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FEBRUARY 2011

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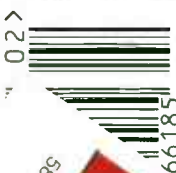
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*"PrimaLuna ProLogue One is now my'affiliate reference amplifier'. With apologies to various British and Italian geniuses, this amplifier has to my ears no equals at its retail price."*  
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**Hi-Fi World, U.K.**



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**Prologue2** 40 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88



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**Prologue4** 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



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**Prologue6** 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



**Prologue7** 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with KT88



**Prologue8** Valve CD Player



**Dialogue1** 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



**Dialogue2** 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88

## PrimaLuna

Music is a universal pleasure that should not be denied to anybody. So, too, the beauty of music reproduced by valves. To make available to a wider audience the seductive, silky sound of the vacuum tube, PrimaLuna has developed a range of all-valve amplifiers with the construction, power and sonic performance of high-end electronics, but with one unique, inimitable feature: prices that can only be described as 'entry level'!

Since the arrival last year of PrimaLuna's first model, the ProLogue One, the audio community has been unable to contain its joy nor reign in its praise, because PrimaLuna has revolutionized the whole concept of 'affordable audio.' Commencing with a pair of integrated amplifiers with prices more typical of mundane, solid-state products, PrimaLuna has shown other manufacturers that compromises in fit and finish, styling and facilities are unnecessary.

And PrimaLuna has shown the music lover that 'high end' performance and pride of ownership can be made available to aficionados on a budget. But don't take our word for it. Audition your preferred ProLogue or the newly-launched Dialogue models at the PISTOL Music dealer of your choice. And prepare your wallet for a pleasant surprise!



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# welcome

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## verdicts

●●●●● OUTSTANDING  
●●●● EXCELLENT  
●●● GOOD  
●● MEDITOCRE  
● POOR  
£ VALUE



Where does science stop and art begin? Because there's no denying the two are inextricably intertwined, at least as far as certain select hi-fi designs go...

Take the EAR Yoshino V12 valve amplifier [p12] for example. There's nothing special about valve amplifiers *per se*; until the nineteen sixties they were utterly run-of-the-mill things. The circuits aren't especially complex, and countless hobbyists have knocked them up on their kitchen tables. So how can the EAR be worth its £6,500 price, as we feel it to be?

Well, the devil is in the detail, and boy has that flame cloaked, pointy speared fellow been busy! Designer Tim de Paravicini is one of the world's masters of the tube breed, a wizard in the way he can take the design down to an almost atomic level, perfect it then build it up into something unique. It's not *just* painstaking tweakerly that does it; the V12 itself is an artful conception; a visual referent to the classic 1971 Jaguar car engine. It's a beautiful thing that's an homage to another beautiful thing; the EAR V12 is a masterpiece.

Yet, reassuringly in these hard times, you don't *have* to be a lottery winner to see art and science collide, as the £299 Arcam rDAC [p73] is another piece of wonderment. Inside its superbly wrought alloy casework – itself a splendid bit of industrial design – lurks silicon chips from two great British manufacturers, Wolfson and data Conversion Systems (dCS) which together offer impoverished digital audio fans a great performance, and the ability to use computers as a source, whilst not relying on their sound-degrading master clocks. This is technology normally only available on products costing thousands of pounds, and it's here, beautifully packaged for under £300!

If you *do* want to spend vast sums however, then the £7,500 dCS Debussy [p52] makes magnificent music from any digital signal you care to feed it. A unique, bespoke design with the trick tech of the aforementioned Arcam plus much more, when you open up the case it looks like no other digital convertor around. Yet it's equally alluring from the outside too, sat on your equipment rack static or powered up and working...

For me, that's the joy of hi-fi. Design is, as an architect once said, 'intelligence made visible' – and this issue is packed with products of innovation and artistry. **David Price, editor**



## testing

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

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

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

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



## ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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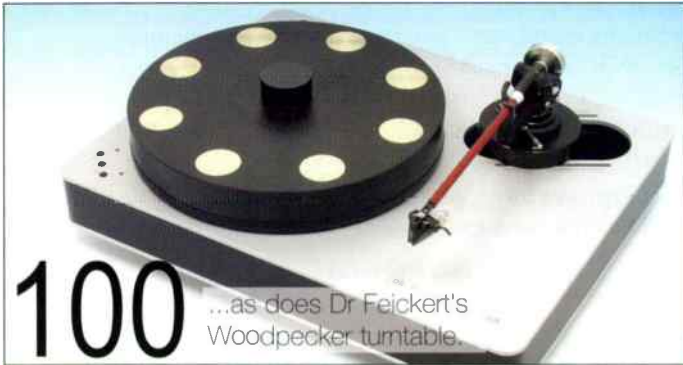
17

Icon Audio fronts up our £1,500 CD player supertest...



104

Avid's new high end Pulsare phono stage impresses...



100

...as does Dr Feickert's Woodpecker turntable.



64

Amphion's Argon 3L floorstanders.



30

Triangle's striking Antal Anniversary edition floorstanding speakers.



56

B&W's superb 804D high end floorstanders.

## DIGITAL

### CD PLAYER SUPERTEST 17

Paul Rigby auditions eight of the latest and greatest £1,500 Compact Disc players.

### dCS DEBUSSY 52

This new high end DAC gets the David Price treatment.

### ELECTROCOMPANIET EMP-1/S 60

David Price is beguiled by this wonderful sounding high end SACD spinner.

## LOUDSPEAKERS

### TRIANGLE ANTAL ANNIVERSARY 30

Noel Keywood finds these floorstanders to have more than a little Gallic charm!

### B&W 804D 56

These fine high end floorstanders are reviewed by Noel Keywood.

### AMPHION ARGON 3L 64

David Price is impressed by these clean living Scandinavian loudspeakers.

## AMPLIFICATION

### EAR YOSHINO V12 12

Noel Keywood samples this glorious valve integrated amplifier.

### XTZ A-P100 80

Paul Rigby finds this budget power amplifier most excellent value.

### OLDE WORLDE 86

Adam Smith tells the tale of Empire's classic 598 turntable.

## VINYL

### VINYL NEWS 98

Paul Rigby has all the latest black plastic releases.

### DR FEICKERT WOODPECKER 100

Rafael Todes spins up this superb high end turntable.

### AVID PULSARE 104

Tony Bolton is most impressed by this flagship phono stage.

### INSTANT REPLAY 107

Tim Jarman reports on an impressive B&O cartridge rebuilder.



## 7 NEWS

Words from the front...

## 35 MAIL

Ten pages of your views.

## 71 SUBSCRIPTIONS PROMOTION

The perfect New Year gift...

## 73, 106, 111, 117 SOUNDBITES

David Price reviews Arcam's new rDAC, then David Price reviews Oyaide's MJ-12 turntable mat and Adam Smith tries Ringmat's Cheetah feet, then Paul Rigby reviews Fidelity Audio's HPA100 headphone amp, then David Price reviews Mark Grant cables and Adam Smith samples a-JAYS 4 headphones.

## 69 COMPETITION

Your chance to win Funk Firm's superb new FXR II tonearm, worth £1,175!

## 74 WORLD STANDARDS

Our guide to the latest and greatest hi-fi hardware on sale.

## 82 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ensure your copy every month and save money too!

## 84 AUDIOPHILE CD

Paul Rigby rounds up the latest audiophile CD releases.

## 89, 91, 93, 95, 97 OPINION

The team get to grips with matters music, hi-fi and life!

## 120 DIAL-A-DEALER

A comprehensive guide to UK hi-fi retailers.

## 123 CLASSIFIEDS

This month's second-hand bargains.

## 128 NEXT MONTH

What we hope to bring you in the next great issue...

## 129 ADVERTISERS' INDEX

## 130 CLASSIC CUTS

Paul Rigby has another seminal recording for you.

# No reference required.



## CPA8000 Reference Preamplifier

Unparalleled sonic performance and a truly flexible approach to preamplification make the CPA8000 the ultimate high-end reference product and worthy of a place at the top of our product range. The high level of build quality and cool retro look are just the start. Pair it up with its perfect partner, the SPM14000 mono block amplifiers (also pictured here) to release its true potential. In the same double

height format to match, it has all the features of the already advanced CPA5000 but now includes three pairs of outputs, true dual-mono construction with separate power supplies for each channel, and separate left and right frequency EQ adjust. Whether its two channel reference quality amplification or the ultimate in home theatre, the CPA8000 is the only preamp the discerning audiophile will need.

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www.chordelectronics.co.uk

**CHORD**

Chord Electronics Limited

news@hi-fiworld.co.uk

# news

## SE-DUCTION

The new Michell Gyro SEduction turntable is a limited edition of only ninety nine pieces; it features a unique-to-this-model 'blue steel' finish combined with many of the upgrades offered by Michell Engineering over the standard Gyro. It comes complete with matching record clamp, HR power supply and black Tecno Arm. The unique 'blue steel' finish of the aluminium parts (platter weights, suspension housing, armboard, motor housing and feet) combined with the black finish of the main chassis and platter combines to make a striking looking turntable, the company says. The HR power supply is finished in luxurious polished black with a glittered-effect, and there's a unique badge stating its serial number out of the ninety nine available. Price is £2,245; for details, see [www.michell-engineering.co.uk](http://www.michell-engineering.co.uk).

## METER RUNNING

Onkyo has a new range of "elite, flagship hi-fi components", the P-3000R preamplifier, M-5000R power amplifier, and C-7000R CD player. The standards of construction, engineering and sound are said to be "of the highest order". The new P-3000R preamp accepts both analogue and digital sources, with connectivity options including AES/EBU digital connectors and a USB input for PC audio. A high quality 32bit Burr-Brown DAC is provided for each stereo channel. Phase Locked Loop technology minimises the effect of clock jitter, and bi-amping capability provides greater flexibility for audiophile applications.

The matching M-5000R power amplifier sports Onkyo's Advanced Wide Range Amplifier Technology, with low negative feedback and closed ground loop circuitry, plus high instantaneous current capability. Twin power meters will win the hearts of retro hi-fi fans, while twin toroidal power transformers and four 27,000 µF capacitors are fitted for a chunky sound.

The C-7000R CD player employs a thermally regulated, high-precision clock, the company says. Analogue and digital circuits are physically separated and employ independent transformers; a massive toroidal transformer for analogue, and an EI transformer for digital. There's a silent disc mechanism, a solid diecast aluminum tray and AES/EBU digital outputs. Features common to all models include audiophile-grade parts – such as "massive" toroidal transformers and gold-plated terminals – along with a wholly new circuit board construction and physically separate chassis panels, to eliminate vibrations. Prices are £1,700 for the P-3000R, £2,500 for the M-5000R and £1,500 for the C-3000R. For more, call +44 (0)1628 473350 or click on [www.onkyo.co.uk](http://www.onkyo.co.uk).



Onkyo P-3000R



Onkyo C-7000R



Onkyo M-5000R



## HOME ON THE RANGE

The new Range Rover Evoque is the first vehicle to showcase Range Rover's new partnership with Meridian Audio. All upcoming Range Rover models will eventually use sound and entertainment systems developed in conjunction with Meridian, the company has announced. The in-car audio systems will match the sound quality of Meridian's high-end home entertainment, says Bob Stuart, Meridian Co-Founder and Chief Technical Officer. 'Cars do provide a uniquely challenging environment,' says Stuart. The Evoque will be available with two high-end Meridian sound systems both specially developed for the sporty new small Range Rover: a powerful 380W 13-speaker arrangement and a top-of-the-range 825W 19-speaker system, using full surround sound. "State-of-the-art amplifiers incorporate Meridian's latest digital processing technology to ensure perfectly optimised sound quality, while both systems feature branded Meridian high-efficiency speakers with lightweight neodymium rare earth magnets for exceptional clarity and dynamics", the company says. The bass and midrange speakers use mica-filled cones made from polypropylene; the tweeter uses an ultra-light aluminium alloy dome to maximise efficiency and provides extended high-frequency performance. Range Rover and Meridian audio specialists have also applied the sophisticated Meridian Trifield surround staging technology, along with Dolby Pro Logic IIx and DTS Neo 6. In addition, the Audyssey MultEQ XT audio tuning system digitally corrects any imperfections created by the cabin environment, it is claimed. To compete the entertainment options, the Range Rover Evoque is also available with digital and satellite TV, DVD playback capability, a hard drive virtual 10 CD multiplexer and DAB/FM/AM/Sirius tuners with a high performance twin antennae system. For details, call +44 (0) 207 491 9934.

## DOCK OF THE BAY

Philips Fidelio £249.99 DS8550 docking speaker is claimed to "deliver stunning audio playback from any iPod, iPhone or iPad; whether directly docked or wirelessly connected using Bluetooth streaming", the company says. The curved fascia is designed to help minimise sound diffraction, while the rear of the cabinet is also rounded to offer a rigid, anti-vibration structure and to reduce the 'muddying' influence of standing waves. Two 3" full range drivers are fitted, and the DS8550 uses Philips' PureDigital sound processing technology to accept a digital input, directly from any docked iPad, iPod or iPhone while they are also being recharged. All processing is then handled digitally, feeding a 30W RMS amplifier. For portable use, there's a built-in carry handle and rechargeable battery which has a playback time of five hours. The dock also features a proximity sensor lighting up and activating the controls when you approach the docked iPad or iPhone or alternatively you can change the volume and track selection via the remote control. For details, call +44(0) 906 1010 016 or click on [www.philips.com/fidelio](http://www.philips.com/fidelio).

## STORE

Described as "the ultimate device for the modern exec", Verbatim's Store 'n' Go Executive USB Drive is a nice way to store your music files. It sports a tough metal casing and ultra-fast data transfer rates of up to 25MB/sec, and comes in 8GB (£15) to 64GB (£98) of storage capacities. For more details, click on [www.verbatim-europe.com](http://www.verbatim-europe.com).



## BATTLE IN BRITAIN

Firestone Audio Europe's brand new Spitfire MkII 24bit/96kHz digital to analogue converter has a 16bit USB connection, along with S/PDIF optical and coaxial electrical inputs. The Spitfire is housed in a rugged 110x80x50mm aluminium housing, and comes in black or silver fascia finishes. See [www.firestone-audio.eu](http://www.firestone-audio.eu).

## RUN OUT GROOVE

Not long after Sony had made the announcement that the cassette Walkman was reaching the end of its life, the sad news comes from Technics that production of the SL1200 turntable actually ceased in February 2010. The deck, which has been featured in the London Museum of Science and Technology, and was the longest running turntable in production, will be sorely missed. Technics say it marks the move from physical media to digital audio, and say that component supply issues have accelerated its demise. Those who've taken an SL1200 apart will know that the deck must have been enormously expensive to make, such was its superb build with some other designs at ten times price fail to match. On behalf of *Hi-Fi World* and our readers, we salute the late SL1200, you'll be sorely missed. Gone but certainly not forgotten!







## STARTER FOR ONE

Teac's new A-R630 is described as "an integrated stereo amplifier offering exceptional value, plenty of power and a well specified selection of features, giving the user outstanding flexibility in use". It sports 2x 50W RMS per channel (claimed), with separate bass, treble and balance controls, plus a source direct (tone bypass) mode. The A-R630 features four line level inputs for devices such as CD players and tuners, a turntable input and two tape loops for connecting recording devices.

On the front panel there is a headphone socket and a microphone input. The A-R630 has a full remote control operation (which can also control other compatible TEAC separates), two independently selectable speaker outputs and a motorised volume control. The user can connect up to five other audio inputs as well as two video. Vital statistics are 435x142x355mm and 9.7kg, all for £199.99. For details, call +44 (0)845 130 2511 or click on [www.teac.co.uk](http://www.teac.co.uk).

## DVD DECLINE

When introduced in 1998, DVD was the fastest adopted consumer electronics format in history, and went on to be a tremendous source of income for film studios across the world. But now, news comes that the format is firmly in decline. In the United States, sales and rentals of DVDs and Blu-ray discs fell by 7% to \$10.9bn in the first nine months of this year compared with last year, according to the industry body The Digital Entertainment Group; and the British Video Association says DVD sales fell 5.6% last year. The fall was most severe in new-release titles, which account for 25% of the market, with sales crashing 15% in 2009. The arrival of Blu-ray, the popularity of online downloads and streaming are all reasons for its demise, along with the new fastest-selling consumer electronics product being the Apple iPad, which doesn't use physical media at all.



*McIntosh MCD1100*

*McIntosh C48*

*McIntosh MC452*

## BIG MACS

The latest CD/SACD player from the legendary McIntosh stable has a 32bit/192kHz evolution of McIntosh's all new Quad Balanced DAC technology first seen in the MCD500. It sports five digital inputs including USB, dedicated headphone amplifier, variable audio output for preamplifier functionality and a balanced level control. The MCD1100 costs £10,995 and is available now.

McIntosh has also just announced two new solid-state preamplifiers; both the C48 and the C50 feature five digital inputs, twin MM/MC phonostages, home cinema bypass modes and programmable equalisers. Prices are £4,995 and £6,995 respectively. There are also two new matching power amplifiers; "the most powerful McIntosh stereo power amp to date" is the Quad Balanced MC452, and offers 450W RMS per channel. Its slightly smaller, less powerful sibling the MC302 has 300W. Features include all new chassis design with revised binding posts, large power meters and sculpted front handles along with a host of performance advancements, and McIntosh say, "battleship build and reliability". Both models are on sale now at £8,495 (MC452) and £6,495 (MC302) respectively. For more information, click on [www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com).

2010S2

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



3010S2

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



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



## COMING UP

New to these shores is Danish brand Tibo Audio, which has launched "a new high-value range, specifically tailored to the UK separates market". Managing Director Bo Wurtz said, "I am delighted to be bringing the Tibo Audio brand to the UK. In the current market, we are certain that our no-nonsense approach to features and value will be appreciated by hi-fi fans looking for quality, low-priced separates – a market which traditional manufacturers have abandoned to inferior mini-systems". The company has launched a full-width separates system featuring a 2 x 45 Watt stereo amplifier with remote control and front iPod input for £119.95 and a matching, MP3-enabled CD player for £99.95. Both are constructed with metal fascias and are aimed squarely at those who want separates performance and styling, at an affordable price, the company says. They're exclusively available from Superfi; see [www.superfi.co.uk/tibo](http://www.superfi.co.uk/tibo).

## PHYSICS HOME WORK

The new German Physiks Limited 11 loudspeaker is said to offer "a level of performance that is similar to the HRS-120", but the recommended end-user price is 'only' Euro 8,888/pair. "We want to give potential customers the chance to acquire a set of our loudspeakers at a more affordable price", the company says. This has been done by using a simplified and cheaper to manufacture cabinet; limiting the choice of finishes to only one – satin finish light grey acoustic linoleum. Also, manufacturing the loudspeakers in one large batch and cutting margins to the minimum possible, have both made substantial price cuts possible. Although acoustic linoleum is primarily used as a floor covering, its excellent sound damping properties and durability make it an ideal material for a unique and attractive loudspeaker cabinet finish, says German Physiks. It's a modern type which is soft to the touch and hard wearing, 4mm thick and double layered with a foam material underneath. The speaker sports a high quality carbon fibre DDD driver and a downward firing 8-inch carbon fibre woofer. Sensitivity is claimed at 88dB/W at 1m; vital statistics are 240x1050x240mm and 28.9kg. For more information, click on [www.german-physiks.com](http://www.german-physiks.com).



## ROTH MANS'

Roth AV has a new generation of OLi series loudspeakers, featuring five models said to deliver "high-end looks, audiophile performances, and truly affordable prices". Baby of the new bunch is the little (£109) OLi 10 [pictured], which is a two-way of just 21 cm, designed for those listening in smaller spaces. The range includes the larger OLi 20 (£149) standmounter, plus a trio of standmounters in the shapes of the OLi 30 (£299), OLi 40 (£399) and the top (£799) OLi 50. Roth AV founder James Roth says, "The sonics and visuals of all five models are testament to many months of research and design, and we are proud of our new speaker quintet." Finishes are Birds Eye, Maple and Black.



## AKURATE AUDIO

Linn's new Akurate system is said to "offer a dramatic performance advancement for exceptional playback quality". Its redesigned enclosure provides "a striking new look with all the hallmarks of Linn's classic and timeless design cues and performance benefits", the company says. Balanced connections available throughout the entire system for even further enhanced performance. The Akurate DS features a "new ultra-low jitter master clock and completely redesigned audio board, which maximises the potential of the DAC and accurately reproduces stereo music with very low levels of distortion". The Akurate Kontrol preamplifier has the latest Linn switching technology and improved isolation for the cleanest sound possible, it is claimed. The matching Linn Akurate Power Amplifier is available with either balanced (XLR) or unbalanced (RCA Phono) connectors and sports intelligent energy-saving and protection modes for reduced power consumption. The system promises flexibility and upgradability, with the ability to move from passive single-wiring to passive quin-amping, and on to the optimal ultimate set-up – a fully Aktiv Akurate system. Further complementing the Akurate system's aesthetic appeal are Linn Akurate 242 and 212 loudspeakers. Now available in a choice of six standard matt or high gloss wood veneer finishes including the new Walnut and Oak, style conscious music fans can also choose from a total of over 200 high gloss finishes from the RAL classic colour range. To find out more, contact your local Linn retailer by either visiting [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk), calling Linn Customer Support on 0500 888 909 or emailing [helpline@linn.co.uk](mailto:helpline@linn.co.uk).





# Powerplant

Inspired by its designer's love of Jaguar's seminal 'double six', EAR Yoshino's V12 is no less impressive a valve amplifier. Noel Keywood enjoys its grace, space and pace...

**W**hy a V12 valve amplifier? Car analogies spring to mind immediately of course, but that's not just it. The reason for designing a valve amplifier like this is a little more subtle, and the outcome intriguing. Some of the smaller power valves available have an incredibly sweet sound and the EL84 has long been recognised as one of them. Unfortunately, whilst it sounds wonderful it handles little power unless lots are used all working together - hence the six per channel within the new EAR Yoshino V12 reviewed here. This way you get a 50 Watt per channel amplifier and a license to use the same V12 moniker that I spotted in the EAR van's number plate at this

year's Whittlebury Show! So a car analogy isn't out of the question.

Designer Tim De Paravicini has put more into this design than lots of EL84s, however. It uses what he calls a Balanced Bridge Mode circuit and no overall feedback, plus substantial Class A working, to keep things sweet and like any good valve amplifier the V12 produces just 'soft' second harmonic distortion, in very low quantities at ordinary power levels. To approach the miniscule 0.06% distortion we measured from this amplifier a transistor amplifier would need lashings of feedback to force it into line and that's one differentiating factor between the two. But in my experience, although the excellent basic linearity and low feedback of a valve amplifier are a great advantage,

I'm not sure they have much to do with the characteristic sound of individual valves. Here, from my experience, it is down to materials and construction, as well as the internal geometries that determine whether a valve is a good (i.e. linear) audio amplifier or not. One of the last power valves designed for audio work was the KT88 and that remains a great sounding valve even today. KT88s remain affordable too, costing around £35 apiece, yet the EL84 costs a mere £12 or so. Obviously twelve of them in this amplifier bumps the total re-valve cost to £144 - hardly a king's ransom - and little different to a brace of KT88s at £140. Compare this to four 300B power triodes at £300 each - ouch!

So the V12 isn't going to cost

a fortune to re-valve, but then as it costs £6,550 in the first place perhaps you could say this does matter, because the piggy bank isn't likely to have anything left in it, or it doesn't matter when compared to the Aston in the driveway. Mark your complaining letters accordingly!

What you get for this is a very large and heavy amplifier. It weighs 22kgs and is just under 17in wide (i.e. it will fit a 17in rack). It is a little deeper than it is wide at 18in (46cm) but height is restrained at 5.5in (14cm) high. The V12 looms large until it has been heaved into place on a shelf, whereupon its low curved front and broken lines make for a pleasing appearance – and an unusual one too. At right sits a machined and gold plated volume control that feels very solid, and at left there is a rotary input selector. Five pairs of inputs are fitted, but I was disappointed that at this price the one marked 'Phono' did not connect internally to a phono preamplifier; if you want one it is an additional purchase, no less! And there is no remote control. Switch on is achieved using a large, yellow illuminated push button at right and the V12 lights up gently, without a murmur...

Sitting right at the back, and facing upwards are the loudspeaker outputs, for 4 Ohm and 8 Ohm loudspeakers. These days it is the 4 Ohm that will best match loudspeakers, as most use 4 Ohm bass units and draw most power reproducing bass frequencies. The V12 produced 50 Watts into either, our measurements showed.

Construction is old-school solid, with plenty of heavy sheet metal work and a massive machined fascia that has a pleasing chrome finish. They don't make amplifiers quite like this anymore; the V12 has the sturdiness of a steam locomotive and this seems to be where much of its weight comes from.

### SOUND QUALITY

Hooked up to our well run B&W 804D loudspeakers, and it didn't take long to discover the low damping factor of this amplifier, typical of a zero feedback design, didn't suit the B&Ws one bit. But this is usually the case with low or zero feedback amplifiers, including my own World Audio Design 300B with feedback switched off. As the bass guitar kicked in on Eleanor McEvoy's 'I Got You To See Me Through' from her Yola SACD, bass was soft and ill defined. This wasn't entirely down to the V12 though; even with our grippy Musical Fidelity AM50 transistor amplifier the B&Ws possess little bass insight.

From experience I knew our under damped Spondor S8es would not match the V12 either, but as luck would have it the Triangle Antals had not crossed *La Manche* to their homeland and they were perfect. With the big Antals the V12 sounded

"the EAR V12 is a finely crafted musical instrument in its own right; it is so wonderfully easy and open, so fluid and natural..."

as well damped and expressive at low frequencies as any other amplifier. In truth it is the Antals that are well (acoustically) damped of course, allowing the high output impedance of the V12 to pass unnoticed.

This points to the need for a suitable partnering loudspeaker and the not-so-expensive Antals were spot on in this role. In fact, they teased out the deeply open and easy nature of the V12, its honey-smooth midband and its totally relaxed delivery. It's a beautifully spacious sounding amplifier that puts singers into a cavernous space. Eleanor McEvoy floated in this beautifully atmospheric environment singing 'When the Rain Falls', tiny hits against cymbals ringing sweetly in the background whilst piano chords struck out sonorously from just to one side of her. With the Antals the bass line strode along nicely, in perfect balance with the rest of the performance. All the same you have less choice with partnering loudspeakers with

amplifiers like this, if you want to get the best from it.

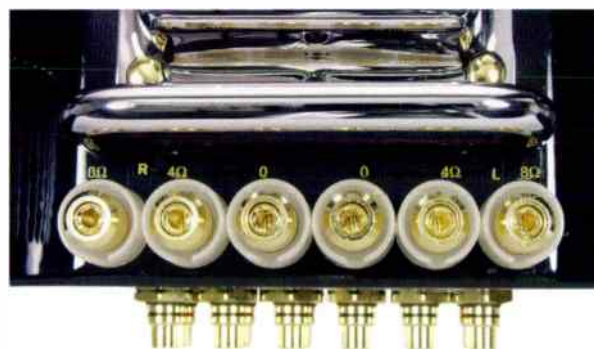
Moving on to Holst's 'Planets' again showed the great strength of this amplifier. It has a lovely sense of unrestrained dynamics that allowed kettle drum to thunder out of from 'Mars', the climactic ending sounding bigger and less dynamically restrained than that achieved by most else except terror weapons like our Icon Audio MB845s. Where the latter are quite easy natured up top, even a little soft, the V12 sounded better balanced and less characterful, but then the 845 is a characterful triode and that's part of its charm. By way

of contrast the EAR V12 comes across as gloriously spacious and clear, putting the orchestra in a big hall with all its sections reaching out clearly from their respective physical positions.

Put this wonderfully open and

balanced delivery, which was just luscious – yes, that's the right phrase! – into your room and you'll marvel at what a good valve amplifier can do. I rarely get to hear EL84 based valve amps because they're uncommon, but Tim De Paravicini's take on the idea in this amplifier is certainly a lesson in what (again) the valve can do when used properly in an audio amplifier. You could almost say the V12 is a finely crafted musical instrument in its own right it is so wonderfully easy and open, so fluid and natural. Only Puresound and Triode Corporation come close with this sort of excessive lusciousness.

Reading the headlines prompts me to label this the Liz Hurley of valve amplifiers; it doesn't have the horticultural solidity of the also lovely Kim Wilde (our MB845s perhaps?) or the finely manicured class of Kiera



Knighley. Its sound is big and bold; horns blared out with a lovely rich, brassy rasp in Jupiter and strings were honey sweet and finely etched. As the romantic main theme enters the orchestra swelled up to a lovely unstrained crescendo via the V12 and the amplifier was, quite simply, in its element with an orchestra. The easiness wasn't just one of tone or its extraordinarily wide tonal palette, but also one of an easy yet broad expressiveness made obvious through a generous sense of well controlled pace and power. 'Jupiter' ends in a simple, strong climax and this the V12 captured perfectly, making it sound

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unhindered and exciting, throwing the instruments out into the room with a lovely power, yet with no little hint of any hardness, restriction of tonal colour or dynamic resolve. Only a beautifully wrought valve amplifier can manage this and the V12 was almost in a class of its own.

To hear the V12 properly you will need good loudspeakers though (in addition to Antals, Tannoys come to mind) since its unhampered dynamic swings and glorious swathes of detail will not be easily apparent from a lot of today's loudspeakers. It does not have the low end drive of the MB845s nor many other valve amplifiers; it does have an unalloyed loveliness that is worth hearing, however, if it is partnered sympathetically.

I realised after some listening that bass from the Antals was reaching lower and had more power than when paired with other amplifiers and here the low electrical damping of the V12 seemed to complement the high acoustic damping of the loudspeakers. Kettle drums in particular reached down and had a lively rumble to them that made me keenly aware of the percussionists actions, making what is often and undifferentiated booming sound a considered piece of playing.

And yes even an amplifier as sweet and sonorous and Liz Hurley luscious as this one could handle the hard rhythmic drive of Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance', little asides like "I'm a free bitch baby" springing out from the side stage whilst the perfectly formed and shimmeringly clear vocals of Gaga punched out from centre stage, supported by bass synth pounding out the backing. In fact, it was with this track I became aware that the sparkling vocal clarity and concise enunciation of Gaga was a step up on most else and the V12 really was a quite extraordinary amplifier in this respect. It has a

strong yet ornate treble delivery that allows not one small detail to escape unnoticed. This is an amplifier that conveys speed as a result, yet without any hard edge. And when those deep synth pushes come through in 'Monster' the Antals were driven to deliver them with a muscular ease that would satisfy anyone.

Out of interest, with volume high, I measured 4V maximum into the Antals, superficially equivalent to 4 Watts (likely 10W absolute maximum as I was using an average reading meter), so the V12 was relatively unstrained driving the 90dB sensitive Antals. This situation isn't unusual. A lot less power is required to run loud than most people think, at least with modern loudspeakers.

Over a long period with the V12, whatever I played was handled with a level of ability that easily places it amongst the best amplifiers available, accepting its low power. But to hear this you will need suitable loudspeakers, ones that are large and well damped acoustically. This is the

case with all low damping factor valve amps. I make this point again because the chances of hearing this amp with suitable loudspeakers is low and partnered with much of what is available today you will not reach the impression I got of this amplifier. But that's high quality valve amplifiers for you; if you know how to treat them, they'll repay you. Bit like my cat!

**CONCLUSION**

This amplifier is a Tim De Paravicini special. It is expensive, exotically crafted and built to survive if the Cold War had ever turned hot. It is also something quite unusual and a special listening experience. I admit I became a convert to this sort of perfection long ago and it just reaffirms to me why valves are a long step ahead when it comes to ultimate sound quality. The EAR V12, for all its cost and quirkiness, was able to demonstrate this fact, and so although it may be easy to protest the price, it isn't easy to protest the sound. That makes it special.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Power output measured 55 Watts from the full 8 Ohm secondary winding and from the 4 Ohm tap, so coupling efficiency of the latter is very good. The V12 has enough power to drive modern floorstanding loudspeakers to very high volume, and shelf/ stand mounters of lower sensitivity to high volume.

Distortion was very low right across the audio band, measuring 0.04% at 1 Watt. Our analysis at 10kHz, 1 Watt shows this was primarily second harmonic; there were no high order crossover components. Distortion rose to 0.24% at high power output (full output, -1dB), comprising mainly second and third harmonics, a good result. Bass distortion was higher than is possible, measuring 0.75% at 50 Watts output, third harmonic from magnetic saturation in the core.

Input sensitivity was 400mV and noise and hum very low, the latter measuring a low 0.5mV at 50Hz. Frequency response was limited to 22kHz, not unusual with low feedback valve amps.

The V12 has useful power output

and benign distortion characteristics, especially at low levels. Bass distortion could be lower, but otherwise the amplifier measures well. NK

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Power              | 55 Watts  |
| CD/tuner/aux.      |           |
| Frequency response | 5Hz-22kHz |
| Separation         | 92dB      |
| Noise              | -105dB    |
| Distortion         | 0.06%     |
| Sensitivity        | 400mV     |
| Damping factor     | 4.5       |

**DISTORTION**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Seminal valve amplifier with sonics, build and style commensurate with its premium price. Needs careful speaker matching, however!

**EAR V12** £6,550  
 EAR Yoshino Ltd.  
 +44(0)1480 210 004  
 www.ear Yoshino.com

**FOR**

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- beguiling design
- epic build quality

**AGAINST**

- no remote control
- limited power
- no phono stage



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# Final Countdown

**The writing's on the wall for Red Book Compact Disc; digital downloads are in the ascendent and physical media is in its twilight years. Yet, as Paul Rigby finds, standards are higher than ever for the fading format, as he compares eight mid-price machines...**

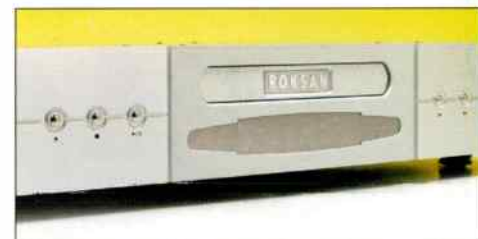
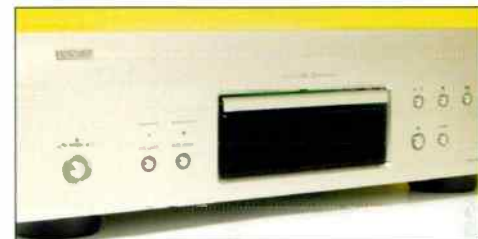
**E**very dog has its day, and Compact Disc has had its. The once mighty, all-conquering format that threatened to render analogue vinyl extinct not so long ago is itself very much on the wane now, in sales terms at least. The collective gaze of the hardware buying public has wandered to digital downloads, network music players and hard disk drives, and the notion of slotting a little shiny disc into a large standalone machine is beginning to seem as quaint as winding up your 78rpm gramophone – especially if you're under twenty five years old.

This magazine once polemicised about the evils of CD, because it failed to ever match the stratospheric standards of the format it tried to usurp – vinyl. But now there's more than a whiff of nostalgia for a group of machines that, let's face it, simply won't be around in a five years' time. There's certainly a strange *fin de siècle* feeling about CD, of late...

The sadness is that, now – almost when it's too late – the machines have got really good. They'll never match a decent turntable of course, but they're now very palatable, as this seven-way shoot out confirms. The standard here is high, offering a significant boost over sub-£1,000 machines; indeed it's good enough for some buyers to seriously consider any one of them as their last bespoke silver disc spinner. Don't forget, in several years you may not be able buy machines optimised for Red Book CD any more - which is something to ponder as you fidget with your iPhone!

So, after a lot of measuring, photographing, setting up, running in and listening, please be upstanding for the Marantz SA-15 S2, Roksan Caspian M Series-2, Denon DCD-2010AE, Astin Trew AT3500+, Creek Destiny 2, Consonance Reference CD-2.2, Icon Audio CD-X1 and Leema Stream III. Long may they run...

**DP**



| THE CONTENDERS              |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Marantz SA-15 S2            | £1,700 |
| Roksan Caspian M Series-2   | £1,600 |
| Denon DCD-2010AE            | £1,500 |
| Astin Trew AT3500+          | £1,500 |
| Leema Stream III            | £1,500 |
| Creek Destiny 2             | £1,400 |
| Consonance Reference CD-2.2 | £1,400 |
| Icon Audio CD-X1            | £1,350 |

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier  
Icon MB845 monoblock power amplifiers  
One Thing Quad ESL-57 loudspeakers  
AE Radiance 1 loudspeakers



## ICON AUDIO CD-X1 SIGNATURE £1,350

**B**ucking the trend perhaps, the increasingly prolific Icon Audio have just launched this new CD player which sports 24bit/192kHz upsampling technology and a tube analogue output stage sporting two 6SN7 output valves, with discrete valve and digital modules and a choke regulated power supply. The CD-X1, spanning 590x530x290mm and weighing it at a heavy 22kg, arrives in two flavours. The basic version is priced at around £1,000 but we managed to grab the Signature edition which includes 'premium' valves and Jensen copper foil oil paper capacitors. Other attention to detail is provided on both versions including point-to-point handwiring, high quality wire wound resistors, silver Teflon audio cabling, gold plated sockets and more.

### SOUND QUALITY

An open, effortless presentation. Via the RCA phono outs, bass was tuneful on the Stacy Kent jazz-inflected ballad, 'Ces Petit Riens' (from the album 'Breakfast On The Morning Tram'; Bluenote), while upper mid and treble were so delicate you could imagine snapping them off in mid-air. Bruce Springsteen's 'Wrong Side Of the Street' ('The Promise'; Columbia) highlighted its low

distortion sound, while there were appreciable gaps between each instrument on the widely structured soundstage. Fela Kuti's LP, 'Zombie' (Wrasse) album was tackled with control and insight, plus lots of life. Via the XLR outs, the music was

frictionless and super smooth, lifting more detail to the surface. The valve outputs proved an almost ideal blend of the two, sitting right between transistor RCA and XLR outputs, sounding beautifully detailed yet smooth.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response through the valve output stage to the phono sockets displays slightly rolled down upper treble, our analysis shows, measuring -1dB at 19.5kHz. The XLR outputs bypass the valves, measured flat to 21kHz and will sound a little less smoothed out.

Distortion levels were high at peak levels through the valves, measuring 0.86% at 0dB, but just 0.001% via the transistor XLR output. Distortion was second harmonic only, so will not be subjectively obvious. At -60dB distortion measured 0.2% via either output with no difference in the harmonic structure.

With a 24bit resolution signal via the digital input, distortion at -60dB measured 0.11%, a good result showing the DAC can resolve 24bit accurately and convey the benefits.

XLR output was 1.7V, valve output 2.15V so there's little difference here.

Jitter levels were fair, signal related measuring 70pS from a 1kHz, -60dB test tone, with a 10pS random noise floor and 37pS low rate clock drift.

The CD-X1 has many options and measures well, ignoring the high level distortion valve output stage. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 5Hz-19.5kHz  
Distortion (%)

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| 0dB               | 0.86  |
| -6dB              | 0.47  |
| -60dB             | 0.2   |
| -80dB             | 2     |
| Separation (1kHz) | 80dB  |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -98dB |
| Dynamic range     | 98dB  |
| Output            | 2.15V |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



**FEATURES**  
A choice of outputs makes this machine great for any mood or style of music. A dazzling new entry into the Compact Disc fray.

**ICON AUDIO CD-X1 SIGNATURE £1,350**  
ICON AUDIO LTD.  
+44(0)1162 440593  
www.iconaudio.co.uk

**FOR**  
- valve output  
- clarity  
- value for money

**AGAINST**  
- nothing at the price



## CONSONANCE REFERENCE CD-2.2 LINEAR £1,400

**T**his non-upsampling, non-filtering variant of Consonance's CD player has a 6H30 Triode valve output buffer, Philips TDA1543 DAC, spans 210x430x330mm and weighs in at a meaty 16kg. Its design is quirky; the CD tray sits over the top of the LCD window with two knobs sitting either side. The CD-2.2's controls felt unnatural and imprecise, I felt, but there was a big thumbs up for the remote control though, which was simple, well made and compact.

### SOUND QUALITY

In general performance terms, the Consonance proved just as impressive as the Icon Audio; it provided tremendous insight and musical involvement while playing the Stacy Kent CD. Bass was packed with personality while the midrange was very detailed and nuanced, where most CD players squeeze these subtle, delicate details into an amorphous blob, like a child squeezing a piece of plasticine.

Springsteen's music was beautifully dynamic via the Consonance, the CD player conveyed the intensity of his lyrics to full effect. The track highlighted how the Consonance captured the life and excitement of the Icon, but without that box's sense of air. The Consonance did provide lots of control, stability and detail, however. You really don't

know whether to tap your toes or sit and wonder at the newly revealed detail emerging from every corner of the soundstage...

The Consonance's all round sonic performance credentials were confirmed with the Fela Kuti track where the sinewy afrobeat rhythms were handled with supreme

confidence. Nothing escaped the Consonance's attention. Saxophone solos provided startling clarity while brass provided energy and precision. This is certainly a quirky CD player, but sonically it's truly accomplished and surely one of the strongest performers at the price, if pulse-racing musicality is your priority.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our distortion analysis shows a very high 4.6% at -60dB on the Right channel, the Left measuring 3.8%. Anti-alias filtering at 22kHz isn't used an extended impulse response analysis to 100kHz (not shown) revealed. The idea is to gain an open 'analogue' sound, but it comes at the expense of severe digital distortion with an extended harmonic structure that will be audible.

The Consonance reaches just 12kHz (-1dB) before its gentle analogue filter starts to roll away high frequencies and this will give a warm balance to the sound. So the Reference CD-2.2 will sound very different to most other players. The player's external input shares the signal path, so a 24bit signal suffered 4.6% distortion at -60dB.

Jitter levels were low, signal related jitter measuring 26pS for a 1kHz, -60dB test tone, the random jitter floor was 5pS and low rate clock drift 38pS, all good figures.

The Consonance CD-2.2 is unusual if not quite unique. Omitting anti-alias filtering and using a low order analogue filter produces excessive distortion, measurement shows. NK

|                           |     |           |
|---------------------------|-----|-----------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) | CD  | 2Hz-12kHz |
| Distortion (%)            | 0dB | 0.15      |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| -6dB              | 0.05   |
| -60dB             | 4.6    |
| -80dB             | 38     |
| Separation (1kHz) | 57dB   |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -103dB |
| Dynamic range     | 85dB   |
| Output            | 2.5V   |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

Zesty and full of life, this is a charismatic, musical and engaging sounding machine – albeit not for every listener.

**CONSONANCE REFERENCE CD-2.2 £1,400**  
 Alium Audio Ltd.  
 ☎ +44(0) 01273 325901  
[www.aliumaudio.com](http://www.aliumaudio.com)

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- musical insight
- dynamic articulation
- explicit detailing

### AGAINST

- fascia controls

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*"The opening acoustic guitar had sparkle and good presence – plectrum, strings and body all having commendable realism whilst the delicate percussion behind the intro was resolved well"*

hi-fi news

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## CREEK DESTINY £1,400

**O**n the face of it, the Destiny is an unassuming CD player. The chassis is extruded but the design is based on traditional principles except for the two clusters of button controls, flanking the LED information screen, for the transport which adds a touch of flair. Nevertheless, the chassis feels strong and secure – even though the box, which spans 430x70x310mm, only weighs 6kg. The one thing that shouts at you about the Destiny 2's innards is attention to detail. It is packed with carefully considered component choices and real effort has been placed upon the major parts. For example, Creek has designed its own transport mechanism, complete with NXP CD chipset which controls the CD decoder and the servo. Quality Schottky-Barrier rectifier diodes are scattered around the power supply, high-stability MELF type resistors are used too alongside film and polypropylene type capacitors. A Delta-Sigma CS4396 DAC is used; Creek say this does the job better than anything else out there, and careful relocking is used to reduce jitter.

### SOUND QUALITY

Starting off with the Stacey Kent disc, and the Creek offers tremendous bass performance. So much so that it's a perfect partner for hi-fi systems needing a fillip in the low frequency department. The other side of this is that if you're already running a bass-heavy system, you'll not take to the Destiny 2. The inclusion of the Spondors resulted in a decidedly over-exuberant bass response. Happily, attaching my Quad ESL-57 electrostatics helped to balance the system.

Here, the Creek remained powerful, epic even, in its output. The effect does mean that upper frequency intricacy is compromised rather, and the soundstage is a little constricted, although there is still plenty of detail to delight the ears.

Mr Springsteen's rock bravado woke up the Creek, which positively loved Bruce's big heart and big voice, launching itself out onto the dancefloor, smiling widely and thoroughly enjoying the experience. With its commanding bass and big, bold presentation, the Creek was able to enhance the electric guitar solo by adding oodles of force and energy, while the percussion

generated enough sweat from the stage to demand a handily positioned towel at my listening position. Heady stuff, but it wasn't overly subtle and intricate in the upper frequencies.

The energy continued with the Fela Kuti tracks where the Creek whipped up the party atmosphere with a driving bass and admirable detail retrieval. The Creek has some sonic similarities to the Consonance as it leans towards control and grip, as opposed to lilting away in a more diffuse way. An exceptionally gutsy CD player then, one which is ideal for high octane rock or dance music, while classical fans might look elsewhere.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Like many modern players the Destiny 2 measured very flat, reaching 21.2kHz within -1dB limits our analysis shows. With an absence of treble lift or fall the Destiny 2 will sound tonally balanced. This player has no alternative inputs so it processes only CD and there are no other frequency response limits to consider.

Distortion levels were very low from CD, measuring just 0.18% at -60dB and this is as good as it gets. A quality DAC is also responsible for an unusually good EIAJ Dynamic Range figure of 101dB, due to low noise and an absence of higher order distortion and quantisation products.

Output was right on Philips standard at 2.1V.

Jitter levels were extremely low, signal related measuring just 15pS from a 1kHz, -60dB test tone, 5pS random noise floor and an impressive 25pS low rate clock drift. These are excellent figures.

The Destiny 2 measures well. It is a well honed design. NK

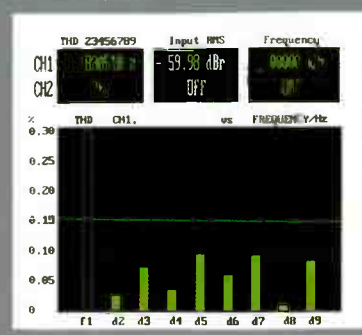
|                           |              |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) | 21Hz-21.2kHz |
| Distortion (%)            |              |
| 0dB                       | 0.0005       |
| -6dB                      | 0.0007       |
| -60dB                     | 0.18         |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| -80dB             | 4.2    |
| Separation (1kHz) | -117dB |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -111dB |
| Dynamic range     | 101dB  |
| Output            | 2.1V   |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
Bouncy, punchy, irrepressible sounding silver disc player that makes music magic.

**CREEK DESTINY 2** £1,400  
Creek Audio Ltd.  
☎ +44(0) 1442 260146  
[www.creekaudio.co.uk](http://www.creekaudio.co.uk)

**FOR**  
- powerful bass  
- energetic midband  
- overall musicality

**AGAINST**  
- lacks treble insight

# FURUTECH

Pure Transmission Technology

*Refinement Has a New Name*

*Debating Furutech's Top-of-the-Line Flux Cable series*

## Flux Cable Series



Speakerflux



Lineflux (XLR)

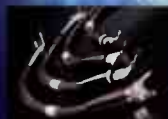


Lineflux (RCA)



Powerflux-18UK

Furutech  $\alpha$  (Alpha) OCC Pure Transmission conductors terminated with beautifully-engineered high performance rhodium-plated connectors. The substantially-built extremely nonresonant connector bodies are finished in layered carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel providing improved mechanical damping for greater resolution, clarity, and powerful dynamics.



Jumperflux-S



Jumperflux-B



Flux-50filter



**FP-1363-S**  
**FP-1363-D**

High End Performance BS-1363 wall sockets with Pure Copper conductors. Rhodium or Gold plated.



**FI-UK1363(R)**  
**FI-UK1363(G)**

High End Performance UK mains plug, straight or angled.

Furutech Co., Ltd. Tokyo Japan

service@furutech.com www.furutech.com

**Sound Foundations**

25 New Road, Blackwater  
Camberley, Surrey, GU17 9AY Great Britain  
Tel : +44(0) 1276 501 392 info@soundfoundations.co.uk

# ADL

ALPHA DESIGN LABS

## Introducing Alpha Design Labs

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



ALPHA Line - Plus

ALPHA Line - 1

ALPHA Line - 2

## ADL GT40 USB DAC with Phono stage !



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

## Formula 2 USB cable



Alpha design Labs Tokyo Japan

service@adl-av.com www.adl-av.com

**Sound Foundations**

25 New Road, Blackwater  
Camberley, Surrey, GU17 9AY Great Britain  
Tel : +44(0) 1276 501 392 info@soundfoundations.co.uk



## LEEMA STREAM III £1,500

**T**he new Leema Stream III is a radical revision of its predecessor. Whereas the Stream II included a tray-based transport, the Stream III has a slot, controlled by in-house firmware. Oh and there's now a selection of digital ins and outs and an advanced DAC that includes a USB port (to rip music from CD to PC or to play high quality digital files on your computer).

The Leema's Quad DAC also reportedly offers a shorter signal path and targets potential jitter problems. Measuring 435x90x330mm, the Stream III weighs in at a relatively lightweight 9kg and offers a front fascia that's presented in workmanlike fashion (as is the accompanying remote control). Minimally designed, the control interface is grouped in a rosette, on the right-hand side of the fascia with the power button situated in the centre; simple and neat.

### SOUND QUALITY

Running Stacy Kent's album, the Leema exhibited a certain sweetness that didn't muzzle the upper mids or treble, but did add a smoothness to the overall presentation and a weight to the bass, providing a great sense of solidity over all frequencies. There's also an expansive and accurately rendered soundstage; you never feel that instruments are going to unravel and fly off in all directions. There's a lot of fine filigree detailing, and this delicate midband integrates nicely with the upper bass, which proved smooth, rich and

textured.

Spinning Bruce Springsteen's new release, the Leema, well, rocked! Bass was tight and punchy and was well formed with an impressive instrumental separation. In fact, the entire soundstage was very ordered and in its proper place. This is a very tidy player, in every sense of the word; it results in a slight lack of spontaneity, but it's never a chore to listen to.

Fela Kuti's album projected well, its busy arrangement came over

with plenty of energy. The Leema loved this vigorous afrobeat style, staying controlled enough to let the listener focus on Kuti's performance. Midband was crisp and nicely etched, with a fine clarity to the soundstage. The Leema gives a full appreciation of the mix and enabling you to hear everything that was going on. This fine new player happily reveals all of music's mysteries in a considered, structural manner, although some will crave a more visceral sound.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response measured flat to 21.7kHz from CD with no variation at all our analysis shows, so the Stream will sound evenly balanced tonally. Its digital inputs accept 48kHz sample rate maximum the handbook states so frequency response is limited to 24kHz.

Distortion levels were low from CD (i.e. 16bit), measuring a creditable 0.2% at -60dB, almost as good as it gets. With a 24bit input via S/PDIF this fell to 0.12% at -60dB, so high resolution audio is properly resolved in terms of bit depth, if not in sample rate. The handbook states only 16bit is accepted, but it is incorrect.

Output was quite high at 2.4V and the EIAJ Dynamic Range figure excellent at 100dB, due to absence of high order distortion products.

Jitter levels were low, measuring 50pS with a 1kHz, -60dB tone, 8pS random and 60µS low rate clock drift, a tidy result better than most.

The Stream III measured well with CD, but its external digital inputs do not accept 96kHz high res sample rates. NK

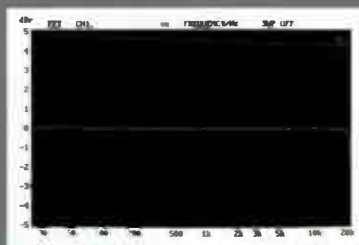
Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 2Hz-21.7kHz

Distortion (%)  
0dB 0.001

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| -6dB  | 0.002 |
| -60dB | 0.2   |
| -80dB | 3.8   |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| Separation (1kHz) | -116dB |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -107dB |
| Dynamic range     | 100dB  |
| Output            | 2.4V   |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

A subtle, smooth and svelte performer, the new Leema makes all type of music accessible in a most enjoyable way.

**LEEMA STREAM III £1,350**  
Leema Acoustics  
+44(0)1938 811900  
[www.leema-acoustics.com](http://www.leema-acoustics.com)

### FOR

- crisp, ordered midband
- fluid bass
- DAC facility

### AGAINST

- upper frequency extension

WHEN THE WORLD STOPS  
AND THERE IS...

# ONLY THE MUSIC

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## ASTIN TREW AT3500+ £1,500

**H**i-Fi World's erstwhile favourite £1,000 CD spinner is back, now freshened up with some minor revisions and promising even better sound – although it's beginning to get expensive now. The casework remains unchanged with the latest AT3500+, measuring 430x340x110mm, weighing in at a heavy 9.1kg and comprising mostly anodised aluminium. The top plate is resonance dampened and the conical feet are made from a self damping composite material. The sparse controls remain, leaving many of the extra functions to the remote control. As ever, the display is poor however. It is cramped and often requires assistance from a boffin at Bletchley Park to fathom out. The CD tray is fronted by a clear fascia. Behind that is a Philips CD12 mechanism while the associated DAC is a Burr Brown PCM1738, a mature, tried and tested unit. Whilst creating the '+', one labour-intensive improvement was to add dampers on all of the integrated circuits on the DAC, bonding them with thermal glue which also acts as a heatsink. Astin Trew love to tinker, it appears, because the company has just added new capacitor and additional IC damping to the AT3500+.

### SOUND QUALITY

Using the player with and without its 24/96 upsampling facility was interesting. Without it, the Astin Trew was a lively, detailed performer but did experience some 'lighting' in the midband which meant that vocals were a touch too prominent. Switching upsampling on softened this down, allowing the detail in the rest of the mix to be more

accessible. This was plain to hear on the Stacey Kent track which also saw a reduction in a minor midrange bloom, allowing the music to relax, becoming more balanced and structured.

Moving to Bruce Springsteen and it was very evident how mature and grown-up the low frequency response was via the AT3500+. Bass took itself to the very edge of the wire but no further, sounding powerful and punchy without ever becoming flabby or over extended. A real balancing act in fact, which allowed Springsteen's vocal performance to be portrayed in a clear and concise manner. There was a lovely sumptuousness to the music,

without sounding overblown – in this respect the Astin Trew reigns supreme at its price.

The Fela Kuti album extended the balancing effect, allowing the saxophones to attack with an aggressive energy, supported by a vibrant wall of brass. At the same time, when Fela Kuti's vocal kicked in, it became a textured, emotional instrument all of its own, packed with character and an interpretive magic. It's rare to hear a CD player that affects an air of poise, but the Astin Trew has it in spades, and yet it's an exhilarating performer at the same time. This clever combination will doubtless continue to win it new friends.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The At3500+ has a very flat frequency response with no high frequency roll down, or low frequency lift, so it will display a good sense of tonal balance, veering toward some sheen in the treble. Results were identical at 44.1kHz sample rate or with 96kHz up-sampling selected.

Distortion levels were lower than our earlier standard version, measuring a low 0.18% at -60dB with 24/96 selected. The At3500+ is linear and has a good measured dynamic range value of 98dB.

A continuing area of concern in this player lies in the jitter that exists on the digital output and is likely to affect analogue stages, as it measured a high 200pS random, and up to 800pS with programme – high values. Better re-clocking is needed.

The At3500+ measures well in all areas except jitter, improving slightly on the earlier standard At3500. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 4Hz-21.1kHz

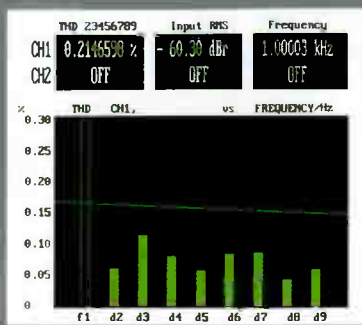
Distortion (%)  
0dB 0.008  
-6dB 0.03  
-60dB 0.18

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| -80dB             | 2.6    |
| Separation (1kHz) | 115dB  |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -110dB |
| Dynamic range     | 98dB   |
| Jitter            | 500pS  |
| Output            | 2.4V   |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

Stands comfortably on the head of a needle, with its powerful, full bodied yet delicate and fluid presentation.

**ASTIN TREW**  
**AT3500+** £1,500  
Astin Trew  
☎ +44(0)1491 629629  
[www.astintrew.co.uk](http://www.astintrew.co.uk)

**FOR**  
- rich, full bodied sound  
- naturally musical gait  
- delicate, spacious treble

**AGAINST**  
- fascia display  
- ergonomics



## DENON DCD-2010AE £1,500

**B**eautifully built and finished, this SACD-capable CD player sports a classy brushed aluminium chassis, spanning 434x137x336mm and weighing a chunky 13.5kg. The fascia has a USB port to connect an iPod or memory stick, plus a source button. Pure Direct button bypasses much of the internal signal circuitry to enhance the sound quality, so was depressed at all times. Denon has fitted its improved drive mechanism, and the player's so-called Precision Direct Mechanical Ground Construction is used to reduce vibration. Finally, the remote is busy, well made but very useful with plenty of options.

### SOUND QUALITY

The dramatic quality of the Denon exceeded even that of the Creek; this is a big hi-fi sounding machine in the classic Japanese idiom. During the Stacey Kent track, the lower midrange felt as if it had been turbocharged, at the expense of a slight lack of vocal finesse. The extra bass definition resulted in unusual details in the mix being highlighted, giving a quite different presentation to most other players here.

When Bruce Springsteen took the stage, the Denon responded with a suitable sense of grandeur; this big stadium rock sound suited the Denon down to the ground. Springsteen's sprawling guitar-fed presentation was wholly 'full on'. Okay, the piano sequences weren't picked out with the

same alacrity as the Consonance for example, but there was plenty of guts in the guitar solo and the percussion was both punchy and weighty.

Exhibiting a solid, tuneful sax rendition, the music emanating from Fela Kuti combined successfully with the bold and dominant trumpet. This album provided a high energy performance that may have lacked the airy complexity of the Icon Audio, but was still packed with passion.

Via a Tony Bennett SACD, his 'MTV Unplugged' release, the Denon handled SACD with flair, offering a more spacious rendition than much of its CD output while the bass proved firm but measured, rather than bombastic. Detail via SACD was also enhanced, with instruments sounding timbrally more believable. Overall then, the Denon is a fine package with punchy sound, lovely build and finish and the bonus of SACD.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Denon's AL32 processing affects its impulse response, resulting in the early roll off and 12kHz upper response limit we show here. However, with steady state tones the Denon measures flat to 21kHz like most players so it is not greatly different. This will likely soften sonic hard edges.

Frequency response with SACD reached 28kHz (-1dB) before rolling down slowly to measure -30dB at 100kHz, so this player gives the benefit of SACD's extended bandwidth.

Distortion from SACD was extremely low, a miniscule 0.022% at -60dB and 24bit PCM via the external digital input was even lower at 0.016%. The Denon could resolve a -100dB signal from SACD, with just 2% distortion.

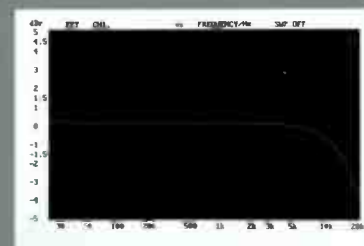
Jitter was very low, signal related jitter measuring a negligible 10pS from a 1kHz, -60dB test tone. The random jitter floor was around 5pS and low rate clock drift hit a low 40pS.

The Denon measured very well all round and AL32 processing will affect its sonic character our measurements show. NK

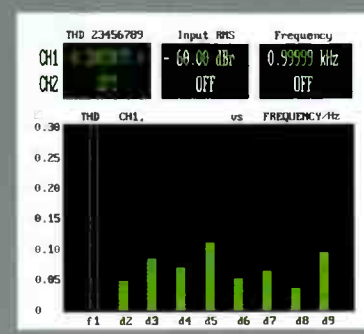
|                           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) | 2Hz-12kHz |
| CD                        | 2Hz-28kHz |
| SACD                      | 2Hz-28kHz |
| Distortion (%)            |           |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| 0dB               | 0.0006 |
| -6dB              | 0.0007 |
| -60dB             | 0.2    |
| -80dB             | 2.8    |
| Separation (1kHz) | -135dB |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -118dB |
| Dynamic range     | 98dB   |
| Output            | 2.16V  |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



**PROS**

- epic presentation
- SACD performance
- build quality

**AGAINST**

- lacks delicacy

**DENON DCD-2010AE £1,500**  
 Denon UK  
 +44(0)2890 279830  
 www.denon.co.uk



## ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES 2 £1,600

**O**f all the CD players here, this has the film star looks; the Roksan looks sporty with its slim stainless steel chassis. Spanning 432x330x70mm and weighing in at 10kg, it feels compact yet solid. In addition to the regulation analogue outputs and optical connections round the back are balanced connections for the analogue outs plus an AES/EBU balanced output via an XLR connector. Inside, Roksan has been eager to prevent signal corruption and has thus provided separate transformer/power supplies for the analogue filters and the outputs while the PCM1798 is the DAC of choice. It incorporates TI's advanced segment DAC architecture. The latter should enhance dynamics while putting up some resistance to jitter. Controlling that little lot, the Roksan has a fine touch-screen, pre-programmed remote control which is easy to use and understand.

### SOUND QUALITY

The Roksan is a subtle performer, working very effectively at the task in hand, but offering no headline-grabbing features. Don't misconstrue this as blandness however, because repeated listening revealed a very finely honed midband with delicate detailing. Bass was punchy and characterful on the Stacey Kent CD. The sound built up slowly, resulting in a satisfying sonic dish. Running the same CD via the balanced XLR sockets showed a more forceful manner, veering towards the bigger, bolder sounds of the Denon.

In my system, I preferred

the RCA outputs, so it was back to the phono leads and the Bruce Springsteen CD. The man himself sounded wonderfully relaxed, allowing him to rock his little heart out without appearing to really try. The track seemed to pass in a jiffy too while the guitar solo was almost angelic in its uplifting nature. Every facet of the mix, in fact, took an equal part in the performance giving a very balanced arrangement.

On to the afrobeat of Fela Kuti which provided an easy, hip-swinging rhythm, translated well by the Roksan.

Never placing any sonic barriers in the way of the performance, the Roksan allowed you to approach it at your leisure – it was so relaxed – which was quite different from the more demanding, in-your-face Creek and Denon machines.

A fine machine then; mature and svelte in a way that the cheaper machines couldn't be, yet it still lacked a degree of chutzpah on really driving music. A laid back but lovely CD player, the Roksan is calm considerate and unhurried – some will love it for precisely this reason.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response displays a small roll down at high frequencies our analysis shows, but not enough to alter tonal balance. The measured response limits, -1dB, were 2Hz-21.1kHz via both unbalanced phono and balanced XLR outputs.

Distortion levels were low, in line with most other modern designs, a figure of 0.22% being measured at -60dB from phono and XLR outputs; our analysis shows harmonic content.

The balanced XLR output delivered 4V and the unbalanced line output 2V. Like most this is an unbalanced player feeding a balanced line drive chip, so using the balanced output separates signal from earth currents.

Jitter was fairly low, signal related measuring 50pS, induced by a 1kHz, -60dB tone. Random jitter floor was 8pS and low rate clock drift a low 35pS. Interestingly, this player also has a balanced AES/EBU digital output and this displayed slightly less random jitter than optical or electrical outputs.

The Caspian Balanced measured well in all areas. It is a quality design. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 2Hz-21.1kHz

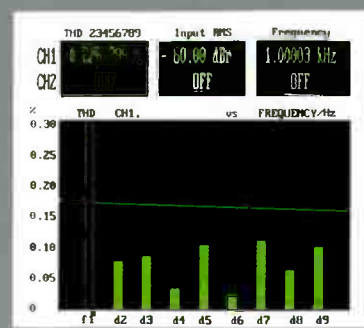
Distortion (%)

|                    |        |
|--------------------|--------|
| 0dB                | 0.001  |
| -6dB               | 0.001  |
| -60dB              | 0.22   |
| -80dB              | 3      |
| Separation (1kHz)  | 120dB  |
| Noise (IEC A)      | -114dB |
| Dynamic range      | 98dB   |
| Output (unbal/bal) | 2 / 4V |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

A centred, sophisticated sound allied to sassy styling and strong build makes this a great package, but dance and rock fans may look elsewhere.

**ROKSAN CASPIAN M  
SERIES-2** £1,600  
Roksan Ltd.  
☎ +44(0)20 8900 6801  
[www.roksan.co.uk](http://www.roksan.co.uk)

### FOR

- smooth, svelte sound
- intricate detailing
- fine design

### AGAINST

- polite with some music



## MARANTZ SA-15 S2 £1,700

**T**he second piece of heavy duty Japanese hardware to make it into the group test, the SACD-capable Marantz weighs, coincidentally, exactly the same as the Denon at 13.5kg, and spans 440x419x123mm. The inside of the SA-15 shows double shielded toroidal transformer that minimises vibration and magnetic leakage, and a high tensile strength Xyron composite CD tray for reduced vibration, and you'll also find a CS4398 DAC. The fascia has a DAC mode button, to turn the Marantz into a DAC for other sources, while the rear of the chassis offers the usual analogue and digital connections plus remote bus sockets.

### SOUND QUALITY

Playing the Stacey Kent CD via the Marantz reminded me of the Denon in many respects, with a similarly ebullient way of presenting music to the listener. Bass is powerful and meaty – but there is also some lifting of the upper mid frequencies that reminds me somewhat of the original Naim CD5.

This gives plenty of attendant detail and also a slight forward nature when playing CDs with excessive peak limiting.

Via the Springsteen CD there's more punch which suits the programme material down to the ground; it's a big hearted widescreen performer with attitude. The other side of this equation is that it's not a delicate flower, brimming with filigree detail like the Roksan or, to a lesser extent, the Astin Trew. If this was a musician, it

would be like The Boss himself, filling stadiums and punching the air.

Playing Fela Kuti showed the Marantz to have a more intense sound even than the Denon, a more direct one too with a slightly more explicit and intricately etched upper midrange.

Finally, when considering its SACD ability, while the vocal performance of the Tony Bennett disc lacks some of the spaciousness of the Denon, the Marantz does

provide a dynamic performance that, while lacking much of the Denon's vitality, is still admirably balanced and musically involving. Essentially it's a little more emotive, and a little less 'refined high end hi-fi' sounding. So the SA-15 is hardly the most subtle player on test but it does offer a force and vigour that complements rock plus similarly lively genres such as upbeat electronica. All in that lovely, beautifully finished, Japanese made case, with SACD functionality too.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Marantz's convolved impulse response runs flat to 21.5kHz like most players, our analysis shows. With SACD frequency response reached 35kHz (-1dB) and -13dB down at 100kHz, so this player gives the full bandwidth benefit of SACD, bearing in mind SACD players rarely reach above 45kHz to suppress supersonic noise.

Distortion from CD was very low, just 0.17% at -60dB our analysis shows. With SACD this fell to 0.06% at -60dB, a little higher than its Denon stablemate. A 24bit PCM signal via the digital input returned 0.035% at -60dB. These are all good figures, showing the SA-15 S2 is a very linear player. Output was on the high side at 2.5V.

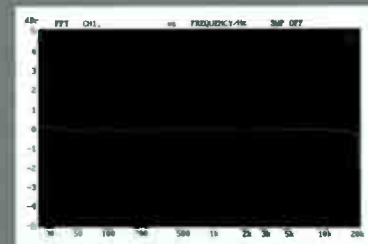
Jitter was low, if not quite as low as some, signal related measuring 70pS from a 1kHz, -60dB test tone, random noise floor 15pS and low rate clock drift 45pS. There was also a high rate jitter peak the Denon lacked.

The SA-15 S2 measured well from all three sources, CD, SACD and external input, although it was not quite up with the best. NK

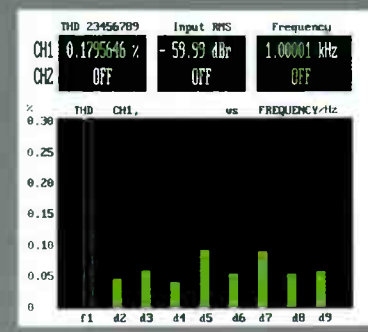
|                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) |             |
| CD                        | 2Hz-21.5kHz |
| SACD                      | 2Hz-35kHz   |
| Distortion (%)            |             |
| 0dB                       | 0.0006      |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| -6dB              | 0.0007 |
| -60dB             | 0.17   |
| -80dB             | 4.1    |
| Separation (1kHz) | -118dB |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -112dB |
| Dynamic range     | 98dB   |
| Output            | 2.5V   |

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



This beautifully put together SACD player offers a bracing, full-bodied sound, but is not the last word in refinement or subtlety.

**MARANTZ SA-15 S2 £1,700**  
**Marantz UK**  
 ☎ +44(0)28 9027 9830  
 www.marantz.eu

**FOR**

- powerful, punchy sound
- explicit detailing
- superb build and finish
- SACD playback

**AGAINST**

- lively upper midband
- price

**A**n enlightening batch of mid-price CD players, this. Although ultimately playing the same ones and noughts, there was a surprising divergence in their respective subjective performances. This means that, pretty much whatever your musical tastes, or indeed how you like your sound delivered, there is something here for everyone. So how did the machines fare?

Bringing up the rear is the Creek. The Destiny 2 is a big hearted beast (an odd epithet for such an unassuming design and a lightweight box) with plenty of naughty bass to rock your listening room. As such, some will find its overall presentation is a little unbalanced as a consequence – yet for any system which is somewhat bass-shy, the Creek will form a perfect antidote. Stomping rock fans who sometimes mistake their front room for a mosh pit will adore it.

Next comes the Marantz SA-15 S2, a real Japanese battleship of a CD player. It's so chunky that it could be used to break windows during jewellery shop robberies in the morning, kicked around in a Sunday afternoon pub football match and then tied on the end of a long chain to knock down derelict buildings in the evening – and still survive to make great music! It's a bracing, barrel-chested CD spinner with the excellent option of making an even nicer noise via SACD. Although satisfyingly charismatic with rock and dance, lovers of classical and jazz will want a more genteel presentation...

The Denon DCD-2010AE pretty much fits this bill; it's as strong and as powerful looking as the Marantz but doesn't have the former machine's slight lift in the upper midband which can result in the over illumination of some CD recordings. The Denon does provide a lower mid fillip however, which often produces startling effects from the mix as details found in these deeper, darker waters are raised to ear level. Its bass performance is impressive with a grand, almost heroic stature. Overall the Denon is actually a fine package.

The Roksan Caspian M Series-2 found fifth place in our long list with an intriguing performance. In some aspects, the Roksan can be accused of hiding its light under a bushel. It's very polite, reserved even, and needs some perseverance before you really find the machine's excellent musical abilities caressing your ears. This reticence might lose some listeners who lack the patience to stick with the Roksan but, for those who do, they will find a player that

exudes subtlety and no little refinement; some will prefer this to all others here.

In fourth place is the Leema Stream III, the control freak of the group. I liken it to James Bond's big brother as this is one CD player that is neither shaken nor stirred. Because it can remain calm under the most intense circumstances, it allows a great deal of information to be released that is often masked by many of its competitors, giving you a clear, comprehensible playback every time. A very grown up machine, and all the better for it.

I have to pause here and declare that to my ears the top three are *all* winners. This isn't a cop-out in any way; I could quite happily live with any of them as my primary digital source. Differences between each were often subtle and subjective and I have been overly harsh to separate them into a winning order...

In third place, the Astin Trew AT3500+ provided a winning show despite its rather schizophrenic performance. With the 24bit/96kHz facility turned off, the Astin sounded a little self-conscious, finding it difficult to relax. With that upsampling engaged however, the Astin was thoroughly appealing and attractive with a definite balance to its performance. This CD player is the Zen Buddhist of the group, supremely confident, eminently poised – a lucid performer that sounds strangely analogue-like in its way.

Second place fell to the Consonance Reference CD-2.2 Linear Mk.2, a CD player that deals in explicit musicality. A highly intelligent machine, it's the Jamie Oliver of the digital firmament; it gets its hands dirty, pushing them deep into the mix to round up everything and serve it up on a glistening platter. The distortion we measured was not obvious upon playback, being integrated in such a way to make it 'non-invasive'. Still, its energetic and

exuberant presentation may not be for all, and certainly not for those craving for a consummate smoothie such as this...

The winner really was a surprise. The Icon Audio CD-X1 Signature is the cheapest machine in the test but offers stunning value for money. The basic CD player, pushing music via the standard digital phono sockets, produces a highly competitive sonic performance while the balanced output is a bit like eating rich food all day. It's wonderful but some will find it too much to bear. The signal pushed through Icon's own valve section provides a perfect balance; bite and edge with a real analogue, vinyl warmth that lifts this machine to heady heights. It's not exactly the world's best dressed silver disc spinner however; compared to rival Japanese and British designs it feels and looks a tad rough and ready. But the same certainly can't be said for its sound. Compact Disc players like this prove that – just like punk rock – digital discs aren't dead!



**Denon's DCD-2010AE is a handsome SACD-capable machine; a good value all rounder**



**Icon Audio's CD-X1 Signature; surprise winner and the cheapest of the group too...!**

"the Icon Audio's valve section provides perfect balance; bite and edge with a real analogue warmth that lifts this machine to heady heights..."

# Three's Company

Noel Keywood has a fine time with Triangle's Antal 30th Anniversary Limited Edition loudspeaker...

**T**urning the volume right up one evening, in our office building when no one was around, I remembered that Triangle's Antal plays great bass lines. It's fast, tight, and tuneful. There's no one-note bass here, nor an outline of what is going on. This loudspeaker has grip across the whole bass scale so bass lines sound taut, punchy and fully expressed. Triangle have taken their large, floorstanding Antal EX I reviewed in our July 2010 issue, made improvements and come up with the 30th Anniversary Limited Edition reviewed here, of which there are 500 pairs.

So what have Triangle done to improve the Antal? The horn tweeter is now of machined aluminium, denser than the original injected aluminium, which gives better wave dispersion and diffraction Triangle say. Internal wiring was changed and a true piano lacquer finish applied to the cabinet. Triangle claim the updates make the Antal less fussy with partnering electronics. They also fit a Silver Anniversary plate to the front, as well as silver fittings. It's a neat package.

The Antal is a large

loudspeaker but it's still the case that you can't beat a good big 'un, so this is an advantage in one way, if a drawback for those who don't want a loudspeaker that looms large in the home. Most loudspeakers top out at one metre high: this is a benchmark height figure. Anything over is big by anyone's standards and the Antal comes in at a lofty 1,160mm when sitting on a sturdy set of spikes. There's no disguising a cabinet this high, but Triangle keep the front fascia narrow at 200mm and even cabinet depth is restrained at 350mm. It's still enough to give the Antal a generous box volume and Triangle exploit it well with some excellent engineering.

For a 'speaker of the size the Antal is almost light at 22.5kgs and quite easy to move around as a result. The original Antal EX I reviewed had a convincing artificial wood veneer. The Anniversary's has a deep gloss black lacquer expertly applied to give a smooth surface and clean edges.

Large, narrow loudspeakers commonly sit on stabilising plinths and Triangle's comes fitted with four rubber feet. There's an additional front foot too. Large diameter spikes can be used





instead, adjustable from above by a spanner that comes supplied.

Of the drive unit line up, the uppermost is a titanium dome tweeter that sits within a short horn that controls dispersion. Below the tweeter lies a 120mm midrange unit possessing a light, stiff cone of inert cellulose pulp at the centre of which lies a stationary phase plug, to smooth response and dispersion. Under this sit two 140mm woven fibreglass cone bass units loaded by a reflex

Here the Antal 30th Anniversary showed they were more expressive at low frequencies than the considerably more expensive B&W 804Ds also reviewed this month! As I turned volume up I heard tight, grippy bass that played bass tunes from Angélique Kidjo's 'Aye' album with great ability. In 'Houngbati' the bass line walked up and down the bass scale with an alacrity that other, mostly smaller, loudspeakers cannot manage.

I make the size distinction

"The Antals are easy on the ear, yet clear and colour-free. They avoid sonic fireworks in favour of a simple, even and honest delivery..."

chamber with front mounted port, seen below them. If you don't want to see all this then a black grille is supplied.

The rear panel carries a conventional bi-wire input board with shorting links for mono wiring. Bare cable, spade terminals and 4mm banana plugs are all catered for.

### SOUND QUALITY

Run in for a weekend and two nights, amounting to fifty eight hours, the Antals needed even more so I piled another weekend or seventy two hours on top, using pink noise and our Monitor Audio De-Tox disc, both at fairly high levels. The sound softened up considerably and lost a slightly hard edge that the first run in period did little to ameliorate. The Antal's synthetic cones need quite a beating before they settle, that's for sure!

Both transistor and valve amps suit; the Antals are a very well tailored amplifier load and this tends to de-emphasise differences between them, as well as between different models of amplifier.

In basic tonal balance the Antal came across as even.

Although measurement showed Triangle have raised bass output a little, this is not especially apparent when listening. As I explained earlier, in quality terms low frequency notes are well defined and bass playing tuneful, with plenty of bass detail to give more insight into the nature of instruments than is common.

because in my experience box volume is all and the Antals have size on their side. Bass heads with a big grunty transistor amplifier will like the Antal 30th Anniversary for its dry and purposeful bass lines that drive along without waffle. But although under measurement the Antal 30th Anniversary looked as if they would have thunderous bass, in practice I found the strong acoustic damping Triangle have engineered in avoids this. The Antals go low but don't have especially weighty subsonics, allowing them to sound quite sprightly. Much like UK 'speakers of yore with heavily damped bass cones, designed to 'play tunes' on the end of a Naim or Exposure amplifier, the Antals can be moved close to a rear wall without sounding boomy unlike, for example, our in-house Spendor S8e benchmark loudspeakers.

The only small blemish was a small amount of boxiness that came from the large fronted mounted port; these things are better placed at the rear to avoid such colour. Foam bungs largely cured the problem, but lightened bass a little.

With vocals the Antals set up clear, firm images across the sound stage that were softly outlined. They hung back in the plane of the loudspeakers rather than forward of it, and in an almost horizontal array, likely because there's less information fired upward by the tweeter. Eleanor McEvoy's sweetly recorded and simply arranged 'Just For The Tourists' from 'I'd

## AMPLIFICATION

**LSA Signature Integrated Amp.** Boxed, excellent condition, upgrade valves (£300 option) & EAT Valve dampers. Stunning. (£5500) £2695.

**Unison Research Unico Primo.** Months old, mint boxed. (£1167) £695.

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**Quad II Forty Mono blocks.** Supplied by us, excellent condition, original packing, 5yr warranty. (£3800) £1795

**Restek MPRE+ with MAMP monos.** Ex-demo. Mint, boxed, 5yr warranty. Scored 85% in recent HiFi Choice review. (£3000) £1895

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

**Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta Rev 2.0.** Ex-display, mint, boxed with manual & remote. 5yr warranty. (£1449) bargain at only £795

**ATC SCA2 Pre Amp.** One owner, supplied by us, 8mths old. Boxed, mint. (£4860) £3495

**NuForce P-8 Pre Amp.** Black, remote. Excellent condition. (£1200) only £595.

**Bryston B4SST power amp.** Excellent condition, in silver, one owner. (£3450) only £1850

**Chord CPA 2200 Pre-amp.** Boxed, silver, excellent condition. (£2917) £1250

**McIntosh MA6500 Integrated amp.** Boxed, mint, stunning reviews. (£4795) £2295.

**Boulder 865 integrated.** Rarer than a rare steak at the rare steakhouse. Mint, one owner, original double boxing. (£10000) £POA

**Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp.** 250 wpc. Black with wooden accents. Excellent condition, very recent Chord service, single ended and balanced inputs. Original box and packing. Rarely available used. (£3950) an opportunity at only £1395.

**ECA Technologies Vista Pre & Lectern Power Amps.** Black with gold logos. Immaculate. Very musical combination. (£1700) only £650.

**Deltec DPA50S power amp.** With Deltech 500S Silk speaker cable, boxed, manual. (£990) £495.

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

## DIGITAL

**TEAC VRDS 10 SE.** One owner, almost new. Original box, packing, 12mth warranty. £595

**DCS Verdi Encore transport** with DSD upsampling. Excellent condition, warranty. Original box, packing, remote, manual. (£10000) £2895

**Benchmark DAC 1 HDR.** One owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed. (£1821) a bargain at £1095.

**Naim CDS with matching CDSPS.** One owner, excellent condition, original boxes & packing. Stunning analogue performance. (£4500) £995

**Bel Canto CD2.** Mint condition, boxed, one owner. (£2700) £1495.

**ASTINtrew AT3500 Plus CD player.** Mint, black, supplied by us new. (£1525) £995

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

**Ayre CX-7e CD Player.** One owner, mint, boxed, manual. (£3000) £1795.

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**Spendor S6e.** Mint, cherry, one owner, only a few months old. (£1900rrp) £795

**Klipsch Heresy III speakers.** Walnut, one owner, supplied by us. Mint, boxed, 99db efficient and a 5-globe HiFi World review! (£1798) £1195

**Klipsch RB 81 Reference Speakers.** Ash Black, unused, only removed from boxes and re-packed. Incredible opportunity (£540) Only £295.

**MBL 121 Speakers.** Satin Black, one owner, supplied by us, months old, customer upgraded to 101e's. Mint, original factory crates. (£10600 with stands) £POA

**Quad 111.2** in high gloss cherry. Ex-demo, mint condition. Boxed. (£376) £279.

**ATC SCM 50 ASL Classic Actives.** Walnut, ex-demo, mint condition, (£9870) £POA

**Klipsch P-39f Palladium series.** Ex-demo, one of best speakers you'll ever hear. (£14750) £POA

**Sonus Faber Minima Amators.** 1 owner, walnut, boxed, mint, matching stands. 5yr warranty. (£2k) £895.

**ADAM Audio A.R.T. Pencil Speakers.** Cherry/Dark Silver, utterly astonishing articulation, excellent condition, original box & packing. (£3600) only £1795.

**Audio Physic Virgo V.** One owner, originally supplied by us, excellent condition. Original boxes & packing, Maple. (£5500) £3395

**Amphion Argon 3L Speakers.** Scandinavian Birch, original boxes & accessories. 8mths old. Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy & Group test Winner (£2600) only £1495

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

**Quad ESL 290S Speakers.** One owner, mint, boxed very low hours. Amazing reviews (£7000) only £4990 with a 5yr warranty

**Audio Physic Tempo VI Speakers.** Maple. One owner pair, 6mths old, completely unmarked, original packing/boxes. (£2612) Only £1895.

## ANALOGUE

**Michell Iso MC Phono Stage** with Hera PSU. Original box/packing, excellent condition. (£900) and now only £295

**LFD MCT Phonostage.** Mint, one owner, amazing performance, only 18mths old, very low hours. (£3400) Very tasty indeed at £2300!

**Linn LP12 Arm Board.** Original, as new. £35.

**Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage.** One owner, only months old. Sensational (£1495) £980

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**PS Audio Power Plant Premier.** One owner, excellent condition, boxed, manual. (£2195) £995

**Supra LoRad MD06 BS/SP.** 6 way Mains Filtering Block. (£149) only £75

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## CABLES

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**Chord Optichord Optical Cable.** Toslink to Toslink - 3m. 50 MHz bandwidth spec. Only £54.

**Vertex Silver Solfon.** 1m, one owner, excellent condition. (£1092) £499

**Shunyata Research 'Altair' Cryo Interconnect (RCA-RCA).** 1m. (£650) only £255

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

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

**Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links.** Set of 4 with 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module - Simply sensational. (£540) £395

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

## ACCESSORIES

**Graham Slee Solo Ultra Linear headphone amp.** Mint, one owner. Boxed. (£655) £395

**Grado GS1000i Statement Series Headphones.** 1.3mths old, original box, packing & warranty card. As new condition. (£1100) £695.

## MISC

**Mission m7ds Surround Speakers.** Black, original box/packing. Perfect. Only £60



crescendos.

Strings came over as silky smooth, likely because the upper midband falls away slightly, eliminating edginess. Yet with strong bass and obvious upper treble the Antals moved from Fleming to the Stranglers with alacrity. Tambourine was obvious high up and centre stage in 'Dreamtime', kick drum tight and immediate, Cornwell's vocals nicely lit centre stage. The Antals were crisp, firm and fast here – and with all the Rock I played.

The tweeter remains fairly prominent and there is a lot of high frequency action, giving a sound that is crisp and brimming with detail. The improved Antal remains a little brightly balanced, but as measurement shows, less so than most modern loudspeakers. Triangle avoid any possibility of the Antal seeming understated in its delivery of highs, but don't let treble become overpowering. The upper midband altered radically from edgy to very smooth after run-in and this made the strings of the London Symphony

Orchestra sound silkily easy on the ear. With kettle drum adding weight and menace in 'March Slave' the Antal 30th Anniversaries were impressive.

Put the Antal's attributes together and what you get is a loudspeaker that is unfussy about room size, positioning or amplifier. Add in a very high sensitivity we measured at 90dB and you need no more than 20 Watts or so to run very loud, broadening amplifier choice even further. Valve amplifier owners should look at this loudspeaker very closely.

## CONCLUSION

Triangle's swish new Antal 30th Anniversary retains the balance of the original Antal EX that I liked so much, but adds extra treble detail and a more finessed delivery to provide an impressively well balanced performance. Add in high sensitivity and easy amplifier matching and you end up with a great all-rounder that is technically and sonically adept in a way few others are at the price. Recommended.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Antal 30th Anniversary is much like the old one in terms of frequency response. This is a flat and accurately balanced design of wide bandwidth. The unusual horn loaded tweeter, fitted with a phase plug, has been subtly reworked to give smoother output, a discontinuity at 9kHz having been ironed out. That means the Antal's tweeter is even smoother than before and it reaches a very high standard here, suggesting a colouration-free sound. Level has been set so that treble will be obvious but not conspicuously out of balance or intrusive.

The midband still has a small plateau lift but another discontinuity, at 650Hz, has also been smoothed out a little. Low frequency output has increased by around +3dB, quite a big lift and enough to make bass more obvious. Since this increase extends right down to 30Hz the Antal II will have more low heft than before.

As before the port is broadly tuned and damps the bass units strongly. Port output was just 1dB higher than forward output at 80Hz so it would appear the drive units are doing more and the port a bit less than before.

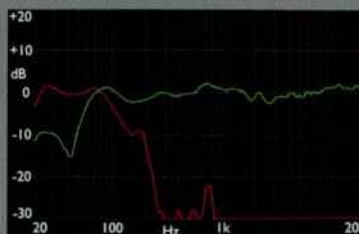
The impedance curve has not changed however, and the Antal remains largely resistive as a load, more so than most loudspeakers. Although we measured impedance as 6 Ohms overall, at low frequencies the Antal gets closer to 4 Ohms. It remains very sensitive though, delivering a loud 90dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input. This is a loudspeaker that needs little more than

20W to go loud.

The decay spectrum was clean, much the same as before, except for an overhang at 80Hz that was worse. The distortion pattern was also unchanged, the Antal producing just 2% from both drivers and port at 40Hz, very low values. From 100Hz to 6kHz distortion hovered around 0.2%, a normal enough result.

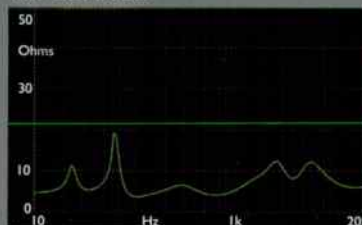
The Antal 30th Anniversary edition is a smoothed out version of the original, with stronger bass. As before it measures very well in absolutely every respect and should give excellent bass quality, plus a smooth, accurate rendition further up the band. NK

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

### IMPEDANCE



Rather Go Blonde' SACD had a simple clarity, sustained Hammond chords adding a rich musical background texture whilst here voice lilted at centre stage, full of expression.

The Antals are easy on the ear, yet clear and colour-free. They avoid sonic fireworks in favour of a simple, even and honest delivery that gets everything right. Getting rid of artifice, colour and edginess produces a very easy sounding result that the ear doesn't challenge: it's a sound that flows past easily with gentle ballads from Eleanor McEvoy, or with Renee Fleming singing 'Un bel di vedremo' from Madame Butterfly, where the Antals were equally adept, giving full expression to her powerful

## VERDICT

Consumately well balanced large floorstander that's both enjoyable and accurate in equal measure.

**TRIANGLE ANTAL** £1,850  
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- long run-in
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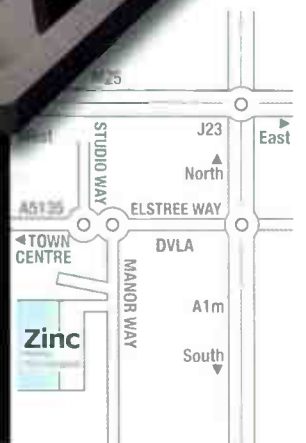
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## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE

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KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

**A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to GREG GILDING, Letter of the Month winner in our JANUARY 2011 issue.**

## Letter of the Month

### WRAPPED UP IN CABLE

I read with great interest the letter concerning the effect of cables and interconnects. Ever since I found out that my uncle's interconnect cost more than my car at the time (second-hand!) the topic has fascinated me. I was told that you needed a certain level of equipment to hear the difference those braided solid silver cables make. To me, this sounded like a load of cobblers. His brother, who worked in pro audio, expressed the same sentiment, commenting that the quality of the coupling medium and workmanship of the soldering made more difference to the sound than the cable itself.

A while back, while I was building up my AV system, I realised that the strip I was using did not have surge protection. I considered Isotek products but in the end came across the Tacima six-way on special offer because nobody was buying it (this was about 6 months before the 5-star review). I bought it thinking that I'll use it for protection until I worked out another solution. I'd paid no attention to the claims on the packaging for the same logic as the 'dirty miles of grid cable' argument. I was more concerned with its surge protection properties. On using it though, the difference it made was amazing to both the sound and picture. Like a veil was lifted. The wife who was with me commented on it straight away (it's still there five years later and I'm scared of shelling out more and being disappointed).

This revelation opened my mind to the notion of passive components affecting audio. This got me into the actual mains cable which I swapped about with bought ones, but alas did not hear any difference. This was until I changed the DVD player to Blu-ray recently and had to re-configure the



**Our mains cables make a difference, Russ Andrews has shown the Advertising Standards Authority.**

rack. I couldn't be bothered to sort the spaghetti at the back, so I left the mains cables to the shelf they serviced and moved the components around. All of a sudden the music opened up a notch again with the only differences being mains cable and the shelf level that the CA640H front end was on. The cable was a TM3 connections shielded item left over from previous experiments, the dearer ones being sold on.

Why I didn't hear this difference before? I don't know, as I must have tried every combination before with what I had, but then again I've changed speakers twice since.

As for interconnects, I did my own pseudo experiments which I think fair enough considering the vast amount of pseudo-science on the topic. I used three cables, two of which I made. They were 22awg solid silver in Teflon, Maplins shielded interconnect and a QED Reference Audio Revolution. The QED was my base reference. I then

listened to the other cables and heard a subtle but apparent difference. Which honestly I wasn't expecting to hear.

The silver wire had its own distinct sound. I'm not much for describing sounds but the analogy would be that the Maplin cable sounded more 'CD' and the silver wire sounded like a good radio broadcast. I could not tell a difference between the Maplins and the QED though. In an effort to make the difference more tangible, I 'listened to the cable' by putting the gain all the way up with no music, then measured the SPL from the speakers from about 5" on an iPhone app (I know...). The static sound with the silver wire hooked up was enough to almost drown out the hum of the transformers. It was much less with the Maplins wire, with the transformer hum being more prominent. The QED had the least sound, mostly the faint hum. Still, during normal listening I couldn't hear the difference between the latter two.

I then put the silver wire inside the

copper braid and guess what? I couldn't tell the difference between the lot of them. Due to my 'experiments' I'm more inclined to attribute these differences more to the configuration of the design and less on the properties of the conductors.

*Conclusion: I would say I'm a cautious convert to the 'yes' argument. My only bone to pick are the pseudo scientific explanations about these differences. Personally, I can't see the obsession with the topic as the differences seem so subtle as to be immaterial, yet I suppose it all depends on the music and components of the user that determines the level of attention to this part of the system. I think Greg 'Letter of the Month' Gilding got it right and good on him.*

*Finally, I think manufacturers shouldn't feel like they need to justify the cost of their accessories with rubbish science. If it's a luxury item, people will buy just because they can and they want to is enough. I think the optimal performance and craftsmanship build of the most expensive cables stopped before thousands of pounds; most of the price is prestige and luxury. If you can afford it (you have to be doing something right to be able to) and take pleasure in owning it, then why not? This might sound like heresy but it's not always about the sound of the system but how it makes you feel when you look at it even before you listen to it. The difficulty admitting to this fact by a lot of people, in my opinion perpetuates and generates a lot of the hi-fi waffle and audiofoolery.*

Regards,

**Jeza (Jeremy Villanueva)**

Thanks for your experiences Jeza. There's long been a tug of war on this topic between those who believe that cables can affect sound, usually because they have heard differences, and those who 'know' that cables can do no such thing, based on electrical engineering principles. The arguments for and against can move into quite esoteric realms fairly quickly, and they can also become 'heated' and move into open warfare. Those who dispute that differences exist believe science is on their side (in truth, the standard 'lumped parameter' electrical model) and this is happening at the moment because of a complaint made to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) that claims made by Russ Andrews for a mains cable were misleading.

And as you are surely aware a reader complained to us that we were misleading readers by stating that sound quality differences exist. But we can clearly hear sound quality differences and being unable to say so

is simply a form of censorship.

I believe readers are aware this is a contentious subject and are able to make up their own minds. The best we can do is to be honest about the situation and I am more than happy to say that performance differences are not measurable in cables with normal levels of capacitance and inductance.

Purely on the basis that listeners commonly describe silver as having a bright sound, copper a more even balance, if often a less insightful one, and carbon as 'laid back', it seems that materials are having an influence. Cable manufacturers and hobbyists say the insulating sheath also affects sound quality and it seems that PTFE is preferred to PVC, to mention one example.

Then we come to screening, the subject of the ground currents when chassis are at slightly different potentials due to mains transformer leakage (etc) and of course resistance to Radio Frequency Interference (RFI). On the latter Russ Andrews tell me that they have submitted evidence that their mains cable reduces RFI and they are awaiting a ruling by the ASA about whether their claims for it making a sound quality improvement are justified. So, you see, it can get a little 'unpleasant' out there when the subject of cables comes up. This is where the fundamentalists jump out of the woodwork and where I don my tin helmet and start digging! **NK**

### DIRECT ROUTE

*I am a long term LP user. I have happily used a Linn LP12 and Ittok arm since 1984. Now, with a Hercules power supply installed a few years ago, the turntable has performed well. The arm has carried a succession of MC cartridges, originally from a much loved Koetsu Wood and currently to a Lyra*

*Dorian. Regrettably a Koetsu replacement has been priced out of my reach, but the Dorian, while brighter and possibly less dynamic, has been adequate for my needs.*

*However, as one of your senior readers, now in retirement, my hand is becoming less and less steady. Even though the table is mounted on a very firm wall shelf, to safely lift the arm from the run out groove without triggering suspension bounce has become something of a problem and I have been looking for a means to stiffen the suspension without destroying the freedom from acoustic feedback the suspension is designed to achieve.*

*Hence I was interested to read recent comments in your magazine and others about the forgotten qualities of Idler and Direct Drive Turntables. I had seen and been impressed by Technics SP10 turntables, which were being introduced here in use in new FM studios in the 1970s. When one turned up on e-bay recently I successfully bid for it.*

*Now the table is mounted on a solid plinth similar to Technics recommendation. One thing I did not realize is that because the Ittok mounting boss is 60mm in diameter, you can't achieve the 211 mm pivot-to-arm bearing distance for the Ittok before it fouls the turntable support frame. Luckily, I had available a Consonance LT100 arm which is slightly longer and had a smaller arm boss and with some juggling could be made to fit. I mounted a virtually brand new Accuphase AC2 cartridge.*

*So now I have two first class turntable systems. Which is better? Actually, meaningful comparison is difficult, because I have two separate turntables, two different arms, and two different cartridges. But I am fairly certain that the Technics system, with the Consonance arm, and Accuphase cartridge is better than the Linn.*



**Technics SP10 Direct Drive turntable, a rave from the 1970s, "is an order better than CD" says John Drew.**

Transients, dynamics, detail, sound staging and perceived distortion are all improved. Bass is more solid and the midrange is superb. In fact, CD played on my Marantz S15 SACD player is different but equal to LP on the Linn setup, but I think the Technics is an order better, and now my preferred source.

**John Drew**  
Melbourne, Australia

Hi John – well there you go! I think 'which is better' type questions such as these are ultimately a bit futile. In truth, it's more about 'which do I prefer?' Now, if you were comparing a Linn with a BSR autochanger, then I think we'd all be a bit surprised if the Linn lost, but the SPI0 (with decent arm) is a superb deck, and so you're comparing two types of excellence. Here then, it's more down to the vagaries of taste. In my opinion, the Technics is punchier, tighter, crisper and more propulsive than the Linn, but the Linn is more beguiling, sweeter and smoother than the Technics. As such, you decide; it's a bit like Sushi versus Aberdeen Angus beef, where I wouldn't be too upset to have to live on either...

Incidentally, on a related subject, the reason we've made such a big fuss about the Technics SLI200 (which is genetically very similar to the SPI0, albeit 'shrunk in the wash') is that it's one of the most misunderstood decks in the hi-fi firmament. There are many audiophiles, schooled on twenty five years of Linn-centred vinyl listening, who simply don't realise that the Technics is a serious turntable, just as the LP12 is. Indeed, I've had conversations with some who still think it's made of plastic, when I think there's likely more plastic in a Linn than a Technics (well, it does have bigger plastic hinges!)

I don't want to startle people; in some ways I prefer the Linn by a long way; it's a great deck. But my point is that so is the Technics, and people who dismiss it are simply ignorant.

Each to their own then, different strokes for different folks. Now, I'm off to listen to my Michell GyroDec, which is an entirely different kettle of fish... **DP**

### TRANSIT DAMAGE

I was both amused and saddened by Adam Smith's experience with the packaging of purchased products on e-bay. However, for such a kindly and benevolent person as your photo would indicate on your opinion page, I was outraged at your suggestion that you would use a piece of Four by Two on the poor innocent party; it should have been



**Technics SLI200 MkV – damaged by the time it reached Melbourne.**

*Six by Four!*

I can however relate that this also happens with professional suppliers. In this instance a turntable supplied to an associate in Melbourne (that's at the bottom part of Australia) which had a platter left on for a 13,000 mile ride! By the time it had reached the poor customer, the platter had worked it's way down the taper of the new bearing, to such an extent that the spindle had to be held vice-like in a pair of 12 inch mole grips whilst the platter was wrenched around in order to release it from the taper. Can you imagine the picture, this on a brand new black SLI200 MkV supplied with SMEV tone arm. This exercise I understand required a few attempts before victory. Needless to say that his new High Precision Bearing was destroyed in the process!

The problem Adam, is that to an extent the 'casual' seller has done his job and got his money. Proper and correct packaging is probably the last thing on his mind as he goes out for a few beers to celebrate his sale.

**Mike New**  
Sydney

### VINYL REPLY

I would very much appreciate your advice on the best direction to take my vinyl replay. This is currently – Thorens 125 Mk2 with SME 3009 Improved arm and a Linn Adikt cartridge. Phono stage is a Rega Fono. The arm and deck date from the mid 1970s and the deck was fettled a few years ago by the dealer I have bought most of my recent gear from, and I have also fitted various tweaks from SRM-Tech which have enhanced the sound appreciably. Nevertheless, I find the sound has too much treble emphasis.

I suspect the main issue is with the arm but am also not sure how the Thorens now compares with modern decks.

Would you advise upgrading the arm (and if so to what) and possibly the phono and cartridge as well or would I really be better off retiring the Thorens. I am well disposed to retaining the

Thorens as I like it's looks but only if you think it viable to do so.

My main listening is classical but also folk, some jazz and light rock.

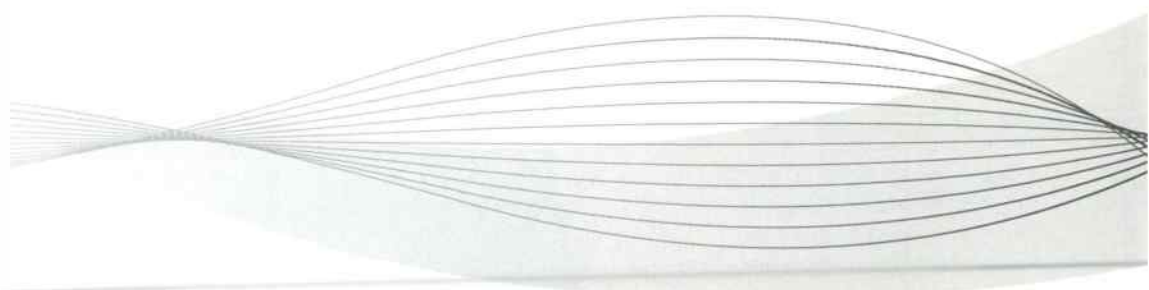
Many thanks,  
**Hugh Marks**

It's an easy one, this. Do you want to retain the TD125.2's period look and feel? If so, then you'd be best to buy a modern deck and use your Thorens in your second system, as it won't look good with a Rega RB251 mounted to it, complete with Funk Firm Achromat! The deck itself is excellent, and with a serious service and decent modern arm mounted (Origin Live Silver, for example) it would yield super results; we're talking close to LP12 performance here.

Yet rather like modern wide diameter alloy wheels and low profile tyres on classic cars, I can't help thinking you're spoiling something. I kept my 180bhp Triumph TR8 roadster on its original 13" rims and 185/70 section bicycle tyres for precisely this reason; it was a bit slippery in the wet (and the dry for that matter), but it looked right and drove as its maker intended. I rather feel you should do the same here, too. The TD125.2 is a stunning period piece in my view, and so should be allowed to retain its dignity. Think how Roger Moore would look in a hoodie, and you'll surely agree things are best left as they should be!

What to buy? Depends on your budget; I still think the GyroDec takes some beating at around £1,200 - but there are a number of great decks out there. If you want maximum sound per pound, then buy a Technics SLI200, get out the (proverbial) hacksaw and fit a modern Rega derivative arm, such as a Michell Tecnoarm, and replace your Rega Fono phono stage with something like an Icon Audio PSI.2; this combination will really get your bass bins moving...

**DP**



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**Thorens TD125 – a fine deck that deserves a good arm and cartridge.**

### JOY THROUGH TRIODE

Hi team and in particular to Noel. Why? On the strength of his somewhat favourable review of the TRI TRV-88SE valve amplifier in the July issue, I ordered one immediately! OK, it wasn't a totally off the cuff decision. I've been wanting to create a new heart for my hi-fi system for a little while now and I'd been mulling over the idea for a fully valve based amplifying system ever since auditioning the fabulous TRI TRV-4SE preamp in my home some months ago. This wonderful bit of kit, when connected with a set of SlinkyLink interconnects to my highly upgraded Jaycar headphone amp (Black Gates, Dale resistors and an Audio-gd HDAM) driving a set of Sennheiser HD 650s made the amp and cans sound like a million bucks. I simply could barely believe such bass and tonal definition coming from the Sennheisers. Such an incredibly smooth and detailed balance from top to bottom.

I began to wonder if the integrated amps also had such qualities and so only weeks ago I was able to borrow a TRI TRV-34SE integrated amp, the EL34 tubed version. Not being certain that either the EL34s or the KT88 would drive my KEF Q7s very well, this would be a good test. I was impressed!

Yes, the EL34s were a touch rolled in the top end, exacerbated by the KEFs not having a particularly extended top end (although I'm very aware of this with them, I still love so much of what they bring musically to the party, so to speak) and lower bass was a little softened, the sheer magic in the midrange, the glorious openness and communication was enough for me to make the decision to go for the KT88 powered version.

Duly ordered, they were excitedly brought home to my living room just five days ago and have already notched up some 40 hours of running in time. This is my first brand new out-of-the-box amplifier in some thirty of thirty seven years in audio, so this is a huge treat for

me.

Gee, what can I say that Noel hasn't already said! This amp is an emotionally communicative joy and utterly addictive to whatever is playing through it. I've actually had to wait until the current CD finished playing to continue writing this letter, two visits to my listening seat left my laptop in mid sentence, Tanita Tikaram's Ancient Heart CD having me utterly entranced, the strings on Valentine Heart so luscious and expansive and her voice and piano are so gloriously emotive ... what's a bloke to do? The swagger and swinging beat of Twist In My Sobriety draws me like a magnet into the tune as a whole. None of my music sounds like it ever has before, a whole collection to now explore and rediscover anew. The KT88s drive the KEFs very well, bass is taut and punchy, midrange so open and clear, yet the sheer musicality of this wonderful musical instrument makes it very difficult to talk in the usual hi-fi terms, there's just ... music ... effortlessly. How incredibly beautiful!

The TRI TRV-88SE seems to work very nicely driving the KEFs with 2m lengths of SlinkyLink speaker cable, these truly excellent cables making a highly synergistic match with the

SlinkyLink interconnects. I find both items bring an amazing level of coherence to the sonic picture and this matches perfectly with the of-a-piece brilliance of the amplifier.

So Noel, thank you for helping to make a decision so right that I can barely imagine now not having made it. A truly fabulous heart to my new hi-fi system, it awaits a new set of even better matched speakers when I leave my current home for a smaller one in the near future. I did want to hear a set of the Triangle Antals or their slightly smaller brothers with the TRI, but it seems the importer has given up on them and I'm out of luck there, unless I can pick up a second hand pair. For now the KEFs portray plenty of soundstage in both width and depth and when I use my DAC as a preamp into the Pre-In sockets on the TRI amp, the walls and hi-fi system totally vanish even more. Actually, it's almost spookily eerie in a virtual reality way, my lounge being replaced with the venue of wherever the Rutter Requiem was recorded, the soprano standing in space and surrounded by the choir and orchestra, the acoustics clearly heard from the roof of the venue. That's really something in my book!

Just one thing please, Noel. I would love to hear what ICs and speaker cables you use in your reviews, for the Triangle Antals to sound so wonderful in your lounge they must have been connected to the TRI amp with something rather good, no? Balanced, cable wise, yes? I find it useful as a potential purchaser considering the reviewed item to have an idea of what sort of, say, speaker cables may be a good match with this amplifier. Considering that the SlinkyLinks are made from twin lengths of very fine pure silver with an air dielectric and that they may not carry high current levels if required, maybe there is an even better match with my chosen speakers, or your Antals? I would like to hear your



**The Triode Corporation TRV-88SE is "an emotionally communicative joy" says Christopher White.**

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thoughts on this, as other members of Hi-Fi World do tend to address the associated bits n bobs in their reviews. Is this not important to you, Noel? Just asking.

Otherwise, I am in great appreciation to you (and the team in general, as I so enjoy picking up my copy of Hi-Fi World each month!) for, in a way, transferring your great enthusiasm for this amplifier into my own lounge every day! A set of Shuguang Treasure Series Black Bottle KT88s are in the pipeline, maybe TJ Full Music 12AU and AX7s as well.

I adore this musical treasure!

Kind regards,

**Christopher White**  
New Zealand.

Ah, a convert to the bottle – the glowing bottle that is. Editor David Price will, however, suspect I wrote the letter, your praise is so effusive. He does not believe I am able to bring joy to readers (!).

But really, it can be quite a shock to hear a good valve amp and I'm glad you like it and find it as beguiling as I did. Valve amps come with a wide variety of presentations these days but the Triode Corporation TRV-88SE was classy – and KT88s usually have a bit more kick to their sound than the EL34.

On the 'bit an' bobs' side I commonly use more than one system, often one at our office listening room and one at home. And I swap around items within them. This makes for quite a variety of products and to avoid confusion and also because space is short, I tend not to go into this too deeply. You will see that I now always use a valve amplifier and at least one transistor amplifier when reviewing loudspeakers, for example, and my valve amplifier at home is a now-unavailable World Audio Design 300B, tuned up with special parts. This makes for a rather confusing panorama of components.

Loudspeaker cables? I like the laid back sound of Van den Hul's inexpensive Royal Jade hybrid cable, with its saturated carbon layer. But beware that this cable is a bit too laid back for many people. **NK**

### NAIM UPGRADE

I use Bright Star Isonodes and they do make a noticeable difference. I was a bit concerned about using them between speakers and stands, I thought that they may make the speakers unstable so I e-mailed Bright Star who recommended using them under the speakers as the compress and there isn't a problem with stability.

The CI headphone and power



**An interesting hybrid: a Naim power amp driven by an Icon Audio valve phono stage.**

units with HD250s are excellent. When I first got them I played 'Kind of Blue' Miles Davis CD and got lost in the music - it was like being at a live performance. I got my LP12 fully funk'd and still an Ittok II with a Dynavector 10x5 cartridge and I now get a lot more music and detail from vinyl. I use Missing Link mains cables and interconnects for a neutral, clear and open sound.

My Naim NAC 32 and P160 I've had since new along with Harbeth HB MkII monitors. My room is 20' x 13' and I like a wide range of music. Vocals and acoustic and lead guitar sound good as do other individual instruments but I must admit the top end does tend to shriek at times and was it PR who described the old Naim sound as Technicolour mono?

I'd like your advice on how to improve the sound without losing the expression and emotion from the vocals and guitars. I do like the Naim sound. NK has said he has had success using valve preamps with Naim power amps so what do you think about an Icon PS1, which I could use with the NAP160? Naim has suggested upgrading the preamp to a 102. Or maybe an integrated, the Nait XS perhaps? Any advice would be welcome. I have about £1400.

**Steve Wright**



**Use Composite video output to view disc menus.**

Hi Steve. Much of the Naim sound comes from their preamps; they are precise but very analytical and somewhat cold in nature. The power amps are more open, lucid and powerful. Put a valve preamp in front of a Naim power amplifier and you end up with a surprisingly nice hybrid combo. I was quite taken aback by

the synergy here. I would say an Icon Audio PS1 would be a fine choice, but be aware that early versions of this valve phono stage suffered rolled off treble at half volume, due to impedance mismatching betwixt the control and following internal circuitry. And whilst I find the PS1 a fine affordable stage, Rafael Todes (who plays violin in the Allegri String Quartet) insists the PS3 is the model with magic. I feel sure you will find the PS1 a fine choice for your system. Just bear in mind that if you have a really fine ear then the PS3 may be best. I hope that is not confusing. As always, do try and get an audition if possible. **NK**

### BLU-RAY SCREEN

I've bought The Virtual Haydn, a well-reviewed collection of disks. Unfortunately they're Blu-ray, thus unplayable on my CD player. I wondered whether you could recommend a Blu-ray player which does not have to be part of a 'home cinema' system. I'd prefer not even to have a screen at all in the hi-fi room: just bung in the disk and play, as I do for CD, but I recognise this might not be possible so should be grateful if you would suggest a suitable screen to deal with the menus so I can play the audio disks.

With best wishes,

**Jim Thorpe**

Hi Jim. That's easy enough. Most Blu-ray players have a low quality Composite Video output, from a Yellow coloured phono socket. This can be fed to a cheap screen if you so wish, since most have a Composite input. Alternatively, you may want to get a modern computer screen or TV with an HDMI input, as most Blu-ray players have an HDMI output too (assuming you do not use this for audio).

You will need a screen to navigate Blu-ray menus, even those on music Blu-rays which sometimes have elaborate menu schemes.

A large, local electrical store may just have a cheap mini TV or such like, perhaps for a children's bedroom, that will do the job. **NK**

### THE RIGHT TRACKER

Being a mite too enthusiastic, having recently set about refurbishing and slightly tweaking a nice old Thorens

TD150 I bought in a car boot many years back for 12 quid, I "lashed out" and bought a nicely fettled SME 3009 Series II Improved arm to go on it!

Wise? foolish? Let me explain my motivation which is pivotal to my continuing interest in the sport of hi-fi. I remember a seminal moment in my hi-fi history, when I was about 12 or so (late 60s) when the son of my father's colleague proudly showed me his Thorens and SME set up. Boy was I impressed. It looked and sounded amazing. The thing just exuded quality, and not a little mystery, a sort of gateway to something I didn't quite understand, but which seemed thrilling and just "wow!"

Whilst I liked music at that age, I had no real concept of high fidelity – never mind stereo! My music priorities were more focused on finding a steel lamppost to stand next to whilst tuning my prized, but very small and none to hi-fi, "tranny", so I could pick up the pirates signal and get my fix of "underground" music (Radio Scotland 242 meters on the Medium Waveband was one fave.)

Anyway enough looking back, so what now? Well a Shure V15 Type III cartridge would seem to be the correct recipe. Well tradition suggests? However, being a solid Hi-Fi World reader of many years I just know you guys can give me the dependable, quality heads up (as long as you don't tell me I should have gotten a Rega instead! I know you will appreciate my rose tinted motivation for the Thorens SME combo). Yes, tradition only goes so far, I still need to get the best from it. So what are my cartridge options with the SME/Thorens?

I am presently running Meridian 101 with 105 monoblocks on very short speaker cables into Gale 401as (some ESL57s are in the wings awaiting their own fettling too).

I listen to anything these days. My interest was underground/rock in the 60s but is pretty catholic now, from jazz to folk, rock, world, even including classical.

Thanks for listening.

Keep up the great mix of high end and practical end, and the occasional controversy. Always a great read even at the price I pay for it out here in Oz. Cheers,

**George Davidson,  
Sydney, Australia**

And thanks for your letter George. I always like to hear from Oz because it brings back good memories – a great place it is, especially when the UK is cold, wet and dark and I can recall the warmth. But on to hi-fi!

The SME 3009 Series II Improved is 'ringy' by today's standards and really needs a smooth, easy going

cartridge. I would suggest a Shure M97Xe, but this does have an obviously warm balance. Then there's the ever lovely Goldring 1042, with its high compliance, great stylus and treble resolution and solid bass. Or finally there is the Ortofon 2M Black, a cartridge that is forensically accurate, clear and detailed. The Shure is 'old school' but smooth and easy on the ear. The other two are far more modern, the Goldring having more real zest as well as accuracy, whilst the Ortofon is a precision reproducer, with good dynamics and plenty of pace. Any of them will suit the dear old SME and give you a great retro deck. **NK**

Having fiddled around with cartridges in SME3009s, I'd say the aforementioned Goldring G1042 is the best partner – it's decently weighty at the bottom end, making up for the SME's somewhat lightweight bass a tad. Set it up carefully and it should sound smooth and musical. **DP**

### STRUGGLING

I've been struggling for a few months to find a satisfactory upgrade path for my current system. I'd love views on what to consider.

My current system is: NAS Spacedeck with fully Origin modded RB250, Lyra Dorian, Tri-chord Dino (with power supply) and Heed power supply. Amplifier is Audio Research VS155 and 'speakers Reference 3A Dulcets (on Appollo AZ stands and some granite chopping boards). Using a Isotek mains block and mostly Transparent Audio

have some rather spongy floor boards. Music tastes range from weird modern electronic stuff (dubstep and Detroit techno) to pretty straight 50's bebop with a sideline in jazz funk, soul and even some soft rock.

I have a problem with distortion on very sharp sounds on modern vinyl. It only happens on 12s that are cut very fat (not sure what the technical term is here!) and tends to be drums that are worst affected. I've spent some time with my dealer trying to remedy this without much success – he reduced the level a bit but some of the same vinyl had similar issues even on their perfectly dialled system. Is this issue familiar?

So I'm tempted to put a second arm on the Spacedeck – an SME IV or maybe something from Origin – and run the Dorian on the new arm for top performance and use my existing arm with a more forgiving cartridge for the few troublesome 12s. Does this sound like a bad idea?

Would love to upgrade the phono stage to either Icon or Puresound valves but will this cost me much punch?

Would also love to try the ANT Kora but can't find a London area dealer who carries it. I have tried to listen to the Anatek MCI but it had way too much gain for my system. I run the Dino on a low output MM setting although the high output MC setting is also suitable for most recordings.

I could find £2-3k for these upgrades and to address my distortion issue.

Any help appreciated.

Thanks,

**Simon Wilden.**



**A blast from the past, Shure's M97Xe has a warm sound.**

cabling with Black Rhodium DCT speaker cables.

I feel that the Dino and my tonearm are the weak links currently. I love the combination of valve texture and solid-state style grunt I get from the amp, but just want more. More richness in the midband, more solid bass, bit more definition in all areas.

My room is pretty small, 12ft x 13ft approx., and is carpeted but does

Hi Simon. Twelve inch, 45rpm singles are cut with enormous bass and you can see the huge groove excursions with the eye. It sounds like your Dorian is mistracking these cuts where groove amplitude is greatest. It managed 65µm in our tests, where 90µm is possible on disc with the sort of cuts you are playing. To track the highest excursions you will need a good quality Moving Magnet (MM)



**Big Macs' have a powerful sound.**

cartridge, although Moving Coils (MC) from the likes of Ortofon are also able to track high level bass cuts. Any Goldring or Nagaoka cartridge should stay in the groove and it strikes me a Goldring 1042 tracking at 1.8gms would suit. The arm you have is plenty good enough not to hinder any cartridge in this task, so an arm upgrade will help little, if at all.

Your Audio Research VS155 tube amplifier is one of the punchiest available. The Quads (e.g. 11-eighty) are also fast and clean and dynamic, whilst being more svelte, but they aren't as brutal. Otherwise, valves go the other way, toward sounding liquid smooth and easy. That's until you start using the big power triodes like the 845 and 211, then the issue becomes the output transformer. With a good one (read: big and very expensive) they'll blast you across the room; solid-state doesn't come close. But you are looking at big prices here. I suggest you try and get a listen, all the same. Alternatives are big McIntosh tube amps and more powerful Audio Research designs, but the latter in particular aren't so subtle. Of course you may alleviate some of the symptoms by a bit a 'tube rolling', replacing the stock 6550s with premium versions, like those from Svetlana.

All-tube phono stages do not have solid-state 'bite', but they can have more heft at low frequencies. David will elaborate on your options.  
**NK**

Given that you're going to run your OL modded Rega, possibly with a Goldring G1042, as your 12" single arm, then you want a really tasty arm for your Dorian and a phono stage to match. The SME IV is just such a thing; Rafael Todes uses a V (same difference, almost!) on his SpaceDeck and loves it, although he's the first to admit it has a certain mechanical quality to the way it goes about making music. Other, more mellifluous options include the latest Origin Live Illustrious 3c, a fantastic all round pivoted arm, and the Audio Origami PU7, which is just as delightful but errs more towards the flowing, gentle unipivot sound.

As for phono stages, my instinct would be for the ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd. The Icon Audio tube stages are lovely, and a touch more expansive and open in some respects, but less grippy in the bass, and slightly less propulsive too. Overall, with your Lyra, my instinct would be for the PU7/ANT Audio combo. **DP**

### **BACK TO VINYL**

*After more time than I would like to remember, I have finally taken the plunge and decided to start listening to*

*vinyl again.*

*My system consists of Naim CDX, Chord CPA 3200 Pre Amp, Chord SPM 1200C Power Amp, Wilson Benesch Orator Speakers with cabling being a combination of Chord, Audioquest and Black Slink all supplied previously by Doug Brady.*

*Just a quick plug for Doug and his team of thoroughly professional colleagues. Nice to see that the customer still comes first in some places.*

*My dilemma now, having recently purchased a Michell Gyro Se on a well known internet auction site, closely followed by both new Technoarm and a Whest One, I am now in the position of looking for a MC cartridge.*

*Confused doesn't even begin to describe how I feel in making a decision. You appear to regularly recommend the Audio Technica AT-OC9 ML111. According to Brady's, Lyra cartridges work well with the Technoarm. I've even contacted Michell themselves, who use the Benz Micro wood when demonstrating. Where do you draw the line with prices in this game?*

*Now, in your latest edition, you give the Wood SL a thoroughly glowing review. I realise that as with all equipment, demonstration is essential. However, name a dealer who stocks everything? And I'm wary of carting around the Gyro Se.*

*My taste in music varies from 70's*



**Benz Micro Wood – a great sounding cartridge says reviewer Tony Bolton.**

*Rock to Blues and Easy Listening. Don't tell my dad who always said one day I'd realise that the old music was the best. Many thanks,*

**Dave Colgan**

*Hi Dave - my choice simply comes down to the rest of your system, which isn't backward in coming forward. As such, the Lyra – brilliant*

though it is in many respects – has a rising treble and thus falls out at the first hurdle. The Audio Technica isn't the world's most laid back either, and that leaves us with the lovely, and slightly less upfront Benz. For best results, make sure your Gyro is perfectly level and the springs are set up meticulously so they don't bounce unevenly. **DP**

### BRITISH CABLE?

Dear David. Recently you helped me decide on equipment to build my new hi-fi system so I was wondering could you suggest any British Entry Level cables that would be good to use, I've seen Black Rhodium in the Hi-Fi World, what do you think?

My system comprises Rega P3-24 turntable, AT95 cartridge, Icon Audio PSI MK11 MM/IMC Phono Stage and Cambridge Audio 650C, Icon Audio Stereo 25 Mk11 amplifier and Royd Eden Speakers.

Thanks,

**John Smee**  
Haverfordwest, Wales

Hi John - a pair of Black Rhodium Rhythm interconnects (£50/1m) would hit the spot nicely. When your boat comes in, look towards an Audio Technica AT-OC9 MLIII cartridge for your Rega; it's perfectly capable of getting great results from it, and the P3 certainly deserves better than the humble AT95E! **DP**

### THE BEST FROM SACD

I have a great two-channel set-up which includes an Audiocom-modified Marantz CD player (wonderful machine!), Meridian 501 pre, LFD PA1 power amp (plus a Funk Firm Vector TT and LFD MM phono stage). Speakers are



**An Onkyo PR-SC886 AV preamp can do it all. It is a great hi-fi AV solution.**

Harbeth HL III.

I've also just got an Oppo DV-980H universal player and that's encouraging me to buy SACDs – mostly classical and either 3-channel (RCA Living Stereo series) or 4-channel (Pentatone).

At the moment I play the SACDs in stereo, but would love to get the



**Is Black Rhodium loudspeaker cable the answer?**

full benefit of the other channels. That means I need a suitable receiver on top of all my other amps and three more speakers.

My problem is this: can I integrate such a system into my existing one or do I need to have a separate multi-channel system?

So can you recommend a great sounding receiver and three speakers (2 rear, one central for those 3-channel RCA and Mercury Living Presence SACDs) that would integrate well with my Harbeths? I've read that the speakers should all be the same so they're voiced the same – but obviously having old Harbeths that's out of the question.

Here's hoping what you suggest is available here in New Zealand.

Many thanks too for all your help you've offered in the past.

**Reza Azam**  
New Zealand

(just leave the receiver power amps unused; they won't blow up) and Harbeth loudspeakers for stereo 'as you know it', ignoring how the receiver preamp may slightly influence sound quality. The remaining channels will then need additional loudspeakers. You can then hook up the Oppo DV-980H via HDMI to get full surround-sound from SACD.

Obviously, with this and any other arrangement you will not have matched loudspeakers. The only solution here is to get more Harbeths. How about new HL-P3s for the main channels, relegating your oldies to surround channels?

In my experience Marantz make the best sounding receivers, closely followed by Onkyo. Sad to say, I could not recommend any other brand as being 'hi-fi'. Their internal transistor amplifiers commonly sound vague and unengaging, in true budget solid-state fashion, because AV receivers are very heavily cost-cut, junk audio affairs using the cheapest components and mass manufacturing techniques.

The best sound would come from a dedicated preamp like the Onkyo PR-SC886 driving tube amps., something I tried with great success in the July 09 review.

Also, if you want to spin Blu-ray audio discs and concerts, something that is well worth doing, you need to upgrade the Oppo to a BDP-83 or get a Cambridge 650BD, both of which are based on the Taiwanese Mediatek platform. You will then be able to play 24/192 PCM Blu-ray recordings in addition to SACDs. Sound quality isn't better, so much as a bit different (more analytical, less organic), or the many 24/96 concerts appearing on Blu-ray, many of which are have great sound quality, largely because the original recording was a High-Def affair and there's no studio

Hi Reza. You can either buy an AV receiver, or an AV preamp like the Onkyo PR-SC886 I reviewed in our July 09 issue. I suspect an AV receiver with Preamp Outputs you will find most suitable. The front Left and Right channel preamp outputs can then feed your LFD power amplifier

mixing to mess things up, meaning you get a very live and intense sound. Many of these concerts make your average music CD sound bland and barren.

I think you can get most of this kit in New Zealand. You will enjoy the extra channels too. Done properly surround-sound can be very engaging and real fun. **NK**

### OUT OF BIRMINGHAM

*I bought your November copy at Birmingham airport the other day and liked it a lot and so have subscribed to your on-line service. I would like your help.*

*Earlier this year I replaced my exhausted Celef PE1s with B&W 805s, had my Linn LP12 serviced and updated and had my Copland CSA14 serviced. In addition I changed the 'wires' with some Russ Andrews goodies. I am very happy with the music the system makes and now want to improve the digital side of my system, an aging Philips CD850. Apart from listening to my CDs I want to download some of B&W's and Linn's studio masters and listen to Linn Radio and the BBC's streams once they have sorted out their quality issues.*

*On a recent trip to the UK I visited a local hi-fi shop and listened to their Cyrus 6 and 8 SE ranges and, to be frank, I was not too impressed. They suggested adding a DAC to my CD850 and my PC. I also auditioned a Linn Akurate DS which sounded nice. However, I didn't think it was very user friendly and thought it was a lot of money.*

*Would you go down the DAC route or are there alternatives to this? My budget is in £1,000 to £1,500 range. Thanking you in advance,*

**Peter Wicksteed**

**Las Palmas de Gran Canaria**

Hi Peter - I'd suggest that, for the moment, you buy a good basic DAC like the £399 Musical Fidelity M1. I've used this in a number of situations and it's a really, really impressive performer. Don't be put off by its low price; I've heard £1,000 machines struggle to beat it. It will be a massive upgrade on your Philips, which has a good CD transport but is off the pace, DAC-wise. Expect a far more spacious and open soundstage, with smooth airy treble and a more supple, tactile bass. The clever thing is of course that it can accept computer audio via its USB input, although my listening tests, via an Apple MacBook Pro, show that it sounds best running an optical cable out of the Mac direct into the M1 DAC. The reason for this, I speculate, is that the TOSLINK optical lead removes all computer-



**Musical Fidelity M1 DAC - I've heard £1,000 machines struggle to beat it, says David.**

derived electrical noise. However you connect it up though, you'll find a fine sound quality that's a world apart from stock computer sound. **DP**

### ADVICE

*Hello David. Could you give me some unbiased advice please?*

*My system is 1985 Linn Sondek LP12, Basik Plus/K9, NAD 3120 (1986), Boss BR900CD (I play the drums which feeds into this CD recorder mixer), M-Audio audiophile BX-8a monitors, and Marantz SA7001 CD player.*

*I have a dilemma; I can either pay £950 to get the Majik PSU fitted to the LP12 (because there is a funny smell coming from the deck), a service (reset), a new motor, a new Linn Adikt cartridge, 45 rpm adaptor, Quadraspire wall shelf for the Linn or buy a new Rega Planar 3 with the Rega cartridge, ext PSU and Rega wall mounted shelf which will be £750.*

*As the Linn LP12 does not appear to be as good as it used to be (i.e. there are other decks just as good), which will give me the very best sound and is it worth another £200 to pay on the Linn compared to the Rega?*

*Or would a Technics SL1210 (the semi pro one) be a better bet at roughly the same price as the Rega?*

*Which would hold its value better in the future, the Linn in repaired/upgraded form or the new Rega 3 or technics SL1210?*

*I want a really professional sound from vinyl, so want the very best sound for the money available and pitch stability (good speed stability/timing) is important as I play the drums*

*Kind regards,*

**Michael Moore**

Okay - if pitch stability is your absolute priority, then get an SL1200 - fitted with a tweaked Rega arm (I like the Audio Origami RB250),

Timestep bearing and power supply. You could fit any good arm, but the secret is to fit a good arm and not use the stock one! A modded Technics will beat either of the other decks in terms of pitch stability, although the Linn is actually very good in this respect for a belt drive, it must be said. Not sure about which would hold its value; I'd buy it as an investment in music. If it's money you want to make, buy a one ounce gold Kruggerand! **DP**



**For a tweaked Rega arm try an Audio Origami RB250.**

### MAC MINI

*As much as NK's reply clears up many points on the Mac Mini Toslink connection, he makes one very large mistake. No Mac with USB 2.0 connections is physically or software limited to 16bit 44.1 - 48kHz through hardware. If a Mac (any Mac) has USB 2.0 and OSX 10.5 or higher it is capable of outputting up to 24bit 96kHz via USB. The limitation NK found with his Cambridge Audio DAC Magic, is the DAC Magic itself. While the actual Wolfson DAC is 24/96 capable, the USB receiver on the DAC Magic is limited to 16/48 max.*

**Brian Alvarez**

### WRONG AGAIN

*In the Mail section of your October 2010 issue NK replied to several response letters regarding the Mac Mini. I am afraid he has given wrong information again. He states "The Intel Mac Mini has selectable fixed output*

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sample rates of 44.1, 48 and 96 Hz via the optical output but only 44.1 and 48 kHz via USB, at least with the a 96 kHz capable Cambridge Audio DAC Magic attached as a test mule."

The fact is that the problem lies with the Cambridge Audio DAC Magic which does not support 96 kHz via its USB input but only through its coax and optical digital inputs. I run a USB to a Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini and do indeed receive 96 kHz via the USB connection.

Best regards,  
**Mike Kulfon**

Hi Chaps. That the Cambridge Audio DAC restricts USB performance had already been discussed and was known about I presumed. I alluded to the limitation by saying "at least with the 96kHz capable Cambridge Audio DAC Magic attached as a test mule". In other words, the Cambridge appears to be 96kHz capable, but it is not via S/PDIF.

Once again though, I am fascinated by your knowledge and experience of using a Mac Mini for audio, not something I would have considered, and feel sure that what you say will be of interest to many other readers. There's nothing like beating the subject (and me) to death! **NK**

## EYE OPENER

Experiences that I've had with my hi-fi system over the past six months have really been an eye opener for me and, I think, changed my way of thinking regarding how I view upgrades, reviews and listening.

My current system is Teac T1 transport (with Trichord Clock 4 and upgraded power supply, Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 21 DAC, Cyrus Pre X, PSXR power supply, Rotel RB1092 Power Amp, Linn Kabers. Cabling is a mix of Russ Andrews, Ixos Ixotica and Linn.

My latest 'adventure' began when I saw a Townshend TAS65 CD player for sale. Having once owned a Townshend Rock turntable/Naim Nait/Heybrook HBI system that I remember extremely fondly, I decided to explore further. Reviews spoke very highly of the TAS65 CD, talking about its solid bass, high resolution playback and plenty more besides. So I arranged to demo the player at the dealer who advised that I bring my current CD and DAC for comparison purposes.

My journey from Staffordshire to Surrey was a tedious three and a half hours but was tempered by my excitement and enthusiasm for what I was surely about to hear. My wife kindly agreed to join me to keep me company... actually I think it was to keep an eye on

PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE



### The (new) Moc Mini will output 96kHz from Toslink.

proceedings and also the purse strings!

Arrival at the dealers was met with coffee, a warm welcome and me drooling at not only the Townshend but also the racks of Naim, Linn and other gorgeous pieces of hi-fi. We settled in and fired up the Townshend which had been warmed up prior to our arrival and started to listen.

Well damn me, what a disappointment: it sounded rather flat, a little drab and dare I say it, rather ordinary. I persevered and played a clutch of discs that I had with me, but everything sounded the same, detail was merely OK but certainly not great, bass was admittedly tuneful but nothing special... I was gutted.

At this point the dealer suggested we compare my old but trusted Teac/Tri-Vista through the same system, we cabled up and off we went. It absolutely wiped the floor with the Townshend, detail was crisp, clear...very clear, bass was tighter, bigger and just as tuneful and the whole thing was way way better. Even the dealer raised his eyebrow and complimented the sound.

Then disaster struck, the sound went out on one channel. We checked cables, leads etc but nothing worked... the Tri Vista was on the blink! So our demo was cut short and we started to pack up for home. Before we left though the dealer offered to play us some of the latest Naim CD players through the demo system whilst we had a last coffee. I don't recall the models but they were certainly expensive...! I do recall the wife saying "don't get any ideas" as the dealer set it up.

Again though, with my demo discs, we were somewhat disappointed, the Teac/Tri Vista had sounded better than the new Naims, the dealer looked

somewhat bemused, embarrassed and had to admit the same. We thanked them for their time, kindness, patience and coffee then headed home. Three and a half hours wondering what the hell was wrong with the Tri Vista!

So, next step, to get it fixed. I contacted Musical Fidelity who were helpful but rather expensive. I then Googled for alternative options. I found a company called J.S.Audio, who appeared to be well versed in Musical Fidelity products. A call was made and a deal done for me to get the DAC to them, the repairs to be done but also some upgrades to be carried out at the same time.

I got the DAC back a couple of weeks later, it worked fine, back on two channels, but I wasn't so sure about the sound, it had lost a little something. A further call was made and they were horrified that I wasn't happy. It went back again with a clearer brief as to what I was looking for.

Two weeks later and it was back at home. Well, I simply couldn't believe what I was hearing, it was simply outstanding. The whole system had moved up to a totally different level. Bristling with fine detail (some never heard before), a truly ridiculous soundstage but most of all an almost holographic imaging that I've only ever heard once before at a show through £20,000 worth of high end system.

I have never before in twenty years of hi-fi interest had such a huge and tangible upgrade – all for £600! I'm listening to discs almost daily and hearing so much more music, detail and depth like never before.

So, either my system was lacking something before, or maybe the upgrades have waved a magic wand



Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 21 DAC, tweaked by J.S.Audio was a "huge and tangible upgrade" says Dave Mayer.

# Definition

Stereo Sound  
Grand Prix  
Award 2009

Definition DC10T

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine

Definition DC10T

Image Hi-Fi  
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# TANNOY



over proceedings. Or, and this is the interesting thing, the Townshend wasn't as good as the reviews/reviewers made it out to be (it was a £3000 player!) but also are the new Naims really that good, is the new equipment on the shelves today any better than what was available years ago?

My experiences have taught me a really valuable lesson. Don't get sucked in by the reviews, the brand names and status. Maybe, just maybe, the potential lies within what you already have, it just needs exploiting.

Food for thought?

Kind regards,

**Dave Mayer**

Food for thought indeed. Ultimately, you have to use your ears. No amount of reading glowing reviews of products will get you to where you want to go; it's a case of listening for yourself. Of course we try very hard to be accurate and open in our reviews, and indeed back them up with measured performance which is a tremendous load in terms of the time it takes, but ultimately it's you who's buying it and it's you who should listen before you so do! Magazines can only frame the debate, and help you make your final shortlist. **DP**

### ONCE IN A WHILE

I have just bought the December issue of *HFW*. That happened sixteen years later my last appointment with the magazine and I discovered that the original good philosophy has not been changed at all.

I am really impressed of that. I am impressed about the coherence of the "message" kept along these years, coherence that I have really appreciated.

As sixteen years ago, the magazine is still with strong roots on valves equipment and with a good number of pages dedicated to reader questions and vinyl records. Even the pages dedicated to old favourites, the classics, are surprisingly populated with the same classic equipment of sixteen years ago! I am talking about the Garrards turntables or the Yamaha M1000 for example.

That is continuity! I would be glad to find your approach elsewhere; the world should be more stable!

After this long introduction, here I am with some questions. My playback system consists mainly of old equipment produced during the eighties and even if my feelings with them are like that of old friends, I believe that some of them need to be up to date even if 'cum grano salis' (Latin for 'with a grain of salt', or 'some little intelligence' Wikipedia tells me! - NK).

The digital spinner is Meridian

200 transport plus 203 DAC while the record playback is by original Roksan Xerxes with Artemiz tonearm and Shelter 501 MkII cartridge. The preamplifier is Motif MC-7 dual mono and the power delivered to Monitor Audio Studio 20 loudspeakers is by Spectral DMA-50. Both interconnect cable and loudspeaker cables were made by Ensemble of Switzerland with some Monster Cable and Van den Hul. Last but not least I still own a Janis Interface 1A power/crossover amplifier with its dedicated 15 inches woofer.

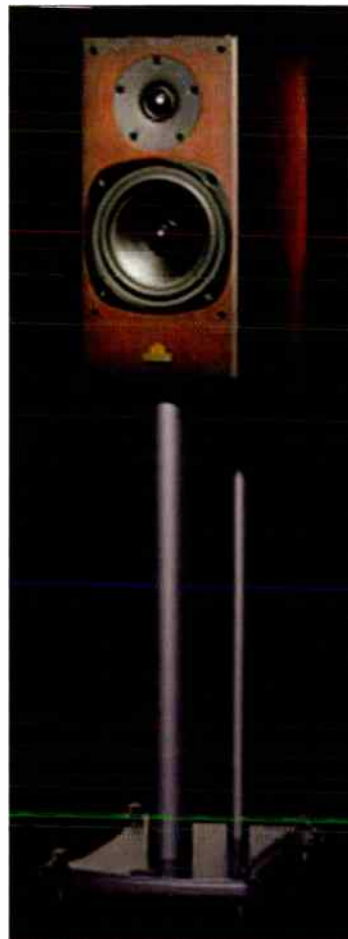
At the time, that stuff represented a good deal of money that, taking into accounts my actual circumstances and family priorities, I am not willing to spend anymore simply because I believe it is not necessary. I shall tell you why. Last September I went to Top Audio Video show held in Milan, Italy and even considering the presence of most important and well known brands in the world, I was not impressed at all of what I heard. Please do not get me wrong, what I mean is that at my mature age, I am not impressed anymore of the cannons and seismic frequency reproduced by some systems and neither the brute force of the very big and very expensive offering has captured my soul, even if this type of loudspeaker and amplifiers may find legion of estimators.

Please do not think I am getting mad about what I am going to write here below but, I was really fascinated by the sound of music, and I repeat the sound of music, coming from a little room where pair of diminutive loudspeaker on stands linked to an integrated amplifier and CD player was in action.

After few minutes of beautiful string quartets reproduced so musically I was not able to resist saying to the Italian representative that his system was one of the very few musical system at the show. Please note this is absolutely not intended as a sale boost for these companies, simply because I have no authority, but the system I am talking about was comprehensive of Creek CD player and Creek integrated amplifier and an incredible cheap, but again with a great sense of music, Castle Knight loudspeakers (I do not remember if Model 1 or 2).

How the folks at Castle did get that is beyond my understanding but from this experience I learned, or better, I refreshed my memory that first, it is not necessary to spend a fortune to be ideally transported in the concert hall and second, that bigger is not always better like some overseas audio writers will induce us to think and third, music is not a matter of muscle but emotion and some brain applied.

The end of this long letter is



**Was it the Castle Knight 2 that Luciano Castoldi found so beguiling?**

focused on the consciousness that during these years I have lost some good equipment and now it is time to up to date my system. To achieve this goal, please, I need your help taking into account that my music room is about 20 square meters and I listen to all kind of music with some preference toward rock and energetic music. Today, differently than yesterday, I would be very glad to experience some equipment with a character verging on "bloom" with a good sense of density without become woolly and confused and with a good deal of detail, rhythm and dynamics.

The budget to be considered shall account the potential sale revenue of my actual system or part of it you will say plus, but only if strictly necessary, a couple of thousand Euros. Considering the above mentioned experience I should prefer to buy new, even if I have no problem to buy second hand.

Sorry for this lengthy letter, it happens once in sixteen years!

Best regards,

**Luciano Castoldi**  
Italy

Thanks for the praise and the Latin – that phrase is a new one to me!

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11



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### The Castle Avon - can it be fixed?

well, it is 'our own' Peter Comeau of course, now working for International Audio Group (IAG) in Shenzhen, China. Peter well knows the 'Castle sound' and ethos and has reproduced it in the new Knights. As always listen first.

**NK**

### FIX AN AVON

I have a problem with one of my 'speakers - Castle Avons. Pinned the fault down by swapping 'speakers, cables, channels, etc. The problem is that there is interference, a background crackling sound. I have tightened everything up, cleaned contacts, checked cables, etc. No luck.

Help! Is there anything else I should do? What can I do? Where can I go to get the problem properly diagnosed and repaired? Now that Castle are no longer Skipton based, I fear a trip to China would be overkill, especially in such straightened times.

My line of thinking is that it will be a) worth repairing and b) (hopefully) cheaper to repair than to replace. Ideally, somewhere in the North West of England would be preferable, but I am happy to travel to get the best repair.

Rest of the set-up: Cirkused LP12, Ittok LVIII, AT OC-9 MkII, Linto, Lingo II, Exotik I Chakra C2200 (recently acquired) and a Quad FM3. (Yes, Linn heavy - but one of my oldest friends tends to pass things on at very friendly prices when he upgrades... got to do something with all these cuts).

Thanking you in advance - and I look forward to your response.

Regards,

**Ian Davies**  
Thornton-Cleveleys  
Lancashire

Try contacting [www.audioloud-speakers.co.uk](http://www.audioloud-speakers.co.uk) who are based in Norfolk. It seems that

harshness. Their new Destiny 2 amplifier (we will be reviewing it in the April 11 issue) would likely suit you.

If you so liked Castle loudspeakers, as many people do, then the new Knight Series must have a model for you. Again, we know the designer

Audiolaboratories of Leeds - nearer you - have closed down, a shame.

A constant crackle while working sounds like one of the drive unit voice coil leadout wires is the cause, as they move with the cone and lead a hard life. I have found dry joints here in the past, where the braid attaches to the cone/coil. If you can't get to the braid then the drive unit will need to be replaced. Of course, it may just be there is a dry joint somewhere else, perhaps in crossover connections, in which case a fix will be easy, providing you can solder. **NK**

### LIFT A FINGER.

I'm looking for a new tonearm. There's loads of 'em. I'd be happy with most of them of a certain standard to replace my RB300. But I'll just tell all you manufacturers concerned why you won't be getting my custom: straight, or non-existent headshell finger lifts!

I have, since getting the bug 35 years ago, always followed the same procedure for putting a record on, especially on a sprung deck, like the Linn LP12 or Michell Gyrodec - lift from the grooves using the finger lift, change record, cue using the finger lift. That's their purpose!

Simple and not half as much disc damage as lifting with the damped device on a bouncy record player.

So why this fashion for a straight thing which even I, with my pianist fingers, can't get under? They might as well just leave it off as give us an abomination like the Project arm which is impossible to use for its intended purpose!

Don't give me the "use a finger and thumb", because that's a recipe for



**We need decent finger lifts, says Ivor Jebson.**

disaster, and please don't claim it makes a difference to the sound because of microphony. I've filed one off a Rega arm only to find I have butchered it for no gain whatsoever. So why this mad fashion?

I can't be the only person who finds this an annoyance surely. There must be

more grumpy old men who agree with me? Bring back curved finger lifts. SME use 'em so they can't be that bad! Let me guess, you take them off for sound quality don't you?

**Ivor Jebson**

Er, yes, you've got it Ivor. But as you say it doesn't make a mountain of difference to the sound, much like the choice between stainless steel and brass cartridge fixing screws (Oh how nutty can we get!). I, like you, cue with my fingers and always have done, because it is simple, convenient and does the job. Cue platforms, damped or not, I do not like. And a delight of my Garrard's vast plinth is that it remains steady whilst I perform the said lift or lower operation.

I guess you could fashion a paper clip with a few screw 'holes' and an upward bent finger lift. I usually fit an old, independent SME 3009 lift to avoid cueing accidents. **NK**

### VIOLINS ETC PART 3)

Hello again! I would like to thank you for your - as ever - excellent advice. As to the sharpness of the sound of some of the violin records I own, I must admit that most of them are 'second-hand' items that no amount of cleaning will ever restore to their former pristine beauty, sadly. As you rightly point out, this may account for some of the sonic unpleasantness described in my first e-mail.

A similar phenomenon manifests itself with some piano records, e.g. Everybody digs Bill Evans, a reissue which suffers from breakup on some tracks, even though it was bought new only recently. Giving it a thorough wash (twice) did not help, as was borne out by playing it on my other record player (Thorens TD125 Mk2/Origin Live Silver/ZYX R100 H/Naim Stageline). Oh the joys of vinyl!

As to the valve option, would you say Quad valve amps would be up to driving the Tannoy D500's, which have a nominal 6 ohm impedance, but drop below 3 Ohm, if I am to believe some people? Would this be a problem?

Thanks again,

**Peter Inghels**  
The Hague  
The Netherlands

No Peter, no problem at all. Just use the 4 Ohm tap and it will cope with anything, even the 1 Ohm or so of an electrostatic loudspeaker at 20kHz (see our measurements of the Martin Logan Ethos in Jan 11 issue). Valve amps are very durable in this regard. A low impedance at low frequencies will demand more power but a Quad II-eighty has plenty of this. **NK**



# Fonder Prelude

**David Price is surprised to find the new Debussy DAC to be one of his favourite dCS products...**

I have to say that I don't regularly ponder the complexities of the model ranges of manufacturers of high end hi-fi. In the same way that I don't concern myself about the Mercedes Maybach limousine options list, nor do I bother especially about whether I'd have this £20,000 DAC or that. With this in mind, it was all the more heartening to find that dCS, purveyors of some of the most expensive, and finest, digital converters on sale, have gone and introduced a DAC that - in many ways - is even nicer than their ultra high end, mega complex higher priced models, at a more 'affordable' price. Instead of the super rich who need only apply, the dCS owners club has now been widened to the merely 'very well off'!

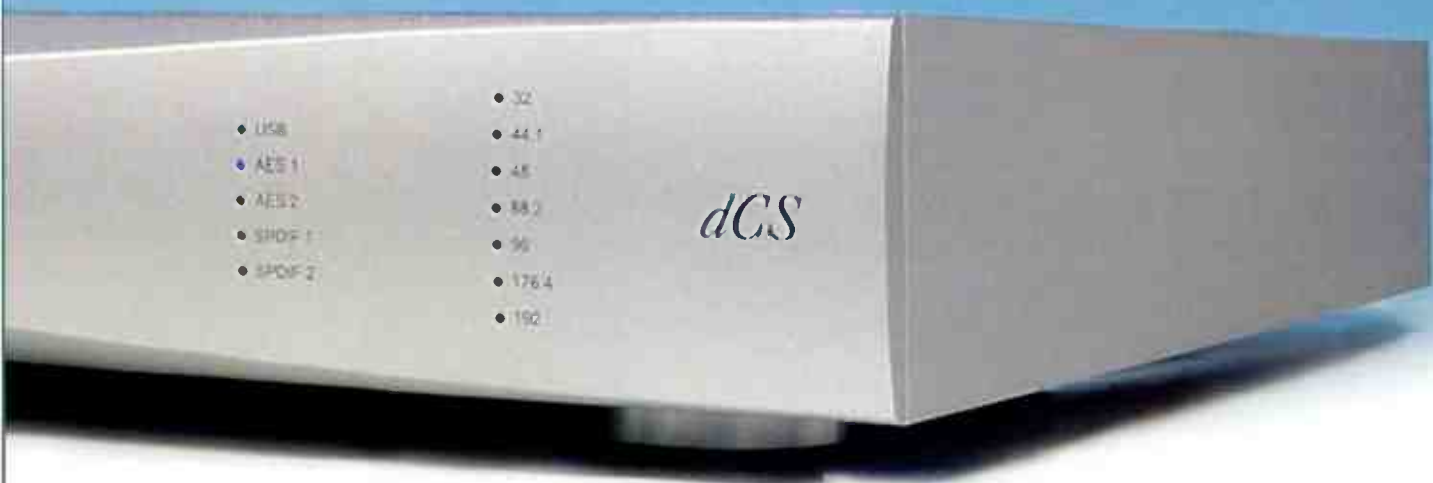
Of course, I'm not about to denigrate the *Hi-Fi World* Award winning Paganini; it's a stunning product and one of the few around that really spurs me to pick up a silver disc (almost) in preference to a black one. But there's no denying that the full Paganini system, including transport, DAC, clock and upsampler

is a massive thing to have in your house, and a massively complex one to get your head round if you want to be sure you're using it to its full potential. The Debussy, on the other hand, is a simple one box affair - and a beautiful box it is too - that's far smaller, easier to use, more inexpensive and yet boasts the 'guts' of the Paganini. Think of it as a cost-cut, lightweight, short wheelbase supercar stripped of the heated leather seats, but with that same glorious engine...

The aforementioned motor is of course the dCS Ring DAC, as used in the flagship Scarlatti, Paganini and Puccini ranges. It's a custom, bespoke designed piece of hardware which does not use any off-the-shelf DAC chips commonly found in other manufacturer's products. The proprietary 5 bit oversampling system spins all digital signals up to either 2.822 or 3.07MHz, performs some very sophisticated digital signal processing on them and then converts them to analogue. A sophisticated multi-mode phase locked loop is used, said to significantly reduce clock jitter, while the Debussy

sports faster DSP chips which make for improved filtering. Higher capacity FPGAs (Field Programmable Gate Arrays) give more logic capacity and increase the scope for additional features and enhancements over earlier dCS models. In essence, it's the Ring DAC which gives dCS products their distinctive sound, and which means that no other DACs can sound like them.

The Debussy also sports dCS's patent pending asynchronous USB technology, meaning the unit will work direct from the universal serial bus output of any modern PC or Mac computer, whilst avoiding the unpleasant clock inside it because the computer becomes locked to the DAC. The unit features the aforementioned USB 2.0, AES3, Dual AES and S/PDIF (coaxial) inputs; it's a great shame to my mind that there's no optical TOSLINK S/PDIF; even though this isn't a universal panacea it's especially good at getting 16/44 digital out of computers without any electrical noise (which is one thing computers have got a lot of). The Debussy has a digital volume control, for direct connection to a power



"the dCS turned in a wide and well ordered soundstage, fine dynamics, oodles of detail, plus rich and full bass with silky treble..."

amplifier, so those minded so to do can eschew a preamplifier (maximum output can be either two or six volts to suit). The Debussy offers two switchable digital filters, offering the choice between linear phase with pre-ringing or non-linear phase without pre-ringing.

Debussy can be locked to an external word clock signal generated by a dCS Master Clock. Experience with the Paganini is such that this should produce a considerable sonic improvement, with an increase in clarity and resolution. The unit can also be periodically upgraded with software updates, loaded from a dCS update disc or connected computer; this is to allow the unit to add new features and adapt to changes in digital formats. The Debussy is also said to have got improved power supplies for lower running temperature and increased tolerance to AC supply variations.

For me, the new casework is a major highlight. The all aluminium casing is large enough to house the umpteen chips inside (the Ring DAC demands this), but far smaller (at 445x392x65mm) than the Paganini, meaning it will sit in your system in a less imposing and more spouse-friendly way. The rear panel sports a switch for 2V RMS or 6V RMS output levels, and sports one stereo pair of male balanced XLRs, and one pair of RCA phono stages, in addition to the aforementioned digital inputs, plus an IEC mains in.

### SOUND QUALITY

There's no mistaking the sound of the dCS Ring DAC, and I mean that in a wholly positive sense. There's an innate smoothness to the sound that some might even conflate with dullness. That one could even be talking about 'dullness' with digital is amazing, but there you go; the dCS Ring DAC is a tonally full and unerringly even sounding device that simply doesn't have the laser-etched-into-glass midband that almost every other DAC working at 16bit/44.1kHz has. You can feed it a bright, bracing mid eighties recording such as Sly and Robbie's 'Language Barrier', packed as it is with mid eighties digital synths and drum machines, plus lots of percussive banging and crashing from Messrs Dunbar and Shakespeare, and not find yourself jumping behind the sofa before the first four bar phrase is through. With, shall we say, well lit loudspeakers such as my Yamaha NS1000Ms, I never failed to appreciate the dCS's even handed nature.

'Bass and Trouble', a slightly derivative (well, if you've ever heard Herbie Hancock's 'Rock it', which came five years before) but nevertheless bracing slice of electro-funk with heavy, Kraftwerk-style drum machine sequences and Art of Noise-style sampling came over in a captivating way. The Debussy furnished me with vast amounts of detail, mining great seams of music from the digital datastream and

stringing it together in a captivating way. It's fair to say that this isn't the most obviously euphonic DAC; it lacks the out and out zest of the classic Philips 16bit designs, for example, but more than makes up for it with a smoothness, incision and even-handedness that is simply on another level. Rather than editorialising, the dCS just gets down and reads the original script, so to speak.

Maintaining an eighties vibe, The Smiths' 'Some Girls are Bigger than Others' proved an unexpected pleasure. The album from which this is taken, 'The Queen is Dead' proved a big disappointment in terms of sonics when it first came out on vinyl in 1986. As my system's got better, it's one of those albums that's almost blossomed before my very ears, requiring seriously high end turntable/arm/cartridge combination to unlock properly. CD, generally, has been a chore, but via the dCS the track duly took off, the DAC conjuring up a wide recorded acoustic with an almost ethereal quality to Morrissey's vocals, which I've only previously experienced via Lyra, Koetsu or Supex-aspirated LP playback. The dCS times extremely well indeed, whilst not overtly giving the impression of so doing; it doesn't sound quite as nimble as, say, the Naim DAC, but it's simply the sound of it not trying so hard to keep up. It's a hoary old hi-fi cliché, but there something of the whiff of high speed open reel tape about the dCS, such is

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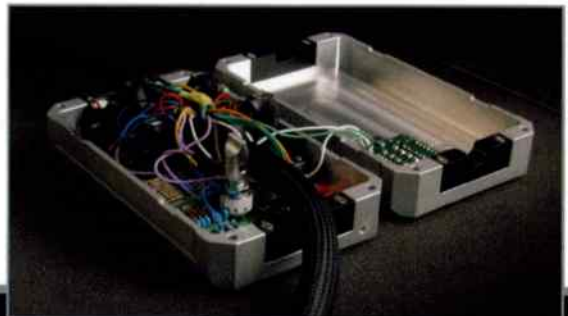
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its relaxed assuredness.

Tonally, whilst not quite warm, it's certainly on the Baileys Irish Cream side of the argument, as opposed to the dry white wine that most rival digital convertors are characterised by. Once again this was a joy with my particular combination of partnering ancillaries, but I can see that with duller loudspeakers and/or amplifiers, it might sound a little less propulsive than it really is. For example, T.Rex's 'Get It On' lacks a degree of raunch to guitar sounds that others imbue it with, yet still the dCS rocks to the beat and works on the beautiful string accompaniments more; in short it gives a more '360 degree' aspect to the song, rather than locking its laser on any eye-catching midband antics. The full, insistent bass was most welcome on early T.Rex material; it's hardly full bandwidth and via many digital sources it doesn't sound much different to AM radio. Happily via the Debussy, it was accorded a full tonality and an expansive soundstage, making it all the more satisfying, if possibly less catchy on a superficial level.

One album that personifies the dCS's sound is Simple Minds' 'New Gold Dream'; the title track is a deep, recessed *melange* of sound that works on subtle repetition and gentle but hypnotic rhythms. This isn't about musicians grandstanding or showboating, it's a glorious indulgence of multilayered sounds. Via the Debussy it was a joy; huge crashing synth pads, powerful, warm, insistent bass guitar, way spacey vocals bathed in reverb. A kind of 'new romantic prog' album (if such a thing could ever exist), there are few DACs I know that could capture the glory of this piece of early eighties pop/rock - aside from dCS's other DACs which I know to sound just a fraction clearer and more detailed, albeit for considerably higher outlay I should add.

Via the USB input, I had my MacBook Pro outputting hi res Beatles with great results; a proper USB connection such as this gives little away to a DVD-Audio player feeding the Debussy by its AES inputs. There's a wonderful clarity to

the proceedings, and the ease and 'out of the box' imaging you'd expect from proper digital, along with that complete absence of upper midband grain that you suffer in silence with from Red Book 16/44. But that's not to say it's super smooth and/or euphonic; there's still a stark clarity to both the format and the dCS DAC that - Lyra Titan i via an SME Series V aside - doesn't exist in the parallel universe of analogue vinyl. The beauty of the dCS is, of course, that as new formats come so this can be firmware upgraded to take them, so the line is not drawn in the sand at 24/192.

**CONCLUSION**

Highly impressive as it is playing hi res, and/or via computer sources, the dCS Debussy stands or falls on its 16/44 playback, which of course forms the vast majority of most people's digital diet. Here this digital convertor really shines, turning in a wide and well ordered soundstage,

fine dynamics, oodles of detail, and rich and full bass and silky treble. On top of all this is an easy rhythmic quality that does nothing except promote enjoyment of the music. There are some other designs I've heard which give a more seat of the pants presentation, and make things sound apparently more engrossing, but still I'd come back to the dCS Ring DAC given the choice. The Debussy is one of my favourite incarnations of this to date; it's more affordable, beautifully styled and built, and sports almost all the features you'd want in a real world situation. Its bigger brothers are terribly impressive in their way, but I'd say the Debussy is all most people would ever really need. If you've got the requisite amount of money and are on the lookout for such a product, you really must hear this.

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
 Sony CDP-R1 CD transport  
 Apple MacBook Pro notebook computer  
 Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier  
 Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our analysis shows the Debussy has a perfectly flat in-band audio response with both 44.1kHz and 48kHz sample rate signals, and this remained so when the Filter was switched in; the in-band audio response did not change at all. This result applies to both balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (phono socket) outputs.

Distortion levels were low from maximum output down to the lowest levels, the illustrative -60dB figure being a low 0.20% with a 16bit signal and just 0.11% with a 24bit signal from our Rohde & Schwarz digital signal generator, using 1LSB of Gaussian dither to ensure good conversion linearity (this makes very little difference at -60dB).

Output from the XLRs with a small rear panel switch set to 6V (maximum) was a true 6V; Philips standard 2V is an option.

EIAJ Dynamic Range was very high at 100dB, due to excellent -60dB linearity and good suppression of higher frequency quantisation products.

The Debussy measured very well in every area and will likely give excellent sound quality. NK

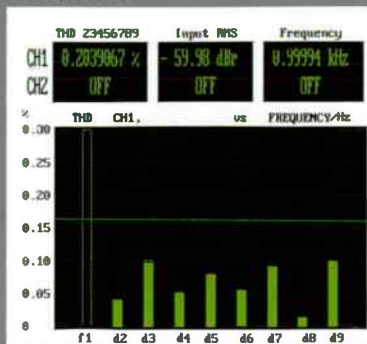
|                           |     |             |
|---------------------------|-----|-------------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) | CD  | 5Hz-19.5kHz |
| Distortion (%)            | 0dB | 0.0003      |

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| -6dB              | 0.0005 |
| -60dB             | 0.20   |
| -80dB             | 4.7    |
| Separation (1kHz) | -115dB |
| Noise (IEC A)     | -114dB |
| Dynamic range     | 100dB  |
| Output            | 6V     |

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**



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**AGAINST**  
 - no optical input

# Sparkling Diamond

Tall, slim and stylish yet seemingly hewn from hard stone, B&W's new 804D Diamond Series loudspeaker is the very epitome of the modern floorstander, says Noel Keywood...

**W**ith a world-wide reach and reputation, B&W's recently introduced high end 804D is a floorstanding loudspeaker I could not ignore. It is a domesticated version of the larger 800D and 802D loudspeakers, predecessors used in studios. Priced at £5,750 these new babies will be slugging it out with a host of rivals from KEF, Monitor Audio, Martin Logan and Tannoy. It's a hot place to be.

The 804D is a fabulously well finished, slinky looking product that strongly conveys its purpose. Not only have B&W come up with a pleasing visual arrangement of curved non-resonant panels, but they've applied a rich gloss black finish and positioned a natty looking 'Nautilus' tweeter assembly on top. The quality of detailing matches that of modern design icons from the likes of BMW and Apple, planting 804Ds firmly in a current style idiom. They feel solid and well made when handled, weighing a manageable 27kgs and standing 1020mm high. Rear terminals accept bare wires, spades and 4mm plugs, and allow biwiring.

Our review samples had been 'somewhere' and lacked the foam bungs B&W usually supply, and they also had odd screw-out whatsits on the rear, unexplained in handbook or website, that should have had stickers over them saying 'Transit Screw - Remove', we were told by B&W. Removal allows the midrange unit to float on a compliant suspension to decouple its chassis. The diamond tweeter has a removable grille.

Spikes are supplied, plus floor pads to preserve wooden floors. The 804Ds are narrow but have no stabilising plinth, so they are not for homes with boisterous children.

This is a classic three-way loudspeaker with large Kevlar coned midrange unit, aided by two reflex loaded bass units and a tweeter.

## SOUND QUALITY

A hard and edgy presentation after twenty four hours of run-in convinced us the B&Ws needed more and we had to give them one hundred and twenty hours in total of heavy running in with pink noise and Monitor Audio's De-Tox disc before reviewing could commence.







I still was not satisfied that our ever-impressive Musical Fidelity pure Class A AM550 transistor amplifier was an ideal subjective match and used our Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifier for this review. The softer, well damped presentation of this amplifier, with its machined graphite anode 845s and Jensen paper-in-oil capacitors, was a perfect foil to the obviously tilted tonal balance of the 804Ds.

"What?" you may ask in surprise

at hearing this. Even if you are not technical and prefer to avoid our Measured Performance section, one look at the green Frequency Response trace shows a distinct lift up at far right and this means treble is emphasised – a property obvious in use. The tweeters jumped out, delivering a stream of fine, filigree detail right into my lap. Smallest taps on cymbals on my obligatory Angelique Kidjo test CD, 'Fifa', rang out hard. And 'diamond' does aptly describe treble quality. Apart from being extremely strong and obvious, treble had a sparkling clarity that was aurally alluring. If you want every little detail to sparkle before you, with a purity that is beyond reproach, then B&W's Diamond tweeter is quite an extraordinary performer. This tweeter avoids the metallic qualities of metal domes of all types and in this respect it is unimpeachable. It does not have the

one-note effects. That the cabinets are clean and bass distortion is low is quite obvious by the tight yet bouncy nature of bass lines. B&W restrain subsonics to ensure there's no overhang or sloth and it's a good strategy in my view. So the 804D does not deliver strong ultra lows, but it got the emphasised bass lines of Fifa out into the room with flawless ability and here the 804D again runs most rivals well. My only reservation, after listening to larger but less expensive Triangle Antals or similarly priced Tannoys was that there was little in the way of upper bass detail. I could not really make out much of the bass synth used in Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance'. The 804D has bass power and a lovely exuberant low end quality, but it isn't expressive in the way larger cabinets can be and at this price a Tannoy DC-10T would give it a hard time (as it would for both tonal accuracy and

"You'll believe you have a high technology loudspeaker when listening to it and so will the neighbours..."

resolution of a ribbon or electrostatic driver though, meaning a Monitor Audio PL300 or Martin Logan Ethos will run it hard. But even when paired with our MB845 amplifier, both with hours of running on the clock (i.e. warm voice coils plus warm 845s) I was always aware that treble output was excessive; this is not something that you can ignore even with acclimatisation, making sibilants obviously hissy for example.

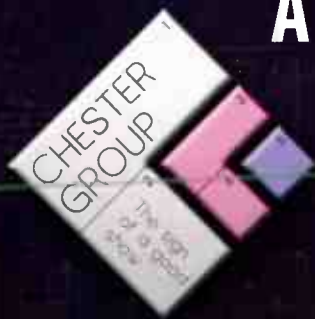
With such strong upper midrange output and projective treble, sound stage images were well wrought, with hard clear outlines, every instrument and vocalist being placed precisely. All vocalists, from Jackie Leven's baritone range to the soprano of Renee Fleming were hard lit centre stage in a way that other loudspeakers would struggle to match. But the 804D can sound a bit remorseless at times. It is conspicuously clean and clear, but not exactly svelte. Its overwhelming upper midrange rather shades the lower midrange, wringing warmth from the sound. This is not a full bodied or warm loudspeaker, yet it has a solid, meaty sound all the same.

Bass quality was very much B&W, meaning low notes were perfectly pitched and moved up and down the bass scale fluidly, with no sign of

depth of insight).

In view of the 804D's unbalanced nature I was surprised at how well it reproduced Nigel Kennedy's violin and the English Chamber Orchestra accompanying him. His violin sounded sweet, crystal clear but smooth and especially well resolved, fast little tremolos I hadn't noticed before suddenly becoming obvious. There was an unbalancing of the instrument's basic tonality but it wasn't especially annoying. Horns had a lovely brassy blare at the introduction of Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherazade' and individual string instruments of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra were well differentiated. The 804Ds have a dense yet well lit presentation that













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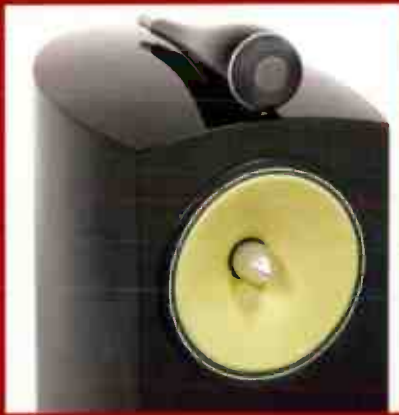
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**DAVID SAYS:**

If you're spending over £5,000 on a pair of loudspeakers, then you have an awful lot of choice. There are some superb electrostatics (Quad), equally wonderful electrostatic/moving coil hybrids (Martin Logan), fascinating ribbon/moving coil hybrids (LFT), stunning ribbons (Apogee) and all number of moving coil designs, weird and/or wonderful. Asked to nominate the quintessential high end conventional moving coil, I'd have to say B&W's 800 series. You don't get much better engineered and built than this, and they have a meticulously voiced sound that personifies the attributes of a speaker built with multiple voice coils moving the same number of cones, set into a big wooden box.

Of course, the way a speaker is engineered completely determines its sound, which is why ribbons and electrostatics don't - *can't* - give great bass, whereas moving coils lack the finesse and space of panel speakers but can move air around a room. The 804Ds fall into this category; they're not madcap weird, nor are they especially innovative or endearingly flawed and quirky; rather they're straight-down-the-line big moving coil boxes with punch, poise and power. Accompanying this is a sublime build and finish, although it's very much in the conventional idiom here; its design isn't special, it's just very well done, with a particular type of sound in mind. The 804D attempts, and largely succeeds, to be everyman's high end loudspeaker - for those who don't want weird things with horns or clingfilm inside them, for those who've been raised on the idea of a big multi-driver box. Given this remit, they work brilliantly.

If you've got a large room and/or want a pro speaker, you'll be buying the 801s or 802s. The 804D instead attempts to deliver a good deal of the 802's majesty, but in a smaller and - critically - more UK room-friendly package. So they're not engineered to push out vast tracts of bass; indeed you can (and should) push these quite close to a rear wall and they'll work happily in a modest-sized British listening room. Properly run in (ours took yonks) and aspirated by smooth and punchy amplifier via a serious source, they give startling results. Taut, tight, propulsive and engaging, they're wonderful for rock music, yet subtle enough for serious classical listening too. The result is a loudspeaker of great precision, with layer upon layer of detail served up with effortless ease. Treble is distinct, but works well; the Diamond tweeter does deliver a crystalline clarity and is smooth too. All in, a powerful, punchy, incisive loudspeaker with style to match the most modern of listening rooms. DP

sounds refreshingly brisk and modern. You'll believe you have a high technology loudspeaker when listening to it and so will the neighbours. And it's one that handles classical music very well I found, no matter what I played. Vivacious, clean and temporally sprightly the 804Ds impress with classical. An absence of cabinet colour and port whoomph helped.

**CONCLUSION**

The 804Ds were at times breathtakingly pure and concise; B&W's engineering shines through to make them a special experience, especially with classical music. There were times with closely recorded Rock that treble was just too strong: Steve Earle's 'Esmeralda's Hollywood' had tambourine hissing at me with demented strength. Overall though, the 804Ds are an impressive experience and at times had me wondering whether an audience of broad taste would think this is what a high fidelity loudspeaker should sound like. Not truly accurate then and a bit hard to swallow at times, nevertheless the 804Ds were impressive - with a capital I. If you want a punchy, visceral and fast sound with diamond pure treble than do try and hear them.

**VERDICT** ●●●●

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- engaging, incisive treble
- suit Rock and Classical

**AGAINST**

- forward treble
- well lit midband

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response analysis clearly shows the B&W 804D has the usual phase dip at crossover due to the use of a slow (first order) low pass filter feeding the midrange unit. B&W insist this gives a better sound irrespective of the dip. In practice the dip shown tends to change according to microphone position but its existence is consistent all the same.

Tweeter output was also consistently high, peaking up by +6dB around 12kHz. This will produce audible brightness in the treble, even a treble sting. High frequency output above 3kHz was generally strong from the 804D, giving good detailing but a bright sound balance. High frequency output from the 804D borders on excessive for a so called high fidelity loudspeaker. It is far from accurate.

The midrange unit peaks around 600Hz in the midband and will push vocals forward a bit, giving them good presence.

A third octave pink noise analysis, not shown, shows bass output is very even down to 55Hz (foam port bungs out). Port output peaks around 30Hz and its effect can also be seen in the impedance curve as the usual dip at this frequency. Bass will be quite dry but there is sufficient subsonic output to give some low bass weight.

Sensitivity was high at 89dB from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) and overall impedance measured 6 Ohms.

The 804D uses a 4 Ohm bass unit measures 4 Ohms across the lower midband, from 90Hz up to 700Hz, so it will draw current.

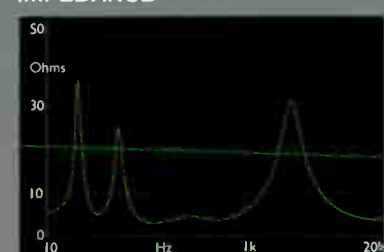
The 804D will have even sounding bass with a dry-ish quality and some subsonic content. It will also sound bright across the midband and sharp in its treble, straying far from accuracy. It is normal as a load, good sensitivity meaning 40 Watts will make it go loud. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**





# Ice Power

**From the snowy expanses of Norway comes the dark, mysterious Electrocompaniet EMP-1/S SACD player. David Price chills out...**

If there's one northern European country that does things a little differently, it is Norway. If you've ever visited you'll find it a bracingly cold country (especially at this time of year) that's exceptionally well ordered and run, and yet there's seemingly a lot of space for people to be themselves – and they are. The result is an eccentric mix of people, and surprisingly cosmopolitan too as so many are used to travelling. Like their Viking ancestors thousands of years before them, Norwegians put themselves about a bit and are well connected to the outside world. Electrocompaniet's Mikal Dreggevik is one such example; he supports Leeds United football club for heaven's sake!

With this in mind, curious soccer club patronage notwithstanding, it's no surprise that the EMP-1/S exists. In so many other countries, the accountants would be telling hi-fi designers and company planners that no one wants Super Audio Compact Disc anymore and after twelve years of under achieving, it would

be madness to invest in making a machine that plays it. And yet that's precisely what Electrocompaniet have done, the sole reason being because the format sounds so good, rather than an anticipated high volume of sales. Good for them, say I!

I too am an SACD fan. I still think it's a crying shame that, in the mass market, the format is no longer supported, because it was the cheapest, easiest and simplest way to get the sort of sound quality that genuinely approached a high end turntable, from a little digital disc that of course very conveniently plays in every standard Compact Disc player going. It wasn't just an improvement on Red Book in terms of traditional hi-fi criteria (i.e. bandwidth, dynamics, etc.), it was a step up for digital in the musicality stakes. Direct Stream Digital – the one-bit, 2.8224MHz system it uses – is a qualitative improvement over any Pulse Code Modulated silver disc system I've heard, in so many ways. Done properly, to my ears music just flows in a fashion that you don't hear via PCM, no matter what the sampling

rate is...

The £4,650 EMP-1/S is unmistakably Electrocompaniet. Its finish is – at the price at least – a tad basic; the black Perspex fascia looks dated, the display isn't so slick, at least to a generation getting used to iPads, and the crackle black steel casing is hardly the stuff of modern lifestyle dreams – it reminds me of the dashboard of a nineteen seventies MG sports car!

But whilst the finish isn't great, the sizeable 420x270x77mm casework is solid and at 8kg it weighs more than most digital disc players these days. It's a substantial product, but not a luxurious one. The four-button navigation feels crude and the disc tray reacts more slowly than might be hoped, making the Electrocompaniet a lot less pleasant to handle than a similarly priced Esoteric, Marantz or Denon, for example.

Electrocompaniet have clearly put some work into this player – on the inside at least – but are keeping pretty tight lipped about its design, apart from claiming that it achieves



"excellent playability and disc acceptance". Frustrating as the glacial disc loading was, I certainly found it glitch-free in use; apparently it even plays "most copy protection systems". It is claimed to play HDCD and MP3 discs, in addition to SACD and CD.

"playing a good SACD, this machine is capable of better fidelity than any CD player, upsampled or not..."

As it comes, it's a stereo product but it can be upgraded to EMP-1/M form which gives multichannel capability. Round the back, there are balanced XLR outputs, plus RCA phonos (I used the former), plus a 75 ohm S/PDIF coaxial digital out for CD.

### SOUND QUALITY

There's much to like, even running plain old CD. I started the proceedings with Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang', a heavily compressed and not terribly thoughtfully recorded chart anthem and was rather taken aback to find one of the nicest renditions of it I've heard to date. There's no denying this player has a big and full bodied nature, getting straight into the music's groove whilst serving up quite a rich tonality. Bass lines were very well carried, sounding

tight but generous with it, and this linked up to a particularly clean and spacious midband, which told me a lot about the album's production but didn't stop me getting into the groove. The soundstage sparkled with detail, had surprising depth and

even slightly 'gentrified' what's a fairly crude recording. Treble was as good as could be expected; crisp, clean and fast, and lacking glare. Overall a punchy and musical start, but it will do subtlety and suaveness too; in this respect it reminded me of the Electrocompaniet EMC-1UP I reviewed back in June 2009.

Moving to 4hero's 'Give In', and there was more to chew on. It's a far better sounding disc, and the EMP-1/S never failed to remind me. I was greeted by a spacious, all-encompassing soundstage, as if someone had pressed some invisible 'stereo wide' button. This is a lovely slice of R&B/soul, with gliding strings, smooth lilting bass guitar and delicious keyboard work, added to some great vocals – and the Electrocompaniet slotted it all together as if music and machine had

been designed for one another. Aside from its lovely tonality – this is a less 'black and white' sounding silver disc player than most – I was struck by its rhythmic flow; instruments came over beautifully syncopated and percussive detail poured forth lavishly. The song sounded as if it had been performed on an epic scale, with musicians and singers totally committed to the occasion.

I could wait no more! My SACD of Steely Dan's 'Gaucho' was slotted in and I sat back in heady anticipation. I know this album intimately through vinyl – the best I've ever heard it was via a Marantz TT-1000/Origin Live Enterprise and Lyra Titan i – and so I wasn't going to be easily fobbed off. It's a super recording alright, although with truly forensic front end you realise it's not quite as breathtaking as you'd first thought when hearing it on lesser equipment. What then of the Electrocompaniet? Well sure enough, the EMP-1/S delivered a vast recorded acoustic, with a massive bass guitar on 'Babylon Sisters' and delicious snare drum and cymbal work; I've never heard the decay of a hi-hat as nicely from silver disc as here. Donald Fagen's menacing



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World Radio History



vocals were captured in all their glory, sounding less nasal than with all sources I've heard bar top end vinyl. Walter Becker's sliced through the mix like a laser through ice in a James Bond film, its rhythmic staccato stabs pushing the song along with tremendous urgency. With my amplifier volume resolutely turned up, I was struck by the fantastic dynamics from this track, the EMP-1/S showcasing the brilliance of this overlooked late twentieth century format.

Moving to some classic eighties power pop, and Propaganda's 'Duel' on SACD was no less a thrill. In fairness, the album – recorded on a mid eighties Sony PCM-F1 digital recorder (16bit/44.056kHz) has less to 'give' to SACD than nineteen seventies analogue masters, but still the SACD showed convincing gains over the standard CD imprint. I was struck by the clarity of the midband, the fluidity of the bass and the crispness and delicacy of the treble. The subtle hi-hat work glistened like distant stars in the sky, whereas the CD pressing of the same sounded more vague, grey and generally opaque. Claudia Brucken's vocals were a particular treat; icy and cold at their best, they're not flattered by 16bit Red Book but via SACD I could hear her true tone, as well as that great, melodramatic inflection. The Electrocompaniet was again wonderful across the midband, with crashing synth chords and a bruisingly powerful electronic snare sound.

With the very fine Linn Records being one of the key sources (in the UK at least) of top-notch SACDs, it was only a matter of time before I loaded up Mozart's Symphony 29, 'Allegro Moderato' (Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Sir Charles Mackerras). The first movement showed the Electrocompaniet's superb textural resolution, with violins having an eerily natural timbre to them, and ditto the body of the cellos.

The recording venue's acoustic was carried in great detail, the sounds of the orchestra swishing around it in a most believable way; this is where SACD romps away from CD, the latter just lopping the top off classical recordings and apparently sucking all the air out of the room. The overall effect was beautiful to behold, the EMP-1/S pushing head and shoulders above excellent mid-market machines such as Denon's £1,800 DCD-2010AE (reviewed in May 2010), giving a quality of sound that's so rarely heard via digital disc.

**CONCLUSION**

In absolute terms, it's hard enough justifying spending £4,500-plus on any silver disc player (or indeed any hi-fi separate at all, especially in these straightened times), not least an SACD machine. But if you have a serious collection of these

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier  
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

curious little discs, and intend to keep collecting them, the sort of fidelity afforded by the EMP-1/S makes a surprisingly strong case for itself. Playing a well mastered SACD (and that's not all of them, mind), this machine is capable of better fidelity than any CD player playing CD, upsampled or not. That's no small claim, considering there are now some great top end machines. So, if you're in that particular niche then you simply have to hear this player. It does play ye olde CD superbly too, but if it's just this you're wanting to play, I'd counsel saving over £1,000 and going for the Electrocompaniet EMC-IUP instead. Either way, there's no denying Norwegians do things differently, making silver disc players that warm the cockles of your heart.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of this player measured flat to 20.8kHz, our analysis shows. This extended to 33kHz with SACD, a sharp roll off imposing a limit of 40kHz, reducing supersonic noise.

Linearity was excellent with CD and SACD, distortion at -60dB measuring a low 0.22% with the former, and a low 0.035% with the latter. The player resolved a -100dB signal from SACD with distortion of just 2.5%, a great result showing the player is able to exploit SACD quality. Both DVD Video and Audio are flagged as compatible on the front panel but our Rohde & Schwarz DVD test discs were unnavigable without a video display and the DVD-A refused to play, so we could not measure 24/96kHz PCM performance.

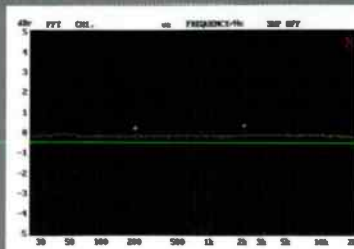
Output from the balanced XLR sockets was a high 4.7V from CD but 3.3V from SACD.

Jitter from the digital output was a bit higher than normal; random jitter reached 60pS across a broad peak in the audio band, against a common figure of 10pS or less. This swamped any signal related jitter there may have been. Low rate clock drift was low at 60pS however.

The EMP1 measured well all round, disregarding some jitter on its digital output. As a CD and SACD player however, it is very well engineered. NK

|                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Frequency response (-1dB) |             |
| CD                        | 2Hz-20.8kHz |
| Distortion (%)            |             |
| 0dB                       | 0.006       |
| -6dB                      | 0.001       |
| -60dB                     | 0.22        |
| -80dB                     | 2.7         |
| Separation (1kHz)         | 132dB       |
| Noise (IEC A)             | -115dB      |
| Dynamic range             | 98dB        |
| Output                    | 4.7V        |

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**VERDICT**

Epic in scale, lavish in tone and exuberant in its musicality, this is a memorable SACD spinner. It's quirky in operation and modest in finish though, so won't be for all at this high price.

**ELECTROCOMPANIET**  
EMP-1/S £4,650  
NSS Ltd.  
+44 (0)20 8893 5835  
www.electrocompaniet.com

- FOR**
- commandingly musical
  - wonderful texturally
  - superb with SACD
  - balanced operation

- AGAINST**
- below par finish at price
  - fiddly nav/slow disc tray

# Ice Power



**Hailing from the frozen north, the Finnish Amphon Argon 3Ls are subtly different from your average European standmount loudspeaker, says David Price...**

**A**mphon are an interesting company, with a very distinctive looking range of loudspeakers, as these prove. Measuring 925x191x305mm, they're sizeable enough to fill most UK listening rooms. The speakers come with a complement of two drivers; a one inch Krypton2 derived Integrator titanium dome tweeter that's recessed deep into the baffle, inside a waveguide. This makes for, the company says, correct time alignment between the two drive units. The matching 6.5" aluminium coned mid/bass driver is set close by and crosses over at 1.2kHz. In this it follows the approach of the Argon 2 standmounter on which it's based, reviewed in September 2008.

The Argon 3L claims to go right down to 32Hz (as opposed to the standmounter's 40Hz) – [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE], although I wouldn't say this is spectacularly evident when listening. However, in their defence the bass was weightier than the substantially more expensive, yet similarly tall B&W 804Ds reviewed elsewhere in this issue! The speaker features a proprietary bass loading system with separated internal chambers for midrange and woofer. They come with two rear reflex ports, both of which are supplied with bungs for damping down backward boom. Rap the cabinet with your knuckles and you'll find it's well damped, with little in the way of resonance. The Argon 3Ls come supplied with plinths to ensure good tight contact with terra firma, and interestingly are not biwireable.

## SOUND QUALITY

Aided by Musical Fidelity's AMS50 solid-state Class A power amp, I kicked off with Sade's excellent cover of 'When Am I Going to Make a Living?' from 'Diamond Life'. The Amphions showed themselves to be clean, open and engaging. I have to say the midband is rather good, throwing out a lot of detail that other speakers simply muddle or throw out of focus. I was struck initially by the lovely detailing on



the guitar work, the speakers picking out quite subtle rhythmic electric guitar work that via most boxes remain stuck at the back of the mix. This, allied to a very 'up close and personal' rendition of Ms Adu's vocals made for an unusually direct and emotive performance of a track that can be delivered by lesser speakers as a bit of jazz-pop filler, music for wine bars on rainy Wednesday evenings in provincial towns.

Moving to Eleanor McEvoy's 'I'd Rather Go Blonde', and again I was fascinated by the vocal rendition. Having spent a thoroughly enjoyable hour with Ms McEvoy a couple of months ago, I remember her voice vividly from sitting two feet away. It was the first time I'd heard it played back on a hi-fi system since then, and so it was fascinating to hear the Amphions' rendition. Actually it was very good, the speakers sucking just a fraction of the warmth of her vocal chords out, and removing just a touch of air from it up top. And yet it was still very well carried, leaving the listener feel totally connected to both her singing and the recording in general. In their typically efficient and fuss-free way, the Argon 3Ls just got on with the job of playing the music, throwing out vast amounts of detail and power into the listening room and making the track a most enjoyable experience.

Indeed, the Amphions did, I found, give a particularly close-miked sound. There's a slight upper midband peak to them, but this isn't in any way offensive and simply makes for a great sense of immediacy; almost as if you were listening through headphones. The treble and mid/bass units cross over well, and display good phase coherence, which makes them particularly good for female vocals. I very much enjoyed Samantha Sang's 'Emotions', a beautifully recorded late seventies disco ballad from the Bee Gees/RSO stable, with the Gibb brothers lending backing vocals (as well as writing the song and supplying the music). Strings were beautiful; very distinct yet smooth and full bodied. Bass was well damped, decently tuneful and provided the appropriate underpinning to the proceedings.

Rhythmically, the Argons worked well too; rhythms had an unhurried quality about them; the speakers seemed very well paced and able to let the music flow. I also enjoyed a nice, believable hi-hat sound up in the treble, the titanium dome tweeter proving itself to be a particularly good example of the breed.

The only caveat to all this was the occasional tendency of the

loudspeakers to screech. Admittedly it was at high levels, via a CD source (hardly ideal) and via the falsetto backing vocals of the Bee Gees, but I could detect just a slight searing quality at full tilt. I wouldn't say this is a fault of the speakers as such, more of a tendency that has to be borne in mind when choosing ancillaries and matching them to rooms. For example, you'd not want to partner the Amphions with a hard amplifier, in a reflective, echo-prone room and play brightly recorded music all the time at high volume. Conversely, they'd be just ideal for putting a tiger in the tank of relatively tame sounding systems in dull, dead, over damped rooms. Not a criticism, but something to bear in mind when matching, all the same...

Moving to Michael Jackson's classic 'Billie Jean', and the Amphions proved up for a bit of fun. I wouldn't say these are the most conspicuously rhythmic sounding speakers; Linn Kans they are not. However, they don't shirk when asked to bring on the boogie, and indeed proved well up to the challenge. The Argon's bass is workmanlike in the best possible way; they got on with the job, drew little attention to themselves and made it possible for the rest of the song to sprinkle its magic. The midband again

threw a spotlight on percussion, throwing incidental elements of the mix out – such as trumpets and rhythm guitar. It positively bristled with detail. It was great on Michael Jackson's unique vocal syncopation, being able to time it with particular success, throwing a spotlight on every last 'oh, uh' and 'eel!' At the same time, it set up an expansive soundstage with lovely space around the exquisite backing strings. Treble was a joy; clean and delicate and completely devoid of any nasty metal dome tweeter clanging, although it has to be said that it wasn't the most spacious or extended I've heard.

Moving to orchestral music in the shape of a Deutsche Gramophon recording of the Emerson String Quartet playing Edvard

Grieg's 'String Quartet in G Minor op. 27', and violins were as clean as an arctic plain; spacious, expansive, open; dry, cool, crisp and bracing in equal measure. There was a commendable tonal accuracy to the Amphions, these speakers conveying the body of the instrument very well. Their 'wiry' quality was there in abundance, as were the rich harmonics of the violin, but there was little in the way of screech even at high levels. Still, that's not to say the Argon 3Ls were in any way recessed across the mid; there was a great sense of sunlight, with vivid dynamic and tonal contrasts. These are not sultry smoothies, however you listen to them and whatever you play.

**CONCLUSION**

An interesting pair of loudspeakers, the Amphion Argon 3Ls proved a calm, reassuringly accurate and engaging listening companion with oodles of detail and insight, especially across the midband. They get on with playing music in an enjoyably complete way. Well worth braving the cold for an audition!



**VERDICT** ●●●●£  
Insightful, engaging, detailed and distinguished sounding floorstanding speakers with ice cool aesthetics.

**AMPHION ARGON 3L** £2,299  
Sound Fowndations  
☎ +44(0) 1276 501 392  
www.soundfowndations.co.uk

- FOR**
- transparency
  - immediacy
  - delicate upper registers
- AGAINST**
- Strongly lit midband
  - powerful amplifier required

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of the Argon 3L is reasonably smooth and even, with peaks at 750Hz and 5kHz, treble rolling down gently and smoothly above this frequency. The 750Hz peak is caused by an internal box mode, showing the usual peak and dip caused by phase addition and subtraction. The rear ports both output strongly at this frequency too, shown by the white and red peaks. This is likely to introduce a bit of colouration but may well enhance intelligibility too.

Low frequency output rolls down smoothly in what appears to be a response tailored for near wall mounting. The ports are both narrow tuned to 35Hz and – surprisingly – add little to overall output power, having sound pressure levels at 80Hz lower than the main bass unit, where narrow tuned ports commonly measure +6dB or so. So bass is likely to be on the light side and the ports apply limited damping to the bass unit, the impedance curve shows.

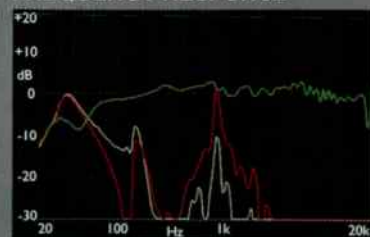
Sensitivity measured 9.5 Ohms with pink noise, a very high value and indeed the DCR was also high at 6.4 Ohms. Our impedance curve clearly shows that over most of the audio band impedance exceeds 10 Ohms, so the Argon does not utilise the potential power delivery of solid-state amplifiers. Sensitivity was inevitably on the low side at 86dB SPL from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input, so the Argon will need to be paired

with amplifiers having some power, say 50 Watts or more.

Our 200mS decay spectrum shows a few hot spots, inevitably including one at 750Hz where the Argon has a strong internal mode. Some colourations may be audible.

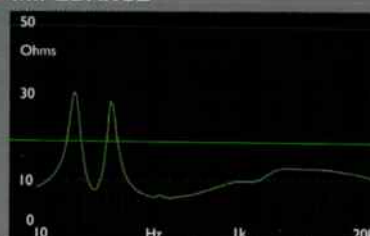
The Argon 3L has areas where it could be improved, like most loudspeakers. All the same, it is a well engineered package with unique properties, measurement shows. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



# Sound quality that'll blow your socks off?

Are widely accepted music formats undermining the quality of the music we listen to on a daily basis?

## The Music Chain

Much is written about music and the musicians who entertain us, and we rightly exalt great musicians. But there is an interlinked chain of participants, two of which are I believe are crucial to our music scene in today's world. For centuries the music chain was a very short one – composers or songwriters, musicians and listeners, and the judgement on quality was immediate. Recording technologies have changed all this exponentially.

Today, we listen to most of our music from a recording and this gives recording engineers the opportunity to avoid poor acoustics, duff notes and off days. This, of course, means the chain has grown to include the recording engineers, the music distribution system (retailers or downloads), hi-fi manufacturers, hi-fi sellers and the hi-fi purchasers, the latter being the listeners. I should start by saying that hi-fi has become an adulterated term that no longer has its original meaning because it's applied to much equipment that certainly should not be termed high-fidelity.

It's said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. However, I believe there are two particularly strong links that, if removed from the chain, would seriously damage the quality of recorded music. These are the audiophile, or hi-fi connoisseur, and the specialist hi-fi retailer, the latter in nearly all cases also being the former because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These are the people who most appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver an emotional experience.

## Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years

the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of

high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for their potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.

What are the future prospects of maintaining high quality music recordings? We must hope that audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, will continue to drive the demand for quality. But another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Full resolution, CD quality, downloads are already available and should become the norm as long as the general public can be made aware of the tremendous quality benefit. This has happened with HD TV so we know this awareness can grow rapidly. In the meantime, we must highly value hi-fi connoisseurs and specialist hi-fi retailers, of which the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest. Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“ There is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. ”

## OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

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

### SOUTH

**Ashford, Kent**  
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI  
40 High Street.  
t: 01233 624441  
www.soundcraft-hifi.com

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

**Colchester**  
RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.  
t: 01206 577682  
www.rayleighhifi.com

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

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

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

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

**Southampton**  
PHASE 3 HI-FI  
37 Bedford Place.  
t: 023 8022 8434  
www.phase3southampton.co.uk

### LONDON

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

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

**SW11**  
ORANGES & LEMONS  
61/63 Webbs Road.  
t: 020 7924 2043  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

### SOUTH WEST

**Bath**  
AUDIENCE  
14 Broad Street.  
t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

**Exeter**  
GULLIFORD HI-FI  
97 Sidwell Street.  
t: 01392 491194  
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

### MIDLANDS

**Banbury**  
OVERTURE  
3 Church Lane.  
t: 01295 272158  
www.overture.co.uk

**Birmingham**  
MUSIC MATTERS  
363 Hagley Road,  
Edgbaston.  
t: 0121 429 2811  
www.musicmatters.co.uk

**Coventry**  
FRANK HARVEY  
163 Spon Street.  
t: 024 7652 5200  
www.frankharvey.co.uk

**Leicester**  
CYMBIOSIS  
6 Hotel Street.  
t: 0116 262 3754  
www.cymbiosis.com

**Nottingham**  
CASTLE SOUND & VISION  
48/50 Maid Marian Way.  
t: 0115 9584404  
www.castlesoundvision.com

### NORTH

**Cheadle**  
THE AUDIO WORKS  
14 Stockport Road.  
t: 0161 428 7887  
www.theaudioworks.co.uk

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

**Hull**  
THE AUDIO ROOM  
2 George Street.  
t: 01482 891375  
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

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

### SCOTLAND

**Aberdeen**  
HOLBURN HI-FI  
441 Holburn Street.  
t: 01224 585713/  
572729  
www.holburnhifi.co.uk

**Edinburgh**  
LOUD & CLEAR  
Bonnington Mill,  
72 Newhaven Road.  
t: 0131 555 3963  
www.loud-clear.co.uk

**Glasgow**  
LOUD & CLEAR  
520 St Vincent Street.  
t: 0141 221 0221  
www.loud-clear.co.uk

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t: 0141 3322200/4707  
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### STAR QUALITIES

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SERVICE



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VERDICT



**TOP 20 UK**  
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QUALITY ASSURED

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## NEWS

The Show is known as THE place to see and hear all the latest products. Keep checking the website as news will be added on a weekly basis.



**BRANDS INCLUDE:** Acoustic Energy, Acoustic Insight, Amphion, Analysis Audio, Anthem, Arcam, Armour Home Electronics, Atacama Audio, Atlas Cables, Audio Note, Audio Technica Headphones, Audionet, Audiovector, Aurousal, BDI, BeCHOCOLATE, Blue Horizon, Bryston, Cabasse, Canton, Castle, Chapter Audio, Chapter Electronics, Chord Company, Clearlight Audio, Computers Unlimited, Cyrus, Dali, Dellec Precision Audio, Denon, Diverse Vinyl, Dynaudio, Elac, Electrocompaniet, Epson, Exposure, Focal, Furutech, Goldring, Grado, Henley Designs, Hi-Fi Choice, Hi-Fi News, Hi-Fi Racks, Hi-Fi World, Hi-Fi+, HiFi Critic, HiFi-Tuning, Home Cinema Choice, IAG, Isotek, JVC, KEF, Keith Monks, Leema Electroacoustics, Lehmann, Marantz, Marigo Audio, Michell Engineering, Monitor Audio, NAD, Naim Audio, Naim Label, NAT Audio, Neat Acoustics, Nordost, Olive, Onkyo, Ortofon, Paradigm, Peachtree Audio, Philips, Pioneer, PMC, Pro-Ject, ProAc, PSB, Pulse, Q Acoustics, QED, Quadraspire, Rega, REL Acoustics, Roksan, Ruark, Screen Innovations, SIM2, Sonos, Sound Foundations, Spondor, Supra Cables, T+A, TMSystems Ltd, Totem Acoustic, Track Audio, van den Hul, Vandersteen Audio, Vienna Acoustics, Vinyls Best, Vita Audio, Walker Audio, Wavelength Distribution, Whatfedale, Wilson Benesch, WireWorld UK, XTZ, Yamaha and many more...

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO WIN THE FANTASTIC **FUNK FIRM FXR II** TONEARM, WHICH DAVID PRICE SO ENJOYED IN THE NOVEMBER 2010 ISSUE! HERE'S WHAT HE SAID...



**"A**rthur Khoubesserian is a man on a mission; he has a kid-in-a-sweetshop enthusiasm for variously music, hi-fi vinyl, and engineering design. He says "it would be easier to make a complete arm from scratch", pointing out that the Rega tonearm on which the FXR is based has to be carefully dismantled from the original setup using custom made jigs and tools. The arm beam is then "parted off to a precise length" and the FXR tube is then jigged and bonded to the cut-down arm stub. Before this is done, it has to be pre-assembled; the object is to produce the most acoustically inert structure possible. The thin walled aluminium tube gets a carbon fibre cross sec-

tion, tensioned within, which terminates in a custom headshell mount. The new bearing pillar is assembled with ABEC 7 bearings, adjusted and set. Along the way, five separate quality checks take place. As for colour choice, Arthur says, "it is identifiable at one hundred paces! Love it or hate it, it is uniquely Funk. If you want a black or silver arm, then buy someone/everyone else's!"

The FXR II has a big hearted, powerful and energetic sound that lets the music's flavour flood out. It reminded me of a King Charles Spaniel romping through a park, absolutely unstoppable and full of the joys of spring. It was a striking contrast to the SME Series V, which was an altogether more cerebral and ordered affair. Indeed, in some ways the Funk arm made the SME sound

positively aloof, despite its characteristic supreme grip and focus. The FXR II sounded tremendously animated and fizzing with energy. I was struck by the phrasing of the strings, which the Funk accentuated, and the SME played down. The result was that the former arm came over as having more passion, or rather the music did; I felt gripped and locked in to the human 'vibe' in the recording studio, whereas with the SME I got a beautifully architectural description of the soundstage, provided matter of factly with rifle-bolt precision. This is an open, spacious and animated sounding tonearm that succeeds spectacularly in the extraction of music from the groove."

If you'd like to win one pair of these superb speakers then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard by 31st January 2011 to:

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

**RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY**

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

**QUESTIONS**

- [1] What metal is the tube made from?**  
 [a] zinc  
 [b] lithium  
 [c] iron  
 [d] aluminium
- [2] What is the cross-section made from?**  
 [a] paper  
 [b] plastic  
 [c] balsa wood  
 [d] carbon fibre
- [3] What grade of bearings are used?**  
 [a] USBEC 4  
 [b] QUEBEC 5  
 [c] DEFEC 6  
 [d] ABEC 7

- [4] David felt locked into the what, in the recording studio?**  
 [a] "prodigious drama"  
 [b] "sinuous bassline"  
 [c] "fascinating rhythm"  
 [d] "human vibe"

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

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

**NOVEMBER 2010 WINNER: XTZ A100D3 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
 Mr. Martyn Formstone of Crewe, Cheshire**

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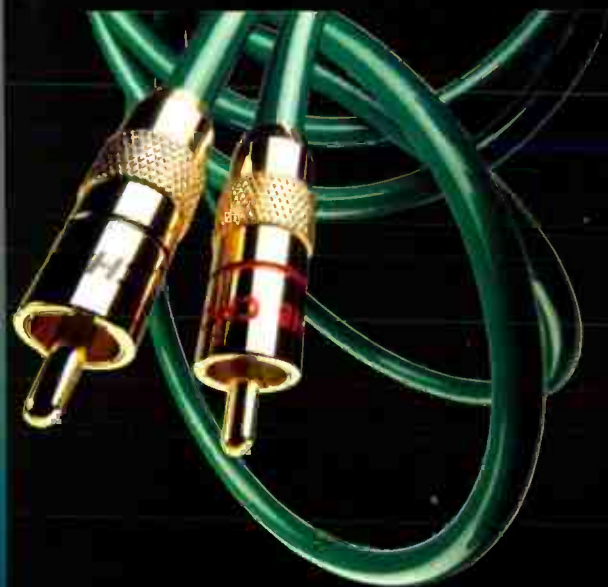
# HI-FI WORLD



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## ARCAM RDAC £300

The rise of USB-capable digital to analogue convertors has been a noticeable undercurrent in the hi-fi market of late, as a sizeable minority have suddenly started taking computer audio seriously. As it happens, ye olde optical TOSLINK is particularly well suited to the job of getting ones and noughts from electrically noisy computers (it of course carries no electrical noise at all and thus is an ideal noise barrier), and until very recently that's what I'd recommend. Indeed, doing in-depth listening with a Musical Fidelity M1 DAC only a couple of months back, from a MacBook Pro, the optical connection vastly outperformed the USB one. However, a new type of USB connection protocol has been developed by British digital specialists dCS, called Asynchronous USB which is claimed to substantially improve the sound by letting the DAC 'clock' the data flow, rather than relying on the wobbly (for digital audio purposes) one in the already overworked Mac or PC.

Normal USB sends digital audio in an isochronous way, where the computer sends packets at a regular rate which the receiver (i.e. DAC) has to synchronise with, in order to rebuild the audio datastream. The system is passive, in the sense that there's no control of the flow by the DAC, and no error recovery – think of it as your wife throwing your possessions at you out of the bedroom window! So the receiving DAC has to catch as much of the data as it can, at times not controlled by it. Asynchronous operation simply adds an additional channel of communication from the receiver to the sender that allows the receiver to control the rate of data. The DAC can say how many bytes arrive in each 'throw', so the DAC's own (hopefully better quality) clock can call the shots, and so nothing gets broken as everything is caught safely.

Whilst asynchronous USB is a great idea, inasmuch as it addresses one of the fundamental pitfalls of digital audio (i.e. jitter), of course it's still an electrical connection, so is still at a disadvantage to TOSLINK in this respect. Trouble is, the latter only works reliably up to 48kHz sampling rates, so anyone with computer audio systems playing the increasing numbers of 24/96 FLAC files will



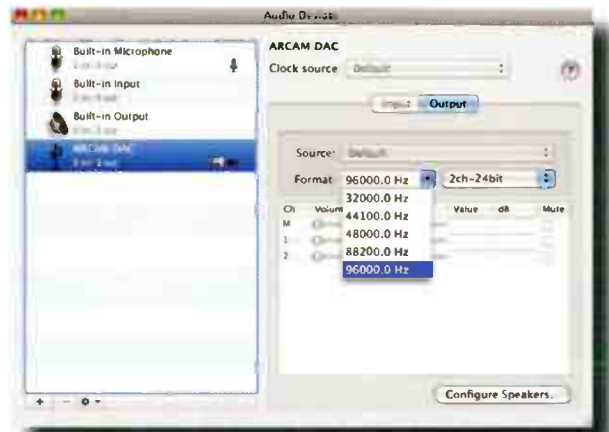
be stuck; it will be back to the USB connector for them (which runs up to 96kHz, currently!) So it is well worth making the USB system give of its best.

The Arcam rDAC is the first 'affordable' digital convertor to have asynchronous USB as standard; sadly it doesn't have the Ring DAC (well, it is £299!) but runs an already popular Wolfson Microelectronics 8741 24bit Delta Sigma chip. This sits in a beautiful aluminium box (160x100x40mm), styled in the company's striking modern way. There are indicators for the input selected (USB, optical, coax) which light up red to denote they're active, and then go green when they've got a signal. Sadly, no sampling frequency LED though, which computer audiophiles and reviewers will find an absolute pain – more of which later...

A wireless version is also available, allowing music to be streamed via your home WiFi network; we'll be testing this in due course. A small 'wall wart' switched mode power supply serves 6v (600mA), from a nice long distance away from the DAC itself.

### SOUND QUALITY

Via the USB input, the Arcam sounded very good indeed. It's important to make sure that your computer's audio mixer is set to the same sampling frequency as the file you're playing, otherwise it starts to do its own, sound-degrading sample rate conversion, uninvited! My Mac needed setting to 44.1kHz, after I found it had already set itself to output data at 96kHz. That's why I'd like to see some sort of sampling frequency indication on the rDAC, otherwise you have to go round digging in the recesses of your operating system to ensure you're getting the best sound. The rDAC sounded better at 44.1kHz playing non-upsampled files than it did at 96kHz via my MacBook Pro's



**For best results, set your operating system's sample rate to the same as file(s) you're playing.**

upsampling, losing a lot of grain and gaining a lot of air and space. Against the Mac's optical out, asynchronous USB sounded tighter, more precise and more detailed, although TOSLINK was marginally smoother. Either way, I was impressed by the very high quality of sound coming out.

Via a high quality bespoke CD transport via coax, things sounded better still; here's a very open and immediate sounding DAC with a big, bouncy bass, a crisp and detailed midband (which is a little warmer and fuller sounding than its price rivals), and a smooth and accurate treble. I enjoyed the rDAC's big hearted musicality, and smooth pleasing tonality; not a million miles from a good Arcam CD player, I'd humbly suggest.

Against the Musical Fidelity M1 (a £399 upsampling DAC; the rDAC is not upsampling), the M1 showed a more open and delicate treble, a more spacious midband with finer filigree detailing and tauter, tighter bass. However, there was a definite bass lightness from the M1, whereas the Arcam was chunkier and more full bodied; it has a little less refinement up top, and a lot less bounce below. As such, the Arcam rDAC is a brilliant new product, and deserves to succeed; watch this space for further findings. **DP**



# Soundbites

# WORLD STANDARDS

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

## TURNTABLES

### PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

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

### REGA P2 2008 £220

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

### TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £495

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



### REGA P3-24 2008 £400

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

### MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

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

### ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2010 £1,399

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

### FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

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



### MARANTZ TT-15S1 2005 £999

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

### MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,005

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

### ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD

2008 £1,350

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

### REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

### AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

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

### MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

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



### LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

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

### SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

### ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

### BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £4,495

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

### AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

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

### McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

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

### EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

## TONEARMS

### REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

### MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



### ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

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

### SME 309 1989 £767

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

### SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

### AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300

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

### NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

### HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

### SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

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

**LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700**

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

**SME 312S 2010 £1,750**

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

**GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495**

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

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600**

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

**OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500**

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

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

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

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

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

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

**DENON DL103R 2006 £200**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250**

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

**ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395**

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

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

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

**LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595**

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

**ORTOFON RONDO****BRONZE 2005 £500**

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

**ZYX R-100H 2005 £625**

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

**BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650**

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

**TRANSFIGURATION AXIA****2007 £890**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****DACMAGIC £229**

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

**STELLO DA100****SIGNATURE £675**

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

**CAMBRIDGE****AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

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

**NAIM CDS1 2008 £895**

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

**ROKSAN KANDY****K2 CD 2010 £900**

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

**BENCHMARK DAC-IS 2009 £930**

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

**CYRUS CD8 SE 2008 £1,200**

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

**SIMAUDIO MOON 300D****2010 £1,290**

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

**NAIM DAC****£1,995**

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

**CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000**

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

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

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

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

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

**ESOTERIC X-05 2010 £4,495**

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

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950**

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

**NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050**

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

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

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

**DCS PAGANINI DAC** £9,599  
 Digital rarely sounds better; dCS's bespoke Ring DAC makes for power, punch and insight on an epic scale. Add clock and upsampler for an even more profound experience. Justifiably expensive.



**LINN KLIMAX DS** 2007 £9,600  
 Landmark network music player, offering brilliant sonics at up to 24/96 resolution from hard disk/NAS. Expensive, but you can hear why...

**NAIM CD555/555PS** 2006 £14,000  
 Very probably the best CD player yet made - certainly the most expensive; a digital *tour de force*.



**RECORDERS**

**NAIM HDX** 2009 £4,405  
 Interesting one-box network enabled hard disk music system gives superb sonics together with impressive ease of use.

**SONY TC-WE475** 2010 £130  
 Essential tackle for committed cassette users, this well calibrated double deck sounds way better than expected!

**SONY RCD-W3** 2002 £250  
 Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for no-nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

**PHONO STAGES**

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P** £99  
 Excellent entry level design that raises the bar for budget phono stages. Crisp, smooth yet brightly lit sound on both MM and MC that's a vast improvement on most budget inboard designs.

**GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V** 2004 £460  
 Wonderfully warm, open and musical nature makes this an essential audition for those wanting a top value mid-price phono stage.

**ICON AUDIO PS1.2** 2007 £599  
 Excellent value valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.



**ASTIN TREW AT8000** £880  
 Expansive, detailed, powerful and musical sound makes this a surprise entrant to the first class sub-£1,000 phono stage club.

**ANATEK MCI** 2007 £850  
 Excellent MC phono stage that offers serious insight underpinned by powerful and tuneful bass.

**QUAD QC24P** 2007 £995  
 Dynamic performer that can be used on its own as a complete phono-level preamp.

**TRICHORD DIABLO + NCP5U** 2006 £1,198  
 Highly musical performer, this is one of the best phono stages at or near the price, but lacks the polish of the rival Whest.

**ICON AUDIO PS3** 2008 £1,500  
 Super sounding valve phono preamplifier, with an expansive, engaging and organic nature that makes vinyl sheer joy!

**EMILLE ALLURE** 2010 £2,495  
 Just as the name suggests, this is a lovely way to play LP with an exceptionally open and lucid sound.



**A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD** 2010 £995  
 Exceptionally musical and natural sounding all discrete transistor phono stage, with highly lucid, valve-like presentation.

**AMPLIFIERS**

**SUGDEN MYSTRO** 2010 £1,225  
 Sugden's first Class AB integrated in a long time surprises; rollickingly good fun to listen to, it loses surprisingly little in smoothness to its Class AB siblings.



**ICON AUDIO STEREO 25** 2008 £500  
 Cracking entry-level valve integrated, with a warm and engaging sound. Limited power so needs careful partnering, though.

**ROTEL RA-06** 2008 £550  
 Vivacious sounding device that, whilst lacking the finer musical points, wears its heart on its sleeve and has plenty of power to match.

**NAIM NAIT 5i** 2007 £725  
 The italic 'i' version remains one of the most musically competent and dynamically engaging integrations at the price.

**CAMBRIDGE 840A V2** 2007 £750  
 Version 2 addresses version 1's weaknesses to turn in a mightily accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

**JUNGSON JA-88D** 2006 £899  
 Stunning value for money Class A monster integrated; extreme power and clarity at a puzzlingly low price.



**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400  
 In other life, this sold for three times the price, making it a stand-out bargain now. Very clean, powerful and tidy sound but not the world's most beguiling.

**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2007 £1,299  
 More power and greater transparency improve even further on the already impressive A21a to give truly impressive results

**NAIM NAIT XS** 2009 £1,250  
 With much of the sound of the Supernait at half the price, this is powerful, articulate and smooth beyond class expectations.

**ELECTROCOMPANIE T PI-2** 2008 £1,430  
 Powerful integrated with seriously solid bass and impressive dynamic abilities. Superbly musical.

**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2008 £1,469  
 Crystalline clarity, dizzying speed and forensic detailing makes this seminal design the most musical at the price, but power limited so needs sensitive speakers.

**ANATEK A50R** 2007 £1,600  
 Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

**VINCENT SA-236MK** 2010 £1,749  
 Big, powerful and expansive sounding hybrid transistor amplifier, with bright, spry and musical nature.

**MOON I-3RS** 2008 £1,890  
 Grippy and clean performer with fine soundstaging and build quality.

**COPLAND CSA29** 2006 £1,998  
 Unfailingly svelte, sophisticated and smooth - both to listen to and look at - this is a truly desirable high end integrated.

**NAIM SUPERNAIT** 2007 £2,475  
 Integrated *tour de force* from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with super sound.

**LUXMAN L-550A** 2007 £2,800  
 Monster Class A integrated with powerful and revealing sound and a whole host of useful features, including a highly competent MM/MC phono stage

**AUDIO RESEARCH VSI60** 2009 £3,298  
 Load of tube power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a grin-inducing listen.

**LEEMA TUCANA II** 2010 £3,495  
 Polished high end integrated amp that combines power, detail and genuine musicality with a good range of facilities.



**SUGDEN IA4** 2007 £3,650  
 Goodly amount of Class A power, icy clarity and a breathtakingly fast, musical sound make this one of the very best super-integrateds.

**QUAD II CLASSIC** 2010 £4,500  
 Beautiful retro styled integrated amplifier with a subtle, supple sound - although needs matching to speakers that are easy loads.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS35I** 2010 £6,000  
 Gorgeous, liquid sounding solid-state full Class A integrated with a supernaturally sumptuous bass; surely one of the very best integrations ever made!

**AV AMPLIFIERS**

**ARCAM AVR350** 2006 £1,500  
Superbly accomplished do-it-all AV receiver package, with an uncommonly, warm, natural and musical sound. A winner goes from strength to strength.

**HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS**

**CHANNEL ISLANDS VHP-1/ VAC-1** £390

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

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

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

**SUGDEN HEADMASTER** 2003 £600

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

**PREAMPLIFIERS**

**CREEK OBH-12** 2000 £220

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



**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1,500

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



**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

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

**NUFORCE P-9** 2007 £2,200

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



**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

**ROKSAN KANDY LIII** 2008 £600  
Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

**QUAD 909** 2001 £900

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

**NAIM NAP150** 2002 £795

Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

**SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER** 2003 £1,300

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



**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2** 2006 £1,750

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



**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

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

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

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

**ICON AUDIO MB845** 2009 £2,499

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

**GRAAF GM20 OTL** 2003 £3,300

Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an

Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no. **ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO** 2009 £4,450 (EACH)

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



**DPA SA-1** 2010 £2,850

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

**SILK GLOWMASTER KT88** 2007 £1,699

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



**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230

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

**QUAD II-80** 2005 £6,000

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

**MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50** 2010 £7,000

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

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**Q ACOUSTICS 2020** 2010 £140

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

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I** 2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

**B&W 686** 2007 £279

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

**KEF IQ30** 2009 £330

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



**USHER S-520** 2006 £350

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

**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3** 2010 £299

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

**XTZ 99.25** 2010 £640

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

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEI CLASSIC** £845

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

**SPENDOR S3/5E** 2004 £950

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

**RRR FS100** 2007 £1,055

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

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

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

**REVOLVER RW451** 2006 £1,199

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

**ONE THING AUDIO ESL57** 2007 £1,450

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

**KIBRI NAIMA** 2007 £1,550

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

**GURU QM-10P** 2007 £1,595

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

**USHER BE-718** 2007 £1,600

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

**MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE** 2008 £1,599

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

**MONITOR AUDIO GS60** 2008 £2,000

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

**SPENDOR S8E** £1,895

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

**ISOPHON GALILEO** 2007 £2,100

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

**YAMAHA SOAVO I.1** 2009 £3,000

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

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100** 2008 £2,300

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

**PMC OB11** 2008 £2,950

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

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

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

**MOWGAN AUDIO MABON** 2007 £3,995

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

**B&O BEOLAB 9** 2007 £5000

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

**ARS AURES MI** 2006 £5,995

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

**QUAD ESL-2905** 2006 £5,995

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

**SPENDOR ST** 2010 £5,995

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

**REVOLVER CYGNIS** 2006 £5,999

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

**USHER BE-10** 2009 £10,500

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

**B&W 801D** 2006 £10,500

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

**ISOPHON CASSIANO** 2007 £12,900

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

**REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD** 2010 £14,995

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

## ACCESSORIES

**MONITOR AUDIO IDECK** 2006 £200

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

**ISOTEK AQUARIUS** 2010 £795

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

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM** 2003 £800

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

## HEADPHONES

**SENNHEISER MX-550** 2005 £19

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

**SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29**

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



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

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

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

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



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

**INTERCONNECTS**

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE 2008 £375**

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

**TUNERS**

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



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

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

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

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

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

**SYSTEMS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

**MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1 2010 £6,990**

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

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





# X Factor

**Tony Bolton – Hi-Fi World's very own Simon Cowell – sits in judgement about the emerging new talent that is the XTZ AP100 power amplifier!**

**B**ack in the September 2010 issue of this magazine I reviewed the XTZ A100D3 integrated amplifier, and was rather impressed with the performance on offer for the rather modest sum of £600 (pre-VAT rise). So I was quite pleased to be asked to have a listen to the 'muscle' end of an A100D3, the AP100.

Housed in a matching solid aluminium casework, and again finished in the same, to my eyes at least, pleasing combination of silver and black (both colours are available separately) the power amp tips the scales at a fractionally more modest 21kg (the integrated weighs 1kg more) whilst maintaining the same 158 x 445 x 468mm dimensions. It is a tight fit on a standard size equipment rack, and allowance needs to be made for cables and ventilation. It is also worth noting that it is front heavy, due to the location of the large toroidal transformer.

This feeds power through a fully balanced, modular circuit, incorporating a dual differential input stage, and finishing with two banks of four Toshiba bipolar output transistors, namely pairs of 2SC5200s and

2SA1943s. The bias is regulated by a thermal sensor mounted on the heatsinks, and the change from Class AB to Class A operation principally involves an increase in this bias, resulting, it is claimed in less power but a purer sound.

This change in operation is effected by pressing the right hand of the two buttons in the lower corners of the fascia (the left switches the power on). Above each of these buttons are single LEDs. The power one shows red for standby, flashing green for entering work state and solid green for operational. The other shows red for Class A and green for Class AB. The back houses matching pairs of quite chunky speaker terminals that accept all the usual combinations of terminations, pairs of balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA Phono sockets, and in the middle sliding switches for Stereo or Bridge modes, Standby Timer and a three position timer switch offering 1 hour, 30 or 10 minute settings.

I installed the AP100 in the rack in the front room and brought down the Bent Audio TAP-X Autoformer Passive preamp that normally feeds either my Quad 303s or the Leak Stereo 20 upstairs. This was fed by

the Clearaudio Master Solution and a Leema Acoustics Agena phonostage and Antilla CD player, and drove my Chario Ursa Majors. The first few hours of use were sourced from the TV, and over the evening I noticed relatively little change in the sound after the first hour, although by the following day I felt that the bass had filled out a little in the intervening hours of overnight repeated CDs. Beyond that there seemed to be little, if any, running required...

## SOUND QUALITY

Over the next few days I did my usual 'as-the-mood-takes-me' ramble through my music collection [Ermm - don't you mean your rigorous review procedure, Tony? Ed.], running the AP100 in both modes, though mostly settling on the Class A operation, finding it had a rather smoother top end, especially when playing classical music. One piece really brought this to light; that being Khachaturian's 'Spartacus', known to those of us old enough to remember Sunday evening TV in the mid 1970s as 'The Onedin Line' theme tune. The theme in question is the 'Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia', a beautiful, lyrical piece of music, that ebbs and flows,



before building up to its main theme on violins, with brass providing a contrasting response. This recording dates from 1962, recorded by Decca with the composer conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

Running in the more conventional AB mode the sound was quite full bodied, although not the tonally richest that I've heard, and I felt that the higher frequencies were not as smooth as some that I have listened to. The violins in particular had a certain papery edge to the sound that wasn't offensive in any way, but wasn't, I felt, tonally accurate. Changing to Class A operation and a lot of this characteristic disappeared, the higher notes having a more rounded and slicker presentation. The rather romantic and yearning nature of the piece came through better, although I wouldn't say that classical music was necessarily this amp's first love.

Imaging was good and the VPO seemed to occupy a sizable chunk of my living room carpet; the soundstage extending beyond the speakers and also coming out into the room and back through the wall a little. The space seemed to be reasonable for the scale of piece being played, although a few excursions into heavier classical fare weren't quite as satisfying.

A few hours later and I was playing the stage cast recording of 'My Fair Lady'. This was the (US) Columbia Masterworks recording which, the gatefold cover proudly informs the reader in inch tall letters, is 'My Fair Lady in Stereo - recorded in London February 1, 1959'. Most readers will have come across the mono Philips recording, which was one of the best sellers of the late fifties and early sixties period. This stereo version is well worth seeking out. The performances are at least as good as the mono version, but the sound engineers went to town with this new-fangled medium, and produced a disc that nearly fifty two years on, demonstrates just how good stereo vinyl can be.

The 'Ascot Gavotte' stood out in particular. The precise, almost mincing pace of the track was exquisitely described, and the over emphasised, vowel-strangling enunciation of the chorus was perfectly rendered. The scene takes place in the Members' Enclosure at Ascot, and created a vivid image of upper class Edwardian society, all refined manners and emotions under perfect control. The almost delicate precision of the music seemed to suit the XTZ's style of presentation.

The following day I was having

a bit of a nineteen sixties psychedelia session and ended up playing 'Forever Changes' by Love. Released in 1971 this LP combines some truly memorable lyrics with a Tijuana influenced brass sound, and the usual period twangle of guitars and drums. Although not hugely successful at the time, it is one of those LPs that has sold steadily and over the years acquired a bit of a cult following, seeming, to me, to almost encapsulate a lot of the musical characteristics of the era on one disc. I bought this record from HMV on Oxford Street in the early nineties, and having compared it to an original pressing, it is somewhat more muted in its sound. Here the quite open nature of the XTZ seemed to compensate for this and it was an enjoyable listen. I felt able to explore the different strands of sound, each being well shaped and placed. Rhythms were quite propulsive and energetic, and the whole piece seemed to flow with a cohesive energy that was both pleasant and convincing.

Staying rather psychedelically orientated (musically at least) I ended my listening with a CD by DJ Freedom called 'Digital Breakdown'. This is medium paced Progressive Trance, so although it has the characteristic deep driving bass of the genre, it has more melody and tune with it than some modern dance music. The XTZ was quite at home here, getting the foot-tapping going almost immediately. Bass wasn't the deepest or most floorshaking that I have heard in this house, but was full bodied enough to be acceptable and fast enough to be energising. The effects and sounds moving around between the speakers was engaging, and the whole performance was most enjoyable.

**CONCLUSION**

Overall a very good performance, especially when the £520 price tag is remembered. Placed against power



amps three times its price then the XTZ lags a little in ultimate performance. Bass is fast and well defined, although not especially deep, and I would hesitate to use this amp if heavy classical was your main musical fare. If, however, your tastes are more towards the lighter classical or more popular spectrums of music then the API00 should serve you very well. There is no matching preamp offered by the manufacturer, so this amp is intended to partner the A100D3 integrated mentioned earlier. Wired up with a decent set of balanced interconnects, this combination should provide excellent performance, with enough power to drive most systems to satisfactorily. So as a free-standing power amp the API00 certainly punches well above its price point, and is well worth auditioning.

**VERDICT**

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

**XTZ AP100** £520  
**Audiosanctum**  
 +44 (0)7517 889738  
 www.audiosanctum.co.uk

- FOR**
- clean, fast sound
  - plenty of power
  - switchable Class A
  - solid build

- AGAINST**
- nothing at the price

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The big Class-AP 100 is quoted as producing 110 Watts in Class A/B mode and 50 Watts in Class A mode. However, ours produced identical power in both modes: 112 Watts into 8 Ohms and 196 Watts into 4 Ohms. Switching from Class A/B to A reduced distortion a little and that was all. I noticed that under test in Class A mode the channel being tested got hotter even with light running and this suggests that bias is low, increasing little when changing from A/B to A. The heatsinks ran warm to the touch in both modes, but not really hot, where pure Class A runs burning hot even with huge heatsinks. All the signs are switching to Class A increases bias in the output transistors a little but the amplifier is far away from running in full Class A.

Distortion levels were low in both modes, even at high frequencies and low levels, where crossover usually dominates. Our analysis shows second harmonic dominated and switching from A/B to A reduced this a little, from 0.04% to 0.009% for example, delivering 1 Watt into 4 Ohms. This performance was maintained through the balanced input and the unbalanced phono input; there was no difference between them, as there as not in voltage gain and bandwidth either.

This XTZ, like a previous model, had very sensitive protection circuits and, unlike all other amplifiers, refused to work on our balanced test bench until its chassis earth was disconnected,

even at the spectrum analyser's input. Driving a fully floating loudspeaker in real life this should not be a problem. However, in bridge mode the XTZ utterly refused to work with either of our balanced input analysers so we could not measure bridge power.

The Class-AP 100 measures well but it hardly merits being called Class A, running little more than warm - unlike our true 50 Watt Class A Musical Fidelity AMS-50 amplifier, for example, that runs hot even with huge heatsinks. **NK**

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Power              | 110 Watts |
| CD/tuner/aux.      |           |
| Frequency response | 5Hz-82kHz |
| Separation         | 98dB      |
| Noise              | -118dB    |
| Distortion         | 0.02%     |
| Sensitivity        | 1V        |

**DISTORTION**



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# Lost Empire

## Adam Smith remembers the glory days of Empire's long lost 598 turntable...

It seems to me that more than one hi-fi company over the years has become well known for a certain product or range, which consequently rather overshadows something else that they make; this may well be the case, in the UK at least, in terms of Empire Scientific. The company started life in the late 1950s as Dyna-Empire Inc. and made a very big name for themselves in the manufacture of cartridges, many of which, such as the 999, 1000 and 2000 models, are still fondly remembered. They also made a rather unusual loudspeaker called the Grenadier that was hexagonal in cross section and featuring a downward-firing woofer. However, their range of turntables are far better known across the Atlantic and it seems that relatively few made it to these shores. Judging by my recent encounter with one, however, this would seem a very great shame.

The first Empire deck to hit the market under the 'Troubadour' moniker was the fixed subchassis 208 in 1961 and it was unusual for the day as it was belt driven. The addition of the optional Empire 98 tonearm turned this into the 298 model or you could equip it with your own choice of arm. The next model was to be the 398 which kept the 208 motor unit but added a new arm; the 980, which featured a 5 pin arm cable socket (good) and a new headshell featuring a rather flimsy plastic cartridge mounting plate (bad).

This deck was superseded by the 498, still featuring the 980 arm but with the addition of an anti-skate device and the motor unit itself was also redesigned to be a suspended subchassis type. A sort of halfway-house between the 398 and the subsequent 598, this is rumoured to be Empire's best deck, but very few were sold and they are a rarity even in the USA. 1970, however, saw the introduction of the 598, which marked a radical redesign for the Empire turntable

range.

Still belt drive, the 598 was the first Troubadour to have a two piece platter, but not in the LPI2/RD80 style that we are all so used to. Instead, the 598's sub platter was a vast thing, measuring ten inches in diameter and weighing in at 2.5kg, with the secondary platter being light and merely serving to bring the record support surface up to twelve inches. The bearing on which the platter spins is equally massive; 12mm in diameter and 75mm long, and the trinity is completed by a motor that wouldn't look out of place on a lathe. The subchassis supporting this is surprisingly skeletal, but does a good job and each spring is easily adjustable from underneath for levelling. The motor features an adjustable mounting that is used for variable speed facilities and speed change is by hand.

The arm fitted to the 598 was the 990, a further evolution of

served as a combined arm rest and handy stylus illumination lamp.

The 598 came ensconced in a very well made walnut case, with a dust cover comprising pieces of real glass, and underwent three revisions during its life. The Mk1 had three speeds and a pop-up 45rpm adaptor; the Mk2 introduced a new Empire logo and was available in both two and three speed variants, and the Mk3 (shown here) was two speed only and had a reversible centre disc for 45rpm adaptor duties. The 598 was made until 1976 when it was replaced by Empire's final deck, the 698, which featured a brand new, low mass arm plus electronic cueing and end of side lift-off. This lasted until around 1981, when Empire Scientific was sold to Ernest Benz and the company focused on the cartridge side of the business. The company survives to this day, but only making a range of batteries for camcorders, cameras and the like.

"a perfect example of simple but solid engineering put into practice in a superbly capable way..."

the 980. Using ball race bearings for both horizontal and vertical movement, the 990 is a high mass device, although one that is very well engineered and surprisingly flexible. Downforce is applied by spring using a control calibrated from 0-4g and bias was inbuilt, with comprehensive instructions in the manual for setting it optimally for a range of stylus, including Quadraphonic on the Mk3 variant. Damped cueing was provided, as was the Empire Dyna-lift; a neat end-of side lift off that worked magnetically to snatch the stylus out of the groove when the actuating pin reached the cutout in the Dyna-lift pillar. For those of a nervous disposition, this could be deactivated by simply clicking the pillar back into its inactive position. Finally, the pillar on the right hand side of the deck

### SOUND QUALITY

Clearly a high mass arm requires a different cartridge to normal and so the Denon DL103 that was languishing in the bottom of my oddments box was pulled into service. As stylus hit groove and the music started I nearly had to get up and check that it really was the 598 playing; this deck is no quaint and fuzzy old-timer. Even with a flaky arm lead that lost contact intermittently in the right channel, I was absolutely astounded by the sound in front of me and I have to say that I have never heard a DL103 sound like this one did before – maybe there is some merit in the old clunker after all [steady on old boy! Ed.]!

The 598 offers a dynamic, solid and astonishingly focused presentation, with a bass that grips like





a vice. All the metalwork in the drive system is clearly not in vain and the result is a deck that times, punches and romps along far better than a good many belt drives that succeeded it. Spinning the Eagles' live version of 'Hotel California' from their 'Hell Freezes Over' LP, the 598 thumped out the bass drum notes with authority and precision, whilst spreading the band themselves across the front of my listening room like a demented fly-poster slapping a huge canvas onto my wall. The soundstage soared wide and deep to give a truly immersive result, and this is simply not the sort of thing that forty year old turntables generally do, unless they are wearing Garrard, Thorens or EMT badges!

At the top end, the Empire was insightful and yet smooth and considered. It captured every detail that was asked of it, although I felt it did lack the last morsel of crisp precision when it came to delicately played hi-hats; they seemed to wander off into the background a little. I suspect, however, that this is in no small part due to forty year old arm wiring as well as that aforementioned flaky lead and, needless to say. Sometimes I find with old turntables that I have to sit and consider whether it is worth putting any real

time, money and effort into them; with the Empire 598 the decision made itself.

### BUYING

As mentioned, the US was the main market for these decks and they do not show themselves on our side of the pond very often. Fortunately, when they do, they don't seem to attract a great deal of attention and so a couple of hundred pounds at most should secure a really good one. The 598 is essentially a simple beast and so there is not a great deal to go wrong. Belts are still available from a variety of sources in the US and the stylus illumination lamp is a simple 5W SES bulb, so no rarities there either. The biggest problem can be the cartridge mounting plate that I alluded to earlier – the cartridge screws onto this and then it in turn fixes to the headshell using a bolt. The problem is that the mounting plates have a tendency to crack and break with age – they are no longer available new and are very uncommon secondhand, so if you find a good one, look after it! Other than this, the only real issues tend to be visual, with the walnut cabinets succumbing to the ravages of time and the gold finish of all the models are prone to corrosion, flaking and

discolouration. Watch the lid hinges as well; the glasswork is heavy and they do weaken over time.

### CONCLUSION

The Empire 598 is a perfect example of simple but solid engineering put into practice in a superbly capable way. The deck is certainly stylish in a rather retro way, but is built on a scale the likes of which have not been seen for many a year. Even better, this retro massiveness does not translate into a vinyl-chewing groove grinder but a turntable that I would audaciously submit can give most modern decks up towards four figure price territory a run for their money, when partnered with a suitable cartridge. They may be uncommon, but they are well worth seeking out.

#### THANKS TO:

Rob Monitor on the AudioKarma forum for his knowledge of Empire history and turntable models, plus his incredible collection of reviews and brochures.

Secondly, a big thank-you to Andy and Phil at Phonography ([www.phonography.co.uk](http://www.phonography.co.uk); 01962 777792) for volunteering the dusty old 598 from their back room!

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"cables are bespoke tuning instruments which make systems sound more than the sum of their parts..."



## David Price

**A**h, cables, don't you love them? It's perhaps a mark of how contentious the subject still is that some people regard me as a Luddite 'cable denier', someone who's got his head in the sand about the huge differences cables can make - whereas others pretty much accuse me of being 'in hoc' with cable manufacturers by printing over-effusive reviews of ridiculously expensive cables that 99.9% of us will never be able to afford.

It's true that some cable manufacturers I talk to seem to think I'm a non-believer who doesn't take them seriously. There's the implication that somehow a manufacturer of a £600 CD player would get more attention and/or interest from me than the manufacturer of an equivalently priced interconnect. What's the difference between a pressed steel box full of off-the-shelf integrated circuits, capacitors, resistors and diodes, and a carefully designed and elaborate piece of fine wire with a specially developed dielectric, they ask, if both can have a huge impact on the sound?

On the other hand, I'm aware of all the 'nudge-nudging' that goes on about the coverage that cables get in the print press in general. "Oooh, I bet they're only reviewing that interconnect because the company is advertising", goes the cry. It's obvious isn't it, because cable manufacturers advertise their wares in magazines then somehow they're not to be trusted; after all, the hi-fi press is 'in on it', isn't it? Of course this theory gets an added octane boost if the person making the accusation is a 'scientist' who 'knows' that capacitance and inductance are the beginning and end of what defines a cable's adequacy for the task.

I suppose I should take comfort from the fact that I get incoming fire

from *both* sides, but the trouble is that if you sit in the middle of the road, you risk being run over from both directions! For me, the truth lies somewhere between the two polar opposites, and it's one that - like so many audiophiles I'd suggest - has come simply from individual personal experimentation. You can read other people's views on the subject until the cows come home; ultimately it's a case of listening for yourself and thinking very clearly about the ratio of benefit to cost.

Personally speaking, there's absolutely no doubt whatsoever in my mind that mains cables (and conditioners), interconnects and speaker cables *do* make a difference. This became clear to me way back in 1981 when I first substituted some QED 79 strand speaker cable (79p per metre at the time, as I remember) for my bell wire. The difference was marked; the sound was smoother, deeper, more detailed, more dynamic. That was a simple and basic test that an impoverished fifteen year old could hear. So it surprises me that thirty years later some people still can't hear the difference cables make. Or is it that their so-called 'scientific' background forbids them to...?

QED 79-strand was, along with Monster Cable, the beginning of 'the cable revolution', as some have called it. These products provided simple, relatively inexpensive and easily demonstrable improvements to system sound. A quarter of a century on, we have a mature cable industry with a vast range of manufacturers competing; no longer a niche, it's now mainstream - with (yes, that's right) - media budgets to match manufacturers of hi-fi separates.

Here's the 'but'. Whilst I never fail to be amazed by the sounds that are possible from high end cables (only this past month have I been wowed by the stellar sound of Furutech

interconnects with price tags higher than the average family saloon car), responsible hi-fi journalists have to keep a sense of proportion. Yes, cables can make a massive difference but it's lunacy to selectively abstract this; the benefit they bring has to be looked at in the round, in the context of the total system budget and indeed from the perspective of the tonality of the system, and what particular cables do to it.

You need a sense of perspective. If I had a £1,000 system, I would not be thinking of spending £250 on an interconnect between the CD player and amp. Yet many people seemingly do, and many cable companies (unsurprisingly perhaps) argue that they should. This I think is where hi-fi retailers and magazines need to stay awake. I'm particularly troubled by 'cable looms'; the notion that the cables can only really give of their best if all the cables in the system are from one manufacturer. It *can* be true but the implication is that people should spend thousands in one go to optimise their cable system, whereas a single large outlay on the source, amplifier or speakers would probably yield more dramatic results.

For yours truly, cables are an essential part of a hi-fi system, but not to the exclusion of other more vital ones. No amount of super-fi interconnect will make a 1986 Sanyo CD player sound anything but low-fi. Instead, the art is to use cables like seasoning in cookery. Too much salt will ruin an otherwise perfect *ravioli*, as can a slightly piercing upper mid in a high end system; it's here that you move in with the right cabling to take the sting out, making the overall sound more palatable. Of course, the principle works right across the board, from budget systems to ultra high end. Used in this way, as bespoke tuning instruments, cables will get your system sounding more than the sum of its parts. ●



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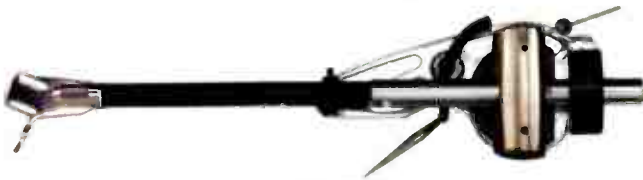
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"this box set revolution is a desperate attempt to squeeze more money from dedicated fans..."



## paul rigby

**H**ave you noticed that the number of music-oriented box sets are on the rise? I'm not referring to the retrospective compilations either; where a single group's career is examined over, say, four CD discs, where previously unreleased tracks are included for the fans and a glossy booklet is stuffed within. What I mean by the recent box set proliferation is the relatively new breed of deluxe versions of new albums. Artists such as Jamie Cullum, Manic Street Preachers, Paul McCartney, Mark Knopfler, George Michael, Brian Eno (see last issue's Classic Cuts for more details) and, now out, Bryan Ferry...

This box set revolution, this packaging rebellion, this download backlash is backed by the major record labels, desperate to grab a few extra pounds of profit from the physical formats and, while they lose profit to the torrent-bedecked kids, squeeze more money from the dedicated fans. Not that the fans are complaining (well, not too much), the boxes themselves are often quite beautiful, packing in both CDs and vinyl, luxurious packaging plus many rarities and memorabilia items.

There is a parallel development on this theme, however. The luxury version of the classic album, packaged in the same imaginative, glorious manner complete with rarities to tempt the rabid fan. We've already seen special editions of Miles Davis's 'Kind Of Blue' and David Bowie's 'Station To Station', now we are about to see a luxury version of The Who's 'Live At Leeds' triggered by the 40th anniversary of the release of the original album.

The album itself, which features a complete performance of the rock

opera 'Tommy', is legendary. Recorded on 14 February 1970, it is often quoted and polled as the best live rock album ever made. The box itself features the entire album on two CDs plus a heavyweight vinyl version of the original, 8-track, album. Along with a Pete Townshend poster, you also get a new 64-page hard-back, colour book containing rare photos and memorabilia along with some informative sleeve notes. A replica 7" single is also featured including 'Summertime Blues'/'Heaven & Hell' with a colour sleeve. The real find however, is the first ever release of the band's gig in Hull, which took place the night after the Leeds gig and is thought, by those in the know, to actually be superior to the Leeds performance!

Remastering engineer Jon Astley, worked on the box set. "The Hull gig was a better sounding gig because the City Hall location had a natural ambience. The Leeds gig was set within a student refectory building with a low ceiling. This led to Leeds sounding quite flat. The ambience makes the Hull gig sound more exciting. Playing-wise, there's not much between them."

Apparently, a missing bass track, which precluded an earlier release, has been reconstructed from the Leeds show to enable the Hull gig to be heard in public for the first time. Still, patching up the gig in this way is slightly worrying for the fans isn't it? "Well, it's not the whole bass track that's missing from the Hull show," said Astley. "I originally heard the masters for the show when I put together the '30 Years of R'n'B' Who retrospective box set in the nineties. It was originally thought that the bass track was missing from the whole Hull gig but it turned out that only

the first few tracks are missing the bass."

Bob Pridden, the original live sound engineer, was called in to handle the missing bass. Pridden lifted the bass from similar tracks from the Leeds gig and then pasted, squeezed, pulled and generally manoeuvred the bass to fit in with the identical tracks played in Hull. The task was a note-by-note, scrupulous task that shows Pridden's immense attention to detail. Without this work of love, the gig would never have been released and so Who fans must thank Pridden for his efforts.

There does appear to be one track missing from the Hull gig, though. 'Magic Bus' is noticeable by its absence but even Astley is unsure why it has been excluded. The consensus is that the quality of the track was too poor to release. The decision to keep or exclude the track would, apparently, have been Pridden's to make.

One final bone of contention for both gigs in this box set is the running order. Astley declared that, during the original gig, 'Tommy' was placed in the middle of the set. He didn't want that classic rock opera broken over two CDs and so, in an early release, decided to shuffle the tracks so that 'Tommy' occupied a single CD of its own. Fans have since complained, citing that the release doesn't follow the band's original running order. Astley did suggest to the record label that this new box set would be an ideal opportunity to correct that anomaly but the label refused to reinstate the original running order.

Whatever, your views on the decision, it is certain that this magnificent box set will be loved by all Who fans and will surely be snapped up quickly. So get it while you can! ●



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"the BBC's decision to redefine DAB is 'digital radio' is arrogant and dishonest..."



## steven green

**A** little over a year ago, Tim Davie, the BBC's head of radio, made the following comment in a speech at the Manchester Media Festival. "Let me just make a few quick points on DAB which I hope will soon be called simply Digital Radio!" Ever since making that comment, the DAB industry (by which I'm referring to the broadcasters and the receiver manufacturers) has replaced the vast majority of references to DAB in its marketing material with references to "digital radio" in the hope that "digital radio" becomes synonymous with DAB. I complained to Tim Davie about the BBC's arrogant decision to redefine the term digital radio, and received the following response...

"My preference for calling DAB "digital radio" is not intended to lead to the descriptor being used solely for the radio broadcast platform. I would like digital radio to describe DAB, [Internet radio and radio via digital TV] etc, and I have no particular bias for DAB within this. I just feel DAB as a separate descriptor is not helping digital adoption."

Contrary to Tim Davie's claim however, the term "digital radio" has *only* been used to refer to DAB. For example, in this year's annual pre-Christmas advertising campaign for DAB on BBC TV, the advert's reference to "digital radio" was clearly referring to DAB, and in small text at the end of the advert it said that the BBC's stations were also available online and via digital TV. Similarly, in the DAB adverts that were broadcast on commercial radio before Christmas, they said that some "digital radios" also included "Internet radio". Jingles on the BBC's national radio stations frequently say

"on digital and online", or similar messages; and for most of the past year the BBC's national station websites referred to DAB as "digital radio" or just "digital" and Internet radio as "online".

Pure Digital, the market-leading DAB receiver manufacturer, now refers to DAB as "digital radio" or just "digital" on its website, and I'm sure that Pure Digital's product literature will have been changed to this effect too. The [getdigitalradio.com](http://getdigitalradio.com) website, which is operated by Digital Radio UK, the body set up by the BBC and commercial radio groups to promote DAB, also uses the term "digital radio" to refer to DAB.

The reason that I object most strongly to what's happened is that the term "digital radio" means radio that is delivered digitally. Internet radio and radio delivered via digital TV are obviously delivered digitally, so they should be included in the definition of what "digital radio" is. Yet the BBC has arrogantly and dishonestly taken it upon itself to exclude these delivery methods from the definition of what "digital radio" is to suit its own agenda, which is to push as many people onto its favoured DAB platform as possible.

If you compare the situation with digital TV, the different digital TV platforms are Freeview (terrestrial), Sky (satellite), Virgin Media (cable) and BT Vision (IPTV). The BBC wouldn't dare to claim that Freeview (the BBC's favoured platform) is the only way of receiving digital TV, because the BBC knows full well that Sky, Virgin and BT would launch a devastating attack on the Corporation if it tried. In contrast, the only organisation that represents Internet radio is the Internet Media Device Alliance (IMDA), and half

of the full members of the IMDA (therefore half of the votes when deciding policy) are DAB-supporting organisations, such as the BBC itself and Pure Digital; so the IMDA would never attack anything that favours DAB.

Tim Davie also claimed that he has "no particular bias for DAB". However, Tim Davie's background is in marketing – he was the BBC's Director of Marketing prior to taking up his current role. So he will know perfectly well that redefining the term "digital radio" so that it only refers to DAB, along with endlessly repeating the term "digital radio" on TV and radio adverts over a number of years, will inevitably lead to the vast majority of people buying DAB equipment, which just so happens to be precisely what the BBC wants to see. Contrary to Tim Davie's claim, though, what he's done is about as biased towards DAB as you could possibly get.

As well as pushing everyone towards the BBC's favoured DAB platform, another reason why Tim Davie has chosen to redefine the term "digital radio" is because DAB has of course been superseded by DAB+. So by not referring to DAB any more, Tim Davie hopes to stop, or at least quieten, the repeated calls to use DAB+ instead of the twenty-year-old DAB system that he wants to inflict on the British public.

In summary then, the BBC's decision to redefine the term "digital radio" so that it only applies to DAB is arrogant and dishonest, and it has taken this decision simply because it knows it can get away with it. This is nothing new, however, because the BBC has claimed ever since DAB was relaunched in 2002 that it provides better sound quality than FM, which we all know to be untrue. ●

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"other hi-fi journalists must be deaf and should be shot!"



## noel keyword

Sometimes I secretly admire some of hi-fi's more rabid opinion holding journo's, simply because they have one. This generous view doesn't last long I must admit, when I realise what they like is conceptually flawed before it has even started out in life, such as a transistor amplifier so complicated it must surely be the most 'intelligent' design ever which they see as a guarantee of sonic excellence, and which I see as a guarantee of sonic disaster! Oh well, that's hi-fi for you.

But I won't go into details of the amusing argument I had over this topic whilst enjoyably lounging in a Parisian hotel bar not so long ago. What brought up my musings about being sure about sound quality, yet unsure too, was a little discussion I was having the other day with our ex-editor Simon Pope – he got away live! – about differing perceptions of sound quality and what he said was "our view", as opposed to the views of others (eh? – they should be banned straight away).

You see if you listen to Rock music on your hi-fi and want it to reach the highest sonic heights then it must be lightning-fast, perfectly timed, ultra hard hitting and have bass that is so perfect – you know, deep, fast, solid, impactful, etc. – nobody has ever heard such a thing, they just seem to have some mental image of it. Or perhaps, as I sometimes unkindly suspect, they had an image seared into their brain long ago by standing next to a giant bass bin at a Black Sabbath Concert and think this can be reproduced at home from a bookshelf loudspeaker..

If you want all this from LP then you start out with a Garrard 401 turntable, just like I've got, and everyone else it seems, including a great many in Japan as they latched on to the 401 well before we did.

But just a minute! In one of our recent corridor conversations Rafael Todes, who has more experience and knowledge of live music than most other beings on this planet (go to Google to find out why) was quite certain that whilst the Garrard had real drive, it wasn't really very good at illuminating the seating arrangements within an orchestra, nor whether the lead violin was prodding the nearby cellist every now and then with overly exuberant bow strokes.

If you think I ever listened out for such things when using my Garrard I must disappoint you. As much as I love and appreciate classical music I suppose it's right to say that I am more traditionally tuned to Rock, and am no scholar of the orchestra, as Rafael or even Simon are. Being an accomplished violinist Rafael doesn't spend a lot of time listening to Lady Gaga, and even less time than that listening to Led Zeppelin, so he isn't so impressed by the Garrard and I fully understand and appreciate why. Other turntables better convey spatial information he assures me (I know this in truth, but trad belt drives also send me to sleep) and this is crucial to him – as it may be to many people. Even lovers of Rock listen to live, miked up performances and are aware of spatial information.

So even in the gentle arena of turntable sound where people don't traditionally take up opposing positions, those positions still exist. And they demonstrate just how our interests and experiences help decide just what we think is right and correct when it comes to good sound quality.

Of course it is easy to see the possibility of a turntable so good it is drivingly fast and hard in its dynamics, with strong bass, yet airy and expressive of an acoustic too. It's just that such a thing hasn't quite

been invented yet, although some of the bigger belt drives like the EAT Forte in our May 2009 issue probably come close by combining two motors loosely coupled through compliant belts to a brutally heavy platter.

If you want the hardest of big hits then some of the old 1970s transistor amplifiers did a seemingly good job, but only because their lacerative quality came from crossover distortion and poor quality components that sounded bright and rough edged too. Only valves could provide a life saving alternative and EAR stepped into the breach with their PL509 amplifier.

Since then transistor amplifiers have calmed down a lot, gained smoothness and purity and in some senses have become less viscerally exciting and more accomplished all-round. But Simon explained that the reference system of one magazine comprised ATC loudspeakers driven by big Bryston professional power amplifiers – a real heavy rock combo if there even was one – to make the point that many like their hi-fi to blow them across the room – and not much else.

I'll admit this did rather pull me up in my tracks. It isn't for me to laugh at a vision of high fidelity as crashing bass and searing treble; I once listened to and loved Leak 2075s! But I did think that in 2010 the wonders of the ribbon and electrostatic may have filtered through to those who write about such things and are immersed in music. But perhaps not.

So just what listeners think is truthful and 'right' from a hi-fi system still varies widely it seems from my recent conversations. I personally try and look at it from all angles and am less rabid than other journo's, especially those that listen to overly complicated transistor amplifiers; they must be deaf and should be shot! ●



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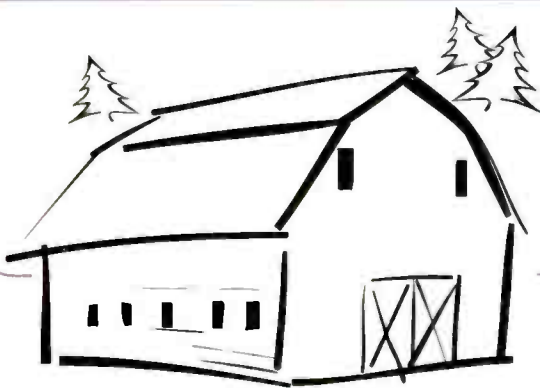
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"my first dalliance with the wonders of portable digital music is complete..."



## adam smith

I knew there would be a catch. You see, after a long telephone conversation with the editor about how modern life would be so much better if the Rover 3500 motor car was still in production, the conversation turned to the slightly less grave matter of hi-fi. Given the current festive mood, we discussed audiophile stocking fillers, products that are nice to have but that don't break the bank. The topic of headphones soon surfaced; after all, this is a real growth area in audio at the moment. And then we considered ones designed for music portables. Right now, the world's favourite music playback device seems to be the iPhone, and so the conversation wandered to in-ear phones for the aforementioned micro-electronic marvel. Would I be interested in reviewing an interesting new pair, Mr P. asked me?

The a-jays Fours, as they're somewhat curiously called, plug into your iPod or iPhone to perform headphone, microphone and even remote control duties. The latter always used to make me chuckle, until I repeatedly found myself too slow to respond to the ringing of my own iPhone as I frantically burrowed into the multiple layers of woollies I had donned to cope with the lovely winter we've been having recently, in order to answer it. Suddenly, a remote seemed like a brilliant idea!

Anyway, the Fours arrived and I set upon them with the verve of a five year old on Christmas morning... until the full horrific implications struck me. Yes, you see, in order to test these devices fully, I was going to have to put some music on my iPhone!

My thoughts on Apple generally are fairly well known amongst the *Hi-Fi World* staffers [you can say that again! Ed.] so it came as big surprise

even to me that I ended up with an iPhone [us too! Ed.]. I played with one owned by a friend and was so impressed that I decided to wait until someone non-Apple came up with a decent imitation of the device, so that my firm views on that company could remain intact. Well, a year of ownership down the line I'm still waiting for that decent imitator to arrive and I do love the thing, but I have so far resisted the lure of the 'iPod' function – even going as far as to move the icon to the third screen so that it would not tempt me.

However, I did indeed end up with some songs on it, which duly allowed me to test the a-jays, but it wasn't an easy ride. The first big hoop to jump through was getting to grips with iTunes, having opened it up long enough to register my credit card in order to purchase lots of silly Apps, and then shut it firmly down again.

Well, following DP's excellent guide from a few years back, I got going and managed to successfully transfer some CDs onto the phone and even download a few hi-res tracks as well.

So am I an iTunes convert now? Erm...no. Frankly, I think it's a pig of a program. I have never had any experience of any other computer music player thingy and the thought that iTunes is considered to be one of the better ones fills me with horror – can the others really be worse?

Maybe it is sensing my weakness and giving me an extra hard time, but from my recent experiences, I have learned the following – it takes ages to boot up, although this is probably something to do with Windows Vista trying its best to kick it off my PC; it is desperate to become my default program for everything from audio playback to CD burning and seems to sulk when I click the 'No' button and,

once loaded, is more interested in flogging me the Beatles back catalogue than actually assisting me in doing anything useful with the hardware that I have connected to it. Oh, and what the hell is 'Ping' which it seems so desperate for me to do something with?!

I was also amused by the 'TV programmes' header. Do people really sit in front of a headache inducing 19" LCD monitor and watch television when they probably have 32 inches or more of high definition scrumminess in their living room? I suppose they must, otherwise Apple presumably wouldn't feel it necessary to offer the option.

Still, I prevailed and the music ended up on my iPod, so I sat down to listen and join the 21st Century of music reproduction. The verdict? Not bad I suppose, and certainly better than I was fearing but my twenty year old Technics portable CD player that I dug out from the depths of a box in the loft for comparison purposes, positively wiped the floor with the iPhone and made me wonder what exactly I had achieved, apart from having a right fun old time with the a-jays.

So there you have it. My first dalliance with the wonders of digital music is complete and a whole new world of adventure has opened up to me, should I choose to explore it. Unfortunately, I choose not to; at least not until David wants to tempt me with another cool gadget. I have finally declared myself officially as a grumpy old git – I am looking at my old Technics portable CD player with renewed affection and am doubling my nagging to Tim Jarman to find me a nice Sony Walkman. My iPhone is empty of music once more and, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to play a record. ●

# vinyl

## contents

FEBRUARY 2011

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**DR FEICKERT WOODPECKER 100**  
Rafael Todes tunes in to a superb high end turntable.

**AVID PULSARE 104**  
Tony Bolton is impressed by this flagship phono stage.

**SOUNDBITES 106**  
David Price tries Oyaide's MJ-12 turntable mat, and Adam Smith experiments with Ringmat's Cheetah feet.

**INSTANT REPLAY 107**  
Tim Jarman reports on an impressive B&O cartridge rebuilder.

**SUNDAZED TRIO**  
Three new albums from Sundazed ([www.sundazed.com](http://www.sundazed.com)) include The Animals' 'Animalism' (1966), which was arguably their best album. Co-produced by Frank Zappa, this LP was only ever released in the USA and appeared after the band had broken up. It's been remastered via the MGM stereo masters. Also look out for The Ventures' 'Christmas Album' (1965), a superb piece of instrumental rock'n'roll and Linda Perhacs' 'Parallelograms' (1970), a folk recording that was her only album release. A stunning achievement that even shows Joni Mitchell a clean pair of heels.

## news



### DIVERSE BY NAME...

...and diverse by nature. Diverse Vinyl ([www.diversevinyl.com](http://www.diversevinyl.com)), the popular audiophile retailer also has its own vinyl imprint, Diverse Records. The company has produced a wide array of records including the new album via Eleanor McEvoy (who was featured in the December 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World*). 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' includes a free download code.

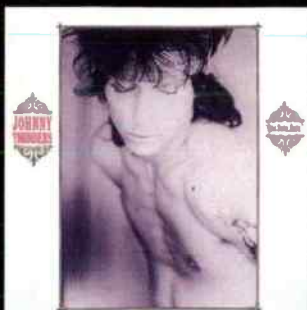
Joan Baez's 'Gone From Danger' is a reissue of the 1996 LP in which she tackles a host of social issues from a selection of contemporary songwriters while utilising her superior interpretive abilities to best effect. She still sounds fresh. Also look out for Chuck Prophet's 'Let Freedom Ring' (2009) whose addressing of financial hardship is particularly pertinent today, plus Simone Felice's new album, 'Live From A Lonely Place'.

### MO-FOUR

Four new releases from the US-based audiophile outfit Mobile Fidelity ([www.mofi.com](http://www.mofi.com)) continue the label's high pressing standards. 'Sinatra's Sinatra' (1963) was Frank Sinatra's attempt to cash in via his own label, Reprise, in the same way that his old label, Capitol, was doing in the early 60s, making lots of cash on Sinatra compilations. A worthy re-recording of old hits. In stark contrast, the Pixies' 'Bossanova' (1990), the band's weakest album (but still excellent, which gives you an idea of the outfit's high standards) was both quirky and left-field, even for them. Also look out for arena-rock outfit's Foreigner's self-titled album (1977) featuring the singles: 'Cold As Ice' and 'Feels Like The First Time', plus Ray Charles's 'Genius Sings The Blues' who makes the album work with the force of his interpretive talent.







**QUIRKY QUTS**

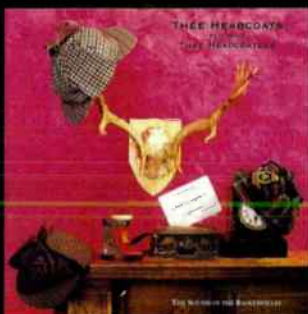
A series of new releases from Vinyl Lovers touch upon the left-field and the idiosyncratic. Ex-New York Doll Johnny Thunders' 1985 second solo release, 'Que Sera, Sera', was seen in the context of his destructive heroin addiction. Well received, it squeezed the last elements of talent from his drug-induced shell...

Next? Two albums from jazz eccentric and genius, Sun Ra. 'Piano Recital - Teatro La Fenice In Venice' (2003) was recorded on 24 November 1977, in which he plays his own works and more traditional standards plus 'Egypt



Strut' which includes the title track recorded in Egypt itself along with 'Dawn' in 1983 and 'Watusa', recorded in a jazz club in Cairo, in 1984.

Also look out for Germs' 'Media Blitz' featuring rare live performances from 1978-79 and The Headcoats & These Headcoates' 'The Sound Of The Baskervilles', a live pub gig recording from 1995.



**JAZZ FORUM**

UK-based audiophile record label, Pure Pleasure (www.purepleasurerecords.com), has released a gamut of top jazz reissues that include

Ella Fitzgerald's 'Newport Jazz Festival: Live At Carnegie Hall' (1973) that serves as an excellent overview of her entire career. Pee Wee Russell's 'New Groove' (1963) saw the great clarinetist team up with Marshall George on trumpet to provide a well received album of Gerry Mulligan-like sounds. Mulligan himself appears with Lee Konitz plus Chet Baker on 'Konitz Meets Mulligan' in which the pair almost tease each other and the classic tunes they interpret in a wholly sparkling manner. Also look out for Chet Baker's '& Crew', a classic jazz bop album released, originally, via Pacific Jazz, Duke Ellington's 'Such Sweet Thunder' a fine concept LP from 1957, based on Shakespearean themes.



KONITZ MEETS MULLIGAN



**...AND FINALLY**

A split LP via Kube and Raionbashi (Hronir; www.hronir.de), 'Ansatz Zum Taumel' offers an expanse of *musique concrète*, found sounds and avant-garde noises that attack the senses with disturbing noises of variety.

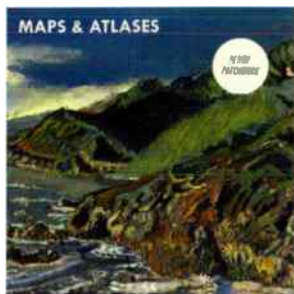
New out via Polydor is 'Entreat Plus - Live' via the Cure, a live version of the 1989 album, 'Disintegration', recorded at the Wembley Arena plus four extra tracks including two US B-Sides originally seen on the single 'Lullaby'.

Maps & Atlases' 'Perch Patchwork' (Fat Cat; www.fat-cat.co.uk) offers often tremulous art rock with a quirky side dish that takes the eye (and ear) and plenty of charm. The LP includes a 320kbps MP3 download option.

Out on Big Dipper (www.bigdipper.no), Norway's Spirit Of The Dead's self-titled album provides a crazy mixture of stoner rock, folk and psychedelic goodness. Impressive stuff in that the songs show a consistent well written quality.

Another new album is Deerhunter's 'Halcyon Digest' (4AD; www.4ad.com), the fourth LP from the group and one that offers a folk-tinged rock portrait of loss - especially from the pen of lead singer/writer, Bradford Cox who mourns the death of his friend and singer/songwriter, Jay Reatard.

Finally, Pulled Apart By Horses' new self-titled album on Transgressive (www.transgressiverecords.co.uk) shows an effusive indie rock energy from the band that screams at you from second number one. An album that offers noisy yet tightly woven tracks that always keeps you interested.



# Bird Song

Rafael Todes takes the Dr. Feickert Woodpecker turntable for a spin...

**T**he Feickert Woodpecker turntable cuts quite a dash, with its sleek modern styling. Brushed aircraft-grade aluminium sandwiches an inch and a half of heat-treated MDF top and bottom. The process stiffens the MDF and according to Dr Feickert makes a big difference to the sound. The platter is built from acetal and is drilled to hold with large brass cylinders roughly the radius of golf balls. This increases the effective mass of the platter to 6.2kg. The platter is a shade under 5cm thick, and has a puck which screws on to keep the record flat. The turntable rests on three adjustable legs, which are simple to adjust. The most

"a formidable and elegant deck which represents fine value for money in a crowded market..."

striking feature of the plinth, is an oval cut-out, for different armboards, which is graduated with the distance from spindle to pivot of the arm. The board can be easily moved to change this distance, thus fitting a twelve inch arm is child's play.

The graduated scale is a tell-tale sign of Dr Feickert's bent, as he has designed a universal alignment protractor, as well as a rather sophisticated software package (Adjust Plus) for aligning cartridge azimuth

amongst other things, using a special test record, and taking the output of the phono stage into the input of a laptop, for analysis with the Dr's bespoke software.

Precision is something that is clearly important to Dr Feickert, the deck has a high precision feel to it, it has a clean, solid look which would not be out of place in a minimalist designer home. There are three speed buttons on the front left of the deck. The obvious 33 and 45, which you depress to start and stop the deck, but also a rather mysterious button marked 'S'. I dared not press this button, but I'm told that its *raison d'être* will be revealed in the fullness of time. Isn't it wonderful to

experience revelations from the on and off switch of a turntable?

The platter is driven by an onboard three-phase dc motor and attached by a narrow belt. Rapid start up indicated the substantial torque of the motor. There is a 24V wall wart which connects to the bottom of the turntable to provide power, for which upgrades will be available in the future. The bearing is an inverted stainless steel type, which is lubricated with a substance Dr

Feickert refers to as "fat", being thicker than your typical bearing lubrication fare. Tapping the plinth yields less of a knocking to the cartridge than I usually hear, showing that the elaborately designed plinth is doing its job well. The Woodpecker is the entry level deck, the next model up is The Blackbird, which costs £4,995 or £5,345 with the inertia inlaid platter.

## SOUND QUALITY

'See You at the Fair' is vintage Ben Webster, a 1964 album which sees a vibrant collaboration of artists, the eponymous first track in a blues style. The deck has great solidity to the sound. Bass is firm and tight from Richard Davis, almost Garrard-like. During the bass solo, using an SME V, there is a real sense of the bass being in the room, such is the accuracy of the reproduced





sound. Pizzicato notes start and stop smack on time, no overhang or smear. Pitch stability of the piano was CD-like, which is no small feat for a turntable. Ben Webster's sound is not the sweetest I've ever heard, but this may be more the SMEV than the deck. The recording's imagery is quite crude, the natural feeling of space of a group of jamming musicians isn't there, but there is not a lot a deck can do if this isn't present.

Listening to the Overture to Verdi's 'La Traviata' conducted by Carlos Kleiber, the sound was exceptionally clean. Transients were dealt with without a care in the world. The huge sforzando chords at the end of the overture that can cause problems for some arm/turntable combinations, sparkled. In the famous 'Brindisi' aria, (the toast

or drinking song) the turntable coped with the choirs interjections well, it is a vast amount of information to reproduce, and this can sometimes scream. No problems here.

I have heard more nuanced renditions of Cotrubas' beautiful voice from other turntables however, with more depth and more colour. Yet on the whole the sound has a tautness and structure and is to a great degree monolithic. No more is this so than in the great 'soprano moments', a top Eb that can sometimes cause the sound to crack like a shattering glass. The Woodpecker remains on song. I do feel however the sound stage is more accurate left to right than it is front to back, perhaps I've been spoilt by

the exceptional qualities in this respect of last month's offering, Fletcher Audio Omega Point 5, but that costs £3699.

The choice of arm can make major differences to the final sound, and for this reason I tried my personal favourite, Len Gregory's Conductor, an air-bearing arm which has a pump in another room shooting out pockets of air on which the arm floats. It is highly versatile, but fiddly and delicate, and not best suited to moving around from deck to deck. If any arm can open up the midrange this one can and did.

Listening to Colin Davis's recording of the Mendelssohn 'Midsummer Night's Dream' music, there was delightful bite and articulation to the strings' opening depiction of fairies prancing about.



# Beat This

Tony Bolton thinks Avid's new Pulsare phono stage is a hard habit to break...

**N**ow celebrating their fifteenth year in the industry, Avid Hifi Ltd have gradually built up a range of products focused around turntables, but which latterly includes cables, equipment supports and now electronics. All are manufactured in-house at their premises in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, to high standards. The Pulsare is no exception; the quality is apparent from the first moment that you unbox it and its partnering power supply. Both are housed in quite compact (290x240x100mm) matching steel cases, each boasting a machined aluminium fascia, with machined and chrome plated feet which are also found on the Acutus turntable PSU.

The power supply is ornamented by a small red LED and the company logo, and annoyingly has the power switch located under the front right hand side near the foot. The phono stage fascia has another power LED and four machined aluminium knobs. These handle input selection from

either the RCA sockets or XLR sockets mounted on the back, gain (preset for moving magnet and low, medium or high output moving coil) resistance (10 Ohms through to 47kOhms, in nine steps) and capacitance (six options). The back is populated by both RCA and XLR input and output sockets, and the centrally mounted input for the power lead from the PSU. This plugs into a corresponding socket at the back of the PSU, where there is also a ground lift, which can be useful in removing hum, if present.

The internals are made to the same standards as the casework, with custom made capacitors in the circuits, which are carefully engineered so that the signal path is separate from the switchgear. The rotary controls on the phono stage operate relays, rather than the more conventional concept of having the delicate signal passed through these components, which should reduce any chance of degradation of the sound. The circuit topology is fully balanced from beginning to end,

regardless of whether the RCA or XLR inputs are used, and should benefit from the inherently lower noise floor of such designs. Both types of input may be used at the same time, allowing two sources to be permanently connected, with selection choice being controlled by the rotary switch. The PSU is based on that of the Acutus turntable, and is a dual mono design fed from a 300VA transformer.

## SOUND QUALITY

Having installed the Pulsare in my front room system, where it was fed by the Benz Micro Wood SL cartridge on the Clearaudio Master Solution turntable, I started listening. Initial impressions were good but rather unexciting, however after a few hours the sound loosened up and the quality of this phono stage began to show through...

The most immediate sensation was one of scale. I'm not talking of an overpowering audio edifice placed in front of me, but a sensation of space and size that seemed to

reflect the different requirements of differing types of music. There are a lot of phono stages, even at these prices, that are very good at producing a sense of intimacy with a performer when playing solo or small ensemble pieces, but seem to get a little crowded when playing Mahler for instance. And at the opposite extreme there are those that 'big everything up' so that Joan Baez, with her guitar, seems to be this huge presence, almost looming over the listener. I give full credit to the Pulsare for avoiding falling into either of these traps. Instead it seemed to find the right balance of near tactile closeness when required and yet, after a change of record, give a convincing portrayal of the splendour of a full orchestra and chorus

extra tracks thrown in. The music still has the cohesive beat of good Swing, but is flavoured with what is now regarded as the forerunner of R&B. McVae on saxophone was joined by his wife, Louise Beatty, providing vocals on several tracks, and the combination of a wailing sax and throaty, full bodied singing with a driving dance beat behind them makes for excellent listening. The band tended to lock themselves into the studio (complete with bar!) and record late into the night until the tape (or booze) ran out. The results have a life and energy to them that are often missing from 'studio' recordings.

Feeding this into the Pulsare resulted in a forceful portrayal of exciting, exhilarating jazz that

some truly floor shaking bass that a nightclub would have been proud of. Towards the end of my listening I was playing Massive Attack's 'Blue Lines' LP and again I found a satisfying depth and detail to the music, along with a comprehensive display of the differing textures of sounds, both real and sampled.



"powerful and authoritative, this phono stage revels in detail and energy..."

the silence in between notes in a meaningful way without being overly analytical about it.

Compared to my

building to a grand *denouement*. This is a phono stage that will satisfy the needs of Wagnerians and folkies alike; an unusual accomplishment!

My first evening's listening finished with some very soothing unaccompanied choral work from the Tallis Scholars, recorded in the Chapel at Merton College, Oxford in 1980, featuring pieces by Allegri, Mundy and Palestrina. The first of these, the 'Miserere', varies between the full chorus and the lyrical solo tones of soprano Alison Stamp. I felt that the gentle, contemplative nature of this music was displayed, allowing me to sit back, close my eyes and just let it flow, very effortlessly, over me.

The smoothness of the delivery was matched by the subtle details in the sound that help create the sense of realism that differentiates top quality reproduction equipment from the merely good. I was aware of the acoustic of the chapel, with the long decay of a note at the end of a phrase seeming to hang in space undisturbed, until it reached its natural termination. Then the pin-drop-quiet silence before the next voices rose, gradually filling the space and then falling away again. It was thoroughly absorbing and very restful.

The next day I was in a more up tempo jazz mood, and settled down to an LP called 'Come Blow Your Horn' by Jack McVae and his orchestra. Although not well known nowadays, McVae was highly regarded from the mid-1940s and through most of the 1950s. This recording dates from 1955, although the record itself is a 1980 mono reissue on the Ace label, with a couple of

sounded very fresh, and belied the fifty five years since the record was made. The live recording style favoured by the group came through well, with my main focus on the music but again, the little background details of the studio acoustic and occasional comments from the band helped to create a convincing window looking onto the proceedings. The Pulsare seemed to come alive to the insistent beat, and the last track on side one, 'Chop Chop Boom', with its latin-hip-grinding flavoured rhythms proved impossible to stay seated for.

I stayed in a jazz mood for the rest of the day, and in the process found the one thing that I could complain about with this phono stage. A lot of my jazz, being older recordings, tends to be in mono, and the lack of a stereo/mono switch resulted in a few sonic nasties coming through that would have been either eliminated, or at least made a lot less obvious if such a control was available.

Over the next few days I wandered through various chunks of my record collection, ending up with modern electronic sounds. Some of my favourite pounding trance tracks were propelled along with the same vibrant energy as the McVae LP exhibited, allied to

**CONCLUSION**

Powerful and authoritative sounding, Avid's new Pulsare is a phono stage that revels in detail and energy in music, yet can also portray

the silence in between notes in a meaningful way without being overly analytical about it. Compared to my Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage (£3,495) I would say it is a fairly close run thing, except the Agena has the advantage (for some at least) of a mono switch, plus the ability to be connected to a computer via a USB lead from the onboard A-D convertor. I also felt the Agena to be a slightly more emotionally lucid sounding device, capable of capturing marginally more of the passion in a performance, compared to the Pulsare which worked more on conveyed a powerful, expansive big picture. As such, the Avid is an excellent high end solid-state phono stage, and I'd strongly urge anyone on the lookout for such a thing to audition one; well specified, well built and fine sound, it stands with the best at the price.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

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  - flowing, musical sound
  - explicit detailing
  - cartridge loading options
  - RCA and XLR ins and outs

- AGAINST**
- no mono/stereo switch
  - price

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

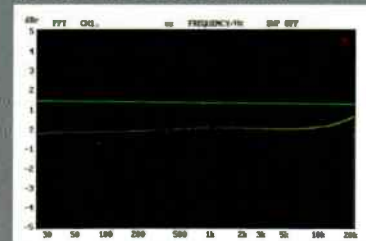
The Pulsare gave identical results (gain, frequency response, distortion etc) on phono and XLR, except that maximum output from phono was a normal 10V but from XLR it was 20V. Full gain exists right down to 0.5Hz so there is no warp filtering. Frequency response measured flat from 0.5Hz up to 44kHz and our analysis shows excellent equalisation accuracy; this stage does not have the treble lift of most, used to enhance detail.

A wide range of gains was available, the lowest being x100 (40dB) for MM, through x300 and x1000, up to a maximum of x3000 (70dB), the last value being suitable for very low output MCs. So the Pulsare suits all cartridges. An input noise value of 0.1µV was fair, but 2dB hissier than many good MC stages (0.08µV). This isn't a great difference.

The Avid Pulsare measured well all round and will give good results in use. NK

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Disc (MM & MC)     |                    |
| Frequency response | 0.5Hz-44kHz        |
| Separation         | 68dB               |
| Noise (e.i.n)      | 0.1µV              |
| Distortion         | 0.005%             |
| Gain               | x100 - x3000       |
| Overload           | phono 10V, XLR 20V |

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**





### OYAIDE MJ-12 £225

Many aftermarket turntable mats are, to paraphrase Lord Blackadder, "about as convincing as a giraffe in sunglasses trying to get into a polar bears-only golf club". I've certainly

found some surprisingly expensive products falling flat in my system. So what of this striking looking, exquisitely finished one from Oyaide (pronounced 'o-yah-ee-day')? It takes a slightly askance look at the problem of trying to damp down platter chatter – by using A5052 aluminium subjected to a special 'alumite' treatment. It's tapered, angled by one degree from the centre circle to the outside edge to help correct record warps, and sports a number of tuning holes arranged in a spiral pattern to reduce mat's inherent vibration. The outer diameter is 294mm, the thickest part 5mm and the total weight 670g, making it ideal for most non-sprung decks; not too heavy but heavy enough to load some mass into the platter. If you're running a Linn LP12-type suspended deck you may have to adjust the springs, although this didn't prove necessary on my GyroDec.

Oyaide recommend use in conjunction with a record clamp weighing around 300g, such as their

own [pictured], but I also tried a Bren I with great results. Compared to the stock glass mat on my Marantz TT-1000, the MJ-12 took out an edgy upper midband, tightened and filled out the bass slightly, gave a sense of ease to the musical proceedings in general and invested high treble notes with a pleasing shimmer. On a Michell GyroDec belt drive, the results were also positive, adding a touch of extra image solidity and grip to the bass, with a slightly more transparent, mush-free midband. Technics' SL-1210 benefited the most, with its mediocre mazak platter running quieter, the noise floor dropping and the deck's true quality really beginning to shine through.

Overall then, this pricey turntable mat proved a great success on my little assemblage of decks; if everything about your vinyl spinner is perfect apart from its platter, you should investigate this. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0) 1332 342233, [www.blackrhodium.co.uk](http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk)]

# soundbites

### RINGMAT CHEETAH FEET £73

A well known name in the world of audio tweaker, Ringmat offer a wide range of support, isolation, static control and tuning items that all purport to improve the performance available from your hi-fi equipment. The Cheetahs are the smallest items in the Ringmat Isolation Feet family and are recommended for use with equipment weighing up to 13kg, including turntables. A multi-layered item, each Cheetah is constructed according to "core Ringmat principles of dispersing vibration into the air in a controlled manner without oscillation". In this case, this means a plastic covered steel disc on top of a second plastic disc, below which is a cork ring containing a Poron spiral; Poron being a microcellular polyurethane foam with good compression resistance. Below these is another plastic disc which rests on top of two foam rings. Various thicknesses of plastic disc, foam and cork/Poron assembly give the full range of feet that are meant for different equipment weights up to

the 69kg of the Mammoth models. In each set of three or four, one foot is marked and is slightly stiffer than the others to avoid oscillation. Also included in the box is one Statfoot, which is a square of Ringmat's patented anti-static film, designed to sit under one foot only.

As with so many support products, I found the Cheetahs to be most effective when used on a lower quality stand, in this case an old Sound Organisation rack of mine, and the results of fitting the units under my CD player were most impressive. Bass lines seemed clearer and easier to follow and I was pleased to find that Ringmat's claim of the Cheetah feet being "exceptionally fast and agile" was no exaggeration – rhythmically the feet seemed to have made my player shift up a gear and really turn in a more focused and dynamically unrestrained sound. I found the Statfoot, however, to make no discernible difference under any foot but, as always, experimentation is the key and it may well work better in other systems.

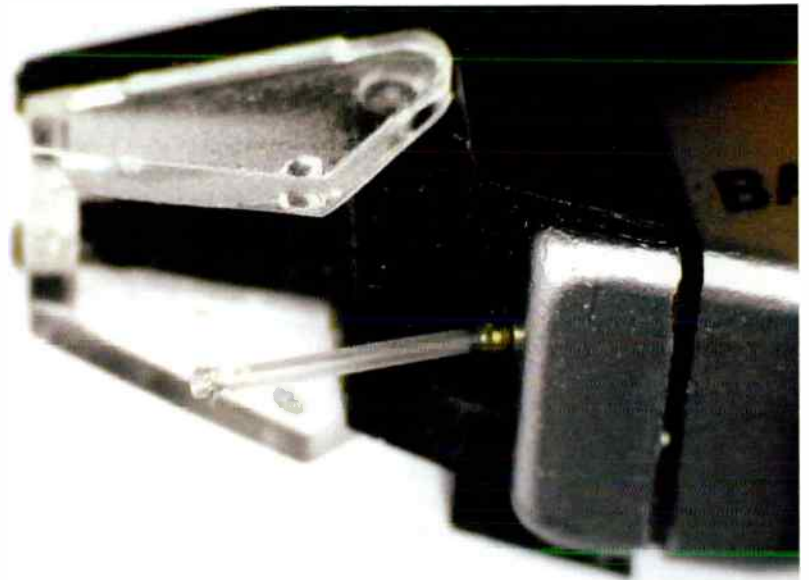


Ringmat's Cheetah Feet are a neat and worthy upgrade that will not break the bank. **AS**

[Contact: +44(0)1729 823873, [www.ringmat.com](http://www.ringmat.com)]

# Cut Back

**After years of snaps, crackles and pops, vinyl loving B&O owners now have the chance to get their cartridges rebuilt to as-new specification for a superior listening experience. Tim Jarman gets in a spin...**



**A** conventional hi-fi turntable, as all regular readers surely know, can be assembled from parts from many sources. You can choose a plinth, a motor unit, a mat, an arm and a cartridge all from different manufacturers and if you get it right end up with something pretty decent. This is one extreme, at the other is Bang & Olufsen, with their 'integrated' philosophy. In their Beogram models each part is specially designed to work as the designer intended with every other part. The motor, suspension, drive system, plinth, arm and pickup cartridge are all carefully matched together and everything works as one complete unit. Considered briefly this sounds easy but remember that even the most creative of the Japanese multinationals only managed it to the same extent a very limited number of times, for B&O after the

mid-nineteen sixties it was a principle that was followed for every turntable that they made!

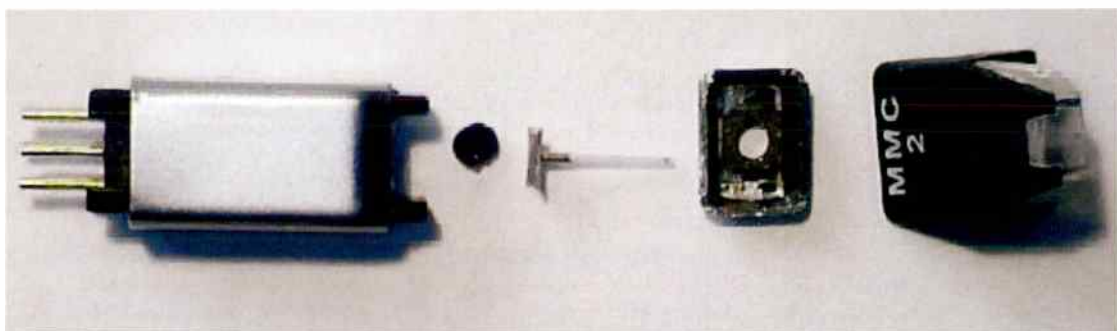
While integration gives a design

appropriate cartridge range – easy. This situation came to an abrupt end when B&O ceased to manufacture cartridges about ten years ago.

"here's the chance to purchase rebuilt B&O MMC cartridges that are genuinely as good as new..."

that works consistently, predictably and dependably, the drawbacks soon become very clear when something goes wrong. Break the stylus of a conventional turntable and once the sickening feeling resides one simply has to choose a replacement from the truly vast range that is available. In the past B&O owners also had an easy cure; take a trip down to the B&O shop with a moderate wad of cash and choose the level of performance you want from the

Suddenly a broken or worn out stylus was a major disaster as no other cartridge will fit, effectively the turntable was sidelined until a second-hand replacement could be found. As this problem became more widely appreciated to cost of used B&O cartridges shot up, unfortunate owners could find themselves paying many times the original new cost on eBay for a worn-out twenty year old cartridge taken from a clapped out music centre, clearly something had



**A complete disassembled B&O MMC2; don't sneeze, whatever you do!**

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|   | 149 Unison Research Unica Secando Integrated, ex demo     | Call PS Audio Q1, as new ex demo boxed              | 499 TEAC Reference 380 system, brand new boxed               |
|   | 119 Unison Research Unica hybrid Integrated, vgc          | Call World  |  |



to be done!

First out of the blocks were Soundsmith with their SMMC series. Designed to fit into B&O arms but not an exact replica of the B&O originals, these brand new models brought a welcome relief to the owners of broken Beograms, albeit at a cost. The Soundsmith cartridges also had a different sound to the B&O originals, being sharper and brighter with a distinctive steely edge. This may have pleased some but such a challenging and fast paced sound was not for some listeners what B&O is all about, somehow the familiar 'niceness' was gone.

However, help may now be

"the rebuilt MMC2 just seemed to glide, as if floating on an invisible film of oil..."

at hand thanks to Axel Schurholz. Having been a hi-fi dealer who sold B&O equipment he was well aware of the problem, but rather than simply panicking like the rest of us he has come up with a solution. B&O integrated cartridges (that is the SPI5, the MMC x000 series, the MMC20 series and the MMC1 > 5 range) can fail in a number of different ways; the stylus can wear out, the cantilever can get broken or the suspension can fail. The coils can also become open circuit, leading to channel loss and this cannot currently be repaired, however Axel can repair all the other faults, using new parts where necessary.

A B&O cartridge is neither a moving magnet or a moving coil, it is a moving iron design that combines the best features of both; a high output voltage combined with a light and responsive generator element, the heart of which is the moving micro cross (MMC). The cross is at the opposite end of the cantilever to the stylus, hidden inside the cartridge body and mounted on a compliant rubber disc. With age the disc either becomes hard or disbands from the coil assembly, spoiling the performance or allowing the cantilever to flap around uselessly. What really marks out Axel's process as special is that he has found a suitable material to re-make this vital suspension component, allowing him to produce rebuilt B&O MMC cartridges that are genuinely as good as new. Furthermore, as all the models in each range are identical except for the stylus and cantilever, you can have whatever you want, turning an MMC20S (entry level) into

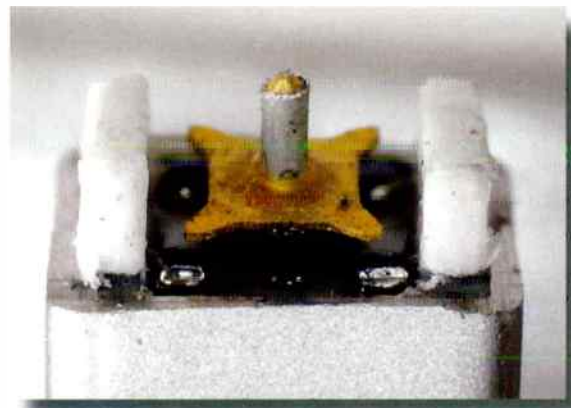
an MMC-20CL (top of the range) or an MMC4 into and MMC2 for example.

To see how effective the rebuilding process is we obtained a broken MMC2 cartridge whose sapphire cantilever had sheared off flush with the cartridge body. Before sending it to Axel the coils were checked, each should measure about 750 ohms if all is well. As a note of caution, the coils most frequently break when inserting or removing the cartridge from the end of the arm so avoid doing this if at all possible, even when transporting the machine (instead remove the platter and hub and secure the arm gently

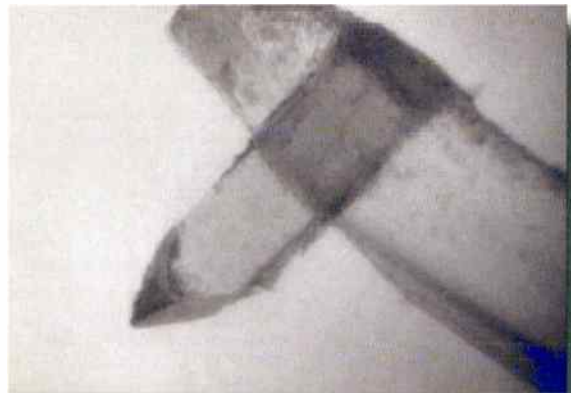
to the top plate). When Axel had worked his magic the fresh MMC2 was fitted into a Beogram 5000, a member of B&O's last series of radial tracking turntables and a real gem. B&O are justifiably proud of the tracking ability of their cartridges and express this in the very low levels of downforce that they recommend are to be used. These settings are not always ideal however; Axel recommends that higher levels of loading are used to secure the best, most distortion-free results. Consequently instead of running the MMC2 at the recommended 1.0g it is suggested that the user try 1.4g, advice which a test record proved to be correct with our example. Remember that more record and stylus wear occurs if the down force is too low than if it is too high.

A B&O MMC2 cartridge costs 225 Euros as tested (prices range from 89 Euros to 265 Euros). As so much of the rebuilt cartridge is new it was felt wise to run the cartridge in for a day before the listening tests started. After this it proved itself to be a very capable performer indeed. The overwhelming impression was of a relaxing experience, with some cartridges one feels that the stylus is battling its way through the vinyl but the MMC2 just seems to glide, as if floating on an invisible film of oil. This manifests itself in two ways, firstly the near absence of any sibilance and secondly the ability to suppress surface noise. These two factors in combination stretch the useful dynamic range of the recordings, which climb out of dark silences up to immaculately formed crescendos with seemingly effortless ease.

Even well-worn records are somehow raised to a higher level; it's almost as if Axel's stylus can find an unused part of the groove which is still factory fresh. Tracking ability is of course the key to all these feats and in addition the accuracy of the rebuilding work is also made clear by the cartridge's imaging ability, which is pin sharp and super-focused. What the MMC2 won't do is to knock your socks off with super fast dynamics or to deliver a rip-roaring thrill-a-minute ride; such things are just not in its character. This description may sound familiar to the owners of original B&O top end cartridges and that is Axel's greatest achievement, his rebuild does indeed sound exactly like the original.



**The rebuild includes replacing the delicate MMC cantilever suspension system...**



**The stylus is replaced to order, depending on which variant of cartridge the customer specifies.**

#### PRICES

A B&O MMC2 cartridge rebuilt by Axel Schurholz ([www.schallplattenadeln.de](http://www.schallplattenadeln.de)) costs 225 Euros as tested. Prices range from 89 Euros to 265 Euros.

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### FIDELITY AUDIO HPA-100 HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER £350

Headphones can be a saviour when younger members of the family are tucked up in bed and you have a yearning to play Led Zeppelin at midnight, but they're also wonderful when you want to escape into a cocoon of music, or if you want to hear music in a different way to that heard via your trusty loudspeakers.

As with any hi-fi component, there are good and bad headphones to choose from, but purchasing the right set of cans is just half the battle. If you then plug them into a poor headphone amplifier, which is going to restrict sound quality, then most of the cost of the headphones themselves might as well be flushed down where the sun doesn't shine. To prevent a sonic bottleneck it's imperative that you select the best quality headphone amp that you can afford. Fidelity Audio's HPA-100 is the latest example to enter the fray...

Compact at 104x56x254mm and weighing just 1.04kg, despite the relatively large power supply, this unassuming dual mono box is robust and well made with minimal controls on offer. In fact, the front fascia has a 1/4" headphone socket plus a rotary volume knob and a power indicator. The rear of the chassis features an IEC mains socket plus power switch on the right with a pair of phono inputs that sit along a pair of outputs. Inside, Fidelity Audio says the HPA-100 includes two "high performance, low distortion" 250mA audio buffers which are accompanied by low ESR, high ripple, smoothing capacitors and "ultra Fast" HexFred rectifying diodes. All well and good, but how does it sound?

The specification sheet makes a

point of saying that it can easily drive Sennheiser's HD650, so I thought I'd put that assertion to the test and did so while comparing the HPA-100 with the Musical Fidelity V-Can, one of the best headphone amplifier performers in its £100 bracket and perfectly capable of putting headphone amplifiers two to three times that value to shame.

Running a series of vinyl discs through both units, it was immediately noticeable that the Fidelity offered a more focused performance than the V-Can. The soundstage was a little more organised, the Fidelity appeared to be calmer in its approach to the music, while the more balanced presentation allowed room for its rich bass flavours to flood in. This added to the ability of the Fidelity to discern layers in the vocal performance while texture was more discernible. In effect, the vocal output was more 3D in nature. The human voice can express so many subtle emotions during a song and the Fidelity found it easy to plug into those feelings.

The V-Can is a highly articulate performer with a surprising fluidity for its price but the Fidelity matched the V-Can and then added bass power and a sense of urgency to more driving, rock-oriented, musical pieces. Bass guitar, for example, could be more easily followed with the Fidelity. Each note was rounded and complete rather than, as with the V-Can, a series of connected

tones that acted as musical punctuation.

While the V-Can can be incisive when it comes to upper

frequency tracking, those same areas sounded rather thin and weedy when compared to the Fidelity. The latter enriched the upper midrange and treble regions, offering a broader insight. So, whereas the V-Can provided a laser-like clarity, digging into the midrange detail and lifting it to the surface, the Fidelity widened that laser, allowing each piece of revealed

detail to express itself fully and to expose a personality. In effect, turning the laser-like details in a rainbow effect.

The story continued on CD where I tested a range of excessively peak limited chart CDs that, on a neutral system, would sound harsh and bright. The V-Can was both penetrating and detailed within the digital domain; it never waited for the detail to come to it, it went off and searched for the stuff but it, in turn, did suffer from a well lit presentation which allowed the upper frequencies to dominate the track excessively. The Fidelity however, reigned in that excess by injecting the musical mix with added bass and then supplemented that with extra clarity towards the upper midrange while treble was effectively tamed. Noticeable was how the Fidelity teased and fattened out vocal harmony sequences meaning that, not only could you better discern individual voices, but that each one had more personality and nuance.

The HPA-100 might not be the cheapest headphone amplifier on the market, nor the most lavishly presented, but it's definitely one of the best value for money. This is a well rounded and balanced piece of kit that provides welcome transparency and clarity, allowing any pair of headphones to sing. **PR**



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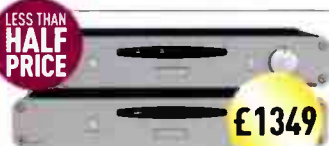
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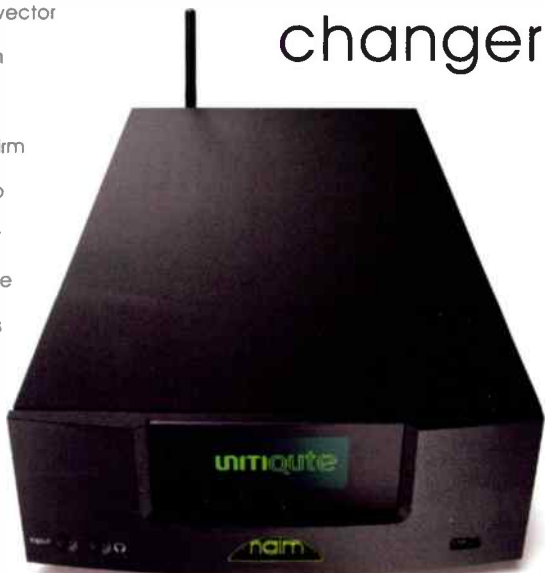
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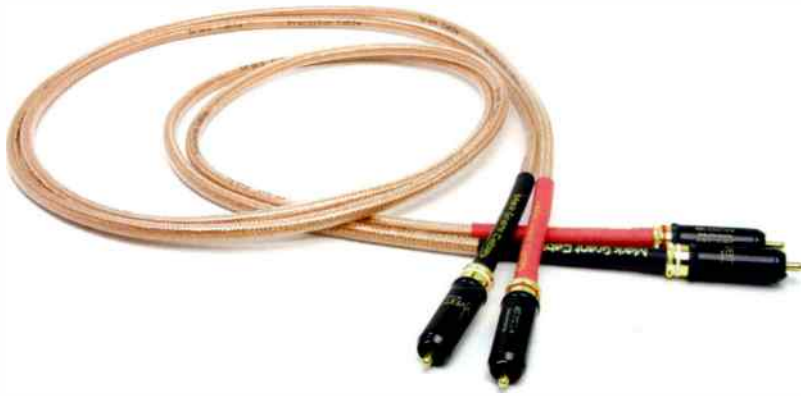


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A relatively new name in cables, Mark Grant cables are one of the best kept secrets of the past year, and the G2000HD WBT nextgen 0102 Cu shows why. Described by its designer and maker as “the best cable I have ever made” no less, it is unapologetically a high purity copper cable, not silver or silver plated copper. “The cable has been produced to my own design to an extremely high tolerance”, Mark says. The central

conductor is a single solid core of high purity copper, this is surrounded by low density gas injected dielectric insulation and a dual layer shielding system consisting of two layers of dense high purity copper braiding and a vibration damping translucent PVC outer jacket. Connectors are WBT nextgen 0102 Cu. with high quality solder and Mark’s “expert assembly”. Certainly the build quality is beyond reproach at the price.

In sonic terms it’s a textbook example of copper cable best

practice. There’s no mistaking this cable’s ‘copperness’ (if there is such a word), which means it is full and bracing across the midband, almost warm in the bass like a good nineteen sixties bass guitar amp, and wonderfully musical with it. Treble has plenty of space and air, without (as with some silver cables) sounding like it’s got a high intensity arc welder sparking white light at it. Hi hats have a lovely delicate metallic sheen, without the usual copper ‘mush’ which infects lesser examples of the breed. Rhythmically, it’s a very percussive performer, giving an explicitly pacy presentation. Don’t buy it if you like silver interconnect, it will disappoint as it simply doesn’t sound like one – but it has many of the latter’s benefits – clarity, grip, incision – allied to all our favourites of copper – pace, rhythm and timing. I found it be unexpectedly capable at the price, and certainly the best £200 interconnect I’ve heard in a long time.

**DP**

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# soundbites

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The Fours are the latest in the a-JAYS range of in-ear phones and differ from their One, Two and Three brethren by the addition of a microphone and three button remote control, optimised for the Apple iPod and iPhone. These then sit alongside the c-Jay, t-Jay, q-Jay and v-Jay ranges to complete the family. The a-JAYS Four are stylish in-ear headphones in a very sleek black soft-touch finish and incorporating rubberised flat anti-twist cables which, if they work, make them worth their price for this alone as far as I’m concerned! The units come with five different sizes of earplugs to help them fit virtually any ear canal and the microphone and remote are inline on the cable to the right earphone. The remote has three buttons; two for volume up and down and one that does, quite literally, everything else depending on how many times or for how long you press it. This is a little daunting at first but soon becomes second nature; I was soon flipping tracks and answering calls like second nature.

Sonically the Fours generally show a good account of themselves. With the right ear canal adaptors chosen they sit snugly in place and block out external sounds very well. In addition, bass response was excellent with real punch and drive, again helped by the good seal, and at the top end treble was crisp and detailed without the harshness that can afflict some other similar designs. However, in the middle things were less certain, the Fours tending to lack body and depth, making vocals sound distant at times. Switching back to my admittedly more expensive B&O A8 reference phones gave things more atmosphere and fullness, but the bass only matched the Jays after a good few minutes of prodding and poking them firmly into location; so the Fours are definitely more user-friendly in this respect. All in all, the a-jays impressed and I would heartily recommend iPod and iPhone users checking them out. Even better, those anti-twist cables worked a treat! **AS**

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KIMBER KCAG -14dB CD interconnect 0.5m £230. Kimber D-60 1m digital interconnect £230. Russ Andrews Yello mains leads, mains filters, QED interconnects, Genelec active speakers. Items include postage. Tel: Mike 01902 884694

REGA PLANAR 3 deck. Rotel RT02 CD tuner amp. AE Evolution3 floorstanding speakers in light maple. Display unit Alphason glass/silver. Grado SR60 headphones. Tel: 0161 344 2865

ARCAM A38 amplifier plus matching CD37 player. Lovely combination. Fatigue free sound £1500. (£2800 new) Tannoy Eyris 2 floorstanding speakers £325. Q-Acoustics 1050i floorstanding speakers £150. All mint with boxes. Tel: 023 8073 8935

QUAD 303 and 33 serviced. Pioneer A300R precision. Fostex FE166EN full range. Rogers Ravensbourne. All vgc. Offers. Wanted: Naim Nait2 or Icon HP8 or MP3. Tel: 0781 802 6427

CASTLE HOWARDS SE2 rosewood, vgc, £580. Audiolab P amp, uk version £265. Audiolab gray C&P £295. Technics SL1200 fitted with RB250 fully modified Ortofon 2M Red, £360. Tel: 07946 704979

MARANTZ CD63 MK2 in excellent working condition and unmarked, little use. Owner's Manual. Remote. This is a classic CD player. Reluctant sale £130. Buyer collects (Harrow, Middlesex) Tel: 0208 866 3523

MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 amplifier (upgraded) A5 CD (upgraded) DAB/FM tuner. Musical Fidelity headphone amp. Mitchel Gyrodec, Tecno arm. All boxed with manuals. Mint condition. Can dem. Tel: 0115 975 4070 (Nottingham)

NAIM STAGELINE-S MC phonostage £129. Also Russ Andrews Power Pak3 £99. Mobile Fidelity Soundlabs LP's. Tel: 02392 453382

KIMBER D-60 digital 1m Ultraplate phono cable £215. Kimber KCAG -14dB CD interconnect 0.5m £220. Russ Andrews Yellow mains cables, filters, items half price including postage. Call Nicky on 07813 953 874

AUDIOLAB 8000Q Pre-Amp, silver, £220; Audiolab 8000P 100wpch Power amp, Black, £240; both boxed mint, 7 mths old, extended warranty. Nottm 07876 197 188

REGA BRIO for sale, black satin finish. Also Arcam CD 82 and AH! Tjoeb 66 amp, tubed pre-amp section. Any offers considered. Contact Andrew on 0207 252 8122 or 07791529128

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp/ Musical Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £1400 ono Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 87 637 6623

# HEATHCOTE AUDIO

TEL: 07860 511111 WEB SITE [www.heathcoteaudio.co.uk](http://www.heathcoteaudio.co.uk)

## VALVE AMPS

|   |              |        |
|---|--------------|--------|
| AUDIO NOTE CONQUERER SE 300B CLASS A POWER AMP (ONE OWNER)  | MINT         | £1275  |
| ROGUE AUDIO 66 MAGNUM REMOTE PREAMP (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  | MINT/BOXED   | £795   |
| UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY! QUAD II DIAMOND JUBILEE GOLD MONOS UNUSED<br>REMOVED FROM BOXES FOR TESTING ONLY (6K NEW IN 1996) | MINT/BOXED   | £3750  |
| ART AUDIO JOTA CHROME/GOLD CHASSIS/VOL POT. LITTLE USED SINGLE ENDED 32B VALVE AMP (ONE OWNER FROM NEW \$12000 NOW?)  | EXCLT        | £3750  |
| PATHOS INPOWER CLASS A HYBRID MONOBLOCS (SUPERB £9K?)   | EXCLT        | £4250  |
| ART AUDIO INTEGRA 30W INTEGRATED INC.P/ STAGE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  | EXCLT        | £1750  |
| MATISSE REFERENCE 2 BOX PREAMP 64 STEP ATTENUATORS ORDERED AT EXTRA COST.MM&MC PHONO STAGE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)       | EXCLT        | £3750  |
| PAPWORTH 200M SPECIAL ORDER KT-90 AMPS WITH VOL CONTROL   |              |        |
| SPECIAL ORDER BUILD (ONE OWNER FEW MONTHS USE ONLY)   | AS NEW/BOXED | £3750  |
| TUBE TECHNOLOGY SYNERGY FANTASTIC REMOTE INTEGRATED 150 WATTS   | EXCLT        | £3750  |
| BALANCED AUDIO TECH. BAT VK-60 POWER AMP (66K? ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  | EXCLT/BOXED  | £2450  |
| DK DESIGN VS.1 SIGNATURE MKIII INTEGRATED (HYBRID)  | DEM/BOXED    | £2450  |
| UNISON RESEARCH FEATHER PRE/35 POWER (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)   | EXCLT/BOXED  | £1295  |
| KRELL 402 EVOLUTION STEREO POWER AMP (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)   | MINT/BOXED   | £10450 |
| ANTIQUE SOUND LABS LJO1 PRE AMP/HEADPHONE AMP   | DEM/BOXED    | £295   |
| ANTIQUE SOUND LABS MINI PHONO (2 BOX WITH NOS MULLARD VALVES)   | EX.DEM       | £295   |
| MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE AMP (E3K?)   | EX.DEM       | £2250  |
| MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE SPECIAL ORDER TWIN VOL.POTS  |              |        |
| 3 RCA/2 BALANCED INS.1 RCA/ 2 BALANCED OUTS (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  | EXCLT        | £2495  |

## SOLID STATE

|  |             |        |
|--|-------------|--------|
| DPA 50S PRE AMP C/W PHONO STAGE  | VGC         | £495   |
| DPA 50S POWER AMP & CABLES   | VGC/BOXED   | £595   |
| DPA THREE BOX PRE AMP EXCLT  | VGC         | £795   |
| DPA 50S POWER AMP & CABLES (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)                      | EXCLT/BOXED | £995   |
| KRELL 402 EVOLUTION STEREO POWER AMP (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)            | MINT/BOXED  | £10450 |
| PATHOS INPOWER CLASS A HYBRID MONOBLOCS (SUPERB £9K?)                  | EXCLT       | £4250  |
| CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 740 A-B (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)                    | MINT/BOXED  | £325   |
| PIONEER A-09 28K CLASS A INTEGRATED (ONE OWNER VERY RARE SUPERB!) (4K) | MINT/BOXED  | £2250  |
| H-CAT 12-B PRE WITH WTC CONTROL (£2800)                                | DEM         | £1750  |
| H-CAT P-12A PRE AMP (£2500?)   | DEM         | £1250  |
| ADVANTAGE I200 INTEGRATED AMP  | EXCLT/BOXED | £795   |
| JEFF ROWLAND COHERENCE-1 2 BOX PRE C/W PHONO STAGE AND                 | VGC         | £995   |
| JEFF ROWLAND MODEL3 MONOBLOCS  | VGC         | £1795  |
| PASS LABS ALEPH P PRE AMP  | EXCLT       | £1195  |
| KRELL KAV 300R RARE TUNER AMP (£3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)               | MINT/BOXED  | £1395  |
| MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-208 TUNER AMP (£4K)                                  | EXCLT/BOXED | £1395  |
| ALCHEMIST APD-15 MKII INTEGRATED C/W PHONO STAGE                       | EXCLT       | £599   |
| ALCHEMIST FORSETTI 2 BOX PRE RCA/XLR (ONE OWNER)                       | MINT/BOXED  | £595   |
| MCCORMACK DNA-125 POWER AMP (ONE OWNER FEW MONTHS USE ONLY)            | MINT/BOXED  | £1250  |
| LYNX STRATOS PRE AND 2 MONOBLOCS (ONE OWNER TIMEWARP STUFF!)           | MINT/BOXED  | £995   |
| YAMAHA CX2 PRE/MX2 POWER AMP (200 WATTS X 2) & CDX993 CD               | EXCLT       | £199   |
| NAKAMICHI AMPLIFIER-2 REMOTE INTEGRATED                                | EXCLT       | £2150  |
| MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE AMP (E3K?)                                      | DEM         | £895   |
| DENON AVC A11 SR AV AMP (CHAMPAYNE GOLD)                               | EXCLT/BOXED | £895   |
| MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE SPECIAL TWIN VOL.POTS (ONE OWNER)               |             |        |
| 3 RCA/2 BALANCED INS.1 RCA/ 2 BALANCED OUTS                            | UNIQUE      | £2495  |
| NAKAMICHI 620 WEDGE POWER AMP  | EXCLT/BOXED | £575   |
| REVOX H-5 INTEGRATED & OPTIONAL REMOTE (ONE OWNER)                     | EXCLT       | £495   |
| DENON PMA 900V SIZEABLE INTEGRATED MM/MC PHONO                         | EXCLT       | £149   |

## DIGITAL

|  |               |       |
|--|---------------|-------|
| EINSTEIN TOPLOADING CD PLAYER BLACK/CHROME                 | EXCLT         | TBA   |
| MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI VISTA CD/SACD PLAYER                  | MINT/BOXED    | £1195 |
| MARANTZ CD-17 KI GIGNATURE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)            | MINT/BOXED    | £695  |
| KRELL KAV 250 CD PLAYER (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)               | MINT/BOXED    | £895  |
| PIONEER CLD 925 LASER DISC PLAYER (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)     | MINT/BOXED    | £249  |
| NAIM CD5X (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)                           | MINT/BOXED    | £749  |
| DENON 3910 UNIVERSAL PLAYER (ONE OWNER)                    | MINT/BOXED    | £395  |
| AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.3 & PS-3 HDCD ETC (LAST ONE £900)      | NEW OLD STOCK | £399  |
| VACCUUM TUBE LOGIC JLT1 SACD/CD PLAYER (LAST 2 £1300)      | NEW/BOXED     | £795  |
| VACCUUM TUBE LOGIC JLT1 SACD/CD PLAYER                     | DEM/BOXED     | £649  |
| MERIDIAN 200 TRANSPORT                                     | MINT/BOXED    | £375  |
| CHORD 1500E DAC/DIGITAL PRE AMP (£6800 ONE OWNER FROM NEW) | MINT/BOXED    | £2750 |
| THETA DATA UNIVERSAL CD/LD PLAYER (ONE OWNER)              | EXCLT/BOXED   | £395  |
| THETA PRO GEN III DAC GLASS & BALANCED OPTIONS (ONE OWNER) | EXCLT/BOXED   | £795  |
| MODWRIGHT P3A DAC SIGNATURE-2 (SUPERB)                     | BRAND NEW     | £795  |
| THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT                              | MINT/BOXED    | £1250 |
| THETA DATA II TRANSPORT (SILVER) AES/RCA ETC               | MINT/BOXED    | £695  |
| ACCUPHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT (£8000?)                         | EXCLT         | £2450 |
| MERIDIAN 602 TRANSPORT 606 DAC                             | EXCLT         | £995  |
| MICROMEGA CLASSIC SOLO XLR/RCA (NEW MECH)                  | BOXED         | £695  |

## VINYL

|  |             |       |
|--|-------------|-------|
| NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE MENTOR REFERENCE                               | EXCLT       | £1295 |
| NOTTS. ANALOGUE MENTOR TONE ARM (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)             | MINT        | TBA   |
| LINN LP12/CIRKUS/ITTOCK/K9/SMOKED LID                              | EXCLT/BOXED | £1095 |
| ORACLE DELPHI MKV SPEC TURBO PSU (ONE OWNER)                       | BOXED       | £2750 |
| NOTTS ANALOGUE MENTOR/EMINENT TECHNOLOGY                           |             |       |
| MKII AIR BEARING TONE ARM/SUMIKO BPS CART.                         | VGC         | £2750 |
| SME 20/2A TURNTABLE SERIES V ARM/WIRE UPGRADE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW) | EXCLT       | £4495 |

|   |          |      |
|---|----------|------|
| ANTIQUE SOUND LABS MINI PHONO (2 BOX WITH NOS MULLARD VALVES) | EX.DEM   | £350 |
| AUDIO NEMESIS PHONO STAGE (£1000 +)                           | GC/BOXED | £475 |
| PROJECT PHONO BOX (ONE OWNER)                                 | EXCLT    | £49  |
| SUMIKO BPS EVO 3 FEW HOURS USE ONLY (ONE OWNER)               | BOXED    | £175 |
| MCCORMACK TWO BOX MICRO PHONO DRIVE MM/MC (ONE OWNER)         | EXCLT    | £349 |

## LOUDSPEAKERS

|   |             |       |
|---|-------------|-------|
| CELESTION A1 STANDMOUNT TITANIUM TWEETER                | MINT/BOXED  | £349  |
| EGGLESTONWORKS ROSA (£11,000 NOW?)                      | EXCLT       | £3250 |
| JAMO CONCERT 11 (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)                    | BOXED       | £1295 |
| BOLZANO VILLETTRI BV3003 & BV SUBWOOFER FANTASTIC!      | MINT/BOXED  | £3450 |
| AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE                                | DEM/BOXED   | £695  |
| THEIL CS 1.5 (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)                       | MINT/BOXED  | £1250 |
| HYPERION HPS 938W GORGEOUS BIRDS EYE MAPLE (ONE OWNER)  | MINT/BOXED  | £2995 |
| CELESTION A-3   | EXCLT/BOXED | £1150 |
| REFERENCE 3A VEENA (£3000)                              | DIS/BOXED   | £1995 |
| PODIUM 1s EXCELLENT PANEL SPEAKERS (£6000? NEW)         | MINT/BOXED  | £2795 |
| MIRAGE M1si BIPOLAR GIANTS (£6500) (ONE OWNER FROM NEW) | EXCLT       | £1995 |
| MIRAGE BPS 210 SUBWOOFERS 2 OFF (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)    | EACH        | £795  |
| MARTEN MILES II CHERRY (8k+ NEW) (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)   | EXCLT       | £3750 |
| CURA CA-30 FLOORSTANDERS (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)           | MINT        | £995  |
| HARPER QUARTETO (£4000)                                 | DEM         | £2250 |
| AURUM CANTUS V3M GLOSS BLACK (£1700)                    | EX.DIS      | £1350 |
| AURUM CANTUS MUSIC GODDESS (£2500)                      | NEW         | £1795 |

## TUNER/TAPE/MISC.

|   |             |       |
|---|-------------|-------|
| MUSICAL FIDELITY AS FM/DAB TUNER (ONE OWNER FEW HOURS USE ONLY) | MINT/BOXED  | £995  |
| PS-AUDIO QUINTESSENCE POWER CENTRE                              |             |       |
| (ONE OWNER FEW HOURS USE ONLY)                                  | MINT/BOXED  | £795  |
| MARANTZ ST-17 TUNER (ONE OWNER FEW HOURS USE ONLY)              | EXCLT/BOXED | £395  |
| KRELL KAV 300R RARE TUNER AMP (£3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)        | MINT/BOXED  | £1395 |
| MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-208 TUNER AMP (£4K)                           | EXCLT/BOXED | £1595 |
| TECHNICS CT-550 RDS TUNER (ONE OWNER)                           | EXCLT       | £99   |
| TECHNICS BX RS501 TAPE DECK (ONE OWNER)                         | EXCLT       | £149  |
| DENON TU 1800 REMOTE DAB/FM TUNER (ONE OWNER)                   | EXLT        | £149  |
| AVI REF.7 BAND TUNER (ONE OWNER)                                | EXCLT       | £375  |

## INTERCONNECT CABLE

|   |              |       |     |
|---|--------------|-------|-----|
| NORDOST QUATRO-FIL 1METRE XLR PAIR            |              | DUE   | TBA |
| HARMONIX HARMONIX-STRINGS HS-101 1METRE RCA   | AS NEW/BOXED | TBA   | TBA |
| HARMONIX HARMONIX-STRINGS HS-101 1METRE XLR   | AS NEW/BOXED | TBA   | TBA |
| VERTEX AQ SILVER SOLFON BALANCED              | MINT         | £695  | TBA |
| AVANTEGARD SILVER CABLE 2 METRE XLR 2 OFF     | EXCLT        | TBA   | TBA |
| TARA LABS RSC1 1METRE XLR BALANCED            | MINT/BOXED   | £199  | TBA |
| TRANSPARENT MUSIC LINK PLUS 1 METRE RCA       | MINT/BOXED   | £225  | TBA |
| BLACK RHODIUM SYMPHONY 1 METRE RCA (LAST 1)   | NEW/BOXED    | £65   | TBA |
| BLACK RHODIUM SYMPHONY 0.5 METRE RCA (LAST 1) | NEW/BOXED    | £55   | TBA |
| LFD SPIROLINK 4 FOOT PAIR                     | AS NEW       | £149  | TBA |
| AUDIOQUEST RUBY 0.8 METRE RCA                 |              | £65   | TBA |
| CHORD CO.CHAMELEON 1 METRE RCA                |              | £49   | TBA |
| STRATOS 1 METRE                               |              | £175  | TBA |
| QUANTUM 'REFERENCE' 1 METRE RCA               | EXLT         | £175  | TBA |
| QUANTUM 'CD' 1 METRE RCA                      | EXCLT        | £125  | TBA |
| QUANTUM DIGITAL REFERENCE 1 METRE RCA         | EXCLT        | £99   | TBA |
| XLO PRO 1METRE AND 0.5 M ETRE RCA (SIX OFF)   | EACH         | 75/65 | TBA |

## LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

|   |            |      |
|---|------------|------|
| GOERTZ M2 VERACITY 6.9 METRE PAIR                       | BOXED      | TBA  |
| MONSTER M24S BI WIRE CABLE 8FT (REAL MONSTER!)          | MINT/BOXED | £325 |
| ECOSSE MS2.3 REFERENCE 5 METRE PAIR                     | EXCLT      | £199 |
| TRANSPARENT MUSIC WAVE ULTRA 8FT PAIR WBT PLUGS         | EXCLT      | £995 |
| KIMBER APR 2.5 METRE TERMINATED PAIR                    | EXCLT      | £99  |
| NIRVANA SL-3 2.3 METRE PAIR                             | DEM/BOXED  | £450 |
| MIT MH-750 2.5 METRE PAIR BI-WIRE                       | VGC        | £595 |
| RAPPORT (USHER) 5 METRE PAIR FACTORY TERMINATED         | EX.DEM     | £299 |
| DPA 5 METRE PAIR TERMINATED FOR 50S AMP                 | EXCLT      | £250 |
| XLO SIGNATURE 2 TYPE 5.2 4FT PAIR                       | DEM        | £495 |
| QED GENESIS SILVER SPIRAL 3 METRE PAIR                  | MINT/BOXED | £199 |
| XLO REF.2.5 METRE PAIR                                  | EXCLT      | £325 |
| MIT MH-750 BI WIRE 3 METRE PAIR                         | EXCLT      | £695 |
| PS AUDIO X-STREAM 3 METRE PAIR (VERY HEAVY!)            | EXCLT      | £500 |
| DIAMOND HI SILVER 3 METRE PAIR (LOCKING WBT'S)          | EXCLT      | £649 |
| BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 7 METRE BI WIRE PAIR (£560) | NEW        | £300 |
| BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 5 METRE BI WIRE PAIR (£400) | NEW        | £170 |
| BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 4 METRE PAIR (£240)         | NEW        | £140 |

## STANDS

|                                    |        |      |
|------------------------------------|--------|------|
| TARGET 6 SHELF STAND               | VGC    | £169 |
| SOLUS/TARGET R2 SPEAKER STANDS     | EXCLT  | £175 |
| SOUNDSTYLE XS105 LAST ONE          | N.O.S. | £199 |
| SOUNDSTYLE XS 100 LAST ONE         | N.O.S. | £199 |
| PIRATE STANDS FOR SNELL K ETC      | EXCLT  | £225 |
| HUGENS STANDS FOR SNELL K ETC      | EXCLT  | £225 |
| PARTINGTON ROUND STANDS            | EXCLT  | £149 |
| 5 SHELF GLASS STAND CABLE TIDY ETC | EXCLT  | £169 |

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**QUAD SYSTEM. 606/66 pre/** power. ESL63s, black, matching cd player, FM tuner with controller and manuals. £1825. Yamaha ns1000m bass and midrange units, used, sensible offers. Graham. 07800 512889. [gb1952@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gb1952@hotmail.co.uk) [somerse]

**LUXMAN PD 441** turntable complete £600. Sony cdp-x7esd/das703es £750, cdp-552esd ii £300 ta-f700es £250 sts-770es £250 sts-730es £200 ta-n 86b £300 all immaculate. Primare t.20 £275 Tel 07500702061. [Noddfa@hotmail.com](mailto:Noddfa@hotmail.com)

**AUDIO RESEARCH Reference 210** mono-amps. 200 Hours use from new, perfect, boxed, manuals, accessories. Stunning sound. Overseas works forces sale of system. 10,995.00 ovno. For more details contact Neil on 01925 656990 or [npage@tadmur.com](mailto:npage@tadmur.com)

**AUDIO RESEARCH Reference Phono**. All valve phono stage, perfect condition with virtually no use as working overseas. 3500.00 priced to sell. For more details contact Neil on 01925 656990 or [npage@tadmur.com](mailto:npage@tadmur.com)

**REGA P3/24, tt psu, funk** firm 5m achromat, isokinetic gt2s subplatter(120), dynavector dv-20x2 moving coil cartridge(500). 3 month's old as new, selling for £600. 0793087858 2, North London.

**KOETSU BLUE Lace. Brand** new. Mounted but unused. Finest ever platinum coiled cartridge 0.2mV output. Very few in existence, boxed. Inspection welcome. 4,995.00 For more details contact Neil on 01925 656990 or [npage@tadmur.com](mailto:npage@tadmur.com)

**KIMBER SELECT 3038** speaker cables 1.00m silver next gen spades, Siltech FTM45G3 1.00m, Kimber Select KS1136 XLR-XLR 1.00m. All approximately 50% of retail, all perfect boxed with little use. For more details contact Neil on 01925 656990 or [npage@tadmur.com](mailto:npage@tadmur.com)

**HITACHI FT-5500 FM/AM** digital tuner £20.00 Cambridge A1 v2.0 Amplifier some marks on case £35 Pioneer DV-636D DVD Player some marks on case £50 01932 856971

**AUDIO NOTE silver AN-Vx** 1m DIY interconnects with WBT 0144 RCA plugs. Two sets available. Cable is approximately 8 years old. Very good condition. Superb sound. £195 ono. 020 84433950. [brilliant.sub@gmail.com](mailto:brilliant.sub@gmail.com).

**METAXAS IKARUS AMP**. Hi-end integrated Australian, 45 watts p/ch. Stainless steel case. Latest price £2265.00. Display model - as new. 50 hours max. £595.00 [micklawley@darkbluemail.com](mailto:micklawley@darkbluemail.com) 0121 7078083 Birmingham.

**WANTED** A faulty or non working Quad 44 preamp, Quad 44 c.d input module 500mv 500k, Quad 405-2 modules, Quad 33 preamp. Contact Mike 01758 613790.

**GARRARD 401** £1000ono, Turntable power supply £300ono, Technics Equaliser £150, Class A Amplifier power supply £300ono, Arcam 9 Power amplifier £250ono, Maplin 50W amp board £25. Tel 0207 499 8729

**B & W 801D's**. Rosenut finish. Four years old. As new condition. Complete with all original packing. £6,500, no offers. Very heavy, buyer to collect. Tel/Text: 07929 721714. Email: [b.revill@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:b.revill@hotmail.co.uk)

**NAKAMICHI 600** Cassette deck, including cover. Very good condition. Black. Offers. [ivangollop@hotmail.com](mailto:ivangollop@hotmail.com) or Tel 07986580006

**WHARFEDALE Opus 3 5.1** Front Floorstanders, Centre and Rears Bipole Gloss Black. Comes with Cloth Protective Bags and Boxes Excellent Condition £2800 ono County Durham, Delivery Offered. 01325315066

**RADFORD TRISTAR** loudspeakers and stands - professionally made cabinets with real wood veneer, genuine Radford drive units and crossover. Excellent condition Offers to [hondola@gmail.com](mailto:hondola@gmail.com). Pick-up only from Stoke on Trent

**MIT SHOTGUN S2** 15ft speaker cable with interchangeable spades/bananas boxed. £795 (1895) MIT Shotgun S2 1m balanced interconnects, adjustable impedance, boxed. £295 (895) two pairs £500. 01797 253073 [majba13@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:majba13@yahoo.co.uk)

**TRANSCRIPTORS SATURN** turntable with original transcriptors tone arm, no cartridge, excellent condition, custom made cover, £265. tele- 07806455032 or 01604 584630.

**FINAL 400i** electrostatic speakers, 7 months old from new, not yet run in as hardly used, as new condition complete with boxes, manuals etc. £795. tele- 07806455032 or 01604 584630.

**GRAAF GM 50-50** valve power amp, superb sound quality and build, piano gloss black finish, excellent condition, can demo or email pics. £795. tele- 07806455032 or 01604 584630

**VACUUM STATE SVP2** valve preamp, carefully built from VS kit in 2009. Phono plus 5 line inputs, switched attenuator volume. Mint condition, can demo, Northants area. £1990. Tel 01604 709541

**MONITOR AUDIO R952/MD** loudspeakers Stereophile Recommended 1988 H:80cm x W:22.5cm x D:32cm. Weight: 20kg each Excellent condition, walnut, original boxes, spikes, one owner. £1000+ new. £200 ono Telephone 01252 640970

**RUSS ANDREWS Crystal Ag** high end iconnect at real price. Was £850 now £299. Same spec as Hero Ag. Fitted with WBT Ag phonos. Chris, Bristol. 0798 1025698.

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Hi-Fi World - May 2008

# NEXT MONTH

As we leave the festive season behind and head into the new year, the decorations come down and the winter blues set in. So what better way to cheer your mood than the March edition of Hi-Fi World magazine? Inside, you'll find the team get to grips with a wide range of kit, from the superb new Spendor A9 loudspeakers [pictured] and exotic Kiseki NOS moving coil cartridge to the striking Meridian G08.2 CD player. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you:

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## ADVERTISERS INDEX

|                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| 2nd Hand Hi-Fi         | 102         |
| Absolute Sounds        | IFC         |
| Audio Components       | 116         |
| Audio Emotions         | 32          |
| Audio Sanctum          | 70          |
| Audio T                | 126         |
| Audiobility            | 54          |
| Avid Hi-Fi             | 102         |
| Basically Sound        | 94          |
| Billy Vee              | 96          |
| Black Rhodium          | 40          |
| Chestergroup           | 58          |
| Chord Electronics      | 6           |
| Claro Audio            | 72          |
| Classique Sounds       | 112         |
| Computers Unlimited    | 20          |
| Cymbiosis              | 110         |
| dCS                    | 24          |
| EAR Yoshino            | 72          |
| Elac                   | 46          |
| Electrocompaniet       | OBC         |
| Emille Labs            | 70          |
| EnjoyTheMusic.Com      | 96          |
| Exposure               | 10          |
| Heathcote Audio        | 124         |
| Heatherdale            | 118         |
| High End Cable         | 118         |
| IAG                    | 62          |
| Ian Harrison           | 112         |
| Icon Audio             | 88          |
| Isokinetik             | 110         |
| KEF                    | 50          |
| Leema Acoustics        | 38          |
| Mantra Audio           | 112         |
| Midland Audio Exchange | 122         |
| Monitor Audio          | 127         |
| Music First            | 118         |
| Nuforce                | IBC         |
| Origin Live            | 90          |
| Pannell & Partners     | 94          |
| Retro Reproduction     | 110         |
| Rock Solid Sounds      | 96          |
| Russ Andrews           | 116         |
| Sevenoaks              | 113,114,115 |
| Signals                | 116         |
| Sound & Vision Bristol | 68          |
| Sound Fowndations      | 14,22       |
| Sound Hi-Fi            | 54          |
| Sugden                 | 94          |
| Tannoy                 | 48          |
| The Chord Company      | 92          |
| The Missing Link       | 115         |
| Top 20                 | 66,67       |
| Triangle               | 40          |
| Turntable World        | 108         |
| Whest Audio            | 90          |
| Yamaha                 | 16          |
| ZincHT                 | 34          |

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| 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 |
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| 21 | 22 |
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# MATADOR AT 21

## MATADOR 2010



**C**reated as part of the label's twenty first anniversary celebrations, this new limited edition box set packs in five CDs of remastered tracks that span the history of the label from 1989 to 2010. You also get an extra CD of previously unreleased live recordings that were taped at the 10th anniversary concerts recorded in 1999 in New York City. In addition, to celebrate the fact that the anniversary party took place in Las Vegas, the box set also includes 36 custom-made Matador poker chips in three different values plus a perfect bound, 85-page book documenting the history of the label that includes plenty of rare photos. The whole lot is squeezed into a sturdy cube box.

Talking to Matador's General Manager, Patrick Amory, he revealed that the set was mooted when the label began to plan its three-night twenty first birthday concert in Las Vegas. "I was discussing the event with my partners, Chris Lombardi and Gerard Cosloy and we thought it would be nice to have a physical artefact that documented the history of the label," said Amory. "Our previous anniversary compilations ('What's Up Matador' in 1997, 'Everything Is Nice: The Matador Records 10th Anniversary Anthology' in 1999, and 'Matador at Fifteen' in 2004) were much smaller sets that aimed at documenting the bands and releases on the label at those particular points in time. We'd never

attempted a huge cube type release that would really try to get its tendrils around the entire history!"

Amory drew up a tentative chronological track list more or less from memory, dividing the set by periods. The idea was to assign each disc with a personality that summed up the era. So the first disc is a pretty noisy affair, very lo-fi and very New York City. "That's what Matador was like from 1989 to 1992... bands like Chain Gang, Dustdevils, Railroad Jerk and Unsane defined the vibe of downtown NYC back then. That said, Matador really made its mark with Teenage Fanclub, who were signed here first, I believe, and we released their first album in the first year of our existence, so we *had* to start with them and 'Everything Flows'."

Similarly, the second disc sums up the period when Matador helped to define the contemporary indie rock scene via acts like Pavement, Liz Phair, The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Yo La Tengo and Guided By Voices. "It's a lot more eclectic and a lot more (intermittently) commercial. The challenge in sequencing all of these was making the eras representative of the music we released, but simultaneously having the songs flow smoothly together. This became particularly hard on the third disc, when we expanded into electronic and hip hop. The disc is all over the place, but I think that's okay, because that's where we were at the time – a little bit lost, a little bit adventuresome."

The remastering for the first five discs was done at Sterling Sound in New York by Steve Fallone. The box was a massive archival project, involving sources of all shapes and sizes that included CD, DAT, 1/4-inch analogue tape and a few WAV files. The original live recordings were mixed by Tom Gloady from the original Rolling Stones Mobile studio via 2-inch analogue tape, then on an analogue Neve board at Fluxivity Recording in Brooklyn and, later, manipulated via Pro Tools. It then went to Sterling for mastering by Greg Calbi.

According to Amory, the live recordings found on that sixth disc were, "a huge undertaking. We had never used any of the material – in fact we'd never mixed or mastered it! But they included really great quality sound and it seemed appropriate to release them on our next big anniversary. All the tracks sound so great but I think the Pavement tracks really stand out. It must have been one of their final shows in the US before they broke up and, of course, their final US reunion show was at our event in Las Vegas last month, so there was a nice symmetry there."

Don't expect a vinyl edition of this set, it's simply too expensive an option to even entertain ("Twelve to fourteen LPs; the price would have been astronomical."). However, enjoy the CD version which is magnificent, packed to the rafters with sonic treasure and well worth the investment. **PR**

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