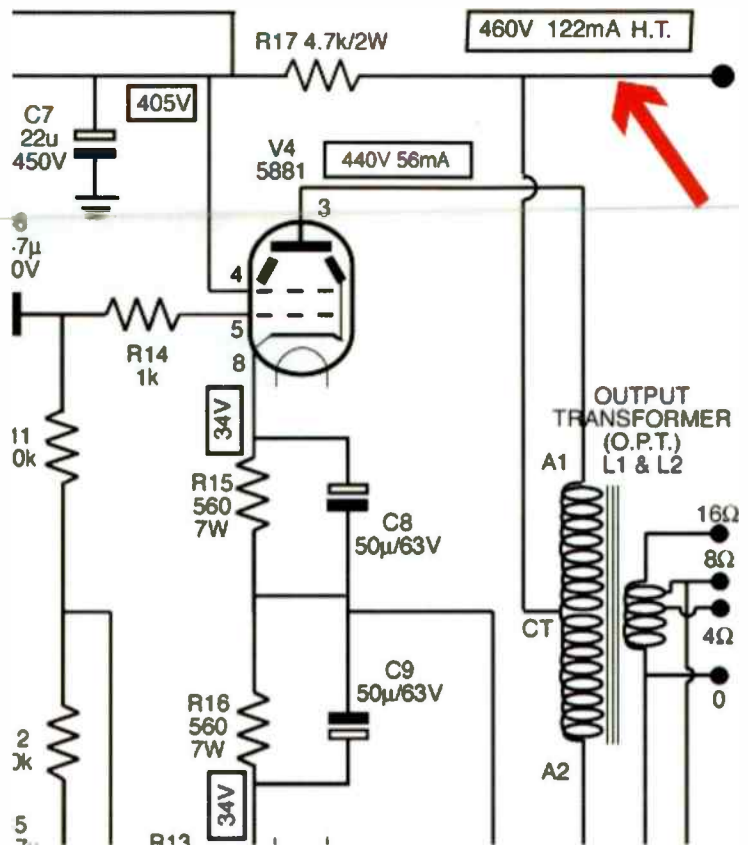
As someone who likes to let the amp warm up for half an hour before use it, turning off and on isn't really an option, so I have decided a Standby Switch might be useful, as I understand that it keeps the amp warm, but am not sure where it should be located within the circuit.

Which part of the circuit does a standby switch isolate in a valve amp? Somewhere, I seem to remember reading that it keeps the heaters alive, whilst closing down the main power supply and cutting the power to the main circuit. Is this correct?

Is it possible to include a Standby Switch in the WAD, or does the circuit design preclude this option? I still have the construction notes and circuit diagram for the amp, so not a problem to make the mods myself.

I'm sorry to have to ask for this information, but as a hobbyist my electrical/electronics theory isn't very good. I can build and repair, but not design circuits. Many thanks, for many years of enjoyable reading and great articles.

Russ Betts



A Standby switch breaks the HT line at the point shown by the red arrow. But watch out, because it must insulate against 500V.

Switch off thump suggests the 5881 valves need replacing by a new matched pair. But check C8 and C9 too.

Hi Russ. A standby switch breaks the HT line, and is connected in at the point shown by our red arrow. This allows the valves to idle with heaters on, with no current being drawn through the valve, so preserving its life. The point to note here though is that the switch must be able to withstand 500V d.c., where most are rated at 250V a.c. max. You need to go to a reputable supplier like RS Components for a special high voltage switch.

NK

GOT THE THUMP

I am the very happy owner of a WAD KS881 Mk 2 amplifier, but it is causing me a certain amount of concern. In recent months, I have noticed an increase in the number of times that, when switching off the amp, it produces a loud thump in my speakers.

Earlier this year, having experienced a particularly loud thump when switching off, upon switching on again the next day, I found one of my Quad ESL 57s had stopped working. As I am about to have the speakers rebuilt by



The Thorens TD 166 MkII in its original drab state – good but not beautiful!



The Thorens after its rebuild, with cherry plinth and Inspire X100 arm, fitted with an Ortofon Black MM cartridge. This little lot will give a great sound.

One Thing Audio, I don't want to find the speakers being further damaged, given the cost of the rebuild.

Currently, I am using a pair of KEF iQ30 speakers, won from you three years ago. They also get a mighty kick, each time I switch the amp off. Is there anything I can do to stop these loud thumps? Some components, maybe, that can be included in the circuit as a filter, or whatever.

Russ Betts

Hi Russ. The amplifier is running down asymmetrically after switch off, due to unbalanced R/C time constants. This is almost certainly due to the valves becoming mismatched and you need to buy a new matched pair. It could conceivably be due to one of the cathode bypass electrolytics C8/9 failing or, less likely, a cathode bias resistor R15/16 changing value. To check this you need to measure their values with a CR meter, which Maplins can supply. Just make sure there is no HT on the HT line first of course, before fiddling. Use a meter to check. **NK**

FORWARD TO BLACK

My turntable is a Thorens TD166 MK 2. I bought it 26 years ago. Due to house moves it remained in various lofts for about 15 years following extensive use. I finally rescued it and upgraded my system to a Cyrus amplifier, CD and tuner, with Linn speakers. I bought a Rega Fono phono stage to go with it and the turntable worked straight out of its enforced period of rest. I did dust it down and changed the belt however and it sounded great.

However I wanted to upgrade and after reading your review of the Linn upgrade package from Inspire Hi Fi I considered getting an old Linn Sondek and upgrading it. I also asked around if the Thorens could be upgraded but met with stony silence from all the dealers I mentioned it to. The stock grudging answer to my continued questions was

either it was not worth it or it was not possible.

After getting knocked back by everyone my mind was made up and a search of e-bay began, to find the right Linn deck. However I found a Thorens, which had been upgraded by Robert Isherwood at Inspire Hi Fi – and it was for sale. It looked great! So I contacted Robert and quickly found that not only could he advise me on how to upgrade my existing deck he could do it for me. So decisions were made to add a new cherry plinth, upgrade the arm to the X100, add an Ortofon 2M Black cartridge and replace the motor with an Origin Live motor and power unit. I took the old deck up to watch the transformation and can only express my thanks at the level of care that Robert gave to the work.

The result is fantastic and the sound is brilliant! It was also a good chance to check out the Inspire turntables which sound great too. The new deck has made me re-visit my vinyl and each record has now become a complete new listening experience with sounds and effects that I have never heard before. I would really recommend anyone to get advice from Robert at Inspire.

Thanks for your vinyl and turntable coverage it has helped me to reach my audio and hi-fi nirvana. At least for now ... should I upgrade that phono stage yet?

Dave Wilkins

The Ortofon 2M Black is quite an amazing MM Dave, and you should consider an Icon Audio PSI MkII. This will knock your socks off – you will finally hear fully what you have paid for! **NK**

FIVE ALIVE

My hi-fi system still does a fine job but having heard a friend's set up I feel I could beef things up a bit, possibly by getting some new speakers, but I'd like your opinion if that's where best to

spend the cash.

My system is Linn Sondek/ Meridian 506 CD player/ Sugden a21a amp/ Mission 752 freedom speakers. I'm not sure what CD player or amp my friend has but the speakers are B&W 684s and compared with my set up the sound is more lively, punchy, detailed and engrossing.

My question is whether an investment in new speakers could bring an improvement in the punch and excitement of my own set up?

Many thanks

**Dave Clarke
Surrey**

Your Sugden A21a amplifier is very low powered, producing just 20 pure Class A Watts per channel. It is a lovely amp and one we recommend, but very specialised for Mission 752 Freedom loudspeakers. I suspect your friend has something more powerful driving his B&Ws.

To make the most of the Sugden you need sensitive loudspeakers and this really means large ones. A recent exception is the smooth Tannoy DCT that we tested in the November 2011 issue and liked very much. Producing a massive 90dB from just one Watt, this moderately sized floorstander will suit your Sugden right down to the ground. Even the Sugden's sparkling clarity will be smoothly handled by the DC6Ts, and they cost around £995 which fits in well.

If you want a loudspeaker just a bit more balanced toward your friend's B&Ws, then Triangle Antals are a good choice. These are big, sensitive and very well engineered – and also reasonably priced at around £1500. Both will impress with the Sugden I feel, and – importantly – make the most of it. **NK**



The new Tannoy DC6T is a very sensitive and super smooth floorstander that will make the most of a Sugden Pure Class A amplifier.

Dual Time

Noel Keywood finds the combination of tube and transistor technology in EMIS Audio's HVA1 hybrid valve integrated amplifier to be a most alluring one...

Here's a lovely little valve amplifier with a few tricks up its sleeve – but you can't see them. The new Emis Audio HVA1 produces a claimed 25 Watts and costs £1,495, so it is no budget design. What you get for this money, say Emis Audio, is very high sound quality – and for once the claim rang true. The HVA1 does have a lovely sound, sweet as a nut and very tidy – and for good reason. Under the skin lurk transistors!

Yes, those horrid little things that blight audio wherever they appear! But in this case Emis have used them imaginatively and well to come up with a hybrid amplifier that took me by surprise. I know most of the topologies and tricks, having conceptualised and designed many World Audio Design valve amps in the past, but the HVA1 is both clever and unique in a simple but effective manner.

The most common hybrid topology uses valves in the preamplification stages and transistors to drive the loudspeakers. This is cheap – no output transformers are needed – and quite effective. What you get is a transistor sound with some of the attributes of a valve amplifier – and done well it is a lovely solution having the more spacious presentation of valves with the bass grip and power of transistors.

In the HVA1 Emis do it the other way around: they use a valve output stage with a transistor input (gain) stage. The logic of this isn't obvious – which is why it's uncommon. Designer Brian Wilson told me "we use a differential input pair just like

transistor amps".

Oh! A little light went on in my head as the building blocks tumbled into place and I realised what this was all about. A differential input stage provides gain and phase splitting in a simple yet elegant manner, without phase shift – meaning more feedback can be used than is possible with a capacitor coupled valve stage. This little trick allows the Emis to use more feedback than is common with valve amplifiers, even though it remains far less than that of most transistor amplifiers, Naim excluded. In conjunction with neat little output

transformers and a lightly run output stage using EL34s, you get what is quintessentially a valve amplifier

that measures and performs like a transistor amplifier – a correlation borne out in listening tests. This amplifier has tight, clean and pacy bass, but low frequency notes have the character and form you get from a valve amplifier. It just does not have the slam of big amps.

As I haven't lost your interest so far, with all this talk about valve amp topologies, I'll just quickly add that a couple of integrated circuits precede the transistor phase splitter to provide additional gain, but they are not in the feedback loop. Even switching is solid-state, where most





"it has a sound that not only left me deeply impressed, I was actually quite taken aback..."

manufacturers prefer to use small Panasonic miniature sealed relays, so Emis are not averse to the transistor and there are in truth plenty of 'em in the HVA1.

Aesthetically, the HVA1 is fairly traditional, apart from the valve covers. These are stylistically at odds with the conservative wooden chassis and the whole is something of a style accident that falls into no particular idiom. It is neither brutally functional, nor cleanly modern, nor deeply trad. Build quality is good and finish satisfactory, but detailing needs more consideration. For example, the loudspeaker outputs comprise one pair of 4mm sockets, Naim style. There are no 4 / 8 Ohm options and no binding posts able to accept bare wire or spade terminals. Emis do not even state what loudspeaker

impedance the amplifier is designed to match, but unsurprisingly it is 8 Ohms, our tests showed. This simply means it delivers most power into 8 Ohms; power into 4 Ohms was less,

but by little. Distortion did not rise when driving a low load so the amp survives this test well, likely due to feedback. There are four line level inputs and a switched tape input, and



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although one is marked Disc it means CD, not LP unless an external phono stage is used.

SOUND QUALITY

The HVA1 is immediately attractive in its sound; its strengths are quite obvious. Whilst having much of the easy liquidity of a valve amplifier it is at the same time fast and controlled and excitingly dynamic. Drums have plenty of punch so the start of Adele's 'Rolling In the Deep' comes across with both punch and pace; there's no softness in the timing. Subsonics might not be on the menu but fast bass with great pace



certainly is, and it makes the small Emis an engaging listen. It is full bodied across the lower midband and bass regions, giving drums body and dimension, yet offers a clean and open window on to a spring morning, as it were. It doesn't have all the depth of a tube amp but neither does it suffer the flatness of soundstaging that causes many transistor amps to render music as one-dimensional wallpaper.

A nicely detailed midband not only made Adele full voiced and strong, but also highlighted the perfect modulation and control of Renee Fleming singing 'O mio babbino caro'. The HVA1 came over as both full of heart here yet controlled and clean too, vocal climaxes underlined by plentiful quantities of dynamic push. With Celine Dion singing 'I'm Alive' intricately wrought treble established a wide sound stage, as strong at full left and right as at centre. Quite often the amplifier's excellent all round

imaging, front to back and left to right, set up a big open soundstage studded with clear stable images that held my attention.

Drawbacks? There were few. The midband was not quite as liquid and transparent as an all-valve amp and treble had a slight transistor edge to it, helped along I suspect by the EL34s which show this quality in any case. They are liked for their delicious detailing and the HVA1 capitalises on this to give a sound that is unusually detailed and specific as valve amps go. This will strengthen its appeal to listeners used to transistors.

Put all these qualities together and you come up with an amplifier that suits both Rock and Classical music. Okay, if you really want the room to be rearranged by the synths in Lady GaGa's 'Monster' this isn't the amp to do it, but that apart Rock does Rock in that it is fast and punchy, full of detail and yet listenable too.

Measuring a high damping factor of 20 I deliberately paired the HVA1 with our under-damped Spondor s8e loudspeakers and it held on to their bass cones well, proving itself a better match than most valve amplifiers. Bass lines from Jean-Jaques Burnel rolled along with fluid muscularity from the Stranglers' 'Dreamtime' album.

The delicious finger picking of Nils Lofgren working through the mechanical complexities of playing 'Keith Don't Go' seemed to

highlight how clear and unclouded the HVA1 sounds, its time domain definition was startling against most amplifiers, allowing me to hear right into the vibrating strings as Lofgren tortured them! There would be a mush or haze here to flatten perspectives from most amplifiers, that shimmering or modulation noise I swear accompanies transistors in particular. Putting a lot of feedback around EL34s in this amplifier seems to extract wonders from them – and had me scratching my head a little in puzzlement!

CONCLUSION

As regular readers will know, I am not the greatest fan of solid-state amplification, but perhaps my fears are just a bit exaggerated? Well, that's what the HVA1 had me thinking. It has a sound that not only left me deeply impressed, I was actually quite taken aback. Few amplifiers jump out as exceptional but this one did. I found it made listening exciting as well as cerebral. Music had life, there was great pace but I could hear right into what was happening. So it appealed to me at all levels, conveying the power behind driving Rock and the majestic breadth of a full orchestra with a skill that eludes other amplifiers. It has punch and pace, but great insight and a fluid presentation too. Definitely worth an audition then, because I think you'll hear what I'm describing within a seconds of hearing it.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The HVA1 has a single output matched for an 8 Ohm load, and the amplifier produces 24 Watts in these conditions, from 40Hz up to 10kHz. However, most loudspeaker bass units are 4 Ohms and into this load output drops to 20 Watts, so in real life conditions it is a 20W amplifier, less than the 25 Watts quoted but not so far off the mark.

Distortion levels were unusually low, even at 40Hz and 10kHz, and from low output up to -1dB below full output. This is a very good performance, quite surprising because the output transformer cores are small, which usually means bass distortion of at least 1%, but the HVA1 managed just 0.2% into a 4 Ohm load, -1dB below full output of 20 Watts. Whilst the amp is no power house, it is very clean. I suspected feedback has been used in good quantity and a high damping factor of 20 confirms this. So bass should sound tight and clean.

Noise was low, hum measuring 1mV on both channels, which is about right. Separation was good at 65dB and frequency response wide, stretching from 10Hz to 54kHz. Input sensitivities

vary, the highest value being a useful 230mV.

The HVA1 is a neat design with a fine basic performance. It isn't powerful, but will likely sound sweet, pure and nicely controlled. NK

Power	24 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	10Hz-54kHz
Separation	-65dB
Noise	-86dB
Distortion	0.015%
Sensitivity	230mV

DISTORTION



VERDICT

An amplifier with a glorious sound, one that is clean yet fast and punchy. It has a lovely tonality too and excellent imaging. In all, true high fidelity.

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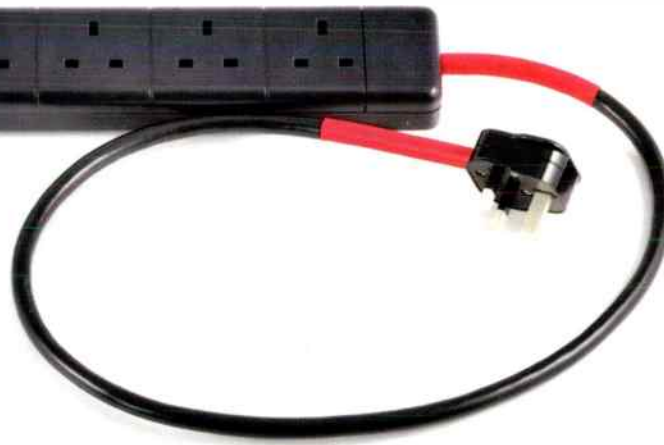
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distribution block, for which you are charged between £65 and £79.50 for one metre to three metre versions!

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sparkly treble and an improvement in midband focus, allied to superior soundstaging – compared to a £9 job from the local hardware store. Of course, better solutions are available, but you'll have to pay serious money for these when this particular item does so much for so little. Heartily recommended. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0)7908 056978,
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soundbites

ISOTEK ULTIMATE SYSTEM SET-UP DISC £19.95

This disc from power supply specialist IsoTek has a few rather unusual features. There is an assumption made by the manufacturer that you already realise that your speakers should be mounted with the tweeters at ear height, in your normal listening position, with the listener sitting at the point of a triangle with the speakers at the other two points. Beyond that, no audio knowledge is required. The instructions are simple, and the test tracks are well thought out and make their point obviously. The spoken voice is accompanied by a castanet which carries a surprising amount of sonic information – it allowed me to identify a slight timbral imbalance on my upstairs system and proved easy to focus on. This proved useful during the 'Soundstage' and 'Stereo Image Depth' tests.

The most unusual of the tracks complete a 360 degree sweep around the room, including appearing to go behind the listener - I am happy to report that both of my systems passed satisfactorily. Further on are a series of ascending and descending frequency tones spread across ten points between 20Hz and 20kHz. I was most pleased to discover that the Quad/ Kelly set up upstairs produced the 20Hz quite clearly and solidly (I also felt it through the seat, despite the Kellys standing on 50mm thick granite plinths) albeit with some reduction in perceived volume level compared to the 43Hz tone which succeeded it. The final six tracks are choices from releases on the Opus 3 record label, each chosen to demonstrate a certain aspect of the sound, be it spatiality, rhythm or dynamic range. They range from Bach's 'Tocatta and Fugue in D

Minor', to 'Tiny Island' by Vaquero, recorded in a church, and involving a rainstick and a steel guitar. I found this disc to be well thought out and practical in the track choices offered. Another must for the toolbox! **TB**

[Contact: www.isoteksystems.com]





Noel Keywood tries the latest and greatest Apple Mac Mini – is this the computer audio server we've all been waiting for?

Mini Adventure

This latest Apple Mac Mini computer is an agreeable companion; it's almost silent and takes up little space. And that has made it popular as a music source. Factor in the iTunes connection and you have a neat way to play music. But how does it stack up sonically? Well, in this review, you'll see the newest Mini Mac released this summer, running its Lion OS-X version 10.7.2 operating system, put under the spotlight of our Rohde & Schwarz digital signal analyser, to find out...

The Mac Mini has, until this new model, measured a tiny 160mm square, giving it a footprint that is minuscule against the average PC. Inside was shoehorned a laptop drive and a cooling fan. The fan doesn't whirr like a demented banshee as most PC fans do and that's crucial if the Mini is in the same room as the hi-fi system. Unfortunately, whilst still silent the latest Mini has

grown to 195mm square, so it is less small. All the same, it remains relatively compact as computers go, solidly made, easy on the eye and unobtrusive in a modern home, all plus points for those who don't want a crude, noisy, tin-box computer making its presence crudely obvious.

Height has dropped from 50mm to 30mm, mainly because the latest Mini has no CD/DVD drive. That means £25 or so must be added to its £599 basic price for an external drive, if you want to rip music from your CDs. We connected up an LG BE12LU30 Blu-ray burner, it was seen by the Mini and iTunes copied CDs and music tracks from it with no hitch. iTunes in its latest version will still burn to CD, even though the Mini has no CD drive. Lack of a CD drive is irritating for music use, but for the time being at least not an insurmountable problem. An external drive does of course spoil the Mini's small footprint: suddenly the cables and boxes of computer mess appear

unless the drive is brought in only when needed.

GETTING GOING

Audio-wise, not a lot has changed in this latest Mini. The peculiarly awkward 'Audio MIDI' utility remains unaltered and it still locks outgoing clock rate at 44.1, 48, 82.2 or 96kHz, irrespective of source rate; 192k remains unavailable (S/PDIF does not support it). The good news is our analyser showed that rate conversion either up from 44.1 to 48, an awkward non-multiple, or down from a 48k rate to 44.1k produced no serious jitter issues, unlike



An adaptor is needed to couple an optical TOSLINK plug into the headphone socket. Maplins sell optical cables with suitable adaptors.

earlier models. In fact, jitter was very low by everyday audio standards, so the latest Mini is fine as a music server in this respect. Even so, on sonic grounds you should always set the outgoing clock rate to the sampling frequency of the files you're playing; any amount of sample rate conversion is not a desirable thing as far as sound quality is concerned.

The Mini still has no uPnP server onboard so it will not be seen by audio devices like A/V receivers or Network players (e.g. Cambridge Audio NP30), over an ethernet or Wi-Fi network. It is easy to install uPnP functionality though, with downloads like Twonky Media Server or Elgato EyeConnect. The latter installed seamlessly and worked perfectly with Lion on our Mini, making connection to a Cambridge NP30 network player. So there's no problem here; Elgato even offer music

ELGATO

Elgato offer a free audio uPnP server for Mac, allowing it to be seen on an ethernet or wi-fi network. Go to www.elgato.com. With a 1kHz, -60dB test tone, signal related jitter measured just 15pS via S/PDIF, a very low value, lower than most CD players. Random jitter and low rate clock drift were minimal too. So as a digital source it is now one of the best. Computers are said to produce a lot of electrical noise, but with a 24bit test signal at -60dB, notched out by our analyser, noise measured an incredibly low -144dBFS unweighted via S/PDIF. So there are no noise problems with the little Apple Mac Mini.



and sounds considerably better and decent by hi-fi standards. Apple Lossless and high resolution audio is also available from the internet of course. The Mini output our 24bit/96kHz AIFF test files perfectly and can stream uncompressed

SongBook (www.bookshelfapps.com) is a good alternative to iTunes, if you want to use FLAC files.

CONCLUSION

So under tests, the latest Mac Mini confirms its popularity as a great little home computer able to act as domestic music server at the same time. It's inexpensive, unobtrusive in a way few other computers can match and able to store and deliver your CDs and downloads to the hi-fi. It gives a good, stable, very low noise and jitter digital output and as such is excellent for connection to hi-fi DACs. Highly recommended, then.



Spot the audio sockets! The traditional ones are at far right, a 3.5mm analogue microphone input and a headphone output that doubles as an S/PDIF optical digital output. The USB, HDMI and Thunderbolt outputs can stream digital audio as well.

streaming functionality free.

You don't have to go down the home network route though. The Mac Mini has an optical digital output in its headphone socket and this will drive a 10m (30ft) optical cable with no difficulty, tests confirmed. This means that instead of an ethernet cabled home network, a single optical Toslink cable can be used to link to a Digital-to-Analogue Convertor (DAC). If the Mini is in the same room as the hi-fi this is likely the best option and a Musical Fidelity V-DAC or Cambridge Audio Azur Dac Magic-S will work nicely. This is a simple, effective and inexpensive way to use a Mini to deliver music to the hi-fi system. But this digital output will not appear for selection in the Sound menu in System Preferences until a plug is inserted in the headphone socket, which is confusing; it should be greyed out to show the option exists.

The Mac Mini comes with iTunes of course, and this is a great way to get music, apart from ripping from CD. The drawback here is that most downloadable music is compressed and of lower quality than CD. However, whilst iTunes 128kbps AAC can be vague in treble detailing with a complex signal and lacking a sense of air and space, iTunes Plus runs at 256kbps (AAC compressed)

24/96 WAV raw digital (PCM) over its optical link (most Wi-Fi links cannot support such a high data rate).

Apple's iTunes software can of course also rip your CDs in AAC, MP3, Apple Lossless and .WAV formats, so you don't have to download everything – you can just transfer your existing CD collection to your computer. Always rip in .WAV for best quality, even Apple Lossless gives a slightly inferior sound, reputedly due to the extra processing the computer has to do to play it. Annoyingly, iTunes does not support FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec), which has become a big favourite with computer audiophiles. It may not sound quite as good as .WAV files but it offers excellent handling of 'metadata', all that album/artist/track information.

VERDICT

With very low jitter and noise via S/PDIF digital out, the Mac Mini is a fine digital transport and an excellent computer music centre.

APPLE MAC MINI £599
Apple Computer UK
www.apple.com/uk

FOR
- very low jitter and noise via S/PDIF digital output
- fine build, stable OS

AGAINST
- FLAC not native to iTunes

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our jitter analysis of the S/PDIF optical digital output, playing a 1kHz -60dB digitally generated test tone at 44.1kHz sample rate with output rate set to 44.1 shows very low levels of jitter. Signal related jitter can be seen as a small blip above the noise floor at 1kHz, measuring 15pS. Since silver disc players commonly manage 35pS, and at worst much more, this is a very good result.

Random jitter lies around the 10pS threshold across the audio band and this just a little higher than top CD players that manage 5pS. However, most manage about the same as the Mini and some are a lot worse, so overall this is a fine result. There was little low rate clock drift, seen as a rise below 100Hz.

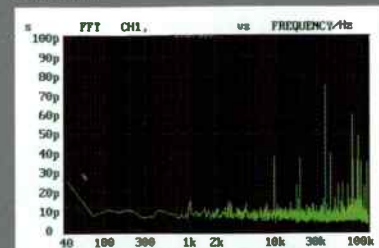
Noise measured -92dB unweighted with a digitally generated 16bit signal and -144dB unweighted with a 24bit signal, this measurement made not at digital zero but using a -60dB notched out 1kHz tone. Absence of random noise in the 24bit analysis noise floor shows electrical interference is not a problem.

Converting a 44.1 sample rate signal to 48kHz and vice versa produced no increase in either jitter or noise. In older models jitter rose significantly in this test so the Mini has improved considerably in this respect.

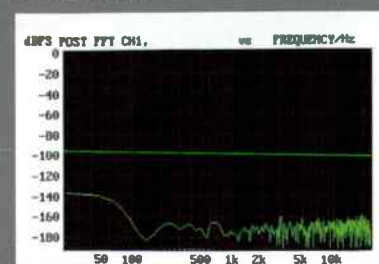
From a technical viewpoint using

the Mac Mini as a music source has no drawbacks our measurements show. In itself it has an excellent performance, a notch above silver disc players. Do bear in mind however, that as most downloaded music is compressed as an MP3 or AAC file, often by a poor encoder, this does not in itself mean the Mini will sound good. Only with uncompressed files, or lossless, preferably of 24bit resolution, will such low levels of jitter and noise contribute to sound quality.

JITTER



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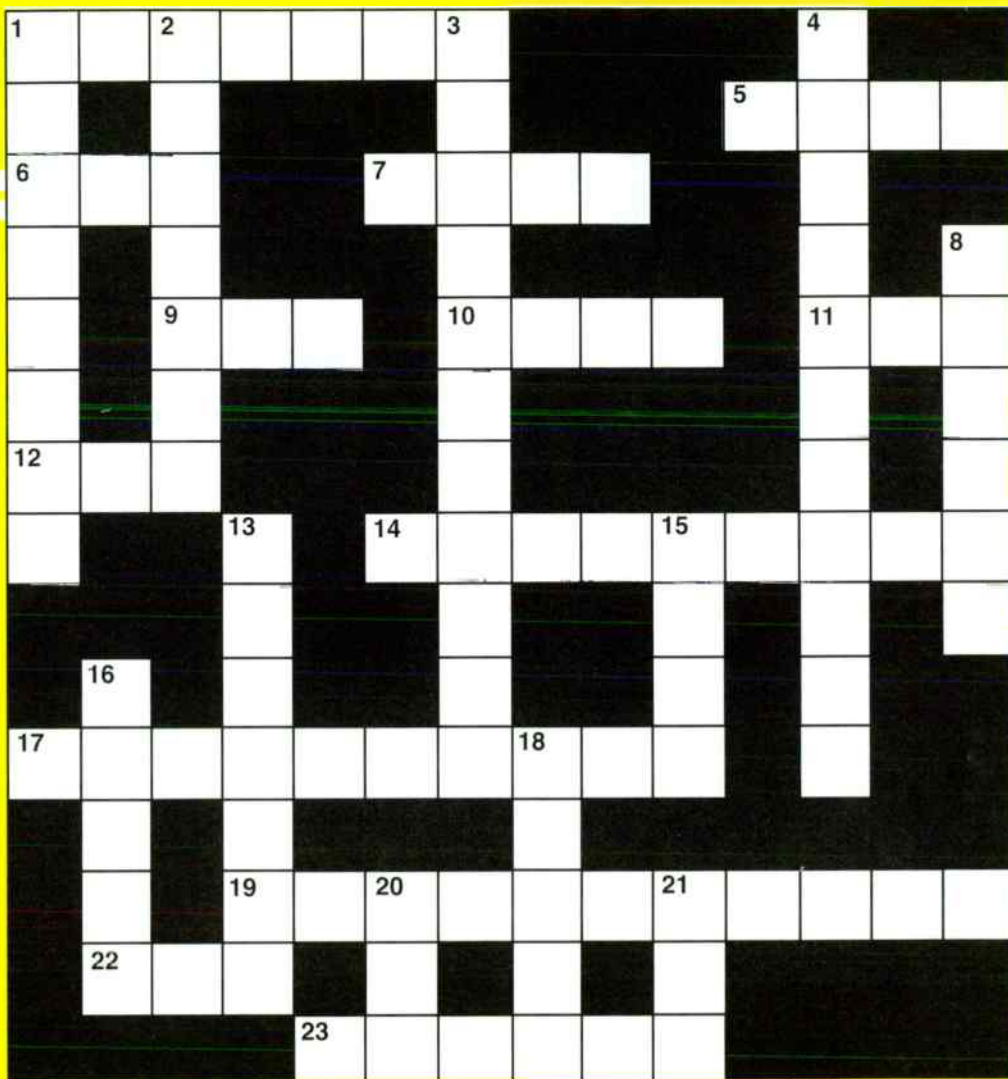
Common Features: Icon Designs by David Shaw. Hand built "Point to Point" wiring. Designed and finished in Leicester UK. No printed circuit board. ALPS Volume control. Gold plated terminals. Audiophile components.

Silver Teflon audio cable. Steel & alloy plate construction. Soft start. Comprehensive manual Inc DIY valve change info Plexiglas valve cover included. "Proper" valve amplifiers are heavy because good transformers need lots of iron!
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CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Not analogue
- 5 Links rhinos to loudspeakers
- 6 Loudness suffers it
- 7 Four of them
- 9 Small amplifier
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- 11 Naim make it
- 12 A logic gate
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DOWN

- 1 How we do it now
- 2 Jeweller's turntable
- 3 Makes noise
- 4 The first frisbee
- 8 Full of bark
- 13 Most loudspeakers have them
- 15 Affects digital quality
- 16 Long distance entertainment
- 18 Chipmaker
- 20 They make tasty turntables
- 21 iPhones rely on it

Answers Across: (1) Digital, (5) Horn, (6) War, (7) Quad, (9) Amp, (10) Sony, (11) Aro, (12) And, (14) Cambridge, (17) David Price, (19) Electricity, (22) OPT, (23) Syllus

Answers Down: (1) Download, (2) Garrard, (3) Loudspeaker, (4) Compact Disc, (8) Wooler, (13) Cabinet, (15) Rate, (16) Radio, (18) Intel, (20) E.A.T., (21) iOS



One and Only

The best things in life come in small packages, finds Paul Rigby as he samples Fidelity Audio's single input Pre-120 preamplifier...

An Audio Research SPI I this is not. You won't find a fascia festooned with fripperies, peppered with potentiometers and studded with switches. Inside, there's not the bird's nest of wiring that other, more esoteric designs feature. In short, the Fidelity Audio Pre-120 is a single source preamplifier with a single volume control adorning the front. So it's a passive then, like the Creek OBH-22? Ermm – surprisingly perhaps – no. Despite its modest £330 price tag, and its absolute economy of design, this is more than just a box with a volume control inside.

Confirming this, designer Brent Rowe confessed that, yes, "it only has one input and one set of outputs. Apart from vinyl or CD-only systems, it's also targeted at people who might use a DAC only, for example," said Brent. "These days, many people are not interested in a big preamp with multiple inputs and outputs. A lot of people I speak to don't even use their CD players anymore or vinyl, all they need is one simple input for their DAC which does all the digital switching. There's a lot of people out

there who just don't want to pay for multiple inputs that they'll never use. It keeps things simple for us too and it keeps costs down."

So, the Pre-120 flies the flag for the less-is-more brigade. It has a sort of a nineteen eighties minimalist sensibility to it, although it doesn't come in black box form (the fascia and rear panel are silver, although there's a choice of silver or black casework). It weighs in at 1.04kg and spans 104x56x245mm, making it wonderfully inconspicuous. "Inside, we've kept the signal path really simple, using the same philosophy as a passive preamp," said Rowe. "Some preamps really overcomplicate the circuits which affects the sound quality, which is one reason why passive preamps sound nice, because of their simplicity".

The Pre-120 shares some parts with Fidelity Audio's respected HPA-200 headphone amplifier, such as the high grade circuit board, capacitors and the same large transformer. "The gain is set differently," said Rowe, "and the buffered outputs for driving headphones have been removed too. We've used different resistors and we've gone for the better quality

op-amps. Because of the price range for the Pre-120, we initially were not going to feature them but they resulted in such a significant sound difference that we decided to put them in anyway."

Packing the components into such a diminutive casing was not a problem apparently, and because of the long-form design, it was possible to tuck the power supply away at the rear, so as to not interfere sonically with the other components. "Actually, you would get more interference with a phono stage because of the high gain, but not on the Pre-120. It even runs at a lower gain than a headphone amp. On that subject, we did contemplate putting the headphone amp and the pre in the one box but it compromised the sound quality of the preamp." Designed as a dual mono box and featuring a dual transformer with two windings, the wee Fidelity Audio sports "the best op-amp we've ever heard" inside.

SOUND QUALITY

As it sports passive preamp-like design simplicity, I brought in the excellent Icon Audio Passive Pre,

priced at around £260, to compare with the Fidelity to provide an ideal contrast, but also to show what differences could be discerned at this price point. It's certainly the closest rival in price terms to the Fidelity Audio, now that the Creek OBH-22 has been discontinued...

My immediate first impressions, playing Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism', was the airy nature of the Fidelity's midrange which opened up a tremendous amount of detail, in comparison to the Icon, giving a far more impressive portrayal. The vocal presentation was more complex than the Icon too. That latter rather

it more approachable, but it couldn't compete with the Fidelity's sparkling presentation which took the form of a light, delicate treble. The splashing cymbals and trumpet solo that appeared early in the track, featured a notable reverb tail via the Fidelity that just didn't exist on the Icon. Bass also played a larger part in the Fidelity powered version, providing a bedrock for the music. The reedy sax on the Fidelity also helped to display the broad



track, 'Plas'. This atmosphere built rather more effectively via the Fidelity, whereas the Icon tended to smooth over such irregularities. Overall, the Fidelity combined a rumbling, tremulous bass with a textured midrange that really satisfied at the price.

CONCLUSION

Of course, the Fidelity Audio Pre-120 will not be for everyone – that's a no-brainer considering it has only one input! But if your listening revolves around one particular source, then this is a great solution for those wanting an inexpensive, high quality preamplifier that lets you budget more, perhaps, on a decent power amplifier.

Alternatively it's also ideal for a second system, possibly with active loudspeakers, placed in a bedroom or office/study. It has a surprisingly mature and smooth sound for the price, yet there's real insight – this preamp really signposted the subtle reverb of brass instruments and the timbre of voices for example, in a way that the rival passive preamp could not.

The Fidelity PRE-120 is surprisingly fresh faced and clean, offering a degree of clarity that is unusual at this price point. Highly recommended, then – perhaps it's time you thought about downsizing?

"a great solution for those wanting an inexpensive, high quality preamp that lets you budget more on a decent power amp..."

muffled this area but the Fidelity allowed the full spectrum of tonal complexity to spew forth. The voice is a complex machine, full of subtlety and nuance and, while the Icon had some trouble tracking it, the Fidelity did so with aplomb, even to the extent of recognising a subtle multi-voice dubbing in the mix. This feature added a previously unheard depth to Skin's delivery that included a gentle side to her often aggressive tones.

The Icon certainly did provide heft and weight to the bass regions, more so than the Fidelity, but the latter offered a better balanced rendition supplementing the rhythmic gait of the track with a sprightly pace that compared well with the sometimes slower demeanour of the Icon. The open nature of the Fidelity Audio's mid, and the better integrated bass, gave the music a superior balance — the Icon sometimes felt like it was a little lopsided with lower frequency tones too often in the ascendancy. By contrast, the broader soundstage provided by the Fidelity contributed to a near-epic presentation.

Pushing the volume up to eleven in true 'Spinal Tap' fashion, there was a measure of midrange hardening from the Fidelity. This was not unexpected but it was a little surprising that, for the price and compared to other solid state contemporaries, the effect was far less imposing and grating than usual.

Moving to jazz and Horace Silver's 'Cape Verdean Blues' on XRCD, the Icon's lack of dynamic realism was less evident here, making

soundstage, reaching towards the sonic boundaries.

Moving to vinyl, and Ella Fitzgerald's rendition of Cole Porter's 'Love For Sale', and analogue playback was smooth and approachable with a sweet tone on the Icon. But the Fidelity was more incisive in its examination of the music and its attendant sonic elements. Fitzgerald's voice, for example, was given far more attention by the Fidelity whose dynamic range was extended, roping in some extra emotion. It was as if her voice had more room to manoeuvre. Bass grooved at a great pace, taking hold of the song by the scruff of the neck and adding control to what was a rather wayward direction via the Icon. Backing brass offered greater texture while orchestral strings held further promise of romance as the midrange tonality revealed superior realism.

Swapping vinyl discs for Cluster's 'Cluster II' CD, which is instrumental krautrock awash with vintage analogue synths, and the Fidelity Audio Pre-120 offered more bite to the midrange than the Icon, which was benign and too well behaved by comparison. The Fidelity added a tension to the presentation with the slightly aggressive blend of analogue synths available on the

VERDICT ●●●●●
Compact design provides an open, dynamic presentation at a bargain price.

FIDELITY AUDIO
PRE-120 £330
Fidelity Audio
☎ +44 (0)1302 739998
www.fidelityaudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- upper mid insight
 - tuneful bass
 - efficient design
- AGAINST**
- limited connections
 - basic facilities

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

This is a simple silicon chip based preamp that, like most, overloads at 10V output, this being plenty enough for all power amplifiers, most of which need 1V. Gain has been set to a modest x2.5 that, when feeding a 1V input power amp equates to 400mV input sensitivity – low. To be of broader use, especially in matching low gain phono stages to power amps, more gain is needed. For silver disc players it is fine.

Input noise was on the high side at 2.4µV (1µV is possible) but at -104dB below 1V out will still be inaudible.

Frequency response was 1Hz-100kHz and flat at all volume control positions. Distortion measured 0.00006%, not the 0.00003% thd + noise quoted, which is just about impossible to either achieve or measure.

The Pre-120 will do its job well, but it has practical limitations. NK

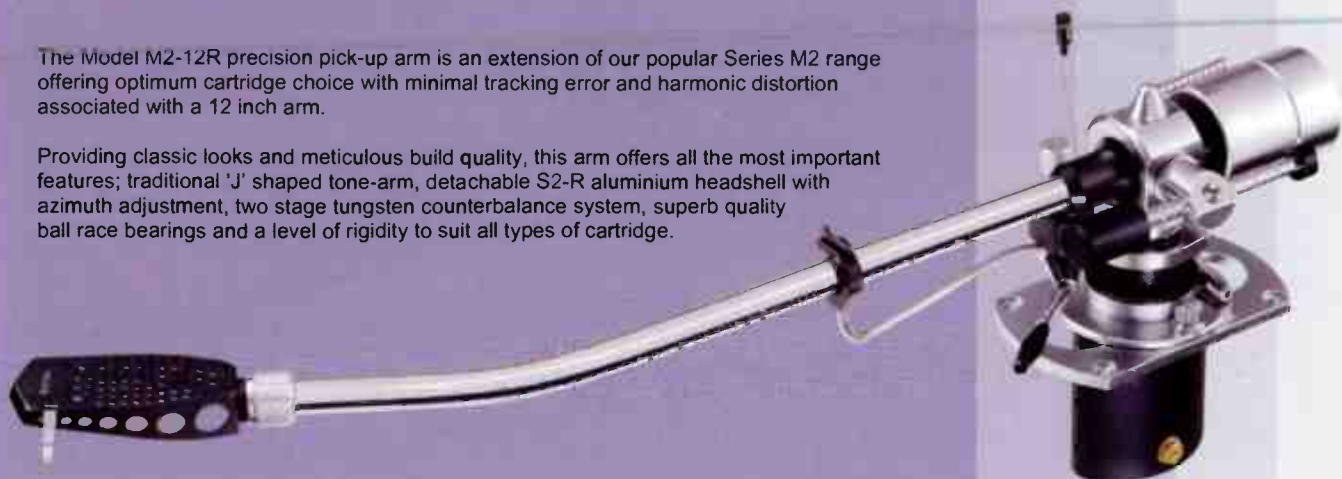
Frequency response	1Hz-100kHz
Separation	78dB
Noise	2.4µV
Distortion	0.00006%
Gain	x2.5 (8dB)
Overload	10V

DISTORTION

SERIES M2-12R

The Model M2-12R precision pick-up arm is an extension of our popular Series M2 range offering optimum cartridge choice with minimal tracking error and harmonic distortion associated with a 12 inch arm.

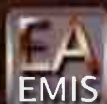
Providing classic looks and meticulous build quality, this arm offers all the most important features; traditional 'J' shaped tone-arm, detachable S2-R aluminium headshell with azimuth adjustment, two stage tungsten counterbalance system, superb quality ball race bearings and a level of rigidity to suit all types of cartridge.



SME

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The HVA1 hybrid amplifier was created featuring an unprejudiced choice of technology; the latest semiconductor devices combined with thermionic valves. The intention was to innovate, to maintain the musicality of valves, but at the same time improve power bandwidth, hum, noise and distortion. The Amplifier is heavily engineered using hand crafted hardwood and high tech laser cut parts and finishes.

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We believe our Amplifier is outstanding!

PDF Fact Sheet Available for HVA1

T: 07425 568989 E: brian@emisaudio.co.uk www.emisaudio.co.uk



Head First

David Price tries HiFi Man's new entry-level HE300 headphones...

I first encountered the HiFi Man range of headphones at the National Audio Show a few months back. They're imported by Mark Dolbear of Electromod, who told me at length about his commitment to service and support of his new range of headphones; he has good provenance in the industry and fully intends to build up this brand in the UK.

Well, he's got his work cut out. The big beasts of the audiophile headphone jungle such as Sennheiser and Beyerdynamic won't be eager to roll over and accede to new names like HiFi Man. Competition is very tough, especially at this price point from Sennheiser's HD650. The latter have a very clear, incisive, detailed but subtle sound – it's not the world's richest and most sumptuous, but it's certainly exciting yet accurate. These HiFi Man HE300s, at just about £10 less than the Sennheisers, have a big job on, then!

Whilst – until recently – the HD650s were right at the top of Sennheiser's range, the HE300 is very much the entry level phone in the HiFi Man range. It's distinct for being the only conventional dynamic design that the company makes. The others, such as the HE4, HE5 and HE6, are orthodynamic or 'magnetostatic' designs, claimed to "manage the sonic merits of static and dynamic headphones combined". The type of drivers aren't new, but are certainly different to conventional designs like the HE300; a thin film is covered with a thin electrically conductive path and clamped in a frame. This framework in turn is mounted in the middle between the opposite and mutually repulsive magnet. A music signal is applied to the conductor; the entire film vibrates within the magnetic

field back and forth and creates the desired sound. The higher end HiFi Man orthodynamic phones sound superb, making life rather difficult for this more conventional baby of the breed...

The HE300 sport 50mm dynamic drivers with a quoted impedance of 50 Ohm, a sensitivity of 93dB at 1kHz and 1mW, a rated power of 30 mW. There's a claimed 15Hz to 22kHz frequency response, and weight is around 270g. The headphone cable is made of interwoven, single-crystal copper in a symmetrical configuration; essentially each driver has its own power cord. This is claimed to give reduced crosstalk between channels. A 6.3mm jack plug adaptor (with 3.5mm mini-jack plug inside) is fitted to one end of the cables, whereas the other ends of the 'Y' have individual gold plated miniature screw connectors to the headphones themselves. Effectively this means the headphone cables are easily upgradeable, then. Even though the headband is trimmed in vinyl, the phones are very comfortable to wear and don't feel obviously more cheaply made than the HD650s.

They sound excellent at the price – these are quite warm and fulsome sounding phones that don't assault you with detail, instead preferring to give a wider, warmer and better rounded sonic performance. Whereas the Sennheiser HD650s pitch you right in the stalls, just inches from the PA stacks, the HE300s take you back in the concert hall a bit, letting you take in the whole musical event in a less concentrated way. Cleverly though, they don't sound any less

musically engaging, it's just that they make their music in a more convivial fashion.

The stinging, biting guitar intro to The Smiths' 'Headmaster Ritual' was majestic, with a powerful, tuneful bass guitar accompaniment, real delicacy to vocals and a smooth, extended hi hat cymbal sound. Stereo imaging wasn't perhaps as tight as the HD650s, but still the HE300 sounded more spacious and airy, giving a bigger, fuller sound that flattered rock music. The Sennheisers by contrast, tended to deconstruct individual details in the mix – great to listen to, but a little clinical and cerebral all the same.

As a first effort, I was very impressed with the Hi-Fi Man HE300 headphones; they are well worth considering and mean that their Sennheiser rivals are no longer in a gang of one as the ones to buy at the price. The only downside is that, frankly, they're a good distance behind their more expensive orthodynamic siblings – so don't try these before you buy the 300s unless you've got a healthier credit card than usual!



VERDICT

Excellent mid-price headphones with a fullsome, musical sound.

HiFi Man HE300 £290

Electromod
 T +44 (0)1494 752171
www.electromod.co.uk

FOR

- smooth, open sound
- easy musicality
- fine build

AGAINST

- stiff competition

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 12 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 LP12SE 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 12 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 12" 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 SME V 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.

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

SME 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-9SE** 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 2010 £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 G08.2 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 1 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 PSI.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 5i 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

Goodly 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 6001** 2010 £5,750

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY**AMS351** 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 9SE 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 AMSS0**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 S-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 AE1 CLASSIC****2006 £845**

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

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950

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

MY AUDIO DESIGN**MY1920 2011 £1350**

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

ELAC B5243**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 SE 2010 £3,299**

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

MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM**2010 £3,599**

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 2011 £5,100**

Flawed genius, and willfully 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 V1.5 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 allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000

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

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

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

Black Rhodium

ACT 1

Wide, open sound that rewrites the rules of speaker cable design



Black Rhodium has applied the single exclusive feature of top-of-the-range Ninja lower down the range. We have been surprised by the natural, open and expansive sound we hear.

ACT 1 uses all the cores in one cable for the positive connection to the speakers and all the cores of a second identical cable for the negative, just as we do in the Ninja. These are twisted together to reduce RF interference.

To hear ACT 1, please contact us to find your nearest dealer.

www.blackrhodium.co.uk
01332 342233 sales@blackrhodium.co.uk

THE Missing Link

AUDIOPHILE CABLES HANDMADE IN BRITAIN



The World's Finest Audio Cables
Hand Built in England

www.the-missing-link.net

The MING DA MC300-PRE preamp fully exploits all the merits of 300B tubes. For the price, the MING DA MC300-PRE with that soft and smooth sound that we expect from a 300B design, combined with extensive high and low frequency capabilities, is probably the best in this design category and price range currently available. The sound quality to cost ratio of the MING DA MC300-PRE is difficult to beat.

—Adapted from NEW AUDIOPHILE written by Chen Yingguang after tested and reviewed in Feb. 2011.

Flagship Preamp MC300-PRE

Valves: 6SN7(MING DA) x2 , 300B(Full music) x2 , 274B x1
Frequency range: 5Hz - 150KHz +0dB -1dB
Signal to Noise Ratio: 92dB
Distortion Factor: $\leq 0.3\%$
Unbalanced input: 4 groups
Balanced input: 1 group
Outputs: 2 groups



Mei Xing Electronics Factory



Tel: 0086-756-3315656
Fax: 0086-756-3317676
Website: www.mei-xing.com
Email: mingda@mei-xing.com

Seeking European distributors

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.

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

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

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650

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



PEACHTREE AUDIO

IDECCO £1,000
Excellent sounding iPod dock, impressive DAC and fine amplifier section make this an excellent one box style system.

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249

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

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250

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

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-751 disc player, SC-752 preamp and MA-952 monoblocks delivers jaw-dropping performance.





East Life

Aurum's new C5 is a modern CD player with a difference, because it's made nearer Berlin than Beijing. Paul Rigby reviews this fine mid-priced, German made, silver disc spinner...

Aurum's new A5 amplifier got a good write up in these pages in the September 2011 issue, so I was curious about the matching CD spinner. Could its brother impress in the same way? Well Aurum certainly believe so, saying it's a design with a difference. Precisely what is this? Well Aurum's Senior Engineer Stephan Rath (a long established and experienced engineer who has worked for other companies too; you will see his handiwork within the amplifier portion of Elac's top-of-the-range subwoofers, for example), explained...

"Working with an industrial designer for the chassis, the entire CD player has been created in-house and within Germany; mechanics, software and electronics... The quality is higher, especially in the electronics section of the player as well as quality control and measurements.

For example, I know that a C5, serial number '10' and another C5 CD player, serial number 100, will be the same in terms of quality".

Consistency is very important, which reflects Aurum's belief that a reputation can only be built when it is controlled. It only takes one bad apple to sour the whole barrel, after all. This is an acute problem for audiophile hi-fi companies, as many manufacturers privately confide to me that getting things made remotely in China demands a rigorous overseeing role, as not every batch of circuitboards is made to exactly the same specification at the OEM factory.

Rath then proceeded to talk about the C5's attention to detail, which focuses upon the reduction of distortion. "We separate our power supplies: the supplies for the digital to analogue convertor, motor and so on are independent," he said.

No big deal you might think, and hardly revolutionary stuff, but according to Rath, it's the application of the technology that makes the difference. "The trick is to put the right technology in the right place. For example, we use damping pads for the CD transport, it's a part of the rim. You can see it when you open the tray. This is one reason why the C5 has an analogue tone. In addition, the output stage is completely discrete with no feedback within the circuit. This reduces several types of harmonic distortion.





"one of the most satisfying and cultured CD players I have heard at this price point..."

We have a special 'trick' to reduce the distortion at specific points in the sonic spectrum." Although Rath refused to elaborate!

Rath's focus on distortion, a vagary that sometimes, he readily admits, he cannot measure, is the result of his own musical passions. "I might be an audio engineer but I'm also a listener. I have a love of listening to music, especially jazz. So I don't see this as just a job. That is the difference between Aurum and our competitors. We are a small outfit, there is only four of us. Yes, we are part of a larger company but our parent has nothing to do with the engineering."

Rath is convinced that, at least in his engineering sphere, this is where his CD design wins. Rath believes that larger companies do less listening and more profit chasing because their economies of scale demand that product be pushed through the manufacturing chain quicker.

This allows him to attend to more left-field aspects of design, like the insidious distortive affects. "On the C5, the distortion was very low within the output but it was audible and tended to affect the soundstage. Now, with this

distortion removed, the C5 provides greater three dimensional elements in the soundstage with more power and punch to the bass plus greater musicality."

Other weapons in his audiophile armoury include a broadband power supply filter on the main and secondary power supplies, plus a special magnetic coupling between the Burr Brown D/A convertor, the datastream and the clock to provide further isolation. "This reduces jitter," said Rath. "Yes, you can measure this aspect but the differences are very small. It's interesting, the differences

when listening are so much greater. The result produces a smoother sound."

Before I began my own sound tests, Rath was eager to pass on one critical piece of advice. "When listening to the C5, the output stage needs a lot of time to warm up. To be honest, nobody really knows why that is. You can turn it on. After a single second, all of the measurements are excellent... but it sounds hard in the midrange. Give the C5 a span of two hours, before you play it, every time, and it sounds a lot better. That's because we don't use a feedback





Inspire Hi-Fi



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UPGRADE PACKAGES FOR BOTH LINN LP12 AND REGA TURNTABLES



Quest

for Rega Turntables

- For:**
- excellent midband focus
 - super base grip
 - fine speed stability
 - enhance dynamics
 - fit and finish

Against:

- nothing

- 50mm solid birch ply plinth with acrylic and sorbothane feet £189
- Veneer in Maple, Cherry, Oak or Walnut £89
- 23mm machined acrylic platter £99
- Puka record platter weight £49
- Acri mat £25
- Re Build £40



vivid UPGRADES

for Linn LP12 Turntables

- For:**
- silky, spacious midband
 - superior grip and focus
 - enhanced dynamics
 - fit and finish

Against:

- nothing

- Full package £799
- Sub chassis with arm board £299
- Acri mat £25
- Hercules PSU £169
- Plinths £POA
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circuit – again, to tackle distortion.”
Spanning 453x82x305mm and weighing in at a respectable 6.80kg, this is a well made machine, but so it should be at its £2,395 price point! It’s nice to use and has a classy feel, with no nasty surprises or glitches along the way. There’s a choice of finishes - Black, Choco Black and Light Oak.

SOUND QUALITY

I connected the C5 to my reference system and, after those recommended two hours, span my first disc, the Blue Note production of Jackie McLean’s ‘Bluesnik’. Compared to my valve-staged Icon CD-X1, the Aurum had a slightly harder edged, solid-state sound while the soundstage was a little more ‘in your face’. The upper midband could not be accused of being bright, but there was a slight tensing in those upper frequencies. On the other hand, because the music was better illuminated, with more detail present and correct, the soundstage presented as being fuller and broader. It gave the impression that more was going on and that the stage-bound jazz players had grown in stature.

Considering the Aurum was up against a machine with a very good tube output stage, the C5 sounded very civilised. It actually had a slightly valve-like persona, but never did it completely relinquish its vigorous solid-state heart. In short, it was a smooth operator, without being an old smoothie! The upper midband was always even and transparent, and treble brisk and open, and at all times I could hear nice, finely chiselled edges to attack transients. There was absolutely nothing untoward here; the machine’s wealth of detailing drawing the ear to sonic elements that the Icon sometimes glossed over. The Aurum, never proffered nasty surprises – there was no brightness, no bass honking, no bloom and no shouty upper frequencies. All good, then.

Moving away from classic jazz to the more rock-oriented and slightly diffusive tones of The Jesus And Mary Chain’s album, ‘Candy’, and whilst the Icon proffered great drive and punch in the lower frequencies, the Aurum

arrived with tremendous bass weight and heft that portrayed real power and determination. This was bass to reckon with.

The essence of this band’s sound is the heavily distorted guitars which swamp the midband of the mix, and this is a big ask for any CD player – normally JAMC songs sound far more palatable on vinyl. Fortunately, the music was more than bearable via the Aurum, yet it still gave more immediacy and emotion to the track than my reference Icon Audio player. In fact, midband detail was better focused overall – don’t confuse that with being clinical, but rather think of it as being more conscientious in terms of what detail was presented and how it was interpreted. This said, compared to the valves of the Icon, the Aurum at high volumes could be slightly harder in the upper midband, but this condition was a rarity and appeared less than many other solid state CD players at a similar price point that I’ve heard. Again, this benefit was purely down to Aurum’s determination in tackling distortion while allowing detail to present itself successfully to the ear.

On the classical piece ‘Acis & Galatea’ performed by the Dunedin Consort & Players, the C5 provided greater bass weight to the harpsichord, imbuing an extra sense of gravitas, an importance that made the entrance grander and more significant. Vocally complex, this piece was given stronger textural interpretation by the C5, the melange of vocals exhibiting greater focus which lent the soundstage a new sense of order. The Icon could be accused of a certain degree of upper mid bloom and

even some confusion, as too much detail was thrown at it. The Aurum handled all of this with aplomb.

CONCLUSION

The Aurum C5 is an excellent new CD player that presents a surprisingly fluid and tonally smooth sound, yet still packs a real punch and has no shortage of incision and detail. As such it’s a really well designed and voiced machine that makes spinning Red Book Compact Discs a pleasure. I’d say it certainly deserves to be right at the top of any prospective purchaser’s ‘to dem’ list – it’s one of the most satisfying and cultured CD players I have heard at this price point.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Icon Audio CD-X1 CD player
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
Icon MB845 mono blockpower amplifiers
Quad ESL-57 loudspeakers (modified)

VERDICT

A finely built, intelligently designed and excellent sounding mid-price CD player.

AURUM C5 £2,395
Quadral UK
+44 (0)1785 748 446
www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk

FOR

- clarity
- transparency
- smooth upper mids
- bass punch

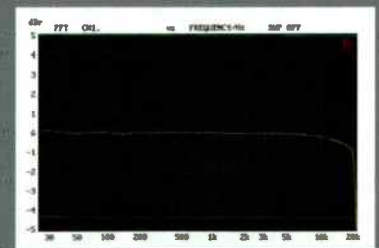
AGAINST

- nothing at the price

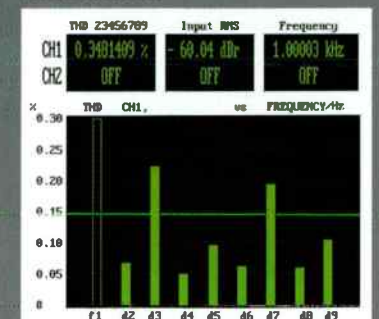
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response shows a small roll off at high frequencies, measuring -0.6dB at 20kHz, just enough to give the Aurum a slightly easier sound than most CD players, although this is not enough to make it sound warm.	-60dB	0.34
	-80dB	3.5
Distortion levels were a little higher than possible, a figure of 0.34% at -60dB, 1kHz, being above the 0.2% or so that is common nowadays. The DAC was also a little noisier than most, noise measuring -98dB. This is not enough to be audible however. In all though, EIAJ Dynamic Range was lower as a result, measuring a mediocre 97dB.	Separation (1kHz)	106dB
	Noise (IEC A)	-98dB
Output from the unbalanced phono sockets measured the usual Philips standard 2V and from XLR 4V. All parameters were checked via the balanced outputs and were identical to those from unbalanced.	Dynamic range	97dB
	Output (phono/XLR)	2/4V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



Frequency response (-1dB)
CD 2Hz - 20kHz

Distortion %
0dB 0.003
-6dB 0.0015

The Aurum C5 is a bit below what is possible nowadays, but not necessarily enough to hamper it. The sound balance will be easy going though. NK

Wishful

Pens at the ready! Various members of the Hi-Fi World team share their Christmas wish lists with you. Just circle the item(s) you want and leave the open page strategically placed where friends or family can see it...

NAME: TONY BOLTON
STATUS: valve head and vinylista



RUSS ANDREWS FOCUS RINGS £11.40/PR
www.russandrews.com

These self adhesive, felt coated rings are designed to fit around the tweeter on your loudspeakers to absorb any high frequency reflections from the tweeter's face plate. They are oval in shape with an internal diameter of 60x45mm. Fitting is easy, just peel off the backing paper and apply the ring to the tweeter. The effect, on the two pairs of speakers that I tried this on, was very noticeable, with a perception of greater clarity in the higher frequencies and sharper, more defined imaging. Affordable and effective.



VDH CARTRIDGE PROTRACTOR £20
www.henleydesigns.co.uk

There are a lot of alignment protractors available, mostly made of card which can wrinkle and deform, giving inaccurate readings. This model from Dutch cartridge and cable specialist Van Den Hul is made of clear plastic, with a reflective backing coating. This makes it easy to use, with the cartridge body being reflected in the lines marked on the top. It also allows checking of the

cartridge azimuth. Two 'null' points are provided for more accurate alignment, and full instructions are printed on the back.

BLUE HORIZON CLEAN-IT £19.95
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

This little bottle of liquid comes with a brush built into the cap and a microfibre polishing cloth. The liquid is applied to all of the electrical connections in your system and then polished off. One of the chemicals in it is claimed to stabilise the inter-reaction between differing materials in connections. I have so far tried this on everything from RCA plugs and sockets, to the TV aerial connection and found improvements in both the sharpness and colour saturation of my TV picture, and similar improvements in the hi-fi's sound. Detail and tonality was noticeably improved. A product that does what it says on the box.



ADL FORMULA 2 USB CABLE £55
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

I had always assumed that one USB cable was pretty much like

another, but this product from Alpha Design Labs (Furutech's affordable brand) has completely altered that viewpoint. It features 24k gold-plated USB connectors and silver-plated (Alpha) OFC conductors enclosed in three layers of shielding. It is available in three configurations, including a miniature USB connection. I was very impressed with the improvements to the sound from my MacBook, running through the Teddy Pardo TeddyDAC. Their shape and texture was more tangible and involving, along with a bigger and more detailed soundstaging. A fine product.



GARRARD SPG3 STYLUS GAUGE £10 APPROX. (S/H)
www.ebay.co.uk

Modern stylus balances usually only measure up to four or five grams, which, if like Adam Smith and myself, you run a period radiogram that tracks at higher levels, is no use. And so eBay comes to the rescue with this Garrard device that was manufactured throughout the 1960s and covers the range from 0 to 12 grams! The required tracking force is dialled in and the stylus placed on the red pan. A needle moves across the scale and gives the appropriate downforce reading. A five gram calibration weight lives in a little compartment at the side. It is simple and effective. There are lots of good secondhand buys out there from around a fiver to twenty pounds, depending on condition. **TB**

Thinking

NAME: TIM JARMAN

STATUS: soldering iron whizz



SONY WM-FX290
£30 www.sony.co.uk

This may be the last year that you get the chance to buy a new cassette Walkman, so if you like analogue listening on the move then this has to be on your wish list. The WM-FX290 may not be Sony's greatest ever cassette personal but it works pretty well, has a reasonable headphone stage, a tape deck compatible with type I, II and IV tapes and an AM/FM stereo radio with 40 preset stations – two great analogue sources in one! It also gives 35 hours of listening from one AA battery, something you can't say about an iPhone



TDK SA90 (£8.99 FOR 5)
www.amazon.co.uk

Blank tapes are a treat for any analogue audiophile, and as most decks made in the last twenty years were set up for TDK's SA in the factory, these are the ones to go for. All TDK cassettes feature excellent, smooth running mechanicals and this latest version of SA gives a clean, vivid sound which is difficult to discern from the original source

material if your recorder is in good fettle. At under £2 a go they cost the same as they did thirty years ago, which thanks to inflation makes them dramatically cheaper in real terms! A bargain buy while stocks last...



PURE HIGHWAY £99
www.pure.com

This dinky little DAB receiver was made for use in cars with conventional AM/FM stereos, so it features a built-in FM Stereo transmitter to send the DAB signal to ordinary car radios. But it has another great application too. Why not rig it up in your loft near your FM antenna, set the FM output to a blank channel and tune into your favourite DAB-only programme (BBC Radio 4 Extra for example)? You can then listen in on your existing FM tuner without having to clutter your rack with any more gear.

NEUTRIK PROFI RCA PLUGS
(£15 FOR TWO)
<http://uk.farnell.com>

These top quality German RCA connectors are gold plated and just the job for making up cables or replacing the scruffy, broken up plastic plugs in your existing loom. Equipment with tethered cables may also benefit from better connectors and at this price it's well worth giving



them a try. Once you've mastered making your own cables you can produce them to custom lengths to optimise the performance of your stack and cut the clutter around the back of the rack, you can buy reels of audio-specific cable from the same source.



FLUKE 115 £175
<http://rswww.com>

A good meter is invaluable for checking things like cables, fuses, amplifier bias currents and the like. This Fluke model can also measure capacitance and frequency so it can also be used for rooting out tired electrolytic capacitors in vintage gear and setting up turntable and cassette deck speeds (in conjunction with suitable test records and tapes). True RMS reading of AC voltage means that you can also use it to make precision adjustments like Dolby level calibration. Fluke meters are the electronics professional's first choice and well worth paying the little extra for.

NAME: DAVID PRICE
STATUS: gadget man



BOSE SOUNDLINK MOBILE £260
www.bose.co.uk

Well yes, I know, it's a Bose. The brand that makes "the best hi-fi in the world" according to everyone you'd meet at a Ruislip dinner party, isn't quite as well regarded in rarefied specialist audiophile circles, but they do – from time to time – come up with lovely products, the sort of things which make you wonder why they haven't been done before. The Soundlink Mobile is precisely this – an exotic looking and feeling object that syncs to your iPhone/iPad and Android device via A2DP Bluetooth – with a range of 10m – or a stereo minijack. Its internal rechargeable lasts seven hours, giving good sound that's best in smaller rooms. Specify the optional (£25) coloured covers and the snazzy leather clad LX version at £300 if you nearest and dearest can afford it!



PHILIPS SPOTON ULTRA £9
www.amazon.co.uk

As the dark winter nights descend, life gets ever harder for vinylists who hand-cue their vinyl. For hardcore users of expensive moving coil cartridges (who like yours truly would rather migrate to Compact Disc than suffer the indignity of using their tonearm's damped cueing lever)

the low light levels you get at this time of year make it easy to fluff your fingerwork, and dump the stylus in the wrong part of the record groove. What better solution then, than this little LED light complete with its very own motion detector? Mount it (either by the screws or sticky pad supplied) near your turntable and whenever you go near it, the Spoton lights up for about 30 seconds then goes off. A great handy localised light source, and there's even a black version for eighties throwbacks!



MONITOR AUDIO I-DECK £400
www.monitoraudio.co.uk

Yes, I know, respect due to the B&W Zeppelin! The Monitor Audio i-Deck's greatest crime is that it wasn't the original article that spawned a thousand imitators. But don't let that put you off – it's no pale shadow of the iconic Zeppelin, but rather a great little music portable in its own right. It runs dual 100mm C-CAM bass drivers individually powered by custom 50W amplifiers and a brace of 25mm gold dome tweeters, driven by bespoke 20W power amps, all set in a reasonably compact (545 x 210 x 250mm, 4.5kg) case that's finely finished. It sounds really good, either via iPod or the 3.5mm input, with a bit more colour and warmth to the sound compared to the B&W, to my ears. I'll have one of these please, Santa. Ho, ho, ho!

KONTAK £15
www.kontakaudio.com

This is so good at cleaning electrical contacts that I get through it faster than I do my favourite Roger et Gallet Farina Eau de Cologne! Kontak is almost as aromatic, too – not that I'd in any way recommend you made a habit of sniffing it. It's a very capable cleaning fluid that works wonders on all electrical contacts in your hi-fi

system, from the cartridge pins at one end of your tonearm to the speaker sockets at the other, and anything between. Apply a small amount of fluid to one of the supplied 'pipe cleaners' and watch in amazement as



the end goes black with dirt straight off what had previously looked like a clean surface. Whatever you put this on – from arm leads to turntable mains plugs – it brings a subtle but obvious improvement, which is often far more profound than the price of the bottle suggests. Liquid gold!

OXX DIGITAL VANTAGE £65
www.oxxdigital.com

Regular readers will know I am not the world's greatest DAB fan. After all, why bother if you've already got a wireless broadband connection, as so many have? Instead of faffing with DAB's poor reception and regular interludes of 'bubbling mud' sound effects, just link a Wi-Fi radio to your router and go. Trouble is, internet radio has been an expensive luxury until recently. The Oxx changes this, as it's very affordable – but despite



being in the cheap seats it's got a lot going for it. It is made to decent quality standards, is well specified and a capable performer. Available in gloss red, white or black finishes, it works from mains or batteries, has a reasonable sound, and as well as providing nearly 20,000 stations worldwide, it also streams music from your computer. Hard to fault then, and a great stocking filler. **DP**

NAME: ADAM SMITH

STATUS: audiophile messer



NORTHWEST ANALOGUE SLATE RECORD PUCK £80

<http://northwestanalogue.weebly.com/>

Despite lamenting the return of the Northwest Analogue slate Garrard 401 plinth and support that I reviewed in the November issue of *Hi-Fi World*, there is a much cheaper way to set foot onto the slate upgrade ladder and it's also a very handy thing to have as well! The Slate Record puck does a sterling job of coupling your record firmly to the platter beneath. Sonic benefits are easy to hear, with the upper bass and lower midrange gaining improved focus and timing. However, for me the big advantage is how superb, stylish and purposeful the puck looks when sat on your deck! There is something reassuringly complete about placing it firmly onto your record before you start spinning it. Just make sure you don't drop it on the way – it'll make a nasty big dent...



AURIC ILLUMINATOR CD TREATMENT £50

www.highendcable.co.uk

Generous person that I am, I would feel a right old meanie if I didn't send some loving care the way of my CDs, and the new Auric Illuminator CD treatment from Audience AV seems a fine place to start. The box contains a bottle of Gel, a black marker pen and some delightfully soft tissues and the process of application couldn't be simpler. The first step is the

application of the light-absorbing pen to blacken the inner and outer edges of the CD, in order to minimise the scattering of stray light from the laser, followed by the Auric illuminator gel across the surface of both sides of the disc. This is claimed to minimise the static charge that builds up on the disc as it spins and which can cause it to rotate unevenly, thus making the job of the laser and error correction circuitry much harder. If you have a large collection of CDs, £50 seems a small price to pay to hear them at their best.

PEAK LCR40 LCR METER £81

<http://cpc.farnell.com/>



One thing that has often puzzled me is the absence of one key feature on nearly all multimeters. For example, mine is an all-singing, all-dancing Fluke model that measures AC and DC volts and amps, resistance, capacitance and frequency and even has a component tester or two built-in. The glaring exception, though, is one that I have stumbled up against on several occasions recently during loudspeaker restoration work – it won't measure inductance. Fortunately, Peak's LCR40 will, as it is a self-adjusting resistance, capacitance and inductance meter. It identifies the connected component and selects the best measuring range for optimum accuracy. Next time I'm faced with a burnt, uncoiled and fractured mess that used to be the inductive part of a crossover, I'll be glad I have one.

RUSS ANDREWS TUBA £11

www.russandrews.com

Continuing onto yet another source, I currently find that I am listening to more and more radio at home as I fill my time fettleing the many loudspeakers and turntables that

keep mysteriously appearing at Smith Towers. Unfortunately, our lovely home in the Hampshire countryside is not exactly in a radio hotspot with a complete absence of DAB and even my FM signal is a bit feeble. Fortunately, Russ Andrews have a very clever gadget in the form of the Tuba



– a widget that slips over the aerial of a portable radio, allowing you to plug in something bigger and beefier, so that none of those passing radio signals are lost. Cheap, clever and very effective!

VELLEMANN HPS140 POCKET OSCILLOSCOPE £96

<http://cpc.farnell.com/>

Whilst I have a bench full of test equipment, most of it is big, bulky and laden down with features that I only rarely find it necessary to use. Consequently something simpler and much more portable is always handy and, whilst my multimeter does many jobs, my eye was recently caught by Vellemann's pocket oscilloscopes. The HPS140 has 10MHz bandwidth, will read from 1mV to 20V per division and can cope with input voltages of up to 100V AC or DC. Weighing only 200g and operating for up to 6 hours on one charge means that it should cover most field service and investigation eventualities. Heck, they



even do a cute little blue case for you to keep it in! Whilst undoubtedly fitting into the 'big boy's toy' category, I strongly suspect it is also one of those things that would find itself being used much more than initially anticipated. **AS**

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 CDI 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 80Vv 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-JE555E5 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 AR185 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 BCI 1976 £240
Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit - and the result is a beautifully warm yet well focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH
Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.



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

IMF TLS80 1976 £550
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800
Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 £375

Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs, warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound,



MISSION 752 1995 £495

Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstanders combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

HEYBROOK HBI 1982 £130

Peter Comeau-designed standmounters with an amazingly lyrical yet decently refined sound. Good enough to partner with very high end ancillaries, yet great with budget kit too. A classic.

CELESTION SL6 1984 £350

Smallish two way design complete with aluminium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding, albeit course at high frequencies and limp in the bass. Speakers would never be the same again...

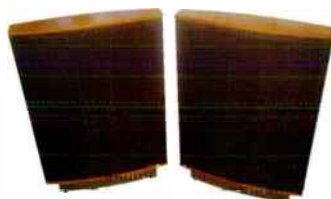
LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH

Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200

An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics



YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532

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



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499

The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!



CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

GT AUDIO

(Graham Tricker, Bucks)
Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.
Tel: 01895 833099
Mob: 07960 962579
www.gtaudio.com

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL

(East Sussex)
Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges.
Tel: 01892 654534

CARTRIDGE MAN

(Len Gregory, London)
Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges.
Tel: 020 8688 6565
Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net
www.thecartridgeman.com

QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS

(Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & VWharfedale).
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

CLASSIQUE SOUNDS

(Paul Greenfield, Leicester)
ESL-57s restored, rebuilt, fully renovated or improved. Leak, Quad valves amps etc.
Tel: 0845 123 5137
Mob: 0116 2835821
Email: classique_sounds@yahoo.co.uk
www.flashbacksales.co.uk/classique

WEMBLEY LOUDSPEAKER

(Paul MacCallam, London)
Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing.
Tel: 020 8 743 4567
Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk
www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI

(Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex).
Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.
Tel: 01903 695695
Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk
www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

ONE THING

(Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad IIs.
Email: one.thing@ntworld.com
www.onethingaudio.com

LORICRAFT AUDIO

(Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)
Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service.:
Tel: 01488 72267
www.garrard501.com

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

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING

(Bristol) Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol. Tel: 0117 925 6015
www.octave-aw.co.uk

REVOX

(Brian Reeves, Cheshire)
Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.
Tel: 0161 499 2349
Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk
www.revox.freeuk.com

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

LOCKWOOD AUDIO

(London)
Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.
Tel: 020 8 864 8008
www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

ATV AUDIO

(Henry Dulat, Surrey)
Repairs, restorations and upgrades to valve and transistor amps and all analogue audio including Revox.
Tel: 01372 456921 Mobile: 07730 134973

Small Business

Philips' GoGear Muse and Sony's NWZ-A866 are not cheap, in the great digital music portable scheme of things. Tim Jarman tries these premium players for size...

The market for MP3 players is clearly maturing, as this year's models tend to be refinements and revisions of existing offerings, rather than new concepts that make you wonder what they are for, and whether you really need them. The Philips GoGear Muse 8GB and the Sony NWZ-A866 are certainly not revolutionary, but instead represent refined implementations of an existing pattern. Early adopters may consider them a bit 'old hat', but if you just want a portable music listening tool right now, then this is the industry's best answer...

The reason to buy a separate player at all has become bit diluted, mobile phones can easily be bought with audio functionality these days – why have two pieces of plastic in your pocket when one will do? Philips and Sony clearly feel that they've found the answer with this pair of models; both major strongly on sound quality and each offer proprietary technology to elevate the portable listening experience, especially from compressed MP3 files.

The new Philips GoGear Muse 8GB looks a lot like the previous model; it's slightly thicker and some of the controls are different but other than that you probably wouldn't notice any changes. The key innovations include a 3.2" touchscreen, a built-in loudspeaker and a Micro SD card slot. Aside from the loudspeaker, these things are all in line with current market trends, but speaking personally I regret the touchscreen – the control keys of the previous version were one of its best points and provided rapid and

accurate navigation of the menus. In comparison the new touchscreen isn't particularly sensitive or easy to use; it's very frustrating as the panel where the keys used to be is still there but now only has one function, a button that returns you to the 'home' screen.

The loudspeaker is interesting

the price which is around £112.

Sony's Walkman range of portable players is huge, ranging from fairly basic models to some of the most comprehensive available. The top models frequently cost more than their Apple equivalents but the quality, performance and finish of Sony's players is more often than not class-leading. The NWZ-A866 is



but not particularly loud; it's okay for home use but in noisy environments it may struggle to make itself heard. Where the loudspeaker *really* comes into its own is with the built-in FM radio (which like the one in the previous model is very sensitive). Philips have cleverly allowed the headphones to be plugged in to act as the aerial but made it possible to still select the loudspeaker as the output device, a great idea. It is also still possible to record from either the radio or a small built-in microphone and then upload the files to a computer afterwards, a genuinely useful feature which is sure to win this model some friends – as should

the latest addition to this line and in the UK is currently only available through Advanced MP3 Players (www.advancedmp3players.co.uk), your local Sony shop won't be stocking them any time soon. This model, priced at £219, features 32GB of storage but if you need even more then the NWZ-A867 (£299) is essentially the same thing but with 64GB.

Both feature a 2.8" touchscreen, an FM radio, Bluetooth connectivity and are supplied with an unusually good pair of earphones (MDR-EX300). The screen is an LCD type which is a shame; remember that two years ago the same sort of money bought you their 32GB NWZ-X1060 which came with a stunning OLED

display, the next best thing to having a Trinitron TV set in your pocket! The LCD does a fair job of things but there's no doubt that in quality terms it's a backwards step, Sony seem to be having real problems with this technology and have also conspicuously not followed up their expensive but gorgeous XEL-1 OLED TV set with any more domestic models, although I understand that they are now beginning to market full sized OLED professional monitors.

Both these players work with a standard Windows PC running Media Player or something similar. Philips also offer a program called Songbird for use with the GoGear which performs a similar function, storing and syncing files and organising downloads from the internet. The software comes preloaded on the GoGear and is very easy to install and use. It's well worth a try, especially if you have become tired of the more mainstream offerings...

SOUND QUALITY

Starting with the Philips, you won't want to use the supplied earphones for long – they have a jangly treble, practically no bass and a hollow and metallic midband which soon becomes tiring. Substituting something better – anything – brings an instant improvement and changes the machine's character across the board. Suddenly the sound becomes, by the standards of personal digital players, both smooth and refined, and unlike the last version there is just about enough volume available for serious listening if you choose your

CD than genuine 16bit 44.1kHz sound, but it really did make dull, compressed MP3 files more interesting to listen to. Whether you'd use this function much after the novelty wears off is debatable, and of course the same old advice still stands: it's better to address any sound quality issues properly with lower compression file formats and better headphones. The 8GB of onboard storage is more than enough for .wav use if you are selective, and if it isn't there's always the Micro SD card slot to fall back on.

To sum up, I found the Philips to be a pleasant sounding device (supplied earphones aside) which is worth trying as a step up from mobile phones and budget MP3 players. The quality of the FM radio is a real bonus if you like to tune in regularly and want to record things, in this role the GoGear Muse performs better than most. Only the clumsy menus with their confusing symbols and the imprecise touchscreen count against; perhaps



own Sony MZ-RH1 (which uses a similar type of circuit but with the benefit of extra large coupling capacitors) shows the NWZ-A866 to be a bit light and brittle sounding when compared to best-in-class performance, and MP3 (192kbps) playback is sterile – Sade's 'Smooth Operator' had me reaching for my CD, cassette and MD versions for example, to make sure that the absence of this track's usual luxurious and embracing nature wasn't down to the headphones I was using (or me). Still, with 32 GB available there's no excuse for the audiophile to be using compressed formats and sure enough with .wav files the Sony does a better job, warming up nicely and giving excellent results for this class of equipment. The FM radio is a definite improvement over some of the previous Sony offerings that I've heard, but in this area the Philips still comes out best – just.

CONCLUSION

In the end it all comes down to taste; the Sony is dry and precise sounding and the Philips is cultured and romantic, just like their full-sized CD playing counterparts of nearly thirty years ago. Flawed European genius or carefully defined Oriental completeness? The Sony is slick but the Philips, when you can get it to do what you want, is not without its attractions either. For the head: Sony. For the heart: Philips.

"the Sony is slick, but the Philips is not without its attractions either..."

headphones carefully. Philips include an optional volume monitor called SafeSound, which uses a coloured icon to show if the sound is too loud and logs both the amount of time that you spend listening (your 'sound dose') and the loudest song that you played. It's interesting stuff but even going right into the red sector it still isn't exactly deafening [pardon? Ed.].

Also in the menu is FullSound, a setting that according to Philips "brings CD listening experience to MP3". You may scoff (as I did before I tried it!) but engaging this mode does add some extra sparkle to the treble and a bit of tubbiness to the bass, which makes for not unpleasant results. The impression I got was more of a caricature of

we can have the buttons back on the next one please?

Moving over to the Sony, my first impressions are that the user interface, graphics and touchscreen are certainly in a class above the Philips and the quality of finish is superior too, as one would expect given the price difference. With all the various equalisers switched off the sound is neat and tidy, but the Walkman is not a muscle-player in the way that (for example) the HiSound Studio is. This latest version of the S Master amplifier isn't its most powerful incarnation, but like the Philips there is usually just enough level available for most circumstances.

Direct comparison with my

VERDICT ●●●●● £
 Fine sounding, feature-packed but fiddly to use machine that's great value at its price.

PHILIPS GO GEAR MUSE 8GB £112
 Philips
 ☎ +44(0)207 949 0069
 www.consumer.philips.com

FOR
 - smooth sound
 - fine FM radio
 - value for money

AGAINST
 - limited headphone stage
 - sometimes fiddly

VERDICT ●●●●●
 Well specified, nicely built and detailed sounding machine, but a slight disappointment considering Sony's previous stellar offerings.

SONY NWZ-A866 32GB £219
 Sony UK
 ☎ +44 (0)1932 816000
 www.sony.co.uk

FOR
 - crisp, detailed sound
 - capacious memory
 - build-quality

AGAINST
 - disappointing screen
 - price

A PERFECT

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JEAN MICHEL JARRE OXYGENE



JEAN-MICHAEL JARRE
Oxygene
Dreyfus

The first of three popular LPs that have been remastered by Jarre himself, on to vinyl for the first time since their original release, 'Oxygene', released in 1977, was Jarre's commercial breakthrough that's deservedly seen as a classic of its genre, but the new issue initially doesn't hit you between the ears. On the contrary, it tends to sneak up upon you, taking a few seconds for you to realise that the new mastering has introduced a rich, silky smooth, dark chocolate flavour to the mix. Two minutes in, however, you will be hit by a deep bass sequence which provides a more characterful, rounded low frequency response than the original.

Dynamics have improved on the new remastering, while the upper midrange response is far superior with new synth elements introduced. Being hyper-critical, you could demand more of this new issue: more clarity, perhaps? More structure to the bass? More pizzazz? But doing so would be a tad churlish because, what we have here is the best version of 'Oxygene' you can currently find on the market – no matter what format you might want to consider. It certainly stomps all

over the original issue.

This album is but one of a series of re-releases which have been personally overseen by Jarre. Others include a newly released set of 'Rarities' which examine pre-'Oxygene' recordings, the classic 'Equinoxe' and the equally well regarded 'Magnetic Fields'. Finally, Jarre has issued Pierre Schaeffer's '5 Etudes de bruits'/'Etude aux objets', a single record featuring two albums. Schaeffer was Jarre's teacher and mentor and is, hence, the fount of 'Oxygene'...

TANGERINE DREAM
Zeit
Reactive

To celebrate the fortieth year since the original release of the album, Reactive (www.cherryred.co.uk/esoteric.asp) has released a luxurious box set based around the album. Limited to one thousand samples worldwide, the pizza-style box includes the original album, presented in a gatefold and pressed on blue vinyl. Within the packaging is a facsimile of the original and very rare German insert. A newly remastered CD edition is also included along with new liner notes plus a bonus CD disc featuring a previously unreleased performance of the album from Cologne, November

1972. Topping this lot off is a well presented 48-page, 7" square soft-back book plus three postcards, completing the package. Well mastered and superbly presented, it is the most comprehensive examination of this album to date.

A more studied, atmospheric suite of noises that plunges you into deep space, 'Zeit' was a significant release for Tangerine Dream. Firstly, it was the first time that they had utilised the Moog Modular System and this production featured a complete lack of melody – a novelty for the era. Zeit was the first project of a new line-up, released as a double album. As Edgar Froese remembers, "we invited Florian Fricke (of Popol Vuh) to the sessions. He owned the only big modular Moog synth in Germany but we didn't know how to use it that well. So we were forced into learning how the thing worked."

The mastering and pressing is highlighted by the track, 'Nebulous Dawn'. Featuring an atmospheric, drone-like presentation, this track is dark ambient music at its best. If you have too much distortion welling around your hi-fi chain, it's going to turn this early synth classic into mush. The more clarity the better, so look to your shelving and cables for salvation!





FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Fra Lippo Lippi

Rune Grammofon

They might not exactly be a household name in the UK but Norwegian outfit Fra Lippo Lippi have been around the music industry for many years: from 1978, in fact. The band spans a mixture of musical styles including cold wave, pop, synth-pop and new wave and, over the years, produced a series of six albums: 'In Silence', 'Small Mercies', 'Songs', 'Light and Shade', 'The Colour Album' and 'Dreams'. Rune Grammofon has collected all six in a pizza-style box set that features a four-page colour, glossy insert detailing each album in turn and a slice of context and history around each. Pressed on white vinyl, each disc is included with a card, die-cut sleeve. We would recommend the immediate addition on a soft-plastic inner to protect your wax investment.

Playing 'In Silence' (1984) was a bit of a shock. I've become so used to Norwegian bands of a more contemporary stripe, infusing their work with *avant-garde* jazz, but this was pure Joy Division! High tempo cold wave fare: introverted, downbeat vocals drenched in dark reverb. 'Small Mercies' (1984) lightened the mood but retained the new wave

theme. Packing a percussive punch, it even verged on early gothic motifs with illusions to The Mission. 'Songs' (1985) was a more MOR, synth pop affair which, by evolution, lead to 'Light & Shade' (1986), a Walter Becker (from Steely Dan) produced LP that was too polished and safe. 'Colours' (1989), fortunately, focused more on the songs themselves, offering a more interesting structure while 'Dreams' (1991) continued this songwriting-centred development that provided clarity of vocal delivery with, in addition to the rather pop-glitzzy frame, a solid set of ditties. A fascinating historical evolution – this charming, well produced, box set is limited to just three hundred copies.

TESTAMENT

The New Order

Back On Black

Testament should have been mega-stars. Up there with the likes of Metallica in the thrash metal stakes. They ultimately suffered from a poor case of timing as the genre suffered in popularity just as the band were ramping up their creative energies. As ever, some internal decisions contributed to their problems too. Don't think that the band has withered on the vine, however. They are still a force in rock with a strong



following and plenty of quality LP releases to boot. This particular release takes you back almost to the beginning, their second album release following on from the very well received debut, 'The Legacy'. To have a top quality debut is good but is not too unusual. What is unusual is to follow that debut with an equally good, if not better, second LP release and that's what they did with this I.P.

Often seen as an ideal entry point into the band's catalogue. It features a presentation of immense power which matches that heard on 'The Legacy'. What has changed and the reason why I believe that 'The New Order' is even better than the debut, is how much the band has learned in such a short space of time in terms of songwriting.

Their lyrics are determinedly ruthless in their targets and cover the subject matter with a dark, foreboding premise. Yes, the themes can be quite overbearing and even pompous at times, but that's all part of the fun. Even when they decide to cover a song – such as Aerosmith's 'Nobody's Fault' – they do it in a peerless fashion. A complete metallic *tour de force*. Also look out for more Testament reissues from Back On Black such as 'The Legacy', 'Souls Of Black' and 'Practice What You Preach'.

PR



Tim Jarman remembers Technics SL-series of compact turntables from the late nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties...

Space Saver

Of the many new turntable designs available today, few – if any – suit the non-technical user. The fashion now is for the mechanism and the structure to be on show, with plenty of things to adjust and fiddle with to tune the sound to the owner's exact preference. They are made for the enthusiast, reflecting the niche that the LP format occupies these days.

Of course, records were once mainstream, and what the larger hi-fi manufacturers all attempted to do was to package the turntable as the perfect consumer product. This normally implied compromises in

performance and specification, but this was not always the case, as a few managed to produce easy to use, domestically acceptable models with *true* hi-fi performance. In the main, microprocessor technology was the key advance that made these machines possible: suddenly all the functions of a fully automatic turntable could be easily sequenced in a flexible manner to deliver 'plug and play' convenience...

By the late nineteen seventies, Technics had built up a reputation for designing decent, reliable hi-fi and their turntables in particular were highly respected. For the 1980 model year, Yosumi Toshikazu's

ground-breaking SL-10 moved the game on yet again. Here was a turntable whose footprint was little larger than an LP jacket but whose performance challenged the better traditional models. 1981 brought another version in the shape of the SL-7, similar in concept but lightly restyled, cheaper to produce and a massive international hit. Both these turntables had direct drive motors, cast alloy cabinets and in the case of the SL-10, a moving coil cartridge and built-in preamplifier. They were good choices for the serious listener but too expensive to be packaged with the miniature component systems that at the time were something

that most of the Japanese household names were keen to get into their ranges.

This problem was solved in 1982 with the introduction of the SL-5. This shared much of the technology and structure from the SL-10 and SL-7 but came with a simpler cartridge and a moulded plastic outer cabinet, making it the ideal turntable for the Technics 315 series of miniature hi-fi components, so-called because all the components (with the exception of the loudspeakers) were 315mm wide. The range started with a combined receiver/ cassette deck (SA-K5) or a receiver (SA-5) and cassette deck (RS-5) combination. Moving up the range, a separate tuner (ST-5) and amplifier (SU-5) could be specified, and finally the SH-E5 graphic equaliser completed the top of the range offering. All these systems were offered with the SL-5 turntable, which fitted neatly on the top and looked smart and unobtrusive. Even the suggested loudspeakers (SB-F5) weren't that bad; these were Japan's golden years in hi-fi after all.

The key development that allowed Technics to make a quality turntable that was so small was the mounting of the arm in the upper part of the cabinet. The arm, which used the linear tracking principle and was electronically controlled, was held in a rigid pressed metal hinged assembly at the rear of the deck to which the lid was also attached, using compliant rubber mountings at all points. The lid was interlocked so that playback was only possible when it was correctly closed; to prevent damage to the stylus should the mechanism be started unintentionally, a small switch was built into the platter near the hub to sense the presence of a record. Another small switch at the side sensed the record size as the lid was closed, giving the microprocessor all the information it needed for when the 'Start' key was pressed. Of course all the major controls were light action logic types; the cranks, levers and piano keys of the previous generations of turntables were very much out of fashion in the early nineteen eighties!

The SL-5 retained the direct drive motor of the SL-10 but the speed was *not* quartz locked; even so long term drift in speed was not a problem due to the high quality of the components used (most of which were made by Matsushita, the parent company of Technics). The motor's rotating core is part of the platter so the two parts could be balanced and trued together. A feature shared with the SL-7 was the base board, which was moulded in TNRC (Technics

Non-Resonant Compound) and carefully shaped for maximum rigidity. The structure of the machine did not allow for a floating subchassis to provide isolation so rubber feet moulded in a dual compound and mounted on soft steel springs were fitted instead. It is attention to details like this that made it possible for the SL-5 to achieve superior performance despite its small size.

If you are used to conventional turntables then the first thing that will strike you about the SL-5 is how small it is. All the cables plug into the back so you can experiment with modern audiophile types if you wish, but as our SL-5 came with all its correct and original ones it is these I used for the listening tests. Playing a record is in theory as easy as playing a CD, you open the lid, pop the disc on the platter, shut the lid,

"this is not a turntable for people seeking warmth, but it will delight those who crave accuracy and precision, however..."

press play and once this is done the surprises start. The combination of an exceptionally short and rigid arm (it's about 11cm long from pivot to stylus tip) and a stable, well balanced direct drive motor result in a sense of speed and timing that is simply not possible to replicate using the current generation of heavyweight radial designs.

SOUND QUALITY

The way that the little Technics SL-5 presents each note as having a definite beginning and end sounds odd initially, as very few turntables can resolve this level of detail with such accuracy – but if you let yourself think of it as a CD player with greatly enhanced resolution rather than a simple record player, then it begins to make sense. Normally such a short arm would cause problems with distortion due to tracking errors, but as these do not occur in a well designed tangential setup such as the SL-5, you get a completely consistent performance across the whole surface of the record.

Despite the care taken throughout the design with isolation, I still found placement to be critical. The centre of the lid surface is very microphonic at low frequencies, and this can lead to an exaggerated sense of bass warmth if the turntable is positioned too close to the loudspeakers. Placed optimally, the bass performance tightens up, leaving only the limited tracking ability of

TOP TIP

Completeness is the key to buying an SL-5; the cartridge for example is a plug-in T4P type and if it's missing a replacement may be difficult or expensive to source. The stylus on the other hand is cheap and readily available so there are no problems there. The mat is also specific to this model; not only does it need a slot for the record sensor but also must be exactly the right thickness for the arm pivot height to be correct.

As for cables, any will do but an earth lead is needed. It plugs into a 4mm socket next to the main outputs which is easily missed. Problems with the arm mechanism normally resolve with the cleaning and re-lubrication of the runners and replacement of the drive belt (the universal 'Walkman' kits contain one of suitable size). These parts are all located in the top part of the cabinet and are easily accessed when the inspection cover and lid are removed.

The only other trouble spots are the cables that pass through the lid hinges; check if the machine is silent on one channel. If the speed has drifted off (use a test record or a strobe disc to check) then it can be easily adjusted using the two miniature controls which are accessible through holes in the baseplate.

the basic cartridge as the one thing that detracts from the machine's performance. This makes its presence felt as a zingy sharpness to the sound of records with heavily modulated grooves; you could never call a stock SL-5 smooth, and so this is not a turntable for those who are seeking warmth and indulgence. It will delight those who crave accuracy and precision, however.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the pricier Technics SL-15 and SL-10s are getting rare, good examples of the SL-5 are still plentiful, so there is no need to settle for tatty, incomplete or otherwise junky specimens – expect to pay £80 or less. As with many Japanese classic direct drives the days of buying a nice one for peanuts are perhaps over but when compared to a new budget deck the SL-5 still looks great value. The later SL-J2 (introduced in 1985) is a repackaged version of basically the same machine and offers a quartz locked motor in addition to the SL-5's existing strengths; both are recommended as high quality automatic designs that are exceptionally easy to use and long-lived.



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World Radio History

"there is so much more information flowing around about hi-fi these days..."



david price

Speaking as someone who got his first ever letter published in a national magazine at the tender age of eight (I'd written in to *Autocar* to complain of their unsympathetic treatment of the (then) new Triumph TR7 sports car in a comparative review with the Fiat X1/9!), the world of magazines has always held a fascination for me.

Where else is it possible to hold mass debates, where writers and readers alike engage in a dialogue about all manner of things – from hi-fi to cars to watches to beauty, fashion and music? Well, until the relatively recent advent of the internet, the answer was *nowhere* else, that's where!

As soon as anything is released into the world, from an academic research paper to a new type of gadget, the great British public have traditionally got stuck in with their opinions, putting pen to paper to take magazines and their journalists to task, along with busy-body letter writers like me. It's something that is quintessentially British, I think, but of course not exclusively.

As a magazine, *Hi-Fi World* has always been rather contrarian. In the nineteen nineties, when others preached the grey orthodoxy of CD players and solid-state, we enthused about vinyl and valves. Whilst it sounds fashionable these days, I recall that when we first started opining that LPs sounded better than CDs, around 1994 as I remember, then it was tantamount to the slaughter of the first born! I remember the *Hi-Fi World* mail bag (in truth it was a sack in those pre-email days) swelling menacingly after radical pronouncements such as this!

Then of course came computer

audio. Around 1999, the term didn't even really exist, but we came up with a mini magazine called *Computer Audio World* which we bundled free with *Hi-Fi World* every month. We were greeted by a stupefied silence from the industry – what planet were they on, people thought? Well, very much the right one, as it turned out – although in truth we arrived at the party *far* too early. It took another three or four years for the iPod and the Squeezebox to arrive...

This magazine has had a history of being right about the big issues, although of course you can't win them all. For example, possibly and with the benefit of hindsight, we were a tad too enthusiastic about Class D amplification I think. Although of course it still can sound great if done properly...

But just having a well-voiced opinion doesn't make you right. Maybe that's one of the bad things about our culture, as we can be just a *bit* too individualistic and subjective. I've met various manufacturers over the years who've been so passionate about what they're doing, yet there wasn't always a correlation between their self-belief and the technical quality of their products.

Almost uniquely in the world – with the possible exception of Japan – this country has a hobbyist mentality where an idea is had at 3'o'clock in the morning, a prototype is knocked up the next day on the kitchen table and the company is formed a week later. We've met a lot of these types of people at *World*, and sometimes it's been a wonderful experience and at other times not so! Still, it's this sort of heroic entrepreneurship that got us through World War II, I suppose...

Nowadays of course, we

have online hi-fi forums. This is an important new development, giving people access to 'crowd sourced' information – thousands of people's lived experiences with a product can be more useful than an isolated reviewer's couple of weeks spent with it. In this sense, I think they're a brilliant thing, but then again forums can also be a platform for industry politics, personal agendas and individual self-aggrandisement, as well as a source of rumour and misinformation. Things would be better if people didn't hide behind the cloak of anonymity, methinks. The difference is that the established hi-fi magazines are accountable, inasmuch as if they're wrong more often than not, then that's the end of them commercially!

So, as we go into this second decade of the twenty first century, things have in some ways never been more healthy – there is so much more information flowing around about hi-fi these days. The hegemony of magazines – whatever their type – has been broken and 'citizen journalism' has taken root. Good news, I think, but there's now a new role for established magazines to act as a counterbalance for the weird and sometimes wonderful world of online commentators, forum posters and bloggers. I still foresee a major role for magazines in future, be they in print or online.

It's been a memorable eight and a half years as editor of *Hi-Fi World*, but now I'm moving on to pastures new. This marks the end of this column, which has been running continually since the mid nineteen nineties. So I'd like to say thank you and goodbye, and if you'd like to stay in touch, well there's always the internet! Catch me at http://twitter.com/David_J_Price. ●

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The Evo ! What an evocative name and rightly so too! The SL-1200 evolved from a Hi Fi turntable into a DJ deck and now we turn it back into a Hi Fi turntable again! Fitted with the legendary SME 309 tonearm and the Audio Technica AT33EV your emotions will run wild. The AT33EV is itself an evolutionary cartridge hence its EV suffix and matches the SME 309 so well. We have worked with direct drive turntables and moving coil cartridges for over 30 years now and the EVO has evolved into a mature product that is quite simply a world beater. We can supply completely new units with 5 year guarantees or we can convert your own, even if you bought it used.

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"audiophiles need to know about this still little-known record label..."



paul rigby

I must tell you about Reel Recordings (www.reelrecordings.org) — a wonderfully anachronistic record label. It is a Canadian imprint with an Anglophile bent and a penchant for producing its CD masters in a slow, methodical, deliberate manner that makes absolutely no sense in financial terms, yet makes complete sense to us audiophiles. Its catalogue is jazz-based, sometimes jazz rock, and has a pleasingly quirky tone featuring the often eccentric voices and sounds of unique English talents such as Soft Machine, Kevin Ayers, Mike Osborne, Steve Miller, Lol Coxhill, Bob Downes and more. Particular highlights include arguably the best live recording of Soft Machine that exists today, 'Live At Henie Onstad Art Centre 1971' (recorded with two Neumann mics, a simple desk and a Studer reel-to-reel) and a superbly recorded piece, plus the Lol Coxhill and G.F. Fitz-Gerald album, 'The Poppy Seed Affair', a remarkable suite featuring haunting guitar playing and *avant-garde* structures.

The quality of recordings is generally excellent, but label boss Mike King wouldn't describe his label as audiophile. "Some of the CDs I have released, a major label might reject it because it was not a pristine recording but, nevertheless, I've taken it and rescued it. We do put a lot of emphasis in optimising the playback. That doesn't imply that they're necessarily 'hi-fi'. On our website we stipulate whether each release is 'hi-fi' or 'mid-fi' (surely there is something in between hi-fi and lo-fi?)"

King receives his sources either on reel-to-reel or via cassettes and auditions the music first. If it engages him then he examines the frequency content and sonic structure. "My

approach to remastering is to maximise the recording's strength and minimise the weaknesses. If you see it as fodder for 'anything goes' mastering then you risk turning it into something it's not. A weak recording can quickly be turned into something that's bombastic, for example."

Even worse, when you have a poorly structured recording, the mastering has to be done sympathetically. For example, a very quiet portion can be isolated so that it can be more complementary and even in relation to the rest of the recording. It's a time-intensive process that takes around forty to fifty hours of application.

"If I applied a monetary equation to the work I do then I simply would not be involved in doing it. We have machines where we could, if we wished, apply a generalised algorithm to a complete track or album. That could be done in a matter of minutes with a result that would 'pass', sonically. But what you're relying on is allowing a mathematical process to make the decisions for you. There could be huge dynamic shifts that wouldn't be properly picked up by the software. It's the subtle cues that I'm very attuned to and I wish to make as consistent as possible for the sake of the musical presentation."

What King does is produce a bespoke mastering experience for each and every CD: it's a bit like making a suit for an individual. "We're told that technology can do all of this for us but, in fact, I've never come across a computer program that can make an aesthetic decision."

Technically, King uses a Technics RS1500 reel-to-reel player. "I know that the transport is as good as it gets. It's not a Studer but at least I don't have to cope with a deck the

size of a washing machine in my house. The Technics is one of the few 'Prosumer' machines that plays at three and three quarter inches per second — the Revox does not. We get a lot of tapes recorded at that speed, mainly because tape was so expensive back then so people often cut their tape speed in half!"

King uses a Teac V7010 for any cassette sources that he comes across. After that, next in line down the sound chain is a Yaquin buffer, powered by two 6N1 valves which rectifies impedance mismatches and adds slight second order harmonic which enhances the overall sound, adding greater musicality, removing the sterility and making the sound more involving. Also used is a dedicated computer with a Lynx L22 soundcard. "I went the extra mile with the card. It had received good reviews but was criticised because of its internal cables. I hard-wired two Atlas cables into the card."

So where do these rare recordings come from? "Everyone seems to know someone else, it seems to snowball," said King. "Bob Downes (top *avant-garde* flautist) called me from Germany out of the blue, for example. He said, 'I need to be on the label, I'm gonna send you stuff! You've got to put out some of my music!' So we did."

So that's it, the reason I wanted to tell you about this company, because it is full of passion for the job and love for the music. Audiophiles need to know about this still little known record label. Offering music without compressors, without dithering, without limiters, without exciters and enhanced by CD glass mastering in real time. What you end up with is just the music. Nothing else. ●

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"when room acoustics are taken into account, my system balance becomes far from even..."



tony bolton

During the course of an afternoon spent helping a friend package up his system prior to his moving abroad, I found myself presented with a few records, some watchmakers screwdrivers and, most interestingly, a used sound pressure level meter. It is a 'Test Lab YF-20 Sound Level Meter', currently retailing on the internet at around £60. It has two analogue scales: 40 - 80dB and 80 - 120dB.

After I got it home and changed the battery, I spent the next hour wandering around the house taking readings of the sound levels of everything from the washing machine, to the hi-fis and even my cat's purr (52dB peaks at a distance of 50cm, when he's in a good mood!) - boys and their toys!

I discovered that a normal level for listening to the TV through both the upstairs and downstairs systems was between 42 and 48dB, with very occasional peaks around 50dB. This was measured with the meter held in front of my chest, while seated in my normal listening position. (Upstairs I sit about 2m away from the speakers, and downstairs this increases to about 3.5m).

When changing to playing music, I found a far greater variance. My normal listening level with company, where conversation is to the fore, was between 40 and 46dB, but when music became the focus the level increased to between 42 and 60dB. What I would consider to be a quite loud volume, and one that I wouldn't normally go to if the neighbours were in (we are semi-detached) proved to be between 50 and 74dB, with peaks sometimes touching 78dB. At this level conversation was only possible with somewhat raised voices. I thought these figures a little low, but paid no further attention at the time.

Soon after this, I received the

IsoTek Ultimate System Set-Up Disc to review as a Soundbite. Apart from the normal channel and phase tests, this disc contains a series of frequency tones starting at 20Hz and going, via nine steps to 20kHz. When I did the review I noticed variations in how I heard the relative volume levels of each tone. So I dusted off the Test Lab and settled down to assess the performance of both my systems.

Starting upstairs, I was unsurprised to find that at my 'loud' listening level, the majority of the frequencies were reproduced at 74dB. However, the 43Hz was down to 48dB, the 93dB was little better at 52dB. The 20Hz just managed to register at 40dB, as did the 20kHz.

Moving downstairs and using the same relative volume level the results were as follows: 20Hz was a fraction better nudging 42dB, the 43Hz and 93Hz tones came in at 60 and 64dB, and the 200Hz, 430Hz, 930Hz, 2kHz, 4.3kHz and 9.3kHz tones all reproduced at 74 dB, with the 20kHz this time registering as 43dB on the meter.

Now, each of these components, when measured by their makers, will probably have produced a fairly flat frequency response between the 20 Hz and 20kHz points. However, when domestic room acoustics were taken into account, the readings became far from smooth. However the readings did not seem very high, and my ears told me that the bass roll off was no where near as steep as the meter had suggested.

So I had a chat with Noel, who pointed out that cheap SPL meters tend to vary in accuracy somewhat, and are not very good at accurately reading frequency extremes. Since bass contributes most to overall band energy, I would be likely to be getting low readings due to the equipment not responding to the lower

frequencies. From my description of the relative volumes that I used (using normal speech as a reference point) he estimated that I was getting readings that were about 10dB under the correct values.

He reassured me that if I was getting a fairly flat response from around 200Hz to 10kHz (which I am) then my system was doing its job, and also suggested that I should move the meter to see if I was getting false readings of the low frequencies, caused by high and low pressure points in the room, and possibly interference from standing waves.

Before I go any further though, I am going to get this device calibrated and checked for frequency response against Noel's equipment, and then redo this experiment. I shall keep you advised.

Therefore, I would err on the side of caution in taking 'home-brewed' SPL readings too seriously, especially if they are taken from either cheap or second hand meters, or from the various Smartphone 'Apps' that are now available. In the meantime, I shall continue to trust the best SPL meters that I have available - my ears!

Noel says - if you want a decent SPL meter then be prepared to pay a few hundred pounds at least, and go to Farnell or RS Components. However, sub-£200 budget jobbies are OK if you do not expect too much from them. Balancing loudspeaker levels in a surround sound system does not require absolute accuracy as you are making comparisons, not absolute measurements.

A great iPhone app that offers an SPL meter in addition to much else is available from Studio6Digital for just £6 and they have a Pro version too, for more serious use. With Christmas coming up this is a nice present idea - at least for the techies amongst us. ●

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"I have often wondered whether more might be possible in the relationship between tube and transistor..."



noel keyword

Last month I could not help but praise Eminent Technology's weird but wonderful LFT-16 loudspeaker, which is a tribute to belief and determination, if not quite to original thinking, because electrodynamic drivers are not new. I don't expect to be surprised by hi-fi anymore – but with the LFT-16 I was. And blow me down if this month the same happens all over again, this time with a valve amplifier, the EMIS Audio HVA-1. It's one of the most unusual hybrid amplifiers, using transistors as well as tubes, I have ever come across but imaginative, well designed and a delight to listen to. And as with the LFT-16s, I sat in front of it thinking "wow, that is really nice", the sound was just so innately attractive.

I'm lucky enough to have sweated through a hard apprenticeship designing, prototyping and testing, as well as using, our own World Audio Design valve amplifiers. This ordeal by explosion and fire, taught me many things and one of them was that valves and transistors do not mix. The more of those horrid little transistors you haul out of any design, even the rectifier diodes in the power supply for heaven's sake, the better it all sounds. It was Audio Innovations original P2 all-valve phono stage with valve regulated power supply that established this point with me and we subsequently found WAD amplifiers sounded better if their bridge rectifiers were replaced by rectifier tubes.

That was one influencing factor behind helping convince me not to mix tube and transistor. Another was when our own brilliantly designed(!), prototype solid-state derived automatic d.c. bias supply went up in a puff of smoke after an output valve 'blew up', in one of our prototype amplifiers. The electrodes

of a valve can warp under heat, the anode shakes hands with the grid and somehow the cathode gets involved, then there's a bang and your valve is no more. But neither is much else inside the amplifier after it has been exposed to 500V! And that especially includes transistors. Our transistor circuitry was intimately linked into the output stage so it felt the full force of the high voltage power line and collapsed immediately.

After this experience we decided to not mix the two technologies. Although it may seem to any decent design engineer that there are ways to tackle such matters, I always feared that some difficult to imagine effect might get around standard protection circuitry and such like to wreak untold havoc by a method that would suit a remake of *Alien*. In particular, valve amps have big coils of wire inside them that transmit, and signal loops that receive and back emfs that don't bear thinking about. They are a cauldron of electromagnetic radiation in which transistors are lambs to a slaughter!

All the same, I have often wondered whether more might be possible in the relationship between tube and transistor. Hybrid amplifiers almost always use a transistor output stage with tube preamplifier. This is inexpensive, relatively simple to design and compact, as well as lightweight. Done well such hybrids sound very good, having a greater sense of life and dynamism to them than all-transistor amplifiers. Providing the output stage is a good one, meaning it does not suffer excessive crossover distortion, tube preamp stages generally add an easy liquidity to the musical process, avoiding the hard treble glare that is so common in all-transistor amplifiers. This effect is commonly confused with the delivery of 'detail'.

Musical instruments do not possess the quality though, making it a phenomenon that I go out of my way to avoid and hybrids with preamp valves make a good job of avoiding it in my experience.

There are plenty more reasons to use preamp valves and output transistors. The extra cost and weight of output transformers is avoided, the amplifier is smaller, less expensive to ship and more reliable than one using output tubes, whose life is limited to 2,000 hours or so. Preamp valves have a life of 10,000 hours or so.

For all these reasons hybrid amps using a tube output stage are rare as hens' teeth, and one using a transistor phase splitter and direct coupled valves to avoid phase shifts, in order to increase feedback, is an idea I have never come across and one I would not conceive of. Or in other words – it is weird!

It is also weird to mix tube and transistor design philosophies; designers fall into one camp or the other and rare are those able to come to terms with both. Transformers are anathema to the solid-state brigade and the electronics industry generally. But to tube amp designers they are the stuff of life.

All this makes the little EMIS a rather strange animal if you ask me, much like Eminent Technology's LFT-16 loudspeaker. But whilst the LFT-16 looks different, the HVA1 does not. It looks like any other valve amplifier, yet its sound is far away from the norm.

Just like the LFT-16 loudspeaker this amplifier is the product of a different but well founded design approach – and it works. So original hi-fi products that are genuinely good rather than just wacky do still appear and they are a delight. I wonder what will appear next month? ●

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VLDH

"we should not be scared of new technology, but do question exactly what the gains are..."



adam smith

Where technology is concerned, I am in the interesting position of finding myself caught between two camps. Naturally, with my predisposition towards vinyl, the lack of flat screen television in my house and a great fondness for my seventeen year old classic car, many assume that I am some sort of flat-earth Luddite [yep! Ed.]. Those same people are therefore somewhat surprised to find that I have a degree in Electronic Engineering and spend my days carrying out electrical and electronic production and design duties for a company that makes some large, complicated and expensive remotely operated underwater exploration vehicles!

As an engineer, I am as excited as the next person when new technology is unveiled and I must confess that, despite my best efforts, even I am occasionally guilty of the blinkered excitement over 'new stuff'. I recently became unduly feverish over Apple's release of iOS5 for the iPhone and set about plugging my phone into iTunes for the anticipated update. I was then mysteriously told that the version 4.2.1 software on my phone was the latest and I was all up to date. How could this be, I wondered?

A trawl of the internet revealed all – you see, iOS5 is not compatible with older models than the 3GS, meaning that my 3G is effectively no longer supported by Apple, despite me still being three months away from the end of the two year contract I took out when I bought it. Naturally, I moaned at everyone who would listen until one of my work colleagues brought me back down to earth with a resounding crash. Raising a weary eyebrow at me, he enquired "does it still make phone calls?" I replied that it did. "Will it

send and receive texts?", he then asked. I responded in the affirmative. Finally, he queried whether it would still allow me to check my emails, surf eBay and find flights using my Skyscanner app. On confirming that these were all still *all systems go*, he duly informed me that I was sounding dangerously like a whining Apple geek and to shut up and get on with using my still-working phone. I saw his point and duly did as I was told!

This brief sojourn into blind 'fan boy' status sums up the problem. There is a very real danger that the average person in the street sees much technology with that blinkered view. If something is marketed as 'new', 'improved' or, worst of all, 'digital' it therefore must be better mustn't it? Surely they are only fooling themselves if they don't immediately throw their old whatever-it-is into the bin and dash out to buy a newer one? Fortunately, the other side of my engineering brain (nearly!) always reins in the excitement of the other side to enquire what exactly I'm getting for my money when something new comes along. It is also why we at *Hi-Fi World* spend a good deal of time debating and investigating whether 'improvements' are actually improving anything.

A perfect example of this raised its head recently, and it's a subject we touch on quite regularly. As I have mentioned before, my house is in a DAB-free zone, which I personally consider no great loss but I have become rather fond of one or two digital radio stations to be found on the internet. Consequently, I have been pondering the acquisition of an internet radio for the kitchen, to replace my grandfather's Fidelity RAD15, and the opportunity recently presented itself to have a play with the very model I had been considering.

With permission to fiddle duly

granted, I fired the beast up and got to work. Well, first of all, this item uses a touchscreen which is dreadful. Maybe I'm spoilt by the screen on my iPhone, but this thing responded with the speed of a lumbering dinosaur and some buttons had to be pressed somewhere near, but not exactly on, the icon in question, in order to work. Equally, by the time they responded, I had jabbed them again in frustration, with the end result being two responses at once. Still, I persevered and set it to Internet Radio mode, whereupon it decided that it needed to completely retune itself and download some new software.

Twenty three minutes later, I finally was able to select a station and was greeted with a sound that scared me. The two speakers either side of it suggested it was stereo but I'd never have known, and the tinny racket emanating from it had me reaching to turn it off very promptly. On rejoining my friends in their lounge, I was asked how I got on and tried to be polite and suggest that perhaps I'd not bother buying one for now, when my friend cut straight to the chase by saying, "I know, it's rubbish, isn't it? I wish I'd never got rid of my old Roberts." He then went on to tell me how this ultra-modern, high tech device would barely pick up any of the FM stations that the aforementioned Roberts brought in loud and clear, regularly dropped contact with his nearby router and randomly decided to ignore stations he wished to listen to.

We should definitely *not* be scared of new technology, as it's often a wonderful thing. However, do take time to question exactly *what* the gains are. It is worth remembering that there was always a lot of rubbish around that has been very effectively superseded but, equally, newer doesn't necessarily mean better. ●

vinyl section

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JANUARY 2012

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Adam Smith auditions a magical tonearm from New Zealand.

SALIENT AUDIO SPOKE LP12 III

Tony Bolton tries this radical Linn Sondek suspension mod.

news



A TRIO OF RAMONES

Whatever anyone else tells you, The Ramones were the very first punk band – four band members, three chords, two-minute songs, one set of basic lyrics and zero idea what was going to happen next. Rhino has just re-released the band's second, third and fourth outings – all classics. 'Leave Home' (1976) packs fourteen songs in thirty minutes at speed with a slightly poppier take than their debut; 'Rocket To Russia' (1977) keeps up the pace, the quantity of songs and album length but increases the song quality and adds ballads! 'Road To Run' (1978) might be an LP designed by the now familiar template, but it's still bags of fun.



MANOWAR

Back on Black has released two albums by this classic rock outfit – well, not so much 'classic rock' as 'macho rock'. Raw and antagonistic, the first release, 'Kings Of Metal' (1988) is a ballad-ridden LP that works best when the tempo is high as on 'Wheels Of Fire'. 'The Triumph Of Steel' (1992), a superior double LP, hits the ground heaving with a twenty-eight minute opener. A tight piece of work, this very seriously approached camp metal piece is the band's best release from their nineties period.



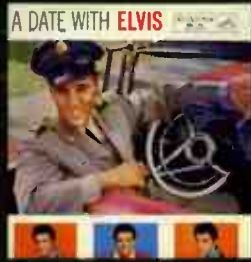
THE JAZZ AGE

Two new reissues from John Coltrane that also include a CD within the LP package. 'Africa/Brass' (Doxy) features his two debut pieces for Impulse in 1961 plus backing of either nine to fourteen piece bands and Eric Dolphy arrangements. 'My Favourite Things' (Doxy) is a classic release from 1960 featuring an unforced brilliance that is powered by both confident and very able sidemen.

From the major figure in free jazz, Albert Ayler, his 1960 release, 'Spirits' (Klimt; 1964) reflects the beginning of his prime, where his touring of Europe had broadened and deepened his tonal appreciation. Also look out for Red Garland's 'All Kinds Of Weather' (Doxy; 1958) where the pianist explores six superior songs - their interpretations always swing and uplift the melodies.



NEIL DIAMOND
12 SONGS



A DATE WITH ELVIS



From ELVIS
In Memphis



LEONARD COHEN: LIVE SONGS



LEGENDS ON WAX

Music On Vinyl have a selection of legendary singers and singer-songwriters on offer via the company's latest selection of vinyl issues. Up first is Bob Dylan and The Band's 'Before The Flood' (1974), a live LP which saw both artists needing to get back on the creative horse after disappointing albums. It succeeds because Dylan reworks the familiar, rearranging to keep things fresh.

Elvis Presley has two offerings; 'A Date With Elvis' (1959) scooped up mid-fifties' songs giving later fans a taste of classic Elvis for the first time, and 'From Elvis In Memphis', which is arguably Presley's greatest ever album. It's a white soul classic from 1969 featuring a rejuvenated Presley, superb backing and excellent production.

Also look out for Leonard Cohen's 'Live Songs' (1973), a collection of live cuts from 1970-72 that featured a number of deeply personal and powerful songs, while the Neil Diamond album, '12 Songs' is his most consistent outing for many years with Rick Rubin cracking the whip as producer, squeezing the very best from the singer.

STATIC CARAVAN

Of course, 12" is only part of the vinyl story, Static Caravan focus on alt.indie and alt.folk releases and, while they dabble in CD and 12" vinyl, they are big fans of the humble 7" – strictly limited and often imaginatively packaged to boot. The latest includes 'Magic Bus' – a psychedelic piece with Kevin Ayers – and 'Zombi', a throwback to Tangerine Dream...



...AND FINALLY

Kiwi four-piece The Unknown Mortal Orchestra's self-titled LP (True Panther Sounds) provides a studio-treated, untutored, almost freeform guitar-based indie outfit injected with late-sixties' psychedlia, a flailing, high-pitched, stoned vocal style and (very) catchy, sing-along melodies.

From New Zealand to Mexico and Los Explosivos' 'Garage Mexicano Muirto Fudido' (Groovie). Featuring covers from The Sonics and The Troggs, this collection includes sixties-style rock'n'roll, high-tempo, and quite frenetic assault on the ears. Passion on a slab on vinyl!

'3' (Alive Natural Sound) is the third album from the US-based Indie-rockers Buffalo Killers. Touched by the harmonic tones of a Stephen Stills-heavy Crosby, Stills & Nash-like sound, this lazy West Coast vibe flows over you, switching on a balmy summer's

evening in your head — even if the snow might be falling outside...

Pure Reason Revolution's 'The Dark Third' (Sony-BMG) is a glossily produced, prog-infused, electro-tinged double album with dreamy psyche overtones and harmonically drenched songs, definitely the contemporary flavour of the month, it seems.

ROCK SOLID

Three varied rock releases this month begin with the first vinyl entry within the new Pink Floyd series of reissues. It is, of course, 'Dark Side Of The Moon' (EMI), released on 180gm plus a 320kbps MP3 download voucher, stickers, posters plus a new poster.

Next is Axel Rudi Pell's new LP, 'The Ballads IV' (SPV). Released as a limited edition coloured vinyl issue, this double album, gatefold provides a suite of balladic, soft rocking heart wrenchers that will have your tears smearing your stick-on tattoos and cascading down your leather jacket.

Folk-prog rockers Parzival's 'BarRock' (Sireena) takes the pop route with this 1973 release, inserting rather ordinary folk-psyche pop with more intriguing prog highlights that don't reach the heights of the earlier 'Legend' LP.



Royal Flush


Rafael Todes strikes it lucky with Inspire's brand new Monarch turntable...

The now deceased Technics SL1210 turntable has been resurrected in many guises. There is the Timestep EVO Technics which I reviewed last year and has become my reference. And Origin Live has thrown its hat into the ring with an upgraded and tweaked version recently, which is also a strong and great value contender. And now, for Technics watchers, an even more radical rethink of this classic direct drive comes from Inspire...

It's not difficult to understand why this is an important event in the great hi-fi scheme of things. Although direct drive was a major player on the international audio scene of the nineteen seventies, in Britain belt drive continued to rule the roost, and still does today. To find a brand new direct drive then, from a British manufacturer (only Brinkmann does DD new, these days, I believe), is a very unusual event.

exudes both superior craftsmanship and gravitas. The plinth is substantial, and beautifully constructed in solid walnut, with a horizontal billet of 6mm aluminium running through it. A quirky gear stick protrudes from the far left hand corner, which switches the motor on, and changes the speed. There is an outboard power supply providing 21V via silver-plated lockable DIN sockets and plugs, boasting a large toroidal transformer, and Fidelity Audio capacitors and voltage regulator. The aluminium billet armboard supplied is for a 12 inch arm (although 9 inch mounting is available), and the review sample is furnished with an SME312S, and a top-of-the-range Ortofon Per Winfeld Cartridge. I used my Audio Origami arm lead with this ensemble.

What then has this got to do with the Technics SL1210? Well, the short answer is that Inspire



SL1200 item on which it's based – two massive billets of aluminium sandwich some Sorbothane in the middle. There are two screws to facilitate removal of the platter, which has a slight record label recess with three added ring indents to offset any resonance escaping from the vinyl. A substantial steel puck weighs down on the record for greater stability. The feet are machined from aluminium and have shock absorbers internally fitted. Aesthetically they are in keeping with the style of the deck, but are without the convenience of screws, so any height adjustment has to be done by other means. There is a touch of the Feickert Woodpecker to this deck, in the shape and layering of the plinth, and the look of the arm board, I feel.

"I don't think I've ever heard this recording come to life in this way before..."

Why? Well, put it this way – most Brit turntable manufacturers tend to work by assembling relatively easy-to-find parts into their own unique chassis. Given that a direct drive motor and the accompanying quartz lock controller and power supply is neither plentiful nor cheap, you're more likely to find them using an Impex AC motor driving the subplatter by a rubber belt. The clever thing about the Inspire is that it uses the one relatively easy-to-find direct drive 'powertrain', that of the Technics SL1200. This obviates the need for a huge investment in motors and controlling circuitry, whilst still taking this technology to the next level.

The first thing that strikes one about the Inspire Monarch is that it *isn't* that easy to detect its Technics ancestry – the deck

have taken many of its best bits and used them in the manufacture of the Monarch, keeping costs down and reaping the benefit of all those years of Technics' research and development. The bearing spindle is rehoused in a phosphor bronze sealed bearing, each one manufactured to fit the individual Technics bearing spindle. High grade oil is used within the bearing, and with the platter off, turning the spindle by hand gives a clue to the high tolerances involved. The onboard circuitry is upgraded with high-spec parts such as a new quartz chip of greater spec – taking speed control to even greater heights than previously achieved with past Technics, it is claimed [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE].

The platter is completely unrecognisable from the original

SOUND QUALITY

Using my trusted reference recording of Bach's 'Brandenburg No.3' (English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Raymond Leppard), and having adjusted the VTA to suit the mood, I was struck by what the deck does right. The strings have a much more coherent sound to them than I am used to with my reference SL1210; there seems to be more texture and depth to the tone. Where that grey-grungy slightly hash-ridden sound exists on the standard Technics, this is greatly reduced with the Timestep Technics, and with the Monarch it recedes further still. The strings seem to have the bloom you hear on a great belt drive, but now with the energy and articulation of a top





direct-drive. The best of all possible worlds, as Dr Pangloss might have said!

In particular, listening to the violin soloist in 'Brandenburg 4', I hear a violin the way I'm used to hearing it sound; not sheeny and brittle, lacking substance, but with a mellow body – so that you could actually identify the maker of the instrument from the information the deck is providing.



Bass is tight, controlled and with a nice articulate leading edge that propels the music forward. I have the feeling that the deck is processing the sound of the entire chamber orchestra equally – there are no registers being favoured, a common fault I often hear with other decks, and this gives a monolithic unity to the final sound.

On one of my favourite jazz albums, 'High Standards 2' with Coleman Hawkins and Red Allen, I

was immediately struck by how the piano on this 1958 recording sounded different to my reference. I was reminded that it is indeed a percussion instrument, as I could hear that split-second attack as the hammer hit the strings, which if not present makes a piano sound soggy. This deck has this in spades. There is a lovely moment on the track when the piano and double bass have a duet, and the combination of piano attack and bass pizzicato is up there with the best I've heard. Coleman

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September 2009



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FUJITSU TEN

Hawkins' sound is sweet and detailed; the whole band seems blessed with pace, rhythm and timing and a foot-tapping quality I don't often hear.

Far from being a one-trick 'pace, rhythm and timing' pony though, this deck has real substance and body to its tonality – there's more than just a beat with a fast leading edge, but rather a well-portrayed, timbrally accurate note that follows.

So it does piano well! Listening to Tchaikovsky's '2nd Piano concerto', a golden age Decca recording with Vladimir Ashkenazy, I was struck by how well the turntable separated

the different textures involved. The

instruments of the orchestra sounded so life-like, that it really illuminated the subtlety of the musical line, as if

someone has taken a bright light to the score. The other thing that it did well is the massive dynamic swings involved in

this symphonic piano concerto. The Inspire really is fiercely dynamic, and I've rarely heard a turntable do this so easily – it's like hearing the master tape.

Listening to the vintage Philips recording of Mozart's opera 'Cosi Fan Tutte', conducted by Sir Colin Davis, there is a moment in the overture when the wind and strings play a chord together, and the strings come off early, leaving the wind to fend for themselves. The better the reproduction, the clearer this ingenious and subtle colour change is. There is so little overhang on this deck, that it's as clear as daylight. The sound has grandeur to it; it's weighty, sweet and compelling.

The first aria between two of the males often sounds unbearably bright, possibly a problem with the equalisation on the master tape, but the Monarch made it sound as acceptable as I've ever heard – indeed it was even rather good! Female voices had real substance, even in the higher registers, in places that can sometimes cause my system to scream. The opera orchestra proved



of pace and timing with a substantial range of tonal colours, to produce a hugely coherent performance which doesn't show off or shout like its earlier adolescent-like incarnations. Instead it quietly gets on with the show with a real maturity. Its soundstage isn't the greatest, but given what it does do, I can live with this. The Technics has finally come of age, and like any doting parent, it's now about to cause me separation anxiety!

a delight to behold, all the subtleties of orchestration that Mozart writes which so often I don't hear were clearly present, not in an ostentatious look-at-me way, but in an organic, almost understated, but nevertheless 'musical' way. I don't think I've ever heard this recording come to life in this way before.

Listening to the Mozart 'Piano Concertos' as recorded by Daniel Barenboim and the English Chamber Orchestra on EMI (not the greatest recording), and even the dazzling playing from Barenboim can often sound muddy, as one of the greatest challenges for vinyl for my ears is the ability to resolve micro-details from background playing. Here the Monarch really triumphs, as in the opera before, exposing the dialogue between the soloist in front, and the forces of the orchestra behind. With this level of resolution, the concertos sparkle with Mozartian wit.

CONCLUSION

No turntable I've heard can do it all. Some can set a soundstage which is holographic, some can be highly inaccurate but capture some of the raw essence of the music, some can be amazingly accurate but leave me cold. This one does a hell of a lot, and what it does, it does really well. The way the Inspire Monarch transduces music is nothing short of pure pleasure to behold. It combines a wonderful sense

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Technics SL1210 mk2 (Timestep)
SME V tonearm
Ortofon Cadenza Bronze cartridge
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
VAC Auricle Musicbloks power amplifiers
B&W 802D loudspeakers
Townshend Isolda cables

VERDICT

Startlingly musical performer with blistering speed and dynamics, yet smoothness, sophistication and purity of tone too. Superb.

INSPIRE MONARCH £3,970

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FOR

- superb transient speed
- excellent dynamics
- tonal purity
- overall musicality

AGAINST

- nothing

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Monarch was very speed stable, producing just 0.09% total wow and flutter with a carefully centred test disc. Our analysis shows basic rate drift at 0.55Hz (33rpm) at a very low level of 0.05%, and no second harmonic common with belt drives. The spectrum above 1Hz is clean and free of flutter components, except for three discrete spikes that are harmonic-related, at 2.2Hz, 4.4Hz and 8.8Hz. These may well be Direct Drive cogging effects, but if so are at a very low level, just 0.02% and, being very narrow, suggest little energy is involved and their audibility unlikely.

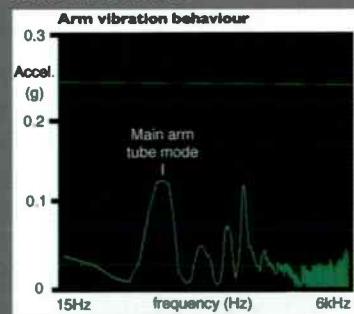
The turntable's low 0.07% DIN weighted wow and flutter value we measured is as good as it gets; the Monarch offers a top notch result.

Our vibration analysis of the magnesium SME312S arm, made with a Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer, shows a basic modal peak at 200Hz, a relatively low frequency as arms go due to the structure's extra mass and length. This shifts colouration down the audio band, away from the middle frequencies where shorter, lighter and stiffer arms resonate, a point forgotten with 12in arms. There are some modes further up the band but the peaks do not reach any high level so they will not have much impact. High frequency headshell ringing is minimal, helped by a web that

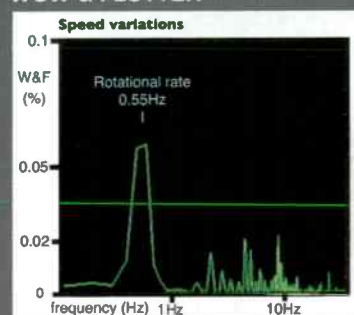
stiffens the top plate, one reason SME arms have smooth midband and treble.

Wow	0.08%
Flutter	0.05%
Total (unwtd)	0.09%
Total (DIN wtd)	0.07%

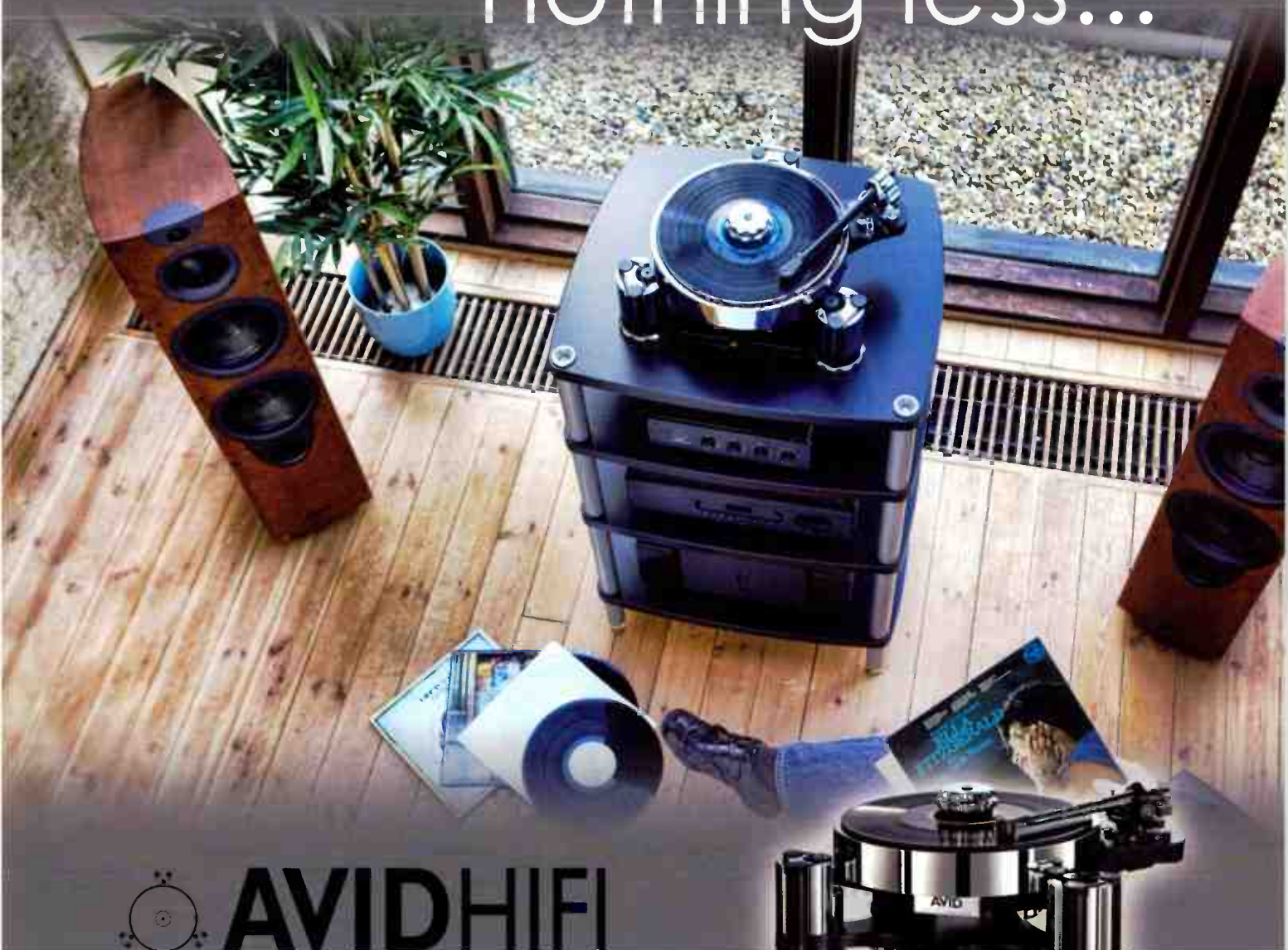
ARM VIBRATION



WOW & FLUTTER



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“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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Pulsare Phono Stage

THE SMITHS COMPLETE — DELUXE COLLECTORS BOX SET (2011)



The Smiths gave succour and solidarity to pale and interesting young men and women of the nineteen eighties, but their significance goes so much further.

The principal indie guitar band of their era, they were icons of their time and a cultural staging post – becoming interwoven with the complex sociological fabric of that time, which included Margaret Thatcher, the miners' strike, inner city riots and Ben Elton. Morrissey, in 1984, famously referred to Mrs T. with the words, "she is only one person. She can be destroyed. It is the only remedy for this country at the moment..."

You either loved or hated The Smiths. Some thought the band too depressing and miserabilist. Others, myself included, saw their work as poignant, cutting, tragic, funny and gloriously sarcastic. There are few bands out there that deserve the 'complete' treatment in terms of their musical output, but The Smiths do, and finally, have got it – and how...

The new 'Deluxe Collectors Box Set' is an enormous box spanning 520x340x60mm. It features a striking, nostalgic, typically working class, 'kitchen sink drama' image of four young girls hanging around a fairground ride. The box itself has a hinged opening and a magnetic automatic seal within the lid. Inside, the contents are neatly laid out and stacked with eight vinyl LPs piled on the right-hand side, eight mini-LP CDs on the top-left with twenty-five, 7" singles on the bottom right.

The CDs and the vinyl duplicate the content which includes the four studio albums: 'The Smiths' (1984), 'Meat Is Murder' (1985), 'The Queen

Is Dead' (1986), 'Strangeways, Here We Come' (1987) plus the live album 'Rank' (1988). You also get the compilations 'Hatful Of Hollow' (1984), 'The World Won't Listen' (1987) and 'Louder Than Bombs' (1987). In the CD pile, you receive a DVD, present in a card sleeve, packing in all of the band's official videos while, on the LP pile, you are given a large poster of the box cover art plus a 12" square booklet of ten pages detailing the albums, singles plus interviews, not with the band though, but a label executive and a studio engineer. There's also a batch of eight 12" square art prints of each album's sleeve art. Most of the 7" singles are pressed in black with the exceptions of 'Shoplifters Of The World Unite' (clear), 'Stop Me If You Think You Have Heard This One Before' (white) and 'Sweet And Tender Hooligan' (white).

In 2009, the vinyl albums were remastered from the original master tapes with the help of guitarist and co-writer Johnny Marr and Metropolis Studios mastering engineer, Frank Awkright, improving sonically over the original issue and issued under Rhino's Vinyl Plus imprint.

Reportedly, the same vinyl has been included in this box. Well, it may be the same masters but they're not the same pressings. Besides an extra cover sticker, the record label is different and so are the matrix numbers on the run-off. More importantly, the sound is not the same as the 2009

issues. The new pressings sound more confident with a stronger, more powerful bass, an appreciable reduction in midrange compression that reduces distortion making Morrissey's lyrics more easily discernible while the soundstage exhibits more clarity giving each instrument more room to manoeuvre.

Digitally, the CD pressings are a different matter. For those fortunate to own the mid-eighties CD pressings, you will notice that the new CD issues are much louder (yes, that old chestnut) with a hardening of the upper midrange that proves far less satisfying.

This box set is almost a triumph. Superbly packaged with lots of excellent additions plus extra rarities on the 7" singles, the digital components are a bit of a let-down sonically, if not aesthetically. For anyone who values analogue however, this box is the ultimate Smiths source. Analogue audiophiles should seek it out but be quick, it's limited to 4,000 copies worldwide, which means that the UK slice of that will be just a few hundred. **PR**





Abracadabra

Our very own Professor of Defence against the Dark Arts, Adam Smith, takes a look at the latest weapon in the battle against dastardly digital; the Design Build Listen Wand tonearm...

Ladies and gentlemen, please be upstanding and offer suitable applause, as it would appear that we are in the presence of an award winner, no less! The awards in question are New Zealand's Best Design Awards, and the Bronze trophy in the Consumer Products category was snapped up by the very item you see before you – the Design Build Listen Wand tonearm. Naturally, designer Simon Brown must be very pleased, as it marks a radical step in his product portfolio to add to his ranges of DIY amplifiers, amplifier parts and upgrades.

As Simon himself puts it in his soft Kiwi tones, the Wand is "not your gran's gramophone"! It actually consists of an unusually large diameter (22mm) Carbon Fibre tube with a cartridge mounting plate inserted into the neatly truncated tube end with holes above for ease of access to fixing screws. This effectively does away with the headshell as such, and measurements of such designs in the past suggest that this goes a long way to amelio-

rating the headshell resonances that can cause high frequency issues. Once again, the Wand bears this out, with a pleasingly smooth higher frequency vibration performance [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. Another bonus is that the angled end of the tube obviates the need for a separate finger lift. Although I am yet to be convinced that these are actually the sonic disaster area some tweakers would claim, they are often inelegant afterthoughts, so the Wand sidesteps the whole issue very neatly.

At the bearing end, the tube is set in a compact but very heavy machined billet of stainless steel, 50mm in diameter, forming the bearing housing. This has a cutout on the underside into which the support pillar sits and various combinations of plates are fitted to the rear according to the mass of the cartridge fitted. These plates are adjustable laterally to balance the arm in the port-starboard plane and a large bolt screws in and out to provide fine tracking force adjustment. Wiring is of the Cardas variety in one continuous run from headshell tags

to phono plugs, although Design Build Listen does offer a short lead/no plugs option for terminations inside the turntable itself. As can be seen, no cueing device is fitted but Simon dropped a hint that the Wand may well be followed by other, higher specification designs which remedy this omission.

As standard, the Wand has a simple single-hole fixing but Rega and SME mounting plates are available and both were supplied with the review arm. As my Garrard 301 sports an SME cutout I made use of the latter and found it very well made and a perfect fit. Setup of the Wand is a little more involved than many arms, although certainly no less complex than some other unipivots, but a very clear and well illustrated set of instructions walk you through each step of the process in a concise manner. Finally, glowing mention has to be made of the superb stainless steel tool provided with the arm, which is a combined height gauge, alignment protractor,



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Thorens TD125 in SME plinth. SME cut out. £295	Thorens TD125 in Thorens plinth. Thorens arm. £249
Ortofon MCA 76 pre amplifier. Boxed/mint. £179	Sony CDP-911F CD player. remote book. Cost. £380
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cartridge alignment jig and spanner for tightening the main support rod. It's beautifully made and very cleverly thought out!

Appearance-wise, the arm is very well finished and has a magnificently purposeful air. I even thought I detected more than a hint of the mighty Continuum Cobra tonearm in its appearance, mainly thanks to the gloriously chunky main tube. My Ortofon 2M Black cartridge was less convinced however – it took one look at the Wand and hid itself in the depths of my vinyl toolbox...

SOUND QUALITY

Having coaxed the Ortofon out of hiding and successfully fitted it, I was keen to know just what sort of magic spell the Wand would weave on me. Dropping the stylus into the lead-in groove of Caro Emerald's 'Back It Up' definitely caused my eyebrow to head northwards as the bass line kicked in. This is a punchy and rhythmic track and the Wand snapped itself straight into action, delivering a deliciously fruity and taut beat that

music-making. Whereas sometimes instruments can be lent something of a 'flavour' by an arm, albeit often a very palatable one, the Wand gave the sense that it was pulling exactly what needed to be heard from the record, without adding or subtracting anything. Drum skins sounded taut and realistic, and acoustic guitars had just the right sense of impact to the

high frequency detail with a glorious fluidity. This ensures that everything that needs to be heard is expertly captured and, once again, I found the Wand grabbing my attention by just the right amount to make sure that I missed nothing. The triangles used at the back of the orchestra were vividly outlined within the main action, whereas so often they can

"appearance-wise, the arm is very well finished and has a magnificently purposeful air..."

leading edges of their string plucks. Equally, the tail ends of the notes faded away with timing such that nothing seemed on top of each other, yet there was no sense of disjointedness.

Things were even better with classical music, as here the Wand really started to work its magic. Violins are never an easy instrument to reproduce at the best of times, straddling a thin line between veiled and screechy, but the Wand parked itself on that line expertly. As a result, Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' rang out in my listening room and, as the neighbours happened to be on holiday, I took great delight in pushing the volume to decidedly antisocial levels, and spent a good fifteen minutes or so grinning manically to myself and conducting an imaginary orchestra with gusto!

The Wand has an unerring ability to really draw you into its performance with its sheer musical vivacity, although being ultra critical, I would have liked to have heard a little more stage depth. It had no trouble in setting up very well focused images between and to the sides of my loudspeakers, nor did it effect any unease at projecting out at me, but I was aware of a rather abrupt cessation of action behind the plane of the loudspeakers. Ultimately, the likes of the Jelco SA-750D and the Roksan Nima both fare a little better in this respect.

However, where the Wand once again showed its top form was in its treble performance. Again, that well designed carbon fibre tube seems to be offering a strikingly impressive neutrality to the top end, never making things overblown or spitty, but imbuing

drift off into the background – and a shattering crash of orchestral cymbals made me jump by just the right amount.

Even more encouraging was the way in which the Wand moulded itself easily into any style of music. Although impressed by its abilities with 'proper' instruments, which had made up the majority of my listening initially, a good slice of 1980s electronica from Jean Michel Jarre showed that the arm was equally happy with something much less acoustic.

CONCLUSION

I would say it is almost impossible not to fall for the Wand's charms. I love the styling, which succeeds on a purely visual level by being neat and yet very purposeful; it makes most other arms look skinny and ineffective! It is easy to set up thanks to clear instructions and the magnificent alignment widget but, most importantly, it sounds excellent. It captures the innate essence of a good unipivot and adds in a healthy dose of the strengths of a conventionally pivoted arm. The result is an effective crowd pleaser in most areas. If this really is, as Simon Brown suggests, the first of a range of arms then I can't wait to see where he will go next. As a first attempt, the Wand has certainly worked its magic on me.

REFERENCE SYSTEM
Ortofon 2M Black cartridge
Sondex DE-1 phono stage
Naim Supernait amplifier
Leak 2075 loudspeakers (modified)

VERDICT ●●●●●
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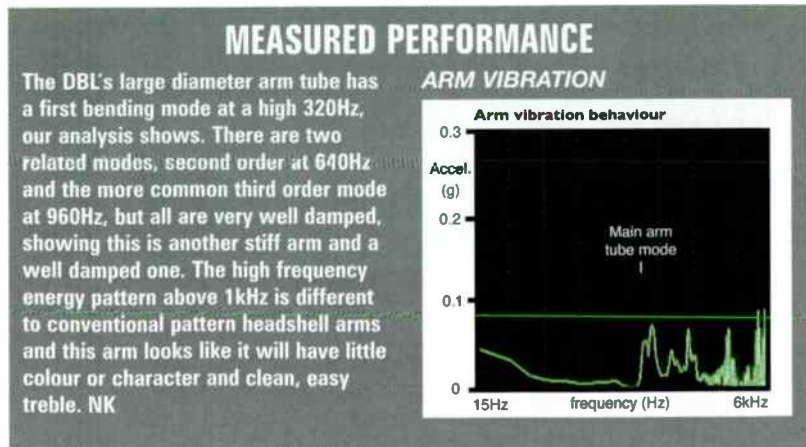
FOR
- excellent bass
- midband lyricism
- sweet, fluid treble
- supplied alignment widget

AGAINST
- curtailed image depth



is most unlike some of its unipivot contemporaries. In fact, as I listened further I became aware that the low end is a real strength of the Wand, as it captures bass lines expertly and never seems to run out of puff or feel that it is lacking authority. Much as I am a fan of unipivots generally, this is one area in which many can be a little wanting, but the Wand was right up there with the likes of the Simon Yorke S9 arm and the Audio Origami Uniarm in terms of low end weight.

Fortunately, this was not the only trick up the Wand's sleeve. It has a delightfully expressive and emotive midrange with a lovely and ever-present sense of purity to its



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The new Salient Audio Spoke upgrade attempts to breathe new life into Linn's evergreen LP12 turntable. Tony Bolton takes it for a spin...

Turning The Table

Nearly forty years after its introduction, we're suddenly seeing a 'wave' of Linn LP12 modification kits – this year I've come across some pretty radical stuff from the likes of Funk, Inspire, Tiger Paw and now Salient Audio. The Spoke mod. that you see before you is a fascinating, controversial and quite serious piece of design. Whereas many of the aforementioned mods packages basically take the Linn design (of plinth, subchassis,

top-plate, etc.) and improve it (usually by making it more rigid), the Spoke actually *changes* the way a part of the Sondek works – namely the suspension.

The first time *Hi-Fi World* came into contact with it was at the National Audio Show at Whittlebury a couple of months back. Editor DP tried a 'before and after' dem of the Spoke – admittedly in the usual noisy, far-from-ideal show conditions – and was very impressed. Many other show visitors also got the chance to

listen to both a standard Sondek and a Spoked one, and most we spoke to ('scuse th pun) certainly heard a difference...

To all intents and purposes the Spoked LP12 looks identical – until the outer platter is lifted off to reveal three thin rods fitted around the inner platter. This configuration, reminiscent of the arrangement of spokes on a bicycle wheel, is what gives the product its name.

In-depth analysis of the behaviour of LP12 suspension resulted in long-



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time Sondek user Gary Hargreaves coming up with the realisation that no matter how well adjusted, the subchassis of any suspended turntable has a tendency to rotate a fraction under load from the motor through the drive belt. An extreme example of this is demonstrated when touching the arm lift in normal use. No matter how well set up the deck is, there is enough play within the suspension system to allow a certain 'yawing' movement when the suspended part of the unit is touched. Even though the movement in question here, caused by the motor, is so small as to be invisible to the human eye, it exists and has a small but detrimental effect upon the sound...

Armed with the resources of his own specialised tool and engineering works in Stoke On Trent, Gary set about coming up with a solution to this behaviour. After some time spent in developing and trying various methods of steadying the subchassis, and differing materials, he evolved the product that was demonstrated at Whittlebury.

It is essentially very simple. Three holes are made in the subchassis and three 18mm tall mounting blocks are bolted in. These protrude through the top plate of the deck through three more holes, and are secured to 8mm tall mounting blocks situated approximately 100mm away by either brass, titanium, carbon or, in the case of the demonstration model, stainless steel rods. The choice of materials is up to the purchaser, Gary says that he can tell no sonic difference between them. All of the mounting blocks are made of high grade aluminium alloy, with tapped holes in the top and bottom for securing the block or the rod as appropriate. The holes are set at 120 degrees to each other, with the rods at included angles of 60 degrees, forming an equilateral triangle around the inner platter. The idea is that any rotational movement of the subchassis is stopped, whilst the vertical movement of the springs is uninhibited by the thin rods.

The actual Spoke kit consists of a replacement laser cut top plate and an exchange subchassis, along with three sets of mounting blocks and rods. It can either be fitted by the purchaser at home or by either of the companies listed at the end of this review. Also, should you wish to revert your Sondek to standard form, then the original top plate can be replaced and there are only three small holes left in the subchassis, which are not visible unless looking inside the deck.



The stock LP12, without Spoke mod.

Of course, it is not only LP12s that could benefit from the Spoke. The majority of the classic suspended subchassis decks; the Thorens 150 and 160 series, as well as Acoustic Research models are all suitable contenders given their close similarity to the LP12 design.

For the purposes of this review, the same two 'demonstrator'



LP12s used at Whittlebury were transported to my home soon after the show. Both are of similar age and condition, so a good deal of consistency can be assumed, and editor DP requested that both got brand new bearing oil shortly beforehand for propriety's sake. To minimise the chance of any other variables coming into play, the same tonearm was moved between the two decks, namely a Linn Ittok LV III with a Benz Micro Glider cartridge. Both decks were prefitted with Ittok arm base mounts, so the arm could be simply dropped in, the cable attached and dressed and the P-clip tightened – rather than having to do a full install of the Ittok. Both decks were fitted with Hercules power supplies, sported black ash plinths, had serial numbers within 5,000 of each other, dating them to the early 1990s. The decks were then immediately driven to *Hi-Fi World's* offices, where Noel measured both.

SOUND QUALITY

First of all, the tea was made and a selection of my records were played

on the standard Sondek. While I was involved in further tea making,

Gary moved the arm between the decks, recalibrated it to as close to the previous settings as possible, and we ran the same selection of discs through again.

Before doing so I decided to answer a question that had been lurking at the back of my mind. My concern was that any form of extra connection between the subchassis and the top plate may transmit some level of motor noise into the arm/platter closed loop. Therefore I did a rudimentary but usually quite effective check, by removing the outer platter to remove the drive belt. Then I replaced the platter, put a record on it and switched on the motor. The needle was then lowered onto the stationary record and the volume turned up. With the volume control on the Tucana II at pretty much full output, (circa 200wpc into the 6 Ohm, 91dB efficiency Charios) I could just discern a vague, possibly mechanical noise lurking in the low level hiss that could be heard near the speakers.

Having done this test, I sat back to listen to some swinging tunes by the Hazy Osterwald Sextet. They were a German based outfit, formed in 1949 with members from six countries, and enjoyed success in both Europe and America over the next couple of decades playing a mixture of covers and their own compositions in the classic hot swing idiom. This stereo Polydor recording showed the band in excellent form, and is one that makes a good test for timing and performer placement.

The first thing I found was that the deck was more stable to use. The springs compressed in a normal manner when I pressed the armboard as I grasped the cueing lever, but remained immune to any sideways movement, providing a wonderfully stable platform for hand cueing. I

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also noticed that the arm's tendency to drift slightly as it lowered was eliminated.

My immediate impression was of a wider, better defined soundstage. In 'Royal Garden Blues' the double bass on the far right seemed clearer and more precise in both image and the snappiness of the playing, while Johnny Ward's drums, centre and back, appeared to have acquired a little more impact and the 'tskk' of the high hat was sharper and more decisive. Just as DP reported last month, there was certainly a change in the sound, with things sounding



apparently crisper.

The next LP was a compilation of Buddy Holly's previously unreleased, alternative takes of various tracks. I don't know what happened during the recording/ release process, but the result is murky, bass-heavy and with a recessed midband and top end. I was impressed with the level of freshness and detail that the Spoked deck managed to extract from this record. It was still far from good, but seemed to be a tad less constricted in both sound and staging, providing a more relaxing and enjoyable listen. The vocals stood out better, and even the moderately muffled high frequencies seemed better displayed.

Earlier on Gary had expressed curiosity about one of my favourite modern electronica groups, Shpongle, so I was glad to introduce him to the world of progressive trance. In this case it involved a musical journey that reached from eastern influences, to the tumbling beats of latin conga drums, with a mixture of vocals, synths and samples, along with Raja Ram's flute playing. The Spoked deck made a noticeably better job of disentangling a rather complex piece of music, while at the same time going deeper into the sub-bass that lurks in this recording. Imaging was seemingly tighter with sounds moving around the impressively large soundstage.

Staying with deep bass I changed musical gear and played Buxtehude's 'Tocatta and Fugue in F'. Having heard this piece live at Exeter Cathedral I paid particular attention to the more obvious layers of background information that was now available to me in this recording from the same venue. The acoustic of the building was displayed in the decay of notes, which was sometimes

DP SAYS:

This is one of those moments when you start pulling your hair out with frustration! When I did the 'before and after' dem I was absolutely convinced I heard a tighter, crisper and more expansive sound from the Spoke'd LP12; the stock Linn simply sounded a bit soggy, distant and vague by comparison. Yet when we very carefully measured the same two decks, the Spoke didn't come out so well – quite the reverse in fact. We took great pains to achieve consistency between the two decks in measurement, so I don't think our methodology was wrong, so why did both Tony and myself hear a subjective improvement? The measurements obviously don't have an answer for this question. My feeling is that the Spoke does change the LP12's performance, in both good and bad ways; it brings a bigger, punchier and more immediate performance, whilst obviously having deleterious effects on some aspects of the LP12's smooth running. As such, if you're interested I can only recommend you have an audition. DP

quicker than before, sometimes slower. Both effects combining to create a more credible sonic picture.

That I think, is the correct term in this case. I felt that sound from all of the records that I played had greater credibility. Even the Holly recordings which are very poorly mixed seemed to be more accessible, and the Osterwald record, although sporting a few pops and crackles, had a sense of closeness to the performance that the standard Sondek could not match.

CONCLUSION

I am not an engineer, so won't speculate about the inherent rightness or wrongness of the Spoke approach, but on a subjective level I can confirm that there's definitely a change to the sound, and that by and large it's a positive one. My ears are telling me that it's generally successful, in the same way you'd notice a difference by doing a substantial cartridge upgrade. It seems to slightly improve some of those known LP12 weak points, such as its bass bloom and the general lack of soundstage width. Even a slight sheen to the higher frequencies, which I have always attributed to the Lttok, seemed to have been smoothed away.

Whilst myself, DP and a number of others who've

auditioned the Spoke have found it be have a generally positive effect on the Linn Sondek's sound, it's probably best to think of it as 'changing' the performance, rather than making outright improvements across the board – the measured performance below shows a somewhat complicated picture, which makes it impossible to unequivocally recommend the mod. Instead, I would seriously urge LP12 owners to go and hear it for themselves.

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AGAINST

- measured performance issues

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

We received two turntables to test, one with the suspension mod and one without. The idea was to swap the arm and cartridge from one deck to the other and see how they compared.

The Spoke modded LP12 did not perform well, recording 0.3% unweighted wow & flutter (W&F), whilst the unmodded deck performed very well, with around 0.08% W&F.

This large difference made me suspect I was measuring differences between the turntables, rather than the impact of the suspension mod. so the modded deck was tested with the mod disabled by removing the three tension wires. Total W&F unweighted fell to 0.22%. Basic rate wow at 0.55Hz (i.e. 33rpm), the flutter noise floor and 1.1Hz second harmonic all rose with the mod. applied.

Our DIN test disc was carefully centred using its locked groove to get consistent results; these are high resolution measurements and a disc without a locked groove to enable accurate alignment would be unacceptable.

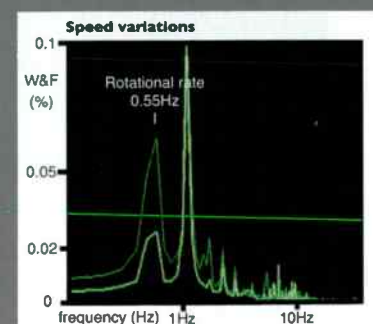
So this suspension modification degrades isolation and speed stability. The subchassis of the unmodded

turntable floated more freely than that of the modded one and this may explain differences between them, suggesting freedom is important.

Although the Spoke mod degrades W&F, bear in mind that other factors may change for the better; after all valve amps measure worse than transistor amps but do not sound worse. And – cough – my Garrard 401 does not measure as well as the Linn, but I am not about to change! NK

Wow & flutter, unweighted	
unmodded	0.22%
Spoke mod	0.3%

WOW & FLUTTER



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 ART AUDIO JOTA CHROME/GOLD CHASSIS/VOL POT. SINGLE
 ENOEO 32B VALVE AMP (ONE OWNER FROM NEW \$12000 NOW?)
 BALANCED AUDIO TECH. BAT VK-60 POWER AMP (E9K? ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 PATHOS IMPROVER CLASS A HYBRID MONOBLOCKS (SUPERB E9K?)
 ART AUDIO INTEGRA 30W INTEGRATED INC.PY STAGE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 WORLD AUDIO DESIGN KT-88 INTEGRATED VALVE AMP (WAD BUILT)

MINT/BOXED £2790
 EXCLT £795
 EXCLT £850
 BRANO NEW £1350
 EXCLT £395
 EXCLT/BOXED £395

EXCLT £3750
 EXCLT £395
 DEM/BOXED £375
 EX.DEM £350
 MINT/BOXED £3750
 EXCLT £3750
 EXCLT/BOXED £2750
 EXCLT £4250
 EXCLT £1595
 EXCLT £895

SOLID STATE

MERIDIAN 502 PRE-AMP ONE OWNER FROM NEW
 MERIDIAN 557 AMP ONE OWNER FROM NEW
 MERIDIAN 557
 MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA-300 MONSTER INTEGRATED
 MUSICAL FIDELITY DOCTOR THOMAS POWER AMP
 MUSICAL FIDELITY MA-50 MONOBLOCKS
 CLASSE SX-L TWO BOX PRE AMP ONE OWNER
 ROTEL RSP9018 PROCESSOR ONE OWNER (E1500?)
 OPA ENLIGHTENMENT (NEW OLD STOCK-ULTRA RARE!)
 H-CAT 12-B AMERICAN PRE AMP WITH WTA CONTROL (E2800)
 H-CAT P-12A AMERICAN PRE AMP (E2500?)
 PASS LABS ALEPH P PRE AMP
 JEFF ROWLAND COHERENCE-1 2 BOX PRE C/W PHONO STAGE
 DPA THREE BOX PRE AMP EXCLT
 ALCHEMIST FORSETTI 2 BOX PRE RCA/XLR (ONE OWNER)
 DPA 50S PRE AMP C/W PHONO STAGE
 CABASSE POLARIS BALANCED MONOBLOCKS
 KRELL EVOLUTION 402 STEREO POWER AMP ONE OWNER
 PATHOS IMPROVER CLASS A HYBRID MONOBLOCKS (SUPERB E9K?)
 JEFF ROWLAND MODEL3 MONOBLOCKS
 MCCORMACK ONA-125 POWER AMP (ONE OWNER FEW MONTHS USE ONLY)
 DPA 50S POWER AMP & CABLES(ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)
 ROKSAN S1.5 POWER AMPS 2 OFF EXCLT CONDITION RARE
 DPA 50S POWER AMP & CABLES
 NAKAMICHI 620 WEDGE POWER AMP
 MISSION CYRUS 2 INTEGRATED
 ONKYO TX-6800 HI-AMP (UNUSED)
 KRELL KAV 300R ULTRA RARE 300I AMP/TUNER (E3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 ADVANTAGE 1200 INTEGRATED AMP (2K7)
 DENON AVC A11 SR AV AMP GOLD (E2K ONE OWNER)
 REVOX H-5 INTEGRATED & OPTIONAL H208 SYSTEM REMOTE (ONE OWNER)
 DENON PMA 900V SIZEABLE INTEGRATED MM/MC PHONO
 YAMAHA AX-620 AV AMP
 NAKAMICHI AMPLIFIER-2 REMOTE INTEGRATED

MINT/BOXED £795
 MINT/BOXED £895
 EXCLT £775
 EXCLT £2250
 VGC £375
 EXCLT/BOXED £695
 EXCLT £595
 EXCLT/BOXED £595
 MINT/BOXED £495
 OEM £1750
 OEM £1250
 EXCLT £1195
 VGC £995
 VGC £795
 MINT/BOXED £595
 VGC £495
 EXCLT/BOXED £795
 MINT/BOXED £395
 EXCLT £4250
 VGC £1795
 MINT/BOXED £1250
 EXCLT/BOXED £895
 EACH £595
 VGC/BOXED £595
 EXCLT/BOXED £575
 GC £195
 MINT £299
 MINT/BOXED £1395
 EXCLT/BOXED £895
 SALE £695
 EXCLT £495
 EXCLT £199
 EXCLT £199

LOUDSPEAKERS

EGLESTONWORKS ROSA
 AURUM CANTUS VOLLA (LAST PAIR)
 USHER COMPASS BE-718 OMO DIAMOND TWEETER (FEW HOURS USE)
 ENSEMBLE FIGURA (SOLID ALUMINIUM E5800?)
 MARTEN MILLE II CHERRY (BK+ NEW ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 BOLZANO VILLETTRI BV3003 & BV SUBWOOFER FANTASTIC!
 PODIUM 1s FEW WEEKS USE ONLY (E6000? NEW)
 HARPER QUARTETO FABULOUS FLOORSTANDERS (E4000)
 MIRAGE M1s1 BIPOLAR GIANTS (E6500) (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 AURUM CANTUS MUSIC GODDESS (E2500)
 THEL 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 BLACK DRCHIO (LAST PAIR E1300)
 SNELL TYPE-C MIKV AMERICAN WALNUT
 AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE
 PRDAC STUDIO 150
 1&A THR-100 SIZEABLE TRANSMISSION LINES
 TL-CCLASSIC ONE'S LARGE FLOORSTANDERS
 TANNIY DC-2000 ONE OWNER
 ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO 1
 ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO 1 CENTRE CHANELL
 ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO 1

EX.DEM £2850
 NEW/BOXED £1695
 MINT/BOXED £1495
 DEM/BOXED £3850
 EXCLT £3750
 MINT/BOXED £3450
 MINT/BOXED £2795
 SALE! £1695
 EXCLT £1750
 NEW £1795
 MINT/BOXED £395
 EX.DS £1950
 DEM/BOXED £995
 EXCLT £995
 NEW/BOXED £895
 NEW/BOXED £795
 EXCLT £795
 DEM/BOXED £695
 EXCELLENT £595
 EXCLT £595
 MINT £595
 MINT £275
 MINT/BOXED £99
 MINT/BOXED £99
 MINT/BOXED £99
 BOXED £795
 VGC £595
 BRANO NEW £595
 BOXED £295
 EXCLT £199
 EXCLT VGC £995
 VGC/BOXED £995
 VGC £395

ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO (2 BOX WITH NOS MULLARD VALVES)
 AUDIO NEMO-88 PHONO STAGE (E1000 +)
 FIDELITY RESEARCH FR-1 MK3 CARTRIDGE
 REGA FONO MM PHONO STAGE
 PROJECT DEBUT

EX.DEM £890
 GC/BOXED £475
 BOXED £249
 EXCLT £175
 GC £99

DIGITAL

SONY 3000S MINIDISC PLAYER
 MERIDIAN 500 TRANSPORT (ONE OWNER)
 ENSEMBLE DRONDO /D-CHRONO TRAMS. DAC/PRE AMP (9K?)
 CHORD 1500E DAC/DIGITAL PRE AMP (E6800 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 ACCUPHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT (E8000?)
 THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT
 IMERGE S-2000 160 GB MUSIC SERVER
 MICROMEGA STAGE 2
 ONKYO NDS-1 MEDIA TRANSPORT
 MERIDIAN 203 DAC
 MARANTZ CD-17 KI SIGNATURE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 PERPETUAL TECH. P3A 24/96 DAC MODWRIGHT SIGNATURE-2 (LAST 1)
 PERPETUAL TECH. P3A 24/96 DAC MODWRIGHT 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 ALTI SACD/CD PLAYER (LAST 1 E1300)
 VACUUM TUBE LOGIC JLT SACD/CD PLAYER
 THETA DATA UNIVERSAL CD/LD PLAYER (ONE OWNER) RARE
 THETA PRO GEN III DAC GLASS & BALANCE OPTIONS (ONE OWNER)
 MERIDIAN 602 TRANSPORT 606 DAC
 MICROMEGA CLASSIC SOLO XLR/RCA
 SONY CDP-X33ES CLASSIC HEAVYWEIGHT ONE OWNER
 NAD CS411 CD PLAYER
 DENON 2910 UNIVERSAL PLAYER

GOLD £349
 MINT/BOXED £495
 MINT/BOXED £5850
 MINT/BOXED £2750
 EXCLT £2450
 MINT/BOXED £995
 EX.DEM/BOXED £795
 SALE! £249
 MINT/BOXED £175
 VGC £275
 SALE! £495
 NEW/BOXED £795
 DEM/BOXED £595
 NEW/BOXED £795
 MINT/BOXED £249
 MINT/BOXED £395
 NEW/BOXED £895
 NEW/BOXED £649
 EXCLT/BOXED £495
 EXCLT/BOXED £795
 SALE! £795
 BOXED £695
 MINT/BOXED £249
 EXCLT/BOXED £175
 EXCLT/BOXED £295

TUNERS/TAPE/DAT/MINIDISC/MISC.

REVOX A-77 MKIV HIGH SPEED TWO TRACK ONE OWNER FROM NEW
 MANUALS/REELS/NABS/COVER ETC
 TECHNICS GT-550 RDS TUNER (ONE OWNER)
 AVI REF.7 BANO TUNER (ONE OWNER)
 KRELL KAV 300R RARE TUNER AMP (E3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)
 PIONEER ELITE SERIES MINIDISC RECORDER (URUSHI CHEEKS 110V)
 TECHNICS BX R5501 CASSETTE DECK(ONE OWNER)
 GRAHAM SLEE SOLO MC HEAD AMP & PSU-1 (E500)
 OPA THE POWER FILTER
 THE ESSENCE REF-POWER CORD (E1000?)
 BLACK RHODIUM 5 WAY MAINS BLOCK
 RUSS ANDREWS YELLOW POWER CORD
 RUSS ANDREWS POWER CORD
 AUDIOPLAN CLEAN POWER POWER CORD
 LAT POWER CORDS 2 OFF (BLUE ONES)
 LAT AC-2 LEAD AND REWIRED 4 PLUG DISTRIBUTION BLOCK

MINT/BOX £495
 EXCLT £395
 EXCLT £375
 MINT/BOXED £1395
 MINT/BOXED £495
 EXCLT £149
 MINT £235
 EXCLT £65
 MINT £349
 VGC £149
 EXCLT £49
 EXCLT £49
 VGC £49
 EACH £65
 EXCLT £149

INTERCONNECT CABLE

BLACK RHODIUM ORATORIO 2METRE XLR
 CHORO CO.SIGNATURE 1 METRE BNC
 PURIST AUDIO DESIGN MUSAE 4FT PAIR
 PURIST AUDIO DESIGN 0.5 METRE DIGITAL COAX
 VAN DEN HUL WCD102 HYBRID 1 METRE XLR 2 OFF
 VAN DEN HUL MCD102 HYBRID 1 METRE XLR TO RCA
 OPA BLACK SLINK 1 METRE RCA PAIR
 DPA SLINK 1 METRE XLR
 ACOUSTIC ZEN SILVER REF-2 2 METRE XLR PAIR
 NORDOST QUATRO-FIL 1 METRE XLR PAIR
 HARMONIX HARMONIC-STRINGS HS-101 1 METRE RCA
 HARMONIX HARMONIC-STRINGS HS-101 1 METRE XLR
 AUDIOQUEST/AUDIOTRUTH EMERALD 1 METRE PAIR
 AUDIOQUEST RUBY 0.8 METRE PAIR
 AUDIOQUEST DIGITAL 2 AES/EBU DIGITAL CABLE 0.8
 AUDIOQUEST AES/EBU PRO DIGITAL CABLE 1FT
 TRANSPARENT LINK-100 COAX DIGITAL CABLE
 CHORD CO.PRODAC DIGITAL CABLE RCA TO BNC

EXCLT £495
 MINT £325
 MINT £325
 MINT £149
 EACH PAIR £99
 EXCLT £99
 EXCLT £175
 EXCLT £125
 EXCLT £650
 EXCLT £895
 AS NEW/BOXED £325
 AS NEW/BOXED £375
 EXCT £195
 GC £49
 EXCLT £55
 VGC £19.95
 EXCLT £99
 EXCLT £49

LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

BLACK RHODIUM POLAR NINJA DCT 2.9 METRE PAIR
 XLO 5.2 SIGNATURE-1 4FT PAIR
 TARA LABS RSC-AIR1 6FT PAIR
 SONORAM PLATEAU 4 METRE VERY HEAVY HI ENO PAIR
 COGAN HALL INTERMEZZO SFT PAIR
 ECDSSSE MS2.3 REFERENCE 5 METRE PAIR
 KIMBER APP 2.5 METRE TERMINATED PAIR
 MIRVANA SL-3 2.3 METRE PAIR
 MIT MH-750 2.5 METRE PAIR BI-WIRE
 RAPPORT (USHER) 5 METRE PAIR FACTORY TERMINATED
 OPA 5 METRE PAIR TERMINATED FOR 50S AMP
 QEO GENESIS SILVER SPIRAL 3 METRE PAIR
 XLO 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(E560)
 BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 5 METRE BI WIRE PAIR(E400)
 BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 4 METRE PAIR (E240)

EXCLT £795
 DEM £495
 DEM £650
 EXCLT £475
 EXCLT £275
 EXCLT £199
 EXCLT £149
 DEM/BOXED £450
 VGC £595
 EX.DEM £299
 EXCLT £250
 MINT/BOXED £199
 EXCLT £325
 EXCLT £695
 EXCLT £395
 NEW £300
 NEW £170
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- Nottingham* 0115 911 2121
- Oxford* 01865 765961
- Poole* 01202 671677
- Portsmouth* 023 9266 3604
- Preston* 01772 883958
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DENON AVR-1912 AV RECEIVER
This AV receiver is both intuitive and easy to use and gets the most out of your movies, music and games.
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PIONEER SC-LX85 AV RECEIVER
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WIRELESS IPOD DOCK
Worth £149

YAMAHA RX-A810 AV RECEIVER
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CHORD COMPANY
CHAMELEON PLUS (1M)
INTERCONNECT CABLE
Worth £135

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 D8000 51"



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PANASONIC

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 DT30 32" 37"
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 G30 42" 50"
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 This stylish award-winning speaker dock system will genuinely give you hi-fi sound.

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 BEST IPOD DOCK AND WIRELESS IPOD DOCK (GENEVA SOUND SYSTEM MODEL M)



MONITOR AUDIO APEX SPEAKER PACKAGE
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 SPEAKER PACKAGE
 BEST IPOD DOCK AND WIRELESS IPOD DOCK (MONITOR AUDIO APEX)

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B&W ZEPPELIN AIR
 Combines good looks with impressive sound quality and useful AirPlay features.

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VITA R4i
 Comprises a multi format CD player, iPod dock, DAB/DAB+/FM tuner and powerful amplifier/speaker system.

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MONITOR AUDIO iDECK 100
 Offering sound quality comparable to the cream of the iPod dock crop the curvaceous device ticks all the boxes.

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KEF KHT7005 AV SPEAKER PACKAGE
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ALSO AVAILABLE:
 Q ACOUSTICS 2020i
 TANNOY DC6T

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 BEST FLOORSTANDER (TANNOY MERCURY V4)

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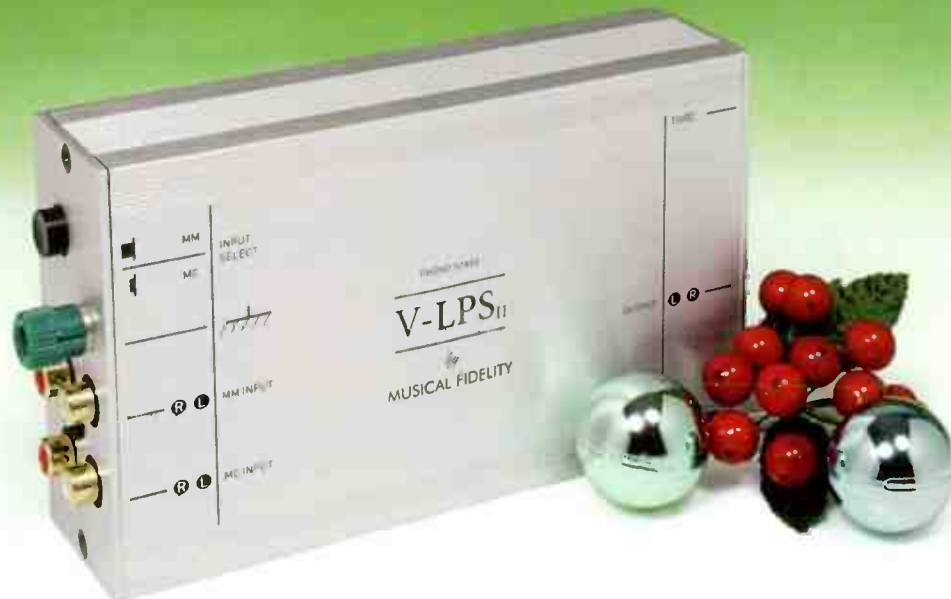
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	Was	Now			
Digital					
Classe CDP300 Universal Player S/H	4950	1999	Martin Logan Summit X Cherry xdemo	12998	9799
Electrocompaniet PC-1 x-demo	1390	899	Magneplanar MG12 3 months old	1850	1299
Electrocompaniet EMC1UP x-demo	3890	2299	PenAudio Charm Sub modules x-demo	2175	1499
Electrocompaniet EMC1UP S/H	3890	1799	PenAudio Serenade x-demo	7250	4999
Heed Audio DACtilus DAC BNIB	370	269	Quad ESL63 Black serviced S/H	N/A	1399
Krell 505 Evolution SACD player x-demo	9189	6499	Rega RS1 black 2 monitors S/H	398	219
Krell SACD Standard III x-demo	6587	4950	Sonus faber Cremona Elipsa Maple x-demo	12980	7999
living Control Music Box 3 BNIB	2887	1499			
living Control Room Box4 BNIB	1712	999			
Primare CD30.2 CD player S/H	1500	699			
Quad CD67 RARE S/H	N/A	499			
Wadia 170i Transport BNIB iPod dock	499	349			
Wadia 381 Sliver xdemo	6749	4999			
Analogue					
Bel canto Phono VB S/H	1299	995			
Heed Audio Quasar MM/MC 2 box Phono stage x-demo	740	499			
Mark Levinson No320s Phono Module x-demo	995	499			
Notts Analogue ACE spacedeck/SME IV 6 months old S/H	3600	2450			
Pink Triangle LPT/New Heed Orbit PSU/Roksan Tabriz S/H	N/A	599			
Rega P3-24 Green gloss x-demo	589	299			
Rega P3-24/Elys 2 S/H	489	299			
Preamplifiers					
Audolici AP01 preamplifier S/H	2100	999			
Audion Sterling MK1 Valve Integrated S/H	1799	699			
Bel canto Pre3 S/H	1899	895			
Conrad Johnson Classic Phono x-demo	2400	1750			
Electrocompaniet EC4.7 x-demo	1890	1299			
Electrocompaniet EC4.8 x-demo	2750	1899			
DPA CA1 preamplifier BNIB	2650	1699			
Krell KAV250p preamplifier S/H	2398	995			
Krell Evolution 222 preamplifier black xdemo	9998	6999			
Spectral DMC 15SS BNIB full warranty	6850	4795			
Spectral DMC 15SS x-demo full warranty	6850	3999			
Amplifiers					
Audio Technica AT-MA50 Mixing Amplifier S/H	399	149			
Bel Canto EVO4 MKII amplifier S/H	3895	1599			
Bel canto S300 S/H	2000	995			
Chord Electronics SPM1400 B mono S/H	12000	3799			
Classe CA2200 Power Amplifier S/H	3950	2650			
DPAMA1 class A monos BNIB	4400	2999			
DPA Power Plus BNIB	950	649			
Electrocompaniet AW120DMB x-demo	3490	2499			
Electrocompaniet AW250R S/H	4999	1799			
Electrocompaniet AW400 x-demo	7180	5950			
Electrocompaniet ECI-3 x-demo	1750	1199			
Electrocompaniet PI-1 x-demo	1425	999			
Krell Evolution 302 black x-demo	12900	8999			
McCormack DNA125 power amplifier S/H	1999	995			
Prima Luna Prologue 2 Silver S/H	1690	1199			
Rega Mira 3 Amplifier black S/H	598	299			
Loudspeakers					
Avi Neutron Cherry S/H	N/A	219			
Focal JM Lab Electra 1007be Classic + stands S/H	3499	1799			
Martin Logan Fresco pair inc stands S/H	1500	699			
Martin Logan Quest Light Oak (new panels) S/H	N/A	1299			
Cables and Accessories					
Apollo 80cm single column Stands S/H	149	99			
CD 4 pillar 60cm stands HEAVY! S/H	279	149			
Electrocompaniet ECS1 M6 feet x4 BNIB	189	49			
Finite Elemente HD09 Amplifier Platform Maple S/H	1100	499			
Jadis KT90 Valves x 4 BNIB	600	300			
JPS Ultra Dual bi wire 2x8 Spades to banana S/H	549	279			
JPS The Power AC+ 2m UK-IEC mains cable S/H	400	199			
MIT Terminator II Biwire 2x10ft S/H	599	249			
MIT MH750 Plus 2x5m speaker cables S/H	N/A	499			
Partington Super Dreadnought 60cm S/H	199	159			
Partington Dreadnought 60cm stands S/H	199	139			
Spectral MI-350 20ft interconnect S/H	2100	899			
Spectral MI-330 UL2 1m BNIB	800	399			
Spectral MI-330 UL2 1.5m BNIB	850	425			
Spectral MI-330 UL2 10ft BNIB	965	479			
Spectral MI-330 UL2 15ft BNIB	1125	579			
Spectral MI-330 20ft interconnects x-demo	950	449			
Spectral MH-750 25ft speaker cables x-demo	2000	995			
Stereovox 2x2.5m HDXV speaker cable S/H	350	169			
Stereovox HDVX 0.5M digital S/H	199	75			
Transparent Premium RCA 0.5m digital interconnect S/H	329	149			
Transparent Balanced Reference 2x30ft x-demo	6345	3299			
Transparent Reference SC 2x10ft x-demo	6192	3199			
Vertex AQ Kinabalu 430mm X 360mm Platform S/H	N/A	150			
Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies					
Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Preset Tuner for Etude S/H	395	179			
Naim Audio NAT O1 Silver bumper FM Tuner S/H	N/A	950			
Yamaha RX V795RDS AV receiver S/H	N/A	149			

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Staged Entry

Those looking for their first serious phono stage will be interested to discover that Musical Fidelity has a solution in the shape of the new V-LPS II, Rafael Todes reports.

For vinyl junkies without built-in phono-stages, or for those wishing to upgrade mediocre existing ones, Musical Fidelity has its new V-LPS II. Its predecessor, a dour and utilitarian black box, has had its outers crossed with silver paint – on its aluminium casing. There have been other small tweaks from the first version too – the RIAA curve is more accurate and the output impedance has also been slightly altered – but basically the principal difference is cosmetic. The phono stage caters for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges, with a push button to switch between the two. It comes bundled with a wall-wart power supply that can be upgraded at a later stage with a V-PSU II (£119).

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to my favourite reference, Bach's 'Brandenburg Concerto No. 3', Raymond Leppard conducting the ECO on Philips, using a Timestep Technics with SMEV and Ortofon Cadenza Bronze, the new V-LPS II in no way disgraced itself. The sound of the orchestra was very open, a generous soundstage for this price bracket, with a nice sense of energy flowing from the music. The sound of the strings had a 'glossy' quality to it. The harpsichord continuo let you feel the clankiness of the feather quills plucking the strings.

The main difference between

this and my £1,800 valve Icon Audio PS3 reference phono stage is what happens during the course of the note. The Musical Fidelity is attuned to the leading edges; it also gives things a touch of pleasing resonance, more so than the Icon Audio, but is a little more vague about the timbre contained within the note. Where the Icon is smooth and rich, the Musical Fidelity is a touch glassy and opaque, in a not unpleasant way.

Switching the power supply to the £119 V-PSU removes most of the 'glassiness', turning in a more refined sound, and a dramatic and significant upgrade for the money. Listening to the string sound with the upgraded power supply, and there was more timbral subtlety in the note envelope than before – as such it's highly recommended.

Listening to Canteloube's bucolic 'Songs of the Auvergne', and Kiri Te Kanawa's voice sparkles with the upgraded MF power supply. The phono stage achieves a big sonic image, with the supporting solo instruments contrasting with the voice well in terms of clarity and spacial separation. It lets this relatively early digital recording

show the potential of the medium. Listening to the same passage on the more pricey Trichord Dino 2 with upgraded power supply brings more stability to the sound, tighter bass control and a greater sense of depth – but it costs £570, over twice the price of the combined MF stage and power supply.

CONCLUSION

As with the V-DAC I reviewed a couple of months ago, this new V-LPS II phono stage really punches above its weight, especially with the addition of its upgraded power supply. It is capable of bringing a bounce to vinyl at what is a knockdown price; as such it comes highly recommended.

VERDICT ●●●●●
Neat little phono stage with fine sound, decent build and easy upgradeability – excellent value.

MUSICAL FIDELITY
V-LPS II £130
Musical Fidelity
+44 (0)20 8900 2866
www.musicalfidelity.com

FOR
- clean, open sound
- build, finish, value
- small size

AGAINST
- not for high output MMs

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Equalisation accuracy of the V-LPS is unusual in not possessing the usual treble lift of other phono amps and it will have just a smidgen of extra body in its sound by way of contrast. Deviation from the RIAA characteristic was minimal, around 0.2dB our analysis shows; there is no warp filter.

A peculiar limitation was an output overload limit of 2.5V out – 10V is common – meaning input overload limit of just 21mV with MM cartridges – too low. Very high output types like the Ortofon 2M Red produce 30mV on peaks. Mostly, this limit will pass unnoticed, but occasional distortion on musical peaks may well occur in use, with some cartridges. NK

Frequency response	8Hz-46kHz
Separation	67dB
Noise (MM/MC)	0.3 / 0.07µV
Distortion	0.005%
Gain	x118 (41dB), x940 (60dB)
Overload	21/2.6mV in / 2.5V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



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TRIO KD-2055 turntable, slate base with Audio Technica cartridge. Good condition. £65. Acoustic Solutions amplifier. £40. Collect. Postage extra. Cumbria. Tel: Mobile 0794959 4492

WANTED: MUSICAL Fidelity KW250S. Contact Roger on 01263 731 211

QUAD II output transformer, early type, £120. GEC KT66 various approx £35 each. Systym 931S speakers £140. Quad 33 Series. Cables, various. Buyers collect. Tel: 01344 776 445 (Berkshire)

GRADO PS1000 headphones. Mint, £700. Carriage £10. Tel: 01752 773 369

NAIM CDS2. One of the best CD players ever made. Brilliant condition, boxed, remote control. Collect or will post. Quick sale. Offers on £850. Tel: 01794 513 003

AUDIO RESEARCH LS17. Pre-amp. Boxed, remote, mint condition. Retail: £3888. Two years old. Selling £2200 ovno. Tel: 01491 614 325

FREE TO Good home. B&W P6 speakers, rosewood finish. One speaker needs new main drivers. Have upgraded hence offer. New owner to collect, Birmingham. Tel: 0121 449 0259

MONITOR AUDIO RSI speakers, black ash, as new, boxed, £160 ono. Rotel RT 935 AX tuner, £45 ono. Teac CRH 258i CD/DAB receiver, as new, boxed, £115 ono. Tel: 01943 467 859 (West Yorkshire)

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 turntable for sale. Clear acrylic version. Origin Live RB600 plus Goldring 1022 cartridge. £700 ono. Exposure 2010-S CD player for sale. £180. Call Andy: 01484 427 426

KLIPSCHORNS WALNUT finish, original drivers, reluctant sale, £2000. Musical Fidelity 'F' Series preamplifier, tuner, power amplifier F19, very good condition, instructions, boxed, remote, £1599, buyer collects. Tel: 077250 29954 or Email: vwarren@hrc.ac.uk

MIT AVT3 speaker cable, 2x 3m pair, £160. MIT AVT1 interconnect, 1m pair £70 (or both £200) Tel: 0161 432 3852

NAIM STAGELINE moving coil phonostage with SNAIC interconnect. £200. Vincent PH08 phonostage with PH08PS power supply and interconnect. £150 ono. Tel: 0151 677 3521 (Wirrel)

MUSICAL FIDELITY E624 CD player. Excellent, remote £195. Project Phone SE MM/MC, excellent £45. Can demonstrate CD player. Tel: 01372 850 665 or 07500 822 886

ATC SIA2150 integrated amp for sale at half new price, £1300. Lots of power, very fine sound, mint condition, still under warranty. Tel: Lee 01225 706 783

LINN SONDEK LPI2, Linn Basik plus tonearm & Valhalla. Very good condition. £425. Radford STA25 poweramp. Very nice amp. £1850. Garrard 401 with Martin Bastin bearing mod, £750. Tel: 07946 704 979

PROJECT RPM 9.1 turntable c/w Speedbox II, virtually unused, pristine, boxed, £675 (£1400). Quad 606 Mk1, immaculate, boxed, £350. Detailed pictures available. Tel: Alan 01323 728 118 or Email: alanchamberlain1@hotmail.com

BRYSTON B60R amplifier, black, 7 months old, in mint condition, boxed with remote, twenty year warranty carries over. Cost new £2500. Selling for £1350. Tel: 01246 232 085 or 07754 507 519 (Chesterfield, Derbyshire)

WANTED: THORENS TD166 MkII turntable. Must be fully operational and mint condition unmarked. Tel: 07908 918 344

ARCAM SOLO CD/FM/DAB All-In-One unit. Condition as new with accessories, manual etc and original box. £599 ono. Would consider part exchange for Linn Ninka/Keilidh speakers. Tel: 023 8073 8935

SUGDEN MASTERCLASS Poweramp, 50 watts, pure Class 'A', graphite finish, two years old. Cost £3800. Sell for £2200 ovno. Mint condition. Boxed. Tel: 01491 614 325

ROKSAN ATTESSA CD, factory service, £475 ono. Yamaha YP511 record deck, £80. Arcam DV78 DVD, £130. Musical Fidelity KW phonostage, mint, boxed, £1200. Garrard stylus balance, £25. Tel: 01708 457 691

REVEL PERFORMA M22 standmount speakers in black ash. Made in USA, 1 year old, immaculate condition, original boxes. £950. Tel: 07703069940 (London)

NAD C515 BEE in excellent condition/with remote Contact Lee on 07967265487 or leedodd@hotmail.com £125 ono. Manchester Area.

LEAK STEREO 20. All N.O.S. Mullard, Bronze. £700. Quad ESL 57s (1979). £750. Rose RV 23s, two box valve pre-amp. All N.O.S. Mullard. £450. Dual 505-1, silver. £30. Rotel 965BX Discrete. £45. Trichord Genesis. £175. Tel: 01722 334 694

LOWTHER ACOUSTA speakers (pair). Fitted with PM6 (Mk I) drive units. Circa late 1960's early 1970's. Lovely effortless sound. Sensible offers invited. Please ring for more information. Tel: 07967113946

AUDIO RESEARCH + KRELL. Reference 3 pre-amp. Krell FBP 250 watt monoblocks. Gamut L3 speakers. Transparent cables. Together or separate. Buyer collects North London. Tony. Details: 07899721899. yatestherapy@googlemail.com

WANTED FOR enthusiast: Quad 2 amps, pre-amps, Tuners and related spares. Any literature & valves would also be appreciated. I am also looking for a single Radford Auditorium speaker. 0117 9467188 slkw@btinternet.com

MAGNEPLANAR I.4 Loudspeakers Ex condition (owned since new) - includes new covers + bespoke stands & hifi tuning fuses updated. Can demonstrate, call for details (Bedfordshire) Email: Stuartdarshan67@googlemail.com T: 07870 912 963

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CRYSTAL PICCOLO interconnects two sets 0.5m £85 each. Audioquest Coral interconnects two sets 1.0m £55 each. Lat International AC2 power cord two sets 0.5m £40 each. Tel: 0208 658 2490 Bernardharding@btinternet.com

MARANTZ KI Pearl. Mint / Light use £ 2000 or very nearest offer. Tel: Mobile 0787 571 9136 or Email: Lesliegriffiths@fastmail.fm

VECTEUR 6.2 French, integrated dual mono, 2 x 160 watts, 8ohms, first 20 watts per channel pure Class'A'. 6 Years old was £1850 when new. Now £650. Pristine condition. Tel: 07811738295

CYRUS 111i amp, 50watt per channel. Precision die-cast enclosure. Instruction manual, Remote handset, all Interconnects. Excellent condition, little used. 125 pounds. k.falconer@o2.co.uk (Edinburgh)

ROTEL RA04SE amp, black, 11 months old, boxed immaculate £195. Meridian 506 cd player, excellent, boxed, £195. B&W 685 Loudspeakers in maple, excellent, boxed £225. Contact 07503197807 (South Wales) seanj8@orangehome.co.uk

MARANTZ CD-63 KI Signature (£500 new) £185. Marantz CD67 Mk2 SE (£300 new) £99. Samuel Johnson S100 CD (£2,500) Discs skip when not warmed up, hence £285 ono bargain. Tel: 01253 869987.

MUSIC FIRST Audio Copper Classic Mk II Passive Magnetic Preamplifier. Very good condition, with manual & boxed. £1300 cash. Buyer to collect (Taunton). Tel: 01823 430920, Email: galileo@onetel.com

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SD1 LOUDSPEAKERS for sale . Mint condition 3 way floor standers 200 watt 92db sensitivity black ash with black grilles.£400.00 buyer must collect too big to post. tel 01942(wigan)213155.or e-mail p.dennis911@btinternet.com.

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LINN LP12 Sondek turntable no arm no lid serial number 012975 £200 or best offer Cambridge Audio Dacmagic never used as new £150 North London 07930878582

FS: CHORD Electronics SPM 1050 power amplifier, 6 months old, black, without integra legs, mint condition, original box. £2250 Call 07729458836 or Email, smu.sew@btinternet.com


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QUESTION TIME

David Price has this bumper Christmas Quiz for you!

[1] WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A TANNOY LOUDSPEAKER?

- [a] Revelation
- [b] Revolution
- [c] Reincarnation

[2] THE LINN WAS WHAT?

- [a] Linn's first standalone phono preamplifier
- [b] Koetsu's most popular moving coil cartridge
- [c] Nordost's newest interconnect

[2] WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORIGINAL AUDIOLAB BRAND?

- [a] Antony Michaelson
- [c] Philip Swift and Derek Scotland
- [d] Arthur Khoubessarian

[3] THE HARBETH BRAND COMES FROM...

- [a] Elizabeth Taylor and Harrison Ford
- [b] Harley Street and Bethnal Green
- [c] Dudley and Elizabeth Harwood

[4] WHAT IS THE NAME OF MERIDIAN'S HIGH END NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER?

- [a] Sooloos
- [b] Loose Enz
- [c] Enzo Ferrari

[5] WHAT WAS AMPEX FAMOUS FOR?

- [a] mains plugs
- [b] recording tape
- [c] electricity

[6] WHICH YEAR WAS DIGITAL AUDIO TAPE FIRST PRODUCED?

- [a] 1987
- [b] 1989
- [c] 1992

[7] WHO DESIGNED THE MISSION 770 LOUDSPEAKER?

- [a] Gilbert Briggs
- [b] Jim Francis
- [c] Henry Azima

[8] WHICH COMPANY LATER BECAME 'PURE'?

- [a] Videologic
- [b] Videoton
- [c] Videostar

[9] WHICH BRITISH SPEAKER COMPANY ONCE PRODUCED A DIRECT DRIVE TURNTABLE?

- [a] Mordaunt Short
- [b] Monitor Audio
- [c] Mission

[10] WHICH FAMOUS JAPANESE GENTLEMAN OFTEN APPEARS IN HI-FI WORLD SHOW REPORTS?

- [a] Akio Morita
- [b] Takeshi Kitano
- [c] Ken Ishiwata

[11] ABOUT WHICH CASSETTE DECK WAS THE TERM 'SKI SLOPE' COINED?

- [a] Nakamichi 700XL
- [b] Yamaha TC800GL
- [c] Aiwa AD1250

[12] STEREO LAB IS WHAT?

- [a] a German music player maker
- [b] a British and French indie band
- [c] an American hi-fi retail chain

[13] WHICH IS THE LARGEST OF THESE THERMIONIC VALVES?

- [a] ECC83
- [b] K5881
- [c] 845

[14] WHICH REGA TURNTABLE FOLLOWED THE PLANET BUT PRECEDED THE P3?

- [a] Planar 3
- [b] RB1000
- [c] Brio-R

[15] IN LOUDSPEAKERS, WHAT DOES 'ABR' STAND FOR?

- [a] Axiomic Bass Resolver
- [b] Automatic Benefit Replenisher
- [c] Auxillary Bass Radiator

[16] WHAT AMPLIFIER PRECEDED NAD'S BEST-SELLING 3020 AMPLIFIER IN 1977?

- [a] 312
- [b] 3030
- [c] 3140

[17] WHO FOUNDED BOSE?

- [a] Dr Amar Bose
- [b] Professor Adam Bose
- [c] Arbuthnot Bose, MSc

[18] ORTOFON'S VMS SERIES OF CARTRIDGES FEATURED WHAT?

- [a] Virtual Machine Suspension
- [b] Variable Magnet Shunt
- [c] Visible Motion Sensing

[19] WHERE ARE RAIDO LOUDSPEAKERS BASED?

- [a] United States
- [b] Israel
- [c] Denmark

[20] WHO HAD A HIT WITH 'HIGH FIDELITY' IN 1982?

- [a] Kids from 'Fame'
- [b] Elvis Costello
- [c] REO Speedwagon

[21] WHICH COMPANY USED TO BE CALLED EDGAR?

- [a] Krell
- [b] Canor
- [c] Electrocompaniet

[22] WHICH TURNTABLE CEASED PRODUCTION IN 2011?

- [a] Linn LP12
- [b] Roksan Xerxes
- [c] Technics SL1200

[23] WHICH ELECTRONICS GIANT ONCE SOLD MOTIONAL FEEDBACK LOUDSPEAKERS?

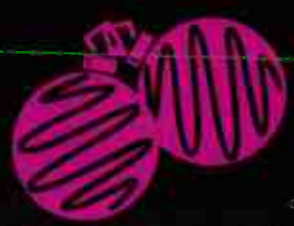
- [a] Matsushita
- [b] Hitachi
- [c] Philips

[24] WHO MADE THE KRAKEN AMPLIFIER IN THE 1990s?

- [a] Aura
- [b] Alchemist
- [c] Arcam

[25] WHICH NORTHERN IRISH TURNTABLE WAS REPUTED TO REVOLVE BACKWARDS?

- [a] Strathearn
- [b] BSR
- [c] Alba



ANSWERS:

- [1] B [2] A [3] C [4] A [5] B [6] A [7] C
- [8] A [9] B [10] C [11] B [12] B [13] C
- [14] A [15] C [16] B [17] A [18] B [19] C
- [20] A [21] B [22] C [23] C [24] B [25] A

RATINGS:

- 25 You have a serious personality disorder - seek psychiatric help!
- 20 Chances are you have no friends, and your family have disowned you.
- 15 You wear an anorak and carry a Thermos flask.
- 10 Not quite a trainspotter, but you certainly know your locomotives.
- 5 You're a well balanced sort who probably likes music...
- 0 You know nothing - well done!

NEXT MONTH

Arriving on your doorsteps in the middle of the Christmas holiday period, the February issue of Hi-Fi World should be a welcome respite from your 'winterval' celebrations! You'll find the usual mix of the weird and wonderful, including a small standmount speaker group test, and a feature about tweaking your Leak Troughline. Then there's everything from Esoteric's beautiful high end K-03 SACD spinner [pictured] to the brand new Martin Logan Montis high end electrostatic speakers. Factor in a smattering of affordable audiophile kit such as the Densen Beat 110 integrated amplifier and the Prima Luna Premium Stereo valve integrated, and there's a lot to help while away those dark winter days.

Here's some of what we hope to bring you:

**GROUP TEST: ACOUSTIC ENERGY COMPACT, CASTLE KNIGHT 2, KEF Q300,
MONITOR AUDIO RX2, USHER S520, TANNOY MERCURY V1**

**PRIMA LUNA PREMIUM STEREO VALVE INTEGRATED
DENSEN BEAT 110 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
AUDIOLAB 8200A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
AURENDER S10 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER
MARTIN LOGAN MONTIS LOUDSPEAKERS
AUDIO RESEARCH PH8 PHONO STAGE
LEAK TROUGHLINE TURBO CHARGE!
MARANTZ CD6004/PM6004 SYSTEM
ESOTERIC K-03 SACD PLAYER
T&A MUSIC RECEIVER SYSTEM
B&W PM1 LOUDSPEAKERS
JOLIDA JD100 CD PLAYER
FUNK FIRM LP12 K-DRIVE**



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FEBRUARY 2012 - 5TH DECEMBER

MARCH 2012 - 5TH JANUARY

THIS MORTAL COIL IT'LL END IN TEARS

1984



"fans of This Mortal Coil, and of the 4AD label, need this box set..."

This Mortal Coil have sometimes been described as 'goth' – a dastardly term. 'Dream pop' is adequate but I prefer the more practical 'ambient vocal'. This Mortal Coil were a collective force pulled together by president and co-founder of the record label 4AD, Ivo Watts-Russell, generally known as Ivo. Featuring a rotating line-up, the group featured members of The Cocteau Twins, Dead Can Dance, Colourbox, guest appearances from the Buzzcocks' Howard Devoto and more. Ivo wrote, arranged and provided support 'programming'.

'It'll End In Tears' was the debut for the outfit that would go on to release 'Filigree & Shadow' (1986) and 'Blood' (1991). Featuring a number of original compositions, 'Tears' was notable for its cover versions, radically reworked including Jeff Buckley's notable 'Song To The Siren', sung here by The Cocteau Twins' ethereally voiced Elizabeth Fraser. Other covers brought the works of Alex Chilton and Roy Harper to the fore. The style of the album was almost celestial. An insubstantial, refined, delicate set of almost ghostly recordings that entranced all who heard it.

Now, you can hear it again on CD along with the other two albums in the discography plus an extra disc of rarities, pressed as Japanese format CDs, complete with Obi-strip and secured in resealable plastic bags via a self-titled box set. Each CD, which also supports the enhanced HDCD format (a vanity choice by Ivo, SACD fans are out of luck), is held in a thick card, digipak gatefold cover replete with booklet while the actual CD is held within a soft plastic bag

and card outer sleeve. This is digital luxury which you will find hard to obtain because this box set, which features tweaked artwork, is limited in numbers and also because it'll set you back a fiver over £100 to buy.

"I'm not a vinyl obsessive at all but I do miss a music carrying device that is at least pleasant to hold in your hands," said Ivo. "The idea of reproducing, in miniature, the original LP design, which reflects graphic design, cultural and sociological aspects of the times as well as being a potential work of art in its own right is so simple but, outside of Japan, impossible to achieve with any degree of quality."

Audiophiles who enjoy the digital domain will be happy that they forked out, however, as the new release offers a richer midrange with more detail from the upper mids and great bass presence. Better integrated within the mix, the vocals also offer more air while the soundstage is now wider and more complex. What you have here is the ultimate digital version of this and the other albums. "For me it's all about archiving," said Ivo. "This box will probably be the last gasp for a physical manifestation of This Mortal Coil albums. As such, I couldn't be happier with the redesigned sleeves, quality of material used and the gorgeous sounding HDCD. We covered a lot of my favourite songs from the earlier decades of my life and now I've been able to present them to the world in a format that has infatuated me in the most recent. It feels good to have participated in putting something of such beauty out into the world once again."

The extra disc features a selection of rarities (apparently

there's nothing else in the can) plus single versions of a selection of LP tracks which have been separately mastered from single-only master tapes.

Part of the team on the box was Steve Webbon, who talked about the new versions. "The remastering was done from the original analogue tapes. I took a 24bit/96kHz digital file for use with the CDs but this transfer will also be utilised for a forthcoming audio Blu-Ray which will feature all the This Mortal Coil audio. Yes, it has the videos too but we still see this release as an audio disc. There's also an extra track not found within this box set – a rare variant of 'Kangeroo'. Ivo is trying to decide on the packaging, which is delaying the release."

A beautifully luxurious production, 'Tears', along with its sister albums, has reached the pinnacle in the digital domain in terms of sonics and packaging. Fans of This Mortal Coil and, probably more apt, fans of the 4AD label, need this box set. Those who do not pick one up will be haunted, not just by the music, but the box-shaped gap on their shelf. **PR**



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