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HI-FI WORLD

JANUARY 2013

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HI-FI WORLD 2012 AWARDS ISSUE

THIS YEAR'S TOP NINETEEN PRODUCTS



KEF R500 loudspeakers



JANUARY 2013



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MEASUREMENT

7 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR
OF KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)

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welcome

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verdicts

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



Innovation doesn't stop it seems. The hi-fi business continues apace to produce a stream of fascinating products and this is the time of the year we have to decide which ones were the best. How do you choose between a £99 special like the Epiphany E-DAC and a £1500 tour-de-force NAD M51? Both do their job extremely well and have some great properties. The NAD in the end pipped it for its unique technology, range of facilities and breadth of application.

Then we come across the peculiar business of stripping the Direct Drive motor out of Technics SL-1200 turntable and building it into an entirely new product, the Inspire Monarch. I was amazed! At a stroke all those veiled criticisms of the Technics decks were exposed to the practical truth: Direct Drive wasn't doing "funny things" like hunting, as armchair pundits had speculated, it just needed to be put into an appropriate context, one Inspire built with the Monarch. I would have tried to design my own motor, but probably would have failed in the process! Concentrating on the bearing, platter and plinth instead was the (sideways?) way to go. Brilliant!

And so it goes on. This month we bring you more winners than ever, nineteen no less, because there were so many good products. Some are wallet burners, I admit, like the Chord Red Reference CD player at £15,000 no less, but every inch of it is unique and the machined casework astonishing; the DAC is unique too.

At the other end of the scale comes Sony's BDP-S790. Everyone has something critical to say about Sony these days but an SACD player for £230 or less is some bargain in my book, and it happens to do other things too like play Blu-rays! Good for Sony: there's nowt wrong with this disc spinner.

A wry smile creeps across my face as Beatles 'issues' creep into our offices, even before the first new re-release, this time of LPs, hits the streets. As time goes by the arguments seem to grow about which releases are – or were – artistically definitive. You'll see such issues arise in our Letter of the Month on p39 and in my column where I feel drawn to comment, because of my past connections with Abbey Road Studios and knowledge of their LPs. Will this (re)issue never die, I ask myself? I suspect not! As always, I hope you enjoy our issue though.

Noel Keywood, 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.



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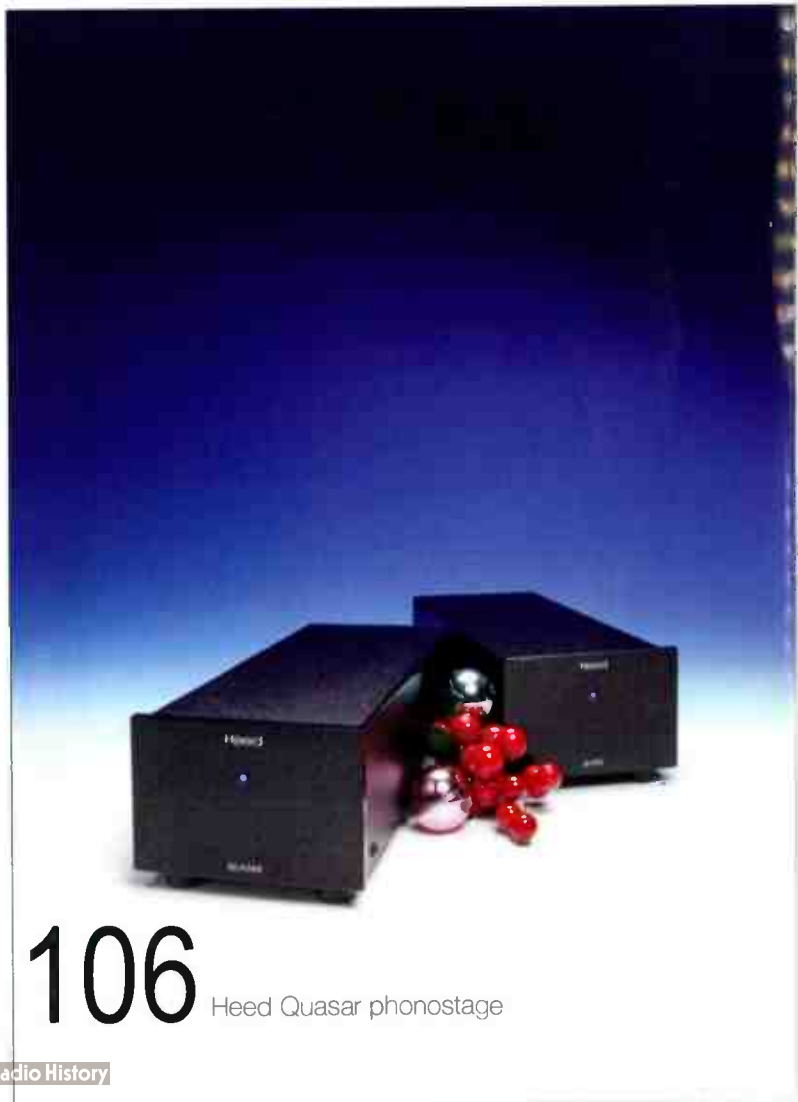
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"In my system, the TelluriumQ's simply turned out to be in a class of their own"

Kai Ekholm, Inner-magazines.com 2012

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BEATLES ON VINYL

The wait of over thirty years is almost over. EMI has just released The Beatles discography on vinyl. 'The Beatles On Stereo Vinyl Box Set' features all of the group's albums including 'Magical Mystery Tour' and the two volumes of 'Past Masters', remastered and pressed onto 180gm vinyl, plus poster inserts for 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band' and 'The Beatles' (the 'White Album'). There will also be special inner sleeves for selected titles. Priced at £300, no less, the box set also includes a weighty, 252-page, hard-back book, written by radio producer Kevin Howlett and featuring a dedicated chapter on each of the band's albums. The box set is 'limited' to 50,000 copies while the albums will be available for sale individually.

Rumours abound regarding the remastering process but it appears that the box set includes George Martin's contentious 1986 remixes of 'Rubber Soul' and 'Help' while the music has apparently been sourced, not from the original tapes, but from digital transfers. Reports from EMI also say that a mono box set will be available sometime in 2013. We hope to bring you more details of both box sets soon.



LINDY HEADPHONES

New from Lindy is a set of closed-backed headphones. The HF-40 features leather pads plus 40mm neodymium drivers. The new design comes with a detachable 1.2m cable with 3.5mm stereo jack and a handy carry bag. Price is £40. Click on www.lindy.co.uk 01642 754000 for more information.



MARANTZ CONSOLETTE

Marantz has announced a new speaker dock. The chassis shape has been developed to widen the stereo image but also to eliminate standing waves. The solid-wood walnut rear houses drive unit enclosures for a 2-way active speaker system.

Marantz has decided to use BMR drivers within the Consolette to help deliver a wide stereo image with 180° sound dispersion, eliminating the sweet spot effect. An amplifier section, developed by Marantz's Ken Ishiwata, powers two 11cm woofers. Six amplifiers are used: two (in BTL mode) to drive each woofer and one for each BMR. This audio circuitry is encased in shielded, anodized aluminium to stop electrical interference, while its solidity and rigidity eliminates vibrations that can harm the signals being processed inside.

The Consolette can be controlled by any Apple iOS or Android device while NetLink makes it easy to connect the Consolette to a home network. All this can be controlled with the Marantz Consolette App that also has an internet radio control section with the ability to store six favourite stations.

Completing the package is a high contrast OLED display. The Marantz Consolette is available in Silk Black and Silver White colour finish. Price is £900. For more information visit www.marantz.com/consolette.

NEWCLEAR AUDIO NC1000L

NewClear has announced the release of the NC1000L, based upon the B&O ICEpower 1000ASP module, which pairs a switch mode power supply with a PWM output section. A Lundahl input transformer is used while the metalwork enclosure includes gold RCA unbalanced, gold XLR balanced inputs and gold output binding posts.

The dual mono design includes two complete power supplies and two amplifiers under a single chassis. The latter is made from 14 gauge steel with a powder coated finish and an aluminium faceplate.

Included protection circuitry reacts automatically after a short circuit, and incorporates thermal stabilization. Other features include selective cryogenic treatments and DH Labs silver plated copper in Teflon for input and output internal cabling. The NC1000L pushes out 500W at 8 Ohms. Price is \$2,600. Call 001 602 2651628 or click on www.NewClearAudio.com for more information.



SANDERS SOUND IS HERE

Now available in the UK are the Sanders Sound 10c full-range hybrid electrostatic speakers. They're designed for bi-amping with a digital crossover, configured to operate at a frequency of 172Hz with a slope of 48dB per octave. The 10c has a sensitivity of 94dB and can be used with amplifiers of several thousand watts. Bass is produced by a transmission line 8.6ft in length, within the base of each speaker. Price is £8,200. Click on www.scotttnangle.co.uk or call 01698 294493



ROTH'S ACTIVE SPEAKERS

UK-based Roth AV has announced the release of the OLi POWA-5 active speakers. The 80 Watts powered design includes one pair of RCA analogue input sockets (to connect to a CD player, for example), one 3.5mm stereo jack input (for a MP3 player) and two optical inputs (for the likes of a Sky box and DVD player) and a built-in Bluetooth receiver (for wireless connection to music-enabled mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktops). In addition, there are two USB outputs to provide power to mobile devices. The Roth OLi POWA-5 will be priced at £250 per pair.

Click on www.rothaudio.co.uk or call 01753 682782 for more information



TDK HEADPHONES

TDK has announced the release of a range of headphones – fourteen new in-ear and on-ear models. Most of the range offers low-cost, value for money features but there are two models that provide more audiophile leanings.

The ST750 on-ear headphones feature 40mm drivers. A built-in amplifier increases the volume by 6dB and the bass by 4dB to, says the company, "...reduce distortion and compensate for the low power of some MP3 devices." The lightweight design features soft touch oval-shaped cushions. Price is £150.

The IE800 dual driver in-ear headphones utilise a patent-pending dual driver design, with one driver dedicated to bass and the other to mid/high frequencies.

The phones include Comply foam tips, providing an in-ear seal for sound isolation. Price is £80. Click on www.tdkperformance.eu or www.facebook.com/tdkperformance for more information.



CLEARAUDIO'S ANALOGUE VENTURES

Clearaudio has announced the release of its new, lightweight, Universal tonearm, improved in design and now available as a 12-inch option, in addition to the 9-inch version. Produced with a one-piece headshell, the arm has been hand-built in Germany. The three-piece

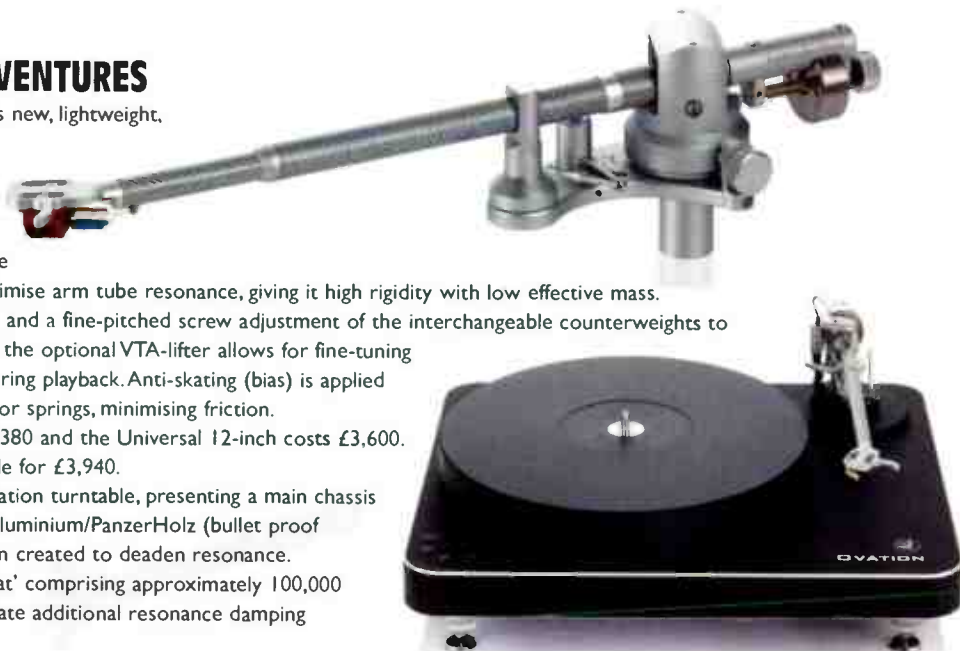
arm-tube is made from carbon-fibre to minimise arm tube resonance, giving it high rigidity with low effective mass.

The Universal offers adjustable azimuth and a fine-pitched screw adjustment of the interchangeable counterweights to permit quick setting of tracking force while the optional VTA-lifter allows for fine-tuning of the VTA (vertical tracking angle), even during playback. Anti-skating (bias) is applied magnetically rather than by way of weights or springs, minimising friction.

The Universal 9-inch is available for £3,380 and the Universal 12-inch costs £3,600. The 12-inch arm with a VTA-lifter is available for £3,940.

Also available is the company's new Ovation turntable, presenting a main chassis made of a complex sandwich of materials: aluminium/PanzerHolz (bullet proof wood)/aluminium. The combination has been created to deaden resonance. The PanzerHolz layer acts as an internal 'mat' comprising approximately 100,000 tiny stainless steel balls, providing an elaborate additional resonance damping measure.

A DC motor that drives a flat belt is integrated with the main chassis, whilst Clearaudio's OSC (Optical Speed Control) technology continuously monitors a micro infrared strobe for speed control. The sub-platter and heavy, dynamically balanced CNC-machined POM main platter float on a magnetic field, delivered by Clearaudio's patented CMB (Ceramic Magnetic Bearing). Start, stop and speed selection (including 78rpm) are operated using four blue illuminated buttons. Any commercially available 9-inch tonearm can be fitted thanks to the Ovation's interchangeable armboards. Spanning 420x350x140mm and weighing in at 13.5kg, the Clearaudio Ovation will retail between £4,360-£4,610, depending on the finish. Call 01252 702705 or email info@audioreference.co.uk for more information. (see page 89 for full review)



AUDIO RESEARCH DIGITAL BRIDGE

Using the same valve technology found in the Audio Research Reference 5 SE preamp, the new Digital Media Bridge DAC features up to 24bit/192kHz sample rate as well as upsampling to 176.4kHz and 192kHz for 44.1kHz and 48kHz sources.

Also included is a pre-amplifier and audio streamer, integrated Wi-Fi, USB for connection to computer and another USB port for phone or iPod. AES/EBU and S/PDIF (coaxial and optical) digital audio inputs also provided.

Supporting DSD over PCM and switchable digital filters, the DAC also includes a TFT colour display. The Audio Research Reference DAC Digital Media Bridge is priced at £13,998. Call 020 8971 3909 or click on www.absofutesounds.com for more information.



SAMSUNG TOP 40 APP

Samsung has announced that anyone who purchases a DA-E550, DA-E650, DA-651 or DA-E670 Samsung Wireless Audio Dock will be given access to the Official Top 40 Chart App, free for six months. The App, which downloads the current Top 40 to their phone and updates it every night will see them receive the chart update daily to their Samsung Galaxy phone. This offer is open until 31 December 2012.

For more information on the offer visit www.samsung.com/uk/ilovemusic



COMPUTER WORLD

iFi has four new products in a micro series: iDAC, iCAN, iUSBPower and iPhono. They use technology licensed from Abbingdon Music Research (AMR).

The iDAC uses an ESS Sabre HyperStream 24Bit/192kHz USB DAC with line and headphone outputs, an asynchronous USB, bit perfect and ZeroJitter Lite technologies. Price is \$299.

The iCAN is a Class A TubeState, Tri-brid headphone amplifier with adjustable XBass and 3D HolographicSound system. Price is \$249.

The iUSBPower is a USB power supply with IsoPower and IsoEarth technologies that has been built to replace the noisy USB power from the computer. It sits between the computer and DAC. Price is \$199.

Finally, the iPhono is a MM/MC phono stage with 40-66dB gain, six different EQ curves and Class A TubeState 'Tri-brid' technology. Price is \$399.

Click on www.facebook.com/lifiAudio and on twitter.com/lifi_audio for more information.

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Our New LA5tx

A Superb Transformer Coupled Pre-amplifier



designed by David Shaw

Shown with upgraded Treasure CV181s

Sometimes less is more!

Our LA4 line pre-amplifier has an enviable reputation for being the ideal match for both valve power amplifiers and for adding warmth and musicality to well known transistor power amplifiers. As such it has often been recommended by several magazines where owners of big transistor amplifiers have not been getting all the performance they thought their amplifier capable of. But we have been asked if we could do even better?

We are delighted to announce the release of our new LA5tx our first transformer coupled pre-amplifier. In recent times there has been a lot of interest in the use of transformers as a pre-amplifier. But a pure transformer pre-amplifier has the problem of providing a "difficult load" for the source, in other words you never get "something for nothing"! And the results will depend purely on the ability of the source unit to drive the transformer, which will be variable

Our LA5tx uses a very simple high quality valve circuit to drive the transformer. This way the source unit is always looking into an easy high impedance load. And the transformer has a low impedance output enabling it to drive any type of power amplifier load, balanced or unbalanced, regardless of load conditions. In other words completely buffered with all the advantages of a conventional pre-amplifier and pure transformer.

Needless to say a lot of effort has gone into the design of our audio transformer. Obviously it demands the finest copper and best type of iron laminations, but the method of winding and ratios used play a vital part in getting the correct sonic signature. Hundreds of hours were spent listening and many prototypes were made before we could say it has the "David Shaw" sonic signature.

The Result; A golden sound like no other, warmth and detail presented in a very focussed way that reveals the sound stage in uncanny detail. Totally without harshness or any mechanical quality. It has the ability for listening for long periods without fatigue or boredom. Guaranteed to work well with virtually any high quality power amplifier, Valve, transistor or hybrid.

For such a pre-amplifier the very best quality of power is demanded. This is supplied by a substantial power transformer. The current is then conditioned and regulated by a valve rectifier and two large chokes for silky smooth power.

Our four cornerstones are **Quality Performance and Value**. And in the future, **Service** when you need it. In this age of "built in obsolescence" it may be unfashionable to talk about repairs and spares but our commitment to future service means you should be able to enjoy your amplifier for at least 20 years.

All of our amplifiers are designed and finished in Leicester they are commissioned and serviced by the people that designed them so you can be sure of our quality control and long term performance. All our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It also allows for easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume is useful for fine tuning your listening level to match your taste. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SCR capacitors and audiophile resistors. A valve rectifier with choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone are unable to do. Tape and other methods of recording and playback are catered for by the "Tape Monitor". Also useful for Home Cinema applications.

From £2,499.95 (inc 20%VAT) Upgradeable. See our other award winning amplifiers on our website

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AVALANCHE!

Unity Audio is offering the Avalanche sub-woofer, designed to complement the brand's existing Rock and Boulder. It retains the sealed cabinet approach but it has a dual chamber with an aperiodic vent in order to reduce port noise.

The Avalanche uses a downward firing 12 inch woofer designed for heavy duty sub-woofer applications, in a 65 litre enclosure. The input circuitry features two transformer balanced XLR inputs feeding Burr Brown op amps. Amplification is run on two Rock low frequency custom E.A.R discrete Class A/B amplifiers running in parallel and totalling 150W, on rubber isolation mounts; outputs are via two XLR connectors. The cabinet sits on four large, adjustable custom heavy-duty solid brass spikes while user controls consist of volume, a 180 degree phase switch, bypass switch and a switched rotary satellite crossover frequency selector. A separate custom power supply is employed rather than an internal one, to maintain cabinet symmetry and balance.

The cabinet spans 490x430x430mm. Price is TBC. Click on www.unityaudio.co.uk or ring 01440 785843 for more information.



AVID SNIPPETS

Avid is promising a range of new goodies in the near future. Details are sparse, at the moment but here's what we have gleaned. First up is a sequel to the company's very expensive Anniversary turntable, which improves the power supply, amongst other items and will retail at £30,000. There's an even more expensive turntable on the drawing board, however. No details yet but the all out, no holds barred model should retail for a whopping £80,000.

Back to the real world and Avid is looking to release a new, entry level, turntable at half the price of the current Diva. Utilising a solid aluminium sub-chassis, it will be offered with a Pro-Ject arm for around £1,000. More expensive versions will be on offer with SME 9 inch and 12 inch arms but no prices have been released for those as yet. Look for the debut at the CES show in January, in Las Vegas, USA.



JBL ONBEAT VENUE

Harman has announced a new wireless loudspeaker. The OnBeat Venue is available in black, white and white/red and is compatible with all Apple iOS devices including the iPad, iPhone and iPod. The system also includes a hidden dock connector behind the JBL logo at the base of the OnBeat Venue. For wireless playback, the JBL OnBeat Venue includes Harman's TrueStream wireless streaming when connecting via Bluetooth technology. It can connect up to eight Bluetooth-equipped devices, whether they are Apple iOS devices or Android Windows Mobile or BlackBerry gadgets.

The Venue provides a free, downloadable App called MusicFlow that allows you to create customised playlists, edit mixes, adjust volume and EQ settings, as well as browse album artwork. An auxiliary input jack allows connectivity to an audio device or a computer, while a component video cable (not included) can connect the OnBeat Venue to a high-definition TV. Price is £160.

Click on <http://uk.jbl.com/jbl-homepage-uk/> for more information.



Five alive

KEF's new R500 floorstanding loudspeaker is a lively listen, finds Noel Keywood.

There are some good floor standing loudspeakers out there, at affordable prices – under two thousand pounds. Think Epos, Spondor, Tannoy, Quadral, to name a few manufacturers whose products have impressed us over the last few months. KEF came back at them recently with their new, high technology R Series loudspeakers and the R500 reviewed here is the 'baby' of the floor standing range. But it is no baby: the R500 stands one metre tall and weighs a substantial 22kgs, as big as most rivals. It costs £1500, pitching right into the field of competitors I've just listed. So how does it compare?

Visitors liked 'our' KEFs, most remarking on their appearance and quality of finish. Designwise, the R500s ring bells with people it seems; they look good. Our review samples had a deep gloss white finish and sat on sturdy cast alloy bases with easy-to-adjust floor spikes. Their slim cabinets, measuring 180mm wide, don't intrude visually, but the bright alloy cones, trims and planar bass drivers combine to give a carefully manicured appearance of high technology – and it is no pretence.

In outline, the R500s are a three-way design, twin bass drivers with their matt black finish straddling the single, central Uni-Q unit. This is two drive units in one: a tweeter sits at the centre of a midrange unit. This co-axiality (Tannoy use the term 'concentric' so I cannot say 'concen-

tricity!) has advantages, giving an even radiation pattern all-round and ensuring smooth crossover between the units at small wavelengths, in this case 115mm. Just to illustrate the problem, the drivers must be less than half a wavelength apart, or 57mm. Without placing the tweeter at the centre of the midrange unit it's difficult to achieve this using separate drive units, hence KEF's co-axial arrangement.

So KEF's Uni-Q unit gives an even sound all round, one free from phaseiness. This version uses a one-inch (25mm) aluminium dome tweeter sitting inside a 125mm aluminium/magnesium coned midrange unit, so the R500 is a metal cone loudspeaker of which Alcoa would be proud. Even the bass units use a flat aluminium/magnesium diaphragm, so there will be consistency of tonality as all drive units are aluminium with magnesium content. And you can hear this, for the R500 has the sort of sheeny, snappy sound that characterises metal coned loudspeakers.

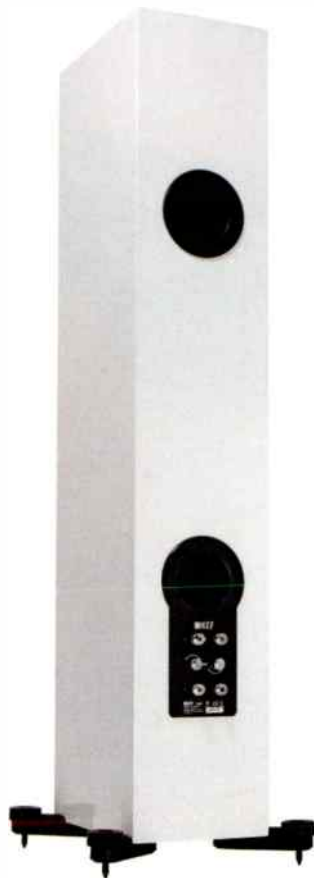
The twin bass units are loaded by a ported, reflex cabinet and the ports are stagger tuned our measurements showed. This means they cover a broad swathe of bass frequencies and should sound even in their handling of bass notes. However, room interaction is always a potential problem so to damp bass down, should this be necessary, two-part foam bungs are supplied.

On balance we preferred to use the outer ring with Classical and Rock, with our lightly damped Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifiers. They R500s sounded lighter and tighter with our Sugden A21SE Single Ended transistor amplifier and probably would be even better gripped by a large power amplifier like an Electrocompaniet Nemo.

Connection is through a bi-wire panel possessing nickel plated connectors and captive screw links that allow bi-wiring or single cable mono-wiring.

In all, the R500 is a complex concoction of high technology parts all designed and produced by KEF. If it looks the part, as visitors to our offices thought, then that's because it is a unique design, not a collection of OEM bits from parts manufacturers.

If you want to extend a system to full surround-sound then there are matching large and small Surround/Backs, large and small Centres, a subwoofer and a non-point-source Surround dipole. Sadly, interest in surround-sound seems to be fading once again; this market is in decline,



The R500 has two rear ports and in the lower one we used the two-part foam bungs supplied to good effect. These fine tune bass to room and amplifier.

not helped by lacklustre interest in Blu-ray, little Freesat HD TV surround content and the massive counterbalancing popularity of portable stereo fuelled by iTunes.

SOUND QUALITY

No matter how much technology seems able to deliver perfection, there remain clear differences between plastic coned loudspeakers from Spendor and Epos, and alloy

coned loudspeakers like the new R500s. But what KEF have done with their technological investment is to remove most of the obvious sheen that is a characteristic – good and bad – of metal cones, and tease out their strengths. In the R500 that means a well constituted midrange that is smooth and clear, and projective too. Where Spendor, Tannoy and Epos – all 'speakers I admire – deliver vocals with a silky

smooth, creamy quality the R500s are more specific. Renee Fleming sat back on the sound stage, but her phrasing was obvious. Her glorious sustained highs in 'Quando me n'vo' from La Boheme soared out from the R500s, almost like shafts of light.

I'm a little surprised at the way the midrange slowly falls toward high frequencies, measurement showed, but in practice this smoothes the midrange and prevents vocals from being thrown forward with that exaggerated force that characterises alloy cones. All the same, switching between our Sugden A21SE and Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifiers showed the KEFs were a lovely match for the rich, deeply textured midrange of the Icons, and a tad more mechanical sounding with the Sugden.

At this level though, I am not talking about major differences or anything I found unarguably questionable (if you understand me!). The R500s have, I suspect, been voiced to work with harder sounding transistor amplifiers than our glorious A21SE and it was a good match in that the KEFs conveyed the rich detail within its delivery.

However, the brute force and wonderful 'darkness' of the Icons, with their special Jensen copper foil, paper in oil capacitors, suited the R500s down to the ground. Renee Fleming became fuller bodied, less mechanical and more human, and as always stage depth increased to place her in the environment being captured by the microphone.

With a close microphone capturing the strings on Nigel Kennedy's Stradivarius clearly, the R500s shimmered with detail and life. They pushed violin forward more than vocalists, and there were moments on a down stroke that the rasp of the bow was given some bite by the tweeter, but overall with

"Nigel's violin was bathed in a bright light, sounded intensely detailed and yet was smooth"

the Sugden A21SE Nigel's violin was bathed in a bright light, sounded intensely detailed and yet was smooth. The Icons again favoured this performance more, bringing extra scale and depth, as well as a broader timbral description of the instrument.

With the outer foam bung only in place, in the lower port, kettle drums filled the background nicely with their bass power in Mars, from The Planets, giving the Scottish

"Far beyond my expectations" - Peter Ball



We believe great sound quality makes listening to music one of the most uplifting and engaging experiences in life. For this reason our products are not just "good" or even "better" - they embody a refusal to be satisfied with anything but the best at every level. If you want to transform your system, then changing to an Origin Live tonearm will yield an awesome improvement.



Enterprise C

"The ultimate real world tonearm" HI FI WORLD



Conqueror MK3C

Tonearm of the Year Award HI FI WORLD

Most wanted component award STEREO TIMES (USA)

Best sound at the show award KLANGBILDER (Vienna)

Perfect 10 award "The most addictive product I've heard"
AUDIO 10 (USA)

"For me Origin Live in the analogue sector is the discovery of the year! ..."
IMAGE HI FI (Germany)



Illustrious MK3C

Best Analogue Product Award FEDELTA' DEL SUONO (Italy)

"An utter delight" Iain Manson (Owner UK)

"The value of this arm is off the scale" John Stratton (Owner - Canada)



Encounter MK3C

Editors Choice Award THE ABSOLUTE SOUND (USA)

Product of the Year Award HI FI +

"One of the truly special products I have reviewed in the last 18 years"
STEREOPHILE (USA)



Silver MK3A

Most Wanted Component Award "So far ahead of the pack ... looks about to lap them. ...first choice for those looking for ultra musical LP performance" STEREO TIMES

Best of Year Award "the Origin Live Silver tonearm is phenomenal and makes me realize what a bargain it truly is at its asking price" 6 MOONS

"Design of the decade" HI FI WORLD

Please see web site for details on all arms including The Alliance, Onyx, and Zephyr which are not listed above - All arms carry a 1 month money back guarantee when purchased from Origin Live or dealers who supports this offer.

ORIGIN LIVE LTD

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www.originlive.com



National Symphony Orchestra a sense of scale, the stage falling away backwards.

Moving onto heavy Rock and my usual torture album, Angellique Kidjo's 'Fifa' with its emphasised bass lines that walk up and down the bass scale, rather than repeat a simple tune. The R500s got these into good proportion, sounding a little full with a hint of overhang with no bungs, but tighter and controlled with the outer bung (lower port, always). I heard the cabinets booming a little with the bass line of 'Bitchifi' and the signature track, 'Fifa'. Measurement shows an internal box mode at 100Hz and heavy bass lines like these seem to excite it. Treble is a little lifted in the recording and the R500's tweeter made this quite obvious.

With Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep' the click of plectrum against string in the introduction was fast and well supported by the tweeter, and the bass drum came across with satisfying power. As the track progressed I was aware of a bit of a boxy boom again but otherwise the bass line was followed well. All through the album Adele's powerful voice was well projected, her diction made distinct.

The pounding bass of Lady Gaga's 'Monster' was kept under control and punched out well, although the R500s don't do subsonics. But this keeps their bass sounding fast and on the beat. GaGa was out of the box, positioned in front of the speakers, her raunchy lyrics made rudely obvious.

Nils Lofgren's guitar fairly leapt at me as he plucked and

strummed his way through Keith Don't Go; I've rarely if ever heard the track so clear and forceful, Lofgren's flying fingers tracked perfectly as they crossed the strings at lightning speed. Breathtaking! His voice chimed out with rocket propelled clarity too.

CONCLUSION

The R500s are fast and concise in their sound. There's a touch of extra zing up top and, on occasions, a little box overhang down the bottom, but in the scheme of things, taking into account basic accuracy, which is high, affordable price and general all round ability the R500s are good, very good.

They're not head and shoulders above immediate competitors like the Epos Elan 15, but they are their equal but different in tonality. The KEFs are

focussed and fast, due to their metal cones, and this is what really sets them apart in basic character. Metal cones make plastic cones sound a little 'easy', somnambulant even. If you want a fast, fundamentally accurate loudspeaker then the R500s are beautifully engineered, have great pedigree and are well worth hearing.



KEF's Uni-Q midrange/treble unit has an alloy midrange cone with stiffening ribs that act as wavebreaks. At centre is an alloy dome tweeter behind a Tangerine waveguide.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response was basically even across the audio band, with a small trend upward toward low frequencies, a characteristic that will give the sound body. The midband was very smooth, but there is a small lift up above the crossover frequency of 3.5kHz as the tweeter comes in. This provides just a bit of lift - +2dB or so - around 5kHz. This is just enough to ensure the R500 is not obviously bright, so much as 'well lit', or quite specific. Upper treble was very smooth. In all the R500 has been tailored to be accurate, but it will be detailed and quite concise.

The two ports are tuned slightly differently, the upper one peaking at 50Hz where it will add bounce to the bass. The lower one peaks around 35Hz and extends output down to 30Hz. With port output around +5dB SPL above the bass units at 80Hz, a normal enough figure, the ports contribute strongly to bass. Our impedance curve shows they damp the bass units well, to give an almost flat curve at low frequencies, around 4 Ohms, making this a 4 Ohm loudspeaker, even though measurement produced a figure of 5.3 Ohms due to the midband lift.

Sensitivity was good at 88dB SPL from one Watt of input, if not quite up with the highest. As a load the R500s work well too, as they are largely resistive at low frequencies. The bass units are well damped by the ports, always a good sign.

The 200mS decay spectrum

was very clean across the midrange and treble; only the bass was a bit hot around 80Hz and there is some overhang here, but then this is not uncommon in floor standers of limited volume.

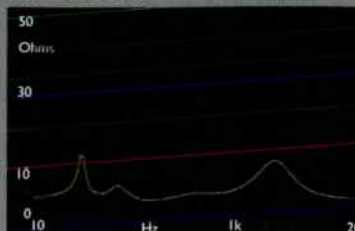
The R500s measure well all round, looking as nicely accurate as both Tannoy and Epos loudspeakers we have measured recently. But the R500 has a well developed midrange unit and is likely to be sonically specific as a result. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red & Yellow - port output

IMPEDANCE



No bi-wire links to lose: just unscrew the internal links.

VERDICT

A forward, detailed and snappy sounding loudspeaker, well made and finished. Modern technology and great value.

KEF R500 £1500
GP Acoustics (UK) Ltd.
+44 (0)1622 672 261
www.kef.com

FOR
- tonally balanced
- clear and detailed
- consistent imaging

AGAINST
- occasional box boom
- small treble zing



MC300-EAR headphone amplifier with integrated(Class A)

Headphone specification:

Output impedance: 8Ω,32Ω,80Ω,300Ω,600Ω

Input sensitivity:440mv

Output power:≤900mw.

Signal to noise ratio:96dB

Frequency range: 19Hz-45KHz ±1dB

Valves:full music 300B x 2,

(JJ)ECC82 x2, 5U4G x1, 6E1 x1

Integrated amp specification:

output power:7W x 2.

Output impedance: 4Ω-8Ω



MC368-B5 stereo integrated with power amplifier

Output power:110W x 2(ultra linear), 50W x 2(triode)

Valves:USA TUNG-SOL KT120 x 4,

TUNG-SOL 6SL7 x 2, 6SN7(special) x 2.



More information, please visit its website.

<http://www.mei-xing.com>

Mei Xing Electronics Factory was built in 1991 and enjoys a history of 21 years. We have our own CNC machining center with numerically controlled lathes and a professional technical team with many years of experience. We produce OEM of hifi audio brands for more than 10 countries in Europe and America. More than 50 models of Ming Da branded amplifiers and 6 types of specially selected high quality valves are now available to our customers. We strive to achieve the highest quality, along with a reasonable price! Also our aim is to give our customers a satisfying and fulfilling product, along with the knowledge of total safety and reliability, backed by strong local service and backup.

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★ HI-FI WORLD AWARDS 2012 ★



Welcome to *Hi-Fi World's Awards 2012!* Here are our favourite products reviewed over the past twelve months. Many great products have passed through our hands over 2012, but those listed here are the ones that offered something special in the high quality separates market, a fabulous sound or fabulous value. Enjoy!

AWARDS 2012	WINNER
BEST HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER	Pg 18
BEST VALVE AMPLIFIER	Pg 19
BEST INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER	Pg 20
BEST POWER AMPLIFIER	Pg 21
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★
BEST
HEADPHONE
AMPLIFIER
 EPIPHANY
 EHP-02

REVIEWED: AUGUST 2012

www.epiphany-acoustics.com

It's affordable and looks simple, but in this case price and looks deceive. The Epiphany EHP-02 headphone amplifier uses two re-chargeable 9V PP3 batteries to advantage. They provide low noise and a smooth sound, as battery supplies usually do, and they make for portability.

Add in the fact that this little headphone amplifier copes with low output from computers and battery powered portable players like the iPod, as well as high level outputs from CD players, and you have a great little headphone amplifier you can take anywhere and hook up to just about any product.

OK, it has no USB input, only an analogue line input. But USB receivers are either cheap and noisy, or good but costly, making USB incompatible with the ethos of this design, great sound quality at a low price of £99, using a simple but clever design approach.

In all then, we are happy to award the little Epiphany top marks for what it does.



★
**BEST VALVE
 AMPLIFIER**
 AUDIO
 RESEARCH
 VS115
 REVIEWED: MARCH 2012

www.absolutesounds.com

Audio Research valve amplifiers are known for their pile-driving dynamics, or "large, thunderous sound" as our reviewer Rafael Todes put it. He uses valve amps out of choice at home so he knows what they can offer and summarised the awesome 100 Watt VS115 perfectly. They produce "shock and awe" yet underneath there is "incredible smoothness to their texture". This is a £5000 amplifier, but it's a "far cry from your average £5000 transistor affair". "There is no hint of steely metallic grain" and its "silky sound is inherently beautiful, lush and ripe". Four pairs of chunky 6550 output valves working in fixed-bias mode, together with quality transformers, allowed the VS115 to deliver over 100 Watts on our test bench. So "if you want oodles of power and enormous punch" as Rafael put it, then this is the one to go for. Great technology from a long-standing U.S. company of repute places the VS115 at the top of our 2012 power amplifier list.



★
BEST
INTEGRATED
AMPLIFIER
BURMESTER
032

REVIEWED:
 SEPTEMBER 2012

www.burmester.de

A massive confection of luscious alloy heatsinks and chromed front panel fittings, the Burmester 032 amplifier is a statement product from Berlin, Germany. It uses straightforward yet well engineered circuits and components housed in a massive chassis that at 36kgs is a two man lift. The circuits are balanced throughout to best reject noise and interference, although the output stage is referred to ground. The 032 has been designed to work with balanced sources so it has a line of XLR sockets along its rear panel for silver disc spinners of the highest quality, and phono stages with balanced outputs. Delivering a substantial 112 Watts into 8 Ohm loudspeakers and nearly double that into 4 Ohm loudspeakers the 032 has plenty enough muscle. Sounding deliciously gentle and open, the 032 is for those who want a large yet subtle presentation, with plenty of air and space around performers. Its £11,500 price tag is breathtaking, but this is a true high-end statement amplifier.



★
**BEST POWER
 AMPLIFIER**
 TELLURIUM Q
 IRIDIUM
 REVIEWED: JUNE 2012

www.telluriumtq.com

Here is one of 2012's more extraordinary products, even as hi-fi goes. The Iridium is a transistor power amplifier that is 'Single Ended'. That makes it different to all others, with just a few exceptions world-wide. No one does this! Designer Colin Wonfor managed to overcome some technical obstacles by employing a special tracking power supply, allowing it to be direct coupled to the loudspeakers. "For a solid-state design" we said, "the Iridium was open, approachable and lacking hardness or harshness, but it still had bite". Its bass was "tight, characterful and deep". Although delivering just 18 Watts into 8 Ohm loudspeakers the Iridium was "a mighty power amplifier that possesses immense clarity and detail" we said. "Single Endeds are rare and their sound unique". One reason is that this highly unusual amplifier runs hot and costs £4500, but if you want to hear just how good high fidelity can get, little else gets close.



★ **BEST**
LOUDSPEAKER
 USHER DANCER
 MINI-TWO

REVIEWED:

NOVEMBER 2012

www.hi-fidelityuk.co.uk

Fitted with Usher's own diamond coated tweeter, the Dancer Mini-Two glistens with detail; it has spectacular treble. Usher's tweeter betters all others, making the Mini-Two a unique loudspeaker. "Apart from a rich swathe of detail...the tweeter had a peculiarly lush quality and a sense of rare evenness to it" we said. "What you get is an intense sense of detailing without emphases. This made the strings of Nils Lofgren's guitar sparklingly clear, his playing of Keith Don't Go shimmered with detail".

The tweeter is flanked by two carbon fibre / paper bass midrange units that are loaded by a massive cabinet that delivers deep, powerful bass.

Beautifully finished with a deep gloss lacquered veneer "the Mini-Two is a big loudspeaker with a big sound, yet it is basically very accurate and missing nothing. It's dramatic in an understated fashion, hours of listening revealed".

Equipped with unique properties, but costing £3500, this loudspeaker offers great sound from a price tag half that of rivals.



★
**BEST
 BOOKSHELF
 SPEAKER**
 WHARFEDALE
 DENTON

REVIEWED:

NOVEMBER 2012

www.wharfedale.co.uk

The wisdom of reviving an old loudspeaker in new form isn't obvious, and the precedent rare, if not absent; the modern Mini is a resurrection of an old idea after all.

Wharfedale have retained the essential essence of the old Denton, launched in 1968, – its easy going, big hearted sound. But they have used modern high technology drive units and computer aided design to bring this new 80th Anniversary Edition right up to date. Add in a wonderfully built and finished cabinet that seeks to out-class not only the original but modern rivals, and you end up with a great modern loudspeaker. It is an intriguing blend of old values and new practices, one that's a great success we found.

"Wharfedale have produced a very impressive, sophisticated and detailed and musical speaker here at an almost bargain price of £500", we said. "Factor in superb build quality and there's no doubt Wharfedale has done a fine job in updating a classic from its illustrious past". As small loudspeakers go this one is a real winner.



BEST TURNTABLE INSPIRE MONARCH

REVIEWED: JANUARY 2012

www.inspirehifi.co.uk

What an amazing product this is! Inspire carry out a massive, and comprehensive rebuild of the Technics SL-1210 Direct Drive turntable, giving it a vast, wood and alloy plinth, new phosphor bronze main bearing, new platter, even new Quartz crystal reference of greater accuracy than the original. The result was "more texture and depth to the tone of a normal SL-1210" we found. Violin was not "sheeny and brittle, lacking substance, but with a mellow body". Bass was "tight, controlled and with a nice, articulate leading edge that propels the music forward". There are no registers being favoured and this gives "a monolithic unity to the sound".

The Monarch is Direct Drive done properly, DD as it always should have been but never was. Inspire put right all Technics got wrong, making this a deeply impressive turntable, even at £3970. We could not help but award it top marks.



★
BEST TONEARM
 ORIGIN LIVE
 ENCOUNTER
 MK.3C

REVIEWED:

SEPTEMBER 2012

www.originlive.com

The wonders of a 12in arm find expression in the Origin Live Encounter Mk3C and we took to this elaborate arm as much for its unusual technologies as well as its final sound. Origin Live use a carbon fibre outer arm tube damped by an ebony insert. The two materials work well together, ebony applying damping to the strong but light carbon fibre tube. This dual composition tube is both strong but light, helping keep effective mass of the Encounter in check. A lightweight polished alloy headshell with integral finger lift will please all those who hand cue, and it looks good too – always a plus point.

The arm "strengthened secondary percussion, displaying a rich tone". It was "creamier and richer in presentation" than a shorter arm. Long arms reduce distortion and the Encounter performed this service well we found, providing "a perceptive investigation into the mix". In all then, the new Encounter 12in proved a £1745 delight, well worth our award.



★
BEST
CARTRIDGE
 ORTOFON
 ANNA MC
 REVIEWED:
 NOVEMBER 2012

www.henleydesigns.co.uk

The name of this cartridge gives no hint of the technology behind it. It is dedicated to Russian Opera singer Anna Netrebko, so you'd be forgiven for not knowing it has a titanium body built by selective laser melting, a solid boron rod cantilever, magnets made from exotic materials neodymium and cobalt – the list goes on. This is Ortofon's top cartridge, a current summary of their long experience and dedication to the art of designing exquisite moving coil cartridges, recognised worldwide. The best of the best does have a few drawbacks. One is a weight of 16gms, due to all that titanium, and the other is a price of £5000. Balancing that was a soundstage "that was almost holographic, requiring little effort to picture the performers as physical entities". Reproducing 'Ball and Chain' sung by Janis Joplin "I felt very close to the moment, almost watching the shambolic figure hanging onto her microphone". This cartridge "has the elegant poise of a well bred lady" and is an unquestionable prize winner.



BEST
PHONOSTAGE
 AVID
 PULSARE II
 REVIEWED: AUGUST 2012

www.avidhifi.co.uk

2 012 saw an avalanche of phono stages hit the market, covering a broad range of design philosophies. Few managed the ease of use and adaptability of Avid's Pulsare II however. Avoiding the inconvenience of cheap DIP switches on the underside of the chassis, Avid use rotary selectors on the front panel. They provide easy selection of load, encouraging users to get the best results from a cartridge, by experiment.

The Pulsare II is currently rare in having balanced inputs, allowing the very best results to be wrung from expensive moving coil cartridges through the use of screened balanced cables that eliminate both hum and interference. There are balanced outputs too, so long cables can be run to a distant amplifier.

All this helped provide a 3D soundstage, we found, with "layers of complexity" and "oodles of air", for an asking price of £4300. Making it our choice of top phono stage for 2012.



★
BEST CD PLAYER
 CHORD RED
 REFERENCE
 MKIII

REVIEWED: JUNE 2012

www.chordelectronics.co.uk

Fitted with Chord's own Pulse Array DAC technology, designed by Rob Watts, the Chord Red Reference CD player is a unique and also massive engineering exercise from tip to toe. Its 14kg chassis is a work of art, topped by a motorised door that opens to reveal a Philips Pro 2 transport tilted at 45 degrees. When the door closes, a puck stabilises the CD onto the spindle. A circular window at the rear of the case gives an illuminated view of the internal circuit board, an interesting visual device used on many Chord products. The CD data stream is up-sampled to 176kHz then processed by a Watts Transient Aligned filter algorithm before reaching the output.

This £15,000 wonder machine also has an asynchronous USB input that works up to the 192kHz sample rate.

The player scores well on orchestral weight we found: "huge orchestral forces are kept in rock solid order". A true reference player, the Chord Red Reference is another unique and impressive product.



★ BEST NETWORK PLAYER

SANSUI

WLD+ 201L

REVIEWED:

OCTOBER 2012

www.sansui.co.uk

At present, digital music streamers are as popular as phono stages, but most are expensive. The Sansui WLD+201L did what Sansui products were traditionally known for: offer great value for money. Costing just £350 this music player has wide ability, featuring a radio that receives DAB, VHF/FM and internet stations. The Sansui will play music from a USB memory stick, coping with WAV at up to 48kHz sample rate, as well as compressed formats like MP3.

Then there is the network connection that allows the WLD+201L to connect to a PC and it will also read music from an iPhone using a free Libretto App.

Music from a memory stick, as uncompressed WAV, was "transparent and honest in its upper mid translation" and provided "plenty of toe tapping fun". VHF radio was "atmospheric and dynamic" we found. As an entry level product the Sansui offers great value with oodles of ability at a great price, making it a worthy prize winner.



★
**BEST AV
 RECEIVER**
 YAMAHA
 RX-A3010

REVIEWED: JUNE 2012

www.uk.yamaha.com

The big RX-A3010 AV receiver is a tour de force of ability, a lesson in dedicated audio engineering from Yamaha, originally (and still) a musical instrument maker. This 20kg monster, supported by five feet, plays everything, from Blu-ray through SACD to LP. No fewer than nine internal amplifiers are able to produce 2,500 Watts in total – our measurements showed, enough for any Home Cinema set up, let alone your average lounge. Additionally, the RX-A3010 plays computer music files via its network input, receives internet radio and connects to an iPhone. And it has a VHF/FM tuner of course.

Not only does the big Yamaha have a wide range of ability, it plays high resolution digital audio at up to 24/96 and makes a great job of it. This receiver offers "a very svelte view" of music, with "no hint of hardness or screech". "It was a lovely listen, in an easy and relaxing manner". It is a receiver that is "well engineered in every area" we found and a worthy award winner in this busy sector.



★ BEST BLU-RAY PLAYER

SONY
BDP-S790

REVIEWED:

NOVEMBER 2012

www.sony.co.uk

Co-inventors of Blu-ray and with Sony Pictures to think about, Sony have an interest in getting the most from this silver disc. But their BDP-S790 player does so much more we found. Priced at an affordable £239, this slim player is one of the cheapest ways of playing that other Sony disc, the SACD. It will output DSD code over an HDMI link to a receiver able to process DSD, for glorious surround-sound. For receivers unable to process DSD, the Sony can be set to output PCM audio, digital code all receivers can work with.

Strong as a basic music player, able to spin all discs, except now-obsolete DVD-A, the BDP-S790 can also play music files from a memory stick, inserted into a front panel socket hidden behind a small flap. Then there's its network connection and a mass of web based services including YouTube music videos it makes available. Music can be played from computers too. The BDP-S790 offers massive ability at a great price.



★
**BEST POWER
 CABLE**
 TELLURIUM Q
 BLUE POWER
 REVIEWED:
 NOVEMBER 2012

www.telluriumq.com

Tellurium Q introduced the Blue, power cable, a budget version of their Black power cable. Although the Black offered a "meaty bass quality" we felt the Blue was best value. It had "a focused, punchy bass, offered a better balanced presentation for the vinyl front-end, injecting more air into the upper frequencies while draining some of the more claustrophobic bass. This gave the Blue a breezy presentation. Upper mids seemed to relax, taking their time to consider detail and tonal colour".

"Playing jazz, via CD, the effect was more accentuated. The Blue almost decluttered and cleansed the midrange to produce an outstanding clarity, adding a tremendous sense of balance". Priced at £399 for a one metre length this power cable is not cheap but it isn't the most expensive by any means either – and it worked better than most we found. With top quality, high resolution systems costing thousands, quality mains cables make a difference, gently smoothing and focussing the sound, and this one was fine value we felt.



★
**BEST
 LOUDSPEAKER
 CABLE**
 BLACK RHODIUM
 TWIST

REVIEWED: JULY 2012

www.blackrhodium.co.uk

Twisted to fight off radio frequency interference, a big problem traditionally for those living close to major radio and TV transmitters, the Twist has new application. These days we are surrounded by wi-fi transmitters and other sources of unwanted high frequency interference, such as that from mobile phones and Bluetooth links. No surprise then that the Black Rhodium Twist loudspeaker cable should bring "a sense of clarity and focus to the musical presentation as a whole".

"This presentation, lacking in damaging distortion, provided a purer translation. The acoustic guitar was both precise and sparkling with a metallic definition that contrasted well with the ethereal backing vocal. The latter vocal and guitar provided the most characterful presentation thus far, teasing apart the often complex arrangement" we said. It is "beautifully designed and so easy on the ear, with a remarkable price". Simple but effective the Twists were worthy winners we felt.



★ **BEST SUPPORT**
 TRACK AUDIO
 PRECISION 600
 REVIEWED:
 OCTOBER 2012

www.trackaudio.co.uk

L oudspeaker stands must sit firm and not vibrate under stimulus from the loudspeaker above. Some accommodate sand or lead shot into hollow legs to achieve this. These stands take a different approach. Within the legs, Track have integrated hydraulic dampers to tackle vibration, turning it into heat which then dissipates harmlessly. This decoupling is meant to improve bass performance and naturalise the midrange. There's even a spirit level built into each stand for levelling purposes. Price is £1380.

Build quality is second to none with high grade stainless steel and a finely adjusted ball lock system for altering height.

Arriving with a ten year guarantee and available in satin black or silver anodised finishes, you can request other colours, if you wish. The stands can be bought in different sizes and heights to support different types of speakers such as subwoofers and more, with different top-plate sizes. Bass sounded tighter and faster; blurring and bloom were reduced by the Tracks too. They are beautifully made, innovative and worked well.



**WIN A MING DA MD7-SE WORTH £1,520
IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!**

Here's your chance to win a Ming Da valve preamplifier worth £1520. Read about it here and answer the questions, at right on this page.

"Although they have been manufacturing in China for over 20 years, it is only recently that the name Ming Da has become better known in this country now that Phil Hodgson and Mark Manwaring-White have set up Ming Da Valve Audio UK, based in Malvern, Worcestershire. They offer two pre-amplifiers in their range, the £849 MC7R and the MD7-SE, priced at £1520 and under review here.

It boasts four line level inputs and remote control for the volume

via a metal remote unit that is very substantial and responsive.

The back contains the usual input phono sockets and two pairs of outputs, making bi-wiring and bi-amping an easy option. Under the metal and acrylic valve cover lurks two pairs of 6N8P valves (used instead of the 6SN7s that are listed on the chassis - I understand that they are interchangeable).

In the middle is a 274B rectifier. Two proprietary transformers linked to a twin choke power supply sit to the right of the chassis. Capacitors are supplied by Jensen, and the circuit incorporates a Cascode output stage.

The chassis sits on legs hewn from billets of solid aluminium, while the main bodywork is in steel. The finish was neat and tidy and the

whole unit felt reassuringly solidly built.

After leaving it running on a diet of the IsoTek Full System Enhancer disc for 48 hours I plugged it into the upstairs Sondek/ Quad/ Kelly system. I played Blondie's track 'Denis' from the LP 'Plastic Letters'. Originally recorded in 1962 in New York by one-hit wonders Randy and the Rainbows, this 1978 reworking was one of the few records in the late '70s to catch my mid teenage ear. Played through the Ming Da it wore its years well. The uptempo beat bounced out of the Kellys, bubbling with energy. Clement Burke's drum fills had speed and detail, propelling the music into the next verse. I thoroughly enjoyed it".

For a chance to win this great prize, just answer the four easy questions at right. Send your entries on a postcard only, by 8th January 2013 to:

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QUESTIONS

[1] What valves does it use?

- [a] EF80
- [b] EL84
- [c] 6N8P
- [d] 6L6

[2] How many line level inputs exist?

- [a] four
- [b] five
- [c] none
- [d] one

[3] Who supplies capacitors?

- [a] Farad
- [b] Jensen
- [c] Watt
- [d] Jim

[4] The bodywork is made of?

- [a] brass
- [b] bronze
- [c] steel
- [d] Smarties

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LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS

Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF 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 **DAVE & DEBBIE**, Letter of the Month winner in our December 2012 issue.

Letter of the Month

BEATLES IN A BOX

I wonder if it would be possible to run a feature on the new Beatles box set vinyl release. Not so much to just state that they exist and how much they cost, but to look into the whole business of the release a little.

For example, this release is in stereo, but many people will chew your leg off and go on about the merits of mono. So, just how should people go about listening to The Beatles. Is it worth holding off for the forthcoming mono recordings due in 2013? Or perhaps just plump for the stereo or perhaps to go for both and get the best (or worst) of both worlds.

The new release also states that it has been seriously prepared by top-class engineers etc but I think I am correct in stating that some of the LPs are re-mixes from 1986 by George Martin. It could be just me, but that seems a little off, bearing in mind what is being claimed in the blurb.

In addition, some of the music will be in mono. Mono, in a stereo release? I guess when the mono release is here, some of that may be in stereo. What does all this actually mean I wonder?

I know what you are thinking, just be quiet and listen to the music, enjoy it and let it be. Well, do you want to know a secret? I can't because it costs a fair bit of cash and I would like the ins and outs of it from an expert before going ahead.

In addition, what is the ideal way to actually listen to a mono release in the modern world? I know that might sound strange but I have heard differing answers to that question.



The Beatles first LP box set, reviewed by us next month, will be the stereo albums. But how can stereo be mono, asks Neil Porter – and will the monos be stereo?

I remember going into a record shop over 30 years ago and buying a record, going back home and playing it, not overly concerned about what it was being played on – and not at all worried about the quality of the pressing. Simpler times for myself to be sure and maybe more enjoyable and carefree.

It seems so much more complicated and workman-like now. Of course I could just be crazy.
Yours faithfully,
Neil Porter

Hi Neil. Yes it is thoroughly confusing – and after discussing this issue at length with Paul Rigby and consulting the oracles, namely the contemporaneous studio records in Mark Lewishon's 'The Complete Beatles recording sessions' – it remains confusing!

The Beatles LPs were issued in both mono and stereo at the time of their release. The monos were considered definitive and had most time spent on them; the stereos were given less attention in

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QUAD

the closest approach to the original sound

mastering apparently. That's why the monos are felt to be most valuable by collectors.

George Martin did re-mix some songs, a few he was not happy with. You can read more about this in our next issue when we review the first stereo box set.

Also perplexing is the fact that these LPs are cut from a 24/192 digital transcription from the analogue masters made in 2009. A CD box set has already been derived from these digital tapes, but of course the CDs are down sampled to 44.1kHz and resolution reduced to 16bit.

So now we are faced with the question: will the new LPs cut from a 24/96 digital master sound better than the CDs? And are they authentic if they come from a digital master?

The only way to overcome most of these limitations is to release the 24/96 masters as high resolution downloads, or as Blu-rays. Er...can you feel what's coming? I say more about these LPs in my column this month, on p79.

Tony Bolton will tell you the only way to play a mono LP is with a mono cartridge, because it produces no vertical information (noise and ticks and pops) from the groove. Ortofon make top quality mono moving coils for this purpose. But for most of us a mono switch is good enough.

The mono in the stereo release refers to the Left / Right mono of their first album that was thought to be stereo at the time. At the moment I can't see how the monos could have stereo in them so you can relax!
NK

ARM ADVICE

Having had my LP12 re-built by Inspire (your review was spot-on!) I am now thinking about dealing with the arm.

At present the deck has a Linn Ekos – probably around 20-plus years old – which, although working well, perhaps can be improved upon. Therefore, should I look to re-wire or replace?

The cartridge is a Lyra Dorian into an ANT Audio Kora 3T LTD phono amp. A Leema Tucana amp and Monitor Audio PL100s complete the vinyl playing. My musical taste is wide-ranging but mainly blues and jazz.

Thanks in anticipation.

Mike Thompson

A lot more attention is being paid to structural behaviour of an arm these days, than when the original Ekos was developed and it is off the pace now. However, this arm has a web on the inside face of the headshell that greatly improves rigidity in a critical

region, a trick most other manufacturers have missed. You could well try auditioning the later, upgraded Ekos SE with its titanium tube and webbed headshell, as this will be a drop-in replacement. Alternatively, an SME309 would be another good choice, it's one of our favourites, but the arm board would have to be changed.

Budget moving coil cartridges have also become popular and improved greatly as a result of competition. Consider a Benz Micro Ace or Van den Hul DDT-II. See our moving coil cartridge reviews from past issues on our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/Vinyl/LP/Cartridge reviews. **NK**

RIGHT CHORD

Just a quick e-mail to say thank-you very much for my Chord Index prize! It arrived just in time for my birthday and I'm having a great time listening to my much-improved music. The Index is a real step-up in sound quality from my old streamer!

But as usual when you improve one part of your system, you start wanting to "fiddle" with other bits! As it stands I'm using a Monrio NAS-DAC CD player, Lyngdorf SDAi2175 amp, Epos 22i speakers and of course the Index.

So what would be the most effective £1500 upgrade now? I'm not against buying used equipment when necessary. Room size is 5.2m by 4m and the Epos fire across the room. My taste in music runs from jazz, pop, classic, folk... just about anything really! I like



a neutral sound with good stage width and imaging (not looking for too much then!).

Thanks again for the Index! Keep up the good work!

Dave Herd
One happy Edinburger!

That's a tightly integrated system you have Dave and not too easy to upgrade without comprehensive replacement. To make a big difference for £1500 I would be tempted to change the loudspeakers and I suspect you'd like the Epos Elan 3S loudspeakers (October 12 issue) or, for a brighter sound, the KEF RS00s reviewed in this issue. They will liven up the Lyngdorf, which with its hard cut off at 20kHz is a little short of sparkle. **NK**

A drop-in replacement for the old Linn Ekos arm is the new SE version with titanium arm tube.



A pair of lovely KEF R500 loudspeakers will add some sparkle to Dave Herd's system.



When in France do as the French do – buy Triangle loudspeakers. Here's the new Quartet, which would be a good choice for John McCulloch living in Paris.

HOT DREAMS

We were delighted to find our recent letter featured in *Hi-Fi World*. Thank you for your advice re: speaker matching for the Sugden A21 SE. While we love our music we are definitely not au fait with hi-fi technicalities and so rely on your guidance. We shall wait for your issue with the KEFs before continuing to audition with your suggestions. We couldn't wait to start and have just tried the Sugden and also Musical Fidelity's AMS 35i with the Martin Logan Electromotions from a Project/Ortofon Blue combo - what a difference from our old system!

We love the electrostatic sound which also gives us the option of later adding a top valve amp for our favourite piano and chamber albums. The trick is to find a dealer where we can hear both speaker types.

Thank-you again for your help and we must say that the generous space you give to reader questions sets *Hi-Fi World* well apart from the competition. (And of course valves are the best. Boy, I bet those new Icon MB845s sound fantastic. If only we were going to where they'd fit.) All the best.

Yours sincerely,
David Briggs

We are getting a lot of mail about the Martin Logan Electromotions, likely because of their relatively low price of £2500. They measured well and sounded great we found in our review that appeared in the October 2011 issue and is now on our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/Loudspeakers/Reviews.

In future if you want to go to valves you will a punchy, dynamic sound from an Audio Research VS55i with its 6550 tetrodes, or an even and smooth result from Quad II-forty power amps with their KT88s. Absolute Sounds, the importers of Martin Logan can surely give you the demo you are looking for. **NK**

STANDING TALL

I'm looking to replace my ageing Epos ES14 speakers with a pair of floorstanding speakers to partner a pair of Audion Sterling KT88 push-pull monoblocs (40W) and would like some advice on a shortlist of speakers to start auditioning. I mainly listen to rock music at reasonable levels through either my Roksan Xerxes/SME V/Ortofon Kontrapunkt B/Densen DP Drive analog front end or via the computer (Mediamonkey) and a Lynx Two soundcard – all of which is passed through an Music First Audio Classic pre-amp.

My listening room is 6.5m x 4.5m

and is acoustically treated as I also use it for recording. I really value timing, especially the crisp stopping and starting of bass notes, and I'm looking to spend in the £1500 - £2000 region. I'm also very happy to go second-hand to get better value for money, although getting heavy items sent over to France where I live can be problematic at times.

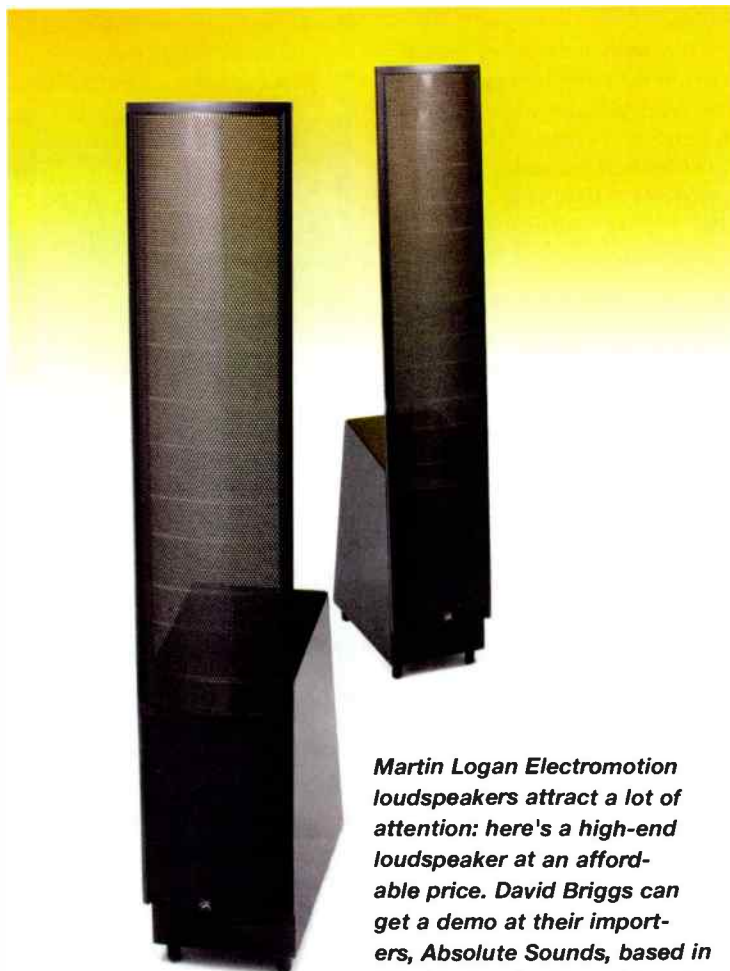
I'll also consider auditioning the local speakers such as Focal and Cabasse, but unfortunately know very little about them and their suitability for use with valve amplifiers.

I've been looking at Revolver, ATC, Neat, PMC, B&W, Tannoy, Usher, Living Voice etc., but now need a little guidance in narrowing my search to a few highly compatible models within my price range that I can listen to.

Yours

**John McCulloch
Paris**

John, you are looking at a wide range of speakers there – all with different strengths and weaknesses. But if you like the sound of your present Epos ES14s and are keen on floorstanders I'd recommend a listen to the new Epos Elan range. The Elan 35s are very special at the price and well within your budget at £1200. They also boast a 92dB sensitivity which makes them ideal for valve amplifiers. They are slightly warmer



Martin Logan Electromotion loudspeakers attract a lot of attention: here's a high-end loudspeaker at an affordable price. David Briggs can get a demo at their importers, Absolute Sounds, based in Wimbledon, Southwest London.

than previous Epos models but have retained the immediacy and musical communication the brand is famous for. **JM**

In France you ought to listen to loudspeakers from Triangle. They are very well engineered and designed to be accurate, so you get the sort of honest, smooth result once traditional in the UK. The Quartet is punchy and dynamic, and the Antal great value too. I have used both with valve amplifiers and they match well, being resistive, sensitive and clear up top. As you can likely get a demo in Paris and prices will be good, I suggest you start here. See the Antal EX review on our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/Loudspeakers/Reviews. **NK**

SERIOUS MUSIC

There are a few things in your November 2012 issue which have attracted my attention.

Once again you have reviewed a product without using classical music. I refer to the Wharfedale Denton speakers reviewed by Jon Myles. He mentions various music but none of it is classical, which to us serious music fans is a serious flaw in any speaker review! Whilst using The Clash might appeal to those of a certain taste it does little to tell us what the Dentons might sound like with properly recorded orchestral/ opera music. Why do you as one of the better publications do this? Doesn't Mr Myles have any interest in naturally produced sound? Surely he could have tried some serious music in conjunction with another reviewer in that case?

You also review a World Designs amplifier, the KT88 model. This is done by Tony Bolton, who does at least use a few classical tracks. But there are a few issues regarding kits. If one builds such a kit and it fails to operate what help does one get? Is the item guaranteed or does one have to seek help on the company's forum?

There are dangerous voltages in valve amps – upwards of 400 Volts – so what help is available if the amp doesn't work correctly upon completion? Many companies offer two year guarantees these days so what about World Designs?

I also refer to the letter from Stephen Condliffe and the implications to those who meddle with ancient designs. I just cannot understand the fascination with such designs. The Leak may have a sweet sound quality but surely it has been bettered by many modern designs? So why all the fuss with preserving what is in effect junk? I daresay that doing so does keep a sector of the hi-fi trade in business and some hi-fi followers regard ancient hi-fi

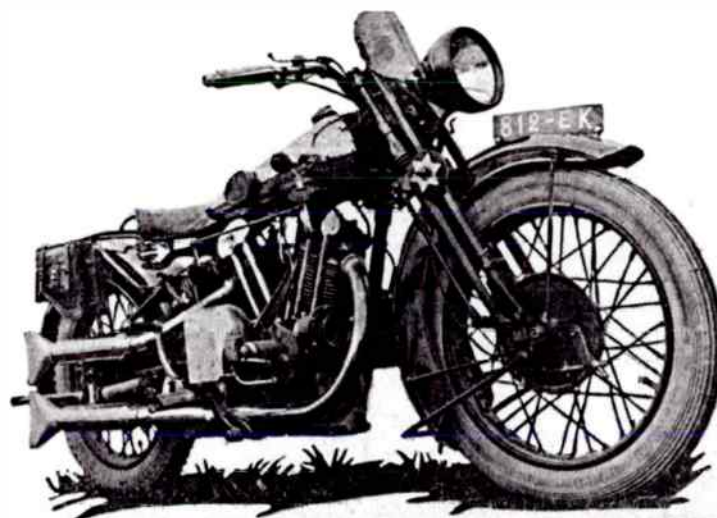


John Myles did not listen to serious music when reviewing the Wharfedale Denton 80th Anniversary Edition, says Cliff Millward.

in the same way they do vintage cars. But Neville Roberts in his reply sent a shiver up my back when he stated that he didn't want to bring the Leak up to CE standards!

I just wonder how many ancient pieces of dangerous junk - sorry, hi-fi - are connected up to systems throughout

etc., etc. Unfortunately, there is not room in one article to mention them all and I chose to try to convey the overall sound of the speakers. Suffice to say they sounded as good with an acoustic recording of Nick Cave as they did with Messaien, Stravinsky and even The Clash - as their award



A piece of junk? A Brough Superior in bad condition is worth £50,000. For more pictures of 'junk' go to <http://brough-superior.com>, who supplied this picture.

the country? I can well recall a friend of mine who owned a full Leak system many years ago. It was a sweet-sounding outfit but I have heard better in the passing years and my friend eventually sold the Leak and got himself a Japanese transistor system which didn't need valve changes and which actually sounded better. Heresy some might say! No. The aim of hi-fi is musical contentment, surely?

Cliff Millward

It's a fair point Cliff. I did actually listen to the Wharfedale Dentons with a variety of classical, folk, rock, jazz, ambient, hip-hop, industrial, punk

in this issue testifies. As to what constitutes 'serious' music.....well, I'll go with Anton Berg's quote to Gershwin: "Mr Gershwin, music is music." **JM**

"Junk"? Hmm. That's a particular view Cliff. I was watching an auction of old motorbikes on TV recently where a Brough Superior untouched since 1930 and in bad condition went under the hammer and sold for around £50,000. It looked like junk, but that wasn't how it was valued. Garrard 401s can reach £1800; our Advertising Manager has just sold one she found in a junk shop for

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£900 – to Japan.

A lot of people out there seem to value "junk" so I think it's best to take a view on such matters. At a hard nosed commercial level such items are seen as an investment, and in this light you can buy a Leak system, enjoy it, then sell it later for a profit if you so wish. In effect, you will have earned money whilst listening to music, which sounds good to me. Buy a massed produced, technologically superior set up and you experience the opposite effect. The choice is yours.

It's probably just as well most people do the latter, or the wheels of industry would fall off. Not good for jobs. But I think the logic of enjoying junk needs consideration. It brings contentment in many ways. **NK**

WHICH DAC?

I feel I must write to you again to express my thanks to you. I took your advice from my letter earlier this year regarding adding a Beogram turntable to my hi-fi setup. I am now the proud owner of a 5005 model and my most recent addition to the growing set-up is a wonderful Technics SL-5 which has just been fitted with a Shure M92E cartridge. This combination has left me stunned by the breathtaking sound which comes from those shiny black discs.

I have only recently returned to vinyl after many years with CD. I must stress I am not about to disown CD. It still has a place in the great scheme of things to me. But the amazing vibrancy and sense of life that is found in vinyl is a real breath of fresh air.

I also took your advice on upgrading my speakers. I went for the Usher S520 which have completely transformed what my expectations of what a standmounter can do. How they crammed such a spacious sound into



The NAD M51 DAC has a wide array of inputs including HDMI, a high resolution digital volume control and upsampling. It would suit Austin Rushworth, thinks Jon Myles.

these little boxes is beyond me.

I am considering a new DAC to boost my Exposure 2010s CD player. What can you suggest? I rather like the look and reviews of the Metrum Octave



This Garrard 401 turntable sold for £900 to a Japanese collector.

and Rega.

Please keep up the good work with your excellent and enjoyable magazine.

**Austin Rushworth
Lincolnshire**

The Exposure 2010 is a fine CD player as it stands but if you're looking to boost its performance and offer more flexibility for other sources the Rega would be a good choice. It has a natural, unforced and dynamic sound with bags of detail. You don't mention a price range – but if you have the funds then for an even better performance and class-leading range of options take a look at our 2012 Award-winning NAD M51 Direct DAC featured on page 35. **JM**

IPC world? My reason for asking this is I have a set of Arcaydis Icarus speakers that use two relatively large, A4-sized NXT panels paired with a separate 10" bass drive unit which I'm extremely happy with.

My reason for buying them, other than my inability to refuse an ex-demo bargain, was the theory that the large speaker area would render them less fickle to placement and provide a wider sweet spot.

I'm currently forced to listen in a room less than ideal for musical reproduction. I've always found them very open and detailed and a significant improvement over my previous Tannoy 638s, which I was already fairly happy with.

However, over the last couple of years I've been upgrading the rest of my system to improve the source and now it's time to consider the amplification.

The problem I have, and what triggered the initial question as to why the technology isn't popular, is that I can find absolutely no information on the speakers.

Arcaydis have not responded to my request for such; there are no hits on the internet - surely a first! On top of that I can find no similar speakers which have been reviewed to provide any guidance on what sort of amplification they are best suited to.

My front end consists of a Garrard 401, recently serviced and brought back to splendid health by Dominic at Northwest Audio, and mounted on a twin-layer Slatdeck plinth. Tonearm is an Origin Live Encounter Mk3 fitted with an Ortofon Vivo Blue. The phono

WHERE IS NXT?

Here's a question for you, well probably Noel actually: why has NXT technology failed to make any serious impression on speaker design outside the surround-



The Podium Sound loud-speaker was an NXT panel that wasn't NXT because it didn't meet their patent specification (it was sub-optimal in this sense). But Podiums still sounded lovely.

section is a Cyrus Phono X feeding a Cyrus 8 amp. Digital a Cyrus 6 CD player.

My musical taste is mainly classic rock as befits my age, but is slowly becoming more varied - mainly as each upgrade allows me to hear the merits of other musical styles.

I really want something that is going to provide a tight bass line as I hate loose and flabby bass - but also something that will provide a more detailed picture than the Cyrus set-up I currently have. It's certainly not bad but I think the analogue front end perhaps now deserves something more refined. I've been considering a move to valves but really don't know if that's the right way to go with this type of speaker. Your thoughts would be appreciated.

Regards,
Martin Taylor

I could bore you for Britain on the the apparent failure of NXT to take over the world - but I won't!

Firstly, let me say I love NXT and the sound it produces by optimally exciting a panel to stimulate its modes in an ordered fashion. Behind it lies Finite Element Analysis as a means of understanding what the panel is doing, so it is absolutely rooted in science and the technology behind it is being spun out into BMR drive units.

You may be amused to know DERA, Britain's Defence Research

Agency, contacted me at Hi-Fi World a long time ago, asking which loudspeaker manufacturer would best understand and be able to develop a panel-driving technology they used in helicopters to reduce noise. I told them straight away and unequivocally Farad Azima of Mission loudspeakers would understand it, be interested in it and would likely be able (financially) to develop it. And so it came to pass. NXT was started with investment from the City. The idea was to replace cone loudspeakers around the world, an awesome prospect.

It didn't work out. Exciters would fall off the panels and the low frequency limit was linked to size as always. Full range NXT panels had to be as large as any panel radiator to cover bass frequencies, or have a bass unit in a box, like your Icarus loudspeakers. This produces a change of character as the NXT dipole, in all its uncoloured glory, crosses over to a cone slogging away in a box. It gave NXT feet of clay in the showcase of high-end audio, and few hi-fi manufacturers either understood how to build an NXT panel properly or negate the problems of making a box match it.

But NXT panels sound pure and peculiarly neutral in character, more so than electrostatics. They are lovely to hear and a pair of huge Podium



Where did NXT go, asks Martin Taylor? Here is one of the few high end NXT loudspeakers ever produced, the Cyrus Ikon X4.

Sound pseudo-NXT (the exciter was in the wrong place) loudspeakers I heard at a Taiwan audio show stay in my mind as some of the most extraordinary loudspeakers I have ever heard. They had vast imaging across a huge sound stage, in width and height, and a sound so pure it was like the air of Spring.

I doubt you'll find an amplifier convincingly better than the Cyrus at driving your loudspeakers, as they are not an especially difficult load and have no special requirements. If you want really tight bass, stay with transistors; at most consider a hybrid set-up of Naim power amplifier fed from a valve preamplifier, say Croft or Icon Audio. If you can stretch to it, a Music First Audio Classic transformer preamplifier will give you a sound pure, detailed and tight at low frequencies and would definitely suit I feel.

Your Ortofon Vivo Blue pickup cartridge is the item to upgrade first though; budget moving coils are rarely worth their low cost. For fast, tight bass go for an Audio Technica AT-OC9 MLIII moving coil cartridge, or an Ortofon Cadenza Blue or Bronze; I use a Cadenza Bronze.

NK

QUICKSILVER MESSENGER

Since I last wrote I have replaced the Monarchy Class A monoblocs with a behemoth American Quicksilver MS190 - four EL34s a side, 95 Watts per channel, 90lbs out of the box...only 75 MS190s were made. It was 1982 and Mike Saunders first foray as a designer/builder. The MS190 changed to toroidal transformers after 75 units and the name changed to the MX 190.

I bought serial number 0037 in 1985, used and ran it for years but finally a botched repair left it languishing in the garage for the last dozen years or so. But a great repair service from a local outfit prompted me to take my rusting monster for a refit. They replaced the two large capacitors plus numerous smaller components and the output tubes. So, a restoration and an enhancement and it sounds quite amazing. Make that stupidly good.

My set-up remains the same: stacked Yamaha NS1KMs plus Townshend Maximum SuperTweeters. I figured when wired up with all three speakers driven the amplifier was looking at a load just above 1ohm.

This time I'm driving the Maxs separately so the 4ohm taps on the MS190s are seeing around 4ohm nominally and probably closer to 2ohm in reality.

Now, here's the question: what are the symptoms of going below the minimums recommended? Shorter tube

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HI-FI WORLD on Rega arm mods

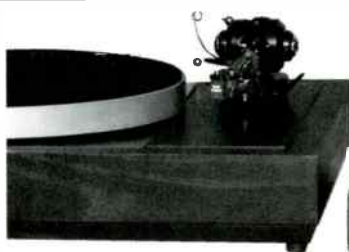
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"I have to say the Rega modifications turn this humble arm into a real giant killer. Gone is the rather grey, sterile sound of the cooking Rega. Instead, tonal colour is fresh, dynamics have great speed and impact, and the sound stage is huge."

HI-FI WORLD on Rega structural Mod

Structural modification awarded 5 star rating by

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- Slotted arm tube - £87 (Rega only)
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life? Or something more exciting?

As a PS: The Monarchy gave no signs of distress.

And a PPS: I have a set of Speltz Autoformers which allow you to vary the speaker impedance as seen by the amp by multiples of 2, 3, or 4. So I plan to give those a trial. They certainly work but they're awkward and with a higher impedance the available maximum volume is reduced which will be problematic with my passive transformer volume control.

Finally: the MS190 is rusty, the fascia material is peeling off, it's big and heavy but it's my sentimental favourite. I don't want to damage it, shorten its working life or blow it up. Any information would be much appreciated.

Andy Smith

If you have an Ohmmeter, measure d.c. resistance of your 'speaker array. This will be the minimum a.c. impedance the amplifier sees and gives a rough idea of what the amplifier will be 'seeing' as a worst case. With valve amps the a.c. impedance is reflected back into the primary, so a low impedance will be seen as a lowered anode load in effect. More current will swing through the output stage and distortion rises. However, this is about all. Unlike a transistor amplifier that will collapse if too much current is drawn by a low load (in real life fast protection circuits are fitted to prevent this), a valve amp will shrug off what it cannot do. Valve life is affected by the H.T. voltage and quiescent current through the output stage, not by loudspeaker load.

I doubt the loudspeakers are worrying the valve amp as much as you fear and doubt whether putting in another set of (auto)transformers will be of much help. If, say, the Yamahas are 1 Ohm then a 4:1 setting will take them up to 4 Ohms as the amplifier sees it, at least in nominal terms.

I suggest you change your loudspeakers if all this worries you,

or stop worrying!

Do make sure you have good, modern HT fuses of the right value fitted as this will save the output transformers from destruction should an EL34 collapse.

Also, keep the mains fuse value as low as possible; try 5A and see if it holds up.

When changing HT fuses use a meter to make sure the HT line is at 0V. If the power supply capacitors have bleed resistors fitted, as they should for safety, then you will be OK. If there are none then you could get a horrible electric shock hours after the amp has been switched off, so beware.

As an inveterate fiddler I hope you at least own and know how to use a Voltmeter to check such things; they are cheap these days. Get one with a 1kV range. Also wear rubber soled shoes and don't hold onto, or let your body contact anything. We used to supply electrical safety gloves with World Audio Design kits and you may like to get a pair. Try RS Components or Farnell, online.

It's a pity you did not send us a picture. **NK**

JACKIE LEVEN

I would like to thank Paul Rigby for his article on Jackie Leven in the December edition. Until 2009, my only knowledge of Jackie's existence was due to tracks used by Noel Keywood in his equipment reviews. When Jackie's name appeared on the gig list at my local venue, I had to go. What a man and what a talent. I was hooked and now own several of his CDs, some earlier Doll By Doll vinyl and the excellent 2004 DVD of his performance at Rockpalast.

For anyone unfamiliar with his work, I would recommend 'Fairy Tales for Hard Men' – the one that Noel uses as a review tool – as a good place to start and there are also plenty of videos of him on YouTube. It is sad that he was not given wider exposure by the media. Later With Jools Holland would have been a good vehicle. Considering the life that he led (there are many references to this in his songs and in his introductions) I hope that someone writes his biography.

Now to hi-fi matters. As primarily a vinyl enthusiast who has an ever-expanding CD collection, I was looking to upgrade my CD player – currently a Marantz CD6000K1 that has served me well for many years. However,

the increasing number of high-quality digital downloads available has led me to think that adding a DAC may be a better solution. For computer audio the Epiphany DAC looks interesting but that does not address the CD problem.

The Beresford Caiman looks interesting but this has been superseded by the Bushmaster, which does not have a USB input.

Can you suggest a reasonably priced DAC that will upgrade my CD player and also allow me to play high-quality 24-bit digital downloads via the USB sockets on my laptop.

Paul Topping

Jackie Leven was indeed an underrated artist during his tragically short lifetime. Luckily, he seems to be getting more recognition these days. If any more evidence was needed he gets a number of name checks in Ian Rankin's latest Rebus novel 'Standing In Another Man's Grave!' **JM**



JACKIE LEVEN

FAIRY TALES FOR HARD MEN

Jackie Leven's 'Fairy Tales for Hard Men' is a good place to start a collection, says Paul Topping.

Jackie was recognised as 'artist of the year' by Q magazine some time ago, I recall, but otherwise he appears little known. He was his own genre it seems; I can think of few artists who sang on the subjects he covered, poverty and alienation always hovering in the background. His Scots upbringing I guess informed this, although 'Call Mother A Lonely Field', a beautiful and sad song, refers to "young Irish men in English Towns" alluding to London. At least, I think it does, as Jackie lived in Maida Vale, North London, close to Kilburn, once resolutely Irish. He liked his LPs and I believe Ian Rankin was a friend.

On the matter of a DAC with all that you need, your prayers are answered by the new Furutech Esprit reviewed on p51 of this issue.

NK

Look Lively

ADL has released a new headphone amplifier/DAC combo within a familiar chassis. Paul Rigby and Noel Keywood review the Esprit.



A quick look at the new Esprit DAC from Alpha Design Laboratories (ADL being the 'value for money' brand of Japanese outfit Furutech) may prompt a double-take. It looks very much like that company's GT40 combined headphone amp, DAC and phono amp.

But that's no surprise; ADL is in the process of building a family of products within its recognizably similar chassis – with more to come, apparently. Furutech's Graeme Coley, speaking from Hong Kong, told me "We wanted the Esprit to be compact in size. There's a local issue too: in Japanese houses, there's not a lot of space."

The Esprit is a direct descendant of the GT40, "We produced that because we had been involved in analogue for some time, working on a phono stage, then we released a pair of high-end USB cables and our engineer got really involved in USB DACs. We decided to combine the three so that people could record their LPs. We later took a survey and found that some people preferred to use their own phono stage because

they already had a high quality phono stage. We thought, let's leave that out of the Esprit and upgrade the DAC which meant that we could incorporate the coaxial and optical inputs and the digital outs on the back".

Finished in silver or black, the Esprit features an upgraded headphone amplifier, with a full size jack, sourced directly from Furutech (as are all connectors and terminals – bar the optical port), handling loads up to 600 Ohms and using a Texas Instruments TI-TPA6120A2 chip.

Also on the front fascia is an illuminated power switch, source selector switch to choose between Line 1 and 2, Coaxial, USB and Optical for the input, a recording attenuator to prevent overload when recording, and a volume knob, "...that took us a while to choose because we wanted to find a very low noise model", said Coley. "That was one of the hardest choices to make. We tested fifteen before we settled on that one, an upgraded variant using a higher grade A-Type variable resistor – the GT40 utilised a B-type".

In fact, for the Esprit, ADL has upgraded just about everything

except the Tenor USB chip.

Other improvements include the 24bit/192kHz WM8716 Wolfson DAC plus a higher rated ADC (Analogue-to-Digital Converter) chip, the 24bit/192kHz Cirrus Logic CS5361.

"Removing the phono stage from the initial GT40 specification improved the noise situation while a few specialists in Japan looked at our circuit boards to rework them and lower the noise floor still further".

On the rear of the chassis are USB for computer connection, for both recording and playback. An Optical output associated with it provides an optional S/PDIF digital connection to the hi-fi system. There are Optical and Coaxial S/PDIF inputs which are switchable between 96kHz and 192kHz (although you can only record at 96kHz). One noticeable quirk is that, to toggle between the 96kHz and 192kHz play options, you need to power down, reselect your chosen sampling rate and then power up again.

You also receive a pair of outputs whose output can be adjusted with the volume control, to connect directly to a preamp or power amp. Two Line-in jacks connect to a phono

stage, opening up the possibility to record your LPs onto your computer.

The Esprit uses an external power supply, an unsettling compromise, as Coley admits, "It's not the perfect situation, we would prefer the power supply to be inside but size restrictions don't allow it. We did work hard on the external power model, testing many adaptors. We initially planned to have the GT40 powered by USB power only but we found that it didn't have the oomph we wanted. The Esprit does use a better quality power supply than the GT40, however".

ADL, being an audiophile-friendly outfit, has decided to keep its options open on the matter, "One of the biggest requests that we have had is to introduce a better power supply for those users who wish to upgrade at a later date. On that question that answer is...well, it's pending".

Other improvements over the GT40 include the Esprit's main coupling capacitors, which now feature audio grade ELNA ROB, and ELNA RFS series capacitors while the DAC Operational Amplifier has been upgraded to a Burr Brown OPA2134 to reduce noise and to improve sound quality.

The Esprit spans 150x141x57mm and weighs in at just 900g

SOUND QUALITY

Sound tests were initially undertaken using a Quad Core PC with a standard hard disk, attached to a Rega Mira integrated amplifier plus a pair of AE Radiance One 'speakers sitting on a pair of HiFi Racks Podium T5 III stands.

With a 24bit/192kHz version of the striding, determined solo piano of Joachim Kwetzinsky's 'Shchedrin: Basso Ostinato' from the album, 'Polyphonic Dialogues', I listened to it via my Arcam rDAC, initially. The Esprit brought in a focus that imposed a chiseled determination within the walking chords. On the Esprit the crashing chords almost halfway through the track confirmed that the piano body was made out of wood. The resonance was quite

thrilling.

Similarly, Marianne Thorsen's solo violin work within Mozart's Violin Concerto No.4 in D major was light on its feet, swift and nippy. Upper mids were feather light and detailed while the lower mids offered a smooth, low distortion, security that underpinned the track.

Moving to the USB port now and throttling back to 24bit/96kHz, I connected my MacBook Pro with SSD plus a Tellurium Q Black USB cable and played Harry 'Big Daddy' Hypolite's blues track, 'Big Bad Girl' via the audiophile quality, Decibel software. The Esprit output was both focused and lean. Upper mids were crisp and fully formed and best highlighted by the plectrum snapping down the acoustic guitar strings while what bass could be heard on this track, restricted largely to the lower vocal registers, were lacking in fuss but had a taut, efficient aspect.

Moving to the headphone amplifier module, I used my Icon HP8 Mk.II as a reference. Playing 'Love Of My Life' from Frank Zappa's live album, 'Tinseltown Rebellion', the Esprit had that inherent solid state chill that infused the music when compared to the Icon's warmer valve presentation. The Esprit thus felt slightly clinical in comparison, especially during the remarkable falsetto vocal sequences from Bob Harris. That won't bother solid state fans, of course and, in more general terms, the Esprit was both precise in how it tackled each instrument and within the overall arrangement.

CONCLUSION

Although the Esprit lacks some of the versatility of the company's own GT40, the dropping of the phono amp module has allowed the remaining two modules: both DAC and headphone amplifier, to be further enhanced to improve both sound output and feature count. Offering excellent sonics and a design that wrecks of quality, the ADL Esprit is a flexible and adaptable little box that would enhance the quality of any

computer system.

RECORDING WITH THE ESPRIT

We are often asked by readers how best to archive LPs. The Esprit's ADC looked very good under measurement with our Rohde & Schwarz UPV analyser, right up to 24/192 resolution. So I spent many happy hours recording LPs to a MacBook Pro to see what issues arose and assess sound quality. PC users will have to install Windows drivers, but otherwise my observations should apply equally to PC, but I did not check this.

The MacBook saw the Furutech as 'ADL ESPRIT USB DAC' in the Sound control panel, where it must be selected. The Audio/Midi control panel in Utilities must also be set to 24/96 on input and output, because Macs re-sample to the frequency selected so you may get CD quality (16bit/44.1kHz sample rate) unless this is set properly.

You need a recording programme like the free Audacity programme I used, available for Mac and PC. This takes a little learning and is fiddly, and you do need to be careful about level and resolution settings; best to go to Preferences and set default as 24bit, and 96k sample rate.

To spin vinyl I used a Rega P3/24 turntable fitted with an Ortofon 2M Black as a test mule, because the 2M Black has high output. It fed an Icon Audio PS1.2 valve phono stage which has plenty of gain and a ground lift in case a ground loop produced hum.

Hum did not occur using the PS1.2, with the MacBook on battery power or connected to its mains charger. So there were no issues here, at least in my set up.

At full gain on the PS1.2 this phono stage overwhelmed the Esprit's recording attenuator even when it was set to maximum attenuation of -12dB; the red LED winked away busily. A valve phono stage can swing up to 40V out, unlike 10V for transistor stages. An input record level control would solve this and improve flexibility. I turned down output on the PS1.2 as it has



Beside the S/PDIF digital inputs lies a tiny slide switch (left) for selection of 192k or 96k sample rates. This is best left at 96kHz, except when 192 is played.

The optical S/PDIF output delivers USB digital only.

Plug a turntable phono stage into a Line input and you can record to a computer via USB.

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adjustable output level. Record level needs a re-think on the Esprit.

Switching repeatedly between inputs when recording from CD highlighted the fact that the input selector isn't clearly marked. A tiny indent shows position and it isn't easy to see, especially in dim light.

Other drawbacks are lack of remote control and absence of balanced XLR outputs, but doubtless these will appear later on a premium version.

I used the Esprit to directly feed our in-house Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve monoblock power amplifiers driving a pair of Quadral Wotan VIII loudspeakers that have revealing ribbon tweeters. There was plenty of gain in the system: volume had to be kept down on the Esprit.

Playing CDs with a Cyrus CD-t transport through the Esprit, using it as a DAC, revealed a nice clean sound with crystalline but clear cut treble. I heard lovely clarity and softness: the Esprit is not soft sounding. Spinning the difficult 'Rockferry' (it had digital distortion added for 'graunch') underlined that the Esprit is very clean subjectively. With 'Syrup & Honey' though, I heard some quite pronounced sibilants fly at me as Duffy hissed "spend your time" into the microphone. This is a take-no-prisoners DAC but it is crystal clear too and impressive.

I recorded digitally from CD, via electrical S/PDIF from the transport to the Esprit, then out to the computer via USB. This invokes a change of digital format, as S/PDIF is contiguous but USB packetised. Playing back imposes a reverse procedure and there was a slight loss of body to the Stranglers singing 'Always the Sun' from their Dreamtime CD.

The slight lightening of the sound was perceptible with Nigel Kennedy playing Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' from Spring, recording digitally from CD, but the recording was again sparklingly clean and clear.

There were no problems either with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing 'Scheherazade': scale was maintained, there was plenty of space around instruments and sections, and the lone violin playing a lilting solo sounded pure.

Recording LP was interesting and the results impressive.

Spinning Mark Knopfler's beautifully recorded and cut 'Kill to Get Crimson' LP gave a recording that on playback in a way sounded a trifle better than the LP. It had lost a little of the vinyl warmth, sharpened up and hardened up in the treble to sound a tad clearer and better defined. Treble quality was superb and the sound a trace drier than the LP played back alone, A/B comparisons showed.

But the basic quality and spirit of the LP remained; the ADC, USB convertor and what have you in the digital transmission path did a good job in retaining a sound that was quite lovely and far better than I have heard from CD, as you would hope. The chiming chords from Knopfler's guitar were lush in harmonics and

completely free of that bleached quality of CD. Of course, this is a 24bit system with far more resolution and less quantisation noise than CD, but all the same whilst I could hear a certain digital-ness had been added (this could well come from the Mac, so I hesitate to pin blame on Furutech) what I heard was still very much 'analogue' in the loveliness of its timbral breadth and believability.

CONCLUSION

The Esprit is a great way to record music and makes recording LP in high resolution digital relatively easy and pain free. After doing this you will realise just how poor CD is, making the Esprit something of a domestic hi-fi revelation in my view.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Both optical and electrical S/PDIF inputs worked up to the maximum 192kHz sample rate, giving a frequency response flat to 28kHz our analysis shows, that measures -3dB at 36kHz, a little below many rivals, but this is unlikely to be very apparent in use. High sample rate and extended bandwidth avoids in-band aliasing products and phase error.

Distortion via S/PDIF at -60dB, 16bit, measured 0.28% against a common value of 0.22% for most CD players and associated DACs. With 24bit distortion sank to 0.13% (96k selected on rear switch), analysis showing this comprised noise. It is possible to record 0.02% with 24bit, where noise is lower but this is a little academic as noise with 24bit is very low in extraordinarily low in any case.

USB gave similar results, with bandwidth to 28kHz with a 96kHz sample rate input and distortion measuring 0.15% at -60dB with 24bit resolution. This makes the USB input better than most in terms of distortion, and noise was low too at -110dB, measured with a notched out test tone. These results approach those of the Epiphany E-DAC which uses the same USB receiver chip.

Frequency response of the preamp measured flat to 100kHz and gain was x4 (12dB). Maximum output was 7.4V so input overload occurred at 1.9V at full gain, but turning volume down avoids output stage overload.

The ADC was very linear. Recording a 997Hz, -60dB tone then playing it back through the S/PDIF output showed just a few distortion harmonics totalling 0.22%, as well as no quantisation noise or spurious products our analysis shows. Playing back through the internal DAC increased this to 0.4%. Noise measured -100dB IEC A weighted. Frequency response of the ADC alone reached to 28kHz (-1dB) with 96k sample rate and rolled down smoothly toward the 48k limit, measuring -3dB at 36kHz.

The Furutech Esprit is flexible and measures well. It doesn't offer the best figures possible with 24bit through S/PDIF but its Tenor USB receiver is very linear and less noisy than most, and the on-board 24/96 ADC measured very well. It is a tightly engineered package that looks good all round under measurement. NK

Frequency response, DAC (-1dB)
192kHz sample rate 2Hz-28kHz
ADC 2Hz-28kHz

Distortion S/PDIF (%) 16 / 24bit
0dB 0.006 / 0.006
-60dB 0.34 / 0.13

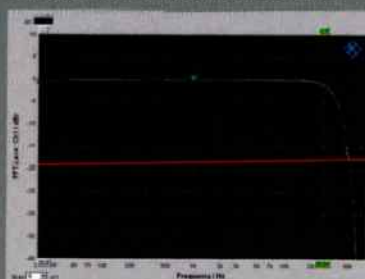
Separation (1kHz) 110dB
Noise (IEC A) -110dB
Dynamic range (EIAJ, 16/24bit) 101 / 105dB

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FREQUENCY RESPONSE 192k



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Wishful Thinking

Paul Rigby considers his Christmas pressies...and dreams of a valve powered mince pie.

NAME: Paul Rigby

STATUS: vinyl head



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The integrated power amp version of the Iridium was amazing. It deserved every one of the five globes attributed to it within my recent review but the thought of a monoblock version of this super amp makes my mouth water. What do you get? Single Ended Class A (SECA) power with phono input and balanced bridge output offering 45W per monoblock into 8 Ohms. Unlike the original Iridium which has power emerging from

the amplifier section, through the speaker and then to ground, the new balanced monoblocks avoid the signal to ground element, lowering distortion.

JUST AUDIO μHA-120 £250/AHA-120 PORTABLE HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS £320
www.justaudio.co.uk

OK, I'm being greedy with this one but I really do need two portable headphone amps, honest! Both are housed in a tiny chassis, made from a soft silver anodised extruded aluminium casework. USB charging connection is via a standard mini USB cable and there are two switches: one for the charge rate and the second for internal battery/USB power. Both the class AB (μHA-120) and class A (AHA-120) portable headphone amplifiers incorporate discrete output stages and high grade capacitors while the PCBs are high quality double sided with a gold finish on the exposed metal pads. Yum.



T. REX - THE SLIDER: 40TH ANNIVERSARY BOX SET £110
www.demonmusicgroup.co.uk

This classic album, initially released in July 1972, includes two CDs, a DVD, the album pressed on 180gm vinyl, three 7" singles and a 48-page case bound book. The package includes a 105 minute filmed interview with Tony Visconti, TV footage including performances of 'Telegram Sam' and 'Metal Guru' from Top Of The Pops, ITV performance footage of 'Cadillac', 'Spaceball Ricochet' and 'Telegram Sam' plus Marc's interview with Russell Harty from 1972 and a 40 page book of sheet music, a poster plus reproductions of memorabilia and ephemera. Gimme!

CAVALLI AUDIO LIQUID LIGHTNING HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER £4,000
www.highendworkshop.co.uk

An electrostatic headphone amplifier can either be tube or solid-state. I currently use the stock valve amp with my Stax 007 headphones and a lovely sound it makes too but this unit promises to exceed even that, despite the Liquid Lightning's solid state heart. It arrives with two output jacks, with a bias of 580V for Jack 1 (Stax Pro bias) and at the owner's choice of 580V (Stax), 540V (Sennheiser HE60) or 500V (Sennheiser HE90) for Jack 2, a great idea that offers so much more flexibility. Utilising high quality components, I look forward to laying my hands on one.



GENESIS - 1976-1982 VINYL BOX SET £90
www.emicatalogue.com

This box set is effectively Part Two, Part One covered 1970-1975. The new box set houses five heavyweight vinyl albums, replicating the original vinyl artwork. They include, 'Trick Of The Tail', 'Wind & Wuthering', 'And Then there Were Three', 'Duke' and 'Abacab' and featuring the 2007 mix. I reviewed the first part in Hi-Fi World and noted that the masters were contentious, yes, but they highlighted different aspects of the mix. In effect, listening to the records make you feel that you're sitting in a different part of the auditorium. Giving you a different take on familiar music.

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Wishful Thinking

Not wishing, but maybe the odd little dream....

NAME: Haden Boardman

STATUS: reviewer of old kit



ORTOFON XPRESSION CARTRIDGE £3,500
www.henleydesigns.co.uk

My obsession with all things Ortofon started early, very early. A 1980s MC10 blew away some 'famous name' Japanese cartridges at eight times the price. For the past 20+ years the beloved Ortofon SPU has been my reference in its various 'gold' guises. A total monster, heavy, requiring a very heavy arm and heavy plinth to tame the beast. But the weight of sound, the soul and the emotion, the sheer clarity of the thing; nothing has come close... Four grams tracking, not for the faint hearted. And now a 'new' version of the SPU concept, higher output and lower weight...

GOODMANS AXIOM 80 FULL RANGE LOUDSPEAKER AROUND £1500

Despite a recent addiction for heavy wooden horns and small compression unit loudspeakers, I still lust after a pair of these. Die-cast chassis support a generous Alnico magnet structure. The entire ribbed paper cone and voice coil assembly is uniquely held in place via small Bakelite cantilevers, front and rear of the cone and there is no surround at all. A small Bakelite 'whizzer' is fitted to extend the high frequencies. A seventy five year old design, still setting reference points. The Japanese are huge fans... I do not have their deep pockets... but maybe someone for Christmas?



PX4 DIRECTLY HEATED TRIODE VALVES AROUND £500

'Real' triode valves fall into two categories of low and medium 'mu' – roughly the valve's gain. The higher this is, as a general rule, less linear and poorer the sound. The PX4 is low 'mu', and low in impedance, is incredibly linear, leaving the much more famous 300Bs absolutely in their wake. Made only by The Marconi Osram Valve Company, this is the ultimate triode valve, a sound sweeter than honey. Four watts single ended; to drive my system I need three per channel; two on bass, and one on an HF horn.

CHORD COMPANY SARUM / MAINS SUPPLY UPGRADE £750 per metre

www.chordcompany.co.uk

I need to run two ten metre lengths of shielded mains cable into my listening room, terminating them in 'MK' metal clad switchless sockets. They will be mounted on a solid walnut switch board cut to 'golden ratios'. Of course all power leads need to match, or else they may pick up RFI and noise. A separate ground earth pole cannot harm either. And the cable I dream about using is Chord Company Sarum, at just £750/metre!



TICKETS & HOTEL FOR WAGNER; DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN, AT BAYREUTH £10,000

www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/english/english_156.html

I hated Wagner, almost with a passion; long and boring surely. There is that one well-known ditty, Ride of the Valkyries, but other than that, most opera had totally failed to communicate to me. Attending a concert by the Welsh National Opera I became hooked on opera. It is hard not to be impressed by seven harps, a barrage of tympani and the sheer scale of it. Even the best High Fidelity system cannot compete. So now I would like to see the full Ring cycle live...

Wishful Thinking

Here are my hot tips, and wish list for a Christmas stocking.

NAME: Rafael Todes

STATUS: musician

LOGITECH SQUEEZEBOX £199
www.pcworld.co.uk

This is a mini server/streamer at a knock-down price. It will play digital radio stations from around the world, it plays high resolution files from a hard disk, it will even stream music from another room. If you have a Spotify account, it'll play these files, and will even play BBC Radio 3 at a higher bit-rate than is otherwise available. A fun product, which does a lot of things! It can be further upgraded with the Musical Fidelity VDACC2, and controlled from an iPod/iPad App.



STARTING-POINT SYSTEMS BATTERY NON-OVERSAMPLING DAC £79
www.starting-point-systems.com

An inexpensive and highly artful battery operated DAC which utilises the last non-oversampling Philips chip, the TDA1543, together with a PP3 battery power supply, which avoids the problems that mains supplies bring. The cheapest version for £79 doesn't include a case, there is a more finished version for £145 with an aluminium case and two batteries. The sound is smooth and analogue-like, a real bargain for those searching for a toe in the high-end at a rock-bottom price.

BEL CANTO C51 INTEGRATED POWER AMPLIFIER £1799
www.coherent-systems.co.uk

This beautifully designed bit of kit has USB, moving magnet phono inputs, 5 digital inputs, using an in-built high quality DAC. Engaging, musical and fluid, it is an amazing performer for something that does everything except stream, and you can use your laptop for that!



DEOXIT D5 CONTACT CLEANER SPRAY £19.95
www.russandrews.com

The best way to spring-clean your cable connections, and to bring some sparkle back to a system. It penetrates through the plating to seal the base metal and stop corrosion building up. Available from Russ Andrews;



KNOSTLI DISCO ANTISTAT RECORD CLEANING SYSTEM £30
www.amazon.co.uk

This is the best-value and most thorough way to clean the clicks and pops out of records. The kit includes a bath, with built-in brushes, and an alcohol-based solution that really gets to grips with audio nasties.

Wishful Thinking

Here are things you can buy and one you can't – but I can wish!

NAME: Tony Bolton

STATUS: valve head and vinylista



BLUE HORIZON PROMAT £64.95
www.bluehorizonideas.com

Turntable mats can make a surprisingly big difference to the sound of your turntable, and this example from Blue Horizon is particularly effective. It is made from what is described as an Indian rubber, cork and leather compound. It is made in two layers, the top one being cut for a label recess. Compared to the sound from felt mats the bass became more substantial and deeper, and the treble gained hugely in smoothness and extension. Very effective and worth the money.

ATLAS BURN-IN AND DEMAGNETISING DISC £10.00
www.atlascables.com

This disc, first released in 2006, contains a sequence of carefully chosen frequencies and beats that both burn-in your cables or components, and remove any residual magnetism that has built up in your system. It certainly seemed to have a beneficial effect on my systems when I tried it.

I felt that there was greater clarity and depth of texture to sounds after using it, with the music feeling a bit more focussed. I use the disc every few weeks to maintain the performance of my systems. A useful addition to the toolbox.



TURNTABLE TUNE-UP KIT £38.00
www.britishaudio.co.uk

This is a particularly useful combination of items. The set consists of four bottles, containing bearing oil, stylus cleaner, belt cleaner and contact cleaner. Alongside these are cotton buds and lint free cleaning pads. Also supplied is a two point cartridge alignment gauge and a selection of non magnetic, stainless steel, Allen headed fixings for your cartridge. There are also appropriate sized washers and nuts, along with an Allen key and miniature combination spanner. Another useful addition to the toolbox, I use some part of this kit on a regular basis.

REVEEL AND RELEES PACK £30.00
www.russandrews.com

Available separately or in this pairing (saving £7 in the process) ReVeel and ReleeS do exactly what they say in the name, to the sound of your CDs. The former comes in sachets containing preloaded wipes. The disc needs to be rinsed off after wiping, removing dirt and the mould release agent left from the manufacturing process. The results were improvements in detailing and sound staging, while ReleeS seemed to tidy up the edges and shape of the sounds as it removed the static charge.



HIS MASTER'S VOICE MODEL 203 UPRIGHT GRAND GRAMOPHONE £6650 SECONDHAND

If anyone wishes to give me one of these for Christmas I shall be most grateful. This is the largest acoustic gramophone that HMV made, measuring 49 1/2 ins. tall, 29 ins. wide and 23 1/4 ins. deep. Inside is a four spring motor, playing four 12in sides or six 10in sides on one winding. All metal fittings are gold plated. Inside there is nine feet of exponential horn, made of terne plate, folded into the solid mahogany cabinet. The sound is excellent with surprisingly deep and full bodied bass. These cost £750/0/0 new in the late 1920s (approx. £7,500 in today's money) and one recently went through ebay for £6,650, so they seem inflation proofed as well!

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Wishful Thinking

Here's my pick of little things that make nice Christmas presents.

NAME: Jon Myles

STATUS: reviewer and digital fiend



VERTERE D-FI CABLES FROM £65
www.vertereacoustics.com

No-one questions the sonic differences between speaker cables any more – but there are still those who nay-say the gains a good USB connection can make. Well, there's no nay-saying the quality of Vertere's D-Fi range. Hook up a laptop to your hi-fi and the extra detail and musical detail they convey is astonishing. Decent recordings are shorn of their sometimes mechanical digital sheen and come across with real authority. The brainchild of Roksan founder Touraj Moghaddam the cables provide a startling demonstration of what can be achieved by the most unpromising of sound sources if you take a little care.

AUDIRVANA PLUS £39
www.audirvana.com

If you're serious about getting good sound from your Apple Mac then this affordable piece of software is a no-brainer. Audirvana Plus is a step up from the previous free version both in sound and features – now including FLAC support, unlimited maximum sample rate, exclusive access mode and playback from memory. It also offers full iTunes integration to boot. Obviously all this would be pointless if it didn't sound good. But it does. There's a commendably smooth and spacious soundstage which majors on drawing out the detail in good recordings. For the price it's a bargain.



FOSTEX HP-P1 HEADPHONE AMP AND DAC £485
www.fostexinternational.com

OK, at almost £500 the Fostex could hardly be called a stocking filler – but it's a quality piece of kit. Housed in a sleek aluminium alloy case it features a 32-bit DAC, three-step gain control to suit varying headphones, S/PDIF out and twin digital filters. It takes a digital signal from your iDevices dock connector, meaning it gives a significant quality boost to even semi-decent on-the-go headphones. Pair it up with a quality pair and those long journeys suddenly become a lot more enjoyable.

ETYMOTIC HF5 HEADPHONES £80
www.etymotic.com

And talking of headphones – we all know the first rule with any portable device is to replace the cheap set supplied in spend many hundreds of pounds on replacements – but for sheer sound per pound value Etymotic's offerings are hard slightly deeper into the ear than most to provide good isolation from outside noise and unlike some other models do boost bass or treble. Instead they have a neutral balance which majors on detail and clarity. You can spend more and get sensible price these are highly recommended.



PERFECT UPnP £30

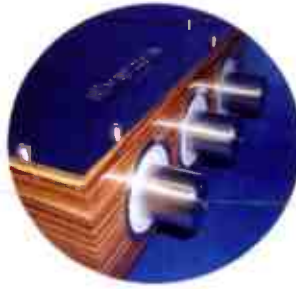
Best UPnP server on the market. Works with Mac and Windows, handles FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis and Apple Lossless. Cinch to add artwork and logical editing of metadata. An absolute steal at £30.

Or it would be if it existed. Because I've just made it up!

But this is what I really, really want and I have a suspicion a great many other people do too, judging by the posts on various hi-fi message boards regarding the complexities of achieving hassle-free streaming coupled with easy metadata editing.

It should be easy – but too often it can be a confusing mish-mash. So, someone out there: how about it?

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* *You only get out what you put in*

Wishful Thinking

Martin Pipe tells about his deep wishes for Christmas, deep wallet wishes that is.

NAME: Martin Pipe

STATUS: reviewer and collector



ELP LASER TURNTABLE US \$15,910
www.elpj.com

Custom-built in Japan to your specification, this is – so far – the only turntable to dispense with the ancient diamond hurtling around the groove. Instead, it uses two laser beams and some clever electronics to 'read' your record – LPs, singles and even 78s are catered for. Current ELP users include broadcasters, universities and the US Library of Congress. Hi-fi users too appreciate that they'll never again have to worry about record wear or replacing expensive styli. Today's models are claimed to be sonically-superior to the 1997 original. Such advantages have their price; specifically, over \$20,000 if you want the 'higher resolution' output option!

NAIM NDX MUSIC PLAYER NAIM NDX £2,995
www.naimaudio.com

Like others, I'm storing much of my music (including 24/96 vinyl 'rips') on a computer server. Although I miss the traditional CD and record-playing 'experience', there's no faulting the convenience; never again will I have to waste time hunting down a particular album. With such importance placed on networked music, it's sensible to go for the best-sounding streaming player I know of – and that's the smart-looking Naim NDX. It handles all key audio formats (including lossless), supports resolutions and sampling rates of up to 24/192 and can even be used as a DAC. It will tune into Internet radio too!



courtesy of Lou Dorren/QuadrasonicQuad.com

LOU DORREN CD-4 DEMODULATOR \$505
www.QuadrasonicQuad.com

Still on the subject of quad, one of the two formats that did it justice was the JVC-developed CD-4 (the other was 7.5ips four-channel tape, a UK rarity). With a good turntable, equipped with the right arm (low-capacitance leads were essential) and – most importantly – the right cartridge (with 50kHz response), cared-for CD-4 records could sound sublime. Until Lou Dorren designed one around 21st-century electronics, no CD-4 'demodulators' (decoders) had been produced since the mid-70s. Sadly, only a limited quantity were built to order (and supplied with a CD-4 capable cartridge). The offer no longer stands; what better entry, then, for a 'wish list'?

B+W NAUTILUS 802 SPEAKERS £11500.00 PER PAIR
www.bowers-wilkins.com

I listen to a pair of the company's DM7s (sold to me at a 1988 boot-sale as 'disco speakers') in one of my 'regular-use' systems – in particular, their articulate bass is eminently satisfying. Most people aspire to the original £55,000 Nautilus speakers with their iconic Alienesque appendages, but having heard them in action at Abbey Road Studios I'm happy to settle for a set of 802s – specifically five, for multichannel music use (although their 70kg weight will make 'em awkward to reposition for 'true' quadrasonic recordings). Dynamics on tap, natural vocals and detailed highs. What more could one want?



OTARI MX5050 ANALOGUE TAPE DECK \$6000 (APPROX)

Even as late as twenty years ago, the serious reel-to-reel enthusiast had a choice of hardware (and, for that matter, tape stock). Studer/Revox, Nagra, Teac/Tascam, Stellavox and even Denon were all making machines. In 2012, only Otari remains loyal to the cause of quarter-inch analogue with this venerable machine. Like all professional recorders, the Japanese MX5050 can accommodate 10.5-inch reels, is a 'three header' (for off-tape monitoring) and employs the 'half-track' format – i.e. the width of the tape accommodates the two tracks of a stereo recording. It offers the all-important 15ips speed, as well as two others (3.75ips and 7.5ips). Those old master tapes beckon...



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Wishful Thinking

Here are some affordable gifts I'd like for Christmas, even if I have one of them!

NAME: Noel Keywood

STATUS: Editor

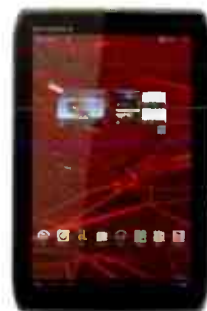


THE COMPLETE BEATLES RECORDING SESSIONS, AMAZON, PAPERBACK £72
www.amazon.co.uk

I already have this in truth, but must recommend it to anyone academically interested in the Abbey Road recording sessions, and much else. Considered the bible on the subject, it is incredibly detailed and even prints the studio records made at the time. A great read and a mightily impressive piece of research, the hardback costs big money, but Amazon sell the paperback for £72. A perfect Christmas present methinks, whether you get the LP box set or not.

MOTOROLA XOOM 2 MEDIA EDITION, £200, WIDELY AVAILABLE
www.motorola.com

I was completely impressed with this little tablet. Unlike most others it has an HDMI output that can feed video and audio to an AV receiver or TV, at higher quality than wireless connections. It has a remote control transmitter and can be used to control the hi-fi, TV, etc. The small Media Edition is a portable music player that can transmit music to the hi-fi over Bluetooth, or play it on the move of course. The Xoom does it all, is affordable and is a great way to while away the hours over Christmas.



OPUS DAC, TWISTED PEAR AUDIO, \$75
www.twistedpearaudio.com/digital/opus.aspx

Aha! The top Wolfson DAC, the WM8741, on a small board for just \$75 from the USA. It costs even less if you build it all yourself. The Opus DAC is a bargain from Twisted Pear Audio (www.twistedpearaudio.com) and I definitely should be getting one to fiddle with. Amazingly, it even handles DSD, from SACD players. This is a fascinating little project board and a great educational tool as well, for anyone interested in digital audio.

SONY VS SAMSUNG AMAZON £12
www.amazon.co.uk

Rarely do we in the West get much insight into how the giant corporations of the Far East operate. Akio Morita, founder of Sony, wrote 'Made In Japan', but this was hardly an unbiased view. Now Chang Sea-Jin, with a PhD from Pennsylvania, an MSc from Tokyo an MA from Seoul, Korea – so he should know a thing or two – offers a deep insight into the battle between the giants, Sony and Samsung. This is a hot topic and one that fascinates me. At just £12 it's a Christmas bargain in my view.



BEATLES STEREO LP BOX SET. AMAZON £300
www.amazon.co.uk

At £300 this is an obvious Christmas present and one I definitely want. The more I read about the early recording sessions and tapes, the more intrigued I become. I played my Beatles albums to death a long time ago so a set of mint LPs as a reference collectors piece appeals, even if I am unlikely to play them much, so as to preserve them.



HELMET
Strap It On
Back On Black

The thing about this album, released in 1991 and showcasing the Seattle version of Soundgarden-esque indie rock and heavy metal, was that when it initially appeared on the scene, not too many people knew about it. For those few who did, it formed a noteworthy impression that served as a significant taster for the band's breakthrough album, 'Meantime' (1992). 'Strap...' was short and to the point, including nine songs and spanning around an hour. Nevertheless, the album was full of energy so that, by the end, the listener is panting for breath. For metal fans who are looking for a more sincere and serious approach to metal rather than the more excessive, over the top mode yet who enjoy indie rock for what it can be, rather than the wimp-like or timid incarnation that it can sometimes effect, 'Strap...' will be a perfect listen. This is music of violence, cruel rhythms roam its grooved surface while hostile intent is reflected as soon as the stylus hits the wax.

Anyone who knows Helmet's music will be less than surprised with the musical direction heard on this first album but they might raise a bushy eyebrow at the pure, lo-fi,



basic, rather stripped production along with the tone that it promotes. That is, the album sounds 'live' rather than cooked within studio technology. It's also for that very reason that this LP should be listened to in one sitting. Helmet offer you a live gig, a stream of emotion that begins with track one and ends when your ears stop bleeding. For those into that twilight world that hovers around the alt-indie and metal genres, run to your nearest vinyl reseller and grab a copy double quick. Look out for other Back On Black, Helmet releases: 'Meantime', 'Betty' and 'Aftertaste'.

THE ROLLING STONES
Some Girls: Live In Texas/
Checkerboard Lounge: Live
Chicago 1981
Eagle Vision

The Rolling Stones have been particularly active of late. Here are two worthy additions to that rather frantic activity.

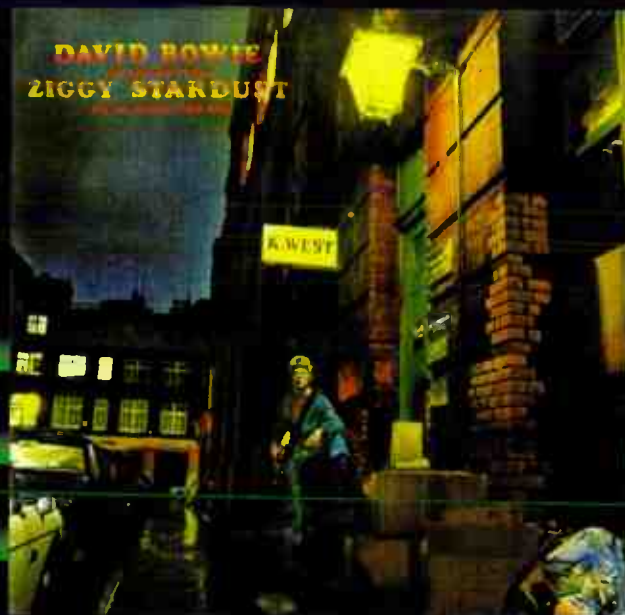
The 'Checkerboard' release was almost an accident. It is notable because it features the legendary blues singer, Muddy Waters. This show was recorded on 22 November, 1981 while the Stones were appearing elsewhere as part of a three-night run at the Rosemont Horizon, USA. It was during their night off that a selection of the

band decided to visit Buddy Guy's club, Checkerboard Lounge. Before long, those same Stones members, including Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Ron Wood, Ian Stewart, Lefty Dizz and also bluesmen Junior Wells and even Guy himself were on stage, jamming along with the rest. They joined the Waters outfit which included guitarist John Primer and harpist George "Mojo" Buford. Selections of the set have appeared as a bootleg but this release is the ultimate document of that special evening – and a little cracker it is too.

Created from multitrack tapes by Bob Clearmountain, all of the tapes have been sympathetically restored and remastered.

The 'Some Girls' package was recorded and filmed live in Texas, USA, during an extensive US tour in 1978. It has to be said, whether you like this musical period of the group or not, this package shows the band on fire. Here, they cared more about the music than posing on stage or skipping through multiple costume changes.

Both packs include two LPs pressed onto 180gm vinyl including a CD for digital fans or for those who might want to listen to the concert in their car along with a DVD of the concert. All are featured within a three-panel gatefold sleeve. So the bases are covered.



GILLAN *Future Shock* Vinyl 180

Ex-Deep Purple front man, Ian Gillan, created a melange of bands to structure his solo career. So, Ian Gillan the solo artist produced a series of quite polished rock records while the Ian Gillan Band promoted more prog-oriented music. Then there was Gillan, which is where this special edition release comes into play. Gillan offered more down and dirty, straight ahead heavy rock. Formed in 1978, the band, by the time of this release, had undergone line-up changes to settle upon the experienced team of: Bernie Torme (guitar), John McCoy (bass), Colin Towns (keyboards, ex-Ian Gillan Band) and Mick Underwood (drums).

The album itself is arguably the best thing Gillan ever created as a solo artist with its almost punk-like energy and hard rocking philosophy while the songs themselves show Gillan at his creative peak. It also has to be said that Colin Towns, co-writer on many of the tracks of this album, is a significant reason for the album's success, with his additional compositional keyboard touches that add a signature element to the album.

Oh – and that sleeve art? It lives up the LP's title because it is, in itself, shocking. One of the most inept pieces of original 'art' ever seen on

an LP cover. Not Vinyl 180's fault, obviously.

This release has been created as two editions. The basic 2LP version retails for £22.50 while the version under review retails for £35 and features a hardback book-like outer sleeve. The album itself has been excellently mastered and spread over two discs to be played at 45rpm. The discs are contained within inner sleeves, newly designed with the help of the Deep Purple Appreciation Society. A beautifully presented 12in square, soft back book completes the package, featuring lyrics, full page band member portraits and additional artwork.

DAVID BOWIE *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* EMI

With 'Ziggy', Bowie would combine several genres from both music and popular culture to form a character and an album that would reflect the newly emerging glam rock pop ethic with a futuristic kick in the teeth as supplied by the likes of 'Clockwork Orange' and his own past works that plugged into heavy rock to form this not-quite-concept-album.

The music touches on themes of corruption and debauchery while the nuclear dread is ever present. In

fact, there's almost a pop opera ethic that floats above the meaty guitars and string section fillgree, while there are riffs aplenty and catchy hooks to sweeten the impact. The sheer grandeur and cinematic quality of the album helped it to become a groundbreaking release. It was that ill at ease sense of drama that helped the album to be set apart from everything else that had come before it.

The 40th anniversary of this classic album has triggered a complete and successful remaster, which is contained within a gatefold sleeve along with an audio DVD of the original album that features additional tracks: an instrumental version of 'Moonage Daydream' plus 'The Supermen' (an alternative version, recorded at the time of 'Ziggy' that was originally recorded as the closing track on the album, 'The Man Who Sold The World'). Also on offer in this package is 'Velvet Goldmine' (recorded at the time of the album but eventually released as a B-Side to the hit single, 'Space Oddity' in 1975) and 'Sweet Head' (recorded for the 'Ziggy' album but thought, with its oral sex references, to be too provocative for inclusion).

The DVD includes additional 96/24 PCM tracks plus 5.1 surround sound 48/24 DTS and 48/24 PCM remixes by Ken Scott.

Quality vs Quantity

How different it is today where advances in technology have driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the considerable expense of quality. For many young people especially, the iPod, MP3 player or mobile telephone, connected to a pair of in-ear headphones, is their primary source of listening to music. The problem with this is that low-grade reproduced music is not going to deliver any significant beneficial outcomes for the listener. Probably the opposite will be true.



Listening to Music - the Benefits

There have been many studies carried out over the years that have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. It is an activity that is intrinsic to all cultures and is one of the few that involves using the whole brain. Listening to music is now often used for various therapeutic purposes because it is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

However, music can also be irritating if it's too loud or distorted, or if it distracts from other activities we are involved in. Most of the studies have been carried out using a reasonably good quality of musical reproduction. Quite remarkably, many people today and probably a majority of teens and late teens, are listening to a considerably lower quality level of music than their peers back in the 1970's. Back then a basic hi-fi system, often consisting of just a turntable, amplifier and a pair of speakers, was a 'must have'. Students going off to university would make it a priority to set themselves up with a decent hi-fi system – and the quality was, in retrospect, surprisingly good.



Style over substance?

Have advances in technology driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the expense of quality?



Low-grade music in this context is the result of two main factors, a) the delivery system (the hardware) and b) the source material (the 'music'). Although the amplification section of the mobile device is a technological wonder, it's not hi-fi! Nor are in-ear headphones. They can't hold a candle to the stereo-typical system from the 1970's. As far as the source material is concerned, it's being over-generous to call it music if it's a typical MP3 or AAC (the iTunes default format) download. These are both highly compressed formats with the most

popular download speed of 128 kbps being about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track (1411 kbps), so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through, for example, an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It is very poor quality made louder and this even affects the type of music listened to. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or

AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing, all the complexities of the music are lost, and the recordings are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Future of Recorded Music

If convenience has trumped quality for many people, we must ask what the future prospects are of maintaining high quality music recordings. Fortunately audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, continue to drive the demand for quality because there are some wonderful hi-end systems available and being sold today. Another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds pre-broadband and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Even iPods, if loaded with full resolution tracks, can deliver acceptable results through a good system. The trade-off is a smaller selection of stored music. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will become the norm as the wider public becomes aware of the tremendous quality benefit.



Audiophiles and Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

Hi-fi connoisseurs and audiophiles are very important to the music industry. By their nature, they are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry.



Specialist Dealers

Specialist hi-fi retailers also come into this category because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These specialist retailers also perform another very important function because, without them, hi-fi manufacturers would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb

system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK.**

They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

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SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
 40 High Street.
 t: 01233 624441
www.soundcraftifi.com

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 216 Moulsham Street.
 t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

E. Grinstead
AUDIO DESIGNS
 26 High Street.
 t: 01342 328065
www.audiodesigns.co.uk

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
 9 High Street,
 Hampton Wick.
 t: 020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead
AUDIO VENUE
 36 Queen Street.
 t: 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich
MARTINS HI-FI
 85-91 Ber Street.
 t: 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 44a High Street.
 t: 01268 779762
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 132/4 London Road.
 t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

LONDON

Ealing
AUDIO VENUE
 27 Bond Street.
 t: 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1
GRAHAMS HI-FI
 190a New North Road.
 t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
 61/63 Webbs Road.
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www.oandlhifi.co.uk

W20
O'BRIEN HI-FI
 60 Durham Road.
 t: 020 8946 1528
www.obrienhifi.com

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www.audience.org.uk

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Chester
ACOUSTICA
 17 Hoole Road.
 t: 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

Hull
THE AUDIO ROOM
 Savile Street, Hull
 t: 01482 891375
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York
SOUND ORGANISATION
 2 Gillygate.
 t: 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk

These specialist dealers have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.



STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
 SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
 FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
 VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The final spin

Revox became synonymous with open reel tape recording. Haden Boardman revisits some old friends...

The second recording device I ever owned was an open reel tape recorder, from my granddad. It was a mono 1950s effort, fitted with a Collaro deck, which could happily record and play at a high 15 inches per second. And very impressed I was!

I love open reel machines and can remember the first time my eyes alighted on a Revox machine in the flesh: it was the B77, at the Cleartone Hi-Fi Show back in the early nineteen-eighties. The B77 was last of a long line of machines produced domestically by the Swiss company Willi Studer, famous for large scale studio recorders.

The domestic story really begins with the E, F and G36 models, the earliest introduced back in 1956. The 'G' was the most famous and well documented, available in Mk I and Mk II forms. The G36 was the first Revox machine I ever owned. These late 1950s/ 1960s machines use valve electronics coupled with quite a terrific and well thought out mechanism. In contrast to the competition, the engineers at Revox chose to use a superb quality capstan motor of their own unique and bespoke design. Couple this with two direct drive Papst reel motors, and



B77 in all its glory, note NAB reel to left, Cine reel to right.

The '36 series models were discontinued by 1967 in favour of the 'new' transistorised A77 model, which was made for the next ten years. The leap in technology was quite enormous. The capstan motor was electronically controlled, with transistor electronics for audio, improved heads, head block and

The valve models all had a small ECL86 tube type mono amp and Philips full range speaker fitted. With the A77 stereo audio amplifiers and loudspeakers became optional.

The A77 was made in both Germany and Switzerland, the prefix 'G' or 'S' giving the game away. There were MkI, II, III and IV version, and tens of thousands of them were made.

Also introduced was the A700, based on the 'pro' models. This unit boasted a quartz PLL controlled capstan motor, but in truth there was no further upping of performance – some may say the less complex A77 was better.

The B77, introduced in 1978, combined elements of both A77 and A700, along with much better quality heads, a more stable chassis, servo controlled capstan and again an increase, mildly, in performance. audio electronics remained stuck in the 1960s. The heads in particular are incredible quality, pinched from the Studer models (apparently) and built from a material called REVORDUR. They have no ferrite bits and are very rigidly mounted to a state-of-the-art die-cast head block, again bolted to a



Variable speed and tape editing block, main differences between MkI and MkII

you have a simple but incredibly solid mechanism on which to base your deck.

construction. This resulted in a machine with a paper specification that left the G36 for dead.

state of the art die-cast chassis.

The B77 became 'MkII' – but loose no sleep as the only things Revox added are full variable speed, (+/- 10%), and an inbuilt editing block, both options on the MkI. Quoted specification (at 7 1/2 ips, two track) is a signal to noise ratio of 67 dB and a (tight +/- 1.5 dB) frequency response of 50Hz to 15 kHz... very dependent on tape quality.



Classic VU meters, what open reel would be complete without them...

In the modern digital era this performance, on paper, does not sound incredibly good. Having said that, as this is analogue, things vary, and I think Revox were being a bit coy here; the machine shown and tested here cleared 30kHz bandwidth with ease, and with a signal-to-noise better than 65dB, it is still pretty good!

One of the Achilles heels with open reels is the choice of recording media. The Japanese loved open reels, and produced some amazing media to record on to, both TDK and Maxell producing quality tapes in their time. Look for these brands today as new old stock. Avoid unknown brands that can shed oxide, suffer print through and deteriorate quickly in storage.

The B77 was a great crossover

Reel size switch vitally important to use, or else tension too high across heads.



machine for a budget recording studio. Again the machine featured here is a HS high speed version running at 15 inches per second. Domestically, for radio relay or vinyl recording 7 1/2 ips is frankly enough. But as a 'master' machine, 15 ips offers higher bandwidth and signal to noise; but obviously whilst munching its way through twice as much tape!

Back in the 1960s pre-recorded

open reel tapes were available freely, and frankly their quality can be simply amazing. After 50 years, sadly, most of them are now falling back to the 'base' metal

oxide! I have two copies of Harry Belafonte's landmark recording from Carnegie Hall recorded in the 1950s. A 3 3/4 ips four-track, and a 7 1/2 ips two track. The 'low fat' 3 3/4 remains



Head block front and back, star 'REVODUR' heads make the big difference from A77

playable, whilst the 7.5 is falling apart. Buying these things second hand is a gamble to say the least.

The quality offered by a good tape is frankly amazing, both for doing your own recordings and playing pre recordings. The 'low fat' 3 3/4 ips quarter track tape left the CD copy of Belafonte for dead, and was as good, better in some areas than the latest audiophile vinyl.

Open reel can offer audio quality on a higher plane than anything else. A good pre-recorded tape really is as close as you can get to an original master tape, and anything recorded pre-1985 is likely to be analogue at its source.

Cassette killed off pre-recorded tape, and in the UK very little was sold past the late 1960s. America and a certain internet based auction site still offer quite rich pickings, and if you are rich, there are a couple of companies still offering some open reel pre-recorded tapes.

Over the past two decades, I have only used open reel as a semi professional, recording small

scale pieces in a Blumlein style arrangement with B&O ribbon microphones has proven a revelation to my understanding and enjoyment of recorded music.

In use, the B77 is pretty bomb proof. I feel it does not sound any better than an A77, but due to the head quality, the mechanism quality, the (younger) age, it is now the machine to buy. The earlier E, F and G, are frankly just past it, unless you pour hundreds of pounds into one; heads are certain to be worn. A HS G36 was a UK modified cock up.

A77s sell for a bit less than B77s, but tend to be more quarter track than half track, and do not have that 'special' head. A decent half track B77 can be sourced for under £500 with ease, and unless a totally thrashed ex abused studio unit, will have lots of life left in it. There are a couple of belts that fail with age, but are easy to find – a non working belt driven mechanical counter can be expected! The absolute electronic simplicity of these decks helps (some may say crude by 1978 standards, but I disagree).



Worse part of the B77 machine, connections buried in the back, and of poor quality.

The rubbish phono connectors on the rear are a complete pain, as is the two pin IEC mains connector. If buying a machine, do try and avoid a thrashed pro version, they sound no better. If you have never dabbled, now is the time to try. Forget the rest, a B77 is best.

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"the merging of human voices creates a sublime magic that never fails to send tingles down my spine"



paul rigby

Do you have a musical guilty pleasure? I always remember seeing, on TV, a chap who represented 'cool' of the time: bit of White Stripes here, Dylan there. He swallowed hard in front of the camera as he opened the cupboard under the stairs to reveal... his complete set of Cliff Richard LPs and rarities!

I have a friend in my area who is acknowledged as a supreme expert on punk and has many hard core rarities to his name and yet I know that he is a big, yet rather quiet, fan of Girls Aloud.

My own eclectic tastes range from jazz vocal (Frank Sinatra, Mel Tormé) to ambient dub and intelligent techno (The Orb and Autechre) to Prog (Yes and Genesis) country (Johnny Cash and Emmy-Lou Harris), post rock (Godspeed You Black Emperor and Tortoise) post punk (PIL and Joy Division) and more.

Yet, I also have a secret love for the Bee Gees. It's the harmonies, you see. I'm a sucker for them. The merging of human voices creates a sublime magic that never fails to send tingles down my spine. Whether you're talking barbershop quartets to contemporary outfits that construct complex vocal harmonic constructions that make your hair stand on end. The UK, however, has never been big of the vocal harmony thing, it's been mainly a US-derived endeavour. So, whenever I wish to move past the Bee Gees and look for variations on vocal harmony, I tend to think 'import'.

That changed recently, when I sort of re-stumbled on a genre of music that I had briefly heard, several years ago, but failed to investigate properly. Rooted within the sixties, it's known by many names, but 'sunshine pop' is a favourite catch-all title. Bands who could be shoe-horned into the

milieu could include star outfits like The Beach Boys, the Mamas and the Papas and the Turtles but the entire genre was rooted around the talents of two individuals: Curt Boettcher and Gary Usher, who created, produced or where involved in a swathe of gentle, harmonically rich, melodic bands who produced a heap of cheerful, upbeat tracks from The Millennium, Sagittarius and, the more familiar, Association with others like Harpers Bizarre and the 5th Dimension becoming similarly important.

Other figures had a similarly important role within the genre such as the composer, arranger and producer David Axelrod (famed for his work with artists like Lou Rawls and the Electric Prunes), Jimmy Webb (who had hits such as 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' and 'Galveston') and Roger Nichols (whose songs have been sung by groups as diverse as The Carpenters to REM).

Granted, sunshine pop can appear, at first glance, to be shallow, superficial escapist flim-flam and some of its best known song hits such as 'Up, Up and Away' and 'Windy' are supremely irritating, verging on the obnoxious. Although, that's mainly due to over-exposure and media exploitation.

That's to ignore two things, however. Firstly, sunshine pop features a wealth of intricate productions that feature many classical elements but also include multi-part harmonies. Secondly, there are many groups out there, largely unsung or unknown, that contain rare treasure troves of musical magic. Bands include Brewer & Shipley, a largely forgotten duo who released a sunshine pop album ('Down In L.A.') in 1968, featuring tight, two-part, harmonies with sunshine pop that verges on folk. The Parade, a male trio, released their 1967 hit, 'Sunshine Girl' and were feted by many as the group that

helped establish the genre, displaying harmonies that sometimes resembled Crosby, Stills & Nash.

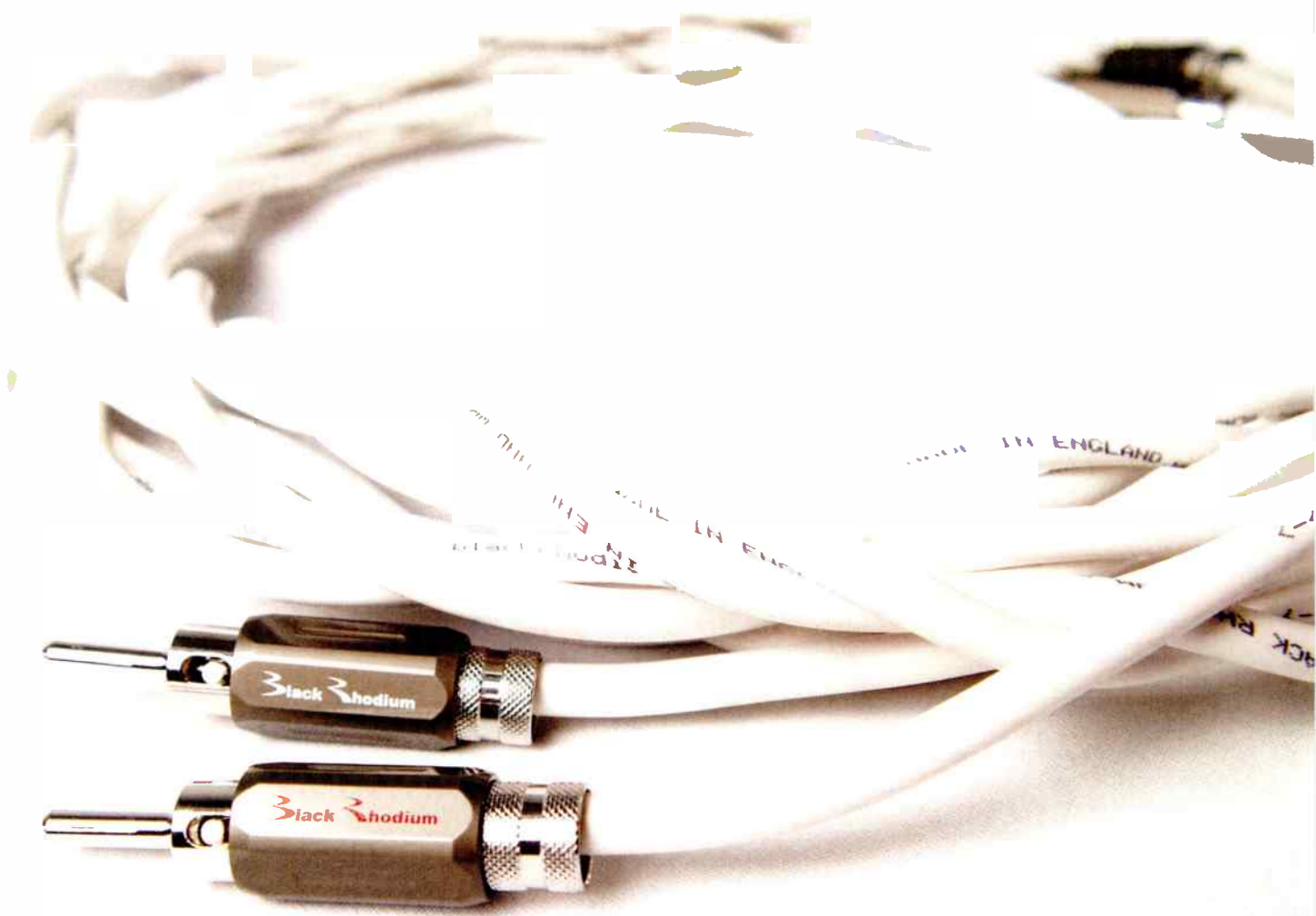
Even more obscure was the Twinn Connexion, a pair of identical male twins offering bright and breezy, inoffensive fare with a touch of baroque harpsichord here and a sitar there to add hippy flavour along with a suite of technically brilliant harmonic constructions.

Consider too, US comedian and film star, Jerry Lewis' son, Gary Lewis, who had a few unlikely hits in the early sixties with a series of nerdy, goofy pop singles. That all changed when he was drafted into the army during Vietnam. The entire musical scene shifted under his feet as psychedelia and drug-aded rock entered the fray. Lewis responded, during a brief period on leave, by popping into the studio and recording an album called 'Listen!', which was designed to keep his name in the public eye.

Arranged by the legendary Jack Nitzsche, the LP was a forward thinking, progressive piece of sunshine pop. Colours had a real pedigree, started by two ex-Motown songwriters, Jack Dalton and Gary Montgomery and featuring Carl Radle (Derek & the Dominos), David Marks, guitarist for The Beach Boys, drummer Chuck Blackwell (The Shindogs which included Leon Russell and Delaney Bramlett) and guitarist, Rob Edwards (The Challengers). The album has a definite 'Magical Mystery Tour' feeling about it and is a real find for aficionados.

If you want to know more about this sort of music then you may be surprised that you don't have to dig around the shadow-coated corners of the internet because the UK's own Now Sounds can supply all the sunshine pop you may ever need. Click on <http://www.cherryred.co.uk/newsounds.asp> for more information. ●

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"owning a radiogram was one of the aspirational targets for the more comfortably off classes"



tony bolton

Regular readers may have realised that Bolton Towers is home to a somewhat eclectic collection of audio equipment ranging from the two hi-fi systems that feature regularly in this magazine, via a selection of radiograms and portable electric players through to 1920s acoustic units. Most somehow manage to squeeze in the house somewhere, but on occasion, the odd impulse buy has had to be housed elsewhere.

Such was the case with a 1931 GEC-ophone Gala radiogram (made by the General Electric Company) that I bought at an auction several years ago. It was one of those occasions where the price was just right and the equipment looked interesting enough that my heart overruled my head and I bought it, knowing that I had nowhere to put it.

Once I had got it home I gave it a quick check over and discovered that the radio worked but the sound from the turntable was awful. Further investigation revealed that the rubber mountings inside the head had gone hard, and that the Bakelite casing of the head was too delicate to risk taking apart, so it was stored in a friend's attic until a replacement arm could be sourced.

And there it stayed until last week when my friend rang up to say that she had sold the house and could I collect my radiogram as she was moving out of the area. I duly turned up with another friend for added muscle, and some rope. This was tied around the radiogram and with two people taking the not inconsiderable weight at the top, and me at the bottom we managed to get it out of the attic without damage to the machine or ourselves - just!

Although this is quite a compact unit, measuring approximately 3 feet tall, 20 inches wide and about 17

inches deep, it is very solidly made, with quite a hefty chassis for the amplifier. The cabinet is nicely finished with a contrasting marquetry trim around the lid and the control panel. This sits on a panel that is recessed on a slope, with the tuning dial and knobs mounted on a bronzed metal escutcheon. The record deck is a single play direct drive unit with a rather substantial looking counter-balanced arm that uses the normal, single use, steel needles in the head. Inside the head is a large magnet with coils wrapped around the needle holder. It is the rubber mountings for this that have gone hard.

By pure chance, a suitable arm turned up on ebay the following day, so I currently have a bid in on it and my fingers crossed. In the meantime I am going to get the internals completely rewired since the 81 year old insulation is beginning to fall off the wires. Once it is up and running I will then have to work out what to do with it.

Although electrical recording had started in 1925, most reproduction machinery stayed acoustic until the early 1930s, due to the combination of the cost of this new class of record player, and the effects of the Great Depression which afflicted the economy for a lot of the decade. So this is a fairly rare machine, made when owning a radiogram was one of the aspirational targets for the more comfortably off classes.

The majority of people were still buying acoustic gramophones such as the 1930 Decca 73 floor standing model that my friend also owned. I use the past tense since she gave it to me on the grounds that she would not have space for it anymore in her new house and was going to use her portable machine for playing all of her jazz 78s.

I was now faced with the problem of where to put two

similarly sized pieces of furniture, but luckily the friend who provided the extra muscle is also an old jazz fan and took one look at the Decca and offered to provide it with a home, and to house the radiogram until I could get it overhauled. We duly transported them, one at a time, in the back of my car to his house and gave the Decca a check over.

The motor, a substantial twin spring unit that will play two 12 inch or three 10 inch sides on one winding, needed a drop of light oil on the bearings and the governor before settling down to run perfectly smoothly. The five foot long, folded exponential horn is made ofterne plate and fills most of the cabinet. The casework is solid mahogany and in generally good condition, apart from the lid which bears the usual scars from ornaments being placed on it. It was finished with shellac varnish that will have to be carefully matched to get the right colour.

The soundbox was found to need a bit more attention. This is the original Decca unit and is made of Mazak, or pot metal, which tended to fall apart after a few years. This one is complete with no signs of decay, but sounded rather fuzzy which would suggest that either the gaskets that surround the aluminium diaphragm had deteriorated, or the pivot points for the stylus bar need cleaning and readjusting. Both are fairly straightforward jobs that just need some care and a steady hand, and will be carried out soon so that my friend can enjoy the machine.

I can't help but keep these little bits of history alive. They're gloriously archaic, but mechanically ingenious, and often still work - just. My house and shed are full to capacity so now my friends have become museum extensions, but they seem to enjoy these little treasures from the past too. ●

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Lock & Load

Thomas Audio Support Systems has taken a unique view on the Hi-Fi shelf. Paul Rigby reviews the Magic-Rack 2

If you are in the market for a shelf system for your hi-fi, it doesn't take long to amass a healthy list of varied and innovative designs. The Magic-Rack 2, however, is a little different.

It looks odd, for a start, because it doesn't actually use shelves or isolation platforms. In fact, the only rigid part available is the frame.

This is because Thomas Audio approaches the idea of component support from a completely different angle. For Thomas Audio isolation is far more important to the final sound, so the company decided to remove the notion of rigid support in its entirety. "I found that the worst thing to make a rack out of was metal or glass," said boss, Simon Thomas. "So I started experimenting with lots of different materials for the straps like leather, fishing line, plastic strip, acrylic strip and Butyl rubber until I hit upon Neoprene rubber. For the frame support, I tried different woods like pine, oak and teak but found MDF the best, which I used on the first racks I built."

MDF was subsequently found to be too inconsistent and, frankly, dangerous to work with (it produces fine dust) so Thomas switched to the superior sounding Birch Ply while carbon fibre was drafted in for the frame's space supports.

Hand made in Dorking, Surrey, Thomas asserts that the Magic-Rack can be made to customer specifications for an extra fee (anything over and above the standard 760x560x450mm dimensions).

Currently, the Racks are finished in natural wood with a bee's wax finish but just about any other finish can be catered for, again at an extra cost.

Modular in construction, the rack is very easy to put together and is also robust so it can take the odd knock without a problem. Aesthetically, the Magic-Rack looks odd. Some will think it ugly and, with its exposed Allen key screws, unfinished. Others may have a problem with its wide dimensions. I quite liked its rugged appearance,



however. It felt like a practical tool that wasn't about to snap or break at a moment's notice.

SOUND QUALITY

Using my Avid Isorak as a reference and playing Leo Kottke's '6 and 12 String Guitar', I moved my reference, two-box, Densen B-475 CD player to the Magic-Rack. There was a real sense of the lowering of the noise floor across the entire soundstage, which was now ordered and more at ease with the performance. The background flavour to the track was a rich, chocolate-like blackness that provided space for more upper mid detail to reach the ears via the precise, finger plucking wizardry from Kottke's fingers. His guitar had an essence of reassurance too. Kottke sometimes plays with an aggressive style, leaning into the instrument during high tempo pieces, which adds tempo to his style. This weight was more obvious with the Magic-Rack, as was the almost total lack of bloom that can often infect this track due to the tsunami of detail that spews forth. The Magic-Rack took this

information in its stride, giving the pace of the track an added boost.

Spinning the Mel Tormé vinyl, 'Mel Tormé Swings Shubert Alley', I tried to isolate the effect even more and moved only the power supply of my Avid Acutus turntable from its current Decent wall shelf to the Magic-Rack. Again, the music enjoyed improvements in the reduction of the noise floor along with a greater degree in solidity to the Tormé vocal. The latter also benefitted from a higher degree of texture that added to his emotional performance. Treble, in the form of the accompanying cymbal effects, enjoyed extra space and air while the double bass was both rounded and weighty.

CONCLUSION

The Magic-Rack's aesthetic problems make you wonder if it will come up to scratch. I'm here to tell you that this support system is one of the most impressive storage and shelving systems that I have heard in a long time. It might look a little quirky and lacking in sophistication but it does the job and does it very well indeed.

VERDICT

It's often the most simple of designs that work the best and the Magic-Rack which improves system sound quality dramatically.

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AGAINST

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HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT ●●●●●

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Sarum Aray

Analogue addict Haden Boardman experiences the new top of the range digital cable from Chord Company.

Over the past decade, I have slowly progressed through Chord Company's various lines of interconnecting cable; from Signature, through the Indigo and a year or so back, to the range topping Sarum. I have been delighted with the performance of all; but the jump when the Sarum S/PDIF electrical cable came along was quite magnificent. I use it as the digital interconnect between my highly modified Marantz CD16, (Philips CDM4 metal mechanism), and Marantz Project D1 16 bit 2x TDA1541 double crown DAC.

The S/PDIF (Sony / Philips Digital Interface) linking the two is a critical piece of kit. Although you may think it purely digital and immune, it is not! The electrical S/PDIF connection is specified as 75 Ohm impedance, the output of the source component should be around 500mV, and the input sensitivity of the receiving unit no less than 200mV. The actual bits are an analogue signal, so cable bandwidth, screening and termination all matter. Reduced bandwidth increases jitter; increased analogue bandwidth lessens jitter by sharpening transition edges. Termination, electrical loss and in particular RF interference can all affect a digital signal's bit integrity and sound quality. The audible differences between different digital cables are significant in my personal experience.

Nigel Finn, Chord's highly respected cable guru / design engineer informed me of an upgrade of the Sarum I use to a Tuned Aray; in Nigel's words, "a new level". The new version of Sarum S/PDIF electrical interconnect is expensive at £1600 per metre, every additional metre

costing £750. So this is for high-end systems.

With a DGG recording of Stravinsky's Fire Bird Suite I cannot describe my total delight. The sound stage was 'truly' at the concert hall, individual instruments I had not been aware of before

seemingly appeared from nowhere, the stereo image was at once, open, wide, but pin sharp

precise; it was like listening to this old friend for the first time. It was astounding. Treble detail made me question my loudspeakers crossover settings; the sound was clearly subtly brighter. But it was not; there was simply much more detail being reproduced by the system.

The massive layered recording of ABBA's 'Day Before You Came' was laid wide open; the height of the image seemed enormous, the presence in the room huge. Again, a very familiar track, but the entire perspective had changed. Agnetha's vocals seemed almost more 'buried' in the mix, the instrumentation almost drowning her out; yet I could hear more of her voice than I have ever heard before. It was a different perspective.

Jimmy Smith Hammond tracks; 'Walk on the Wild Side' and 'The Cat'; The Hammond vibrato was just so much more real, the production on these tracks, the location of the instruments within the mix, recordings I have been listening to for many years became fresh, new, and delightful.

Don Williams' Greatest Hits, has always been a little heavy, with its classic Country & Western bass

lines. I have always used it as an aural guide to setting up speakers in room. The disc itself is pleasant enough, but to my ears, each track kind of blends in to the next. A disc that has tracks across a decade should sound different track to track, and now with the new Sarum in place, I can only describe a truly massive improvement. Different vocal treatment,

different guitars, all of a sudden came right to the forefront, I simply could not stop playing the disc.

One of my favourite LPs is an Al Jarreau disc GLOW. Long since deleted, and initially struggling to buy a copy on vinyl, I bought the CD instead, replacing it with the LP as soon as I had tracked a 12in copy down. The CD was one of those 'rubbish' 1980s issues, flat, lifeless, and almost unlistenable. However, Sarum Tuned Aray has opened it up and transformed this recording.

Whatever track I played, this cable offered a serious improvement. There is not one single disc that has not benefited from the arrival of this cable: treble cleaner, quicker, smoother. Midrange, again cleaner, quicker, more accurate. The transformation in the bass, is similarly major.

Stereo image was much more in control. Previously the sound stage in my system was very precise, but now the location of instruments and voices on digital sources is so pin sharp, it is almost unbelievable, not just between the two loudspeakers, but in height, depth, a real '3D' experience. It is, however, the layers of extra detail that most listeners will notice at first; it is so obvious it is astonishing.

I absolutely hate to say this, but this is the biggest digital upgrade I have made. Once you have heard its capabilities, there is no going back. The cost is outrageous, but then again, so is the performance. If your system is worthy, I can only urge you to give this cable a try.

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ACROSS

- 1 Scottish manufacturer
- 6 We are.....or Neil
- 7 Drop the needle in it
- 8 Cartridge maker missing an 'h'
- 10 Are they in the corner?
- 12 London called them
- 14 American LP standard
- 17 They broke down the wall
- 19 Over your ears?
- 23 One Elvis?
- 24 Rotates the disc
- 25 From Salisbury
- 26 No need for stands!

DOWN

- 2 Hits you with his rhythm stick
- 3 Analogue - No!
- 4 They send messages.....and help it all sound better!
- 5 Falls from an electronic tree
- 9 A musical spy plane?
- 11 It's not digital
- 13 University city's preferred manufacturer?
- 15 It's not iOS
- 16 Miles wasn't red or green, but he was.....
- 18 He edits!
- 20 A beautiful atmosphere
- 21 Electronic Point Of Sale Sound Good!
- 22 Bob's the word!

Answers Across: 1) Linn 6) Young 7) Groove 8) Sure 10) Speakers 12) The Clash 14) MCA 17) Five Floyd 19) Headphones 23) Prestley 24) Turntable 25) Naim 26) Floorstander
 Answers Down: 2) Ian Dury 3) Digital 4) Twister's 5) Apple 9) U2 11) Analogue 13) Cambridge 15) Android 16) Klid Of Blue 18) Noel Kerwood 20) Ambience 22) Manley

vinyl section

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JANUARY 2013

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CLEARAUDIO UNIVERSAL 9 INCH AND 12 INCH TONEARMS 89

Tony Bolton listens to and loves two new hi-tech arms.

TURNTABLE POSTER 94

Noel Keywood admires turntables from the past.

MICHELL TECHNODEC TUNEUP 102

A new counter-weight and LP clamp uplift the Technodec, Tony Bolton finds.

HEED QUASAR PHONOSTAGE 106

No chips? Tony Bolton changes his diet with this all-discrete amp.



news



LITTLE SEEN

Music On Vinyl continue to release a whole heap of wax with glorious regularity. The latest releases include the less familiar such as Toto's 'The Seventh One' (1988), a power ballad fest. Then there's Alan Parsons Project records: 'Ammonia Avenue' (1984), that explores spiritual isolation plus 'Stereotomy' (1985) that examines how people are slaves to their lifestyle.

You don't see any reissued vinyl covering Daryl Hall & John Oates, so 'Bigger Than Both Of Us' (1976) that features more pop-oriented, high production values, is very welcome. As is the lesser seen Spirit album, 'The Family That Plays Together' (1968), the band's second album that forged their style, vastly improving the vocals.

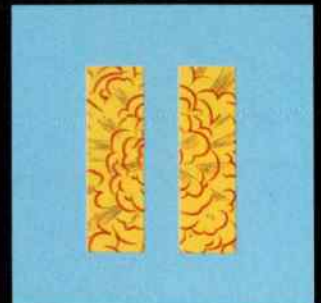
Other rarities include Living Colour's 'Time Up' (1990) including the hit 'Love Rears Its Ugly Head', Bill Laswell's Material and 'Hallucination Engine' (1993) an ambient space jam piece with guests including Wayne Shorter and William S. Burroughs and the rock/grunge/psyche noise from Screaming Trees and their 1991, major label, release, 'Uncle Anesthesia' a more mellow, psychedelic journey.



NINJA COMIN' ATCHA

Two crackers from Ninja Tune include, turntablist, Kid Koala's, gatefolded, '12 Bit Blues'. A record that proves that this guy doesn't want you to dance, just linger over his grooves, embedding technology into old blues recordings.

Amon Tobin is back as Two Fingers and 'Stunt Rhythms' featuring rather meaty dubstep, slices of ebullient and nervous breakbeats. Tobin was always a class act - this album reaffirms that view.





LET'S ROCK

Rock fans are in for a treat, this month. Eagle Records – the die-hard CD outfit – has finally entered the vinyl market...hurrah! First up is Gary Moore's double album, 'Blues For Jimi', the Hendrix tribute gig, recorded in 2007 at the Hippodrome in London including guest appearances from Hendrix stalwarts, Billy Cox and Mitch Mitchell. Moore is on fire on this LP. Similarly, the label's second release, 'Re-Machined: A Tribute To Deep Purple's Machine Head', features tracks from Metallica, Glenn Hughes, Iron Maiden, Carlos Santana and the Flaming Lips.



Next is the left field rock of The Birthday Party, featuring Nick Cave, and 'Junk Yard' (1982) a post punk masterpiece and the band's second and final, full studio release: disturbing, bleak and rather noisy.

SPV has a batch of new rock 'out and about' including Anvil's 'This Is Thirteen'. An early influence on later thrash metal bands, this 2009 release will appeal to hard rock and metal fans, however. 'Silverthorn' is US metal band Kamelot's tenth studio LP and features new lead vocalist, Tommy Karevik who replaced stalwart, Roy Khan. Karevik does a great job on this concept piece telling of sibling murder: one of the band's best ever albums.



Would you believe it – Magnum has released a new album! Wahoo! Hard rock, Brummie-style, that moves uptempo. The band's previous LP releases, 'Visitation' and 'Into The Valley Of The Moon King' were good but 'On The 13th Day' stomps all over them. Great songs, excellent vocals.

With connections to Ian Gillan and connections to If and Orbisla, Zebra's self titled album (1974; Sireena) combines prog with afro-funk over varying moods and tempos. Highly regarded, this band were a 'should have been' but they never hit star status. This album tells you what all the fuss was about.

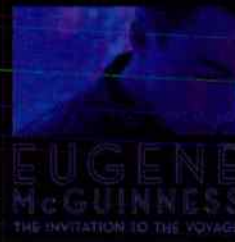


GO DOMINO!

Been a while since we featured new releases from this top UK label. Experimental indie rock outfit, Dirty Projectors' new album, 'Swing Lo Magellan' (arriving with attendant MP3s) is a melting pot of styles and influences, conflicting melody with discordance.

Eugene McGuinness' 'The Invitation To The Voyage' takes a Beck view on musical arrangement, mixing styles and themes but doing so in a noble, rather dignified manner. Righteous rock.

Also look out for Hot Chip's 'In Our Heads' which mixes electro and funk with pop sensibilities and beautifully insistent grooves: check out 'Flutes' and 'Motion Sickness'.



...AND FINALLY

First up is Mike Tyler's new album, 'Erection' (The Art Cannot Be Damaged). Described as a post-beat poet, Tyler's music features quirky pop-rock. Names like Lou Reed and Beck are associated with Tyler and you can hear both in this laconic album.

Another new release, The Ready Stance's 'Damndest' (Damndest) who offer straight-ahead, guitar-rich, melodic rock with a US-based edge and flavourings of REM and Buffalo Tom.

Onto more experimental fare now and Emanuele de Raymond's 'Buyukberber Variations', his new release on Zerokilled Music. Taking the clarinet and pairing it with computer manipulation, he explores jazz, folk and classical music to soundscape effect.

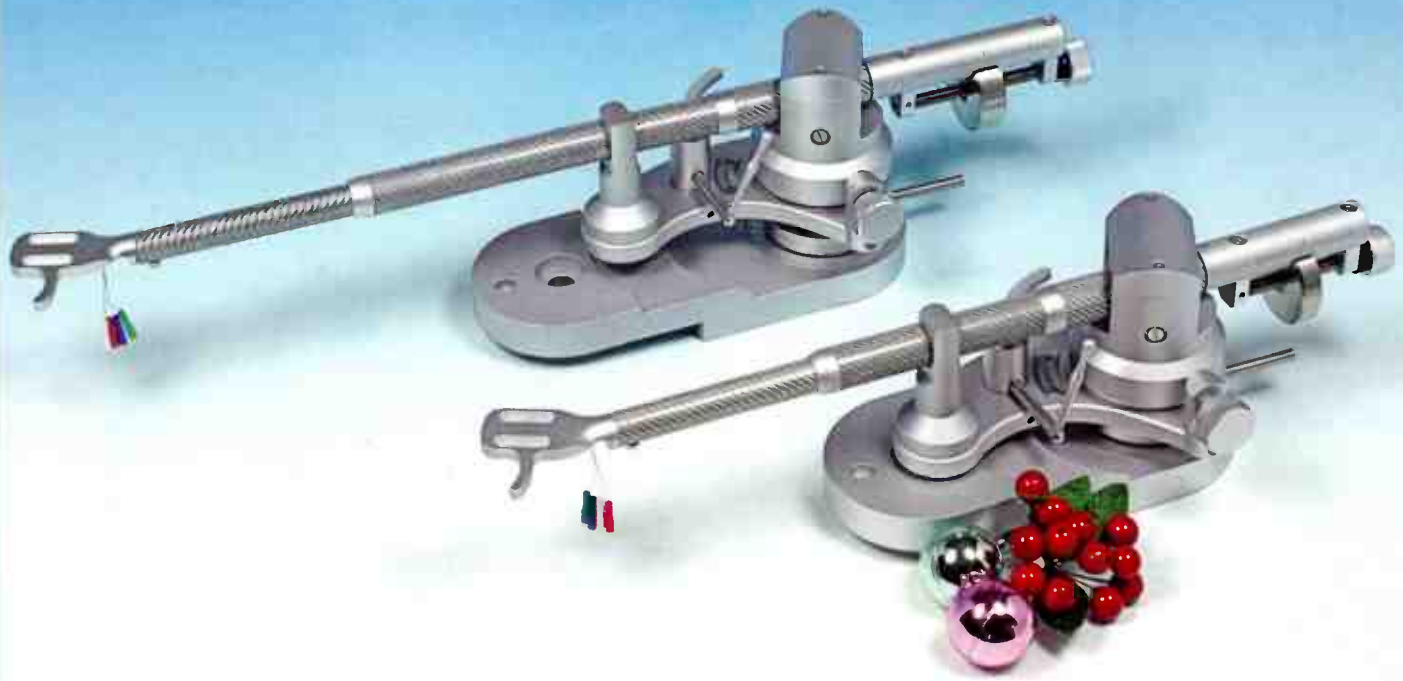
One Mile An Hour's new, self-titled album (Snowbird) is a low key, sometimes gentle, sometimes pastoral, harmonic affair that is introspective, even on uptempo numbers. Music to swoon by.



'Prince Fatty Presents Hollie Cook In Dub' (Mr Bongo). Cook, daughter of Sex Pistols member, Paul Cook, has produced a seemingly authentic dub LP despite its contemporary origins, infesting her pop stylings onto the dub soundscape. Brilliant!

Finally DJ Marcelle/Another Fine Mess' 'Meets Further Soulmates At Faust Studio Deejay Laboratory' (Klangbad) is a double album split into four single-sided mood mixes. Wholly innovative and surprising, the record was created almost in a single take using three turntables and around sixty records.





Longer arms

Tony Bolton becomes convinced that longer arms are indeed what we all need, at least when they come from Clearaudio.

My Clearaudio Master Solution turntable has been fitted with the Company's Magnify tonearm for some-time now, and I have been very pleased with the performance, but on hearing that the top-of-the-range Universal arm had just been improved, and that there was now a 12 inch version available, I was unable to resist the offer of reviewing it and the standard 9 inch.

Both are made in-house at the Company's factory in Erlangen in Germany, and consist of three part woven carbon fibre arm tubes with detachable alloy headshells. The substantial bearing housing is also made of alloy. Anti skating force is applied magnetically by turning a screw at the side of the housing.

Tracking force is applied by turning a screw at the back of the arm which moves a counterweight along a fine thread. A choice of five counterweights is provided for the 9 inch version and three for the 12 inch. This means that cartridges weighing between 2.9g and 24.8g (9 inch) and 2.9g to 21g (12 inch) can

be accommodated.

The optional VTA-lifter was fitted to both arms, which has the advantage of being able to fine-tune the VTA while the turntable is playing, if required. It certainly made the task of setting the arm height easier, since once an initial setting had been found, fine tuning could be done more delicately than the normal method of using the hex-head bolt on the arm base.

I started off listening to the 9 inch version and was impressed at the extra weight and control to the sound that the Universal offered compared to my Magnify. I found a bigger soundstage appeared to occupy a large part of the carpet in front of the Chario loudspeakers. Performer placement was so precise that I almost felt that I could get up and walk between the artists.

When playing older mono recordings, such as my favourite Benny Goodman LP, the dimensions of the soundstage did not decrease much, and seemed better described than I am used to. I was also impressed with the way rhythms were played. The timing seemed

tighter, and this general air of greater precision extended to all parts of the sound. High hats shimmered more, kick drums had more punch and the all important midrange was more open and accessible.

I moved onto the Saint-Saens' Organ Symphony and found what I can only describe as a majestic presence to the sound. It was big and detailed, as suited the piece, and the point in the second movement where two pianos, the full orchestra and the organ are in play was more defined than I have previously heard it on this system.

Simpler music, like Joni Mitchell's first LP, was played with an almost tactile quality that went a long way to convincing me that I was listening to a live performance rather than a recording. The delicate nature of her voice was treated like fine Dresden china, beautiful and artfully decorated with just the right hint of fragility to



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The longer 12 inch arm at rear needs an extended arm plate to fit the turntable. This is the only drawback of modern 12 inch arms: they are big and need space. Carbon fibre and aluminium are used to control effective mass and rigidity in these Clearaudios.

make it sound realistic.

My last record before changing to the 12 inch arm was another favourite, 'Are You Shponged?' This psychedelic trance extravaganza moves from softly produced solo voice and flute through to the pounding deep bass that most people associate with electronic dance music. It was handled with complete aplomb. The bass had an almost physical impact, while the detailing of the flute sound was mesmerising.

The big advantage of 12 inch arms over shorter models is the decrease in tracking error as the stylus moves across the record. In this case it resulted in a far cleaner sound that seemed to acquire even greater levels of detailing – or rather, the detail was less masked than previously. The Goodman LP played with less surface noise than I would have believed possible (it has been well loved over its 60 year life) and the level of definition to the sound was nothing short of amazing.

I was able to completely disentangle the complexities of the Saint-Saens to the point where it sounded like two separate pianos

playing, rather than two instruments combining into one sound. It felt effortless to listen to, as though the music had stepped out of the system entirely and become a living entity in the room in front of me.

I would rate this as the best arm that I have ever had in this house, and it has produced the best sound that I have ever heard through this system. The only arm that has come close is the Audio Origami 12 inch PU7, and I would want to listen to them back to back on the same turntable before I was prepared to choose between the two.

The 9 inch Universal is truly excellent, offering levels of detail, weight and tonal colour that few arms can come close to, but the extra £340 for the 12 inch model

is more than worth every penny. If your turntable will accommodate this length of arm then do not hesitate to buy one. The sound is awesome – it's as simple as that!

SYSTEM USED:

Clearaudio Master Solution Turntable/ Benz Micro Wood SL and Clearaudio Da Vinci cartridges. Leema Acoustics Agena phonostage and Tucana 2 amplifier. Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.

MUSIC USED:

Saint-Saens. 'Symphony No.3 in C- minor, Op.78. "Organ Symphony"'. Deutsche Grammophon Records. 2530 619. 1976.

The Benny Goodman Trio. 'Plays For The Fletcher Henderson Fund'. Columbia Records. 33SX 1020. 1952.

Joni Mitchell. 'Joni Mitchell'. Reprise Records. K 44 051. 1968.

Shpongle. 'Are You Shponged?'. Twisted Records. TWSLP4. 1998.

VERDICT ●●●●●

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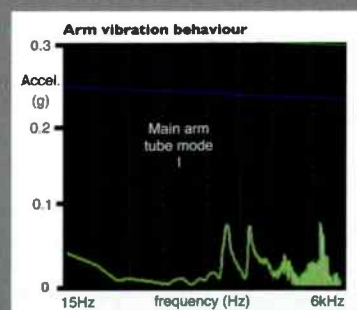
The 9 inch arm was expectedly the most rigid of the two, the main arm bending mode being situated at a relatively high 280Hz and barely visible in our vibration analysis, made as usual with a B&K 4517 accelerometer on the head shell. This shows the arm tube is both stiff and well damped and suggests excellent image stability, especially in the lower midband with hand drums and such like. There appears to be a small resonance effect around 1kHz, also seen on the 12 inch arm, but there is little energy in this. The head shell is well damped and treble will come across as clean and pure.

The 12 inch has an obvious main bending mode at 280Hz, but at 0.05g it is low in acceleration (and velocity and displacement). Most 12 inch arms have a low broad peak like this. Interestingly, the rest of the 12 inch assembly is better damped and vibrationally quieter than the 9 inch arm. This is a very passive assembly.

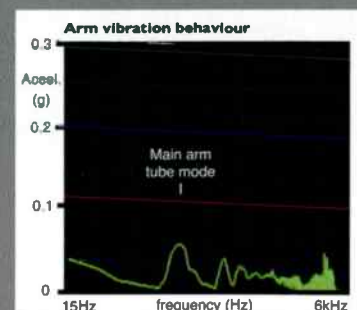
Both Universal arms measured very well, suffering little vibration under excitation from the cartridge, and the

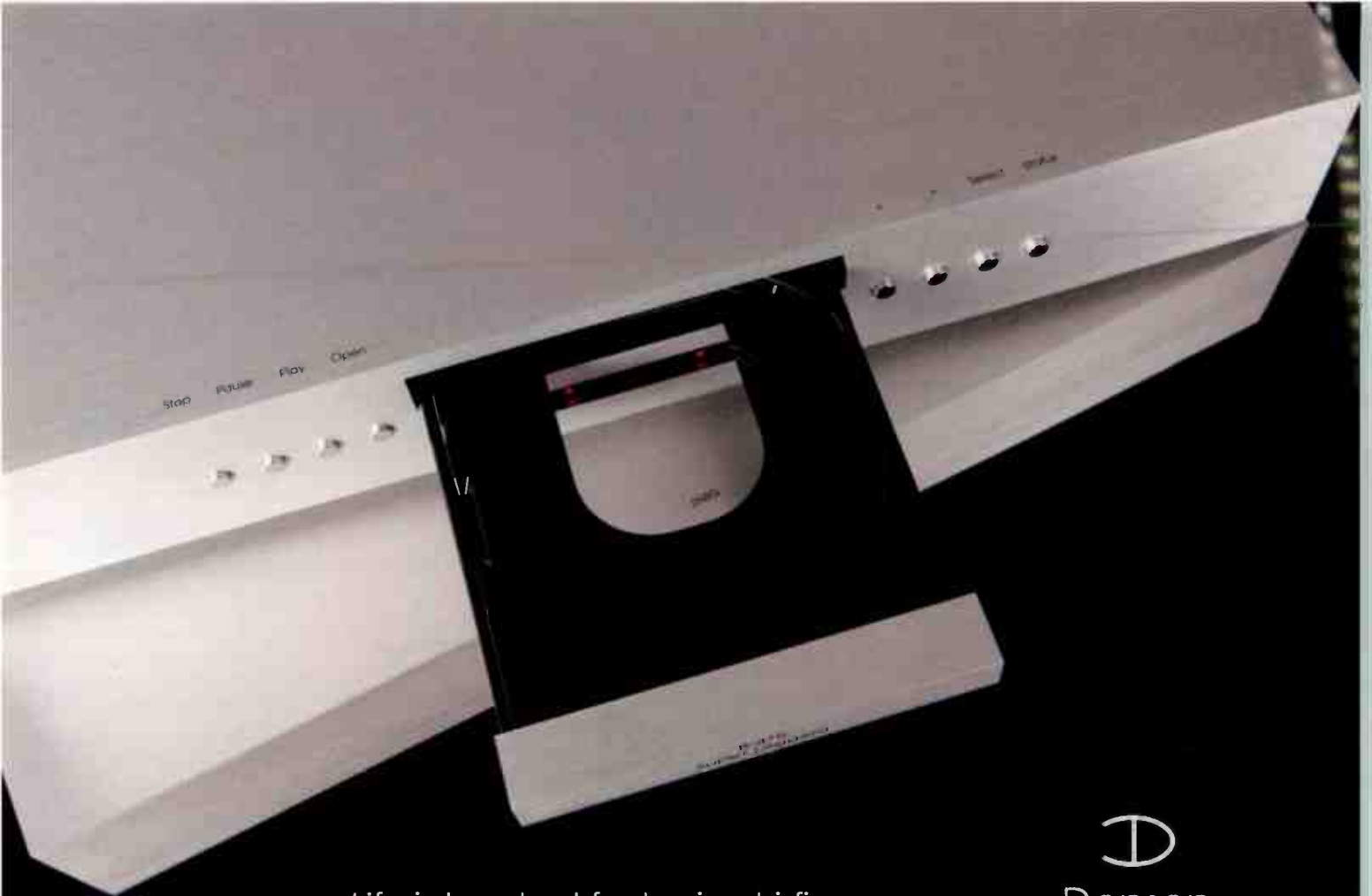
12 inch was especially impressive. NK

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World Radio History





BLUE HORIZON PROBURN £695.00

I am a firm believer in the benefits of burning-in both equipment and cables, and use various burn-in discs for this purpose with components. However, cables can take quite a long time to reach their full potential. The Proburn from Blue Horizon gets around this problem by conditioning your cables within 24 to 48 hours.

It consists of a compact alloy box that has a selection of different sockets spread across all four sides. This allows for a pair of speaker

cables, and both balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA phono plugs) interconnects to

be plugged in at the same time.

The instructions give advice on the direction of connection.

This is important, since most cables are directional,

and are sometimes marked with arrows showing the 'direction' of flow of the signal. If there are no such markings I usually follow the direction of the print on the sheath, connecting it so that it reads in the same direction as the alternating signal is 'meant to travel' (only d.c. has direction).

A complimentary bottle of Blue Horizon's Clean-IT contact cleaner is provided. This should be used on all the connectors before plugging them into the Proburn.

Mains power is provided by a wall mounted transformer-plug. This connects with a small socket at one end. Once plugged in a variety of lights appear on the top of the box to

indicate that conditioning is in action.

The conditioning process consists of ultra high and extremely low frequencies being fed through the cables in a controlled sequence. This is claimed to penetrate, both through to the core of the cable, and into the dielectric more effectively than just playing music can do.

On new cables the effect was transformative. The hard, bass light sound that characterises most new cables disappeared and was replaced with an open and detailed sound that had a wide bandwidth and a seemingly more effortless presentation.

I also found great benefits when used on cables that had been in use for months or even years. Bass seemed to go deeper and the treble seemed to extend higher, and with greater cleanliness to the sound.

I have also found that using the Proburn every two or three months keeps the cables in top condition. It is an expensive product, but is very effective and one that I use a lot as part of my maintenance regime. **TB**

[Contact:
www.bluehorizonideas.com]

soundbites



AUDIO ORIGAMI. HEADSHELL SPIRIT LEVEL £9.99 (EITHER SIZE, INCLUDES UK P&P.)

Getting the headshell of a pickup arm absolutely horizontal when the needle is on a record is important since, if it is not, then the cartridge will not work as effectively as it should. If it is down at the back then the bass will appear over emphasised and the treble muted, and the converse will apply if the front is too low. The obvious answer is to use a spirit level to get it correct, but the weight of most of these is such that the cartridge suspension will get compressed and give a false reading

while the spirit level is in situ.

It is also important to get the vertical alignment of the cartridge correct since it is likely to mistrack if it isn't, and this will result in distortion and an increase in any perceived surface

noise. It will also cause the sound to seem to have shifted to one side somewhat.

Audio Origami have produced two miniature spirit levels, that are light enough to get over this problem, and being circular, will provide a check on all angles of alignment at a glance.

Most arms have adjustment facilities for both height, usually adjusted by loosening a collar around the arm base, and azimuth. Accessing this varies, depending upon the design of the arm, so consult your handbook or contact the manufacturer.

I have found these miniature

spirit levels invaluable when setting up my Hadcock 242 Cryo unipivot arm. With these arms it is possible to alter both the relationship between the headshell and armtube, and the armtube and pivot housing. I use two spirit levels, one on the headshell and the other on the pivot housing to ensure that all of the components are level.

I have also found them useful when fitting motors. These need to be parallel to the platter to get the speed of rotation exactly right. If they are not, then there will be very slight fluctuations in the rotational speed of the platter, resulting in wow. This will be apparent in instability in the pitch of long, slow notes, especially from recordings of a piano. I therefore put one on top of the pulley when installing a motor to make sure that it is sitting correctly.

These spirit levels are available in two sizes, either or both make very useful additions to the tool box. **TB**

[Contact:
www.audioorigami.co.uk]

The Poster Collection

An interesting e-mail dropped into our letter box, from www.hi-fi-posters.com, showing some of the world's wackier turntables. Here's a selection from the poster, but with descriptions derived from our own experiences, service data etc.

1910 - Endlessgraph Fairy Phonograph Lamp

This was an attempt to make an acoustic gramophone look good in the home. Back then, gramophones could be mistaken for a wooden crate. The Fairy phonograph, built by the Fairy Phonograph Lamp Company, Chicago, USA, span the 78rpm record on an electrically driven platter, over which swung an acoustic arm, one where a needle was attached to a diaphragm whose acoustic output was amplified by a horn. In this case the horn extended downward through the lamp base. The platter even had a dust cover, adorned with a small figurine.



1950 - Zenith Cobra Matic Model 4L02

The Cobra Matic, from Zenith Radio Corp of the USA, was an early 1950s record player that could spin 78rpm 'standard records', as well as new 33 and 45rpm micro-groove records. It would accept up to ten records on its auto-changer and could play at any speed, as speed was infinitely adjustable from 16rpm up to 80rpm. It used a four valve amplifier and one 5in loudspeaker. The novel styling included a 'tone arm' shaped like a snake and with a snakes head. Hiss was likely a problem.

1956 - Metz Babyphon 56 kofferadio

The Babyphon 56 from Metz radio of Germany was a natty little portable with its own record player, so where you went you could take your own music with you - which meant lugging around a stack of 7in singles. If those added too much to its considerable 8kg weight then there was always the radio, that in 1956 - the year of manufacture - had FM as well as Medium Wave. Forget Duracells, this baby needed a 90V H.T. battery.





1960 - Emerson Wondergram

The Emerson Wondergram was another attempt to produce a small portable record player. It came in a shiny plastic case beneath which three stabilising feet would swing out to give breathing room for its downward firing loudspeaker. Both 33 and 45 rpm records could be played and amazingly they were surface driven from below by two rubber wheels, an inner one for 7in singles and an outer for 12in LPs. Their distance from the hub determined speed – ingenious! The pick-up arm had a spring to set 'needle force'. This lovely contraption was made by Baird Radio England, for Emerson of New York, used early audio transistors and was powered by four 1.5V C batteries.

1960 - General Electric Show 'n Tell

In this children's toy the record player also operated a film strip viewer that illustrated whatever was playing. Both record and accompanying film strip were specially produced by General Electric of the USA to carry children's songs with accompanying mechanically synchronised illustration. Early models played 45rpm singles, 33rpm LPs and 78s and film strip/record packages came from Disney, amongst others.



1960 - Marantz SLT-12 Straight Line Tracking turntable

An early linear tracking turntable, the SLT-12 used a light weight arm running on fine bearings that the cartridge effectively pulled across the disc. A weight at the far end, under the cover, counter balanced the assembly. Set up was critical because the arm and platter had to be precisely level or the arm would run under gravity! Early models came with a Shure V15 apparently. Cueing and arm return were all manual; there were no auto-systems. There was a cue mechanism though. The turntable was a massive belt driven affair. The SLT-12 was impractical and difficult to use, but it did pre-date the Rabco and later Japanese linear trackers and is seen as a pioneering design.

1970 - Vinyl Killer Silver Edition

This amazing toy originated in Japan in the 1970s and was sold as a novelty item, or gift. It is a portable record player that races around the LP to play it. Powered by a 9V battery, it relies on a needle buried into the groove to control a single front wheel that guides the player on an inward spiral, whilst two back wheels provide drive from a motor. Sound quality is dire, the needle jumps and groove damage is guaranteed – but is it ever wacky? If you want one (no, you don't) go to www.vinylkiller.net, www.razy-works.com or eBay.



1980 - Mitsubishi LT-5V

The amazing LT-5V was a vertical belt drive turntable, with a servo controlled driven parallel tracking arm. LPs were clamped to a slightly concave platter, so flattening warps and dished discs. The arm was totally automatic, sensing an LP's edge; the LT-5V would play to the end of a side, lift and return. Speed setting was manual. Inside, this record deck was full of electronic control systems. It was easily fixed to a wall, where it worked brilliantly.



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Chord Electronics CPM2650 Integrated Amplifier S/H	4899	2799
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DPA Power Plus BNIB	950	649
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Rega Elicit MM phono Silver x-demo	1595	1099
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Spectral MH-750 25ft speaker cables x-demo	2000	995
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Leak Troughline Tuner S/H	n/a	199
Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Preset Tuner for Etude S/H	395	179
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1980 Sony PS-F5 and F9

This was an extraordinary portable Direct Drive 33/45rpm record deck with linear tracking tonearm that stood vertically. It could be used in any position, including on a wall Sony said. The idea was you could play your records anywhere, courtesy of four internal C cell batteries, a car battery or a mains supply. The arm moved on a carriage driven by a cord, overseen by a massive array of linear electronic sensors and actuators. It was hugely complex and required extensive adjustment to work properly. Listening was through headphones or an external amplifier. Known as the Flamingo in Japan, this Sony was pictured alongside a surfboard in Japanese brochures, a player suitable for Beach Boys LPs perhaps.



1980 - ELP Laser Turntable

The ELP laser turntable reads the LP groove with a laser, causing no wear or damage. Sounds perfect doesn't it? Unfortunately, when we reviewed one it sounded like a poor CD player. The laser does not push aside dust or grunge, like a stylus. It processes the signal heavily and its laser doesn't read the same path along the groove wall as a stylus. It is a complex and expensive gadget, 'de rigueur' for music libraries, but sadly not the definitive player one might expect, which is possibly why it faded into obscurity. A new version sounds better, we learn. This is still one amazing turntable.

All you turntable fanatics, take a look right. A massive poster of the most astonishing confect-ions designed to play music underscores how the LP provoked innovation before the silver disc appeared. It is available from – www.hi-fi-posters.com (just click on the link!).



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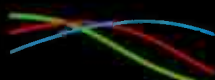
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KEF AUDIO
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Michell tune

Tony Bolton tunes up Michell's budget Technodec turntable with an optional weight and a clamp. What he heard was a nice tune.

Based in Borehamwood in Hertfordshire, Michell Engineering have a long history of producing turntables that seem to be a combination of eye catching styling combined with excellent audio manners. One of John Michell's last designs, before he died in 2003, was the Technodec. This was a departure for the company from the more expensive suspended chassis designs of the Orbe and



The Technodec disassembled. It clamps beneath the arm tube, on its own arm stub.

Gyrodec, and was an entry level product that offered the same level of engineering excellence, but in a simplified and more affordable form. It is also a turntable that has somehow never made its way to Bolton Towers for me to listen to, until now.

The Technodec needed assembling when it arrived, allowing me to examine the various components as I put it together. Although this is the company's entry level product there is nothing about it that seems cheap in any way. The machining of the acrylic base and the platter, the latter made of a mixture of acrylic and vinyl, were excellent.

The platter sits on an inverted bearing assembly that requires a little of the supplied oil being put in it, and the platter assembly carefully lowering onto it, being careful not to disturb the ball bearing inside.

The bearing is an unusual design that has a channel running through the phosphor bronze stub that terminates in a hole at the top. It is designed so that as the platter turns oil is pumped up through the bearing.

To the left of the base is a cut-out area shaped to locate the outboard DC motor that is housed in a beautifully machined block of aluminium. A small button on the top acts as a stop start control. Drive is transmitted via a belt that rides on the outside of the platter.

The deck was supplied with a Rega RB251 arm which fitted into the mounting on the base and was secured by a large nut from underneath. I fitted my Benz Micro Ace L cartridge and started listening to Oscar Peterson and Dizzy Gillespie's eponymously named LP. The opening track is a cover of Duke



The various parts of the clamp, disassembled.

Ellington's 'Caravan' and was relayed through the hi-fi in a very grounded and solid sounding manner. The bass had an almost tangible mass to it that was quite surprising in a deck at this price point, and seemed to have quite a lot of energy to the beat. Stereo imaging was wide and deep, although it did not extend very far forwards into the room. Gillespie's trumpet was focussed, with enough rawness to the sound to make it seem realistic but avoiding the ear-piercing excesses that some sub-£100 decks can display with this record.

I moved onto some David Bowie and again found the bass driving along 'Changes'. Bowie's double tracked voice was well defined, as was his playing of the saxophone, and the whole presentation was both capable and enjoyable. This is one of the first 1000 pressed (identifiable by the lack of an RCA logo on the top right corner of the front cover) that has survived the years well and the Technodec seemed to come alive when fed with a well pressed disc.

I finished that night's listening with Quantic's 'The 5th Exotic' a pleasantly laid back piece of electronica that grooves along with various Latin rhythmical influences along with guitars, piano, double bass, organ, saxophone and percussion, topped off with live vocals. As is usual with electronica as a genre, games are played with stereo placement and again I found a spacious setting for this to take place.

The next day I settled down with Mussorgsky's 'Pictures At An Exhibition'. Originally written as a piano piece, the orchestration by Ravel is probably the best known, and this recording by Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is an excellent example of it. This mono pressing was also available in stereo, being one of the first releases in the then new format. Either demonstrate the recording engineer's skill, and in this case the capabilities of the Technodec.

The 'Promenades' between

pictures had a pleasant lilt, and the impressionistic descriptions of the artwork seemed quite open and accessible. I did feel that there was a certain mannered presentation, which I think may be due to the seemingly neutral presentation of the deck and the rather cool sound of the Rega arm, so I fitted the Technoweight.

TECHNOWEIGHT

Fitting the Technoweight was a simple job involving unscrewing the stub from the back of the arm and replacing it with the machined stainless steel one and the underslung weight. The weight is positioned to be in line with the cartridge, a position that is claimed to help when tracking heavily modulated recordings and to reduce record wear.

I cannot comment on the latter, but I certainly felt as though the needle was more securely located in the groove, with the sound becoming more authoritative and



A standard Technodec, without LP clamp. Its Rega RB251 arm has the Rega circular counterweight.

better defined. Replaying all of these tracks convinced me that the Technoweight should be an essential fitment to these arms. The Peterson/Gillespie recording seemed to produce more spacial information, so that I felt I was more aware of the relationship between Gillespie and his microphone, while the multiple harmonics of the piano seemed a lot more defined.

RECORD CLAMP

After this I changed the spindle for a threaded one that came with the black Delrin record clamp. I refitted the platter and tried the discs again, this time clamped to the platter.

The effect was dramatic, with a bigger soundstage and the virtual elimination of any surface noise that

MUSIC USED:

Moussorgsky/ Ravel 'Pictures At An Exhibition' Fritz Reiner Conducting Chicago Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor Records. LM-2201. 1958

Oscar Peterson and Dizzy Gillespie. 'Oscar Peterson and Dizzy Gillespie'. Pablo Records. 2310 740. 1975.

David Bowie 'Changesonebowie' RCA Records. RS1055. 1976

Quantic 'The 5th Exotic'. Tru Thoughts records. TRU LP 016.

had occasionally appeared.

The bass seemed to go deeper and the treble sounded freer to reach upwards.

Overall, I am quite impressed with the Technodec, and the cost of two quite reasonably priced accessories, the record clamp and the Technoweight, is money well spent. They take already good performance up to surprisingly high levels given the overall cost of the complete unit.

SYSTEM USED:

Luxman E200 phono stage.
Bent Audio TAP-X passive pre-amp.
2 x Quad 303 power amps.
Kelly KT3 loudspeakers.

I would describe the deck as sounding pretty neutral, and this combined with the fairly unemotional nature of the Rega RB251 would lead me towards cartridges such as the Benz Micro used here or Ortofon. Dynavectors and Audio Technicas would give a more vivid sound but this might be initially impressive and end up being a little too brilliant sounding for extended listening.

Although the design of this turntable is ten years old, its performance does not sound dated in anyway and if you are in the market for a well designed deck, with admirable build quality and a formidable pedigree, then the Technodec should be seriously considered, but do budget for the extras.

VERDICT

Well engineered British made turntable that benefits from affordable upgrades.

MICHELL TECHNODEC £821.00

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RECORD CLAMP £29.75

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FOR

- down to earth sound
- good timing

AGAINST

- a little cool sounding for some tastes

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Chip chop

Built in Hungary, the Quasar phono stage uses discrete transistors, giving silicon chips the chop. Tony Bolton enjoys the change.

Hungarian company Heed Audio started out manufacturing the well known Obelisk amplifiers which were designed by Richard Hay. Over the years the range has expanded to include the Obelisk line and the Modular line, of which this is one of two phono stages on offer. The cheaper Questar comes in either Moving Magnet or Moving Coil configuration, while the Quasar, under review here is equipped for both types.

It is supplied with the Q-PSU power supply unit that can also be used to upgrade the performance of the Questar or to power the Dactilus D-to-A converter. It is housed in a compact metal case that measures 9.5 x 7.2 x 25cm. The back contains the IEC socket for mains input, with a power switch beside it, and another socket for the lead that connects to the phono stage.

Inside is a 60 VA toroidal transformer that feeds power through 40,000 micro Farads of capacitors which are connected in

parallel to reduce internal resistance.

The phono stage is housed in a matching box (both are finished in black) and consists of two separate amplifier stages for MM and MC cartridges, each fed from their own regulated power supply. This is a genuine dual mono design from the PSU onwards.

The circuit uses transistors mounted on a printed circuit board. This also houses the jumpers that are used to choose between 100, 200 and 600 microvolt sensitivity for MC cartridges, and 100, 200 and 470 Ohms impedance. Accessing these requires taking the lid off so should always be done with the mains disconnected, even though voltages are not lethal.

The back of the phono stage has four pairs of RCA Phono sockets, for the two types of cartridge, and low and high output. The former is the usual connection that would be used to a pre-amp, while the latter can be used to drive power amps directly, although no on-board volume control is provided. Alongside these is the

socket to connect it to the Q-PSU.

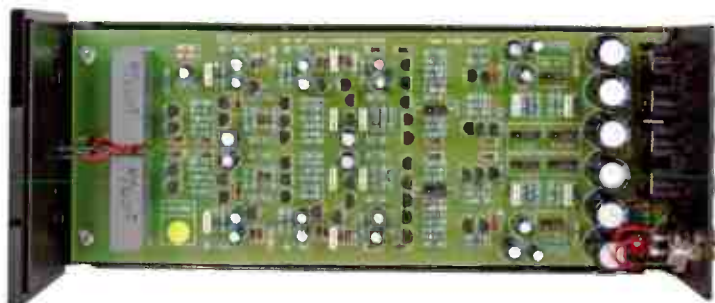
I started listening while I still had the Michell Technodec set up with the Benz Micro Ace L fitted, playing an LP called 'Les Lullistes'. One side is devoted to a work called 'Le Temple de la Paix', written by Jean Baptiste Lully, a Florentine by birth, who rose from quite humble beginnings to become the court musician to King Louis XIV of France. Side two covers works by Fischer and Muffat, two German composers who followed in his style and musical methods in the late 17th Century German courts, where all things French were the fashion.

The musical style is typical of the Baroque, but they are all particularly good examples of the genre. I found myself enjoying the upbeat presentation of the Minuet in the Lully piece although I felt that there was a certain sparkle missing. The bass was quite full and the treble was very detailed but it seemed a little reserved. So I changed back to my reference Sondek and found that the quite deep and dark nature of





Power supply has a toroidal transformer and big smoothing capacitors.



Inside sit lines of little black transistors, plus simple MM/MC selection jumpers.

MUSIC USED;
L'Ensemble Orchestral de L'Oiseau-Lyre, conducted by Louis de Froment. 'Les Lullistes'. Editions De L'Oiseau-Lyre. OLS 165. 1957.

Dave Brubeck Quartet. 'The Dave Brubeck Quartet at Carnegie Hall.' Columbia records. C2S 826. 1963.

The Doors. 'Greatest Hits'. Elektra Records. 5E515. 1980.

The only criticisms that I found was the lack of a mono stereo switch, which meant that surface noise on some older records was not adequately suppressed, and a little fussiness regarding the partnering turntable. This phono stage has quite a deep, dark sound and this could become a little too much if partnered with a similarly natured deck. Used with a sympathetic source then the Quasar is capable of a very open and fast sound that can be very energising to listen to.

It is reasonably flexible in the choice of partnering cartridge and has the ability to drive a power amplifier in a minimalist system. At £770 it offers a lot of performance for the money, and is most definitely worth an audition.

VERDICT ●●●●●

Compact MC and MM phono stage, with two levels of output and a deep, dark and precise sound.

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FOR

- deep and dark bass
- good treble extension
- fast and precise

AGAINST

- works best with open, airy sounding decks

this phono stage did not blend too well with the neutral nature of the Technodec, and the moderately unemotional presentation of the Rega RB251 arm. With the Sondek/Hadcock combination in charge the more airy, open sound suited the Quasar and it began to really come to life.

The mono image was quite big, with a lot of depth, allowing me to separate the different strands of harmony. The tonality was quite rich in the upper bass/lower mid range region, which helped flesh out the sound of quite a small orchestral grouping.

After the gentleness of the Baroque I changed to the more

aggressive sounds of The Doors' 'L. A. Woman'. The opening guitar and pumping bass lines were vivid and powerful, making for a very exciting rendition of the music. Jim Morrison's voice was placed dead centre, with his growling vocals sounding both explicit and raw, the band pounding out the track around him.

I kept the pace quite hot, changing to Dave Brubeck's Carnegie Hall Concert and a cracking version of 'Take Five'. It is played a little faster than the studio version and again the speed of the performance seemed enhanced by the precision of the attack of the sound of Joe Morello's drums. Eugene Wright's double bass boogied along nicely, while Paul Desmond's alto sax stabbed away with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel, interspersing with Brubeck's sparkling piano. It certainly transmitted the vibrancy of the event in a most entertaining manner.

SYSTEM USED:

Linn LP12/ Hadcock 242 Cryo/ Clearaudio Concept MC/ Goldring 1022GX.
Michell Technodec/ Benz Micro Ace L
Bent Audio TAP-X passive pre-amp.
2 x Quad 303 power amplifiers.
Kelly KT3 loudspeakers.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Quasar subtly differs in its frequency response to most rivals, our analysis shows. Equalisation (318µS) is such that there is a slight lower midband lift in output of around +0.3dB, whilst treble (75µS) is down by the same amount, but flat to 20kHz. This will give a fuller bodied sound than the many phono stages with raised treble that seek to emphasise detail. Gain extends unaltered down below 10Hz because there is no warp filter, so cone flap may be an issue with warped records.

Gain with MC selected measured x2190 (67dB), suitable for most MC cartridges. Equivalent input noise, IEC A weighted, was a low 0.09µV, so hiss will not be audible. Output overload occurred at 7.4V, a satisfactory headroom figure even though 10V is common from silicon chips and discrete transistors can swing more.

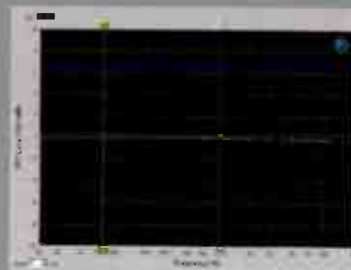
Gain with MM was high at x256 and noise high too, but what looked like power supply pulses affected the results, in spite of IEC A weighting and a high pass filter at 400Hz being used to eliminate them from the measurement (this did not affect MC). As MM cartridges produce a lot of Johnson

(thermal) noise in themselves, more than input devices, this may not be obvious in use.

The Quasar is an all-discrete transistor phono stage with no ICs inside at all, but it measures every bit as well as well and turns in a fine set of results, except for what appears to be low level rectifier switching components on the MM input. NK

Frequency response	10Hz-20kHz
Separation	57dB
Noise (e.i.n. MC, MM)	0.09µV, 0.7µV
Distortion	0.01%
Gain (MC, MM)	x2190 (67dB), x256 (48dB)
Overload	3.4mV in / 7.4V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



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QUESTION TIME

Our festive teasers for you!

11) WHO MADE A 'BALLERINA' AUTO REVERSE CASSETTE DECK?

- [a] Akai
- [b] Nakamichi
- [c] Philips

12) KEF CELEBRATED ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2012 - BUT AFTER WHAT FIRM WAS THE BRAND NAMED?

- [a] Kinetic Energy Foundation
- [b] King Electric Firm
- [c] Kent Engineering & Foundry

13) AND WHO FOUNDED THE COMPANY?

- [a] Raymond Cooke
- [b] Pastry Cook
- [c] Paul Cook

14) WHICH TURNTABLE WENT BACKWARDS?

- [a] Garrard
- [b] Strathearn
- [c] Thorens

15) WHAT COUNTRY IS HOME TO MOON ELECTRONICS?

- [a] Brazil
- [b] USA
- [c] Canada

16) MICROSOFT'S NEW TABLET COMPUTER IS CALLED WHAT?

- [a] The iPad killer
- [b] Tablature
- [c] Surface

17) WHICH LOUDSPEAKER NEEDS ITS OWN AMPLIFIER?

- [a] Active
- [b] Passive
- [c] NXT

18) ENIAC IS HELD TO BE THE WORLD'S FIRST COMPUTER - HOW MANY VACUUM TUBES DID IT USE?

- [a] 17,468
- [b] 13
- [c] None

19) THE NAME SANSUI MEANS WHAT?

- [a] Noodle free
- [b] Heavenly sound
- [c] Mountain and Water

10) AUDIO RESEARCH'S REEFER-ENCE 750 MONOBLOCKS USE WHAT TUBES?

- [a] ECC83
- [b] KT120
- [c] 845

11) WHICH YEAR WAS ITUNES INTRODUCED?

- [a] 2001
- [b] 2000
- [c] 1999

12) SONY LAUNCHED THE WALK-MAN IN WHICH YEAR?

- [a] 1978
- [b] 1979
- [c] 1980

13) WHO PRODUCED THE FIRST PORTABLE CASSETTE PLAYER?

- [a] Sony
- [b] Nakamichi
- [c] Panasonic

14) WILSON BENESCHI ARE BASED IN WHICH CITY?

- [a] Shanghai
- [b] Sheffield
- [c] Shenzhen

15) WHO MADE A SKI RAMP CASSETTE DECK?

- [a] Matsui
- [b] Sansui
- [c] Philips

16) LOUDSPEAKER MANUFACTURER DALI'S NAME IS AN ACRONYM OF WHAT?

- [a] Delightful Audio Loudspeaker Interests
- [b] Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries
- [c] Disastrous Audio Loudspeaker Inventions

17) WHICH CD BECAME THE FIRST MILLION-SELLER?

- [a] Abba's The Visitor
- [b] Pink Floyd's Dark Side Of The Moon
- [c] Dire Strait's Brothers In Arms

18) WHICH LOUDSPEAKER DESIGNER HAS WORKED WITH HI-FI WORLD, MUSICIAN AND IAG?

- [a] Peter Comeau
- [b] Karl Muggler
- [c] Michael Stevens

19) WHICH COMPANY OWNS QUAD AUDIOLAB, MISSION AND WHARFEDALE?

- [a] Music First
- [b] International Music Group
- [c] IAG

20) D'AMPOLITO CONFIGURATION REFERS TO WHAT?

- [a] Surround-sound layout
- [b] Loudspeaker drive unit layout
- [c] Fruit machine layout

21) NAIM PRODUCES BESPOKE SOUND SYSTEMS FOR WHICH CAR COMPANY?

- [a] Bentley
- [b] Reliant
- [c] Lagonda

22) MICROSOFT'S IPOD CHALLENGER WAS CALLED?

- [a] Zune
- [b] Spoon
- [c] Rune

23) AN ITUNES BEST-SELLER FOR BERT SPRINGSTEEN IN 2011, THIS IS RADIO...

- [a] Somewhere
- [b] GaGa
- [c] Nowhere

24) USB STANDS FOR?

- [a] Useless Sound Bus
- [b] Universal Serial Bus
- [c] Unreliable Steam Bus

25) WHO MAKES BELT-DRIVE CD PLAYERS?

- [a] Sony
- [b] Philips
- [c] CEC

RATINGS:
 25 Wow! What a score. Double portions of Turkey at Christmas.
 20 You know more than most audio experts!
 15 Congratulations on a good score. Have another brandy.
 10 Getting warm - join a different forum.
 5 You've overheard your mates...and they were wrong!
 0 You know nothing but are happy.

ANSWERS:

- 1) [b] 2) [c] 3) [a] 4) [b] 5) [6] [7] [11] 9) [c] 10) [b]
- 11) [a] 12) [b] 13) [b] 14) [b] 15) [c] 16) [b] 17) [c]
- 18) [a] 19) [c] 20) [b] 21) [a] 22) [a] 23) [c] 24) [b] 25) [c]

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B&O BEOMASTER 2400/2 amplifier/tuner. Perfect working condition. £125. B&O Beocord 8004 HXPro cassette deck, recently serviced, £95. Goldring Lenco GL69 turntable, two cartridges, no cover, perfect, £75. 07903 443 220 (London)

VAN DEN Hul Integration phono-phono interconnects, 4 pairs, £300. 2 pairs Van Den Hul The Name phono-phono interconnect, £50. Tel: 01642 456 228

MARANTZ PM7001 amplifier, boxed, £170. Marantz ST7001 DAB tuner, £170. Pioneer PL1000 DD parallel tracking turntable, £450. Kenwood 3090 MiniDisc, £60. Armstrong 521 amp, wooden case, £35. Tel: 01708 457 691

AKAI M-9 reel to reel with SSI10 speakers in original boxes. Working order. Stored for last twenty years. Some extras. Only serious offers. Tel: 023 92 550132 or Email: l.tomsett@hotmail.co.uk

MUSICAL FIDELITY 308CR CD player. Heavyweight 'Dreadnought'. Immaculate condition. Boxed. Was £1999. Sell £699. Tel: 01531 631 337

LFD PA2M Power amp (monoblocks in single chassis) Excellent working condition includes upgraded internal hifi tuning.com fuses. Can demonstrate, call for details Offers (Bedfordshire) T: 07870 912 963 E: stuardarshan67@googlemail.com

ROUNTREE ACOUSTICS Omnimon loudspeakers. Well reviewed. Two way. Excellent sounding British speakers with cases and manuals. Original owner. (£6400 new) £2450. Tel: 0116 241 15435 or 07817 365 5393

MUSICAL FIDELITY A5.5 CD player. Remote, boxed, £595. Q-Acoustics 2020 speakers. Gloss white finish, boxed, hardly used, £80. Bang & Olufsen 9300 music system, excellent condition, £495. Tel: 01782 596 470

ICON AUDIO Stereo 40 MkIII, Jencaps, plus MFV floorstanders and Chord Epic twin cable. £1500. Tel: 01285 644 418 (Glos)

QUAD CDP2 £300 ono. B.K. 400 XXLS subwoofer 8033 anti-mode, £350 ono. Email: stafford799@btinternet.com

WANTED THORENS 124 or preferably 224 turntable and any interesting valve amps from 40's to 70's. Still looking for the elusive single Radford Auditorium speaker. Will travel, cash waiting. 0117 946 7188 slkw@btinternet.com

MARANTZ PM11S2 amp. Superb current model. Buyer collects. Demo. £1500. Audiolab 8200 CDQ, mint, £500. Both very little use. Tel: 01205 724 191 (Boston, Lincs)

PAIR QUAD 57 ESL, fully reconditioned by Quad. Great sound. Tel: 01394 272 305 (Felixstowe)

QUAD II output transformer spec no 1003, £100. Mullard GZ34, light use with red box, £25. Buyers collect. Tel: 01344 776 445 (Berks)

SONY HI-MD MZ-RH1 Walkman £249. Unused, boxed. Fi HI-MD discs, 1Gb, unused, £50. Russ Andrews Power Pak3 for Naim equipment, £129. Sheffield Lab discs, £20 each. Tel: 02392 453 383 (Hants)

TRANSPARENT MUSIC Link balanced XLR interconnects, 1 metre stereo pair, £250. Nordost Solar Wind speaker cable, 3.5 metre and 2.5 metre lengths (doubled) £150. Terminated and all in excellent condition. Tel: 01457 871 622

AUDIO TECHNICA AT-33EV MC cartridge, brand new in unopened box, £340. Audio Technica AT-33PTG Mk2, also new and unopened, £365. C.J. Walker turntable, £60. Tel: 01323 728 118 or Email: alanchamberlain@hotmail.com

WANTED LARGE heavy power amplifier Sansui AU717, 919 or AU111, Pioneer A858, Rotel, Luxman, Quad, Leak, also Valve pre-amplifier & linn sondek turntable or Similar Any condition. Will collect. 01726812966.

DALI IKON 5 Mk 2, (black oak) mini floorstanders, boxed, bought Sept 2011, immaculate, only six months use due to house move, £475. Tel 01485 542331 (Norfolk)

MISSION FREEDOM 752 floorstander, 90dB. Immaculate condition. Room too small. £350 ono. Tel: 0207 263 5702 after 6pm or 07926 126 663 anytime

CYRUS 6XP amplifier, s/n CANB1029, £375 ono. Black. Cyrus CD6 SE2 s/n AP2CB0163. Black. £375 ono. both bought September 2011, both as new. Tel: 01262 606 089 or 07890 933 787

SPENDOR A6 floorstanding speakers, oak finish, excellent, £1350. Can demo. Buyer collects, Essex. Tel: 01708 475 319

TURNTABLE COVER for Project XPerience range, perspex, size 450mm, 350mm, 145mm, thickness 5mm. Condition as new. Price includes shipping. £65. Tel: 07980 033 707 or Email: mike.stne@gmail.com

ALR JORDAN Classic 2 speakers, birch, Hi-Fi World prize, still boxed, new! Standmounts, gorgeous quality German engineering, £325 (retail £800). Tel: 01308 868 044 after 7pm or weekends

CYRUS VS2 pre amplifier with two Eight Cyrus power amplifiers and Cyrus PSXR. Pair floorstanding B&W CM7 speakers, Sony SCDXA 5400ES CD Player, factory boxes. £2475. Tel: Barrie 01908 376 966 (Bucks)

NAIM 150x 122x both mint, boxed etc. £650 the pair. Tel 01638 668 299.

WANTED: REL Sub bass Quake instruction book, mains lead, hi-level I/P lead for connection to main front LS terminals on amplifier. Below £100 including P&P. Tel: 0151 427 6761 (Liverpool)

SPENDOR S8E floorstanders in maple. Mint condition. Always played at low volume. Lovely listen all day sound. (£1895) £950 plus P&P. Townsend Maximum Supertweeters and cable (£800) £400. Mint. Tel: 0151 608 4481 (Wirral)

NYTECH Receiver 252XD Mk11 with matching CXA 252 power amp and bespoke Monster Cable link (Cost £80 in 1987). Reviewed Hifi World May 2004 and Russ Andrews' 'Connected' Mag. Summer 2011 Receipt and Product leaflets from manufacturer. Fair condition-case needs attention. Needs repairs as one channel down. Probably a capacitor has failed. Offers. 07783 327 689 & 01159 877 567. Nottingham. rayspink@supanet.com

PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGY P-3a DAC. Accepts signals up to 96Khz 24 bit plus states it takes DSD direct. All packing and accessories including metal feet for vertical storage. In good condition and fully working with original power supply. i2S lead available if required. Looking for £225 ono. Tel 0151 521 6286. Liverpool area.

PRIMA LUNA Prologue 2 integrated valve amplifier KT 88 valves 30 watts x 2 £850, Lumley Heliosphere 2 motor turntable SME arm mount upgraded massive 90 mm acrylic platter superb £950 Dave 07554016461 Hampshire

BERNING EA230 enhanced triode mode Valve power amplifier, the perfect amplifier for Quad ELS see Stereophile. £695 elsfan@yahoo.com

SUGDEN HEADMASTER pre-amp/ headphone amp vgc £400; Cyrus Power, power amp, black vgc £200. Email steverappleby@gmail.com or text/ call Steve 07905 762363. SE London.

KEF REFERENCE Three-Two floorstanding loudspeakers (matched pair). Excellent condition. One owner from new. Downsizing forces sale. Buyer collects (Newmarket, Suffolk). £750. Tel: 01638 578552. E-mail: smithpr@nildram.co.uk.

GARRARD 401 turntable £375, SME 3009 tone arm £180. Telephone 01189 413708.

NUFORCE P9 pre-amp. Matt black finish with remote and all the original packaging. Amazing technical tour de force with sound quality to match. Check the reviews for more details. Works with solid state and valve equally well. Balanced outputs too. Cost £2800 wants £950. Tel 07989 651673 Email hondola@gmail.com

MONITOR AUDIO RX6 £800 SELL £500. Includes Pair 4M Recommended Cable/ Speaker Switch A; B; A+B. 16kg. 8ohm. 125W. 905mm H. Northumberland. grant.darras@gmail.com Tel: 01661 823606.

AUDIO SYNTHESIS SP Interconnects 13/4 metre stereo pair and 1 metre stereo pair. Sensible offers. Tel: Brian Stanley 01903 261931 W Sussex

LEEMA XERO bookshelf speakers, Cherry, boxed mint (£700) £350; Denon DN30 & DN31 CD/FM Receivers (£180) £90 & £70; Mission M71i bookshelf speakers beech (£120) £49; Davies Nottingham 07583 640342.

CYRUS HARK 2 Stand 2012 model, six shelves excellent condition £200 Contact Gary 01526 320785 Mobile 07852244988 Email gary.wilson069@btinternet.com (Lincolnshire)

MICHELL MYCRO turntable complete with two armboards, one for Regar RB300 and the other for Michell TecnoArm A, in good condition and working order. £200 ovno, buyer collects. Email robin.mean@sky.com. Tel: 0208 670 6828.

LYNDORF DPA1 digital pre-amp mint only 2 years old Silver £3300 new offers. ATC SCM Studio monitor speakers Rosewood very good condition £6500 new Offers ring 01132297524 anytime.

NAIM NAP 90 + NAC 92 with MM phono stage. Recent service. £375 01323485114 East Sussex.

DALI FAZON F5 red speakers. New never been used unwanted prize still in boxes £1700.00 ono. Tel: 01323 733843 (Sussex)

TECHNICS SL1210 Mk2 (no cartridge) £249, Garrard 401 with plinth, no arm £699, Garrard 401/301 power supply £299. Can post if needed. Call 0207 499 8729.

REL Stadium 3 sub woofer owned from new, in mint condition boxed with manual and cables. Cost £1500 bargain at £550. Tel: 01282 438224 or stuhacking@o2.co.uk (Lancs)

ATLAS HYPER2 Loudspeaker Cable in excellent condition. 3.5 metre of bi-wire * 2 each fitted with 6 Atlas Z plugs - 2 to amplifier and 4 to speaker. £150 (£336) Postage to be paid by buyer. 01305 263069 (Dorset)

CHORD 3200E Balanced pre-amp, serial no.6634. Silver with Integra legs, "brick" remote control. 2007. As New. 2 XLR, 5 RCA inputs. Contact 0208 655 8674, jbandgz@aol.com for demo. £2195. ono.

WANTED A faulty or non working Quad 34 preamp must be complete. Contact Mike 01758 613790.

AURUM CANTUS Volla loudspeakers. Figured maple finish. Hardly used. As new condition. With stands, boxes. Can dem. £1400. James. 07736339194. email: j.boswell@rbht.nhs.uk. Bromley

RUARK PROLOGUE One speakers in excellent condition £250. Thorens TD160 in fantastic condition for age £220. A pair of Bose 901 speakers that need re-foaming £100. Tel 07853420598 (w.midlands)

LINN LK280 power amplifiers x3 excellent condition with consecutive serial numbers £595 or will split £225 each. Tel 07805196354

ARCAM 192 CD Player mint condition cost 850 sell for 300 also Arcam AVR 300 AV Amp cost 1500 sell for 400 boxed. Chingford area E4 Call Harry on 07413771204

KEF REFERENCE 4.2 loudspeakers, rosetta burr, mint condition, outstanding sound, boxed, grilles perfect £1750. call 003531 2014427 or email pkmadden4@hotmail.com

CARDAS QUADLINK RCA interconnect cables, 2 pairs 0.5m £55 per pair. Contact John on 01202 515474 or e-mail johnlangley@talktalk.net (Dorset)

RUSS ANDREWS 1 x 1m DCT Signature PowerKord £295 (RRP £421.50) 3 x 1m Signature PowerKord £285 each (RRP £399) 1 x 1m Signature PowerKord (16A IEC) £295 (RRP £414) 1 x Ultra PurifierBlock-AG. All silver version. Internally wired with 2m of Hyper-pure silver wires. Also fitted are MegaClamp & ClarityMains & DCT. Purchase price £1805. Will accept half price. All items in excellent condition. Buyer to pay postage or collect from North London. Tel: 02083728376. E-mail: adelyn@live.co.uk

QUAD FM3 tuner. Boxed, new, unused. 2 Quad 22 control units 2 Quad 22 power amps 1 Quad AM/FM tuner (tired/worn) various Quad valves. 0131 4494997

WANTED THORENS 124 or preferably 224 turntable and any interesting valve amps from 40's to 70's. Still looking for the elusive single Radford Auditorium speaker. Will travel, cash waiting. 0117 946 7188 slkw@btinternet.com

ALR JORDAN Classic 2 speakers, birch, Hi-Fi World prize, still boxed, new! Standmounts, gorgeous quality German engineering, £325 (retail £800). Tel: 01308 868 044 after 7pm or weekends

NEXT MONTH

Next month we take a close look at the latest preamplifier and streamer from Naim, the NAC-N 172 XS. With phono stage and digital music streamer including radio, all controllable from an iPad App., it looks like another cracker from Naim.

Talking of iPads, we are also reviewing a hot rival, the Samsung Tablet 10.1 that can play music through the hi-fi over a Bluetooth wireless link, and act as a remote control, as well as solve equations and feed the cat.

Want perfect bass quality? Consider a room equaliser, like the Behringer DEQ2496 preamp we review in the next issue, pictured below. It's been modified by Audiosmile to suit domestic hi-fi systems, and it has an analogue-to-digital convertor on-board too. Don't miss our in-depth review.

Here are the products we hope to bring you in the fab Feb issue –



DIGITAL

Naim NAC-N 172 XS preamp,
with Naim 155 Xs poweramp
Samsung 10.1 tablet
Exposure 2010-S2 DAC

FEATURES

Recording with Audacity
Samsung BD-8500M Blu-ray player

VINYL

Steam Turntable Feature
Ortofon Factory Visit
Beatles Stereo LP box set
Michell Gyrodec with upgrades

ACCESSORIES

Record Cleaning Machine
Cables Section
Isotek mains conditioner

We either have, or are about to receive these products, but can't guarantee they will appear.



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MARCH 2013 - 8TH JANUARY

APRIL 2013 - 5TH FEBRUARY



BOOKER T. & THE MGS

GREEN ONIONS

ATLANTIC

"the LP stood head and shoulders above any other instrumental album of its day"

Arguably the lynchpin for the entire Southern Soul movement, this bunch of very talented musicians were, at least initially, nothing more than employees for the US-based, Stax soul label. They were not supposed to be stars in their own right, they were supposed to be the backing band for Stax's star names. The idea, you see, was to do a job, collect their pay-cheque, go home and brew a well deserved coffee. But something went terribly wrong...they were too good.

Consisting of Booker T. Jones on Hammond organ, Steve Cropper on guitar, Al Jackson on drums and Lewis Steinberg on bass (to be replaced by Donald "Duck" Dunn soon after), the general idea was to play behind the likes of Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Sam & Dave but their tight, groove-laden style quickly began to attract attention and became the signature sound of the label itself.

Even 'Green Onions', the lead track off this album and their most successful and biggest hit single, was an accident, a jam session performed while the 'backing band' were waiting for the rockabilly singer, Billy Lee Riley, to appear for his session within the Stax studio. 'Green Onions' reached No 3 in the charts in 1962.

The album itself is a model of concise, efficient grooves. It might only span thirty-five minutes but the band pack it full of superb music. A wholly instrumental affair, the LP stood head and shoulders above any other instrumental album of its day. In fact, one of the best indications that you've stumbled across a classic

instrumental LP is to listen to a track that has entered your subconscious as a vocal-only record and see how it grabs you.

Take, 'I Got A Woman', a classic track from Ray Charles that has been covered by many other celebrated vocal artists and is present as track three on the 'Green Onions' album. With an insistent beat from Jackson on drums and a driving bass riff via Steinberg, Jones lets rip with a convoluted, groove packed organ before Cropper's funk-filled electric guitar shows his string-chips to the full. Before you know it, you've forgotten that the song ever had a lyric.

The fact that both Jones and Cropper were bursting with new and innovative ideas was entirely evident on this album and, again, is best seen on cover material which can often trap an artist into following the train-track style of the original. On 'Stranger On The Shore', the group's rendition starts predictably enough but eases, almost without you realising, into a superlative slice of soul.

'Behave Yourself' continues the atmosphere, a quiet, understated groove but here, Jones shows his consummate skill on the Hammond, dazzling with his dexterous style. You can almost imagine his fingers flying across the keyboard.

'Comin' Home Baby', meanwhile, begins as another Jones-centred Hammond organ groove but Steve Cropper's electric guitar eases into the spotlight and takes over the burden of the song which flows like

silk from his fingers before Jones shuffles back to handle the melody. This track is the epitome of the album, there's obvious skill here but the playing is never fussy. Not a note is wasted or misplaced.

'Green Onions' has been re-released in digitally remastered form from the original mono masters by Bill Inglot and Dan Hersh as part of a five album CD set called 'The Original Album Series', accompanied by other albums from the group: 'Soul Dressing' (1965), 'And Now!' (1966), 'Hip Hug-Her' (1967) and 'Doin' Our Thing' (1968). It's part of a batch of other 'Original Album Series', releases that include The Incredible String Band, Roberta Flack, Alice Cooper, The Replacements, Dwight Yoakam, Static-X, Stone Temple Pilots and De La Soul.

The Booker T. & The MGs box, like the other sets mentioned here, feature all five albums, presented within their own, miniature vinyl-like card sleeves with a copy of the full sleeve art printed on the front and rear, contained in a card slip-case. Unfortunately, no inner sleeve protects the CD, which is the most obvious difference from the similarly presented Japanese import miniatures that you might sometimes see on the market, but this lack of protective packaging is more than made up for by the low price of the set as a whole. In 'Green Onions' case, it is part of a five album set that fetches just £13 on Amazon, great value indeed, especially when you consider that each album only works out at £2.60 each. A steal, in fact. **PR**

USHER

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USHER Dancer Diamond Series. Featuring the world's first Amorphous DLC (diamond-like-carbon) diaphragm tweeter, which makes all current diamond tweeters on the market obsolete. To find out more, visit www.usheraudio.com, or USHER'S UK Distributor Hi-Fidelity to find your local stockist.



Behind the Scene

A world renowned authority in audio and acoustics, Dr. Joseph D'Appolito designs crossovers and does the final tuning for Usher's speaker systems. Consulting to a couple of famous audio companies, Dr. D'Appolito finds the tremendous value of Usher's products a pleasant surprise in today's high end audio world.



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World Radio History



COPLAND

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Scandinavian Cool.

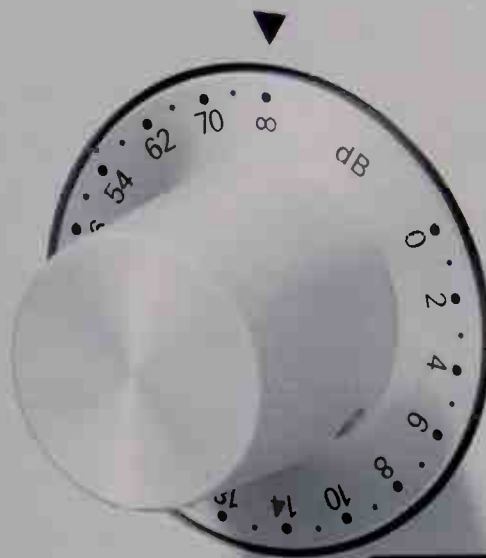


PREV

NEXT



POWER



Copland's design team believes that its greatest challenge is to use a scientific approach to create a product which conveys art. Although music has its basis in mathematics, its raison d'etre is to communicate emotion.. Soul. Spirit.

To achieve this end, Copland has chosen to blend the best of proven technologies - the valve - with the most sophisticated of modern methodologies. Because of this, you will find a compact disc player in a range which also reverses the vinyl LP. You will find stereo playback, which has served pure music for a half-century, alongside multi-channel amplification, designed to recreate the cinematic event in the home.

All of this reaches you, the music lover and cineaste, through components which reflect the most striking of Scandinavian virtues: minimalism. simplicity. clarity.



CDA823 - High resolution CD player



CTA305 - High Performance valve preamplifier



CTA520 - Power amplifier (stereo or mono)



CVA305 - Multi Channel Valve preamplifier



CVA535 - 5 channel Audio Video amplifier



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World Radio History