

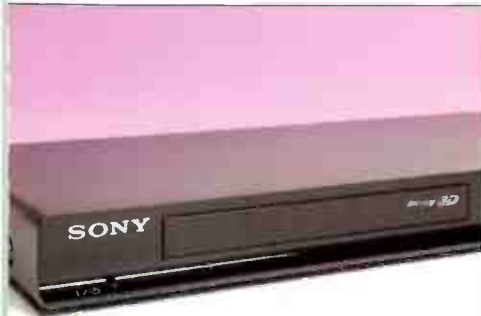
HI-FI WORLD

NOVEMBER 2011

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SONY BDP-S480
Blu-ray disc player



TANNOY DC6T
loudspeakers



REGA RP3
turntable



SUPERTEST

integrated amplifiers

COMPETITION



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CD PLAYER/PREAMP
WORTH £950!



Icon Audio Stereo 20PP



Pioneer A-A9Mk2-K



Onix A55



Creek Evolution 2



Onkyo TX-NR709



Yamaha A-S1000



Cyrus 6 XP d

NOVEMBER 2011

- > MISSING LINK VINCENT PHO-111 VP phono
- > TIGER PAW LINN LP12 modifications part 2
- > NORTHWEST ANALOGUE SLATE 401 plinth
- > OLDE WORLDE: SONY DVP-S725 DVD player
- > DELTEC PDM 3 digital converter

11 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST OF
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ADL

ALPHA DESIGN LABS

Introducing Alpha Design Labs

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



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ALPHA Line - 1

ALPHA Line - 2

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Formula 2 USB cable

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welcome

EDITOR
David Price
tel/fax: +44 (0) 1672 569090
e-mail: editorial@hi-fiworld.co.uk

DESIGN EDITOR
Faiza Chunara
tel: +44 (0) 20 7625 3129
e-mail: adproduction@hi-fiworld.co.uk

PRODUCTION EDITOR
David Noble
tel: +44 (0) 20 7625 3134
e-mail: classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk

ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE
Debi Silver
tel: +44 (0) 1723 500 435
mob: +44 (0) 7966 84 35 36
e-mail: debisilver@hi-fiworld.co.uk

ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE
Brad Francis
tel: 01923 677 256
mob: 07715 421 569
email: brad.francis@sky.com

ACCOUNTS
e-mail: accounts@hi-fiworld.co.uk

PUBLISHER
Noel Keywood
e-mail: publisher@hi-fiworld.co.uk

FREE READERS CLASSIFIEDS
tel: +44 (0) 20 7625 3134
e-mail: classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS
tel: +44 (0) 1442 820580
fax: +44 (0) 1442 827912
e-mail: hi-fiworld@websubscribe.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY
David Noble
tel: +44 (0) 20 7625 3134

WRITERS
Tony Bolton, Alvin Gold, Tim Jarman,
Paul Rigby, Adam Smith, Rafael Todes.



One of the great things about doing this job is the chance to rediscover classic hi-fi components – and the opportunity to hear a well fettled and/or restored golden oldie must never be missed!

And this month we feature two classic turntables, both subtly modified and carefully rebuilt. The Tiger Paw Khan modification package for the Linn LP12 [p106] is genuinely one of the most important reinterpretations of that magic Sondek formula. Its cast aluminium top plate is built with the precision you'd normally only expect from Linn themselves, and reduces resonances to effect a dramatic clean-up of the sound.

Then we have the Northwest Analogue Slate 401 [p111], which is a huge slate plinth and stand for the classic Garrard 401. Just as the Sondek is held back by its stock plinth, so is the Garrard – only more so as the massive motor in these decks throws noise and vibration into the system, which is why it's essential to have a massive structure such as this to filter out the nasties. This design works brilliantly well, and lets people hear their classic deck in a way that was never possible when new.

Elsewhere in this issue, we go back to the future with Tannoy's excellent DC6T floorstanding loudspeaker on p12. The brand has an mighty historical pedigree, and this features traditional Tannoy design cues (Dual Concentric drivers, wideband tweeter) in a modern setting. The result is a fast, clean, expansive performer for under £1,000. Our new integrated amplifier supertest has seven models of differing prices up to £1,200, including a tube amp and an AV receiver. There are some surprises – read on from p17.

Digital disc fans will like our review of the new Sony BDP-S480, which is entry level Blu-ray *par excellence* [p44] and its cousin from some thirteen years back, the DVP-S725. One of the first DVD players, it still gives great pictures but works as super CD spinner too, all for pennies secondhand; read our Olde Worlde on p86. But for me this month's nicest surprise is the Bladelius Freja III [p50] – a great sub-£3,000 SACD player that reminds us what a super format Super Audio Compact Disc still is. Enjoy this issue!



David Price, editor

testing (see www.hi-fiworld.co.uk for full explanations of all our tests)

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

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

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

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

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verdicts

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

- simply the best
- extremely capable
- worth auditioning
- unremarkable
- seriously flawed
- keenly priced



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17

Seven mid-price integrateds compared, including this Onix A55.



44

Sony BDP-S480 Blu-ray disc player.



54

Deltec PDM3/Deltran DAC/sync lock system.



28

ALR Jordan Classic 2 loudspeakers.



106

Tiger Paw Khan Linn LP12 modification package.



100

Rega RP3 turntable.

LOUDSPEAKERS

TANNOY DC6T 12

Alvin Gold enjoys his time spent with these top quality affordable Dual Concentrics.

ALR JORDAN CLASSIC 2 28

David Price is highly impressed by these German designed and built standmounters.

HART AUDIO DUO SONIX 72

Noel Keywood samples this powerful new British high end speaker system.

AMPLIFICATION

ALL IN ONE? 17

Paul Rigby tries a range of mid-price integrated amplifiers...

ICON AUDIO STEREO 20PP 19

ONIX A55 20

PIONEER A-A9MK2 21

CREEK EVOLUTION 2 22

ONKYO TX-NR709 23

YAMAHA A-S1000 24

CYRUS 6 XP D 25

DIGITAL

SONY BDP-S480 44

Noel Keywood tries this great new entry level Blu-ray Disc player.

BLADELIUS FREJA III 50

David Price enjoys his time with a superb SACD spinner from Sweden.

DELTEC PDM3/DELTRAN 54

Rafael Todes samples this distinctive DAC and sync locking system.

FEATURES

SHOWTIME 66

Noel Keywood visits China's popular Guangzhou AV Fair 2011.

OLDE WORLDE 86

Tim Jarman remembers Sony's late nineties DVP-S725 DVD player.

THE LUXURY RAP 126

David Price talks to Heaven 17's Glenn Gregory and Martyn Ware.

VINYL SECTION

VINYL NEWS 98

Paul Rigby has the latest and greatest vinyl releases...

REGA RP3 TURNTABLE 100

Adam Smith auditions this new mid-price vinyl spinner.

MISSING LINK VINCENT PHO-111VP 105

David Price enjoys this carefully tweaked budget phono stage.

TIGER PAW LINN LP12 106

Tony Bolton auditions a superb new Sondek modifications package.

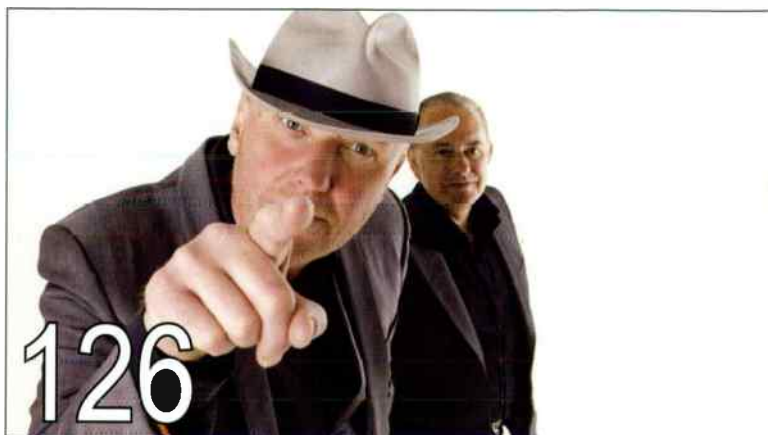
NORTHWEST ANALOGUE SLATE 401 111

Adam Smith does some heavy lifting with this great new Garrard plinth and stand.

SOUNDBITES

AVID ISORAK/ORIGIN LIVE LINEAR 49

AUDIO PRO WF100/PURE ONE MINI 71



7 COMPETITION

Your chance to win an Audiolab 8200CDQ CD player/DAC/preamp worth £950!

8 NEWS

Words from the front!

33 MAIL

Eleven pages of your views.

58 WORLD STANDARDS

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

74 WORLD CLASSICS

Grand designs that have stood the test of time.

80 MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Noel Keywood explains our rigid testing regime.

82 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ensure your copy every month and save money too!

84 AUDIOPHILE VINYL

Paul Rigby rounds up the latest audiophile 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.

124 CLASSIFIEDS

Two pages of second-hand bargains.

128 NEXT MONTH

what we hope to bring you in the next issue...

129 ADVERTISERS' INDEX

130 CLASSIC CUTS

Paul Rigby remembers Miles Davis' 'Bitches Brew'.

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HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



ORION



VISION



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TITAN



WIN A FANTASTIC **AUDIOLAB 8200CDQ** CD PLAYER/PREAMP WORTH **£950** IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!

Here's your chance to win one of our favourite mid-price CD players, in the shape of Audiolab's 8200CDQ – and it's an excellent preamplifier too! Here's what David Price said about it in the August issue of *Hi-Fi World*...

"A CD player, digital preamp and analogue preamp rolled into one, this is basically an Audiolab 8200CD on steroids. It has a choice of two preamplifier modes; digital or analogue. In digital mode you can switch between two optical (24/96), two coaxial (24/192) and one USB (24/96) inputs (or of course the inbuilt CD player) and control the volume digitally via the 32bit Sabre DAC. In analogue mode there are an additional three line-level analogue inputs. The preamp section is fully balanced, helping to reduce noise. There's also a direct-coupled, discrete Class A headphone

amplifier, and the 8200CDQ uses the American ESS Technology Sabre DAC, a device with 256 individual DACs per channel inside the chip, to increase conversion resolution, while also reducing static conversion errors. As per Naim's DAC, the CDQ operates either in integer Oversampling or Upsampling mode, depending on the input sample rate. It also features Audiolab-developed user selectable digital filters for optimal listening and measurement modes. Along with being especially proud of the filtering, designer John Westlake has taken a lot of trouble over jitter reduction, and careful attention has been paid to the analogue output stage; the CDQ has true balanced analogue XLR outputs, connected directly to a pair of proprietary Audiolab FET based Class A stage buffers per channel.

Having spent more than a little time with the £2,500 Meridian G08.2 and the £2,995 Leema Antilla IIS

Eco CD players of late, the £950 Audiolab appeared relaxed in such exalted company. Indeed it was quite spookily close to the latter in its general character, giving a relaxed yet compelling sound; a little soft, ever so slightly on the warm side of neutral, wonderfully expansive with a cathedral-like soundstage, and musical in a way that simply isn't associated with digital.

The Audiolab 8200CDQ is a very accomplished machine in every respect, but for me its stand-out talent is to make music flow onwards and upwards, relentlessly yet caressingly, in a way that normally only good vinyl can. As a standalone CD player, this is one of the most impressive new products I've come across in a long while – especially at its amazing price of under £1,000. A superbly musical yet amazingly transparent sound allied to excellent versatility makes this a brilliant value package."

For a chance to win this great prize, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 31st October 2011 to:
**November 2011 Comp.,
 Hi-Fi World magazine,
 Unit G4, Argo House,
 The Park Business Centre,
 Kilburn Park Road,
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QUESTIONS

[1] What's the Sabre's resolution?

- [a] 8bit
- [b] 16bit
- [c] 24bit
- [d] 32bit

[2] How many DACs per channel inside the Sabre?

- [a] 32
- [b] 64
- [c] 128
- [d] 256

[3] What type of headphone amp is used?

- [a] Class AB
- [b] Class D
- [c] Class S
- [d] Class A

[4] What kind of package is it, according to DP?

- [a] "quite tasty"
- [b] "rather good"
- [c] "pretty spiffing"
- [d] "brilliant value"

November Competition
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entries will be accepted on a postcard only

**AUGUST 2011 TRIANGLE COMETE LE LOUDSPEAKERS WINNER:
 Dr Chris Corrigan of Grays, Essex**

news



JET FIGHTER

AX Horn Loudspeakers new AXJet is a heavily reworked horn speaker designed "for reintroduction to the high-end hi-fi and studio monitor market". Finished in gloss polyester (black is standard although most colours are available), it is said to use AX Wavefront Engineering techniques "to maintain as near to possible a pure hemispheric wavefront, very efficiently and smoothly transforming high pressure energy to an even and fast sound distribution at the listener". The phase aligned compound horn design "allows a remarkable lack of intermodulation distortion and the single Voigt Lowther full-range driver covers the entire audio spectrum with no crossover, giving stunning transient response", the company says.

The AX Afterburner is said to give pressure equalisation to both sides of the driver, allowing higher sound pressure levels without the driver moving into distortion. Deltec Precision Audio have developed a purpose made amplifier with Kelvin Sensing (feedback control) direct to the driver. The company recommends the solid aluminium machined DPA-SA2 (Kelvin Sensing) stereo power amplifier complete with cables as a partner. For more details, click on www.axloudspeakers.com, or see it as the National Audio Show 2011 in room 154.

HUNTINGDON TRANSPORT

Cyrus Audio has updated its CD transports with Servo Evolution 2 software; the new SE 2 code is said to deliver "state-of-the-art CD data extraction and a highly polished revision of the original code". The original SE code was written to extract 'precise' optical data from a CD with the smallest number of bit errors, but occasionally this meant rejection of imperfect discs, says Cyrus, but the new code can better accommodate less than perfect CDs such as those with copy protection, or hybrid SACD layers. The new SE 2 servo code can play non-standard CDs, yet can output data with the same low bit error rate, it's claimed. All Cyrus slot loading CD players can be upgraded to SE 2 spec through a factory upgrade for £99, which includes latest production components such as the load bezel and a new two year warranty.

Along with this comes news of an affordable new CD transport product, simply called Cyrus CD Transport [pictured]. Priced at £750 it benefits from the latest SE 2 servo code and the company's low resonance, monolithic, non magnetic, alloy diecast chassis. It is fully upgradeable to the ultimate CD XT SE 2 flagship CD transport from the premium X series range at a cost of £799. The company is also doing a special promotion on their DAC-equipped 6 series amplifier, comprising the new CD transport and a Cyrus 6 XP d amplifier for £1,699. This represents a saving of £300, or the equivalent of a free DAC upgrade from 6 XP to XP d (usually £1,250). The Cyrus 6 XP d sports 11 inputs, six of them digital, including a USB input, allowing connection to a computer whereby the DAC card receives a digital stream from the connected computer. The 6 XP can be upgraded to the higher power 8 XP model, matching power amps can be added or the CD transport can be upgraded to full XT SE2 specification. For more details, click on www.cyrusaudio.com.



HEAD LINES

Ministry of Sound has a new headphone range that "delivers their signature sound directly to your ears", they claim. Designed to suit Ministry of Sound consumers old and new, the range boasts "fantastic sound and 'on trend' colours to classic over-ear designs", plus curled cable sections to prevent tangles. It includes the MOS006, priced at £39.99, which sports high-grade anodised aluminium cups with 50mm drivers, plus a soft foam-coated split headband and classic sliding loop adjustment system. It's available in four colours (black, silver/black gunmetal/black, gunmetal/orange). For more details, click on www.ministryofsound.com.



NAIM CHANGE

News comes that Naim Audio and Focal are merging "to create a new European leader in the audio industry". The management company Focal & Co will own and manage Focal and Naim as independent brands, retaining their unique philosophies and product ranges, it is said. Focal & Co, owned by Jacques Mahul (Founder and Chairman), CM-CIC (long-term shareholder in Focal) and the management teams of Focal and Naim, will employ 325 people at its facilities in Saint-Etienne, France and Salisbury, UK and have a combined turnover in excess of £48 million. The Research & Development teams of Focal and Naim are central to the success of both brands, and these will be brought together to "create an industry leading R&D capability to propel the Naim and Focal brands to the next level of innovative, high quality sound classics in the dynamic new world of hi-fi technology". Paul Stephenson, MD of Naim Audio Ltd and now member of the Board of Focal & Co said, "it is a merger of European minds. In Focal, we have found a partner which shares our passion for music and will help us take Naim to the next level. We can achieve far more together than would have been possible alone, yet at the same time we are able to retain everything that is unique about Naim and everything that our customers love us for."



STRONG STUFF

Atlas Cables has announced two new interconnect cables, handmade at their factory in Scotland, which are said to "bring a new level of high quality performance to the mid-priced interconnect category".

The Hyper MK II Asymmetrical is an unbalanced cable that consists of a central conductor made up of 95 individual strands of OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting) copper wire with 99.9997% purity. Insulated by low-loss foamed polyethylene dielectric, the return conductor is a two-layer braid made from a total of 192 strands of Ultra-Pure OFC (Oxygen Free Copper). This is wrapped over a PVC foil to provide 100% rejection of RFI (Radio Frequency Interference). The conductors are bedded into copper yarns and covered by a soft gloss black PVC sleeve.

The new Atlas Hyper Symmetrical is a balanced cable design using a pair of OCC copper conductors with an extremely high purity 99.9997% that are twisted together for noise interference reduction. Each conductor is constructed using a single 0.4 mm core which is then shrouded by 72 individual strands. Insulated by dielectrics that are made of extremely low-loss foamed polyethylene, the conductors are shielded by a two-layer braid consisting of 192 strands of Ultra Pure OFC copper. This double layer of tightly woven wire mesh is wrapped over a PVC foil for RFI rejection, and as with the Hyper MK II, the conductors are bedded into copper yarns and covered by a soft gloss black PVC sleeve. Atlas Symmetrical can also be fitted with XLR plugs for truly balanced analogue applications. Prices range from £160 for 1 metre pair for Asymmetrical RCA to £375 for the Hyper Symmetrical XLR. For details, call +44 (0) 1563 572666 or click on www.atlascables.com.



HORN BLOWER

Another interesting product shown at the National Audio Show is the Voigt 'Memory' Domestic Corner Horn. This speaker was designed by the legendary Paul Voigt way back in 1934, and is said to be famous for its natural, effortless soundstage.

GREAT MOMENTS IN MUSIC

This charming website showcases the work of Sheffield artist Pete McKee, who has done work with Oasis amongst many others. Click on www.greatmomentsinmusic.co.uk and see also www.therealmckee.co.uk.



SUPER SONIC!

Naim's new SuperUniti is a £3,250 design said to "extend the Uniti range and the possibilities for UnitiSystem into the high end, and extends its suitability for large rooms and those who like to play their music just that little bit louder". It can be considered to be a combination of Naim's SuperNait integrated amplifier and the multi-source UnitiQute and a Naim DAC. It sports Naim's latest generation streaming board, including Naim's latest know-how in digital, plus a six-layer circuit board design with power to stream 24bit/192kHz sources, plus there's a "high performance" digitally controlled analogue volume control.

See www.naimaudio.com.



Acoustic Imagery Power

Acoustic Imagery Pre

THE LOOK

Acoustic Imagery has a brand new preamplifier and Class D monoblock power amplifiers, along with a phono stage, on sale. Launched at the National Audio Show, more details can be found on the website at www.aacousticimagery.com.



STAR QUALITY

The New Zodiac USB DAC (\$1,895) is said to bring professional level audio to the living room. It uses Antelope's 64bit clocking technology and Jitter Management. Along with a sampling rate of up to 192kHz and a claimed 129dB dynamic range, the DAC sports twin S/PDIF and twin optical inputs, plus balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs and high-speed USB 2.0 connectivity through a custom USB chip, working with native drivers. In addition, users can download a free desktop app (http://antelopeaudio.com/en/control_panel.html) for OS X, Windows and Linux which allows remote control of the device and a one-click firmware update. For more details, click on www.ontelopeaudio.com.

For more details, click on www.ontelopeaudio.com.

COCKTAIL BAR

The new Cocktail X10 includes CD Storage, Music Streaming and Internet radio. You can load your CD collection on to its hard disk (3.5inch SATA) via its high speed front loading CD, and there's a 3.5" full colour TFT LCD sporting a "well designed high quality user interface". The unit has a 60W amplifier inside which can deliver "high quality sound" despite its compact 180x147x98mm casing. It lets you encode your rips in MP3, FLAC, OGG or WAV, and these can be streamed via Ethernet or optional Wi-Fi. The X10 comes in 4 size options, without HDD to add your own, 500MB HDD, 1TB HDD or 2TB HDD. Prices for the Cocktail Audio X10 starts at £279 without a HDD up to £429 for the 2TB version. See www.audiosanctum.co.uk.



POLE POSITION

Formula One driver Bruno Senna has installed a pair of PMC AML2 active monitors in his Monaco-based project studio, where he carries out remixes and production work of house and trance music. The Brazilian recently visited the PMC factory to collect his AML2s, whilst on route to Silverstone for the British Grand Prix. The driver for the Lotus Renault GP Formula One team has had a project studio at his Monaco home for several years. Senna is impressed with his new acquisition, saying, "how do you get a big monitor sound like that from such small speakers? These are the best nearfield monitors I've heard". For details, click on www.pmc-speakers.com.



LINN DEPENDENT!

Linn have new Klimax Solo and Twin power amplifiers with specially designed new Dynamik Power Supplies, and a new Klimax DS with a new audio board. To celebrate the improvements Linn is offering existing customers an unprecedented upgrade opportunity, they say. The Renew DS upgrade package reuses the existing audio board in a new custom-built enclosure resulting in a second DS player for use in another room of the home, making use of the new Songcast feature to enable perfectly synchronised multiroom playback. So existing customers can not only enjoy their music at a better quality than before, but also more of the music they love in different areas of the home.



Linn Kinsky

Linn also has an all new £3,500 Majik Isobarik loudspeaker, "combining the latest playback developments to offer deep bass and clean highs". It sports a 2K driver array and an 8" ported isobaric bass system, with a claimed reduction in distortion at bass frequencies. The mounting of two bass drive units face-to-face gives a more linear response to the input current, and there's a new crossover design. Majik Isobarik loudspeakers come finished in a choice of real-wood veneer cabinets, plus high gloss options and colours.

Linn has also launched a new Kinsky App, allowing users to wirelessly control their Linn DS system within the home. The new App joins the recently launch KinskyDesktop for Mac, a Mac-based control solution for Linn DS which includes complete iTunes support. The App is available as a free download from the App store whilst KinskyDesktop is available for free from the Linn website (www.linn.co.uk/kinskydesktop). The software offers direct control of your Linn DS from your Mac, iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad, and allows immediate access to all of your music from Studio Master to MP3 files along with all Apple file formats, including AAC and 24bit ALAC support. iTunes library support also allows easy access and high quality playback of existing playlists stored there, with album artwork automatically shared and updated. Information on the full range of Linn products can be found at www.linn.co.uk, or

by calling Linn Customer Support on 0500 888 909.



Linn Majik Isobarik



Linn Klimax DS

HEAD FIRST

AmpCity have announced what they call "the UK and Europe's first headphone recabling service, a hassle-free way to get the maximum performance from any pair of headphones". Customers simply mail in their headphones, then they're disassembled, the stock cable removed and 'Fidelis' ultra-high purity silver headphone cable soldered directly to the driver using Cardas silver solder. The whole process is completed, fully insured and tracked. The Fidelis cable is described as "a sonically transparent cable which reveals the true beauty of every song, exactly how it was recorded". The cable geometry has been designed for maximum interference reduction, as well ensuring perfect signal transmission. It can be used with any headphone with a detachable cable, with models supported including the Sennheiser HD800/HD650/HD600, HiFiMAN HE-500/HE-5LE/HE-6, Audeze LCD-2 and the AKG K702. The Fortis is a lightweight and portable version of the Fidelis cable, designed specifically for use with earphones and custom monitors. Models supported include all JH Audio and Unique Melody custom IEMs, Shure SE530/SE535, Westone UM2/UM3X and the Ultimate Ears Triple.fi 10 Pro. The Headphone Recabling Service, 'Fidelis' and 'Fortis' range will be available to UK, European and worldwide customers. Prices start from £225, £180 and £140 respectively. See www.ampcity.co.uk or call +44 (0)20 3384 6392.

MOVIE PIONEER

Pioneer GB introduces the first model of a new line-up of 3D Blu-ray Disc players - the £169 BDP-140. It is said to combine 3D playback capabilities with advanced networking features and exceptional sonic performance. An HDMI output offers high definition connectivity, and there's connectivity to a local network and the internet,



opening up a host of new content and networking opportunities. In addition to an Ethernet port for regular wired integration, the players can each connect easily to a wireless home network via an optional Pioneer AS-VL300 wireless LAN converter. Support for a whole range of formats including MKV, DivX Plus HD, WMV and MP3 playback, plus a JPEG viewer for photo slideshows makes each of the Pioneer BD players flexible content companions, regardless of the source medium - be it CD, DVD, USB or LAN. The latest high-definition audio formats like Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio are supported, which it can either output as native bitstream or decode internally and output as uncompressed multichannel LPCM on HDMI to give Blu-ray Disc movies a compelling soundtrack. There's also support for SACD, whereby the output over HDMI can either be the DSD 1bit signal or hi-res PCM 88.2kHz/ 24bit or 176.4kHz/ 24bit. See www.pioneer.co.uk.

CORRECTION:

In our review of the Raidho X Monitor II in the September 2011 issue, the description of the mid/bass units was incorrect; the review suggested the magnet arrangement was that of the C Series with 20 neodymium, whereas the X series in fact uses a neodymium ring magnet driver. More information about Raidho loudspeakers can be found at www.raidho.dk.

Tall Order

Alvin Gold stands up to Tannoy's Revolution Signature DC6T loudspeakers...

There are many mainstream producers of loudspeakers, of which there is a handful – perhaps no more than half a dozen or so – who set the standards, not necessarily for excellence but simply as yardsticks that others judge themselves by. For a long time Tannoy has been one of those yardstick performers. For example, they make enormous wardrobe scale horn loaded loudspeakers that are highly prized (and highly priced) especially in Japan, which you could almost live inside and which have a very special kind of cachet and desirability.

The company has long championed the use of wideband (up to 50kHz in some cases) tweeter technologies, before most others latched onto the idea. Indeed the very word Tannoy has become an adjective for many, a word that defines what a loudspeaker *does* and not just what it is called. Tannoy was also one of the prime movers in the shift to coincident driver technologies, which mimics the idea of a single point in space that radiates all audio frequencies. By placing the tweeter at the focus of the bass driver, this should mean firmer and more consistently focused stereo imagery. The technology is known as Dual Concentric, which is a key component of the DC6T design and many other Tannoy models over the years.

The generic pattern on which the test loudspeaker is based is the DC7. And this model, which includes the T in the model name that stands for tall or maybe Tower, self-explanatory perhaps to fully paid up members of the audiophile community. However the real root

of this model is another design called the Revolution Signature, of which the DC6T is a simplified, lower cost variant. The two models look superficially quite similar, but where the Signature has curved side walls, which is a more complex and expensive way of building an enclosure and which helps stiffen the enclosure, and eliminate most internal parallel surfaces, the DC6T enclosure is constructed from flat panels which are joined to each other at shallow angles, something a little less than right angles. It has a broadly similar acoustic effect, while significantly reducing complexity and manufacturing costs. The result is a loudspeaker with most of the benefits of the more expensive Signature models but at more palatable prices.

Restricting our interest to the nuts and bolts of the review DC6T, it comes across initially as a neat but relatively simple design, which appears to boast two medium size 150mm pulp cone drive units. But for the reasons already given, appearances are deceptive. One of the units is indeed a 150mm passive ABR pulp cone bass driver with a rubber surround, pure and simple. The other is a compound unit, with a similar size bass driver diaphragm and a similar surround, but which has a titanium dome tweeter mounted at its central focus, behind a central waveguide. In Tannoyspeak,





this is known as the Tulip waveguide, a plastic moulding that is vaguely tulip shaped (surprise!) whose role is to control the directivity of the tweeter close to its crossover to help blend in with the bass section of the system. In

"this speaker is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making..."

both cases the bass section extends to 1.7kHz, and the crossover has a passive low loss 2nd order LF network for the bass, and a simple 1st order (6dB/octave) for the neodymium magnet HF unit. According to the maker, the carefully designed crossover network uses laminated core inductors and audiophile-grade polypropylene capacitors throughout, in addition to the exclusive use of silver-plated oxygen free copper internal wiring, with due consideration having been given to the precise layout of the crossover to minimise inter-component coupling and signal pathway losses.

The enclosure, which has what Tannoy somewhat fancifully describe as a real wood espresso finish (i.e. not vinyl wrap, but not as distinctive as it sounds on paper), is made from 15mm particle board, internally crossbraced, and with an 18mm MDF front panel. The cabinet measures 950(h) x 202(w) x 253(d) mm, and because the vertical panels are not joined at right angles, it has a trapezoidal cross section to reduce internal reflections and resonances. It weighs just a smidgen in excess of 15kg.

The back panel is home to a small reflex port and biwire speaker terminals, and the baffle covers are secured using magnetic catches concealed below the enclosure veneer.

The loudspeaker is said to be compatible with amplifiers rated up to 175 Watts, with continuous power handling at 87 Watts, and peak power handling at a somewhat fanciful 350 Watts. My own feeling is that however you dress it up, the system is probably good for about

150 Watts at best with a following wind. Sensitivity is moderately high however at 89dB for 1 Watt at 1 metre. So the Tannoy is not a glutton for power. Finally, frequency response according to the maker is 34Hz–35kHz, the second figure indicating the presence of a wideband tweeter, though it is unlikely the response is flat much beyond about 18kHz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE].

SOUND QUALITY

Getting the Tannoys up and running presents no real challenges. One of the pieces of paper supplied with the review pair suggested that they need an extensive running in period, pointing to a slightly sharp treble presentation, and I would agree wholeheartedly with this advice. The treble is not quite the sweetest or most refined around – Tannoys rarely are, in fact few loudspeakers are at this price level. It's just not what they do best. But on the whole the midband and treble are well enough integrated, and with a few days of whistling practice, the treble calms down nicely enough. The treble is clean, detailed and articulate. Female voice is handled particularly well; the slight sharpness and forcefulness adds some colour and variety to the sound, while the same applies to its reproduction of piano. Piano is an instrument that rarely gives loudspeakers anywhere to hide.

But not as much as the midband and (in particular) the bass. The Tannoy DC6T is a full on loudspeaker with a warmth and fullness that is unusual for a speaker this size. The bass especially is full and muscular. It doesn't reach down much further than usual, but what it does have is a warmth, with a hint almost of



a worthy partner

softness that may come as a surprise. This helps deliver a large scale, relaxed performance, which worked well with Mozart piano concertos, for example a recently remastered disc of K537 No 26 and K488 No 23 from Friedrich Gulda/Harnoncourt and the Concertgebouw on Teldec (reissued by Esoteric on an SACD hybrid). But it worked surprisingly well with a much spikier recording of Bartok, to give just one example from many.

The Tannoy also does a great job with full orchestral material. The characteristic low frequency richness already described, and the attendant muscularity work well for this type of kind of music, be it a Beethoven symphony, or something sonically more sonically challenging from Mahler, Britten (say, the always astonishing 'War Requiem') or Schoenberg whose almost Strauss-like juvenile tone poem 'Pelleas und Melisande', has more layers than an onion and more depth than a coal mine, and which demands something special to work properly.

I also had great success with quite different styles of musical poison – Marc Cohn's driving

eponymous album for one, and Hugh Laurie's 'Let Them Talk', not forgetting chamber music generally, for example Schubert's 'Trout quintet' Amadeus, or another particularly fine quintet, the Brahms's Clarinet Quintet (Fitzwilliam String quartet) sounded fresh as a daisy.

Overall the Tannoy is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making. It is powerful and lucid. It doesn't overtly favour one type of music over another, and although most of the examples quoted are classical, this does nothing more than reflect my own musical passions. I do however believe that there is something about classical music generally that is more demanding and ultimate revealing of the equipment used for its reproduction. There are only so many times I can listen to Marc Cohn without the music becoming seriously irritating, but I am well aware that this is not something that many readers will agree with.

CONCLUSION

Tannoy's DC6T is an excellent loudspeaker, one that lives up to the promise on the page. It has its limitations; it's not for example the most refined even at its relatively



modest price, but it does a great job of reproducing the scale and power of a musical performance. It has strength and agility, and makes a more than fair passing stab at playing the silences between the notes (to coin a cliché), and to separate out a complex sound picture so that individual instruments can be followed clearly. Its depth and weight also stand in particularly good stead. Stereo imagery is also handled well, but take heed of NK's advice to listen from slightly off axis with the speaker pointing down the length of the room. In short, this is a loudspeaker that shows every sign of having been designed by someone who knows his musical onions.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

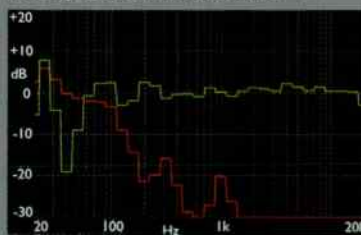
The DC6T measures almost perfectly flat in its frequency response, our third-octave pink noise analysis shows, but this is with the measuring microphone off-axis. On-axis it is a little lumpier in the treble and brighter, so for best results it should be pointed straight down the room, not directly at listeners. By today's standards it is then an unusually accurate loudspeaker, free from the accentuated treble that is so common, and can be wearing over long periods, especially with bright CDs. There is just however, a small emphasis that will ensure the speaker does not sound warm or dull.

Bass output lifts slightly and reaches down to 55Hz, the port peaking up below this value to add heft to subsonics. It also exerts very good acoustic damping upon the bass unit our impedance curve shows, resulting in a relatively smooth impedance curve at low frequencies. Hovering around 4 Ohms however, the DC6T does draw current from an amplifier, meaning it utilises their output capabilities well. The benefit comes in a massively high measured sensitivity value of 90dB from a modestly sized floorstander, so high power amplifiers are definitely not needed; 40 Watts will be more than enough in most situations and 20 Watts will do, meaning the DC6T is fine for low power valve amps as well as transistor amps. Our decay spectrum

showed low levels of colouration, although bass is a little hot around 80Hz, suggesting lively bass.

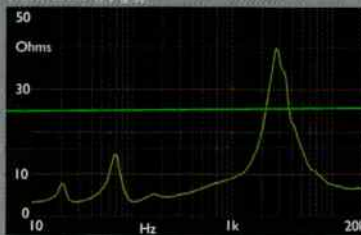
This Tannoy is an accurately balanced loudspeaker with a wide raft of strengths measurement shows. In use it should give good sound quality, although less forward, bright, emphasised or shouty than is common. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Clean, detailed and expansive sounding like few others at the price, this is an excellent floorstanding loudspeaker.

TANNOY SIGNATURE
DC6T £995
Tannoy UK
+44 (0)1236 420199
www.tannoy.com

- FOR**
- wide soundstaging
 - midband detailing
 - fast bass
 - fine build and finish

AGAINST

- nothing at the price



Jo Sound

Jo 45/1

*"their spirit makes
music joyful
rather than merely
pleasant – in
this respect they're
sublime..."*

HI-FI WORLD



David Price
September 2011

Nature's Beauty in Sight & Sound

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All In One?

Can affordable integrated amplifiers really give anything approaching serious hi-fi sound? Paul Rigby auditions seven of the best mid-price models to find out...

It's not an easy life being a mid-priced integrated amplifier. At this level, there's no leeway for the designer in terms of specifying fancy components; everything is accounted for on a very strict budget. For this reason, the circuit design has to be spot on for the amp to sound good, and be reliable with the sort of use it's going to receive. At the same time, the unit has got to have a fair sprinkling of facilities, and look good too. Whilst £5,000 amplifiers can easily be jacks of all trades and masters of some, doing it on one tenth of the budget is nigh on impossible.

So please be upstanding for

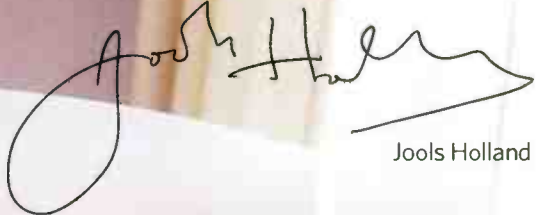
the manufacturers with models in this group test – they've been brave enough to mix it in a hotly contested market sector which has little room for also-rans or even runners up. There's a fair smattering of Japanese names in the group (something you didn't see a few years ago, when they were all obsessed with home cinema), some renowned British specialists (including a budget valve design), and we've even got an AV receiver, to see how they fare in a stereo world (the manufacturer reckons it's good enough to compete with standard stereo amps). Read on to find out what's hot and what's not...

THE CONTENDERS:		PAGE
ICON AUDIO STEREO 20PP	£500	19
ONIX A55	£700	20
PIONEER A-A9-J	£700	21
CREEK EVOLUTION 2	£700	22
ONKYO TX NR709	£800	23
YAMAHA A-S1000	£900	24
CYRUS 6XPD	£1,200	25

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Avid Acutus/SME IV/Benz Glider turntable
 Icon CD-X1 CD player
 Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
 Icon MB845 monoblock power amplifiers
 Quad ESL-57 (One Thing) loudspeakers
 Avid Isorak shelves
 Atacama HMS 1 stands

Music has been my life and now I can fit it all and more on my brilliant Brennan



Jools Holland

"If you've got 100s or even 1000s of
CDs like me, you'll just love it!"

**The Brennan JB7 is a revolutionary CD player
with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs**

Key features

- ▶ Browse albums by spinning the volume knob - push to play
- ▶ Display track names as they play
- ▶ Delete tracks you don't like
- ▶ Seven rainbow colour coded playlists
- ▶ Segue function blends one track into the next
- ▶ One touch record from vinyl, cassette or radio
- ▶ One button plays the entire music collection at random
- ▶ Plays MP3 downloads - future proof
- ▶ Clock with alarm
- ▶ 60 Watt, 4.8 x 16 x 22 cm steel and aluminium construction
- ▶ Backup music to external USB hard disk for safe keeping
- ▶ You can use it with your existing hi-fi or on its own



Jools Holland has always loved music of every kind and during his illustrious musical career he's bought and collected 100s and 100s of CDs and albums many of which he continues to play on his weekly radio show. Trouble was, the space they took up, keeping them in some sort of order, the need to find a certain album and then a particular track was always hugely time consuming. Then Jools was introduced to the Brennan JB7. Now his whole collection is stored on something no bigger than a hardback book. Titles of his CDs, albums, even the tracks are automatically recognized and finding them again using the remote control takes just seconds.

"I can honestly say I've rediscovered lots of my music purely because the Brennan has made it so accessible. Just to be able to find what I want instantly rather than have to wade through CD after CD is a joy!"

Jools Holland pianist, bandleader, composer, singer and television host. He was a founder of Squeeze and the multi-million selling Rhythm and Blues Orchestra. He has collaborated with many artists including Sting, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, B.B.King, David Gilmour, Amy Winehouse and Bono. He tours regularly with his Rhythm & Blues Band and currently hosts 'Later...with Jools Holland' on BBC2.



The Brennan JB7 is available in Cobalt Blue or Titanium Metallic



Money back guarantee

If you're not suitably impressed with your Brennan JB7 we'll collect it free of charge and refund you in full.

ONLY AVAILABLE DIRECT. To order visit www.brennan.co.uk

brennan



ICON AUDIO STEREO 20PP £500

Spanning 200x310x270mm, this new amp is based upon the classic Leak Stereo 20 design; utilising EL84 and ECC83 valves, this 15W unit also includes a built-in headphone amp. Well made and solid, the Stereo 20PP feels like a piece of engineering. Good first impressions, then...

SOUND QUALITY

Driving my reference Quad ESL-57 electrostatics proved a difficult task – the Icon sounded like it was pushing a large boulder up a steep hill. So I scaled down the load with AE Radiance One standmounters, a much easier load to handle...

Offering a fine sense of transparency without a hint of forwardness, the Icon first tackled some badly recorded pop CDs. Here, its smooth midrange took the more offensive frequencies off the table. Dynamic CD rock tracks like Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' may lack a guttural low frequency punch on the Icon but the amp responded to this well recorded disc by glorifying in its melodic, rhythmic musicality, displaying a well integrated midrange.

On vinyl, the jazzy Ella Fitzgerald rendition of 'I Love Paris' was a revelation. The Icon focused on the vocal, lifting

delicate tonal details off the disc, providing not only nuance and shade to the upper mid but a well balanced presentation. With the Yes track 'Going For The One', the warming aspect of vinyl helped to enhance what little LF was available, while the Icon's upper mid performance

allowed the amp to give a toe tapping, high energy performance. With smaller speakers in a compact room, you can enjoy its peerless midrange abilities which make for a sophisticated and involving listen, but it's ultimately limited in power and punch.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

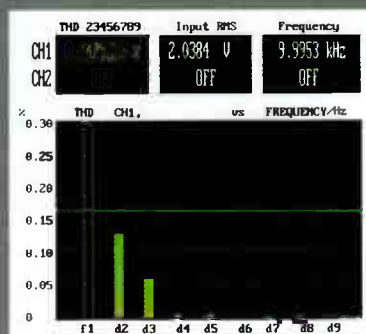
Rated at 15 Watts per channel the 20PP managed 12W at a generous 3% distortion limit, working into 8 Ohms. It manages slightly less, just 10 Watts into 4 Ohms, so the optimal load would appear to be between these values (i.e. 6 Ohms as claimed) and into 6 Ohms it may just make 15 Watts. Overload is relatively soft though, making the precise overload point academic; this is a low power amplifier. With sensitive loudspeakers like the Tannoy DC6Ts reviewed this month it will still go loud. Bear in mind the EL84 output tubes are inexpensive and known to sound sweet. Brute power is not what the 20PP is really about.

Damping factor was low at 6 so fairly well damped loudspeakers are the best match; here Triangle Antals would be better than the Tannoy DC6Ts. Input sensitivity was high, noise low and bandwidth just wide enough, bearing in mind little feedback is used. Distortion levels were low all round and the amplifier had a very stable distortion pattern where second harmonic dominated up to high output levels, whereupon third harmonic from the output transformers appeared. Bass distortion was low up to full output

(0.33%) though, a very good result. The 20PP is a nicely proportioned low power valve amplifier that is simple, cheap to run and will have a lovely sound, if not powerhouse dynamics. NK

Power	12 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	10Hz-22kHz
Separation	54dB
Noise	-96dB
Distortion	0.14%
Sensitivity	240mV
Damping factor	6

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Small form factor valve amp with refined midrange performance and great value for money.

ICON AUDIO
STEREO 20PP £500
Icon Audio UK
(+44(0)1162 440593
www.iconaudio.co.uk

FOR

- midrange subtlety
- clarity
- value

AGAINST

- light bass
- runs hot
- needs careful matching



ONIX A55 £700

A neat looking design, the standard sized (30x372x91mm) Onix has a sleek piano black finish. Shame then about the large, silver volume knob, which is rather clunky in operation. Quoted at 55W RMS per channel, the Onix weighs in at a respectable 8.7kg. All good at the price, but nothing remarkable, so far...

SOUND QUALITY

Kicking off with Yes on vinyl, and the Onix presented a fulsome sound with a plummy bass that sounded a tad too much at times. Detail was nicely presented, but things seemed slightly veiled and indistinct, with apparently rolled off high treble. Jazz on vinyl was more appealing, as it showed the amplifier's nicely lyrical quality. Ella Fitzgerald singing 'I Love Paris' was impressive, grabbing my attention as the Onix's low frequency power gave a commanding sound. As time moved on however, the legendary vocalist began to battle against her own orchestral backing, as if in a show of strength, as the lower midrange elements of the vocal were boosted too much, slowing the pace slightly.

Moving to compression-heavy, chart-based CDs and this smooth sounding amp calmed the bright mix, making these albums a real pleasure to listen to. For the first time, I could relax and enjoy the music. Bass was suddenly magnificent; whereas it had sounded a little over the top with the bass-heavy vinyl

source (and tube phono stage), via CD it was just right, giving a satisfyingly firm foundation for the music without overdoing it. Low frequencies were not only deep and grippy but the Onix struck each bass note like it was toting a sledgehammer, even via my Quad ESL-57s. The ol' radiators seemed to find bass tones in their darkest, deepest corners that shocked these rather cultured electrostatically-tuned ears! The Onix brimmed over with musicality along with an incredible bass slam. Not ideal for sumptuous vinyl sources then, but give the Onix A55 a decent digital signal and this friendly giant turns into a rampaging beast.

Playing Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' rock ballad, the Onix displayed a solid stereo image, sitting within a broad based soundstage that, while not quite as deep as the Pioneer, extended beyond the edges of the speakers, stretching the space occupied by the instruments which, in turn allowed them extra room to breathe and to perform. This gave a rich, dynamic sheen to the strummed acoustic guitar and cymbals.

Overall then, a commendably smooth sounding design that flatters poor sounding source material and/or average ancillaries, and one that's never unrewarding to listen to.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Onix A55 produces a useful 72 Watts into 8 Ohms and 110 Watts into 4 Ohms. This is more than enough to drive modern loudspeakers up to very loud, as the real life power output will be somewhere between these values, depending upon the impedance of the loudspeaker. Damping factor was high at 54 so bass will sound quite tight.

The amplifier's distortion pattern remained reasonably stable right up to high power levels, even at high frequencies. Second harmonic dominated, even at 10kHz, up to around 12 Watts, above which higher harmonics appeared. Judging the transfer characteristic closely in its harmonic structure and its visual time-domain residual, the Onix looks good, if not quite as stable as the best.

Input sensitivity was very low at 504mV. This suits silver disc players, all of which give 2V output, but it does not suit low gain external phono stages; volume would have to be wound right up. Noise was low simply because of low gain.

The A55 gives a tidy set of

measured results. It works well in every area, ignoring low input sensitivity, but it is not distinguished in any way. NK

Power	72 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	6Hz-63kHz
Separation	60dB
Noise	-112dB
Distortion	0.063%
Sensitivity	504mV
Damping factor	54

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
Fulsome tonality and a big bass punch makes the A55 an easy listen, although some will crave greater transparency.

ONIX A55 £700
UKD
+44(0)1753 652669
www.ukd.co.uk

FOR
- warm sound
- big, slamming bass
- cultured midband

AGAINST
- oversmooth for vinyl



PIONEER A-A9Mk2 £700

At 11.5kg, this amplifier is a slice of Japanese heavy metal if there ever was one! Offering gigantic speaker binding posts at the rear and built like a tank, you can't say Pioneer have skimped on construction. Finish is very good too, with an expensive look and feel and classy subdued lighting on its read-out. It's a largish (420x113x369mm), nicely presented and modern feeling machine that confers a sense of wellbeing on its purchaser.

SOUND QUALITY

First impressions were of a big, meaty and powerful sounding performer, with tremendous grip. The Pioneer was unflappable and resolute, while I was especially impressed by the soundstage, which was noticeably grander than the Icon yet more expansive than the Onix. It's a well lit design which unlocks murky mixes, throwing luminance onto the proceedings. This gives a sense of transparency but there's definitely some brightness to its upper midband, which means that – unlike the Onix – it doesn't suffer poor mixes badly. At times, this gives it a clinical personality.

Spinning the well recorded Skunk Anansie track, the Pioneer lacked the low frequency exuberance of the Onix, nor did it exhibit that same guttural power and kick. What the Pioneer *did* offer however, was an immense improvement in the lower frequency area over the Icon. That said, the Pioneer wasn't as involving; the Icon has the ability

to drag the listener into the centre of the music while the Pioneer likes to remain on the outside looking in.

Jazz on vinyl sounded clean, the rolled off nature of the plastic itself calming the clinical feel and enhancing the clarity. Ella Fitzgerald's vocal had a simple, classic delivery. Yes, there was a slightly forward edge to the Pioneer's presentation but strings exuded a textured approach while the soundstage was particularly impressive, as it offered a three dimensional structure and admirable

instrumental separation. Rock on vinyl highlighted the Pioneer's ability to portray midrange frequencies well. Despite the lack of control and grip in the bass, detail on guitars was commendable and expressive while the vocals blended well with the ensemble. Offering a magnificent, broad soundstage, the Pioneer showed itself to be a controlling, organising influence, albeit with brightly lit upper frequencies. A great value amplifier, but not for all systems and tastes.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Pioneer remains no great powerhouse, producing 60 Watts into 8 Ohms and now in Mk2 form 90 Watts into 4 Ohms. All the same, this is more than enough for systems in which modern, sensitive loudspeakers are used in small to medium sized rooms. Measuring 52, Damping Factor was usefully high so the Pioneer will have a good sense of bass control.

The amplifier's distortion pattern was consistent at all power levels, with low order second and third harmonics dominant, both in the midband and at high frequencies, the pattern being a steady one, unmodulated by signal conditions. Our analysis of a 1 Watt, 10kHz signal into a 4 Ohm load shows this pattern. With distortion measuring 0.003% in the midband and 0.024% at 10kHz, into a 4 Ohm load, the Pioneer remains clean and relatively distortion free, so there will be no undue harshness.

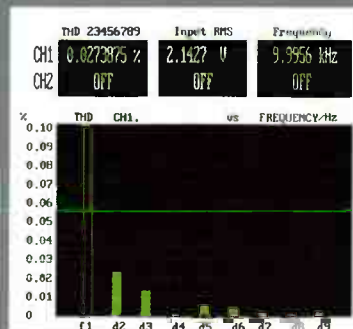
The phono stage measured well but full gain exists down to 5Hz on MM so record warps will induce strong cone flap. Curiously, this does not happen on MC where gain falls below 20Hz to suppress warps. Otherwise, equalisation was accurate and noise low.

The Pioneer A-A9Mk2 produces a good set of results, but is a little inconsistent. NK

Power	60 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1.5Hz-120kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise (indirect/direct)	-87/102dB
Distortion	0.024%
Sensitivity	210mV
Damping factor	52

Disc	
Frequency response	2.5Hz-27kHz
Separation	62dB
Noise	-81dB
Distortion	0.04%
Sensitivity (MM/MC)	2.6/0.26mV
Overload (MM/MC)	64/9mV

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Superbly built, nicely laid out and possessed of a punchy, expansive and incisive sound, the Pioneer is impressive at the price.

PIONEER A-A9Mk2 £700

Pioneer GB Ltd.

+44(0)870 600 1539

www.pioneer.eu

FOR

- transparency
- expansive soundstage
- classy build and finish

AGAINST

- clinical presentation
- forward midrange



CREEK EVOLUTION 2 £700

Arguably the most svelte looking in this group, there's something about the Creek's (430x80x340mm) compactness that sits nicely and unobtrusively on your shelf. In use, the Creek feels both solid and secure but it cannot be accused of being demure, unlike some of the Japanese-sourced amplifiers on this test – it's a chunky amplifier with a positive feel; change a source and electrical relays clunks and click into operation.

SOUND QUALITY

Via my chart pop CDs, the Creek presented itself as *by far* the most balanced amplifier in pure sonic terms so far. Whereas the Pioneer had been a little upset by the bright, hard mixes of these discs, the Creek was unfazed; their inherently hard balance still remained recognisable during playback but it was noticeable that the effects were toned down appreciably and the Creek did a great job of digging into the vocal aspects of the performance and lifting more detail from these areas than the Pioneer and Onix. Only the Icon proved to be superior in this respect. While the Creek might not have provided the same delicate mids as the Icon, the Creek was capable of conveying glorious synth sweeps with a broad brushstroke that gave this little amp a grandeur all of its own. It wasn't quite as expansive as the Pioneer in this respect, but was impressive all the same.

The better quality Skunk Anansie recording allowed the Creek to properly express itself; while the Onix had the

dramatic edge, the Creek offered a better blend of dynamic bass and midrange detail.

The Creek may not have been as fulsome as the Onix in the bass, but it still offered a tight, solid bottom end that blended easily and naturally with an equally impressive upper mid and treble performance. The latter showed a particularly light touch, successfully giving the Creek a broad sonic contrast during the Yes track. It's this sort of balanced approach which induced a sense of well being, especially during analogue play. You felt you were not going to be overly surprised and that, instead of waiting on tenterhooks for your hi-fi to give you a nasty surprise, you could concentrate upon the music instead.

Which is what we're all here for, isn't it?

Playing the Ella Fitzgerald track, the Creek was able to follow her famed enunciation with ease with added atmosphere to her delivery. Brass was also textured and vibrant. With none of the bass bloom of the Onix or the forward nature of the Pioneer, the Creek's overall performance was one of equilibrium with both analogue and digital sources. On either format, cymbals had a lovely metallic sheen, electric guitars offered a metallic ring to their strings and drums proved richly resonant. Couth and smooth but wonderfully revealing and musically satisfying all the same, this should be at the top of your shopping list.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Creek Evolution 2 produced a 66 Watts into 8 Ohms and 121 Watts into 4 Ohms, a healthy step upward into a low load, due to a 'stiff' power supply able to supply current. This will drive modern loudspeakers very loud, as the real life power output will be somewhere around 100 Watts, depending upon the impedance of the loudspeaker. Damping factor was high at 44 so bass will sound well controlled.

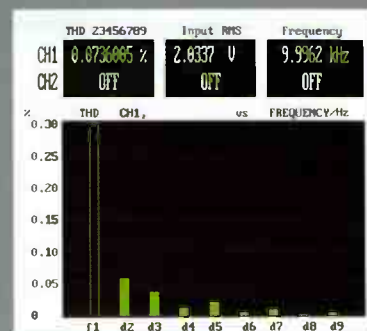
The amplifier's distortion pattern was stable up to high power levels, even at high frequencies. Second harmonic predominated, although third exists too and our analyser showed this was due to classic crossover. Levels were low though, 0.08% at 1 Watt into 4 Ohms and the distortion pattern remained stable with level, always a good sign. Input sensitivity was normal at 330mV, just enough for lowish gain external phono stages. Frequency response stretched from a low 1Hz right up to 120kHz, an unusually wide response as Creek amplifiers go.

The Evolution 2 measured well in all areas. With a stable distortion pattern

and plenty of power it should give a good account of itself subjectively. NK

Power	66 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-120kHz
Separation	71dB
Noise	-100dB
Distortion	0.08%
Sensitivity	330mV
Damping factor	44

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
A super all-rounder, the Creek does everything asked of it and more.

CREEK EVOLUTION 2 £700
Creek Audio
+44(0) 1442 260146
www.creekaudio.co.uk

FOR

- excellent balance
- tonal accuracy
- musicality
- quality build

AGAINST

- nothing at the price



ONKYO TX-NR709 £800

An AV amp in a two channel stereo group test? Yes, and deliberately so; Onkyo boast that this is more than capable of mixing it with the others here, so we thought we'd see for ourselves! Of course, being a full size AV receiver (435x174x379mm), it has a chunky (12.2kg) chassis featuring a large fascia packed with many features that most two-channel users will find redundant. In operation, the Onkyo looks confident and feels nice and slick.

SOUND QUALITY

Playing my harsh chart CDs, the Onkyo becalmed the coarse, compressed upper mids; I felt I was actually hearing more musical information from the Onkyo than the Pioneer for example, because the latter emphasised the compression which forged a blocking effect on the ear. What it does not have though is the Creek's super-insightful midrange. The Creek can focus your ears towards individual instruments, giving each a distinct personality, but the Onkyo found these skills difficult to emulate. On 'Hedonism', the Onkyo didn't track the lower frequencies with the precision of the Creek, but was capable of tremendous power and plenty of fun to go with it.

Via vinyl, Ella Fitzgerald sounded pleasingly balanced, the Onkyo successfully integrating all of the elements of the orchestra in a concise whole. It may not reach into the mix in the same way as the

Icon but the Onkyo still conveyed Fitzgerald's ability to interpret this song with both romantic and rhythmic ease. Playing Yes via vinyl, and it fell short compared to the Pioneer's ability to examine each instrument individually, but it made for a nicely rounded presentation that was competent in soundstaging all the same. Tonally too, it didn't offend, and treble was decently crisp even if it wasn't the last word in silkiness.

So the Onkyo, which *Hi-Fi World* already recognises as a fine AV amplifier, performed surprisingly

well as a basic two-channel amp too. It's hard to characterise it in terms of what it does especially well, as it's more notable for a relative lack of character that just gets on with playing music in a straightforwardly enjoyable way, underwritten by a serious dollop of power. In a world where the audiophile and the AV enthusiast occupy different camps and where the attendant technologies prioritise different targets, the performance of the Onkyo is a bonus for audiophiles who are looking for a second choice system connected to an AV set-up.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Onkyo produced a massive 144 Watts into 8 Ohms and 225 Watts into 4 Ohms, which over seven channels amounts to 1.5kW! A/V receivers do go effortlessly loud, mainly because the power is distributed to so many loudspeakers they run unstrained. Damping factor was satisfactory at 28 so bass will sound much like that of ordinary hi-fi amps, although Onkyos have quite 'big' bass subjectively.

The TX NR709 produced little distortion at all power levels and frequencies and although it runs quite warm, this is due to biasing into Class A. As it warmed up distortion went down, below the figures we quote. Levels were low, measuring 0.013% at 1 Watt into 4 Ohms, and less than 0.01% when hot, very good results.

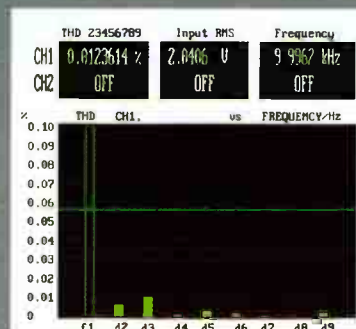
Input sensitivity was high at 180mV with Pure Direct selected and frequency response stretched from 1Hz up to 120kHz. Via the input ADCs the limit was 22kHz, imposed by anti-alias filtering, and noise jumped from -100dB in Pure Direct to -77dB, so Pure Direct should always be selected for hi-fi use.

The Onkyo TX-NR709 amplifiers

measured well. They produce little distortion and Onkyo run them warm-to-hot to ensure this is so. NK

Power	144watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-120kHz
Separation	83dB
Noise	-100dB
Distortion	0.013%
Sensitivity	180mV
Damping factor	28

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Surprisingly good for an AV design, the Onkyo can be wholly recommended for two channel use too – with a smooth and easy musicality.

ONKYO TX NR709 £800
Onkyo UK Ltd.
☎ +44(0)1628 473350
www.eu.onkyo.com

FOR

- smooth tonality
- all round competence
- flexibility and connectivity

AGAINST

- size!



YAMAHA A-S1000 £900

What's with the monster (435x137x465) Yamaha's 22kg weight? It's the behemoth of the group, with a distinctly retro, late seventies look and feel. The clunky switchgear feels very solid and precise; purchasers will feel they've got their money's worth before they even plug it in! Just don't drop it on your toes...

SOUND QUALITY

The Yamaha glided across the brightly lit pop chart CDs, smoothing out much of the excesses of their production. Highlights included backing synths which generated a smooth sweep along with an attendant widescreen aspect. In fact, the Yamaha was able to provide music with landscape views that competed effectively with the Pioneer. The Yamaha's large soundstage provided ample room to display the sound to its best advantage. Spinning the rock ballad 'Hedonism', and the song was supported by a mighty bass wallop that reverberated across the entire soundstage. This was a performance of grand gestures with everything magnified to huge proportions. Bass slammed, the midrange rocked its socks off and the treble lashed to tsunami levels.

Moving to the smoother jazzy tones of Ella Fitzgerald, and this ballad couldn't fail to be 'driven' by the Yamaha, such was its sheer brute strength. But still it just couldn't infect the listener with the rhythmic magic of the music; things sounded big

and bold but lacked the subtlety of the Creek, for example. Switching to Yes on vinyl, the Yamaha didn't have as much focus as the Creek, lacking the delicacy to really convey what was going on – even if it had vast swathes of power to push the beat along. Listening to the Yamaha was the audio equivalent of a fun fair, all

surprise and delight but with little room for reflection and relaxation.

On a visceral level it was very satisfying, and as such would make a great choice for a dance or rock music fan, but classical fans may wish to look elsewhere, as should those without someone to carry it home for them!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The A-S1000 produced 98 Watts into 8 Ohms and this figure rose to 170 Watts into 4 Ohms, more than enough power for all situations and loudspeakers. With a massive damping factor figure of 80 the amplifier also exerts a lot of speaker control and will sound tight and possibly dry in its bass. This really depends upon the acoustic damping within the loudspeaker however.

Distortion was primarily third harmonic caused by crossover. However, the characteristic remained stable from low to high levels and it would be unlikely to affect the sound greatly.

Input sensitivity was very high at 150mV, Yamaha following a trend toward higher gain to improve matching to external devices, notably low gain/output phono stages. However, the A-S1000 has a switchable MM/MC phono stage onboard and it measured very well. Input sensitivity was again high so low output MM and MC cartridges can be used, but overload values are just high enough to avoid any issues here. Equalisation was accurate too (MM and MC) and both have the same warp filter that usefully reduces gain at 5Hz by around -10dB whilst not affecting audible bass, right down to 20Hz. Yamaha have carefully engineered the phono input stages.

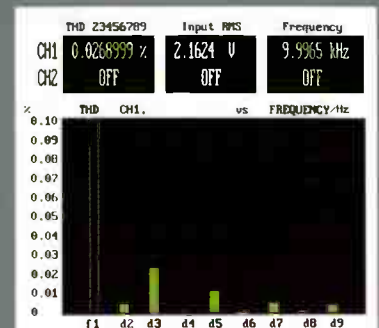
Tone controls provide small amounts of lift and cut at spectrum extremes if moved just a little. Action was coarse though and maximum lift

too high at +10dB. A bypass is needed too.

The A-S1000 is powerful and works well; it has an especially good phono stage for MM and MC cartridges. NK

Power	98 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-71kHz
Separation	98dB
Noise	-101dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	150mV
Damping factor	80
Disc	
Frequency response	15Hz-60kHz
Separation	68dB
Noise (MM/MC)	-83/-64dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity (MM/MC)	2.4/0.5mV
Overload (MM/MC)	46/9mV

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●

A fun-filled, action packed, big hearted, happy-go-lucky amplifier, but subtlety seekers should look elsewhere.

YAMAHA A-S1000 £900
 Yamaha Electronics UK Ltd.
 +44(0)1923 233166
 www.yamaha-uk.com

FOR

- wide soundstage
- bouncy, powerful sound
- confidence and authority

AGAINST

- likes musical insight
- style not to all tastes



CYRUS 6 XPd £1,200

Following the familiar Cyrus blueprint, the compact, half width (215x75x365mm) 6 integrated is beautifully finished from cast alloy and weighs in at a modest 4kg. It's simplicity itself to use, aside from the non-standard speaker terminals which apparently all EU-sold amplifiers should use, but very few actually do! The 'D' suffix refers to the fact that this model came supplied with an optional built-in digital convertor card, making the amp far more flexible than the others here.

SOUND QUALITY

It took just seconds to realise that this amp stood apart from the crowd, even when faced with the spitting hardness of some modern pop CDs. It didn't mask their uncouthness, but tamed them just enough to make listening pleasant, if not a joy. Lower down, its bass was deep, firm and well integrated into the mix while the upper mids and treble showed a heightened sense of clarity which gave great insight into the music. This was all the more evident when the Skunk Anansie track hit the CD tray. For the first time, the tambourine, which had been muscled to death by the likes of the Onix and the Yamaha, showed itself with its attendant delicacy – along with a tight, forceful and dynamic bassline.

Playing Yes on vinyl was a testament to the Cyrus's good nature, as it successfully gave a structured and controlled presentation with admirable detailing. For example, during intricate guitar sequences I

could hear the artist dragging his fingers across the metal strings of the guitar, with a palpable sensation of each string being a separate entity.

A critical comparison, while playing Ella Fitzgerald's 'I Love Paris', was how the Cyrus would stack up against the Creek because this track offered a range of subtle music transitions, finely nuanced orchestral playing and multi-toned vocal manoeuvres. The most noticeable feature was a warming, sweeter effect from the Cyrus amp which contrasted against the relative chill from the cheaper Creek – a facet that only now reared its head. The

Creek, when compared directly, could sound a little formal and impersonal when played alongside the more natural and humanistic sounding Cyrus.

Fitzgerald sounded expansive and flowing while being controlled by the Cyrus, with plenty of tonal texturing to the vocals and a romantic sweep to the strings. There's a richness about playback over all frequencies, a sense of *bonhomie*, as if the amp isn't really trying. So if you're looking for a new mid-price integrated, there's a good chance that the Cyrus 6 will fit into your system, no-matter what kit you may already have.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Cyrus 6XPd produced 55 Watts into 8 Ohms and 90 Watts into 4 Ohms, a good step upward into a low load and a useful amount of power for modern loudspeakers. These power levels are plenty enough to play very loud, bearing in mind real life power output will be somewhere around 75 Watts, depending upon the impedance of the loudspeaker. Damping factor was high at 61 so bass will sound well controlled.

The amplifier's distortion pattern was stable up to high power levels, with a trace of crossover present, plus small amounts of second and third harmonics. Levels were low, measuring 0.014% at 1 Watt into 4 Ohms, a very good result.

Input sensitivity was high at 200mV as standard and it can be increased to 63mV if the need arises. Frequency response stretched from a low 1Hz up to 43kHz, a normally wide response as amplifiers go.

The digital input measured flat to 21kHz and distortion was low, but not up to the highest standards. A 24bit signal at -60dB measured 0.15% where

0.05% is possible.

The Cyrus 6XPd measured well. It exhibits very low distortion like all Cyrus amps and will likely sound smooth and open. NK

Power	55watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-43kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-100dB
Distortion	0.014%
Sensitivity	200mV
Damping factor	61

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Excellent musical performer with superb build and a pleasing form factor.

CYRUS 6XPd £1,200

Cyrus Audio
 +44(0)1480 435577
www.cyrusaudio.com

FOR

- clarity and detail
- midband insight
- size, build, finish
- flexibility

AGAINST

- speaker connections

Jade

S E R I E S

Musical Artistry

By Wharfedale

Britain's most famous loudspeakers

Jade is the new audiophile class speaker design from Wharfedale, the world's most famous hi-fi brand. Jade incorporates the latest improvements in loudspeaker technology and production from Wharfedale's in-house design, computer-aided modelling and precision tooling in a marriage of music and art that will suit the taste of even the most discriminating hi-fi enthusiast.

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Jade 5 - Oct 2011

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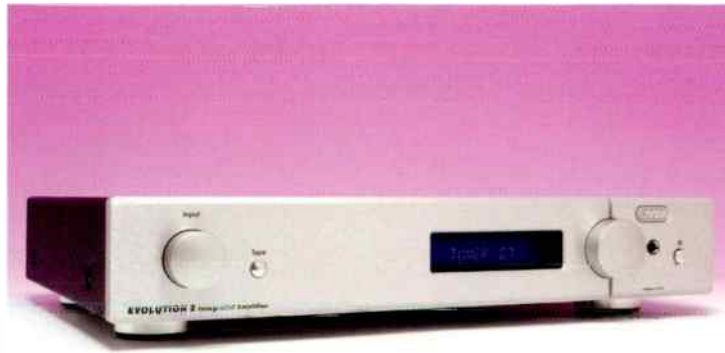
When you gather together a group of amplifiers priced around or below £1,000, differences will be marked. To that extent, those differences may even be more significant than if you were faced with a series of amplifiers priced around the £5,000 mark.

The reason is budget. Faced with limitations, different manufacturers tackle the problem in different ways. Some will play the balanced card, trying to please everyone, but that means a jack of all trades and master of none. Others will concentrate upon one particular facet of the sound which will mean that their product will perform stupendously well in just one or maybe two respects, but will crash and burn at others.

Consequently, these amplifiers can be recommended for certain jobs but should be avoided for others. There are some designs that take a quirky route and stand alone in a crowd, while others may fall at the last hurdle. It's only the select few that will take their limited design budget and get serious across-the-board results. We've neglected to include the total failure case study in this group test, but we have examples of all the rest...

First up is the Pioneer A-A9Mk2, which fits neatly into the 'coloured sound' group. It's one of those amps that decided to concentrate upon certain facets such as an excellent chassis design and build quality. In sonic terms, the Pioneer can be highly incisive, bringing a raft of detail that many other designs miss altogether, bubbling to the surface. It's *how* it achieves this result that draws the Pioneer into disrepute on occasion which means that its clinical sound requires careful component matching and thought. If you can successfully slot it into your chain, then you will have quite a amplifier – but you'll need a smooth source and speakers...

Next is the Yamaha A-S1000.



Creek Evolution 2 - best for value...

It's a brute of an amplifier and one of the few designs in this price bracket that can give you both a smile and a hernia in one evening! Its rambunctious style means that, in a well ordered hi-fi chain, it's a bit like have a big, hairy, soppy dog dancing around your living room breaking all the fine china. This is an amplifier that doesn't stand for reputation or elegance or finesse. It doesn't stand on ceremony either, which means

it proved a little too smooth and fulsome with my, ermm, smooth and fulsome vinyl source. Well worth auditioning if you're looking to tame a wayward front end or speakers.

The Icon Audio Stereo 20PP is another flawed but charming design. Large rooms dislike it, as do power hungry loudspeakers, but if you desire an amplifier for a smaller room and have efficient speakers, and crave detail and clarity in the upper

"offering the best sound in the test with some ease, the Cyrus 6XPD is a comfortable winner..."

that it might end up rubbing your audiophile sensibilities the wrong way. If you want a fun time however, consider the Yamaha above many others.

The Onkyo TX-NR709 is next. Now this is a sensible design that provides a heap of AV facilities but also gives you a balanced overview of two-channel sound – and it does so in a very reasonable manner. It's not the best at anything but neither is it the worst. It does everything well and, for an AV amp placed in an audiophile group test for stereo sound, that's nothing short of miraculous. Respect due!

The Onix A55 is an excellent amplifier in its way. One of the best here with a clean CD source, but

frequency regions with a lightness of touch and a subtlety in execution, then check it out. It's not for everyone, but some will adore it – and its price!

The Creek Evolution 2 is a winner, of sorts. To produce an amplifier that covers *all* the sonic bases and performs well over both formats while scoring in the looks department, and to do that at almost half the price of the overall winner deserves a prize of its own – the budget king perhaps? Think seriously about the Creek, though. The Cyrus is superior but I really wonder if the Cyrus sounds £500 superior.

A time-honoured design, Cyrus has obviously put a lot of thought and application into its 6 XPD and it is evident during playback. Yes, this is the most expensive amp in the group test but there are so many ways to mess up a design – it's much harder to maximise the sound per pound, and that's what Cyrus has done. Despite the now familiar looks, the Cyrus has anything but prosaic sound quality. Standing proud, the Cyrus amp races ahead in how it handles both digital and analogue sources while skipping through the musical genres with ease. Offering the best sound in the test with some ease, the Cyrus 6 XPD is a comfortable winner.



Cyrus 6 XPD - most expensive and best outright.



Precious Metal

Alloy coned mid/bass drivers make ALR Jordan's Classic 2 loudspeakers one of the most divine small boxes David Price has heard recently...

What's the best way to design a small loudspeaker? Well, come on, that's a trick question, isn't it? Anyone who answers this quickly with a rigid prescription put most firmly and forcibly probably doesn't know one jot about the subject – as there's no textbook answer to this. But in the same way that there's no one single best way to lose weight (exercise, diet, sleep-

ing habits – and any combination thereof), so there is no *one* right way to do small loudspeakers. You've got so much constraining you that the answer becomes the most artful compromise of cabinet design, drive unit quality and crossover characteristics. Essentially then, speaker design is where science meets art – a clever software package and an 'A Level' physics book is only half the solution...

This pretty much describes

loudspeaker designer extraordinaire Karl Heinz Fink. Based in Essen, Germany, he has his own consultancy with a good number of staff and some very tasty computer modelling software. But this is only the start for KHF; it's his personal magic dust that achieves the finished result, and it's highly distinct. He develops or designs a wide range of loudspeakers for a large number of manufacturers across Europe, from Q Acoustics to Naim Audio, and all have his



"there are precious few standmounting speakers at this price that present such an open, musical sound..."

design DNA visible (or audible) in the finished product, and it's a very palatable sonic footprint. Think 'clean', 'warm', 'sweet', 'expansive' and 'musical' as your starter for ten; you'll never hear an ear-splitting, cranial laser etching Karl Heinz Fink speaker. And it is he who's been involved for a long time with ALR Jordan – the Classic 2s tested here have his dabs all over them!

A two way bass reflex design, they have a claimed frequency response of 45-30,000Hz [see **MEASURED PERFORMANCE**], with a 6 Ohm impedance and 80W continuous power handling. ALR Jordan recommend amplifiers between 25 and 150W, giving decent sound pressure levels from its quoted 88dB/W sensitivity. High frequencies are courtesy of a 25mm textile dome tweeter, married via a phase optimised Linkwitz Riley crossover network to a 140mm Ted Jordan metal coned mid/bass driver. They're nicely built and finished small speakers, available in a choice of

three real wood veneers. They feel solid at 5.3kg apiece and measure 170x300x260mm, making them an excellent size for small rooms. The rear panel sports a bass port and two pairs of loudspeakers sockets for biwiring. My only criticisms would be styling; the Classic 2s look so old fashioned that I predict they'll probably be back into fashion fairly soon! Oh, and the detachable grilles are decently enough made (even if their styling is straight out of the nineteen seventies, along with turtlenecks and Space Hoppers), but they do seem to take the treble level down a little – I'm sure Karl Heinz would recommend you take them off before serious listening.

SOUND QUALITY

I do listen to lots of expensive speakers, and going back to budget ones can be a bit of shocker. All the more surprising then that the ALR Jordan Classic 2s didn't offend in the least; indeed quite the reverse; they were entertaining and charming in

equal measure. It's quite rare to hear a pair of small speakers that don't have some screaming bass or treble peak – I've heard a good few that practically take off into a low earth orbit when asked to reproduce that deep synth cadence leading into the bridge of Scritti Politti's 'Absolute' for example, their bass ports going positively bonkers. Not so these, which proved a study in even-handedness and intelligent sensibility. Indeed, they're about as far from a loudspeaker that's engineered for the showroom as I've heard anywhere near their price; clean, open, delicate, subtle and smooth from top to bottom, it proved hard to fault them at their price.

Propaganda's 'Dr Mabuse' on SACD was testament to their superlative balance; if there's an eighties digital synth-laden electro torture track that's going to set them off crashing and grating then this is it, but instead I was surprised to hear them handle this song with aplomb, at searchingly high volumes too. Most

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The Hart EVO1
Dual Monitor
Modular
Loudspeaker

“Hart has delivered a true high sensitivity speaker without the difficulties inherent with horn systems. No wonder the Quad amp sounded so sweet”

September 8th, 2010
by Jason Kennedy
Source: HiFi+

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arresting is their midband, which handled Claudia Brucken's voice brilliantly, making her icy, teutonic tones come across surprisingly smoothly and with great depth; she hung high above, and behind the loudspeakers in a wonderfully ethereal way. The opening crashing electronic noises can sometimes grate, but not this time; instead the Classic 2s shuffled into the groove and pushed the song, refusing to sound harsh whilst pushing out – gently and in due proportion – the mix's innermost secrets. Bass wasn't in any way overwhelming, but had just enough body to give weight to proceedings, and sounded decently snappy without perhaps being the tightest or tautest around. Treble was unerringly smooth and nicely detailed, even if in my particular system it didn't quite have the atmosphere and extension I'd have liked – too much time spent with ribbon tweeters or the NS1000M's beryllium units, methinks!



Moving to some good old unreconstructed prog rock music, and Egg's 'Seven is a Jolly Good Time' was no less enjoyable; that electric organ which dominates the song can grate on lesser speakers, as can the slightly nasal vocal tones, but not so with these little boxes. They sounded light, breezy, gently musical and endearing, and I was impressed with their rendition of the bass guitar, which was delightfully supple and tuneful. In absolute terms they were a little dynamically constricted at higher volumes, but this was never enough of an issue to limit their very obvious innate musicality, which was pure pleasure. They had a remarkable ability for making mistakes (as all loudspeakers conspicuously do, especially at under £1,000), yet hiding their tracks so gracefully and genteelly that you'd never notice. Even their tweeters, which I'd first worried were a little uncouth and veiled, seemed to blossom after they'd got some 'miles' underneath their belt, beginning to sound

really rather smooth and crisp and delicate in an almost ribbon-like way.

Driven by a boiling hot Musical Fidelity AMS35i, almost too hot to touch on top, and having been whacked with serious amounts of power for hours on end, I found them really settling into their skins. Speakers with metal drive units always take time to get going (it's rather like waiting for your car to get off choke). Speakers that had, in their first hour of so, sounded just a little uptight and clinical, suddenly got into the groove like they'd been smoking jazz cigarettes instead of the regular variety available from a news agent near you. A Blue Note CD imprint of Lou Donaldson's 'Alligator Bogaloo' had the ALR Jordans partying like it was 1999, so to speak, with a wonderfully wide recorded acoustic, dropping back a good few feet more than when they'd

first been teased into action, and an infectious groove. You'd never say these were out and out rockers, but suddenly their easy musicality began to win the day. The great thing about

them, I mused, was how they connected you right to the musical event but didn't distract you with tedious details of the recording and mastering, as many high end speakers do. They take you to the party, so to speak, without having to do the washing up afterwards!

CONCLUSION

At £800 the ALR Jordan Classic 2s are almost in a gang of one – there are precious few standmounting loudspeakers at this price that present such an open and musical sound without getting anywhere near harshness. They come in, do the job brilliantly and yet leave no blood on the carpet. With no nasty bass or treble peaks, high quality drive units intelligently married up and cabinets that don't really draw attention to themselves, it's hard to fault what they offer at the price. Maybe in absolute terms, I'd ask for a tauter and deeper bass, a tad more midband insight and a slightly more searching treble, but as I stated earlier, the Classic 2s know how to quit when they're ahead. Their genius lies in their ability to do what they're good at then quietly move on without drawing attention to their failings. That, surely, is the mark of a great speaker designer – and indeed a superb loudspeaker.



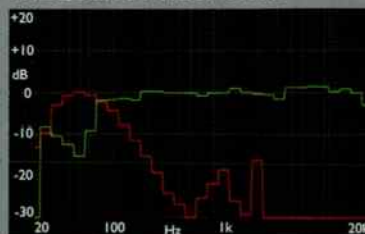
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Classic 2 measured almost flat across the audio band, our pink noise analysis shows. The tweeter exhibits a small plateau lift of 1dB so this loudspeaker will not sound dull, but as there is no sign of peaking in high frequency output, neither will it sound sharp or coloured. In fact, the absence of perturbations in the frequency response indicates an unusual absence of local resonances in the speaker and a resultant lack of colouration. Our decay analysis confirmed this view across the midband, although the tweeter does have some overhang at 4kHz and the bass/midrange also has a little delayed output below 400Hz. However, the bass unit is well damped and the cabinet is not at all 'hot', so there is no bass boominess and the Classic 2 should have very good bass quality. With a port tuned to 50Hz and of broad output +6dB above the drive unit at 80Hz, the port reaches down to 30Hz and will give the loudspeaker a good feeling of bass weight. What has to be borne in mind with the Classic 2 is that its flat frequency response will translate to an accurate delivery but this, by definition, will sound more sober than the inebriation of many designs (or perhaps their designers)! Sensitivity was good at 86dB Sound

Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) and as overall impedance measured 6.6 Ohms the Classic 2 is an easy enough load.

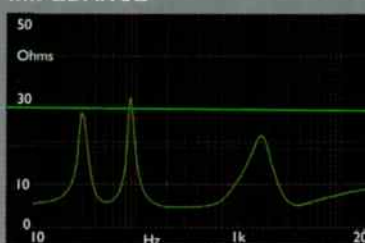
The ALR Jordan Classic 2 is neatly engineered all round. It is very accurate and bass well damped, so should suit near wall placement. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



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LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS

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

A pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers are on their way to **JOE COHEN**, Letter of the Month winner in our **OCTOBER 2011** issue.

Letter of the Month

IT'S MORE FUN TO COMPUTE

I would just like to pass on my experience of getting decent sound quality from a Mac and refer to some of the points raised by Alex Cohen in July letters.

My main (serious listening) system is still (mainly) analogue based and will remain so. Like Alex, my primary reason for changing my second hi-fi over to a purely digital server based system about three years ago was convenience. It's in the living room and so is used more than the other systems. However, unlike Alex, I was not completely blown away by the resulting sound quality: Mac Mini with 1TB USB hard disk, Stello DA100 Signature connected to the Mac via an optical lead, Creek OBH-22 passive feeding an active crossover, then out to bi-amped (much modified) Spondor Preludes (soon to be replaced with some Celestion 5000s).

Initially, I used iTunes AAC at 320 kbps but soon realised that for classical and jazz recordings especially, there was just something not quite right. I can only describe it as a slight 'ringing' (especially on piano), or touch of shrillness or coloration. This was puzzling since I was also aware of a slight lack of space around the instruments and the fact that the extreme treble just wasn't as smooth as it ought to be. True, the sound quality was better than a budget CD player but that isn't saying much! I had expected a better sound from the Stello, but could the reviews all have been wrong?

So began a search for possible improvements. First of all came a valve amp for the treble and then later on



Audirvana – superb sounding computer audio software for Macs, says editor David Price.

a separate valve amp for the mid-range/bass (both pre-owned World Audio units). Quite an improvement, particularly in the treble. The shrillness was reduced considerably. But there remained a niggling dissatisfaction with the system. There was still a lack of ultimate detail. Piano recordings in particular showed up the shortcomings of the system and so I tried doing a few WAV rips using EAC (Exact Audio Copy). Immediate improvement!

I also tried Apple Lossless but totally agree with David Price's findings that it sounds as if a veil has been drawn over the recording, flattening the sound stage and depriving the music and instruments of any emotional content. I'm guessing that the decoding process just strips out those high frequency clues that make listening to

music a truly emotional experience. In my opinion, it isn't even as good as AAC at 320 kbps.

A brief dalliance with Fluke enabled me to play FLAC files in iTunes and frankly I cannot tell the difference between them and WAV files, they both sound very good. However, I have now replaced Fluke with Pure Vinyl software which integrates perfectly with iTunes and enables me now to play FLAC files without any problems.

So why am I writing to you? Well, for a long time I have suspected that whatever the synonyms applied (ringing, coloration, jitter, etc.) that basically what I could hear that left me dissatisfied was distortion. So, after your review of the Musical Fidelity V-Link, I ordered one. Connected it up via USB from the Mac then optical lead to the Stello.

Gave it 24 hours to run in and listened. Now I was completely blown away. I just cannot believe the difference this little unit has made to the whole system. The coloration has completely disappeared and everything is now reproduced with such effortless ease that it even makes 16/44.1 recordings sound better than I've ever heard them. Even AAC at 320 kbps sounds acceptable! I'm now listening to the most analogue sounding digital system I've ever heard and that shiver down the spine factor is back! All the emotional involvement has returned, all due to a small, very low-priced box that has to be the hi-fi bargain of this century. I just cannot put into words the difference the V-Link has made; I can now clearly hear Diana Krall's breathing between notes and the pedal stops being used on her piano. But best of all,



Musical Fidelity V Link made all the difference to Howard Spendlove's computer based system.

using the acid test of piano music, that 'ringing' has gone. The system sounds completely natural; so effortless that I simply forget it and enjoy the music with great pleasure. The Stello now sounds like the superb D/A converter it is.

So I got there in the end, mainly thanks to your magazine and what I have gleaned from it. I wonder if you would consider doing a feature on Computer based systems and how to get the best out of them sometime? I'm sure it would help a lot of people.

Howard Spendlove

Hi Howard – happy to hear you've got there in the end! Like you I'm of the opinion – on the hardware side – that Asynchronous USB from the motherboard to the V-Link, then optical to the DAC (to kill noise), is the best compromise for 16/44.1. Then there's the issue of playback software: I'm currently using Audirvana 0.9f (www.audirvana.com/Site_2/Audirvana.html) which to my ears works way better than iTunes. It has native playing of FLAC, WAV, ALAC and other Quicktime

formats (AAC, MP3), and has a direct sound path to the computer's audio core. There's an audio device exclusive access mode to switch off co-processing tasks, and it plays completely from memory (so as not to need current-sapping HDD use); the tracks are loaded, decoded and sample rate converted in a memory buffer before being played. I'll be writing an in-depth computer audio feature very soon - it's 'in development' right now! **DP**

SPEAK EASY

The October issue has just arrived at the news stands in Portugal and I got mine immediately before lunch. I'm writing to you because I was deeply shocked by Mr. Joe Cohen's letter which you did well, giving it the "pole position" thus, making sure that it wouldn't be overlooked by the readers.

People are free to speak their minds, but nobody should feel free to insult other people or institutions. One thing is to make an accusation, based on facts and supported by documents, extracting conclusions that may or not be fair and verifiable. A totally different thing is to jump into conclusions and without the most basic respect for the ethical principles that should guide free speech, based on hearsay, without a consistent source of information, to produce statements that lay a blanket of suspicion upon others. That is what I call an insult. However, people who do that deserve our respect as human beings but they also deserve to be harshly criticised for their irresponsible actions. If such people learn from their

from launching a blanket of suspicion over Hi-Fi World's whole team of professionals and specifically over its Editor and one of the reviewers in particular, Mr. Adam Smith.

The unfairness of the accusation is unacceptable, as your replies make absolutely clear, thus it would be useless to repeat the arguments therein which are final and based on facts which may be verified by anyone more curious than I am. I trust your word and don't need anything else.

Along a period of twenty years Hi-Fi World has conquered the trust of its readers and did it for being faithful to the Truth, in every circumstance. Your readers may disagree with some of your reviews; I may prefer a different pair of speakers or a different phono stage to the ones you recommend. Sometimes I would prefer the runner up to one of your yearly awards' winner but your reader's letters show that they always trust your opinion as an independent and highly professional one.

There is a culture of conspiracy in this world we live in. People remain on the surface and aren't socially punished for the lies they spread.

I think it is fair to point one's finger to the media as they are highly responsible for such a generalised behaviour as they usually give an example about how irresponsible, regardless of the consequences, some of the published material may be.

I tend to agree with "Good Old Winnie" when he said: "there is no such thing as public opinion, there is only published opinion!"

Truth is so rare and so fragile



Ming Da's MC300-PRE was bought by Olaf "in a frenzy of risk taking". And he's still alive.

mistakes they should be given new opportunities. If not, they should be prosecuted. That is what I think. In such circumstances, libel actions have more correcting power than a reply letter.

Mr. Joe Cohen, whom I don't know except for his writings, didn't refrain

that it must be protected" - from external aggressions but, not certainly by surrounding it with a bodyguard of lies. Unfortunately that is the world's modern way. I sincerely hope for a change in the trend.

Mario Kopke Tulio

Thanks for that Mario. It's heartening that you see it differently. People put pen to paper without a great deal of concern or consideration, yet at the same time we also have to accept that in our position we have an obligation to answer criticism in a clear and honest way. As they say, "if you put your head above the parapet, it will get shot at". The difficult bit is catching the bullets between your teeth! **NK**

I think that as soon as you say something in the public domain, you're fair game for being contradicted and challenged – and quite right too, as they say, "sunlight is the best disinfectant".

The problem is that along with this come people who simply cast aspersions upon peoples' motives, for whatever reasons they may personally have, yet offer no substantive evidence. Allying that you get a rave review in return for advertising in a magazine is seductive if you're of a conspiratorial mindset (and many are), but it just doesn't logically stack up with us. As I said last month, that would mean that [a] all reviews of advertisers' products were rave reviews (they're not), and [b] non advertisers wouldn't get reviews (they do) and [c] we'd only rave about the products of companies that were advertising (we don't). I trust that our regular readers know all this, and they can make their minds up in their customary intelligent and open minded way. **DP**

TUBE TALK

In a frenzy of risk taking and charting unknown territories (acquired qualities – I am a boring German by birth) I purchased last year the Ming Da MC300 PRE preamp and would agree with your balanced published assessment of it, in particular the microphonic aspect of the sound reproduction. However, the use of Russian Military 6SN7 tubes reduced this short coming, improved positioning in the sound stage and resulted in more clarity in sound production. Combined with JJ 300b tubes it is a very robust setup. Another point I would like to add – the 274b tube is charged by an insane 100µF cap – WE suggested only 4µF max for this tube. Negotiations with the producer (Suena) generated an alternative: two 4µF caps parallel instead of the 100uF with the effect that the 274b stopped sparking.

Olaf Handrick

Hi Olaf. Thanks for your letter: it is very timely. The bass peak, caused by incorrect feedback time constants,

has been dealt with by Ming Da, and microphony in the valves supplied was obvious and curable too, your experiences show. The point being that with these issues seen to, the MC-300 PRE then becomes a wonderful sounding preamp at a great price.

All the same, the owner was not a happy bunny at the Guangzhou Show I have just attended, and he gave me some dark looks when our representative Anna Chang spoke to him (in Chinese). Criticism in a review is less acceptable in China than the West; it is taken as an insult I am told, even though it can have a positive outcome, as in this case.

To be frank though, a disappointingly large number of Western manufacturers totally reject criticism too, but usually on a different basis. For them, their products are 'perfect' and anyone who does not think so is wrong. This is, of course, is logically absurd, apparent when the model is later replaced by one that is better. If it was perfect it would not need replacement.

I mention all this because some readers have regaled us with the fact that we do not criticise enough products and award too many Five Globe reviews. I accept this to an



Mei-xing's Suena Li - a nice person to deal with!

Mei-xing who handles all overseas enquiries because her (self taught) English – of which she is proud – is excellent. Suena, as you have likely discovered, is very nice to deal with and diligently ensures customers are happy. **NK**

IDLER CHIT CHAT

Dear Noel - I believe you are a Garrard 401 fan, which pleases me because I have recently purchased a 401 installed into an SME 2000 plinth with an early SME 3009 arm. The arm lift has failed to work and SME have told me that it



What's the best tonearm and cartridge for Terry Mason's Garrard 401?

extent, but there is a reason. Poor products are winnowed out before review to avoid filling the mag with substandard product, to save paper and also to make space available for good products of interest to readers.

We tend to get involved in engineering issues with some items too, as a result of measurement. The MC300 PRE is a good example. It has a lot going for it, having a quite unique sound, as you might expect from its construction and parts, but the subsonic peak revealed by our spectrum analyser had to go.

And finally, Suena is not the producer. She is the person at

cannot be topped up with fluid. I have tried to cue by finger but am not too happy with that. It is fitted with a Shure V15 III cartridge.

It is time to splash out for a new tonearm I think. And cartridge. I have only ever used MMs, so do not have an MC phono stage. This is where I would like your help please. I will soon have a budget of £2,000 to spend.

I have been reading Hi-Fi World for many years and it always gives me much pleasure. I have short listed the Origin Live Illustrous Mk III, the Audio Origami PU7, the Funk FXR II, the Inspire X 100, and SME Series IV maybe, although I understand that may



Icon Audio PS2 phono stage was liked by reviewer Paul Rigby – see our August 2011 issue.

be a little less romantic in its presentation?

As for a cartridge, I have read good reports of the Ortofon 2M Black, Benz Micro Ace and the Goldring 1042. Any other suggestions? I have not heard any of them and I don't know how on earth I will be able to compare. This is where your expert opinion will be so valuable.

I have just read the review by Paul Rigby of the Icon Audio PS2. That could be just the job once I have sorted out the arm and cartridge. Although I could be tempted by something like the Graaf WFB2 for the same money.

My system comprises a pair of Klipschorn corner horns (original 1972 models). I am thinking of purchasing a pair of Trachorns from ALK Engineering (www.alkeng.com/klip) when funds permit. The 401, an early Croft Super Micro pre (the weakest link?), and a pair of CR Developments Amphion single ended power amps with the "spectacular" (your words) 6C33C output valves. They sound lovely.

My tuner is a Leak Troughline with decoder....I love it! also an old Pioneer PD9700 CD player. My room is approx 26' x 14' with a curved long wall and 8' 3" ceiling. I have no option but to have my speakers on the short wall which is not ideal I know.

I very much look forward to your reply so that I can move forward and enjoy my music again (after all, I am pushing on a bit and time and good reproduction of good music is very precious to me)!

Terry Mason

Hi Terry. The 3009 and V15 are well past their sell by date. Both have merit and the Shure tended to disguise the 3009's lively structure, but times move on. All the arms you list are very, very good and the PU7 and FXR are especially strong, although the Inspire pips them all for value in my view. Goldring's 1042 is great fun to listen to, and basically very accurate. Its stylus also resolves high frequencies well, and it is a fine

tracker – all at a reasonable price. Ortofon's 2M Black is technically more correct sounding and forensic, and it is a triumph of engineering when measured, but you pay for all this, at £400 nearly double the Goldring.

Budget moving coil cartridges are getting very good and becoming popular, and the Benz Micro Ace is one fine example. Just bear in mind you will need a suitable preamplifier, making this a costlier solution. Personally, I don't much see the point of buying a good MC and then pairing it with a cheap transistor phono stage; it strikes me as contradictory.

NK

SECOND CHANCE

Recently I was given a Musical Fidelity A100 as a worker, but with intermittent faults. Apparently, it had been back to the dealer for repair on several occasions over a number of years and the customer had just lost faith in the product. As an electronics engineer, I took this on as a challenge (especially as it was free of charge). After some remedial work which included un-



Musical Fidelity A1 / A100 – not bad as a fixer upper for free!

blocking/cleaning the cooling fans, replacing the emitter resistors and resoldering a few suspect joints I then had a working product. I also noticed that the heatsink compound was not very evenly applied across the heatsink, so that was cleaned and replaced.

I now had what I consider to be a very good sounding product (Class A) and very low noise floor

especially on the line inputs. In the past I had overlooked Musical Fidelity as a company, but was familiar with people like Leak, Quad and Audiolab. The amplifier is now giving a fine performance in my second room system.

You may wonder where this is all going! Having had success with a 20 year old product and liking the house sound it led me to purchase a new Musical Fidelity preamp as a start to my upgrade path and if funds permit an Musical Fidelity power amp, although I am currently using a self-repaired Audiolab which had a couple of burnt resistors which I replaced, along with some damage to the PCB track. So I do feel that second hand is a good way to experiment with a variety of makes, and could lead to a purchase of new equipment, if styling, features and warranty are important to you. Currently I am using a pair of speakers I bought for £10 from eBay, but that's another story...

Changing tack, I have been following with interest, your review of the Eminent LFT-16. I see that the review did not make it to the August magazine, and all is explained on your new website. I first heard these speakers about a year ago and was very impressed, and was almost ready to buy, but I did have a couple of concerns. In the UK a got the impression that these were being distributed by a one man team, so I was concerned about continuing support, although there is a three year warranty.

Styling and look were quite basic. However, given the sound of these speakers, I think that is not so important, as any other type of electrostatic/ribbon type speaker will either be too big for the room, or could never be placed in an optimum position. I also noticed that on the Eminent website there is a very good user guide for the LFT-16s which details the design theory,

measured performance and component values. I also notice that there is another downloadable document, which describes how to adjust the film tension, using the adjustment cams. Although the LFT 16s are not specifically mentioned, I wonder if you could enquire when you revisit the review if any adjustments are required during the life of the product. We know that companies like Quad and other



Eminent Technology LFT-16 - not so much a loudspeaker as a labour of love, for many!

independent traders can offer rebuilds, repair and upgrades and I wonder where we stand with Eminence. If these support issues could be addressed in the review, I could well be their next customer.

Alan Ralph

Hi Alan. You are a brave man methinks, but the LFT-16 is arguably one of the best £1k loudspeakers going and out runs others sonically by a big margin I feel. As we are finding though, U.S. production seems a little – erm – variable. We await more news of the fix for depressed tweeter level.

In the meantime, another manufacturer tells me they are to revive their 'Isodynamic' treble unit from the 1980s and we might hopefully see a midrange unit too. Magnetic planar drive units have potential, the LFT-16s show. **NK**

Hi Alan - yes, there's a lot to be said for buying second-hand, and contrary to what many manufacturers seem to think, it doesn't actually preclude people going on to buy new. Speaking personally, my first Michell GyroDec was a previously (well) owned example, from someone selling up to move to South Africa. I bought it, with GyroPower PSU, for £425, fitted a Rega R200 arm and Linn K9 cartridge to it (both lying around in my hi-fi spares box) and was amazed that it sounded better than my finely fettled, very expensive, bought-new, Linn LP12/Ittok/AT-33E. I duly sold my Linn, and my second-hand (and slightly battered) Gyro and bought a brand new Michell Orbe. So there you go – used hi-fi can be a great stepping stone to new hi-fi. It's also a great way to get lots of bang for your

buck (metaphorically speaking; that wasn't a reference to your A100's unreliability)! **DP**

TOP NOTCH

I am happy to say I received my pair of Eminent Technology LFT-16 loudspeakers on the same day you got the new review pair. They were delivered by Darren Hatcher of A&D Audio. The fit and finish does leave something to be desired. There were loose screws in both treble units, one that had no wood behind to fix to. Some glue or other material is evident on the midrange units and the wood has a small crack above one unit. Having said this the boxes are heavy and feel solid. They certainly pass the knuckle wrap test. Initially I was underwhelmed by the sound, it was a little muddled and veiled. The speakers were initially on low heavy spiked bases tilted backwards and angled inwards. The system they are in consists of a Benchmark DAC 1 pre amp, Channel Audio D200 power amps an Xstreamer digital source and Michell GyroDec with Hadcock 242 arm Benz M2 cartridge and Benz Micro PPI phono amp. All connected with a mix of Van Den Hul The First interconnect and Odyssey 2 speaker cable.

The speakers were run in with a burn-in CD from a rival magazine for 48 hours (source: an X Box). After running in the sound opened up a little, sounding more transparent with good front-to-back depth. They did however still seem a little dull to me. I experimented by putting the treble on the high (0 dB) setting. This was not successful and made them sound a little phasey on some material.

Having spoken to Darren he suggested the speakers be raised so the treble unit was at ear level. The speakers now reside on Atacama SL400 stands.

These are sand filled, very rigid and not prone to ringing.

I have liked the bass on the LFT-16 from the beginning. It is very tuneful and fast, no doubt due to the sealed box. However, on the stands it takes another leap forward and integrates with midband seamlessly. The speakers are far from being dull as I first thought and are very well balanced. They don't shout the midrange or treble, but there is no lack of detail or insight. Tonally, I have never heard instruments more convincing. As for the sound stage there is space and air around each instrument and a real sense of height. I am genuinely hearing aspects of recordings I have not before, such as dubbed instruments and room acoustics.

The speakers are understated but dynamic, it is this ability to reproduce dynamics that gives the realism to the music. Records I have previously found difficult to listen to, such as the Sundazed reissue of MCS's 'High Time' (Sundazed make the best of a poor original recording) now have more body and atmosphere that allow you to concentrate on the music for what it is. It is enough to say I usually combine listening with reading a hi-fi magazine or two, but since I have had these speakers I just find myself putting it down to listen. Thanks for a great magazine.

Kevin Foster

Hi Kevin - that was a timely and interesting e-mail. I have only measured our second pair and even with the tweeter at 'high' the 'speaker barely makes 10kHz – see our graph. Moreover, this was the best it could do over a narrow forward angle, so there is little treble energy going into the room and it will sound dull, exactly as you say. The speaker must be pointed at listeners for strongest treble. As you note though, the loudspeaker still offers fabulous results, quite different from cone loudspeakers and much better. I wondered whether the originals were the best loudspeaker I had ever heard at the price. **NK**

Kevin replies -

I am so glad that you agree with my ears. I did not realise that much treble was missing, but cymbals and high hats, etc., do sound recessed. Despite this they are solid and lifelike. I have lived with Monitor Audio GS 100 for some months and a speaker based on the Loki dual concentric drive unit, both of which are more brightly lit and forward, but neither have the presence or realism of the LFT-16. Darren had told me the speakers were delayed because a crossover component was not available. Could a wrong value item in the crossover be the problem? Or perhaps it is a different

tweeter unit? I do think the bass is very tuneful and well integrated. At ear level and pointed at me, the speakers now seem well balanced but a little dull, I shall try the high treble setting again. Presumably we shall get some feedback from the manufacturer; he seems an approachable man. I do hope that a solution to the treble fall off is available as these are great speakers that are getting better each listen. Once again many thanks for replying. I may see you at Whittlebury Hall if you are there, Darren promised me a couple of tickets!

Kevin Foster

UPGRADE DOWN UNDER

I am in need of some guidance regarding the common problem of an upgrade path. This has never been a problem, given I've always known what I wanted but now able to take another step and am confused which way to go. My system consists of the Usher CD1 and Northstar design CD players, Goldpoint SA1 passive pre and a pair of Usher R1.5 power amps in bridged configuration. My cable loom is made up of the Atlas Titan Al Cu interconnects and Ichor speaker cables. Power leads are Russ Andrews Sig and Oyaide Black Mamba on the CDP and Oyaide Tsunami gpxr on the power amps.



TimeStep's SL1200 EVO from Sound Hi-Fi – just one of many fine vinyl mods packages on the market...

grab my attention. My room is 8m x 6.5m; it's softly furnished with hard floors and heavy drapes. As for upgrades, whatever is recommended will be looked at in depth. Price wise or budget would be relative to the rest of the system. As I am in Australia hopefully it's available nearby!

Renee Barker

Hi Renee. JBL TL260 loudspeakers are not the subtlest of performers yet the Usher power amplifiers are good and will drive just about

is common. I also rather like the Kingsound electrostatic range of loudspeakers. Manufactured in Hong Kong they are likely to be available in Oz. **NK**

BIG SMILE

In your last edition you gave the Audiolab 8200DCQ a great review, but no mention of the ancillaries it was tested with; what power amp was used as a CD transport? You are usually very good at this sort of stuff, so I was a tad disappointed, as at that price and with those facilities, a great sounding system could be had for a relatively small outlay, do you not think? Also, I have seen pics of the Audiosmile advantage active speakers that augment the Kensais, but still no review! I think I saw it mentioned around the end of last year in the "next month we have section", but still no joy??

Also, I found the mod projects available for the Rega (Inspire Hi-Fi) and the SL1200 (from Sound Hi-Fi) both very interesting. The Timestep Evo looks amazing and also sounds well worth investigating.

I would love to see a review of the Audiomod's take on upgrading the Rega tonearm, ideally on both of the above; would the Inspire mods not warrant such an arm, bearing in mind the price of each item??

As I said before, thanks for a great mag. I look forward to hearing your views on the above. Keep up the good work!!

David

Hi David - sometimes we have to miss out our 'Reference System' panel on the grounds of space; the pages get too crowded and it becomes impossible to fit it in! Basically though, we all run fairly consistent reference systems from month to month, so if in doubt look up the name of the reviewer, and find another review of his with the



Castle Knight 5 is well finished and has a smooth sound.

Speakers are the JBL TL260 towers.

The problem I face is that my taste in music, as in how I listen to music, is changing. I don't listen to it as loud as I use to and my music is a touch more laid back than energising. I like everything that my current system does but am needing that bit extra to really

anything you choose. I suggest you try and listen to the latest Castle Knight range of loudspeakers, which I know are distributed into Australia and New Zealand. They are deliberately engineered to offer a more sober and more truthful approach to reproducing music than



My Audio Design My1920 – a great 'speaker solution for those lacking space...

'Reference System' panel shown; that's about 95% accurate! If there's something special or unusual about the systems/ancillaries being used, then we'll always mention it in the text, anyway. As far as the Audiolab 8200CDQ was concerned, I ran it in several systems, but primarily with a Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier (using the CDQ as a CD player, via its balanced outputs, as I remember) and of course my Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers. I also tried its preamp capabilities into a World Audio Design K5881 power amplifier.

Regarding our 'Next Month' page, I have to periodically remind readers that I say "here's what we hope to bring you". Note use of "hope", for hoping is all a poor editor can do when promised lots of tasty new kit that's "just a few weeks away" by the manufacturer or PR, and then it never materialises for any number of reasons – often beyond the control of even the manufacturer! So please take this almost as a "wish list"; what yours truly would like the Santa Claus of the Hi-Fi World to deliver down the World Towers chimney before the next issue is done...

We've been amazed by the range of mods packages for, variously, the Technics, Linn, Rega and Garrard 401 (and indeed this issue has two more superb variations on the theme); it's almost the case that the modding world is more interesting than the new turntable releases right now, and they're certainly superb value. We're lining up an Audiomodds review for you very soon, along with a supertest of all these modded arms to get some sort of perspective. Watch this space... **DP**

ON THE SHELF

I hope you can give me some advice with regards to bookshelf loudspeakers. Due to my domestic situation, specifically

a young child running around, I am having to trade in my current Sugden Masterclass integrated amplifier and Focal Electra 1007BE speakers as the hi-fi will be relegated from dedicated rack to a closed cabinet and the speakers from their stands to the top of the cabinet. The rest of my kit consists of a Cyrus CD XT and DAC XP. I also have a Linn Majik power amplifier stored away which I am considering bringing back into service as it runs cool and should therefore be happy in a cabinet. I have a large music collection across a range of genres and primarily listen to Americana, Indie and Rock. I'm not sure of the trade in value of the Sugden and Focals but hope to have up to £2,000 available to buy a new pair of bookshelf speakers and possibly a new power amp. I would prefer a sound that is slightly on the warm side if it has to be tonally coloured and am happy with my current kit's presentation which I find very smooth, but also clear and detailed.

I recently read your review of the MAD My1920 speakers and think they

will be approximately 6-8ft apart. Are there any other speakers you would recommend I audition that would be happy in this configuration? I would also consider changing the Linn Power Amp if you thought I could improve upon the sound within my budget, or felt that there could be a better match with the new speakers. I found the Linn underpowered with the Focal speakers and the sound was too bright until I bought the Sugden second-hand.

Robert Pearce

Well, you've got several choices. The best speaker for your particular situation, I would suggest, is the AudioSmile Kensai (£2,100). This is a small standmounter which is very unobtrusive in the room, and easy to site, but has superlative sound which fills rooms in a way completely at odds with its diminutive dimensions. Its ribbon tweeter is superb, and treble is one of the best in the business. The Linn Majik power amp would drive them, although you might want more heft. Obviously though, they're at the top of your budget so it's difficult to upgrade the amp – the numbers don't add up! So, if you want a slightly bigger and more powerful sound, I'd counsel the MAD My1920, which is a sort of twenty first century LS3/5a; it has a far more even sound balance and a bigger bass than the Kensai. It works well right against a wall and will please with its smooth musicality; not as fast or incisive or transparent as the Kensai, but it's half the price and gives you some money to play with power amps.

Personally, I'd search out a Rotel RB1092 secondhand. These go for around a grand in mint condition, are not that hard to find, and sport 2x 500W RMS per channel (we actually



Rotel RB1092 Class D power amplifier, produces massive power and stays cool.

could be a good fit and suit my taste. How do you think they would pair with the Cyrus kit and Linn Power Amp? Also, do you think they would be suitable sighted on top of a cabinet and close to a rear wall. The lounge itself is long and thin, I listen across the room and am around 10ft from the speakers, which

measured 592W, as I recall!), which is plenty enough for the MADs – it will tickle them nicely and allow them to punch hard into your room. The clever thing here is that the Rotel uses B&O's IcePower Class D chips, so the amp runs totally cool even at full whack - a Musical



Paul Geoghegan uses a Magnum Dynalab tuner to receive quality VHF/FM in the Emerald Isle (Ireland!).

Fidelity A100 it is not (I refer the honourable gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago; see **SECOND CHANCE**)! This should fit into your cabinet nicely... The Rotel is a touch on the dry side, tonally speaking, but should complement the My Audio Design speakers which are, if anything, just a tad warm. I'd recommend Black Rhodium's Tango speaker cable (£15/m), which is nicely smooth and silky too, for this application. **DP**

RADIO GAGA

Steve Green has had a running commentary on radio reception from the BBC with some occasional comments for other areas of Europe, including Lyric FM in the Emerald Isle. Last Monday, 15th August I heard a live streaming broadcast from BBC Radio 3 of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake on my very recently acquired music server from Cambridge Audio [NP 30]. Thanks for the review that influenced my leap in that direction. Most of the stations I visited were coming through at 128kbps WMA. However, the BBC Radio 3 broadcast that night was coming through at 478kbps AAC. I had a feeling we were in for a good night's listen.

To say it was good was an understatement: my wife and myself were spellbound. I have never heard live radio like this, it was stunning. I should mention that I do like FM and have heard some good broadcasts, admittedly not BBC Radio 3 on FM as it is beyond my range. It shows what can be done.

A visit to various websites indicate that the BBC are running test broadcasts. Well, I think they have cracked it, absolute perfection or as close as can be reasonably expected. The following day, Tuesday 16th, the quality dropped slightly to 466kbps and then to 307kbps for Wednesday 17th. These bit rate figures are still good and make for great listening.

Very sadly, the local

state radio station here in Ireland for classical music, Lyric FM, broadcasts at 32kbps. I think they believe Microsoft's statement that 32kbps is audio quality when everyone else realises that this is not the case. Programme content is great but broadcast quality really sucks. FM is no better with clicks, pops and clacks with volume drops. My FM tuner is a Magnum Dynalab FM 90 which is very good at pulling in a quality programme, when it's there. Incidentally, the clicks and pops are also audible on my car radio some distance from the house which removes housebound issues as being the problem.

It seems to me that if you want to listen to digital radio in your car, or generally as background music in your house, then best buy a table top DAB radio. If you want to listen to digital radio more seriously, then invest in a music server streamer that can pull in live streaming broadcasts world wide. I hope BBC Radio 3 maintain this broadcasting quality for its a real achievement. Keep up the good work in the magazine. I enjoy my monthly read.

Paul Geoghegan

Hi Paul - yes, one of the 'side effects' of me spending so much time with network music players of late has been me almost accidentally listening to a lot of internet radio. You're right, the quality is variable, but it can be very good indeed - a particular fave of mine is Radio Paradise (www.radioparadise.com/), which plays fine rock music at a decent bitrate.

The great thing about internet radio (as opposed to DAB) is of course that it's extensible, which is to say the bitrate can be instantly and invisibly upgraded; it's just a case of the broadcasters being bothered. It's great when the Beeb does bother - it saddens me that over the past decade it's been on a race to the bottom in terms of both content and technical quality. A few less home improvement shows on BBC 1 and dire sitcoms on BBC3, and a few more serious bits of music broadcasting such as what you've outlined, would be welcomed by us all. If anyone at the BBC is reading this (and I'm aware that some do), then I'm sure I can speak for all the readers when I say we like you when you remember who you are (i.e. the BBC) and don't try to compete with commercial stations for ratings. That's why we pay our licence fees, much as many of us resent it these days. Okay, I'm off my soapbox now - time for a glass of water and a calming half hour of Radio 4! **DP**

DOWN AND DIRTY

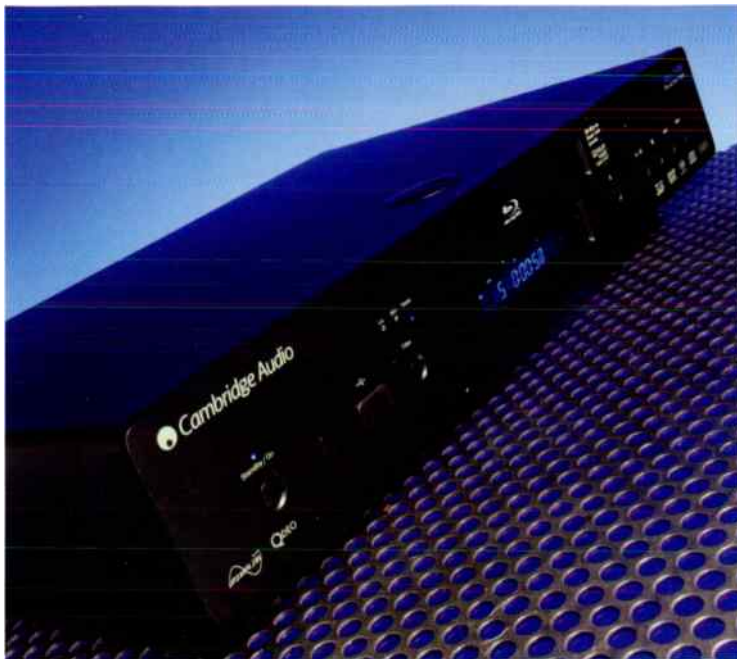
I am currently listening to 2Ls the Nordic Sound sampler 2 disc SACD / Blu-ray disc. Some wonderful music. I am currently playing the 2ch 192/24bit layer on my Sony BDP-S370 connected to my Rega DAC via a QED co-axial cable. When I hit the DISPLAY button on the Sony's remote it confirms that I am playing the 2ch 192/24 layer. However, the Frequency LED lit on the Rega indicates the incoming sample rate is 44.1/48kHz. Will it be impossible to get the 192/24 layer unmolested to the DAC via this type of connection? I am assuming the Sony is downsampling the coaxial output to 16/44.1kHz despite what it says via the display, or could the Rega be telling porkies?

Derek James

The digital audio (S/PDIF) output on your Sony is most likely streaming 16/44/1 to your DAC, as you suspect, because this interface cannot support more than 96kHz sample rate in stereo. Downconverting to CD standard is the safe thing to do, allowing the player to interface with any external device to give sound. What manufacturers try and avoid these days is a 'no sound' scenario that leaves users confused and dissatisfied. So you get the lowest common denominator option; anything that works! You could look at the player's audio menu; on access you can set the max output sample rate to 96kHz but I do not recall this option on the Sony. You must use



David listens to Radio Paradise on-line.



Cambridge Audio Azur 751BD Blu-ray player has selectable analogue output filters, but it is expensive.

the HDMI output to enjoy 24/192 high resolution digital audio and at present only A/V receivers, or A/V preamplifiers (e.g. Onkyo) can accept and make sense of an HDMI input.

NK

THE BLUES

I very much enjoy reading your Hi-Fi World editorials. Earlier in the year I read a review you wrote of the Pioneer BDP-LX53 and you compared it to the Oppo BDP-83 and Cambridge Audio 650BD. I have been researching both of these players to replace my current universal DVD Pioneer player, but my limited technical knowledge of digital to analogue converter chips has left me in a bit of a quandary.

I was hoping I could ask for your advice in this regard? I realise that at this point these companies have new players (Oppo BDP-95 and Cambridge Azure 751BD), so I'm wondering if I should choose from the new players instead? Or is the audio performance between the new players and the older players negligible? Is the performance of the Cambridge Azure 751BD worth twice the price of the 650BD?

Either way, my main question is regarding the difference in audio performance between the Dual ES9018 SABRE 32-bit Reference DACs in the Oppo BDP-95 and the five Wolfson WM8740 24/192kHz DACs in the Cambridge 751BD. I see that one is a 32bit versus a 24bit. Not knowing enough about the technical difference it would seem that the Oppo DAC would be superior than the Cambridge DAC. Is that reasonable to assume or is that misleading? I prefer the design of the Cambridge players, but I want to buy the player that will create the best audio

playback from SACD, Audio-DVD and Blu-ray. I will be using the analogue 7.1-channel surround outputs to connect to my Rotel processor. My priority is audio performance over video. I hope this is not too trivial of a question for you, as I'm at a loss trying to decide which player to choose given the different DACs employed.

Alberto Trujillo

Hi Alberto, I am sorry to disappoint you but I have not heard the analogue output of the Oppo BDP-95 so cannot comment upon its analogue performance. I have measured and carefully listened to the Cambridge 751BD and whilst it is a good analogue player, it isn't the best by any means. That is because Blu-ray players are intended to work with AV receivers via HDMI; their analogue outputs are not a priority. You would be better advised to buy a modern Onkyo receiver like the TX-NR609 (see our review) and use HDMI connection. If you want

the very best from SACD then get a more expensive Onkyo or Marantz receiver, preferably with proper DSD convertors. I compared the 751BD with the 650BD in our September 2011 issue. I hope this helps you. **NK**

We have an Oppo BDP-95 on order – review coming soon. **DP**

COMPUTER BUILD

I wonder if you could help me. I am about to have a new computer built and would like to be able to download music and burn high definition discs to play on my hi-fi system. My current, elderly PC is not connected to my system and the few CDs I have burned from downloads sound rather dull and lo-res, though the music sounded well through the PC speakers. Can you advise as to the required hardware/software needed to burn high fidelity discs; does burn speed affect quality? The dearth of record shops these days means the only way to buy music is online; gone are the days of Rare Records, Forsythes, Virgin and dozens of other record stores. I hope you can help me. I will be specifying a PC based around an Intel i5 processor, the rest is dependent on what you suggest. Thank you for reading my request.

Fred Davies

Hi Fred - what a subject! There's enough to discuss here to fill the entire magazine. The answer to your question depends on how seriously you want to take the subject of computer audio, and what your budget is. If you're really serious, then I suggest to you get an off-the-shelf audio computer from Item Audio, for example (see www.itemaudio.co.uk). There's a choice of platforms (Mac or PC) and you can specify just about everything you want; the key is zero noise fanless operation, internal electromagnetic shielding, a rigid low vibration chassis and with high quality components. Solid-state SSD hard drives are pretty much essential, as are good quality internal cables. If you don't go

item

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For an audiophile PC go to Item Audio says our editor, David Price.

for the Item Audio solution then aim for all the aforementioned in your build choices. As far as burning is concerned, you need to run the best quality optical media at the lowest possible burning speeds, while the computer itself is not doing any other tasks. DP

LOUDSPEAKER UPGRADE

My last letter to you, written in the summer of 2007 listed a wide range of kit which worked okay but failed to deliver truly enjoyable listening. In between times I culled much of the equipment in an attempt to simplify things. One mistake was to buy the Pioneer A-A6 integrated amp on the basis of a glowing review; how bitterly disappointing this proved to be and I could not dispose of it fast enough (thanks eBay)! Then a colleague loaned me a Naim CD5/ NAC112/ NAP150 just to see what I thought. Running this through Naim NAC5 cable to my Acoustic Energy Evo3 floorstanders was an utter revelation – absolutely stunning sound. At last, decent solid punchy bass, lovely vocals and imaging like we have never heard before. A deal was swiftly done and my remaining old components headed for eBay too. I have since indulged in a Naim tuner and Flatcap PSU which does make a difference...

Maybe a single brand system won't give the last degree of perfection but I have lost the urge to change boxes in search of better sound; it all just works so well. However, I do think that the speakers are now outclassed by the electronics. I have yet to audition anything but had been considering Yamaha Soavo 1 (or maybe the newer 3?), KEF Reference series; then I read a review of Magneplanar MG12 and felt strangely drawn to them. What do you think? Musical tastes vary from lighter classical to a bit of rock (ACDC, Led Zeppelin), to soul and dance (70s disco to Lady Gaga).

Ben Bristow

Hmmm... well to me this reads a little like someone saying "I was very hungry, so I thought about fish and chips, then I was considering tagliatelle and then I saw a picture of lemon cheesecake and felt strangely drawn to it – what do you think I should eat?" My point is that you've reeled off a list of wildly different speakers, at wildly differing price points, and asked me what I think? What I think is that I don't really know what you want because there's no pattern to follow, so it becomes a tricky diagnostic process.

If it's light rock and soul you're into, and you have a Naim system, and you want floorstanders, and your budget doesn't seem to be constrained then I'd consider the Eminent



A Yamaha Soavo 1.1 was liked by our editor David Price, in our October 2009 issue.

Technology LFT-8b. These use superb 'isodynamic' drive units for a sweet, transparent, spacious sound that would really suit your musical tastes, and offer moderate but effective bass; your Naims should drive them no problem. They're pretty affordable too, as exotic floorstanders go! **DP**

HO HUM

I love the Letters section, I really do! Then again I can see with all the pressures of the 'day' job, you can be a little distracted. If you have a set of Tannoy Westminsters sitting in your hall and a letter describing the mythical powers of a 1960s cartridge that sounds superb in a 1970s Laskys special and is clearly better than any other cartridge (ever!), I can sympathise. However, I was a bit disappointed to your reply to John Watson in the July issue regarding Hadcocks and cartridges. Noel clearly isn't keen and the respected Alvin Gold's contribution was akin to a dinner party guest who'd reached the port stage.

I have an interest as I am using a Hadcock 242 with a Goldring Lenco idler drive and am currently using a Musicmaker cartridge. I read Raphael Todes recent review and agree that pairing the Hadcock with an idler drive creates a unique synergy. I bought the arm about seven years ago to replace a worn bearing Akito on my Linn. After the initial excitement about it being better I discovered it wasn't. It didn't have the lovely micro rhythms of the Linn pairing and wasn't a great success on

my rock/prog collection. I compounded the problem with the Musicmaker which tonally was superior to my Denon DL304 but that was about it.

I persuaded myself that an Ortofon Rondo Bronze was the way to go but really it's too heavy for a Hadcock and is a bit like racing a bus around Silverstone. At this stage my wife bought me a Pioneer PL12D and when that seemed more enjoyable than the Linn, I knew it was time for revision. The Lenco came with a Mission 774 SM (the Ittok rival) and after happy times with this I put the arm on the Linn with the Ortofon and finally understood about system synergy.

Now back to John Watson's question. The Musicmaker works superbly with the Hadcock but the Lenco motor is causing the cartridge to hum. I understand this is a longstanding problem with Grado based cartridges. Would the Audio Technica AT33E provide an answer? You've a long list of contributors who've listened extensively to the types of setups both John and I have so there must be an answer there somewhere. I play the turntables through Croft pre/VTL ST85 power and Monitor Audio Studio 20s.

Steven Slawther

Yes, even in their heyday in the nineteen seventies, Grados did have hum issues, as I recall, and of course the MusicMaker shares a lot of DNA with them. None of our long list of contributors have heard this exact combination, I am afraid, so we can't

give a definitive answer, but my feeling is that Audio Technica AT-33E is less likely to give hum problems on the Lenco. Sorry we can't be more helpful on this. **DP**

DIRECT LINE

Fascinating to read about your new turntable measuring regime, and I thought you might like to hear about my experiences with two decks I recently acquired. They are a Dual 505.1 and a Yamaha P-520 direct-drive, bought at the same time in a British Heart Foundation furniture and electrical store for £15 each! Both were obviously low hours, particularly the Dual. They are, coincidentally, peers both in era (early 1980s) and their price at that time. I have a Townshend Rock part-way through a complete rebuild, which hopefully will soon be up and running with a Garrott Decca C4E, but I needed to do some transfers of LPs for a friend, and the two decks were an opportune find.

Despite its near-mint condition, I assumed the Dual would have 'dried out' (which proved to be the case), so it

comparing them. There are two things about the Yamaha I wouldn't have noticed were it not for the A/Bing I was able to do with the Dual.

1 - the 'timing' of the Yamaha is what I would describe as slightly 'constipated' compared to Dual, the latter has a 'fluidity' that the former simply lacks..
2 - The Dual has a (really quite surprising) purity and clarity with voices and instruments which the Yamaha also lacks. This was evident on most discs (not all - but I suspect it was less so on those from less than perfectly played master-tapes which had inherent wow/flutter issues), not least the first two I played, AC/DC's 'Highway To Hell' (180g re-release) and 'In A Blue Mood' by Kay Starr (1985 re-release of a c. 1955 LP). (BTW I pretty much ignored AC/DC in my formative years, despite having a life-long penchant for hard rock (I'm 52) and now I can't fathom why - this superb mastering of a superb album has given me (and many others) an immense amount of pleasure in recent months.)

Take the chiming, bell-like power-chords that Angus Young is so brilliant

is the best way to do this).

I have to assume that the direct drive 'cogging' you've been discussing is the root of these singular differences in sound, but it's surprising that artefacts down in single and double-digit Hertz could be responsible for such a profound difference in them. My friend also has the Kay Starr album as a set of three 45's, which I also transferred. Interestingly, although they actually have a slightly 'better' sound in terms of dynamics and even detail, they lack the purity of tone on the LP and thus I believe the tapes were not as well set up as they were for the LP - in fact I think this is actually visible as less rock-solid peaks in spectrograms as they are played, viewed on my PC.

Rainer Scott

Hmmm. Thanks for that Rainer. Forensic measurement has revealed only small cogging effects; I have yet to measure anything large. Unfortunately, the presence of cogging was much amplified and speculated upon by the UK press when Direct Drive first appeared and I am not at all certain that an explanation of the sound of DD is anywhere as near as simple as this. Even the mechanical construction of a DD may introduce sonic problems. In your case too I must note you are listening to different cartridges as well. **NK**

MAD ABOUT THE GUIDE!

I am so pleased to see your old Buying Guide back up and running on the internet. I was using it on a very regular basis up until its disappearance from the Net and quite frankly (as daft as it may sound), when it went I was lost without it! Thing is, all the stuff that I wanted in the mid 1990s but couldn't afford is now available 2nd hand at good prices (e.g. eBay and cash converters) and this guide is absolutely ideal for helping out with research on this older (but golder) stuff (for example turntable cartridges and mid end CD players as upgrades). Apart from product reviews, I find it very useful for checking this 1990s stuff's price when new, to give a good feel for where the item sits in the pecking order and welcome help with likely component matches. Today's Buying Guides are pretty useless to me. I'm a lot happier now I've got the use of yours again.

Richard Franks

Thanks for writing in Richard. We resurrected this guide in response to your request and those of so many others who wrote in from around the world. Now we understand the value, I hope we can improve this listing slowly. **NK**



Classic Dual CS505 belt drive – beats its Yamaha P-520 direct drive rival, thinks Rainer Scott.

got a service, main bearing cleaned out and lubed with Redline 30W synthetic motor oil, a drop of the same on the motor pulley. The belt was slack (slipped on start up and flipped instead of sliding on to 45rpm), I de-glazed it and left it in boiling water for a couple of minutes which restored service, although it's still slightly looser than spec., I suspect.

The Yamaha is much more difficult proposition to service, but all the bearings are play-free and the platter spins freely and smoothly.

The Dual has the standard Ortofon P-mount with a 5E stylus, the Shure V15 on the Yamaha was u/s and replaced with a Nagaoka MP11 Boron I've owned since c. 1992 (stylus a little later, c. 1996).

It was an eye-opening experience

in producing - they have just that on the Dual, a bell-like quality which is not present with the Yamaha. Ditto Kay Starr's voice, along with the muted brass and other orchestral instruments on the latter album.

Then the timing - 'Highway To Hell' just damn(sic)-well boogies on the Dual (feet can't keep still), not so the Yamaha. Despite the fact that the Dual is distinctly light in the bass the kick-drums and bass-lines are still unmistakably there and making their intrinsic part in the music known. Both decks have strobes which tell me they are both very speed-stable in terms of drift and very-low rate wow, but sometimes I think I might perceive a little variation with the Dual. But then again I could be looking too hard and imaging it (I find using peripheral vision



Slimline Tonic

Noel Keywood tastes the diminutive digital delight that is Sony's new BDP-S480 Blu-ray Disc player...

People I speak to often "wonder whether I should get a Blu-ray". Sony have more interest than most in persuading them to do so, because they were one of its original developers. The BDP-S480 is an instrument in the process of persuasion, otherwise known as marketing: it's as cheap as chips but it does a great job at a price of just £140 or so. I can't see why anyone wouldn't want a player like this, it does so much but costs so little. But I am a Blu-ray fan. It is still early days for Blu-ray and people remain ambivalent toward it.

The BDP-S480 plays more varieties of silver disc than all except the best players, like the Cambridge 650BD I use. In fact it plays all silver discs, including SACD high resolution music discs, but not the high resolution PCM on DVD-As (DVD audio only discs, now obsolete). It does of course play DVD video discs, as do all Blu-ray players, and it upsamples the video to high definition specification. This process cannot in theory improve picture quality other than to make

it smoother through interpolation, but in practice DVDs do look better through a Blu-ray player, I have found.

It plays CD of course, and last but not least it plays Blu-ray discs, including high definition audio discs. I'll point out quickly here this means audio discs of appreciably better sound quality than CD. In effect, Blu-ray players were to replace CD players, except as usual the industry blew this opportunity by betting the future lay in surround-sound from a silver disc, when it turned out to be iTunes from thin air.

What concerns many readers wondering whether to get a Blu-ray is whether it will connect into their stereo: well, all of them do this. The Sony has stereo sockets on the rear. What it does not have is a 5.1 analogue output set of sockets, for connection to an old analogue-only receiver. If you have one of these, it is time to bin it. AV receivers have improved a lot over the last few years and Onkyo and Marantz offer great receivers at bargain prices. They all have an HDMI digital input and this is what you need to use to fully utilise and appreciate any Blu-ray player, especially if you intend to spin

SACD music discs.

Providing you set it to PCM in its audio menu, the BDP-S480 will output SACD sound from its analogue stereo sockets. Setting to PCM introduces onboard DSD-to-PCM transcoding so the digital signal can be sent through the onboard PCM DACs, because dedicated DSD convertors are too expensive to use. Surround-sound is internally mixed down to stereo.

This might sound like no way to treat super high quality SACD and it isn't ideal, but our measurements confirmed that DSD code does not get mashed in the process; distortion was lower than CD and bandwidth wider and more analogue like, so via its analogue outputs the humble BDP-S480 manages well for the price when used as a simple CD/SACD player. Even its jitter was very low!

Connected up to an AV receiver able to process the DSD code from SACD the BDP-S480 can be internally set to output raw DSD over the HDMI line, allowing SACD to be heard in full surround-sound (or stereo) through the receiver. For receivers unable to process DSD it can be set to output PCM.





If you have a DVD-A collection then the Sony will play them, but only the Dolby (AC-3) surround-sound track, not the high resolution (24/96) PCM track. This isn't always so bad though; for example Carlos Santana's 'Supernatural' DVD-A sounded better in AC-3 on the Sony than the stereo mixdown on the CD, which for some reason is very ropey, possibly attributable to low quality mix down studio processing.

To enjoy high definition video from Blu-ray you need an HD TV, connected by an HDMI cable that carries both video and audio in high resolution digital form. All Blu-ray players are currently backwards compatible to older equipment though, including this one, and you can connect up an old TV using its Composite or Component signals. The player does not have a SCART output though, nor S-Video (European version). The Component output is restricted in quality, according to Sony's specs. This points to a limitation of the BDP-S480: it is not especially strong in backwards compatibility. Not only is component quality limited but the player's digital audio output is electrical only; there is no optical TOSLINK S/PDIF output, common on other players, not are there analogue surround-sound outputs as I mentioned earlier.

All video formats are catered for, including 1080p progressive video. Both Sony and Panasonic camcorders now offer HD video running at 50/60 progressive frames a second and the BDP-S480 did indeed play a 1080/50p Blu-ray disc of video from my Panasonic HDC-TM900 camcorder, providing it was set to 1080p. Set to Auto, it converted it to 50i, which wasn't very nice, producing shimmering effects on verticals (lamp posts) as the camera panned horizontally. But with 50p the player

indicated a 23Mbps data rate when the Display button was pressed, much below the 28Mbps expected. Picture quality was far better from my Cambridge 650BD which also plays 50p, but it ran the same sequence at an indicated data rate of 28-32Mbps - much higher and a high rate by any standard. This gives video approaching good quality broadcast TV, at least when the sun is out (and the wind in the right direction!). The Sony fell behind the Cambridge here, but then it is a lot cheaper and the need to reproduce 50p to perfection is hardly mainstream.

As you would expect the player can be set to decode lossless Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio, sending PCM out to a receiver unable to process these formats. I checked these functions at 24/192 resolution with the 2L 'Divertimenti' music Blu-ray, and with a Dolby test disc, as well as with ordinary programme discs and all worked well.

The player identified my PC on the home network and was able to start the Windows Media player to access both photographs and music, whereas this normally has to be initiated at the computer. It also has a web browser, can access YouTube (great for music videos) and much,

much more – because Sony have really strengthened up this aspect of the player compared to the BDP-S370 I reviewed in our October 2010 issue. For more detail on the player's web related connectivity it's useful to read the handbook, available on Sony's UK website, under the Support section. It is a downloadable PDF.

I do not much like the player's T-bar on-screen navigation scheme, where the player defaults to player menus rather than a disc's top menu. Also, it repeatedly blocked my actions with a Gracenote look up warning; generally the control logic was a bit messy because Sony try to get all functions up on screen, instead of delineating them. This was OK when there were few, but now it looks messy - and trivial obstructive messages are a real no-no, as that delectation of software gone mad, Vista, once showed us.

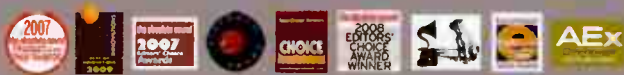
You can control the player with an iPhone, but I did not try this. Load times were similar to the earlier BDP-S370 I reviewed in our October 2010 issue, 22 seconds for the Java menu of John Meyer's 'Where the Light Is' which is fast as it normally takes 30 seconds, and just 10 seconds for a CD. Curiously, our standard



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BDMV test BD-R took 17 seconds to load, compared to 14 seconds before, and it should load in 10 seconds or so, meaning the Sony can be a tad slow with some discs, but not all. Loading was lengthened by 10 seconds if Auto was not selected in the Video menu. The software was updated from MO7.R.0213 to MO7.R.0427 upon arrival, prior to review.

SOUND QUALITY

Sound quality from the analogue output was good, as measurement suggested, making this a half decent stereo CD player for those so interested. It isn't an audiophile player, as some readers hopefully ask about budget Blu-ray players, but it does an honest and decent basic job, where earlier Sony players did not. Sony have stopped trying to stuff sub-standard audio electronics into such products hoping no one would notice. Many buyers want decent analogue stereo and as Samsung can give it to them, Sony were never in a position to decide not to. Connected to my Marantz SR8002 receiver and spinning standard Rock, the Eagles CD 'Long Road out of Eden', showed the usual dry, firm if one dimensional low end, a tad less generous and atmospheric than the Cambridge. There was still plenty of punch in the drumming though; the S480 was not anaemic and nor was it coarse or edgy as some budget players can be due to cheap DACs.

With SACD, violins of the Marinsky Theatre orchestra were well separated, one from another, behind Lang Lang playing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2, their strings having the smooth analogue quality that SACD is known for; in this respect the BDP-S480 performs unusually well by preserving the strengths of the format through its analogue outputs. Bear in mind our measurements show 24bit equivalent distortion levels (i.e. very low) from the analogue outputs when playing SACDs and the benefit is discernible, if not as obvious as in higher resolution players.

The analogue output was similar in balance and dynamics to the electrical digital output A/B comparison showed, but as is often the case the digital link was a trifle more specific in its images, and

suffered less subliminal muddle. The sound stage was wider too, partly because full left and right images were more firmly established. Lack of jitter on the S/PDIF link gave the sound a pristine quality that could only be matched on HDMI by switching off the video content at the receiver by selecting Pure Direct. The player itself has no Video Off feature, unlike the Cambridge, but then it is basic, not an audiophile machine.

Spinning the close miked harp of Yolanda Kondonassis playing 'Malaguena' (beautifully) on SACD underscored how clean the S/PDIF output of this machine is, now appreciably tidier and more pristine than analogue. Note that this player processes the high resolution DSD layer of SACDs our measurements confirm, where most Blu-rays just play the CD quality layer, that is the difference. One consequence of this is that the analogue and S/PDIF outputs fall silent when DSD is selected (because there is no conversion to PCM); the CD layer of an SACD cannot be directed through them.

Switching the player to DSD output via HDMI gave full SACD surround-sound from the receiver of course, as the Marantz can process DSD. Spinning music concert Blu-rays like John Meyer's 'Where the Light Is' gave fine sound quality, native or PCM output. Our many 2L 24/192 Blu-rays and SACDs all played perfectly, sound quality being determined by the receiver of course. Picture quality was very good and a tad above other similarly priced players, our HQV and Spears & Munsil test discs showed. Our own test sequence on 1080 50i of an idling Tiger Moth at Duxford airfield looked very good, with plenty of detail in grass

and trees, the slowly idling prop having a smooth blur. Silky colours suggested low noise. The John Meyer concert (VC-1 HD video at 60p) also came across well, with an indicated data rate of no less than 40Mbps. Replay video quality reached a high standard.

Build quality is lightweight and the front controls unpleasant, but the remote control is handy enough. A Display button puts up a lot of tech info on what is playing too.

CONCLUSION

With mountains of ability and no major weaknesses Sony's BDP-S480 is a great way to enter the world of Blu-ray and high definition audio and video. This applies to audiophiles as much as those who want decent pictures, especially audiophiles who'd like to enjoy SACDs as well as other silver discs. Great value then, and a fine audio player too.

VERDICT ●●●●●
 Excellent entry level BD player with fine picture and decent sound, plus useful internet functionality.

SONY BDP-S480 £140
 Sony UK
 +44 (0)8705 111 999
 www.sony.co.uk

- FOR**
- excellent picture quality
 - decent sound for the price
 - SACD playback
 - internet functionality
- AGAINST**
- slightly fiddly navigation
 - slowish disc access

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response from CD through the analogue outputs was flat to 21.6kHz, our analysis shows. Frequency response with 96kHz sample rate digital reached 48kHz and with DSD code from SACD a high 65kHz, these results being identical to the outgoing BDP-S370.	Distortion (%)	DSD	24/96	CD
Distortion levels were low with CD (i.e. 16bit), measuring 0.22% at -60dB, resulting in an EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 99dB. As usual distortion dropped with 24bit, the player returning a low 0.1% at -60dB and 0.1% from DSD code. This is a relatively good performance for a budget player, showing Sony has put some effort into the analogue performance. PCM must be selected to get DSD from the analogue outputs.	0dB	0.003	0.004	0.001
Jitter levels from S/PDIF were good, a 1kHz -60dB tone producing 50pS of signal related jitter, whilst random jitter hovered around 10pS across the audio band, and low rate clock drift was just 150pS. Output was a normal 2.05V.	-6dB			0.006
The BDP-S480's internal conversion of digital audio to analogue was of a high standard, so CD and both SACD and 24/96 PCM digital from DVD video discs will give very good sound quality from the stereo analogue outputs. NK	-60dB (16,24bit)	0.1	0.1	0.22
Frequency response (-1dB)	-80dB			3.3
CD, 24/96, DSD2Hz - 21.6/48/65kHz	Separation (1kHz)			110dB
	Noise (IEC A)			-105dB
	Dynamic range			99dB
	Output			2.05V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE SACD

DISTORTION SACD

THD 23456789 Input RMS Frequency
 CH1 0.1104509 % -60.01 dB 0.99998 kHz
 CH2 OFF OFF OFF

THD CH1 vs FREQUENCY/Hz

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AVID ISORAK £285 PER SHELF (UPWARDS)

The Avid Isorak is a simple to build, modular isolation shelving system. Constructed from either 30mm black or 26mm oak veneered MDF, the shelves can be supplied on three or four legs (black or silver) of varying lengths, providing a bespoke unit. The secure-slot design simplifies stacking, you just rest one shelf upon another. Each set of legs rests on the legs below, separated by a large ball bearing providing isolation. Finally, each shelf provides heat dissipation slots plus a 'tidy' hole for cabling.

Listening began with my Icon CD-X1 CD player, perched upon a simple MDF table. Spinning the King Crimson-esque tones of Polyphony's 'Without Introduction' (Gear Fab), it was no surprise to hear a forward, sometimes bright series of upper frequencies. In fact, treble flailed about like a tree in a storm, losing direction and precision while bass sounded like a hillside full of sheep – woolly. More, the lack of structure allowed it to bleed into other frequency areas robbing the lead guitar of much of its impact.

Placing the CD-X1 on the Isorak,

the most startling improvement was the bass which was tighter, snapping into view for the first time and providing a fuller, more complex arrangement. Upper frequencies relaxed into a richer, more flowing aspect while vocals were less edgy. Synth work now offered a more sweeping aspect with newer, more delicate elements being noticeable for the first time.

Comparing my admittedly much cheaper reference shelving, the Atacama Equinox, with the Isorak was fascinating. Despite the excellence of the Equinox design, it should have sounded less capable, and that proved the case. It sounded airy but less secure than the Isorak which provided a greater bass presence plus a richer, more mature tone to the upper frequencies, plus more surety and confidence. By comparison, the Equinox sounded like a kid on his first day at school; slightly nervous and unsure of his footing. Well designed, easy to assemble, move and modify and producing top quality sound, the Isorak is a no-brainer if you're looking for an isolation shelving system. **PR**

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soundbites

ORIGIN LIVE LINEAR FLOW 2 SPEAKER CABLE £30/M

Speaker cables are critical in the hi-fi chain. If this often ignored area is not right then it can cause a crippling information bottleneck that can falsely skew how you view your entire hi-fi. On the other hand, there are plenty of top performing cables out there which fetch an absolute fortune. Striking a balance therefore, between value and top quality sound is a tough call. Origin Live has tried to blend both aims into its Linear Flow 2 design. Looking at these flexible lengths of wire, they look unassuming, with nothing particularly macho about them. They do feature Litz cabling technology however; multiple wires, individually insulated to prevent the audio signal jumping from wire to wire, adding distortion. When you buy the Linear Flow 2s, Origin Live will charge £30 per cable

for an 'ending' fee. This is where each cable wire end is coated with tin (at 450°C). You can also request banana plugs to end each cable (which costs another £30 on top of the ending fee) but Origin Live doesn't recommend it, stating that the tin ending is a superior conductor.

To test the Linear Flow 2s, I compared them with a set of Chord Epic Twins (£37 per metre). In comparison to the OLs, the Epic Twins sounded slower. Playing a range of vinyl-based female vocal jazz, the Epics showed a good upper midrange performance but the treble lacked life and pace was slower. The Linear Flow 2s on the other hand, displayed more energy and verve. Bass showed greater punch while the upper mids provided more attack during, for example an acoustic guitar strum while treble-based cymbal work had an altogether lighter and more



metallic ring. Listening to the Linear Flow 2s for an extended period across varying additional musical genres, these cables showed more clarity with added depth to vocals. Offering excellent sound quality for a very reasonable price, the Origin Live Linear Flow 2s will provide the basis for a top drawer hi-fi system. **PR**

[Contact: +44(0)2380 578877,
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Super Star

It's not every day you find bespoke SACD players, but Bladelius's Freja III is precisely this. David Price dusts down his Super Audio Compact Disc collection and enjoys hi res, millennium-style...



As I write this, television is awash with the 9/11 commemorations, with nostalgic looks back at how the world was on that fateful day. Tony Blair was at the height of his political powers, the charts were still owned by Oasis and the England cricket team was a national disgrace – what a different world it was! In hi-fi too, things certainly weren't the same as now; MP3 players were crude in the extreme, a new generation of music fans were learning that they didn't need to pay thanks to Napster, and SACD and DVD-Audio were squaring up for a format war that never was...

Back then every week I'd get emails telling me of countless new hi res disc releases, whereas

now there are precious few new SACDs; DVD-Audio has well and truly died. There are some rays of light, with several websites offering hi res downloads (B&W's Society of Sound being one example), but it's fair to say that optical disc-based hi res never really came to much, much to my chagrin. And so why, pray tell, would anyone want a bespoke, non-universal two-channel SACD player such as the Bladelius Freja Mk.III?

Well, I *still* like Super Audio Compact Disc. Indeed, as optical disc formats go it remains my favourite by a long way, and I do have a number of discs. Linn Records are releasing stunning classical music on this format on an almost weekly basis, and there's still a fair range of discs available. Amazon UK lists classic

rock albums from Pink Floyd, Sting, Dire Straits, Steely Dan, The Who, Elton John, Depeche Mode, etc. for around £10, and Nick Drake's 'A Treasury' compilation is a mere £2.97! So it's not quite game over for the ageing format – SACD is not going to take over the world in the way that it once promised, but like punk it's still not *quite* dead!

The Bladelius hails from Sweden, recognisably so. It's an object lesson in clean modern design, with beautifully brushed aluminium casework, radiused at the edges to great effect, and a fascia that's an essay in minimalism; just a power, open, stop and play button (all else is on the remote control). The greenish blue alphanumeric fluorescent display is wonderfully retro in



"SACD is not going to take over the world in the way that it once promised, but like punk it's still not quite dead!"

appearance, sporting zeros that have a diagonal bar going through them from bottom left to top right, just like you'd see from a computer in a nineteen seventies science fiction adventure! The disc tray isn't the slickest but is decent enough, and as per all SACD players track access is a little pedestrian, but the overall effect is of a nice machine to use.

At 125x440x445mm, the unit is unusually large, but much of this is air (doubtless the purer Scandinavian variety) as it weighs a middling 10kg.

Inside, the company have done a fully balanced design, which sports (I presume) a Sony SACD/CD mechanism (with CD Text), "super high performance", Burr Brown digital converters (two per channel), which upsample to 192kHz on CD. For low jitter, the clock is mounted right up close to the DACs. There's also a generous toroidal transformer with separate power supplies for the digital and analogue sections. Round

the back, there's a choice of RCA phono or balanced outputs (I used the latter), plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. Overall standards of finish are excellent and the Freja is very nice to live with, if you don't mind its bulk taking over your equipment rack, that is!

SOUND QUALITY

Pricewise, the Bladelius inhabits a strange world between 'affordable' silver disc spinners and the true high end designs, so for it to justify its price it had to give more than a taste of the latter. I'm pleased to say it did, on both CD and SACD (which of course substantially outperformed the stock Compact Disc variant). The essence of this machine is its cleanliness. It's not an exceptionally forceful sounding design, with massive crashing bass or searing treble that imposes itself on the listener just because it can (*a la* certain Japanese machines I can think of). Instead



it simply gets on with giving an unsullied rendition of what's on the disc in a controlled yet engaging way.

Kicking off with Simple Minds' 'Someone, Somewhere In Summertime', and the Freja showed a cool muscularity with the thundering pop rhythms of this classic early eighties stormer. I was struck by the tautness of the kick drum, and the way it played off against the snare, which was carried with dizzying impact and speed; meanwhile the hi hats glistened away behind in the mix, with silkiness that you'd never get from a CD player at any price. The Bladelious showcased the wonderful shimmering clarity of SACD, making short work of a mix that can sound murky via cooking Compact Disc, and indeed a number of lesser SACD players. It was exceptionally clear alright, but not bright – there was, if anything, a sense of things sounding a little less upfront than via Red Book CD.

Moving to Steely Dan's 'Babylon Sisters' on SACD, and the Bladelious was again something close to majestic. It set up a massively powerful groove, with punching bass drum, thumping snares and dramatic vocal peaks, all underpinned by warm washes of keyboard accompaniment. The track was bubbling with subtle detailing, but this didn't detract one jot from the

"factor in striking styling, fine build and as much charm as an object such as this can possess, and it comes highly recommended..."

strong musical direction of the song which pushed along at high speed. In this sense it reminded me very much of high end vinyl courtesy of one of the latest generation of super moving coil cartridges (Lyra Titan i take a bow!). It gave a dazzlingly high resolution sound but one that was highly musically expressive – something akin to a live performance, in fact.

Sensing that I could be having too much of a good thing, I elected to steal myself and enforce a period of SACD-free listening, difficult as the prospect seemed. On to 4hero's towering 'Give In' and instead of the 'SACD' message I'd got on disc load, it said 'CDDA' and off it went.

I was surprised to find that Red Book wasn't as harsh as I'd expected, by comparison. I think the upsampling going on with 16/44 smoothes over a lot of the venerable format's

CD

- 16bit PCM, 44.1kHz sampling frequency
- two channel stereo at 6.144Mbps
- 'enhanced' multimedia capability
- SCMS (Serial Copyright Management System) built into subcode
- 96dB signal/noise ratio, 20Hz-20kHz frequency response

SACD

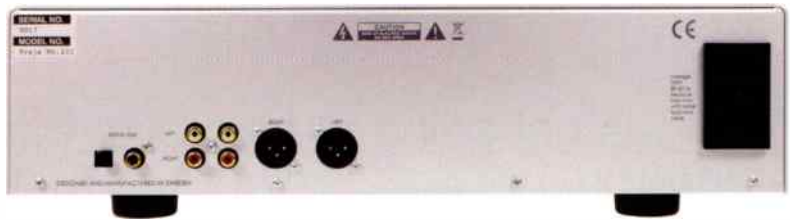
- 1bit DSD at 2.8224 MHz sampling frequency
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- hybrid disc option offering 16/44 PCM stereo on any standard CD player
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- 120dB signal/noise ratio, 2Hz-100kHz frequency response

failings, and the result was effectively a lowering of the contrast rather than any hardening of the sound; it was akin to going back to DVD from Blu ray – hardly a life enhancing experience but perfectly usable all the same. There was a sense of the vocals being a little closer miked, with less space around the singer, and the soundstage seemed to tuck in closer to the speakers, whilst a good deal of the depth behind them disappeared, but still I was heartily

well as unerringly musical; this it did. It has a sort of cool, understated confidence that makes you feel you can trust it with anything – the hi-fi equivalent of the friend you'd give the keys of your new car too.

CONCLUSION

The first and most immediate worry about any SACD player is that they're not going to do standard CDs very well, while the second concern is that they'll not play SACDs particularly



impressed by the Bladelious's skill at flattering the lower-fi recording into sounding nice. Again, I heard the player's clean, matter-of-fact midband, tight and taut bass and smooth, almost rolled down treble, with just a little more sweetness than you'd dare to ask for.

UB40's 'Don't Let it Pass You By' from an original imprint of 'Present Arms' wasn't quite as nice though; upper mid got a little steelier than I'd have liked, with those soaring saxophones sounding quite bracing. I found a little sibilance on vocals too, whilst cymbals fizzed more than I'd have liked. This is a poorly mastered disc however, and a true torture track for silver disc spinners; it's a reminder why many mid-eighties CD players were unlistenable.

So, given what it was asked to work with, the Freja did well, always trying to stay tidy and in control, as

convincingly either! On both scores, you should have no fears about the Bladelious Freja III – I have found it extremely capable all round. My other worry was it might turn out to be good, but not good enough for its price point, and again there was no cause for concern, as I'm struggling to think of any stock CD player that sounds obviously better at the price. What you get is a very controlled, composed and cool customer that doesn't editorialise or lose the plot one jot, but instead lets the music's natural quality flow freely. It's not a glitzy or showy performer, but neither is it in any way dry, cerebral or analytical. Instead it ekes its way right into the heart of the music and holds your attention right there. Factor in striking styling, fine build and as much charm as an object such as this can possess, and it comes highly recommended.

TALKIN' ABOUT THE RESOLUTION: THE GREAT SACD - DVD-A DEBATE

The phrase "pure, perfect sound, forever" still resonates around the audio industry. This is how Philips - co-developer of Compact Disc - described its brand new sixteen bit digital music format back in 1982. This view didn't last however, and the race was on to find a new digital coding system that could offer a wider window on the music. Super Audio Compact Disc (SACD) was announced in 2000, a bespoke audio format that used the (then) new DVD platform but was not compatible with DVDs. Confusingly though, it used a *completely* different digital coding system to that found in both DVD-A and CD. Rather than the Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) system, where 16, 20 or 24bit samples are taken at high speed, the new Direct Stream Digital (DSD) approach took far smaller 1bit samples at a far higher speed of 2.8224MHz. This gives a frequency range of up to 100kHz (better than DVD-A) and a dynamic range of 120dB (not quite as good).

Whilst DVD-Audio's Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) coding system gave a very wide bandwidth and excellent resolution and dynamic range, it generated massive amounts of noise at its sampling frequency (44.1kHz in the case of CD, 192kHz for DVD-A). Were this not eliminated from the audio signal, it could play havoc with a hi-fi's electronics, so a heavy 'brick wall filter' is applied, which simply chops off all the signal above half the sampling frequency. In the case of CD, this is 22kHz (i.e. 44.1kHz/2), and with DVD-A at maximum resolution it's 96kHz. This is a bit like using a hammer to crack a nut, as the filtering just lops off the top of the audio signal. Because it's above the limit of human hearing, it was initially assumed to be inaudible, but it actually creates phase and noise problems inside the audio band. This is obvious with CD (it has a 'brightly lit' upper mid, even with the best of players), but even 24bit, 96kHz DVD-A shows a slight metallic ting in the treble and loss of atmosphere. 192kHz is obviously smoother still, but some experts have ventured that to truly get around PCM's inherent high band noise, a sampling frequency of at least 384kHz is needed.

SACD uses Direct Stream Digital however, which works in a way that doesn't require it to chop off all the music's extended high frequencies. By taking tiny 1bit samples at dramatically higher sampling rates, it gets round the need for brick wall filtering. This means it can offer an incredibly wide range without the intrusive effects of filtering, giving a more natural high end performance - in theory, at least. Digital experts like Professor Malcolm Hawksford of Essex University have said that the system simply doesn't work at high enough sampling frequencies to give decent resolution. He says this is particularly obvious in the treble range, which is - of course - where the ear is most sensitive. While DSD achieves better than 20bit PCM performance at low frequencies, further up the range the resolution effectively goes right down. Indeed it's said that most of DSD's 2.8 million pulses per second are needed just to reach 16bit standard, let alone better it...

So *neither* PCM or DSD are ideal; both are flawed. DSD was designed expressly to bypass PCM's weaknesses, and succeeds in this, but it then introduces other compromises such as lower effective resolution at high frequencies. The result is that neither DVD-Audio (and its more modern descendants) or SACD give perfect sound, but instead sound differently imperfect - and the question is which sort of imperfection sounds better to you! Personally, I think SACD gains more on the swings from DVD-A than it loses on the roundabouts; I prefer its slightly warmer, smoother, more romantic feel which echoes the ultra crisp, delicate and detailed sound of the very best moving coil phono cartridges. DVD-A (and its spiritual heir, 24/96 PCM downloads) by contrast, sounds more like 'Compact Disc on steroids'; more of everything except the music. DP

DIGITAL DISC COMPARISONS:

MD	0.14GB
CD	0.65GB
DVD single sided, single layer	4.7GB
SACD single sided dual layer	7.9GB
DVD double sided, dual layer	17GB
Blu-ray Disc single layer	25GB

VERDICT ●●●●●

Quirky, characterful design with an insightful musical nature allied to detail and polish; fine CD spinner but showcases SACD to great effect.

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FOR

- superb SACD performance
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- highly musically engaging
- great styling, fine build
- balanced operation

AGAINST

- slow disc loading
- plasticky remote control
- cheap printed handbook

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Bladelius measured flat to 21kHz with CD. With SACD this extended to 32kHz with a steep fall off above this frequency, our analysis shows. Although SACD is able to reach 100kHz these days few players get much further than the Bladelius, possibly to limit supersonic noise that is a result of DSD processing.

SACD gave remarkably low distortion on this player though, up with the best in measured terms and nearly ten times lower than that from CD, the result at -60dB being 0.03% against 0.26% from CD. It is this and the ability to resolve a -100dB signal with low distortion of 2.8% that gives SACD its remarkable performance and contributes to its smooth sound.

EIAJ Dynamic range with CD was 98dB, a common result.

Output from the phono sockets (unbalanced) was a normal 1.8V but from the XLR sockets (balanced) a very high 6V. Otherwise results were similar between these outputs.

Random jitter measured 60pS across part of the audio band, a result above most players. This may slightly degrade purity.

The Bladelius measured well all round, but was undistinguished with CD. With SACD it was very linear, if not wideband. NK

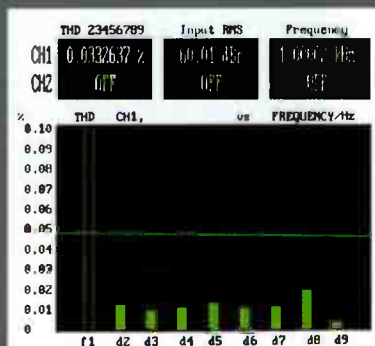
Frequency response (-1dB)	
CD	2H-21kHz
SACD	2Hz-32kHz

Distortion (%)	CD	SACD
0dB	0.0008	0.0005
-6dB	0.0006	0.0003
-60dB	0.26	0.03
-80dB	3.2	0.37
-100dB	-	2.8
Separation (1kHz)		102dB
Noise (CD, IEC A)		-116dB
Dynamic range (EIAJ, CD)		98dB
Output		1.8 / 6V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE SACD



DISTORTION SACD



Tec Talk

Rafael Todes expounds on Deltec's new PDM3 digital to analogue convertor, and its custom Deltran sync-locking CD transport modification...

Deltec Precision Audio is highly respected as a purveyor of serious, specialist digital products. It was founded by Adrian Walker and Rob Watts in the nineteen eighties, while they were still students at Cardiff University. Around 1990 Adrian left the company, whilst Rob Watts continued, changing the company name to DPA Digital, to reflect its new emphasis. They continued until 1998, when under-capitalisation caused it to cease trading. During these early years, they produced a string of 'cult' products, which lovers of classic hi-fi can still experience, although not inexpensively – the Deltec 1 amplifier, for example, may still be found in the annals of eBay, fetching not insubstantial sums!

Cut to 2008, when Deltec customer and fan Dave Clarke met up with Adrian Walker, and they decided to reform the company. The first products of this company were amplifiers and mains filters (editor DP was highly impressed by the CA-1/SA-1 pre-power in the March 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World*), and now we have a new digital convertor in the shape of the £2,649 PDM3 you see here. The latest product of this new venture, the DAC can either work as a standalone unit connecting to its source by USB (44.1 and 48kHz, 16bit), S/PDIF or TOSLINK – as well

as via the special Deltran module in the DAC, communicating by optical link to a specially modified CD player..

The Deltran facility generates the clock within the D to A convertor using a 'high-spec temperature controlled crystal oscillator', and feeds this back to the CD transport. Indeed Deltec were one of the first companies to use this sync-locking technique way back in 1989 – and it became a new fashion which got people really excited. Similar sync-locking was also employed by Arcam, in the Blackbox 50, by Linn in their Karik/Numerik and by Wadia.

Our PDM3 review sample was supplied with a Deltran-enabled Cambridge Audio Azur 650c CD player, because it's a good inexpensive machine, but DPA can of course fit the sync-lock to virtually any CD player for around £250, making it a very high quality bespoke digital transport for the Deltec DAC. In accordance with DPA's philosophy – which is somewhat unconventional these days – the digital path is as simple as possible, so there is absolutely *no* upsampling going on!

For the PDM3, DPA use internal thick-film hybrid voltage amplifiers, circuit designed on a ceramic substrate. It has printed ink resistors that are laser-trimmed giving well-matched circuits. The case is 3mm aluminium, with the front panel 25mm thick. The width is a shade over 23cm, with standard depth. Height is 10cm. Overall the unit feels a quality product, although it's very much Deltec's version of the above rather than an aluminium-clad, chrome festooned Japanese battleship of course. The DAC has a single green LED on the front panel to show power is on, but disappointingly there's no further information to show resolution or bitrate. Still, it locked on to its target effectively, and the one time I had a problem, it was



easily remedied by restarting, Microsoft Windows-style!

The matching Cambridge Audio Azur 650C is a bargain at £350, but I was curious as to how DPA were going to transform this great-value budget CD player into a high-end object. After all, the transport mechanism is a computer-style plastic drawer – not the sort of thing you'd see on something with high-end pretensions! Physically on its rear, it has been modified with a circular piece of plastic, the size of a two pence piece, with an optical slot in the centre of it. The optical cable goes into the PDM3, along with a second cable, either optical or S/PDIF. For the purposes of this review, I used a Chord Indigo Plus for the S/PDIF, and the supplied DPA optical cable.

SOUND QUALITY

Kicking off with a Linn recording of a former ensemble of mine, the Schidlof Quartet playing Shostakovich quartets with the Piano Quintet, I was aware of the commendably mellow nature of the DAC. It has a rich, warm, almost valve-like sound which complimented the string sound of four Stradivari instruments beautifully (if Stradivari had designed amplifiers, I'm sure they would have been valve!). There's a passage in the first movement where I have to pluck violently, simultaneously with my colleague's bowed note. It should sound shocking,





violent and disturbing. It receives a bit of pasteurisation with this combination, as the front of the attack is damped down a bit, but the upside is that the Deltec will make poorer, less accurate recordings more palatable.

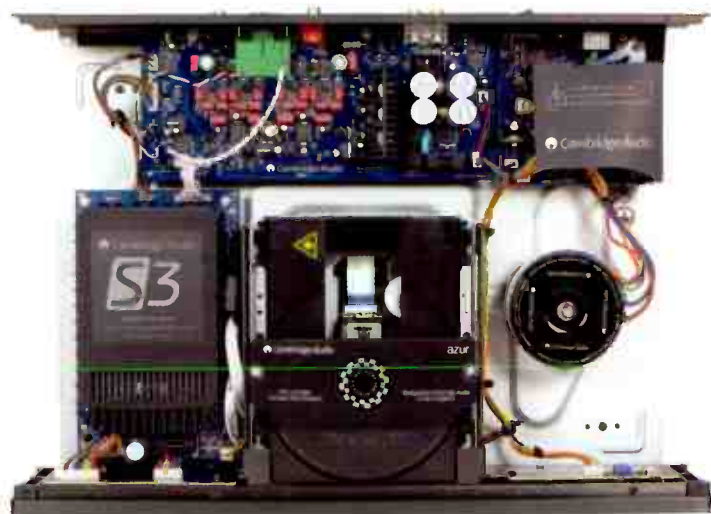
The Piano Quintet with Ian Brown on piano presents other difficulties for a DAC. Recorded with a concert Steinway, the piano had as I remembered it, a slightly brittle sound; what I hear now has smoothed over some of the more jagged edges that gave the performance its seat-of-the-pants quality, and that I am accustomed to hearing on my (far more expensive) Bel Canto CD2/Weiss DAC202 reference. There also seemed to be more of a contraction of the dynamics of the performance, but there was also an impressive lack of post-ringing to the piano sound which I also get with my current reference.

On to some Wagner, and the 'Tagesräuen' from *Götterdämmerung* (Barenboim

conducting the Bayreuther Festspiele Orchestra). This Dawn chorus is like the world waking up, as a single motive is woven together on different instruments to provide a heroic climax with the brass triumphing. It's a study in orchestral colour, and a gripping paragraph of music. The PDM3/Deltran Cambridge combination had a credible crack at this. The woodwind colours were on the mellow, understated side – certainly not varnished in appearance, they glow rather than sparkle. It's a lovely smooth sound, not oozing with detail, but it had a musicality to it that makes the passage highly engaging to listen to.

Listening to the same passage on the reference Weiss DAC202 with a Bel Canto CD2 transport, and there was more of a sense of doom to the music, as the basses paint the picture

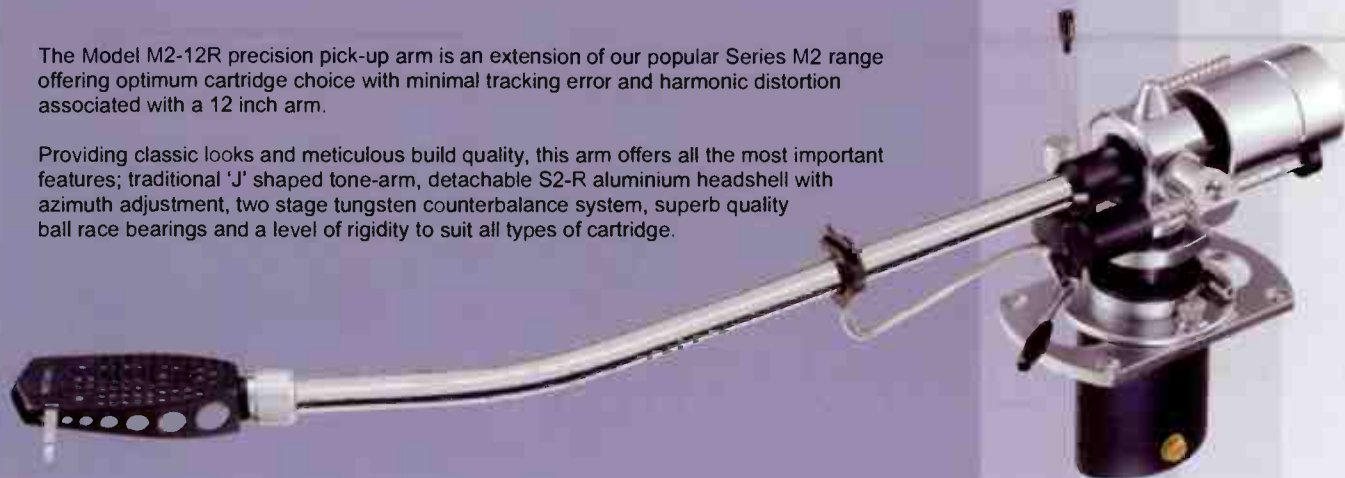
of depression and desolation so realistically. There was more detail to the woodwind sound, and because there are more micro-dynamics, you are swept along with the waves of sound more convincingly. There is more gloss to the sound as well as more underlying texture. However, this combination, the Weiss is £4,600, the Bel Canto CD2 is £2,700 plus



SERIES M2-12R

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

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



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Highly Made in Finishing

"...a highly capable deck that sits comfortably and against stiff competition - excellent value for money."

Acoustic Signature Storm Turntable
Awarded 5 stars - Hi-Fi World Review



ASTIntrew



CHISTO

"I found that on virtually all my CDs the spray made a difference."

Chisto Cleaning Products
Review by TNT Audio



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power supply LNS (£400) comes to £7700, as compared to the Cambridge Azur plus modifications (£700) plus the PDM3 (£2,649) comes to £3,400. At less than half the price, you would expect a considerable difference, so under the circumstances the PDM3 does remarkably well.

A fairer comparison was the Bel Canto CD2 as a standalone player with power supply which is the same ballpark. Listening to Solti's recording on Decca of Ravel's 'Tombeau de Couperin' grittily played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Deltec dug nicely into the string texture of this piece. The orchestra had a fine spaciality to it, and the Minuet really danced beautifully; it has a lovely swing with its Sicilian rhythm which comes across very well. Listening to the Bel Canto, the separation of the various instruments wasn't quite as good, although there was slightly more depth to the string sound and tighter bass pizzicato. Again however, the sense of timing of the Minuet wasn't as convincing, its dance is more reticent; there wasn't that much in it though.

With the DPA I was using a Chord digital cable for around £1,000; changing to DPA's own proprietary digital cable (£170) is good value for what it is, but doesn't yield quite the same stage depth as the Chord costing five times as much, or the same incision to the sound. So I would take the Bel Canto over the DPA with their own cable, and would reverse this with the Deltec and the Chord Indigo. I guess this shows the importance of a good digital cable in the grand scheme of things!

Listening to Martin Taylor's 'Years Apart', spirit of Django on Linn Records, it proved fascinating to listen with and without the Deltran connected. Without, the Deltec DAC sounds very good at its price but still unremarkable, the soundstage being closed in with some lack of definition to where the performers are in space, in absolute terms. With it connected, you're suddenly into a very different world where you can almost see the musicians in thin air; there's a crystalline clarity of sound, and the whole thing has a toe-tapping rhythmic drive. The saxophone had a raspingly real quality to it, and the guitar's timbre hit the spot; perhaps the leading edge of notes was on the softer, more gentle side,



lacking a touch of bite, but the overall effect is highly engaging and a delight to hear. Not bad for a turbo-charged budget CD player. Obviously then, prospective purchasers of the PDM3 are strongly advised to get their players Deltran'd!

CONCLUSION

Deltec's PDM3 DAC is an interesting and successful product, as befits their fine reputation in specialist high end digital. Via its Deltran sync lock, it has a gentle, almost analogue-like sound, which invites long listening sessions, and has a laid-back musicality to it which is very appealing.

The DAC isn't capable of doing high-res from a computer via its USB input, which may put some off, but this can be remedied by the simple

expedient of a Musical Fidelity V-link, enabling 96kHz 24bit USB reproduction of course – so no worries there.

The key point is its unusually smooth and gentle but compellingly musical nature, which is precisely what so many digital sources lack. It's highly recommended then, for those seeking an alternative to typical boom-tizz digital sound, especially with the highly worthwhile Deltran mod to the matching CD player.

REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Bel Canto CD2 CD player
 Weiss DAC202 digital converter
 VAC Auricle Musicblocs power amplifiers
 B&W 802D loudspeakers
 Townshend Seismic speaker cradles
 Chord Indigo Plus cable
 Coherent Systems 5D digital cable
 Chord Epic Twin speaker cables

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response shows a lift at high frequencies our analysis shows, measuring +0.4dB at 20kHz. This is quite unusual and may make the DPA PDM3 a bit brighter than usual in a just-perceptible manner.

Distortion levels were very low throughout most of the dynamic range with a CD 16bit signal, measuring 0.019% at -6dB through to 0.18% at -60dB, a very low value. Switching our digital generator to 24bit saw the tell-tale -60dB figure drop to 0.04%, very close to the best possible, so the DAC is inherently very linear. EIAJ Dynamic Range measured a high 100dB, partly because of this.

Output was a normal 2V and noise low at -100dB.

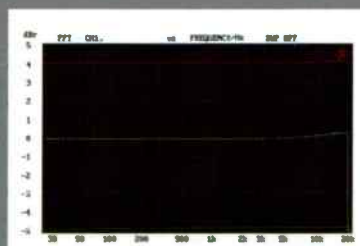
The PDM3 is a very linear DAC, up with the best in this area. The small lift in its frequency response suggests it may have a bright-ish sound balance. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)
 CD 2Hz - 21kHz

Distortion	CD
0dB	0.02
-6dB	0.01
-60dB	0.18
-80dB	4.6

Separation (1kHz)	119dB
Noise (IEC A)	-110dB
Dynamic range	100dB
Output	2V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
 Distinctively smooth and natural sounding new DAC with excellent Deltran sync lock functionality.

DPA-PDM3 £2,649
 Deltec Precision Audio Ltd.
 ☎ +44(0) 1793 238 085
 www.deltecprecisionaudio.com

FOR
 - smooth, delicate sound
 - clarity and detail
 - flies with Deltran sync lock
 - build and finish

AGAINST
 - unusual styling
 - no hi-res via USB

WORLD STANDARDS

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

TURNTABLES

REGA RPI 2010 £225
Pleasing sound, fine build and ease of set-up and use make this a great first 'real' hi-fi turntable.

REGA P2 2008 £300
Excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound.

REGA P3-24 2008 £405
Seminal affordable audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and really sings with optional £150 outboard power supply.

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579
Superb introduction to Michell turntables - on a budget. Top quality build and elegant design mean it's still the class of the mid-price field.

FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860
Innovative engineering gives a nimble, pacy and musical sound that's one of the best at the price.



MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,138
Design icon with superlative build and finish. Sound is beautifully smooth, effortless and exceptionally expensive. No longer peerless at the price, but still a brilliant platform.

MARANTZ TT-15S1 2005 £1,299
Cracking all in one deck/arm/cartridge combination, this must surely be the best sounding 'plug and play' package at this price point.

ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2011 £1,450
Although getting expensive, the latest Radius is a highly grown up package with a flowing yet engaging nature; a fine package.



AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000
New twin belt drive and power supply make this a more commanding performer, although there's a substantial price hike. Speed, dynamics and detail are hard to beat anywhere near the price.

INSPIRE ECLIPSE SEv2 12 2010 £2,349
Finely engineered, smooth and detailed sounding deck offering valuable twelve inch tonearm compatibility.

NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE HYPERSPACE 2010 £2,390
Deliciously spacious, lyrical and beguiling sounding turntable, but lacks ultimate grip.

MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500
The top Michell disc spinner remains a superbly capable all rounder with powerful, spacious sound that's delicate and beguiling.

DR FEICKERT WOODPECKER 2010 £3,445
Elegant deck with great low frequency solidity, coherent soundstaging and a precise midband.



LINN LP12SE 2010 £3,510
Surely hi-fi's most iconic turntable, the legendary Sondek goes from strength to strength. New Keel subchassis and Radical DC motor add precision and grip to one of the world's most musical disc spinners. Expensive, though.

ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE STORM 2011 £3,612
An excellent high end design with a smooth, solid, open and lyrical sound and razor sharp styling and build.

FLETCHER AUDIO OMEGA .5 2010 £3,699
Charming high end turntable that's a fitting testament to the late Tom Fletcher.

PALMER 3 2010 £3,750
Eccentric hand built high end turntable with a pleasingly smooth, sweet and lucid sound.



E.A.T. FORTE S EVO 12 2010 £4,750
Excellent premium price turntable with power, precision and passion aplenty, but relaxed and easy going by nature too. Great value package with the Pro-ject Evo 12" arm option.

ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,050
Huge turntable, both in terms of sheer mass and sonic dynamics. Fit up to three arms and enjoy, just don't damage your back moving it...

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556
Exquisitely engineered deck and SMEV tonearm combo that's an extremely accomplished performer with classical music.

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600
Stylish high end vinyl spinner with industrial strength build quality and a sound to match. Exceedingly neutral yet powerful sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £5,845
Unique high end direct drive turntable with amazing grip and focus, albeit not the most romantic of natures.



McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995
Big, expensive, controversially styled and glows more than some might consider necessary, but an astonishingly good performer.

EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500
Lavishly finished two box, two motor turntable with gorgeous Ikeda 407 tonearm bundled. Exceptionally stable and unfussy performer with a relaxed but highly enjoyable gait.

TONEARMS
REGA RB251 2009 £136
Capable way past its price point, the new 3-point mount version of the classic RB250 serves up a taut and detailed sound. A little lean for some tastes, but responds well to rewiring and counterweight modification.

MICHELL TECNOARM A 2003 £442
The late John Michell's clever reworking of the Rega theme, using blasting, drilling and rewiring! Surely the best overall performer under £500.

ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 3C 2010 £599
Excellent mid-price tonearm with a clean and open yet lyrical sound.



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

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

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



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

NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425
Charismatic unipivot is poor at frequency extremes but sublime in the midband; truly emotive and insightful.

HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595
Stylish and solid lump of arm with fabulous build quality, that turns in a dynamic and weighty performance.

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,620
Offers nine tenths of the SME V's magic at just over half price. Exquisitely built and finished, and a design classic. Faces stiff competition these days, but lovely nevertheless.

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



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

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

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

LINN EKOS 5E 2010 £3,700
Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Has a commanding musicality all of its own.

OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500
Few if any pivoted arms come close to this arm's combination of liquid musicality and forensic grip.

CARTRIDGES

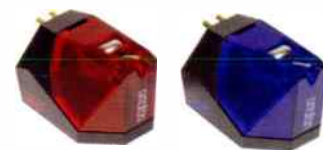
AUDIO TECHNICA AT-95E 1984 £25

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

AUDIO TECHNICA AT-F3/III 2010 £189

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

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



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

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

DENON DL103R 2006 £295
Awkward to get working properly with a poor mounting arrangement, yet it rewards with a musical performance that makes similar priced cartridges sound cold.

DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £295
Distant descendent of the classic Ultimo 10X, this has warmth and sweetness in spades, allied to a punchy bass. Beats G1042 comfortably.

ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350
Staggeringly good high-end MM that uses a stylus from the MC Jubilee and easily rivals similarly-priced MMs

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395
Deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go makes this a great value budget MC. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLIII 2010 £399

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

ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE 2005 £500

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

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



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

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

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

BENZ MICRO WOOD 5L 2010 £945
Highly finessed Swiss moving coil that plays music with riflebolt precision.



ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE 2009 £1,000
Musical, out of the box sound, allied to real finesse, makes this a great do-it-all high end moving coil.

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

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

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £2,250
Ortofon's new flagship MC is a sophisticated and alluring performer that takes the vinyl experience to a new level.

KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE 2007 £2,399
The new K Signature adds a hefty dose of insight and finesse to the already impressive Red and the results are fabulous.



DIGITAL SOURCES

MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC £170
Clear, concise, low distortion sound belies giveaway price. Supelative value for money.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 2010 £230
A flexible new DAC, this is an impressively rhythmic and detailed performer.

ARCAM rDAC 2010 £300
Cracking budget DAC sporting a fulsome and musical sound with gorgeous build and styling.

MUSICAL FIDELITY MI DAC 2010 £400
Surprisingly sophisticated upsampling DAC with oodles of detail and air, but bass isn't quite as powerful as it could be.

STELLO DA100 SIGNATURE £750
Superbly finessed sounding DAC at the price, with strong driving bass and plenty of air and space.



CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800
Well built CD player with a silky, yet detailed sound and a whole host of useful facilities. Excellent value for money.

NAIM CD5i 2008 £895
Naim's new italic 'i' variant improves even further on the original mid-price classic, offering super tight, grippy and musical sound.

ROKSAN KANDY K2 CD 2010 £900
A charmingly musical performer at the price, this is a surprisingly sophisticated CD player for the money.

BENCHMARK DAC-1S 2009 £930
Power, precision and poise - allied to real seat-of-the-pants musicality, this DAC justifies its premium price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY M3 CD 2011 £995
Excellent mid-price machine with slick slot loading and an open and inviting sound.

ELECTROCOMPANET PD-1 2011 £1,250
Quirky but highly capable digital convertor with an effective wireless radio option (£250) and balanced outputs.

SIMAUDIO MOON 300D 2010 £1,290
Lovely fluid sounding DAC with a deep, dark, velvety tonality.



CYRUS CDB SE 2008 £1,350
Bespoke Servo Evolution mech makes this the most musically engaging machine at the price, with super smooth tonality to boot. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

DENON DCD2010AE 2010 £1,700
Powerful, open sound allied to a rich tonality and satisfying subtlety make this an excellent mid-price buy.

NAIM DAC 2010 £1,995
Superb high end digital convertor with a probing, punchy and forensically detailed sound.

MERIDIAN G08.2 2011 £2,400
Everyman's modern high end CD player, the stylish, well made Meridian has an extremely enjoyable yet refined and accurate sound.

MARANTZ SA-KI PEARL CD 2010 £2,500
Finely honed affordable high end silver disc spinner, this has a musical lucidity that's unexpected at this price.



LEEMA ANTILLA IIS ECO 2011 £2,995
Stable and smooth yet superbly detailed and musically engaging, this is class of the £3,000 CD player field.

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000
Bespoke architecture gives a uniquely musical sound that's beguiling yet proffers dizzying incision and grip.

ELECTROCOMPANET EMC-1UP 2009 £3,450
Quirky yet extremely capable high end upsampling CD spinner, with a musical fluency that beguiles more than it impresses.



ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2 2007 £3,985
Styling not to everyone's taste but build quality is impeccable and the performance is stunningly musical.

ESOTERIC X-05 2010 £4,495
Superlative 'affordable high end' CD/SACD spinner with excellent build, massive detail and great poise.

WEISS DAC202 2010 £4,600
Brilliantly open and insightful sounding DAC with a range of useful features.

ELECTROCOMPANET EMP-1/S 2011 £4,650
Epic in scale, lavish in tone and exuberant in its musicality, this is a memorable SACD spinner. Quirky in operation and modest in finish, though.

NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950
A fine high end machine, but add an XPS2 and it becomes one of the most charismatically engaging 16bit machines we've ever heard. Plays music with such passion!

NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050
The most polished Naim CD to date; tremendously capable and musical, but lacks the Rottweiler quality of the cheaper CDX2-XPS2.

dCS DEBUSSY 2011 £7,500
Compact, stylish DAC bringing the gloriously smooth, svelte, spacious sound of dCS to a wider audience.

ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE I MK2/TUBE DAC 2 2007 £7,980
Superbly built high end CD transport and DAC combo that shows just what the format can be capable of. Very tangible, musical sound with wonderful dynamics and glistening harmonics. Only curious styling and clunky build detract from its brilliance!

DCS PAGANINI DAC £9,599
Digital rarely sounds better; dCS's bespoke Ring DAC makes for power, punch and insight on an epic scale. Add clock and upsampler for an even more profound experience.



NAIM CD555/555PS 2006 £14,000
Very probably the best CD player yet made - certainly the most expensive; a digital *tour de force*.

**NETWORK**

NAIM HDX 2009 £4,405
Interesting one-box network enabled hard disk music system gives superb sonics together with impressive ease of use.

LINN KLIMAX DS 2007 £9,600
Landmark network music player, offering brilliant sonics at up to 24/96 resolution from hard disk/NAS. Expensive, but you can hear why...

PHONO STAGES

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P 2009 £99
Excellent entry level design that raises the bar for budget phono stages. Crisp, smooth yet brightly lit sound on both MM and MC that's a vast improvement on most budget inboard designs.

GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V 2004 £370
Warm, open and musical nature makes this a great budget phono stage.

ICON AUDIO PS1.2 2007 £599
Excellent valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.



CHORD CHORDETTE DUAL 2010
£799

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

ASTIN TREW AT8000 2010 £880

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

A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD 2010 £995

Exceptionally musical and natural sounding all discrete transistor phono stage, with highly lucid, valve-like presentation.

AVID PULSUS 2010 £1,100

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

QUAD QC24P 2007 £1,200

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

ICON AUDIO PS3 2008 £1,500

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

SUTHERLAND 20/20 2010 £1,999

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

EMILLE ALLURE 2010 £2,495

Just as the name suggests, this is a lovely way to play LP with an exceptionally open and lucid sound.

**AVID PULSARE** 2010 £3,800

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

WHEST PS.30 RDT SE2011 £4,500

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

NAT AUDIO SIGNATURE 2011 £5,633

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

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

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

**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400

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

NAIM NAIT 5i 2007 £725

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

CAMBRIDGE 840A V2 2007 £750

Version 2 addresses version 1's weaknesses to turn in a mightily accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

SUGDEN MYSTRO 2010 £1,225

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

NAIM NAIT XS 2009 £1,250

With much of the sound of the Supernait at half the price, this is powerful, articulate and smooth beyond class expectations.

CREEK DESTINY 2 2010 £1,445

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

SUGDEN A21A S2 2008 £1,469

Crystalline clarity, dizzying speed and forensic detailing makes this seminal design the most musical at the price, but power limited so needs sensitive speakers.

**CYRUS 8XPd** 2010 £1,500

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

ANATEK A50R 2007 £1,600

Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

VINCENT SA-236MK 2010 £1,749

Big, powerful and expansive sounding hybrid transistor amplifier, with a lively, musical nature.

NAIM SUPERNAIT 2007 £2,475

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

AUDIO RESEARCH 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.

QUAD II CLASSIC INTEGRATED
2010 £4,500

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

SIM AUDIO**MOON 600i** 2010 £5,750

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

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

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

DARTZEEL**CTH-8550** 2010 £16,500

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

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

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY**X-CAN V8** 2008 £350

Open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive anything to very high levels makes this a great partner for most mid-to-high end headphones.

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

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

ICON AUDIO LA-4 2011 £800

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

NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200

Impressive two box preamp with superb resolution and an engaging sound.

**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

Excellent solid-state preamp with a meticulously detailed and propulsive sound, but a deep velvety tonality.

MELODY PURE BLACK 101D 2007 £3,295

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

MF AUDIO CLASSIC CII SILVER

2010 £4,500

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



MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU
2010 £5,995

Exceptionally open and expansive, yet musically expressive sounding high end preamplifier.

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO
2009 £7,900

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

POWER AMPLIFIERS
XTZ AP-100 2010 £520

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

QUAD 909 2001 £900

The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but superb value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2
2006 £1,750

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



DPA SA-1 2010 £2,850

Pacey, engaging and rhythmic almost to a fault, this solid-state power amplifier isn't the world's most powerful but is none the worse for it.

QUAD II-40 2005 £3,230

Modern tube monoblock power amplifiers with plenty of power, liquid and open mid-band and spacious, airy treble. Explicit, engaging sound, but not as euphonic as some.

ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO
2009 £4,450 (EACH)

The Norwegian power station is as cool as a glacier tonally, yet impresses with its sheer physicality and fleetness of foot. 600W per channel makes for a massive bang per buck.

ICON AUDIO MB845 MkII 2010
£5,500

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



QUAD II-80 2005 £6,000

Quad's best ever power amplifier, this is a dramatic performer with a silky but dark tonality, blistering dynamics, serious power and a compellingly musical sound. They don't come much better.

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50
2010 £7,000

Mighty, assured high end full Class A integrated proffering icy clarity allied to real musicality. Lacks the lucidity of the best tube amps but redeems with power and punch.

LOUDSPEAKERS

Q ACOUSTICS 2020 2010 £140

Great little standmounters with a friendly, fun yet surprisingly refined gait. Excellent value starter speakers.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I
2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

MISSION MX2 2011 £200

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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I v2
2010 £225

Civilised sounding speaker with fast and tuneful bass.

B&W 686 2007 £279

B&W's new baby standmounters offer a sophisticated and mature performance that belies both their dimensions and price tag.

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3
2010 £290

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

MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 2010 £300

Classy sounding standmounter at a still affordable price.

KEF IQ30 2009 £330

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



USHER S-520 2006 £350

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

XTZ 99.25 2010 £640

Disarmingly open and refined at the price, these standmounters bring unexpected civility, refinement and insight to the price point. Exceptional value for money.



ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC
2006 £845

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

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950

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

MY AUDIO DESIGN MY1920 2011 £1350

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

ELAC BS243 2010 £1,000

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

RRR FS100 2007 £1,055

Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.



ONE THING AUDIO ESL57
2007 £1,450

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

GURU QM-10P 2007 £1,595

Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but well capable at playing a tune and pulling you in to the music.

USHER BE-718 2007 £1,600

Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE
2008 £1,600

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

SPENDOR S8E 2008 £1,895

Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.



ISOPHON GALILEO 2007 £2,100

Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

MONITOR AUDIO PL100 2008 £2,300

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

EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT8B 2010 £2,300

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

PMC OB11 2008 £2,950

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

MY AUDIO DESIGN**MYCLAPTON SE 2010 £3,299**

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

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

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

YAMAHA SOAVO I.1 2009 £3,000

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

**MOWGAN AUDIO MABON****2007 £3,995**

Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

B&O BEOLAB 9 2007 £5,000

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

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

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

ECLIPSE**TD712z/2 2011 2011 £5,100**

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

ARS AURES MI 2006 £5,995

Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

**QUAD ESL-2905 2006 £5,995**

The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

SPENDOR ST 2010 £5,995

This classy sounding, superbly presented big floorstander will appeal to those seeking high end sonics with subtle looks.

REVOLVER CYGNIS 2006 £5,999

Revolver pull out all the stops and show what they can do with this magnificent flagship loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

VIVID VI.5 2010 £6,000

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

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

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

USHER BE-10 2009 £10,500

Clever high end moving coil design with immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...

B&W 801D 2006 £10,500

In many respects, the ultimate studio monitor; dazzling clarity and speed with commanding scale and dynamics.

**ISOPHON****CASSIANO 2007 £12,900**

Drive units featuring exotic materials allied to superlative build quality result in an immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy load to drive, however.

REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD**2010 £15,000**

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

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

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

ACCESSORIES**WADIA I701 2010 £349**

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

ISOTEK AQUARIUS 2010 £795

Highly accomplished premium priced mains conditioner that delivers the sonic goods, unlike so many others.

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM**2003 £800**

Classy ribbon supertweeter with flexible level settings and cool styling - you'll be amazed at the difference it makes, especially with Quad electrostatics.

HEADPHONES**JAYS V-JAYS 2010 £49**

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

**SENNHEISER MX-550 2005 £19**

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

Cracking pair of lightweight open back cans ideal for personals, but good enough for real hi-fi use. Superb build allied to a smooth and engaging performance make them the spiritual successor to the HD400s.

**GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70**

Excellent build and fine sound makes these budget cans superlative value for money.

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199

The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250

A super all round reference design with crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000

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

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

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



Our Four Cornerstones are: Quality – Performance – Value – Service You won't be disappointed!

NEW MB845 I mono blocks

Fabulous huge 845 triode mono block amplifiers. NEW improved version of the original. Now with "Low Distortion Tertiary" transformers 90+90w. **5 Globes Hi Fi world**
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all designed by David Shaw

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Outstanding Value!
Compact, Efficient & Beautiful The Queen II is a compact efficient 3 way design, less conspicuous than a full range panel needing only 40 Watts to fill the average room with sublime sounds. Stunningly transparent. Excellent deep bass from hybrid ABR
Only 121Hx28Wx31D (cm)
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NEW ST20pp 15+15W Amp

15+15 watts of Pure Valve Heaven. Mullard's amazing EL84 makes this amplifier perform way beyond its modest size. Now with headphone socket. Not sure about valves? Try this with our money back guarantee.

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NEW Stereo 60 MK III 85+85w

Total redesign with new KT120s New Tertiary transformers New power supply, very low distortion. Huge power in 1 box! "High power, good timing" Hi Fi Choice RECOMMENDED



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Several unique features 3 power supplies. Valve rectifier, valve & choke regulated. Hard wired analogue output stage. With a top quality 192kHz 24bit player. Upgradeable.

From £1199.95 (upgradeable)
"Great for any mood or style of music"
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LA4 MK II Line Preamp

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NEW 150w Mono Blocks

150+150w of pure UL valve power (or 100 + 100w of pure triode), Using 4 KT90, KT88 or KT120. Based on our award winning MB90s. Unlike transistors, these giants retain the Icon warmth and texture at volumes, giving massive headroom and very low distortion. Various upgrades available. Now available with the new KT120!

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Our Best Ever Mid Range Amplifier!

Stereo 40 MK III our best ever value amplifier. It has everything! 40+40 watts, Triode mode, Valve rectifier. Remote control. Tape loop. Standby switch. KT66/KT88 EL34/6550 compatible. Two rave reviews in HFW and HFN.

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P Rigby Hi Fi World
Awarded 5 Globes



NEW PS 2 All Valve Phono Stage

Pure valve to get the best from vinyl. All triode. No feedback. Passive RIAA. High output. "One box" design. Rediscover your vinyl collection! From only £449.95 complete
"Injects excitement and vigour into vinyl performance, yet smooth with it. An excellent budget phono stage"
5 Globes Hi Fi World August 2011



NEW MB805 SE Mono blocks

45+45 Watts of Single Ended Heaven
From £4995.95 (upgradable)



Low Distortion Tertiary Transformers

NEW Stereo 25 MK II

NEW high quality headphone socket for private listening. NEW 6SN7/6SL7 valves for better definition. Upgraded output transformers for better bandwidth. 35+35w. Alps pot, 4/8 Ω outputs, Supplied transparent cover
FREE EL34 UPGRADE WORTH £100 (limited offer)



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All triode. Passive RIAA. Custom British MC TX option. Very quiet, high output. With the best possible Power supply. Valve rectified & regulated for definition and smoothness, 14kg.
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INTERCONNECTS

TELLURIUM Q

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



TECHLINK WIRES

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

WIREWORLD

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

CHORD COMPANY

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



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

VDH ULTIMATE

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



TCI CONSTRICTOR

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

MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE

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

TUNERS

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



CAMBRIDGE

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

ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550

Excellent hybrid FM/DAB+ tuner with a smooth, engaging sound. Factor in its fine build and it's a super value package.

CREEK CLASSIC

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

MICROMEGA FM-10 2010 £750

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

MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800

Sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-90T

2010 £1,295
Exceptionally able, but commensurately priced, audiophile tuner that cannot fail to charm.

MAGNUM DYNALAB

MD-100T 2006 £1,895
One of the best ways to hear FM that we know; superbly open and musical sound in a quirky but characterful package.



SYSTEMS

YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200

One heck of a lot of quality performance on DAB, CD and FM for £200! Optional matching £170 NX-E300 loudspeakers aren't too shabby either.

TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329

Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!



NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429

Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650

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

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650

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



PEACHTREE AUDIO

IDECCO £1,000

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

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249

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

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250

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

NAIM UNITIQUE 2010 £1,350

Great little half width one-box system with truly impressive sound allied to a wealth of source options.



MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500

Fantastically built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/AM unit, designed in conjunction with Ferrari. Ignore nay-sayers who sneer that it isn't a 'proper' hi-fi product; most see sense when they listen to it...



AURA NOTE MUSIC CENTRE

2007 £1,500
Lovely shiny CD/tuner/amplifier with fine sound quality and dynamic abilities.

NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995

Uniquely versatile one box music system with excellent ergonomics and sonics to match. A landmark product for Naim.

LINN CLASSIK

MOVIE 2007 £2,250
Superbly built all-in-one that offers excellent sound across all formats and is surprisingly easy to use.



MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1

2010 £6,990
Thanks to its crisp styling and bright, colourful touchscreen, plus excellent search facilities this is one hard disk music system with a difference. Best partnered to Meridian active loudspeakers.

MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000

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





Guangzhou Audio Fair at the White Swan hotel; outside it was busy, hot and humid!

Show Time

Noel Keywood visits China's popular Guangzhou AV Fair 2011...



Dussun R20 monoblock power amplifier, delivering 200W.

In Britain, hi-fi show organisers hope people turn up; in China they hope they don't – that's the difference! When 12 million people live in a city – China's third largest – if they all turn up at once it's hard to fit them into the hotel. Well, you get my drift. A Chinese hi-fi show is attended by lots of people, to the point where I often found it difficult to get a picture of a product, there were so many folks in front, wandering around, peering underneath and generally coming betwixt camera and item. I was told the Guangzhou AV Fair in China was a busy show worth attending, and now I know just what that means...

Is a Chinese hi-fi show any different to a Western one? In many ways, no. This one reminded me of the UK's Bristol Show, only on a larger scale. Bearing in mind the

White Swan hotel at which this show is held has a miniature lake in its centre, fed by a waterfall topped by a small Chinese temple, there is obviously a difference of scale. But then, everything in China is large. The Pearl river outside the hotel is



Ornate Chinese inlaid furniture and embroidered wall hangings. Lovely but expensive, up to £8,000 for the bigger items.



A nice traditional touch: girls in Cheongsams line up to greet visitors at opening time on the first day. ..



Timothy Jung, Hong Kong born founder of My Audio Design, flies the Union flag in China, which signifies quality.



A massive Fountek Grandmaster 598 amplifier using five parallel push-pull pairs of KT88s per channel (www.fountek.net), good for 200W.

an inland waterway, 100 miles from the sea, yet still over one quarter of a mile wide. At the show, spread over five floors, and with additional suites, there were hundreds of exhibitors, but the rooms and corridors were little different in size to those at Bristol's Marriott hotel. They were far busier, and as the temperature outside was a hot 35 degrees Celsius, it wasn't so cool inside.

But (hallelujah!) China worships at the altar of the valve ('tube' over there) and valve amps were everywhere. This was a notable difference to UK shows, although the gap is narrowing as Brits get the message. A valve amplifier is an altogether more visually engaging and expressive device than any transistor amp can hope to be, and this seems to go down well in China. Whilst I saw many transistor muscle amps lurking on floors, adorned by big power meters waving their needles to gain attention, nothing could match the splendour of China's valve amplifiers, some of which are works of art. Entire rooms were dedicated

to them. Prices were not so different to the UK; China isn't cheap. But it is consistent. Valve amps sell in the £1,000-£3,000 range, with few trying to ask more. Forget Communism and poverty, China's cities are thriving Meccas of wealth and consumption, with Ferrari's and Range Rovers in the car parks. And the cities are vast. I'm told, however, that in contrast the countryside is desperately poor, and that a permit is needed to live in a city.

China has a large number of manufacturers not known in the West, like Lai Dengni and Line Magnetic (both pictured here), many a little known like Fountek and Dussun, and a few better known



KEF were demonstrating their new Blade loudspeaker to a capacity audience.

like Ming Da and Beijing-based QAT. The show occupied five floors of the hotel, and with 40 rooms per floor occupied, no fewer than 200 brands were exhibiting. Larger manufacturers like KEF, owned by Hong Kong based Gold Peak, Hi-Vi (drive units) and International Audio Group (IAG)



A Lai Dengni amplifier TW-02A with top cap equipped 807 output tubes giving a quoted power of 26W (www.laidengni.com).

This is a Line Magnetic LM-219 amplifier (31,800 RMB). It was on open display in the foyer – and the young lady is a guard with fight training, we were told!



Western brands were everywhere, because everyone wants to get into the Chinese market. Consequently, there were plenty of visiting Western exhibitors, like XTZ we spoke to, and China is a friendly and welcoming place to be. Guangzhou (also known as Canton) may be largely unknown outside China, but not only is it vast, double the population of London,



A Red Woman Army LP, spotted in an annexe selling music. It's a high quality Direct Metal Master pressing.

it is just a two hour train journey from Hong Kong, making it easy to reach. The biggest presence at the show was that of IAG, and here I had to get my head around a curious reality: Wharfedale is China's largest distributor of audio!

Yes - that old British stalwart of a brand name now has an entirely new and even bigger life in China. Regular readers will know loudspeaker designer Peter Comeau for his design articles in *Hi-Fi World* and the products of World Designs. Made an offer he could not refuse, Peter is now head of acoustic design at IAG (Shenzhen) and responsible for designing Wharfedale loudspeakers (amongst others). So I found myself at a huge distributor gathering where Peter had to explain the technologies being used in Wharfedale

loudspeakers to Wharfedale dealers throughout China, of which there are hundreds!

That's the story behind our picture of Peter on stage as a senior figure at IAG, thanking distributors for their time, interest and efforts. Behind him you can see SWT, short for Sino Wharfedale Trading, set up by IAG to handle distribution through the vast country that is China. The IAG room made much of Wharfedale history, with large black-and-white pictures of founder Gilbert Briggs, his books, factory, products, etc., including a Wharfedale advert for their well known E Series with the slogan "Blow up your amplifier with an E Series"!

I mention all this to illustrate that China isn't quite what is



Wharfedale history in the IAG room, with picture of founder Gilbert Briggs.



Peter Comeau, Chief Acoustics Engineer at IAG Group (centre, wearing a tie) congratulating Chinese distributors at a SWT (www.swt5s.com) conference. SWT is short for Sino Wharfedale Trading and is very big in China.



A miniature Quinpu horn loudspeaker (www.chpo.cn). The Guangzhou based company produce miniature hi-fi products.



The compact and smart Ming Da MC34-A valve amplifier (www.mei-xing.com).

turers of Kingsound electrostatic loudspeakers, were there, Hi-Vi make advanced drive units and many of the valve amplifier manufacturers boast of winding their own transformers in order to maximise performance (not always so successfully our measurements suggest). LPs were on sale and are bought in quantity from Western markets; Chinese LPs



Giant Hi-Vi loudspeakers (www.swanspeaker.com).

are pressed in Germany. There were few turntables on display and where they were being used, such as the Linn Sondek in the Raphaelite room (see the picture) the interest was enormous; I struggled to get pictures. CD players and servers, like those from QAT, are the most popular sources it would seem. Radio tuners were curiously absent.

Whilst Guangzhou might seem a long way from the UK it many ways it was very close. The hotel setting was familiar enough, the products not unfamiliar. Happily, not everyone turned up at once, but it was packed for all three days and I was a happy participant in throng of eager audiophiles!



A Raphaelite 211 SE amplifier (www.raphaelite.com.cn) and, in the background, a Linn Sondek that was in use for demo purposes.



The White Swan hotel has a waterfall feeding a mini-lake at its centre, full of Koi carp. A bridge across the pond was popular with children.

commonly imagined in the West. Nor is it one shred like that other engine of the East, Japan. The wealth of China's huge cities in the Pearl River delta is historically based on trade with the outside world and it reflects in the Chinese outlook, of which SWT is an intriguing example.

I did not see any radical new Chinese products or technologies. However, Kings Audio Ltd, manufac-



A monster triode on display alongside 845s and 211s in the Foshan City Nanhai Guiguang tube factory room (www.ggtube.net).



The hotel's terrace overlooked the Pearl river, at this point 500m wide.



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V Pack, now including:
Ortofon Vivo Blue cartridge
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Pro-ject Xperience turntable
Price tag - £1,000



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AUDIO PRO WF100 £150

With products like the Logitech Squeezebox Touch taking networked music to the masses, you could say we're enjoying a new golden age of wireless. This time though, of course, it's not about vast transmitters beaming radio waves hundreds of miles, but small scale, local home transmissions via Wi-Fi routers. With all the hype around this, it's easy to forget that actually there are other wireless possibilities, and it's not a case of Wi-Fi or the highway!

The Audio Pro WF100 is a package of two wireless 'dongles', one being the TX100 transmitter and the other the RX100 receiver. The former plugs by USB into your PC or Mac, and pipes out your music digitally, whereby it's transmitted

by a dedicated, protected protocol which is in the 2.4 GHz-band "for best possible sound quality", say Audio Pro. With a bandwidth of 1.6Mb per channel, the transmission is said to be "in full CD quality", and is compatible with lossless compacted file formats like FLAC and Apple Lossless. There's a built-in 'sniffer' that looks for any other wireless channels which may cause interference, whereupon the system hops onto a different channel to avoid it – all done invisibly and behind the scenes, of course. This means the system can coexist with other wireless systems in the house. The music is transmitted in real time, with a 20ms buffer.

The RX100 receiver plugs into the mains and has a USB output,

or analogue line outs, and uses a "specialised Burr-Brown DAC" which runs at up to 48kHz sampling rates. The range of the system is fifty metres via the internal antennas. No installation files are required which means setup is a quick process, and there's no cumbersome pairing. There's a 'housecode' switch which lets you select between one of three different API00-equipped wireless sound sources, and there's no limit to the number of receivers, so you can achieve true multiroom if desired, although extra transmitters or receivers cost £85 apiece.

The system worked very well within the confines of my house, giving a strong sound that – whilst not the equal of a high end Wi-Fi streaming solution – was more than adequate for casual music and internet radio listening. Via the RX100 going into my reference system, there was a good deal of detail, a nice smoothness and things sounded pleasingly musical in the way that a good entry-level CD player of yesteryear would. It worked in a glitch-free way, with no nasty noises or network drop outs. All in all, a handy and capable alternative to those not wishing to commit to Wi-Fi music streaming, for whatever reason! **DP**

[Contact: www.sav-distribution.co.uk, 0843 289 7195]

soundbites

PURE ONE MINI £50

If Digital Radios had been this good – and this cheap – ten years ago, then DAB would surely have made a greater impression on the British listening public. In short, you get a DAB/DAB+ and FM-capable small table radio, available in black or white, for under fifty quid. There's an optional ChargePAK for £28 which offers easy rechargeable battery operation, and it has a 3.5mm input to let it play out your iPod or Walkman. Sixteen presets, a headphone output and a USB socket for future updates complete the picture. As radios of this type go it has relatively low power consumption (although analogue portables are still much better) and

it sports an excellent, but small, backlit display. Sound is decent and the radio is surprisingly sensitive (by the rather modest standards of DAB); it certainly seems superior to designs of a few years back. Overall then, this is a very agreeable and unassuming little package that's genuinely affordable in a way DAB radios haven't been until now. If you need Digital Radio, then try this. **DP**

[Contact: www.pure.com, 0845 1489001]





Noel Keywood straps himself in to his listening chair to audition the mighty Hart Audio D&W Sonix loudspeakers!

Big Generator

If the number of bass units in a loudspeaker were a guide to quality, then Hart's new D&W Sonix would walk away with all prizes. It boasts eighteen a side, or thirty six in all! The rear panel of each module carries no fewer than nine; it is smothered in them. They are small 4in drivers all working in parallel. The idea is to get a lot of well controlled cone area, plus a lot of motor to push them. In effect the rear of each module is one

big bass unit, making four big bass units in all. And if you are wondering whether these Harts produce bass, the answer is a big yes!

The one big 12in driver you do see is a Tannoy Dual Concentric, its voice coils rewound by Hart. For those not acquainted with big Tannoys, what you have is a midrange horn sitting at the centre of a large bass unit. This close physical arrangement eliminates phase errors at crossover, giving smooth off-axis

coverage. It makes for a stable stereo image that sounds more focused than usual. Tannoys are known for this property, as well as clean bass and massive dynamics from their big twelve inch cones. Put this little lot together as an idea and you have a loudspeaker that will sound focused across its stereo sound stage, as well as very punchy and extended in its bass. It may seem a little left-field compared to the herd and it is certainly different, but loudspeakers

are an art form as well as a science and for anyone who dreams of having their room moved physically, in this case by a loudspeaker that isn't so large, here is an unusual but interesting solution.

The bottom module is a passive bass bin housing nine rearward firing drivers. In earlier models Hart made the bins movable so they could fire inward or outward, as well as backward. With the D&W Sonix however, styling prompts the bins to be aligned with the bass units all firing rearward. The heavy bass/midrange module sits on top and is connected with sturdy jumper leads. Connection to the amplifier is through chunky screw terminals that accept 4mm plugs, as well as spades and bare wires.

This loudspeaker is entirely passive, unlike earlier models, so a mains connection is not needed. I will note straight away though that it draws amplifier current and needs a reasonably sturdy amplifier, although it does not need a powerful amplifier. Producing massive volume from a few Watts it is ideal for valve amplifiers with a 4 Ohm tap, or any good modern transistor amplifier, all of which can these days cope with 4 Ohm loudspeakers.

Each module is 43cm wide, 45cm deep and 89cm high overall. Hart now use a lustrous Macassar wood veneer with a lacquered deep gloss finish that looks classy, but there is no grille to cover the big Tannoy driver.

SOUND QUALITY

Spinning Adele's latest album '21' and 'Rolling in the Deep' had all thirty six bass units in a state of frenzy as they pounded out the beat, and it was interesting to hear a peculiarly non-resonant quality to the bass: it sounded powerful, ran deep but was very even in its spectral spread. There was no 'boing' in the sound, no bounce nor spring, but there was firmness and power. Despite their solid bass power the Duo Sonix were not bass-heavy; the balance was excellent in our 28ft square listening room, which is well damped and not obviously modal in spite of its squareness (because a large air volume is well damped). They may well over excite smaller rooms, but as there is so much cone area, coupling into the room load will always be good and bass quality likely good too. The '21' CD lacks high treble and in conjunction with the loudspeaker's own roll off the sound balance was obviously warm. Spinning a succession of better balanced CDs than '21' showed the treble roll off

to be obvious most of the time and a bit more high treble would not go amiss to avoid a pervasive sense of warmth. The converse of this is that



the D&W Sonix is very easy on the ear, mellow in fact. Rising impedance at high frequencies correlates with falling output, as is common, suggesting more treble is available.

The midband was projective as it usually is from a Tannoy midrange horn, violins of the London Philharmonic sounding clear and well differentiated from each other and the rest of the orchestra. Nigel Kennedy's playing was well lit and explicit, although the absence of upper harmonics lessened airiness in the sound. David Hart told me he rolled down treble to soften the characteristic hard character of Tannoy's horn.

With thunderous rock of the Lady GaGa variety, the D&W Sonix drove the room in startling fashion, bass synth in 'Monster' laying a carpet of subsonics into the room that felt threatening. That the cabinets are home to so many drive units does make their existence a trifle obvious in the form of cabinet warmth, and a hint of tubbiness in the sound. Skunk Anansie's 'Just Because You Feel Good' had bass guitar sounding full bodied and powerful, drums had a visceral punch and Skin sang with conviction from centre stage, projected out at me in typical Tannoy

fashion so I was aware of every little vocal inflexion. These are big hearted loudspeakers; they send out a massive performance, one with heart and soul.

The soundstage stretched linearly between the loudspeakers, images on it outlined with dependable precision, even when moving around the room. There may have been more air and space had higher frequencies bounced from our walls and ceiling, but off axis treble falls more heavily than our on-axis graphs show. As it was, the stage was dense and intense. The speakers can be spaced quite wide apart however, without a 'hole in the centre' appearing.

CONCLUSION

The Hart Audio D&W Sonix are hardly mainstream. But when manufacturers around the world turn out loudspeakers to a widely accepted pattern that draws complaint about lack of innovation, we should take them for what they are, an interesting and diverting alternative. Effectively a Tannoy Dual Concentric in a reasonably sized cabinet with massively enhanced bass, they come out of the corner with a head start. More upper treble would not go amiss to my ear, but this apart they are focused, massively dynamic and a fun listen, all from a few Watts. There really isn't much like them!

VERDICT ●●●●
Massively powerful and startlingly dynamic loudspeaker with great bass and an easy demeanour.

HART D&W SONIX £9,500
HART AUDIO
☎ +44 (0)1983 612 924
WWW.HARTAUDIO.COM

FOR
- formidable bass
- tonal warmth
- strong dynamics
- high sensitivity

AGAINST
- need high current amp
- subdued treble

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our frequency response shows the Hart has extended bass and is reasonably smooth across the lower midrange, with a gentle hump in the response peaking at 800Hz – an unusual effect that gave vocals some prominence, pushing them forward a little on the soundstage. The dip around 2kHz will soften detailing but also make for easier listening, whilst the roll off above 6kHz will ensure there's no sting in the treble. However, the degree of roll off is sufficient to be audible also as a slight warmth or even dullness to upper treble. The roll off will not pass unnoticed and it gets steeper off-axis so the speakers must be pointed at the listener.

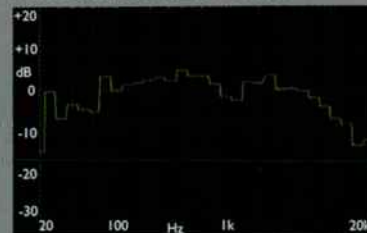
Helped by massive low bass output, right down to subsonic regions, and a very low measured overall impedance of 3.7 Ohms (it is a 4 Ohm loudspeaker) that results in high current (and power) draw, way higher than other loudspeakers, the D&W Sonix produced a massive 94dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) so it will be much louder than any other loudspeaker at a specific volume control position. This loudspeaker only needs a few Watts to go loud and is a perfect candidate for low power valve amps with a 4 Ohm tap.

The decay spectrum was clean

above 800Hz but there were some hot spots below this frequency that suggest a bit of cabinet colour may be apparent.

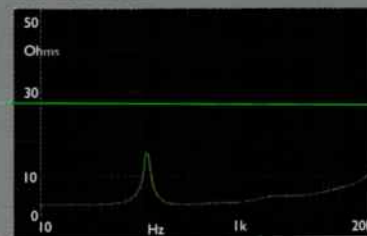
The D&W Sonix will certainly have its own sound; this is a very characterful loudspeaker. However, it will be smooth and full bodied, as well as dynamic and strong at low frequencies. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



WORLD CLASSICS

Here is our list of the great and good from audio's glorious past, products that have earned their place in hi-fi history. You'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price.

We do not sell these products. It is for your information only.

DIGITAL

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CDI 1986 £1500
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD4SE 1998 £200
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

LINN KARIK III 1995 £1775
The final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally dry.

MARANTZ CD73 1983 £700
A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 14x4 DAC -super musical



MARANTZ SA-1 2000 £5,000
The greatest argument for SACD. This sublime Ken Ishiwata design is utterly musically convincing with both CD and SACD, beating most audiophile CD spinners hands down.



MERIDIAN 207 1988 £995
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA 2002 £4000
When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSD design. CD sound is up in the £1000 class, too! Future classic.

MERIDIAN MCD 1984 £600
The first British 'audiophile' machine was a sweeter, more detailed Philips CD100. 14x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.



NAIM CDS 1990 £ N/A
Classic Philips 16x4 chipset with serious attention to power supplies equals grin-inducing sonics.



SONY CDP-101 1982 £800
The first Japanese CD spinner was powerful and involving. Brilliant transport more than compensated for 16x2 DAC, and you even got remote control!

SONY CDP-R1/DAS-R1 1987 £3,000
Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.



SONY CDP-701ES 1984 £890
Sony's first ever bespoke high end audiophile machine used a 16x2 DAC to provide a clinically incisive sound; supreme build quality allied to the pure unadulterated luxury of a paperback-sized remote control.

TECHNICS SL-PI200 1987 £800
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

YAMAHA CD-X1 1983 £340
Nicely built 16x2 machine with a very sharp and detailed sound; sometimes too much so. Excellent ergonomics, unlike almost every other rival of the time.

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

TEAC VRDS-T1 1994 £600
Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.



ESOTERIC P0 1997 £8,000
The best CD drive bar none; TEAC's Tokyo boys pushed the boat out in style. Brilliantly incisive, ridiculously over engineered.

KENWOOD 9010 1986 £600
The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully done and responds well to re-clocking even today.

DACS

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 1995 £99
Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.



DCS ELGAR 1997 £8500
Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.



DPA LITTLE BIT 3 1996 £299
Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.



PINK TRIANGLE DACAPO 1993 £ N/A
Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!



QED DIGIT 1991 £90
Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RDI 15 1972 £94

Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300

Bonkers 1970s direct drive that uses an infra red beam to allow track selection and programming. More of a visual and operational delight than a sonic stunner.

PIONEER PL12D 1973 £36

The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this brought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600

Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

DUAL CS505 1982 £75

Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound.

GOLDRING LENCO GL75 1970 £15.65

Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TD124 rivals.

LINN AXIS 1987 £253

Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86

For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price..



MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £ N/A

Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.



MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599

Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79

Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Acos-derived S-shaped tonearm. 1983 saw the arrival of the RB300, which added detail at the expense of warmth. Superb budget buy.

GARRARD 301/401 1953 £19

Heavy metal - tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down. In many respects, better than the seventies 'superdecks' that succeeded it.



ROKSAN XERXES 1984 £550

Supposedly the first to 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

SONY PS-B80 1978 £800

First outing for Sony's impressive 'Biotracer' electronic tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

THORENS TD124 1959 £ N/A

The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck', this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass.



TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 £ N/A

The product of academic research by the Cranfield Institute, this novel machine has an extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

TRIO LO-7D 1978 £600

The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made, Trio/Kenwood threw their 'engineering best practice' book at this one with startling results. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

TONEARMS

ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46

The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120 1978 £75

Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

ALPHASON HR100S 1981 £150

First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.



SME 3009 1959 £18

Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

GRACE G707 1974 £58

This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound. Imported by Linn, fitted to early LP12s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

REGA RB300 1983 £88

Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.



SME SERIES III 1979 £113

Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

HADCOCK GH228 1976 £46

Evergreen unipivot with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253

Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

NAIM ARO 1986 £875

Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.



TECHNICS EPA-501 1979 £ N/A
Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS

DELTEC 1987 £1900
Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

ROGERS A75 1978 £220
The prototypical Audiolab 8000a – lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 £625
Seminal mid-eighties Exposure pre-power, offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness and sweetness. Still, it's by no means 'sweet' by today's standards, being lean, punchy, musical. It's also possessed of that quintessentially eighties look – frumpy black steel boxes with rough silk screened logos!



SUGDEN C51/P51 1976 £130
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300
Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

A&R A60 1977 £115
Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.



CREEK CAS4040 1983 £150
More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 £495
Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.



MCINTOSH MA6800 1995 £3735
Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

SUGDEN A21 1969 £ N/A
Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 £299
Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.



MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 1985 £350
Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.



NAIM NAIT 1984 £350
Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

NAD 3020 1979 £69
Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.



MYST TMA3 1983 £300
Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

ROGERS CADET III 1965 £34
Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves



ROTEL RA-820BX 1983 £139
Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

CHAPMAN 305 1960 £40
Smooth pre/power combo with a sweet and open sound. Not quite up to Leak/Quad standards but considerably cheaper second-hand.

PREAMPLIFIERS

AUDIOLAB 8000C 1991 £499
Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.

CROFT MICRO 1986 £150
Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-8 1982 £1,400
Beautifully designed and built high end tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

CONRAD JOHNSON MOTIV MC-8 1986 £2,500
Minimalist FET-based preamplifier from the Yank valve specialists is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry, light balance in the mould of Sugden high end stuff. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £ N/A
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fit!

LINN LK-1 1986 £499
A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not half bad for under £100.

LECSON AC-1 1973 £ N/A
Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.



QUAD 22 1958 £25
The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

QUAD 33 1968 £43
Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

NAIM NAC32.5 1978 £ N/A
The Salisbury company came of age with this, their classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

POWER AMPLIFIERS HH ELECTRONICS TPA-500 AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £31
Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.



LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £N/A
Leak's biggest valve power amp offers 35 Watts per channel and more low end welly than the smaller Stereo 20. Despite concerns over reliability their rarity means high prices are the order of the day.

LECSON API 1973 £ N/A
Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'tower of power' pretensions, but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

MARANTZ MODEL 9 1997 £8000
Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

MICHELL ALECTO 1997 £1989
Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this sounds delicious!

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 £28
Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigeur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR
200W of sweet smooth transistor stomp in a grooved tube! Under-rated oddity.



QUAD II 1952 £22
The all-time classic valve amplifier, with a deliciously fluid and lyrical voice. In other respects though, it sounds hopelessly dated. Low power and hard to partner properly



QUAD 405 1978 £115
The first of the current dumpers is a capable design with smooth, effortless power and a decently musical sound. 606 and 707 continue the theme with greater detail and incision.

QUAD 303 1968 £55
Bullet proof build, but woolly sound. Off the pace, but endearing nonetheless. Some pipe smoking slipper wearers swear by them!

KRELL KMA100 II 1987 £5,750
Ludicrous monoblock version of the giant KSA-100 is one of the seminal eighties transistor power amplifiers. Massive wallop allied to a very clean and open Class A sound makes this one of the best amplifiers of its type, ever.

RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE 1986 £977
At the time, very possibly the least cool amplifier on the planet – and we're not talking heat dissipation here. This reworking of Radford's original late sixties design was possessed of a wonderfully rich, old school valve sound with enough power (25W) and lots of subtlety.



PIONEER M-73 1988 £1,200
Monster stomp from this seminal Japanese power amplifier, complete with switchable Class A and Class B operation. Clean, open and assured sounding, albeit a tad behind the pace on high speed dance music. Rosewood side cheeks and black brushed aluminium completes the eighties-tastic experience.



PHONO STAGES
CREEK OBH-8 SE 1996 £180
Punchy, rhythmic character with oodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile classic. Partner with a Goldring G1042 for an unbeatable budget combination.



LINN LINNK 1984 £149
Naim-designed MC phono stage built to partner the original Naim NAIT - yes, really! Fine sound, although off the pace these days.

MICHELL ISO 1988 £ N/A
This Tom Evans-designed black box started the trend for high performance offboard phono stages. Charismatic, musical and punchy - if lacking in finesse.

TUNERS

MARANTZ ST-8 1978 £353
Marantz's finest radio moment. Warm, organic sound plus an oscilloscope for checking the signal strength and multipath.



CREEK CAS3140 1985 £199
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

NAD 4040 1979 £79
Tremendously smooth and natural sound allied to low prices and good availability make this budget analogue esoterica. Needs a good antenna to work properly, however.

NAIM NAT03 1993 £595
The warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners.

PIONEER TX-9500 1976 £295
Another of the serious classic solid-staters. Boasts the usual high end Jap package of fine sound, brilliant sensitivity and superb build.

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 £25
Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.



YAMAHA CT7000 1977 £444
Reputedly the best of the classic Jap analogues, this combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.

QUAD FM4 1983 £240
Supreme ergonomics and styling allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.



REVOX B760 1975 £520
More of a semi-pro machine than a domestic bit of kit, the Revox offers superlative measured performance although the sound isn't quite as staggering as the numbers. Fine nonetheless, and surely the most durable tuner here?

NAD 4140 1995 £199
Brilliant affordable digital tuner has a smooth, detailed musical sound plus sensible real-world facilities.

ROGERS T75 1977 £125
Superb mid-price British audiophile design, complete with understated black fascia. Fine sound in the true Rogers mould – smooth and sweet with fine dimensionality.

SANSUI TU-9900 1976 £300
A flagship Japanese tuner designed to steal sales from the likes of Accuphase and Revox, it boasts superlative RF performance and an extremely smooth and lucid sound, along with very fine build and finish.

SONY ST-5950 1977 £222
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, a format that came to nought. Still, it was Sony's most expensive tuner to date, and boasted a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.

SEQUERRA MODEL I 1973 £1300
Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.



TECHNICS ST-8080 1976 £180

National Panasonic's specialist hi-fi brand was a big hitter back then, and this is no exception. Superb FM stage makes for a very clean and smooth listen with lots of detail and depth.



ANALOGUE RECORDERS

YAMAHA TC-800GL 1977 £179

Early classic with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!



AIWA XD-009 1989 £600

Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 £800

The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



PIONEER CTF-950 1978 £400

Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.



REVOX A77 1968 £145

The first domestic open reel that the pros used at home. Superbly made, but sonically off the pace these days. B77 better, but couldn't match the Japanese.



SONY WM-D6C 1985 £290

Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.



SONY TC-377 1972 £N/A

A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards

DIGITAL RECORDERS

SONY MDS-JE555ES 2000 £900

The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480

For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100

Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 £500

Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.5; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 £599

Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

LOUDSPEAKERS

ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AR185 1978 £125

Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88

Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers AB1 subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!

LOWTHER PM6A 1957 £18 EACH

This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110

Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

TANNOY WESTMINSTER 1985 £4500

Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in tautness but can drive large rooms and image like few others.

JR 149 1977 £120

Infamous cylindrical speaker that was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEF T27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



SPENDOR BCI 1976 £240

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

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH

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



KEF R105 1977 £785

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

IMF TLS80 1976 £550

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

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800

Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 £375

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



MISSION 752 1995 £495

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

HEYBROOK HB1 1982 £130

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

CELESTION SL6 1984 £350

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

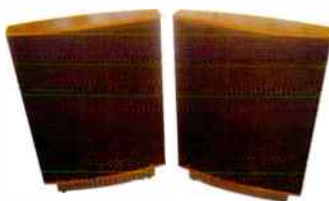
LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH

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



QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200

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



YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532

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



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499

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



CLASSIC CONTACTS

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

GT AUDIO

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

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL

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

CARTRIDGE MAN

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

QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS

(Camps) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).
Tel: 0845 4580011
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

Dr MARTIN BASTIN

(Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc.
Tel: 01584 823446

ARKLESS ELECTRONICS

(Northumberland)
Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.
Tel: 01670 530674
Email: info@arklesselectronics.com
www.arklesselectronics.com

SOWTER TRANSFORMERS

(Brian Sowter, Ipswich)
Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services.
Tel: 01473 252794
www.sowter.co.uk

WEMBLEY LOUDSPEAKER

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Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing.
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Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk
www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

EXPERT STYLUS COMPANY

(Wyndham Hodgson, Surrey) Stylus replacement service for all types of cartridge. Including precise profiling for 78s. Tel: 01372 276604
Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

ONE THING

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

LORICRAFT AUDIO

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

LOCKWOOD AUDIO

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

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI

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

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING

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

REVOX

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

CLASSIQUE SOUNDS

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



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Hi-Fi World tests all products before they are reviewed. Many fail this first hurdle, rejected for a variety of faults. Pre-testing is crucial but only Hi-Fi World does it. For those products that pass, our measurements give our reviewers invaluable information about behaviour. Hi-Fi World is the only magazine, worldwide, sufficiently well equipped to be able to apply comprehensive tests in all product categories. Here's how we do it...

LOUDSPEAKERS

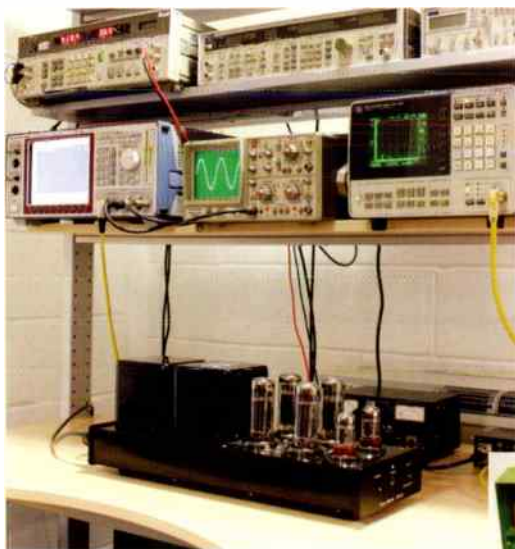
Loudspeakers are tested with the industry standard Clio measurement system from Audiomatica of Italy, giving results understood and accepted by manufacturers worldwide. Measuring microphones are a Bruel & Kjaer mic. capsule on a B&K SPL meter and an Audiomatica microphone. Our tests include decay plots and coloured contour maps, as well as unique distortion measurement that provides valuable insight into bass behaviour. See our website www.hi-fiworld/loudspeakers/tests for more detail.



PICKUP ARMS

Our unique arm vibration tests are made using a special miniature Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer attached to the arm's headshell, at the cartridge mounting position, as our picture shows. This reveals arm tube bending modes and high frequency vibrations in the headshell, that degrade sound.





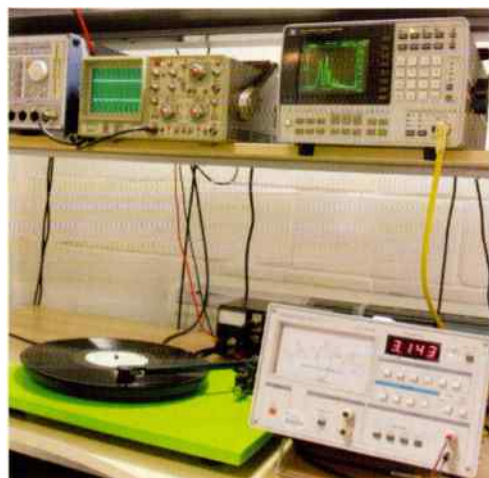
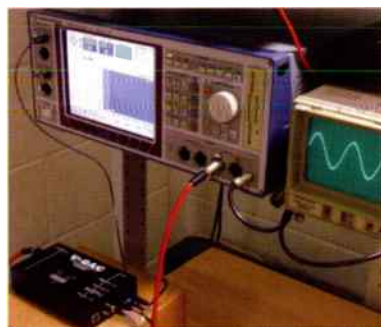
AMPLIFIERS

Amplifiers are connected to large resistive loads, 8 ohms and 4 ohms, and all parameters including power and distortion are measured by a Rohde & Schwarz UPL, the world's most advanced audio analyser. The loads are custom built to our specification, able to absorb 200 Watts without generating high frequency distortion due to magnetic hysteresis caused by iron content in the wire. This allows us to measure crossover distortion at 10kHz accurately and understand its influence upon sound.



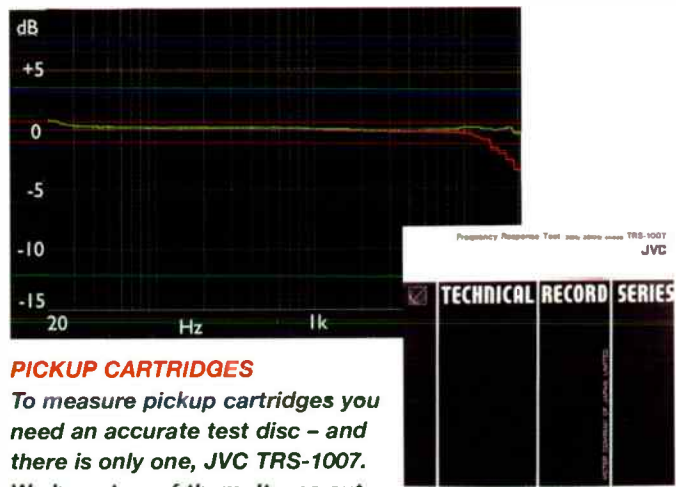
DIGITAL CONVERTORS

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



TURNTABLES

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



PICKUP CARTRIDGES

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



VHF/FM TUNERS

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



CD, DVD AND BLU-RAY PLAYERS

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

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Living By Numbers

Tim Jarman goes back to the nineties to remember the first DVD players, with the help of Sony's DVP-S725D...

It may seem strange to see a DVD player in 'Olde Worlde', but the format has been with us now since the late nineteen nineties and in that time the equipment has changed a lot. DVD seemed under threat from Blu-Ray a couple of years ago, but just as with CD and SACD it may well be that the earlier, more basic format ends up prevailing, such are the quirks of the audio-visual market...

Not so long ago the supermarkets and discount electrical retailers got themselves into a pricing war with the cost of a basic DVD player dropping to under £10. An effect of this race-to-the-bottom was that people soon forgot that DVD players had in very recent times been high-price luxury items, and

serious money at the time and because it doesn't record you still really needed to buy a video cassette recorder as well, a perfect situation for a manufacturer!

Sony first started talking about DVD players for the UK market in 1997 but did not show any actual models until 1998. The initial offerings were the DVP-S715 and the DVP-S315, the former being a full function machine and the latter being slightly more basic. Both used a complex optical assembly with two lasers and two sets of lenses arranged on a common carriage, something that was necessary so that the machine could play both CD and DVD discs. A similar pickup was used in 1999's DVP-S7700, the next top model which came finished in champagne

could read all types of discs.

At a glance, the DVP-S725D isn't greatly different from a modern player. Perhaps the only thing that one would really notice is that it is rather larger and heavier than those which are in the shops now. It comes with a comprehensive remote control whose keys glow in the dark, useful for 'high fidelity' viewing which is of course best done in near darkness. Around the back there are all the usual sockets and connectors, some of which are gold plated as is par for the course for expensive Japanese gear (yes, they still made them in Japan in those days!). Plenty of other tricks have been used to ensure top performance, the underside of the cabinet is carefully pressed and shaped to ensure minimum resonance and the feet are fitted with their screws off centre to further damp any vibrations. Damping material is also attached inside the top cover and rear panel, tinny it ain't!

Of course we now know that the Digital Versatile Disc format became a huge global success, but back in those days of 'Cool Britannia' that certainly wasn't a foregone conclusion. The public traditionally

"few modern CD players are constructed with such care and attention to detail..."

when compared to the supermarket cheapies, early DVD players were extravagantly engineered and solidly built, as befitted their high asking price. The Sony DVP-S725D shown here for example cost around £500,

gold to match Sony's range of high-end AV amplifiers. 1999 also saw the launch of the DVP-S725D, the first of the second generation players on the UK market whose key difference was the use of a single laser unit that

did not buy non-recordable video disc formats and had already rejected Telefunken's TelDec system, RCA's CED (Capacitive Electronic Disc, very similar in appearance to a vinyl LP!), JVC's VHD, Philips LaserVision, Pioneer Laserdisc and Philips CDi (with its much-delayed full motion video adaptor) to name but six, so it is clear that against a backdrop of untarnished failure the odds were stacked against DVD.

There was little that Sony could do about this but they did do one thing to cushion the blow should DVD fail, they made the DVP-S725D a very accomplished CD player as well. There was more to this than a couple of gold phono sockets and a handful of copper-plated screws. Instead, the audio circuits were isolated from the power, servo and digital sections of the machine and fed from their own 'R Core' transformer and linear regulated power supply. Top quality audio-specific components were used throughout these stages and extra special attention was paid to component selection in the L/R stereo output amplifier with special capacitors and instrument-grade op-amp chips from US firm Analog Devices. Few modern dedicated CD players are constructed with such care and attention to detail.

Assume then that DVD bombed and all that you were left with was an expensive CD player; how good is it? Trying it in my system the first thing that struck me is how tidy the sound is; it's all there but there is absolutely nothing wayward no matter what sort of music you play. Bass is tight without being dry, treble is clean without being harsh and that upper midrange glare that spoils some modern designs just isn't an issue. This is the natural outcome from something designed by people who knew exactly what they were doing operating on sensible budgets for the task at hand. You don't expect rough edges – and sure enough there aren't any. Okay, so it lacks the mellifluous midband and treble sweetness of the best classic European machines but that's something the Sony shares with just about every other CD player ever to come out of Japan, it's a difference in taste – not ability. In the final analysis the rendering of vocal texture can sometimes be considered slightly uninvolved, but overall the DVP-S725D is practically the equal of £500 CD players available new today.

Of course DVD didn't fail, they're everywhere and so a player remains a useful asset. We are lucky in Europe that our version of the DVP-S725D is fitted with SCART connectors so

there is almost direct access to the red, green and blue outputs of the video DAC. As with audio the best quality is often obtained by minimal signal processing so delving into the menus and switching the AV output from CVBS (PAL) to RGB in an absolute must, then the signal need only go up the cable, through a few wideband amplifiers and then straight into the three electron guns of the monitor's picture tube. That's right, for maximum viewing pleasure forget low-end consumer flat screens and find yourself a pensioned-off professional TV monitor instead. A good one will give a simply stunning picture and they are built to be tough enough to run for decades!

Most were mega-money new but with the TV stations re-equipping for HD there are plenty of bargains out there. For the beginner the Sony Trinitron PVM-2130QM (21") or PVM-2730QM (27") are a good choice as there are loads about, you don't need to make up special cables and they don't look too industrial in a domestic setting. On my PVM the DVP-S725D really shows its talents with smooth movement and solid blocks of stable, vivid colour. DVD's limited resolution and colour palette is occasionally evidenced by a jagged diagonal line or a certain lack of subtlety in the rendering of skin tones but that's the format talking, not the player. The Sony's menus allow you to adjust the video filtering to smooth such things over but as is often the case the cure is worse than the disease; make sure they are all switched off before you start that box-set viewing marathon.

All this talk of CRT monitors and SCART cables may seem rather quaint in a world of upscaling players, HDMI and oversized LCD TV sets but just as with LP records, valve amplifiers and loudspeakers in massive wooden boxes the newest way isn't automatically the best way to do something.

Why bother with an early DVD player? Well, along with the very decent CD playback, lavish build and surprising video performance, they're irredeemably cheap! This particular box changed hands for £10, and even on a

REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

There is usually a repair and maintenance aspect to used hi-fi but unless you are very skilled and well equipped such things are mostly off the menu with the likes of the DVP-S725D. Luckily they are not *that* old so general decay has not yet set in, but watch out for worn-out laser pickups, indicated by a reluctance to read the disc. New lasers are still available but the cost is sobering; it's easier to find another complete machine. Even with a working example it is worth taking the time to clean the lens and the 'turntable', the latter item seems to get far grubbier in DVD players than with CD ones (possibly due to the discs sharing table space with too many TV dinners!) and this can sometimes give the impression that the laser is on the way out.

The DVP-S725D has no proper 'off' switch, and although the linear audio supply is switched off in standby mode, parts of the main switch mode one that runs the digital circuits keep going all the time. For this reason, tired electrolytic capacitors and cracked soldering in this area are a good possibility in a well-used example; replacement is straightforward for anyone with an electronics background. The remote control uses a conductive silicone rubber membrane for its keys and switches and with use this exudes a sticky mess over the circuit board inside, stopping certain functions from working. Once dismantled warm soapy water will clean it up however.

bad day on eBay, you'll likely pay no more than £30. That's a good deal for a fine sounding mid-price CD player, let alone one that also does video too. The Sony DVP-S725 isn't the most romantic olde worlde you'll have seen in these pages, but it's still a testament to a just passed age that will one day seem as quaintly nostalgic as Britpop, the Rover 75 and the idea that "things can only get better" by voting in a landslide government.



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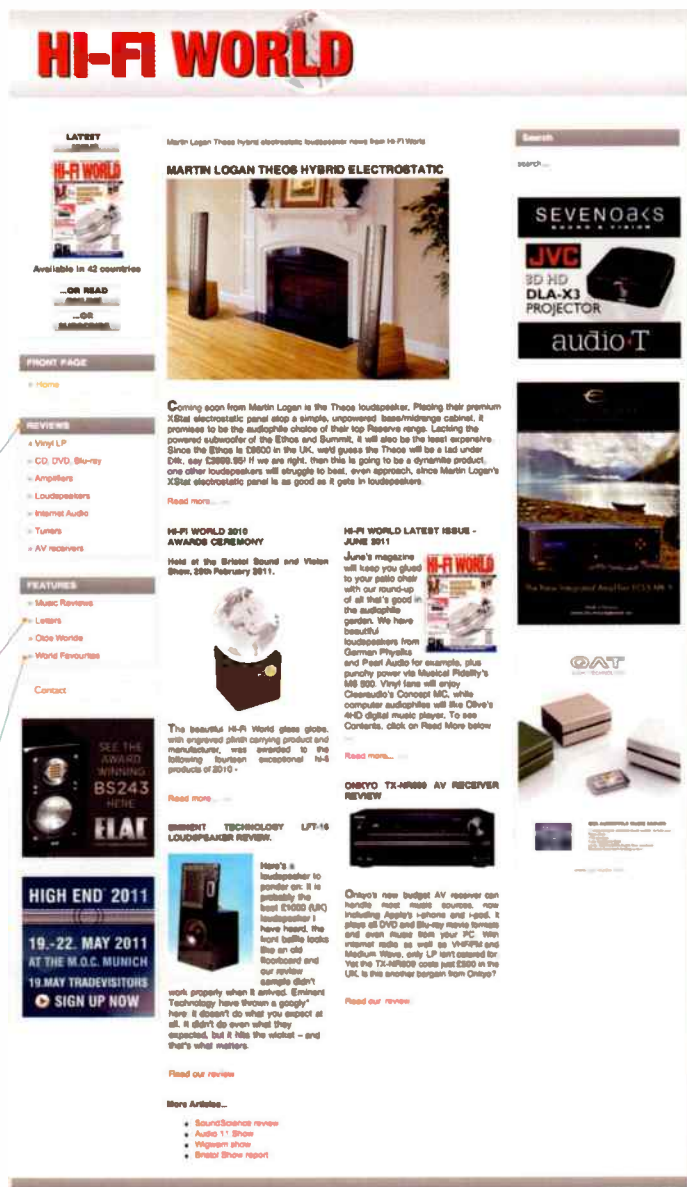
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Reviews unsuited to the magazine now go on-line. See our recent review of Eminent Technology's new LFT-16 loudspeaker for example. It didn't work properly but it was still worth an in-depth review. You'll find it interesting.

See Letters published in past issues, along with our replies - they're a valuable and entertaining read, now available on-line. More are coming. You can e-mail us from there too.

World Favourites are listed, as are 2010 World Awards. We will be adding an Olde Worlde listing soon. There is so much to come from our vast archives, including our definitive picture library.



"it was terrible to be limited to Red Book 16/44 digital audio for the best part of twenty years..."



David Price

"I can smile about it now, but at the time it was terrible." As a certain Stephen Patrick Morrissey observed in one of

The Smiths' great mid-eighties singles ('Shakespeare's Sister'), there are certain things in life which seem gravely important to you for long periods of your life, but then get relegated to the status of a wry smile when you look back nostalgically many years later...

I can personally think of many such examples, from Arsenal losing to Ipswich Town in the 1978 FA Cup final and that first series of Dallas ending in a cliffhanger over "who shot JR?", to the lowly 'C' grade I got in 'O' Level Music and my managing to fall off my shiny new Honda MTX125R motorbike at 2mph, twisting the front forks, aged 18! We all have our crosses to bear. I've had a few hi-fi moments too – spending many hundreds of pounds buying a new CD player in 1985 (a Yamaha CD-X2), only to find it so bright as to be unlistenable – springs to mind.

Indeed, this was to become something of a seminal moment in my life. Back in the mid eighties, I liked LP but was still perfectly happy to commit to the shiny new silver disc as my future format. But it was CD's terrible sound that ruined it, and I then had to suffer – as a keen purchaser of hi-fi magazines – reading about how wonderful and perfect the new format was for years to follow. More and more of 'my' trusted reviewers, people whose judgment I'd taken as gospel, started using them and accordingly my trust in them suffered somewhat. I began to feel a little depressed about my favourite hobby and alienated from the hi-fi scene in general, as the only people still daring to say vinyl was superior were Linn's Ivor Tiefenbrun and a long lost magazine called *Hi-Fi Review* (lead

contributor, one N.Keywood)!

At a time when the market was being showered with mediocre sounding CD spinners, many of which were hailed as superb by the CD loving hi-fi press, yours truly and a few of his closest friends stoically soldiered on with vinyl, feeling ever more dejected. What I desperately wanted was for people to admit that CD was *not* perfect (which at the time was akin to proclaiming the earth was really flat after all), and for a new digital format to come along and prove it...

Well, it did. Despite only raising the sampling frequency to 48kHz (from CD's 44.1kHz), Digital Audio Tape sounded surprisingly superior. But still this wasn't *quite* what I'd had in mind; I craved a new 'Super CD', and wondered if we'd ever get one. But there didn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. Even in the letters pages of early nineties *What Hi-Fi*, people were still saying things like, "If CD is perfect then why does my system sound so shrill!", only to get replies telling readers that it was what the music really sounded like. For me, these were hi-fi's Dark Ages.

Then, in the mid-nineties, just when I thought Compact Disc could not be stopped, and that it was 'game over' for audiophiles, came the announcement; Sony and Philips were working on a replacement! I couldn't believe it. Oh my god, the inventors of the Devil's own disc had admitted the error of their ways and repented!

It was hilarious watching some magazines and/or hi-fi journalists, who'd pretty much intimated that CD was "perfect" having to explain in print the existence of something, errmm. even more *perfecter* [sic]. And then suddenly another, second 'Super CD' disc was announced! I was in heaven; all my 'hi-fi-curious' friends, who'd thought I was nothing more than a black plastic worshipping

weirdo, suddenly, errm, didn't think I was *quite* so weird.

Super Audio Compact Disc proved a delight. I was amazed. I can still remember auditioning the very first Marantz SA-1 and being awe-struck. All those years of pining for decent digital and here it was before me – was it a dream, or just an illusion? DVD-Audio was less convincing, I thought. The fact that – to all intents and purposes – you needed a TV attached to the player to navigate the menu system, spoiled it. And also its sound, although undeniably very good (and way better than CD) still seemed a little more clinical.

As it happened, DVD-A bombed fairly quickly, while SACD never achieved the momentum it needed to become a mass market format, although it has been modestly successful. You can still buy new SACDs from a range of sources, Linn Records being a key player; their classical releases are sublime. There are a few on Amazon and failing that eBay, secondhand. Serious SACD-ers however, look to the market where the format really got a foothold (and still has) – Japan. At the time of writing CD Japan (www.cdjapan.co.jp) has 1,100 new titles. DVD-Audio of course has since been reborn; stripped of its physical carrier, it's now the *de facto* high end download format (in its 24/96 incarnation, often compacted via FLAC).

And so hi res digital continues; it's had an unspectacular first ten years, but at least it didn't go the way of Elcaset. For example, to be resurrected in the 'where are they now' category. In my view it really was terrible to be limited to Red Book 16/44 digital audio for the best part of twenty years, before SACD (and then hi res downloads) appeared, and vinyl made its rightful resurgence. The bad days are over, it seems. ●

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"It's amazing what vinyl does to a person – or a record label, for that matter.."



paul rigby

It's amazing what vinyl does to a person – or a record label, for that matter. It changes that person's or company's perspective. It alters how they do things, how they think about music and the way it should be presented...

Take World Circuit (www.worldcircuit.co.uk), one of the premier world music labels. It has just released four albums on vinyl, the first time it has issued anything on black wax since the late-eighties. They include the live Carnegie Hall performance of the 'Buena Vista Social Club', the Ry Cooder-produced project featuring a host of legendary Cuban musicians; 'Afrocubism', the original project that spawned the idea for the Buena Vista LP but this time featuring the likes of Toumani Diabate and Eliades Ochoa; Tony Allen's 'Secret Agent' and Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabaté's self-titled LP.

Nick Gold, owner of World Circuit explained why it has taken so long to address the black wax. "We understand now that we can produce it and sell it without losing money and that there is a market for it. I've always been told that you shouldn't produce vinyl because it will lose money – not now. A magic line has been crossed that's now made it possible. It was probably our German distributors who began pushing us for vinyl, initially. They produced our first recent vinyl release under license, the live Buena Vista sessions at Carnegie Hall, that went well and we began to do it ourselves. Sales of the recent releases seem to be holding up quite well. The numbers aren't massive but they're doing well."

On a personal level, this vinyl

rediscovery prompted Gold to dig out his treasured Rega Planar 3 turntable. This, in turn, has tweaked the interest of his fifteen year old son *et al.*, "...and there's no nostalgia excuse with him and his mates. They love the records and the 'thing' that it goes on. This strange machine we call a turntable. Some kids have never seen one. Watching it working is fascinating for them. At a gig, he'll always buy vinyl now. Even if he doesn't play it he'll put it on the wall or prop it on the mantelpiece."

You see how the vinyl ripples enter into Gold's personal life too? In addition, it shows you the affinity even someone of fifteen years of age can have with the beloved plastic. The same age group which the general media wrongly believe are download fixated to the exclusion of everything else. But back to World Circuit!

"This release of four LPs is partly a toe in the water," said Gold, "but we do intend to release more, especially those releases that have never been released on vinyl before. It was all originally created on analogue anyway. There is the wherewithal to produce really nice vinyl at World Circuit, especially from the half-inch tapes in our possession, which are all in excellent condition. Later this year, we are looking to have a reissued 'Buena Vista Social Club' vinyl, mastered by Bernie Grundman (long term mastering engineer of choice when Classic Records were still with us).

He won't be doing them all, though. We've decided to approach the original mastering engineers for each of our releases. Whoever did the album the first time round will be approached to do the reissue because they will know the recording

intimately. If that's not possible then we'll talk to the original mix-down engineer. It's horses for courses".

Another reason for this selective approach to mastering engineers is a bad experience Gold had with a remastered LP in the past. "I wasn't happy with it so we approached a second engineer. The difference between the two engineers can be huge and was in this particular case. To the extent of sounding like a completely new mix. One might provide a mix with a softer, deeper bass that's not so brittle, another might sound harder with a much wider soundstage. All from the same tapes."

Of the forthcoming releases, in addition to the original 'Buena Vista Social Club', expect to see Ry Cooder and Ali Farka Touré's album, 'Talking Timbuktu'. For both LPs, Ry Cooder has taken an intimate and very hands-on interest. Also, on these albums, Gold has found extra tracks but he's not sure how they will be presented on vinyl; possibly via an extra 12" disc or even a bonus 7" single.

"There's some good stuff on there," affirmed Gold. "Nearly every tape has extra tunes. Some of it is pretty obvious why it wasn't released but there are interesting pieces too. A lot of these sessions that we did were also recorded to DATs, so we have much to choose from."

So why have they suddenly thought of extra tracks and rarities? According to Gold, a natural train of thought, "Vinyl, analogue, 1/2" tapes, music on the tapes, what other music is there on those tapes? Simple really." But that's vinyl for you. A simple idea that keeps on being brilliant. **PR** ●

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"it's amazing what a couple of hours of fiddling and fettling can do for the look and the sound of your system..."



tony bolton

For me, one of hi-fi's greatest hassles is dust. My system seems to attract it, both to itself and the area immediately surrounding it. This was brought home to me when I was preparing for the visit by Mark and Derek from Tiger-Paw, as recounted on p106 of this issue.

Due to space considerations I decided to move my Linn Sondek turntable from its normal position as part of my upstairs system down into the front room, in place of my Clearaudio Master Solution – which usually does the vinyl spinning honours downstairs. Despite regular housework, moving the decks revealed a veritable desert of dust in those places which are just impossible to reach with the equipment *in situ*. So I reached for the vacuum and dusters and cleared it away. Of course this immediately showed up the dust lurking around the rest of the system and the fingerprints on the glass shelves of the rack upon which it all sits, so, as you can guess, this turned into a mammoth spring (or should that be autumn) clean...

Since I'd taken everything off the racks and disconnected it all, it seemed a good opportunity to give the entire system a good going over. Now over the years I have tried various products for cleaning this and polishing that, and to be honest, with few exceptions I have found that a slightly damp microfibre cloth (99p from Wilkinson, www.wilkinsonplus.com), wiped over the casework does the job. And for good measure I usually gently buff the surface afterwards with a soft lint free cloth, and then zap it with my Zerostat gun in the hopes that this will slow down the inevitable reappearance of the

dreaded dust.

I avoid using proprietary polishing sprays since the chemicals in them can sometimes have a destructive effect on the finishes of some units. Many years ago I was somewhat distressed to find that Mr. Sheen and the paint on Quad 33 preamps was not a good mixture – some of the paint coming away from the light on the front and a slight speckling appearing on the bodywork itself! I clean acrylic, such as the lid on the Sondek, with spray glass cleaner, which gives a good finish and seems to be reasonably dust repellent. Followed again by a quick 'Zero-zap'.

When it comes to the electrical connections I generally use Russ Andrews' DeoxIT Gold (www.russandrews.com) for the plated finishes on most hi-fi cables and mains leads. I have found it seems to keep things shiny over long periods and has a small but beneficial effect upon the sound. If this isn't handy then a wipe over with either Isopropyl Alcohol or Methylated Spirits does an effective job.

I usually use a good quality cotton bud to clean the inside of phono sockets with a dab of Isopropyl on it. Be wary of cheap cotton buds from the discount stores and go to your local chemist instead (and with a bit of friendly persuasion, if they know you well enough to believe you're not going to drink the stuff, they can still order in Isopropyl Alcohol as well). The extra cost of decent buds is minimal. Cheap buds tend to come apart and Murphy's Law dictates that this will happen leaving a wad of cotton in an inaccessible and inconvenient place, requiring patience, swearing and a pair of tweezers to extract it. A slightly damp bud is also very useful for cleaning the fine line

of dirt that accumulates in those little narrow gaps around the edges of panels and knobs on hi-fi equipment. The attention paid to such detailing can make an elderly piece of kit look brand new again in just a few minutes.

Ordinary brass-pinned mains plugs are treated a little differently – they get polished with Brasso until they're nice and shiny, not forgetting the fuse and fuse holder, and then wiped over with either Isopropyl or Meths to remove any last traces of polish. If these aren't available then vodka will do a reasonable job; again, best not drink until you've got some tonic water and a slice of lemon to go with it!

Last but not least, I go over all of the screw connections in the plugs to make sure they are tight. By the same token, this is also a good time to take the screwdriver or Allen key to the loudspeakers and tweak up the screws or bolts holding the drivers in. Over time they invariably work loose, especially on bass and midrange units, and will often tighten by a quarter turn or more. Just be firm, but not heavy handed – overtightening could deform the basket. The reward is usually a tighter, punchier and more detailed sound (the speakers also get a periodic coat of good quality wax polish, such as Antiquewax to help retain their shine and show off the graining in the wood).

It's amazing what a couple of hours of the aforementioned fiddling and fettling can do for the look and the sound of your system. There's a new freshness and vitality to its performance, and a perceptible improvement in detail that makes all of the effort worth while. As upgrades go, you can spend fifty times the cost of the cleaning materials and still not get such a dramatic change. ●

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noel keywood

Shooting video can be pig difficult, it can annoy and upset people and you get stuck behind a viewfinder and miss what's happening! But the final result can make it all worthwhile – and it is the audio that brings it to life. This is where AV gets very interesting, because you put the sound of an event through your hi-fi and can sit in the middle of what was happening afterward. Still pictures bring back memories; video takes you back to the event.

I mention all this because I bought myself a new toy the other day, one that slots into AV in an impressive way. It's a camcorder, one that shoots video at 50 progressive frames a second to give picture quality that approaches that from professional cameras. Each frame is so good it can be used as a still shot, and when running, video quality is startling. Transferred to Blu-ray disc it plays through a Blu-ray player, with the audio directed through the AV hi-fi system to give an immersive, palpably real experience. Suddenly the hi-fi has a new role, to reproduce the sound of a live event.

Video sound quality is a world of its own and one that isn't so easy to cope with. I started shooting video ten years ago and soon learnt that what you see and what you hear can be two entirely different things. The shots I have of a Tiger Moth aircraft idling on the grass at Duxford airfield, happen to be a useful test piece for judging picture quality, but I didn't realise there was a family right behind me – out of sight, out of mind I guess – and they are what the camera heard. I got a great piece of video of my son at nine years old flying off into the blue, but instead of the gentle purr of aircraft's engine on the sound track what I got was "waaah - I wanna ice cream".

I needed a directional microphone of course; the mics on the Canon HV30 I was using at the time were picking up sound from all around, which might be what's needed for, say, a wedding reception video, but not for much else. The mics should gather sound from the direction the camera is facing if sound is to meaningfully relate to the picture, but directly you go directional you compromise left and right information (stereo) in the forward direction, ultimate directionality being, by definition, mono.

A useful device here is the M-S microphone where the Side channel can be matrixed in to produce stereo if wanted, or just left out for forward facing directional mono. I admit I have yet to try this; at present I have just one Sennheiser shotgun mike and an Audio Technica stereo mic of better sound quality, but less directivity. And even these do not get a lot of use because they badly hamper portability and the need to start shooting quickly when a situation arises, something recent camcorders that shoot video direct to onboard memory are especially good at, unlike old tape based machines.

And sound quality? This is another difficult area because a microphone of good sound quality also picks up low frequency disturbances and wind noise that don't relate to the object onscreen. Extended high frequency response gives lovely clarity and an airiness to the sound, but it also emphasises noise, including whistling wind noise over the mike.

Trying to get a sound track that both relates to the subject being shot and one that is free from annoying noises, children shouting for ice creams, jets screaming overhead and what have you is hideously difficult, but fascinating and very rewarding

when it goes right. I have some great footage of growling Rolls Royce Merlins at air shows, on Spitfires and Mustangs as they taxi past the camera, a noise that thankfully drowns out all others – including all requests for ice cream!

The new toy is a Panasonic HDC TM900, bought on the basis of good reviews, notably from www.camcorderinfo.com (I really wanted Canon's new HF G10 but the extra cost and complexity ruled it out). Using the Panasonic's standard modes was disappointing, providing a picture little better than the outgoing tape based Canon HV30 I have been using. Grass and trees faded off into a gentle blur.

Selecting 'turbo' mode, recording in HD at 50 progressive frames a second, changed everything. Suddenly, I had video! This mode greatly increases data rate, required storage capacity, and the computer processing power to cope with it when editing. It is also a non-standard format based on MPEG4. But so far there has been no problem storing, editing and burning it to Blu-ray, using TMPGEnc Authoring Works 4, nor playing either the resulting Blu-ray through the TV, or the camera direct through the TV. Picture quality approaches that professional HD video on Blu-ray. Colours are rich and lustrous, due to low noise, and detailing exceptional, removing the blur from grass and trees. Riding a Hong Kong tram puts the rumble and clatter of these historic hundred year old vehicles through the hi-fi and it's great fun to hear the busy, noisy streets roll by, courtesy of a decent surround-sound system.

Blu-ray players and AV systems can do much more than what they were designed for: playing Hollywood movies. Spin SACD surround-sound through them or playback high rate video with a decent soundtrack and you'll see what I mean. ●

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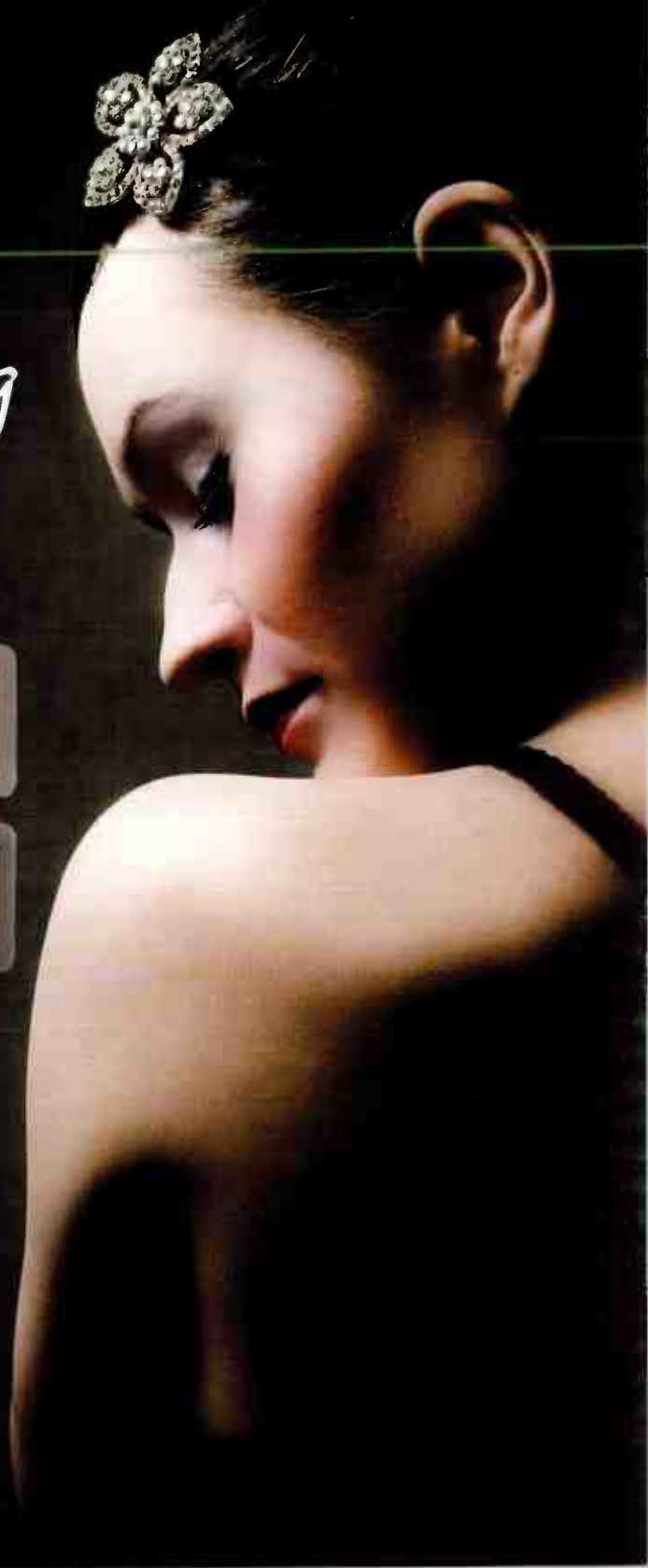
WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

AWARDS 2008

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World Radio History

"it's with a heavy heart that I have to announce the end of a long and wonderful era in the Smith household..."



adam smith

It's with a heavy heart, dear reader, that I have to announce the end of a long and wonderful era in the Smith household, and I have chosen you as the ideal conduit to channel my anguish, as I feel sure that you'll understand what I am going through...

You see, ever since I discovered car boot sales in my early teens, I have taken endless delight in the discovery of worthy audio and hi-fi equipment from all sorts of places. The aforementioned car booter was a very fruitful source but my local dumps, free advertising papers, second-hand shops, audiojumbles and even the odd skip parked in a road have all proven to be surprisingly fruitful sources of, at times, impressively worthy equipment. Yes, a great deal of it was merely average that simply suited a particular need for spare parts, or the occasional friend who would request me to find him "a cheap one of those old record players" so that he could enjoy the few dozen LPs he'd rediscovered in the loft.

Equally however, a few gems have cropped up, like a mint, boxed Bang & Olufsen Beogram 4000 from the car boot sale, a pair of original 1960s Goodmans Maxims at the dump and, on one startling occasion, a twelve inch professional Audio Technica arm from the bottom of a box at John Howes' Audiojumble that everyone else missed! However, it looks like the days of my collecting these bargains may now be at an end. "What on earth has happened?" I hear you cry. Has my long-suffering wife finally put her foot down and declared "No more"? Has my trusty Range Rover finally dragged in the mother of all repair bills [probably! Ed.]? Heck, have I even just grown bored of the whole thing?

Well, you'll probably be relieved to hear that the answers are

no, no and *no*. My wife is still as understanding and supportive as ever, although she is starting to develop a nervous tic whenever she sees a new turntable in the listening room. The Rangey is purring like a kitten and I'm still as enthusiastic as ever about the whole subject. No, I'm afraid the reason is far simpler – an email arrived in my inbox today to confirm that, yes, those rotten scoundrels at Unilever have stopped making Cif with Bleach!

Naturally, when purchasing items that have been parked under a table in a car boot sale field, lobbed unceremoniously into a dusty skip or sat out in the rain at a dump, a good cleanup is absolutely mandatory. When just a young lad, I started off with a bit of washing up liquid on a damp cloth but then came the day when I bought something that was just that little grubbier. My mother was consulted, a bottle of Jif (as it was then known) was pulled from the cupboard and the item in question (a Yamaha CR-820 receiver, I seem to recall) soon sparkled...

Obviously, standard Jif became a staple part of my hi-fi clean-up kit, along with assorted cloths, toothbrushes, cotton buds and the like, and I even switched to the lemon variety when it came along, just to add that little extra frisson of freshness to my items. And then that fateful day struck – I was given a magnificent, huge JVC amplifier that drove my Leak 2075s a treat but unfortunately had resided in the lounge of a heavy smoker for most of its life. Fortunately it had been in a rack with only small gaps around it, so the smoke had not permeated inside too badly (if the circuit board soaks it up, trust me – you'll never get rid of the smell) but the allegedly silver front panel was brown and it absolutely stank. My Cif (as it was now renamed) did its best but

couldn't quite cut through the grime.

Off I went to my local supermarket to peruse the alternatives – and there it was – Cif with Bleach. A bottle was purchased, I raced home and in no time that amplifier's front panel was gleaming and smelling surprisingly sweet! I never looked back and this became my staple cleaner for many years, both for hi-fi and home. There were one or two hiccups however, like discovering that it was remarkably effective at removing the lettering from the front panel of 1980s cottage industry units like my Quantum Electronics 102 preamplifier. One or two visitors were perplexed by its 'lum' and 'alanc' controls where one would normally expect to find 'Volume' and 'Balance'. Still, I worked around these issues and was delighted with it until recently when I noticed it disappearing from the shelves. My father found a bulk three litre bottle at a local cash and carry, which lasted quite a while and the last bottle I bought was from a supermarket in Italy when my wife and I were on holiday there. In retrospect I'm not too sure how I'd have explained that to the Customs officers, had they chosen to search my case, but my need was great!

It has now finally vanished however, and a nice person from Unilever has indeed personally confirmed to me that it is no longer made due to "low levels of demand". I am sure that I'll find something else to do the job and that my favourite hobbies of bargain hunting and "dumpster diving" will continue but I really am disappointed that they have chosen to cease production of such a useful product. Unless I can find something as effective yet gentle, I may well have to decline any smoke damaged-items in future. More importantly, I'm sure our bath tub will never be as shiny again! ●

vinyl section

contents

NOVEMBER 2011

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REGA RP3 100

Adam Smith auditions this new mid-price vinyl spinner.

VINCENT PHO-111VP 105

David Price enjoys this carefully tweaked budget phono stage.

TIGER PAW LINN LP12 106

Tony Bolton tries a superb new Sondek modifications package.

NORTHWEST ANALOGUE 401 111

Adam Smith reviews a new slate Garrard plinth system.



JUST JAZZ

We haven't had a great deal of jazz in the last couple of issues so let's right that wrong. Via Pure Pleasure (www.purepleasurerecords.com) is Jamie Cullum's debut commercial LP, 'Pointless Nostalgic' (2002), proving that this little man had the gall to claim his position as the British Sinatra but also mixing jazz with contemporary and self-penned ditties. Stacey Kent has a deliciously naughty voice that manages to interpret a song with

news

LATEST FROM MOV

Another eclectic bunch of goodies from Music On Vinyl (www.musiconvinyl.com) begins with Buffalo Tom's 'Let Me Come Over' (1992), the indie-rock band's third LP release but the first to show the outfit has confident performers and maturing songwriters. Teenage Fanclub's classic 1991 release, 'Bandwagonesque' was a power-pop sensation with hard, grungy riffs and a melodic sensibility to delight. Also look out for Emerson, Lake & Palmer's 'Brain Salad Surgery', the band's best album and

a feast of electronica; 'Chet Baker & Strings' (1953), a three-day recording which sees Baker in a quintet setting, with a successful mix of bop and cool strings plus Devendra Banhart's 'Cripple Crow' sees the Tim Buckley-esque singer turn into a sly, winking Marc Bolan with often blissful material.



...AND THE LEFT BANKE

Influenced by The Beatles and The Zombies, The Left Banke are known today for their big hits 'Walk Away Renee' and the follow-up, 'Pretty Ballerina'. The first LP, 1967's 'Walk Away Renee Pretty Ballerina' (*Sundazed*; www.sundazed.com), spouts that peculiar flavour of baroque rock that infused the chamber orchestra within their arrangements, popular in the sixties, combined with psychedelic pop. The second release, 'The Left Banke Too' (1968) is infused with more sunshine pop-related harmonies but continued creative ambition. These albums are full of great songs along with the innovation along with quality mastering.

PRINCE TRIO

Witnessing the rise of a superstar that finishes just before the phenomenon that was Prince's 'Purple Rain' (1984), Warners has released 'Dirty Mind' (1980), Prince's first carefully crafted work, packed with superb funk-pop music plus lots and lots of sex. Right after that we have 'Controversy' (1981), featured here with a limited edition poster, that pushed back the musical boundaries and began to introduce social commentary until his second masterpiece, '1999' was released in 1982, computer funk in extremis with maturing writing skills and enough raw talent on display to scare the life out of every other singer-songwriter of the time.



surgical exactitude blended with often heart-breaking emotional generosity. 'The Boy Next Door' (2003) is a celebration of favourite songs from favourite men such as Bennett, Sinatra, Como and Ellington. Featuring Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Hank Mobley and Don Byrd (a rising star at the time) with Doug Watkins, 'The Jazz Messengers' (1956) features classic tracks with some Asian-influenced innovation.

From Germany's Speakers Corner (www.speakerscorner.de) is Oscar Peterson & Nelson Riddle's self-titled album that

performs a perfect tension of breakout exuberance from pianist Peterson and the smooth Riddle arrangements. The result is warm and rich; music to bathe in. Also look out for Baden Powell's 'Solitude On Guitar' (1971) which features the gifted Latin instrumentalist bossa nova co-founder; Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong's 'Ella And Louis Again' (1957) follows the 2CD version, packing in two LPs while 'The Soul Of Ben Webster' sees the great tenor sax man entering a purple patch late-on in his career.

EXPLORING THE LEFTFIELD...

Kicking off the world of the weird and strange is a quintet of new, related albums emanating from the Spectrum Spools label (editionsmego.com/spectrum-spools). Consisting of Temporal Marauder's 'Makes You Feel', Bee Mask's 'Canzonidal Laboratorio del Silenzio Cosmico' and 'Elegy For Beach Friday', Fabric's 'A Sort Of Radiance' and Forma's self-titled piece, they all utilise a nostalgic electronica framework of often sweeping rhythms and synth-based loops to provide sometimes magnificent, lush and rich soundscapes that transport you to a rollercoaster ride of emotional turbulence.

Reinhold Friedl's 'Inside Piano' (*Hronir*, www.hronir.de) is a new didactic piece that provides a guided tour around the instrument, utilising an *avant-garde* approach of tones, effects and noise. This vinyl edition, limited to 470 copies, features three pieces not found on the CD version.

Finally, Phurpa's 'Trowo Phumag Ceremony' (Editions Mego; editionsmego.com) utilises a range of traditional Tibetan instruments along with extraordinary bass-infused chants, whose reverberation is both invigorating and disturbing.



...AND FINALLY

The Three Seasons' 'Life's Road' (Transubstans; www.transubstans.com) is a new two disc release fronted by ex-Siena Root vocalist Sartz, who comes across all Glenn Hughes on this rock release, infused with hard blues. Dave Depper's 'The Ram Project' (Jackpot; www.jackpotrecords.com) is a 'reimagined' take on the Paul McCartney, 1971 release, 'Ram'. A fun project more like, it's interesting to see a tweaked viewpoint on this classic release. Tropical soul and beat are next from the Brazilian outfit, Garotas Suecas and their new LP, 'Escaldante Banda' (Vampi Soul; www.vampisoul.com) which provides a partybeat backed with a circus tent full of instruments which keeps the energy high and the vibe swinging. Finally, check out the heavy blues rock Of The Raver's 'Bad, Bad World' (Wah Wah). Fans of The Edgar Broughton Band will lap it up.



Third Degree Turn

After several years of market dominance, Rega's P3 turntable has suddenly been pensioned off for this, the new RP3. Adam Smith takes it for a spin...

I don't know if it's something in the water, but interesting things are definitely happening down in Southend-on-Sea and the fruits of this can be seen in the outpourings of exciting new goodies from Rega. Historically the company has been known for its very sedate rate of new products and existing product updates but, in the past few years, things have definitely ramped up in a noticeable manner. First there were the flagship Osiris and Isis amplifier and CD player, then the entire loudspeaker range received a tasteful restyle and recently we have welcomed the arrival of the Rega DAC and the decidedly stylish new Brio-R amplifier.

However, back inbetween these events, another significant happening occurred, namely the replacement of the P1 entry-level turntable with the RP1. This occurred a year or so after the publication of an interesting photo on various internet forums which may or may not have been a prototype of a new flagship 'P10' turntable, or a development mule for future models lower down in the range. Rega is still remaining tight lipped about that flagship possibility but one item in that mysterious photo has finally stumbled into the spotlight, courtesy of the brand new RP3 – a replacement for the highly capable P3-24.

The item in question was a phenolic resin brace which is fitted between arm mounting and main bearing housing. Giving the deck the apparent appearance of a suspended

subchassis type but without the suspension, Rega claims that it "forms a structurally sound 'stressed beam' assembly specifically where increased rigidity is required". This therefore prevents energy absorption and unwanted resonances from causing distortion in the music. Of course, the company has always followed the path of low mass in its plinths, which is why the RP3 still had a traditional Rega lightweight plinth with a small brace – the company claim that making the whole plinth skin from the brace's phenolic material would cause counter-productive issues in terms of mass absorption resulting in unwanted energy transmission.

Sitting atop the RP3 is yet another new item in the form of the RB303 tonearm. A further development of the P3-24's RB301 item, which in turn was an evolution of the original, classic RB300, the RB303 advances Rega's tonearm technology further still. New for the latest model are a new arm tube with claimed increased rigidity between it and the bearing housing, plus an alteration to the mass distribution within the arm which Rega claim "ensures the arm will exhibit fewer points of possible resonance". The counterweight is also now a satin black finished item that matches the arm tube – Rega claims no sonic wonders as a result of this but it certainly looks nice!

The RP3 comes in three finishes, namely White, Grey and Titanium which does seem to suggest that you'll have to be content with

the older P3-24 if you still want something more vivacious like Red, Blue, Green or Pink. Still at least you can still jazz the deck up with a red, blue, yellow or purple mat should you so desire. Retail price of the RP3 is £475, although it is available as a package with Rega's Elys 2 cartridge for £549. As the motor used in the RP3 is the same as that of the P3-24, the TT-PSU upgrade would also appear to be an option, but the review sample was supplied without.

SOUND QUALITY

Going back to the P3-24 that I reviewed in the July 2009 issue of *Hi-Fi World*, I personally felt that this finally marked the incarnation of the deck that offered the sort of sound quality that many people stated that it had offered for years, but by which I had never been quite convinced. Consequently, I was intrigued to hear whether the RP3 was imply a swift polishing exercise to keep the deck competitive in the marketplace but I quickly realised as I started listening that such cynicism was misplaced. Frankly, being well aware of Rega's abilities I should have known better!

With the Elys2 nicely warmed up, the RP3 immediately announces itself as a sophisticated and intensely poised customer. Traditionally the Planar/P3 has always expertly bridged the gap between boisterous budget belter and suave mid-priced smoothie but has been gradually moving closer and closer to the latter. The RP3 however, truly completes the jump across that gap; such is its silky,



"the tonally grey sterility of Rega's past decks that has often troubled me seemed nothing but a distant memory..."

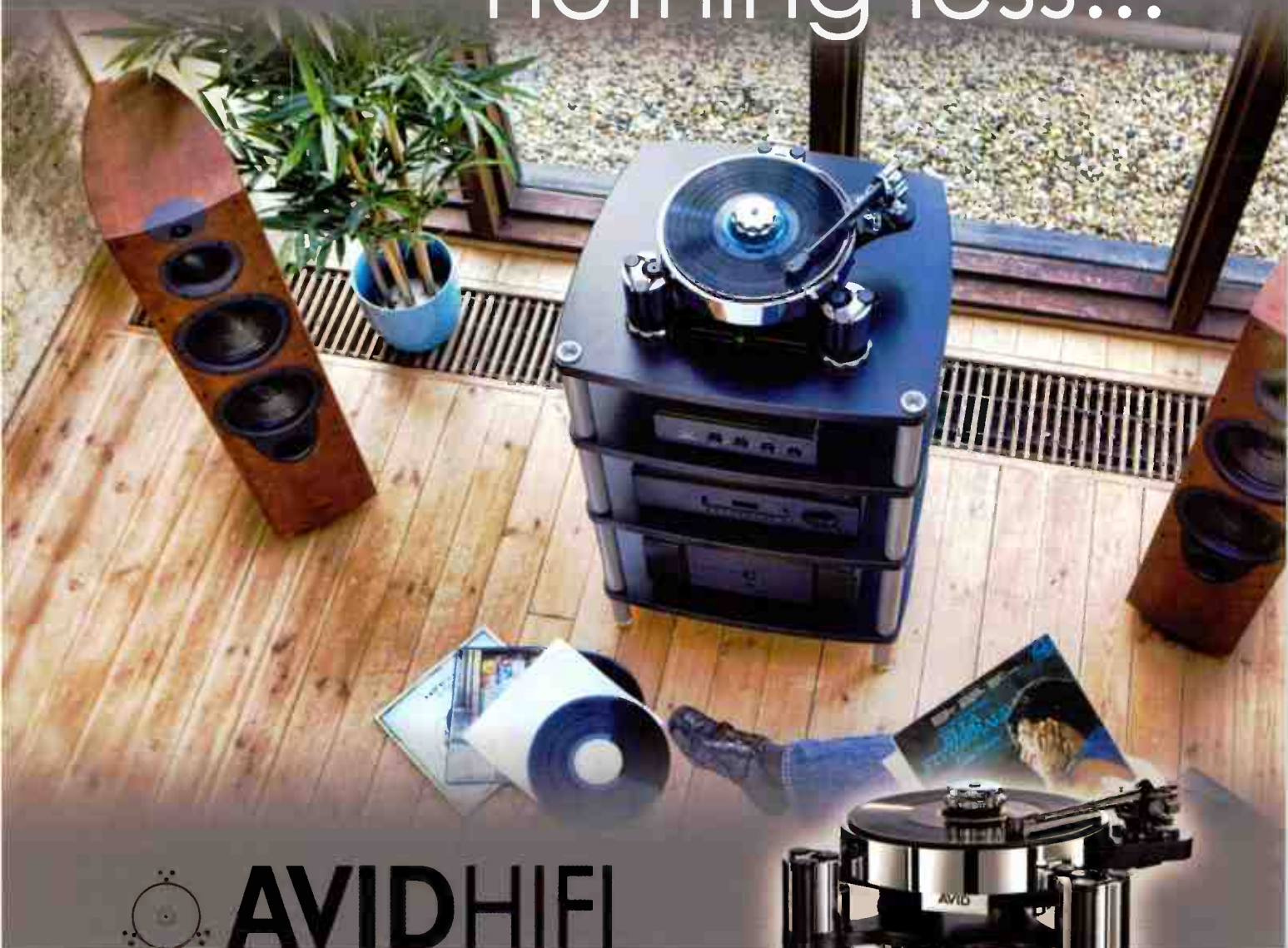
lustrous presentation. Ironically I had chosen to start my listening session with some jazz, courtesy of Dave Brubeck, and the Rega put me straight into a smokey jazz club as the band punched out 'Take 5'. The piano shimmered deliciously centre-stage and the steady cymbal strikes that underpin the track rang out gloriously across the front of my room. The best part however, was the way in which the RP3 pulled me into the performance – the tonally grey sterility of Rega's past decks that has often troubled me seemed nothing but a distant memory.

The other thing that struck me as I continued listening was the incredible lack of surface noise and background mush coming from the loudspeakers during quiet interludes. That new brace seems to be doing its job very effectively indeed as the silences between tracks were positively cavernous. When the music restarted however, the RP3 instantly filled the soundstage, offering a better sense of focus and accuracy than its P3-24 predecessor. This meant that instruments were vivid and stood out in superb clarity within the soundscape, ensuring that all the

action was easy to follow. Once again however, I couldn't help feeling a lack of focus to the treble at times, which experience suggested was down to the Elys 2 cartridge; it's a pleasant enough performer but its rolled-off top end means that it is simply rather too veiled and over-smooth for me at times.

Consequently, out came the Smith vinyl toolkit and in went my Ortofon 2M Black. A spot of protractor-wielding followed by weight and bias tweaks saw the stylus back in the groove and everything deliciously crisp and shiny once again.

“The Truth, nothing more,
nothing less...”



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Pulsar Phono Stage



Now cymbals were delivered with a superbly crisp leading edge and perfectly judged decay, and contained just the right amount of metallic sheen to really make them stand out from the backing instruments. From the centre of the soundstage however, there was much to be enjoyed as well – the likes of Eleanor McEvoy floated almost mystically out of the speakers at me with the combination of 2M Black and RP3 never failing to captivate and delight.

At the low end, the RP3 is a convincing performer with plenty of detail and impact, but I was aware, thanks to tracks like 'Bang Bang Bang' from Mark Ronson's 'Record Collection' LP, that there was a slight sense of blur to the bass notes as they pounded out. Whilst my Garrard 301 separates them with almost military precision, the Rega seemed to be struggling to do this, and my time with the P3-24 a couple of years back showed exactly the same sort of problems, which were reduced by the introduction of Rega's TT-PSU to power the deck. Without it, the low end of the RP3 felt a little hesitant and unsure in pure pace and snappiness terms, although it certainly had no trouble in capturing the woody thrum of a double bass or the swift turn of phrase from a bass guitar. Equally the rather chesty upper bass that I noted in the P3-24 review had all but vanished, again speaking volumes for the latest modifications. Ultimately, bass-wise, the RP3 never sounds wobbly or flabby, but just lacks that last ounce of precision that the TT-PSU reinstates very neatly.

All in all though, as I continued through my record collection, I was repeatedly struck by the RP3's overall cohesion and the way in which it really seemed keen to dig to the heart of the music.

The deck has a sense of grace and smoothly effortless commanding musicality which means that it never seems ruffled or distantly emotionless, but equally it never becomes over-boisterous and trips itself up. In many ways it reminded me of the mighty Thorens TD550 in its sense of fluid insight – no bad thing when one considers that the TD550 is one of the finest turntables I have

heard, and retails at well over ten times the price of the RP3.

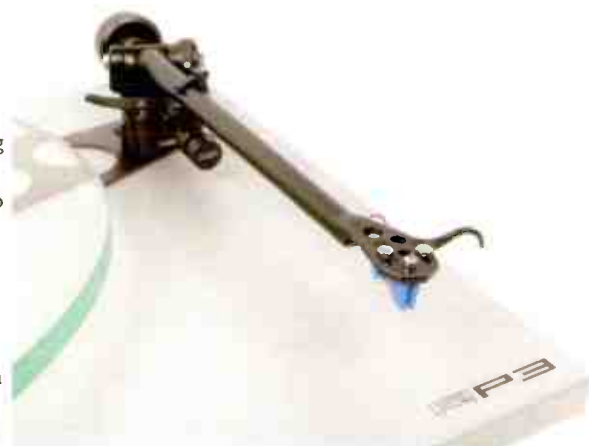
CONCLUSION

There is a regular procession of turntables of all shapes, sizes and budgets through the Smith listening room, yet it's a rare thing to hear a deck that offers such sophistication and poise whilst bearing such a modest price tag. Rega have

successfully upped their game once more with the RP3, and although I feel it needs the TT-PSU to really perform at its best, it is pretty much the class leader at the price and more than good enough to worry decks brandishing bigger price tags as well. Even more tantalisingly, the box it came in was a dual-purpose carton that was also labelled with 'RP5' markings, which suggests that there is much more to come from Essex yet. Personally, I'm looking forward to it immensely.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Ortofon 2M Black cartridge
Sondex DE-1 phono stage
Naim Supernait amplifier
Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers (modified)



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

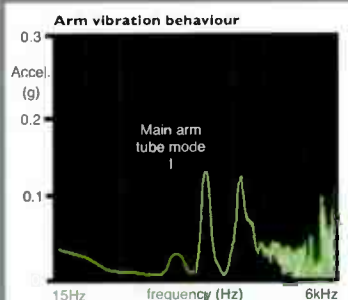
The Rega's new RB303 tapered cast arm in the P3 is rigid, having a first bending mode at a high 300Hz our analysis shows. There are two higher peaks, at 575Hz and 1150Hz but they are narrow and encompass little energy (area under the curve). However, this RB303 still exhibits quite a lot of modal energy around 1kHz and this is possibly the source of the arm's characteristic tonality. In all though the RB303 on the P3 reaffirms its place as an advanced design with little resonant energy and a good general rigidity.

The P3 turntable varied speed quite strong at the basic rotational rate of 0.55Hz (33rpm) just like earlier Regas and nothing has changed here measurement suggests. Unweighted wow was 0.15% and DIN weighted 0.1%. Speed was reasonably accurate, the turntable running +0.4% fast, not enough to produce obvious pitch change.

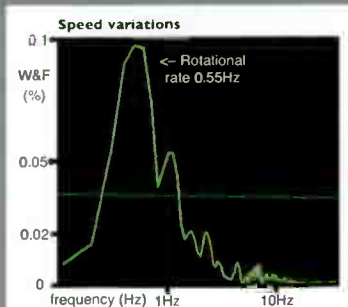
The Rega remains mediocre in terms of speed stability and it is unlikely to have the rock solid pitch of a direct drive or better belt drives; better is possible. It is however a good enough result for a budget deck and the RB303 arm remains a strong design of deserved reputation. NK

Speed accuracy +0.4%
Wow & flutter unwt'd 0.15%
Wow & flutter DIN weighted 0.1%

ARM VIBRATION



WOW & FLUTTER



VERDICT

Super smoothness, detail and poise at the price, but the slight speed instability detracts; needs TT-PSU to really fly.

REGA RP3 £475
Rega Research
+44(0)1702 332071
www.rega.co.uk

FOR

- smooth sophistication
- detail and warmth
- grippingly detailed

AGAINST

- needs TT-PSU to counter speed stability issues

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MicHELL Orbe SE, AC motor, excellent boxed	1999 Krell KAV400xi, nr mint boxed	1599 Linn Karik 3, excellent	449 Kudas C30 Oak finish, excellent
Naim StageLine, recent excellent boxed	2499 Krell Evolution 600 Monoblocks £31,000 new!	Offers! Linn Genki, excellent boxed	399 Linn Keliidh, KuStone stands in cherry
Natts Analogue Spacedeck/arm, heavy kit, p/s	999 MarkLevinson ML9, due in	799 Leema Pulse 3, nr mint boxed	799 Magneplanar MG3.6, Ex demo, superb
Ortofon TA1000 Tonearm, brand new unused	499 Linn Majik 2100 Power	899 Meridian 203 DAC, vgc	199 Martin Logan Odyssey, excellent boxed
Project Tube Box original, excellent	119 Luxman LV105u, rare integrated, excellent boxed	299 Meridian 200 Transport, good condition	199 Meridian M20 Active speakers
Project Tube Box SE Mk2, excellent boxed	329 Luxman LV505u, integrated, nr mint boxed	1999 Meridian 207 CD/Preamp, good condition	249 Meridian M3 Active speakers
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Quad 24P phono stage nr mint boxed ex demo	899 Melody 101 Preamplifier, world renowned ex demo	1199 Micromega CD30, nr mint boxed new model	1199 Monitor Audio Radius HD, various ex display
Rega P3, St Georges flag, excellent boxed	Call Melody 243 Integrated, ex demo	1199 Monitor Audio GSW12 Gold series Subwoofer, excellent	699 Monitor Audio PL200, vgc, boxed
Revolver Rebel, vgc+	299 Meridian 601 preamplifier, vgc with remote due in	1499 Monitor Audio BX2, ex demo mint	749 Monitor Audio PL200, vgc, boxed
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Passion Play

David Price tries the Missing Link tweaked Vincent PHO-111 Vinyl Passion phono stage...

In a world of phono stages where it's possible to get no change from £4,000, here's something for £119 that's been specially tweaked by the capable hand of Mark Sears from Missing Link. The 'Vinyl Passion' edition of the Vincent PHO-111 phono stage, itself a German designed, Chinese built box of chips, has been subtly but usefully breathed on.

The PHO-111 itself is a cheap and cheerful op-amp based phono stage in a box. It offers two switchable input sensitivities (4mV MM and 0.45mV MC) and three loading options (47 kOhm/100pF, MM II: 47 kOhm/300pF, MC: 100 Ohm/100pF), with cheap gold plated RCA input and output sockets. The 145x55x125mm box is a very inexpensive pressed steel affair, and comes with a 16VAC/200 mA 'wall wart' switched mode power supply, that comes with an enigmatically "upgraded" Missing Link sticker outside! That, as far as I can discern, is the extent of the mods...

SOUND QUALITY

This modest phono stage sounded surprisingly smooth with a nice, fulsome bass and absolutely no upper midrange nasties. Kicking off with Nu Era's 'Some Think Electronic' EP, and 'A 3rd of the Third' was most enjoyable, its sins being those of omission, musically speaking. Bass was quite warm and soft and tuneful, the bass guitar line being picked out well and

counterpointed nicely to the banging electronic percussion. The snare sound, which can be quite hard and grating, wasn't anything of the sort, although there was a slightly diffuse nature to it in absolute terms; ditto the hi hats which were ever so slightly blurred, yet never harsh. Behind this, thick swirls of synthesiser sound gave an expansive and immersive effect, making the track relaxing get involving to listen to – and certainly far, far better than expected.

Daryl Hall and John Oates' 'I Can't Go for That' showed the Vinyl Passion as a little dynamically constrained and loose at frequency extremes, with a subtle tendency to cloud fine detail, but then again it never sounded anything other than enjoyable. Indeed, I found it quite relaxing and beguiling in its way; it didn't ask much from the listener, letting its sound wash around in a comforting way and giving as much as it needed to in terms of detail, without falling over itself to sound overly forensic. This contrasts with other cheapo designs which throw everything at you in a forced and

harsh way, trying to give the illusion of ability they don't have.

The only real downside was the hiss, which was audible on MM and almost intrusive on MC; via the latter it was almost like listening to analogue tape without Dolby! This apart, it wasn't a bad performer at the price, with an unusually smooth and warm tonality, and a general musicality only normally heard from grown up phono stages – the Vincent PHO-111 Vinyl Passion just gets on the job of making music fun.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our analysis shows flat frequency response, a result of accurate equalisation. However, gain does not reduce below 20Hz on MM or MC, being maintained right down to 1Hz; in other words there is no warp filtering and warps at 5Hz will get strongly amplified, causing loudspeaker cone flap.

MM gain is close to unusably low at x48 (33dB), a common gain being x100. MC was x10 higher (correct ratio) but again too low in absolute terms: it should be x1000 minimum.

And finally hiss was 20dB higher than usual in MC, and 8dB higher than usual in MM mode, since both were a high 0.7µV equivalent input noise (IEC A weighted).

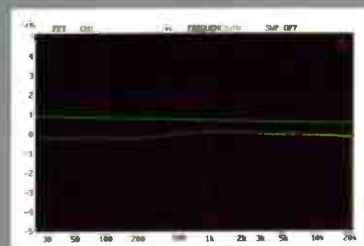
No differences existed between MMi and MMII in all the above measurements.

This phono stage did not measure

well. Lower noise ICs are commonly available nowadays and more gain is needed. NK

Disc	
Frequency response	1Hz-35kHz
Separation	65dB
Noise (e.i.n.)	0.7µV
Distortion	0.003%
Gain	x48(33dB) - x490(54dB)
Overload	9V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT

Warm, smooth and enjoyably musical considering its modest price, although hiss can intrude via moving coil.

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FOR

- musically enjoyable
- smooth and warmish
- MM and MC inputs

AGAINST

- hissy on MM and MC
- rudimentary build!

Tiger Goods

Here's one of the most interesting upgrade packages in recent years, for the ubiquitous Linn Sondek turntable. Tony Bolton gets his claws into the Tiger-Paw Khan Linn LP12...



Like most of you I'm sure, I am very protective of my hi-fi equipment. I am quite happy to try 'hot-rodding' things as long as whatever is done can be undone without leaving a mark if it doesn't work. So when editor DP approached me to do this review, which involved the stripping down, replacement of the top plate studs and crossbrace, and reassembly of my Linn Sondek, I must admit that I approached it with some degree of trepidation...

Regular readers will be aware that my Sondek is not standard, in that I use a Hadcock 242 Cryo unipivot tonearm on it, and it is powered by an Origin Live Ultra DC motor. Both of these changes, I feel, have been extremely beneficial to the sound, and have the advantage for me of enabling the deck to spin at higher speeds than just 33 and 45. The interchangeability of the Hadcock arms allows me to have three; one for LP, one for 78 and the other for

visiting cartridges, also making it a convenient tool for this job.

Having been reassured that the Khan modifications could be undone if required, I duly got the kettle brewing and awaited the visit from Mark Digman and Derek Jenkins, two of the three partners that make up the rather abstractly named company, Tiger-Paw. Based in Coulsdon in Surrey and formed in the early part of this year, they offer a range of modifications to the LP12 ranging from replacement hinges through to the Khan mod under review here.

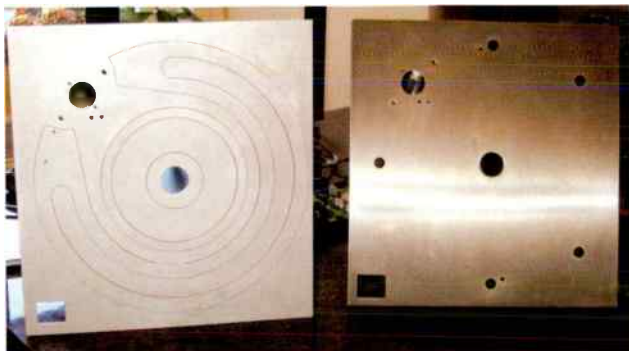
Whilst various companies have focused their attention on the LP12's subchassis, armboards and power supplies over the years, very few have looked at the effects of the stainless steel top plate upon the sound. After experimenting with several versions, this final design is a piece of bead-blasted and anodised aluminium which is cut from a solid billet. The top has a curved design on it, whilst the underside has a straight

pattern cut in, along with tappings for the studs. These shapes are claimed to dissipate resonances making for a more inert mounting for the subchassis and motor.

The original top plate is slightly curved to make it a stressed fit into the plinth. This one weighs about



Dismantling the Sondek, prior to surgery...



New and old – the two top plates compared...

the same amount but is machined to close tolerances to allow it to just drop into place. The bolts which go right through the original top plate are replaced with high quality bespoke steel studs. Completing the ensemble is a replacement crossbrace, again in aluminium with more 'standing wave reduction grooving' which replaces the original pressed steel example. This is where the electronics for the Valhalla board or Lingo control board live, so any improvement in the mounting should benefit the sound.

After their arrival, and suitable time being allowed for tea drinking and a listen through a selection of my records ranging from Shpongole to a 1933 copy of Lew Stone's 'White Jazz', the Sondek was carried from the front room into the kitchen and placed on a Linn jig, ready for

"for the performance improvement on offer, I feel the Tiger Paw Khan is exceptionally good value for money. Quality is second to none..."

surgery. The Linn jig is a stand which holds the deck both steady and level while allowing complete access to all parts of it. Over the next hour Derek, who has over thirty years of experience in working on Sondeks, removed the original bits until there was just a plinth sitting there. Then the new top plate was installed, followed by replacement springs and mounting grommets onto which was put the original subchassis. The bearing was thoroughly examined and pronounced to be in excellent health (pleasing news considering that this player was built on the 19th April 1982, and in my hands for the last eight years, has covered quite a high mileage) before being reassembled. Next was the crossbrace, armboard and motor unit...

Years ago a good friend who used to work for Linn introduced me to the black art of setting up Sondek suspension, and I have, on occasion, lost whole evenings tweaking the bounce of both LP12s and various Thorens decks, so I was very impressed to watch Derek get it bouncing perfectly in under five minutes. After final checks for arm and cartridge alignment, and balance, the Sondek went back to the wall rack in the front room and was fired up.

SOUND QUALITY

This is one of those rare occasions when it took a matter seconds of listening before I turned to Derek and Mark, commenting on the hugely increased scale and detail of the soundstage. They laughed and informed me that I was conforming

to what they had begun to call the "three second rule"!

Starting with Shpongole's 'Are You Shpongled?', we worked our way back through the same selection of records and I sat there mesmerised by the transformation of the sound. I have mentioned the scale differences – the music seemed to be coming from a far bigger area in front of me, with increases to all dimensions of the sound, without it acquiring a grandiose, overblown manner. The other thing that was obvious with the Shpongole pieces was the increase in detail and depth to the bass. It seemed to gain a better shape and a more defined position within the music, but lost a certain euphonic colouration that, to my ears, slows and clouds the sound somewhat.

Moving onto Lew Stone's 'White

Jazz' was an ear opener. This cover of the Casa Loma Orchestra's hit is well recorded with the band on top form, and this copy is in good condition; I now found the surface noise had taken a big step further into the background, and the beat of this rather crackingly paced foxtrot had more snap and precision. The trumpet pyrotechnics of Nat Gonella stood out with a sharper attack to the notes and the decay being better described. It was hot jazz that had just had the temperature turned up.

After Mark and Derek had left for the long drive back to the Southeast, I settled down for a very late evening of record playing. After a lot more 78s I moved back to microgroove recordings and played Acker Bilk's second LP, revelling in the latinesque beat of 'Creole Jazz'



The new top plate in situ.



The new crossbrace.



Finished and ready to go; the bubble wrap provides an element of sound deadening for the DC motor...

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with Bilk's wailing clarinet almost sending tingles up my spine. I usually reach for the mono switch with this record. It bears a few minor scars from its fifty years of existence, but I now found it playing in an acceptable manner with the phono stage still in stereo mode. The background crackles were sufficiently muted so as to not be intrusive.

The same applied to a 1964 Roy Orbison LP that had obviously attended a few parties in its youth. Played on the rejuvenated Sondek,

the final track on side one, a cover of Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Mean Woman Blues', played with minimal disturbance but displayed a more incisive guitar sound than I am used to hearing from it.

While I was putting together my notes for this article I played through Kalman's operetta 'Gräfin Mariza'. First performed in 1924 it is typical of the period with swinging Viennese waltzes and lush sounding choruses, complimenting rather sprightly two steps such as 'Komm

mit nach Varasdin' sung by the two leads. This recording, originally done by Electrola (HMV) in Germany in 1972, has most of the spoken bits in between the songs so comes with performers walking into and out of the stage area, along with some basic sound effects such as doors opening and differing acoustics for indoor and outdoor scenes.

I felt that the level of detail retrieval had vastly improved since last playing these discs and even though I know them well, I kept hearing odd little things in both the music and effects that I hadn't previously been conscious of. It was musically coherent, and thoroughly delightful to listen to.

As I write this I've been trying to think of any drawbacks to this modification to the LP12, and the only one that I can come up with is that if you have been relying on the bass colouration of a standard Sondek to enrich up the sound of your system then you may find this a little different. There is plenty of bass there, but it seemed to be more evenly weighted across the



The full Khan kit now fitted, with the crossbrace visible...



The Sondek back upstairs, awaiting fitment of the outer platter.



The finished deck back in the listening room, singing away to the strains of Acker Bilk!

REVIEW SYSTEM:

Cartridgeman MusicMaker III cartridge
Clearaudio Concept cartridge
Leema Agena phono stage
Leema Tucana II amplifier
Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers

frequencies and possessed of greater agility. If the bass sound was human then I would say that it had lost a couple of stone of flab and gained a leaner and more toned musculature!

CONCLUSION

For the performance improvement on offer I feel that £795 for the Tiger Paw Khan mods package is exceptionally good value for money. The quality of the components, the enthusiasm for music and the technical knowledge of both Mark and Derek was second to none. I think that the Khan works very well, but should it not be to your taste, it can be removed as easily as it went in, of course. Based on my experience, you won't want to though, unless it was the obvious coloration (and other flaws) the stock LP12 exhibits that first attracted you to it. As such, I think this is a positive step forward sonically, which retains the positive characteristics of the turntable, while eliminating some areas of sonic confusion, and I totally and unequivocally recommend it.

VERDICT ●●●●●

A beautifully crafted modifications package for the evergreen Linn LP12, bringing very substantial sonic improvements.

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FOR

- noticeably lower noise floor
- more expansive soundstage
- improved timing precision
- retains LP12's charm!

AGAINST

- nothing



Adam Smith treats his Garrard 401 to some of Northwest Analogue's slate goodness...

Stone Age

Remarkably, it is now nearly sixty years since the Garrard 301 was born. Although a risky proposition for a company more famed for their more affordable turntables and record changers, it immediately became the reference turntable for the serious home user to have, as well as becoming an almost essential fixture in recording and radio studios. Garrard hit on to a winning streak that continued eleven years later with the unveiling of the 401 – crisper, more modern styling and a few tweaks

under the bonnet kept the Swindon company at the top of its game, until financial dire straits, cost-cutting, poor quality control and intense Japanese competition finally killed off the 401 in 1977, and the entire company a few years later.

Fortunately, though, Garrard rose again under the guiding hands of men such as Loricraft's Terry O'Sullivan, and the mighty 301 and 401 motor units are once again at the top of their game. Able to take on the finest of modern designs, these decks show just how simple but intelligent engineering works, although they

do need a bit of help along the way. A good service, proper setup and a seriously solid plinth are essential in hearing just what they can do and, fortunately, there's a new name on the block that can do the whole lot for you...

Dominic Harper turned his hobby into a business after realising that he was spending more time than was *strictly* necessary repairing and rebuilding turntables, and Northwest Analogue was born. Specialising in Garrard 301s and 401s, plus Thorens TD124s and assorted Goldring Lencos, the company aims to

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"provide a wide range of services for your turntable, from basic servicing (starting at around £60) to complete overhaul". However, my eye was caught by the rather swanky plinths on their website, especially as they are made of slate, and I have still yet to hear a better Garrard setup than that in a plinth from the now-defunct Slatedeck. Combine this with the recent unearthing of my own, rather sorry-looking 401 from its resting place in the loft (or "gateway to the skip" as it is sometimes known) and this was clearly an opportunity too good to miss.

Contact was made and Dominic mentioned that he might like to take a look at my 401 before it went into one of his plinths; just to be sure it was operating at maximum potential. I sheepishly confessed to its rather less than LP-ready condition and ended up sending it off to him for a full fettle. All I can say is that Dominic's mother clearly raised him well as, after unboxing and examining it, his response was an effortlessly polite, "it has seen better days"! The rebuilt, relubed and repainted vision that returned to me looked like new however, so I can heartily recommend Northwest's restoration services, which extend to nearly any turntable you like, and even to cartridge rebuilds.

Following further discussion, we settled on a review plinth made from finest Burlington Blue slate and fitted with rotating armboard with an SME mount that would cater for 9-10 inch arms, bringing the cost in at £1,150. Dominic also supplied two tiers of his slate racking system to support the deck, priced at £350 each with legs of any length up to 230mm and an Exact Audio cork mat to supplant my 401's rather unwell original item. This £30 mat damps the platter very effectively and sits neatly inside the 401 platter's raised edges. All plinths are made to order, starting at around £900, and customers can specify their own requirements for each one. Of course, arms up to 12" in length and with any mounting pattern can be accommodated and Dominic is happy

to make plinths that will take up to four arms if the owner so desires.

Other options include extra armboards for £175 each, slate SME arm base spacers for £80 and a rather natty slate record puck, also £80. The plinth itself is superbly finished and, unlike the old Slatedeck type, comes in a single, easy to manoeuvre layer (well, 'easy' given the confines of its considerable weight, naturally – setup and positioning definitely requires four hands). It also has a thicker outer edge to hide

wooden support, what will you hear? The first thing, naturally, will be the rock-steady, sledgehammer bass for which the deck is rightly known. This means that rhythm is king and the deck's astounding sense of timing will ensure that nothing is allowed to slip, slur or fall behind. This stability means that midrange detail is very good and treble smooth, if somewhat less crisp compared to the best of the rest. Equally, imaging is spacious and well defined, if somewhat lacking in the ultimate depth and width offered by some of the opposition.

Swap the deck to the Northwest Analogue slate plinth and support however, and something remarkable happens. Whilst that magnificent, tight and oh-so-deep bass is still very much present, suddenly the deck no longer appears to be attempting to continually thump you out of your chair. Not an ounce of depth or weight is lost but suddenly the low end takes on real form, snaps into incredible focus and simply leaves you sat there, jaw somewhat slack at

"Its sheer even-handedness and neutrality means that it lets the music shine through, keeping me listening into the early hours, night after night..."

the deck's motor and below-decks linkages.

Setup is simply a case of fitting the motor unit, securing the arm to the circular arm mounting plate and aligning it before securing it from below using the nut and brace. Adjustable feet are fitted for levelling and once the cartridge is aligned, you're ready to go.

SOUND QUALITY

So, if you take a decently fettled Garrard 401 and pop it into a basic

what you've been missing.

Vinyl in the Smith listening room over the few weeks prior to this review had been courtesy of a very fine, although admittedly cheaper, belt drive turntable that had impressed with its sense of smooth yet well defined low end. Spinning Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang' on the Garrard however, suddenly made that previous deck seem as wobbly and uncertain as a jelly sat on a trampoline. This time round, every single bass note snapped into action



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Instantly and ceased with almost military precision.

Furthermore the sense of effortless ease with which the deck dealt with the most complicated bass lines I could find in my record collection almost had me chuckling at the way it constantly seemed to be sat beside my rack, feet up on the desk and filing its nails, whilst asking of me, "Is this all you've got?" Interestingly my 12 inch single boxes haven't seen the light of day for a few months but within hours my listening room floor was scattered with them as I delved through my collection – take a decent dance EP and a Garrard like this and I guarantee you'll be captivated. Added to this was a feeling of clarity and lightness to the upper bass. In a less than perfect example of these decks, this area of the frequency range can come across as willing but rather stodgy, but the comprehensive overhaul performed by Northwest Analogue allied to the plinth suddenly added a proper sense of space and atmosphere.

Of course, those of you who are less of a bass freak than myself

may be wondering what all the fuss is about, but trust me, everyone is catered for. Across the midrange, the slate plinth opens up the soundstage noticeably – admittedly the likes of the Michell GyroDec still has the edge in terms of sheer expansiveness of soundstage, but the modifications and support around my old 401 suddenly had it sounding cavernous compared to its previous incarnation.

A help at this point was the substitution of the standard Garrard mat for the Exact Audio cork item. I generally stick with the standard rubber mat on my own 301, finding it to offer the best overall performance, although I do exchange it for a Funk Firm Achromat if I'm in the mood for more midrange detail and openness.

The Exact seems to capture the best of both worlds – adding in the midrange fluency of the Achromat but without robbing the low end punch that it occasionally misses, and for which the rubber item is still best.

Finally, the 'veiled treble' that some Garrard detractors like to point smugly at was absolutely and completely gone. In its place was a smooth top end blessed with an

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Garrard 401 turntable
Alphason HR-100S arm (Cardas wired)
Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII cartridge
Anatek MC1 phono stage
Naim Supernait amplifier
Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers (modified)

OPTIONS

Slate Plinth (as tested)	£1,150
Slate Racking Systems (per layer)	£350
Slate Record Puck	£80
Exact Audio Cork Mat	£30
Garrard 401 Full Service	from £120

almost mastertape-like clarity and insight. Neither too bright nor overly warm and syrupy, the modified Garrard's top end simply seemed to be telling me exactly what I needed to hear; no more and no less. In fact this actually sums up the deck's whole performance during my entire listening session – its even-handedness and neutrality means that it lets the music shine through, keeping me listening into the early hours on several nights.

CONCLUSION

It's good to have another company making beautiful slate plinths for Garrard 301s, 401s and other classic turntables once more. The vibration given off by that massive motor, even when it is running at its very best, needs to go somewhere, and a Northwest Analogue slate plinth does the job of taming it brilliantly, with the slate racking system providing the icing on the cake in both sonic and visual terms. Add in the company's capabilities in terms of the restoration services that they offer to ensure that the item the plinth is housing is in tip-top condition, plus their impressive range of accessories and add-ons, and you have an excellent one-stop shop for all your vintage turntable needs.

Of course, it must be remembered that there are some excellently crafted, highly capable and superbly styled plinth units made from all sorts of materials out there that also perform very well and will lighten your pocket somewhat less than the Northwest Analogue unit but, to me, it just seems that a massive chunk of finest slate has a regal sense of authority, control and purposeful musicality that no other design can quite match up to. Rather like one of those old Garrards, in fact.

VERDICT

The finest way to release the potential of a classic turntable motor unit that I have heard to date. Start saving now.

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FOR

- styling
- build quality and finish
- ease of assembly
- flexibility

AGAINST

- setup is a two person job!



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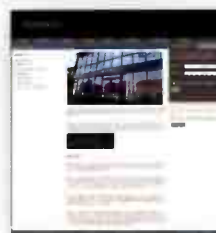
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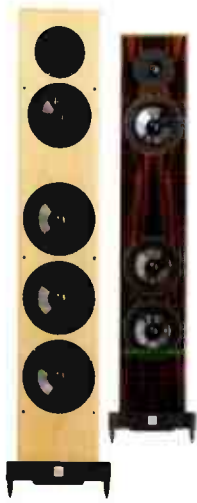
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The Luxury Rap

David Price talks to Heaven 17's Glenn Gregory and Martyn Ware about life, the universe and everything analogue...



Along with Glenn Gregory and Ian Craig Marsh, Martyn Ware co-wrote and co-produced some of the most memorable hits of the nineteen eighties. 'The Luxury Gap', Heaven 17's second studio album, which spawned 'Temptation', 'Let Me Go', 'Come Live With Me' and 'Crushed by the Wheels of Industry', is now being 'toured' live, performed entirely in three dimensional surround sound at the London Roundhouse on Friday October 14th. The next day, his side project, British Electric Foundation's 'Music of Quality and Distinction' is being performed live, with a range of guest vocalists including La Roux's Elly Jackson, Sandie Shaw, Glenn Gregory, Scritti Politti's Green Gartside, Boy George, Midge Ure, Polly Scattergood, the Noisettes' Shingai Shoniwa, plus Kate Jackson.

I got the chance to speak to Martyn Ware and Glenn Gregory in London's Primrose Hill. Both from Sheffield, the guys haven't lost their northern friendliness and remain resolutely down to earth. Charming and approachable, at times they still sounded like awe-struck sixteen year olds in awe of the wonder of great music, seminal recording artists (many of whom they've now worked with) and the technology in general. We kicked off with Martyn explaining to me about BEF night; he was still at the planning stage...

MW: We've got so many guests! From a logistical point of view, the BEF show is a problem, because you're relying on the goodwill of the artists, and you're dealing with

a certain number of egos. Hopefully none of them are going to be divas, although Boy George is on – although he's a mate, and we've always got on really well with him! Sandy Shaw can be edgy, but she's a fantastic woman and a great singer. I'm thinking it's going to be quite an emotional night, it's the joining of generations, hoping to expose the provenance of great pop music. The whole BEF project is about trying to prove that electronic music can be emotional and affecting.

DP: It was a heck of a project, the original BEF 'Music of Quality and Distinction', an inclusive thing bringing together so many different artists but with a new sound...

MW: Yeah - we were so in love with technology at the time, there was a lot of things we used. We used to order a lot of kit in. It was about that time that Ian bought the Fairlight. Forty grand he paid. Forty thousand quid!

DP: It must have cost a bob or two!

MW: He just turned up and said, 'I've bought a Fairlight!' It wasn't very user friendly and the sound quality was appalling, but it looked great. Being the world's first sampler was amazing, being able to see the 3D waveform was really cool. It was like great, hi hat, kkkkkk! It was that bad that we rang up Synclavier in Australia and said there's something wrong with this machine, I think we need a replacement motherboard. And they said, "that will be the aliasing noise, mate"! But it doesn't sound anything like a hi hat! And they said, "that's because it's only eight bit

sampling"...

GG: Didn't really work!

MW: When the EMU 2 came out it was a hundred times more useable, and £3,000. Ian was sick as a dog.

GG: He ended up using his Fairlight as a keyboard stand. Then he sold it; I think someone in New Order bought it...

DP: But it was part of the birth of sampling. And the analogue synths of the day sounded so nice back then.

MW: Still do. Sadly I sold 'em all throughout the course of the eighties. We got rid of all sorts, Jupiter 4s, Jupiter 8s, and bought horrible clanking digital synths in an effort to keep up with times. Then it got to 1992 and I met Vince Clarke for the first time. He was always a fan of the early Human League, and claims that 'Being Boiled' got him into electronics, because before that he was a sort of 'happy clapper' Christian folk singer. And then one Christmas this stuff arrived, it was a bunch of boxes. And he'd found me an original boxed Roland System 100, and he'd bought it for me in an effort to get me to go back to make records like, back in the day.

GG: And, coming full circle, you have started using them again - and there's a lot of that on the new BEF album.

DP: When the synth generation came it was two fingers up to the Eagles, wasn't it?

GG: That's exactly what we were doing, wasn't it? Even before the Human League, when punk had smashed open the door for us, we realised we don't have to play guitar, we can do it with these synths...

MW: It wasn't as important to have

a traditional musical skill, as it was to have a good ear and a sense of what sounds were appropriate for different sources,

GG: We were writing demos, and I remember it was a lovely day, and Ian was sat on the windowsill of his flat. And he said, 'I've had an idea - I'm going to write a song about the Lord's Prayer. He was going on about a chord structure that never seemed to stop building, like sexual tension. And both me and Martyn went, "are you all right?"'

MW: But the man had got it right! We were writing a lot using this Akai keyboard, that had a stepping chord facility. There was something about the appeal of this sort of random way of writing, it was really about multiple choice. And actually the funny thing is we wrote the entire 'Luxury Gap' album using this technique, and our publishers brought out the sheet music. And when you look at it, it was incredibly complex - some of those tracks are in the most bizarre keys, these weird inversions, seven flats, you know. Funny enough making the first BEF album, 'Music of Quality and Distinction Vol. 1' was like a crash university study course in brilliant song structures; they were great songs but we didn't quite understand why we liked them so much. When you start deconstructing songs like 'It's Over', 'Anyone Who Had a Heart'... you know Jimmy Webb, Bacharach and David, it was like a crash course in how to keep people interested in a song. And often what appeared to be incredibly complex were very simple chord sequences, because some of the greatest songwriters were not very good keyboard players. Like a swan floating on the lake but underneath was something different going on entirely, that really appealed to us.

DP: What are your favourite Heaven 17 tracks - 'Temptation'?

MW: We've played that for what must be a couple of hundred of times, and everybody gets it, always. But for us, the song that we're most proud of is 'Let Me Go'.

DP: And 'Come Live with Me' has a certain Bacharach quality...

GG: Yeah, totally!

MW: That's part of the excitement of doing 'Luxury Gap' live for the first time ever, it has to sound right, it has to sound epic, it has to sound like the best thing we ever did. And that's the reason we're doing in three dimensional sound... it's gonna sound great.

GG: I tell you, 'The Luxury Gap', when it was at Air Studios which was in Oxford Circus, we had to order in extra air conditioning to keep the

machines cool, because we'd got so many tape machines in the room. We were running three 24 track tape machines in sync, which took about 15 seconds to sync up, plus a couple of half inch machines, plus quarter inch machines with multiple loops going round the outside of the studio, choral loops which we mixed down to 128 tracks!

DP: So if you dropped your fag on the floor the whole of London would have gone up...

MW: It was technological insanity; we had towers of outboard gear, going up to the ceiling. We had every Dolby SR unit in London! I think it cost £300,000 at that - like way over a million quid in today's terms. We really were highly motivated. We had that work ethic, maybe it's the Sheffield thing, but we weren't lounging around with a bunch of prostitutes...

GG: Tragically.

DP: Did you get the sense that it was a special time in music?

GG: Oh yeah. Greg Walsh the co-producer/engineer on that album was pushing the envelope constantly...

MW: He was trained by Geoff Emerick, a famous engineer who worked with the Beatles at Abbey Road, and with Rod Temperton, who wrote some of Michael Jackson's hits - all of those vocal harmonies he brought to us.

GG: We were doing 128 track backing vocals for 'Let Me Go'. We really went for it on that album.

MW: When it was finally mastered, we so proud of that album.

'Penthouse and Pavement' was more like an experimental album, energized, but with 'Luxury Gap', we were attempting to make a timeless album. And a lot of credit has to go to Virgin Records, because there was literally no agreed budget for that album. When we started working on 'Temptation' in the studio, and we thought it would be great to have a big orchestra, and we rang up the record company, the answer was, 'when do you want it?', not 'how much does it cost?' It's a different world now...

DP: It was just at the time when you could do that...

MW: Oh yeah, it was a particular window of opportunity that you could exploit - and we did!

GG: To be honest, there was an awful lot of 'we're gonna show everybody out there that we're better than you - and can write better songs that are more melodic and more beautiful. It's not like that anymore, but at the time, yes!

I sense that for Glenn and Martyn,

feelings run deep; they're immensely proud of the 'Luxury Gap', and justifiably so. But the album itself wasn't the beginning and the end of the Heaven 17 project. They were really trying to do something new at the time, which was to bring soul music to electronics (or vice versa). Whereas the likes of Kraftwerk and Phil Oakey's Human League (one of the biggest bands in the world, momentarily) were following a cleaner, colder and more clinical groove, Heaven 17 were working hard to fuse the warmth of soul with the clinical precision of electronics. I put it to them that it defined their sound...

GG: Oh yeah - we were listening to a lot of black dance music and northern soul.

MW: It was a burgeoning time, I mean come on, the Michael Jackson albums, Quincy Jones, Earth Wind and Fire, I mean, it was an incredible time! Even a lot of Norman Whitfield productions, it all had an influence on us, as well as disco. Giorgio Moroder...

GG: And the important thing about the Heaven 17 take on that, we also were equally in love with Bowie and Roxy (Music), and lyrically I guess we were more on the Bowie side, and musically on the funk side, so it was a lovely hybrid.

DP: That's something I love about your albums...

MW: Yeah - on 'Luxury Gap' we were doing a lot of composing on the Roland MC8, and it's very mathematical - it was beautiful. And you know the nature of Linn Drums is that they were super-accurate timing wise, much better than any modern computer-based system. That's what you get from a Linn drum, and why 'Penthouse and Pavement' sounds pin-sharp.

DP: It's very difficult to hear that album sounding right - you've got to have good hi-fi equipment, a really good stable turntable, and then it suddenly snaps into focus, otherwise it sounds mushy...

GG: Do you know, even a good CD player can make a difference to that album!

And that's why I can't wait to hear the classic 'Luxury Gap' album performed live; it is bound to sound superb, with painstaking attention to detail not just to the music itself but the sonics from the guys. Indeed, either of the two nights are going to be very special indeed.

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NEXT MONTH

With its wide range of great new products from all around the world, December's Hi-Fi World magazine keeps the winter chill away – and maybe even help your hi-fi sound better too! For example, on the speaker front, we've got the Piega Premium 1 mini monitors, totting superb ribbon tweeters and built with Swiss precision. Vinylistas will love the Design Build Listen RWand tonearm, a striking new design from New Zealand. The brand new British designed, Chinese made Audiolab 8200A integrated amplifier promises much, as does the Danish Densen Beat 110. And it's back home to Huntingdon, England for the latest Cyrus CD transport, likely a corker. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...



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 2nd Hand Hi-Fi 104
 Absolute Sounds OBC
 Air Audio 56
 Audio Component 108
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 Basically Sound 108
 Billy Vee 114
 Black Rhodium 46,48
 Brennan 18
 Classic Hi-Fi 112
 Classique Sound 108
 Coley 46
 DPA 48
 EnjoyTheMusic.Com 114
 Gilabend 46
 Hart Audio 30
 Heathcote Audio 116
 Heatherdale Audio 125
 Henley Designs 70,96
 Hi-Fi Sound 104
 I.A.G. 26
 Ian Harrison 110
 Icon Audio 64
 Inspire Hi-Fi 32,90
 Isokinetik 112
 Jo Sound 16
 Mantra Audio 110
 Mei Xing Electronics 32
 Midland Audio Exchange 122
 Music First 112
 Origin Live 92
 Q.A.T 14
 Quadral 48
 Retro Reproduction 110
 Rock Solid Sounds 114
 Sevenoaks 117,118,119
 SME 56
 Sound Fowndations 6,1FC
 Sound Hi-Fi 92
 Turntable World 104
 Unique Furniture Outlet 112
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23	24
25	26
27	28
29	30

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"one of the most important, revolutionary jazz albums of all time" ..

One of the most important and, above all, revolutionary jazz albums of all time, 'Bitches Brew' was a jazz-rock fusion piece that was created via tape spliced jams and various takes, featuring great musicians such as Joe Zawinul, Wayne Shorter, Airto Moreira, John McLaughlin, Chick Corea, Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland, Don Alias, Bennie Maupin, Larry Young and Lenny White. The album sounds as fresh today as it sounded like an alien landing in the middle of the High St. back then. The record itself was a *zeitgeist* influence of varied musical styles. In fact, the first recording was made just a day after Hendrix had played at Woodstock – his influence is in there too (on 'Miles Runs the Voodoo Down')...

Drummer Lenny White remembered the sessions. "My role was to play in between the cracks. I wanted it to sound like one drummer with eight hands. You know, some critics say Jack played by himself on 'Sanctuary' but it's not true, yet I consider that a compliment in a way. I played subtly and it sounds like it's just one guy. The entire group was built around a double rhythm section—two drummers, two percussionists, two bassists, two – sometimes three – keyboards and guitar! We were all positioned in a semi-circle with Miles and Wayne in the middle. Miles would start a take by pointing at someone, like John or Jack, we'd all play and then he'd stop us with a wave of his hand."

The feeling that something significant was being created was

there at the very beginning. And what better way to celebrate the album than this box set released by Sony? Frankly, it's a bit of a corker. It includes three CDs featuring the original ninety four-plus minutes of music that appeared on the LP. In addition to that you receive six bonus recordings including alternative takes and single edits of 'Spanish Key', 'John McLaughlin', 'Miles Runs The Voodoo Down', 'Great Expectations' and 'Little Blue Frog'. In addition to those you also get a previously unissued performance at Tanglewood August 1970 with Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette, Airto Moreira and Gary Bartz and a DVD containing a previously unreleased performance at Copenhagen November 1969 with Wayne Shorter, Corea Holland and DeJohnette.

But that's not all. You also receive two 180gm vinyl LPs housed in a replica gatefold picture sleeve.

That little lot is contained in a 12" slipcase box set complete with a full-size 52-page book featuring rare, unpublished photographs and record label memos and a memorabilia envelope containing a reproduction of the Davis' Rolling Stone cover story from December 1969. There is previously unseen correspondence from producer Teo Maceros' archives, reproductions of three Fillmore West concert tickets from April 1970, high quality photograph prints and a foldout poster of Miles Davis.

Which is all well and good but you know and I know that this box set, which is still available, appeared

on the shelves a little while ago. So why are we talking about it now? Well, the box set is a mighty beast but so is the price tag (somewhere around £70) and not everyone can afford it. Besides, despite the luxurious aspect of the set, not everyone wants to pay for the extras – especially in the present economic climate. People like to pick and choose. Hey, we're human, we're complicated!

For those Miles fans who might like to set their sights a tad lower, there are alternatives and they all arrive via the Sony vinyl reissue partner, Music On Vinyl. Firstly, if you're after a well pressed, excellently mastered vinyl version of the basic 'Bitches Brew' album, then MOV can supply the very thing as a 180gm, double album for a reasonable price. But that's not all. If you do want to see extras, MOV can also supply those for you, as and when you can afford them. The company has just released 'Bitches Brew Live', a double album which includes a full hour of live 'Bitches Brew' performances. The first from Newport Jazz Festival, July 1969 includes the first professionally recorded live version of 'Miles Runs The Voodoo Down' and the first known recordings of the revamped electric version of Sanctuary. You also get a full set from the Isle Of Wight festival, August 1970 plus a 12-page booklet.

For anyone looking to delve into the 'Bitches Brew' experience, there is something for everyone here, no-matter what price point you can afford. **PR**

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