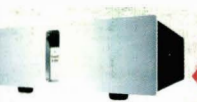


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# HI-FI CHOICE

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### ULTIMATE GROUP TEST SPEAKERS

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  - > Living Voice Auditorium
  - > Canton Karat L800 DC
  - > Mirage OM7
  - > Graves Audio Koronglay
  - > Totem Forest
  - > Jamo D870
  - > Triangle Naia

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# HI-FI CHOICE

NOVEMBER 2003 ISSUE 247

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To make sure you get the best advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most talented and experienced writers in the business.



**JASON KENNEDY**

Jason previously edited *Hi-Fi Choice*, but can now be found swanning about the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational (trust us) and his love of music knows no bounds.



**PAUL MESSENGER**

A former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also writes for respected US hi-fi journal *Stereophile*.



**PAUL MILLER**

Science officer Miller is hi-fi's undisputed king of lab testing. He employs his own specially designed equipment to pull apart every measurable parameter and explain its effect on a product's performance.



**ALVIN GOLD**

Alvin cut his hi-fi teeth in the retail trade, and has now been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). Few can match his encyclopedic knowledge of all things audio.



**RICHARD BLACK**

Richard is one talented guy: a professional musician, experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiast to boot. He's particularly nerdy about cables. It's probably Freudian.

Judging by your letters and emails, you like the changes we've made to *HFC* these past few issues. In our view, a good hi-fi magazine should be like a good system – crisp, clear and richly detailed, yet beautifully simple to use. Our goal is to produce pages that are attractive, readable and concise, yet contain a more thorough and thoughtful analysis than you'll find anywhere else, mixing passion for the subject with objectivity for the buyer.

If you want dozens of one-dimensional, quick-hit reviews, you've bought the wrong mag. And if you crave dull, dense pages with little passion or discernment we suggest you go elsewhere. *HFC* has no affiliations, no axes to grind, no predetermined agenda – just a love of the subject and a level of knowledge gained through years of experience. We obtain the finest kit for review, listen to it, measure it and, having lived with it a while, give you our thoughts and verdicts... verdicts formed by the most creditable set of reviewers in British hi-fi journalism. From the world's most rigorous group tests to our in-depth solo reviews and associated features we strive to make *HFC* the most vibrant, reliable and clear-thinking hi-fi journal available – 13 issues a year.

Our aim is to test the most important new components as soon as they're available, and to that end this issue is chock-full of kit you won't read about anywhere else, like Krell's new amp, Marantz's latest SACD player and a world exclusive review of Avid's Diva turntable. If you're a regular voyager on the good ship *HFC*, we hope it meets your expectations. And if you're new on board, we hope you enjoy the trip.



Tim Bower **editor**

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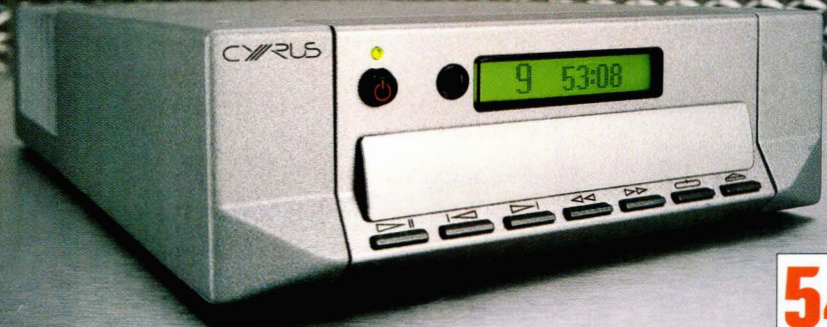
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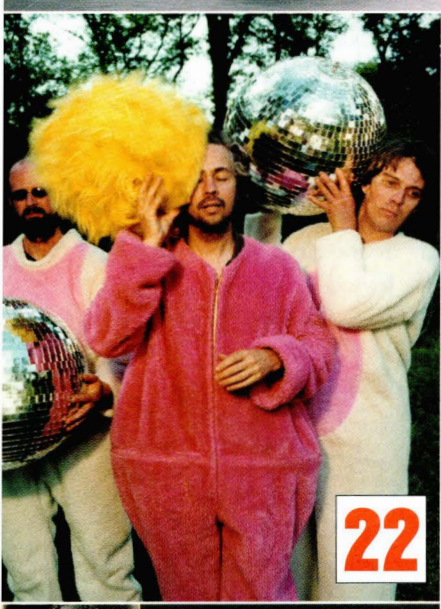
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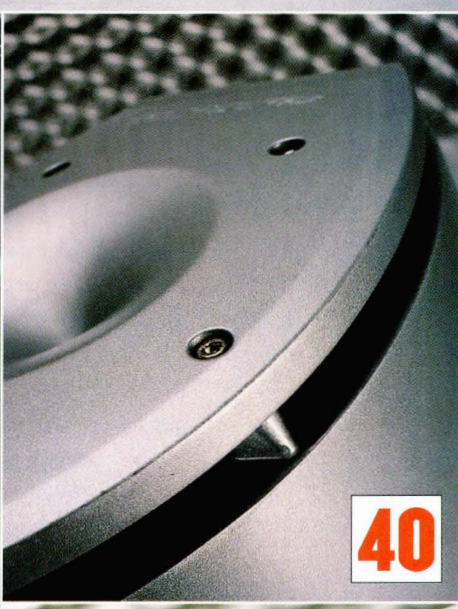
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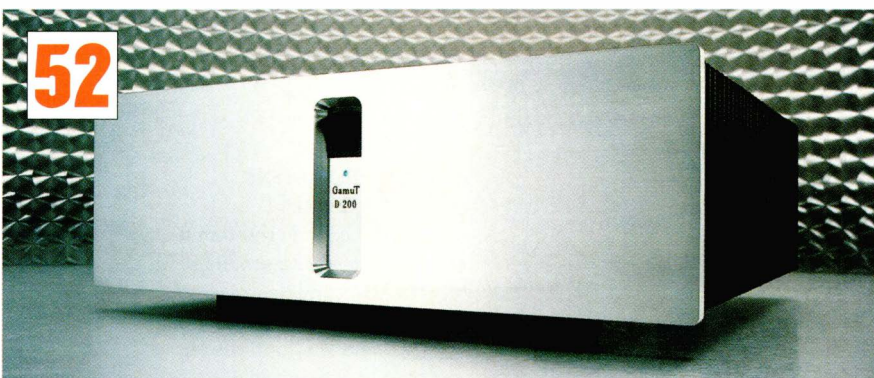
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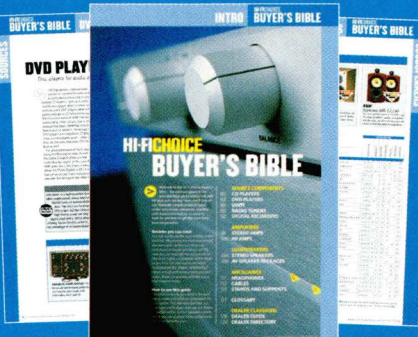
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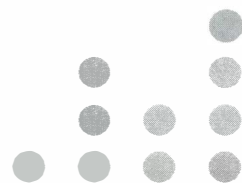
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Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 28 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi guide around. And our mix of thorough group tests and in-depth solo reviews continues to ensure that HFC is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the *smarter* hi-fi read...

# audiofile



## NOTHIN' BUT A G THANG

MERIDIAN G-SERIES OFFERS HIGH-END IN THE MID-RANGE

➤ If you've lusted after Meridian's high-end 800 series but couldn't face parting with the kind of money that requires, the British brand's new G series could be the answer to your prayers. This new range draws heavily on the technology developed for the 800 series including Meridian's recent work in video processing, and sits in between that and the 500 Series, both of which will continue.

The G Series is split into three families: optical disc players, processors, and power amplifiers. The first branch will include a CD player plus CD/DVD players – two of which will feature extended preamp capabilities.

The first product to be announced is the G91 DVD-Audio/Video player, which will retail for £3,895. This stylish, full-width unit combines a DVD/CD transport, AM/FM tuner, and stereo digital amplifier – possibly the nearest thing you'll ever get to a Meridian one-box solution. Another product, the G68 flagship surround processor, will be the first to feature Dolby Pro-Logic IIx, designed to upscale stereo and multichannel sources to 7.1 output.

☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com



## LOGAN'S HEROES

NEW SPEAKER RANGE FROM MARTINLOGAN



➤ **Electrostatic specialist**

**MartinLogan is treating us to a trio of new products. The US brand has announced three new speakers – a floorstander, standmounter and a subwoofer. Mosaic is a compact floorstanding speaker featuring ATF (Advanced Thin Film) transducers and very attractive curved wood cabinet.**

**The smaller Fresco is a versatile standmount that can be used as an LCR (Left, Centre, Right) speaker or as a surround speaker. Last of the three new products is the wonderfully named Grotto, a subwoofer with a 25cm driver driven by a 250-watt power amplifier.**

☎ 020 8971 3909  
🌐 www.martinlogan.com



## TWO'S COMPANY

LINN ADDS SECOND UNIVERSAL PLAYER

➤ Linn has added a second universal DVD player to its range. The UniDisk 2.1 will sit below the current 1.1, and at £4,500 costs £2,300 less. So what's the catch? Well, the 2.1 will still play almost every disc type – DVD-Video, DVD-Audio and SACD included – with video performance that is on a par with the more expensive player, including PAL progressive scan output. But savings have been made on the audio, making it much more of a home cinema-centred product, although Linn still stresses its credentials as an audio player.

Linn also has a new multichannel loudspeaker system called Akurate. It comprises the 242 floorstander, 212 standmount, 225 centre and 221 subwoofer with a 500W power amp. Prices start at £3,500 for the 212 and go up to £5,750 for the larger model.

☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk



## CAN YOU DIG IT?

### SENNHEISER'S NEW HIGH-END HEADPHONE

⊗ Sennheiser may be making massive inroads into the portable headphone market, but it's not ignoring the audiophile. The German brand's new HD650 aims to serve the demanding listener with a performance which the company claims is reminiscent of its famous Orpheus cans.

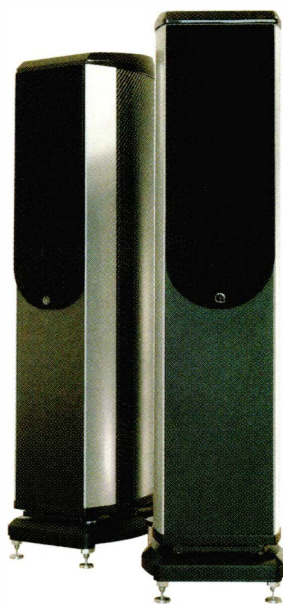
With a frequency response of 10Hz to 39.5kHz, it's designed with SACD users in mind and features a compressed cellulose fleece intended to reduce standing waves in the diaphragm and provide a more precise image for bass frequencies. Available in November, the HD 650 will retail at £300 a set.

☎ 01494 551 551  
 Ⓜ www.sennheiser.co.uk



## WILSON ACTS UP

### NEW ACT SPEAKER REPLACES TWO MODELS



⊗ Wilson Benesch is replacing both its ACT One and ACT Two speakers with a single innovative model, the ACT Silver. The new model is the first to be entirely assembled from metal and carbon composite, and will cost £8,500, about the same as the outgoing ACT Two.

Thanks to the extra strength of the materials, the Silver has the same internal volume as the ACT Two, but with the external dimensions of the One – however, the weight has almost doubled from 42kg to a massive 74kg.

If the metal finish isn't your bag, the ACT Silver is available in any colour or veneer. Prices for wood veneers are £9,105, while prices for bespoke options are available on request.

☎ 01142 852 656  
 Ⓜ www.wilson-benesch.com

## RUSS IN TIME

### RUSS ANDREWS LAUNCHES HI-FI SYSTEM

⊗ Hi-fi accessories specialist Russ Andrews is branching out into hardware. The mail order company has just announced a trio of products – a pre/power amp combination and a pair of speakers. The amp elements of the trio are modified versions of SJ Audio equipment, and will cost £2,750 for the pre and £3,500 for the power amplifier. The speakers are the brand's own

design however, and will set you back £2,550.

As the equipment is only available via mail order, auditioning it may prove tricky, but the company will be demonstrating it at various hi-fi shows and prospective buyers can also listen to it at Russ Andrews' own premises.

☎ 01539 825500  
 Ⓜ www.russandrews.com

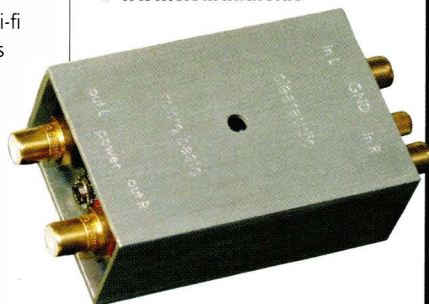
## CAN YOU SPEAK MICRO?

### CLEARAUDIO'S LATEST PHONO PREAMP

⊗ Turntable specialist Clearaudio is the proud father of a baby phono preamp, the Micro Basic. This miniature phono stage measures a mere 5x7.4x3cm and weighs in at 200g. It's designed to work with relatively affordable turntables and features high-quality, non-magnetic Clearaudio RCA sockets and an off-board power supply to allow high power-supply capacity while keeping noise and distortion to a minimum. Gain is adjustable by switches on the main circuit board, allowing it to be used with either Moving Magnet or Moving Coil cartridge types, while an impedance-sensing circuit automatically sets the ideal loading.

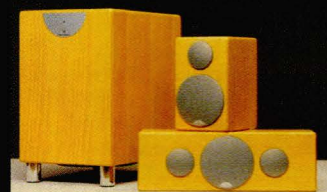
Available now, the Micro Basic phono stage will set you back £225.

☎ 01252 702 705  
 Ⓜ www.clearaudio.de



**audiofile**  
 ⊗ PRODUCT NEWS

⊗ Soundbites



**MONITOR AUDIO** Radius is a new speaker range intended to be a compact solution for the person who demands both high sound quality and room to breathe. The series comprises three models – two bookshelf speakers, the 90 (£125) and 180 (£150) and a seriously compact subwoofer, the Radius 360 (£350).  
 ☎ 01268 740 580

**BLACK RHODIUM** has unveiled the Concerto interconnect. The conducting elements are four solid nickel wires insulated with PTFE. The cable is available in two forms: as a one-metre pair with gold-plated RCA phono plugs for £135; and with Eichmann Bullet Plugs for £187.  
 ☎ 01332 361390

**KUBAN** is a smart range of hi-fi furniture from Kube Design. The range extends to four pieces – a kit rack with open front and back for ease of access, and two larger units that can house up to six pieces of kit and support a 50-inch screen. There's also a CD storage unit capable of housing 300 discs. Prices start at £475.  
 ☎ 01279 651 080

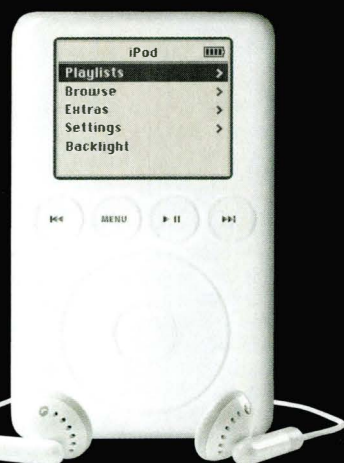
**JAMO** hopes its D4 speaker range will please music and movie fans alike. These stylish boxes are finished in real wood veneer and prices start at £499 a pair for the D400 going up to £999 for the floorstanding D450. There is also a subwoofer available for £599 and a centre speaker at £299.  
 ☎ 01788 573100

**NAD** has launched a new AM/FM tuner for the budget hi-fi sector. Priced at £180, the C422 carries a full feature set including RDS, Radio Text, 30 station presets and an eight-character preset naming facility. NAD is offering the tuner in both its classic gun-metal grey or the new titanium silver finish. Further benefits include a MOSFET front end, VFL display and an IR sensor that, combined with NAD's link system, allows remote operation when used with other NAD gear. The C422 is available now.  
 ☎ 01908 319360

**Soundbites**

**TAG MCLAREN AUDIO** is far from dead, despite recent problems. And to prove it the brand has announced a new high fidelity video product. The VSM2048 is a video scaler module built for TM's high-end AV192R surround sound processor. It scales incoming video images to generate any progressive format from 480p upwards and can be added to existing processors for £4,995. ☎ 01480 415600

**APPLE** has evolved its iPod portable audio player once again. The largest model now offers a massive 40Gb hard drive, capable of holding a whopping 10,000 MP3 tracks, and costs £400. Apple has also upgraded its 15Gb model to 20Gb, but keeps the price the same at £299. The E250 10Gb version remains unchanged. ☎ 0800 039 1010



**Hi-Fi diary**

**OCTOBER**  
 17-19 Home Entertainment Show  
 Manchester, 01524 36991  
*A hi-fi and AV event for the NW*

**NOVEMBER**  
 1-2 Dublin Hi-Fi & Home  
 Cinema Show  
 Dublin, Ireland  
 00353 1 288 9449  
*Good for 'the craic'*

**FEBRUARY 2004**  
 15 Audiojumble 2004  
 Tonbridge, 01892 540022  
*Go for a rumble in the  
 Tonbridge Audiojumble*

20-22 Sound and Vision  
 The Bristol Show  
 Mariot Hotel, Bristol  
*One of the UK's biggest*

**MAY 2004**  
 20-23 High End 2004  
 Munich, Germany  
*The dog's danglies at the  
 former Frankfurt Show*



**NORTHRIDGE E'S ARE GOOD**

**JBL UNVEILS LATEST SPEAKER RANGE**

JBL has announced an affordable speaker range with a high-end name. The Northridge E Series comprises ten speakers designed for stereo and multichannel. Stereo speakers in the range begin with a compact bookshelf, the E20 (£150), and range up via two more standmounts to three floorstanding speakers including the E60, smallest of the big three, and the most affordable at £400.

Surround sound is catered for by a pair of centre speakers, the EC25 (£150) and EC35 (£250), together with two active subwoofers – the 150-watt E150 P (£300) and 250-watt E250 P (£400). The speakers may be affordable, but JBL has built them using technology from the professional side of its business including PolyPlus reinforced driver cones. ☎ 020 8731 4670 www.jbl.com



**FULL FAT CYRUS  
 MULTI-ROOM MUSIC SERVER**

Following our report in HFC 245 that Cyrus had licensed Imerge's server technology for its Cyruslink wireless multi-room system, here are the first pictures of the resulting product. Pictured is the LinkServer, the hard drive of which can store some 400 uncompressed CDs and costs £4,000. In addition, the Linkport receiver units will cost £650 each, and you'll need one in each zone. ☎ 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com

**SUPER AUDIO  
 TOUCHES DOWN**  
**NHT FLAGSHIP LANDS IN UK**

The top-line speaker in NHT's Super Audio series is now available in the UK. The NHT ST4 is an interesting speaker both inside and out, with the external modernising of the classic gloss black NHT style passing muster to our eyes. But the technology is high-concept too, and the three-way floorstander features a 25mm fluid-cooled tweeter, a 16.5cm midrange unit and 20cm bass driver. The latter unit is a side-firing polypropylene cone, which is capable of getting down to 31Hz. The ST4 is available now at £1,199 a pair. ☎ 01327 706560 www.nhthifi.com

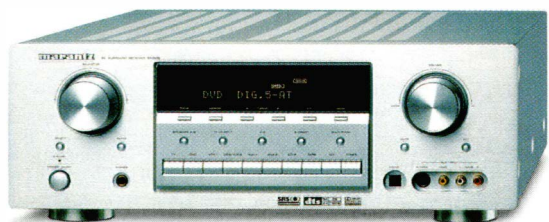


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## FIREWIRE GAINS GROUND

If the signs at the recent IFA show in Berlin are anything to go by, FireWire is the digital connection standard to beat when it comes to piping high-res DVD-A and SACD data from a player to a processor or AV amp. The FireWire, or IEEE1394 standard in its A&M protocol guise, is akin to a 21st century S/PDIF connection for multichannel high-resolution audio – similar to the digital connector on the back of a CD player but with much greater bandwidth. It not only saves you six analogue interconnects but also removes a potentially lossy D-to-A-to-D conversion process from the chain and allows bass management to be undertaken by the processor/amp, often more comprehensive than that in the player itself.

Early adopter Pioneer has launched the £1,200 VSX-AX5i, its most affordable multichannel amp so far to feature i.Link (aka FireWire). It joins Pioneer's existing DV-757Ai universal player and VSA-AX10i amp, and it's reviewed next issue. Yamaha, meanwhile, has previewed a new £3,300 FireWire-equipped amp called the Z9, which has a 'DSD Direct' option for purer SACD transfer. Matching players are on their way.

Then there's Denon, which is currently using its own protocol dubbed Denonlink but will incorporate FireWire in future kit, while Sony has included i.Link in its new top-end SACD player and multichannel amps in an attempt to ensure lossless DSD transmission. Expect reviews in *HFC* soon.

## LIVE AT THE MOVIES



Bowie likes his Reality surrounded

David Bowie launched his latest album *Reality* with a live concert broadcast in DTS surround sound at cinemas around the world last month. Produced by Sony Music and delivered by Quantum Digital Network it was the first time that a live concert was broadcast to cinemas in this way and included a brand new application for DTS 96/24 5.1 channel surround. The event on 8 September was relayed live to cinemas across Europe including London's Odeon West End.

Tandberg DTS encoding and decoding equipment was used at both the concert and in the cinemas as well as the signal delivered via satellite. The cinemas involved have been equipped with the DTS XD10 Media Player which is capable of delivering up to ten channels of scalable digital surround sound.

## DOLBY PRO LOGIC IIx

### DOLBY'S X FACTOR

Dolby Labs is to replace the Pro Logic II matrix with a new IIx version that offers up to 7.1 channels for both music and movies. DPL IIx uses feedback logic to derive extra channels from a stereo source. Whereas DPL II can expand analogue sources from two to 5.1 channels, IIx extends this to the 6.1 or 7.1 channels offered by the current digital surround formats such as Dolby Digital EX and DTS-ES.

The theory with DPL IIx is that home cinema enthusiasts who now have 7.1 systems for digital surround will also want to utilise these channels with unencoded stereo signals such as those produced by video recorders, games and CD or vinyl. So far Arcam, Marantz, Meridian, Yamaha and Pioneer have signed up and should have product ready this winter.



## LIVING PRESENCE ON SACD

Decca Music has announced that it will be releasing five of the classic Mercury Living Presence recordings on SACD this winter. With original vinyl copies of these late fifties and early sixties albums commanding silly prices, this is good news for classical music enthusiasts who want their legendary sound without paying legendary prices. Of interest even to the lucky few that own original LPs will be the fact that the SACD will feature the three-channel recordings that producer Wilma Cozart Fine made at the time yet have never been commercially available for lack of a suitable format.

The initial batch of titles are:

Stravinsky: *The Firebird* (Antal Dorati & London Symphony Orchestra)

Rachmaninov: *Piano Concertos* (No2 & 3 – Byron Janis)

Bach: *Complete Solo Cello Suites* (Janos Starker)

Respighi: *Ancient Airs & Dances* (Philharmonia Hungarica)

Suppé: *Overtures* (Paul Paray/Detroit Symphony Orchestra)

Five more titles are planned for the new year.

Performance: get it out of your system.



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*Shown here: T562 DVD/CD Player and T752 Surround Sound Receiver.*

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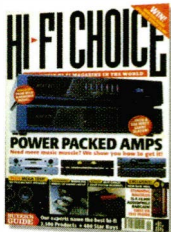
## TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice  
November 1998

We got our hands on one of our favourite ever speakers in November 1998 and we were so taken by B&W's new

Nautilus 802 that we gave it our coveted Editor's Choice award, something that's held true as the £6,000 pair are still selling

respectably well today. We were also taken by a 'budget' Wadia CD player, the excellent £3,000 830, and at the other end of the scale we also went cable crazy, with a round-up of speaker leads. Elsewhere Arcam announced its first ever DAB tuner, the £800 Alpha 10, while Philips was busy driving the price of CD recorders down to £350.



## TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice  
November 1993

It was a bumper CD player issue back in November 1993, with a massive test of 20 disc spinners driven to their limits. If

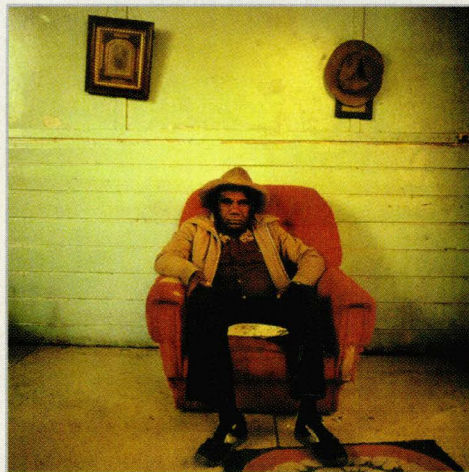
you don't recall, you may be surprised that the Best Buy from this bunch was Goodman's GCD-650II. We also raved over



the Rega Elicit amp, which at £730 was "simply a class act". Kef announced its first-ever THX-Certified speaker system and in a group test of pre/power amp combinations we decided against giving any a Best Buy Badge, although offerings from Alchemit and Arcam warranted our recommendation.

## SYSTEM BUILDER

EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



### BUFFALO TOM

*Let Me Come Over* Beggars Banquet

Back when the eighties turned into the nineties there were two places on earth to come from if you were in a band – Manchester or Boston. But whereas the Stone Roses and the Happy Mondays were supported by the limp likes of wannabe Madchester hooligans The Farm, Boston heroes like The Pixies, Throwing Muses and Dinosaur Jr had bands such as the sorely under-rated Buffalo Tom waiting in the wings.

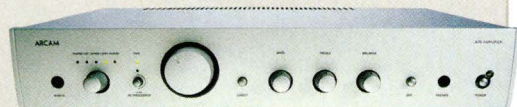
*Let Me Come Over* is a melodic, emotional guitar-fuelled trip, chock-full of crunchy, crackling tunes and anchored by the perfect rock ballad in *Tailights Fade*, a track that demands a powerful vocal delivery and strong dynamics to highlight its peaks and troughs. This is an album that many an ex-indie kid will have knocking about, therefore we've gone for a system designed for the person who spends more on music than hi-fi. It still makes for an exciting listen, though.



### CD PLAYER

**EXPOSURE 2010** £600

A substantial and musical sounding player that's smooth enough not to over-analyse the Tom's rough edges while delivering their melodic power with a well-aimed punch. (It's great on vinyl too...)



### AMPLIFIER

**ARCAM DIVA A75 PLUS** £470

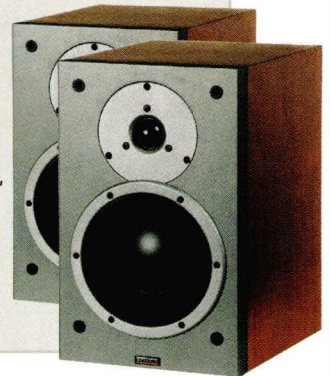
Quick, solid-sounding and well priced, Arcam's second-rung amp is an all-rounder that works well with all music types, rocket-fuelled rock included. Bass is particularly good at the price.

### LOUDSPEAKERS

#### DYNAUDIO

**AUDIENCE 52** £557

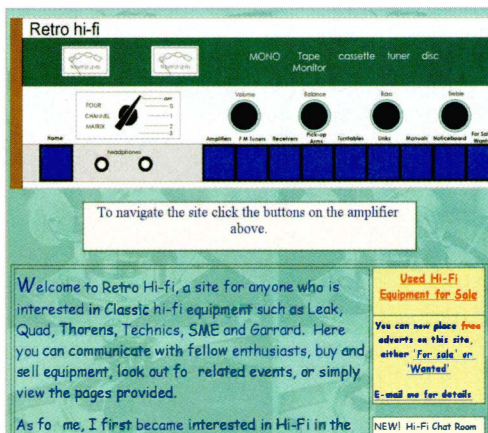
Choice of speaker here is crucial – a model with an expressive midrange and solid, punchy bass is essential to convey the album's rightful impact, and nothing at the price can beat Dynaudio's Audience 52.



## WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

**www.retrohifi.co.uk**

*Hi-Fi Choice* is of course a magazine dedicated to bringing you the very latest dispatches from hi-fi's cutting edge. Every now and again however we like to kick back and dream of boxes, dials and diodes of yore, and we don't care who knows it. If, like us, you occasionally get a tear in your eye when recalling classic brands such as Leek, Garrard and Technics then this site is the ideal spot to hang out. There are loads of good quality pictures of equipment, plenty of reading material and even copies of the manuals of a few items – just in case you've lost yours. You can also buy and sell classic kit here if you feel your hi-fi museum is lacking a couple of key exhibits.



## READERS' DEMO DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



### JONI MITCHELL

Blue

"To my mind this is Joni Mitchell's finest hour – well, 40 minutes anyway. It's the stunning interaction between the acoustic guitar and Mitchell's vocals that provide the hardest test of a system. Play it on something that's a bit on the bright side, and it'll take your ears off! But spin it on the right system and the pure, sweet vocals will soon drag you into the wonderful imagery. The better tracks are the ones where James Taylor accompanies her on guitar, where the double-edged acoustic sword really puts a system through its paces when it comes to detail and natural presentation."

David Brooks via email

**What's your favourite disc for hi-fi auditioning?** Why not write in and tell us – 100 words on what and why – we'd love to hear about it. Email your choice to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk or write in to Classic Demo Discs, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

## JIMMY'S TWEAKS #14

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



### Subwoofers

When you add a subwoofer to your hi-fi system, there's a tendency to adjust it so it's perhaps a shade louder than it ought to be. It's only natural after all – having paid good money for the darn thing, you want to be reminded of its presence – literally and as often as not pretty much constantly.

Indulge yourself for a few weeks. But, when the novelty wears off, try turning the sub down so its effect is less obvious. Often, you'll find 'less is more', and that by reducing the sub's volume level you paradoxically get a bigger effect. Not necessarily in terms of room-shaking bass, but a subtler tonality with greater spaciousness and depth. How do you know you've got the 'correct' volume level? Easy! The sub won't draw attention to itself, yet there'll be a distinct loss of richness and dynamics when it's switched off.

## ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

**Sam Cooke** Portrait Of A Legend

**Warren Zevon** Life'll Kill Ya

**Joe Strummer And The**

**Mescaleros** Streetcore

**Jeffrey Lewis** It's The Ones

Who've Cracked

**Rainer** Live

**Spooks** Faster Than You Know...

**Twilight Singers** Blackberry Belle

**Beth Orton** Pass In Time

**Peter Mallick Group** New York City

**Fantastic Plastic Machine** Fantastic Plastic Machine



## NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



### THE STROKES

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** late October

Having abandoned sessions with Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich because the songs were "too clean", the Strokes have finished their difficult second album with original producer, Gordon Raphael. The 11-track album now has a "more filthy" sound, says singer Julian Casablancas. The first single is 12-51 and the band tour the UK in December.

### MORRISSEY

**Title:** Irish Blood, English Heart

**Release date:** Spring 2004

The enigmatic former Smith has been without a record label since 1997's *Maladjusted*, and many had begun to doubt if he had any interest in making another record. But buoyed by some well-received concerts last year and an acclaimed TV documentary, he enters the studio in Dublin in October to begin recording with Jerry Finn.

### ERIC CLAPTON

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** March 2004

On 2001's *Reptile* the artist formerly known as God sounded more like a surrogate James Taylor than a blues-powered guitar hero. But the indications are that he's reverting to a grittier sound this time around and guest musicians include the explosive slide guitarist Sonny Landreth.

### RYAN ADAMS

**Title:** Rock'n'Roll

**Release date:** 4 November

Not the previously announced album, *Love Is Hell*, which has now been



shelved, following a dispute with Adams' record company who complained it was "too dark". Instead, the prolific singer-songwriter has been back in the studio in NYC with a new bunch of songs. Production is by Courtney Love's producer/manager, Jim Barber, who says the album "rocks really hard".

### COLDPLAY

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** 2004

Coldplay front man Chris Martin has announced that the band's summer festival appearances were the last for 12 months, while they work on the next album. "We have to go away and reinvent ourselves and really come up with something amazing," Martin says.

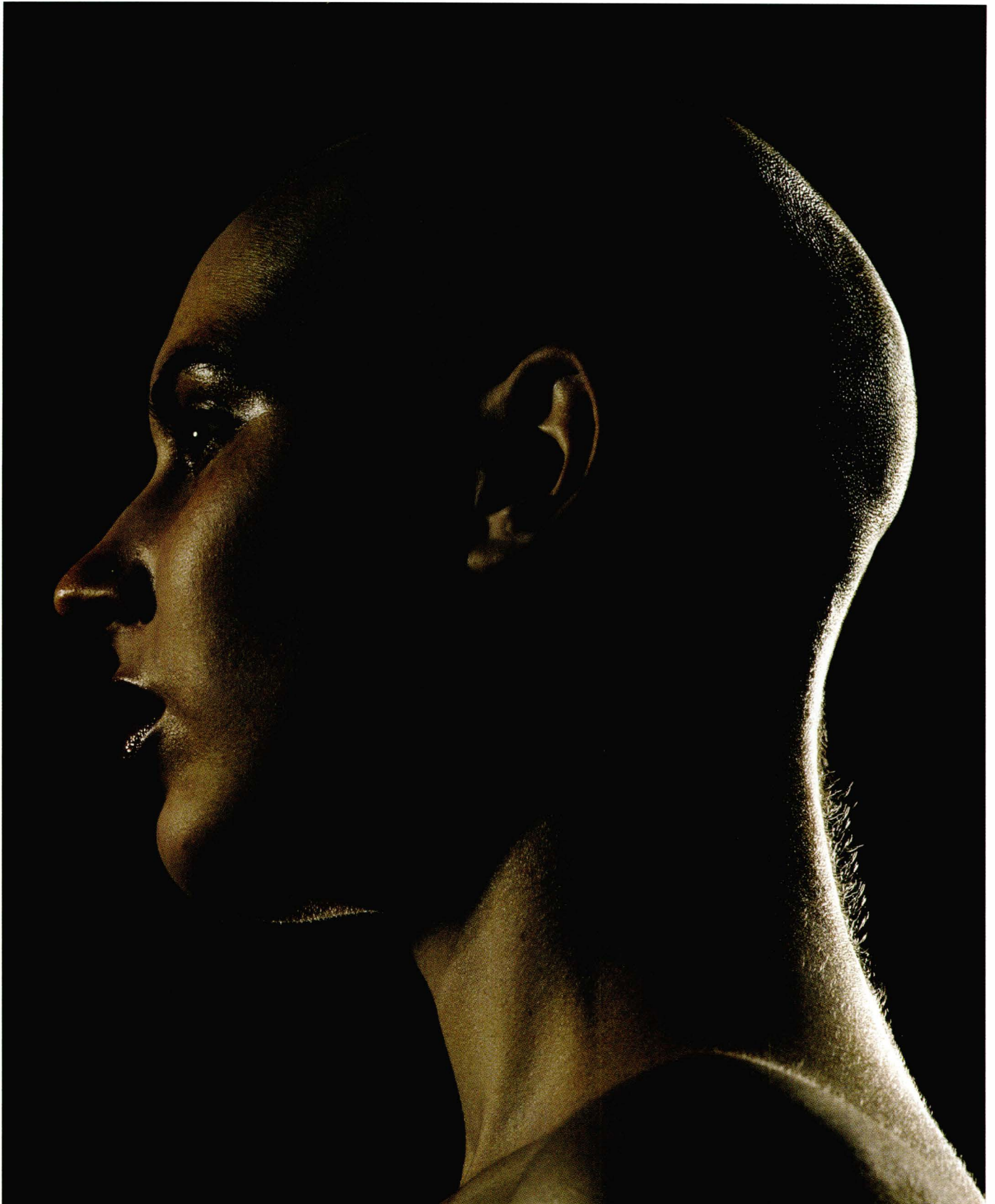
### ALSO COMING SOON...

#### ROCK/POP

**Celine Dion** Un Fille Et 4 Types (Oct), **Kelis** Tasty (Nov), **Howe Gelb** Cycle Some Piano (Nov), **Alabama 3** Last Train To Nashville (Dec), **Lyle Lovett** My Baby Don't Tolerate (Nov)

#### CLASSICAL/JAZZ

**Béla Fleck** Little Worlds (Oct), **Chris Botti** A Thousand Kisses Deep (Oct), **John Williams** El Diablo Suelto (Oct), **Joshua Bell** The Romance Of The Violin (Nov)



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## Cardas Caps £35 (set of 12)

Yet another product that claims to deal with the insidious problem of radio frequency interference, the Cardas Caps are simply metal caps that fit over unused phono sockets on the back of any appliance. Unlike the shorting plugs that one can buy (or make, frankly) these have no centre contact at all, merely covering the hole in such a manner as to preserve screening. This means that they can be used, for example, on unused tape outputs, where shorting plugs would load whatever source is in use, causing distortion. They can also be used on unused digital outputs, which some claim are a source of interference.

Results will vary between units tested but in general there was something to be gained with a variety of amplifiers and source components. It's quite subtle, but typically you can expect a slight reduction in grain from a fully Capped amp. Buy 'em and try 'em is our advice.

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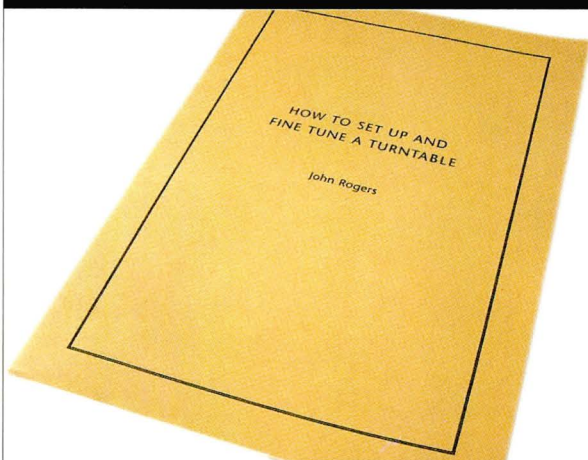


## Isotek Elite Mains Cable £75

Not long ago this would have been a very expensive specialist mains lead – now it's almost a budget one, trumped by £300 models from several other brands. It's nothing too fancy, with plain copper conductors rated at 16A and insulated in PVC, but it does have the relatively unusual luxury of a braided screen over the whole assembly. It's not a very tight braid but it will still keep out most interference in the sub-VHF spectrum, and it's earthed too. Connectors come in the shape of a nice MK plug and Furutech socket.

Although you can indeed get better quality by paying more, the law of diminishing returns applies, while this is a noticeable and good-value upgrade. You get clearer sonic textures, better-focused images and an all-round feeling that things have just tightened up a touch. Compatibility with various sources and amps seems generally good. Most definitely recommended.

☎ 01635 291357 🌐 [www.isotektechnologies.com](http://www.isotektechnologies.com)



## Ringmat 'How To Set-Up And Fine Tune A Turntable' £7.50

On the one hand, £7.50 for such a slim pamphlet seems expensive, on the other, given the wealth of information it provides and the difference it could make to your analogue enjoyment, it's excellent value. Granted you'll have to put a bit of work in, but the great thing about this booklet is that it tells you exactly what to do and how to do it so that you don't waste hours and grey hairs trying to set up a turntable by luck and faith. Nothing we can think of that you can simply 'fit and forget' could give such a lift, not at this price or anywhere near it.

From the basics of turntable support, through the perplexities of Vertical Tracking Angle, to the arcane mysteries of drive-belt direction of travel, it's all here, cogently and practically explained by John Rogers. Just buy it!

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## Yung Li IEC Fig-8 adapter £2.95

Adding adapters in the way of signal or mains currents is not generally such a clever idea, but in this case there's a solid rationale: although it's possible to get 'audiophile' mains cables terminated for small figure-8 (Telefunken) sockets, there's not much choice. IEC 'kettle' cables, on the other hand, come in many flavours, so for those who don't want to take a soldering iron and Q-Max punch to their figure-8 equipped CD player, here's a handy solution to fitting an IEC inlet for mains cable upgrades.

Granted there's a degree of sacrifice involved in practical terms since the combined length of IEC connector and adapter is quite substantial, but on the other hand the figure-8 part of this is a nice tight fit in all the inlets we tried and there were indeed benefits to be had from trying IEC mains cable upgrades through it into figure-8 socketed CD players and recorders from Marantz and Pioneer. Given the price, it's hard not to recommend it.

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# HI-FI CHOICE COMPETITION

## Win a superb Exposure CD player and amp combo worth £2,400!

Regular readers of *Hi-Fi Choice* will have noticed the solid performance that Exposure products have demonstrated in recent months, collecting a host of *HFC* Award Badges along the way. The exceptional 3010 amplifier is a case in point. August's *Ultimate Group Test* focused on integrated amplifiers and saw Exposure walk away with a Best Buy Badge with our reviewer enthusing, "Atmospheric and relaxed without being constrained, the 3010 had us all enthralled with its luxurious and remarkably well sorted sound".

Exposure has also agreed to include its optional £200 phono board in either MM or MC configuration as part of the prize, bringing the amp's value up to £1,200. But don't worry if you don't own a turntable – Exposure's £1,200 3010 CD player has been designed as the amp's perfect partner and completes this fantastic prize. Last issue we described it as "a fluid and inherently musical player that does justice to its partnering amps" – the first correct entry pulled from the hat will ensure its sender hears the quality of these two components for his or herself.



### HOW TO ENTER:

Answer the question by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and day-time telephone number below. Please also take the time to fill in our small questionnaire – we want to make *Hi-Fi Choice* as good as you deserve, dear reader.

### QUESTION

Which badge did Exposure's 3010 amp receive?

- a) Best Before
- b) Best Buy
- c) Best Of Three

### YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Day time tel number \_\_\_\_\_

What type of hi-fi product you intend to buy next? \_\_\_\_\_

What brands would you most like to read about? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to see more expensive or less expensive kit reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice*? \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us if there's anything you don't like. \_\_\_\_\_

### COMPETITION RULES

The closing date for this competition is 2 November 2003. Winners of the Exposure competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the closing date. Winners will be notified by post. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The Exposure competition is not open to employees of Exposure Electronics Ltd, Future Publishing Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates. We regret this competition is only open to UK residents. No cash alternatives will be offered. By entering the competition you will be bound by the rules. We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equivalent value to those shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable. All entries must be on this official coupon, but photocopies are acceptable. Only one entry per household

### Send your entry to:

**Exposure Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing,  
 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.**

# ChoiceCuts

This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Shaun Marin, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman, Nigel Williamson

## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

### THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

Axis: Bold As Love

MCA 180g vinyl

Music: 1968's follow up to their debut *Are You Experienced* retained the commercially honed production talents

of Chas Chandler and features only two tracks that breach the three minutes dictated by pop radio. *Axis* features many outstanding tracks including classics *Little Wing*, *If 6 Was 9* and *Castles Made Of Sand* in their original pan pot frenzy

form. This is a genuinely classic rock album from one of its most influential figures, revelling in a gatefold sleeve with a large booklet featuring images and text about this phenomenal band. The way Hendrix could play virtuoso guitar to a tune has yet to be matched. Essential, really. ★★★★★

Sound: This heavyweight pressing on good, quiet vinyl does justice to the supreme quality of music it contains. A mono version has also been reissued but this is the real deal and reveals the full extent of the experimental studio techniques. ★★★★★ JK

### JOHN COLTRANE

Sun Ship

Impulse 180g vinyl

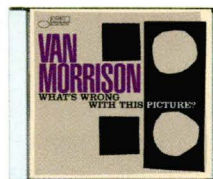
Music: From 1965, *Sun Ship* was Coltrane's last album with the classic quartet that featured McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums. It's not for the Jazz FM crowd – the descriptions 'free' and 'atonal' come to mind and if it's tunes you're after, you should look to earlier work. If you appreciate intensity and depth

of expression however, it's remarkable. Trane's sax is explosive and Jones especially matches it brilliantly. The playing is always progressive, but it's not as seemingly random as Pharoah Sanders or Albert Ayler – there's a logic to it that is apparent even if your tastes rarely touch on the hardcore. Smokin'. ★★★★★

Sound: A Bob Thiele production from what many consider a golden age of jazz, this Impulse disc is phenomenal, with silent backgrounds and tremendous energy from tonally convincing instruments and, of course, a killer saxophone. ★★★★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 @ www.vivante.co.uk

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL



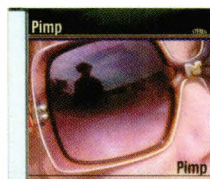
### VAN MORRISON

What's Wrong With This Picture?

Blue Note

Music: There are those who will tell you that Van Morrison's albums these days are dull and lazy affairs. Either they're not listening properly or his sheer effortless mastery has confused them into thinking he's not trying. His first album for Blue Note is a finely-crafted masterpiece by a man who knows exactly what he's doing. From the gentle swing of *Meaning Of Loneliness* to the piano boogie of *Stop Drinking Wine* via the late night blues of *Gold Fish Bowl*, and the lyrical loveliness of *Somerset*, he doesn't put a foot wrong. Immaculate. ★★★★★

Sound: As usual, the entire record has that live-in-the-studio feel. Van's a perfectionist, but he achieves it naturally, without the aid of endless overdubs and digital 'corrections'. ★★★★★ NW



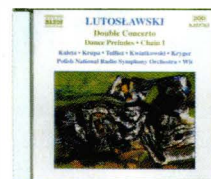
### PIMP

Pimp

O'Savage

Music: The best live band in London – Louisiana swamp funk with punk attitude, think Tom Waits meets James Brown in Dr John's clinic – finally deliver their debut album, seven years in the making. And it really works, with RD Savage's blistering vocals illuminating songs which are, by turns, exciting, unsettling and intriguing. You wouldn't let your daughter marry one but you can rest assured she'll be playing this at her parties anyway. They've got the funk and they ain't giving it back – an X-rated indie riddim classic. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded in the now near-legendary Sweet Georgia Browns studio – the Muscle Shoals of north London – this is fine-grade analogue. Mucho macho headroom and bittersweet authenticity. ★★★★★ PS



### LUTOSLAWSKI

Double Concerto, Dance Preludes, Chain 1, Two Children's Songs, Six Children's Songs

Antoni Wit (cond), Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra

Naxos 8.555763

Music: This is the eighth volume of a Lutoslawski series on Naxos, made with idiomatic sensibility by a Polish orchestra. The main work, the Double Concerto, features the unusual combination of oboe and harp, set against percussion and a small string orchestra. It's a pleasing and approachable piece in the tradition of Bartok, and is matched here to an eclectic series of shorter works. ★★★★★

Sound: As so often with Naxos, the music is very well recorded in a natural concert hall acoustic, the disc striking a nice balance between coherence and detail. ★★★★★ AG



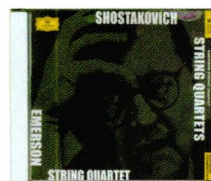
### JOE STRUMMER & THE MESCALEROS

Streetcore

Hellcat Records

Music: Former Clash front man Joe Strummer was two-thirds of the way through recording a new album when he died of a heart-attack at the age of 50 last Christmas. His band were left to finish off *Streetcore* without him, but thankfully it's a more than fitting last will and testament. There are plenty of jagged guitars and characteristically spirited vocals of course, but surprises include the acoustic cowboy ballad *Long Shadow* and an outstanding version of Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*, so moving it brings a tear to the eye. It's great that he's gone out on such a high. But *Streetcore* reinforces how much we're going to miss him. ★★★★★

Sound: The disc produces a nice balance between preserving something of the demo-like feel of the acoustic songs and the more fully-produced sound of the full-on rock numbers. ★★★★★ NW



### SHOSTAKOVICH

String Quartets (complete)

Emerson String Quartet

DGG 463 284-2 (5 discs)

Music: This set has been criticised as 'not Russian enough', for lacking the big rubato that these works demand. Be that as it may, the Emerson quartet are a virtuosic group who play beautifully, individually and together. If ever you were in any doubt that this music deserves to stand alongside the Bartok and even the Beethoven quartets, this release will put you right. No rounded collection of classical music should be without at least one set of these quartets. ★★★★★

Recording: Just as there can be no question about the quality of these performances, the same applies to the recording, made live at the Aspen Music Festival with an unearthly quiet audience. ★★★★★ AG

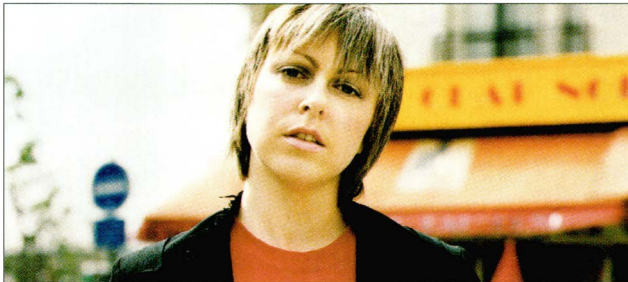


## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC *"Ali plays guitar with a fluidity rarely heard"*

### ALI FARKA TOURE *Niafunké* World Circuit

**Music:** Mali's most successful musician called it a day after this 1999 album, giving up the 'rock and roll' lifestyle to concentrate on farming. It was made at his farm, Niafunké, in the barrel-vaulted buildings usually used for storing grain, which explains the unusually open, reverberant sound quality. His music is based on traditional kora stylings with a distinctly bluesy influence that harks back to John Lee Hooker among others. Ali plays guitar both acoustic and

electric with a fluidity rarely heard, as well as most of the singing. Stand-outs are many including the pulsing *Tulumba* and the solo acoustic guitar of *Instrumental*. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** You can't beat acoustic instruments and natural reverb for creating a spacious and natural soundstage. But when the electric bass kicks in it's gorgeous, deep and open, undulating along with an easy power. For imaging, timing and tonal resolution this disc has it all. ★★★★★ **JK**



### WILLIS

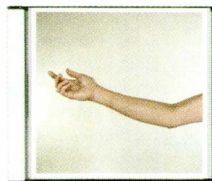
#### Come Get Some

679

**Music:** Feltham's Willis sounds occasionally like Joni Mitchell, sometimes like PJ Harvey and once in a while like Beth Orton, but mostly very like herself on her first, long-delayed album. Hayley Willis (for such is her real name)

apparently worked in a record shop prior to making this, and it sounds like she was spoiled for choice when it came to influences, mixing elements of wistful folk, raw(ish) blues, country, soul, pop and electronica into an ever-changing brew of subtly distinct arrangements, ranging from rock to folk bands with a chamber orchestra, elements of primal percussion and many more points in-between. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Recorded in a dilapidated farmhouse on England's south coast, it's not what you'd call a hi-fi album, but the clarity of Willis's voice, sometimes breathy, sometimes strident, weaves a seductive course through the relatively sparse instrumentation. ★★★ **DO**



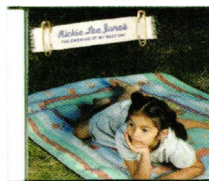
### SPIRITUALIZED

#### Amazing Grace

Sanctuary

**Music:** Ever since Spacemen 3 broke up in 1990, Jason Pierce's Spiritualized offshoot has struggled to live up to his old band's achievements. The subtlety and heavenly bliss of, say, *Playing With Fire* was replaced with a tendency for the over-blown and conceited, for massed choirs and deafening guitar solos as if Pierce was hitting us over the head with the message 'I am here!'. Recorded in a few weeks with minimal overdubs, the album begins like the White Stripes, before evolving into Aretha and the Stones with Evan Parker's squalling sax thankfully roughing things up a bit. ★★★

**Sound:** The many transitions from sub-bass to screaming highs should come in handy for testing any system's expressive range. ★★★ **MP**



### RICKIE LEE JONES

#### The Evening Of My Best Day

V2

**Music:** Through the eighties Rickie Lee Jones turned out a string of classic, if not top-selling records (apart from the hit, *Chuck E's In Love*). Problems with alcohol then raising her daughter kept her out of the spotlight in the nineties but now she's returned with her first self-written collection since 1997's trip-hop experiment *Chostyhead*. Elements of soul, jazz, rock 'n' roll and folkly songwriting are all there, but most importantly that alarmingly elastic voice, caressingly smooth one moment, barbed and pointed the next, remains intact and scintillating. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Working up from collaborator David Kalish's Pro Tools experiments, Rickie Lee has crafted a fecund blend of live instruments and electronic atmospherics. ★★★★★ **DO**

## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

### STAINED

#### 14 Shades Of Grey

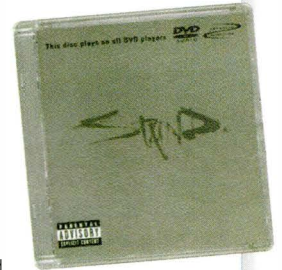
DVD-Audio (24/96 surround, 24/96 stereo, Dolby

Digital 5.1 and 2.0)

Flip Records/Elektra

**Music:** The third from grungemeisters Stained is another dose of US teen angst set against a dense, riff-laden backdrop that leaves little space for relaxation. Musically it taps the same Alice in Chains derived vein of their former albums, but lyrically there is a sign of change with singer Aaron Lewis' turning away from introspection and instead blaming the world at large for his suffering. The finest moments are the relief of the ballads *Zoe Jane* and *Layne* but if it weren't for these two it would be difficult for the uninitiated to differentiate between the shades of grey. ★★★

**Sound:** For a heavy wall of sound this is surprisingly listenable, however at the end of the day one doesn't get the impression that this is going to be a great sounding album whatever format it's played on. ★★★ **JK**



### BEETHOVEN & MENDELSSOHN

#### Violin Concertos

John Elliot Gardiner (cond), Victoria Mullova

(violin), Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique

SACD (multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Philips 470 629-2

**Music:** This new recording of Beethoven's violin concerto takes second place to no other, at least not among modern recordings. But even better is the popular Mendelssohn concerto, tackled by the soloist with blazing intensity, brilliant articulation and breathtaking technical facility (sample the opening movement at 8:34), ably assisted by the orchestra led by John Elliot Gardiner. Orchestral textures are light and clear, tempi are not forced but neither do they drag. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The soloist is balanced against the orchestra without excessive spotlighting. The recording is warm and open, with a natural glow in multichannel form without loss of clarity or anomalous imagery, though you may want to turn the surround channel down a couple of notches. ★★★★★ **AG**



### LED ZEPPELIN

#### How The West Was Won

DVD-Audio (24/48 surround, 24/48 stereo, Dolby

Digital 5.1 and 2.0)

Warner Music Vision

**Music:** Led Zeppelin are becoming a key DVD act, with this DVD-A following their excellent DVD-Video. The first instalment of this double disc set from a brace of California gigs at their 'golden god' peak in 1972 is simply electrifying, and surely ranks as one of the best live recordings ever committed to disc with a simply stunning version of *Immigrant Song*. The second disc is a more difficult listen for the non-fanatic, including a stirring – but seemingly endless – medley and a 19 (count 'em) minute version of *Moby Dick*. Proving once again why punk was such a great idea. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Surround sound is the perfect foil for live concert recordings and this is no exception. The disc may not feature the highest possible resolution available with the DVD-Audio format, but it's more than good enough to put you right at the heart of the action. ★★★★★ **SM**



# Lips incorporated

Flaming Lips front man **Wayne Coyne** talks about the radical DVD-Audio reworking of his band's most popular record, *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots*. **Dave Oliver** listens

**“W**ell, some artists aren't really so keen to put their music through the blender, but I just thought fuck it, let's see what we can do here, let's see if we can make people throw up.”

It's a bright summer morning in his hometown of Oklahoma City, and Wayne Coyne, greying godfather of art rock psychedelic groove machine the Flaming Lips is explaining the working philosophy behind his band's recent DVD-Audio release, which features a 5.1 surround mix of their latest CD, *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots*.

“I simply want people to have an experience. I'm not saying that what I do is better or even more intense, I just like to try something, given the opportunity. And I think maybe in some cases we've gone too far, and maybe the music and the song itself becomes a bit of a second fiddle to all this movement of the sound. But who knows – and I'd rather go too far and say, well, let's try something different next time, rather than just sit there and play it safe, and say, 'who knows what the limitations of this set-up could be?’”

Wayne Coyne is a man who likes to talk, and you get the impression that he's had a terrific time over the last eight months, working with production maestro Elliot Scheiner, whose surround work includes remixes of Queen and Steely Dan. It didn't stop there either – as well as the surround mix (the disc

includes 24-bit/96kHz Advanced Resolution Surround, Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1 versions, plus Dolby 2.0 and 24/96 stereo), he's been organising the myriad obscurities, videos and artwork that make up the *Yoshimi* DVD-A.

“We got along famously – I think he and I talked more than we mixed. We thought someone like Elliot, who's won Grammys and worked with Steely Dan and been around since 1972 making great recordings, would look at what we do and say 'pah, what are you freaks up to?'. And we would accept that simply to work with someone of that calibre. But he was really just the opposite. He couldn't believe that we were doing these new and weird things, that people usually talk about but never do. Like for the song *Do You Realize?*, I thought, why don't we have the whole thing rotate as if it's sitting on a record player, and then the whole song is not just spinning around being played, the whole song is spinning around you and you're spinning at the same time. So Elliot devised a way that each of the instruments could stay in the position that they were in and yet spin around the room. When we tried it out it did disorientate you quite a bit so on the DVD itself I've warned people – because there are a lot of these 5.1 systems installed in cars these days – not to listen to this while you're driving, because it does disorientate you and your spatial references there. It was impressive as far as how much you could get the movement, but I don't know if it works so well as regards listening to a song and being able to keep track of who does what.”

## MORE IS MORE

Few musicians have embraced surround sound with Coyne's gusto, and it certainly seems a natural environment for a band like the Flaming Lips, their densely layered songs encouraging fresh explorations of their sonic limits.

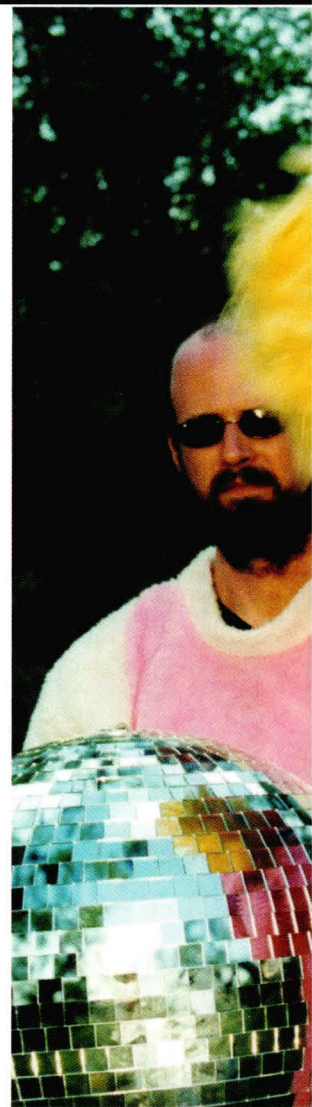
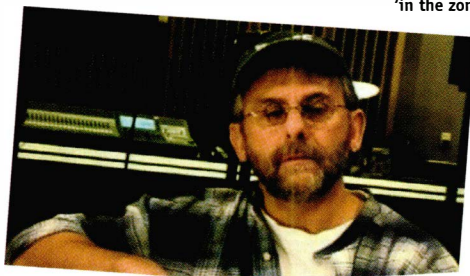
“Within a year or two, all the classic albums will have been re-released in 5.1

and honestly I think that it's a gas to listen to. I'm not sure that it's set to be the next greatest thing since the invention of the wah-wah pedal, but then again maybe it will be.

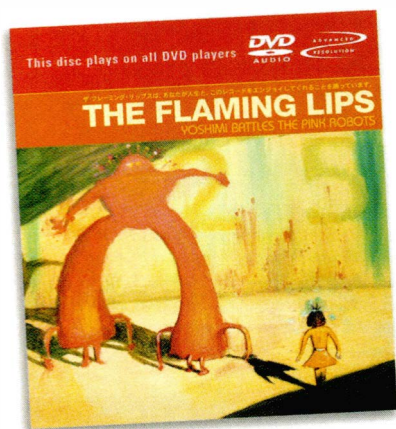
“All though the career of the Flaming Lips we've struggled with the limitations of stereo. We'll get mixes where we think 'oh man, we want 20 million things to all be working in there at the same time'. Even with our record *Zaireeka* (1997), where we had four CDs playing at the same time coming out of essentially eight different speakers. Actually, what we were doing there was simply absurd compared to 5.1 surround. But I still think there was always a longing to get more out of the songs, just because you can. Why not? If it's there and you're curious about it then let's mess with the format.”

*Yoshimi* isn't the first time that the Flaming Lips have experimented with surround sound. In their live shows in the past, they've tried placing speakers at various points around the concert hall, and even issuing the audience with headphones in an attempt to bring something new to the rock 'n' roll circus, sometimes with mixed results.

“To tell you the truth, a lot more people come to a concert whether it's



Above (l-r): Lips sync – Michael Ivans, Wayne Coyne, Steven Drozd  
Below: Producer Elliot Scheiner tells 'em how he did it in a video segment on the DVD-A and Wayne Coyne gets 'in the zone'





**“It’s a great opportunity in a way because the surround format is still so new that there are still areas where you can be quite original and radical.”**

the Flaming Lips or Radiohead or Bon Jovi simply to drink beer and have sex. We’ve done concerts where we’ve put speakers at the back of the room and speakers at the front and the side to try and give you a sort of surround sound idea. But sometimes people will just want to get to a place where they can talk to their friends and when you surround them with too many speakers they simply go the bathroom, that’s what I’ve found.”

**SILLY, NOT SILLY**

While excited by the possibilities of surround sound, Coyne is not in thrall to it, and certainly doesn’t see it as the exclusive ‘future of music’. But he does seem genuinely thrilled by the way it’s opened up new avenues for his muse.

“Warners asked us early on to think about the 5.1 mix of these things

because they said, ‘we want you guys to have some sort of freaky, unique, extraordinary DVD that people can look at and say, hey, here’s what the Flaming Lips are doing, here’s what they’re capable of. I think it’s a great opportunity because the format is so new that there are still areas where you can be quite original and radical.”

“I can see where it stems from – these home theatre ideas where you’re watching a movie and for lack of a better phrase, helicopters are coming up your ass and I think somewhere along the way somebody thought ‘well hey, what about music, why don’t we have Fleetwood Mac do that?’ and so here we are today.

“But I do it simply because I like it and if other people feel they’ve got the kind of music or ideas that can stand being thrown in the washer drier sort of

mentality, I say they should go for it. But at the same time if our DVD is hailed as something great and new and successful, I think other people will follow, but if our DVD is looked on as being something that’s self-indulgent and silly I think people will pull back a bit and think ‘well we want to be looked at as artistic and creative and we don’t want to be looked at as silly’. But I don’t care about being silly. As with some of the best things in life if you pull back you miss all the fun. So in some ways the Flaming Lips have been given this spot within the possibilities of rock music to say, ‘let’s see how far we can take this thing’. And if people follow us, fine, but if they don’t, well, maybe it’s not worth following.” **HFC**

*Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots is released on DVD-A on 13 October 2003*

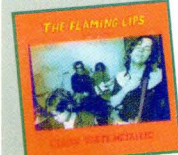
**Future Lips 5.1s?**



**The Soft Bulletin**  
“Overall it would be pleasant, like a warm ocean flowing over you but occasionally having these jabs that would sort of wake you up. I can see that working.”



**Zaireeka**  
“It was designed to be played on four CD players simultaneously and I can see where if we ever had six months to dissect this thing it would be perfectly suited for 5.1 surround.”



**Clouds Taste Metallic**  
“This has a lot of freaky My Bloody Valentine-esque guitar that could swoop up and down and in and around and stuff. I think a lot of our mixes have had a lot of in-built possibilities to do a lot of motion-ness.”

**Begging for 5.1**



**The Beatles – all of them**  
“They should let us do a really horrible remix of *Revolution #9*, that would be great!”  
**John Coltrane – Om**  
“I don’t think we could separate all 16 or so players out but without anybody being too precious about it, we could really make some unique other versions of these classic recordings.”  
**Miles Davis – Bitches Brew**  
“I’d love to hear it not just simply enhanced, but made even freakier.”

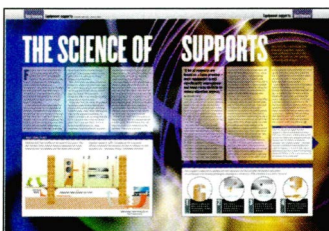
# Choice Mail



Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP



Above: Our test of digital audio recorders in HFC 243 – will copy protection render such products useless?



Above: Richard Black's informative study of spikes and supports from HFC 240

**“By the way, BMG, EMI etc, can I have back my levy that I paid when I bought a box of audio CD-Rs?”**

## LOOKING GOOD

WOW! Like the new look! One welcome reinstatement is the letters section – I think this still plays an important part in any mag, despite the 'online everything' that we have now. Readers will always have that feeling of being 'accommodated' by their favourite mag every time they read their letters. The addition of music interviews is an added delight, as are the features by Richard Black – very helpful for non-technical readers like me. Commendations also to Howard Malone for such a stunning job on the look of the mag – now every time I go to the mag stand, HFC attracts my attention more than the competition.

Serge via email

HFC: Aw, shucks.

## NEW FOR OLD?

In the September issue Paul Miller asks if today's CD players sound as good as those of a decade ago. I own an Arcam Delta 270 that I bought second-hand around five years ago after hearing it compared to £500-£1,000 machines.

Last year its laser began to fail so I decided to treat myself to a new machine. Again, to my ears, new players failed to match it – so off it went to Arcam for a new laser and I am still very much enjoying it. It simply seems to play music better. None of the other machines seemed to have the same 'leading edge' to bass notes – and it's this that seems to give it superior rhythm and pace. It also has a lovely sweet top end. I see that Mr Miller has begun his

quest by comparing six of the latest CD players in the last issue. Perhaps he then intends comparing the Best Buy with some ten-year-old machines? I hope so – particularly if a Delta 270 is included.

David Deeks via email

## ANCIENT CASTLES

I want to replace my old Castle Severn speakers with a pair of floostanders up to £1,000 that will match will with my Sugden A21a amp. Any suggestions?

Martin Smith via email

HFC: Your low power Sugden requires a fairly easy load – listen to Monitor Audio's powerful sounding Silver S10 and Castle's more recent and engaging Conway 3.

## REMOVE THE GROOVE

In the July issue, Paul Miller wrote an article on the sound of SACD and DVD-A versus LP (*Digitalia*, p77). I agree with much of the article and I do believe that some of the problems remaining with digital are in the filters (which was recognised as early as 1983 when CDs first arrived). However, I don't necessarily believe that very high frequency wiggles in the vinyl groove wall are wiped out after one or two plays. First, I don't notice any changes in

Below: Thule CD150B: sounds as good as the Arcam Delta 270?



## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### CORPORATE CAN'T'S

I write with regard to copy-protected CDs. Given that a number of products that you have covered recently are designed to extract audio from a CD, (hard disk and CD recorders) surely these products will eventually be rendered useless?

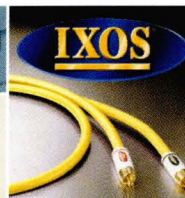
Another concern is compatibility, now that we are seeing universal players with DVD/CD-ROM based drives. I have experienced problems with copy-protected CDs and believe that my CD player is now damaged as a result. The copy-protected discs that I have, Ed Harcourt's *From Every Sphere* and Keziah Jones's *Black Morpheus*, emit sharp noise spikes in between tracks.

I am annoyed at this technology being

implemented by the record companies and whilst I am not in the habit of pirating CDs, I reserve the right to make compilations for the car and put albums on my PC, which serves as a jukebox for the house. This kind of annoyance will only serve to make me search for other outlets for my music (ergo, a lost customer).

I feel it is becoming something of a minefield not being 100 per cent certain whether CDs will play or not. Oh, and by the way, BMG, Warner Brothers, EMI etc, can I have back my levy that I paid to you when I bought a box of audio CD-Rs?

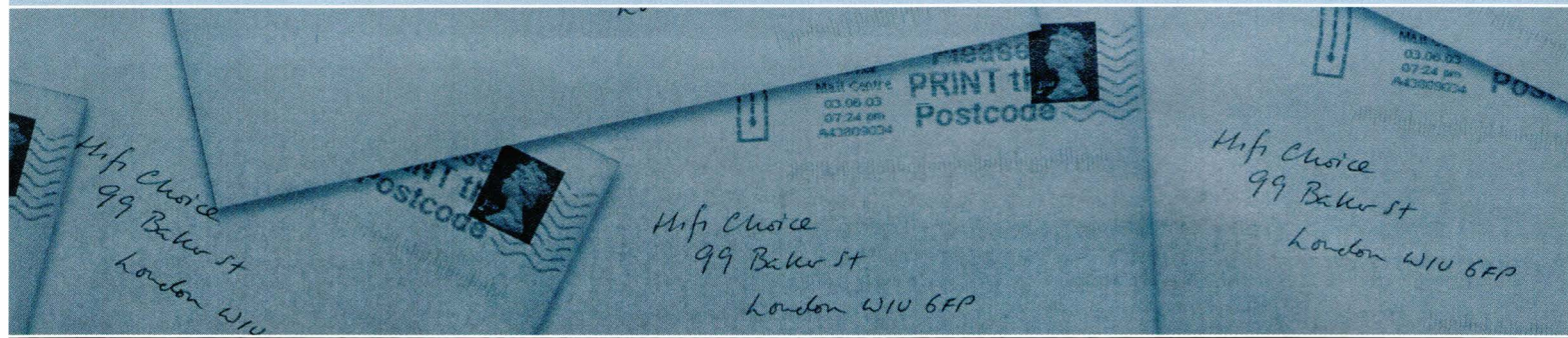
Pearce Clayton via email



### WIN IXOS INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of Ixos XHA606 interconnects worth £60, featuring Gamma Geometry and silver plated OFC conductors for superior sound. So get writing! (250 words max please...)





Or email your letters to [dan.george@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:dan.george@futurenet.co.uk)

You have mail



my LPs after several playings. You will doubtless say that I am old and can't hear the highs anyway. But, in my physics courses, I teach acoustics and can regularly hear higher frequencies than my students. Secondly, on what does Mr Miller base his statement? There's no justification presented, nor is there a reference to a study in the area.

What does the hardness of diamond have to do with the highs on an LP? The cantilever has compliance and the stylus should follow the groove, not eliminate it. When I was a child I received an acoustical record player which used to leave stings of vinyl on the needle. Today's high compliance cartridges are not in the same ballpark.

**Jim Gibbs** via email

**Paul Miller:** I assume your physics courses also include the concepts of inertia and friction, as these also have a role to play in the interaction between stylus and groove. Clearly, vinyl will suffer more quickly from the wear and deformation that will inevitably occur because the playing of a record is not a frictionless process. Turn to p85 where I discuss the issue in more detail in this month's *Digitalia*.

#### PORTRAITS OF THE ARTISTS

I would like to congratulate you on a revitalised magazine. I used to subscribe but cancelled some time ago. I picked up the August issue because it looked very attractive and what a pleasant surprise! The interview with Daniel Lanois was excellent – I think that artist and music reviews enhance your publication even more. I have since reinstalled my subscription and look forward to the next issue landing on my doorstep...

**Bernd** via email

#### POINT OF VIEW

I've got a simple question regarding positioning of spikes under loudspeakers and under subwoofers. Should the point go upward or downward? My floor is unfortunately suspended and I don't know how to attach the spikes for best results.

**Martin Smith** via email

**HFC:** Spikes are an effective way of joining speakers to stands and floors, and should have the spike end pointing down. Most floorstanders and stands have spikes supplied, and you can use purpose-built cones or pads (or just four blobs of Blu-tack) to mount smaller speakers on their stands. With suspended wooden floors you can place the spikes on four small coins to protect the surface, or use a tip from Russ Andrews – sink four crosshead screws into the floor and then locate your spikes directly into the heads, making sure you mark their positions accurately first.

## ONLINE FORUM

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)



Have you noticed the classical CD label 'Classics' in your local Superdrug at ridiculously low prices? The finest bargain is the Shostakovich complete symphonies set at £6.49 for an 11-CD set – that's 50 pence per disc! This box set has won the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis, one of the most prestigious prizes in recorded classical music. **Pete H**

I bought a copy of *HFC* after a short break and man has it changed. I think their new percentage-based rating system works a treat and their more in-depth technical analysis is a welcome feature too. Also they now select bits from the forum to publish – we're all famous! **Ultrasonic**

**HFC:** Fame Academy's got nothin' on us – post your views and grab your 15 mins...

A friend has recently lent me a turntable. It's an inexpensive model but I am absolutely astounded at how much better vinyl sounds than CD in many ways. **Wilse**

## HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2003 VOTING FORM

The build-up has begun. In just two issues' time, we'll be publishing the most vital, comprehensive and considered *real* hi-fi awards in the UK. We'll reveal the best components of 2003, as voted by our exceptionally experienced band of reviewers. What's more, we're giving you the chance to have your say too.

The *Hi-Fi Choice* 2003 Awards Issue will also feature a special *Readers' Awards* section, giving you the chance to cast your votes for your own personal highlights of the year. Simply send us the voting form below – don't worry if you don't have a favourite for every category, just fill out the ones that are relevant to you. Please include your contact details and remember to buy the special Awards Issue to check out the results – on the shelves 28 November.

1. Best CD player
2. Best DVD or SACD player
3. Best turntable
4. Best radio tuner
5. Best digital audio recorder
6. Best stereo amplifier
7. Best multichannel/AV amplifier
8. Best stereo speakers
9. Best multichannel speakers
10. Best hi-fi accessory
11. Hi-fi innovation of the year
12. Hi-fi brand of the year
13. Hi-fi dealer of the year
14. Album of the year (CD or vinyl)
15. Best SACD or DVD-Audio music disc
16. *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewer of the year

CUT OUT OR PHOTOCOPY AND SEND TO: Hi-Fi Choice Readers' Awards, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.





UNISON RESEARCH UNICO CD PLAYER AND S2K INTEGRATED AMP | DIAPASON KARIS SPEAKERS | £3,700

# Beauty's not a beast

*Small but beautifully formed Italian hi-fi with more curves than Silverstone*

**B**uy an expensive Italian hi-fi system like this Unison Research/Diapason combo and you buy into a shade of opinion that contributes to one of the most colourful arguments in hi-fi – what is 'high-end' sound quality? Perhaps the easiest way to understand the impetus behind the drop dead gorgeous approach spun from the land of Ferrari and Armani is to describe what it quite deliberately doesn't set out to do.

It doesn't, for instance, try to compete with similarly-priced heavyweight systems that provide massive power and stability to drive exotic American panel speakers with their diabolically low impedances. Such loads – loads that would flambé your average output stage – are but a light snack to a Krell and its muscle-bound rivals. These behemoths nearly always sound beguilingly effortless and smooth (nothing wrong with that) but sometimes also rather slow and leaden.

The Unison Research S2K integrated amp, on the other hand, uses low-powered triode valves with a single-ended output stage. The conventional wisdom is that tubes have a warmth, grace and delicacy that sonic sledgehammers can't approach and therefore earn their place on the stairway to audio heaven. They're also lumbered with being the antithesis of the 'classic' Brit-fi transistor approach where pace, rhythm and timing are championed to the exclusion of pretty much everything else. But these are, at best, clumsy archetypes. The best hi-fi somehow manages to avoid such labels as these and lets the music weave its own magic.

For more than 15 years, this is where Unison Research says it's been at. The

company claims that, from the very beginning, its purpose has been to provide "enjoyment through listening to music". And, to that end, it has resisted pinning its colours solely to the valve mast. It also manufactures a parallel line of valve/transistor hybrids under the Unico brand, and it's from this range that the CD player comes.

## SEE-THROUGH STYLE

This is far from your regular silver disc spinner. Three years in research, it uses a CD-ROM transport and sophisticated control microprocessor for enhanced disc reading ability and robustness and a fully balanced pure triode valve amplification stage comprising two ECC 82 valves. Conversion is handled by a 24-bit/192kHz Crystal DAC. The infrared remote control meanwhile is fashioned from the company's trademark solid wood.

The S2K was developed from the original S2, but now uses two classic KT88 valves (one per channel) in single-ended mode. It may be Unison Research's entry-level model, but the first thing that strikes you about this impressively weighty nugget of an amp, with its sumptuous walnut cheeks and seductively glowing tubes, is the terrific build quality and fine attention to detail throughout. The mains and output transformers, for instance, are made in-house. The care lavished on the appearance, however, is quite eye-rubbingly extravagant. The way sculpted hardwood and stainless steel are combined is the very definition of hardware sex. And it's all down to a team of craftsmen and technicians you could fit on a double-decker bus with room to spare.

What excites Unison Research, ☑

**"The way sculpted hardwood and stainless steel are combined by Unison Research is the very definition of hardware sex."**



**Unison Research Unico CD player**  
£1,200

Exquisitely built with a CD-ROM as the transport. Balanced pure triode valve amp stage and 24-bit/192kHz Crystal DAC.



**Unison Research S2K integrated amplifier**  
£1,300

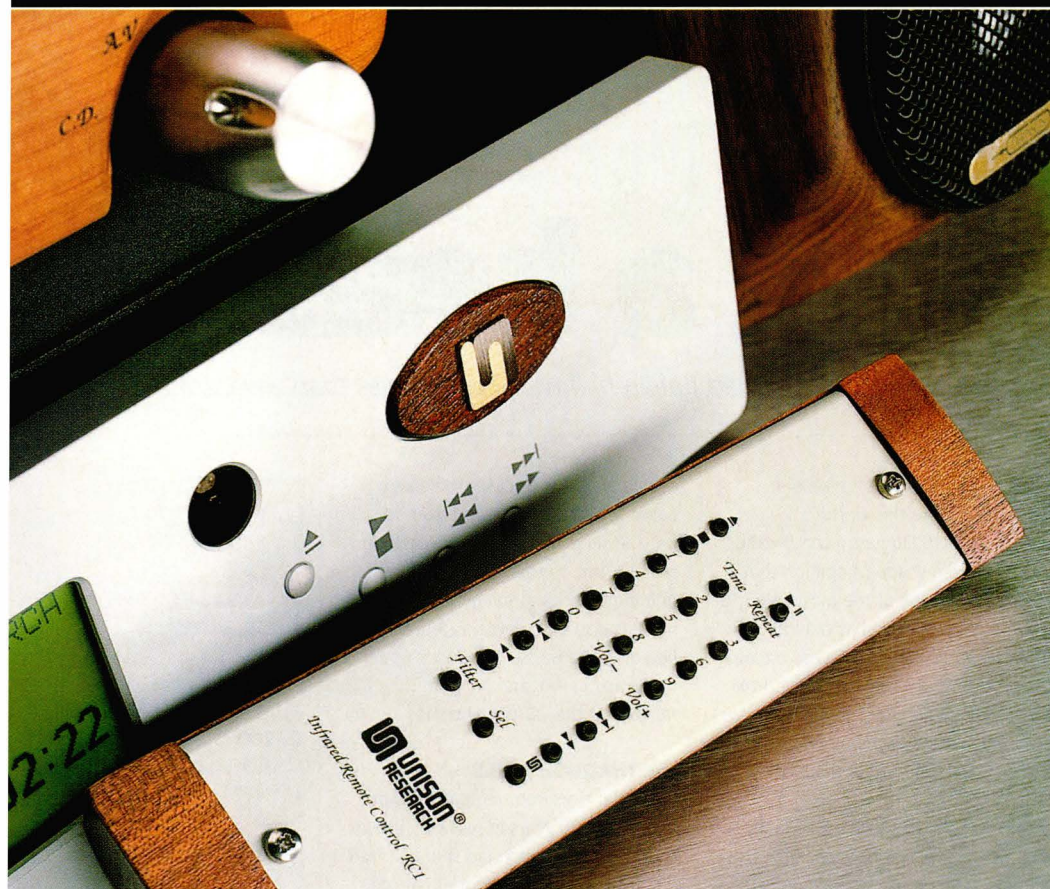
Purist entry-level all-valve amp with two classic KT88 valves in single-ended mode. Impressive transparency.



**Diapason Karis speakers**  
£1,200

Luxury miniature in gorgeous solid wood with elliptical baffle. Amazingly extended bass for its size and three-dimensional soundstage. Best in smaller rooms.





sonically, is that most fundamental of all hi-fi qualities – transparency, the thing that enables you to hear clearly, deeply and meaningfully into a recording. The thing that leaves no scrap of harmonic and timbral resolution unturned. The thing that allows you to appreciate every subtlety of technique, every ambient acoustic clue. Rather than settling for the warm, cuddly ‘tube sound’, the SK2 aspires to sound fresh, explicit and focused with pin-point imaging and a realistic sense of incisiveness. The goal is, as it ever should be, to fling open the window on the recording.

And for that, of course, you need the help of an exceptional pair of speakers. In the impossibly pretty town of Brescia in northern Italy, Diapason makes them. The tiny, rear-ported two-way bass reflex Karis is a beautiful example of what the Italians do so well – the true luxury miniature. Diapason’s aim was to produce a perfect replica of its Reference Series Adamantes III flagship on a much smaller scale that retained much of its presentational generosity, soundstage depth and bass weight. The cabinet is constructed completely by hand from solid ‘Canaletto’ walnut which is completely hand-made and lacquered. Uniquely, and rather cutely, the Karis looks as if it’s pouting. The

protruding elliptical baffle shape is achieved by using a single piece of curved multi-section ply and it’s said to provide excellent standing wave damping and sound dispersion characteristics.

The mechanical engineering’s interesting, too. What Diapason refers to as ‘Direct Drive’ technology allows the amplifier to be connected directly to the bass unit thereby eliminating the need for a crossover. The drivers are built exclusively for Diapason to its own specifications and are run-in and performance-matched for optimum results.

#### DEEP INSIDE

Now, I’ve listened to my fair share of true ‘high-end’ systems – some of which, it has to be said, have appalled rather than enthralled. But it didn’t take long to discover that the Unison Research/Diapason combo was something genuinely special. In a nutshell, it simply sounds more transparent and revealing than most mainstream £3-4K systems, capable of unearthing nuances of technique and the recording acoustic you always hoped your dream hi-fi would. We’re talking palpable images, pin-sharp focus and convincingly resolved ambient information.

It was with this system, for example, that I discovered Harry Connick Junior’s penchant for moving around the microphone while singing. He didn’t sound quite as cuddly as he had with another (more expensive) valve amp system I had on test concurrently, but he did sound remarkably like a gifted singer fully resolved in three dimensions, both spatially and musically – slick, polished and expressive. Moreover, the *a capella* harmonies were exquisitely portrayed by the all-Italian system.

It also went a long way to revealing just how much production effort went into Steely Dan’s latest album, *Everything Must Go* – the layering and studio effects were very easy to follow but, importantly, no less enjoyable for being so explicitly analysed. Stereo was spectacular, almost stunning in fact. With this CD, the system delivered on a gut level, too, walloping out bass lines with wholesome funk.

A deep, tangible bass and crystalline mid and treble clarity made Claire Martin and co’s performance especially enjoyable on *Too Damn Hot* with an especially well-portrayed sense of atmosphere. But then this is an immaculately well-produced CD on the Linn label. The haunting *I Can Let Go*





## “Lacklustre discs sounded fresher and livelier played on this system – temporal aspects of the music were given equal billing with the more usual hi-fi obsessions of resolution and focus.”

Now sounded particularly lovely, the sound imbued with a rare sense of stillness and tranquility. There was plenty of height and good ambient specificity to the image and the performance had a delicious delicacy and lightness of touch about it. Perhaps, here, the Diapasons lacked the last ounce of treble definition but I hardly felt short-changed.

### TIME AND MONEY

The key to this system's performance seems to be resolving power and grace. It really doesn't matter where you start. Its bass is deep and powerful with a sumptuous quality missing from most small speaker kit. Yet it's also fabulously agile and responsive. Treble is clean, extended and rich with shimmering detail, yet completely free from grain. Timing's right on the money, too, capable of capturing the deftest shifts of tempo, and brilliant with fancy cymbal work. And, despite the modest 15 watts per channel, there's ample drive for rock.

The track I anticipated might trip up the system – an overly bright GRP recording of fusion saxophonist Eric Marienthal from the early nineties – simply sounded better than ever. All right, his alto sax was a shade too reedy to be strictly accurate but I'd never heard it located so solidly in the soundstage, or as capable of projecting its sound into the room. Imaging was virtually holographic with the drums placed precisely where they should be, behind Marienthal and the singers. Quite unexpectedly exhilarating.

These qualities came together to spectacular effect with a much older Linn label favourite, jazz pianist David Newton's *Eye Witness*. Here, Newton and friends – Dave Green on bass and Allan Ganley on drums – assumed a tangible presence in the listening room, the power and dynamics of *Ol' Blue Eyes* coming across with foot-tapping, neck-tingling realism. But that's a great recording. Even more impressive was the amp's sympathetic treatment of indifferent or over-zealous productions

as I sifted through my CD collection. Lacklustre discs somehow sounded fresher and livelier played on this system – temporal aspects of the music were given equal billing with the more usual hi-fi obsessions of resolution and focus. This gave life and structure to discs even as turgid and clogged as Yes's *Union*, while better produced material positively shimmered with clarity and confidence.

The most remarkable thing about this system is that it has outstanding ability in conventional 'hi-fi' terms – its clarity and grip; its powers of resolution, analysis and organisation; its fundamentally truthful and revealing nature – but combines it with a special knack of giving the business of listening to music a sense of occasion, making it a real, living, breathing event. Without resorting to gross tonal aberrations or special effects, it holds the listener's interest like the best hi-fi should. And that goes for when it's switched off, too. **HFC**

David Vivian





**Perfect compatibility**



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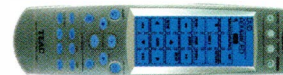
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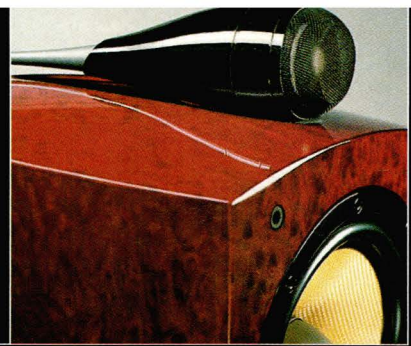
LEGACY



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**TEAC**

# REVIEWS



Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high performance hi-fi in the world.

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## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked point here is to the job of... recommend you... after a livelier... tubes shone... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidence and ease. It even seems to be

You can find more civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC** Jason Kennedy

**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 83%**

**FEATURES >> 85%**

**BUILD >> 85%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

**CONCLUSION**

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%**

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



**Best Buy**

A component receiving the coveted *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



**Editor's Choice**

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...

marantz

CD

TRK

5

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

42:39  
TTL TIME

SUPER AUDIO CD PLAYER SA-17S1

PHANTOM-C

SOUND MODE

TIME

OPEN/

D





# SUPER DEDICATED

*With the SA-12S1 as its template, the SA-17S1 is aimed squarely at the multichannel audiophile*

**PRODUCT** Marantz SA-17S1

**TYPE** Multichannel SACD/CD player

**PRICE** £1,500

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x11x39.4cm

Weight 11.5kg • Multichannel SACD and two-channel SACD, CD, CD-R/RW replay • SACD and CD Text compatible • Phantom centre channel mode

**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

**W**ith both Marantz and Denon now under the umbrella of D&M Holdings Inc, it's fascinating to see how each company is pursuing its own product development. Denon certainly has the lead with universal disc technology in the form of its DVD-2900, while Marantz has stuck with the older, Pioneer-based DV-8300. But while Denon has made most impact with DVD-Audio and universal DVD-A/SACD players, Marantz continues to place a greater emphasis on realising the best from Super Audio CD. Historically, this stems from its association with Philips, the co-developers of SACD with Sony. Either way, it allows Marantz to steer a distinctive course through the digital maze.

And the SA-17S1 is its latest marker in the labyrinth, a £1,500 player dedicated to multichannel SACD. Two-channel CD and CD-R/RW formats are accommodated, naturally, but neither DVD-V nor DVD-A is accepted. In many respects, the SA-17S1 looks like a stripped down version of the £3,500 SA-12S1 DVD/SACD player which is destined to continue for another season. If we trace its family tree back another generation, then the SA-12S1 itself borrowed very heavily from

Philips' first multichannel DVD/SACD player, the SACD-1000. All three players share the same DSD decoder and Crystal's multi-format CS4397 DACs, but the DVD video, Dolby and DTS decoding of the SACD-1000 and SA-12S1 is purged from the purist SA-17S1.

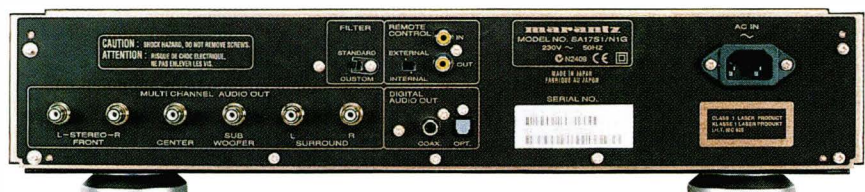
While the player's audio performance can only benefit from the liberation of video clocks, decoders and DACs, it does also mean that its set-up is entirely traditional – there is no on-screen menu and no facility for channel volume or bass management, for example. This is a purist player with a build quality and component selection to match.

Marantz's discrete op-amp circuits, known as HDAM or Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Modules, are retained while extra attention has been paid to the headphone amp, allowing it to drive low impedance cans without difficulty. Nevertheless, this facility is most useful for two-channel CD and SACD as multichannel software is *not* downmixed to the headphone socket. One genuinely new feature now permits the generation of a 'phantom' centre channel for multichannel audio systems lacking a centre speaker. In this instance, centre channel information is distributed to the front left and right channels, helping to create a more significant central image.

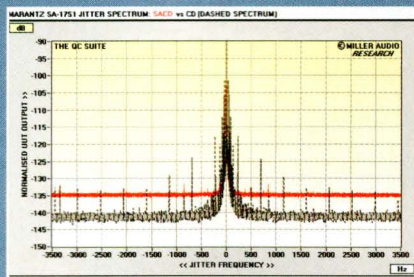
It's worth remembering that while most multichannel SACDs host 5.0-channel data, there are still SACD discs populated with just 3.0 or 4.0 channels of audio. The sixth channel (the 0.1 channel in DVD terminology) may either carry sub-bass audio or 'height' information or be left unused. Press the 'Sound Mode' button on the SA-17S1's fascia during playback to discover just how many channels are available from your SACD. Where there's no centre channel recorded on the disc, then Marantz's phantom mode will provide no advantage.

Finally, two analogue filter settings are provided via a switch on the rear of the player. The 'custom' position simply provides a more gentle, extreme-treble roll-off than the 'standard' setting, although it's doubtful whether the slight differences in high treble energy will have any real subjective impact. The filters themselves may 'sound' different, but any amplifier susceptible to ultrasonic noise and spurious is unlikely to benefit from being partnered with any SACD player, regardless of its filter configuration.

In terms of its physical construction, the substantial gold-finished alloy fascia and matching drawer frontispiece take their cues from the established SA-12S1. A more ▶



## LAB REPORT

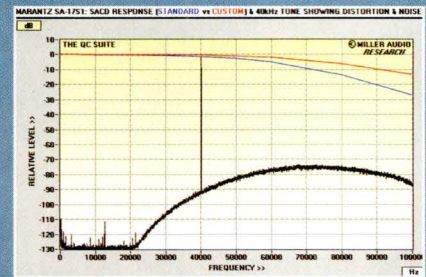


While the SA-12S1 benefits from isolated audio and video clocks, the SA-17S1 is free of any such cross-contamination as it's also devoid of any DVD video decoding. As a consequence, the SA-17S1 *should* enjoy as low (or lower) 160psec jitter as its costlier cousin. In fact, Fig 1 (left) shows an altogether messier jitter spectrum with PSU and other low-rate interference bringing jitter to some 430psec with CD (shaded black trace) and 320psec with SACD (red trace). The difference in noise also reflects the slightly *greater* dynamic range enjoyed by CD software, contrary to expectations.

Indeed, there's no practical difference in the 113.5dB A-wtd S/N obtained with both CD and SACD software because this is typically limited by the analogue output stage and not the number of digital 'bits'. As are other parameters, like interchannel crosstalk which is better than 110dB through the midrange but ~95dB at 20kHz. It's also worth noting that both CD and SACD software is referenced to the same 2.25V maximum analogue output, so A/B listening tests between the two formats are perfectly valid.

Marantz specifies a lower distortion figure for its SA-17S1 than the SA-12S1 even though, in practice, the reverse is true. While the latter achieves a low 0.001% THD through the midrange, this increases to 0.0015% (CD) and 0.0025% (SACD) via the SA-17S1. The gap widens at high treble frequencies where the SA-12S1 suffers just 0.007% THD in comparison with a hefty 0.013% from the newer SA-17S1. This increased distortion is composed of 2nd and 3rd harmonics and looks distinctly 'analogue' in origin. It was suggested that the SA-17S1's HDAM op-amps had a 'relaxed' specification, and this may reflect such a compromise.

Of course, at higher frequencies any SACD distortion harmonics are submerged beneath the wash of requantisation noise that accompanies the SACD *encode* process. This is clear enough from Fig 2 (right), which also shows the difference in response of the standard (blue trace) and custom (red trace) output filters. In this instance, the SA-17S1's 'standard' filter has pretty much the same action as the 'custom' filter fitted to the SA-12S1. The SA-17S1's 'custom' output is more extended still, as shown.



compact, dot-matrix display is used here to indicate the track complement, timing and CD or SACD text information where it's included on the disc. The 'Sound Mode' button has another use when an SACD is loaded but not in play, allowing the user to select priority between multichannel SACD, two-channel SACD and CD layers on disc.

This feature is duplicated on the matching RC-17SAS1 remote control, which also provides a ten-second intro scan facility and CD text reader. It's a little-known fact that CD/SACD text can be read into a player's memory while it is trawling through the disc's

TOC (Table Of Contents). As a result, you can skip through the album, artist and track information using Marantz's 'text' button even if the disc is loaded but not spinning...

Of course, the SA-17S1 is not short on advanced technology even if much of this can be traced back to Philips' first-generation SACD-1000 model. The CS4397 DACs, for example, were one of the very first to accommodate both PCM audio up to 24-bit/192kHz *and* the DSD bitstream used by SACD. Individual DSD 'bits' are serially clocked into the CS4397 but the final D/A conversion is achieved via 'dynamic element

matching' using 24 switched capacitors within the chip. Crystal's literature is a little vague, but there seems to be some similarity between this technique and the Ring DAC architecture developed by DCS and used very successfully in Arcam's previous top-end CD players. So while the DAC will accept SACD data, a question remains whether it is converted into something rather closer to '4.6-bit' PCM audio just prior to its release into the analogue domain.

### SOUND QUALITY

Partly because the SA-17S1 has no on-screen set-up facility, its implementation in any multichannel system is necessarily very straightforward. We connected the player to the multichannel inputs of an Arcam AV8 processor (used in analogue bypass mode), driving a P7 power amp and a mix of B&W Nautilus 802 (front) and 804 (centre/surround) speakers with a massive ASW850 subwoofer for that little-used sixth channel. With no speaker configuration, delay or balance settings available from the SA-17S1, this is as close to plug-and-play as any multichannel product will permit. I couldn't resist opening the SA-17S1's account with the recent 30th Anniversary remix of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*, a genuine 5.1 channel SACD that has spelt trouble for more than a few SACD/universal players. The neutrality of this player's delivery was to set the tone for its performance with both multi and two-channel software.

There is a pervading sense of control about its sound, a feeling of security that things will never really get out of hand regardless of how elevated the volume or how heavy-handed the engineer was at the mixing desk. Listen to







# FLAMING KRELL

*Krell's powerful new stereo amp is the company's most advanced integrated design to date*

**PRODUCT** Krell KAV400xi

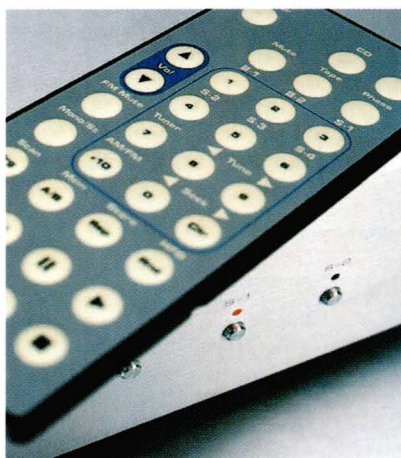
**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £2,698

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 50x9x43cm • Weight 14.1kg • 200 watts/channel (8 ohms) • 4 single-ended inputs, 1 balanced input • remote control

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8971 3909

🌐 www.krellonline.com

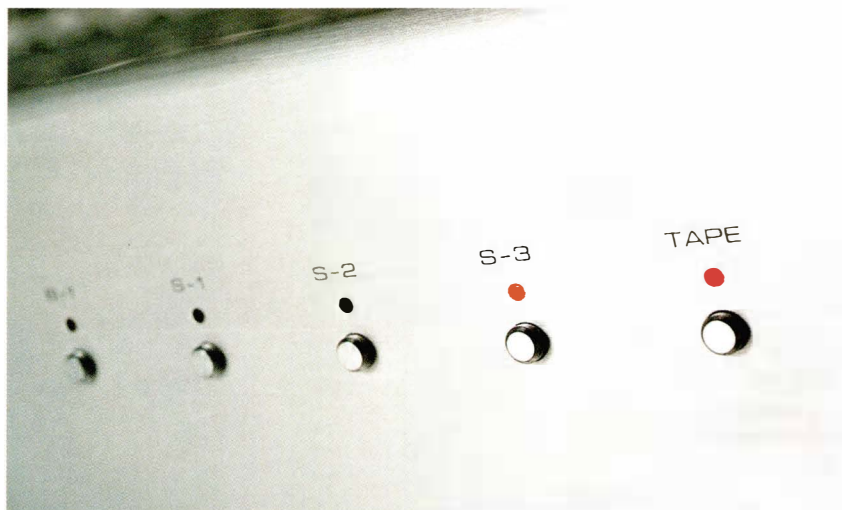


**K**rell has always been best known for its component pre and power amplifiers, but in 1995 expanded into integrated amp territory with the 150 watts per channel KAV300i. It made quite a stir, just as you would expect from an aspirational brand that introduces a relatively affordable product for the first time. The new KAV400xi is a linear development of that model, but with circuit improvements derived from the FPB series power amps. Power output is also up, to 200 watts per channel into eight ohms, and 400 watts into four ohms, the doubling in output implying that power supply limiting is not a factor. The massive 800VA toroidal (and it really is massive for such a svelte exterior design) transformer with separate supplies and discrete voltage regulators for the preamp, digital control and power amp stages, supported by a 55,000mF reservoir bank, shows the designer means business.

The KAV400xi looks very high-tech. No, let's not pussyfoot around – the KAV400xi looks absolutely drop dead gorgeous. With a finely engineered finish offset by capped, rounded

corners in polished alloy, the case is a variant of the design introduced with the Showcase range, but in a new slimline form factor which gives it a particularly elegant appearance. The controls feel good, the free-running encoded volume control in particular, and the amp is supplied with an ultra-slimline remote control powered by a lithium cell, which can control a CD player too.

Technically, the KAV400xi is an evolutionary advance over the previous model, but many of the ideas familiar from the previous practice are represented here in full measure. For example, the amplifier uses Krell's proprietary current mode topology internally, which involves current rather than voltage gain, which means impedance matching at each end of the circuit is easier to manage. The Krell is balanced from input to output except, by definition, in the case of the unbalanced in and outputs of course. There are four of the latter, all at line level and switched by sealed relays. The input includes a tape loop, and there is also a single balanced input on XLR connectors. Control is available over balance



and there's a mute option. There is even a 'Theatre Throughput' mode, which switches any chosen input to unity gain, so that when used in a multichannel system controlled by the Showcase processor (for example) the overall gain level is set by the processor.

Balanced interfaces are largely immune to RF pickup and in an amplifier where the internal circuits operate in true balanced mode this should be (and normally is) reflected in bolder, more detailed and more explicit sound. What is conspicuously lacking, however, is a facility to normalise the volume between inputs, which is important with any amplifier with mixed balanced and single-ended inputs due to the 6dB gain differential when balanced operation is implemented. Volume control is exercised by a precision resistor bank, but is controlled digitally, so there is no compelling reason why such a facility could not have been added without compromising sound quality. Another irritating factor here is the large volume sets at the bottom end of the volume range. A software revision could take care of this.

All internal circuits apart from the output and its associated pre-driver stage operate in Class A, with low negative feedback, and cover a wide bandwidth. 180kHz is mentioned in the literature ("suitable for SACD"), though the only properly qualified figure refers to a 20kHz frequency response within a very tight 0.07dB envelope. The 47kOhm input impedance is high enough for

## “What you get is fast, fluid and powerful – just what you expect from the best Krell designs, and this is one of the best.”

any source components to operate without modification of their frequency responses, even over relatively long cable runs.

Other features include a preamp output for use in a bi-amplified system, or to bypass the internal power amp, and interfaces for custom install purposes. The latter includes an input for RC-5 baseband signals from an external infrared receiver, and a 12V I/O circuit which can either output a wake-up trigger signal, or respond to an external trigger.

### SOUND QUALITY

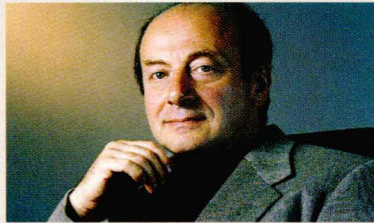
Don't expect this amp to perform straight out of the box. It is quite normal to have to run an amplifier in, and not unusual to expect a half-hour or so each session before it delivers the goods. The Krell is much the same, but with bells on. For the first few days, it sounded clean, but rather mundane. The

break-in period however seems to help it lose its inhibitions as it flexes its muscles, and what you end up with is fast, fluid and powerful – just what you expect from the best Krell designs, and this is one of the best.

Once the initial burn-in period has elapsed, the new Krell baby is an absolute screamer. If it was a car it would be an Alfa Romeo – not without character, but with lightning speed and resolution. The big difference is that the Krell is not Italian, and it won't start shedding body parts, or throwing pistons. It is much too well screwed together. Unlike some amps, it won't throw a wobbly into challenging loudspeaker loads either. It is even difficult to think of systems that it won't suit. True, it doesn't sound very valve-like, so if that's your thing you should probably look elsewhere. At the same time, the Krell is not grainy, harsh or in any other way obviously solid state, at ▶



Q & A



Dan D'Agostino, founder, chief executive officer and chief engineer of Krell Industries Inc, talks about and around the KAV400xi

**HFC:** Can you explain what job the 400xi was intended to do, and how it is being received by the market?

**DD'A:** It is a wide application device. The 400xi was originally intended to be a starter design which could also be used as an adjunct for those with systems based on our bigger amplifiers in another room. But it is certainly not noticeably limited in what it can do. Power output doubles into four ohms, the output stage is robust and the amplifier is inherently very stable. It is more than capable of driving big, power-hungry speakers.

**Looking inside the amplifier, there hardly seems room for the power supply reservoir capacitors, but the transformer has a very high rating. How would you describe the key elements of the power supply?**

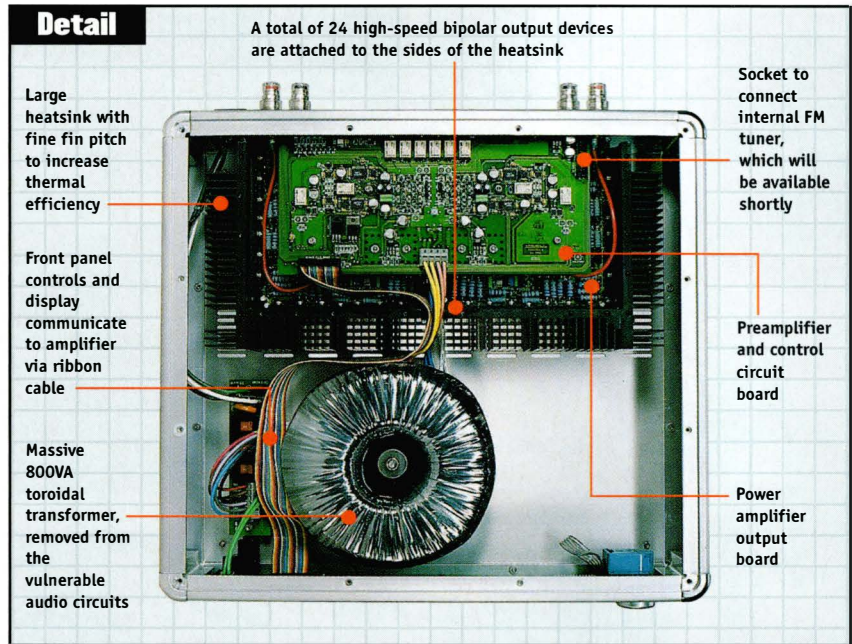
This is the way to produce the kind of amplifier we want to make. We've been reducing the size of the capacitors in our amplifiers over the years, and it's true that the reservoir has quite a low rating. The type of circuitry we design doesn't need large reservoirs, and for speed we don't want it anyway. We found that if you have an adequate power supply and good regulation, a large reservoir causes slew-induced distortion, and this is not our style.

**How has the amplifier been voiced?**

It's simple enough. We voiced the 400xi to sound as much like the FPB series power amplifiers as possible. We wanted it to be fast, detailed and solid, and also to be as independent of the speaker load as possible.

**We have all been hearing about the poor state of the consumer market for hi-fi over the last two years. Are there any signs of recovery?**

The area of the market we operate in is becoming very strong in the US. We noticed our domestic market started to pick up around June. In the last couple of months there has been some upturn in export markets too, but recovery abroad appears to be slower than in the US.



At least it isn't once the warming-up ritual has been observed. It needs more than the usual period under power before each listening session before it gets its act fully into gear, and it runs quite hot when it has been on for a while.

Nevertheless, some speakers are going to prove more obvious partners than others. It worked particularly well with a pair of the new two-metre £20,000 Triangle Magellans. In one way this is no surprise. Large speakers tend to be relatively sensitive, and this is certainly the case here. But extended bandwidth operation brings its own problems, as can speaker balance, and the Magellan certainly has a potential balance problem. With the wrong amp in charge it can sound aggressive and 'in your face', and while the temptation is to smooth it out using valves, or simply a relatively soft-sounding amplifier, that turns out to be precisely the wrong approach to take.

The Magellan is a fabulously detailed performer, and what it really needs is an amplifier which combines clarity with control to make the most of its assets, rather than one that minimises its weaknesses. Combining clarity with control is virtually a three-word encapsulation of the KAV400xi, and this combination sings. It does not sound aggressive, even when listening on the tweeter axis, but the resolving power of the speaker is fully exploited for musical effect.

The bass is also well integrated, lacking a slight tendency to boxiness that can appear through other combinations.

But the words 'bass' and 'Krell' are, and always have been practically synonymous. A Krell that doesn't do bass is simply unthinkable. In the end, the bass is of more than just passing interest. Bass control and driving ability do more for reproduced sound than just tacking on a few notes at the bottom when you're playing Massive Attack or Bach Chorales. The bass is an integral part of the sound as a whole adding colour, depth and space to the illusion, and these are the qualities the Krell possesses in abundance. Even when the bass is not particularly obvious in its own right, as when playing female vocal material or a string quartet, say, the wide tonal colour palate remains, and so does the sense of space, light and depth. The long and the short of it is that this is an amplifier that knows how to sing. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 93%**

**FEATURES >> 83%**

**BUILD >> 95%**

**VALUE >> 89%**

**CONCLUSION**  
The sound is fast, tuneful and detailed, and remains so out to the frequency extremes – the bass is particularly impressive. More than this, here is an amplifier with real brio, which is entirely suited to wide bandwidth, high-resolution systems.

**PRO**  
A champion that performs well above its weight, the KAV400xi sets an impressive marker for its rivals.

**CON**  
Width could embarrass some racks and equipment supports, and the absence of input normalisation will result in a big volume step between unbalanced and balanced input selection.

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%**

# the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



**SME turntables.** Both Model 10 and Model 20/2 on permanent demonstration



**A.R.T. Skibo loudspeakers** with bass modules



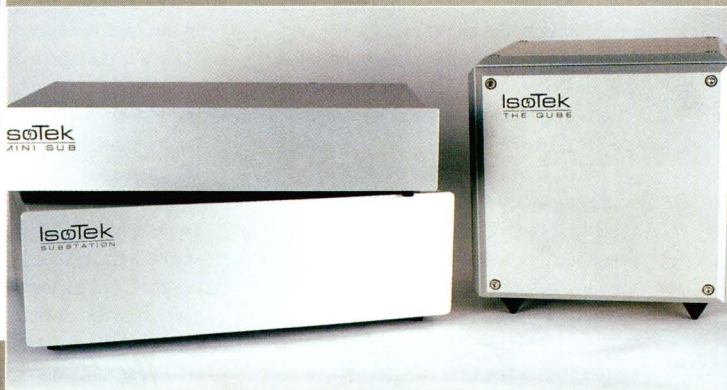
**Unico CD.** CD player with valve output stage



**Wadia 861 CD player.** Both Basic and SE versions on permanent demonstration



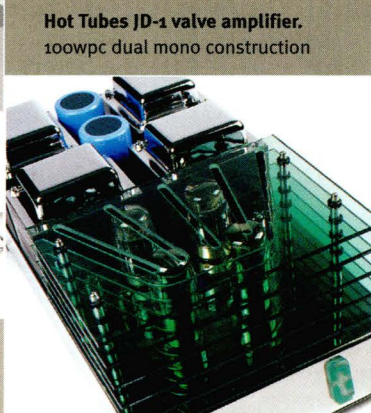
**Unico pre-power amplification.** Valve hybrid design, very good sound and great value



**IsoTek mains conditioners.** All modules in use in our demonstrations



**Acoustic Arts.** High quality amplification from Germany



**Hot Tubes JD-1 valve amplifier.** 100wpc dual mono construction



**Thorens 800 Series turntables.** The new line of non-suspended turntables



**Moon Audio products.** Nova CD player and i Series amplifiers

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ROGUE AUDIO ▶ SME ▶ SHANLING ▶ SHUN MOOK ▶ SUGDEN ▶ TRANSFIGURATION ▶ TRIANGLE ▶ TRINITY AUDIO ▶ TRI-PLANAR ▶ UNISON RESEARCH ▶ VPI ▶ WADIA

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# TEENY HIGH END

*Looking for a discrete speaker solution with real high-end qualities? Try this radical package for size*

**PRODUCT** Eclipse TD Lulé 307/307PA and 316SW

**TYPE** 2.1-channel sub/sat speaker system (with amp)

**PRICE** £1,250 (inc. stands)

**KEY FEATURES** Sizes (WxHxD): sat 12x16x16.2cm, amp 14.4x14.8x15cm, sub 23.6x30x35.3cm • Single driver 'time domain' design • 12W amp supplied

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 7328 4499

🌐 www.eclipse-td.co.uk

**E**clipse, part of the Fujitsu-Ten OEM audio manufacturer, produced something of a stir when it introduced the egg-shaped 512 a couple of years ago, and repeated the trick with a smaller but otherwise similar variant, the TD508, about a year later.

Described from the outset as 'time domain' design, all Eclipse speakers follow the same basic groundplan, and that includes the new miniature satellite and subwoofer, the 307 and 316SW, reviewed here for the first time.

In effect, Fujitsu-Ten was co-opted to indulge a passion for audio which behaves correctly in the time domain, even if this means sacrificing frequency response linearity. A multi-driver loudspeaker is guaranteed to introduce phase and group delay errors, problems which result in smearing of information on the time axis. Sounds which consist of a number of discrete frequencies (all music signals can be analysed as a combination of discrete frequencies) arrive at the listener's ears with unrelated arrival times and even if the frequency response is maintained, something important is lost.

This system consists of two of the new 307 satellites with the partnering 307PA amplifier and a single compact subwoofer, the 316SW. Also included is a pair of floorstanding pedestal stands, but this is only one possibility for a speaker which can be attached to wall or ceiling, or mounted on a small tripod stand.

This is a classic case of a design whose form mirrors its function. The shape of the satellites is determined by the designers' wish to avoid secondary radiation from cabinet edges and corners, and to encourage an audio output waveform which is like an expanding soap bubble. Another design aim was also to avoid internal flutter echoes, by producing a shape that is maximally irregular. A single driver is specified to avoid the crossover and phase problems they cause. The 5cm unit is fixed to an internal 'anchor' or mechanical ground, which is coupled through to the base and then to the speaker support, which is a sturdy, relatively heavy, yet extremely attractive

design with integral cable management.

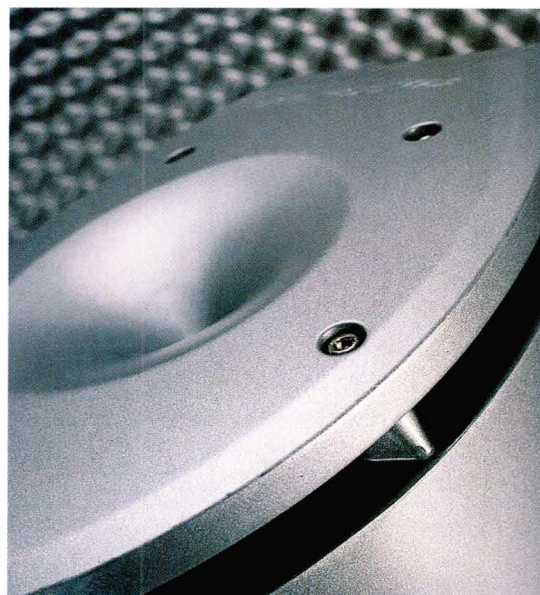
The amplifier supplied with the satellites is a compact design rated at 12 watts per channel, with a single input and an outboard power supply. The only user interaction is with the volume control, the large knob at the top, which is bathed in light when powered up. The limited range of features is fine if you want to use it with a single source – a CD player say – but at the very least a passive switchbox (or a full-on preamplifier) may be necessary to act as a front-end source selector.

The subwoofer follows the same design priorities as the satellite, and again everything has been done to ensure good timing, which in this case is synonymous with speed. The TD-316 is claimed to be the fastest subwoofer available, and to mate with the satellites particularly well as a result. Power output is hardly prodigious at 30 watts continuous and 60 watts peak.

Most of the structure is made from finely finished heavy aluminium die-castings. It's surprisingly light at 19kg, and the acoustic design is sealed, with sound from the 16cm twin-voice-coil driver directed upwards, bounced off a reflector and diverted around 360 degrees by a slot which also provides a resistive air pressure in front of the drive unit cone. Internal construction mirrors that of the satellites, with a similar 'floating' arrangement to avoid energising the enclosure, which would otherwise be a major source of delayed resonance output. The electronics are similarly floated, and a toroidal transformer was chosen primarily for its low flux leakage. Adjustments are limited to a level control, phase and a variable low pass filter.

## SOUND QUALITY

It is not unusual for components to require extended warm-up time, though the extent to which it needs to be kept on heat (as it were) is perhaps a reflection of its resolving ability. In this case, auditioned fresh from the box, the 307 satellites are close to being unlistenable. There are several credible reasons why this might be so, of which the best candidate is that the drive unit suspension needs to settle in by being exercised. With other speakers it would also be reasonable to suggest that crossover capacitors need to



be 'formed', but with no passive crossover this is a non-starter as an explanation. But there are capacitors in the amp power supply reservoir.

Whatever the reason, the observation is straightforward enough. From cold or new, the satellites sound raw and coloured, though when thoroughly burned in and warmed up, the coloration recedes. But it never completely disappears. The mineral loaded polymer enclosures are not as acoustically 'dead' as the marble-loaded resin enclosures of the senior models, but this was clearly a cost-related decision which hints that the subwoofer may also be a rather good partner for their more costly satellite brethren.

There are no equivalent criticisms to be made of the sub, which behaves completely transparently, and which operates seamlessly down to about 40Hz, and up to as high as 200Hz, though around 120Hz turns out to be optimum once run in (higher initially).

With so little power on tap, and with a satellite sensitivity of just 80dB (per watt, per metre) on the maker's figures, this was never going to be a speaker system for full-bore Mahler symphonies at realistic sound pressure levels. It is a system that works best in the nearfield, around two metres away. It's not as strapped for







**“Sometimes the sound may not be as luxuriant, as polished, or as large in scale, but equally the music is often the better for it.”**

acoustic power as you might suppose, however. In fact, one of the larger Mahler symphonies (*No6*/Benjamin Zander on Telarc) was used as part of the test, and it has the desired effect, putting this listener through an emotional wringer after listening at a perfectly serviceable volume level.

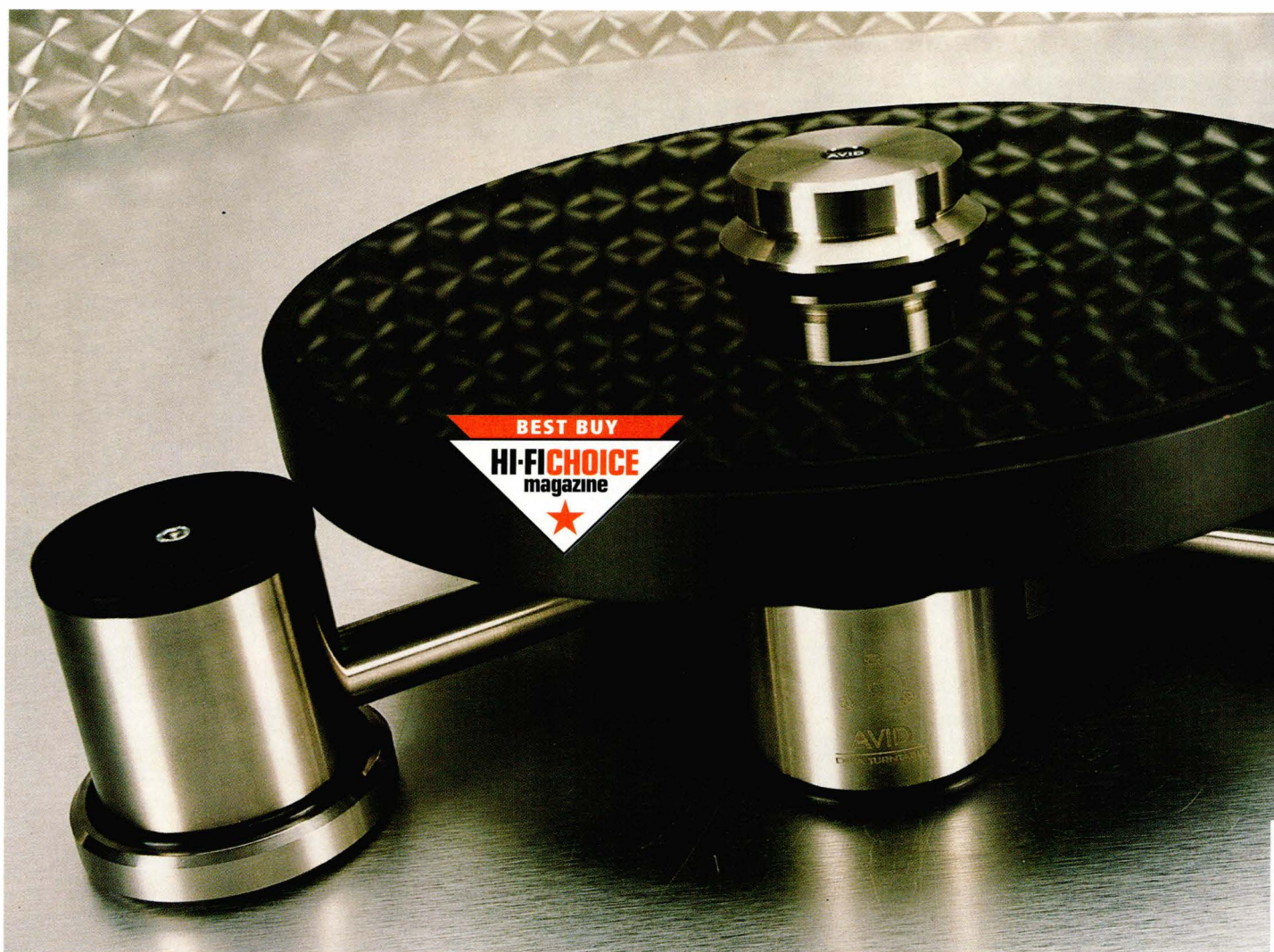
The musical properties of this package are an inversion of what you'd normally expect, but in many ways the differences serve musical ends peculiarly well. The system sounds fairly lean and dry, and a little coloured. But the whole effect is extremely well knitted together. Musical articulation is especially effective, and the result is a heightened feeling of musical performance. Sometimes the sound may not be as luxuriant, as polished, or as large in scale, but

equally the music is often the better for it, with vocal quality particularly well handled.

Imagery is the closest thing to audio holography yet, though it's important to place the subwoofer in the same plane as the speakers, and ideally equidistant between them to avoid imaging anomalies as the crossover frequency is necessarily rather high. Although the speakers throw a relatively forward image by some standards, there is very clear differentiation in the depth plane, and lateral imaging is precisely handled, even for off-axis listening. Again there is a caveat, but it's one that's already been mentioned in another context, which is that it works as long as you listen from a relatively short distance, ideally around two metres. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 83%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Peculiarly involving, high-resolution compact system that serves the music and leaves most sub/sat packages for dead.  <b>CON</b> Suffers from limited output at both frequency extremes, some upper midband coloration artefacts, limited acoustic power output.
<b>PRACTICALITY &gt;&gt; 80%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 86%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 80%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Goes a long way to redefining how hi-fi systems interact with the listener and the music, and a natural for those with small rooms but large musical ambitions. Note that this system can also be bought in 5.1-channel system form.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 83%</b>	



# LIVING LA DIVA LOCA

*Avid's least expensive turntable still looks the dope, but have corners been cut to meet the price?*

**PRODUCT** Avid Diva

**TYPE** Vinyl turntable

**PRICE** £1,100 (plus tonearm and cartridge)

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 40x11x38cm

- ◊ Weight 10.4kg
- ◊ Three-point spring suspension
- ◊ Optional second armboard
- ◊ Sapphire bearing

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 457300 @ www.avidhifi.co.uk

**A**vid's proprietor Conrad Mas is a lucky man. He initially turned down an offer by TEAC to distribute his turntables in Japan because he didn't realise that it was the TEAC of audio electronics fame, one of the foremost high-end disc transport makers in the business. Fortunately for Avid, Conrad got a second chance and his decks are now almost as easy to find in the Far East as they are here. TEAC has also offered him the opportunity to develop his own disc players

using its technology and in exchange he has built a new entry-level turntable partly to feed demand in the Far East. The Diva, as it has been dubbed, is also available over here and could set the cat among the gramophonic pigeons with its stainless steel metalwork and fancy suspension system.

At this price point you need to build a pretty decent turntable to compete with the well-established competition from Michell and Linn, and Avid has created what looks like a loss leader for the purpose. The engineering quality is unusually high, especially if you look at the block that forms the mechanical hub of the turntable. It's machined from solid aluminium and its beautifully sculpted form makes it seem a pity that it's so well hidden. It effectively ties the whole thing together, supporting the bearing and clamping the

arms that go out to the three suspension posts. It also supports the unusual armbase outrigger and a counterweight to balance the mass of the arm.

Each of the widely spaced suspension pots contains a spring hanging from a post with a device that can wind the spring up and down to allow for balancing out the turntable. Adjusting height is a simple matter of holding the spring and turning the stainless steel base of the post. When all three have been adjusted to take their portion of the turntable they allow it to bounce with a smooth, piston-like action that is free but not too lively. The nature of the spring-hanging posts means that each spring is likely to be a slightly different length to the others, which should stop the system having a single resonant frequency and thus improve isolation.



**“The Diva’s sound is the opposite of that of a Bluenote turntable for instance, eschewing romance for power and detail.”**



The tonearm support consists of three tubes which can slide in and out of the central puck and offer some degree of adjustment for different length arms. This being an Orally oriented design there are longer tubes available for ten and 12-inch arms. Having three tubes in a triangular configuration confers good rigidity and creates a low resonance platform on which to mount a tonearm. In this instance the arm supplied is SME's entry-level model, the 309 (reviewed very favourably in *HFC 244*) which costs £767. Alternative bases for other popular arms are also available but the SME range is a favourite of both Avid and *Hi-Fi Choice* so this seemed an appropriate choice.

The platter on the Diva is a composite of MDF, glass and stainless steel. The surface is glass and the bulk of it is MDF, with

three stainless cones sticking out of the bottom that sit in cups set into the sub platter. The latter is driven by a 24-pole AC synchronous motor via a small rubber belt, the motor being housed in a stainless pod to match the suspension. The motor is free-standing but stands close to the hub underneath the platter, with a cable trailing out behind the deck to the separate power supply. Speed change is manual and only a little bit fiddly as such things go.

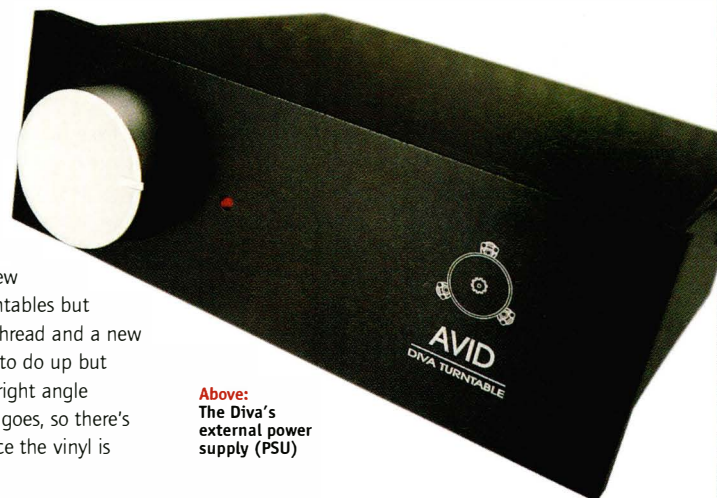
The quality of fit and finish is very good on both turntable and power supply. Set-up, though a little daunting because of the sheer number of components, is pretty straightforward if you follow the instructions. Neat aspects of the design include the ability to feed the arm cable through the large tube that supports the armboard and out through the bottom of the hub – this is a lot neater than having the cable hanging from the armbase.

#### SOUND QUALITY

It used to take an age to screw down the clamp on Avid turntables but the Diva has a coarse pitch thread and a new one-piece clamp. It's quicker to do up but getting the clamp on at the right angle sometimes takes a couple of goes, so there's still room for refinement. Once the vinyl is

clamped to the platter the fun can begin, and good entertainment it is too. The Diva has a strong, definite sound that is more confident than most at the price. This is aided by a good solid bass performance allied to a distinct sense of assurance – it is the opposite of a Bluenote turntable for instance, eschewing romance for power and detail.

Detail levels are high in terms of hearing all the instruments and voices in the mix but could be higher with respect to shape and scale – better turntables reveal more depth to the soundstage as a whole and more body to each element within it. That said, voices have considerable presence. Kurt Wagner on Lambchop's *Is A Woman* is almost physically with you in the room. The rest of the band ▶



**Above:**  
The Diva's external power supply (PSU)

Q & A



Avid's proprietor and designer Conrad Mas explains some of the thinking behind his company's new entry-level turntable

**HFC:** Why did you develop the Diva?

**CM:** We produced it at the request of our Japanese distributor TEAC – they wanted a more affordable entry-level design. So we produced the Diva for their market but also as a universal player, hence it will accept more than one arm and anything up to 12 inches. Cosmetic finish had to be faultless, a prerequisite for their market.

**You have used a glass, MDF and stainless steel platter which appears to be a different approach to existing Avids. What was the reason for choosing this particular composite?**

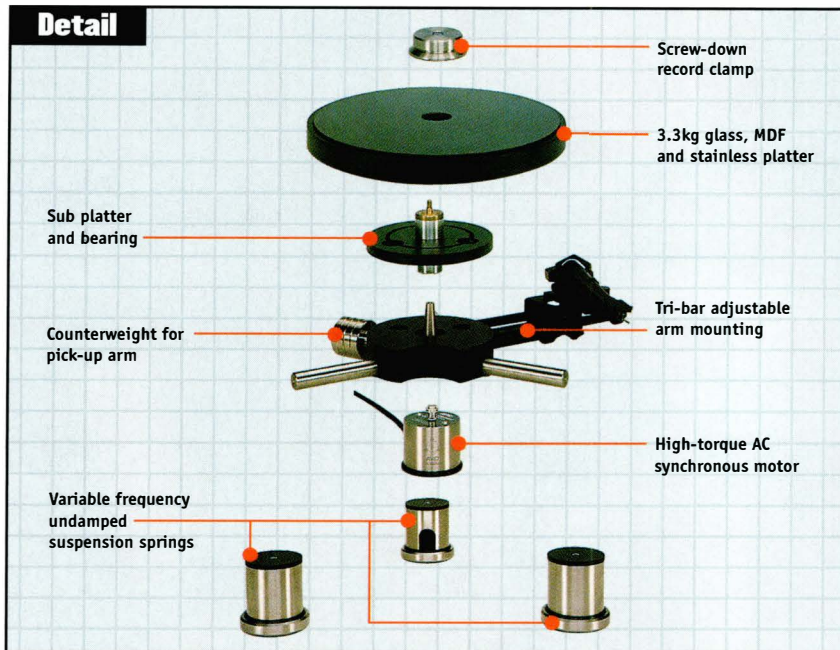
Surprisingly, it's exactly the same approach as our other designs. Our design approach has always been to reflect mechanical energy produced by the cartridge away from the platter and to use the record, made rigid with clamping, as a rapid conduit to the subchassis. The materials we have used for the Diva have exceeded our sonic expectations within the tight cost constraints for manufacture.

**How does the sliding arm base support benefit the design?**

The two rails and tube give a three-point rigid fixing which is easily interchangeable to allow the use of different arm sizes. The arm base is fitted to the rails using alignment grooves so that arm geometry is correct. The tube also allows the arm cables to be hidden out of sight. It is not intended that the arm mounting slides as part of the design.

**You discourage placing the power supply on the same support or near the turntable. Why?**

Any power supply will have the possibility of radiated fields that could be picked up by sensitive phono cartridges. This should not be a problem with the Diva as its PSU is shielded. However, it's preferred that the PSU is not near the turntable, thereby removing the chance of any problem occurring.



❑ may not be reproduced with as much reverb as is sometimes the case but all the fundamentals are there.

Tonally there's a slight hardness to the balance which enhances some records but has a less positive effect on others – take Joni Mitchell's *Court And Spark* for instance. This 180g pressing can sound pretty luxurious but on the Diva it lost some of its sheen and seemed a little muted. Older recordings like the Art Ensemble Of Chicago's *Theme De Yo Yo* seem realistically gritty and Lester Bowie's saxophone is as piercing and real as you'd want it to be. Equally appealing is the way the deck can open up usually compressed sounding pressings such as the Mahavishnu live *Between Nothingness And Eternity* album, with the awesome Sister Andrea coming across in an open and powerful fashion that's rarely encountered.

Up against CD the Diva sounds natural and real, maybe not quite as tonally neutral but a lot more transparent and with more of the reverb apparent. It has a coherency and drive that most CD players would kill for. Moving the Diva from a highly floaty original Townshend equipment support to a design offering less isolation reduced bass weight as expected but didn't seem to affect detail levels too dramatically. Image height is still restricted but with a good quiet piece of vinyl such as Zakir Hussain's *Making Music* you can hear right through the sound, which enhances dynamic range and allows the myriad fine details to shine through.

When the going gets busy, such as on Keith Jarrett's *Eyes Of The Heart*, there is some sense that the deck loses a little composure – the music doesn't become obviously muddled, it just gets a little dense and less easy to follow. That said, this track (*Encore a-b-c*) is one of the toughest grooves I know and only

the best turntables can reproduce its energy without losing track of the musical message.

Because the Diva has such a confident and solid sound there's a strong tendency to judge it by the standards of designs costing a lot more. In the context of its real competition it will be a hard act to beat – Linn's LP12 will score with its trademark timing and Michell's GyroDec might present a more relaxed picture, but neither have the welly that's on offer here. This is a remarkably assured sounding turntable for the money and it looks like it really should cost more.

On the pick-up arm front, the Rega RB1000 arm might suit it extremely well, the silky smooth nature of this arm going some way to ironing out the foibles mentioned above. Then again the SME will be doing the deck plenty of favours, especially in the bass, and if you crave the deep stuff it will be a hard choice to beat. Whatever you equip it with, the Diva's qualities will shine through. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 85%</b>	
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 84%</b>	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 89%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 87%</b>	
<b>PRO</b>	Good build quality with a high quality bearing and decent suspension. Solid, powerful and confident sound.
<b>CON</b>	Sonic character is a touch 'hard' and imaging slightly restrained.
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	
Avid's Diva turntable is a solid and powerful sounding deck with very fine build quality for the money. It's good enough to really stir things up in this market sector while holding its own with plenty of more expensive designs.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>&gt;&gt; 86%</b>



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# PEDIGREE CHUMS

*Two new CD players from Arcam show there's still plenty of life left in the old digital dog*

**PRODUCTS** Arcam DiVA CD73T and CD93T

**TYPE** CD players

**PRICE** £400 and £950

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x8.5x29cm

Weight: 4.6kg/6.5kg CD73T – Wolfson WM8740 DAC, toroidal transformer CD93T – 4x WM8740 DACs/ch, upsampling to 192kHz, frame transformer

**CONTACT** 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk

**D**VD players will answer most CD playing needs after a fashion, but rarely can they do it as well as a dedicated CD player. New CD players have slowed to a trickle, but just when it seems you're in for an indefinite wait for something new and exciting to come along, several new models turn up at once. These two new designs from Arcam have model numbers incremented by one from the previous range, but this rather understates the differences below decks.

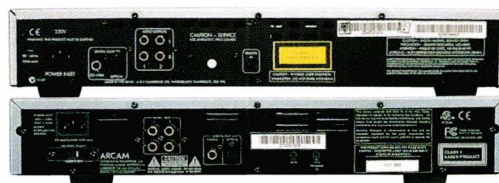
Functionally, there isn't much to distinguish them. They're both single-disc players supplied with the rather less than ergonomic CR-314 CD/DVD remote. They use similar Sony mechanisms, which can cope with CD-R and CD-RW discs plus CD Text, and they have the same set of front-panel controls, with similar

green fluorescent displays. Around the back the disposition of the sockets differs, reflecting the different motherboards, but they both offer optical and coaxial digital outputs, two pairs of analogue outputs and an input for an external remote control sensor. The only substantive difference is that the CD73T (the cheaper model, note) can be switched on and off from an external trigger signal, thanks to a more recently designed chassis. Neither model has a headphone socket. Build and finish is indistinguishable and is of the clean standard that we have come to expect from Arcam's DiVA range, but predictably the CD93T is heavier thanks to the larger transformer and power supply.

The junior of the two is the £400 CD73T, one up from the base CD62. This is a relatively straightforward player equipped with a Wolfson WM8740 24-bit/192kHz two-channel delta sigma DAC (used previously on Arcam DVD players) driving a servo-controlled DC-coupled output amplifier via a 4th order Bessel filter. The PC board is a dual layer design, its power supply based on a toroidal transformer with independent

supplies for the analogue and digital circuits.

The CD93T has a more elaborate internal topology, which upsamples the input data from 44.1kHz to 192kHz interpolated to 24-bit precision. At this high data rate, it is possible to run a much more relaxed anti-aliasing filter, which means less group delay, and what Arcam describes as a "smoother, more natural top end". The other key feature of the CD93T is the use of four Wolfson WM8740 DACs per channel to reduce noise and distortion, and increase linearity by averaging. The PC board in this case is a four-layer type with separate ground planes. Opamps are from Analogue Devices (ditto the upsampler) and Burr-Brown, and decoupling caps are from Stargate and Oscon, with polypropylene output caps from Wima. Jitter reduction strategies include a sophisticated master clock and the power supply uses a





**“The CD93T distinguishes itself with a deeper, more powerful feel. It digs deeper.”**

frame transformer rather than a toroid.

This upsampled circuit topology, which is loosely related to the circuitry in Arcam's DVD players, replaces the Arcam-sponsored dCS RingDAC from the CD92T and older models from the last five years. As the maker points out, technology waits for no man.

Arcam has built in an upgrade path from their junior DiVA range players (with the exception of the CD62T) to a specification close to the CD93T. All DiVA models are now available in matt black or silver finishes.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Although there are points of contact between these two players on audition, they provide a quite different listening experience, appropriate for rather different systems.

The CD73T delivers a quintessentially Arcam-style smooth, easy-going ride. Any sharp edges are knocked off the sound, and the result is that some edgy sounding discs sounded considerably better than expected. In common with the way that Arcam's product range has evolved in recent years, the CD73T is more transparent and detailed than its predecessors. The slight opacity and sloth of earlier generation hardware has largely gone, but the scintillating miasma of detail that you hear from some top-notch players is not a part of the CD73T (or any other Arcam design for that matter). It's cleaner and more transparent than some previous Arcams, but still ear-flatteringly big and smooth. Along with other discs, we used some very early CDs, including the Karajan/Anne Sophie Mutter Beethoven

violin concerto recording, which I believe was officially the first ever officially sanctioned CD, but which can sound rather frazzled. The CD73T made it much smoother.

The trade-off is that such a player can tone down the frisson in fine music making. By and large, the CD73T avoids that pratfall rather well, but might still give that impression when auditioned alongside the CD93T, which really is something else. In the fraught opening bars of *Mahler's Third* (Benjamin Zander), the CD93T sounded more muscular and alive at the same volume. It was clearly a more expressive, emotive performance through the same replay chain (Arcam FMJ A32 amp and Sonus Faber Cremona speakers with Nordost Valhalla wiring throughout). The CD73T sounded matter of fact in this passage where the CD93T seemed to lean into its role, infusing the music with an inner glow and a sense of gravitas. Both players distinguished themselves with a strong, muscular and tuneful bass, but again it was the CD93T that distinguished itself with a deeper, more powerfully built feel. It just digs deeper.

Something of the same qualities could be heard with quite different source material, for example *New Dawn* from Dominic Miller & Neil Stacey, the opening track on the Naim Audio sampler included with the October issue of *HFC*. Intriguingly, the softer, safer quality through the CD73T did nothing to detract from the atmospheric feel of the disc, but the CD93T was sharper and cleaner, with much more treble detail and presence. Whether this necessarily led to a superior



musical experience or a more communicative result is a moot point. In some ways it was the cheaper player that sounded more moving, perhaps because the essence of this particular recording is rooted in the bass and midband. But switch to Cowboy Junkies' *Mining For Gold* or the close harmonising of Sibelius's *Hymnus* from Cantus's *Against The Dying Of The Light*, and the CD93T's extra resolving power and precision pay dividends.

Both these new Arcams are impressive. Each manages to avoid the subtle electronic overlay that took the musical edge off some earlier Arcam players, and the result is pure gain. **HFC**  
*Alvin Gold*

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 80%</b>	<b>PRO</b> Impressive budget to mid-price player manages to keep a rein on unruly discs, without smothering musical expression.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 80%</b>	<b>CON</b> When it does err, it does so on the side of sounding safe and comfortable, though across a range of discs this is not such a bad thing.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 89%</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Just what a (near) budget CD player should be – a refined sounding machine that can drive modestly ambitious systems fully, but which never strays over the line by sounding edgy or mechanical, though ultimately it lacks some fine detail.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 84%</b>	

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 89%</b>	<b>PRO</b> High-resolution sound delivered with spirit and transparency from a technically ambitious design.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 80%</b>	<b>CON</b> There's no headphone socket, the display could be more cleanly designed, and ditto the remote control.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 84%</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Arcam CD players have slowly evolved into a breed offering real transparency, and which rarely betray their digital origins, and this is an excellent example of a player that reproduces fine detail without unwanted side effects.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 87%</b>	

# SEVENTH HEAVEN

*B&W's new 700-series neatly fills the gap between its 'budget' 600s and upmarket Nautilus 800s*

**PRODUCT** B&W 703

**TYPE** 3-way floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £2,000

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 23x101x36cm

• Tube-loaded alloy dome tweeter • 165mm Kevlar midrange driver • 2x 165mm paper/Kevlar bass drivers

**CONTACT** ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

The largest of all the specialist hi-fi speaker brands, Worthing-based B&W is noteworthy for the considerable resources it devotes to research and development, with a small army of engineers operating out of a well-equipped, purpose-built facility some miles away from the main factory in Steyning.

It's this research effort that lay behind the very advanced and radical Nautilus 800 models in 1998, and their subsequent Signature upgrades, and something of the same has now 'trickled down' to the brand new 700-series models, which very much fill a gap between the 800s and their 'budget' 600-series brethren.

There are three 700s all told: an £800 per pair 705 standmount; a £1,300 per pair 704 two-and-a-half-way floorstander; and this £2,000 three-way 703 floorstander, which arrived just a couple of weeks too late for inclusion in this month's group test.

In a sense, these 700s replace the CDM NT models, though perhaps supplant is the better word, as they by no means fit into the same price slots and are claimed to deliver much more of a mid-point level of performance between the widely separated 600s and 800s than their predecessors.

The industrial design brief here was to make reference to the cabinet shape of the outgoing CDM NT series – specifically the concept of mounting an external tweeter on top of a sloping cabinet top – but also to incorporate the bent-wood technology that was pioneered in the Nautilus 800s. A further requirement was to reduce the rather angular appearance of the CDM NTs, and also to take acoustic factors into account.

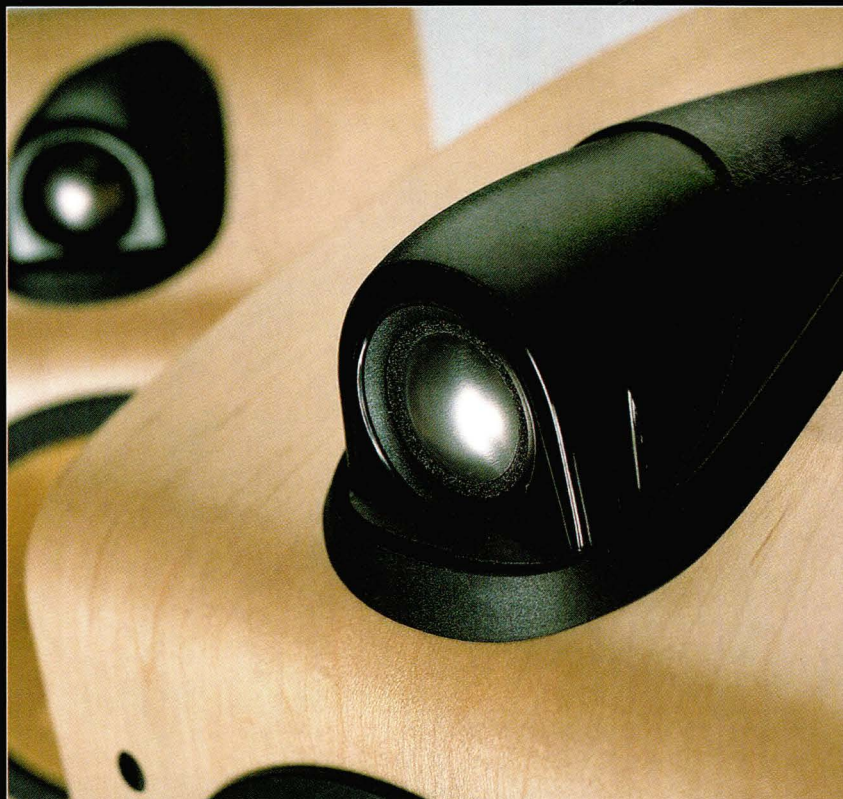
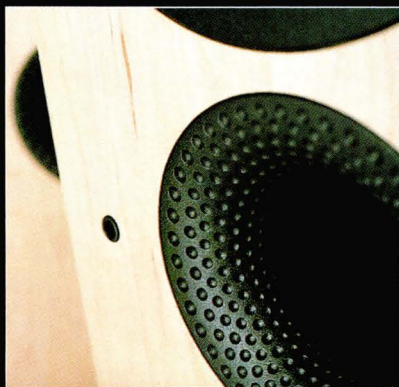
The new speaker looks less fussy than its predecessor, with cleaner lines and construction that promises some performance advantages. The front and top are formed from a single piece, giving great strength, while the curve under the top-mounted tweeter will give greater 'scatter' than the flat surface used before. The radiused edges have disappeared now, but the enclosure is subtly tapered front to rear, so the only parallel



surfaces are the front and back, which will help to de-focus the internal standing waves. Classy real-wood veneer covers all the faces, our samples coming in an attractive American walnut.

Crucially, this 703 uses a version of the 'surroundless' FST (Fixed Suspension Transducer) midrange driver that was





pioneered by the more upmarket Nautilus models, and which provides one of the better reasons for adopting the extra complexity of a three-way, as distinct from the two-and-a-half-way configuration used in the 704.

In the vast majority of three-ways, the midrange driver is either the same as, or a scaled down version of, the bass driver. However, the essential difference between a midrange-only unit and any unit required to produce bass (whether bass-only or bass/mid) is that a mid-only driver doesn't undergo significant cone excursion.

Whereas the rubber roll surround at the edge of a driver cone normally has to centre the cone, absorb edge-of-cone vibration and permit generous fore 'n' aft excursion, a mid-only driver has no need for the last of these. B&W has therefore come up with a midrange driver with a heavy but unfixed surround that locates the cone but ignores excursion in order to optimise the vibration absorption characteristics, by using a heavy rubber gasket in place of the usual roll. The result, allegedly, is improvement in dynamic range resolution.

Thanks to relatively new Klippel distortion measuring apparatus, all the drive units have undergone significant improvements over their predecessors. B&W calls the techniques it has used to make the drive unit magnetic fields more symmetrical and minimise variations in inductance 'balanced drive'. The high frequency extension of the external tube-loaded tweeter has also been improved, avoiding any need for a 'super-tweeter'.

There are two bass drivers here, port-loaded and operating in tandem, and each with

**“The 703 is much less laid back than the Signature, and actually sounds much more upfront than any B&W in recent memory.”**

Kevlar-reinforced paper cones 120mm in diameter. The FST midrange has B&W's familiar yellow woven Kevlar cone, 140mm in diameter, while the tweeter has a 25mm alloy dome. Just two pairs of terminals are fitted, conveniently low down near the floor.

#### SOUND QUALITY

Not unexpectedly, in-room measurements pointed towards free-space siting for this substantial floorstander, though the bass alignment is relatively dry and bungs are provided should close-to-wall siting be unavoidable for domestic reasons.

First impressions came as a bit of a surprise, especially as the Signature 805 (see p62) was on site at the time of its arrival, allowing immediate comparisons. The 703 is certainly much less laid back than the baby Signature, and actually sounds much more upfront than any B&W in recent memory.

Indeed, the initial judgement was that this speaker was a little too bright and edgy for its own good, with a touch of aggression and harshness that bordered on the unacceptable. This opinion was reinforced by the visible peak at around 4.5kHz, near the bottom end of the tweeter's operating range, which was clearly visible on the far-field in-room traces.

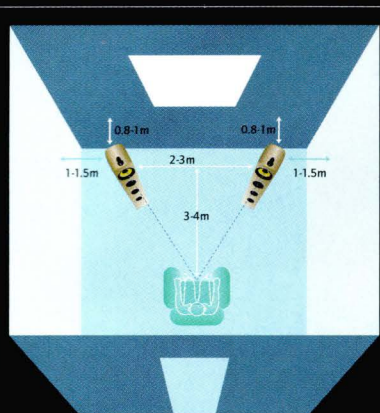
While this treble strength did seem likely to

#### MULTICHANNEL OPTIONS

B&W makes centre and surround speakers to fit in-between and around the 703/4/5 stereo pairs for multichannel sound. The £450 HTM7 (for 'Home Theater Monitor') is the centre-front. Retaining the curved top and external tweeter, this two-way appears bulky, but voice-matches the 703 well enough, albeit without the latter's slightly bright top end. (It matches the 704 even better – probably because it shares the same drivers.) One crucial thing to note – the HTM7 should not be placed on top of a large-screen TV set, as close proximity to a large flat surface adds a 'honky', thickening coloration in the midband. Coming soon, the £900 per pair DS7 surround speaker looks potentially even more interesting. It's switchable between dipole and monopole modes (the former best for movies, the latter for music), and the change can cleverly be effected remotely via a 12V 'trigger' signal from the receiver.

pose a problem at first, after a few days the tendency towards harshness and aggression seemed to have mollified quite significantly. Our samples had apparently had a couple of days of running in before being shipped, but presumably this is a speaker that needs at least a week to get properly settled down. ▣

## SET-UP



### POSITIONING

For the smoothest and most even bass delivery, this speaker design ought really to be kept well clear of walls if at all possible. If domestic considerations dictate some wall proximity, bungs are supplied to block up the ports. However, the ports here are tuned to a low 35Hz, while close-to-wall bass reinforcement occurs rather higher up, in the 50-100Hz octave, so results are unlikely to be smooth.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

B&W's claim for a 90dB sensitivity is fully justified – even marginally pessimistic perhaps – but the generous figure is compromised by a rather demanding load, which hits a three-ohm minimum at around 100Hz, which is a power-hungry part of the spectrum, and remains low between 80Hz and 350Hz.

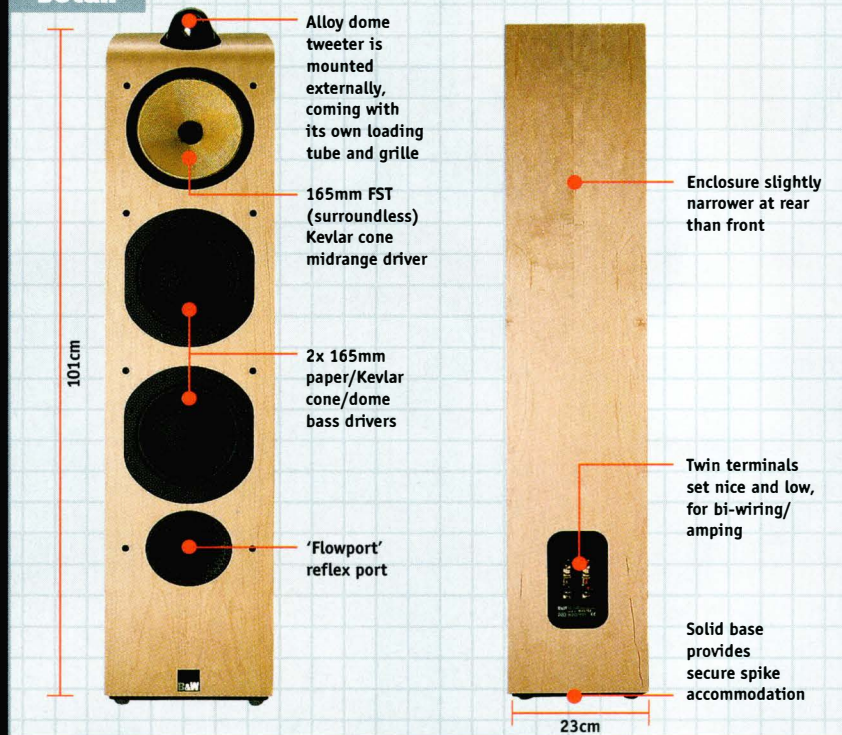
The in-room far-field averaged responses look very promising, however. With the speakers mounted well clear of walls, and the ports left open, the bass comes across as unusually smooth (+/-4dB throughout, in spite of room modes), and also very well extended (-3dB at 20Hz in-room). The lower midband is a little lean, but strengthens between 500Hz and 1.5kHz. The presence zone is slightly recessed at 1.5-3.5kHz, but then peaks up quite strongly at 4-6kHz, although these trends are obvious enough, both in measurement and audible terms.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

Although this speaker has a decent enough sensitivity, the impedance dips to a low three ohms in the bass and lower midband. It's therefore not really suitable for use with lower power valve amps such as single-ended and direct-coupled types, and is better partnered with solid state amplifiers that have relatively generous current delivery capabilities.



## Detail



Once properly in the groove, the 703 showed some delightful characteristics, and an overall standard of performance that stands well out from the two-grand crowd. There's still arguably a touch too much strength at the top end here – it's certainly a dB or two stronger than the 704 here, for example – and this can occasionally prove a trial with bright and edgy recordings, especially if you want to play them loud. But by the same token it often adds some welcome extra 'bite' and clarity to the musical proceedings.

It was interesting to have the 704 on hand, and many will prefer the slightly warmer and more laid-back balance and restrained treble of the less expensive model (reviewed next month). But direct comparison immediately highlights the obvious superiority of the 703's FST midrange, which reproduces voices in particular with much greater clarity and expression, with a significantly wider dynamic resolution window. It's not entirely free

from coloration – there's a certain amount of nasality here – but it is very expressive, and stereo imaging is beautifully spacious and superbly free from boxiness.

A very complex modern composition involving several choirs – *Idmen*, by Iannis Xenakis, since you didn't ask – came over the BBC airwaves late one summer's evening, and the separation and clarity which the 703s brought to the complex vocal parts was really quite transfixing. This is far from familiar or indeed comfortable music for late night listening, yet I was genuinely

disappointed when it finished.

If the midband is something a bit special, the bass end is arguably even better. It's dry, clean, deep and even, all of which is quite unusual and impressive. Even better, it's very, very fast and always agile, bringing truly propulsive momentum and drive to a bass-led album like the Easy Star All-Stars' *Dub Side Of The Moon*. Even an overblown recording like Wyclef Jean's *The Carnival* managed to sound quite crisp and controlled – and very, very clean and clear.

Do check first that this speaker's slightly cool, thin and bright balance suits your personal taste and system. If it does, you'll be rewarded with a wonderfully analytical and entertaining speaker, with superb agility and an exceptionally wide dynamic range. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

## VERDICT

SOUND >>> 91%

EASE OF DRIVE >>> 66%

BUILD >>> 95%

VALUE >>> 88%

PRO

Classy floorstander has artfully shaped enclosure and very advanced drive units. Superb imaging and an exceptional dynamic range, with expressive midband, and fast, clean and deep bass.

CON

Sound is dry, cool and a touch thin – the top end a mite strong, giving a character which can become aggressive.

### CONCLUSION

Classy floorstander with very advanced drivers delivers superb imaging and exceptional dynamic range, with a very expressive midband and fast, clean bass, though its bright top end can become aggressive when played loud.

**HI-FI CHOICE** OVERALL SCORE >>> **89%**

what do you want?

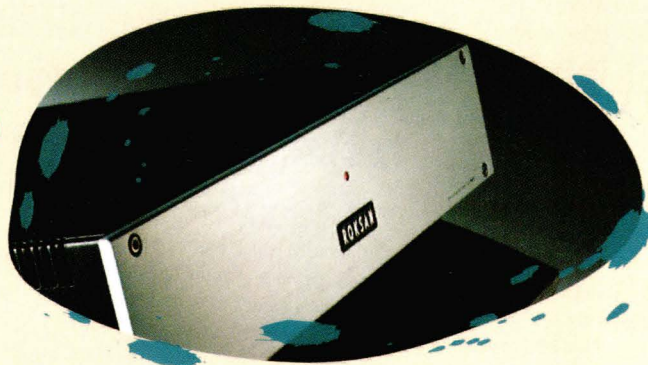
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# POWER AND PASSION

*Gamut Audio's cult D200 power amp has been heavily revised, but you'd never guess by looking*

**PRODUCT** Gamut D200 Mk3

**TYPE** Stereo power amplifier

**PRICE** £3,975

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x16x45cm

● Weight: 31kg ● Output power: 200W/8 ohms, 400W/4 ohms

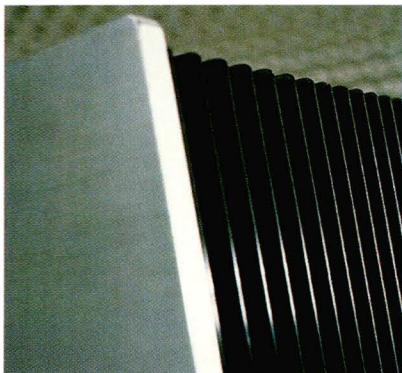
**CONTACT** ☎ 01252 702705

🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

**G**amut's Ole Christensen likes to hide his light under a bushel. How else can you explain the fact that his most successful product, the D200 stereo amp, has gone through two major changes in the last five years and yet to look at the casework you'd never know it. In a world where many manufacturers bring out new versions of key components almost annually this stealth marketing is not only rare, it's unnecessary. We want to know when one of the best power amps you can buy has been upgraded, especially if like me you have been blissfully using your original model for all that time. Hell, maybe that's it – Ole is trying to keep existing customers happy by leaving them to enjoy what they have rather than planting a seed of upgrade desire that might undermine their musical pleasure. No, that's going too far.

Gamut may not be a well-known brand in the UK but this power amp has garnered something of a cult following thanks to the remarkable qualities it offers at the price. The latter may not be exactly low but in the scheme of high-end power amps it's not excessive and you will find the D200 capable of holding its end up when compared with alternatives at two or three times the price.

In its latest incarnation this 200-watt power amp utilises RIFA capacitors in its power supply, Wima polypropylene capacitors in the signal path and its circuit board layout has been revised. In other words no drastic changes, just a process of evolution that has



been prompted by Gamut's R&D for its £20,000 S300 behemoth power amplifier – a component so substantial that it can be ordered with wheels. Yet both that range-topper and this relatively modest design are based on the principle of using a single pair of transistors per channel. It's a radical concept in a world where multiple output devices are the norm and as far as we know Gamut is the only company to do this. The advantage is that you eliminate the distortions which are inevitably introduced by the slight differences between transistors, which are exaggerated when multiple devices are combined.

Gamut uses a single pair of MOSFET transistors to produce a power output of 200 watts into eight ohms and 400 watts into four. There's clearly no shortage of power on tap thanks to the MOSFET's ability to pass a peak current of 300 amps. Each transistor is driven by its own class A push-pull amp, and

**“The Gamut digs all the way down and reveals the full scope of low notes – harmonics as well as fundamentals.”**

at lower outputs the D200 operates in class A continuously, which probably explains why it sounds so sweet with my high sensitivity Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2 loudspeakers.

Gamut electronics share their Danish manufacturing base with a sister company in the professional audio business. This is one of the reasons why you'll find balanced XLR input sockets on the back of the D200, a feature which has been joined on the Mk3 by more UK system-friendly RCA phono inputs. But if you use these remember to short the balanced inputs with the supplied plugs.

The D200 is unusual in having the ability to operate at different gain levels, so that it can be matched with preamps of differing output levels. You can select between three levels of gain but the manual encourages you to have the dealer do this for you – perhaps Ole doesn't want customers frying themselves!

An unusual feature on this amp's rear end is a second pair of speaker terminals marked Direct – these lack the self protection of the standard output in order to optimise high-frequency performance. So if you're bi-wiring, connect the treble driver to the direct output and the bass/mid to the standard pair.

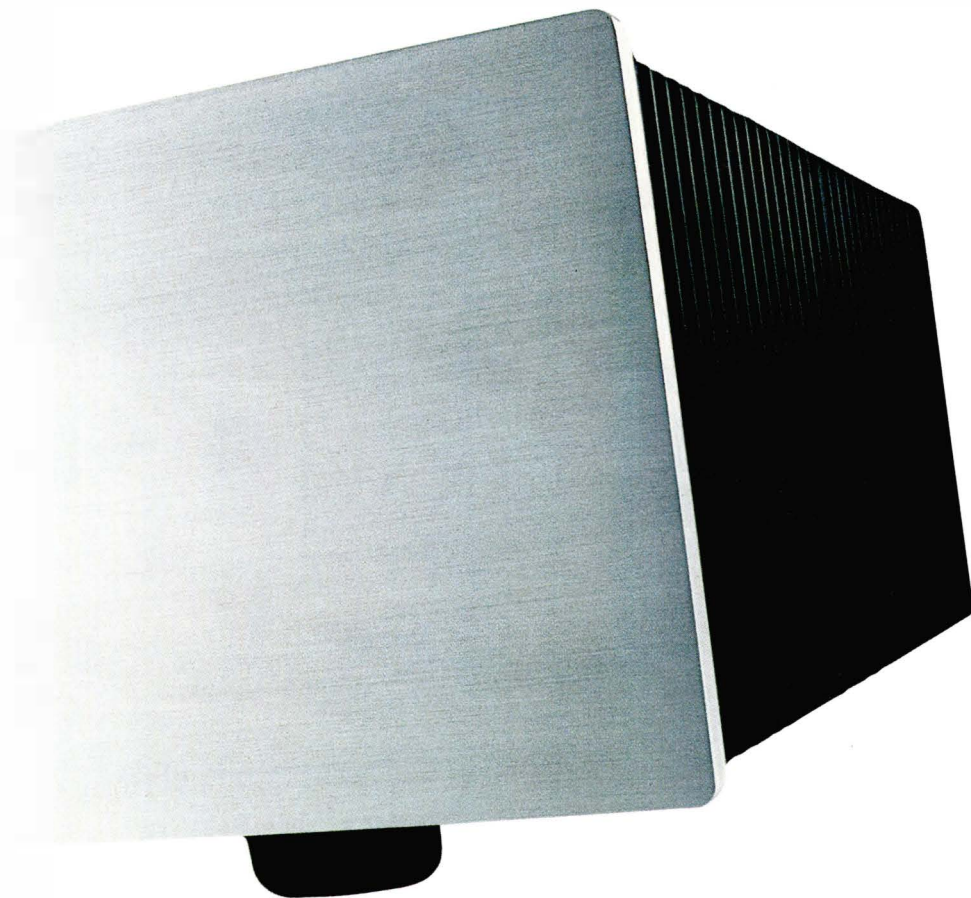
## SOUND QUALITY

The changes made to the D200 have resulted in a considerable improvement to an already capable design. This is an open, dynamic and extremely coherent amp that will work with a range of preamps from passive designs to valve and transistor powered models. Our initial listening was carried out with Sugden's Masterclass AA preamp (HFC 246) but also included an Ayre K-5x.

The D200 delivers a transparent and fluent sound that's very strong on presence – you are right there in the crowd while Led Zeppelin play *Going To California* on *How The West Was Won*, the bass driving the monster sound along in no uncertain fashion. Bass from the D200 is not only phenomenally solid and weighty, it's juicy and shapely with it, so you hear the full texture of the sound. All too often high-powered amps produce bass that is dry and inarticulate, substituting brute force for tonal depth. The Gamut digs all the way down and reveals the full scope of low notes – harmonics as well as fundamentals.

There's a degree of openness here that's also uncommon in the solid state world – atmosphere is presented in such a tangible





fashion that with a good live track you are transported to the venue and you can feel the electricity in the air. This is partly due to very high transparency but also relates to the quality of low-frequency resolution. Anyone that has used a decent subwoofer will tell you that not only do they extend and empower the bass, they also expand the soundstage, particularly in depth terms. The D200 does this even with speakers that don't really plumb the depths, giving the impression that they go a lot lower than you thought they might. I was quite shocked at the rudeness emanating from the aforementioned Living Voice speakers when playing Sly and Robbie's dub excursions.

This amp's transparency won't disguise good or bad aspects of your source and preamp. The Cyrus CD8 CD player (see p54) revealed a slight softness while our SME turntable's interpretation of Keith Jarrett's *Cologne Concert* was surprisingly hard and glassy – what is it with those Steinways? But on the whole this is a forgiving transparency – the Mk3 is a smoother amp than its predecessors and it's tendency (if any) is to make the music sound better rather than opt for maximum starkness. You can also play it louder than usual without discomfort – it's surprising how much cone excursion you can induce with a 12-inch copy of the Prodigy's *Out Of Space* before the sound becomes uncomfortable!

This is because high and mid frequencies are amplified, like the bass, with so little

distortion. It can at times sound like a softness but the resolution of low-level detail combined with the silent background suggests that nothing is being masked. What we have here is an uncannily relaxed yet powerful and dynamically responsive amp. Sometimes this type can suffer in terms of timing and there are alternatives with a greater sense of 'slam', but if we're talking musical timing and fluidity this is a very strong contender. An Ayre V-5x power amp produced a bigger soundstage and marginally improved timing but could not compete with the power and poise on offer from the Gamut, despite a higher price tag. Likewise, Sugden's excellent £3,300 Masterclass AA power amp has a more organic sound but lacks the authority and the ultimate transparency on offer here.

The latest incarnation of this classic amplifier should bring it even more accolades. It combines power, precision, dynamic subtlety and transparency in a way that is totally musical. If you are after the best power

amp money can buy, don't ignore it just because it doesn't cost the earth – it has little difficulty moving it. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 96%</b> [Progress bar]	 <b>PRO</b> Serious power, great dynamics, remarkable transparency and gorgeous bass. <b>CON</b> It's unlikely to endear you to your neighbours!
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 88%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 88%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 89%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Gamut has succeeded in making an already great amplifier even better with a minimal degree of fuss. If you want the very best and can live without inch-thick casework this should be your first port of call.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 92%</b>	



# PLATFORM PLAYER

*Why buy a CD player when you can buy a CD platform?*

**PRODUCT** Cyrus CD8

**TYPE** CD player

**PRICE** £1,000

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 21.5x7.5x36.5cm

• Weight: 3.5kg • Twin low-noise toroidal transformers • Dual balanced Burr-Brown 24-bit DACs

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 435577

🌐 www.cyrusaudio.com

It can't be easy differentiating your new CD player from the competition, especially if, like Cyrus, the standard case design means that they tend to look rather similar to their predecessors. Which is probably why this Cambridge-based brand is promoting the building block platform that supports its new range-topping CD player, the CD8. There's an irony here however, which is that you can't actually add anything to the inside of this machine as it represents the pinnacle of Cyrus digital audio technology to date. The previous range-topper, the CD7, had the 7Q upgrade option but there is no such plan for the CD8. The platform aspect only comes into play

when you take a step down the range to the CD6 (£600) which, as it's on the same platform, can be upgraded to CD8 status.

But the real story behind this new player is that it contains the dual Burr-Brown DACs of the CD7Q upgrade player plus a brand new transport and not one, but two, toroidal transformers. In a Cyrus half-width case that's a very tight fit.

The transport change was forced by a discontinuation of the one in the CD7 but unlike many these days, it is still a dedicated CD drive rather than a CD-ROM. The size of Cyrus casework is said to limit the choice of parts but fortunately Philips' latest 'footprint' kit proved not only suitable but superior to that in the CD7. The two mains transformers are used to supply the signal and transport sections separately so the noise created by the servo is less able to pollute the supply for the digital and analogue sections. This

combined with 11 regulated power supplies is designed to keep the player running as quietly as possible. You can of course still add an outboard Cyrus PSX-R power supply if you want to take performance even further.

Speaking of which, even though the CD8 contains a dual-balanced 24-bit DAC with re-clocking and extensive circuit tuning, the end of the year will see the introduction of an outboard 'X series' DAC to go with the top-end preamp, power amp and tuner revealed so far. This will hook up to the CD8's digital output and represents a pretty serious upgrade route.

As it stands, the CD8 looks and feels much like your regular Cyrus player. On the rear, twin main phono outputs sit alongside Cyrus





## “The CD8 offers up textures in the bass that other players fail to resolve because the emphasis is on weight.”

control bus connectors and digital outputs (optical and electrical) for recorders or DACs. The front panel is a tad cramped, especially in the button legend department, and while this is something you can get used to, there's no beating familiar labels like play arrows for ease of use. Functionality is a question that also arises if you want to play a disc when the unusually long drawer is open – it's a lot easier with the remote. The drawer, a slightly rattly affair, covers the various buttons making access to them rather tricky, but with practice the slim-fingered will master the procedure.

The handset is a system-driving remote from the lightweight school of design, it's ergonomic enough but the extra facilities make rapid button selection less easy. Still, if it drives your amp as well (and many amps share the same volume control command system), it will make a Cyrus system owner's life that much less cluttered.

### SOUND QUALITY

Looking back at our review of the Cyrus CD7Q (HFC 238) it's interesting to see how the player has evolved and progressed despite a reduction in price. The similarities lie in the excellent sense of timing which, while not overt, underpins everything it plays with a surefootedness and cohesion that means it never loses its composure, even when played 'in anger'. But despite using the same DAC this is a better player than the 7Q in most

respects. It is a little soft-sounding overall – alternatives like Sony's SCD-XA333ES SACD player have a greater sense of transparency, if not necessarily more detail. The CD8 has a leaner balance and gives the sensation of better high-frequency extension. Which is probably why the Cyrus sounds a mite bass-light when in fact it extends way down, but in a subtle, free-flowing fashion.

The CD8 delivers music with an unusually light touch, and the slight softness is only notable by comparison with other high quality players. If you listen to the Cyrus alone this sense quickly passes and leaves you with a highly engaging musical experience, and one which reveals plenty of the low-level details in recordings that combine to produce a full, rich sound. You can hear the sonic shadows on the Peace Orchestra's *Double Drums*, and you can feel the live atmosphere in Led Zeppelin's LA Forum concert from the *Way The West Was Won* recordings. The power and glory of the band at the time was phenomenal – you are left in no doubt that the Zep were and always will be the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world, ever. And if you're still not convinced, you're not playing it loud enough!

Energy levels have to come directly from the disc with the CD8. It's not a high-energy player, and while dynamic contrasts are strong it doesn't have the drive that some alternatives offer. Players like the Exposure XXII have a bit more get up and go about

them but may not offer quite the level of resolution and coherence that's available here – you'd have to hear them side by side to be sure but the XXII's naturalness could still win the day.

The CD8 is a very easy player to enjoy. It communicates well and keeps you listening to the next track, even if you're a hard-working hack who needs to be objective and scientific. (As of course we all are!) The sound could have more grip but the bass is revealed with good variety in the CD8's capables, Goldfrapp's *Brown Paper Bag* offering up changes and textures in the bass that other players fail to resolve because the emphasis is on weight. It's almost as if they swamp the system or room with so much LF energy that the nuances get lost.

Not so with the drier delivery of the Cyrus. It's an interesting trade off which makes you wonder if other players are not overdoing things for effect, yet there's no denying the seismic delights of truly bone-crunching bass. But as so few loudspeakers are capable of delivering the stuff in controlled fashion there's something to be said for a drier delivery that tracks the changes in the music without overpowering the speakers and room. There's a good chance that with big active speakers, for instance, the CD8's bass balance would be substantiated and deliver both control and crunch.

Part of this player's strength comes from the unusually quiet nature of its background noise levels. Tempting as it is to call this 'inky black', I'll restrain myself, but you get the idea. This is a characteristic that's usually the preserve of far more expensive alternatives and a testimony to Cyrus engineering.

Overall the CD8 is a rather nice disc player. It won't be all things to all hi-fi nuts but it will engage both the mind and heart in a way that is not as common as we'd like. It differentiates between notes and albums with equal ease – all you need to do is hear the difference it makes to your music. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 84%</b>	<b>PRO</b> Detailed and relaxed sound with good dynamic contrast and very low noise. Excellent display.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 80%</b>	<b>CON</b> Slightly soft sonic character. Incompatible with CD-RW and has a rather rattly drawer mechanism which manages to obscure some of the buttons when open.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 78%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 82%</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> While its presentation might not scream high fidelity, it delivers excellent musical communication. It will reveal the emotional and intellectual message in everything it plays and is guaranteed to keep you listening.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 82%</b>	

# ALPHASON A5-G

*It may look delicate, but this support is a heavyweight in more ways than one*

**PRODUCT** Alphason A5-G

**TYPE** Equipment support

**PRICE** £399

**CONTACT** ☎ 01942 885600

🌐 www.alphasondesigns.com



**D**espite the prodigious number of individual components you'll find in the box, this stand goes together easily and smartly, with Alphason's trademark tension rods holding each pillar firmly together and keeping the structure comfortably rigid. The shelves are of 6mm safety glass and don't look very strong, but experience suggests otherwise and Alphason claims they are strong enough for "the heaviest amps". The construction has the advantage that no height-wasting lateral members are needed under the shelves, maximising available space, and the height of the shelves seems well judged. Adjustable spikes are supplied and can be used or not, according to taste.

## SOUND QUALITY

This probably isn't the most neutral stand in the world but its colorations are not particularly striking. It does seem to add a little 'honk' to the midband, and there is some slight reduction in detail too, the precise degree varying with music type: vigorous rock 'n' roll loses some bite and

precision and opera lacks some image depth, but simpler recordings show merely a mild apparent increase in the presence band, emphasising the upper strings of a guitar somewhat and giving female vocals slightly more 'twang'. Interestingly, the tonal aberrations seemed a little more pronounced with the spikes fitted, at least in the review room (with a suspended floor). Turntables benefit greatly from a proper isolation mount, but the structural integrity of this stand and its large top area make this practical. All in all, probably one of the least sonically intrusive of the various glass-shelved stands we've tried. **HFC**

## VERDICT

**SOUND** >> 73%



**PRACTICALITY** >> 83%



**BUILD** >> 88%



**VALUE** >> 80%



## CONCLUSION

A bit bulky but will handle most kit comfortably and overall is one of the best glass racks around on all fronts. Good value.

## HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

>> **81%**

# CLEARLIGHT AUDIO RDC ASPEKT

*Are Clearlight's Super Position damped aluminium shelves worth the upgrade?*

**PRODUCT** Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt/Super Position

**TYPE** Equipment support

**PRICE** £850

**CONTACT** ☎ 01635 291357

🌐 www.activdistribution.com



**T**hough much the same stand as that which received high marks for neutrality in *HFC 216*, this is the upgraded version with four Super Position shelves. The basic stand has one of these and three 'standard' shelves, each with a spiral cut in the MDF and filled with Resonance Damping Compound, a very dead composite material. Super Position features two spirals back to back, allegedly even less resonant but substantially more expensive: the price quote includes a full complement of SP shelves, while with regular shelves Aspekt comes in at £550 (depending on veneer options). Shelves alone, as an upgrade, cost £130. The MDF frame and RDC feet are the same for all models.

## SOUND QUALITY

The laid-back, neutral character noted in *HFC 216* remains, although Custom Design's stand arguably slightly betters this one on both counts. But the interesting comparison is surely between regular and SP

shelves. In fact, expectations of even better performance were slightly dampened on finding that improvements were inconsistent. Naturally lively and upbeat music seems pretty well preserved by either version, with the uprated shelves giving a small improvement in stereo image precision and depth. But subtler music such as classical chamber music or simple voice and guitar seemed if anything better served by the basic shelves, the SP versions tending to add just a shade of upper midrange coloration. It's an effect that's neither gross nor unpleasant, but all in all it does make any recommendation for the upgrade a conditional one. **HFC**

## VERDICT

**SOUND** >> 88%



**PRACTICALITY** >> 82%



**BUILD** >> 82%



**VALUE** >> 74%



## CONCLUSION

In basic form, it's smart, practical and good value. Shelf upgrade is worth trying but may not always be entirely for the good.

## HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

>> **82%**



# CUSTOM DESIGN CONCEPT 400

Impressively characterless support is good for most kit – except turntables

**PRODUCT** Custom Design Concept 400

**TYPE** Equipment support

**PRICE** £699

**CONTACT** ☎ 0191 262 4646

🌐 www.customdesign.co.uk



The 'concept' of the name is CD's 'acoustic steel', a laminate of two steel sheets glued together, making an uncommonly 'dead' structural material. We liked this in the utterly basic form of a sheet for damping lively equipment casework, but this is a much more ambitious application – the side uprights are made of acoustic steel and the shelves of acoustic aluminium, much the same thing but lighter and non-magnetic. Assembly is a little fiddly and the stand ends up slightly wobbly – an extra triangular brace would help no end. A cable tidy is included, as are a set of clamp-on spikes.

## SOUND QUALITY

Dump that cable tidy! It's made of undamped sheet metal and its sonic signature dominates that of the rest of the stand. But the corollary of that is that the signature of the basic structure is writ very small indeed. There seems to be a touch of midband coloration but it's hard to be

absolutely sure. More alarming to some listeners will be that the bass seems slightly soft by comparison with other stands. It's a little hard to be definitive here, but in fact that seems to have more to do with this stand's unusual lack of upper-bass character, where other stands seem to add 'speed' to the bass. The hardest test of all, putting a naked stand near the speakers, revealed only some slight veiling in the upper midband – certainly no bass thump or overhang – and even the veiling largely cleared up once the shelves were realistically loaded. For best results, put even more acoustic steel on casework! **HFC**

## VERDICT

**SOUND** >> 92%



**BUILD** >> 77%



**PRACTICALITY** >> 78%



**VALUE** >> 85%



## CONCLUSION

A very fine equipment support which despite its slightly drab appearance deserves to partner top quality kit.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**OVERALL SCORE**  
**>> 85%**

# ISOBLUE 'THE STAND'

An attractive and practical newcomer to the equipment rack scene

**PRODUCT** Isoblue 'The Stand'

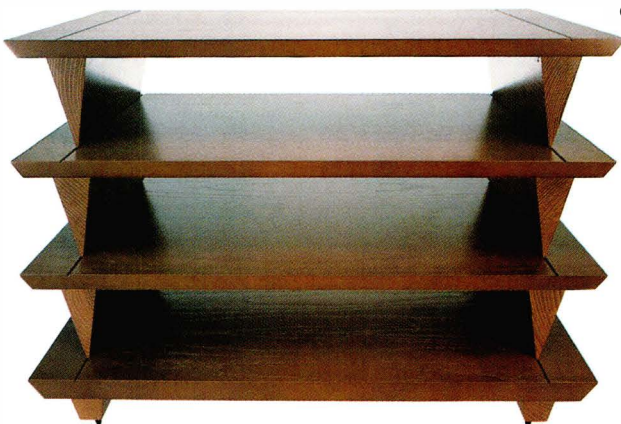
**TYPE** Equipment support

**PRICE** £460

**CONTACT** ☎ 01332 875700

🌐 www.isoblue.com

Isowho? A newcomer, in fact, whose launch product is very clearly attractive furniture first and hi-fi second. So much the better for many folks, but in addition to being



attractive this stand is also practical, easy to assemble, well made ('legs' of solid ash, shelves of well veneered MDF) and conveniently modular. Each shelf simply sits on the one below, located by means of grooves which allow back-and-forwards movement but are secure against regular button-pushing. That sliding movement certainly makes cable plugging very easy. Extra height can be added by means of leg extensions (35mm or 65mm, £38 and £48 respectively).

The base shelf sits on adjustable spikes.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is not the most neutral rack in the group. Pieces of MDF of this size are apt to be a little lively and these are no exception, but effects are not so obvious as to be seriously intrusive. There's some tonal warming of voices and a slight slackening on really incisive

sounds like sax and small percussion, and sometimes stereo images seem slightly compressed, but the basic character of the music is preserved pretty well. A brand-new piano recording seemed to lack a little of the instrument's power, but there was none of the clangorous quality which can be imparted by really lively racks. There may be an advantage here in the unusually narrow shelf spacing, which means that less open air (and hence resonant space) is enclosed than normal. Most modern kit puts out little enough heat and we found no problems at all with temperature. An unusual and, in its own terms, successful design. **HFC**

## VERDICT

**SOUND** >> 75%



**BUILD** >> 90%



**PRACTICALITY** >> 87%



**VALUE** >> 80%



## CONCLUSION

Its very low profile is not always a blessing but has interesting possibilities. Sound quality takes second place but still does well.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**OVERALL SCORE**  
**>> 82%**

# audio salon



" Welcome to the audio salon, the only place where you will find a wonderful range of selected products from around the world. Horns, valves, electrostatics, and a host of other technologies bring your music to life as you have never heard it before. Complemented by excellent long-term customer service from myself and the people at the Salon, what more could you ask for ?

By the time you read this the salon will have opened in its new premises. Why you may ask? Simply because we are one of the largest growing Audio Specialists in the UK and we need more space ! Larger and more luxurious demonstration rooms, more displays, new product ranges, Audiophile CD shop and many other surprises to follow in the coming months.

Why not visit our new Web Site ! Bigger, brighter and full of useful information to help you choose the right product/system for you. Not only can you look through our second-hand and ex-dem products, you can view them on screen too. Like all things at the Salon, the Web Site will be constantly evolving so make sure you visit regularly.

Do you have equipment that you would like to part exchange for that new item that you have always dreamed of owning ? Please give us a call and we will be more than happy to discuss this with you. Alternatively we can sell your products on your behalf. Our adverts and web site attract a lot of people from all over the world and in most cases we have a very quick turnaround rate on second hand and ex-demonstration equipment.

Choosing the right cable is a minefield ? It doesn't have to be if you buy **JPS-Labs** cables. The range caters for all budgets and system requirements No other cable in our experience seems to work as happily in every system and offers such an exceptional performance. **Simple !**

**Jack and Dale** would like to say a huge thank you to all those who visited our room at the London Hi-Fi News Show in September. I think you will all agree that **BOW** and the new **Zingali Speaker Ranges: Prelude and Overture** are truly something very special. For those in the market for a new system or speakers - **BOW** and **Zingali** should be at the top of your Audition list !

Friends, families and people from all over the world, call or visit the salon time and time again, shouldn't you give us a call and find out why ? "

Happy listening

Jack Lawson

## our portfolio

	valve	solid state	digital	speaker	turntable/arm	cartridge	phono amp	home cinema
art audio	•			•			•	
art loudspeakers				•				•
atc		•		•				•
audiostatic				•				
ayre acoustics		•	•					
bow		•	•					
ear / yoshino	•	•					•	
gryphon		•	•	•			•	
heart audio	•		•					
lyra						•		
mark levinson		•	•					•
michell					•		•	
parasound		•	•					•
pathos	•	•						
proac				•				•
proceed		•	•					•
revel				•				•
shanling	•	•	•					
simon yorke					•			
sme					•	•		
sugden		•	•					
sumiko						•		
trichord	•	•	•				•	
unison research	•	•	•					•
yamaha		•	•	•				•
zingali				•				•

## new products

atc scm-35 floorstanding speakers - features the acclaimed ATC mid-range driver	£1999
ayre cx-7 cd player - wadia and mark levinson watch out ! this is an astonishing CD player and with recent changes, nothing near the price gets close !	£2950
ayre acoustics: k5 pre-amplifier	£2950
ayre acoustics: v-5x power amplifier	£4495
gryphon: cantata loudspeakers - inc room correction module	£12300
mark levinson 431 (200wpc) and 432 (400wpc) - grace, power and true dynamics !	£5995 / £7995
michell technodec from	£575
shanling sp-80 valve monoblock amplifiers - built in volume control - very musical	£2000
sugden musicmaster power amplifier - class A, single-ended, solid-state	£1290
unison research unico cd player	£1095

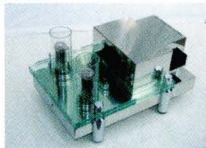
## cables & tables

	analogue	av	digital	power cords	power cond	speaker	tables	stands
<b>cables</b>								
audio note japan	•		•					
audiosource	•	•	•	•	•			
furman sound					•			
jps labs	•	•	•	•	•	•		
kemp elektroniks					•			
<b>stands &amp; tables</b>								
bcd							•	
cd								•
grandprix audio							•	
obelisk							•	•
stands unique							•	•
townshend							•	•

open 9am-6pm (mon-sat) 4 demonstration rooms

valve

Valve Amplifiers continue to have a wide following through-out the world. **Single-ended, push-pull, 845, 300B, EL34** - we have something for all tastes and budgets! The **Art Audio Diavolo (£4450)** continues to entice all those that hear it. Its sheer ability to drive real word speakers with such grip is astonishing. **Shanling** proudly introduce their **SP-80 Valve monoblocks (£1999)** with built in digital volume control. 50wpc, built to the same high standard as their CD Range and offers exceptional musicality. **Unison Research** merge valve finesse with beautiful hand crafted Italian wood to create products that are as distinct and as beautiful as the sonic signature they deliver to your speakers.



transistor

We offer a wide range of transistor products from manufacturers such as **Ayre, Gryphon, Mark Levinson, Pathos, Sugden** and **Unison Research**. The new **Ayre AX-7** integrated amplifier and **CX-7 CD Player** at **£2,950** each offer a performance that is rarely found in equipment at this price. Exceptional build and performance ensure that any **Ayre** component will be the pride of your system. **Mark Levinson** have been causing waves with their new dual-monaural Power Amplifiers, the **431 (£5,995)** and **432 (£7,995)**. High current delivery and sheer power fuse to create a sonic signal that raises the performance versus price bar several notches higher! **Sugden** who continue to offer true high end products at reasonable prices introduce the **MusicMaster** power amplifier (**£1,290**), a very wonderful addition to the popular **Bijou** range.



digital

New Digital formats such as **SACD** and **DVD-Audio** may be on the horizon but their is no clear sign as to which is likely to be the standard for the future, if any! Manufactures continue to build players pushing existing CD technology further to produce a sound that is truly breathtaking. The **Ayre CX-7 (£2,950)** is one such CD player, which peels away layer after layer of music from CD to create a beautifully three dimensional soundstage and enticing sound. **Shanling** introduced a valve CD Player the **CD-T100 (£1,650)**, which has fast become a popular choice for Vinyl fans looking for that ultimate Digital Player. The **No. 390s (£6,495)** from **Mark Levinson** continues to set the standards for high-end and reference CD players to beat. Listen to the **No. 390s** connected to the **No. 432 Power Amplifier** - you will be convinced!



analogue

Like so many of our customers, the Audio Salon is still very much committed to Vinyl replay systems and will be for many years to come. We demonstrate some of the finest turntables in the world from **Michell, SME** and **Simon Yorke**. Prices start from **£575 (michell technodec)**, up to **£10,459 (SME 30/2)**. We stock a range of superb cartridges from **Lyra** and **Sumiko**. Prices start from **£149 (Sumiko Blue Point)**, up to the **£2,995 (Lyra Titan)**. Keeping your stylus clean is very important and using **Lyra SPT (£29.00)** will keep your stylus clean offering you the best sound from your vinyl replay. A good Phono Stage and support under your turntable are also very important too. We are more than happy to discuss the different options available. Why not let the Salon help you to re-discover your vinyl collection.



loudspeakers

No matter how good your amplifier, CD player, vinyl equipment and cables are, you will only hear them at their best if you have speakers that will faithfully reproduce the signal it receives! Here at the Salon we offer a diverse range of speakers from Manufacturers all over the world, each using a different approach and technology but the goal is always the same. To bring you as close to the performance as physically and sonically possible. How are the approaches different? Moving Coil, Electrostatic and Horn are three of the different technologies used to produce outstanding speaker products! The new **Prelude** range from **Zingali** start at **£999 (stand mount)**, up to **£2000** and use their **patented Compression Horn Driver**. Unheard of for a speaker starting at this price! You should place your order soon as we think that demand will be very high! The new **ATC SCM-35 (£2000)** has been receiving a lot of attention and uses the famous and much admired **ATC mid-range driver!**



home cinema

**Home Cinema Technology** evolves at almost the same rate as Computer Technology. With this in mind the Salon choose **Yamaha** and **Parasound** Home Cinema Products. **Parasound** offer superb products at reasonable prices, products that keep up with the latest technology and are way ahead in film reproduction in the home. Battleship construction and a 10 year warranty, what more could you ask for? **Speakers** are just important and at the Salon we have a huge choice from **ATC, Proac, Revel** and **Zingali**. Two dedicated Cinema rooms will immerse you in the movie so that once you sit down you won't want to get up! The only thing we don't supply is the popcorn.....



headphones

**Electrostatics** are not only renowned for their speed and lack of colouration, but their ability to retrieve even the smallest of details in any piece of music. **Stax** bring electrostatic technology to headphones, which treat your ears to a three dimensional field of music that no loudspeaker can match. Unlike a loudspeaker, the **Stax** headphone will reproduce music faithfully and accurately because speaker positioning and room acoustics are no longer a problem. There is simply nothing between your ears and the music. **Stax** offer a large range of different models, prices range from **£349.00 to £2995.00** for the **Omega Reference** with balanced and s/e input triode amplifier. Not expensive considering their direct rivals are priced at **£6000 - £8000.00**.



An alternative is the **Ergo Headphone** (formerly **Jecklin Float**) which produces a sound that will truly delight the ears with a wide detailed soundstage ensuring that no part of a performance escapes your ears. The **Model Two** costs only **£149.00**.

Choosing the right cable can be a real minefield, right? Not if you buy **JPS-Labs**. In our long and vast experience no other cable works as well in nearly every system regardless of the components you are using! A bold claim, yes, but very true! Using a **JPS-Labs Cable**, alumiloy wire will simply allow the components in your system and most of all your speakers, to breathe. Your music will be reproduced as faithfully to the original as possible. **JPS-Labs Cables** offer a wide range of interconnect, speaker and mains cables for all systems and budgets. Call for more information, you will be glad you did!



cables

**AudioSource Stratos** offer interconnects of the highest performance at prices that break the market norms based on high costs of distribution. By direct mail order, a **28-day trial assures no mistakes**, and affords the opportunity to compare with much more costly cables. Priced at just **£125 for 1.2 metres** per stereo pair (**£99 for 0.6 metres**), they are rated by customers as the rivals of the highly acclaimed ... and highly priced alternatives.

The **E4/2** is a power filter for an astonishingly low price of **£129** as an introductory offer; featuring exactly the same mains filter as the acclaimed six and eight outlet boxes (**£349 and £389**), what you gain here is substantial reduction of **EMI and RFI** mains borne pollution. Top of the range is an all-new **E4/12**. At **£659**, the twelve outlet power source requiring a double wall socket and separating digital and analogue apparatus with separate and buffered power. Designed for **AV and multi-channel**, it is equally suited to the audio purist with digital equipment



audiosource

Quite often good supports for equipment and stand mounted speakers are overlooked or thought of as a waste of money. Excellent support and isolation can mean the difference between an average and a superb system, **its that simple!** We stock a wide range of specialist equipment tables from **BCD, Stands Unique, Townshend, CD** and **Grand Prix Audio**. Catering for all taste and budgets. We ourselves use stands from these companies so you will be able to see many of them by visiting the **Salon** or alternatively you are more than welcome to call and discuss your requirements.



support

GROUP TEST: PAUL MESSENGER LAB REPORTS: PAUL MILLER

# SPEAKERS

Anyone with £1,500 to £2,500 to spend on a pair of loudspeakers will find a fascinating array of options open to them, as this group clearly demonstrates

This month's *Ultimate Group Test* consists of a collection of eight upmarket loudspeakers, priced up to £2,500 per pair and showing a wide variation in size, shape, type and configuration. The only thing they have in common is that all use conventional moving-coil drivers, and show the wide range of alternatives that are available, especially when price isn't an overriding consideration for the consumer.

Indeed, there's very little obvious relationship between the price of these speakers, and their size, weight, or indeed the number of drive units used. At this end of the market, it's quite difficult to see how the prices are arrived at – especially as two of the simpler, smaller speakers are also two of the more costly.

Working up the price ladder, the Living Voice Auditorium at £1,700 is LV's base model, and it has undergone a number of changes since our original review back in 1998. This large d'Appolito two-way comes with its own little stand, so it's effectively a floorstander, and comes with a particularly attractive veneer.

Bigger, and considerably heavier, Canton's £1,849 Karat L800 DC is slim but unusually deep, packing a 310mm bass unit in the side panel, and using twin midrange drivers above and below the solitary tweeter. Just as distinctive visually and just a shade taller, the £1,900 Triangle Naia is a lofty three-way with twin bass drivers, Triangle's corrugated-surround midrange driver and a special new horn tweeter.

At an extremely competitive £1,999, meanwhile, Graves Audio has the horn-loaded, Lowther-equipped Koronglay, a speaker intended mainly for use with low-power, single-ended valve amps.

At £2,000 and £2,200 respectively, the Mirage OM7 and Jamo D870 provide a total contrast, the former a Canadian three-way, styled very much in the American tradition, with omni-directional radiation that will give a very different sort of listening experience. The Jamo is an altogether more conventional package, both in its styling and in the two-and-a-half-way driver line-up, but using top class ingredients inside and out.

Totem's £2,390 Forest is a simple but

very refined floorstanding two-way, while B&W's luxury £2,500 Signature 805 standmount takes surface finish to a new high with its extremely cute 'red bird's eye' lacquer. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS2 CD player
- ⊕ Rega Jupiter CD player
- ⊕ Linn LP12 turntable
- ⊕ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ⊕ Linn Akiva, Dynavector XV-1 cartridges
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner
- ⊕ Naim NAC552 preamp
- ⊕ Naim NAP500 power amp
- ⊕ Naim NACA5, Nordost Valhalla speaker cables

## MUSIC USED

- ⊕ White Stripes *Elephant*
- ⊕ Hot Tuna *Live At Sweetwater Two*
- ⊕ Lambchop *Nixon and Is A Woman*
- ⊕ Grateful Dead *Reckoning*
- ⊕ Alison Krauss + Union Station *Live*
- ⊕ LSO Live *Shostakovich Symphony No 11*
- ⊕ Christy Moore *Live At The Point*
- ⊕ BBC Radios 3 & 4 were also used extensively

## ON TEST



B&W SIGNATURE 805  
£2,500



CANTON KARAT L800 DC  
£1,849



GRAVES AUDIO KORONGLAY  
£1,999



JAMO D870  
£2,200



LIVING VOICE AUDITORIUM  
£1,700



MIRAGE OM7  
£2,000



TOTEM FOREST  
£2,390



TRIANGLE NAIIA  
£1,900

## LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening poses a more complex set of problems from those involved in assessing components further up the hi-fi chain. Speakers vary dramatically in size, type and tonal balance, and also interact strongly and often unpredictably with the room. The fatal difficulty facing sequential unsighted loudspeaker presentations is the strong tendency to judge each example according to how its balance differs from the model that preceded it. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted, giving proper scope to adjust to the inevitable changes in balance and to experiment with positioning.

## LAB TESTS

The speakers were tasked by a mix of external, GPIB-controlled signal generators and analysers. The returned data is processed via virtual instrument software, allowing us to build very high resolution plots of the loudspeaker impedance and phase angles, nearfield responses and distortion trends. All this information is collated, processed and revealed, in a highly condensed fashion, by our at-a-glance bar graphs.

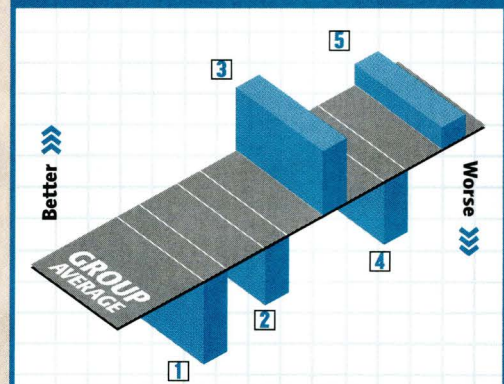
**No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.**

## LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five parameters are:

- 1] Sensitivity:** The speaker's axial output at 1m distance with an input of 2.83V. The level is averaged across 3rd-octave bands from 500Hz-8kHz.
- 2] Loudness:** The capacity of speaker pairs to generate short-term musical peaks without compression, at a given amplifier power output and at 2m distance.
- 3] Ease of drive:** Peaks and dips both in impedance and phase, along with the average impedance across the audioband, are all considered.
- 4] Bass extension:** The perceived bass extension will vary from room to room and certainly with speaker positioning, so this projected value represents an 'average' result at -6dB below the mean output of the speaker.
- 5] Low distortion:** An estimation of the impact that harmonic distortion across the audio range has on the 'colour' of the speaker. Generally, higher bar graph values suggest a more neutral sound.

## OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



£2,500 per pair ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

# B&W SIGNATURE 805

*The cutest and prettiest little speaker on the planet – probably!*

**B**&W's Signature models, launched in 2002, go one step beyond the hitherto top-of-the-line Nautilus 800-series. They're based on very similar technology and components, but have benefited from around three extra years of drive unit and crossover network development. They come clad in some of the most beautiful surface finishes ever applied to the outside of a loudspeaker, with a deep-lustre lacquer that apparently takes many coats and six days to apply. Our samples came with a cheeky red 'bird's eye' patterning under the lacquer, though a slightly more sober grey 'tiger's eye' option is also available.

This £2,500 Signature 805 is closely based on the Nautilus 805, and packs all the company's top technologies into a decidedly elegant and compact two-way standmount package. The enclosure is curved every which way to 'spread' standing wave frequencies, and the sides are made immensely stiff by a system of 3-D matrix bracing. One particularly noteworthy feature is that the tweeter is placed on top of the main enclosure in its own separate tube-loading arrangement, in order to widen its distribution, and it is also mechanically decoupled from any vibration which may be generated in the enclosure by a lossy gasket.

Both drive units have undergone technical improvements over those used in the Nautilus

805, in order to lower distortion, and the bass reflex porting has also been re-tuned. The main driver here has a 165mm cast frame and a 120mm Kevlar cone – chosen primarily for its smooth ultimate break-up – while the tweeter has a 25mm metal dome. Our in-room measurements would suggest that some close-to-wall reinforcement may well be beneficial.

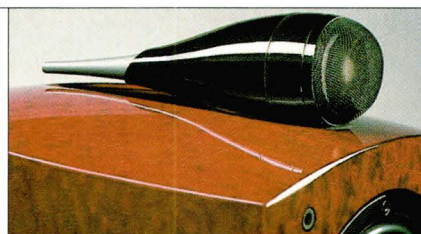
Some time back, when visiting B&W, its engineers put on a dem which compared the Signature 805 to the earlier Nautilus 805. The two look so alike, one hardly expected to hear much difference, so the clear superiority of the Signature therefore came as quite a surprise. There were obvious improvements in the dynamic range and resolution throughout the midband, and a significantly livelier and more agile bass end.

In the context of this test group though, the baby Siggy does lack a little muscularity, in terms of grunt and dynamic expression – after all, it is quite a small loudspeaker. But it also has exceptionally good manners and breeding, sounding unusually clean, relaxing and easy on the ears, with a wide dynamic 'window' that makes low-level information easy to hear and comprehend, allowing good access into 'difficult' types of music.

The tonal balance might be a little too restrained and laid-back for some tastes perhaps, but others will welcome its unflappability and refusal to get aggressive or 'edgy'. The enclosure control is of the highest order, so there's a fine freedom from boxiness, and beautifully precise and stable stereo imaging.

The abiding impression is that this speaker is immensely civilised with plenty of class. It might fall short of the most expressive competition in terms of vigour, excitement, weight and power, but it never fails to bring sweetness and downright pleasure to the party.

Perhaps simply because it's so easy on the ears, it's the sort of speaker that makes you want to keep on listening, long after you should be switching off and heading for bed. **HFC**

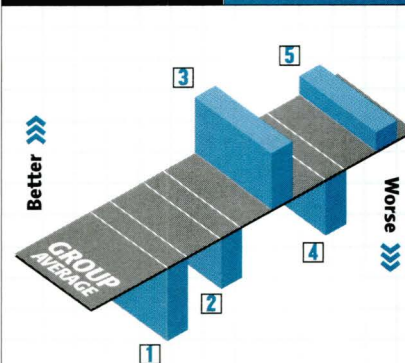


## LAB REPORT

Quite the smallest and most beautifully finished box in our group, the Signature 805 still achieves a very useful in-room bass extension of 40Hz (estimated -6dB point) and a reasonable 87.3dB (2.83V/1m) sensitivity. This figure would have been spot on B&W's claimed 88dB if it were not for a slight depression around the speaker's 4kHz crossover point (2-5kHz). Otherwise, response is smooth and has a sufficiently good off-axis uniformity for it to be employed in a number of different room locations.

The large port is cleanly-tuned to 40Hz and ties in perfectly with the -3dB point of the bass/mid driver at 83Hz. Distortion, too, is impressively low at ~1% through the bass at levels as high as 96dBA while through mid and treble (where the enclosure volume has less influence) this falls further to <0.5%. Phase angles exceed 60 degrees through the crossover region but the average 11.9ohm load and 'safe' 5ohm minimum will be easy on all amplifiers. As expected, a thoroughly professional design from past masters.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -60%
- 2] Loudness >> -40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 45%
- 4] Bass extension >> -45%
- 5] Distortion >> 15%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	87.3dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	11.9ohm
Estimated bass extension	42Hz	40Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 90%**

**PRACTICALITY >> 88%**

**BUILD >> 95%**

**VALUE >> 77%**

A bijou speaker with exquisite finish, delightful presentation, and exceptionally good sonic manners. Not the most exciting, but its understated subtlety and quality engineering mean it's always inviting and informative.

**HI-FI CHOICE** **88%**  
OVERALL SCORE >>



£1,849 per pair ☎ 02392 501888 🌐 www.canton.de

## CANTON KARAT L800 DC

Germany's biggest brand is back in the UK – with a monster!

**C**anton is just about the biggest name in speakers in Germany, and while the company has sold its models on the UK market in the past, it has only just returned to these shores after an extended absence.

The company makes an enormous roster of ranges and models that cover all possible applications, inside and outside the home. Even the models intended primarily for stereo music reproduction are found in four separate ranges, and the top-of-the-line Karat series includes stereo speakers in no fewer than eight different sizes, alongside a generous cluster of additional home cinema types.

The £1,849 per pair L800 DC is just one step below the top model in the range, and is itself built on an awesome scale, standing 115cm tall with a total weight of 42kg, making it comfortably the biggest and heaviest – though by no means the most expensive – in our test group.

It's a full three-way, four-driver design, combining a very generous 310mm

port-loaded paper-cone bass unit with a pair of 180mm midrange drivers using 115mm aluminium cones mounted above and below the 25mm alloy dome tweeter. The latter three drivers are all fitted on the front in the conventional manner, but to keep the front view nice and slim the bass driver is mounted in the side of the enclosure. The speakers are therefore made as mirror-image pairs, and should normally be used without toe-in and with the bass drivers on the inside faces.

Our samples came finished in a rather nondescript cherry real wood veneer: other options include black ash and beech veneers, and silver-satin lacquer. Stability is unlikely to pose any problem, given the 47.5cm footprint, though blunt spikes (without lock-nuts) will assist in floor-coupling. Inevitably, given the bulk and generous bass drive, free space siting is indicated, and even here the mid-bass output was a little strong when measured under far-field in-room conditions.

That was certainly true when playing Lamb Chop's *Is a Woman*, which definitely sounded a bit warm and heavy even in our largish listening room. Smaller rooms are likely to be even more seriously affected, so it seems likely that this big Karat will provide the best match with seriously large rooms.

Bass alignment aside, it has a very clean and unboxy sound with particularly impressive stereo imaging – very stable with precise lateral locations and fine depth perspectives. There's also, however, some time-smear here: the bass end seems a little detached, adding some thickening to textures, and reducing the impact of heavyweight transients such as kick drums and plucked bass guitars.

The midband has notably tight and precise focus with a very clean, almost clinical character. There's also a slight lack of tension and transparency here, and dynamics do sound a little muted. While colorations are generally low, speech does take on a slight nasal 'twang', and the overall balance is perhaps a shade bright.

This is a difficult speaker to sum up, because it doesn't show any obvious signs of weakness, but was clearly a little too mid-bass heavy even in our quite large (4x3x6m) listening room. While clearly good material value for money, its performance is ultimately a little too cool and clinical perhaps, somehow lacking the warmth and romance that helps provide music with its soul. **HFC**

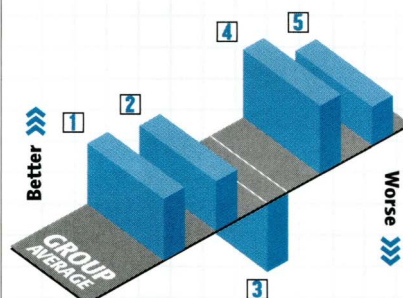


### LAB REPORT

Standing proud and capable of sounding very loud, the Karat 800 significantly exceeds its 89dB specification and delivers a full 92.1dB (2.83V/1m) but with a response that carries a notable emphasis beyond 7kHz or so. There's also a possibility of a bass peak, so siting will prove important (these boxes are paired and it's crucial to keep the left and right boxes on the correct side). The output of the large (310mm) bass unit rolls off quickly below ~70Hz and while the port is tuned to a relatively high 53Hz, this successfully augments its LF output to around 30Hz.

Moreover, distortion is usefully low at ~0.6% through bass and midrange at levels up to 96dB, so its 'colour' is more down to balance than THD. With a current-sapping average impedance of 4.35ohm (and minima of 3.1ohm), the 800 is a devil to drive. But with high sensitivity and copious power handling on its side, the 800 will be capable of sustaining a massive 111dBa provided your amplifier (and hearing) are up to the job.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 50%
- 2] Loudness >> 40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -55%
- 4] Bass extension >> 55%
- 5] Distortion >> 30%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	none supplied	92.1dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	4ohm	4.4ohm
Estimated bass extension	20Hz	30Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 82%**



**PRACTICALITY >> 64%**



**BUILD >> 90%**



**VALUE >> 85%**



No obvious signs of weakness and good material value for money, but a little too mid-bass heavy even in our quite large listening room, and perhaps a little too cool and clinical overall, lacking warmth and romance.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **79%**



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# GRAVES AUDIO KORONGLAY

*This elegant speaker is sharply priced for a Lowther-driven horn*

**A** new name on the scene, Graves Audio is the brainchild of one Brian Graves, a businessman and longstanding hi-fi enthusiast, who has a particular passion for high efficiency horn loudspeakers and single-ended valve amps. Such components go together like hand in glove – the high efficiency of the horn compensates for the relative lack of power inherent in single-ended valve operation, while the latter's warmth and sweetness will counter the horn's forwardness and lack of weight.

Graves Audio plans to offer a pair as a package, alongside a valve amp, at a combined price that looks very competitive at £3,500. £1,999 for the speakers on their own is not exactly inexpensive of course, but it is inexpensive for a Lowther-driven horn speaker, which are more likely to cost twice this price. Unlike some others of its ilk, it's also a reasonably compact and conventional looking package. In fact, the enclosure is built by the

same cabinetmaker that makes the boxes for PMC's popular FB1 and OB1 floorstanders, and the Koronglay looks very like a slightly bulkier version of those popular models. It's finished in a very nicely figured real wood veneer, and comes with an MDF plinth which extends the stability footprint and securely accommodates the hefty 8mm spikes.

There's just a single 'full range' drive unit here, but the Lowther EX2 is expressly intended for horn loading. It has a powerful magnet, a very short coil, and a very light twin cone made from undamped paper. A large perforated phase compensator is fitted onto the tip of the polepiece and the horn exit is located on the rear panel, a little above halfway. There's no crossover of course, and therefore just a single pair of terminals for connection. Because the midband sensitivity is dramatically high – around 100dB under far-field conditions – the bass is inevitably rather lightweight, so close-to-wall or even in-the-corner location is indicated.

That high sensitivity can reveal previously unsuspected amplifier hiss, and also cramp the usable range of the volume control, so check for compatibility here. But there's nothing faster or more time-coherent than a Lowther-driven horn speaker. High drama is the name of the game here, with magnificent midband dynamic expression, awesome leading edge definition, and a tremendous immediacy. Speech could sound uncannily realistic at times, but the down side is a degree of in-yer-face presence 'edginess', which tends to be all the more obvious because the bass end is decidedly lightweight, and which can become uncomfortable and aggressive if the volume is wound up.

Certainly the sound could have more warmth and weight, but the ear adjusts to the slightly 'cold' overall balance, and the strengths here are also very real. String tone is superb, and these speakers are much better than most at revealing the subtle textures of orchestral instruments.

Radio broadcasts of classical concerts were particularly impressive – if a tad inclined to highlight FM hiss – but I was also astonished at the marvellous speed and delicacy of the percussion work on the Grateful Dead's *Terrapin Station*. Because these speakers act like magnifying glasses on whatever they're fed, system matching is critical, and partnership with a quality valve amp is definitely indicated. **HFC**

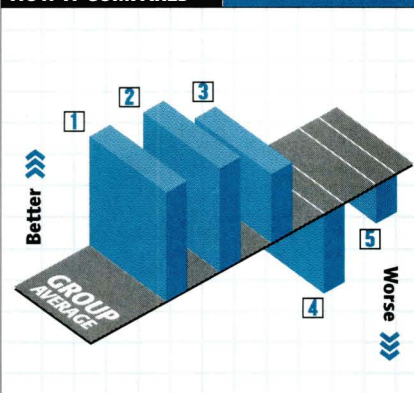


## LAB REPORT

If you know an enthusiast who believes that 5W valve amps are 'a good thing' then you could do worse than direct them to Grave's Koronglay. Rated at an imaginative 103dB, this speaker still achieves an astonishing 99.8dB (2.83V/1m) – quite the highest sensitivity I've ever measured. High output is achieved at the expense of response uniformity, the Lowther XP2 driver (with pulp whizzer cone) offering a bold upper midrange and fierce lower treble (+7dB @ 9kHz) before rolling off beyond 11kHz. At 1m, a narrowband analysis shows the Koronglay's output is 'rippled' with undulating peaks at 900Hz, 1.4kHz, 2.1kHz, 4.5kHz and, finally, the big one at 8.9kHz.

Neither is distortion especially low, hovering around 1% through the mid and increasing to 2-3% through the bass at 4dB below its rated sensitivity. The 'Tapered Pipe' bass loading is 'tuned' around 80-100Hz but suffers a series of sharp resonances at 180Hz, 260Hz, 340Hz and 420Hz which also appear on the impedance and phase plots.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 90%
- 2] Loudness >> 85%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 55%
- 4] Bass extension >> -65%
- 5] Distortion >> -30%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	103dB	99.8dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	11.8ohm
Estimated bass extension	38Hz	48Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 84%**

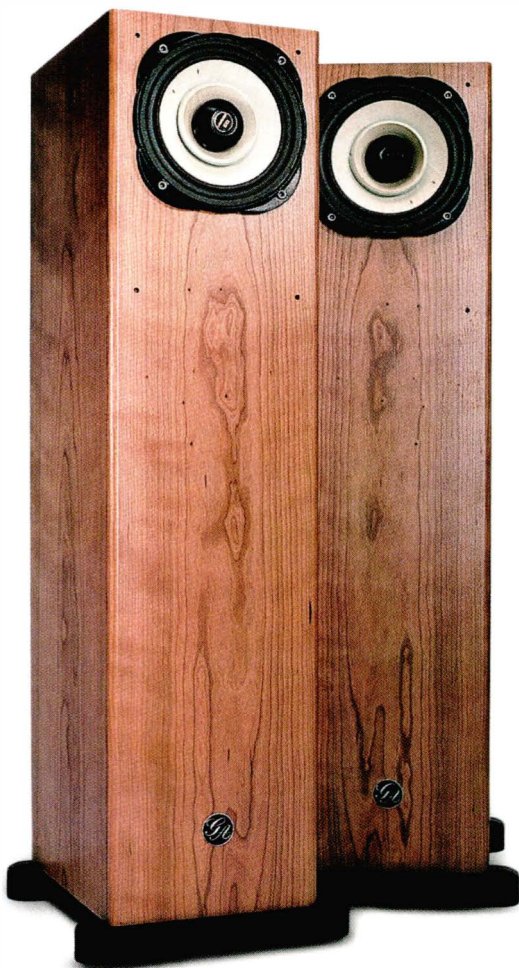
**PRACTICALITY >> 78%**

**BUILD >> 88%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

Inexpensive for a Lowther-driven horn, this sensitive speaker has the fastest, most time-coherent sound around. Balance is bass-light with aggressive tendencies higher up, so needs careful system matching – preferably valves.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **84%**





£2,200 per pair ☎ 01788 573100 🌐 www.jamospeakers.com

# JAMO D870

*Restrained style and classy ingredients from one of Europe's biggest*

**J**amo has certainly done its bit to help make Denmark synonymous with stylish industrial design. That said, the company is probably better known for rather more striking looking speakers than this sober looking floorstander, which is big brother to the classy little D830 standmount that *HFC* reviewed in February 2001.

Once you've summoned enough energy to unpack its considerable 32.5kg, you can appreciate the good quality real wood finish, the nicely post-formed vertical edges, the separate fitted plinth and the awesome solidity. The extra-thick front panel is made from Jamo's patented NCC (Non Coloration Compound) material, and internal bracing further enhances the structural integrity.

One might fairly accuse this Jamo of being conservatively styled, but that in no way implies criticism of an attractively solid looking speaker, with rather classy looking drive units. There are three drivers operating

as a two-and-a-half-way, and a neat touch is the way the 165mm main driver's 120mm metal cone matches the tweeter's faceplate cosmetically. Said main driver has a solid cast chassis, and a pointy copper phase plug which protrudes from the middle of the cone, to avoid the need for a dust cap and assist in cooling the voice coil. The extra, lower 165mm bass-only unit is a rather more prosaic looking plastic-cone affair, loaded by a front port tuned to a low 30Hz.

Decent quality spikes ensure good floor coupling, while three separate terminal pairs allow full flexibility in multi-wiring or amping options. In-room measurement shows a good, though not particularly smooth, overall balance. The low port tuning ensures fine ultimate extension, but the traces unequivocally indicate that this speaker should be sited well clear of walls.

This is also a beautifully balanced speaker sonically. The simplicity of two-and-a-half-way operation might not advance its ultimate loudness capability, but it does ensure good top-to-bottom time coherence alongside a lively and informative disposition.

The bass alignment worked very well indeed, keeping the speaker free from undesirable mid-bass 'thickening' and 'thump', while also supplying the righteous sense of scale that only a generously proportioned speaker can deliver. This was particularly obvious when tuning in to the BBC's Prom concerts from the Royal Albert Hall, whereupon the Jamos did a good job of recreating and conveying that magnificently large acoustic space, and rich ambience.

The upper bass is perhaps a little too dry, leaving the sound a touch lacking in warmth and texture in the cello registers, and robbing bass guitars of some of their bite, drive and punch. This is compounded because the upper midband is a bit too forward, a characteristic that initially impresses because of the way fine detail is emphasised and projected, but which can become wearing over the longer haul.

Ultimately, the sound here is just a bit 'cold' and 'shiny'. This is good for voice articulation and intelligibility, and also helps highlight transient details, such as the way a string is plucked or picked, for example. The D870 is always easy to listen to, and a good basic communicator, even when playing the system at a low level, though it could do with a fuller, richer balance in the lower registers. **HFC**

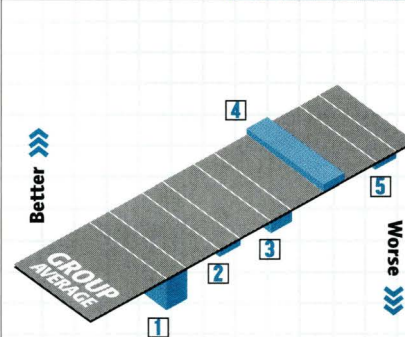


## LAB REPORT

The average seating position will bring a listener on-axis with Jamo's soft-dome treble unit where the speaker has its brightest balance (increasing by up to +5dB at 14kHz relative to the midband). This effect is less obvious above the cabinet where, despite bold treble, the midrange is rather smoother. Fizz can be reduced by removing Jamo's 'HF tuning' jumpers, which dampens the response above 3kHz by 2-3dB.

While the D870's sensitivity is a little lower than claimed at 89.5dB (versus 91dB), its generous power handling will permit in-room levels up to ~108dBA. Distortion is low at ~0.5% through mid and treble but increases to between 1-2% through the bass at 96dBA. The bass alignment is also very sharp with a high-Q port resonance at a low 30Hz supporting a bass driver that peaks at a far higher 70Hz. The latter is sufficiently damped to behave as a sealed box, rather than reflex system, and it's here that the D870 is toughest to drive (3.3ohm minimum). Through mid and treble, impedances are easier at >7ohm.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -25%
- 2] Loudness >> -5%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Bass extension >> 5%
- 5] Distortion >> -5%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	89.5dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	4ohm	7.1ohm
Estimated bass extension	30Hz	35Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 83%**



**PRACTICALITY >> 70%**



**BUILD >> 93%**



**VALUE >> 82%**



This handsome if sober looking floorstander delivers good intelligibility and transient details. Easy to listen to, it's a good communicator, though just a little 'cold' and 'shiny', so it could do with a rather fuller, richer balance.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **82%**

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## LIVING VOICE AUDITORIUM

*This classic 'twin two-way' is the result of painstaking refinement*

**N**ottingham-based Living Voice might have started out making gigantic horn loudspeakers more than a decade ago, but its main stock in trade is now a compact 'd'Appolito-style' floorstander – a two-way design, using twin bass/mid drivers mounted above and below a single tweeter.

LV's proprietor Kevin Scott is a valve amp enthusiast, and so places a high priority on good sensitivity and realistic midband dynamic expression. The inspiration behind the Auditorium was a budget speaker from the Danish brand Dali, which so impressed Kevin that he decided to use its outline configuration as the basis for his much more sophisticated models. These come in at least three different versions, all of which share the same basic dimensions and drive units.

The basic Auditorium received a Best Buy rating in 1998, and both the Avatar and Avatar OBX have made subsequent appearances. All the Auditoria have been



through a process of steady modification and refinement over the years, so a re-examination of this base model is well overdue.

The chipboard cabinet is now much stiffer (750 density rather than the previous 650), so port and crossover tuning have also been changed. Internal wiring is now non-inductive, as are the tightly toleranced Clarostat resistors, and the separate low stand is now made out of the same material as the speaker's enclosure.

It's still a port-loaded floorstander, using twin Vifa 165mm main drivers with 127mm doped paper cones mounted above and below a single 28mm soft dome tweeter. The latter is offset from the centre line, to improve smoothness, and so the speakers are made as mirror-image pairs, and should be placed with the tweeters towards the inside.

Our samples came in a beautifully figured cherry real wood veneer, with European maple, walnut and 'rosenut' options. In-room measurements point to free space siting, though the port re-tuning (from 38Hz to 49Hz) has not improved the bass alignment or its ultimate extension in our largish room.

Sonically, the latest Auditorium has improved in both dynamic range and musical coherence, though the tonal balance seems to have become a little less even overall.

It has a great midband, without question – one that is smooth, dynamically literate, coherent and highly involving. But it's also rather mid-prominent, and while the mid-to-treble transition is handled very well, so that speech sounds a little laid-back rather than obviously 'shut in', the treble proper is just a bit too dull and restrained, particularly so when compared to the others assembled for this group test. It's a perspective to which one adjusts quite easily, and some listeners will actually prefer their treble as restrained as this, but it remains an unequivocal departure from true neutrality nonetheless.

The bass end is quick and agile, with plenty of bounce and life, if a little short of ultimate weight and authority. It does have a slight tendency to thump on some material, but carries a tune well, providing appropriate momentum and drive with some enthusiasm.

Box coloration is very low, and stereo images are precise and well focused, but the real strength here is that gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, which explains why this speaker is such a popular choice with the valve fraternity. **HFC**

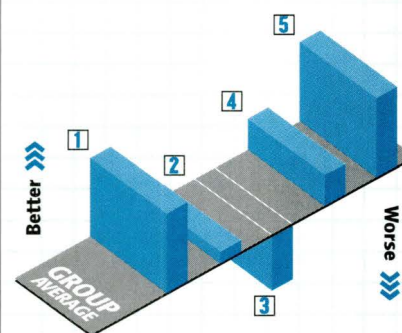


### LAB REPORT

What Living Voice refers to as its 'high sensitivity D'Appolito configuration' does indeed yield a full 93.7dB on test at 2.83V/1m. Neither is this generous sensitivity achieved with a bright or aggressive balance. Quite the reverse, as the Auditorium shows a generally reinforced 800Hz-2kHz region, followed by a slightly depressed presence and recovery at 12kHz once the treble unit gets into its stride. Another of the Auditorium's strengths is its low distortion, falling to ~0.3% through the bass at 96dB and even as low as ~0.2% through the upper midrange/treble.

Nevertheless, the chances of a truly 'low coloration' bass are slightly marred by the strong quarterwave resonances that escape the rear-firing port at 210Hz and 740Hz. The former misterrmination also crops up on phase and impedance plots where its current-hungry 4.9ohm average impedance is revealed. The load remains sub-8ohm from 90Hz-20kHz. The port itself is tuned to 53Hz and successfully powers the bass output down to a projected 33Hz in-room.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 65%
- 2] Loudness >> 10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -45%
- 4] Bass extension >> 25%
- 5] Distortion >> 65%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	94dB	93.7dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	60ohm	4.9ohm
Estimated bass extension	?Hz	33Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 86%**



**PRACTICALITY >> 80%**



**BUILD >> 90%**



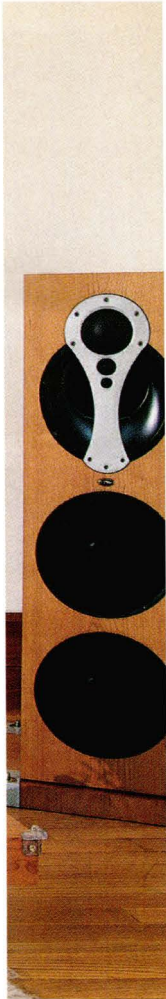
**VALUE >> 85%**



Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband has made it a favourite with valve amp fans, but the top end is a little too restrained and the bass evenness under our conditions has not been improved by recent port re-tuning.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **85%**

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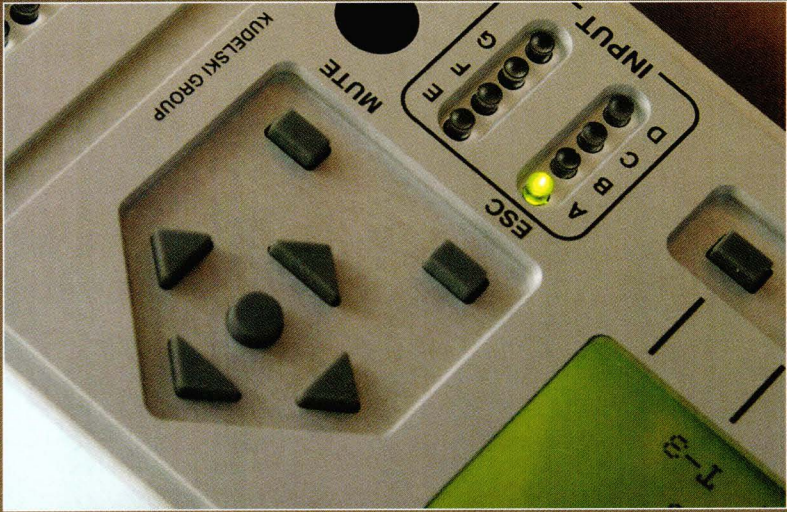
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# MIRAGE OM7

*Omnidirectional speakers take an intriguingly different approach*

**M**irage is part of the API Group of Toronto, Canada. The company has two speaker brands under its wing – Energy focuses on conventional loudspeakers with forward facing drive units, while Mirage models are deliberately designed to radiate sound in all directions more or less evenly. ‘omnidirectional’ is the most widely used term to describe this approach.

Our last test group included Mirage’s Omni 260, a £700 floorstanding three-way, which directed upward-facing mid and treble drivers towards conical deflectors in order to provide all round sound distribution. While this did create an omnidirectional distribution, there was evidence that the reflector contributed to a rather peaky treble. Which is something that can’t afflict this £2,000 OM7 – it achieves ‘omnipolarity’ without recourse to reflection, instead using twin midrange and treble drivers, pointing both fore and aft.

A five-driver, three-way design, this speaker’s unusual shape consists of a chunky lower

section housing a 200mm port-loaded bass driver. This supports a wide but shallow top section that houses the mid and treble drivers, and ‘lightens up’ the rather heavy impression created by the distinctively American black lacquer finish of our samples – cherry veneer is a less gloomy option.

Both the bass driver and the two 115mm midrange units have polypropylene cones, the latter just 80mm in diameter. The two 25mm tweeters have what’s enigmatically described as ‘Pure Titanium Hybrid’ domes. This heftily built speaker turns the scales at a very substantial 35.5kg, and comes with twin terminal pairs and unusually long spikes, along with large brass locking thumbwheels.

As the instructions suggest, omnis are best kept well clear of walls, and this also suits the bass alignment, as confirmed by the in-room measurements, which look just a little heavy through the bass region even without walls.

The omni factor plays a major role in supplying a sonic character that has a different flavour from that of conventional ‘forward-firing’ speakers. Not surprisingly, image focus is dramatically reduced – but that isn’t necessarily such a handicap.

On most recordings the stereo image is actually an artificial construct of the recording studio and engineer, and some listeners find its precise reproduction something of a distraction. The omni approach might dilute the precision of the imaging, but it does create a rather more effective illusion than forward-firing speakers of actually placing the musicians there in the listening room.

Imaging aside, the OM7 has a warm, weighty, rich and laid-back balance that’s unusually smooth and easy on the ears.

Indeed, these speakers provided a real incentive to simply sit back, relax, and wind up the volume – and then wind up the volume a bit more. It never seemed to get aggressive, though it’s true that the top end is a bit obvious and not the sweetest around.

There’s an almost cuddly quality about these speakers. They tend to fill the room with sound rather than attempt to provide precise image focus, so the room becomes much more part of the total sound, and it’s less important to sit in the usual stereo ‘hot seat’. In all, they provide a very interesting alternative that has plenty going for it. **HFC**

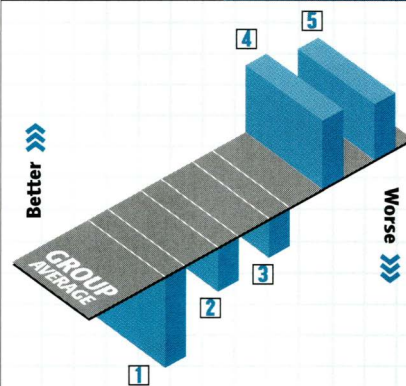


## LAB REPORT

This speaker has the strongest bass and extension of all the boxes in our test, but it must be used well clear of room boundaries if this weighty sound is not to ‘boom’. The 200mm polypropylene driver crosses over at a low 200Hz and, indeed, its output peaks at 85Hz with an 8dB/octave rolloff to higher frequencies. The dual port offers a broad reinforcement from 30-80Hz and is free of spurious resonances, pushing the in-room response close to 30Hz. Distortion, too, is usefully low at ~0.4% through the bass (re 96dBA).

Mirage quotes a “90dB room efficiency” which tallies with our forward response sensitivity measurement of 86.0dB. The forward response is surprising, showing a strong bass, depressed midrange but a presence and treble that builds in intensity (the room averaged response shows a +8dB peak at 16kHz). The load is also pretty tough with a 5.9ohm average and 3.5ohm minima at 90Hz and 470Hz, nevertheless it’s doubtful whether a speaker of this stature would be partnered with an under-powered budget amp.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -75%
- 2] Loudness >> -35%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -30%
- 4] Bass extension >> 55%
- 5] Distortion >> 45%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	6ohm	6ohm
Estimated bass extension	30Hz	30Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >>> 85%**

**PRACTICALITY >>> 60%**

**BUILD >>> 89%**

**VALUE >>> 82%**

The OM7’s ‘Omnipolar’ feature weakens the stereo image precision but helps to bring the musicians into your room. The sound here is warm, full bodied and laid back, and this speaker loves to be driven hard and loud.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >>> **81%**



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# TOTEM FOREST

*Simple elegance and refinement are the watchwords at Totem*

It's exactly ten years to the month since HFC first encountered Totem loudspeakers.

They come from the Quebec end of Canada, are designed by one Vince Burezza, and always seem to cost significantly more than you'd expect from their size and driver complement. But that didn't stop the delightful little Model One 'miniature' from receiving a confident Recommended flag when the goodies were being handed out. And the simple fact that this first ever Totem model is still part of today's range makes it something of a classic, and is a testament to just how 'right' that design was when it first arrived on the scene in the late 1980s.

While UK distribution has been sporadic, it's now handled very efficiently by the Belgian operation Joenit, and Totem's range has expanded steadily. At £2,390 the pair, the floorstanding Forest sits quite high up the hierarchy, though it remains a relatively compact and simple two-way design, albeit with an unusual level of detail refinement.

The very substantial and solid 'lock-mitred'

and braced enclosure is beautifully finished in a reddish cherry real wood veneer (a much paler maple is an option), and has nicely radiused front edges, with the drivers neatly flush-fitted. No grilles were supplied, though they are available as optional extras. The rear panel is subtly angled, to avoid parallel faces, and the whole enclosure sits on three of Totem's hefty and elegant 'Claw' feet, with large ball-bearings for floor coupling (a spike option is available).

The main driver here might look very like a Dynaudio device (as used by some other Totems), but is actually made by ATI. It has a 165mm cast frame and 110mm plastic cone/dome diaphragm, driven from a large and virtually indestructible 75mm oxygen-free copper voice coil. Heavily modified by Totem, the SEAS-sourced tweeter has a 25mm aluminium alloy dome. In-room measurements showed a rather strong mid-bass output even when the speakers were sited well clear of walls.

The Forest soaks up rather more amplifier voltage than the others assembled for this group test, and while that might suggest solid state amps are to be preferred, it doesn't seem to disadvantage the sound quality in any way. Indeed, this speaker sounds beautifully open and neutral, and delightfully free from the sort of 'shut in' voice band character that is widespread elsewhere. If anything it's just a shade too bright perhaps, and does tend to emphasise sibilants, but is very clean with it.

The bottom end is also a little strong, and shows an occasional tendency to 'thump' on some rock and dance material. But again it's qualitatively very clean, with good basic agility. It added a welcome warmth and richness with classical material, helping to delineate the ambience surrounding the recording or broadcast.

Clearly the elaborate enclosure engineering has paid off here, as there's no obvious 'boxiness' whatsoever, and the overall dynamic range is notably wide, with good low level detailing, though dynamic expression and tension are perhaps a little weak.

The slight over-emphasis at each extreme of the audio band seems to work better with CD than vinyl, and with classical rather than rock or dance. But this is, ultimately, a beautifully communicative and musical speaker, that does much to break down the barriers between music and its listeners. **HFC**

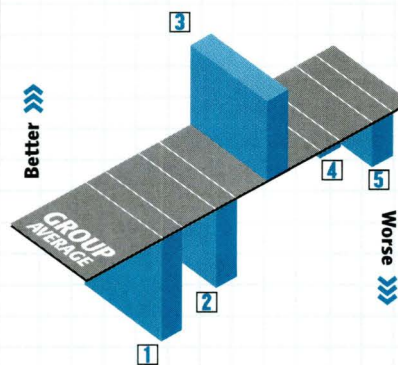


## LAB REPORT

It was subjectively evident from running-up the Forest with pink noise that this speaker was not going to achieve an 87dB sensitivity, so the 84.8dB recorded at 2.83V/1m came as little surprise. It is possible to 'stretch' this figure to 85.8dB by widening the 3rd octave measurement bandwidth from 500Hz-8kHz to 200Hz-20kHz, but this simply reflects the extra treble energy release by the dome tweeter. The output of the carbon-fibre bass/mid driver seems slightly depressed while a narrowband analysis shows a 'notch' at the ~2.5kHz crossover.

Even at this modest sensitivity, distortion is still rather higher than expected at up to 3% through the bass (re 96dBA). This contrasts with the fabulously low 0.1-0.2% distortion recorded through mid and treble. The bass loading is very sharp with its narrow rear-firing port offering a high-Q 43Hz output but massive 7-85ohm swings in impedance. Still, while the Forest is rather less current-hungry than others in this test it remains something of a mixed bag.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -85%
- 2] Loudness >> -65%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 65%
- 4] Bass extension >> -5%
- 5] Distortion >> -35%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	84.8dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	15.1ohm
Estimated bass extension	33Hz	36Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 89%**



**PRACTICALITY >> 81%**



**BUILD >> 94%**



**VALUE >> 82%**



A gorgeous floorstander with low sensitivity but very open neutrality. Slight top and bottom emphasis works best with CD and classical material, but it's still a beautifully communicative and musical loudspeaker overall.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **87%**



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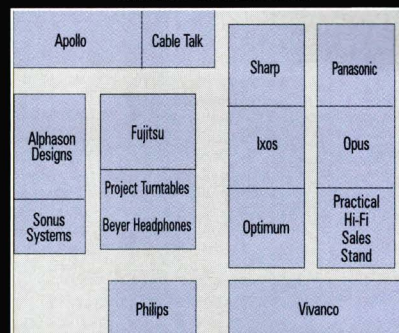
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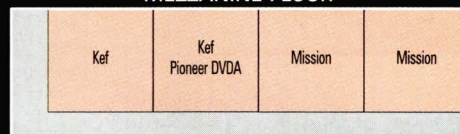
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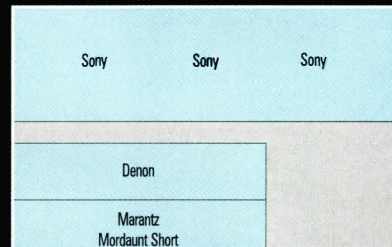
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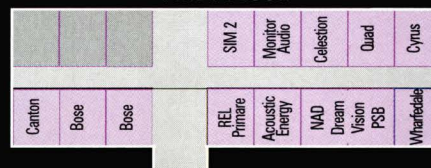
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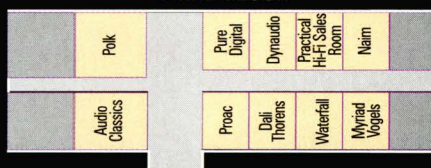
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# TRIANGLE NAIJA

Triangle's new Stratos uses very distinctive mid and treble drivers

Triangle – which the company pronounces “tree-ongle”, ‘cos it’s French – has some of the idiosyncrasies and individualities one associates with that country’s speakers, but has also been something of an *HFC* favourite since the Zephyr II claimed a strong Best Buy back in 1999.

In fact, we were hoping to cover Triangle’s recently introduced twenty-grand Magellan flagship model as a standalone review this autumn. Then the only pair in the UK got itself sold, so we settled for one of its baby brothers instead. This £1,900 Naia is one of the brand new Stratos range, which builds on similar driver technology to the Magellan, but in considerably more compact and affordable packages.

Heftily built and standing nearly 1.2m tall, it’s quite a surprise to find that the Naia is actually the smallest of four Stratos floorstanders. It’s a full three-way design, with twin 165mm bass drivers operating in a port-loaded section of the enclosure, with cast frames, 120mm paper cones and rubber roll

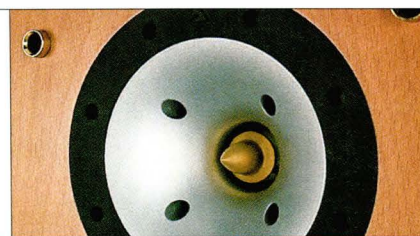
surrounds. The midrange driver also has a 165mm cast frame, but this time with a 110mm paper cone and a corrugated fabric surround that has less hysteresis than an elastomer like rubber. The new tweeter uses a 25mm titanium dome loaded by an unusually large and deep horn.

The tall, slim enclosure is finished in a plain but attractive real wood veneer, described as ‘amber beech’, and a full-height black grille can be used to keep all those drivers covered up. A separate plinth is fabricated from steel and damped by rubber pads, but uses rather curious floor coupling arrangements that look ill-suited to the sort of fitted carpets with springy underlay often found in the UK – a single central pointed cone at the front is supposed to sit on a large metal disc, while there are two studs at the rear, plus two extra stabiliser studs halfway along the sides. Sited in free space, the in-room traces show a bass alignment that looks just about ideal, though the overall trace is far from smooth, especially through the treble.

The Naia’s introduction to the listening room brought an immediate impression of authority and dynamic tension to the music. The listening tests were carried out during the BBC’s Proms season, and the Naia proved particularly effective in transporting the listener to the best seats in the Royal Albert Hall, helping to challenge the realisation of actually being at home seated in one’s favourite armchair. This tall speaker has real grip, scale and authority, with altogether sharper timing than most three-ways (indeed, sharper than many two-ways), plus fine dynamic vigour and expression, all of which are important ingredients in creating the suspension of disbelief.

Exciting, vivid and communicative it might be, but it’s also a bit untidy and uneven. It’s neither smooth nor easy on the ears, and colorations are audible especially through the upper part of the audio band. Most obvious is a pinched nasality that is very obvious on speech, and while it helps the speaker avoid sounding aggressive, it does rather hamper the intelligibility. And there’s a slightly ‘spitchy’ character to the extreme top end too.

However, if these colorations don’t offend, this speaker is a whole lot of fun. Its combination of vigorous dynamics, fine scale and impressive speed will get you closer to the heart of the musical experience than most of the competition. **HFC**



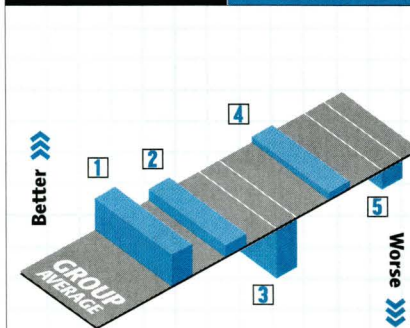
## LAB REPORT

Following a gentle depression from 2-6kHz (through the 4kHz mid/treble crossover region), the Naia’s response climbs away to a positively stinging +10dB at 16kHz. Off-axis listening at 2m or more will tame this speaker’s bite, but it should never be partnered with bright amps, DVD or CD players. It’s tough to drive with a current-hungry average load of 5.3ohm that never rises above 8ohm from 25Hz-20kHz.

Additional swings in impedance and phase angle occur through the midrange where, from 500Hz-8kHz, there’s a sensitivity of 91.5dB (2.83V/1m).

Triangle’s bass tuning is very well engineered with the front port at 40Hz, the driver null at 38Hz and impedance minimum at 36Hz. Both port and dual bass drivers offer a very clean output, free of spurious resonances but levels of harmonic distortion are disappointingly high at ~1-2% up to 300Hz. The strong 2nd harmonic measured through the bass is replaced by a 3rd harmonic through the midrange, although levels are somewhat lower at ~0.7%.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 25%
- 2] Loudness >> 10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -40%
- 4] Bass extension >> 5%
- 5] Distortion >> -15%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	93dB	91.5dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	5.3ohm
Estimated bass extension	40Hz	35Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 85%**

Exciting, vivid and communicative, but also a bit untidy and uneven. Most obvious coloration is a pinched nasality, but if this doesn't offend, it's a whole lot of fun, with vigorous dynamics, fine scale and impressive speed.

**PRACTICALITY >> 71%**

**BUILD >> 90%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE >> **84%**



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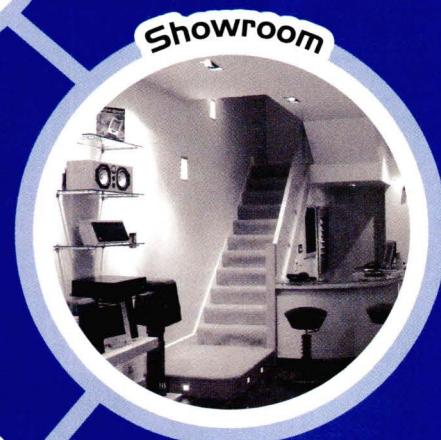
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# CONCLUSIONS

A tight group, each speaker showing its own distinct attributes. It's all a matter of taste and space...

Given the price span on offer here, it's hardly surprising that this is a very impressive group of highly competent loudspeakers. However, they're not beyond criticism, the power of a group test lying in the way each serves to keep the others honest. Every design has its own particular set of compromises, and it's only through comparing different models that their contrasts are clearly revealed.

B&W's little Signature 805 standmount clearly showed the

advantage of having very little cabinetwork, getting it off the ground, and making it amazingly stiff. You simply hear the drive units here - and they're very classy drivers too - though it's also true to say that this is a small loudspeaker, and lacks some muscularity compared to its bigger rivals.

Graves Audio's Koronglay, with its single horn-loaded Lowther driver couldn't represent a greater contrast. A bass-light and slightly aggressive balance, together with massively high sensitivity and a

very easy amp load makes this speaker a natural partner for single-ended valve amps, giving righteous dynamics and extraordinary speed.

Then there's the Mirage, which has extra drivers on the back to create an omnidirectional source, and sounds quite different from the rest in consequence. Do try it - you might love it!

The two two-way floorstanders, from Living Voice and Totem, are certainly among the more successful sonically. Even though a three-way can theoretically go

significantly louder, this shows once again the very real virtue of simplicity when operating at normal listening levels.

Much the same is true of Jamo's two-and-a-half-way, which has a coherence advantage over the three-ways, though for sheer welly and authority the Canton and Triangle will take some beating.

While it can fairly be said here that each speaker helps to show up the limitations of its rivals, it's also true that the bonus with upmarket speakers comes in their splendid variety and breadth of choice. **HFC**

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## HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.

⊕ Standmounts need the best stands to achieve best results.

⊕ Finding the right place to put

the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take time and trouble experimenting.

⊕ Expect speakers to improve over the first 100 hours or so.

⊕ Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to be at its best.

## LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	B&W Signature 805	Canton Karat L800 DC	Graves Audio Koronglay	Jamo D870	Living Voice Auditorium	Mirage OM7	Totem Forest	Triangle Naia
PRICE	£2,500	£1,849	£1,999	£2,200	£1,700	£2,000	£2,390	£1,900
SOUND	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
PRACTICALITY	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
BUILD	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
VALUE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
CONCLUSION	A gorgeous little standmount with a sound that's subtle and informative. Best for small to medium rooms.	Clean, cool and clinical, and a little mid-bass heavy even in our large listening room.	Ultra-sensitive with the fastest, most time-coherent sound around. Needs careful system matching.	Always easy to listen to, and a good basic communicator, if a little 'cold' and 'shiny'.	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though top end is a little too restrained. Lovely veneer.	'Omnipolar' weakens image precision but helps bring the musicians into your room.	Neat and musical floorstander has wonderful open neutrality, with slight top and bottom emphasis.	Exciting, vivid and communicative, but a bit untidy and uneven - a whole lot of fun.
KEY FEATURES								
SIZE (WxHxD)	24x43x36cm	20x117x48cm	25x109x36cm	27x105x38cm	21.5x86x28cm	29.5x115x16-39cm	19.5x90x27cm	23x119x32cm
DRIVING CONFIG	2-way	3-way	1-way	2.5-way	2-way	3-way	2-way	3-way
MAIN DRIVER	1x165	1x310 + 2x165	1x165	2x165	2x165	1x200 + 2x110	1x165	3x165
STAND/ FLOOR	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor
BI-WIRE OR TRI-WIRE	Bi-wire	Bi-wire	n/a	Tri-wire	Bi-wire	Bi-wire	Bi-wire	Bi-wire
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR								
SENSITIVITY (2.83V/ 1M)	87.3dB <b>A</b>	92.1dB <b>G</b>	99.8dB <b>E</b>	89.5dB <b>G</b>	93.7dB <b>G</b>	86.0dB <b>A</b>	84.8dB <b>P</b>	91.5dB <b>G</b>
MAX LOUDNESS @ 2M	103dB @ 120W <b>A</b>	111dB @ 250W <b>G</b>	119dB @ 250W <b>E</b>	108dB @ 200W <b>G</b>	109dB @ 100W <b>G</b>	104dB @ 200W <b>A</b>	101dB @ 120W <b>P</b>	109dB @ 160W <b>G</b>
MIN/ AVE IMPEDANCE	5 / 11.9ohm <b>G</b>	3.1/4.4ohm <b>P</b>	7.6/ 11.9ohm <b>G</b>	3.3/ 7.1ohm <b>A</b>	3.3/ 4.9ohm <b>P</b>	3.5/ 6.0ohm <b>A</b>	7.3/ 15.1ohm <b>G</b>	3.1/ 5.3ohm <b>P</b>
DISTORTION @ 96dB	0.4-1.0% <b>G</b>	0.35-0.6% <b>G</b>	0.30-2.2% <b>P</b>	0.45-1.4% <b>A</b>	0.22-0.35% <b>E</b>	0.25-0.56% <b>G</b>	0.14-2.8% <b>P</b>	0.45-1.8% <b>A</b>
IN-ROOM BASS	40Hz <b>G</b>	30Hz <b>E</b>	48Hz <b>A</b>	35Hz <b>G</b>	33Hz <b>E</b>	30Hz <b>E</b>	36Hz <b>G</b>	35Hz <b>G</b>



# Mastering

*Before a recording can be pressed as a CD, vinyl LP or DVD, it must first undergo the dark art of mastering. Feature: Richard Black*

**O**f all the various processes in the chain that starts with musicians in a room and ends with CDs in the shop, mastering is perhaps the most mysterious. That's hardly helped by the fact that the word means several different things. Everyone knows what a 'master tape' is – or thinks they know. It should be the final tape used for production of the commercial release, but depending on context and who's speaking it can also be the tape fresh from the session, or from the mix...

Mastering is the last thing that happens to a recording before it becomes a mass-produced item, be it LP, CD, DVD or cassette. Hence the confusion, really – if you're a musician or session recording engineer the 'last thing' is the tape that leaves the session or the last audio process, the rest being something beyond your ken or control, whereas if you're a manufacturer the last thing involves some kind of production disc or mould.

For the purposes of this article, we'll keep as our definition what most recording-industry folk mean by mastering, which is the final stage of audio processing given to the recording, after editing and mixing but before it goes to the factory. Even there, there's a significant difference between the way things work in the digital and analogue worlds, so let's start with digital as that, after all, accounts for over 90 per cent of all audio workload these days.

## WHY MASTER?

It's not even obvious why anything should remain to be done to a recording after it has been through all the stages to produce an initial edited mix. And in fact Bob Katz, one of the world's leading mastering engineers and the author of a recent book on the subject, agrees: "The perfect mix may

need no mastering at all!", he states in large print.

Let's make an analogy with writing. No matter how carefully one writes and rewrites, there's still the chance that a sentence may be grammatically incorrect, a construction clumsy, an argument inconclusive – but the author remains oblivious, having spent too long staring at the wood to see the trees any more. An editor, reading the article or book, will spot the infelicity and correct it, making the text flow better and improving the clarity of the author's plot or argument. A mastering engineer does much the same kind of thing to a recording, lending an

that he/she can judge clearly how the recording will work out in the real world. For reference, many MEs also keep a variety of other systems, right down to a ghetto blaster, but the primary system remains key. Key also is the experience of the ME, and despite the superficial superiority of young ears this is one area with a distinct upward skew in age. Many MEs have a musical background as well as technical expertise. Allied to the experience is the high degree of respect in which leading MEs are held, reflected generally in their high fees which discerning clients are often queuing up to pay.

The tools of the ME, inasmuch as the

**“A cynic might say the mastering engineer exists to correct the cock-ups of the previous contributors.”**

independent ear to the balance and dynamics achieved by previous contributors to the project and tweaking them, often quite subtly, to improve the music's impact, feel and general attractiveness.

A cynic might say that the mastering engineer exists to correct the cock-ups of the previous contributors, but that's unfair and inaccurate. It's simply a different specialism with a different way of viewing things.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The mastering suite is very similar to – no, simply *is* – a very fine hi-fi system. This of all recording processes is the one where big, loud studio monitors don't apply. It is essential that the mastering engineer (ME from now on) should have a high resolution, neutral system playing at a realistic level so

work involves altering the audio, are similar in essence to those of the recording and mix engineers. However, the smaller changes generally required, and the fact that most work is in stereo (migrating slowly to surround), have produced a breed of equipment targeted specifically at mastering. If you're involved in mixing you'll be applying often quite large frequency-response changes to single channels at a time, and while mastering may sometimes involve single-channel operations and large response adjustments it's more common to be adjusting both channels at once in small increments.

Mastering of this kind is always a challenge, and often immense fun. All MEs have a few unique tricks they've developed in response to such typically diverse challenges as rescuing a



## “Even the most sophisticated processing can have side effects, and ‘natural’ recordings are usually best left that way.”

submerged voice from an over-instrumental mix, injecting life into a dynamically ‘flat’ recording, or taking some bite off an over-excitabile electric guitar. Sometimes all that’s needed is some equalising, though often not where one might at first think (for example, a little judicious fiddling with the treble can often have its most audible effects in the midrange or bass). Sometimes some careful dynamic compression or expansion is required, or sometimes a combination, using a multi-band compressor to adjust the level of a narrow portion of the spectrum depending on how prominent (or otherwise) it was in the first place. The aim is always the greatest musical

communication with the least interference from the recording hardware and software. In fact, the criteria are exactly the same we usually apply in the sound reproducing world. In more than one way, the ME bridges the apparent (not always real) divide between recording and playback.

Digital mastering is now very common, even though most MEs still have plenty of analogue processors to hand as well. The flexibility of digital processes has made functions readily available that not many years ago were only dreamed about. Multiband compression is a case in point. Yes, it’s feasible in analogue but it’s complicated, expensive, and relatively hard to adjust successfully. In the digital domain it’s much cheaper to get and easier to use, with real-time analysis to tell the user exactly how much energy there actually is in a band, both before and after processing. And any function involving delay is nearly impossible to implement in analogue (frequency-independent delay being a particularly tricky problem in electronics) but almost trivial in digital.

With digital processing so easily available it’s tempting for the original recording engineer to master the recording too – why pay someone else when the workstation is sitting there?



Apart from the usefulness of experience and specialised ways of working, think of our writing analogy. The person who created the recording is so much more likely to overlook faults which have become too familiar. All the same, in classical recording there is quite often no audio mastering at all, and the requirement is then simply for a well-made CD-R to send to the factory. Even the most sophisticated processing can have side effects, and ‘natural’ recordings are generally best left that way, perhaps with just a touch of EQ to mask an isolated blemish. I for one have ‘mastered’ recordings simply by playing it to a few audiophile friends and taking an absence of horrified stares as a sign of approval.

A digital master is either a CD or a tape (usually a computer-type format such as Exabyte) which is sent to the factory and turned into a finished product bit-for-bit. Part of the ME’s responsibility is to listen to this final version from start to finish and ensure that there are no unwanted clicks,

### NO PANACEA?

Not surprisingly, good and bad processors exist in both the digital and analogue worlds. While it is in principle easier to do a lot of things digitally, it’s also possible to get it wrong and create various kinds of distortion along the way. In addition, both approaches can often have side effects which aren’t necessarily distinctly good or bad but are still audible. The phase response of filters is a case in point – analogue filters usually have some phase shift, while many digital ones don’t. Problem? Not necessarily in either case. Analogue filters can often sound more natural, depending not least on why they are needed in the first place – they may simply be reversing the effect of something earlier in the chain which had an equal and opposite phase shift. Many of the latest digital equalisers offer a variety of filter types, with and without ‘analogue-style’ phase shifts, and with gentle or sharp characteristics.

## HISTORIC REISSUES

Remastering of historic albums is an increasingly important sub-specialism of mastering generally. These days, 'historic' can mean as recent as the 1960s, the key features of historic recordings being generally old and perhaps fragile media, uncertain technical parameters of the recording and quite often restrictions in frequency range and dynamics. Sometimes one gets lucky: I recently came across some tapes recorded in 1956 and badly stored since which however turned out to be in good condition, well recorded to an accurate pre-emphasis curve.

On the other hand, another set of tapes from around the same time which I transferred a couple of years ago were in good condition but recorded on an ill-matched pair of tape decks, complete with interfering noises, improperly-erased test tones and some very strange frequency responses. On these occasions the ME becomes a sort of audio forensic scientist too, and I was lucky in both those cases to be able to work with Tim de Paravicini who in addition to being an amplifier designer of note is also an encyclopaedia of all things audio. Disc transfer is a similar story, with nothing taken for granted, not even speed. Audio restoration is of course a complex field in its own right.

devising and carefully noting level changes which may be necessary during the cut and so forth. In a way, though, this aspect imposes a discipline which can be useful – it's possible to spend far too long fiddling and faffing when mastering digitally, safe in the knowledge that nothing is being done that cannot be undone. With lacquers at £20 a pop and lathe time at more than that per hour there's a strong incentive to prepare efficiently.

These days, though, vinyl mastering engineers are acquiring another specialism. One of the biggest markets for vinyl is dance music, and there's an art to making a cut really 'punchy' so that it will stand out from all the tracks played in an evening. The people making the records are not necessarily technically adept, at least not as regards sound quality and its quirks. The tricks of the experienced cutting engineer in this respect are a perfect example of what mastering is all about. A little EQ here, a touch of very careful compression there, combined with detailed knowledge of how the cutting system and the DJ's turntable will respond (and neither is perfectly neutral, especially when driven hard), and a track can be turned around from lacklustre and unnoticeable to the highlight of a night's clubbing.

### FIDELITY TO WHAT?

You may by now be wondering where the whole issue of 'fidelity' has ended up. As mentioned earlier, in classical music recording mastering is much less of an issue, and that's true of other styles which are recorded in a fairly 'natural' way. But with anything recorded in a modern studio manner the mastering is part of the artistic process and if there's to be any 'fidelity' to anything it must logically be to the sound heard by the ME. The interesting philosophical point arises when something gets mastered on more than

one occasion by more than one engineer. This is less common with digital recordings but for practical purposes LP titles released in more than one country were often separately mastered (and manufactured) in the relevant countries. What's more, prior to CD release they were mastered by someone else. This is where many CD/LP comparisons fall flat, because one is comparing apples with oranges. Really keen LP collectors will often have different editions of the same title for this reason. And, as documented quite fascinatingly by Mark Prendergast in *HFC 242*, some pop albums (Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon* in this particular case) get remastered every few years, for good reasons or bad.

The end product of vinyl mastering is effectively also the first stage of manufacturing, which takes us into our final article in this series. As we'll see, there is at least one more 'master' at that stage. However, all the audio processing pieces are now in place and barring accidents the sound should be what the ME intended. **HFC**

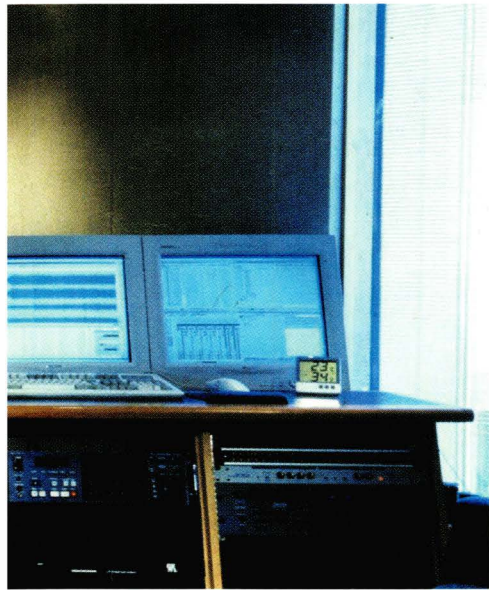
*Next month: manufacture*

## MASTER FORMATS

What format should be used for the master? That might seem like a stupid question – surely one should master CDs to 16-bit audio etc since that's how it will appear in the shops. But surprisingly often there's an intermediate stage on analogue tape, the sound of which is arguably just another tool in the mastering kitbag. The resulting master is of course suitable for conversion to digital at any current or future sampling rate, and may also be used for any LP release. Typically, half-inch tape will be used at 15ips, giving excellent performance all round. Some studios even go to the trouble and expense of stereo on one-inch tape, as done originally by EAR in 1986 and also latterly by ATR Service. The sound of that format can be really stunning.



Images: courtesy of PMC



missed fades, repeated tracks (oh yes, that one's far too easy to do!) or other upsets. An LP master is very different – it's a cut lacquer. Partly because every copying stage in analogue involves a quality loss, and partly because there are particular characteristics and limitations of vinyl discs which are best understood by the people who cut them, mastering in analogue is a real-time operation generally performed between final edited tape and the cutting lathe, in the cutting room.

### THE ART OF VINYL

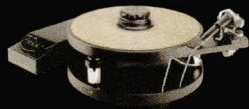
With the benefit of hindsight, the digital generation is apt to look back at LP and comment patronisingly on its limitations. In fact, they aren't as severe as many claim. The main one concerns out-of-phase bass, which must be controlled to some extent – but then it's not a very useful feature of any recording at the best of times. Exceptionally high levels of treble can be a problem for disc cutters and require extremely high power levels. It's possible to stack up power amps, of course, and at The Exchange, the London mastering studio I've used many times, they have about 600 watts per channel, but the problem then shifts to the cutter head which is not very large and can't dissipate that kind of power for ever. Accidents do happen and are expensive to repair.

Apart from that, what's special about vinyl mastering? For a start, if the EQ is being adjusted as the lacquer is being cut – which is necessarily a continuous, one-shot process – there's a real-time element which isn't usually there in digital mastering. For this reason, there's more preparation work to do,

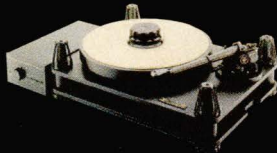
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Ruby Open Air; **Kondo** Io J.

Amplifiers: **Border Patrol**; **Canary**; **Sugden**; **Art Audio**; **Monarchy**;

**Western Electric**; **Icon**; **Tom Evans Audio Designs**; **SJS**.

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Sugden Musicmaster power amplifier - new	£1000	£1300
Monarchy M33 DAC - fabulous processor with class A pre-amp output	£1000	£1595
Monarchy SM70 pro - power amp 25 watts class A - juicy mini beefcake	£600	£900
Wadia 830 CD player - fully serviced, new laser - warranty	£1600	£3000
Tom Evans Groove - mc phono stage - 500 ohms, 0.2mV - as new	£1400	£1850
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany - new PM6As (alnico)	£1400	£3800
Canary Audio CA 301 - 300B - 22 watts - juicy and fabulous - new valves	£3000	£5400
Canary Audio CA 300 - single ended monos - valve rect. - 8 watts	£1900	£3500
Jamo Concert 8 - 2½ years old - beautiful maple finish - spotless	£600	£1365
Townshend Seismic - speaker stands - ugly, bouncy and rather good	£400	£695
Townshend Rock Mk III turntable (acrylic platter) super rare - super good	£500	
Linn LP12 + Lingo - black - Alphason HR100 - Music Maker - tidy	£700	
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Audio Innovations P2 phono stage - serviced, saucy and sought after	£700	
Revolver R45 funky floorstanding loudspeaker - brand spanking new	£600	£900
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Nottingham Analogue - Mentor with Reference PSU + LV Mystic Mat	£1950	£3580
Nottingham Analogue - Dais turntable with LV Mystic Mat - lovely	£2500	£3500
Nottingham Analogue - Interspace turntable + RB300 - scratch and dink	£500	£768
Nottingham Analogue - Horizon turntable - RB250 - new	£400	£590
Tube Technology Unisis integrated amplifier EL84 Class A - shiny	£1500	
AudioNote Soro - phono integrated - serviced/new valves - smooth & sweet	£500	£1900
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B&W DM603 S3 - black - very good condition - unboxed	£350	£600
Avid Acutus turntable - 10 hours use if that, perfect.	£4000	£5000
Avid Volvere Sequel turntable - sealed box new	£3000	£3500
Avid Volvere turntable - sealed box new	£1500	£2000
AudioNote ANJ-D - walnut - Huygens high mass stands	£500	£1400

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*R*

# RETRO

STAX SR-3  
ELECTROSTATIC HEADPHONES



Conventional wisdom used to have it that specialist high-end products all came from the UK (or at a stretch, Europe) and of course the USA. Hi-fi was only produced in the Far East by gigantic electronics multinationals whose business was to crank out routine, mundane, mid-price equipment by the container-load. Of course, the picture of Japan Inc as being exclusively the home of the multinational was an illusion caused by nothing more than ignorance and distance. Surely only big companies from so far away have any presence across the globe in the UK?

The reality is very different to the perception. Japan is full of specialist, small-volume, high-end brands. In fact, some of the Japanese national characteristics, of fastidious craftsmanship and the striving for perfection, make the country a particularly rich source of the true specialist high-end. Think of Koetsu cartridges, Nakamichi cassette decks (the only high-end cassette deck brand there has ever been) and Stax condenser microphones and cartridges.

Microphones and cartridges? These were the first products that Stax produced back in the early 1950s, but it was electrostatic technology that was the particular passion of company founder Naotake Hayashi. The first Stax electrostatic headphone, a product category that Stax is widely credited with inventing, was the SR-1, introduced in 1960. But it wasn't widely distributed in the UK and it was the SR-3 that brought Nakamichi to world attention in 1968.

Three things set it apart. One was its supremely beautiful sound. It really was quite unlike anything that had been seen or heard previously. The bass was respectable, but nothing special, at least in terms of extension. But bass quality was something else. The common boomy, resonant bass that made headphone listening such a claustrophobic experience at the time (and with many headphones nothing has changed) played no part of the Stax listening experience. The bass was light, tuneful, and airy. You could hear pitch correctly defined down to the lowest frequencies, which were fully integrated into the fabric of the sound as a whole.

**“It was renowned for its mid and treble, which benefited immeasurably from the SR-3’s inherent transparency and speed.”**

But it wasn't the bass for which the Stax SR-3 was most renowned. It was the mid and treble, which benefited immeasurably from the SR-3's inherent transparency and speed. This was one of the earliest open-back headphones. By the standards of the day, its sound was nothing less than exquisite.

There were other features that set the Stax apart. One was the price, which was a previously undreamed of £100 (more or less) when supplied with its preferred step-up device, the SRD-5 or 6. Another was comfort. This was a time when the standard was set by the vice-like heavyweights from Koss, which needed good sealing around the ears to sustain low frequency reproduction. The open-back Stax applied only as much pressure as was required to locate the phones in a stable manner on the head. Lightweight, soft leather, circumaural earpads and a sound sweeter than crème brûlée were secrets lost to most brands at the time, though not for long.

Stax always insisted on calling the SR-3 and later models 'ear speakers', a rather unnecessary conceit that was later picked up by AKG and others. Of more interest was the fact that the SR-3 was not locked to a single step-up device. I used it with a valve step-up on one occasion, and was stunned by how much better it sounded than the standard article. This was not lost on Stax itself, which has always produced a range of step-ups at different price levels, usually variations on the theme of transformer, solid state and valve power.

Irrespective of these variations on a theme, Stax set the standards for sound quality then, and allowing for a few exceptional products from elsewhere (the AKG K-1000 reviewed recently for example) it continues to be the standard setter to the present day. *HFC*

*Alvin Gold*

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# M

## MUSO

TELEVISION  
MARQUEE MOON



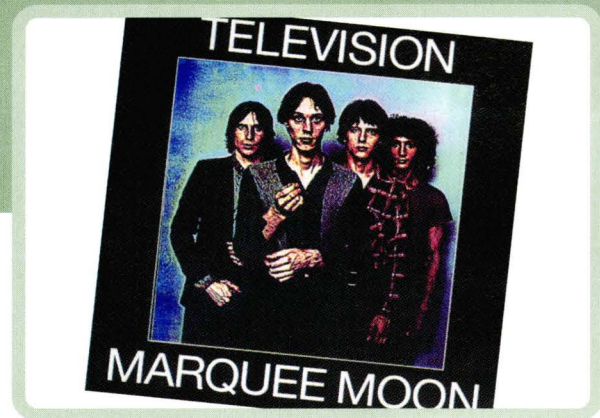
At the height of punk in 1977, Television changed what a guitar rock band could sound like. Unlike the other punk bands with which they associated on the New York CBGBs scene, they elevated the idea of musicianship, featuring extended guitar solos – but solos that sounded like nothing that had gone before, utilising punk's energy and wiry paranoia, but eschewing the blues, indulgence and ego trips of traditional rock soloists. *Marquee Moon* was their first album, their first record for a major label (Elektra) and the only time they would really capture what made them great.

The band had been formed in 1973 by Tom Verlaine (Née Thomas Miller) and was initially a thrashy Velvets-inspired noise-fest that included on bass the spindly iconoclast whose safety-pin-encrusted T-shirt inspired Malcolm McLaren to create punk, Richard Hell. But with the addition of guitarist Richard Lloyd, Verlaine began to develop an increasingly complex songcraft, and the pair's lyrical, interlocking guitar lines – Lloyd's painstakingly composed, Verlaine's more improvised – inspired each of them to greater heights.

After losing Hell and signing to Elektra in 1976, Tom had very clear ideas about the sound he was after. His first choice for producer was Rudy Van Gelder, the New Jersey-based magus behind countless classic jazz albums on the Blue Note and Prestige labels. When it became clear that Elektra had no intention of entrusting their latest proto-punk charges to a jazz producer, no matter how legendary, they settled on engineer Andy Johns, whose work with Led Zeppelin, Free and the Rolling Stones indicated that he knew how to get a good guitar sound.

Which seemed logical, until it became apparent that taste-wise, they were on different planets. When Johns arrived at the tiny room in A&R Studios in New York for recording in December 1976, he was appalled at the conditions he was expected to work in. Lloyd has said, "Andy turned up the first day and said, 'What kind of shit is this?' The board had no compressors, EQ or anything – it was the last working tube board in Manhattan, basically fifties recording technology."

Once Johns had upgraded the desk with some new EQs, it was



**“It had no compressors, EQ or anything – it was the last working tube board in Manhattan, basically fifties technology.”**

the band's turn to be horrified when they turned up for the first day of recording only to find that Johns had got there early and set the drums up as if he were recording John Bonham – a huge, compressed behemoth of a sound, and a world away from the stripped bare aesthetic they would eventually become known for. When Johns expressed surprise at the band's attitude (it was his trademark, after all), Verlaine assured him that they wanted an extremely dry, bare sound, with no reverb and little compression – for all the instruments, including their Fender guitars.

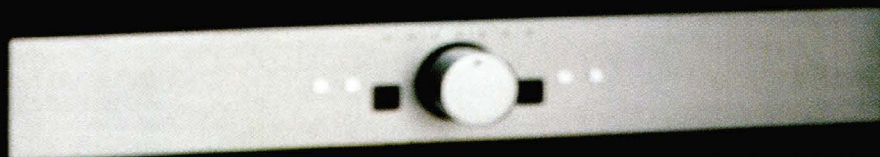
The sound and songs they came up with were certainly rock, but they reinvented the guitar solo as a viable musical entity again, stripped of strutting ego, grandstanding virtuosity and pointless noodling. Verlaine and Lloyd's solos were lyrical, poignant and to the point, never overstaying their welcome, and never resorting to the familiar. Verlaine's strangled chicken vocal stylings won't be to everyone's taste, no more than his wilfully obscure lyrics (try "I want a nice little boat/Made out of ocean" for size), but with the pared down backing of Billy Fica on drums and Fred (not Sonic) Smith on bass, Verlaine and Lloyd found a space where the guitar hero could actually say something again.

Both *Marquee Moon* and its follow-up, *Adventure*, have just been re-released in remastered versions, improving on the rather murky original CD mastering from 1990. Each also comes with a series of alternative takes and rarities, including the band's first extended single, *Little Johnny Jewel* (7:50mins), complete with fadeout between sides one and two of the original seven-inch single. The band split up after *Adventure*, but despite reforming briefly in the late nineties, they've never, either together or in their various solo careers, ever achieved anything as perfectly realised as *Marquee Moon*. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

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## Densen B-340 4 ch power amp

The new Densen B-340 is based on the top of the line power amplifier B-300XS, instead of 2 channels it has 4 channels and slightly reduced output power. This unique amplifier can be used in a variety of configurations; The B-340 can be put in Bi-amp mode, which means you use two channels to drive each speaker. The effect of using the B-340 in this mode is stunning. But, here you can take Bi-amping to a much higher level, because you can use the Densen SAXO electronic crossover, and have a true active system (by removing your speaker's crossover, and use the SAXO crossover instead...). This is done by mounting the SAXO board internally in the B-340 in a socket. The SAXO crossover is adjustable, and will fit all speakers on the market. This configuration sounds absolutely mind-blowing! If you have a B-300 or B-300XS you can buy another one and Bi-amp or buy a B-340 and Tri-amp. This way you can slowly upgrade towards using the SAXO without selling any of the components you have already bought.

High-End surround is also a possibility with the B-340. In combination with a B-300 or B-300XS, you have a total of 6 channels allowing for 5.1 or 6.1. The B-300 / B-300XS then takes care of the front channels, and the B-340 drives the center channel, rear channels and a passive subwoofer (which can be controlled through an SAXO crossover). Alternatively, if you have an active sub, you could Bi-amp your center speaker.

With the B-340 there is also the possibility of high quality multiroom applications. However, no matter which configuration you choose, the B-340 will match the B-200 preamp perfectly in both design and sound.

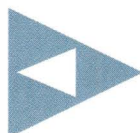
Even though the B-340 is extremely versatile, it has all of the Densen trademarks; unforgettable musicality and innovative technology. The B-340 contains a new outputstage, built using Densen's unique: "DMCD" technology (patent pending). This makes the B-340 extremely fast and precise, while retaining unlimited control with the speakers connected. In addition, the bandwidth has been improved and the B-340 goes straight to 400.000Hz, resulting in improved slew-rate.

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# DIGITALIA

VINYL VERSUS DIGITAL AND  
THE ROLE OF NOISE



In a previous *Digitalia* (HFC 243), I made a brief reference to the vinyl LP being rather less of a fixed quantity than any of its digital cousins. I'll not get drawn into the old "perfect sound forever" fiasco that accompanied the launch of CD. And yet, whatever the longevity of those earliest CDs, all non-contact digital media is inherently more robust than mechanical storage and retrieval mechanisms, like the LP, where 'data' is represented and recovered in truly analogue form.

Let's assume for a moment that an LP's vinyl substrate is infinitely rigid and the stylus footprint has an impedance of zero (no mass or compliance). A simple spherical stylus tracing a transient signal, like the edge of a square wave, might be subject to accelerations in the order of 1500G – a phenomenal figure. In practice, the stylus has a mass and its suspension infers a compliance, which damps this acceleration at the expense of some ringing. Moreover, with its 1-2g downforce, our diamond stylus will readily deform the relatively compliant vinyl wall of the groove. Vinyl is elastic, but not perfectly so, and friction very low but not infinitesimal.

Over time, even with the subtlest of today's line-contact stylus profiles, record wear is inescapable. Anything less than perfect tracking may aggravate disc wear quite significantly. The higher the recorded frequency, the finer the groove modulation and the more susceptible it is to such damage. Now, I haven't spun an LP in anger for over ten years, but I retain an extensive collection of prized test discs from B&K and CBS Laboratories, many of which contain frequency response sweeps to 50kHz. I would use these for MM and MC cartridge lab reports in years past, but many of these discs would only last for ten to 20 plays (depending on the quality of our test cartridges) because of disc wear.

Modern digital media including DVD-Audio and SACD have secure frequency responses well beyond that of vinyl, offering 40-50dB greater dynamic range and harmonic distortions that are typically much lower in level. The higher sample rates of 96kHz and 192kHz DVD-A largely offset the subjective repercussions of the near-band brick wall filters used in 44.1kHz



**“Modern digital media including DVD-A and SACD have secure frequency responses well beyond that of vinyl, giving 40-50dB greater dynamic range.”**

CD players while the DSD bitstream used by SACD avoids the need for digital filtering of any description. And yet the limited response, pleasing distortions and increased noise of the vinyl LP ensure it has, and will always have, its adherents. Much like the similarly vociferous fan base that exists for traditional valve amplification – some people just like that sound.

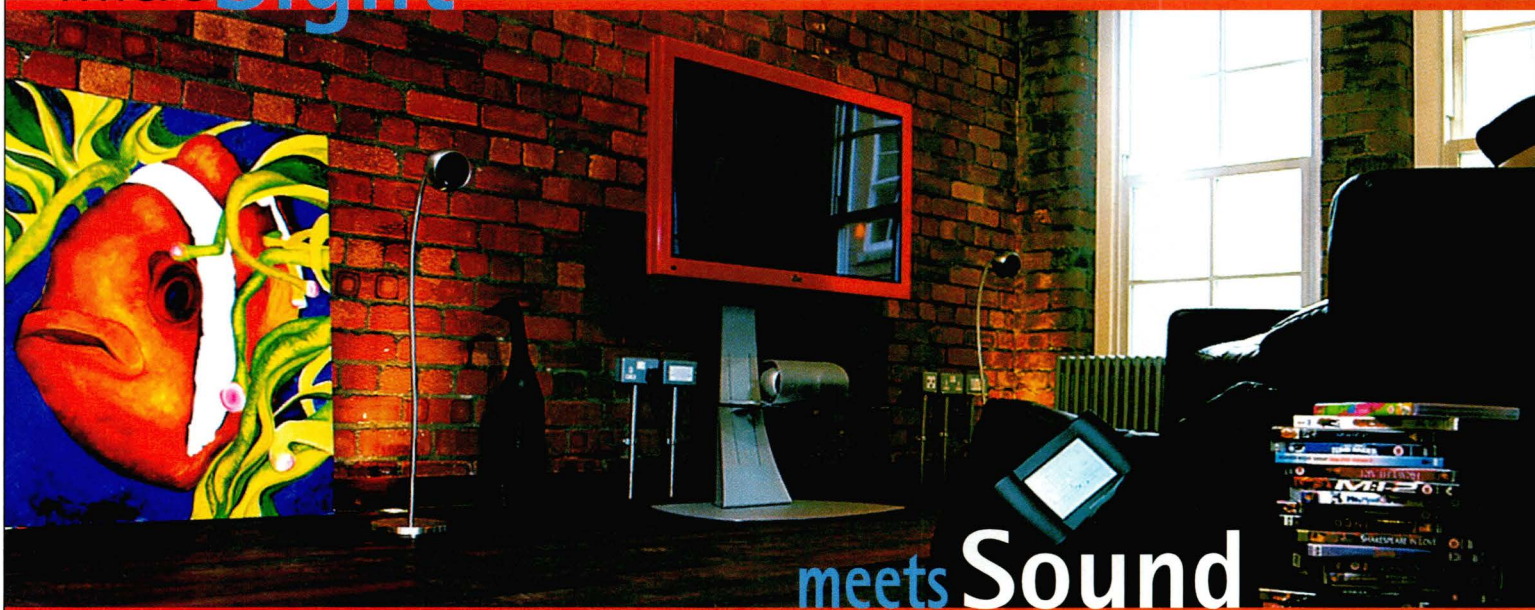
Strangely, noise also plays a role in the subjective 'acceptability' of digital audio. Because digital audio uses a *linearly* quantised code, there are progressively less 'bits' available to adequately describe lower and lower analogue signal levels. The lower the signal (music) level the more erroneous is its digital representation. Unfortunately, there's a periodic element to these errors that results in a marked increase in, typically, extended odd-order harmonic distortions. These are disastrous for sound quality, so the errors are randomised by the addition of an inaudible digital noise called dither. This 'smears' the distortion so it appears as a very slight increase in background noise rather than as discrete harmonic frequencies.

The effect of the noise that accompanies SACD recording (see the Marantz SA-1751 review, p32) has also been likened to a form of ultrasonic dither, both on distortion mechanisms at work in the player and in our perception of the music itself. Making a digital copy of 96kHz or 192kHz PCM audio with an equivalent ultrasonic noise has, according to personal accounts, resulted in a sound that's close to the openness and fluidity offered by the best SACD players. So while DVD-A might offer a theoretical 140dB+ range, there remain good reasons for not throwing these digital shutters quite so wide open. **HFC**

Paul Miller

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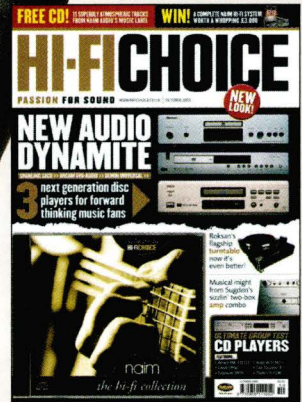
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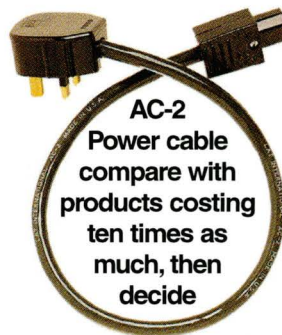
GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA2.5) £48 for 1.0m, £58 for 1.5m, £68 for 2.0m, Off the reel £30 for 1st meter, £20 per m thereafter. GNLM 05/04 £58 for 1m, £68 for 1.5m, £78 for 2.0m Also off the reel. Both GNLM cables available for export

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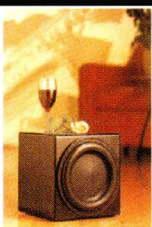
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# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and AV gear you can buy. Here you'll find all our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, together with useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

## Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most thorough techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

## How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

Products that score more than 80% overall are automatically featured in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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# CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

## SUPER AUDIO CD



SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has the potential for uncompressed six-channel surround, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio – these are listed in our DVD section.

## Q&A

### WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

### WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

### CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output – and most do.

### DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

### WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

### CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

### CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

## TOP BUYS



### Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

An affordable high-end machine, this very impressive player has it all: brawn, finesse and class. Not to mention the full range of features.



### Meridian 507 £1,195

The entry-level player from British digital audio specialist Meridian is an absolute peach – a transparent and detailed sound, and superb build quality to boot.

## Our favourite HB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# CD PLAYERS

### Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>												
	Exposure 2010	600	A smooth and substantial-sounding player, a little lacking in refinement but musical all the same		●	●	●	●				231
	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								●	212
	Heart CD6000 OSE LE	750	Valved-up Marantz makes an entertaining and colourful player that will inspire you to listen longer		●	●	●	●		●	●	245
<small>HB</small>	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		●	●		●		●	●	217
<small>HB</small>	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		●	●	●	●		●	●	231
	Marantz CD-17 MkII M	800	Insight, detail and rhythmic precision make the modified CD-17 MkII M a top-draw player at the price		●	●	●	●				243
<small>EC</small>	NAD C541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●					231
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●		●					231
<small>HB</small>	Thule CD150B	775	A light but engaging and expansive-sounding player with a very quirky user interface		●		●	●	●			246
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>												
<small>EC</small>	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!		●		●					231
<small>HB</small>	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●		●			238
<small>EC</small>	Copland CDA 822	1,598	Well built and carefully thought out, if you go for the more sophisticated musical forms it is superb value		●		●					241
	Exposure 3010	1,195	What this player lacks in immediacy and punch is offset by its sparkling sense of occasion and musical tension		●	●	●	●				246
	Exposure XXII	1,395	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening		●	●	●					238
<small>EC</small>	Gamut CD1R	2,350	Natural, precise and impressively 3D sound that marries precision with emotional communication		●		●		●			240
<small>EC</small>	Krell KPS 25sc	24,998	One of the finest CD players available, this is also a state of the art preamplifier with Cast interface technology		●	●	●	●	●		●	236
<small>EC</small>	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●	●	●		●	231
<small>HB</small>	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●					238
	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE <sup>24</sup>	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●	●				●	229
<small>EC</small>	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●	●			237
	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb		●	●	●		●			238
	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses									212
<small>EC</small>	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via onboard XPS supply				●					238
<small>HB</small>	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●			226
<small>HB</small>	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●		●	244
<small>EC</small>	Sony SCD-XA333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround	●	●	●		●				224
<small>EC</small>	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●	●	●		●	●			223
<small>EC</small>	Talk Thunder 3.1	1,900	A player whose sound has both direction and stature, remaining cool under the busiest musical fire		●	●	●	●	●		●	246
<small>EC</small>	TEAC D-70/P-70	13,000	This two-box solution is one of the best CD replay systems available, with a fantastic range of facilities	●	●	●		●	●			239
<small>EC</small>	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect		●	●			●		●	228

**SPECS KEY** **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder.

**OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs.

**CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers

**HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

**Copland CDA822 £1,598**

A beautifully built Scandinavian player with an equally attractive sound. If natural, fluid music-making sounds up your street, make sure you give it a spin.



**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

**Naim CDX2 £2,650**

A superb player that mixes rhythm and timing with precision and poise. Add the £2,300 XPS power supply (pictured) to make one of the best CD players in the world.

# DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multifunction player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can



use a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround sound benefits that the format specialises in.

## Q&A

### WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

### WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

### DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

### DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

## DVD-AUDIO

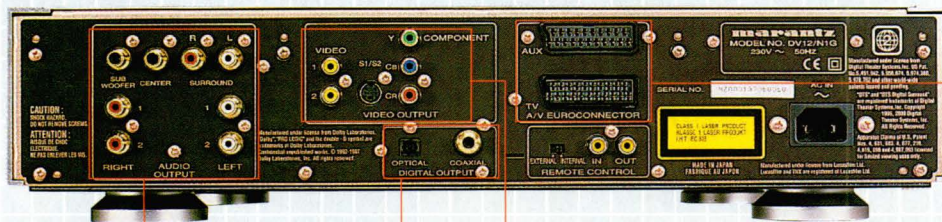
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs.



The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player. While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for

information – lyrics, images and so on. To save you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, and this would seem to be the best route if you want to enjoy high-resolution digital audio. If you're after a high-end model, look for one with a 'high bandwidth' digital audio output as well as 5.1 analogue outputs.

## CONNECTIONS



**ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS:** For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

**DIGITAL OUTPUTS:** For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

**VIDEO CONNECTIONS:** Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

**SCART CONNECTIONS:** These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

## Our favourite HB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

### Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
<span>EC</span>	Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	1,000	The first DVD player (just) enabled to deliver progressive scan with UK-spec PAL discs. Superb picture and good sound			●	●		238
	Cambridge Audio DVD57	200	DVD-Audio replay, progressive scan pictures and a good performance at a silly-low price. Fantastic value for money.	●		●	●		243
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
<span>HB</span>	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price	●	●	●	●		246
	Pioneer DV-656A	400	Do-it-all 'universal' player is a decent performer with all disc types, and superb value for money considering its range	●	●	●	●		240
<span>HB</span>	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	State of the art universal player with iLink digital interface provides performance stretch currently unavailable to others	●		●	●		240
	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs	●		●	●		237
<span>HB</span>	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD in a distinctly superior package, with above average performance	●		●		●	234
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	Arcam FMJ DV27A	1,900	Very accomplished, clean sounding player with CD, DVD and DVD-Audio alike	●		●	●		246
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs				●	●	238
<span>EC</span>	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●		●	●		230
<span>EC</span>	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●		●	●		229
<span>EC</span>	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player				●		218
<span>EC</span>	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●		●		●	230
	Roksan Caspian DVD	1,195	A good all-rounder – a solid and propulsive sounding DVD player which is also a surprisingly capable picture-making machine				●		237
<span>EC</span>	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	An engineering <i>tour de force</i> . It's pricey and plays neither DVD-A nor SACD, but performance – especially video – is top notch				●	●	212
<span>EC</span>	Townshend DV-747A	2,899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners	●	●	●	●		232

**SPECS KEY** **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

### TOP BUYS



**Sony DVP-NS905V £400**  
SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



**Denon DVD-2900 £850**  
A universal player that's good with CD and great with DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD alike.



**Pioneer DV-757Ai £800**  
Now pressured by Denon's DVD-2900, but its wideband digi-out is still unique at the price.



**Marantz DV-12S1 £2,500**  
A superb DVD-Audio/Video player – great with DVDs and unusually fine with CDs too.








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# VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



## TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

## TOP BUYS



### Rega P3 £298

Latest version of a hi-fi classic is a very capable deck for a very modest price, with very little serious competition from other makes. A great turntable for the money and a very safe buy.



### Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

Simple, unpretentious and relatively inexpensive, Audio Note's TT1 delivers a real taste of high-end performance at a realistically affordable price.



### Michell Orbe SE £1,825

A fine example of the turntable art, the stripped down SE version of Michell's flagship now features a DC motor. Does justice to the best arms and cartridges.



### Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

A beautifully made turntable that delivers a high-end vinyl experience without costing the earth. Neutral, even-handed, detailed and frankly spellbinding.

## Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# TURNTABLES

### Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<span>BB</span>	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●	203
<span>EC</span>	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
<span>EC</span>	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●		194
	Bluenote Bellavista/Borghese	1,594	Charming in appearance and sound if not particularly practical. Start your love affair with vinyl here	33/45			●	239
	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	223
	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		●	103
<span>BB</span>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<span>EC</span>	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor.	33/45	●			235
<span>BB</span>	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain	33/45			●	236
<span>BB</span>	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	33/45			●	214
	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45			●	239
<span>EC</span>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<span>EC</span>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●	●	246
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●	195
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
<span>EC</span>	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in clean, clear reproduction	33/45	●	●	●	205

## Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO CARTRIDGES

### MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
<span>BB</span>	Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	214
	Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
	Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms			●	235
	Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone			●	235
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
<span>BB</span>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<span>EC</span>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
	Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it			●	223
<span>BB</span>	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300			●	192
<span>BB</span>	Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light			●	235
<span>EC</span>	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage			●	244

## Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO STAGES

### Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU.I GAIN	AU.I IMPEDANCE	
<span>BB</span>	Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	●				223
	Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price	●	●	●	●	234
	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	●	●			201
<span>BB</span>	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension alongside good tonal colour this is the one to beat, excellent value for the money			●		234
	Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs			●		223
<span>EC</span>	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP			●		201
<span>BB</span>	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

**TURNTABLE SPECS KEY** **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

**CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY** **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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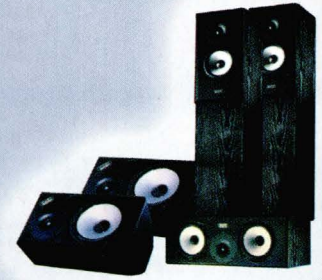
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<b>SONY</b>	STR-DB1080 STR-DB780
<b>DENON</b>	SOUND SYSTEMS SC-ST1 SC-HT500
<b>SHARP</b>	DL-SL10H SD-EX220H VC-MH835HM
<b>SONY</b>	DAV-DS1000

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<b>SONY</b>	DAV-SA30 HTK25 + DVP-F25E
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# SOUND & VISION A HOME ENTERTAINMENT AWARD WINNING COMPANY

# RADIO TUNERS

## FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

### DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is said to be available to 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

### RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See [www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio) for details.

### TOP BUYS



#### Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget AM/FM tuners, with great sound and features.



#### Cambridge DAB300 £150

A low-cost DAB radio that gets very close to much more expensive digital models.



#### Rega Radio 3 £374

An excellent sound-first FM/MW tuner – low on features but big on sound.



#### Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

If you're serious about radio this superb FM tuner is about as good as it gets.

## Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>FM TUNERS</b>									
	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM, M, L	64			●●		193
	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM, M, L	64			●●		193
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM, M, L	40	●			●	193
	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5			●●●		241
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●●		211
	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too; capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29			●●		193
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		●●		230
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	●		●		230
	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM, M	20		●			242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM, M	30	●	●	●		242
	<b>DAB TUNERS</b>									
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		●	●●		221
	Cambridge Audio DAB300	150	Simple unit with limited features (no RD) but decent sound – a very near match for more expensive models	DAB	10			●●		242
	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99		●	●●		234
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB, FM, M	99	●		●●		242
	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB, and a joy to own and use	DAB, FM, M, L	99	●	●	●●		230

**SPECS KEY** WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. PRESETS How many stations can be stored in memory. RDS Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). REMOTE CONTROL For the couch potato. SIGNAL STRENGTH METER Useful for setting up an aerial. ROTARY TUNING KNOB An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

# DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



## MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

## Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

## Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard disk drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



**Philips CDR802** £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



**Marantz DR6000** £400

Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



**Yamaha CDR-HD1300** £600

Combining hard disk with CD-R makes CD recording a whole lot more flexible.



**Imerge S2000** £1,599

Impressively flexible hard disk music server for multi-room applications.

## Our favourite DIGITAL RECORDERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>CD-R/RW RECORDERS</b>								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	● ●	218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	● ●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		● ●	● ●	243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ●	● ●	233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	● ●	205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		● ●	● ●	243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		● ●	● ●	218
<b>MD RECORDERS</b>								
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	● ●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		● ●	● ●	233
<b>HDD RECORDERS</b>								
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	● ●	● ●	243
	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	● ●	● ●	243

**SPECS KEY** **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

# Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stocks a wide range of Hi-Fi separates, DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma screens, LCD televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.

From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all outlets to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle. If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet and **experience more.**

0% interest free option\* is available on most products.

\*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers.  
Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

## CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Are you looking to neatly and seamlessly integrate a Home Cinema or Hi-Fi System into your home? Our Custom Installation experts are fully trained in all areas



and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for lighting control systems, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has the solution.

## NEW OUTLETS

### • WEYBRIDGE NOW OPEN

The WEYBRIDGE store at 43 CHURCH STREET, is now open. For opening hours and more information, please telephone 01932 828525 or visit our website.

### • STAINES MID-OCTOBER

The new store at 4 THAMES STREET, STAINES, MIDDLESEX, is due to open in mid-October. Please call 01784 460777 to confirm before travelling or visit our website.

### • OPENING SOON

Subject to legal completion, we will be opening a new store in Ealing (North London).

[www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk](http://www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk)



## B&W Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series

The new 700 Series from Bowers & Wilkins offers the perfect upgrade for audiophiles looking for maximum performance and design from their speakers.

They represent everything that's best about B&W: world-beating Nautilus™ 800 technologies delivering matchless sound from contemporary computer-modelled, handcrafted cabinets.

The 700 Series comprises seven speaker models for both

audio and home cinema applications. Two floor-standing models (703 and 704) and one stand-mount model (705) for main speaker duty. Specialist centre (HTM7) and surround (DS7) speakers and two formidable subwoofers (ASW700 and ASW750) complete the line-up.

All models, (except the DS7), are available in a choice of five real wood veneers - Maple, Cherry, Rosenuit, Walnut and Black Ash - with main and centre models featuring curved one-piece top and front panels. The DS7 comes in a choice of black or white painted finishes.

B&W 700 SERIES AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION OUTLETS



BEDFORD  
BIRMINGHAM  
BRIGHTON  
BRISTOL  
BROMLEY  
CAMBRIDGE  
CARDIFF  
CHELSEA  
CHELTENHAM  
CRAWLEY  
CROYDON  
EDINBURGH  
EPSOM  
EXETER  
GLASGOW  
GUILDFORD  
HOLBORN  
HULL  
IPSWICH  
KINGSTON  
LEICESTER  
LEEDS  
LINCOLN  
LIVERPOOL  
MAIDSTONE  
MANCHESTER  
NEWCASTLE  
NORWICH  
NOTTINGHAM  
OXFORD  
PETERBOROUGH  
PLYMOUTH  
POOLE  
PRESTON  
READING  
SEVENOAKS  
SHEFFIELD  
SOLIHULL  
SOUTHAMPTON  
SOUTHGATE  
STAINES **NEW**  
SWANSEA  
SWINDON  
SWISS COTTAGE  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
WATFORD  
WEYBRIDGE **NEW**  
WITHAM (ESSEX)  
WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7  
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE  
NUMBER DETAILS



## HI-FI SEPARATES

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Best Buy  
2003  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS



**MICHELL GYRO SE**  
TURNTABLE / RB300 TONEARM  
**£1049.95**



WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Best Buy  
2003  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

**ROTEL**  
RCD-02 CD PLAYER  
**£379.95**

RA-01 AMPLIFIER (PICTURED)  
**£249.95**

RA-02 AMPLIFIER  
**£349.95**

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Best Buy  
2002  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS  
AMPLIFIERS  
£251-£500

## PRO-JECT 1 XPRESSION TURNTABLE (BLACK) **£209.95**



"Compared with a £200 CD player this deck sounds remarkable: dig out your vinyl and give the Xpression a spin."

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Best Buy  
2003  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

**FREE** ORTOFON CARTRIDGE WITH SELECTED TURNTABLES  
\*PLEASE ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS

## ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER **£399.95**



WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Product  
of the year  
2003  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

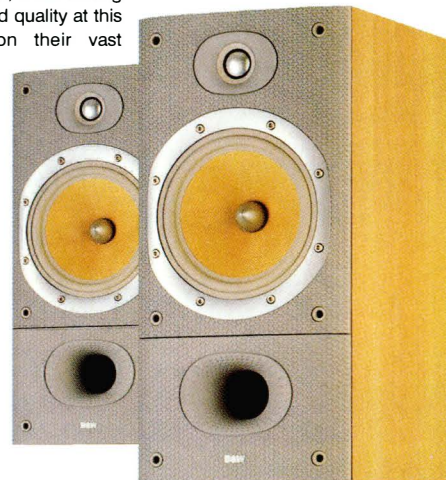
## B&W BOWERS & WILKINS

### DM602 S3 SPEAKERS

**£299.95**

The B&W 600 Series has become synonymous with superb value performance in both 2-channel stereo and home cinema. Now, Series 3 continues that tradition, while raising the standards of sound quality at this level by drawing on their vast experience in the high-end sector.

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners. They're big and not particularly beautiful, yet if it were our money they're what we would buy. No rival can match the wide ranging dynamics or low frequency performance of these not so compact standmounters. Add all-round sonic excellence and the choice is easy. Give them sufficient space to breathe, then sit back and enjoy the music."

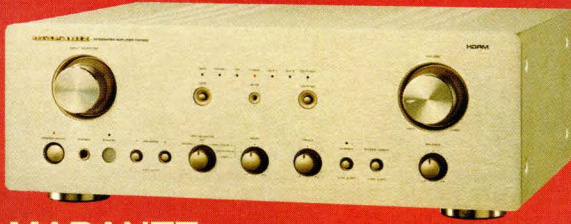


WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
Best Buy  
2002  
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS  
SPEAKERS  
£201-£350

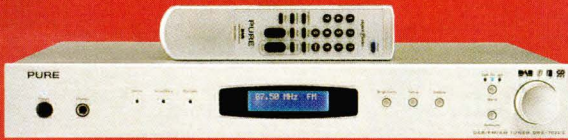
experience more

# experience more

# experience more



**MARANTZ**  
PM7200 AMPLIFIER  
**£329.95 (BLACK)**



**PURE DIGITAL**  
DRX-702ES ANALOGUE/DAB  
TUNER **£329.95**



**MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2**  
A3.2 CD PLAYER **£999.95**  
A3.2 AMPLIFIER **£979.95**



**FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE\* WORTH £100**  
WHEN ANY MF CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

# £

### PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

# 0%

### FINANCE OPTION\*

Spread the cost of buying.  
0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock.

\*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

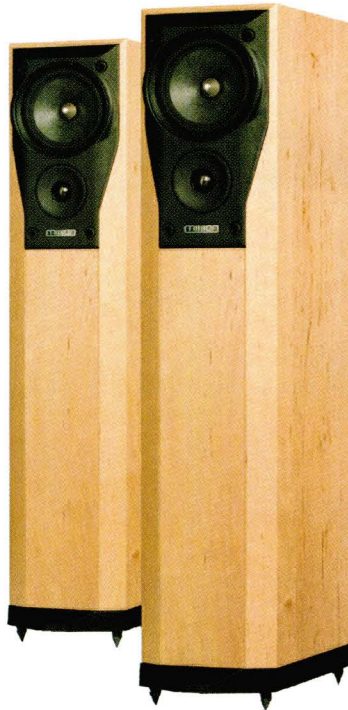
**Please Note:**  
Some products may not be available at all outlets.  
Please call before travelling. \*Not in conjunction with any other offer.  
Advertisement valid until at least 23/10/03, E&OE.

## QUAD

99 CD-P CD PLAYER/PRE  
**£999.95**

99 POWER AMPLIFIER  
**£549.95**

11L SPEAKERS  
**£379.95**



## MISSION

782 SE SPEAKERS  
**£899.95**

780 SE SPEAKERS  
**£349.95**

### ◀ 782 SE

"Well, with the exception of the alderwood-veneer finish, these floorstanders look identical to the standard model, although there's a new tweeter and crossover design. One of the advantages of the three-way configuration is that each driver deals with only a narrow section of the frequency range, and the designers optimise each unit to perform its respective task. Mission's engineers have excelled in this area: these elegant floorstanders sound beautifully balanced and few rivals under £1000 can match their wonderful levels of clarity. The 'special edition' tag is overused but these talented floorstanders are bona fide sonic stars."



### 780 SE

"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."



**FREE SPEAKER CABLE\* WORTH 10%**  
OF THE SPEAKER VALUE WITH ANY MISSION SE SPEAKERS

# Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION

## ROKSAN KANDY ▶

KD-1 MKIII CD PLAYER

£544.95

KA-1 MKIII AMPLIFIER

£544.95



**KA-1 MKIII AMPLIFIER** "Roksan has done an impressive job with the Kandy MkIII, creating a powerful and musical amplifier that's a step up from previous models."



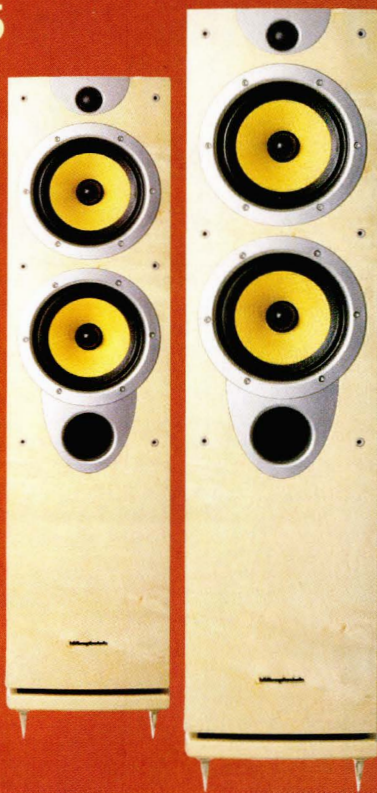
**KD-1 MKIII CD PLAYER** "Last year we said the Kandy CD player was very impressive but could be better - and now it is. The MkIII model is an exceptional-sounding all-rounder."

## WHARFEDALE PACIFIC EVOLUTION 30 SPEAKERS £649.95

"Evolution? This is more like a revolution: Wharfedale's new range is more than an upgrade of its Pacific series.

Listen to the Evolution 30s and the sonic changes leap out at you. Sitting on their chunky spikes and situated in free space, the speakers sound wonderful: low frequencies delve deep and delivery is punchy and fast...

You'll have gathered by now we love the Evolution 30s. They're beautifully made and great all-rounders."



**Please Note:**  
Some products may not be available at all outlets.  
Please call before travelling. \*Not in conjunction with any other offer.  
Advertisement valid until at least 23/10/03, E&OE.

## CYRUS ELECTRONICS

6 CD PLAYER

£599.95



8 CD PLAYER

£999.95



8 AMPLIFIER

£799.95 (BELOW)

PRE X PRE

£999.95

MONO X POWER

£1199.95 (EACH)

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for nearly 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. Cyrus products are hand finished, half size die-cast enclosures and include a hidden digital command system that allows simple operation of any size system.

The new product range includes the 6 and 8 amplifiers and the stunning new high performance, CD players, the CD6 & CD8. Other models include the Pre X and Mono X Pre/Power combination and a new disc player, DVDB, featuring specially tuned video and audio circuitry.

### CYRUS 8 AMPLIFIER

"The 8 is a large step forward from older generations of Cyrus amplifiers, and takes the company back into the leading pack in the sub-£1000 integrated amp sector... The Cyrus 8 is a must-audition product."





experience more

# experience more

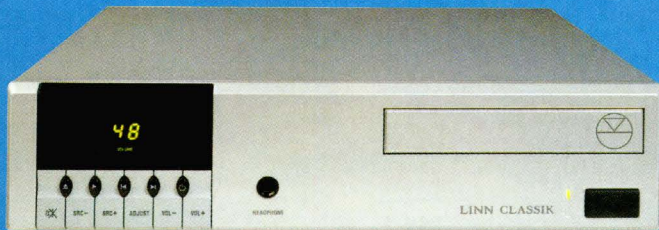
# experience more



## LINN CLASSIK ▽ MUSIC SYSTEM (EX SPEAKERS) £999.95



"The Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the



performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."

**CLAIM £200 OFF THE SPEAKERS\* OF YOUR CHOICE**  
WHEN PURCHASED AT THE SAME TIME AS THE LINN CLASSIK MUSIC SYSTEM  
MINIMUM SPEAKER VALUE £350.



## YAMAHA CDR-HD1300 CD-RW/HD RECORDER £529.95



## SONY RCD-W3 CD-RW RECORDER £219.95



## DENON DM31 SYSTEM ▶ UD-M31 CD RECEIVER £229.95 SC-M51 SPEAKERS £69.95

**FREE**  
BEYER  
DT231 GALACTIC  
HEADPHONES\*  
WORTH £44.95  
WHEN YOU PURCHASE A  
D-M31 SYSTEM



## MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BRONZE B2 SPEAKERS £199.95

"...Their overall performance is faultless... The Bronze B2s sound like pure gold: at £200 they offer superb value for money... Forget "must-listen" - the B2s are 'please-listen' products."



"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

OPTIONAL RECORDERS: DMD-M31 MINIDISC RECORDER • DRR-M31 CASSETTE DECK

# Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



## PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores. However, some products may not be available at all outlets.

Please call to check availability before travelling.

## TURNTABLES

Michell Gyro SE/RB300	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec	£599.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut II (Black)	£119.95
Project Debut II (Colours)	£134.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95
Project RPM4	£349.95

## TUNERS

Arcam DIVA T61	£249.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII	£119.95
Marantz ST4000	£109.95
Pure Evoke 1 DAB	£99.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£329.95

## CD PLAYERS

Arcam DIVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD82T	£599.95
Arcam DIVA CD93T	£949.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1299.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8	£999.95
Denon DCD485	£129.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikemi	£2199.95
Marantz CD5400	£149.95
Marantz CD17/II M	£799.95
Meridian 507	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308P	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD	£3994.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£544.95
Roksan Caspian	£994.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

## AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£369.95
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A85	£799.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1149.95
Cyrus 6	£599.95
Cyrus 8	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X Pre	£999.95
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£1199.95
Denon PMA355	£199.95
Harman Kardon HK670	£299.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£574.95
Linn LK85 Power	£544.95
Marantz PM4400	£179.95
Marantz PM7200 (Black)	£329.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£979.95

Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£544.95
Roksan Caspian	£894.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

## SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£179.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£349.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII (From)	£1699.95
B&W DM303	£179.95
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
KEF Q1	£249.95
KEF Q3	£399.95
KEF XQ1	£999.95
Linn Katan	£649.95
Linn Ninka	£1099.95
Mission m31	£129.95
Mission 780SE	£349.95
Mission 782SE	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£299.95
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£599.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£1499.95
Quad 11L	£379.95
Quad 22L	£894.95
Ruark Epilogue II	£344.95
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£649.95

## RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£169.95
Sony RCDW3 CD-RW	£219.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck	£199.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW	£529.95

## HI-FI SYSTEMS

Cyrus Quattro FM Ex Power Amp & Speakers	£899.95
Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£549.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£349.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£229.95
Linn Klassik Music Ex Speakers	£999.95
Onkyo CS210 Ex Speakers	£224.95
Teac Legacy 600 Inc Speakers	£299.95
Teac Reference 300 Ex Speakers	£469.95
Teac Reference 500 Ex Speakers	£599.95

## DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV1000 Ex Speakers	£699.95
Linn Klassik Movie Ex Speakers	£1499.95
Linn Klassik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£2999.95
Onkyo DR-S2.2 Ex Speakers	£899.95
Pioneer DV565A/C-501 Ex Speakers	£599.95
Teac Legacy 700/LS-1800 Speakers	£999.95
Yamaha DVX-S100	£599.95
Yamaha DVX-S80 Inc Speakers	£549.95

## DVD PLAYERS & RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	£999.95	£999.95
Arcam DIVA DV89	£1299.95	£1299.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£799.95	£849.95
Denon DVD-A1	£2149.95	£2199.95
Harman Kardon DVD21	£249.95	£249.95
Harman Kardon DVD25	£349.95	£349.95
Marantz DV4300	£269.95	£269.95
Onkyo DV-SP500	£249.95	£249.95
Panasonic DMR-E50 DVD-R	£349.95	£ TBA
Philips DVDR70 DVD+RW	£399.95	£399.95
Philips DVDR75 DVD+RW	£449.95	£449.95
Philips DVD963SA	£329.95	£329.95
Pioneer DV360	£119.95	£139.95
Pioneer DV464	£139.95	£159.95
Pioneer DV565A Universal	£229.95	£249.95
Pioneer DV656A Universal	£299.95	£329.95
Pioneer DV757Ai Universal	£649.95	£699.95
Sony RDR-GX7 Recorder	£799.95	£ TBA
Tag McLaren DVD32FLR	£2994.95	£2994.95
Toshiba SD330E	£99.95	£119.95
Toshiba SD9500 DVD-Audio	£1599.95	£1599.95
Toshiba RD-XS30 DVD Recorder	£699.95	£749.95
Wharfedale DVD M3	£79.95	£79.95

## A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 AV Receiver	£799.95
Arcam AV8/P7	£5499.95
Cyrus AV8 AV Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A1SR AV Amplifier	£2499.95
Denon AVC-A11SR AV Amplifier	£1599.95
Denon AVR1604 AV Receiver	£299.95
Denon AVR1804 AV Receiver	£399.95
Denon AVR2803 AV Receiver	£599.95
Denon AVR3803 AV Receiver	£799.95
Harman Kardon AVR2550 AV Receiver	£399.95
Harman Kardon AVR5550 AV Receiver	£899.95
Harman Kardon AVR8500 AV Receiver	£1799.95
Marantz SR4400 AV Receiver	£349.95
Onkyo TX-SR501E AV Receiver	£299.95
Onkyo TX-SR601E AV Receiver	£449.95
Onkyo TX-NR900E AV Receiver	£1499.95
Pioneer VSX-D812 AV Receiver	£449.95
Pioneer VSX-AX3i AV Receiver	£799.95
Pioneer VSX-AX5i AV Receiver	£1199.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10i AV Amplifier	£2499.95
Rotel RSX1065 AV Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075	£1799.95
TAG McLaren AV30R AV Processor	£1799.95
TAG McLaren AV192R AV Processor (From)	£5999.95
Yamaha DSP-AX640SE AV Amplifier	£379.95
Yamaha RX-V440RDS AV Receiver	£279.95
Yamaha RX-V640RDS AV Receiver	£449.95

## A/V SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aego 5 Package	£449.95
Acoustic Energy Aego P5 Package	£599.95
Acoustic Energy Evo 3B Package	£899.95
B&W VM1/AS1 Package	£849.95
B&W ASW675 Subwoofer	£649.95
B&W ASW750 Subwoofer	£1199.95
Energy Take 5.1 Package	£399.95
Energy Encore Package	£999.95
Jamo D7 THX Ultra 2 Package (from)	£3249.95
KEF KHT1005	£499.95
KEF KHT2005.2	£799.95
KEF Q7 Package	£2199.95
M&K K5 A/V Speaker Package	£1715.95
M&K K3 A/V Speaker Package	£1894.95
M&K 850/CS35/V850 A/V Speaker Package	£3899.95
Mission FS1A/V Package	£449.95
Mission m70 A/V Package	£479.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B4 Package	£949.95
MJ Acoustics Pro 50 Subwoofer (Black)	£299.95
MJ Acoustics Pro 100 Subwoofer (Black)	£599.95
MJ Acoustics Reference 100 Subwoofer (Black)	£349.95

MJ Acoustics Reference 1 Subwoofer (Black)	£699.95
REL Q150E MKII Subwoofer (Brittix Black)	£499.95
REL Q201E Subwoofer	£724.95
REL Q400E Subwoofer (Brittix Black)	£999.95
REL Quake Subwoofer (Brittix Black)	£349.95
REL Strata III Subwoofer (Wood)	£699.95
REL Storm III Subwoofer (Brittix Black)	£799.95
Ruark Vita 120 Package	£1699.95

## PLASMA

Fujitsu P42HHA10 42"	£3799.95
Hitachi 32PD3000P 32"	£2599.95
Hitachi 42PD3000E 42"	£3299.95
JVC PD-42D30ES 42"	£4999.95
Panasonic Latest Models	£ POA
Panasonic TH42PW6B 42"	£3299.95
Philips Latest Models	£ POA
Philips 32PF9965 32"	£2799.95
Pioneer PDP433MXEV 43"	£3299.95
Pioneer PDP433HDE 43"	£3999.95
Pioneer PDP503HDE 50"	£5699.95
Sony KE32TS2 32"	£2999.95
Sony KE42TS2 42"	£3599.95

## LCD

Panasonic TX15LT2 15"	£999.95
Panasonic TX15LV1 15"	£1099.95
Sharp Aquos LC-13B4E 13"	£449.95
Sharp Aquos LC-13E1E 13"	£429.95
Sharp Aquos LC-15B4E 15"	£549.95
Sharp Aquos LC-15E1E 15"	£499.95
Sharp Aquos LC-20B4E 20"	£999.95
Sharp Aquos LC-20E1E 20"	£949.95
Sharp Aquos LC-22SV2E 22"	£1299.95
Sharp Aquos LC-30HV4E 30"	£2799.95
Sharp Aquos LC-37HV4E 37"	£4699.95
Sony KLV17HR1S 17"	£999.95

## PROJECTORS

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\*SPECIAL OFFERS - Not in conjunction with any other offer or promotion and when sold at the prices quoted in these adverts. Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 23/10/03, E&OE.

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Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

### NEW OUTLETS

We are pleased to announce the Weybridge store is now open and the store in Staines is due to open mid-October. We will also be opening in Ealing (North London) - Subject to legal completion.

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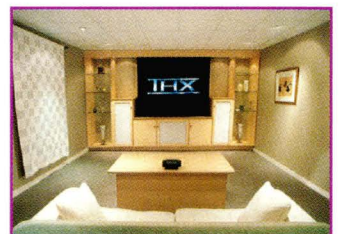
### SEVENOAKS WEBSITE

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its outlets.

There are regularly updated special offer and stock clearance lists with hundreds of products available and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest outlet. To find out more, click on [www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk](http://www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk)

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# STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



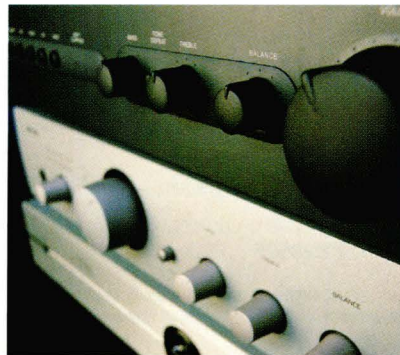
Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

## How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

## Q&A

### SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

### WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

### WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

## HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

## TOP BUYS



### Arcam DiVA A65 Plus £370

Arcam's entry-level integrated is a terrific budget option. Its sound is both bold and articulate, making it a fine all-rounder at a highly tempting price.



### Rotel RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is a true giant killer, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and is capable of embarrassing a good many more costly designs.



### AVI Type S21 MI £1,399

This AVI's full name is Lab Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI – a lengthy moniker for such a neat little amp with a hugely accomplished sound.



### Exposure XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

A beautifully natural and dynamic sounding pre/power amp combo – a transistor design with a touch of the valve amp sound.

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers				SPECIFICATIONS					
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Affordable integrated, with sophisticated control system, and crisp, detailed sound	5	●	●	●	85	245
	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Powerful, sophisticated and flexible – no longer quite the king of the sub-£1,000 crop but still a strong contender	7		●	●	105	244
	Cyrus 8	800	Impressive at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal. Sounds musical, if a touch 'safe'	6		●		50	214
	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		●		30	214
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
	Roksan Caspian MkII	895	An excellent all-rounder, with an articulate, assured delivery and excellent drive capability with a wide range of loudspeakers	6				70	239
	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
	Rotel RA-1062	595	The pick of this season's crop. Fabulous sound with the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	opt	●	●	95	244
	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integratreds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
	AVI Lab Series S21 MI	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution but effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4				24	202
	Karan KA-i180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	3,999	If you audition one, you will want to be one of the handful of Tri-Vista owners	5	●	●	●	350	239
	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers				SPECIFICATIONS						
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>										
	Arcam DIVA A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		●	85	225
	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	●	100	227
	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5		●		221
	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		●	140	212
	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●		30	216
	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	●	●	6	opt	opt	100	216
	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after Nuvista	●	●	4	●	●	250	231
	NAD Silver Series S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		●	200	200
	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		●	50	213
	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	●	●	6			10	216
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>										
	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●		18	216
	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	●	●	6	●	●	100	216
	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		●	150	221
	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●				20	231

**SPECS KEY** **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS** *continued*

### Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		POWER OUTPUT (W)
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	●	300	241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4		●	100	237
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">□</span>	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		●	120	216
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">□</span>	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	●	70	241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Halco dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	●	225	243
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●				700	234
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4		●		238
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●				125	230
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	●	●	6		●	125	195
	Naim NAC202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience		●	6		●		233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7		●	120	241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7	●	●	100	236
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Sugden Masterclass AA	5,600	Yorkshire's finest class A kit. Dynamic and tonally rich, this gives even valve amps a run for their money	●	●	7		●	35	246
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3	●	●	150	242

# AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

### Q&A

#### HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

#### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

#### WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

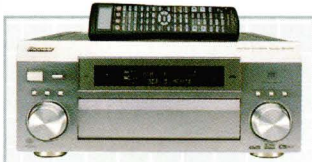
## HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo.

There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

## TOP BUYS



**Pioneer**  
VSX-D2011 £900  
A feature-packed receiver, and a great sounding one to boot. Only Denon's AVR-3803 currently competes at the price.



**Marantz**  
SR9200 £2,000  
Few AV receivers manage to sound as musical as this one. A top all-rounder and an excellent multichannel solution.



**Denon**  
AVC-A1SR £3,000  
Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date – superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



**Arcam**  
AV8/P7 £5,498  
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – an top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

## Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>INTEGRATED AV AMPS</b>								
	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6		70	229
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVR-3803	899	Feature packed 7.1 channel AV receiver which needs a lot of studying but does everything well	●	11	●	110	239
	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11	●		235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVC-A1SR	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link		8	●	170	232
	Harman Kardon AVR 5550	850	The upgrade to the AVR 5500 comes with features that are actually of some use to the audiophile and a meaty sound to boot		9	●	85	240
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9	●		235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer VSX-D2011	900	Outstanding sonic performance for the price and a remarkable features list to boot	●	10	●	140	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer VSA-AX10i	2,700	Seven channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and eq, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD		8	●	150	229
	Sony VA-777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder		9		100	210
<b>AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS</b>								
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam AV8/P7	5,498	State-of-the-art processor (£2,999) and seven-channel power amp (£2,499). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	EAD TheaterMaster 8000 Pro	5,200	Arguably the most 'musical' sounding AV processor to date – tested with the PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp		9	●		242
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PS-17/2 x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	●	60	238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Myryad MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel AV amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music		9	opt	120	215
	Naim AV2/NAP175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Parasound Halo C1/A51	8,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238
	Roksan DSP/5ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels		4		80	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form		6	●		215

**SPECS KEY** **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

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# STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

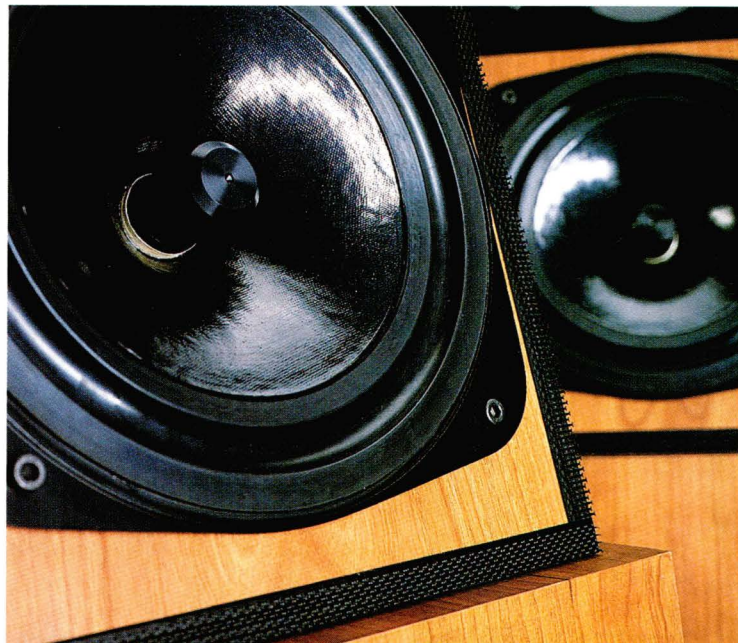
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

## Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

## Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



## Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

## Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

## POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

## Q&A

### IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

### DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.



## TOP BUYS



**Tannoy**  
Sensys DC1 £449

A new dual-concentric main driver plus super-tweeter in a solid standmount box results in a neutral yet expressive speaker at a very tempting price.

**BEST BUY**  
HI-FI CHOICE magazine



**Focal-JMLab**  
Cobalt 816 Sig S £999

One of the best all-round performers below £1,000, combining a lively and dynamic character with an unusually smooth and neutral balance.

**BEST BUY**  
HI-FI CHOICE magazine



**Sonus Faber**  
Cremona Auditor £2,149

A beautifully crafted standmount speaker with a boat-tail cabinet and a highly seductive sound. Produces a bigger soundstage than its size would suggest.



**Living Voice**  
Avatar OBX-R2 £4,000

Newly revised for 2003, the top model in Living Voice's Auditorium range is capable of delivering both the music's spirit and also its finest detail.

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
HI-FI CHOICE magazine

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# STEREO SPEAKERS

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		A	30	●		226
	ATC SCM12	999	Transparent, engaging and quick – a revealing, high-fidelity performer that's not afraid to bare all	22,39,25		A	62	●		237
	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30		●	215
	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		A	30		●	211
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
	B&W DM309	330	All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●		235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		A	30	●		208
	Bluroom Minipod	249	Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		A	50		●	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●		237
	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●		227
	Dali Royal Tower	750	Cutely compact floorstander has a delightful liveliness and lightness of touch to match its luxury real wood finish	17,85,22	●	A	25		●	237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24		A	40	●		215
	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●		231
	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29		A	40		●	231
	Energy Connoisseur C-5	600	Has a marvellously even and neutral overall balance, if a little too laid-back with restrained dynamic expression	20,95,37	●	A+	23	●		240
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26		A	40	●		215
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	A-	22		●	227
	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●		224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816 S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●		242
	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30		A	30		●	234
	Mission m71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28		A	40		●	226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●		215
	Mission 782SE	900	Definitely one of the prettiest speakers around. Very even balance but could sound more exciting	17,80,30	●	A	35	●		242
	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	18,5,35,25		A	42		●	238
	Monitor Audio Silver S1	300	Super-quick sonics thanks to the C-CAM metalised drivers. Resolution and speed – a great value box	18,30,24		A	45		●	236
	Monitor Audio Silver S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●		237
	Monitor Audio Silver S10	1,000	Timing might be less than the best, but the full balance and fine dynamic range deliver plenty of detail.	20,100,27	●	A+	20	●		242
	MonoPulse 32	695	Very creative style and construction with an unusually vivid and communicative if less than smooth sound	21,98,23	●	A	30	●		245
	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		A	30		●	211

**SPECS KEY** **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

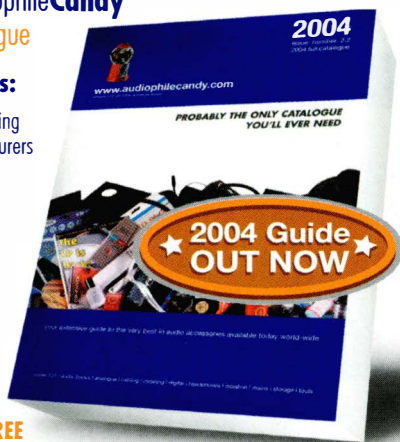
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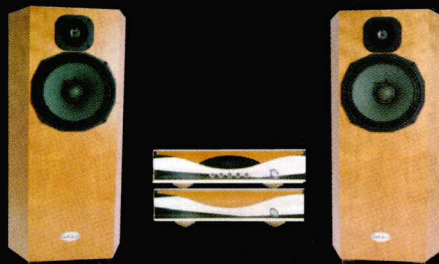
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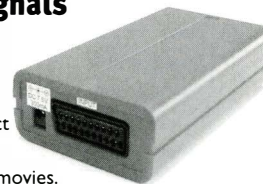


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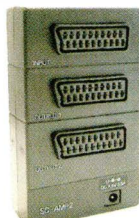
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## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	FASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50		●	225
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	PMC DB1	555	Lacks a little weight and authority, but beautifully balanced, free from boxiness, and loads of fun for a tiny	16,29,24		A	50		●	240
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		A	30	●		211
	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40		●	233
	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30		●	223
	Spendor SR5	1,000	This wall-mount very cleverly avoids the usual colorations, delivering a very dynamic if rather dry sound	31,31,18		A+	50		●	240
	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26		A+			●	227
	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	A	20	●		231
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	●	A+	45	●		234
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29		A	40		●	245
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	A great-value speaker combining a super-tweeter and Dual Concentric drive unit at a real-world price	21,97,29	●	A	35	●		242
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	A-	40	●		219
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>										
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36		act	45	●		240
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	45	●		221
	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent, but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		A-	65		●	219
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		A	38	●		218
	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		A+	20	●		204
	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		A	38	●		219
	B&O Beolab 5	10,000	Radical, environmentally independent active speaker has exceptional bass, neutrality, and imaging	49, 97, 49	●	n/a	<20		●	244
	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		A	28	●		199
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art. Needs real power, but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	A-	34	●		183
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	A-	34	●		186
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●		231
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Staggering transparency and resolution for the money, one of the best standmounts money can buy	24,42,34		A-	42	●		232
	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	A-	40	●		204
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75	●	A+	80		●	244
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	A	50	●		219
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricy compared to some though	21, 99, 32	●	A+	38	●		229
	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear, but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	A	41		●	225
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●		229
	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	●		219
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80	●	A+	180		●	242
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	A-	35	●		219
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia	3,500	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		A	50	●		245
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●		233
<span style="background-color: #ccc; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 1px;">EC</span>	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29		A+	27	●		233
	KEF Reference Model 205	4,000	Great looking speaker with a smooth, neutral and slightly 'cool' sound that could be tauter and more exciting	29, 116, 43	●	A-	20	●		245
	Leema Xen	1,000	A true micro-mini-monitor with remarkable powers of analysis and great musical insight, if a touch forward	14, 22, 23		A-	50		●	245

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE  
**STEREO SPEAKERS** continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (W/H/D) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
EC	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	New improved version even better than before. Beautifully natural and expressive – a real universal soldier	22,97,28	● A+	35	●		239
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	● A+	40	●		218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	● A+	35	●		244
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●		245
EC	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22	act	45	●		214
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	● A	40	●		229
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	● A-	20	●		200
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	● A-	20	●		232
EC	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative, if a little bright	22,38,37	A+	25	●		241
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	● A-	20	●		226
	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	A-	40	●		199
EC	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	● A	20	●		204
EC	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47	A-	25	●		237
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	● A-	20	●		221
	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	● A+	40	●		229
	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	● A	38	●		219
EC	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	● A	20	●		211
	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32	A	48	●		246
	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	● A+	40	●		229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	● A+	37	●		223
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	30,5,85,5,30	● A-	25	●		240
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	● A-	38	●		215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	● A-	23	●		225
	Triangle Zays 222	1,295	Wonderful freedom from time-smear gives invigorating and realistic dynamics, but colorations are also obvious	26,116,32	● A	22	●		242
	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	● A-	30	●		229
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	● A-	20	●		234
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	● A-	45	●		212

# AV SPEAKERS

## Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

### Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

### SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position – this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

### SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

## TOP BUYS



**B&W**  
600 S3 package £900  
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



**KEF**  
Q AV7 £1,300  
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



**Mission**  
m5 package £1,450  
A five-speakers-plus-sub package giving a strong performance with both music and film soundtracks. Excellent value.



**Mirage**  
Omni 2 £2,650  
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

## Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	B&W 300	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A-	6	27	●	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A-	5	22	●	224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●	224
	Dynaudio Audience 42	1,142	AV package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	B-	5	53	●	241
	Focal-JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●	224
	Focal-JMLab Electra	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●	232
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as does big bass for movie fans	B	6	28	●	241
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25	●	210
	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	20	●	210
	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	A	5	25	●	210
	Spendor S-Series	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A	5	30	●	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20	●	210

**SPECS KEY** **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.  
**NUMBER OF SPEAKERS** The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.  
**FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

## Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
	REL Strata III	700	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence, this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42, 52, 33	100	20	210
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59, 56, 39	200	16	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	300	30	225
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

**SPECS KEY** **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers  
**BASS FROM** How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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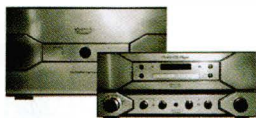
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## ◆ Mission



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Celestion Compact A Spks-R/wd (was 599)	£239.00
KEF Q3 Speakers Cherry - Dam (was 399)	£249.00
KEF KHT 2005 Speaker Pack Blk (was 799)	£499.00
Linn Classik Movie - Silver (was 1995)	£1295.00
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# HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals

enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

### Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

## Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190	219
	AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price						190	205
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal						250	194
	Beyerdynamic DT990	150	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	194
	Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise						200	230
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	219
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort						270	205
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too						250	219
	Stax System li	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						295	205

**SPECS KEY** **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc

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# CABLES



## Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances

electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

## Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●		●			211
	DNM TBB75	75	Bass not always completely consistent, but sound has great clarity and insight		●	●			241
	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●			211
	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●			224
	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●			211
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●			211
	Townshend Audio DCT100	99	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
	van den Hul The Well	49	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		E	207
	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
	Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value					O	207
	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>									
	Black Rhodium S130	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed	●		●			227
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●			241
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●			227
	Electrofluidics 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
	Ixos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●		●			203
	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
	QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●			215
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●			203
	Townshend Isolda DCT	150	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241

**SPECS KEY** **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.



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"It has agility, verve, a fair degree of midrange snap and enough bass control to cope with fast-paced rock." - *WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION* MAGAZINE. **TSP £349.95 WERE £299.95**

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# STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

### Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50.50	●	4	Glass	217
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5.45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45.34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		4	MDF	206
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49.39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54.49		4	Torlyte	240
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50.40		5	Glass	217
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Townshend Seismic Stand II	1,140	multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58.45		5	MDF	240

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE SPEAKER STANDS

### Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60.50	14.5,18	●		3	202
	Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17,19			1	220
	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
	Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17,15	●	●	5	220
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Partington Dreadnought Ult	99	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	●		1	202
	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48			0	202

**EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY** HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

**SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY** HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates. FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.



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# GLOSSARY

## TECHNICAL TERMS

**5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO** Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

**BALANCE** Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

**BASS** The lowest three octaves of the audio band – hence 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz); 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz); and 'upper bass' the 80-160Hz octave.

**BI-AMP** (sometimes tri-amp) Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

**BI-WIRE** (sometimes tri-wire) Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each driver can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

**CD-R** Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

**CD-RW** Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

**CLASS A** The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

**CLASS AB** Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

**CLIPPING** An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

**CLOCK** Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

**CROSSOVER** A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

**DAB** (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

**DAC** or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

**DOLBY DIGITAL DD (AC3)** A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

**DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL** Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

**DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER** A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

**DSD** (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

**DSP** or Digital Signal Processor. Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

**DTS** or Digital Theatre Sound Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 41 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

**DVD-A** High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

**ELECTRICAL DIGITAL** Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interface.

**FILTERS** Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE** The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

**IMPEDANCE** With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier which is driving it.

**JITTER** An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, being imprecise.

**KBPS** (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

**LINE LEVEL** Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

**LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A** method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

**LOSSY COMPRESSION** Reduction in data density by recourse to a psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

**MIDRANGE** The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

**MP3** (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

**OUTPUT IMPEDANCE** A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

**PCM** (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

**PRESENCE BAND** Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

**QUANTISATION NOISE** A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

**SACD** (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

**SAMPLE RATE** The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

**SENSITIVITY** The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W).

**THX** Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. THX Ultra is more stringent than THX Select.

**TOSLINK** The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

**TRANSISTOR/MOSFET** The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

**TREBLE** High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

**TWEETER** Treble driver.

**TWO/THREE-WAY** Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

**WATTS** (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

## DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

**AGGRESSIVE** Forward and bright sonic character.

**AMBIENCE** The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

**ANALYTICAL** Highly detailed.

**ARTICULATE** Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

**ATTACK** The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

**BALANCE** Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the digital coding system is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

**BODY** Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

**BOXY** The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

**BRIGHT** A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

**DARK** A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

**DECAY** The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

**DEFINITION** (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

**DEPTH** (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

**DETAIL** The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

**DRY** A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

**DYNAMIC** The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

**EUPHONIC** An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

**FAST** Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

**FOCUS** A strong, precise sense of image projection.

**FORWARD(NESS)** Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

**GRAINY** A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.

**GRIP** A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

**GRUNT** See grip.

**HARD** Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

**HARSH** Grating, abrasive.

**IMAGING** (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

**JUICY** Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

**LOW-LEVEL DETAIL** The quietest sounds in a recording.

**MUSICAL** or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

**NATURALNESS** Realism.

**OPAQUE** Unclear, lacking transparency.

**OPEN** Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

**PACE** Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

**PRESENCE** A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

**PRESENCE RANGE** The upper midrange.

**SEISMIC** Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

**SIBILANCE** An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

**SNAP** A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

**SPEED** A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

**STURDY** Solid, powerful, robust sound.

**THICK** A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

**THIN** Bass light.

**TIMBRE** The tonal character of an instrument.

**TIMING** A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

**TRANSIENT** The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

**TRANSPARENCY**, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

**TWEAK** To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

**TWEAKER** Someone who enjoys this process.

**VEILED** Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

**WARM** A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

**WEIGHT** A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

## Welcome to the Hi-Fi Choice accessories shop

Choice Bits is the easy way to buy the best audio accessories available today. Simply pick up the phone, order online, drop us an email or fill out the order form opposite and pop it in the post. Ordering couldn't be simpler!

This issue we've gathered together some of the best system improvement discs around. This selection will help you optimise your system, right down to exact speaker positioning for those who wish to remodel their room with the HFC Award-winning CARA Computer Aided Room Acoustics Software.

Then there's Densen's highly acclaimed DeMagic CD, capable of transforming your complete audio chain in just three minutes. If you have new audio equipment, the CD3000 Ultra Burn-In disc is a must, while owners of AV systems can boost performance with Chesky's Ultimate Surround DVD and Allsop's DVD Optimiser.

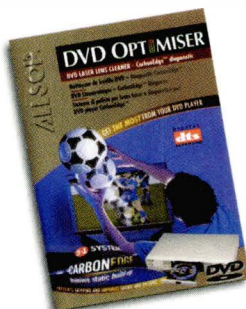
### SHOWCASE

#### DVD Optimiser

High quality laser lens cleaner and set-up disc

#### Key Features

- Award winning CarbonEdge cleaning technology
- Complete collection of set-up tools
- Simple on-screen graphics and audio



#### Allsop DVD Optimiser - DVD laser lens cleaner

Quite simply, DVD Optimiser features the already renowned CarbonEdge technology that in this case, prevents

skipping and improves sound and picture quality. Eight unique carbon fibre brushes, positioned in a spiral pattern, remove and prevent static build-up on the laser lens of your DVD player.

This NTSE encoded disc also features a Dolby Digital 5.1 set-up and diagnostic system, with a complete collection of set-up tools. With comprehensive audio walkthroughs of all test and on-screen graphics, this is a must-have item that should be purchased as standard alongside all DVD players.

**Only £19.95**

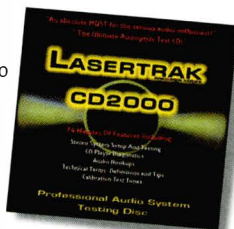
#### Densen DeMagic CD



A must for all music and hi-fi enthusiasts. Place this disc into your CD player, set the volume and press play. In approximately three minutes your system will be demagnetised, helping to optimise your sound!

**Only £11.95**

#### Lasertrak CD2000 system set-up, calibration and test disc

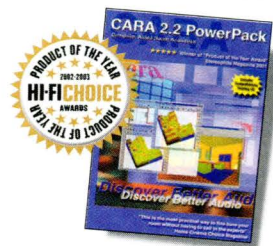


Used worldwide by audio professionals, the Lasertrak CD2000 takes the guesswork out of system set-up. The disc contains 74 minutes of programs that couple precise test signals, unique audio tests and useful component diagnostics in a concise way. Audiophiles wanting to achieve 'sonic certainty' with their audio systems should look no further.

Tests featured on the CD include: inner edge tracking indication, operating levels, channel checks, record testing, phase testing, tweeter testing, woofer testing, crossover testing, CD player index testing, spin-up (track acquisition testing), noise diagnostic, digital silence diagnostic, laserPath exercising maintenance, auto muting test (CD auto space function), alignment test tones and more.

**Only £19.95**

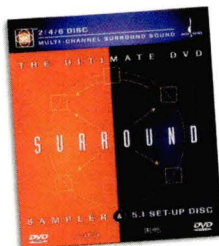
#### CARA PowerPack Computer Aided Room Acoustics



The CARA PowerPack consists of the multi-award-winning 2.1 computer-aided room acoustics software, new training CD rom, and Audio Test Tone CD. This disc allows you to model all kinds of room shapes to obtain exact hi-fi positioning.

**Only £49.95**

#### Chesky Ultimate DVD Surround 5.1 set-up disc and sampler



Designed to help you improve the sound of your music surround sound system, as well as including a Dolby Digital 5.1 test section for home theatre systems. Tests include channel ID, channel levels, speaker phase, left & centre, right & centre, left front & left rear, right front & right rear, circular pans (with pink noise and audio), subwoofer phase, in & out-of-phase bass and delay tests.

**Only £24.95**

#### Ultra Burn-In CD3000



CD3000 is regarded as one of the finest burn-in discs available. By means of a uniquely diverse combination of complex composite audio signals, Ultra Burn-in CD3000 precisely 'burns-in' audio system components. Virtually all components benefit from electro-mechanical burn-in.

**Only £24.95**

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Allsop DVD Lens Cleaner & Optimiser	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Chesky DVD Surround 5.1 Set-Up Disc	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Clearaudio Exact Stylus Gauge	£265.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Record Clamp	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Stroboscopic Light	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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T Force Ortofon Tracking Force Gauge	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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The Cartridge Man Digital Level Gauge	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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AudioPrism CD Blacklight™	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AVIA Home Theatre Set-Up & Calibration	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
A-Z CD Clips	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Furutech RD-2 Disc Demagnetiser	£349.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
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Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
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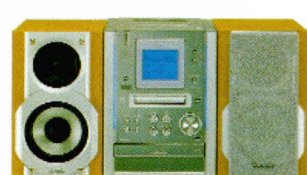
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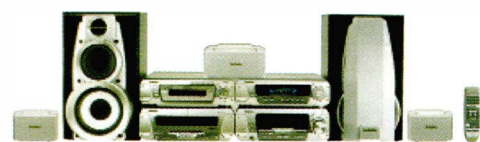
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£80. Kimber 8TC 10 foot pair, £190. Kimber Monacle X, 3m pair, £390. Reference Powercord 6 foot £120. Douglas 01506 441455 or email [drhmurdoch@yahoo.com](mailto:drhmurdoch@yahoo.com) (Edinburgh).

**KEF Q35** floorstanders £80, small Tannoy speakers, £50. Mr Bennett 01438 221477 (Stevenage).

**KEF REFERENCE 1.2** speakers, bought brand new. Mint cond in black ash veneer. KEF five-year warranty, not fully run-in. Boxes, packing and documentation, £695. Also Naim Credos in cherry, fine cond and sonically perfect. £495. One pair must go. 01423 864754 or email [micwalters@aol.com](mailto:micwalters@aol.com) (Yorks).

**MICHELL ISO HR** (moving coil) with Hera Power supply. Modified by the designer Tom Evans with his Lithos regulation, £399. 01344 621388 or email [gpanton@gpanton.evesham.net](mailto:gpanton@gpanton.evesham.net) (E Berkshire).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A370** power amp, excellent 185 watts, Class A beauty, £900 ono. Marantz CD17 KI Signature, £580 ono. 020 8309 5583 or 07719 258245 (Kent).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY LPS** MM/MC phono amp, boxed, mint, as new £105. Mr Smith 01903 247779 (Sussex).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-Pre/** X-PSU with XA-50 monoblocks, (£850) £400. X-ray CD (£800) £450. Jason Moore 07831 271714 or evenings 01883 345 305 (Surrey).

**NAD 370** amp, good condition £220. Project Debut II deck, three

weeks old (£120) £85. 01708 452136 (Essex).

**LINN KAIRN** preamp mm/mc remote, mint, £450. Isobariks walnut, boxed, stands, £450. LK 100s x4, active modules, mint, £995. Also LK280 spark boxed, mint, £295. 003531 2954076 (Dublin)

**PIONEER A300R** precision amp with after-market Tom Evans upgrades, £390. Moth 30 active preamp, £100. Patrick 01582 724414 (Beds)

**QUAD FM3** tuner, good condition, £75. Linn Aktiv Kabers with Ku stones and boards, £395 John 07736 638686 (Kent).

**QUAD QLSCR4** speaker cable, £40. Target 70cm stands £25, 54cm £25. Stax earphone adapter SDR-7SB mk2, £25. 020 7724 9945 (London).

**SONY FA3ES** amp, Denon DCD/1290 CD player. Both boxed as new, £100 each. Sonic Link speaker cable, AST 200 bi-wire. Three metre terminated pair, £50. 0116 2238926 (Leicester).

**SPEAKER CABLES**, Russ Andrews 8TC/4TC bi-wire, 2.5-metre pair, as new, half-price at

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**DAT RECORDER**, Sony, Tascam etc, for domestic use. Immediate cash for quality product, can collect. 01785 850535 (Staffs).

**MERIDIAN** digital speakers and processor, DSP33 and 861. Will collect anywhere for realistic prices. 07775 855744 (Cheshire).

£200. 01274 632492 (W Yorks).

**SUGDEN AUDITION C** amp, 65W, tone controls, MM phono and remote volume, boxed, £360. Wharfedale 150 dynamic headphones, £38.

01661 871010 (Newcastle). **SUGDEN SDD-1** CD transport and SDA converter, (£1,600) £550, free Musicworks mains cables and Campaign Audio Design digital interconnect. 0161 226 6125 (Manchester).

**TECHNICS RP-FDA100** stereo headphones, Musical Fidelity V2 headphone amp and Qunex SS RCA pair to RCA pair cables, £250 complete or will split. Mr Greenway 01229 470961 after 6pm (Barrow In Furness).

## BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

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<i>Note ANVx + VDH Frog Mark 2 (mint)</i>	£5,658	<b>£3,645*</b>
<b>Sumiko Pearwood MC Cartridge</b> new	£1,195	<b>£850</b>

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<b>Classe CD 1.5</b> s/h	£2,295	<b>£1,150</b>
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<b>Gryphon Adagio</b> s/h	£4,300	<b>£3,250</b>
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<b>Nad C541i CD Player</b> s/h	£330	<b>£225</b>
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<b>Metronome C20 Signature DAC</b> s/h	£1,790	<b>£695</b>
<i>(mint, valve, 24/192)</i>		
<b>Theta Miles CD Player</b> s/h	£2,895	<b>£1,100</b>
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<b>Art Audio Diavolo monos 300B</b> exd	£5,995	<b>£3,995</b>
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<b>Art Audio Pre Amp</b> s/h	£2,550	<b>£1,750</b>
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<b>Audion Black Shadow Monoblocks</b> s/h	£5,000	<b>£2,250</b>
<i>(mint, 24wpc, single ended, 845 - superb)</i>		
<b>Audio Research LS2b Pre-amp</b> s/h	£3,249	<b>£1,150</b>
<i>(mint)</i>		
<b>Audio Research VT100 Power amp</b> s/h	£4,950	<b>£2,250</b>
<i>(100 wpc, bal/s-e, mint)</i>		
<b>ATC SIA2-150 Integrated Amplifier</b> s/h	£2,422	<b>£1,450</b>
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<b>Sugden Bijou FMMaster tuner</b> exd	£949	<b>£799*</b>
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<b>ATC Active SCM 100-ASL (active)</b> exd	£8,533	<b>£6,500</b>
<i>(mint, cherry finish)</i>		
<b>Avalon Arcus</b> s/h	£7,800	<b>£4,450*</b>
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<b>Meadowlark Heron Speakers</b> s/h	£4,000+	<b>£1,850</b>
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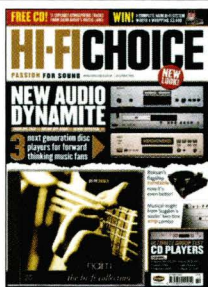
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# HI-FI EXTREME



**“No hi-fi accessory is more elegant, inscrutable or tantalisingly mysterious than the Shakti Stone.”**

components has become the audio equivalent of taking a sick person to Lourdes. Claimed improvements include enhanced resolution, clarity, dynamics and focus and I wouldn't argue with any of it.

You don't have to power them up or plug them in, just place them on any hi-fi component you want to sound better. And, as if by magic, it will. Don't trust me on this, ask Abbey Road Studios – they use them all over the place. How do they work? Will any old slab of stone do?

Not really. In fact, the stone bit is something of a red herring. Its main purpose is to encase three internal trap circuits (microwave, RF and electrical field) which absorb a broad spectrum of EMI. The conventional approach to dealing with EMI usually includes extensive shielding in and around the circuits and transformers that produce the sound-degrading stray fields. The Shakti way differs in that it draws energy from the very fields it is attempting to smooth out. Once the loop is formed, it becomes an active transducer by changing a portion of this field into mechanical energy and then dissipating it as heat into the stone. To accomplish this, Shakti uses proprietary ferrous and nonferrous materials along with quartz crystal oscillators in combination with a low-level magnetic field. The components are housed in the poured stone material.

So there you have it, a perfect example of fringe-fi. Trouble is, of course, when something works this well, you want to use it on everything – pre and power amplifiers, CD players, transports, DACs, turntables, tape recorders. Anything and everything – the beneficial effect is cumulative. And they cost nearly £200 a go. I reckon I could use about ten. Which is the other thing about fringe-fi. It costs about as much as hi-fi. **HFC**

## Fringe-fi

*David Vivian searches for the outer limits of hi-fi sanity*

**Y**ou probably won't have heard of fringe-fi. That's because I've just made it up. I thought I'd better. Otherwise, the object I'm about to write about might be dismissed as just another common or garden audiophile accessory or, worse still, some kind of flooring tile.

I have to confess I haven't really given much thought to what the definition of fringe-fi should be, but the reasoning goes something like this: conventional accessories tend to act directly on kit or software. Vibration dampers and isolation cones, for instance: full contact, essentially mechanical in nature, only mildly whacky. You know exactly where you are, as some of my friends are wont to say, with a tube of freshly spliced squash balls.

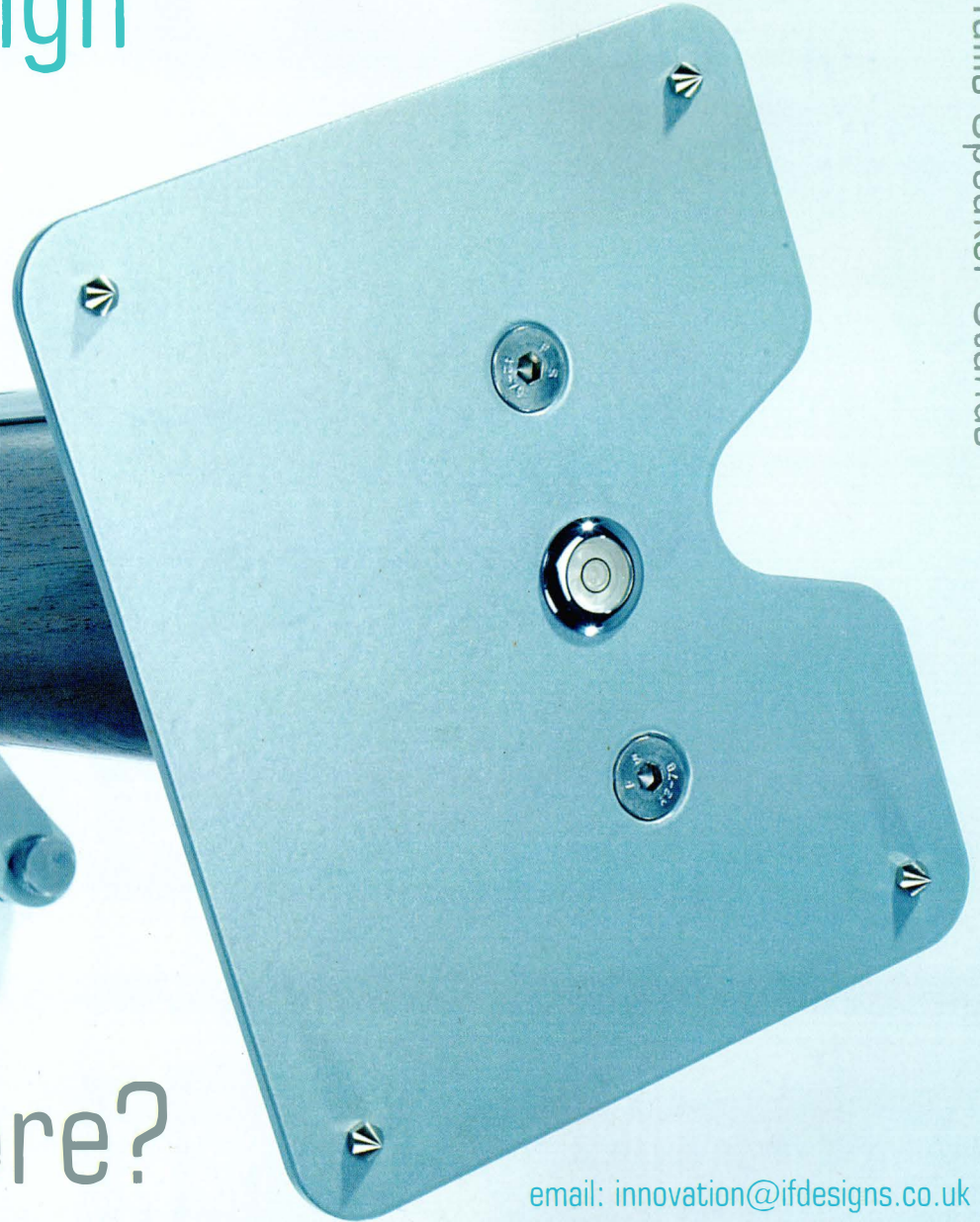
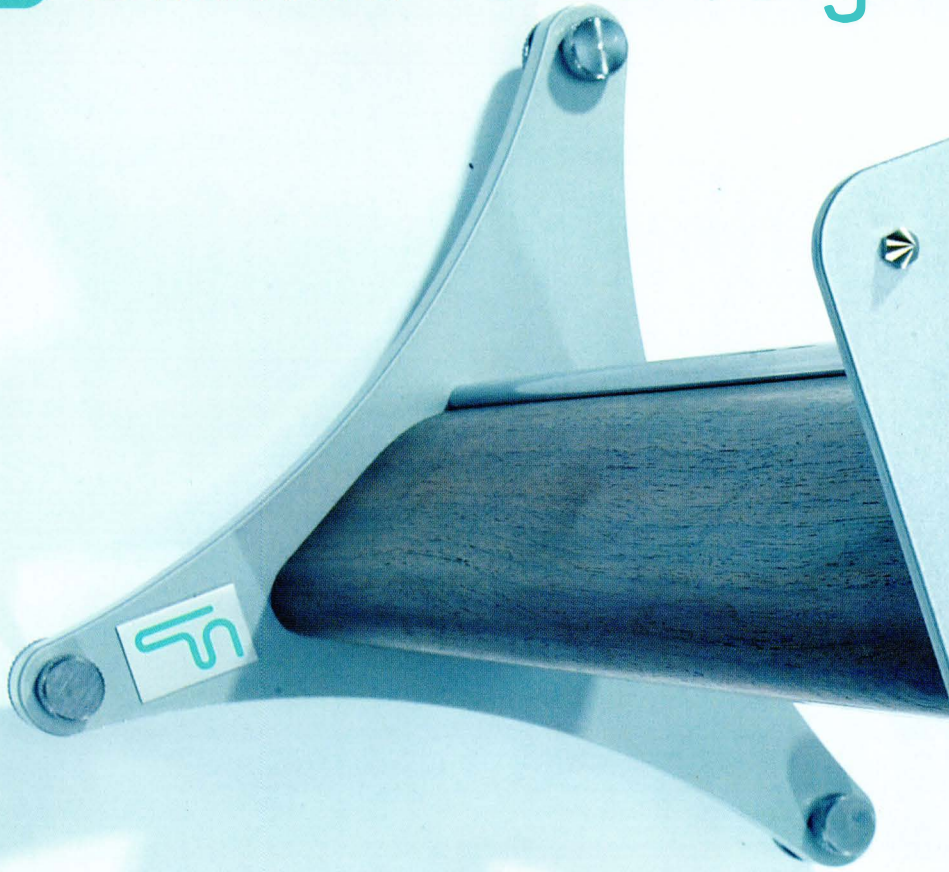
Fringe-fi, on the other hand, addresses the immediate environment around the hardware. And does a number on it in the name of higher fidelity. For this reason – dealing with an apparent 'nothingness' that eludes all our

senses – fringe-fi sometimes looks more mystical than its belt 'n' braces equivalent.

There's no such thing as 'nothing', of course. The space we live in is teeming with radio frequencies and all kinds of electromagnetic grunge. It goes under the heading EMI (electromagnetic interference) and is widely considered to be hi-fi's number one enemy, not least because hi-fi is a major source of EMI itself. It's why, in my most recent copy of the invaluable Audiophile Candy accessories catalogue, in addition to several pages of mains and powerline conditioners, there are no less than eight different products devoted to zapping the stuff.

None, however, is more elegant, inscrutable or, indeed, tantalisingly mysterious than the near-legendary Shakti Stone. So many people are now convinced of these paperback-sized black stone slabs' power to improve the sound of recording or playback equipment that the placing of Shakti Stones on or near hi-fi

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