

# WHAT HI FI?

## SOUND AND VISION

JULY 2015 ₹100

INDIA'S No.1 HOME ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

# SPEAKER SHOOT OUT

B&W, Tannoy, Q-Acoustics and others battle it out in a seven-way showdown!

## SMASHING SUB

REL S/5 shows us how subsonic is done right



**WIN!**  
**Denon**  
**ENVAYA**  
Bluetooth  
Speakers  
P58

## EXCLUSIVE

**Davis Acoustics**  
comes to India!

French speaker brand stuns us with the Matisse mid-level model

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## Tested: Onkyo TX-NR3030

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# WHAT HI FI? SOUND AND VISION

Ground floor, Podar Centre, 85, Parel Post Office Lane,  
Off Dr. B Ambedkar Road, Parel East, Mumbai 400 012.  
email us [whathifi.edit@haymarketsac.com](mailto:whathifi.edit@haymarketsac.com)  
Call us 022-43021000 fax us 022-43021050

## EDITORIAL

**Editor** Nishant Padhiar  
**Deputy Editor** Yatish Suvarna  
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## CONTACT

**Mumbai** Ground floor, Podar Centre, 85, Parel Post Office Lane,  
Off Dr. B Ambedkar Road, Parel East, Mumbai 400 012.  
Tel: 022-43021000 Fax: 022-43021050  
e-mail: [whathifi.edit@haymarketsac.com](mailto:whathifi.edit@haymarketsac.com)

**New Delhi** A2/9, Lower Ground Floor, Safdarjung Enclave,  
Africa Avenue Road, New Delhi - 110029  
Tel : 011-46020600, 32444090, 32969125 Fax: 011-46020633

**Chennai** M H V Pinnacle, First Floor 8/27 Govindu Street, T Nagar  
Chennai 600 017. Tel: 044-65446363 Telefax: 044-4212 3230

**Bengaluru** No. 811, 'A' Wing, 8th Floor, Mittal Towers, M.G. Road,  
Bengaluru - 560001. Tel: 080-2559 3775

**Secundrabad** No. 6-1-144, Nirmal Bhavan, Ground Floor,  
Street No 9, Walker Town, Padmarao Nagar, Secundrabad - 500 025

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This magazine contains 102 pages including both covers.

# Hello/07/15



For most part of this decade so far, we have been living in confusion about what audio and video formats would emerge as the home-theatre staple.

Now that 4K with HDR and Dolby Atmos seem to have dug their feet deeper into the sand, it's easier to make an informed purchase decision regarding the epicentre of

this home-theatre in question. The brand-new **Onkyo TX-NR3030** (p8) is a tour-de-force that simply caters to every connectivity and pass-through option you can think of, while sounding dynamic and refined. Partner it with one of the seven floorstanders we have in our **Speaker Shootout** (p28) and you would have build a solid foundation for a future-safe home-theatre.

There have been a few surprises for us this month. A new brand for India, **Davis Acoustics** (p71) was simply a revelation of what a good, value-for-money loudspeaker should sound like. Packaged in a slender, gloss-black column with simple aesthetics, it proves that there is no substitute for great driver design and pure physics. There's a bunch of **streamers** (p40), one of the world's finest **subwoofers** (p67) and the newest generation wireless headphones all waiting for your attention. Enjoy the read.

Nishant Padhiar, Editor



## Why we're No.1!

### Experience and heritage

In the AV universe our deep rooted heritage and experience helps us share a wealth of information, helping you make a sound decision

### Dedicated test facilities

Our bleeding edge test facilities are stocked with the top of the line reference systems to put incoming products through their paces

### We spot big trends first

Don't blame us for breaking the best stories, it is a habit that ensures you get to learn about tommorow, today

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### Q Acoustics 3020

#### First test p12

"Partner the 3020s with high quality hi-fi separates and good recordings, and they have the transparency to make the most of things"



### REL S/5

#### Off-the-shelf p67

"Its speed, resolution and sheer depth will reveal new information in familiar recordings"



### Bluesound Node

#### Group Test p40

"Energetic and entertaining, it throws its all into the stew of electric riffs and taut bass guitar"



### First test Onkyo TX-NR3030

"We had been slightly concerned about Onkyo's lack of five-star reviews. We needn't have worried - this is one heck of a comeback"

## What's in this issue...

**8 First Tests** The Dolby Atmos-ready Onkyo TX-NR3030 charms it's way in and we sample the Q Acoustics' game-topping 3020 stereo speakers along with giving the Audio Analogue Fortissimo AirTech a good run and finally sink into our couch with the Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 wireless headphones

**28 Supertest: Stereo speakers** Seven pairs of the choicest floorstanders let us know what big sound is all about. Dare we complain

**40 Streamers** Six top streamers fight it out for domination. Take your guesses on the winner



### First Test

"From vocals to guitars, there's a level of subtlety here that uncovers stacks of fine detail"

### Supertest

"We're impressed by the level of integration. The various elements cooperate to perform as a unified whole"

## Subscriptions p58

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## Top Shelf p100

A simple yet elegant wireless speaker setup is what you are looking for and that is exactly what you will get

### Insider Interview

"I feel there's a lot that can be done. Controlling distortion, using DSP to limit the drive, speech intelligibility and things like that"



**50 Temptations** A truly exquisite set of stereo speakers mesmerise us and a room-shattering pre/power amplifier combo make sure we forget about our lives and never leave the listening room

**60 Playlist** We get pulled into the world of *The Birdman* and hand-pick a prime selection of games that are bound to keep your PC and consoles busy

**65 Off-the-shelf** The Davis Acoustics Matisse HD invites us to an ethereal level of sonics, Onkyo CS-265 serves up big sound at a budget, Rel S/5 sub-bass system plunges us into aural euphoria and the Sennheiser RS 175, Crystal Audio Teevy 5, Sol Republic Punk, House of Marley's Get Up Stand Up entertain us



**Temptation**  
"The Gamuts deliver attack when required yet have no problem easing back with chilled-out tracks"

### Our ratings explained

We always test products as a team, in dedicated facilities, and always compare them with their peers. That's why our ratings are the most authoritative in the industry.

One of the best

A serious contender

Worth a look

Disappointing

Awful



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**TEST WINNER**

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## New Buyer's Guide... two mags in one!

**The most trusted hi-fi guide!**

**1500 products rated p75**

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Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

# FIRST TESTS

**MORE  
FIRST TESTS**



**Q Acoustics 3020**

₹ TBA **Page 12**

These young ones sing loud and clear with impressive detail



**Sennheiser  
Momentum 2.0  
Wireless**

₹ 40,000\* **Page 14**

The Momentum 2.0 provides impressive sound with no strings attached



**Audio Analogue  
Fortissimo Air Tech**

₹ 1,75,000\* **Page 17**

This solid block may be all you need for your stereo needs

**EXCLUSIVE**

## Sky's the limit for a great-sounding box

**Onkyo TX-NR3030 | AV amp | ₹1,90,000**

**It has been** a while since an Onkyo AV receiver received the full five stars from us. At this price, at least, it has been a few years, but much of that has been down to fierce competition from the likes of Pioneer and Yamaha.

But the wait is finally over for Onkyo. The TX-NR3030 is a tremendous bit of kit, and the sort of amp that not only rips the flag out of the competition's turf but takes it home too. At ₹1,90,000 it's pricey, but what you get for your money is a great-sounding box of many tricks, including the much talked-about Dolby Atmos.

### The next step in surround-sound

For the uninitiated, Dolby Atmos is the next step in surround-sound technology. It brings an element of verticality to your traditional set-up. With added in-ceiling speakers, or up-firing speakers that bounce sound off your ceiling, you'll find yourself being covered by a dome of sound.

The point of this is to create a more natural soundfield. You get a sense of height to the presentation, and sound effects travel around the room more organically than before.

### Spacious and immersive

That's the theory, anyway - but on the Onkyo TX-NR3030 it really works. The effect is a subtle one. Sounds don't blast you from above but rather you feel your listening room open up. The soundfield is massive, spacious and utterly immersive.

Suddenly you no longer have a ceiling. You may feel mildly concerned when you first hear raindrops fall from above you, but that sense of

concern swiftly turns into admiration. Switch between Atmos and standard 5.1 and you'll realise just how imposing your ceiling really is. Without Dolby Atmos, you've been missing out.

Of course, it's not all about the atmosphere. Sometimes you just want to have a bullet zing past your left ear. In this respect, the effects placement with Dolby Atmos is superb. We load up a Blu-ray of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (there are very few Atmos discs available as yet) and the sound of drones and helicopters hovering above us brings a smile to our faces. Bullets go through you and hit the other side of the room, rather than sticking to one corner at a time.

But aside from Atmos, we're equally impressed with the Onkyo. With a 5.1 set-up there's still a huge sense of space. More importantly, the character of the sound ticks all the right boxes.

It's a tonally balanced presentation, with no undue emphasis on any part of the frequency range. High notes are crisp but not harsh. The midrange is direct and full-bodied, while the bass is deep and taut. It's a smooth, rounded listen that's very easy on the ears.

We're also impressed with the amount of detail on offer. We watch a Blu-ray of *Black Sea*, and the submarine's creaking and clanking has enough texture to make us concerned about our room's structural integrity. It's a subtle sound, with plenty of nuance.

### Adrenaline rush

The Onkyo is not the last word in agility and punch, but the sound is lightfooted enough,



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Dolby Atmos is the next step in surround-sound technology. The soundfield is spacious and utterly immersive - suddenly you no longer have a ceiling. You may feel mildly concerned when you first hear raindrops falling from above, but that swiftly turns into admiration



and strong dynamics help. The Pioneer SC-LX88 undoubtedly yields a more exciting, hard-hitting sound, but it's also a more tiring listen over time. And the Pioneer doesn't have quite as much subtlety. The Onkyo may not be as much of an adrenaline rush, but it has no trouble entertaining us.

#### Box of tricks

Top marks for sound, then. But elsewhere, this box of tricks deserves some praise. When it comes to features, the Onkyo TX-NR3030 means business. It boasts 11.2 channels. That gives you some degree of flexibility when it comes to your Atmos set-up. We used a 5.1.4 system (meaning five surround speakers, one subwoofer, and four Atmos speakers), but the amp allows up to 7.2.4.

There's very little that the Onkyo doesn't do. Take streaming, for instance. DLNA certification means you can stream music

both from networked computers and storage devices.

Network connectivity is by ethernet and built-in wifi. Wifi means flexibility, but for a more stable connection we'd still recommend a wired connection. File compatibility is good, and you'll be able to play MP3, WMA, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC, Apple Lossless, LPCM and DSD up to 5.6MHz.

There's also AirPlay, which means you can stream from a number of Apple devices. Don't have an Apple device? That's fine, you can use Bluetooth, which is also built-in. And if you don't want to use your own material, you can find more from the internet. The Onkyo supports Internet Radio, as well as Spotify Connect, Deezer and Aupeo. Now you have the world's content to discover.

When it comes to plugs, the Onkyo is very well endowed. There are eight HDMI inputs, which is more than we find

Dolby Atmos may be the star of the show, but we are equally impressed with the rest of this amplifier

#### The app...



#### Let your phone take control

Don't want to use the physical remote? Then you can use the Onkyo Remote app. It's a little basic, but very handy. On a basic level you get the main buttons, such as directional arrows. Swipe left and right to access separate pages for adjusting tone setting and listening modes, as well as choosing zones (Main, Zone 2 and Zone 3). You can also use the app to stream music from your phone. And at any point,

you can bring up a volume adjustment bar.

The app is free on Android and iOS. You just need to make sure your phone and amp are both on the same network.



Balanced Speaker  
Directivity



Teevy  
Bar



No 'bridge' necessary



Cuby  
9 MR



Teevy  
6



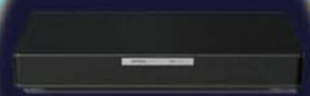
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**In detail...****1 Connections**

An ethernet connection will give you a more stable experience, but you also get built-in wifi, which gives you more flexibility. There's built-in Bluetooth too.

**2 Inputs**

If you like to plug things in, you'll be right at home. There are eight HDMI inputs (one at the front) and myriad analogue connections for old-school kit.

**3 Speaker settings**

Pay extra attention when connecting your speakers. The terminals aren't marked for Atmos. You'll want to use Height 1 and Height 2, and then adjust the settings.

ourselves using at any one time. You get three each of digital optical and coaxial inputs, while a USB port lets you play music from memory sticks and iPods.

There are also plenty of analogue inputs and outputs, which can be used for multi-zone listening.

**Accurate calibration**

Now, a word on setting up the Onkyo. Pay special attention to the way you hook up your speakers, because the terminals can be a bit confusing. There's no label for Atmos speakers, so you'll have to connect them to 'Height 1' and 'Height 2'.

Automatic calibration is quite accurate, but we'd suggest taking the time to check the settings so that the Onkyo realises Height 1 and Height 2 are your Atmos speakers. If you're using large speakers, make sure that's reflected in the menus too.

We'd also suggest at least starting with all processing modes off and experimenting with each one in turn. The 'night mode' flattens the dynamic range, making the sound a bit unexciting. Turn this off and you'll hear what the Onkyo can really do.

**No degree required**

As for design, it's difficult to get excited about any AV receiver, and the Onkyo is no exception. But it's not unpleasant to look at. There's only one dial (for volume), with input selection left to individual buttons



The remote control is pleasant to operate, but there's a simple app if you prefer

along the face. We'd prefer a dedicated input selection dial, but it's hardly a deal-breaker. The build quality is strong. It's a well-built metal box, available in black or silver, and is heavy enough to convince you not to move it once it's settled.

The remote control is pleasant to operate. It's a good size, with well-spaced buttons, and you don't need a degree to navigate it. If you don't like it (or if you lose it) you can always use the remote control app (free on Android and iOS). It's a bit simple, but it gets the job done.

**A great comeback**

We find ourselves very impressed by the Onkyo TX-NR3030. With a class-leading sound and a great list of features, it offers plenty for your money. We had been slightly worried about Onkyo's lack of five-star reviews for a while, but it turns out that our concern wasn't necessary. This is one heck of a comeback for the company. Very well done indeed.

**TECH SPECS**

HDMI in 8 • HDMI out 3 •  
Networking yes • 3D passthrough yes •  
Bluetooth yes • Wi-fi yes • Dolby Atmos yes •  
Dimensions (hwd) 337 x 602 x 594mm •  
Weight 26.5kg

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Spacious, subtle sound; plenty of connections; Dolby Atmos

**AGAINST** Could do with a little more agility and attack

**VERDICT** Onkyo is back on top of its game with this stonkingly good amp

**SYSTEM BUILDER**

Get these three and you'll be fully prepared for home cinema nirvana



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**Total build ₹9,02,900**

**We had been slightly concerned about Onkyo's lack of five-star reviews. We needn't have worried - this is one heck of a comeback**

**REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE ONKYO TX-NR3030**

**1** Yikes, this thing is heavy. But it's built like a tank, and looks imposing in black or silver. That glowing dial is nice.

**2** Connecting speakers for a 5.1.4 set-up is tricky. Which terminals do the Atmos speakers go into? Clearer labelling, please.

**3** Auto calibration is quick and fairly accurate. But it pays to tinker with the settings. Turn Night Mode off.

**4** Atmos works! Where did the ceiling disappear to? Those raindrops are almost falling on my head. I need the loo.

**5** It sounds lovely in standard 5.1 too. Looks like Onkyo has made a very strong comeback after a few years in the pack.

Q Acoustics 3020 | Stereo speakers | ₹TBA

# These little gems are ahead of the Q

The success of the Q Acoustics brand has been astonishing. The company started back in 2006 and right from the start has produced sensibly priced, class-leading speakers. And guess what? They've only gone and done it again.

The 3020 is part of the new 3000 series. While the multiple Award-winning 2000 range continues for now, it's hard to see demand remaining once word gets out about these new products.

## A familiar look

The series includes two standmounters, a floorstander, centre and subwoofer, but the 3020s on test are the larger of the standmounting options. There's a familiar look about these speakers, but otherwise almost everything else is new.

Many of the lessons learned in the design of the premium-priced Concept products have been applied here. This is particularly evident in the cabinet. While the price has taken the sandwich construction used in the Concepts off the menu, Q Acoustics has still produced a surprisingly well-engineered box.

## Rigid structure

The 3020's cabinet is mainly made of 15mm MDF panels but with a double-layer 30mm top plate and similarly layered 24mm front baffle. This structure is then extensively braced in specific places to control resonances and help with stiffness. All this work pays off in an enclosure that feels immensely solid and provides a good, rigid foundation for the drive units to work from.

The speaker terminals - hidden under the base panel in the 2000 series - have been moved to a more conventional position on the back. This not only makes the terminals more accessible, but also improves structural rigidity.

A less obvious benefit is that the cabinet depth is significantly reduced from the 2020is, but without losing much internal volume. Height and width stay the same.

The 3020s are single-wire only, losing the biwire arrangement of the 2020is. Though apparently a retrograde step, at this end of the market it's much better to have a single length of decent cable than two sets of inferior alternatives.

## Attention to detail

These speakers are available in five finishes. Matt Graphite and American Walnut are standard options, but if you pay extra, you can have either white or black lacquered gloss or an interesting leather option.

Our gloss white review sample is finished beautifully, and made with an attention to detail that few competitors come close to. Q Acoustics' work hasn't stopped there. Both drive units are new too. The 12.5cm mid/bass unit's cone material has changed from a paper/mica mix to one that combines paper and aramid fibre, more commonly known as Kevlar. This strengthens the paper cone and makes its behaviour more predictable, leading to what Q Acoustics describe as a 'more natural tonality'.

The new 25mm tweeter is unusual. It uses a diaphragm that aims to combine the best qualities of ring radiator and dome designs. The aim here is to deliver highs with low distortion and wide dispersion. The tweeter's motor system uses a dual ferrite magnet, and the whole assembly is decoupled from the main cabinet structure by butyl rubber. The idea is to isolate it from the vibrations of the cabinet and produce a purer sound.

These drive units are linked with a revised crossover that features higher grade components than found in the 2000 series, designed with a view to lowering

distortion and minimising any phase issues at the crossover frequency.

These speakers are just as likely to find themselves partnering a little micro system like Denon's evergreen DM39 as they are in a hi-fi separates set-up. They need to be relatively easy to drive and forgiving sonically, and that's exactly what they are.

Over the years, Q Acoustics has developed a specific sonic character, refined and subtle but with enough in the way of dynamic punch and rhythm drive to satisfy. And so it is with the 3020s.

## Level of enjoyment

Their innate refinement means that any harshness or edge in the partnering electronics isn't emphasised. They aren't overly fussy about shortcomings in source material either, so anyone with low-bit rate MP3s still has a chance of getting a decent level of enjoyment out of them.

Partner the 3020s with high quality hi-fi separates and good recordings, and they have the transparency to make the most of things. A typical partnering system would be something like the Marantz 6005 CD and amp, but such are the 3020's talents that it would be quite happy at the end of an Audiolab 8200CD and Arcam A19 pairing - impressive considering the speaker's pricetag.

## Solid stands

Of course, you'll need to take care in set-up. While these speakers will perform well on wall brackets, we recommend using good, solid stands if you can. Something like Atacama's Moseco 6 would be good, with Q Acoustics Concept stand being even better. Either option might seem quite pricey considering the cost of the speakers, but we think the 3020's potential fully justifies that outlay.

Our review sample has a white lacquered gloss finish, which pushes the total cost higher

## In detail



**Tweeter** The new tweeter assembly is decoupled from the cabinet to deliver a purer sound



**Terminal panel** The revised terminal panel is now on the back. In this position, it is easier to use and helps with rigidity



**Magnetic grilles** The 3020s sound best with the grilles off, but if you have to use them, they're attached magnetically



**Reflex port** The mid/bass unit is tuned by a rear firing reflex port. The speaker isn't overly fussy about positioning



The 3020s aren't particularly picky about positioning either. We preferred them around 15cm from the back wall, but they sounded pretty balanced tonally even well out into the room. The tweeter's dispersion characteristics mean that exact toe-in angle isn't critical; they just render a wide and cohesive stereo image without much effort.

Play Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and the 3020s deliver a wide, deep sound stage populated by nicely layered and precisely focused instruments. We're impressed by the dynamics on offer, as the 3020s deliver the music's crescendos with confidence, while rendering low-level subtleties with a skill quite outside the scope of most rivals.

We listen to Bruce Springsteen's *Terry's Song* and love the way these speakers handle the genuine emotion in Springsteen's vocals as he mourns the loss of his friend. The tweeter does its job well here, delivering all the bite we expect without overplaying the recording's occasional hard edge.



**USE THEM WITH**

**Marantz PM6005**  
₹44,900

This amplifier is as talented as the CD player and a worthy partner to the 3020s. Few rivals can match it for finesse

**Beyond expectations**

Move up a gear to *Radio Nowhere* and the Qs show they can rock too. They motor along with this track, delivering plenty in the way of drive, dynamics and attack.

We listen to a range of music, starting with the sparsely-produced *Coexist* from The xx and Bjork's energetic *Post*, through to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, and these little gems never fail to please. For their size they deliver a decent dose of low-end punch, and are loud enough for most situations.

Partner them with a bit of care and you'll get a quality of sound that's well beyond the typical expectations of such speakers. Fabulous value? Without a doubt. But are they better than the Wharfedale Diamond 220s, our current budget champions? We wouldn't bet against it.

**Q tips**  
Q Acoustics has a habit of making class-leading speakers at a reasonable price, and the 3020s are no exception. With the right partners, you'll get a quality of sound well above what you'd expect

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Exceptional combination of refinement, insight and dynamics; terrific build and finish

**AGAINST** Absolutely nothing at this price

**VERDICT** Yet another top class budget standmounter from Q Acoustics. It delivers a fabulous sound for the money

**Needs to beat**

**Wharfedale Diamond 220**

₹23,000 ★★★★★

Our current budget speaker champion is a terrific all-rounder



Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 Wireless | Headphones | ₹40,000\* (Approx.)

# Sweet music, with no strings

When Sennheiser launched the first range of Momentum headphones in 2013, it showed a fashion-conscious popular headphone market that style and substance didn't have to be mutually exclusive.

With these 'phones now in their second generation, that message is stronger than ever. Not only has the range been tweaked and improved, it's also expanded with the addition of these wireless, noise-cancelling cans. And what an addition they are.

From a pure design perspective, the Momentum 2.0 Wireless are as desirable as ever. At first glance, they appear similar to the first generation, sporting an all-leather headband and elegantly sculpted earcups on adjustable stainless-steel rails.

## Spot the difference

Look closer though, and you'll notice there have been some tweaks. The frame is now collapsible, allowing them to fold down for better portability, while the earcups are bigger to ensure a better over-ear fit.

The soft leather earpads are thicker too, making them even comfier than before. We have worn them for hours at a time without feeling the need to remove or adjust them, and our ears have never become overly warm during use.

**Despite the strong bass response, it's in the midrange that we think the Momentums really shine. From vocals to guitars, there's a level of subtlety here that uncovers stacks of fine detail**

Obviously the headline features of this model over the standard Momentum 2.0 are aptX Bluetooth and active noise cancellation, both of which make their debut here with excellent results.

You'll get around 22 hours of stable wireless music playback with noise cancellation activated (more at a modest volume level), and should you drain that you can attach the included cable and continue listening passively (passive mode is available when wired only). We do wish the power light stayed on constantly when they're powered up though - without it it's easy to forget to turn the Momentums off and waste battery life in the process.

## Controls to hand

You'll find all the controls for power and music control on the right earcup. The power button doubles as the pairing button, with the ability to remember up to eight different devices, or you can use NFC pairing if your device is compatible.

There's a multi-function button that shifts up and down for volume adjustments,

and can also be depressed to perform varying functions. Once you remember which combination of presses does what, it's a handy option.

The noise-cancelling on board is Sennheiser's proprietary NoiseGuard technology, and it does a really good job of dulling down the noises of the world around you.

You don't get the almost eerie levels of silence provided by Bose's QC25s, but you also don't get that odd feeling of pressure on your ears when noise cancellation is activated.

Office noise is all but gone and airplane noise is drastically reduced to a negligible hum - it's up there as one of the most effective noise-cancelling experiences we've had, and one of the most natural too.

Fire them up for a listen and we're greeted with the Momentum sound signature we know and love, which hasn't lost any of its verve or excitement in shedding wires. In fact, we're really impressed at how close the wired and wireless performances are. Things are a little tighter with the wire attached, but you certainly won't feel like you're missing out when you go wireless.

It's a rich, full-bodied performance with a level of composure and refinement that we aren't always used to hearing from Bluetooth headphones.

The low end is weighty but detailed, giving the pulsing bassline of Jay-Z and Kanye West's *No Church In The Wild* plenty of punch without ever sounding boomy or drowning out the rest of the frequency range.

In fact, despite its strong bass response, it's in the midrange that we think the Momentums really shine. From vocals to guitars, there's a level of subtlety here that uncovers stacks of fine detail, with plenty of clarity to boot.

In Rihanna's *FourFiveSeconds*, vocals are expressive and focused, while Paul McCartney's guitar strums have real depth and texture to them. Dynamically the Momentums don't miss a beat either, timing superbly and delivering a wonderfully enthusiastic, up-front presentation that keeps you hooked on the music track after track.

The high end is as well judged as the rest of the frequency range, possessing an open,



Now collapsible, the soft leather earcups are also larger than before - and more comfortable

articulate treble that shows no hint of harshness, even with lesser-quality recordings. The Momentums have always been forgiving and that quality has continued in the second generation.

They also offer an impressively spacious presentation for a pair of closed-back headphones, giving instruments and performers plenty of room to breathe, even in the busiest of recordings.

## Separate microphone

Take a call while wearing the headphones and thanks to a separate microphone dedicated to voice calls built into the earcups, you don't need a mic on the audio cable to be heard. We find calls to be clear and stable, with callers always able to hear us without issue.

The only hitch in all of this is the price. ₹40,000 is a not inconsiderable amount to spend on a pair of headphones, but if you have it to spend you won't be disappointed.

In the Momentum 2.0 Wireless, Sennheiser has delivered an endlessly listenable, hugely likeable pair of headphones with new features and design tweaks that make them better than ever. If you can find ₹40k you'll be well rewarded.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Design; great dynamics; clear, detailed midrange; rich bass; good noise cancellation

**AGAINST** A little pricey

**VERDICT** The Momentum range just got even better - these headphones look stylish, offer great functionality and sound superb



### A friendly voice

As well as the multi-function button on the right earcup, the Momentums also offer voice prompts to let you know when you're connected to a device, in pairing mode, or powering on or off

There's little to choose between the wired and wireless performance; it's superb in each case

## System builder **Total build ₹NA**

### Smartphone

**Samsung Galaxy Note 4 ₹41,900 ★★★★★**

Samsung's excellent Galaxy Note 4 is able to take full advantage of the Momentums aptX Bluetooth function, and with NFC on board as well, pairing the two together is quick and easy.



### DAC

**Audioquest Dragonfly v1.2 ₹13,800 ★★★★★**

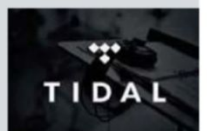
A dinky DAC that offers an outstanding performance for a great price, Audioquest's Dragonfly is a simple way to bring greater transparency and detail to your computer's audio.



### Streaming service

**Tidal \$20/month ★★★★★**

CD-quality streaming might come at a price, but it really is worth it. Tidal is the most together service of its type we've seen, with sound quality that blows competitors away.





Market Share of more than 19.11%  
Source: Future Source Consulting Report, 2014

W+ Series Projectors

# Reconnect family with BenQ Because **FAMILY** matters



W1070+



W1080ST+

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Because it matters



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**Audio Analogue Fortissimo AirTech | Stereo amplifier | ₹1,75,000\* (Approx.)**

# Fortissimo has strength and subtlety

If you're looking for a well-equipped premium integrated amplifier, this Audio Analogue is worth investigating. The Fortissimo AirTech packs a lot into its large chassis, including digital-to-analogue conversion, a headphones output and moving coil/moving magnet phono stage.

Don't let the 'AirTech' name fool you; there isn't the wireless functionality here that the tag suggests. It simply indicates that this is the revised version of the Fortissimo amplifier we tested back in late 2013. The changes include a new thicker chassis and front panel, upgraded internal cabling and improved capacitors in the power supply and audio circuits. The company has revoiced the Fortissimo too, aiming for improved smoothness, transparency and spaciousness in its presentation.

## Plenty of inputs

First impressions are positive. As is Audio Analogue's way, the unit feels solid and is nicely finished. It's available in two colours, black and silver.

A single, large rotary control dominates the front panel, handling volume and source selection duties. There are a lot of connections to work through as the amplifier has five line-level inputs (including one balanced and a 3.5mm input on the front panel), three digital options (USB, coax and optical) as well as a phono stage. The remote makes things easier, though you'll have to learn the specific number associated with each input to get direct access.



## I get around

The large rotary control on the front panel handles volume and source selection duties. It can only cycle in one direction, so if you miss the one of your choice, you'll have to work your way around the dial again

The remote handset may not have the clearest layout we've seen, but it is nicer to use than most rival offerings.

## USB sampling rate is a let down

We're a little thrown by the DAC. It can accept data streams of up to 24-bit/176.4kHz sampling rate through its optical and coax inputs, but just 16-bit/48Khz through via USB. We'd expect the USB and coax inputs to cope with 24-bit/192Khz signals at least.

Through the analogue inputs this amplifier puts in a strong performance. It sounds big and powerful, as its 100 watt per channel power output suggests, but combines these traits with an impressive degree of subtlety when required.

We start with Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and the Fortissimo AirTech delivers the piece's large-scale dynamic swings with composure, keeping the complex arrangements organised. There's a good degree of insight and fine handling of the interplay between instruments.

Tonally it's mostly even, with just a touch of extra sweetness at the top end. We like this balance; the amplifier retains a good degree of transparency without

## USE IT WITH

### Roksan Caspian M2 CD player

An excellent CD player that delivers a dramatic and engaging sound, yet lacks nothing in refinement



turning nasty if fed with poor quality source material or partnered with aggressive-sounding kit.

Moving to an old favourite in PJ Harvey's *White Chalk*, the Audio Analogue sounds right at home. It has a lovely midrange; articulate, agile and subtle. Harvey's voice is delivered with all the passion intact, and the sparse instrumental backing is rendered with care. There's power when needed, but the amplifier's finesse impresses us most. By the highest standards at this price there are small, but noticeable, shortfalls in terms of dynamic punch and rhythmic precision, but it's not enough to spoil things.

## Pleasing, but perhaps not exciting

The on-board DAC is a decent one, but doesn't have the all-round talent of Arcam's irDAC. Listening to Kanye West's *Yeezus* shows off the Fortissimo's refinement and composure, but also reveals a slight lack of dynamic expression. The amplifier remains a pleasing listen, but falls a little short in the excitement stakes. The headphone output is disappointing though, and it loses a notable amount of insight and finesse this way.

Overall, the Fortissimo AirTech is a capable amplifier, packed full of useful features and with a pleasant and subtle presentation. Worth a listen? We'd say so.

## In detail

### 1 New chassis

While the Fortissimo looks the same as the model we reviewed back in 2013, the front panel and chassis are both thicker and more rigid than before.

### 2 XLR connection

The Fortissimo has a good range of analogue inputs and includes a balanced XLR connection. This amplifier will happily accommodate most stereo set-ups.

### 3 Built-in DAC

One of the big selling points of the Fortissimo AirTech amplifier is the built-in DAC module. Although it's a decent unit, it is still bettered by the likes of Arcam's irDAC.



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Subtle and articulate midrange; refined presentation; good build and finish

**AGAINST** Lacks a little attack and rhythmic drive; headphone output could be better

**VERDICT** A good amplifier which is at its best with music that requires finesse above all else

## Also consider

### Rega Elicit-R ₹1,92,000 ★★★★★

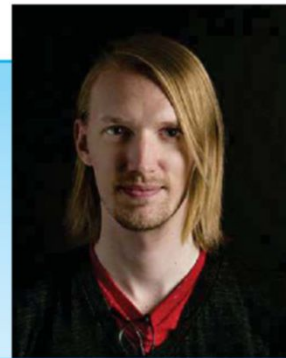
A top-class amplifier that delivers excellent dynamics and precise rhythmic drive



## Industry Voice

# Getting in the headspace of a headphone designer

Audioquest's Nighthawk is poised to become an icon and figure why



Skylar Gray - Director of In-ear speakers at Audioquest

**T**he world doesn't need another pair of headphones. So why does cable brand Audioquest want to get into the over-crowded market? Well, a couple of years back, they roped in one of the brightest minds when it comes to headphone design. At the Munich High-End Show, we caught up with Skylar Gray and quizzed him about his newest creation.

## The Nighthawk seems to have been in development for years, whats the story?

It's a process of constant iterations and you learn a lot just by building prototypes and pre-production models. You also learn how to build the product more efficiently, but what's important to the customer is the comfort, performance etc. So, we've changed the tension on the headband ever so slightly, changed the drivers and acoustic impedance to affect the tonal balance and more such tweaks based on feedback we get from people like you and at trade shows.

## How long did it take from the design table to final production?

It's been 2.5 years

during which 85% of my time was spent just on the Nighthawk and the rest on some other ideas. But once you get close to production, it's only that 'one' project that is critical. So, the last 7-8 months have only been spent in perfecting the production and quality control process.

## One of the headlining features of the Nighthawk is its 3D-printed diffuser. Was this born out of necessity or marketing?

It's always the functionality of the design that will eventually define the marketing. But you bring up a really good point. A lot of people

who are new to 3D printing or don't understand the process completely assume that it will replace regular manufacturing of parts. Rather, 3D printing helps designers to make things that were previously impossible to make. I always knew that this part was possible only with 3D printing. As a designer, I have a toolbox of processes and materials for building things that I can pick from. So, sometimes I may have a part that needs to be die-cast or injection-moulded. In this case, there was a three dimensional structure that I had accidentally stumbled upon and I knew instantly that 3D printing would be the only way to make it. I was studying gyroid lattice structures because I had a feeling it would work as a great diffuser.

## What are the acoustical benefits of having a diffuser on the back as opposed to an absorber in a headphone?

If we have a two-dimensional surface here, like an acoustic fabric or perforated steel plate, there will be some reflection back. I wanted to avoid any kind of resonance that might occur inside the enclosure. So, I instead chose a design through which I could control the acoustic impedance and tweak it. This design is called the diamond cubic because it has the same molecular crystalline structure as a diamond but it's also found in certain species of butterfly. These butterflies have iridescent wings but when you observe them under a microscope, you realise that they have no pigments at all and they're just reacting to light and diffusing it. Hence, I did some simulations based on this principle and scaled it up in size. What's true for light, also works for sound!

## Headphone driver sizes are becoming increasingly larger. Where do you draw the line?

Well, at some point, you start becoming limited in HF output. Sony, in fact, used to



A long time in the making, the Nighthawk seems worthy enough to be the first AQ headphone



### HP Omen

With B&O designed audio, this ₹1,59,990 gaming laptop has segment-defying thickness at 19.9mm and features NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M 4 GB gaming graphics card.



### Creative Sound Blaster Jam

This Bluetooth and NFC-enabled lightweight Rs. 3499 headset from Creative offers inbuilt noise-cancellation and offers one-tap bass enhancement option.

have a headphone with a 70mm driver and it sounded quite nice, so that might be the upper limit. I have chosen 50mm for the Nighthawk because I know how it responds and it gives me the bass extension I need without too much excursion. But there will be some limitations ultimately that are material based. We have to think about how rigid we can make the materials in order to get HF extension without break-up or distortion.



### What sort of cone technology have you developed for Nighthawk?

The cone material is actually a design that was perfected jointly by Sony and another Japanese technical firm back in the late 80s. They made a famous headphone that used this bio-cellulose driver and it was called the Sony MDR-R10. At the time, it was probably the most expensive headphone you could buy (\$5000). What makes it really great is that it is rigid and has self-damping properties, which is important to avoid resonance peaks. It's similar to titanium in its stiffness-to-weight ratio but behaves like paper or polymer cone when it comes to damping. It's the best of both worlds. I am working on new diaphragm materials but as of now, this is the best you can get and only one company in the world (in Japan) makes it.

### Does it make logical sense to incorporate other Audioquest technologies like the DAC or Jitterbug into future models of headphones?

When people found out that Audioquest was going to do a headphone, they naturally assumed that we would have a DragonFly built in and they aren't wrong. It would make sense for us and such a product is under active development. But we wanted to do a purist design first that proves our competency as a passive, high-end headphone manufacturer. I think it's important we build that notoriety and respect first and then come up with more mass-market models.

## A material called liquid wood is used to make the ear cups of the Nighthawk and it's actually a type of wood that melts upon heating. It's a special material that was invented several years ago

### Are you adopting the top down strategy with the Nighthawk?

Not really. We might have an even bigger headphone than the Nighthawk in the future, depends on the design and what's required in the market. We will make mobile-powered and passive headphones, in-ear monitors and whatever other form factors we think we have an opportunity to innovate in.

### Does the prospect of surround-sound gaming headphones excite your team?

Of course. There is a small clan even within Audioquest that believe in gaming as well. There is a huge problem with the quality of the microphones and being a transducer designer, I feel there's a lot that can be done. Controlling distortion, using DSP to limit the drive, speech intelligibility and things like that. But you also brought up a very interesting point, which is spatialisation of surround-sound. Object-based sound combined with HRTF (Head Related Transfer Function) can take Virtual Reality to a whole new level. The missing ingredient in most of these so-called surround headphones is that they miss head tracking. So it would be great to partner with a VR headset and use its native head-tracking sensors and input it to our DSP circuit to create the necessary spatialisation. Inter-aural delay, inter-aural level change and the very shape of every individual's ears make it challenging and not a lot of brands are doing a thorough job with these parameters still. DTS is doing some great work in generalising HRTF that may work for everyone and that's called Headphone X. There are talks of having our ears 3D scanned and based on that modelling, you could create your own, personal HRTF. So, there could be some type of headset that you wear and plug it into your phone that produces a sweep tone and that captures your data forever.

### Why the choice of exotic materials in the Nighthawk?

I hate using plastics. As much as possible, I use materials that come from renewable or organic sources. Materials that are not bio-hazards and have a low carbon footprint are essential. So, in our products, everything from packaging to ear cups is taken into consideration. A material called liquid wood is used to make the ear cups of the Nighthawk and it's actually a type of wood that melts upon heating. It's a special material that was invented several years ago but hasn't seen a lot of mainstream use because its kind of expensive to use for mass products. It's a process that is similar to making paper and we alter the characteristics of the wood pulp, typically a spruce or fir. It's a proprietary process that keeps the material 100% biodegradable and then we heat it, liquify it and mould it in a high-pressure injection mould. Even acoustically, it is rigid and self-damping just like the diaphragm, making it ideal for use in 'ear speakers'. It took us a year and a half to custom formulate this process to our needs and get consistent results and colouration right.



Liquid Wood is the material that is used in the making of the earcups. It's rare, expensive and looks absolutely fabulous!

**Microlab M 200 Lab**

These Platinum Edition Microlab 2.1 multimedia speakers offer a unique wired remote control with rotary volume dial and AUX connectivity. Yours for ₹4990.

**Intex LED-5000**

The LED-5000 is Intex's first Full HD TV in the 50in segment. It is priced at ₹49,000 and will be available at all leading electronic retail stores.



# LG'S SUHD SERIES TO BETTER 4K

*Serves up a brew of Harman/Kardon sound, 4K 3D, and WebOS 2.0*



How do you make 4K TVs better? According to LG, it's got the answer with its new, ultra-slim Super UHD Series. These new 3D Ultra High Definition sets use ColorPrime technology and IPS panels to improve colour accuracy while delivering more vivid images. LG claims that ColorPrime also helps boost the colour spectrum by over 20% as compared to standard UHD sets. Then there's Ultra Luminance tech, which uses local dimming to make images brighter, and 4K 3D, which uses passive 3D glasses to deliver a flicker-free image.

As expected, the new range features LG's renowned WebOS 2.0 Smart TV system, with a new Magic Motion Remote Control, which acts a universal remote for your other devices, and an updated interface that's supposed to be far more responsive and intuitive compared to earlier versions. Other features you get with LG's new Super UHD Series include 4G LTE expandability, Music Catch recording and smart sharing, and sound designed by Harman/Kardon. LG's new Super UHD range is available in sizes of 55in / 65in / 79in, with prices starting at ₹2,94,900.

## The Modern World Studio

In our eagerness to cover the platitude of demo rooms featured in the "Thunder Down Under" south special in the June 2015 issue of *What Hi-Fi?* magazine, we placed an incorrect image for Modern World Studio.

The image on the left depicts the correct one and is part of the three demo rooms. On display are a host of brands from B&W, Cerwin Vega, Klipsch, Q Acoustics, Energy, Jamo and Onkyo. From bookshelf speakers, floorstanders to home-theatres, all are powered by Denon and Onkyo amps, and make sure you're not bereft of choices.



B&W, Cerwin Vega, Klipsch, Q Acoustics and a host of brands await you here.



**Bech de**

# LET THE OLD MAKE WAY FOR THE NEW





### Portronics POR 318 Pico Projector

Priced at ₹22,500, Portronics' latest is a 50 lumens portable projector with a projection of 80in screen diagonal, and bundles a built-in battery and speakers.

### Zebronics Zeb-3201

The Zeb-3201 by Zebronics is a 32in LED TV, a first by the company. It is priced at ₹18,999 and boasts of a dynamic contrast ratio of 5,000,000:1.



## New A/V and stereo receivers from Onkyo

*With Dolby Atmos support and multiple streaming options*



Onkyo has announced a trio of new network receivers, the TX-8160, TX-RZ800, and the TX-RZ900. The TX-8160 Network Stereo Receiver features an 110W/channel output, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity, Quick Access presets, Zone 2 distributed audio support, and a 384 kHz/32-bit DAC. The TX-8160 also has multiple streaming apps built in - including Spotify, Pandora, and TuneIn - multiple format support, an anti-vibration chassis, and Onkyo's high-current amplification tech. Along with this stereo unit, Onkyo's also got a pair of 7.2 channel network A/V receivers - the TX-RZ900 and TX-RZ800 - which are THX Select2-certified, feature Dolby Atmos and DTS:X support, are

capable of playing 4K/60Hz video. The TX-RZ800 features an 185W/channel output, and uses a high-current amp design for more dynamic sound. The TX-RZ900 offers a 200W/channel output and also adds in a custom toroidal transformer.

Both the RZ900 and the RZ800 use non-phase-shift amplifiers and Vector Linear Shaping Circuitry, which Onkyo says guarantees a cleaner sound. Other features common to the two include 3-Stage Inverted Darlington circuitry, a 384 kHz/32-bit DAC, AccuEQ Room Calibration, Zone 2 audio and video, built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth with multiple streaming options, and Airplay compatibility.



## Samsung brings its SUHD Curved TV range to India

Samsung has announced the launch of its SUHD Curved TV range in India. According to Samsung, these new Ultra High Definition television sets use its proprietary Nano Crystal Technology for a far better image quality - with up to 10 times the contrast and over 2.5 times the brightness of traditional TVs. Samsung is also promising colours far more vivid than other 4K TVs, and also says the 'optimal curve' makes its new range perfect for an immersive experience. The TVs also use a 'shirring' design pattern at the back, and a chamfered bezel that resembles paintings in a frame. Powering the SUHD sets' Smart TV functions is Samsung's home-grown Tizen, which supports features like TV-phone (and vice versa) media sharing and split-screen multitasking that lets you use apps while watching a movie. According to Samsung, the TVs' Smart Hub has been simplified and is now more intuitive and easier to use than earlier. Owners of Samsung's phones also get the 'Briefing on TV' feature - with the TV syncing with your phone to display weather updates and your schedule. As of now, two models are available 55in (₹3,14,900) and 65in (₹4,40,900).



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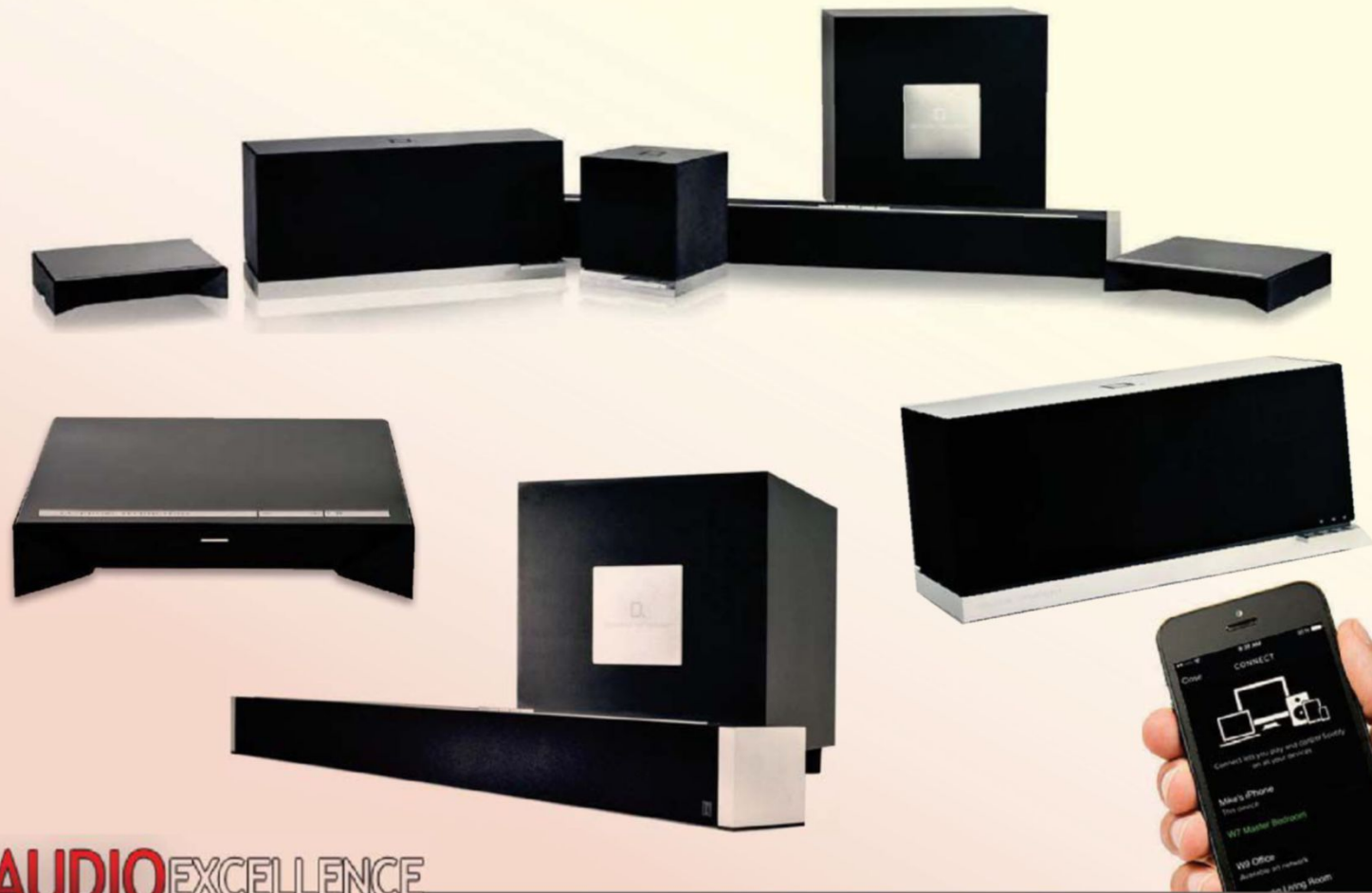
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## Definitive Technology ushers in DTS Play-Fi™ with new Wireless series



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**Vu LED60S8575 TV**

Vu's latest, a 60in FHD Smart LED TV offers features like Dolby Digital sound quality and smart networking features. The smart TV is priced at ₹92,000.



# PALM EXPO 2015

Leading Pro-AV show brings together industry giants and professionals in Mumbai



**T**he 15th edition of the pro AV and DJ trade show Palm Expo was held at the Bombay Exhibition Centre in Mumbai over 28-30 May.

Organised by ABEC Exhibitions and Conferences Private Limited and International Trade Exhibitions (India), Palm Expo Mumbai 2015 featured 166 exhibitors, with almost a quarter being first time participants.

Highlights of the show included 3 separate Palm Demo Qubes, which gave exhibitors a purpose-built demo space; the Palm Open Air Line Array Demo, which saw live demos of array units by 11 exhibitors; the Prolyte Campus Live Stage, which included safety and installation seminars; and a Live Rigging and Trussing Workshop and Demo by rigging experts Natura - which also gave visitors an aerial performance show using FlyingFX systems, and a rock

**Harman Palm Arena 2015, saw live performances by some of India's most popular bands and DJs**



climbing zone using Natura's Adventure Challenge Tower.

Palm Expo Mumbai 2015 also honoured the contributions made by various stakeholders, industry members, and professionals, at the 9th Indian Recording Arts Awards and the 5th Palm Sound and Light Awards, held at the ITC Grand Maratha.

The event was also notable for a massive presence from Yamaha, which was the largest exhibitor and had its own Demo Qube, and Modern Stage Service, who had the second largest show area. Apart from these, Hi-Tech Audio and Bose Corporation India had their own Demo Qubes.

Another highlight was the Harman Palm Arena 2015, which saw live performances by some of India's most popular acts, alongside workshops on stage setup techniques, with



equipment provided by Harman and technical support lent by Sound.com.

Meanwhile, the 5th Palm DJ Championship saw DJs get a chance to win pro gear from Pioneer. DJs also got their own dedicated space at the show, with the DJ Soundscape organised by UnMute bringing together top acts, DJs, musicians and other industry professionals for conversations on the state of the music business in India. And finally, specialised seminars on each day saw the gathered experts discuss various aspects of the pro AV industry - Stage sound and lighting, AV install and Integration, and Music production were all covered in detail.

According to the organisers, the show saw visitor turnout shoot up by 17% over previous years, with over 9000 visitors recorded on day 2 of the 3-day event.

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### New range of Ultra-Short Throw projectors launched by Ricoh

With three new models, the PJWX4141 (basic), PJWX4141N (with networking capabilities) and PJWX4141Ni (which offers an interactive screen), Ricoh enters the realm of visual communication devices that includes Projectors, Interactive Whiteboards and Portable VC Solutions. These employ 'Free Form Mirror' projection technology i.e. they project vertically and don't use an external mirror, thus reducing cable clutter. Visit [ricoh.co.in](http://ricoh.co.in) for more information. Prices start from ₹1,13,724 plus taxes.



### Sennheiser Urbanite Headphones

The new Urbanite range from Sennheiser features three models- Urbanite XL Wireless, Urbanite XL and Urbanite. The premium model, the XL Wireless uses Bluetooth 4.0 to connect with up to eight different devices. It has a touch control panel on the right ear cup and Sennheiser claims over 25 hours of playback on a single charge. The range starts from ₹15,990 and goes on to ₹24,990.



### Ultimate Ears launches the Boom speaker in India

Ultimate Ears has brought its Boom 'social' wireless speaker to India. The Boom offers a 15hr playback time, 360-degree sound, along with water and stain resistance. The Boom's Double Up feature also lets you pair two speakers together using the Boom app - which also features a 5-band equaliser. The Ultimate Ears Boom has a list price of ₹14,995, and comes in four colour choices.

### Livello MD215

A Bluetooth and NFC-enabled wireless speaker, the ₹2490 Livello MD215 has an in-built mic for call handling with 6 hours of playback time.



## Home Acoustics Alliance (HAA) to host Seminar for enthusiasts and professionals

HAA's seminar is aimed at AV Professionals, manufacturers, dealers and consultants and even the end-user, i.e. audiophiles on the holy grail of sonic perfection. Having conducted seminars all over the world, HAA will be conducting its first ever seminar in Mumbai on the 23rd and 24th of July 2015 where topics such as peaking bass mode at the listener's position, tweaking a speakers' toe-in, optimum number of acoustical panels to use in a home theater, among others will be covered. To get in on the hottest tips, tricks and insider-information in the world of Home-theatre designing, register yourself for the event by visiting their website, [homeacoustics.net](http://homeacoustics.net)



## FiiO's 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen X3 launched

Origin Marketing Private Limited has announced the launch of the 2nd-generation of the FiiO X3 portable music player. This new iteration features an updated circuitry and exterior design. The X3 now handles DSD decoding natively, courtesy of a new digital audio architecture and supports major lossless audio formats like WAV, FLAC, APE, WMA, ALAC, and AIFF. Utilizing the Cirrus Logic CS4398 DAC coupled with a tuned low-pass filter, the X3 is touted to realise extremely low noise and phase distortion. Priced at Rs. 14,599, the player will be available at [origingames.net](http://origingames.net).

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**Panasonic headphones**

Priced between ₹949 and ₹13,999, Panasonic's new range of headphones has 33 models under 13 different categories like Pro DJ, Sports and Noise Cancelling.



1

**1 McIntosh amplifiers ₹TBA**

McIntosh has updated and re-released the C22 preamplifier from the 1960s, and the MC75 "vacuum tube" power amp from the '70s. Still in touch with their retro roots, the amps feature classic control knobs and switches and visible valves. The C22 benefits from 10 inputs including a MC/MM phono stage and four outputs. The MC75's two stereo channels meanwhile deliver a total output of 75 watts.



**TOP 5** New launches

**2 Onkyo DAC-HA300 ₹TBA**

Onkyo's DAC-HA300 is designed to add high-resolution audio capabilities to iOS and Android smartphones and tablets. Connection is via USB and the DAC will sync with Onkyo's own HF Player app. Alternatively it can be used as a standalone music player, with 128GB microSD card support. It comes with a switchable optical/coaxial/analogue input, which can accept digital signal up to 24-bit/192kHz.



3

**3 DTS:X**

DTS has created its own object-based surround-sound technology to rival Dolby Atmos. DTS:X doesn't require any extra speakers or configuration, as its remapping engine can support "any configuration within a hemispherical layout". The technology is expected to make its way to some 2015 AV receivers and several major movie studios are looking into using the technology in the future. It supports lossless audio up to 24-bit/96kHz for object mixes and up to 24-bit/192kHz for stereo and multi-channel mixes.



4

**4 Acer XR341CKA from ₹89,999** Launched as the world's first curved gaming monitor, the XR341CKA features a 34in QHD display with NVIDIA G-SYNC

technology that minimises stutters and screen tear. It also has DTS sound, two 7W speakers, DisplayPort, HDMI inputs and a built-in 3.0 hub that can even charge smartphones and other devices. It offers a 178-degree viewing angle and supports 100 percent of the sRGB colour gamut, and can be used by even design professionals. Visit [acer.co.in](http://acer.co.in) for more details.

**5 Bel Canto Black series ₹41,25,000**

Described by Bel Canto as: 'elegant simplicity. Three boxes. Two connections. One coveted musical result.' The Black series is a product of 20 years of R&D. The highly-tuned, highly-optimized audio system includes an ASC1 (Asynchronous Stream Controller) digital Amplifier, network media renderer and two MPS1 (Mono Power Stream) units, which can only be referred to as 'monoblock power amplifiers' in the conventional sense.

5



STEREO SPEAKERS ₹72,000-₹1,50,000

# SUPERTEST

## EXPLICIT

### Floorshow

**L**ess is more? Not always. Sometimes, you just want your music to sound bigger. Go louder. Beat harder. You need floorstanders. And when you're spending the best part of ₹1,50,000, you're entitled to expect some frankly revealing speakers that will lay your music bare.

That's not to say you should throw all thoughts of practicality out of the window. There are good reasons to choose floorstanders over standmounters. For starters, you don't need to invest in stands, leaving more cash to spend on your speakers. Then there's space: floorstanders don't always take up a lot of room. Whether you're starting out or upgrading, the right pair of floorstanders can be a sound investment.

To help you decide, we've put together a seven-way death match. Our trusty Q Acoustic Concept 40s are joined by newcomers from Bowers & Wilkins, Cabasse, Epos, PSB, Tannoy and Triangle. All of them have been working hard to shout louder and better than the others. It's been deafening at times, but it's also been a lot of fun.



#### ON TEST

**B&W** 684 S2

**Cabasse** Jersey MT32

**Epos** K2

**PSB** Imagine X1T

**Q Acoustics** Concept 40

**Tannoy** Revolution XT6F

**Triangle** Antal 902



# BOWERS & WILKINS 684 S2 ₹1,15,000



**Bowers & Wilkins has** done very well of late. Much of that success is down to the 600 S2 series. We're big fans of the 683 S2 floorstanders, and even bigger fans of the 685 S2 standmounters. Both picked up Awards in their respective price class.

So our expectations were naturally high when we received the 684 S2s. Alas, we're not quite as blown away as we were with their bigger and smaller siblings. We're a little disappointed, yes, but that's not to say these speakers deserve to be overlooked: there's plenty of enjoyment to be had here.

## Deceptively powerful

Things begin very well indeed. We're struck by the size of the sound we hear, which is entirely at odds with the size of the cabinets.

That's not to say these speakers are diminutive by any means, but close your eyes and you could believe that far larger boxes are responsible for that clamour.

The soundstage is admirably wide, and on it you'll find firmly placed instruments and vocals.

Ah, the vocals. The 684 S2s can boast an excellent midrange. It's direct, articulate and very expressive. These speakers' rendition of Johnny Cash's *Hurt* might well make you quiver.

The treble, meanwhile, sparkles. There's plenty of detail at the top end, but it's delicate. Even the thrashest hi-hat stops short of sounding harsh.

But what about the bass? There's a good deal of it, but the 684 S2s aren't capable of trouser-flapping or other such clichés. You need their big brothers, the 683 S2s, for that.

## The art of articulation

The real issue here isn't the amount of bass, but the character of it. It goes deep enough, but we find it a little restrained and not as articulate as we'd like.

As a result, the performance doesn't gel with the cohesion we're looking for. That's despite the dynamics on hand, which are decently strong and wide.

It's a shame, because in other areas the 684 S2s are more-than capable. On the physical side, these speakers are sturdily built. They may appear a little plain next to the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs or the Q Acoustics Concept 40s, but they look smart on their own terms.

The centre of gravity is quite high, so it wouldn't take much to tip these speakers over - worth thinking about if you have children or a dog. B&W provides a stabilising plinth, but performance does suffer a little with it attached.

Those Kevlar cones are a familiar sight on a pair of B&Ws, as are metal dome tweeters

B&W's yellow Kevlar cones are certainly distinctive whether you choose the black or white finish. The S2 series speakers all benefit from a new tweeter, which is covered with a metal grille. This aids dispersion and fends off wandering fingers. The tweeter has also been decoupled from the rest of the cabinet to reduce unwanted vibrations.

There's a new plug at the centre of the Kevlar drivers. It's a mushroom-shaped cap, which replaces the old bullet-shaped plug, and promises better damping.

A note on positioning: these speakers are designed to work well in tighter spaces, but we still wouldn't put them right up against a back wall. Give them a little space to breathe.

The B&W 684 S2s don't quite blow us away, but there's plenty here to admire. If you're tight on space, these compact floorstanders are worth an audition.



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Expressive midrange; delicate treble; good build; fairly flexible about positioning

**AGAINST** Bass is a bit restrained; some rivals offer better all-round performance

**VERDICT** A more-than competent compact floorstander but not B&W's finest offering

**CABASSE JERSEY MT32 ₹85,000**

**This is the** second time in as many months that we've tested a pair of Cabasse MT32 speakers. Last time it was the Antigua bookshelf model, which we liked despite a few shortcomings. Will the Jersey floorstanders be as appealing?

For the money, you're getting a lot of speaker. While some rivals have gone for the 'compact' approach, we'd struggle to apply that label to the Jersey MT32s.

Incidentally, the 'MT' part stands for 'midrange tweeter' - that's the DOM 37 tweeter, a design derived from the flagship La Sphere and L'Ocean speakers, which are really expensive.

These entry-level floorstanders don't have the same level of fit and finish as their more expensive siblings, sadly. They're well built, and available in ebony or walnut finishes, but there's no denying they look a bit austere. That's not necessarily a bad thing - just don't expect them to add a luxury feel to your living room.

### Out in the open

Now, you're going to need a fair bit of space. Not only are these fairly big and boxy - they aren't too keen on walls. Put these speakers into a corner and you won't get the good tonal balance that they otherwise enjoy.

Give them space, and you'll get space right back. They have an expansive sound that has no trouble filling a larger room. They can comfortably pump up the volume, too. If you're after something to shake the house a bit, these fit the bill nicely.

### A musical mix

As for the presentation itself, it's a mixed bag. There's a fair amount of detail across the frequency range, but the Q Acoustics Concept 40s demonstrate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of texture.

Timing is another area where the Cabasses fall short of standards set by rivals: the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs' level of precision makes the Jersey MT32s seem a little sloppy.

What we do like is how well the frequencies integrate. The drivers demonstrate a consistency of character. The sound is smooth and full-bodied, just like the Jerseys' standmounted siblings, the Antigua MT32s.

But unlike those speakers, there's no real sense of enthusiasm. Where the standmounters had a sense of life, these floorstanders feel a touch ponderous.

Play something inherently bouncy - Taylor Swift's *Shake It Off*, for example

**Time for austerity: the Jerseys have a pared-down, business-like look but are well built**

- and the performance feels a bit by the numbers, lacking any sense of energy. There's plenty of power on hand (as demonstrated by a quick blast of any Hans Zimmer), the Jersey MT32s seem rather ambivalent about exercising it.

The result is a performance that feels unexciting. Rarely were we rapt with attention or animated, as we often are while listening. In fact, we occasionally found our attention wandering.

And that's a shame, because the Cabasse Jersey MT32s do quite a few things right. We appreciate the smooth presentation. We're impressed by the sense of scale. And then there's that appealing consistency across the frequency range.

But we can't get past that unexciting sound. We want to be entertained, and similarly priced rivals prove themselves to be significantly more capable.



### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Large sound; consistency of character; smooth presentation

**AGAINST** Rivals are more precise, detailed and nuanced; unexciting performance

**VERDICT** A huge sense of scale but a rather forgettable listening experience

# EPOS K2 ₹1,16,850



**If your space** is tight and you're looking for a pair of compact floorstanders, these Epos K2s fit the bill nicely.

We tested their standmounted siblings, the K1s and were impressed by their solid sound and lively performance. The K2s are a very similar offering. There's just more of them to go round.

## Full-bodied sound

Like the K1s, these also sound solid and lively. There's enough energy to get your feet moving. They punch hard and keep time well. They have no problem grabbing your attention and holding it for the duration of your listen.

They deliver a smooth, full-bodied sound, which makes for an easy listen without tiring your ears. We have a good crack at Dave Brubeck's repertoire and didn't find any hardness in the drumming (of which there is plenty).

That's partly to do with the bass on offer, which is rich and weighty without getting overblown. It never overpowers the rest of the frequency range, which includes a lovely, sweet treble.

However, the K2s can't be described as the most revealing performers we've come across. Up against the similarly priced Q Acoustics Concept 40s and

Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, we find ourselves wishing for a greater level of transparency.

More than once, the K2s find themselves slightly overwhelmed by more intricate compositions from Mogwai. They're also not entirely at ease with great dynamic shifts, as found on Muse's *Exogenesis*, and here the Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2s definitely have the edge. It doesn't help matters that the K2s' bass is a little tubby.

But what these speakers lack in bass definition they make up for in tonal balance. No part of the frequency range sticks out to distract, which makes for a more engaging, natural listen.

There is also a consistency of character over the whole frequency range and the sound is smooth and solid across the board.

## Minimalist vibe

The K2s also impress with their sense of scale. It's a big sound from these small speakers, although we wouldn't necessarily put them in a larger room.

On the aesthetic front, the K2s win points for simplicity. If you're after a minimalist vibe, look no further. There are no markings or brandings. There are no screws or holes on the front panel to

**A smooth sound and minimalist design make the K2s ideal for a small space**

complicate matters. It's just a smooth matt coat, available in black or white. The only elements present are the drivers (a 25mm tweeter and two 15cm cones) and a slot-shaped reflex port, designed to minimise audible distortion.

The build quality is excellent. These speakers feel sturdy. And at the back, there's even a neat party trick - the back panel can be unscrewed and removed. This is to let you switch the passive crossover for an active one, using Epos's own Active-K modules. That's right, you'll be able to turn these passive speakers into actives when Active-K modules are released later in the year.

There's a lot going for the Epos K2s. We like the smooth sound and the minimalist design. The bass and transparency could do with more work, but if you have a small listening room these are worth investigating.



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Smooth, weighty sound; energetic presentation; an engaging listen

**AGAINST** Slightly tubby bass; could do with greater transparency

**VERDICT** If space is tight, check out these talented little floorstanders



**PSB IMAGINE X1T ₹72,000**

**Products from Canadian** brand PSB, the lesser-known sister of NAD Electronics, don't often appear at *What Hi-Fi?* Towers. In fact, the last time we played with their speakers was about a year ago. It's a shame, because we've rarely been disappointed by them. And we're not disappointed here, either.

**Short, chunky - and punchy**

What we have here are the PSB Imagine X1Ts. They are the smallest floorstanders in the Imagine range, but appearances can be deceptive. They are short at 87cm and thin at 21cm, but a depth of 40cm means they're still reasonably chunky.

The good news is that they're fairly flexible about positioning. You can stick them within a 30cm of a wall without noticeably affecting the performance.

Set-up is simple: plug them in and toe them a little towards the listening position to firm up the stereo image.

You can always benefit from some running-in time, but our review sample didn't exhibit much change even after an extended, solid blasting.

Our experience with PSB has led us to expect an energetic, surprisingly punchy sound. And that's what we get. The company clearly knows exactly what its customers want, and that's a fun listen.

There's certainly a lot of energy here. These are agile, caffeinated performers, and they're eager to charge along to anything you care to throw at them.

Play Muse's *Uprising* and the pounding call-to-arms intro has a rousing momentum to it. That's helped no end by the bass, which the X1Ts dole out in spades.

It's a deep, solid sort of bass. The PSBs keep it on a firm leash, but there's no getting past the fact that there's an awful lot of it. The balance is definitely tipped towards the low end.

Not that the treble and midrange feel the need to protest. They're allowed, where pertinent, to register their say.

**Verisimilitude**

It's a fun listen. There's a real sense of life to the performance. Dynamic shifts are confident and deliberate and there's a surprising amount of punch, given the size of the speakers. The depth of the cabinet suddenly makes a lot of sense.

Reservations? We don't have many. By this point we've accepted they're not the most neutral performers, prioritising thrills over verisimilitude.

But we would like a bit more subtlety when it comes to instrumental and vocal textures. The beating of drums is plenty

**A little more refinement needed from our infrequent Canadian visitors**

of fun, but it's occasionally hard to identify the individual components. It doesn't help that the sound isn't the clearest we've heard. We wouldn't go so far as to call it cloudy, but neither is it particularly insightful.

Build quality is strong. They feel solid, and they're surprisingly heavy too. The design will probably split opinions. On one hand they're minimalist and smart, but we're not sure how we feel about the creamy, slightly-off yellow of the cones.

Overall, we've rather enjoyed our time with the PSB Imagine X1Ts. They're capable, entertaining performers, and they're aggressively priced.

That said, we would like more refinement, as offered by the Q Acoustics Concept 40s. And we'd like more precision, as shown by the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs. Not a class leader, then, but highly commended.

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Lively presentation; deep bass; good energy levels

**AGAINST** Could do with more subtlety; sound isn't the clearest

**VERDICT** A pair of floorstanders that have plenty of energy

# Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 40 ₹1,27,000



Over the last few years, our feelings towards Q Acoustics have evolved from a pleasant surprise to a deep respect. Despite being a young brand (less than ten years old) it has gone toe-to-toe with long-established heavyweights, and we've lost count of the number of Awards we've given to it.

Despite its success, Q Acoustics never gets complacent. The Concept 40s (and their standmounted siblings the Concept 20s) are a determined move upmarket, bringing a relatively exotic cabinet construction to their price points.

## Bags of detail

What you get here is an unusual box-within-a-box structure. Two layers of MDF are separated by an elastic compound called Gelcore, which turns vibrations in the inner cabinet into heat.

The idea is that those vibrations don't radiate to the outside world to distort the sound produced by the drive units.

It works. The level of insight is very impressive. Not only are we treated to bags of detail, it's also an extraordinarily clear sound. Then there's the consistency to the way the Concept 40s handle all parts of the frequency range.

Tonally, it's the same Q Acoustics sound we know and love. That means a

smooth, highly refined presentation that trades outright excitement for an easy listening experience.

The Concept 40s could never beat the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs when it comes to sheer excitement or finger-snapping glee. Then again, they don't want to. Q Acoustics instead aims to give you a sound that you can happily listen to for hours on end.

It would be easy to dismiss these speakers as overly polite, but that would be a mistake. Unlike the Cabasse Jersey MT32s, these are not too laidback.

There are strong dynamics, as well as a pleasing degree of agility. They have no problem making sense of Étienne de Crécy's dance-happy *Smile* - certainly not when there's the kind of hefty low-end that could cause your neighbours considerable grief.

## Futuristic design

There's certainly a good deal of attack when the occasion calls for it. Orchestral crescendos are delivered with enthusiasm, and there's plenty of scale and authority to boot.

We're also taken by the Concept 40s' aesthetics. The design is minimalist and futuristic, and build quality is top-notch. The cabinet is heavy and solidly put

The machined aluminium faceplate gives the Concept 40s a modern feel

together, and finished in high-quality black or white gloss. That machined aluminium faceplate is also a nice touch, giving these speakers a distinctive and modern feel.

Positioning is a straightforward affair. Just give them a bit of space (there's a large reflex port at the back) and toe them in slightly towards the listening position to get a focused stereo image.

These speakers aren't particularly fussy about partnering equipment, although we'd suggest avoiding a system that sounds too laid-back.

No doubt about it: these are five-star speakers. Sure, they lack the precision and high-octane entertainment offered by the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, but they counter with a very high level of refinement. If you want a talented set of speakers with an easy-going, welcoming sound, these must be considered.



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Refined balance; surprising sonic agility and composure; impressive build

**AGAINST** Slightly polite sonic balance may be a little too smooth for some

**VERDICT** Build on the brand's strengths to deliver a wonderfully inviting sound

**TANNOY REVOLUTION XT6F ₹1,41,000**

**Vive la révolution.** Tannoy has historically done well in this arena, but at the moment it gets to strut around proudly like a very loud peacock.

We don't deal readily in hyperbole, but we feel compelled right about now. The Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs are incredible speakers for the money and you must seek them out for an audition.

Their aptitude is obvious. They waste no time in setting out their stall: what you get is an entertaining listen. There's a tremendous immediacy to the Tannoys' delivery that has no problem attracting your undivided attention.

### Well endowed

We put on a bit of Prince and party like it's 1999. Your feet will tap. Your fingers will snap. So infectious is the level of energy that you can't escape, at the very least, doing a tiny dance in your chair.

That said, these Tannoys are more than just a joyride. These are versatile speakers, and while they're happy to bop along with Pharrell Williams they are just as content chilling to Portishead.

Timing and dynamics are the key here, and these Tannoys are well endowed in both departments. Whatever you throw at them will be handled with precision and agility, while

the wide dynamic range offers enough zest to ensure the performance never veers into the clinical.

### Spacious and airy

Despite their lively demeanour, the sound is nice and balanced. No part of the frequency demands your attention.

The midrange is lovely. It's direct without being demanding. Vocals stand out without feeling isolated. There's a good deal of bass, but it's agile and nicely controlled. We move up to the treble and find it could be a little sweeter and more delicate, but now we're just nitpicking.

We're impressed by the level of integration. The various elements cooperate to perform as a unified whole. There's also plenty of detail throughout the frequency range. The various textures are entirely convincing.

It also helps that it's a big sound, tall and wide as you like. The presentation is spacious and airy. There's room enough whether you want to occupy that soundstage with brass bands or full orchestras. Whichever you choose will be organised and fully ready to rock.

A stunning performance, then, and it's entirely down to the engineering. We're always nervous when a manufacturer decides it's time to shake up a winning

**The Revolution XT6Fs will get your feet tapping and your fingers snapping**



formula, but the Revolution has definitely been improved - at least where the XT6Fs are concerned.

### Attention to detail

'XT', by the way, stands for 'extra technology'. The most obvious change here is the angled base of cabinet and an integrated plinth and down-firing reflex port for better dispersion of low frequencies. Tannoy's signature Dual Concentric driver has also been tweaked to improve integration between the tweeter and mid/bass cone.

The trapezoid shape of the cabinet, as always, helps to reduce internal standing waves. And as always, fit and finish is superb. We're particularly keen on the attention to detail: look closely enough and you'll see 'TANNOY' written on the bolts at the front. This is very pleasing. We are very pleased.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Timing and integration; upbeat, lively demeanour; good balance; fine build

**AGAINST** Treble could be a little more delicate, but that's just nitpicking

**VERDICT** Talented, hugely entertaining floorstanders. These will be hard to beat





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**TRIANGLE ANTAL 902 ₹TBA**

**Imagine, if you will,** a monster truck. It's not particularly practical. Nor will it offer the refined driving experience. But take one look at those house-sized wheels and you know you're in for a lot of fun. And that just about sums up our experience with the Triangle Antal 902s: it's a bit like driving a monster truck.

### Chunky old beasts

Let us explain, starting with the bit about being impractical. These are massive speakers, at least when compared with others in this group.

While many rivals at this price want to tempt you by fitting nicely into your sitting room, these Triangles couldn't care less. They're heavy, chunky old beasts and that's that.

Not only do they take up a fair bit of space, they also need room to breathe. Keep them a couple of feet from the back wall, or they'll get a bit boomy. That's no joke with speakers this size.

It won't come as a surprise when we say these speakers pump out a massive sound, but it's true. Not only will they fill your living room with ease, they'll happily occupy the adjacent rooms too. They're certainly loud enough.

We'll get this bit out of the way: it's not the most subtle sound we've ever

encountered. What you get are the broad strokes. These Triangles leave the finer brushwork to their smaller, more sensible rivals. When it comes to conveying finer textures and nuances, these don't even come close to what the Q Acoustics Concept 40s offer.

So why should you get them? We've clearly gone out of our way to paint a ridiculous picture, after all. Because they're fun. Better than that: they're fun and actually quite competent.

### Sharing the spotlight

There is a lot of bass. Enough to upset the bookshelf you thought was sturdy. Enough to crack a smile across your face.

But it's not just about the quantity of bass - it's the taut, controlled type of low-end heft that we like. While the presentation is tonally unbalanced, the bass never threatens to drown out the rest of the frequency range. The treble and midrange have no problem getting their fair share of the spotlight.

There's a surprising amount of control. Notes start and stop when they're meant to, even if leading edges could benefit from better definition. Another surprise is how revealing they are. The sound is nice and clear, which makes for an insightful listen.

**The Triangle Antal 902s are chunky old beasts, but they're also a truckload of fun**

Dynamics are strong and far-reaching, and combine with that good feeling of rhythm for a real sense of life. Overall, what you get is a hugely entertaining sound that's as exuberant as it is forceful.

As for the cabinet itself? We've already established that they're enormous, but they're also very well built. We'd suggest giving them a bit of time to run in when you first get them. Fresh out of the box, they're not as coherent as they can be.

We're sticking with that monster truck analogy - at least until we drive home the point. Sure, the Q Acoustics Concept 40s offer more refinement, and the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs offer greater precision. But still, rarely do we encounter something with the power to make us grin uncontrollably, and that has to count for something. We highly recommend a test drive at the very least.



### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Tremendous fun; lively presentation; power on tap; impressive agility

**AGAINST** Not the most refined or subtle listening experience

**VERDICT** Who needs refinement when you can have this much fun?

# TEST VERDICT

## THE WINNER

### Tannoy Revolution XT6F

₹1,41,000 ★★★★★

The seven pairs of floorstanding speakers we tested have something to suit every need. But there was one clear winner – step forward **Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs**, the floor is all yours

**T**his was fun. There's a lot of talent among these seven pairs of speakers, and pitting them against one another has been fascinating. At times we struggled to establish a hierarchy, but when it came to picking the winner, there was only one clear choice: the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs.

We were won over by their astonishing precision. Their remarkable timing and strong dynamics make for an entertaining and engaging listen. And yet there's enough detail and subtlety for those with more refined tastes. Tannoy has traditionally been great at making floorstanders at this price – so practice does make perfect indeed.

#### A bit more bite

Don't be too downheartened, Q Acoustics! The Concept 40s are also formidable speakers, and thoroughly deserving of their five-star rating. Their level of refinement is second-to-none in this group. We only wished they packed a bit

more bite, which would make them a more rounded, versatile performer.

#### Power and vivacity

But don't write off our four-star rated speakers just yet. They are all worth your consideration, even if a flaw here and there stands between them and full marks.

In third place we've put the Triangle Antal 902s. They may not be the subtlest of performers, but they make up for it with sheer power and vivacity. They are a force to be reckoned with, and we find them thoroughly invigorating. Try them when they are available to buy and prepare to smile.

Next up are the Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2s. We were impressed by their scale, their strong dynamics and expressive midrange. Sadly they lose out in the bass department, which could have been less restrained and more articulate.

Then there are the PSB Imagine XITs. Like the Triangles, these place fun and outright

energy ahead of subtlety. But they're not quite as adept as the Triangles, because they suffer from a relative lack of transparency.

The Epos K2s are interesting, largely because they will be able to be converted to run actively later this year. However, until then we can only judge them on their passive skills. And while we are impressed by their smooth, solid sound, we find our attention drawn to their bass, which needs better definition. Transparency could also be improved.

#### Precision and nuance

Bringing up the rear are the Cabasse Jersey MT32s. Like their standmounted siblings they offer a large, well-integrated sound, which makes up for a weaker performance in terms of precision and nuance. Sadly, their performance fails to get us excited. It's decent, but your money can get you further.

Seven pairs of floorstanders: we've picked our favourite, but there's plenty here to suit every need. Go out and try them.



**Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2**  
**₹1,15,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 8 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2  
 • Dimensions 92 x 16 x 23cm



**Cabasse Jersey MT32**  
**₹85,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 100W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 8 ohms  
 • Biwirable no • Finishes 2  
 • Dimensions 100 x 22 x 32cm



**Epos K2**  
**₹1,16,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 4 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2  
 • Dimensions 86 x 19 x 25cm



**PSB Imagine X1T**  
**₹72,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 200W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 8 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 1  
 • Dimensions 87 x 21 x 40cm



**Q Acoustics Concept 40**  
**₹1,27,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 6 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2  
 • Dimensions 97 x 17 x 29cm



**WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER**

**Tannoy Revolution XT6F**  
**₹1,41,000 ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 8 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2  
 • Dimensions 10 x 27 x 32 cm



**Triangle Antal 902**  
**₹TBA ★★★★★**  
 Power handling 120W • Sensitivity 91dB • Impedance 4.5 ohms  
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 1  
 • Dimensions 110 x 26 x 31cm



**Location, location, location**  
 It's very important to consider where you put your floorstanders. Here are a few thoughts that will hopefully help you with positioning, but also with choosing speakers.

The size of the room matters as much as the position. If you have a large space, you'll never fill them with small floorstanders. Likewise, don't get large speakers for a small room, because things will get very boomy indeed.

Now, let's talk about walls. There are no universal rules about positioning. Some speakers sound fuller and more controlled when placed close to a wall. Others prefer a bit of breathing space, out in the open.

Don't be fooled by front-firing reflex ports, either. They don't guarantee that a pair of speakers will like being put near a wall.

Only by moving speakers about will you find their optimum positions. The best thing you can do is play around.

**SYSTEM BUILDER**



**Turntable**  
**Rega RP6/Exact ₹1,35,000**  
 ★★★★★

This articulate and engaging Award-winning turntable is the perfect partner to the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs.



**CD player**  
**Naim CD5si ₹1,39,875 ★★★★★**  
 A truly terrific player with a winningly enthusiastic approach to music.

**Total build ₹5,28,375**



**Stereo amplifier**  
**Rega Elex-R ₹1,12,500**  
 ★★★★★

One of the most talented sub-₹1.5 Lac amplifiers we've heard.

UP TO ₹65,000  
Bluesound Node  
Cabasse Stream Source



₹1,00,000-₹1,80,000  
Cyrus Stream Xa  
Pioneer N-70A



₹65,000-₹80,000  
Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2  
Pioneer N-50A



# KILLER

# BYTES

Freeing you from the constraints of your CD collection, music streamers open up a whole new world of listening

**G**one are the days when your music consumption was limited to physical formats, such as vinyl or the CD, or at the mercy of tedious download times - and good riddance too. For some time now, music streaming (where you playback online in real time without having to

download or store a single file) has steered our listening habits.

Everyone's doing it these days: rather than downloading songs from iTunes or Amazon, people are getting their digital fix by streaming thousands of songs (sometimes for free) at the touch of a button.

And today, it's more influential than ever: streaming data now influences official chart rankings, and the imminent, long-anticipated arrival of Apple's streaming service is stealing the headlines.

## Multi-room potential

Ready to make your existing hi-fi system streaming-savvy? Good for you. All you need is a stable home network, connected to an all-important music streamer (via an ethernet cable, ideally), and a source: a NAS (network-attached storage) device loaded with music, or a subscription to the streaming service juggernaut.

No matter what the cost - budget or high-end - music streamers let you stream high-res music and control your library with a smartphone or tablet via a dedicated app. Many have multi-room potential, while others have offline streaming powers via Bluetooth or AirPlay. Most allow access to their DAC, so streaming files from a computer or USB drive is also feasible. Some streamers are amplified 'just add speakers' solutions, but this test's participants will need hooking up to an amplifier.

## Let battle commence

Here, we have pitted our Award winners, ranging in price from ₹65,000 to ₹1,80,000, against newcomers in three intense head-to-head challenges. First Cabasse takes on the Bluesound Node for the prized title of best first step into streaming. Then the familiar Cambridge Audio jostles with a five-star Pioneer for pole position in the mid-market. And finally, at the top end of the range, Pioneer makes its second appearance, this time with its flagship unit making a stand against one of Cyrus's many esteemed streamers.

And to that end, let the battles commence...



### Bluesound Node

Bluesound has recently expanded its already-exhaustive offering of Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Qubuz and TuneIn Radio by adding Tidal, WiMP, and HDtracks



### Cabasse Stream Source

Energetic and entertaining, it barely comes up for air in The Cure's *Just Like Heaven*, throwing its all into the stew of electric riffs and taut bass guitar

# UP TO ₹65,000

BLUESOUND NODE vs CABASSE STREAM SOURCE

## Bluesound Node

₹65,000 ★★★★★

If anyone (including us) thought the five-star amplified Powernode streamer from new-kid-on-the-block Bluesound was a fluke when we reviewed it last time, they (and we) couldn't have been more wrong. In less than a year, Bluesound's high-resolution 'ecosystem' has taken the streaming sphere by storm, making formidable inroads into the multi-room market at the same time.

The Node is the unamplified, entry-level part of the system and although specs play a big part in its success, it's performance that grants it top honours. Its rich, balanced presentation has an entertaining temperament that's wonderfully detailed and spacious.

### Wish fulfilment

Play Wyclef Jean's *Wish You Were Here* cover and its acoustic intro is full of subtlety and texture, so you can hear every strain on the strings as they hum into being. The muffled radio in the background sounds rightfully tinny in comparison - through the Cabasse it sounds over-amplified.

The presentation isn't the very last word in brio, though energy levels are far from drained as the Node launches into the familiar melody. There's body to guitars and impressive insight into Jean's voice.

There's space and organisation aplenty too - enough to whip even The Smith's dense *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* into shape. The heavy piece has a lot going on but unlike through the Cabasse, instruments have room to work and there's a clear sense of layering to the presentation. The weighty disposition gives electric guitars a solid backing, yet the high-energy Node never struggles to keep up with its breakneck pace.

Its knack for clarity, detail and openness pays off when you drop down to a 320kbps Internet-stream. The piano sequence in 'The Unthanks' *Madam* is full of information, while the fragile, folksy vocals are clearly projected and bathed in subtlety.

### Impressive app

The slick, hassle-free Bluesound app (free for iOS and Android) is the heart and soul of the Node experience, and once the streamer is connected to a home network and hooked up to an amp, it detects the Node instantly. If for some reason it doesn't, the app's manual set-up process is straightforward.

The app is the portal to the music stored on your network (the Node gets one over on the

Cabasse by supporting FLAC and WAV files up to the full 24bit/192kHz), and the gateway to its myriad streaming services.

Bluesound has recently expanded its already-exhaustive offering of Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Qobuz and TuneIn Radio by adding Tidal, WiMP, HDTracks and Slacker Radio among others. The intuitive app's sidebar is where you can access the music and services.

It's hard to feel hard done-by on compatibility, and there is also a USB input for connecting a USB stick or an optional Bluetooth adapter.

Bluesound didn't work so hard on function that it forgot about form. The Node is a glossy (black or white) cubed design, small enough to pick up with one hand and tuck away on a shelf. It's a beautiful modern design, and a lovely finishing touch to what is an outstanding all-round budget streamer.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Rich, insightful sound; balanced, precise and spacious soundstage; huge list of streaming services; easy set-up; intuitive app

**AGAINST** Nothing

**VERDICT** An all-round beauty, from sound to features to design. And it won't break the bank

## Cabasse Stream Source

₹29,900 ★★★★★☆

If you're looking to start out in music streaming, the Cabasse Stream Source is an appealing option - and not just because of its funky elliptical shape. It's the most affordable offering in Cabasse's streaming bloodline, boasts multiroom functionality and high-res support, and sounds pretty decent too.

Previous tests have complained that a "frustratingly glitchy" and "counter-intuitive" app has blighted other Cabasse streamers, so we're glad to see a markedly better one here: the new StreamCONTROL app (see roundel). If your device is out of arm's reach, a small remote - a mirror image of the unit, but palm-size - can control input and volume, and skip tracks.

The Stream Source will hook up to an amplifier via its analogue or optical outputs. As

### CABASSE TAKES CONTROL

Cabasse's control app StreamCONTROL (free on iOS and Android) is a marked improvement over its predecessor (Stream Audio Control). You'll find your stored music in a neat sidebar, along with Spotify and Deezer, and can link Cabasse streaming products in a multi-room capacity. It's mostly intuitive to use, too

well as playing files on your home network, there's also Bluetooth with NFC connectivity. And the Stream Source has another trick up its sleeve: a USB stick can be plugged into the unit's rear socket. As well as playing popular formats such as WMA, AAC and MP3, the Stream Source supports high-res WAV and FLAC files up to 24-bit/96kHz - sadly, it doesn't go the whole-hog to 192kHz like the Bluesound.

The Cabasse's sound is an enjoyable one: balanced, full-bodied and more than happy rustling up detail and organisation whether it's a 24-bit/96kHz WAV or low-res web stream.

Energetic (if anything, too forward) and entertaining, it barely comes up for air in The Cure's *Just Like Heaven*, throwing its all into the stew of electric riffs, energetic keyboards and taut-sounding bass guitar. The Bluesound kicks slightly harder as the drums penetrate the soundfield, yet the Cabasse's controlled treble is a godsend when the cymbals start thrashing.

### On the quiet

Slip into a more soothing Norah Jones piece and her distinct vocals are clear and focused, the Cabasse drawing out enough nuance to be convincing. On the flipside, dense material - such as Johann Strauss II's *Voices Of Spring* - requires space and instrument separation, and this is where the Cabasse could take tips from its more open-sounding Bluesound peer.

Minor snags aside, we're now satisfied with the new app software, so the Source's barrier to a fifth star is quite simply the standard of the competition. The Bluesound has a more dynamic, subtle and spacious performance, one-upping the Cabasse on its number of streaming services and high-res compatibility. Would we part with more rupees for it? Sure.

That said, the Stream Source has an entertaining sound, ample features, and affordability on its side. It's easily good enough to get you off the blocks into music streaming.

### Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Enthusiastic delivery; balanced, detailed sound; improved, intuitive app; USB input is a bonus

**AGAINST** Bluesound has better dynamics, subtlety and space; no support for 24-bit/192kHz

**VERDICT** A decent streamer at a tempting price, but sound needs to be a little better to worry the Node

## Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

The punchy, dynamic character and unyielding rhythmic drive makes its presentation both informative and exciting. This is a born entertainer



## Pioneer N-50A

The minimalist look of its solidly-built casework and brushed aluminium faceplate grants it an aesthetic quality most hi-fi enthusiasts would welcome

# ₹65,000-₹80,000

## CAMBRIDGE AUDIO STREAM MAGIC 6 V2 vs PIONEER N-50A

### Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

₹67,500 ★★★★★

Despite appearances, spending a bit more than the previous two streamers doesn't just get you more traditional casing and a display screen. It also brings a substantial leg-up in quality - if you choose the right machine for the job.

Here we have the Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2 - our 2014 Product of the Year, fresh off the back of the update to the Award-winning original. This second version is a more versatile, better-sounding streamer, and confirms its credentials with impressive compatibility.

#### Alternative sources

Once connected to your home network - wirelessly or directly via an ethernet cable - the Stream Magic 6 V2 can stream popular formats (MP3, WMA, AAC), and FLAC, WAV and ALAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz.

And if you wish to use alternative sources such as a computer or USB hard drive, the internal DAC offers the same file support through the machine's coaxial, asynchronous type-B USB, and front and rear type-A USB inputs. Through the optical input, playback is limited to 24-bit/96kHz.

Additionally, if you get your hands on the company's BT100 receiver, local files from a smartphone or tablet can be streamed over Bluetooth. Whatever the source or file type, the Stream Magic 6 V2 automatically upsamples songs to 24-bit/384kHz using its proprietary upsampling technology.

#### A somewhat dated display

The Cambridge isn't always the seamless operator you'd like it to be. Its bright blue-on-black text display is crystal-clear when looking at it head-on, but less so from height or an angle. Compared to the Pioneer N-50A's high-contrast LCD, it looks a little dated too.

The real bugbear is the app. Apple device owners can download the 'Stream Magic' app, but Android users have the 'Stream Magic Lite' app, which looks more polished but is buggy. The remote control at least oozes quality, its nicely spaced buttons geared towards browsing folders, and the large, responsive control dial making easy work of manual operation.

Once you're good to go you're in for a treat, for the Cambridge is a born entertainer. Its punchy, dynamic character and unyielding rhythmic drive, coupled with its rich character makes its presentation both informative and exciting.

During our first track, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's *Same Love*, the piano is delivered with dynamic subtlety while the vocal delivery is nothing short of vivid. The Cambridge rises to the challenge of the duo's denser songs - littered with agile beats, explosive synths and cutting cymbals - offering a listen that's both balanced and precise.

Test its DAC capability through a USB stick and its assets in a streaming capacity are consistent: a 24-bit/96kHz recording of Bob Marley's *No Woman, No Cry* is insightful, with texture to the instruments.

Great care has been taken to reduce jitter and produce a 'noise-free' sound. Even with a low-res MP3 file, we're pleased with how small the compromises are when it comes to clarity and detail. This Cambridge remains a fine product, but it's up against some very talented, more affordable rivals.

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Rich, insightful, balanced; good rhythmic drive; clear, spacious soundfield; convincing dynamics

**AGAINST** Screen not clearly readable from certain angles; Android app needs improving; price

**VERDICT** An unquestionably impressive streamer, but one now ousted by a cheaper box

### Pioneer N-50A

₹60,000\* ★★★★★

**Our first impression** of the Pioneer N-50A was that, for approximately ₹60,000, it's an exceptional streamer. So has the Cambridge Audio met its match?

We can't help but adore the minimalist look of its solidly built casework (available in black or silver). Its brushed-aluminium faceplate grants it an aesthetic quality most hi-fi enthusiasts would welcome, but the talking point is the 3.5in LCD screen, bright and crisp for easy readability, and displaying everything from sampling rate to album artwork.

#### A decent ControlApp

The handheld remote is suitably arranged for navigating your music collection. ControlApp (free on iOS and Android) is also pleasing, with user experience clearly a priority. Both methods are easier to use than the Cambridge alternatives.

#### VERDICT

With performance differences largely tit-for-tat, initial comparisons had us sitting on the fence. As it turns out, the Cambridge gets its toe ahead with a bigger soundstage and richer bass. Ultimately, though, the Pioneer wins our vote. Not only does it sound pretty much as good, we prefer its app and appealing design - not to mention its price

Pioneer hasn't pulled back the reins when it comes to compatibility, either.

Getting one over on the Cambridge Audio, the N-50A can stream PCM files up to 32-bit/192kHz and DSD files up to 5.6MHz, or play them from a computer connected to its asynchronous Type-B USB input. Users can also plug hard drives or iDevices into the USB - these support FLAC and WAV files up to 24-bit/192kHz - or make use of its coaxial and optical inputs.

#### DLNA, AirPlay, and more

DLNA functionality means you can connect to NAS drives and smartphones. AirPlay lets you stream from an iPhone or iPad, while web stream and internet radio are also at your fingertips. Optional extras like a Bluetooth AS-BT200 adapter, and an AS-WL300 dongle for wirelessly connecting the N-50A to your network hub, build on this impressive list.

Performance doesn't let this fine product down. Precise, energetic and dynamically adept, its sound is one of the most engaging we've heard in the sub-₹1 lac streamer market.

#### A sweet, controlled treble

Start with Alexandre Desplat's *Mission* (from *The Imitation Game* soundtrack) and the Pioneer captures its gradual dynamic build-up, happily swinging between its quieter, calmer moments and the attacking instrumental passages.

Tonally, the presentation is never less than balanced: the treble is sweet and controlled, while bass response is solid and tight. The N-50A isn't afraid to put pedal to metal, either, its fanatical rendition of Michael Jackson's *P.Y.T (Pretty Young Thing)* full of attack as the beat hits hard underneath the poppy vocals.

Turn to its internal DAC and the Pioneer remains a talented performer. The default 'Direct' mode is our preferred setting, though we wouldn't discourage experimentation. 'Auto Sound Retriever' is for optimising low-quality files, though it sounds a little recessed. Overall, this is an impressive piece of kit and crucially, costs significantly less than some of its rivals.

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Dynamic, detailed and precise; plethora of digital inputs; impressive compatibility; bright, crisp screen; nice build and finish; competitive price

**AGAINST** Wireless connectivity not built-in

**VERDICT** Excellent sound, vast compatibility and slick design in one great-value package

## Cyrus Stream Xa

Its honest delivery of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No 1* is awash with perfectly placed instruments loaded with texture and subtlety



## Pioneer N-70A

The soundstage is wonderfully coherent and nicely tight-knit as Bowie's echoed vocals on *Moonage Daydream* bounce between the speakers

# ₹1,00,000-₹1,80,000

CYRUS STREAM Xa vs PIONEER N-70A

## Cyrus Stream Xa

₹1,79,000 ★★★★★

**Cyrus has long** pitched itself as the brand to beat when it comes to high-end streaming. Ever since music streamers became a *What Hi-Fi?* Awards category in 2011, a Cyrus product has always featured there - not wholly surprising considering the decade's-worth of streaming development the company has under its belt.

The Stream Xa, which sits between the preamp-packed Stream XP2 and DAC-less Stream X Signature, is one of Cyrus' latest entries and, unsurprisingly, the brand's representative in our 2014 Awards issue.

It's a Cyrus product through and through, not just because of its half-width aluminium casing and agricultural black-on-green display, but in its sound too: precise, controlled and agile, with an effortless musicality that can bring any genre of music to life.

### Inticing character

Engaging and transparent, the Stream Xa has a rare knack for drawing you into a song and keeping you there. Its honest delivery of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No 1* is awash with perfectly placed instruments loaded with texture and subtlety. The Cyrus's dynamic know-how makes the most of the varying orchestration, capturing the intensity of the explosive start before picking out the subtle variations in the leading strings.

Its presentation may be close to clinical, but precision and organisation aren't trade-offs for energy and liveliness. Feed it Supertramp's *Breakfast In America* and the song's giddy rhythms brim with pep and pizzazz. The streamer bites into the intro's catchy keyboard, each crisp note exact and punctual.

Open and expansive, the Stream Xa's soundstage has good spatial awareness, so the jumble of piano, trombones and brass that make up the anarchic chorus never feel cramped together.

### Getting the tone right

Tonally, the Cyrus takes the middle path: the midrange is lucid and detailed between a sparkly treble that's clear and controlled, and a tuneful, agile bass. Sounds have more body and warmth through the richer Pioneer N-70A, but the neutral-sounding Cyrus has more solidity.

Vocals are clear and detailed, the streamer really getting under the layers of the vocals.

Away from sound and, as the rest goes, the Stream Xa is an easy machine to figure out. Just as it should be. It can stream files up to

24-bit/192kHz over a wi-fi network, though we'd always go down the more stable wired route.

Access to TuneIn Radio puts 100,000 internet radio stations on the map, while digital connections (three coaxial, two optical, one USB) and an internal 24-bit DAC expand compatibility to computers, USB drives and portable devices.

The unit's small, three-line display is less than ideal for browsing folders manually, so we're glad the streamer has two decent alternatives: the Cadence app and 'n-remote' (see roundel).

The Stream Xa's compact design won't be everyone's cup of tea. But its truly entrancing sound undoubtedly will. At the end of last year it proved the best-performing streamer at this price, bagging a well-deserved Award. Here we are months later, dying to know: is it still the front-runner? Well, that's in the hands of its newest rival, the Pioneer N-70A.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Precise, organised, agile sound; transparently musical delivery; controlled bass; clear, sparkly treble; expressive; seamless app and handy 'n-remote'

**AGAINST** Design won't be for everyone

**VERDICT** A fantastic performer that sets the benchmark for sound quality in streaming

## Pioneer N-70A

₹1,20,000\* ★★★★★☆

**Think the Pioneer** N-50A, but bigger and (as you'd hope for twice the price) better. That's the N-70A, the company's brand-new flagship streamer. It comes into a rather static market knowing full well the mammoth task at hand: compete with the likes of Cyrus.

As well as a 6.3mm headphone output (with dedicated amp), the N-70A gains 2cm in height over its sibling (to 12cm) and looks like a machine that will last a lifetime. Our sample is black, but a silver finish is also available.

The N-70A can stream and upsample LPCM files up to 32-bit/384kHz (and play DSD 5.6MHz) over a wired connection to your home network. DLNA support is included, and spending a bit extra buys the adapter for wireless pairing.

To complement web-based streaming - Spotify Connect and vTuner internet radio - there's AirPlay for streaming from iDevices.

### CONTROLLING THE CYRUS

Logical and intuitive, the Cyrus's Cadence app has a neat layout with helpful shortcuts. For those who prefer a more tactile feel, the 'n-remote' is a thoughtfully designed, do-it-all tool with a small screen providing visual aid for navigating servers. The button layout is easy to get along with, and browsing is surprisingly speedy

All your music is controllable with Pioneer's intuitive, responsive ControlApp (free, Android and iOS) or the familiar lanky, well-featured remote. As with some of Pioneer's other flagship products, the unit's interior is divided into chambers to isolate the components. This is to reduce signal interference.

The N-70A has a very similar character to the N-50A: clean, big-boned and tonally balanced, with decent dynamic insight and rhythmic drive. But here the sound is bigger and more powerful, more authoritative and detailed, and thrilling.

Play David Bowie's *Moonage Daydream* and the Pioneer is as muscular as it looks. It drives the song's rhythms with pleasing punch and dynamism, steamrolling through the guitar melodies and applying control where necessary.

The soundstage is coherent and nicely tight-knit as his echoed vocals bounce between the speakers. It could do with more space, though - the Cyrus Stream Xa's open and airy presentation has more room for instruments to work in, and better communicates depth and dimension.

### A shudder down the spine

That said, the Pioneer has little problem projecting Johnny Cash's distinctly deep, quivering vocals with enough clarity, focus and insight to send a shudder down your spine.

It's a confident, dynamic delivery on the whole, and that doesn't change as we play our computer's music through the asynchronous USB. The headphone amp pulls its weight, too, so listening through cans is just as satisfying.

The N-70A is a worthy flagship, but the Cyrus Stream Xa sets the bar just outside the Pioneer's reach, with more precision, subtlety and drive.

If you've made the decision to spend serious bucks on a streamer, we'd imagine you'd want the very best sound quality. The N-70A might seem like a good mid-point between the N-50A and Stream Xa but, logically and practically, the direct jump to the Cyrus makes more sense.

### Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Big, powerful sound; authoritative; detailed; feature-packed; solid build; crisp, bright display; good app software; sensibly priced

**AGAINST** Competition proves too good

**VERDICT** The Pioneer is a serious contender, but sound-wise it's no Cyrus Stream Xa

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**TEST VERDICT****WINNER** up to ₹65,000  
**Bluesound Node**

★★★★★

**WINNER**  
₹65,000-₹80,000  
**Pioneer N-50A**

★★★★★

**WINNER**  
₹1,00,000-₹1,80,000  
**Cyrus Stream Xa**

★★★★★



Spending more doesn't guarantee extra features, so our test winners – **Bluesound Node**, **Pioneer N-50A** and **Cyrus Stream Xa** – stand out for their sound and usability

**E**ssentially, sound quality will determine whether you spend ₹65,000 or ₹1,80,000 on a music streamer.

Whatever the price, most are similarly matched for connections and file support, and features are often tit-for-tat – spending additional money, won't necessarily get you an extra USB input or improved compatibility. In fact, the best-sounding streamer here is probably one of the more sparsely featured.

General usability (mostly through an app) is important too – there is nothing more frustrating than having a music collection that's a burden to access.

If our first head-to-head tells us anything it's that decent sound doesn't have to cost an

arm and a leg. The funky-looking Cabasse and Bluesound are both decent-sounding and easy to use, and either would sit well with first-time buyers. Extra levels of dynamics and subtlety steer the comparison in the Bluesound's favour, seeing it sail past yet another competitor.

While the Bluesound hangs onto its credentials, the Cambridge Audio proves less fortunate, courtesy of its new Pioneer adversary. It's not only outshone, but loses a whole star. Even if the Cambridge is a fraction more dynamic and open, there's no question that the cheaper Pioneer offers more bang for your buck. Its seamless operation puts the less-than-perfect design of the Cambridge in

perspective, too. At an enticing ₹60,000\*, the Pioneer is probably the star of this test.

Sometimes, though, it's not about taking baby steps. With the market as it is, your next leap should be to the Cyrus Stream Xa. Here Pioneer is less fortunate. Its flagship is out to ruffle Cyrus feathers, but fails to change the pecking order. Both deliver the goods, but are a star apart performance-wise. More dynamic and spacious, the Cyrus continues to set the standard at this price (and until you reach its bigger brother, the ₹2,69,000 Stream XP2-Qx).

Only three streamers will get you the very best for your budget, but there's no bad box here – we'd be happy letting any of the six loose with our (or Spotify's) music library.

**Up to ₹65,000****Bluesound Node**

₹65,000 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 0 • Optical in 0 • Coaxial in 0 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 15 x 21 x 17cm • Weight 1kg

**Cabasse Stream Source**

₹29,900 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 0 • Optical in 0 • Coaxial in 0 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/96kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 4 x 23 x 13cm • Weight 0.5kg

**₹65,000-₹80,000****Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2**

₹67,500 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 9 x 43 x 31cm • Weight 4kg

**Pioneer N-50A**

₹60,000\* ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless no (optional) • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 43 x 33cm • Weight 7.5kg

**₹1,00,000-₹1,80,000****Cyrus Stream Xa**

₹1,79,000 ★★★★★

Optical out 0 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 2 • Coaxial in 3 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 7 x 22 x 36cm • Weight 4.2kg

**Pioneer N-70A**

₹1,20,000\* ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless no (optional) • Resolution 32-bit/384kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 12 x 43 x 34cm • Weight 11.5kg

# TEMPTATIONS

Roksan Darius S1



Neat design touches abound throughout, including the smart label disc machined into the top panel



# “We're caught up in the drama of the melody”

■ **Roksan Darius S1** Stereo speakers

■ **₹5,01,240 (inc ₹75,200 stands) (Approx.)** ★★★★★

**T**hose with long memories may remember the original Roksan Darius. Introduced in the '80s, they were the company's first speakers; odd-looking high-end standmounters with a suspended tweeter and in their earliest incarnations, an intriguing exoskeleton stand.

They could perform really well, if pampered, having a direct and dynamic delivery. Fans of the originals might be surprised to learn that the new S1s share little engineering DNA with that classic design, but we have to say they're none the worse for that.

The S1 remains a two-way design. It mates a high-quality aluminium ribbon tweeter (an Aurum Cantus G2N) with a custom-made 13cm mid/bass driver. That fearsome-looking grille in front of the mid/bass is only there to prevent unwanted poking and prodding.

## Care on the crossover

Roksan has taken a great deal of care with the crossover design, trying to integrate the two drivers as seamlessly as possible. Take a look at the quality of the components used and it's clear the company hasn't tried to save the rupees. The crossover components for treble and mid/bass are also positioned on separate boards to prevent unwanted interaction, and good-quality internal cabling is claimed throughout.

That smart, internally braced MDF cabinet is immaculately made and finished. We like the attention to detail, right down to the curved cabinet edges and dimples machined into the side panel. It makes the speakers look so much more interesting than would otherwise be the case. The enclosure

The dedicated stands suit the S1s perfectly, but bear in mind the combo could be easily toppled if bumped



is relatively slim in proportion, but deep enough to gain a decent amount of internal volume. Look around the back and you'll find a pair of determined-looking reflex ports and a biwire set of rather swish WBT terminals.

## Made for the job

While the Darius will work on third-party stands we would suggest sticking to the dedicated supports. These aren't cheap but look good and suit the speakers both in appearance and performance. There's also a tidy cable management arrangement. The combination is available in two gloss finishes, white and black - both options look smart.

A word of caution though. If you have young children running around it's worth knowing that the speaker/

**Roksan has taken a great deal of care with the crossover. Look at the quality of the components used and it's clear the company hasn't tried to save the pennies**

stand combination is fairly easy to topple if it's bumped, thanks to a pretty high centre of gravity and a relatively small stand footprint.

Any speakers at this level need top-class electronics to shine and these Roksans are no different. Their quoted sensitivity is relatively good at 89dB/W/m but the nominal impedance is 4 ohms, which suggests a relatively beefy amplifier is required. We get good results with our reference system of Naim NDS/555PS streamer, Clearaudio

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# TEMPTATIONS

## Roksan Darius S1

Innovation Wood turntable package and Bryston BP26/4B SST2 amplifier. Given this kind of system the Darius S1s soar.

We like them best positioned well out into our test room. It pays to take a bit of time getting the toe-in and the distance between the channels just so. Get it right and these standmounters produce a lovely, well-focussed soundstage that extends well beyond the physical placement of the cabinets. The imaging is wide, deep and beautifully layered with impressive precision.

The Darius S1s are immensely likeable speakers. They have a wonderfully fluid delivery that blends attack, insight and refinement well. Most high-end speakers tend to be mostly about analysis; with the better ones you'll be able to unravel a recording and spot any errors in production or the musicianship. That's

**While they reveal plenty of detail, it's the way they organise it that impresses us. These speakers are rhythmic and dynamic, yet have finesse when the music demands**

great as far as it goes, but we want more. We want to feel the energy of Stevie Wonder at his best on *Higher Ground*, and get caught up in the hard-charging momentum of the song. This is the area many fall short on, delivering lots of detail without communicating the energy of the music properly. Not the Darius, which get straight to the core of the track with ease.

### Attention to detail

Equally, play an intricate piece like Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* and we want to get caught up in the drama of the melody and swept away by the ever-building tension of piece. The Darius S1s manage all this and more.

While they reveal plenty of detail, it's the way they organise it that impresses us most. These speakers are rhythmic and dynamic, and yet have finesse when the music demands too.

They're pretty small, standing just 38cm high, so truly deep bass isn't on the menu. Roksan itself quotes 47Hz (-3dB) as the low-end limit, so you'll certainly find alternatives that will dig deeper.

### TECH SPECS

**Type** Standmounter **Sensitivity** 89dB/W/m  
**Impedance** 4 ohms **Max power** 200W  
**Birirable** Yes **Finishes** black or white gloss  
**Dimensions (hwd)** 38 x 20 x 38cm



**1** The dedicated stands have slots top and bottom to facilitate neat cable management **2** Despite the significant bass ports, the S1s don't suffer too much from being placed close to a wall. Biwire terminals are high quality **3** Neatly machined side dimples look attractive **4** The ribbon tweeters work especially well in the S1s, but are fragile

But don't dismiss these speakers on that account. Importantly, the Darius produce enough low-end weight and authority to ensure a lack of bass reach never gets to be an issue in our test room. We never feel like we're missing out on the lowest octaves. The solidity at low frequencies is pleasing, as is these speakers' ability to render texture to their bass delivery. The leading and trailing edges of notes are defined neatly.

### Seamless flow

This solid foundation is mated to a quite lovely, flowing midrange. We're impressed by the naturalness on vocals and the utterly seamless way they track sounds from the lowest notes upwards. It's all topped off with a clear, crisp and subtle treble performance that sparkles with cymbals but has the required bite when needed. Tonally, things are nicely balanced and without emphasis on any part of the frequency range.

While Roksan has always made speakers, they have never grabbed the limelight in the way the company's amplifiers, CD players and even turntables have. These new Darius S1s are good enough to change that.

**Consider if** You want great sound from well built, compact standmounters  
**Highlight** Sonic balance is exceptional; fluid, refined yet still exciting to listen to

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Fluid, well balanced sound; convincing midrange; solid, agile bass; strong dynamics; fine rhythmic ability; impressive build

**AGAINST** Dedicated stands are pricey

**VERDICT** The Darius S1s are excellent performers and one of the most enjoyable standmounters we've heard in years

# The world's most desirable kit

# TEMPTATIONS

## “Rarely have we heard bass delivered with such resolution”

■ **GamuT D3i/D200i** Pre/power amplifier

■ ₹5,51,250/₹9,31,950 (Approx.) ★★★★★

**G**amut: we wouldn't be surprised if you've never heard of the company. It's Danish, and started life under the Sirius brand name back in the early '80s making amplifiers for studio use. But this is a company that has never really shouted about itself, or its products for that matter. That's a shame, because from what we've experienced it makes some very fine components. You can count the D3i preamp and D200i power amplifier among them.

That may be understating the matter somewhat. This pre/power combination is easily one of the best we've heard and - while expensive - is comparable in performance to alternatives that cost as much as a car.

### You get what you pay for

A high-end bargain, then? Hardly. ₹15 Lac is still a truckload of money but we certainly see this combination as great value as far as top-end amplification is concerned.

This Gamut pre/power impresses the moment the music starts. It sounds clean, crisp and invitingly clear. Detail resolution is superb; we can't think of a rival that tells us more about the recording. Listen to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and the production is laid bare, but not in a clinical way. Low-level information that describes the recording venue is easily heard, making the size and type of acoustic space used obvious. The orchestra is arranged with care and precision, with the placement of instruments pleasingly secure.

More than its imaging capabilities, we're taken by the way this pairing renders instrumental timbre. It's done

Let's not understate the matter; this pre/power combination is easily one of the best we've heard and - while expensive - is comparable to alternatives that cost as much as a car



You won't be disappointed by the quality of build on these units - both exhibit the kind of attention to detail and solidity you'd expect at this price

in a natural, unexaggerated manner that separates the sounds of different instruments (playing in the same frequency band) with ease.

### Sensitive yet powerful

We love the way the D3i/D200i combination deals with dynamics too. It has the finesse to deliver low-level variations brilliantly, yet given something challenging - Orff's *Carmina Burana*, for instance - it delivers the crescendos with real intensity and force.

There's more to applaud when we play *The Heist* by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. The music has plenty of drive

here and a surefooted way with rhythms. The Gamuts deliver attack when required yet have no problem easing back with chilled-out tracks such as *Same Love*. We like the way this pairing handles midrange - it's articulate and fluid in a way most other transistor-powered alternatives barely hint at.

Rarely have we heard deep bass notes delivered with such resolution. This pre/power has no trouble discriminating between different bass instruments or notes, nor does it lack anything in agility at low frequencies. We've heard rivals that produced weightier bass (not that the Gamuts are obviously lacking in this

## The Gamuts deliver attack when required yet have no problem easing back with chilled-out tracks

See overleaf for more detail...



respect), but little that has so much insight in this region.

### Top level top end

Move to the opposite end of the frequency spectrum and you'll find plenty of bite coupled to an unusual level of clarity. The combo's excellent transparency and insight mean poorer recordings are exposed, but unlike much of the competition these amplifiers don't go out of their way to emphasise those flaws. You'll get an honest and balanced account of the recording.

Move away from sound quality and the Gamuts remain on sure ground.

The preamp offers four line-level inputs, including XLR, and the usual option of balanced or single-ended outputs, which are mirrored on the power amplifier



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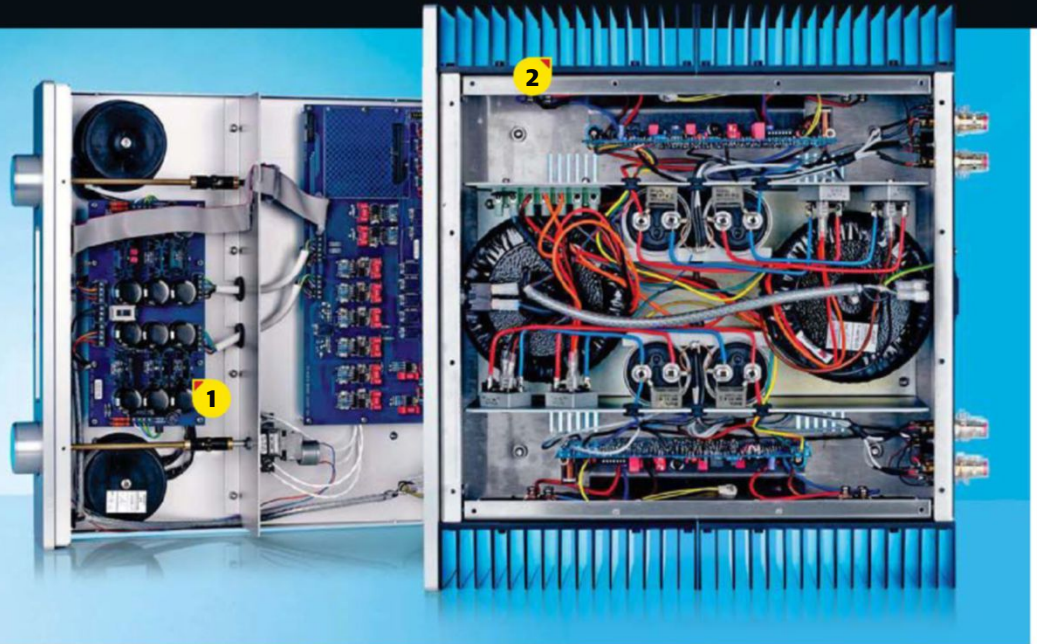


### In detail

The dual-mono design of both units keeps the two channels separate from one another, giving each its own mains transformer and smoothing capacitors. It's a weightier solution than a conventional design and it pushes production costs up, but Gamut considers it worthwhile for the gains in noise reduction and stereo separation.

**1** Extending the principle of component separation, the preamp houses its power supply board in a compartment at the front, away from the rear-mounted audio board.

**2** The D200i can run at high volume levels without getting worryingly hot thanks to extreme heatsinks.



Build quality is as good as we'd hope for at the price and everything feels as if it will last for years. It's hard not to be impressed by the care taken in construction. These aren't cheap products but it's clear where the money has been spent. Our only complaint concerns the remote handset, a cheap-feeling unit that's not intuitively laid out. Gamut has to do better in this respect.

Don't be fooled by the input marked 'Phono' on the D3i preamp. This is a line-level only unit. There are four inputs (including balanced XLR) and the usual option of either balanced or single-ended outputs. Take a look inside and you'll find a dual-mono configuration right down to the power supplies. The idea is to ensure the two channels don't interact unduly, something that would increase distortion and degrade the stereo imaging. The D3i is a large unit as far as preamps go, particularly when it comes to depth, so make sure your equipment support has enough clearance.

#### The virtue of simplicity

The D200i power amplifier is a simple affair as far as features are concerned. It mirrors the preamp's balanced and single-ended connections, and has two pairs of speaker outputs per channel to make biwiring a little easier.

Under the cover there's another dual-mono configuration with doubled-up power supplies. Gamut's power amplifiers are unusual in using just a single output transistor per channel rather than combining multiple transistors as in conventional designs. Why do this? The company feels the technical compromises involved in

#### TECH SPECS

**GAMUT D3i**  
**Type** Preamp  
**Line level in** 4  
**Tape loops** 1  
**Outputs** Preamp, XLR  
**Dimensions (hwd)** 11 x 43 42cm

**GAMUT D200i**  
**Type** Power amplifier  
**Claimed power** 220W  
**Bridgeable** No  
**Inputs** Phono, XLR  
**Dimensions (hwd)** 16 x 43 x 47cm  
**Weight** 34kg

#### Benno Meldgaard Engineer



The D3i has the same basic construction as its D3 predecessor, using a balanced, single-ended J-fet

input buffer, and a special analogue ALPS Volume potentiometer of only 1 Kohm. This helps keep noise and crosstalk to an absolute minimum. The buffer was chosen for its low levels of noise and coloration. The difference is in the power supply section, which has been further fine-tuned for cleaner, faster power delivery.

The key features of the D3i are its genuine dual-mono construction, with separate toroid transformer for each channel, and a very short, high-quality signal path for a very open and natural sound, with very low distortion.

In keeping with Gamut's key amplifier design philosophy, the D200i uses a single mos-fet [transistor] solution in which one ultra-fast output device drives each channel. We believe multiple devices cannot be absolutely aligned and so smear the sonic signal.

In the D200i we use a new ultra-high current mos-fet that handles up to 500A, together with a balanced power supply with much faster and higher power delivery for a lower noise floor and improved dynamics.

As the icing on the cake, we changed the cabling on both units to our own Wormhole cable, to ratchet the performance up another notch.

combining multiple output transistors are too great.

#### Muscle to match

The D200i will deliver 220W per channel into eight ohms and 400W as impedance halves. The company also claims 700W per channel into a two-ohms load, which suggests the D200i will be happy driving just about any price-compatible speaker.

There's no shortage of quality high-end pre/power combinations, but we find ourselves deeply impressed by this Gamut pairing. Its transparency and resolution are class-leading and we find its fluidity quite addictive. If you want an honest amplifier that doesn't stamp its signature on the recording too heavily we can't think of a better alternative.

**Consider if** You value transparency, detail and agility above all else  
**Highlight** We love this combination's insight, subtlety and fluid delivery

#### Gamut D3i Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Transparency and detail resolution; agility; fluid delivery; subtle dynamics; stable and expansive stereo imaging; fine build and finish  
**AGAINST** Poor remote handset

**VERDICT** If you're looking for an insightful and honest preamp the D3i is an fine place to start

#### Gamut D200i Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Immensely detailed sound; articulate presentation; power; finesse; build and finish

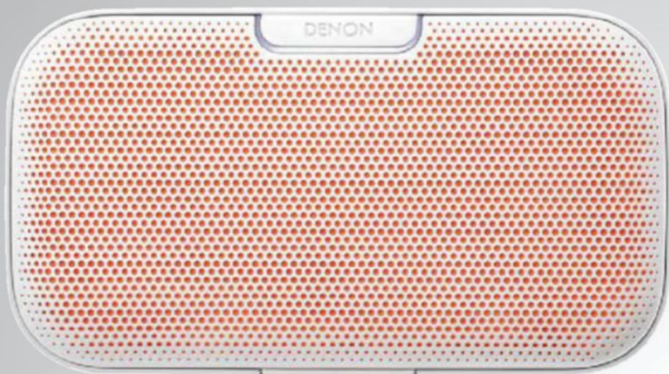
**AGAINST** If price isn't an issue, nothing

**VERDICT** One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard. The D200i is both analytical and entertaining; that's a rare combination

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The movies, music and games to test your system

## Out this month



### Birdman: (Or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)

Blu-ray  
Out 30th March

★★★★★

#### Bonus content

- Birdman: All-Access
- A Conversation with Michael Keaton and Alejandro G. Iñárritu
- Gallery: Chivo's On-Set Photos

Duration 119m

Audio English: DTS-HD  
Master Audio 5.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p

Picture	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Sound	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Extras	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

## Flying in the face of convention

**What is it?** That's a tough one. Nobody can answer that one in a confident, succinct manner.

It's best to come out and say it. We have no idea what *Birdman* is. It makes a mockery of the pigeonholes we bring to the movies. It defies classification.

The yarn itself is uncomplicated. An ageing movie star (Michael Keaton; ingenious casting choice) wants to escape his superhero typecast. He tries to prove himself a true artist by writing, directing and acting in a Broadway play.

It's the execution that will have you cheering or jeering. No, there is no middle ground. You will leave this impressed or indignant.

There is heavy melodrama, although a throbbing vein of dark comedy keeps us from too much of a downer. You get a gritty look at the less glitzy side of showbiz, but surreal sequences pull you out and stop you feeling grounded.

There is no rest, especially not when a fluid camera drifts from scene to scene, presenting the whole 119 minutes as a single take.

It's an odd effect, mildly nauseating for some but thrilling for others. It is at once realistic and bizarre. A lack of cuts suggests a documentary vibe while granting everything a dreamlike quality.

#### Brought up short

Once in a while the camera pauses, and you're woken with a jolt. Witness the actor's impotence and his daughter's resentment. It's a hard look at the futility of man and his art, made all the more effective by sterling turns from Michael Keaton and Emma Stone.

Harsh realities come out of nowhere and hit hard, but you drift on to the next scene, each impeccably timed and acted, each at once bleak and hilarious. *Birdman* is a curious journey.

It is also a beautiful one. The theatre stage presents an array of colourful sets, but the free-roaming camera keeps the scenery still more varied.

The faint yellow of dim corridors yields to deep-red backstage lamps, blue mist and the neon of a Manhattan rooftop. It's a vibrant, dynamic picture.

Incidentally, the constant panning and tracking will test your system's grasp of motion. And then there's the soundtrack: primarily jazz drumming, with stacked cymbals that sound like trash cans. It is quite spectacular in surround sound.

*Birdman* is a film like no other. Bold and irreverent, it goes out of its way to ensure you're never certain where you stand. That will enthrall some while infuriating others - and it's worth your time finding out. One thing is for sure: this is no superhero flick.

## Music highlights

**Sufjan Stevens: *Should Have Known Better*** Effortlessly affecting, confident and open-hearted music from a latter-day king of melody.

**Boys Age: *The Wish Is Father To The Thought*** If you like mumbly, approximate, tremendously exciting and engaging Japanese indie-pop, at last your search is over.

**David Gilmour: *On An Island*** Tasteful, high-gloss, overwhelmingly musicianly fare with *Abbey Road*-era Fab Four harmonies to sweeten the already sugar-coated pill.

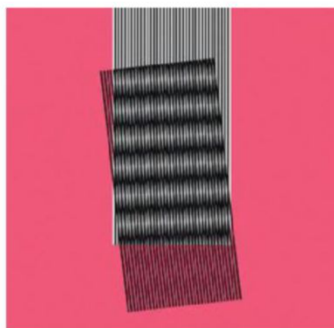
**The Fairfield Four: *Standing In The Safety Zone*** Fast approaching a hundred years as a going concern and yet to deviate from their entirely winning gospel/doo-wop formula.

# Music

GAMES, MOVIES  
& FORTHCOMING  
RELEASES  
p63



## Download, CD, vinyl



### HOT CHIP WHY MAKE SENSE?

Out Now

★★★★☆

There can be longevity in disposability and, despite the occasional Grammy or Mercury nomination, Hot Chip's modus operandi has always been delivering the disco glitter. Songs that seem urgent and vital when they're blasting from a system but are as anonymous as a last-dance snog-and-grind as soon as they're over is where they do all their best work.

And while with *Why Make Sense?* (their sixth album since 2004's debut *Coming On Strong*) Hot Chip remain a kind of pub-quiz pop-music round (a

bit of *Underworld* here, a dash of New Order there, a Best of The 80s vibe pretty much everywhere), there's a robustness about the songs here that's entirely new. With *Why Make Sense?* Hot Chip sound like they've grown into themselves.

### If it ain't broke...

That's not to say this album is any great departure, mind you. Chunky, four-square, mid-tempo teeth-grinders are the order of the day here, but with *Cry For You*, *Started Right* (with its daring deployment of clavinet) and *Dark Night*, Hot Chip hit the hips/feet spot without ignoring the head too much.

It's not without filler ('trite' is too glamorous a description for *Easy To Get*, for instance), but as a test of your system's timing, transient detail retrieval and low-end attack it's action-packed from end-to-end. And while it's not an especially dynamic recording (and consequently radio-friendly), it's a thorough examination of tonal variation.

### Specifications

**Duration** 44m 51s

**Standout track** *Started Right* "You make my heart feel like it's my brain"

## Download, CD, vinyl



### TWIN SHADOW ECLIPSE

Out Now

★★★★☆

No one moves from 4AD to Warner Brothers without having at least one eye on the main chance, and for his major-label debut George Lewis Jr (for it is he) sounds like he has the mainstream in his cross-hairs. *Eclipse* may be soft-peddalling the overt 80s synth-pop references of his first two albums, but if it's big choruses, bigger drums and unabashed commitment you want, just set your watch back 30 years and dive right in.

There's a commonality to all 11 songs here, from the 4m 19s of opener *Flatliners* to the 2m 57s of

closer *Locked And Loaded* and through the 3mins-odd each of the nine songs inbetween. Opaque (but opaquely meaningful) lyrics, glossy synth pads, drum fills the like of which T'Pau might have rejected as being a bit too bombastic, and huge, hooky melodies. There's immediacy and urgency here in spades, but between the sincerity and the vast, unmanageable scale of most of the songs (with the title track arguably the only exception) it's the aural equivalent of eating foie gras three times a day for a week.

### Hardware challenge

Thanks to its occasionally dense layering of sound, its hefty dynamics and the obvious care Lewis Jr has taken with his vocal harmonies, though, *Eclipse* is a superior showcase for your set-up's powers of focus and organisation. Without proper administration this is an album that could provoke hi-fi indigestion, but well-handled it's an intricate listen.

### Specifications

**Duration** 38m 15s

**Standout track** *Old Love/New Love*  
The sound of *The Breakfast Club* grown old and knackered.

## Listen to it this way

### CD player

**Naim CD5si** ₹1,39,875 ★★★★★

Boundless energy and enthusiasm, but plenty of poise when required too

### Stereo amplifier

**Rega Elex-R** ₹1,12,500 ★★★★★

Classic iron-fist-in-velvet-glove stuff from one of the best integrated amp around

### Stereo speakers

**Tannoy Revolution XT6F** ₹1,41,000 ★★★★★

Effortlessly dynamic, casually precise all-round entertainers. Money well spent

This system will relish digesting the meaty dishes Hot Chip serve



## Listen to it this way

### Smartphone

**Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge** ★★★★★

Outstanding sound quality from one of the best smartphones out there

### Music streaming service

**Spotify \$10 per month** ★★★★★

It's coming under a fair bit of pressure for the first time, but Spotify remains a go-to service

### Headphones

**Philips Fidelio M1MKII** ₹10,999 ★★★★★

Brilliantly balanced, thoroughly engaging headphones and an authentic bargain

These three will be equal to the task of doing justice to *Eclipse*





OFFICIAL SELECTION  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

THE DEEPER YOU GO, THE DARKER IT GETS.

" BRILLIANT "



THE INDEPENDENT

" UNMISSABLE "



STYLIST

" MY FAVORITE FILM,  
ASIF KAPADIA KING  
OF CANNES 2015 "

ANUPAMA CHOPRA

From the award winning team behind 'SENNA'

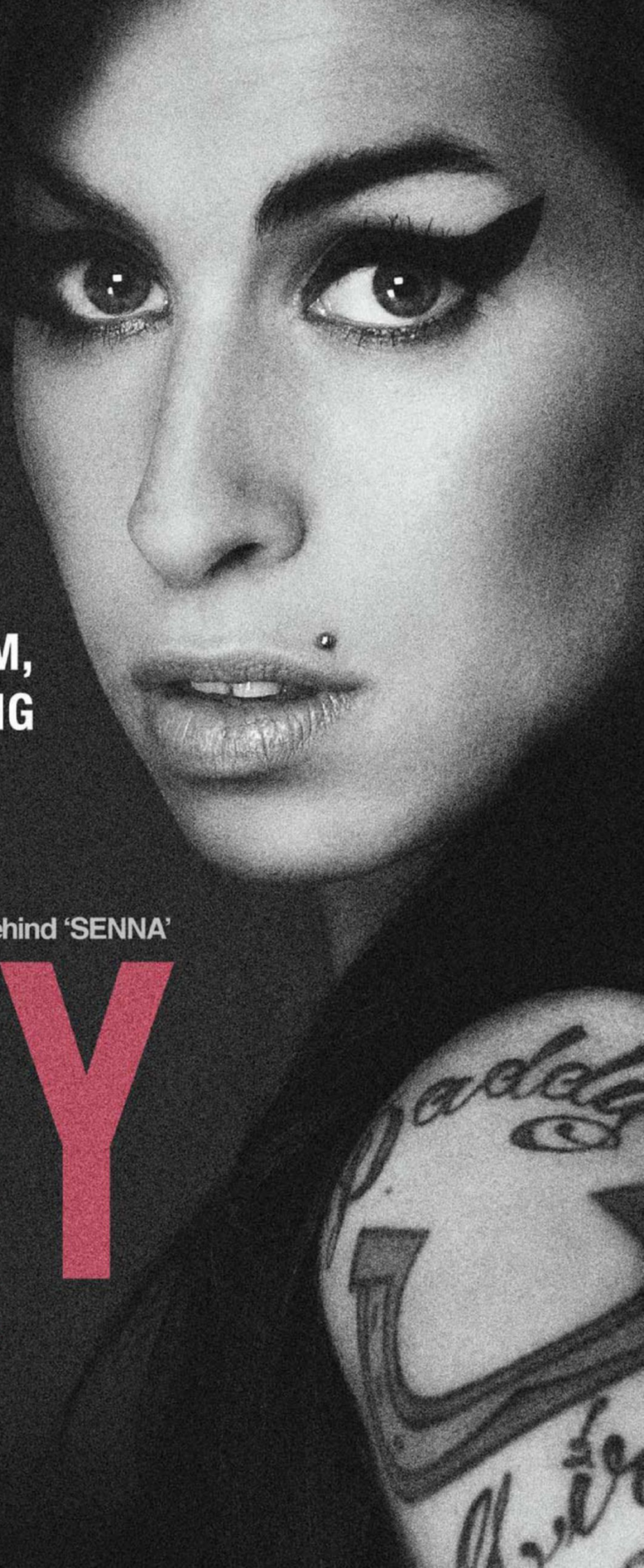
# AMY

The girl behind the name

JULY 2015

PVR  
DIRECTOR'S NAME

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION





## Movie shorts

### Into The Woods

Stephen Sondheim has Meryl Streep and friends frolic in the woods and subvert fairytale tropes. There is singing. It's not quite dark enough.

### Unbroken

The true story of an athlete and bombardier captured during WWII. There's nothing new about war-time valour tales, but it's still inspiring.

### Exodus: Gods And Kings

Ridley Scott's latest epic retells the story of Moses. Avoiding biblical fidelity and old-world charm, it gets a bit stale. Sure is spectacular, though.

### The Theory Of Everything

Biopic season concludes with one of Stephen Hawking. A touching and enlightening portrayal of a man who is definitely more than a wheelchair.

## On-screen

### System tester



### Cobain: Montage Of Heck Blu-ray Out now

★★★★★

Constantly seeking to replace the family he lost at age nine with his parents' divorce, Kurt Cobain could find solace only in music. Even then, he found the comfort of music taken away from him when his band became wildly fashionable and popular. Money couldn't save him. A family of his own couldn't save him. His threat that the follow-up to the huge-selling *Nevermind* would be

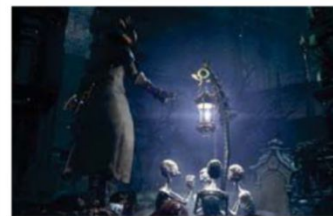
titled *I Hate Myself And I Want To Die* was far from idle.

*Montage Of Heck* is a start-to-finish, top-to-bottom documentary of real ambition. Interviews with Cobain's parents, friends, band-mates and wife, images of global Nirvana hysteria, elegaic animations set to cassette recordings of conversations and demos, vérité home-movie footage and incendiary, blown-gasket concert performances all combine to tell the story of a short, angry, confused and ultimately tragic life. A downer, sure, but compelling nevertheless.

## Games

### Bloodborne PS4, Out now

★★★★★



The sadistic sods behind the *Dark Souls* games have done it again, with another gruesome third-person adventure that delicately treads the thin line between hellishly infuriating and gloriously satisfying. The combat is more intense, but this is still tactical and perilous, with painful penalties for mistakes.

### Dark Souls 2: Scholar Of The First Sin

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★★



If you never played the original *Dark Souls 2* or simply want an excuse to go through it again, this expanded special edition is just what you need. Essentially it's a tweaked version of the brilliant but frustrating and brutal third-person adventure, but with all three of the downloadable packs built-in.

### Mortal Kombat X

PS4, PS3, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★☆



Surely the world must be over *Mortal Kombat*? *Mortal Kombat X* might just do enough to convince you that's not the case. The fighting is fast and precise, and the gore is more graphic and inventive than ever. There's even a story that sort of works. If you think you might like it, you probably will.

### Titan Souls

PC, PS4, Vita, Out now

★★★★☆



Think *Shadow Of The Colossus* meets the old *Zelda* games and you've about got the measure of this charmingly old-school indie offering. You hunt down monsters and attempt to get the single shot into each one's weak spot to kill it. Each battle is a frantic dash about as you try to pick your moment.



### Watch it this way

#### Blu-ray player

**Oppo BDP-105D** ₹1,20,000

★★★★★

If you want a source that does it all - brilliantly - the Oppo is hard to fault

#### Television

**LG 55EC930T** ₹3,59,900

★★★★★

Just a gobsmackingly fine television

#### Speaker package

**Bowers & Wilkins MT60-D** ₹3,28,500

★★★★★

Venerable, in nothing but a good way

#### Home cinema amplifier

**Pioneer SC-LX58** ₹1,10,990

★★★★★

Power, precision - and stacks of features

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# REFERENCE SYSTEM



*We use only the best ingredients in the making of this magazine. This in-house system helps us to evaluate incoming products with more insight and accuracy, so you always get the best tests!*



### Arcam D33 DAC / UDP-411 BD/SACD Player

Capable of full high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz processing and SACD playback, this duo is state-of-art audio/video decoding



### Denon AVR-X7200W

Dolby Atmos out of the box and an upgrade to Auro 3D on its way, this is the most future-proof AVR we could get our hands on, yet.



### BlueSound Vault

All our CDs and music get stored and served by this elegant solution from the boys at NAD



### Mark Levinson No. 585

An integrated amplifier with (almost) no equal, this 200 w/pc dual mono design is the pinnacle of cutting-edge tech along with a 32-bit DAC onboard for added ammo!



### AudioQuest cables

Working truthfully between the various components, the DBS-equipped line of cables and interconnects helps us see and hear without any anomalies



### PMCTwenty Series speakers

Using the Twenty.26 as mains, Twenty.C for centre, DB1 Gold and Wafer 1 for surrounds, this speaker suite is the ideal blend of neutrality and musicality



### REL S5 Subwoofer

The cleanest and fastest way to add real weight and dynamics to our system was to introduce the brilliant S5 to the music and multichannel mix. A true legend





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**NEED TO KNOW****CONSIDER IF**

Your main speakers do or do not need additional low-frequency support

**YOU'LL NEED**

Room that is structurally rigid to take the beating this REL can throw at it!

**MAKE SURE**

You use both the LFE and the high-level inputs for maximum performance

**AVOID**

Placing it out in the room. REL has designed it to work best in a corner

**HIGHLIGHT?**

The incredible increase in clarity and depth it brings to the entire system

## REL S/5

₹1,95,000

Rarely have we seen a brand so conscientious about its message. REL has been a specialist brand ever since it was founded in 1990 by Richard Edmund Lord and they've never called themselves makers of 'subwoofers'. No Sir. The term they like to use is 'sub-bass systems' and their almost legendary S/5 proves rather quickly why this makes more sense. Sitting at the top of their mid range, the S/5 isn't exactly cheap but its purposeful build and aesthetic befit a product of this calibre.

The gloss black cabinet is perfectly square with chrome-plated grab handles on the side and an embossed logo in an aluminium patch right in the centre up top. The front is dominated by REL's 12in custom continuous cast alloy cone that does away with the dust cap and is instantly identifiable with its aluminium finish. This is actually a bass reflex design but the port is not kept open, instead is covered by a 12in carbon passive radiator and again, REL believes this kind of solution makes the system behave like a sliding ratio design. At low power, it performs like a fast 8in driver but when more power and oomph are demanded, it switches character to sound more like a thumping 15in woofer.

The busy back is fully loaded with every

kind of connection you would ever need and then some. Part of REL's 'sub-bass system' philosophy is the belief that you should be using both the LFE and high-level input simultaneously to preserve the actual harmonic content of the music. The crossover point of your main speakers is thus not tampered with and REL encourages you to run them full range. Contrary to what you may think, even full-range speakers benefit from the

### Its speed, resolution and sheer depth will reveal new information in familiar recordings

inclusion of the S/5 in the system, such is its effective as a sub-bass system.

The owner's manual is comprehensive in its guidance and for the better, since this is one component in your hi-fi system that might take the most work to integrate but is eventually the most rewarding. Using the supplied Neutrik Speakon connector to connect the high-level inputs directly to the speaker outputs of our Mark Levinson No.585 amplifier and the LFE input to our Denon AVR-7200W's subwoofer pre-out, we were ready to be thrilled. It takes a while to set the individual levels for the crossover and level, since REL allows you to dial in different volume levels for music and movies.

Once you do get it right, it integrates with your system like it wasn't there. Its speed, resolution and sheer depth will reveal new

information in familiar recordings, irrespective of your main speakers. Trentemoller's *Vamp* is a punishing track for any subwoofer but the REL simply revelled in trying tracks, making it all so effortless and seamless. It literally creates a new foundation for your system and your main speakers only seem to sound better defined, with improved imaging and soundstage depth.

It's not often that a single component makes such a significant difference to the overall signature of your system and the REL S/5 is one of those rare components. Subwoofer haters should give this a listen before calling them off in a purist system. This isn't your run-of-the-mill sub and what it delivers isn't ordinary boom. This should be what true bass should sound like.

**Rating**

**FOR** Ease of use, loud and punchy sound, great all-round connectivity

**AGAINST** Remote feels flimsy, lack of stereo imaging and depth

**VERDICT** If you want a party speaker that cannot be crushed, this is it

**TECH SPECS**

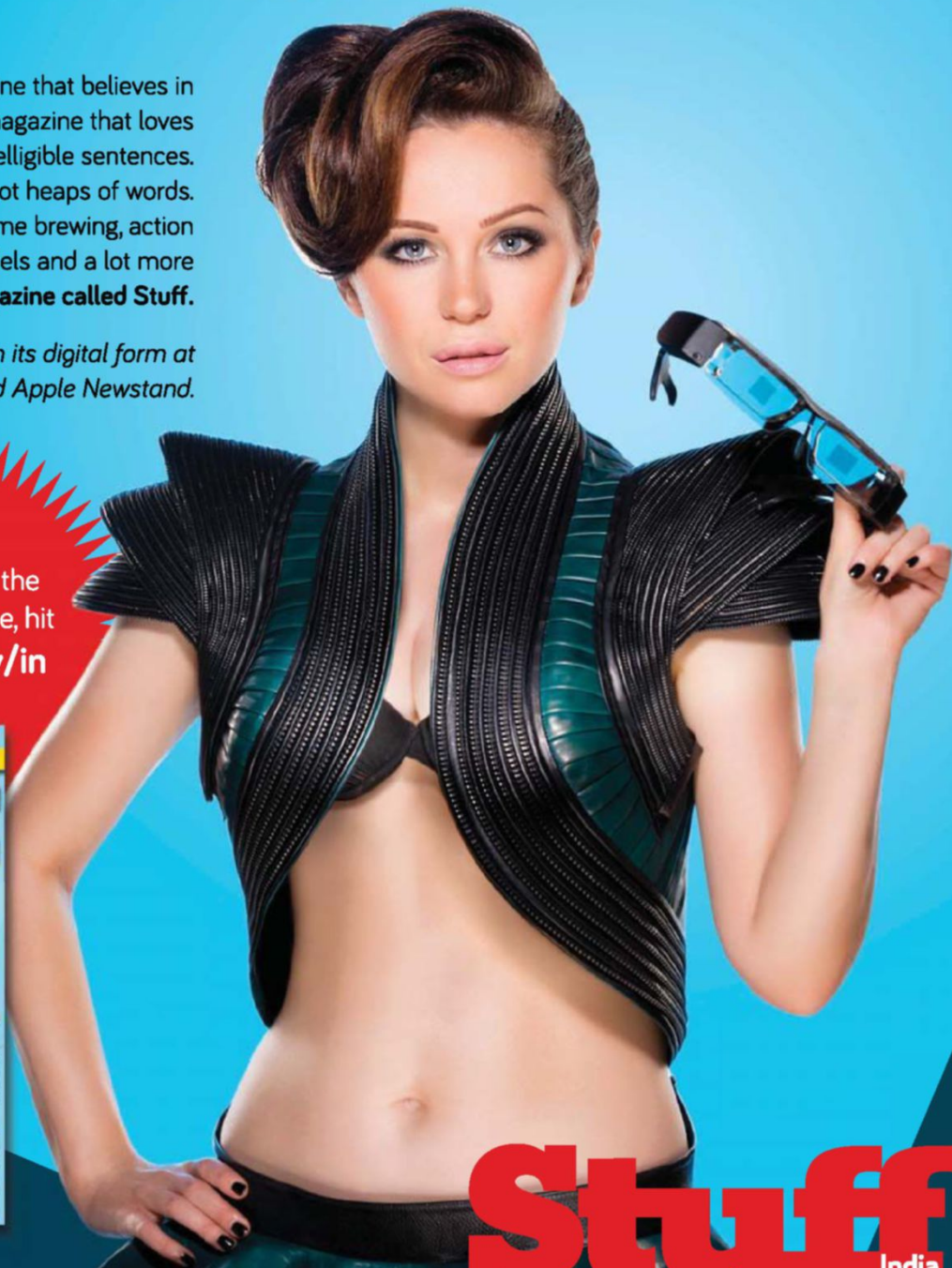
**Drivers** 12in front-firing aluminium woofer, 12in down-firing carbon radiator **LF Response** 21Hz @ -6dB **Inputs** High-level Neutrik, L/R Low-level, LFE, Wireless option **Power** 550W **Dimensions (WHD)** 13.75 x 14.5 x 16.75in **Weight** 31.6kg

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IS A TECH MAGAZINE THAT KNOWS ITS  
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**NEED TO KNOW****CONSIDER IF**

Space is at a premium but you want full-bodied, stereo sound

**YOU'LL NEED**

An NFC-enabled smartphone if you want one-touch pairing

**MAKE SURE**

The S-Bass setting is kept to 1. Too high or too low upsets the tonal balance

**AVOID**

Placing the speakers too close together. Stereo separation needs space

**HIGHLIGHT?**

Naturalness with a high resolution sound that belies its small size

**Onkyo CS-265**

₹22,500

**Colibrino is not a new name for Onkyo to have used on its mini systems.** Indicating its availability in a range of colours, the Colibrino range has always been known for its character and not so much the sound.

But this latest iteration seems hell-bent to change that perception. For starters, it's one of the few compact systems available with an optical drive. Yes, those ageing CDs have a reason to exist still! There have also been improvements in key areas such as performance and connectivity, both of which instantly translated in instant gratification upon turning it on.

We placed the CS-265 on our desktop, with speakers placed about four feet apart. James Vincent McMorrow's *Cavalier* was delivered with a clean, open soundstage that totally belied the speakers size and the amplifiers class. Digging deeper into the specs and fumbling over the cabinets, we did realise that there is a more powerful digital amplifier on board now and the speakers have new drivers along with cabinets that boast of non-parallel sides. Features that you would normally expect in much more expensive audiophile products, it was a pleasant surprise knowing Onkyo is taking this segment

seriously. The highs weren't ever harsh or lacking in detail. The even-handed tonal balance is quite unlike anything else in this price segment, which is dangerously close to many palm-sized Bluetooth speakers from some premium brands! The bass through the 4in drivers needed a nudge and thoughtfully, Onkyo provides two bass settings for a much-needed

### The even-handed tonal balance is quite unlike anything else in this price segment

boost. We preferred the lower of the two as it kept the low frequencies more controlled rather than bleeding into the mids and robbing the sound of articulation. *Earned It* by the popular outfit The Weeknd sounded big as it's supposed to with a high level of vocal drama and attack to the snare and the violins. It makes for a valiant attempt at leaving the confines of the speaker boxes and while it manages to succeed to a certain extent, the lack of structural rigidity gives it away. But imaging is superb and with such an easy set-up process, it's also not very long until you start experiencing an on-desk phantom centre image, and that truly makes this system a much better buy than any one-piece speaker in our books.

Onkyo hasn't overlooked the feature set whilst busy tweaking the performance either. NFC and Bluetooth connectivity arm it with wireless streaming abilities from virtually any device and the front USB will play friendly with iOS devices, passing a native digital signal to the amplifier directly. Alternatively, it will also read a USB drive full of MP3s you shouldn't be listening to in the first place.

With sculpted speaker grilles and clean lines, Onkyo has done a great job at making the Colibrino look inoffensive even with all the plastic content on board. In a world full of one-box systems and BT speakers by the dozen, this stands out with its true stereo sound and a presentation that is rich in detail, resolution and fun factor.

**Rating**

**FOR** Big sound from a small box, easy to set-up and use, speakers use good quality drivers

**AGAINST** CD tray feels a little flimsy, remote could be more responsive

**VERDICT** An absolute gem at this price and one that we highly recommend over BT speakers!

**TECH SPECS**

**Power Output** 20watts x 2 **S/N Ratio** 77dB  
**Speaker type** 2-way Bass reflex **Drivers** 2 x 4in woofers, 2 x 0.8in tweeters **Frequency Response** 80Hz-20kHz **Dimensions (WHD)** 130 x 210 x 281 mm **Weight** 6.7kg

# TECH IS DEAD LONG LIVE TECH



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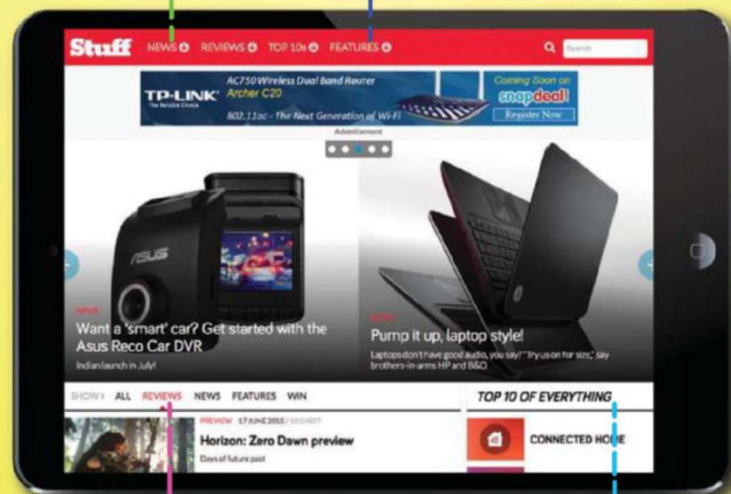
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## Davis Acoustics Matisse HD

₹2,38,000

**A name not well-known in India, yet, making waves for over 25 years,** Davis Acoustics is finally here to stay, thanks to local distributor Decibels Audio. Starting life as a DIY kit speaker brand and evolving into an OEM manufacturer, it wasn't until 1993 that the company produced its first complete speaker in-house. Davis Acoustics prides itself in making every single component of the speaker themselves, by hand. This includes voice coils, crossovers, cabinets, drivers and everything in between! That's no mean feat if you understand the business of loudspeaker manufacturing, and to add to the complexity, Davis Acoustics makes most of it by hand using a team of

## Patricia Barber's *Morning Grace* was delivered with all the grandiose that a track like this demands

dedicated and experienced engineers. So, when we received the Matisse HD for review, our initial scepticism about the brand was quickly converted into confidence that these guys know a thing or two about loudspeakers. Considering they supply drivers to blue-chip brands like Goldmund, MBL and Avant Garde amongst others, they ought to!

The Matisse is available in three variants - 3D, HD and Signature. Each of them improve the drivers, crossovers and even the plinth to make for a more secure coupling with the floor. Our HD model sits right in the middle of the range and features the company's hallmark kevlar midrange and carbon cellulose woofers

### NEED TO KNOW

#### CONSIDER IF

Imposing speakers are not your thing and you want stealthy but good sound

#### YOU'LL NEED

Sufficient breathing space around them to let them really shine in the imaging department

#### MAKE SURE

You don't toe them in too much as this tends to sharpen the top-end a bit too much

#### AVOID

Driving them with an inexpensive amplifier

#### HIGHLIGHT

Their phase coherence is remarkable and makes for a fatigue-free experience for long hours at end

mated to a soft dome tweeter. The gloss black finish make them look slick, chic and stealthy, save for that ostentatious yellow kevlar cone. There are two ports on this bass reflex design, one at the front for the two woofers and one at the back for the midrange. Yet, placement is fairly easy and we were in the sweet spot within 30 minutes of set-up time. Locked and loaded, the first thing that struck us about the Matisse HD was its sense of space. Thanks to their slender column design and small 5in drivers, they effortlessly disappear from your room with any kind of music that you're playing. Brandon Flowers' *Between Me and You* opens with a drum loop and shuffling brushes with a pervasive bass note that filled our room without sounding boomy at all. Patricia Barber's *Morning Grace* was delivered with all the grandiose that a track like this demands. Her soaring vocals were always kept in check even during the falsettos without ever getting piercing and the attack of the snares during the drum solo coda was visceral. Almost unbelievable for a pair of 5in woofers to plunge this low and yet maintain tonal accuracy. The cabinet is super-rigid and even at high SPLs, there is little evidence of the drivers working overtime, such is its inertness.

The only real chink in this speakers armour was the slight chestiness it developed in the upper mid-bass region. James Taylor's Hourglass is a great record for speaker tests and on *Gaia*, the guitar sounds a tad too heavy for an acoustic and gives it a slightly unrealistic tone. This is evident only on certain kinds of music and for most of the time, it excels in every other area that makes a loudspeaker engaging to listen to over long hours.

New to the Indian market, Davis Acoustics doesn't have a strong dealer network, but as word spreads of its phenomenal value for money, it will surely hit a home run with audiophiles. It is simply one of the finest deals in the industry right now and easily sounds worth at least twice its price. Highly recommended!

### Rating

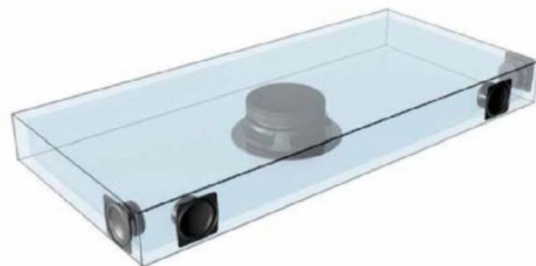
**FOR** Huge open soundstage, pinpoint imaging, quick and accurate bass, clarity amongst the best

**AGAINST** Slight heaviness in the upper mid-bass. Nothing else to note

**VERDICT** One of the best value-for-money loudspeakers we have heard in awhile and is destined for success if marketed properly

### TECH SPECS

**Type** 3-way Bass reflex **Drivers** 1x1in soft dome tweeter, 1x5in kevlar midrange, 2x5in frequency cellulose woofers **Sensitivity** 91dB **Frequency Range** 40Hz-23kHz **Impedance** 4-8ohms **Crossover frequency** 350Hz, 3.5kHz **Dimensions (WHD)** 21 x 102 x 29cm **Weight** 23kgs



## Crystal Audio Teevy 5

₹24,990

Our love for wireless products has been on a steady incline and just when we thought we were done for the week, the Teevy 5 lands in our office. What we have here is a sound base that can be placed on a rack or mounted on the wall.

It features WiSound technology that aims to eliminate the so-called sweet spot and instead, offer a more dispersed yet immersive aural experience. You can place the base anywhere in the room and still enjoy a wide stereo soundstage. The product connects to your smartphone via Bluetooth and it can even connect to any TV or device that supports DLNA/UPnP. Therefore, practically anything from your computer, home server to your NAS device could be connected to the Teevy 5. You can even add multiple speakers and enjoy audio output in different rooms controlling

## Play the *Mad Max: Fury Road* soundtrack and the Teevy 5 plunges you right into the menace

it all via the WiSound app. However, if you need to, you can even connect wired devices to the Teevy via the ports on the rear. This includes playing tracks off a USB stick (it can even charge your smartphone).

We beam FLAC-encoded tracks from our smartphone and Teevy 5 responds with a room-filling sound. Instruments can be pinpointed with ease and it is uncanny that a device that's barely 95mm deep can muster bass that sounds this good. It goes overboard on that rare occasion, but remains controlled overall. Play the *Mad Max: Fury Road* soundtrack and the Teevy 5 plunges you right into the menace cooked up by Tom Holkenborg aka Junkie XL. You can even play music off your USB stick, if you need to. As we switched from music to movies, the overall impact was thunderous while watching a rerun of *Game of Thrones*

on the telly. It is not just the bass, the Teevy 5 delivers subtle sound effects well and the convincing soundstage fools you into thinking that this is a bigger setup. For a future-ready wire-free solution, the Teevy 5 makes a truly good buy.

### Rating

**FOR** Loud enough to fill a large room without stressing out, good build quality, looks, simple setup.

**AGAINST** Bass overpowers a touch

**VERDICT** Great to enjoy music and movies. Simple to setup and use.

### TECH SPECS

**Drivers** 1 x 5.1in (subwoofer), 4x2in (midrange)  
**Connectivity** Bluetooth, Aux, Optical, RCA, USB, Ethernet

### NEED TO KNOW

#### CONSIDER IF

You need a simple yet classy wireless speaker to listen to music or enjoy movies with

#### YOU'LL NEED

A TV that supports DLNA/UPnP technology to beam audio to the device

#### MAKE SURE

You download the Wisound app to setup the device and connect it to your home network

#### AVOID

Placing objects on the sides or front of the unit as they could block the speakers

#### HIGHLIGHT

Room-filling sound, that excels in detail and power



## Sol Republic Punk

₹6750

Sol Republic is no stranger to belting out stylish products that weigh in on the performance too. Well-designed and an assured head-turner, the diminutive Sol Republic Bluetooth speaker is called 'Punk' and it lives up to the name - rebellious colour options notwithstanding. Priced at a slightly expensive ₹6750, the Punk feels rugged and has a rubbery feel, and seems capable of its claims of being water, shock and dust-resistant. It sits squarely on its base, just like the JBL Micro and has a protective flap on the left flank that protects the 3.5mm Aux line-in, charging port and a port that allows to

daisy-chain other speakers. The 'Sol' symbol sits evenly across the upward-facing mesh in the direction of the 6W speaker's throw, while buttons for controlling volume, power and Bluetooth can be found on the top. Another unique feature on the back of the portable speaker is a 1/4-in threaded mount with which it can be screwed onto a cycle's handle bar for truly on-the-go music.

The Punk may be small in stature but as far as audio output is concerned, it really is a little punk - if the punk took up a guitar, formed a band, went on stage and stood with towering speakers and let it rip that is. The speaker is loud but doesn't compromise on the nuances of what makes music sound good. It does justice across the frequencies with size-defiant detail. The bass response is impressive given the size, with a decent battery life averaging 8 hours, depending on the use.

Pinch harmonics of the guitar intro on *When I feel the sea beneath my soul* from the *Tiny Island* album from *Opus3* were distinctly audible, along with the rest of the instruments as the crescendo increases with the song's progression. At moderate to small-room-filling volumes, *Ben Howard's* lilting vocals and his guitar on delay effect in *Small Things* held their sway. The Punk didn't disappoint us with bass-heavy tracks like *Free Tibet* by the *Hilight Tribe* either.

## The speaker is loud but doesn't compromise on the nuances of what makes music sound good

Regardless, there was expected distortion at higher volumes (*Kasmir* by *Led Zepplin*) but that takes nothing away from the speaker's overall performance. The Bluetooth has an impressive range and we didn't have any connectivity issues.

A few features that we best assume as being over-looked, such as lack of NFC, no voice-calling capabilities can play a serious spoilsport when one considers buying this product. Given the price, this is where the scales may tip in favour of the more economic speakers that offer more options.

### Rating

**FOR** Impressive sound, detail, clarity and bass for the size, rugged build, good Bluetooth range, mounting option is a plus

**AGAINST** No NFC or voice-calling, short Aux cable, better alternatives at the price

**VERDICT** A great-sounding portable audio companion for the urban traveller

### TECH SPECS

**Dimensions** 91 x 91 x 39 mm (HWD)  
**Connectivity** Bluetooth A2DP/APTX2, AUX, micro-USB **Weight** 183.5 grams

### NEED TO KNOW

#### CONSIDER IF

You want a portable Bluetooth speaker that's big on sound, ruggedness and connectivity range

#### YOU'LL NEED

A lengthy 3.5mm AUX cable if you wish to use the line-in

#### MAKE SURE

You fully charge the device before a long trip

#### AVOID

Playing at ridiculous volumes because it tends to distort

#### HIGHLIGHT

Impressive Bluetooth range, loud for its size and rugged look and feel



## House of Marley Get Up Stand Up

₹39,990

**House of Marley has been at the eco-friendly product game since inception and the Get Up Stand Up was one of its first few products.**

Now in its second generation, this beautifully crafted unit wants to wow us all over again. The first generation was remarkable both in terms of build quality and the quality of audio.

Impressive build quality and the Marley brand have almost become synonyms now. The new Get Up Stand Up architecture is made of FSC-certified and recycled walnut and birch wood frame that is seriously luxurious and refreshing when compared with products made of plastic or other materials.

But all plastic is not done away with, that's not to say there's a lot of it though. Only the enclosure, dock, and trim rings are made from plastic, which is again, recycled. But it doesn't deteriorate the look in any way. The unit is sturdy and has quite some heft, there are three rubber pegs that keep the unit firmly planted to the surface. House of Marley has surely outdone itself this time with such an impressive build. Even the



plastic that covers the back feels premium and complements the other components seemingly well.

The speaker array comprises of dual 4.5in woofers that are paired with two 1in 'high-def' tweeters. It gets Bluetooth Apt-X along with the regular 3.5mm auxiliary input and USB.

But the speaker is just that - looks and style. The audio side of things don't impress as much as something that costs ₹39,990. Play *Morning* by Beck and the guitar strums at the beginning of the track lack definition and sound muddy. The overwhelming favour to the lower frequencies means this speaker is suited to play the less demanding tracks that are out there.

The mid-range is also robbed of its panache and Micheal Buble's voice in the live version of *Feeling Good* doesn't sound as crisp as it should. The lower frequencies are the dominating ones on the Get Up Stand Up and affect the rest of

**The overpowering bass might feel at home to someone who likes such application to their music**

the frequency range in a negative way.

This is more apparent when you play the dreaded MP3s. But the overpowering bass might feel at home to someone who likes such application to their music and is not very finicky about audio quality. Tracks like *Free Tibet* are presented well and the details in the lower range are brought to life by the Get Up Stand Up.

However, there are many other options that can provide a better, more rounded sound for such a price. We wouldn't recommend the Get Up Stand Up unless its price drops a fair bit.

### Rating

**FOR** Gets loud without strain, extremely good build quality, looks, style

**AGAINST** Price, overpowering bass, lack of definition, better alternatives at this price

**VERDICT** The Get Up Stand Up is best suited for casual listening and parties in which you want to pump up the volume

### TECH SPECS

**Dimensions** 60.7 x 26.2 x 33.5 cm (HWD)

**Connectivity** Bluetooth A2DP/APTX2, RCA,

**AUX Driver** 2 x 4.5in woofers, 2 x 1in tweeter

### NEED TO KNOW

#### CONSIDER IF

You want a good-looking and well-built speaker to play at parties or for a casual evening listen

#### YOU'LL NEED

To pump up the volume slightly for the Get Up Stand Up to really start making a noise

#### MAKE SURE

You place the remote back into the slot provided on top of the unit

#### AVOID

Using MP3s as the quality further deteriorates and it isn't an enjoyable listen

#### HIGHLIGHT

Overpowering bass that very few people might warm up to

## Sennheiser RS 175

₹19,990

**You can listen to music on the new RS 175 but it is primarily aimed at elevating your movie experience.** A bundled base station /transmitter sends audio signals from the source to rather large headphones via a frequency modulated channel (2.4 - 2.8Ghz). The RS 175 offers a wireless range of up to 100 metres (line of sight) and it worked flawlessly even as we snuck behind walls. Due to the exceptional signal quality, there is barely any drop in the audio feed. In short, things are way better than what you'd get from Bluetooth-enabled products.

Connect the base station to a power socket and your audio source (TV, Amp, Blu-ray player) via the digital or analogue input ports and power on the headphones by pressing the tiny button on it. You can even control volume, surround and bass levels via the buttons placed on the exterior of the headphone. This comes handy when you have sunk into the couch and tuned into movie mode. The base-station feels absolutely flimsy and it topples backwards if you try to press the surround/bass buttons on it, the tiny rubber pads underneath do not help.

As you settle down and spin your



favourite Blu-ray, you will realize that the large size and design of the RS 175 comes in the way of resting your head comfortably on the couch. We fire up the movies and are immediately underwhelmed with the detail on tap in the normal mode. Bass too lacks depth and realism, both of which get fixed to an extent as you switch to the surround mode and level up the bass. It almost feels like the cans are tuned to underperform in the normal mode. Once both the modes are enabled, on-screen explosions exhibit a decent amount of bite. Mids are handled well too, which means dialogue delivery is clear, perfectly audible. Overall, however, you do get a feeling of something missing as far as overall punch

**The RS 175 offers a wireless range of up to 100 metres (line of sight) and it worked flawlessly even as we snuck behind walls**

goes and that stays true even as you listen to music. Yet again, in the normal mode, there just isn't that level of detail and impact you expect.

The RS 175 certainly didn't blow our minds and the fact that it is not portable might deter some potential buyers. However, with the increasing number of HD channels on the telly, the RS 175 can be the preferred companion for your audio needs at home. It offers a decent sonic experience and works effortlessly thanks to its wireless tech.

### Rating

**FOR** Wireless listening, signal quality, movie experience (with surround and bass turned on), 18 hours of battery life

**AGAINST** Flimsy base-station, doesn't impress in normal audio mode, not portable

**VERDICT** Great wireless connectivity, average sonics

### TECH SPECS

**Frequency response** 17 - 22,000 Hz **Operating time** up to 18 hours **Weight** 310 grams **Range** 100 meters **Ports** 1 x 3.5mm, 1 x optical digital

### NEED TO KNOW

#### CONSIDER IF

You need a wireless headphone to enjoy watching TV content or movies at home

#### YOU'LL NEED

To spend time tweaking the surround and bass setting for the best audio experience

#### MAKE SURE

You place the headphones back on the base station to be charged when not in use

#### AVOID

Moving beyond multiple walls to enjoy gap-free audio

#### HIGHLIGHT

Lag-free wireless performance

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# The No.1 source of expert advice. Now, fully updated!

# BUYER'S GUIDE

## We can help

Welcome to India's best guide to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and MP3, with full specs and ratings for hundreds of products.

## Up to date and to the point

We've put the Buyers Guide through a much needed refresher. All prices and products are now up to date and current, and there are also a few tips and tricks for getting the best out of your kit.



## How to use us

**1** Browse by section: categories are arranged logically, with products accompanied by price, date and star rating.

**2** Entries have a star rating followed by a concise summary of the review, so you can easily find the product for you.

**3** We offer the most comprehensive list of technical specifications for each and every product we've reviewed.



**Shanth Swaroop**  
Editor, Buyer's Guide

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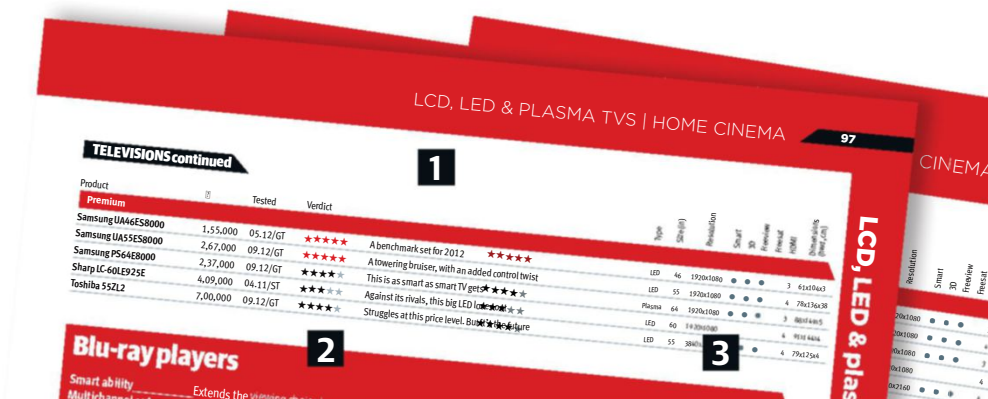
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## AV receivers & amplifiers

<b>Budget</b>	Well-equipped and deliver convincing surround sound
<b>Mid</b>	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
<b>Premium</b>	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

Product	₹	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pioneer VSX-522	NA	★★★★★	An agreeable entry-level amp	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer VSX-922	NA	★★★★★	A highly specified all-round performer that excels at its new price point	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V373	28,990	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2012</b>	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V375	30,990	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2013</b>	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Denon AVR-1912	45,900	★★★★★	A fine amp bettered by close rivals	7x90	5	1	●	17x44x38
Onkyo TX-NR525	46,000	Not rated	Not rated	5x160	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-2113	49,900	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Harman Kardon AVR171	59,990	★★★★★	Could be subtler but still delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Pioneer VSX-923	55,190	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a compelling and confident amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	63,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x175	6	2	●	17x44x33
Onkyo TX-NR727	72,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x185	8	2	●	17x44x38
Denon AVR-X4000	1,34,900	★★★★★	A decent enough AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Yamaha RX-V673	56,990	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (budget-mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer SC-LX57	1,10,990	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (mid), Awards 2013</b>	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature laden powerhouse	9x170	7	2	●	17x43x41
Onkyo TX-NR1009	1,30,000*	★★★★★	An incredibly talented amplifier	9x180	8	2	●	20x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3030	1,61,000	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2013</b>	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Onkyo TX-NR828	95,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x215	8	2	●	20x44x40
Pioneer SC-LX56	NA	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier (mid-premium), Awards 2012</b>	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR750	4,50,000	★★★★★	It isn't flawless, but it is very good indeed	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1010	89,990	★★★★★	A receiver with huge but fluid delivery	7x170	8	2	●	18x44x43
Yamaha RX-A1020	89,990	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Onkyo TX-NR1010	1,60,000	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	1,60,000*	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	1,90,000	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR5010	2,20,000	Not rated	Not rated	9x280	9	2	●	20x44x46
Pioneer SC-LX86	NA	★★★★★	<b>Best Home Cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2012</b>	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x414
Yamaha RX-A3020	1,34,990	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-V377	34,990	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-A1030	1,04,000	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, but this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with the feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR450	2,55,000	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42

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## Surround speakers

Full size	Traditional cabinet design that are big but can deliver a great sound
Style	Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole	Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1**

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Budget)



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Dali Zensor 15.1**

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack (Mid)



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1**

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	33,099	★★★★★	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 125 MX	39,375*	★★★★★	12x9x10	9x20x10	12x9x10	43x24x42	3
Canton Movie 130	75,000	★★★★★	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	45,000	★★★★★	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	58,500	★★★★★	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22	1
SKS HT-528	25,000	Not rated	18x10x12	10x27x11	18x10x12	43x23x41	
KEF KHT3005 HD2	1,08,000	★★★★★	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1
Monitor Audio MASS	1,03,000	★★★★★	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Monitor Audio Vector AV10	59,000	★★★★★	24x15x17	15x35x17	24x15x17	37x32x32	3
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	87,750	★★★★★	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000	95,250	★★★★★	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Tannoy HTS-101	60,200	★★★★★	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
B&W MT-50	1,91,250	★★★★★	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	3,28,500	★★★★★	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 2	88,000	★★★★★	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x36	2
DALI Zensor 1 5.1	1,12,000	★★★★★	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
DALI Zensor 5 5.1	1,55,400	★★★★★	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1,05,000	★★★★★	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	2,17,000	★★★★★	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEF KHT3005SE	1,08,000	★★★★★	25x12x15	13x30x18	25x12x15	39x44x19	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1,26,000	★★★★★	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	89,900	★★★★★	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1,60,000	★★★★★	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	2,75,000	★★★★★	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1,40,000*	★★★★★	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	7,99,875	★★★★★	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	2,01,65,625	★★★★★	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
DALI Ikon 5 Mk2 5.1	3,21,900	★★★★★	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Cerwin Vega SL Series 5.1	2,36,000	Not rated	84x36x38	17x28x18	91x42x50	45x13x16	1
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1,57,000	★★★★★	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
KEF R100 5.1	2,47,000	★★★★★	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
Monitor Audio Apex	1,68,100	★★★★★	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Energy Veritas RC Micro 5.1	47,100	Not rated	12x9x9	9x9x15	12x9x9	32x31x27	1
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	14,10,000	★★★★★	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2,93,400	★★★★★	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2,50,800	★★★★★	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	5,27,200	★★★★★	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Mordaunt-S. Performance 5.1	13,14,000	★★★★★	121x24x37	60x21x22	121x24x37	50x50x50	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	5,00,000*	★★★★★	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution Signature	1,64,500*	★★★★★	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

# CD Players

**Integrated** Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech  
**Transport** Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

## The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**

**Marantz CD6005**

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Budget)



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Naim CD5si**

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Mid)



**AWARD WINNER**

**Roksan Caspian M2 CD**

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial In	Optical In	AES/EBU In	USB In	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	30,800	★★★★★ A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	46,600	★★★★★ A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Denon DCD-710AE	27,400	★★★★★ Enjoyable enough, but holds itself back	●	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x28
Marantz CD6004	39,900	★★★★★ <b>Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2012</b>	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
NAD C546BEE	41,000	★★★★★ Excellent all-rounder that entertains like no other at this price point	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x44x29
Audiolab 8200CD	80,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best CD player (Mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Cyrus CD T Transport	1,15,000	★★★★★ An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	1,25,000	★★★★★ Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	1,25,000	★★★★★ A stripped down affair, but it's as musical as they come	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Roksan Kandy K2	1,29,000	★★★★★ Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Burmester 069	45,00,000*	★★★★★ Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Audio Research CD5	6,18,750	★★★★★ Audio Research strikes gold again. The CD5 is a terrific player	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1,23,000	★★★★★ Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1,82,000	★★★★★ <b>Best CD player (mid-premium), Awards 2012</b>	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	9,50,000	★★★★★ With the master clock it's an amazing combo	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
Parasound Halo CD1	3,00,000	★★★★★ Great player for classical, jazz and sultry female vocals	●	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	11x44x34
Naim CD5 XS	2,50,000	★★★★★ It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555	14,00,000	★★★★★ The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	4,50,000	★★★★★ The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Primare CD32	1,63,000	★★★★★ It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	2,26,000	★★★★★ <b>Best CD player (Premium) Awards 2013</b>	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
Marantz CD6005	41,900	★★★★★ <b>Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2013</b>	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Esoteric K-05	8,50,000	★★★★★ A great place to start... If you're looking for your final disc player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36

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# DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from its source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turn it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

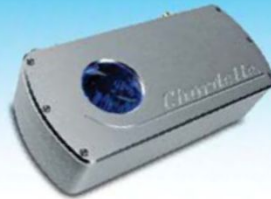
## The shortlist



### HRT microStreamer

Has beaten our 2012 Award-winner

“Truly captivated us with a stunningly agile-paced performance that reveals layers of subtlety hitherto unheard with just a pair of headphones and a laptop.”



### Chord Chordette QuteHD

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Mid)

“It’s simple, looks great – and above all, sounds absolutely fantastic. You’ll have to spend twice as much to get something significantly better.”



### NAD M51

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Premium)

“The M51 sounds sensational. In fact, we’d go further than that by saying it’s one of the best NAD separates we’ve heard in recent memory.”

Product	₹	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES/EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced/XLR out	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Audioengine D1	11,789	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	13,800	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC (Budget), Awards 2012. Now beaten by the HRT microStreamer</b>	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x2x6
Arcam rDAC Wireless	36,000*	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam rPAC	19,800	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	18,800	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	38,500	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
HRT microStreamer	20,000*	★★★★★	HRT has struck gold again. The microStreamer is an excellent buy	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
Meridian Explorer DAC	31,000	★★★★★	The Explorer’s design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	32,000	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC’s for you	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity M1 DAC	40,500	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012</b>	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	10x22x30
NAD DAC 2	25,500	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x14x7
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1,03,000	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it isn’t the best in delivering outright entertainment	1	4	3	1	0	0	1	0	12x43x36
Chord Electronics QuteHD	1,00,000*	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012</b>	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Meridian Director	65,000	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger present in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Audio Research DAC8	5,30,000*	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJD33	2,34,000	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Burmester 113	4,00,000*	★★★★★	Want excitement and insight above all else? The 113 could be for you	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Rotel RDD-1580	80,000	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x43x32
NAD D1050	42,500	★★★★★	If you’re looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
NAD M51	1,27,000	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC (Premium), Awards 2012</b>	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2,50,000	★★★★★	Best premium DAC, Awards 2010. Gives digital sources a big boost	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30

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## Hi-Fi speakers

**Standmounters** Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves  
**Floorstanders** Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters  
**Powered** Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

### The shortlist



**Q Acoustics Concept 20**

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker (Budget)



**AWARD WINNER**

**KEF LS50**

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Mid)



**AWARD WINNER**

**PMC Twenty 22**

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Audioengine P4	18,000	★★★★★ Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●			3	23x14x17
PSB Alpha T1	37,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated		●		3	91x18x31
PSB Alpha LR1	13,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated		●		3	18x12x16
Waterfall Serio	15,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				3	5x5x3
Q Acoustics 2010i	19,200	★★★★★ Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	25,900	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo speakers (Budget), Awards 2013</b>	●			4	26x17x28
Tannoy Mercury V1i	19,800	★★★★★ An excellent entry-level all-rounder	●			2	30x17x26
Wharfedale Diamond 10.0	11,500	★★★★★ An ideal choice for the easily startled, but a little straitlaced for our liking	●			7	24x15x17
Audioengine A5+	27,980	★★★★★ Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●			3	27x18x20
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	39,990	★★★★★ There are few other products as versatile and easy to like at this price	●	●		4	31x19x24
Boston Acoustics A-26	24,600	★★★★★ A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●			2	33x21x27
B&W 685 S2	65,000	★★★★★ A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●			2	35x19x32
B&W MM-1	40,000	★★★★★ Still good, but there's better available		●		1	17x10x10
Waterfall Hurricane Evo	31,200	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				3	11x7x3
Bose Computer Music Monitor	28,013	★★★★★ Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●			2	12x7x12
DALI Lektor 2	37,500	★★★★★ Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●			2	31x18x22
DALI Zensor 3	33,000	★★★★★ If it's entertainment you crave, these standmounters deliver in spades	●			3	35x21x29
DALI Zensor 1	23,700	★★★★★ These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●			2	27x16x22
Epos Epic 1	32,950	★★★★★ Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●			2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	49,999	★★★★★ Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●			3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	29,999	★★★★★ A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop.		●		1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	33,000	★★★★★ Product of the year - Stereo speakers, Awards 2011	●			3	36x21x30
Totem Dreamcatcher	33,250	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				4	11x5x7
Totem Mite	44,750	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				6	11x6x8
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	32,000	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo speakers (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012</b>	●			4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	43,900	★★★★★ Form and function in perfect harmony, these speakers will sit pretty in any home	●			6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1	18,000	★★★★★ Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●			1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	23,000	★★★★★ Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●			3	32x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 2	37,800	★★★★★ For speakers so small, you get surprisingly full bass	●			2	35x22x28
Q Acoustics 2050i	66,400	★★★★★ <b>Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2012</b>		●		4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	38,000	★★★★★ Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●			4	31x19x24
Tannoy Mercury V4i	48,200	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2011		●		2	97x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	42,700	★★★★★ They may be small of stature but these Tannoys have a huge sonic heart	●			2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	70,300	★★★★★ <b>Best standmounter (Mid), Awards 2012</b>	●			1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	49,400	★★★★★ Small, but perfectly formed	●			3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 10.1	18,500	★★★★★ Fresh competition now offers more for the money	●			4	30x19x28
Wharfedale Diamond 121	20,000	★★★★★ Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival.	●			7	32x17x23
Audio Pro LV2e	86,625	★★★★★ Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish				3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	TBA	★★★★★ These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with		●		5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	TBA	★★★★★ Packed with resolution and speed		●		5	98x14x24



## SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d,cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/6	59,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers at this price. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	66,000	★★★★★ A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
ATCSCM 11	93,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	38x21x25
B&WXT2	1,12,500	★★★★★ Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	●		2	31x15x20
DALI Ikon 6 MK2	1,26,000	★★★★★ Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●		3	100x19x36
DALI Ikon 1 Mk2	60,000	★★★★★ Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●		3	33x15x26
DALI Mentor Menuet	84,000	★★★★★ These Menuets are something of a gem	●		2	25x15x23
DALI Zensor 5	54,900	★★★★★ Compact and affordable floorstanders	●		2	84x16x27
Energy Speakers CF70	78,400	Not yet rated	●		1	103x21x40
Energy Speakers CF50	67,200	Not yet rated	●		1	98x18x37
PSB Image T5	67,000	Not yet rated	●		2	94x21x32
PSB Imagine T	1,39,000	Not yet rated	●		5	94x21x35
Elac BS142	60,000	★★★★★ An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elipson Planet L	60,000	★★★★★ Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	66,425	★★★★★ Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●		2	92x21x32
KEFLS50	1,10,000	★★★★★ <b>Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	●		1	30x20x28
KEFR100	73,000	★★★★★ These are extremely talented stand-mounters	●		4	28x18x29
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	55,000	★★★★★ Easiest floorstanders to live with we've heard in a good while	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	65,300	★★★★★ A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●		6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	83,250	★★★★★ A sensational product from Monitor Audio – detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1,09,000	★★★★★ If you're addicted to bass, these floostanders will suit you	●		6	96x28x39
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	41,500	★★★★★ A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●		3	95x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	52,000	★★★★★ Great speakers for sure, but too controlled	●		3	95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	75,600	★★★★★ Possibly the best in their class	●		2	100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1,09,000	★★★★★ Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable	●		2	107x22x31
PMCD1i	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●		4	29x16x23
Quad 12L Classic	52,000	★★★★★ There's plenty to admire here	●		4	34x21x28
Spendor S3/5R2	84,500	★★★★★ A little less than the sum of their parts	●		4	31x17x18
Spendor SA1	1,35,800	★★★★★ Small, top-class standmounts	●		3	31x17x19
Tannoy Precision 6.1	96,300	★★★★★ Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Precision 8D	60,000*	★★★★★ Solid active speakers that sound good	●		1	44x27x37
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	1,03,700	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1,10,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012</b>	●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	40,000*	★★★★★ DC4s are still appealing across the board	●		2	27x17x18
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC6T	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Expensive but fully justify the price tag – expertly balanced performance	●		2	14x9x9
Totem Rainmaker	59,500	★★★★★ Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	77,000	★★★★★ A brilliant desktop speaker package	●		3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	1,24,000	★★★★★ Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	85,920	★★★★★ Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	52,000	★★★★★ Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●		1	32x20x31
Neat Iota	85,000	★★★★★ Attractive, but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Elac FS249	2,40,000	Not yet rated	●			115x26x36
JBL Project Everest DD66000	16,16,999	Not yet rated	●		2	44x38x18
JBL Synthesis 4700	7,04,599	Not yet rated	●		1	43x20x15
Neat Motive SX1	2,20,000	★★★★★ Charming, unique speakers - they lean backwards	●		4	93x16x20
PSB Synchrony One	3,47,000	Not yet rated	●		3	109x23x33
PSB Synchrony One B	1,49,000	Not yet rated	●		3	99x19x28
ATCSCM 100A	10,99,000	★★★★★ Massively talented and proportioned	●		4	107x40x56

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## SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d,cm)
ATC SCM40	2,20,000	★★★★★ Among the best at this price level, but is your system good enough?	●		1	97x23x32
Harbeth P3ES-R	1,74,027	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	30x19x20
Harbeth Compact 7ES-3	2,46,089	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	52x27x32
Harbeth Super HL5	3,00,181	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	64x32x30
B&W 800 Diamond	26,71,875	★★★★★ An exceptional performer, and a fine showcase for B&W's range of technology	●		3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	5,34,375	★★★★★ Good, but easier to admire than really love	●		3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	2,79,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	5,60,000	★★★★★ Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●		3	39x22x28
Neat Motive SX2	1,75,000	★★★★★ Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●		3	39x21x37
DALI Fazon F5	2,49,000	★★★★★ Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●		3	92x28x32
DALI Mentor 6	2,55,000	★★★★★ Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●		1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Excite X32	1,94,000	★★★★★ These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●		4	92x17x27
Dynaudio DM 3/7	1,48,000	★★★★★ Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●		2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Focus 160	1,88,000	★★★★★ Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●		6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Excite X12	80,000	★★★★★ They get enough right to warrant the full five stars	●		4	29x17x26
Focal Diablo Utopia	8,99,999	★★★★★ When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●		Any	43x26x43
Jamo R907	6,23,800	★★★★★ The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●		1	119x44x19
KEF Reference 207/2	12,50,000	★★★★★ Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●		4	123x40x69
Linn Akurate 242	6,74,860	★★★★★ Very impressive speakers, and ideal in a Linn set-up	●		2	100x21x38
Monitor Audio PL100	2,13,000	★★★★★ For those who want sonic delivery and insight	●		3	37x23x29
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	4,78,000	★★★★★ Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●		3	111x41x47
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 2	1,56,000	★★★★★ Not all-rounders, but exceptional in some areas	●		3	49x24x36
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 6	2,68,000	★★★★★ Among the most realistic-sounding speakers ever	●		2	121x24x37
Neat Petite SX	1,75,000	★★★★★ Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●		6	31x20x18
Neat Ultimatum XLS	6,20,000	★★★★★ An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●		9	38x22x37
PMC DB1S-All	2,20,000*	★★★★★ They may not look it, but these PMCs sound like every penny's worth	●		1	29x16x28
PMC Fact 3	4,20,000*	★★★★★ Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●		4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	5,00,000*	★★★★★ These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●		4	103x15x38
PMC FB1i	2,50,000*	★★★★★ Great all-rounders. They have real long-term appeal	●		4	100x20x30
PSB Imagine Mini	49,000	★★★★★ Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a small room	●		5	23x14x21
PMC PB1i	6,50,000*	★★★★★ Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●		1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	2,20,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2012</b>	●		4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	3,25,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2012</b>	●		4	92x15x33
ProAc Response D18	1,49,625	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2011	●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1,16,275	★★★★★ An entertaining and dynamic performer	●		4	104x19x28
Quad ESL 2805	5,40,000	★★★★★ Exceptional electrostatic speakers	●		1	104x70x39
Quad ESL 2812	on request	★★★★★ Still a terrific electrostatic speaker, in certain respects it remains unmatched	●		1	107x69x38
Spendor A6R	2,25,000	★★★★★ An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●		5	88x19x28
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	4,83,750	★★★★★ One of the best standmounts money can buy	●		2	35x20x37
Spendor A5	1,63,000	★★★★★ The most accomplished speakers for this money	●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A6	2,06,000	★★★★★ Brilliant speakers for the money - a class-leading combination of insight and naturalness	●		4	88x19x28
Spendor A9	4,06,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers (Premium), Awards 2010. Stunningly capable	●		4	103x21x35
Spendor D7	3,18,000	★★★★★ The finest Spendors in years	●		6	95x20x32
Spendor SP100R2	6,28,500	★★★★★ Can still compete with the best at this price level	●		2	70x37x43
Spendor SP2/3R2	2,24,500	★★★★★ They're wonderfully natural with a seamless presentation	●		1	55x28x33
Tannoy Definition DC8	2,81,500	★★★★★ Capable of seriously controlled sound	●		3	47x27x26
Totem Mani-2 Signature	2,49,900	★★★★★ When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●			44x22x1x31
Triangle Quartet	2,48,400	★★★★★ Hugely entertaining premium floorstanders	●		2	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1,52,000	★★★★★ Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●		3	106x25x40

# WHAT HI FI?

## SOUND AND VISION

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# Stereo amplifiers

**Integrated** These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box  
**Power output** A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers  
**Digital inputs** Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

## The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**NAD D 3020**



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Arcam FMJ A19**



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Naim Nait 5i**

Product	₹	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamplifier	Speakers out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam FMJ A19	72,000	★★★★★ Picky about partners but wonderfully talented	50	6	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	9x43x28	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	TBA	★★★★★ Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	43,000	★★★★★ Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	12x44x35	
Cyrus 6a	1,30,000	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo amp (Mid), Awards 2012</b>	40	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Denon PMA-720AE	40,900	★★★★★ Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x31	
Marantz PM6005	44,900	★★★★★ A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM6004	39,900	★★★★★ Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM8003	56,700	★★★★★ Built like a battleship and delivers most of the goods	70	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	12x44x36	
NAD C326BEE	38,000	★★★★★ A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	10x44x29	
NAD C356BEE	57,000	★★★★★ A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	13x44x34	
Naim Nait 5i	1,00,000	★★★★★ The Nait 5i gets all the basics right and more	50	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x44x31	
Onkyo A-9030	25,000	★★★★★ Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Onkyo A-9050	35,000	★★★★★ Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Roksan Kandy K2BT	1,48,000	★★★★★ Full of power and punch, but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Kandy K2	1,29,000	★★★★★ Best stereo amp (Budget-Mid), Awards 2011	125	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	3	10x43x38	
Rotel RA-04SE	45,000	★★★★★ A startling upgrade to an already strong performer	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x44x34	
Rotel RA-06SE	91,125	★★★★★ A forceful, articulate listen. Could do with more detail	70	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	9x44x34	
Rotel RA-10	55,125	★★★★★ <b>Best Stereo Amp (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	27x43x34	
Rotel RA-1520	1,05,750	★★★★★ It's got good looks, a good spec, and a great sound	60	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x269	
Cyrus 8a	1,82,000	★★★★★ Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8 DAC	2,19,000	★★★★★ Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	●	2	7x22x364	
Denon PMA-2010AE	1,39,900	★★★★★ Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	18x43x449	
Naim Nait XS	1,75,000	★★★★★ Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x30	
Quad II Classic Integrated	3,80,000	★★★★★ A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x31x38	
Roksan Caspian M2	2,18,000	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo amplifier (Premium) Awards 2012</b>	85	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x43x32	
Unison Research Preludio	2,40,000	★★★★★ Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x40x38	
Unison Research S6	2,90,000	★★★★★ In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6,45,000	★★★★★ We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1,50,000	★★★★★ A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	26x19x35	
NAD D3020	42,500	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo amplifier (Budget) Awards 2013</b>	30	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	●	●	2	19x6x22	
Naim Nait 5si	1,25,000	★★★★★ <b>Best stereo amplifier (Mid) Awards 2013</b>	60	3	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	74x43x31	
Cyrus DACXP Signature	TBA	★★★★★ With the signature update, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Mark Levinson No585	8,28,000	Not yet rated	200	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	●	1	19x44x51	

## Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Product	₹	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
ATCA-2	1,43,000	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4,18,600	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	75,000	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC152XS	1,25,000	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	79,000	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Rotel RC-1580	1,59,750	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Audio Research LS27	7,31,250*	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Burmester 808 MK5	25,00,000*	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA8000	20,50,000	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Naim NAC252	6,50,000	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31

## Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
ATCP1	2,16,000	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo 150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Cyrus Mono X300	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo 235	1	1	7x22x36	73
Linn Akurate 2200	3,33,795	★★★★★	A fine product with a distinctive sonic signature	Stereo 111	1	1	9x38x38	6.5
NAD C275BEE	99,000	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo 150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP155XS	1,50,000	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo 60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP250	3,75,000	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo 80	0	0	9x43x32	165
Quad QSP	95,000	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo 140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1,80,000	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo 200	1	0	14x43x41	33
Audio Research Reference 75	9,00,000*	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo 75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	35,00,000*	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo 535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	19,75,000	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono 700	1	1	31x48x69	75

## Instant expert... hi-fi separates

### 1. Why matching pairs are a winning combination

We advocate separates over all-in-one systems. Sound-wise, separates tend to perform better, but when buying we still suggest you demo the same maker's matching amp and CD player. The kit usually shares the same design team and will sonically complement each other: if you like the sound of the amp, you'll probably enjoy the CD player, too.

### 3. Position before you listen - and don't stack it, rack it

You've bought your shiny new system. But you're not going to stack your new amp, CD spinner and turntable on that rickety table, are you? And don't even think of putting the kit on the floor. To sound it's best, hi-fi kit needs a dust-free, level and secure base. Invest pounds in a dedicated rack, and the sonic (and visual) rewards justify the outlay.

### 2. Listen to your favourite music, not the dealer's

Hi-fi dealers should have a decent CD and vinyl collection for demo purposes, but we suggest you take your own. Take tunes you know so you can concentrate on how the kit is performing, rather than on the new music. And don't just take your 'good'-sounding CDs. If you listen to lots of compressed pop, take it and hear exactly how it sounds.

### 4. Give your amplifier room to breathe

Well done for buying that nice equipment rack, but before you undo all your good work, make sure you give your stereo amplifier room to breathe. These machines get hot, and the chassis vents shouldn't be covered up. The top shelf of your rack is ideal, but if you also own a top-loading CD player and/or turntable you'll need clearance for all.

### 5. Keep on running, keep on improving

Hi-fi units are also (sort of) like Spanish footballers. No, not constantly feigning a blown fuse, but happiest playing in the heat. New kit can take weeks to reach optimum levels. Once run-in - unless you have an environmental conscience - we suggest you leave your kit on. Otherwise, give it around half-an-hour to warm up before you hit play.

# iPod docks

**Docks with power** \_\_\_\_\_ These are ready-made systems for your iPod; usually include speakers  
**Docks without power** \_\_\_\_\_ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

## The shortlist



Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (W)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam rCube	42,300*	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	14,513	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
<b>Epoz Aktimate Micro</b>	<b>27,500</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>			<b>iOS</b>	●	<b>40</b>	<b>24x15x20</b>
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	19,900	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
GenevaSound Model S	24,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x24x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	15,990	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Logitech S715i	9995	★★★★★			<b>iOS</b>	●	<b>20</b>	<b>6x39x13</b>
Logitech UE Air Speaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	<b>iOS</b>	●	<b>n/a</b>	<b>17x53x15</b>
Monitor Audio i-deck 100	20,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	25x32x21
Monitor Audio i-deck 200	TBA	★★★★★			iOS	●	140	25x55x21
Revo K2	30,000*	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
B&O BeoSound 8	92,000	★★★★★			iOS		n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	48,263	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	48,000	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Epoz Aktimate Maxi	56,450	★★★★★			iOS	●	60	32x21x265
Geneva Lab Model L	1,10,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	54,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	2,00,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
<b>JBL OnBeat Xtreme</b>	<b>24,990</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>		●	<b>iOS</b>	●	<b>120</b>	<b>23x44x24</b>
Loewe AirSpeaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x244
Marantz Consolette	75000*	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21

# Wireless speakers

**Bluetooth** \_\_\_\_\_ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources  
**AirPlay** \_\_\_\_\_ Apple's proprietary wireless system; works over your home network

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
B&O Beolit 12	66,600	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	19x23x13
B&W A5	38,000	★★★★★		●	●			18x30x20
B&W A7	62,750	★★★★★		●	●			22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	23,513	★★★★★		●	●			17x31x10
Bose Soundlink W'less Mobile	20,138	★★★★★		●	●	●		13x24x5
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	36,100	★★★★★		●	●	●		18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	12,500	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	23x24x6
JBL Charge	9990	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	18x7x7
Bose SoundLink Mini	16,200	★★★★★		●	●	●		5x18x6

# Headphones

**Ear tips** Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with sizes to get the best fit.  
**In-line remote** Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are growing. Handy.

## The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
SoundMAGIC E10



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
AKG K451



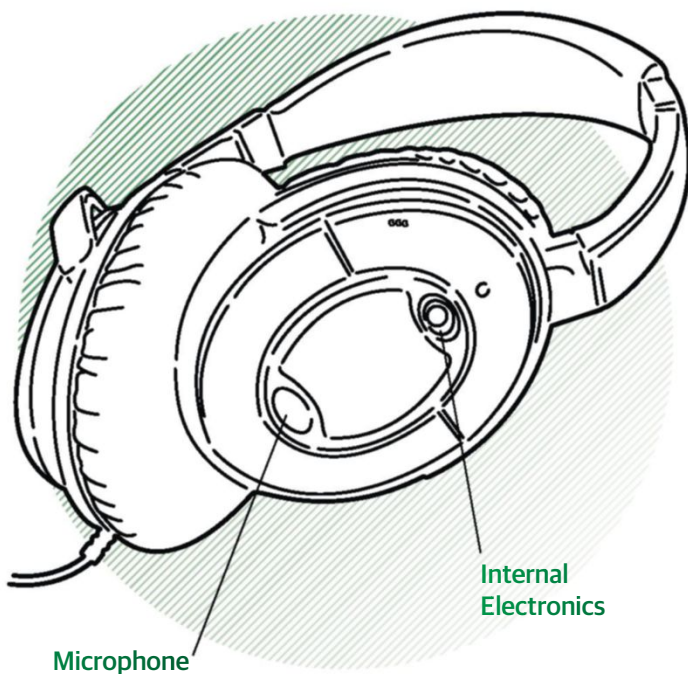
**AWARD WINNER**  
Sennheiser Momentum

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CK555i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			260
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	6795	★★★★★ <b>Best in-ears (Budget), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed			11
Nokia BH-504	6500	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	108
Panasonic RP-HJE170	799	★★★★★	●		Closed			3
Panasonic RP-HTX7	3999	★★★★★ <b>Best portable on-ears (Budget), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed			153
Sennheiser CX 300-II	3490	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	2790	★★★★★	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser HD 202	2290	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Sennheiser MM 70i	7490	★★★★★	●		Closed	●		12
Sennheiser MM50	4990	★★★★★	●		Closed			7
Sennheiser PX100-II	3990	★★★★★	●		Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	3559	★★★★★	●		Closed			13
Skullcandy Icon 3	1949	★★★★★	●		Closed			45
SoundMagic E10	2500*	★★★★★ <b>Best in-ears (Budget), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	1486	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	2730	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	2990	★★★★★	●		Closed			110
B&W P7	33,990	★★★★★ <b>Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013</b>	●		Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed	●		100
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			165
AKG K3003i	1,00,000*	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
AKG K370	8000	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
AKG K451	5000	★★★★★ <b>Best portable on-ears, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	●		Closed			120
AKG Q701	19,990	★★★★★	●		Open			236
AKG Q460	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DT880	22,399	★★★★★	●		Open	●	●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	4999	★★★★★	●		Closed			12

## HEADPHONES continued

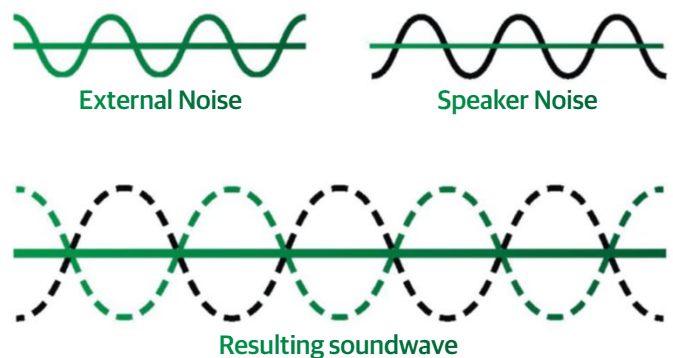
Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight(g)
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	4,750	★★★★★ <b>Best in-ears (Mid), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	1,00,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Premium), Awards 2010.		●	Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	11,800	★★★★★ <b>Best portable on-ears (Premium), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed			174
Bose Around-ear 2	8663	★★★★★ Packed with clever technology and work well		●	Closed			142
Bose MIE2i	7650	★★★★★ A perfect headphone meets microphone solution		●	Closed			19
Bose Mobile in-ear headset 2	8213	★★★★★ Unobtrusive in place, but lacking in excitement		●	Closed			18
Bose QuietComfort 15	17,550	★★★★★ <b>Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed	●		227
B&W P3	16,500	★★★★★ Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones		●	Closed			130
B&W P5	23,500	★★★★★ Aesthetically beautiful and aurally accomplished too		●	Closed			195
Focal Spirit One	19,999	★★★★★ Refined enough, but not the most exciting		●	Closed			225
Grado SR80i	12,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best home on-ear headphones (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012.</b>	●		Open			200
Harman/Kardon CL	9990	★★★★★ An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon		●	Closed			195
Klipsch Image One	6600	★★★★★ Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass		●	Closed			138
Klipsch Image X5	9750	★★★★★ Still a great buy, with a very balanced sound		●	Closed			11
Klipsch Image X10i	12,000	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Premium), Awards 2011		●	Closed			320
Klipsch S4i	4490	★★★★★ These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge		●	Closed			12
Logitech UE 9000	31,995	★★★★★ Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed	●	●	378
Martin Logan Mikros 70	TBA	★★★★★ If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job		●	Closed			13
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	15,000	★★★★★ For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace		●	Closed			n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	38,000	★★★★★ Brilliant at what they do well		●	Closed			299
Oppo PM-1	79,999	★★★★★ Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success		●	Open			395
Philips Fidelio M1	16,000*	★★★★★ <b>Best portable on-ears (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012</b>	●		Closed	●		166
PSB M4U2	28,000	★★★★★ PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!		●	Closed			362

## How Does Noise Cancelling Work?



This kind of design is usually battery-powered and will reduce background noise. They contain microphones that pick up external noise, and then invert its waveform electronically before outputting it to your ears. This inverse wave works against the original, and greatly reduces the amount you hear.

It works best on continuous low-frequency sounds such as plane engines and Brian Blessed humming. It's not unusual for such designs to tweak tonal balance to improve things, although some add a degree of hiss in the process.



## Try these

**Bose QuietComfort 15** ★★★★★ ₹19,013  
*"The noise-cancelling is so effective it can feel like silence is being pushed into your head. Mid-tune, it's almost as if the outside world disappears completely."*

**Logitech UE9000** ★★★★★ ₹35,000  
*"They could do better in terms of refinement - but if it's energy and entertainment you're after (as well as Bluetooth), they're pretty much spot-on."*

**PSB M4U2** ★★★★★ ₹28,000  
*"If you want to turn your office, flight or train journey into a private listening experience of exceptional quality, these are the headphones to get."*

## HEADPHONES continued

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	9990	★★★★★			Closed			220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	3990	★★★★★			Closed			140
Sennheiser HD 800	84,990	★★★★★			Open			350
Sennheiser IE 8i	24,990	★★★★★			Closed			18
Sennheiser IE80	27,990	★★★★★			Closed			5
Sennheiser MM 400-X	17,990	★★★★★			Closed		105	
Sennheiser Momentum	24,990	★★★★★			Closed			190
Sennheiser PXC 450	27,990	★★★★★			Closed			240
Sennheiser RS 160	13,490	★★★★★			Closed		226	
Sennheiser RS 180	21,990	★★★★★			Open		204	
Sennheiser RS 220	29,990	★★★★★			Open		329	
Sennheiser X 320	7990	★★★★★			Closed			280
Shure SE115	8200	★★★★★			Closed			30
Shure SE310	21,000	★★★★★			Closed			7
Shure SE420	29,000	★★★★★			Closed			29
Shure SE535	31,000	★★★★★			Closed			272
Shure SRH1840	49,778	★★★★★			Open			268
Sony MDR-1R	TBA	★★★★★			Closed			240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	19,990	★★★★★			Closed			270
Sony XBA-3iP	7990	★★★★★			Closed		7	
SoundMagic HP100	15,000*	★★★★★			Closed			228

## Headphones Jargon Buster

## OVER-EAR



The most popular hi-fi headphone design (also called circumaural), these cup your ears completely, usually with semi-air-tight earcups. You'll notice cans of this type used as monitors in recording studios: depending on the type of design they use they can be extremely effective at cutting out the outside world.

## ON-EAR



Supra-aural or on-ear designs tend to be smaller and lighter than circumaural models. They sit on your ear rather than over it, usually pressing on to it as well. Some listeners find them lighter and easier to wear for extended listening than over-ear models, but they do tend to allow in more sounds from outside.

## IN-EAR



Gone are the days when everyone else needs to hear your music. In-ear buds are a great way to isolate yourself in sound. Nowadays, in-ears usually come with rubber tips, which provide a good seal and help the music travel only down your ear canals. A better fit means better sound, so experiment with tip sizes.

## Try these

## AKG K550 ★★★★★

"The K550s are sweetly communicative, handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and punch into and out of low-frequency information with precision."

## Philips Fidelio M1 ★★★★★

"A rounded, refined presentation. Vocals have room to breathe, while high-frequency sounds are natural and don't harden up when you crank the volume."

## Sony XBA-2iP ★★★★★

"Agility and precision is up there with the very best at this price, and the spacious delivery allows for plenty of detail all the way up the frequency range."



## Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

### The shortlist



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Denon D-M39DAB**

Awards 2012: Best Micro System



**Ruark R4i**

Awards 2012: Best All-In-One Music System



**Onkyo CR-N755**

Awards 2012: Best Networked Micro System

Product	₹	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Denon CEOL Piccolo	39,900	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style			●	●	●	●	●
Denon D-M39	44,900	★★★★★	<b>Best micro system, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR502	31,758	★★★★★	Exceptional precision and timing, and better value			●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	32,000*	★★★★★	<b>Best networked micro system, Awards 2012</b>			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	54,900	★★★★★	<b>Best music system (premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>			●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Mini	87,000	★★★★★	Best CD system (Mid), Awards 2010			●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Neo	1,38,000	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy			●	●	●	●	●
Denon CEOL (RCD-N7)	39,900	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, with great features			●	●	●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	3,85,000	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR603	39,900	★★★★★	Best microsystem (Premium) Awards 2011			●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player (Premium)			●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1,25,000	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year			●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	60,000*	★★★★★	<b>Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012</b>			●	●	●	●	●

## Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Product	₹	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (Bit/KHz)	Video
Apple TV	8900	★★★★★	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	8595	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	0	3		20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	38,400	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/96	
Denon DNP-720AE	29,990	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0	1		●	24/192	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	69,700	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Cyrus Lyric 09	4,40,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	●	24/192	
Pioneer N50	NA	★★★★★	0	1	0	0	1	0	1		24/192	
Rotel RT-09	NA	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	55,500	★★★★★	0	0	0	1	2	1	1		24/96	
Cyrus Stream X2	1,45,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline2	1,75,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-QX	3,08,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	3,20,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	3,50,000	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	2,00,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	

# Tablets

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

## The shortlist



Apple iPad Air



Apple iPad Mini Retina



Google Nexus 7

Product	₹	Verdict	OS	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	14,590	★★★★★ A solid option for Amazon users, but no Apple-beater	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad 2 16GB Wi-Fi	24,500	★★★★★ Best tablet, Awards 2011	iOS	●	9.7	1024x768	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	33,900	★★★★★ It's pricey, but it feels and performs as it should	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 32GB Wi-Fi	37,900	★★★★★ iPad tweaked and improved, again	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	49,999	★★★★★ A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Trans Prime	42,999	★★★★★ A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Google Nexus 7	9999	★★★★★ <b>Best tablet (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	99x120x11
Google Nexus 10	34,413	★★★★★ Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	25,000*	★★★★★ An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	28,900	★★★★★ An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS 7	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	31,900*	★★★★★ <b>Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013</b>	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	35,900	★★★★★ Refined and improved, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology	iOS 7	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	20,999	★★★★★ <b>Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	49,470	★★★★★ A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	46,990	★★★★★ Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	72x266x69

## Things to consider: tablets



### Camera

Most tablet cameras are decent, but they won't be able to beat a dedicated camera in terms of picture quality. Think long and hard if you're looking to capture footage as quality can be inconsistent.

### Apps

iOS is the king of apps, but Android is hard on its heels and Windows is catching up. If apps are your thing then your choice may come down to which ones are available on each platform, rather than quantity.

### Keypad

Want to increase productivity? On-screen keypads are a mixed bag, but some have optional (and expensive) physical keyboards. Keep that in mind if you're looking to do some work on the go.

### Ecosystem

iOS, Android and Windows 8. Each one is better (or worse) than the other, in some way. Apple has the apps, while Android is customisable and Windows offers a lot in terms of functionality.

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p58

# Smartphones

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

## The shortlist



Product	Verdict	OS	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★ A powerhouse of a smartphone in every respect	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Apple iPhone 5	★★★★★ Faster, lighter and better: iPhone gets its annual facelift	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	★★★★★ A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android	●	4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
HTC One Max	★★★★★ A fine performer but could make better use of its big screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One X+	★★★★★ Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	
LG G-Flex	★★★★★ All the pros of the G2 and more, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	★★★★★ A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 1520	★★★★★ Apps still disappoint, but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	★★★★★ Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	★★★★★ The original phablet. Updated and still among the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	16/32	151x80x8
LG G2	★★★★★ Unbridled power and thoughtful design. A fantastic phone	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	★★★★★ <b>Best smartphone, Awards 2012</b>	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
HTC One M8	★★★★★ Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
Sony Xperia Z1	★★★★★ Sony fans will love it. A speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
HTC One	★★★★★ A true marvel in terms of smartphone tech	Android	●	4.7	1920x1080	16	
Apple iPhone 5S	★★★★★ <b>Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR</b>	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★ A powerhouse of a phone in every respect	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Nokia Lumia 925	★★★★★ The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	★★★★★ Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8

## Consider these

Wired cans sound better, but wireless is catching up. Here are the best on offer



### Logitech UE 9000

Solid build and effective noise-cancelling features make the UE 9000 a fine proposition. The wireless connection is a tad unrefined but the energy produced is excellent. Good for six hours' use.



### Parrot Zik

Stylish and advanced, the Zik features the 2.1A2DP variant of Bluetooth which doesn't quite match aptX. Still, with NFC on board and a detailed sound to boot, the Zik should be on your list.



### Philips Fidelio M1BT

Our 2013 Award-winners boast aptX compatibility and easy-to-use controls. It's in the sound where they really shine, showing off an excellent turn of pace with bags of detail. Good for 10 hours' use.



### Sennheiser MM 400-X

A compact, portable design and low(ish) price make these cans quite enticing. Vocals have plenty of detail and directness, and with aptX along for the ride too, these are some capable headphones.

## HDMI cables

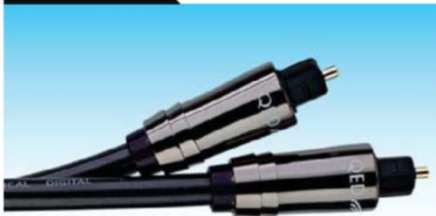
Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Product	₹	Verdict	Lengths tested (m)	HDMI type
Audioquest Pearl	2100	★★★★★ <b>Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012</b>	1	1.4
Chord Company Supershield	5000	★★★★★ Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1	1.3
Kimber Kable HD-09	6500	★★★★★ Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2	1.3
Profigold SKY HDMI Ethernet	2999	Not rated	2	1.4
QED Performance HDMI-e	7410	★★★★★ Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	7	1.4
QED Profile HDMI	2225	★★★★★ Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 6	1589	★★★★★ Best HDMI cable, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1	1.4
Audioquest Cinnamon	6600	★★★★★ A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	9300	★★★★★ A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield and again	5	1.4
Bridge Connect BPE105	3399	Not rated	1	1.4b
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	9500	★★★★★ An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	9000	★★★★★ A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5	1.3a
QED Reference	7740	★★★★★ An assured, but expensive, performer	5	1.3ab
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	10700	★★★★★ One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	13000	★★★★★ It's pricey, but has good performance	1	1.3

## Digital interconnects

- USB** An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
- Optical** Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
- Coaxial** Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

### The shortlist



**QED Performance Graphite**  
Awards 2012: Best Optical Digital Cable

"The sound through this cable is incredibly detailed and startlingly clear. There's a good grasp of dynamics, too."



**QED Performance**  
Awards 2012: Best Coaxial Digital Cable

"The QED is good at conveying subtleties. There's a good sense of energy too, with plenty of attack."



**Supra USB 2.0**  
Awards 2012: Best USB Cable

"It helps deliver impeccable timing and plenty of energy, both of which translate into a tangible sense of fun."

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Profigold SKY Optical	2299	Not rated	Optical	2
QED Performance Digital	4135	★★★★★ <b>Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012</b>	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	2760	★★★★★ <b>Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012</b>	Optical	1
Supra AnCo (coaxial)	4700	★★★★★ Ideal if you like it meaty and beaty - it revels in low-end stuff	Co-axial	1
Wireworld Nova 6	1059	★★★★★ Like and up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet USB	1324	★★★★★ <b>Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list</b>	USB	1
Chord Company Optichord	3300	★★★★★ Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical	1
Bridge Connect BEA562	2599	Not rated	Optical	2

## Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

### The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

#### Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2012: Best Analogue Interconnect

“Improves on many of the things that the former champ did right. The Element Integra is highly recommended.”



#### Furutech Alpha-Line 1

“If your current soundstage sounds a little loose and disorganised, this can help to snap everything back into place. Best for owners of midrange systems.”



#### Chord Company Chameleon Plus

“Give your kit a serious shot in the arm – an overly dull system would certainly benefit from its ability and verve. One of our long-time favourites for high-end set-ups.”

Product	₹	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Wireworld Luna 6	979	★★★★★	●	1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	649	★★★★★		1.8
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	2800	★★★★★	●	1
Profigold PROI3301	899	★★★★★		1
QED Performance Audio 2	4770	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile	1855	★★★★★	●	● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	2914	★★★★★	●	● 1
QED Profile J2P	1590	★★★★★	●	1.5
QED Reference Audio J2P	3290	★★★★★	●	3
van den Hul The Name	8000	★★★★★	●	0.8
Bridge Connect BEA423	2499	Not rated	●	● 3
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	8300	★★★★★	●	1
QED Signature Audio S	23,535	★★★★★	●	1
van den Hul The Wave	15,900	★★★★★	●	1

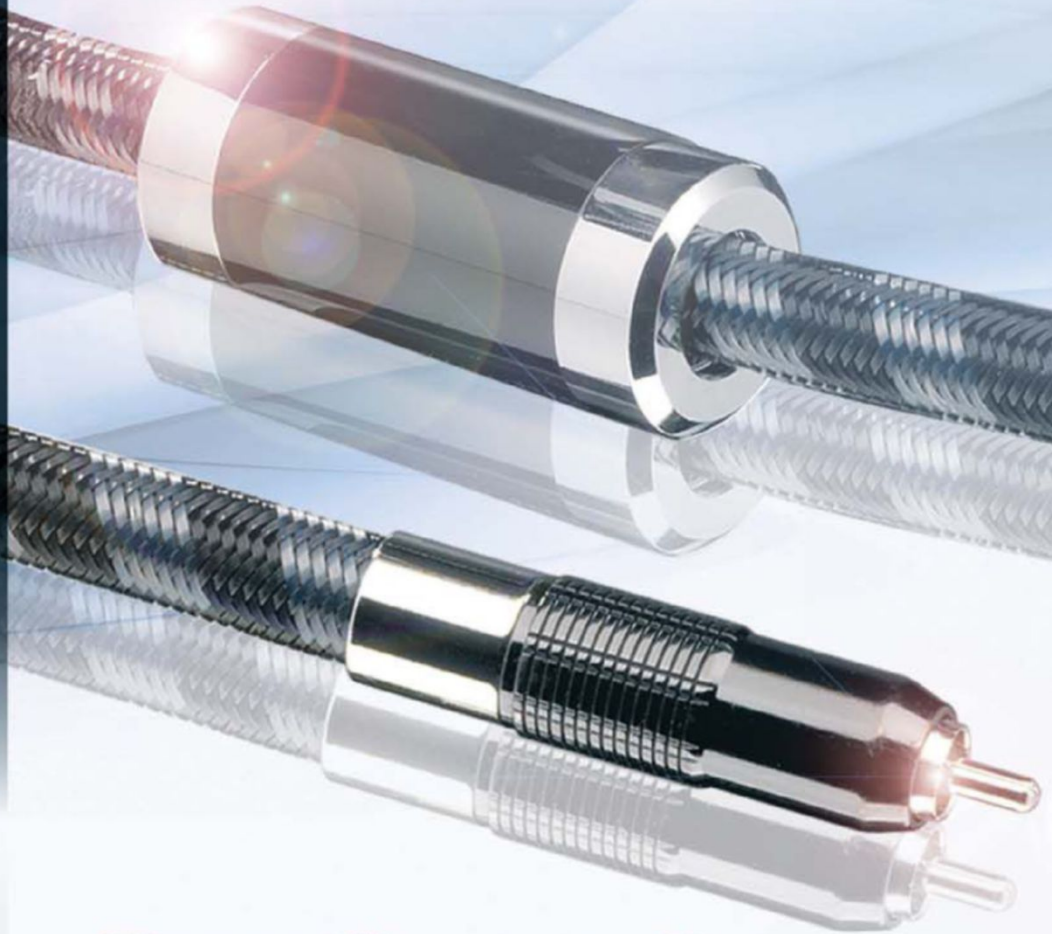
## Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

Product	₹	Verdict	Biwire
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	750/m	★★★★★	
SCP 16/20FC-HD-WT	174/m	Not rated	
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	380/m	★★★★★	
Chord Company Leyline	160/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniversary XT	668/m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	2119/2m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Orbit	4239/2m	★★★★★	●
QED Revelation	1908/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	1336/m	★★★★★	●
van den Hul CS122	2050/m	★★★★★	●

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Real Cable's products are engineered to take the medium of digital entertainment to greater heights. As new genres of cinema and music redefine expressions, our endeavour is to redefine the very experience of image and sound by ensuring that all our components work together in synergy to give you a lifetime of superlative performance.



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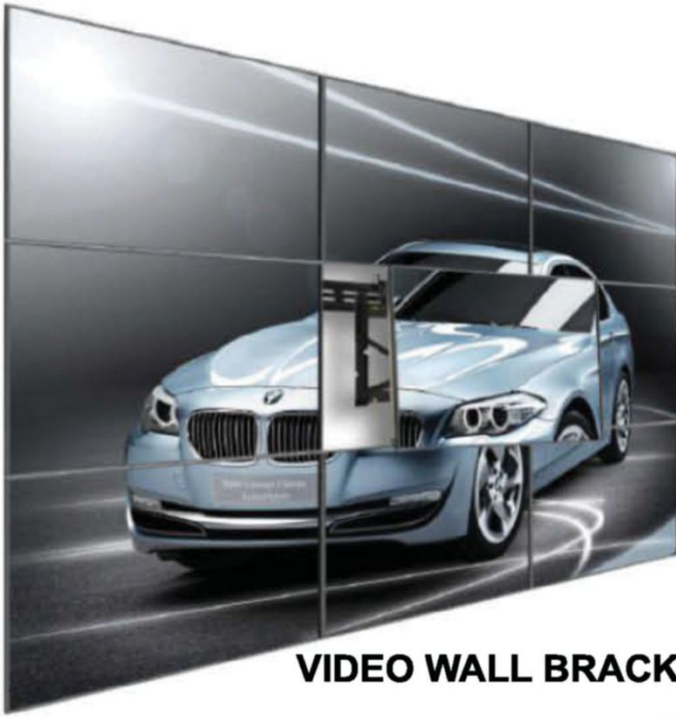


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The best of the rest

# TOP SHELF

## Definitive Technology W Studio

We ditch the wired mess and hand-pick a new wireless product that looks poised to impress



**W**hen it comes to the perfect home-theater setup, our opinions are usually divided 50/50. With one half swearing by the traditional wired setup and the other looking for a wireless solution. If you happen to favour the latter, the new Definitive Technology W Studio soundbar+sub combo should impress you mighty. The slender product you see above is the company's flagship wireless soundbar that should pack a wallop of sonic goodness. We can't wait to chalk down a full review.

The W Studio makes use of a slim 3.5in, simple, yet, classy design. To bring out the very best of surround detail, the W Studio uses a proprietary spatial array technology that helps to create a room- engulfing 5.1-channel surround-sound experience from a single unit. The soundbar is comprised of nine drivers which include three 1in aluminum dome tweeters and six 3in mid-range drivers. To ensure deep, soul-stirring bass, a compact, wireless subwoofer is bundled in the package. The bass reflex design features a

downward-firing 8in woofer and a mighty 200W amp to squeeze out every last bit of bass.

The good bits don't end there. The W Studio is a wireless star that lets you effortlessly connect it to your home Wi-Fi network, letting you stream audio from multiple devices. Thanks to its built-in, dual-band, Wi-Fi tech christened Play-Fi (developed by DTS), you can connect up to a maximum of 16 devices. The interesting bit is that you can have multiple speakers placed in different rooms in your house and each of them can be commanded to play a different track. Individuals in any room can choose what they want to play. However, if one fine day, the entire family is in the mood to listen to the same track across the entire house, that is possible too. We also like the fact that Play-Fi is capable of transmitting lossless audio and you can even mix and match any speakers that support Play-Fi technology. We certainly cannot wait to get our hands on this wireless star and if you need to sample one, the product is currently distributed in India by Audio Excellence and can be purchased from [audiocheck.in](http://audiocheck.in)



The downward-firing 8in subwoofer features a bass port and offers maximum bang for your money, thanks to its 200W amp. The rear area is also home to multiple HDMI ports



## Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

Revolution XT lives up to its name, marking a major leap forward in loudspeaker design and the realisation of some of Tannoy's most radical and forward thinking technologies.

Retaining the classic trapezoid shape from its multi award-winning predecessor, the new Revolution XT cabinets now feature an ingenious reflex-coupled dual-cavity design. The complex internal design is perfected with an integrated plinth that provides a uniform and predictable low frequency interface to the listening environment, delivering the deepest bass notes with ease.

Dynamic, engaging and articulate, yet incredibly easy to set-up and place in any room, Tannoy's Revolution XT is a true revolution in sound. Find out more at [tannoy.com](http://tannoy.com)

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