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FEBRUARY 2009

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FEBRUARY 2009



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**verdicts**

- OUTSTANDING
- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- MIOCRE
- POOR
- £ VALUE



Listening to Electrocompaniet's massive Nemo monoblock power amplifiers (p10) this month caused me something of a headache. Not as a result of any harsh upper midband or screechy treble, but from trying to fathom out *why* I liked it despite it being so diametrically opposite in sonic character to what I normally enjoy. Basically, my brain was plunged into conceptual confusion!

Whereas we've measured nearly 600W RMS from Rotel's compact Class D RB-1092 power amplifier, the near-Class A Nemos are huge and imposing monsters – with a razor-sharp visceral sound to suit. After the initial shock of their stunning detail and speed subsided, I found myself really enjoying them. Strange, as I am more used to the softer, sweeter tones of my World Audio Design K5881 valve power amplifier. The two products couldn't be more different, my reference being considerably cheaper and with just one thirtieth of the on-paper power!

Although I've always thought it possible to enjoy both solid-state and vacuum tube powered amplifiers, I'd had a strong preference for the latter since I first heard a wonderful 300B power amplifier some fifteen years ago. But the sheer force, grip and effortless muscle of the Electrocompaniet reminded me quite how good solid-state can be, in its own particular way... I used to know what I like, but now I'm not so sure!

Still, I've always been something of a 'pluralist' with loudspeakers, finding it less easy to come to definitive positions. On p32 we test Robson Acoustics Greystokes and KingSound Princess IIs. Each is designed quite differently (one has a ribbon tweeter, the other an electrostatic panel), yet I found myself appreciating both speakers' distinct presentations. Although superficially the sound is different, both boxes offer similar 'connect-ness' to the music.

Isn't it fascinating how hi-fi can use such diverse technologies yet provide equally high levels of listening pleasure? Even though the subjective experience feels quite different, it still provides real satisfaction. There's a lesson to be learned here – we shouldn't privilege any type of technology over one another, or make claims about the intrinsic accuracy of one compared to the other. In the final reckoning, all that *really* matters is whether the music moves you.

**David Price, editor.**



**testing**

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

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

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

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



**ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE**

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# news



DPA CA-1



DPA MA-1

## BACK IN BLACK

The return of the Deltec Precision Audio name will surprise many, but the marque has just resurfaced with two new amplifiers. Said to be taking the design philosophy from the original Deltec, these are the first in a forthcoming range of high quality audiophile products, it is said, achieved through "radical design, engineering excellence and precision manufacturing". This range starts with the DPA-CA1 Stereo Pre Amplifier and the DPA-MA1 Mono Power Amplifier. The CA1 is a minimalist stereo preamplifier with the signal handling circuitry as simple and direct as possible. It has six line level inputs for sources, two record monitor outputs and two play monitor inputs.

The DPA-MA1 is a mono power amplifier with 60W RMS into 8 Ohms and 120W into half that, via a current coupled Class A output stage. At the heart of both amplifiers is the hybrid voltage amplifier, the DH-OA37. This thick film hybrid has been designed and developed by Deltec and offers many sonic advantages over conventional circuitry, they say. The hybrid circuit is physically much smaller than conventional PCB layout, which allows RF filtering and decoupling to be closer to active components for "smoother, sweeter sound quality". Front panels are sculpted by precision machining from a solid billet of aluminium. The surface part is mirror finished to a very high standard, which is then hand gloss painted and lacquered to a high lustre. The fabricated envelope and chassis are accurately laser cut and folded, and finished in a fine anodised satinwood black.

Prices are £2,300 for the DPA-CA1 Stereo Pre Amplifier and £2,200 for the DPA-MA1 Mono Power Amplifier. For more details, call +44 (0)1793 238 085 or click on [www.deltecprecisionaudio.com](http://www.deltecprecisionaudio.com).



## EPOSTULATION

Epos's latest ELS8 loudspeaker features a 5 1/4 inch woofer with polypropylene cone and 1 inch voice coil. It has a steel chassis and shielded motor system, and the injection moulded trim ring is blended into the cabinet. The new speaker is designed to produce lower frequencies than the ELS 3, achieved in part by a bigger cabinet volume, Epos say. The all new Epos metal dome tweeter has a metal mesh grille and ferrite magnet, and is shielded. The multi element crossover has been engineered to extract the best possible performance from both drive units, it's claimed, while the internally braced cabinet is rear ported with a stylish curved front. A removable injection moulded curved cloth grille completes the picture. Priced to sell at £250, the ELS 8 follows on the success of the original ELS 3, the first in a line of lower cost Epos speakers. It is available in a choice of two finishes, maple or black, and its vital statistics are 310x180x215mm and 5.67kg per single speaker. For more information, click on [www.epos.co.uk](http://www.epos.co.uk).



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBCU PHOTOBANK

## STUDIO LINE

Prince fans will be interested to learn that he has chosen a PMC BB5-XBD-A Reference Monitoring System for his Los Angeles-based Composing Facility. The artist has released several hundred songs both under his own name and with other artists, winning a total of six Grammy Awards and an Oscar for Best Music and his original song score for 'Purple Rain'. And now a PMC monitor system has been installed in his state-of-the-art Paisley Park recording complex in Minneapolis. Prince was said to be looking for a system that is powerful and, above all, had the ability to translate his music without compromise. He first heard the system at Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis' Flyte Time Studios in Santa Monica, and subsequently contacted Maurice Patist, PMC USA's President of Sales & Marketing, then arrangements were made to install a system. "We are very pleased with the new PMC BB5-XBD-A system," the studio manager states, "because of three main factors. Firstly, the BB5 sounds wonderful. Secondly, it doesn't hype the sound – frequency response is ultra-flat across the entire frequency spectrum. And, thirdly, the system produces a full, large sound – just the way we like to work while tracking and mixing". For more information, see [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com).

## HIGH LEEMAS

The new Leema Agena phono stage is designed to “extract hitherto unheard of levels of information from vinyl records and present it with transfixing musicality”, the company claims. It sports fully adjustable inputs, each with two separate ‘headshell settings’ to allow precise matching for up to six phono cartridges. In addition to the single-ended RCA and fully balanced XLR analogue outputs a reference quality analogue to digital converter feeds USB and S/PDIF digital outputs allowing broadcast quality archiving to computer hard-drive or other digital media. User features include mono, mute, high and low frequency filters, and a sleep mode, which turns off all processing and display circuitry to ensure the very best fidelity when listening. Vital statistics are 440x110x320mm and 11kg, and price is £2,995.

The £3,995 Pyxis preamplifier is the first of a new Leema Reference Class of product. Designed to offer “absolute transparency, resolution and musicality” it also sports a comprehensive and customisable range of inputs including both single-ended and balanced analogue inputs, an optional phono stage and digital inputs (including USB and S/PDIF) for use with digital sources such as computer hard drives. Digital outputs are also included for archiving to computer. There’s even “non-intrusive, audiophile adjustment” of bass and treble. Size is 440x110x330mm and weight is 11kg.

The new flagship Altair mono power amplifier is said to bring “a new level of control, transparency, detail and speed”. The £8,495 beastie can produce peaks of over 2 kilowatts and 100 amps, and is described as “a technical *tour-de-force*, establishing new levels of detail, linearity and agility leading to a staggeringly real musical performance”! The headline power output figure is 550W RMS per channel into 8 ohms. Featuring LIPS (Leema Intelligent Protocol System), the Altair can be configured to receive a full level signal from a Leema preamplifier whilst the preamplifier sets the volume at the input stage of the Altair. Size is 440x390x335mm and it weighs 45kg. For more information, call +44(0)1938 811900 or click on [www.leema-acoustics.com](http://www.leema-acoustics.com)

Leema Agena



Leema Pyxis



Leema Altair



## BLU FOR YOU

NAD's new £850 T587 is an advanced Profile 2.0 Blu-ray player featuring BD Live and BD Java for a new level of interactivity with home entertainment media. BD Live enables Internet-connected users to access additional content, such as movie

previews, alternate movie endings, and special features for Blu-ray viewers, from the studio that produced the movie being screened. BD Java is the interactive platform supporting advanced content for Blu-ray Discs.

Video and audio performance is said to be outstanding, and it is versatile enough to play Blu-ray discs in BD-ROM, BD-R and BD-RE formats, conventional DVDs in NTSC and PAL, and several other popular disc formats, including DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW, CD-R/RW, and Audio CDs. With Blu-ray's native resolution of 1080p and pure digital transmission via HDMI, the T587 supports 1080p at 24 frames per second for the most fluid motion available from film-based material, it is claimed

Most Blu-ray Discs offer true high-definition audio, up to 7.1 Linear PCM soundtrack with 24bit resolution, and the T587 supports this format via HDMI. The T587 also supports the new HD formats from Dolby and DTS that offer 'lossless' compression. They can be decoded in the T587 and sent as LPCM via HDMI, or forwarded compressed to another component that supports decoding. It also supports Audio CDs and CD-Rs with MP3 or WMA decoding, Dolby Digital Plus, and the legacy formats of Dolby Digital and DTS, which it transmits as bitstreams via HDMI, coax or optical connections. Dolby Digital Plus is a new backward-compatible Dolby format that significantly increases the bit rate for improved fidelity, with support up to 10.2 channels.

For more details on the new T587 Blu-ray Disc player, see [www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com).

## SPACE 2009

Moon's new CD3.3 Disc Player is described as the companion source component for the i3.3 Integrated Amplifier, and “embodies many of the revolutionary technologies found in the highly acclaimed Moon CD players”, the company says. It features a digital input for use with a PC, music server or standalone transport, plus optional balanced analogue outputs, a fully customised CD transport mechanism, a bidirectional RS-232 port, an IR input for external control, and “luxurious industrial build quality”. It features discrete digital and analogue power supplies using a toroidal power transformer, ten stages of DC voltage regulation, a proprietary CD drive system with in-house developed hardware and software, mounted on Moon's M-Quattro gel-based four-point floating suspension. The circuit board features pure copper tracings and gold plating. Internal upsampling with 24bit/1.411MHz processing is used, and BurrBrown PCM1798 24bit/192kHz DACs and 8x oversampling digital filter – all run by a very precise 25PPM digital clocking system. Fully balanced differential analogue outputs are optional. There's an S/PDIF digital input, so the unit can be used as a digital-to-analogue converter with either a digital music server or external transport. Available now, for details see [www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com).







## ART OF SOUND

We're big fans of the Accoustic Arts range of high end CD players and DACs, so it's interesting to hear about the company's new CD transport - the Drive II - which is designed to partner the Tube DAC II in the company's high end reference series. Able to play CDs, CD-Rs, and CD-RWs "in uncompromised quality", at its core is a CD-Pro2LF mechanism with a solid diecast metal chassis providing excellent damping, stability and rigidity, the manufacturer says. This 3-beam laser assembly is fully decoupled by an elaborate subchassis mounted within a solid aluminium enclosure. Two large magnetically shielded transformers supply the voltage feed, and a custom designed filter removes interference from the incoming mains to ensure consistent performance. The mains filter may be switched off by means of a rear panel switch, useful if the unit is already connected to a filtered mains supply. Next to the mains filter switch is a mains polarity indicator and switch to ensure that the incoming mains is of the correct polarity. Motor control, laser control, digital signal processing, display control and display heating all have their own high performance power supplies.

The chassis is constructed from machined solid aluminium plates and chrome-plated lathe-turned solid brass. The solidity of the enclosure is important to make sure that the CD is read by the laser without any external interference. Airborne vibration is prevented from reaching the CD compartment by the 1.6 kg, acoustically damped, solid aluminium top cover, and the interior of the CD compartment is coated with Nextel to absorb any stray light, while the CD itself is exactly positioned within the drive by a magnetic clamp. Pure silver cable that connects the CD module to the digital signal processor for better performance. Measuring up at 130x482x375mm and weighing in at 18 kg, the new Drive II costs £6,150. For more information, call Audio Reference on +44(0)1252 702705 or click on [www.audioreference.co.uk](http://www.audioreference.co.uk).



## WEBWATCH: RADIO PARADISE

[www.radioparadise.com](http://www.radioparadise.com)

One particularly interesting internet radio station we've come across of late is Radio Paradise. It seems a smallish operation, possibly even family run, but what they do well - besides playing great classic rock music - is give the listener a real sense of involvement. Their expansive, eclectic playlist links superbly with Amazon.com, making it very easy to find (and buy) the music they play, and there are no advertisements or inane DJ chit-chat. Essentially then, it's a great resource for lovers of its particular flavour of rock music. Even the sound quality is excellent (considering the genre!), with 128kbps AAC and 192kbps MP3 available.

## KIND OF BLU

Onkyo's first Blu-ray player, the new £399.99 DV-BD606 comes in at a lower price than some rival manufacturers' first generation designs. Said to be capable of delivering richly detailed, lifelike video images with a full HD resolution of 1920 x 1080p and a film-like refresh rate option of 24 pictures per second, it runs the latest HDMI version (1.3a) to support Deep Color (on appropriate discs) and render images with exceptional colour depth. In addition, the DV-BD606 (which complies with BD-ROM Profile 1, version 1.1) is BONUSVIEW compatible. This allows owners to take advantage of the picture-in-picture playback of interactive bonus material, such as video commentaries, where available. The player also natively decodes Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio formats, sending them as bitstreams via its HDMI port straight to the receiver. It can also play CD and MP3 music via its Burr-Brown PCM1782 192kHz/24bit DAC. The player also boasts a custom-specified power supply with high quality components. For more details, click on [www.onkyo.com](http://www.onkyo.com).



## BIG TIME

The origins of PMC's massive MB2 XBD floorstanding loudspeaker can be found in the professional active version which is currently the reference for Emil Berliner/Deutsche Grammophon Berlin, no less. But the new passive version features the same PMC hand built 75mm midrange and twin twelve inch Radial bass units as the active but with the flexibility of choice of amplification due to its passive nature. The massively engineered handbuilt 32 element 24dB per octave crossover is housed in a dedicated enclosure and is mounted externally on the rear of the lower cabinet. The speaker has just undergone the series upgrade which includes a new Sonolex tweeter unit and dispersion plate, while the cabinets are constructed with a higher density grade Medite with a staggered jointing process that ensures greater integrity and a more homogenous, stable structure. The cabinet is balance veneered with both the internal and external faces trimmed in real wood veneers with the outer in a sumptuous high sheen finish. The powerful 12 inch bass units sit in an extremely long, heavily damped Transmission Line producing low frequency extension that is flat down to 20Hz, PMC claim. Although a large scale monitor, the MB2XBD is highly efficient with a sensitivity of 91dB, making the choice of amplification very wide. For information, click on [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com).





# Power Points

**With its gargantuan Nemo, Electrocompaniet is gunning for the high end monoblock power amplifier market. After a life with lower powered valve amps, Noel Keywood is in for a shock!**

**Y**ou didn't get one of these in your stocking at Christmas because of its size – and if it came down the chimney then you're sitting in a pile of rubble right now. Weighing 41kg (90lbs) each, we struggled to lift these power amplifiers; perhaps we have seen and lifted bigger, but not by much. Humongous power amplifiers like these usually have a suitably massive sound, and the Nemos didn't disappoint - everything about them is big, I found!

Although going under the official nomenclature of AW600, they've been given the 'Nemo' name because they're designed to drive Nautilus loudspeakers from B&W. Not that if you had a pair of these in your front room, you'd be worried about choice of speaker however, as they'll drive *anything* ever made - Heaven

knows, they'll even get more than a squeak out of BBC LS3/5as! The AW 600 moniker gives some idea of the power these amps deliver: 600 Watts no less. Testing for power at these levels gets a little sticky but we found this is about right as a conservative figure. The output is heavily protected by a current sensing circuit to prevent the Nemo becoming an arc welder if its outputs are short circuited. There are two sets of parallel loudspeaker outputs and one balanced input, for which Electrocompaniet supply an adaptor that allows the use of an ordinary (unbalanced) phono lead.

The power switch is located in an awkward position on the rear panel, beneath the IEC terminated power lead. Claimed by Electrocompaniet to be substantially Class A, the Nemos run warm but not burning hot like 100% Class A.

Switching on brings no noises other than the clatter of the protection relays. However, I did in my fiddlings manage to touch a live signal lead accidentally and there was a fierce crack from the loudspeakers with the power of a lightning bolt!

Not only are the Nemos monstrously heavy, but they are large too (514mm wide, 288mm high and 470mm deep). Their quiescent power consumption is 230 Watts and, being Class A this changes little with an applied signal. They need ventilation of course and could not be shut away in cupboards. Electrocompaniet don't say they should be left switched on but they do specify a two hour warm up for optimum performance and, together with the awkwardly placed power switches this does suggest the Nemos be left on. They also need a seventy two hour running in period.



Build quality is good in a functional rather than lavish way. The case has black steel sleeves for protection, with a lot of venting to give warm air an exit. The front panel comprises a thick sheet of acrylic, again black but with gold lettering, gold holding studs and a natty blue light the shape of Electrocompaniet's logo to warn the unit is on. The styling 'does the job', being suitably discreet and as unimposing as a massive lump of electronics in your listening room can be.

### SOUND QUALITY

If you're buying a solid state monoblock of this size and price, then you're not going to be the sort of person who'd otherwise enjoy a 3W single-ended tube amplifier. As such, you want a big, powerful and ultra clean sound - without so much as a flaw from bottom to top - and that's precisely what the Nemos give. Their delivery is dry and concise, with everything kept under an iron grip and supported by the ability to deliver seismic power, the sort that moves buildings.

That they work down to d.c. didn't surprise me. All-direct-coupled amplifiers are nothing new and the ones I have heard in the past did have a wide open door to a peculiarly earth shaking sound that forces its way into the room with the unstoppable force of a bulldozer. The massive bass line in Sly and Robbie's 'Make 'Em Move' took on

this form of unstoppable force, as if it could rearrange the room physically. Our Spendor S8e benchmark loudspeakers are underdamped and can sound plummy if not used with an amplifier possessing grip, but the Nemos grabbed them - and various other loudspeakers I used - by the neck as expected. They kept the bass cones in perfect control no matter what I threw at them. My preferred Angelique Kidjo test disc is a commercial recording, rather than a demo disc, with strong energy right down to 30Hz from the emphasised walking bass lines and the Nemos made the subsonic power of a track like 'Fifa' frighteningly obvious in a way I am not acquainted with. They appear to possess no constraint. Of course, the simple truth is that with 600 Watts and huge peak current available, claimed to be 150A, the AW 600s can in truth drive anything...

Across the midband the Nemos sound detailed and concise. They are

it, from The Stranglers 'Ghost Train' for example, made stage width and movement across it plainly obvious. The Nemos strength of delivery was attention grabbing.

There was of course infinite quantities of power available, and the Nemos remained clean at all levels, no matter where I set the volume control. Giant power amplifiers like these know no limits whatever is asked of them, and the Nemo is no exception. Another key feature is this easy display of power whilst remaining relatively neutral and easy going in presentation. They are crisp and clear certainly, but without the sort of high frequency sharpness that makes cymbals sizzle for example.

In fact, the Nemos were remarkably even mannered and balanced in their handling of vocals and metallic percussion, bringing to cymbals a pleasantly bright ring from which tizz was thankfully absent. The rasp of synthesiser in Goldfrapp's

"Giant power amplifiers like this know no limits, no matter what is asked of them, and the Nemo is no exception..."

crisp and fresh in presentation, quite evenly lit, with an ability to push out a mass of fine detail. With so much force at their disposal there was a lively dynamic right across the sound stage. Even fairly mild pans across

'Lovely 2CU' had a fierce strength and the pulsating bass of this track had conspicuously more power than usual; it was quite strange that other amplifiers subjectively lack power against the Nemos when compre-

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Piotr Tomaszewski - Piazzale Degli Uffizi, Florence - Sunday afternoon

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IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

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hensive measurement shows that technically they do not. Yet there you are: subjectively these monoblocks make other amplifiers sound wanting at low frequencies, weak kneed, of mediocre grip and of no great resolution either.

Anyone wanting to drive serious loudspeakers in a large space would need amplifiers as forceful as these, although this doesn't include high sensitivity Tannoys and such like which are best not used with high power amplifiers - for those you must use valves. The Nemos have far more power than a valve amplifier and

brutishly powerful bass, but they don't have the same stage depth nor their sense of easy flow, but then neither do solid-state amplifiers of any persuasion, no matter what claims are made!

With classical,

orchestras took on an extra sense of scale and the horns in Wagner's Lohengrin blared a bit louder than usual, or perhaps I was being a bit too enthusiastic with the volume control. Thunderous rolls on the kettle drum were more seismic than usual, going down further to better disturb the underworld I mused, as the settee quivered. And the inevitable crash of the cymbals at climaxes was delivered with searing power. Generally, from the strings of the Emerson Trio playing Grieg to the sonic antics within large scale works like those from Wagner, the Nemos deliver with almighty gusto and a raw insight that is very revealing.

Deeply detailed, evenly balanced across the audio range with no undue light, in any one area, and disturbingly forceful, Electrocompaniet's Nemo monoblock power amplifiers are a solid-state spectacular. If you want a power house that combines force with finesse then these are the amplifiers to choose. You will need a big pocket of course, bulging arm muscles and chunky floor joists to withstand their weight. They'll work well with just about anything I can think of, but with B&W's Nautilus on the end of these monsters, I'll wager you'd end up with oceanic force.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

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**AGAINST**

- size and weight
- awkward power switch

**DAVID SAYS:**

If you are rich enough to afford the Electrocompaniet Nemo monoblocks, then I would suggest you are rich enough to need them. How so? Simply because they are too enormous to fit anything except a large room - and a large room requires large loudspeakers and an amplifier that can drive them with intent! As such, valve amplifiers *cannot* apply; rather, you need a really clean and smooth pair of solid-staters such as these.

Massive power, incredible resolution and a smoothness that starts from subsonic frequencies and goes all the way up to the province of bat chit-chat - that's the Nemo. They cast a revealing light on a recording, showing its every detail, nuance and fault - yet deliver it to the speakers with unflappable ease. The result is a fascinating listen - and one that is unknown to most. Although surely one of the great amplifiers for classic music - with that glassy clarity and massive transient thump - I found their handling of jazz funk music most effective. Alphonse Mouzon's 'By All Means' was delivered with mind-expanding detail, breathtaking punch and incredible insight into the playing of arch ivory tinker Herbie Hancock. This is high resolution music in its purest sense.

Still, the dub stylings of Augustus Pablo in 'King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown' was no less of a revelation. Although the Nemos can never match the beguiling, liquid 'lilt' of a top tube amp, they more than make up for it with a bass performance the like of which sticks in the memory for weeks after. Consummately controlled, yet brilliantly articulated, they make your average PA amplifier sound like a battery powered headphone stage. Most impressive is the way the Nemos can deliver enough Watts to light up a street in such a rhythmically coherent fashion; their speed is of the essence. At the same time as serving up all that power on the beat, they lock everything else on the soundstage into place perfectly.

With superlative power, grip, dynamics and clarity, solid-state power amplification can't get much better than this. The only issue facing purchasers is how well they integrate into their systems - the Nemo's icy clarity won't flatter poor loudspeakers or suffer bad sources gladly. As such, an audition is mandatory - but don't go thinking you can get 'em home on the bus if you like them! DP

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Nemo can swing no less than 80V on short term peaks our measurements showed, making it vastly powerful. With a steady sine wave test it gave 75V, or 700 Watts into 8 Ohms. A current limiting protection circuit operates to limit power into low loads and although we got a few cycles through it at 1,400W in a burst test before the relay clattered in, it gives a steady 600 Watts or so. As most loudspeakers are effectively 4 Ohms it is then a 600 Watt amplifier able to give a little more on short term peaks. So the Nemo has vast headroom, but as such power is unusable on any sustained basis it is low level performance that counts.

Distortion was very low across the audio band our sweep shows, reaching just 0.012% into 4 Ohms at 1 Watt, 10kHz, rising to 0.05% maximum at high powers. Midband levels were much lower, down to 0.0015% at 1 Watt into 8 Ohms and 0.04% just below full power into 8 Ohms. So no matter how hard the Nemo was pushed it produced little distortion, and third harmonic dominated what was there.

Input is balanced via XLR and sensitivity unusually low at 2.8V for full output of 700 Watts, so the Nemo will need a high gain preamplifier, preferably with balanced outputs. Most preamps can swing 3V out, but x3 is a common gain figure and the Nemo needs x9 or more if it is to be matched to low output sources, like phono stages.

The Nemo is a hugely powerful amplifier

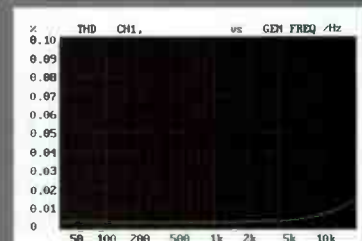
that works substantially in Class A. It measures very well and should drive any load. NK

Power	700 Watts
Frequency response	d.c. - 54kHz
Noise	-122dB
Distortion	0.012%
Sensitivity	2.8V
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World Radio History

# Different Strokes

**The three systems featured in this month's system supertest show that David Price, Paul Rigby and Patrick Cleasby are very different folks! David Price is your host...**

I'd venture that most *Hi-Fi World* readers have already got fairly tasty systems. As your letters flood in every month, we can tell that the starting point for most people is fairly high up the audio evolutionary scale; gone are the days of readers wanting advice on that all-important upgrade from their Fidelity music centre!

Still, if you weren't where you are already with your hi-fi, where would you start? That was the challenge I set the team this month. If we had to rip it up and start again with a system of modest budget – but not quite from a position of penury – where would we be?

Whereas a decade or so ago, we'd all be clamouring for a separate CD player, solid-state amplifier and (the then *de rigeur*) floorstanding speakers, now life isn't as simple. We have a number of things bubbling under in the background...

First, there's a vinyl revival in full swing. It's now perfectly possible to run a 'sustainable' vinyl collection – from the countless new audiophile reissues, the massive amount of second-hand stuff surfacing on eBay and all those lovely high street record libraries (sorry, 'charity shops'). As a testament to this fact, even *Hi-Fi World's* resident 'digiphile' Patrick Cleasby can now be found buying copies of the Human League's 'Dare' on vinyl for 50p at his local Sue Ryder. That's where my system comes in...

Second of course is the valve revival. A decade ago it was a mere glow in the eye of a few folk wishing the end of the evil transistor, but now though it's a perfectly normal purchasing choice available to any hi-fi buyer. Indeed, it's so run of the mill that you can even get valve powered iPod docks these days. This month sees Paul Rigby choosing a tube aspirated all-in-one 'style system' touting a massive 3W into horn loaded Klipsch loudspeakers – now that's something you wouldn't have been able to do a decade ago.

Finally, Patrick Cleasby has been prized from his Logitech Transporter hard disk based set-up, to run a conventional CD separates system just like he used to when he was sporting red braces and a Flock of Seagulls haircut back in the eighties. Exposure provides a superb solid-state silver disc spinner and integrated amplifier, to drive a pair of powerhouse KEF floorstanders.

So sit back, relax and enjoy the diverse new world of hi-fi system building, 2009-style!



#### SYSTEM SUPERTTEST:

p16 REGA P3-24, MARANTZ PM8300, MONITOR AUDIO RADIUS 90HD

p18 SHANLING MC-30, KLIPSCH RB-61

p20 EXPOSURE 3010S CD, EXPOSURE 3010S INTEGRATED, KEF X030



David Price has a ball with Rega's latest P3-24 turntable, Marantz's new PM8003 amplifier and Monitor Audio's just released Radius 90HD loudspeakers...

# Green Party

**W**hat I love about vinyl is that – assuming you've got the right combination of components – you can get a remarkably musical sound for a relatively small sum of money. And so it is with this, my weird but wonderful Rega, Marantz and Monitor Audio combination...

I've designed this system to be just as I would like it were I starting out on the hi-fi path afresh and wanted to take the vinyl route. First, Rega's P3 turntable needs little introduction to vinylistas. In its latest incarnation it's called the P3-24 and comes with a fancy gloss finished plinth available in a wide range of colours, including what I like to call 'Rega Racing Green' you see here!

Coming in at £586 (with 15% VAT, and my review sample also sports a £107 Elys 2 cartridge), the P3 is simply a beautifully finished slab of painted and lacquered phenolic resin laminates, into which is fitted

a high quality bearing and a 24 pole AC synchronous motor (as used in the company's more expensive P5 and P9 turntables, plus many more) with clever control circuitry to reduce vibration and an outboard power supply unit that conditions the electrical supply with a synthesised low distortion crystal controlled ac input, plus electronic speed control.

The P3-24's plinth has one other important cut-out – the mounting for the new Rega RB301 tonearm. This is a modified version of the very famous RB300, which has been modified for superior sonics. An improved vertical bearing housing has been used, which gives improved rigidity in the tonearm's mounting, reducing the stresses in the main 13mm bearings, say Rega. This assembly is topped off with the improved RB700 bias housing phono cable.

Second in the chain is the £630 Marantz PM8003 integrated. At its core is a large bespoke toroidal transformer, used to drive audiophile-grade circuitry inside, including the

latest generation of Marantz HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module) op-amps. The current feedback amplifier features symmetrical circuit topology, a copper-plated chassis and rear-panel to reduce signal-degrading electromagnetic interference and offers the lowest impedance grounding to every section of the amp. An additional heavy bottom plate reduces vibration.

The result is a claimed 70W RMS per channel into 8 Ohms, which is just about enough for the partnering Monitor Audio Radius 90HD speakers. Usefully for some (but not for me), the Marantz has simple bass and treble controls, although I kept these at arm's length, preferring to keep the Source Direct function switched in. There's also an Amp Direct mode for operation as power amplifier only (for bi-amp mode or extension of AV/Receiver), and most importantly here – a good moving magnet phono stage.

Last but not least are Monitor Audio's £350 Radius 90HD loudspeakers. At 198x125x140mm,



they're not that much taller than a CD jewel case, so don't be buying the MAs thinking you're going to get bass aplenty. Still, they take a great stab at giving you just enough to make them enjoyable. The cast chassis of the 100mm mid-bass unit is made from glass loaded engineering polymer, while Monitor Audio's just-reworked metal matrix polymer cone material does the air moving job. The latest 25mm Gold C-CAM tweeter is now claimed to extend to 35kHz, while the crossover uses high grade metallised Polypropylene capacitors, high-grade air core and laminated iron core inductors and specially developed high grade PCOFC internal cable.

## SOUND QUALITY

This system was designed with one thing in mind – to give the most musical sound possible in a small space – and it largely succeeds. The Rega P3-24 gives a very precise sound that's highly subtle and refined, and in the context of the full bodied Marantz PM8003 amplifier and taut, tight Monitor Audio Radius 90HDs loudspeakers, it all gels together perfectly.

The source – especially fitted with the very detailed but slightly dry sounding Elys 2 cartridge – is clean and open but not possessed of much in the way of tonal warmth. So the Marantz amplifier adds just the right amount of warmth. It's a largely fast, grippy and propulsive performer, but still prefers to serve the music with a dash of cream in your coffee, so to speak, and the odd sugar lump or two.

And that's just what the tiny Monitor Audio Radius 90HDs need. They are brilliant little boxes, but crave all the heft they can get in the bass department, and the Marantz duly obliges. Indeed, so good at real loads is the PM8003 that a short spell driving my huge, closed-box Yamaha NS1000Ms saw it singing away with a surprisingly svelte but musical sound.

With the Rega P3-24 mounted on a Quadraspire stand, the Marantz PM8003 running QED 79 strand speaker cable (very affordable at just £1.46 per metre), and the Monitor Audios Blu-tacked rigidly onto either end of a bookshelf, I was amazed how nice my record collection sounded. And it was all the more poignant considering I'd just been listening to a £10,000 plus Avid Acutus/SME V/vdH Frog, via an Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage, Sugden IM4 Class A amplifier and Yamaha NS1000Ms for a week before setting this system up. Even after such

illustrious kit, this little system sang its heart out no less enjoyably...

Of course, you're not going to get the same sort of 'Royal Albert Hall scale', but still this system comfortably filled a small-to-medium

sized room and went loud without either falling apart or annoying the neighbours (the latter being something that can't be said for my reference system). One of my major reservations with the previous pre-HD versions of the Monitor Audios was their propensity to clam up and compress and higher volumes, but I feel that the new versions are far less compromised in this respect. They're not going to blow the roof off your house you understand, but they're happier with power than the previous ones.

Freez's 'Caribbean Winter' showed what a delight the system could be. A very tightly played slice of early eighties 'new jazz', the Monitor Audios loved it. Stopping and starting on the small edge of a sixpence, the music sounded dizzily enjoyable. What modest bass there was proved incredibly taut and tuneful, whereas the midband was open, uncoloured and expansive beyond all expectations. There's something very right about having speakers with treble and mid/bass units a matter of centimetres away from one another, in terms of the brilliant phase coherence it brings. There wasn't a hint of a box anywhere, or even a 'point source' – instead the music seemed to be coming from the wall in front of me, as if there was a pair of stacked Quad electrostatics behind an acoustically transparent curtain!

I was very impressed with this system's treatment of vocals – there was little of the 'cuppiness' you get from most other small speakers. Instead, I could hear a very clean, open and even sound that crossed over with the tweeters beautifully. And oh those tweeters! Monitor Audio have had a lot of experience with metal domes, and these were a joy to listen to. True, they do still broadcast the merest hint of their construction material, but so do the best silk domes, and at least the MAs had speed, grip and insight in spades – without a hint of harshness. It's safe to say that I can't remember hearing a better treble performance from a pair of £350 loudspeakers.

Steely Dan's 'Hey Nineteen' furthered convinced me of the rightness of the system. The new Rega P3-24 is subtly different to the old P3-2000, but in all the right ways. If there was one respect in

"what I love about vinyl is that you can get a remarkably musical sound for a relatively small sum of money..."

which the previous model was falling off the pace, it was speed stability, but the new '24' incarnation, with its electronic power supply gives it some much needed grip in the bass. It's nowhere up to a Technics SL1200 in this respect even now, but it pulls ahead in the midband, which has more focus and a wider tonal palette. Whereas the stock SL1200 can sound a bit well let across the upper mid, the Rega is the model of decorum, offering a very clean signal to the Marantz amplifier that's packed with dynamic inflection and detail.

Speaking of which, the PM8003 proved a truly capable listening partner. It is less 'showy' sounding than some, but not less enjoyable (indeed over long periods it is more so). It showed an expansive soundstage, real musicality and not a hint of the mechanical 'analysis paralysis' that can afflict some other Japanese amplifiers. Indeed I found myself quite beguiled by this product – it's very hard to remember you're sitting in front of a very modest £600 design with tone controls. The Marantz lacks out and out punch compared to some rivals, and even some detail, but what it does do, it does brilliantly and throws it all together in one lovely package. This made Steely Dan a joy to listen to – with a powerful, fluid bass line, striking syncopations and the ability to convey all of that dreamy, mesmeric quality the song has in its entirety.

## CONCLUSION

An impressive collection of components this may be, but what's more important is the way the system plays together. As they say, the system that plays together stays together, and so it is with this! It is a delight to listen to, in a natural and unselfconsciously musical way. As I've said, it won't flap your flares or step in when your local metal band's PA goes south, but it still goes decently loud and does so with *élan*. Even at modest listening levels, you'll struggle to hear a more enjoyable and compact way of making music.

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**A successful system is a balanced system, and Paul Rigby finds that the quirky Shanling MC-30 'Music Center' and Klipsch RB-61 speakers are made for each other...**

# Yin & Yang

**T**he whole is greater than the sum of its parts, so runs the saying, and that's what building a serious music system is all about. I cannot emphasise just how important synchronicity is when buying any hi-fi component - after all, if your system fails to work together, then it just fails full stop as far as I'm concerned.

This system is an interesting one - inasmuch as it will have the high end brigade tut-tutting and budget buyers looking on with bemusement. But still it works, and rather well at that!

The heart and soul of it is the rather wonderful Shanling MC-30. You might have seen this before in the pages of *Hi-Fi World*, but we loved it so much we simply had to try it again

with a rather left-field approach to loudspeaker matching (more of which later). Of diminutive dimensions (266x143x385mm), you won't find a bank of Class D power amplifier chips under the hood, punching out the usual 60W or so this type of product has (i.e. Arcam's Solo Mini). Rather, the little Shanling sports a pair of 6P1 tetrode valves 'pushing' out a miserly 3W in single-ended mode. Not your average mini system, then...

Other aspects of the MC-30 are more conventional - there's a CD player sporting a quality Philips VAM-1202 laser transport and CD-7 II servo mechanism, feeding a Burr Brown PCM-1738 DAC. There's an analogue tuner with twenty presets covering both AM and FM, plus MP3 player connection via a stand and

3.5mm port with a cable supplied in the box. Emphasis needs to be placed on this point because it can cause confusion. The included MP3 player holder does not act as a 'dock' as Shanling want it to work with generic MP3 players, not just iPods.

Given the Shanling's meagre handful of Watts, you might be surprised to see a pair of bookshelf speakers sitting next to it. After all, small speakers invariably have low sensitivity, don't they? In our small speaker group test last month, many were hanging around the mid/late eighties in terms of the number of decibels per one Watt at one metre. Well the Klipsch RB-61s claim no less than 95dB! This makes them - in theory - ideal to work with the low powered Shanling.

Available in either a cherry or

black finish, these little beauties are shelf or stand mountable, and biwirable. Treble and upper midrange duties are handled via the bespoke Tractrix horn – explaining the stratospherically high claimed efficiency, and behind it is a 1-inch tweeter made from titanium and powered by a ceramic motor structure. A bespoke Cerametallic cone woofer, made from a mixture of materials to create a stiff, responsive driver handles the lower midrange and bass, supported by a front-firing bass port to allow bookshelf mounting. Measuring 391x216x311mm, the RB-61s weigh a solid 10kg.

The look of the MC-30 is both stark and majestic. Full of towering valves accompanied by futuristic pillars, its design celebrates both space and strength. Still, I have reservations with the ergonomics. The side-fitting 'soft' on/off switch should in my opinion be positioned at the front or back of the chassis instead of the side where it can be accidentally knocked. Then there's the built-in joystick, used to control the CD player and to select the tuner radio band. After playing with this with a measure of Homer Simpson-like glee, I realised how imprecise it is – it is not there to allow you to progress to the next level in the latest PlayStation beat'em-up. It is supposed to be there to quickly process audio-based commands.

As for the aesthetics of the Klipsch speakers, was this a throw-back to that H.R. Giger-themed documentary for extra-terrestrial family planning, 'Alien'? This is a speaker for boys – tough looking – so I endeavoured to approach it in my most obsequious fashion for fear of receiving a good kicking! Design is such an emotive area, and I can't say either were my cup of tea, but still at least they look different and both manufacturers have actually made an effort instead of giving us yet more generic black boxes.

## SOUND QUALITY

Had the Shanling been wired up to most loudspeakers, I could comfortably have played it outside the bedroom window of my next door neighbour in the middle of the night without so much as a grumpy "shut up!" emanating from his general direction. Mouse squeaks would sound like volcanic eruptions compared to the MC-30 at full tilt. However, the cunning plan to partner it with a super-efficient pair of speakers worked a treat – and here is a system that really gels.

No, it's not going to threaten the Electrocompaniet Nemos in the

decibel stakes, but actually this little three Watter goes surprisingly, ermm, loud via the Klipsches. And it doesn't just make a noise, it makes a *nice* one too. Single ended valve operation is a very pleasant way of listening to music, and normally only heard from much more expensive valve kit, so it's amazing to get it from such a modestly priced little product. For example, the peak limited, R&B/pop

"unusual it may be, but this is one of the most enjoyable ways of listening to music at the price..."

album by The Sugarbabes', 'Angels With Dirty Faces' features offensive compression that, with other less sweet amps, would be screeching like a barn owl.

Although the Klipsches aren't the world's smoothest speakers – they are horn-loaded after all – the innate sonic cleanliness of the Shanling was such that it kept them under control. True, vocal crescendos were still a little shouty, but remember this isn't an ideal recording. Indeed, the MC-30 tamed the damage, allowing me to hear some excellent separation of instruments, vocal clarity and an almost surgical study of various bass timbres.

Shifting to a superior master and Carol Kidd's new jazz-vocal album, 'Dreamsville' (Linn Records). Singing 'A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square', the upper bass and lower-mids displayed devastating clarity and a double bass that was organic in its presentation. Again, upper midrange notes were 'well lit' but this was offset by Kidd's stunningly atmospheric and sensual vocal sound – the Klipsches even revealing the subtle effect of air passing through her throat.

Moving onto Black Dog's 'Parallel', a seminal early trance album which sports massive transient attack, and the MC-30 coped with ease, removing any rough edges and increasing the musicality of the performance. This tendency to combine the detail of the Klipsch speakers with the musicality of the MC-30 extended to the Sinfonia for Handel's 'Acis & Galatea', a new classical release via Linn Records, which not only followed the complexity of the performance but presented the music as an ensemble piece as opposed to merely a collection of detailed instruments. Most obvious however, was the real sense that this was a recital in a large auditorium – there was a

tremendous sense of air around the music.

The MC30 sounded super through its built in CD player, but its tuner was a little veiled against my Sony ST-S261 budget reference. Still, sonically this was of course infinitely more preferable to DAB! I wasn't terribly impressed by the sound via my iPod Classic 80GB, which was hampered by low gain, although this

is partly the fault of the iPod's own weedy analogue output stage. But combined with the poor siting design (the portable sits in amongst the hot power supply and valves) and the lack of remote control, I have to say it's not an ideal implementation. Still, the sound reproduction was open and pleasantly transparent, as you'd expect from a single-ended valve amplifier! The difference between low quality lossy files was obviously marked against better quality FLAC and WAV files.

Finally, I couldn't resist plugging the Shanling MC-30 into my reference loudspeakers – a pair of One-Thing modded Quad ESL57 electrostatics. These proved rather more sensitive than I initially expected, and I was able to push the Quads to relatively high volumes before break-up occurred. The most revealing characteristic was a trademark valve warmth oozing through the Quads. Gone was the bracing nature of the Klipsches to be replaced by a more grown-up, broader, fuller sound. True it did lose a little insight and was perhaps not quite as detailed, but did offer a balanced and lusciously smooth response. So there's an idea to conjure with!

## CONCLUSION

Unusual it may be, but for my money this is one of the most enjoyable ways of listening to music at the price – especially if space is at a premium. As a pair, they are unusually transparent and revealing, yet enjoyably musical too. And interestingly, the Shanling MC-30 is not a *cul-de-sac* that you might think given its low power – it will also drive bigger more sensitive floorstanders further up the Klipsch range, and even Quad ESL57s which (in One Thing guise) are one of the best in the world! As it is, this £1,100 system is a match made in heaven – and yet you can take things higher still!

SHANLING MC-30	£750
KLIPSCH RB-61	£350
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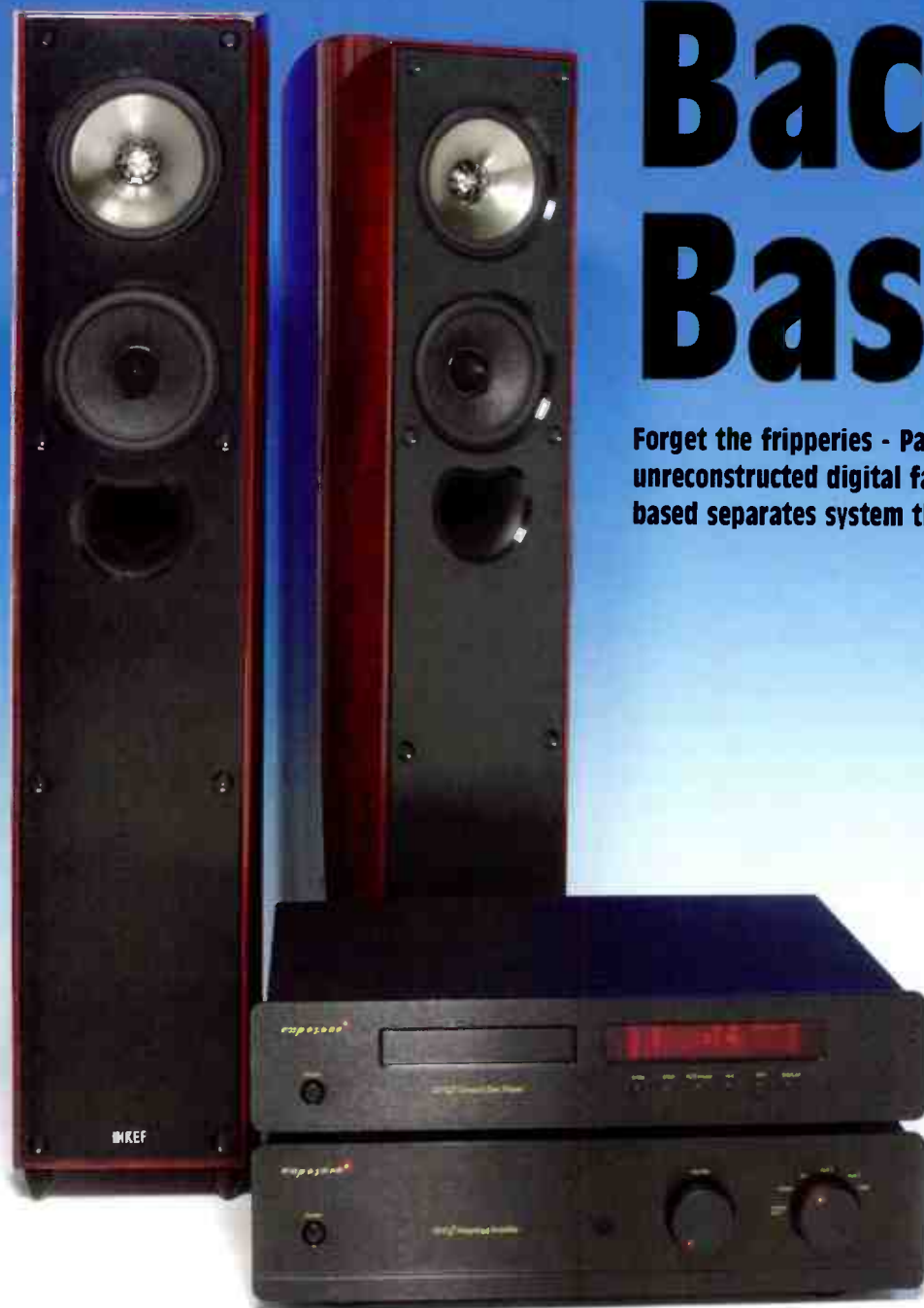
# Back To Basics

**Forget the fripperies - Patrick Cleasby, Hi-Fi World's resident unreconstructed digital fan chooses a serious Exposure/KEF based separates system that just gets on with the job...**

The Exposure 3010S CD player (£1,200) is the business end of the system, and features a new custom-made Exposure-designed CD transport mechanism, servo unit and control mechanisms, plus twin Burr-Brown PCM 1704 mono 24 true multibit DACs, a discrete output stage and large toroidal power transformer with separate windings for CD transport and audio stages. A high stability crystal clock reference and dedicated power supply regulator for the transport and audio stages ensure very low jitter, says the company.

Partnering it is the new Exposure 3010S integrated amplifier (£1,000), which is a crisply styled unit sporting chunky power supplies, upgraded internal components and a hefty 110 Watts per channel claimed. A high capacity custom-made toroidal power transformer and power supply capacitors are used, plus uniquely tuned short signal and power supply path, bi-wiring compatibility and fast bipolar transistor output stage for dynamic and vivid performance. Aluminum is used for all the casework, and the extruded front panels are designed to control resonance and stray electromagnetic fields.

There is something genuinely nostalgic about these two Exposure boxes - their plain black look, simple display (on the CD player) and easy remote layout and functionality take me back a long way. Heck, I didn't even have a CD remote for the first five years of my CD life - and nowadays the AV products I often use are mind-numbingly complex by comparison! Oh for the innocent, uncomplicated life of the nineteen eighties audiophile - this is how we used to live.



**O**kay, so David's gone for a weird looking green and black vinyl system and Paul's chosen the maddest mixture of miniature tube source and speakers I've seen for a long time - so now it's time to get down to business with this serious full size solid-state separates system. Forget your fancy turntables or quirky low power amps, this system needs no distractions - it's a straight down the line Compact Disc playing system, just like your dad used to have!

How quaint, you may say. After all, many are now having the realisation that vinyl can't really be beaten if you want to get as close as possible to the music [oh my gawd PC, are you feeling alright? Ed.], and even worse for CD we're realising

that this remastering malarkey is very rarely actually a good thing. And then there's the fact that even in audiophile circles systems are rapidly becoming file-based, so why would anyone still need a common or garden Compact Disc spinning system anymore?

Well, it's not all doom and gloom. CD is cheap, accessible and there's a massive secondhand market. (If you don't like these new remasters, then just buy the original non-remastered album on Amazon or eBay for pennies, give the disc a wet clean and slip it in a new jewel case to give it that freshly minted look.) CD may not be perfect, but it is easy to use and ubiquitous - and as this system shows you can get mightily impressive results if you set it up properly...

In fairness to the KEF XQ30 loudspeakers I chose to partner the Exposure electronics, there's nothing nineteen eighties about these tall, slender and elegant boxes. They pair KEF's latest 130mm bass driver with the new incarnation of the company's Uni-Q 'point source' array for the middle and upper frequencies – a 130mm midrange cone incorporating an elliptical dome tweeter and new 'tangerine' waveguide. There's an audiophile grade crossover, running the bass driver up to 450Hz, and the midrange unit up to 2.5kHz. Weight is 14.8kg per box, and their vital statistics are 860x190x247mm. There's a choice of beautiful finishes – including Birdseye Maple, Khaya Mahogany or Piano Black.

The Exposure machines came in identical robust cartons, reassuringly sealed with 'Made In Britain' stickers. In both cases, all you get is the unit, manual, an IEC lead and identical Exposure HSI01 remotes, which both control both machines. Similarly the KEF speakers are very securely packed, with a variety of feet/isolation options supplied. Exposure recommend that if you're not using the coax or optical digital outputs of the CD player they should be defeated - for brave souls the relevant manual provides instructions on how to open the box and do it yourself.

One of the joys of the return to a network-free, non-surround, non-AV system is the ease of getting the system set up. In no time at all, with the aid of a pair of Chord interconnects and some Black Rhodium speaker cable, I was up and running. Noel recommended that the KEFs would function best firing straight down the room, and so it proved, with an attempt at toeing-in delivering no perceivable imaging benefit. Initially I tried the speakers close to the wall, but the bass felt very much stymied, and I did my testing with the 'speakers standing an impractical, female-offending couple of feet from the wall. This gave a much more free-sounding bass, but in the real world a compromise might have to be reached...

## SOUND QUALITY

Well, what I wanted was a very lively and upfront sound - almost exclusively for use with the singer/songwriter, rock and electronic music that I love. Accordingly, the urge to kick off with the exemplary rock of the new Kings of Leon was impossible to resist, even if their diametric opposite - late-period Leonard Cohen - was obliged to follow! The system served up all

the gusto the modern compressed recording could allow. I established a reference listening volume of roughly 25% of the dial or around 'nine o'clock', but I found the system rewarded me edging the knob round

"ye olde CD was allowed to sparkle on this old skool separates system..."

a bit further, whereupon Leonard Cohen's 'Ten New Songs' was a joy. Those tinkly-bonk synths with the impressively rendered guttural growl of the maestro resulted in a very smooth, satisfying listen.

This system suits detailed recordings, ones that benefit from close analysis, as the Exposure pairing excelled with Eurythmics' (non-remastered) 'Touch Dance', which had my foot tapping enthusiastically, particularly on the instrumental 'Second Side'. The fantastic sound of Dean Garcia's WAL bass funkiness on the dubby 'The First Cut' was a delight to listen to - a bass player's bass player, done full justice to by this truly big boned musical system.

Another eighties excursion proved how very well suited to this type of electronic material this system is. Never the album of choice with Heaven 17, but key tracks 'Sunset Now' and 'This Is Mine' from 'How Men Are' (unfortunately the remastered version) were almost as enjoyable as the Eurythmics had been, with compelling rhythm and a confident if a little strident tonality. The same traits were evident on the Propellerheads' 'OHMSS' from 'Shaken And Stirred', with the live horns sounding out well but getting a little bright thanks to the XQ30s' upfront nature. On the other hand, the punishing dynamic bassline was rendered with ferocity and precision, particularly on the 'Spybreak-ish' outro. Once again, an enjoyable listen!

Neil Young's ever improving analogue-to-digital set up is the reason he is one of the only people whose remasters are actually an improvement on previous digital transfers, and his Greatest Hits is testament to how good a great analogue recording *should* sound in CD, HDCD and 24/96 (on the accompanying DVD-V). On the 3010S 'Down By The River' sounded like a quality recording and transfer, crisp and open and detailed with great reserves of dynamic power. The electronics, I feel, have a really musical gait to them which digs deep into the recording and lets the flavour flood out.

However, I couldn't help feeling

frustration that the 3010S CD player doesn't do HDCD. It strikes me that if you're going to extend the lifetime of optical disc-based media, then it must be worth trying to include the HDCD decoding which enables the

collector to get the best out of the (admittedly small in volume) cream of the format.

All the same, even ye olde CD was allowed to sparkle on this old skool separates system, and fortunately there were no major sound glitch niggles. The 3010S CD player is a well designed product, as I found out due to me having a girlfriend whose CDs are, shall we say, less than optimal in condition (well, actually I've never seen anything like it - cracks on the inside, cracks on the outside - another reason mine are going into storage!). I was afforded the opportunity to do some error correction testing, a moderately scuffed 'The Miseducation of Lauren Hill' being played back without noticeable impediment and fine fidelity.

## CONCLUSION

Whereas DP went for a high quality, lowish price vinyl system and PR a quirky miniature tube thing, my third way was – as far as I'm concerned – the best way. This is a big, thumping, blustering separates system just as they used to be. No valves, no hard drives, Wi-Fi or iPods – just ye olde Compact Disc kicked out by a chunky integrated amplifier and seriously sized floorstanders. As such, I loved its ease of use, directness and overall musicality. Flare-flapping bass, a detailed and well lit midband and crisp, spry treble were all on offer – although in fairness the wick really did need turning up to get things cooking, as the KEFs don't sound particularly engaging at lower volumes.

This said, I can't help wondering where mainstream systems like this can go next. I loved the immediacy of popping a little disc into a tray and sitting back and relaxing without so much as a multiple button press, but I did find myself thinking about its lack of hi res and the hassle of not having 3,000 CDs at the touch of a button via a hard disk music server. But if you're convinced that the CD format still has legs, and/or use pre-remastered discs then this very musical system may be the solution for you.

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One of the fascinating things about our hobby is watching fashions change. Just ten years ago, I'd wager that if three hi-fi reviewers were asked to assemble systems, you'd get three variations on precisely the same theme – that of a separate CD player as a source, a beefy integrated amplifier and a pair of large loudspeakers. In 2009 however, things are becoming altogether more eclectic, quirky and locked into people's individual lifestyles.

These three systems aren't three of a kind – they're three quite different kinds. In my case, I chose a vinyl based system because that reflects how I listen to most (but not all) of my music. That in itself might be seen as scandalous to some, or quaint and eccentric to others, but to me it's as natural as opening my mouth when chocolate travels in its general direction!

My chosen source, the Rega Planar 3 turntable, is an iconic product as far as I'm concerned. I've owned several over the years, and for me it is the minimum one should invest in a vinyl playing source. This is to say that, in my experience, spending anything less buys you a turntable that simply has too many downsides to make the experience of listening to LP records an unalloyed musical event. No disrespect to lesser Regas, Pro-jects, Duals, *et al.*, but for me the P3 is just about 'man enough' for the job.

Whereas the previous P3-2000 incarnation was a fine machine, this new P3-24 variant provides superior speed stability. The previous one sounded just a little too soft and indistinct (albeit nicely smooth), but I'm happy to note that now the latest P3 offers a serious improvement in bass grip. And that Rega tonearm - now in RB301 guise - remains a masterstroke. I know it has its detractors, but for the price the level of detail and insight is breathtaking.

Still, the RB301 has a slightly dry tonality, and is less musically beguiling than some arms – and so I feel the Marantz PM8003 is a fine match. This is a rich, warmish sounding amplifier and has a lovely lilting quality. It's not the world's most detailed, but this isn't what's needed here. I was impressed by the way this mid-price Marantz doesn't draw attention to itself; its sins are those of omission rather than adding its own character to the music. And what character it does have is wholly welcome in this context, as its fulsome musical sound is ideal for the Monitor Audio Radius 90HDs.

Of course, these are billed as rear speakers, or satellites in a sub/sat system – but with a super source like the Rega and a big hearted, warm natured amplifier with a decent amount of Watts like the Marantz, you can just about get away without adding an extra bass box. Indeed, Bluetack them to your bookshelf or even window ledge and ram them up close to the rear wall, and they will sing. Suitably set up, they throw images into the room as confidently as Quad ESL57s and have a wonderfully clean, incisive yet musical nature. The result is a system that gets on with the job of playing LP records in an uncomplicated and direct style.

"in 2009, systems are becoming altogether more eclectic, quirky and locked into people's individual lifestyles..."

That's also a good way of describing Paul Rigby's Shanling/Klipsch system. With an enormous CD collection, the important thing for him was for the system to cut to the musical chase, so to speak. With a meagre 3W on tap, the Shanling MC-30 isn't going to be your average Motorhead fan's first choice, but this isn't the whole story. It isn't Watts per channel that determine how strongly your speakers flap their cones, but the sensitivity. For example, a 100W integrated driving an old pair of Linn Kans with a low 83dB sensitivity will sound little louder than the 3W Shanling tickling the Klipsch RB-61s, with their ninety plus dB sensitivity. And so it transpires that in real life Paul's system isn't actually underpowered for his purposes - indeed, it is like the mouse that roared.

Better still, the single-ended valve powered Shanling amplifier section is so sweet that things stay musically enjoyable at all times. The essence of this system is the way you can take almost any recording, and it still finds the simple rhythms within – there's a wonderfully matter of fact way it plays CDs of all generations and lets the flavour of the recording come shining through.

Patrick Cleasby's Exposure/KEF system is the most conventional here, and a marked contrast to the others. It's a simple unreconstructed CD-based separates affair with punchy transistor amplification that relies on muscle to get the job done. The Exposure CD player is an impressive product with a liquid sound that is a perfect front end for the excellent

Exposure 3010S integrated. This is another standout separate at the price, with real power and grip – but Exposure's characteristically crisp but sweet tonality smoothes out the lively KEF loudspeakers. Ever since the eighties, people have been coming to Exposure amplification to give a great mix of transistor wallop and tube subtlety, and the latest range still does the job.

I'd have reservations running the KEF XQ30 speakers with anything less smooth than the Exposures; these are very clean, dry and slightly analytical boxes that need a gently warm and smooth amplifier to drive them. Even the brightly lit Sugden

A21 S3 would I think, push them into forwardness. Properly matched however, you get a coweringly expansive, tight and punchy sound which is great for stadium pop, large scale choral music and pounding techno alike. These speakers like to rock and this was reflected in Patrick's findings – precisely the opposite to the ultra high sensitivity Klipsches, they thrive at high volumes but aren't the most lively at low levels. Deploy the KEFs in a large room, give the Exposure amp some juice and you have a commanding system.

So there you have it - three very different ways of spending money, from three very different folk. All have their respective strengths and weaknesses, and the art of system building (and therefore great sound) is simply learning how to assess a product and harness its character for the good of the other components it's to be used with. This done, you can get an almighty bang for your buck, and - more importantly - just the *right* sort of bang to suit your tastes.



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# De-Lektor-ble!

**Noel Keywood finds Dali's new Lektor 6 loudspeaker a delightful listening companion...**

**T**here are a dizzying number of variations on the same basic theme in loudspeakers and this alone favours models that stand out because they are innovative. Dali's new Lektor 6s do not sit in this category. They appear pretty conventional but have a very broad range of ability that comes from a balanced and well developed package. Making the most of the compact floorstanding loudspeaker, I came away very impressed. Refined yet exciting too, they trod a fine line between the two, not so refined as to be lifeless nor dynamically bloated for added excitement. Conspicuously capable, the Lektor 6s will do well in any showroom shoot out I suspect - and I believe our measurements suggest why...

Standing 929mm high, 207mm wide and 285mm deep the Lektors look pretty conventional and come weighing a liftable 14.2kgs, making them relatively easy to move around. They have a removable black grille, beneath which sits a pair of pressed wood fibre bass/midrange units, the lower one handling bass only, the next up bass and midrange. Above these units sits a 28mm cloth dome tweeter. Like most modern loudspeakers the Lektors are ported, so are a bass reflex design. Spikes are supplied for the base. The cabinets are made from Medium Density Fibreboard, or MDF, and are covered with a convincing artificial veneer. Single gold plated terminals are fitted that accept bare wire or 4mm. Priced at £684 the Lektor 6s sit in a group of quality floorstanders from the likes of KEF and B&W so they face quite serious competition, especially from Q Acoustics with their impressive 1050i.

## SOUND QUALITY

What distinguished these loudspeakers is what they lacked. Today's metal cones have a characteristic signature, light and spry that's for certain, but a little too shiny to

be truly described as neutral. Dali's fibre cone drivers had just about no distinguishing tonal colour at all. There wasn't the smallest zing that comes from metallic cones, yet nor were Dali's tinged by the warmth and softness - sometimes woolliness - that's common to fibrous cones. The Dali drivers totally lack such colour and were sparkingly clear across the midband. They also sounded nicely balanced tonally: I noticed that male voice in Mussorgsky's 'Boris Godunov' was convincingly full bodied, yet crisply defined at the same time. The backing choir was well lit and I could pick out individual voices, but not at the expense of an easy smoothness that made the Lektors a satisfying listen. I was intrigued by the balance between a strongly lit presentation with plenty of treble, yet reasonably free from sharpness at the same time. Sometimes, with instruments like close miked cymbals in the Zutons 'Valerie' there was some obvious added zest and the Lektors don't need a bright sounding amplifier, yet they were relaxing with most material.

There was real bite to the strings of Steve Earle's chiming guitar at the start of 'Copperhead Road', but rich detailing too. That the Lektors have an unusually smooth lower midband made itself known here as a

deliciously natural, full bodied delivery of Earle's vocals, making others seem a bit contorted by comparison. Quite how Dali have managed to get such a smooth coverage where others seem to run into difficulty I'm uncertain, but it was audible as a convincing sense of evenness. The crispness and underlying clarity of the Lektors



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# Master & Commander?

Noel Keywood tries Philips' expensive SRU8015 Universal remote control...

If you have remote controls sitting in ranks across your lounge coffee table, this smart universal unit from Philips might be an answer to a prayer. It was for me, not only because it clears the table but because it has a great high resolution screen I could read easily in low light.

My love of remote controls sits but one rung above that for mobile phones, and Philips don't make this the easiest one to set up - although it is a delight to use. It has onboard seemingly endless menus of manufacturers remote control codes, but it cannot be set to match specific models as there are just too many. So for an Onkyo TX-NR906 receiver in for review, I had to choose 'Receiver' then search under Onkyo for its code, found by running a scan. What you then get is a generalised code set, to which special functions like Pure Audio must be added.

This is quite a tedious process, with menus to wind through using a rotating ring and names to be typed in, mobile phone-style from the keypad. Long menus can be accessed at the start only, not at the end to work backwards, but Philips add the ability to enter the initial letter, like 's' for Sony to get you to the right area without a lot of tedious winding. Lack of a 'cancel' function meant that a menu branch accidentally entered could not be exited, which was frustrating. Confusingly, a 'Back Exit' button didn't perform this function!

More surprising was lack of a Blu-ray player 'Device' category. For a Samsung BD-PI500 Blu-ray player I loaded DVD controls for Samsung and re-named the DVD device as Blu-ray. Although this worked, the control set did not match the player well and there was no 'Power On' or 'Off' in the 'More' (controls) menu, so I could not use them in a Macro (called 'Activity' by Philips). The way around this was to add



and name a 'Function' by reading the output of the Samsung remote into the Philips, in this case 'Power On' and 'Off'. It was tedious but at least do-able and the ability to type in a custom description made later use easy. So the SRU8015 is a little shaky in places; some omissions are surprising and procedures to cover them laborious. The formal logic of

the handbook was little help and I never did fathom why the usual 'OK' function for entering a command is a key with a 'Tick'!

If you have lost a remote control or bought an item without one then the SRU8015 should contain at least a good set of basic functions from its built-in store of codes used by all manufacturers worldwide.

In contrast to the complication of setup, actually using the SRU8015 was easy - if not obvious at first glance. A small button at top right marked 'Home/Setup' is the starting point. This opens up a menu of devices on the clear, bright, screen, like 'TV', 'DVD', 'Receiver'. Select a device and then its roster of 'Functions' ('on', 'off', 'play', etc.) by pressing a 'More' button and you are off. Okay, it's a bit lengthier than using the dedicated remote, but only if you can understand the latter.

Complex remotes like those for an AV receiver are littered with buttons to directly access never used functions, lettering such as black on a grey background is difficult to read in any light let alone low light, and illumination - if it exists - is weak. All these hurdles to easy usage the SRU8015 overcomes so it can be faster, not slower, than a manufacturer's dedicated remote control. There are few direct access buttons on the Philips, just 'volume', 'play' and suchlike, which keeps its face clear and simple. Because it puts most 'Functions' onto the illuminated screen, they are easy to find and select in bright or dim light.

Nicely made and weighty in the hand, well illuminated, easily legible and straightforward to use, Philips SRU 8015 Universal remote control is worth its £99.99 asking price. Set up can be a tedious process if you own many complicated gadgets and want to access all their functions, but once set up this remote was simplicity itself to use.

## VERDICT

Well built and easy to use universal remote control, but a chore to set up.

PHILIPS SRU8015 £99.99

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## FOR

- easy to use
- clear illuminated display
- all codes onboard

## AGAINST

- tedious setup
- no Blu-ray category
- no Cancel button



# Plane Speak

**Noel Keywood auditions two unusual loudspeakers using planar drivers - a ribbon on Robson Acoustics' Greystoke and an electrostatic panel on Kingsound's Princess II...**

**H**aving lived with Quad's ELS63 electrostatic loudspeaker and Heybrook's Sextet with its Tonigen ribbon tweeter I learnt to appreciate the unique strengths of both loudspeakers. So I couldn't pass up an opportunity to pit a ribbon against an electrostatic once again by running two very unusual loudspeakers alongside each other: a Robson Acoustics Greystoke Opulus (yes, really!) fitted with a ribbon tweeter and a Kingsound Princess II, fitted with an electrostatic tweeter. Both are standmounters, but not budget designs by any means; the lavishly crafted Greystoke costs

£1,600 and the Princess II £1,500. Would they bring back some of the glories of my audio past I wondered? Such delights have been swamped by a sea of metal cone and dome equipped boxes that crowd today's marketplace - and our listening rooms!

## KINGSOUND PRINCESS II

I'm going to start my comparison by looking at a strange to almost bizarre idea totally new to me and therefore an unknown quantity - the electrostatic panel tweeter of Kingsound's Princess II loudspeaker. When my eyes alighted on this little box of tricks at September's Hi-Fi Show at

the Park Inn, Heathrow I knew I had to take a closer look. Never have I seen an electrostatic panel built into a box loudspeaker like this. Is that barmy, I wondered, a complicated Oriental contrivance as sensible as a motorised rickshaw? Or is it just that I have become accustomed to picturing electrostatics as Quads - big, open panels that are the very antithesis of small box loudspeakers. I make the distinction 'Oriental' because the Kingsounds hail from Kings Audio of Hong Kong ([www.kingsaudio.com.hk](http://www.kingsaudio.com.hk)) and if you look at their loudspeaker range - especially the extraordinary Emperor that looks like a Ming Dynasty room

divider - you'll see some fascinatingly different designs.

Most challenging to electrostatic orthodoxy however is the Princess II reviewed here, complete with side exhaust ports that remind me of tropical window slats. These allow rear sound from the panel to escape, as it were. Sound doesn't flow like water so the analogy isn't an especially appropriate one, but whatever. If they sound good, who's worried about the odd technical peculiarity or two!

Also within the box, in the lower half that forms a ported reflex enclosure, lies a small 6in bass unit that works up to 800Hz before handing over to the Martin Logan style single-sided (not push-pull as per Quad) electrostatic panel. For those unfamiliar with the electrostatic transducer, picture it as a super lightweight piece of Clingfilm, driven by invisible electrostatic forces. The extremely low mass of this film allows it to follow the musical signal faithfully, giving a pure sound free from distortion and colouration. In practice electrostatics can sound perceptibly clean and pure, but it is difficult to make them perfect. The Princess II panel is interesting in that it works from a low 800Hz upward which should perceptibly alter handling of violins in particular, which invariably fall victim to phase and amplitude anomalies that beset most loudspeakers with their higher 3kHz crossover point. However, I must point out here that flat panels have their own unique problems and that these panels were directional, much like Martin Logan panels. All the same, providing they are listened to on-axis the sound balance remains pretty consistent.

The cabinet is a compact 207mm wide, 260mm deep and 401mm high, and weighs in at 7.8kgs, making it an easy lift. The Princess II is a standmounter, as it's a bit large for most shelves, although it will fit a 12in deep shelf. Quality of finish is good, although the artificial veneer isn't especially alluring, nor the black grille cloth against it a fetching match. Technophiles will better like the bright blue LED at rear that lights when power is connected.

Yes, this loudspeaker needs power to polarise the electrostatic panels, and like Martin Logans each loudspeaker comes with a small wall wart supply that sends a safe 12V to the cabinet. Also on the rear panel lies a +2dB treble lift switch and, of course, input terminals, in this case a single pair that prevents use of bi-wiring.

No arcane start up rituals are

necessary, and your house doesn't need the right *Feng Shui*. Placement isn't apparently an issue, partly because rear radiation sees fixed acoustic conditions imposed by the cabinet. The side slats output quite a lot of the rearward sound our measurement microphone showed, and the idea is that when bounced off a rear wall this will increase the sense of spaciousness, making the Princess II sound more like an open electrostatic panel than a closed box. With an internal rear cabinet wall there to reflect sound back to the panel and out toward listeners though, this will only be partially successful. The Princess II isn't a high power loudspeaker, being quoted as needing 60-120 Watts.

### ROBSON GREYSTOKE

Hailing from Britain's Lake District, in the northern county of Northumbria that, I am told, is somewhere near Iceland but is more solvent, Robson Acoustics hand craft loudspeakers using traditional materials that better blend into expensively furnished modern homes than the bland, cheap looking artificial veneers on many loudspeakers. So our review samples came with deeply patterned and fissured Oak end pieces and a hide wrapped cabinet that will, I'm sure, appeal to a great many proud homeowners unhappy with bland alternatives.

The Greystoke is a weighty (18kgs) but compact design featuring a ribbon tweeter, another interesting way of generating clean treble. The electrical signal is passed through a light metallic ribbon immersed in a strong magnetic field. The ribbon is very light, if not as light as a piece of Clingfilm, nor quite as sonically neutral. It is however much lighter than a dome tweeter and more evenly driven too. Ribbons measure superbly well and are known for their clean, incisive sound. If you want conspicuously fast, detailed treble a ribbon is the drive unit to go for.

Ribbons usually reach down to 4kHz or so, making them difficult to partner. The ribbon in this loudspeaker works from 3.5kHz upward, our measurements suggest, the bass/midrange unit struggling to reach up so high. This is the same problem suffered by the Sextet, whose crossover between plastic cone and metal ribbon was rather obvious. Robson have better managed this difficult transition by using similar materials to avoid an obvious change of character and by using a small, modern, dish shaped magnesium alloy cone better able to reach up high.

The bass unit is port loaded,

making this a reflex design. With a cabinet 340mm high, 180mm wide and 280mm deep, carrying a rear port and a single pair of chunky gold plated terminals, the Greystoke is compact and will fit a shelf if need be, although it is meant for stands. Bass output isn't prodigious and a somewhat over damped response is most suited to near wall placement in small to medium sized rooms where room gain will make a contribution to low end weight.

What you have here then is a high quality two way that, like the Kingsound Princess II, will give quite a different rendition to the everyday two-ways we all know so well.

But how different do both loudspeakers sound and - more crucially - does different mean better with either of them?

### SOUND QUALITY

I had difficulty getting the best from the Greystokes, yet from the off they sounded very amenable and of quite a different tonal pallor and general demeanour to most loudspeakers. With our capable Anatek A50R transistor amplifier, to us a benchmark design able to handle most loudspeakers with equanimity, the Greystokes had a pleasantly light air about them, and were obviously fast and concise at higher frequencies, giving tambourine in Steve Earle's 'Esmeralda's Hollywood' the ability to penetrate the room with alarming incision. This was classic ribbon behaviour. Treble as clean as a whistle, delivered with force that was penetrative. Violin sounded more convincing in its constitution and tonality than most rivals, firm, full bodied yet with no hint of harshness or screech.

The Greystokes pushed Nigel Kennedy out at me, but in the smoothest, most svelte manner I've heard since using electrostatics. They sounded all of a piece, focused and fleet of foot too. Indeed, the Greystokes were brighter lit than electrostatics,



but totally free from the hard and somewhat unnatural tonality today's metal dome tweeters impose on violin, and free from the contorted presentation caused by phase and amplitude problems at crossover between bass and treble unit. Nigel Kennedy suddenly became an easy and gratifying listen, his violin having a gentle and sweet tonal pallor quite unlike that I am used to from today's loudspeakers. There was some small sense of a softening of the sound, where the bow glided across a string perhaps just a bit too silkily, but this was to change.

Running through my usual torture tracks chosen to fully stress a loudspeaker I became aware that the Greystoke was more 'nice' than exciting. Vocals were projected well, metallic percussion tinkled beautifully but at lower frequencies there was progressive lessening of the dynamic push, typically behind drums and bass guitar. So whilst the striding bass line behind Angelique Kidjo's 'The Sound of the Drums' was discernible it lacked real push.

This is to be expected from a small loudspeaker I thought to myself, but I was at the same time concerned that our Anatek A50R could be wound to full volume and still seemingly lacked puff. So I

switched on our resident Icon Audio MB845 tube monoblocks



and with these the picture change significantly. The Greystokes jumped into life, taking on an altogether more lively nature. Where before they had sounded restrained and a little soft, now they had real insight and zest. Suddenly,

Sinead O'Connor's voice had a sharply etched outline and material presence that hung in front of me as she sang 'Foggy Dew' in her eerily piercing nasal tones, backed by flute and pipe of the Chieftains.

Similarly, Kennedy's violin became an altogether livelier instrument, taking many steps forward on the stage it seemed. The Greystokes

deliver music with a steady, focused intensity that had me held in fascination. That have the spry gait of all metal coned loudspeakers, without their blemishes. Of similar sonic character, the drivers integrate well to give a cohesive sound free from distracting port noises or treble sizzle. Here's a loudspeaker that doesn't make you wonder whether you're listening to violin or bowed steel string guitar; violin had a pleasingly organic woodiness that I enjoyed - and it was a violin, not an instrument found on a Metallica tour bus.

If you can listen to these little marvels, hooked up to an amplifier able to drive them - and I would nominate a powerful valve amplifier like the MB845s or Quad II-eightys - then it's an education to do so. They successfully challenge the field, with a lovely tonal pallor that seems natural to the ear, whilst at the same time being fast, incisive and deeply detailed, and free from sonic stridency. I was drawn into listening to the finest drawings of breath, gentle tinkle of cymbals and bells all intensely described before me. It was superb to hear.

As measurement suggested the Greystokes don't go really low, yet at the same time with the MB845s at least they had acceptably vigorous bass lines. Listening in, Editor David Price immediately said they'd be perfect as a super high quality monitor for smaller rooms. Low frequencies would be brought up by room gain, without boom occurring.

Switching over to the Kingsounds brought a large change. With enthusiastic bass and, at times, searing highs, the Princess IIs brought emphasis to both ends of the audio spectrum and rather than sounding calm, svelte and composed like the Robsons, were less of a piece. However, the electrostatic panel was at times utterly superb and distinguished these loudspeakers. I was aware from the off that there's a lot of high treble, bringing a searing quality to the strings of Nils Lofgren's guitar in 'Keith Don't Go', but their sheer vibrancy and the exquisite decay of each note told me that this was an electrostatic working its magic. Reverberation faded out into the hall behind Mercedes Sosa's voice as he chanted 'Misa Criolla', the choir hovering behind in a heavenly acoustic. The slow, solemn beat of a drum was strong and timed with precision. It was lovely to hear, drawing me right into the performance, making it not just enjoyable, but exciting.

The supreme clarity of an

electrostatic and its ability to work right down to the lowest levels, so you can "hear a pin drop" as I am won't to explain it, was apparent too as Sinead O'Connor's voice falls to a murmur at the end of 'Foggy Dew'. Where I've had to resort to reading the lyrics of this song on the internet when listening via conventional loudspeakers, through the Princess IIs I could catch the words as O'Connor trills and warbles through this lament, through to the last dying phrase. I've had to hold my breath before with material like this, but only when listening to every last little nuance being conveyed by an electrostatic: first from Quad, recently Martin Logan and now I'm delighted to say, from Kingsound. This is a loudspeaker that literally takes your breath away, if not for the usual meanings of the expression. At times it had me on the edge of the seat, not daring to breathe.

Strong treble from the panel was also responsible for crystal clear imaging, tiny details in Dadawa's 'Canton Story' springing from the loudspeakers at far left and right, giving the sound stage a firm width.

Bewitching with a lot of Rock and much Classical, there were times when the Princess IIs displayed limitations. Massed strings in The Planets 'Mars Bringer of War' had an overly bright shimmer to them, making their presence a little too obvious within the rest of the orchestra. Choral works like Beethoven's 'Missa Solemnis' were characterised by some edginess that the smoother Greystokes avoided. It wasn't overly annoying but at the same time the Princess IIs were a trifle edgy with strings and choirs. They lack the smoothness of Quads, but then these are single sided panels like the Martin Logans, not more linear push-pulls like the Quads.

Spinning Angelique Kidjo's 'The Sound of the Drums' showed the Princess IIs have surprisingly strong but supple bass, able to convey the walking bass lines and thunderous drums, as well as searing percussion. As you'd expect from the small cabinet size, deep bass is limited in level, but it was there all the same I found; the Princess IIs had much the same tidy bottom end behaviour as Usher's S-520s and should suit medium sized rooms well. In small rooms their treble might be overpowering, even when switched to Flat, as I ran them.

I was surprised to find that imaging and tonal balance changed little as I moved my head both sideways, up and down, when listening four metres away, contrary

to the large changes seen by our measuring microphone close up (1m). So although flat electrostatic panels are known to suffer phase cancellation effects that result in a ragged forward response, the Princess IIs sounded quite even in use.

**CONCLUSION**

Although I wanted to capture the essence of two very unusual loudspeakers in this review rather than run a shoot out between them, there was one area where they seemed diametrically opposed. The Princess IIs worked best at lower listening levels; push them and the electrostatic panels harden up and get a little confused I found. By way of contrast the Greystokes enjoyed going loud, so smooth and composed were they. However, no small loudspeaker can be pushed too hard without bass distortion (doubling) becoming apparent as stodginess and muddle. Ultimately, neither loudspeaker is meant to shake the foundations of a large room.

I realise from what I have said that Robson's Greystokes would

seemingly suit Classical music played at high level whilst the Kingsound's Princess IIs best suit Rock played at low levels, a decidedly contrary result. This is only partly the case. The Greystokes were lovely with all forms of music and it is quite obvious that they have been honed over a long period to produce a polished sound that is nothing other than pure class. You will not hear anything like them elsewhere I believe, at any price, they are sufficiently unique.

Kingsound's Princess IIs are less svelte, that's for sure, but their small electrostatic panels were at times sonically breathtaking. Imperfect perhaps, but also extraordinary at the price I feel. I would be tempted to re-wire the rear switch to give -2dB treble cut rather than lift - that would tweak them nicely! As they stand they have an edge to them, but it isn't intolerable.

Both designs featured here are highly refreshing alternatives to more conventional stand mounters, especially when they carry high price tags that are sometimes difficult to justify. Both the Robson

Acoustics Greystokes and the KingSound Princess IIs are fine small loudspeakers that justify their prices, I believe. Amongst today's metal domed hoards they were a breath of fresh air sonically, although both were difficult and demanding loads that need a good amplifier. Keep this in mind and either one could be just the tonic your system needs.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●£

Insightful electrostatic panel with decent bass, but still a bright speaker.

**KINGSOUND PRINCESS II** £1,500  
Icon Audio  
+44 (0)116 2440593  
www.iconaudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- deeply insightful
  - sharp imaging
  - supple bass

- AGAINST**
- strong treble
  - limited volume
  - need mains power

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

Interesting loudspeaker with a svelte, fast and detailed sound that's ideal for smaller rooms.

**ROBSON GREYSTOKE** £1,600  
Robson Acoustics  
+44 (0) 1768 484000  
www.robsonacoustics.co.uk

- FOR**
- fresh tonality
  - superb treble
  - elegant cabinet finish

- AGAINST**
- difficult to drive
  - limited bass
  - need amplifier power

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

**PRINCESS II**

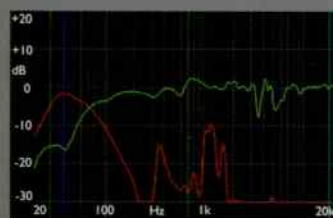
The bass unit and electrostatic panel of the Princess II meet at 800Hz and the need to match perceived energy levels results in what is a peak in the midrange, much like that of Martin Logan loudspeakers. The electrostatic panel works relatively smoothly across a very wide frequency range, from 800Hz up to 20kHz, eliminating the usual crossover phase problems suffered by conventional loudspeakers. Like any flat panel the KingSound electrostatic panel is directional, high frequency output falling off to either side, or above and below the loudspeaker. This limits the listening position a little. Side vents emit the entire frequency range and this will bounce off walls to widen to enhance the sense of spaciousness. There are a few narrow band response effects at 4kHz, but otherwise the electrostatic panel offers smooth output over its operating range, and especially at high frequencies, so treble quality should be excellent. Increasing treble by switching to +2dB raises output right across the electrostatic panel's entire operating range by a small amount.

The bass unit runs smoothly down to 65Hz and the port, tuned to 50Hz has fairly broad output to provide support lower down. Our impedance trace shows the

electrostatic panel has a high characteristic impedance of around 10 Ohms, so KingSound have used an 8 Ohm bass unit with it, resulting in a high overall measured impedance of 8 Ohms. Impedance falls above 10kHz, but there is so little energy here most amplifiers should cope. A drawback is low sensitivity of 83dB from one watt of input (2.84V), meaning quite a lot of power is needed to go loud, at least 40 Watts.

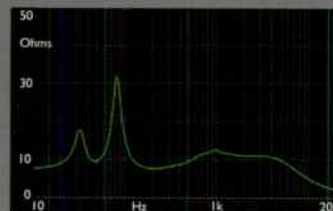
The Princess II is well developed, delivering a honed all round measured performance. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

**ROBSON GREYSTOKE**

The ribbon tweeter of the Greystoke runs smoothly from 4kHz up to 18kHz our frequency response shows. There's a dip between it and the bass/midrange unit, which is a little peaky around 2kHz before its output rolls down above 3kHz. Third-octave analysis suggested it will have little impact.

There may well be a little extra vocal projection from the broad lift around 1.6kHz though; the Robson will not sound distant across the midband. Analysis of spectral decay (waterfall) shows the peaks are not associated with energy storage, decay looking relatively clean and even with time.

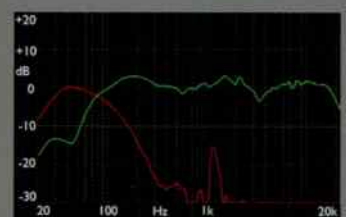
The bass unit covers the lower midrange nicely, suggesting instruments and vocals will have a good sense of body, the rise in output down to 150Hz ensuring there will be quite a strong sense of warmth to the lower midrange, especially as decay at this frequency is slow in the time domain.

Lower frequencies fall away steadily, as it to be expected from such a small cabinet and the Robson is best used on stands close to a rear wall. Port output peaks at 40Hz and provides some support for forward radiation, but the Robson does not go down low, reaching 60Hz or so within a small to medium sized room.

Sensitivity was low at 82dB from one nominal watt (2.8V) not helped by an unusually high measured impedance of 12 Ohms; a high DCR (7 Ohm) bass unit has been used. High power amplifiers of 60 Watts or more are best suited.

This is an unusual loudspeaker, but one that is quite well engineered. It will likely have an entertaining balance and insightful presentation. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



*On stage and at home,  
Jools Holland's sound is pure Yamaha*



*Powered by music*

Products featured: CD-S1000 CD player and A-S1000 amplifier

On the road and in the studio, Jools depends on his Yamaha piano for its clarity and purity of tone. At home, he enjoys the same standards of audio excellence thanks to Yamaha's total dedication to the listening experience. You can too. Visit [www.yamaha-uk.com](http://www.yamaha-uk.com) to find out more.







# Special Brew

David Price gets a taste of Naim Audio's brand new Nait XS integrated amplifier...

People want affordable or ultra high end hi-fi. It's a split between those who are affected by the credit crunch and those who are not. Worried mortals in the mid-market are being careful with their cash right now and buying budget. With this in mind, Naim's entry level Nait range is expanding. The SuperNait has been a great success, and the 5i remains very popular. However, there's been a gaping hole between the £750 price point of the 5i and the £2,500 of the SuperNait – and so here's where the new Nait XS at £1,250 fits in.

Fair enough, but what is the XS exactly? Let's not forget the Nait 5i is a stripped-down, 'less is more' design that's not upgradeable, and the SuperNait is about as close as Naim come to an all-singing, all dancing do-it-all hi-fi product. What then of the new XS? Well I am happy to say it falls on the 5i side of the fence here; whereas the SuperNait has serious onboard DACs (as well as all its other tricks), the Nait XS is – ostensibly – the SuperNait minus its digital bits, in a smaller 5i style box with a slightly less beefy power supply. In essence then, you're getting much of the SuperNait, without the fripperies (at least if you're not a digiphile), for half the money.

It's a high quality, stripped

down, back to basics two channel analogue amplifier at an affordable price – in Naim terms at least. A clever selling proposition, and all the better because you can attach one of Naim's external power supplies and get recognisable performance improvements. This fits the Naim upgrading hierarchy very well, but does it deliver the sonic goods?

Down to the engineering nitty gritty, and it's easiest to conceive of the XS as a SuperNait in the

input socket is mounted in a 'floppy' way so that it doesn't directly send ground-borne vibration from the mains cable into the chassis – a clever touch. The two layer circuit board is optimised for size, and combines surface mount technology with thru-hole components. It too is decoupled, allowed to 'flap around' (for the want of a better term) so as not to carry the vibration from the case into it. Carefully hand aligned individual wiring runs to the

"a high quality, stripped-down, back-to-basics two channel integrated amplifier at an affordable price..."

series 5i's smaller aluminium chassis and sleeve with zinc die-cast front panel. Inside is a larger-than-the-5i transformer, rated at 380VA with five separate windings, giving 60W RMS per channel. The preamp section is flexible, with six inputs, the facility to add FlatCap, HiCap or SuperCap power supplies, a switchable AV bypass, a stereo full bandwidth sub out (effectively then it's a preamplifier output), programmable Auto Input Switching (AIS) and a front panel 3.5mm auxiliary input.

As such, it looks closer to the SuperNait than the 5i under the hood, with very careful attention given to component layout and topography, along with vibration isolation. For example, the mains

ALPs Blue volume control, again to reduce microphony. The tape monitor loop has been removed, and the preamplifier is said to be the same as the SuperNait, but with its gain altered to improve sonic performance in this application. Adding a separate power supply improves performance by powering the preamp stage exclusively from the external power supply. The power amp uses the output devices of the NAP 200 power amplifier with a circuit based on the NAIT 5i high efficiency amp.

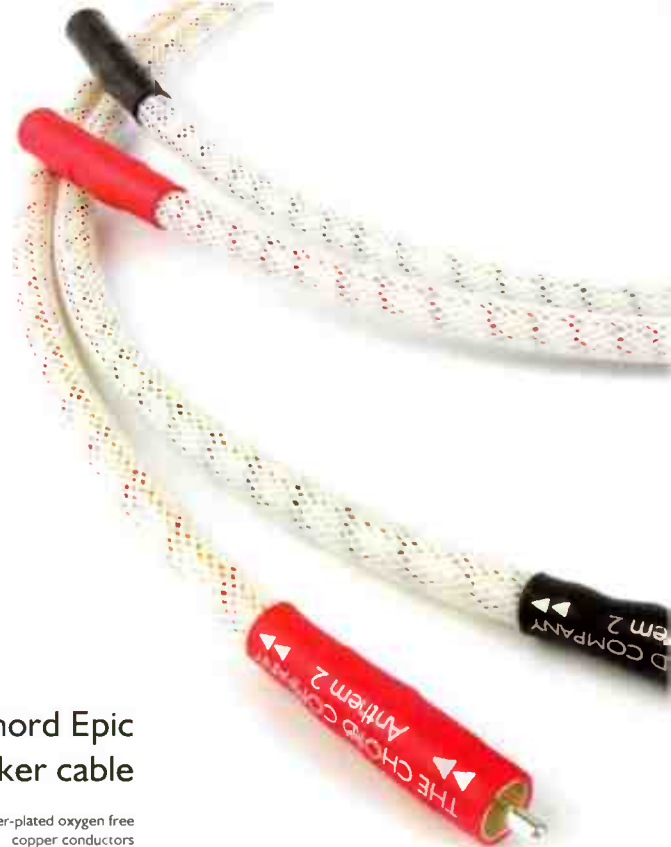
## SOUND QUALITY

If the Nait 5i is a relatively light and tight sounding product and the SuperNait is altogether richer



### Chord Epic speaker cable

- 2mm diameter silver-plated oxygen free copper conductors
- Twisted pair configuration
- Silicone internal jacket
- High frequency effective dual foil and braid shielding system
- Vibration damping translucent PVC outer jacket



### Chord Anthem 2

- Silver-plated multi strand signal conductor
- Silver-plated combined shielding system
- Internal and external Teflon insulation
- Ultra low mass silver-plated non compression RCA/phono plugs
- Isolated signal return path
- Single material signal path
- Also available fitted with DIN and XLR plugs

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tonally and if anything a little softer and more rounded (albeit with huge scale and punch), where then is the XS pegged? Well, just as its price is closer to the 5i, so the XS's sound lies closer to that of the 5i in its character, if not in its level.

Kicking off with Augustus Pablo's 'King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown', a classic slice of early nineteen

good fun. This amplifier's superb bass pushed the track along with an unerring sense of urgency; it gave the sense that the song was really going somewhere.

Moving to Mary J. Blige's 'Children of the Ghetto', and I was beguiled by the Nait XS's presentation of her superlative soul vocals. There wasn't so much as a hint of

generic Naim sound. The rival Sugden A21 S2 is a tad more insightful and transparent across the mid and treble, if less obviously powerful and propulsive. Leema's Stream is a sweeter and more euphonic product, easier to listen to late at night it doesn't reach out and grab your attention in the way the XS does. Musical Fidelity's new A1 is just about



seventies dub music, and the Nait XS proved quite a performer. As ever, the defining characteristic of Naim amplifiers for me is the space between the notes – or how well the amp is able to stop playing one note before the next one starts. The new XS is no different to its family relations in this department, showing fleet footedness and great control. The result was a beautifully timed rendition of the music, causing profuse tapping of the feet.

Despite its smaller casework, in the bass department the new Naim sounds very close to the larger SuperNait. It is considerably stronger and more animated than the 5i, giving a visceral thump to the song's distinctive bass guitar playing, allied to a heroic kick to the bass drum. This new amp may still not be quite the most 'bass heavy' in its class, but it is surely the most expressive in the low frequency department. As far as I could discern, the SuperNait has a slightly more fulsome bottom end, but it is only marginally so – for my money I found the XS there or thereabouts in this respect.

The upshot is that the XS has a very taut, tight but punchy underpinning to its midband. Whereas the SuperNait is a teensy bit opaque (by £2,500 class standards) in this area, the XS gives about as incisive a midband I can think of at £1,250 (Sugden A21a S2 notwithstanding). This means a huge amount of detail, with very confident, 'architectural' soundstaging. ABC's 'Lexicon of Love' is an old favourite of mine, and 'Date Stamp' delighted with the dizzying amount of information the XS threw out, along with the remarkably tidy way it kept all the numerous strands of this complex Trevor Horn production together. Not only did it sound ordered and impressive in a hi-fi sense however, but also riotously

hardness, the new Nait if anything giving quite a dark and velvety tonality to proceedings, yet capturing Blige's every vocal inflection. Of particular note was her phrasing; it was there in all its glory. It is interesting that my listening notes show I first remarked on the texture of her voice and not the phrasing; Naims of ten years ago would have done the latter brilliantly but the former only perfunctorily. It's fascinating to see that the new Naims are able to give (almost) the best of both worlds – no small feat.

I also loved the Nait XS's treble; the crispness of hi-hat cymbals is pure pleasure. Whereas the Nait 5i is good at the price, it's just a little muffled and electronic sounding in absolute terms. This new amplifier however, is a clear step forward in this respect. The stick work on Lou Donaldson's 'Alligator Bogaloo' was a joy; this 1967 BlueNote jazz recording was captured in all its glory, with all the air and space that the original crossed-pair of microphones imparted – and once again, there was not a trace of brightness.

**CONCLUSION**

I can think of few downsides to this amplifier; as a package it is superb and so any objections are more down to whether you actually like the

the creamiest sounding thing you can buy at the price, but lacks 'gumption' compared to the new Nait. My advice is as ever – go and listen. What I can say is that I loved it, and for me it's the most complete and capable 'affordable' Naim amplifier I've come across - making it ideal for these troubled economic times.

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**

Avid Acutus/SME V/vdH Frog turntable  
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage  
Sugden IM4 integrated amplifier  
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

**VERDICT**

Super affordable integrated amplifier, with power, subtlety and sophistication in equal measure. Build, finish and upgradeability seal the deal.

**NAIM NAIT XS** £1,250  
Naim Audio Ltd  
+44 (0) 1722 426600  
www.naimaudio.com

**FOR**

- unerringly musical sound
- convincing dynamics
- subtlety, detailing
- upgradeability

**AGAINST**

- nothing at the price

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Like a few amplifiers we have tested recently the XS produced an especially stable distortion pattern that held steady at all levels and frequencies - very unusual and difficult to achieve. Our analysis shows steadily declining harmonic level with rising frequency and this held stable at all frequencies, as the distortion sweep shows. The XS all but mimicked a valve amplifier in this respect, but that is not to say it will sound the same as sound quality differences are not attributable to distortion alone. Together with a rigidly imposed bandwidth limit of 20kHz (-1dB) the XS will sound smooth and should be an easy listen, lacking the uncorrelated distortion 'tune' many amps play.

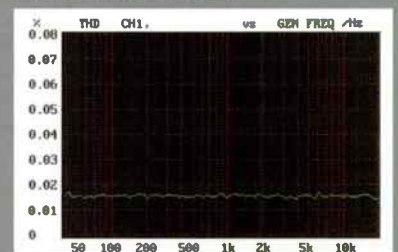
Damping factor was typical of a Naim amplifier - at 15 low, if not very low, so bass will likely be 'obvious'.

Power output measured 60 Watts into 8 Ohms and 90W into 4 Ohms, the latter being close to what will be delivered as most loudspeakers have 4 Ohm bass units. It's plenty enough for most situations.

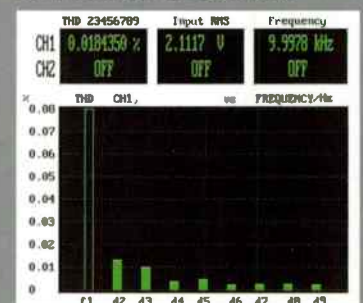
The XS measured very well. It will likely have a smooth sound, with obvious bass in the Naim style, and ameliorate today's bright sounding loudspeakers. NK

Power	60 Watts
Frequency response	5Hz-20kHz
Separation	82dB
Noise	-92dB
Distortion	0.018%
Sensitivity	120mV
Damping factor	

**DISTORTION SWEEP**



**DISTORTION SPECTRUM**





# Serious Logic

**Andrew Harrison's head calculates that Audio Logic's Model 34MXL digital-to-analogue convertor is a very decent digital device, but can it win his heart?**

**W**hen assembling the best sounding D/A converter for a digital front end, there are two principal schools of thought about how to achieve the best performance.

In simple terms, one seeks the most linear reconstruction of the digital audio bitstream, meaning that we must do our very best to maximise the actual digital conversion stage. This may involve finding novel techniques where necessary to ensure that the music's not mangled while it's still being manipulated in the digital realm. It often entails using custom digital signal processing rather than off-the-shelf silicon.

The other school of thought says that our current converters are doing just fine thanks, and it's how we apply them and then treat the raw analogue coming out the end of tried-and-tested converter chips that makes all the difference...

In the first school reside the digital pathfinders; companies like dCS, Chord Electronics, Meridian, MSB Technology and EMM Labs, while in the second lie the analogue experts like Audio Note, Bryston, Zanden and just about any CD player or DAC maker that uses a valve output stage. Audio Logic Co. is a small-scale audiophile manufacturer based in Westport, Connecticut, and one who falls squarely into the latter camp.

Audio Logic Co is one of the less well-known companies in the rarefied world of speciality hi-fi, with no web

presence or any marketing behind it. It seems to be more a word-of-mouth placed company, debated on forums but rarely reviewed. The information we have is limited to an eleven-page manual and a close examination of the product itself.

So here we have the Audio Logic Co. Model 34MXL, a stereo DAC using two standard – but unspecified – DAC chips, along with a balanced valve output stage. In fact the chips' identity is obscured by what appears to be copper paint over the part numbers! Based on experience though, the DAC was happy to accept a digital input up to 24/96 specification.

In line with similar such units, the designer has specified many high quality electronic components such as large audiophile-grade capacitors. The main deviation from the norm appears to be the unusual use of transformer coupling between the DAC output and the valve stage, so that the two dual-differential chips are direct coupled to transformer primaries, with the secondaries wired to the control grids of a pair of dual triodes. In the review sample, these were NOS Mullard E88CC types, comparable to the 6922 and designed as an improved version of the ECC88.

Two digital inputs are offered on the back, RCA coaxial and XLR balanced, although there's is an option for a third input of the optical variety. For output, there's one pair of RCA phonos and another pair of XLR balanced sockets. The 34MXL is very solidly built into an all-metal

case with thick alloy faceplate, all surfaces finished in a textured black paint. Two long horizontal slots on the 9mm-thick aluminium fascia allow blue light from within to seep through when the unit has a digital signal lock. And four chromed buttons here allow simple switching between the three inputs, and reverse signal phase.

Looking inside we have three small frame-transformer power supplies to the digital, analogue and valve heater stages. The circuit is built on a large glass-fibre PCB using thick tracks for best performance. And standing in the centre of the board are the unusual interstage coupling transformers.

## SOUND QUALITY

Adding valves to digital electronics is often seen as a means to sweeten or soften the excesses of 16bit CD sound, and here the Model 34MXL did not disappoint in the least. Its sound was characterised as smooth and edge-free to a fault, and at no point in the extended listening did it stand forward as anything other than vice-free in this respect.

In frequency coverage the Model 34MXL didn't seem as well extended as most modern DACs – there was something of a 'vintage' tinge to its sound, as it seemed to trade on midband focus at the expense of bass slam and upper treble sparkle. At the low end for example, playing through the live take of Pink Floyd's 'The Wall', there was little conviction behind low bass guitar. Here a detuned bass E string underpins

'Another Brick in the Wall Part 2', a low D used alternately through the verse. Through the 34MXL, the low thrum was comparatively lost and light, taking away some of the impact of the performance.

In simple and sparse jazz pieces though, the 34MXL could really go to work and bring out the best of acoustic instruments. From Zakir Hussain's 'Making Music' album, where flute, sax and acoustic guitar interplay with Hussain's tabla and percussion, you could easily bring your attention on each line in its vinyl-like wholesomeness. Listen beyond the main lines however and you may realise that some of the air and space was being robbed...

The soaring flute and tubby tabla sound in 'Water Girl' could not be matched with the 34MXL in place, where a Chord DAC 64 could let the instruments show off their respective and unique timbres that much more clearly.

When music got harmonically richer and more complex, the smooth and sanguine sound of the Model 34MXL had some difficulty in keeping up. Given the two concert grands of Rachmaninov's 'Suite No. 1 for Two Pianos', and in particular the fourth 'Paques', played with gusto by Güher and Süher Pekinel, I had difficulty in making out the individual contributions of the four hands. There was about as much stereo width to work with as the Chord for example, but a slightly duller effect that sounded like a screen between you and the playing. The brilliance of hammered piano strings was somehow overly smoothed, almost veiled in its one-step-removed presentation.

This was a theme found with most types of music – a dampening of upper frequencies and curtailment of the low end, which nevertheless did have a useful side effect in drawing me in to some midrange tunefulness not normally apparent. For example, I found myself more taken in by the edge in Waters' emotional outpouring in 'Don't Leave Me Now' from the Wall set, as if the deficit in frequency extremes had been merely diverted into more effort to express the humanity in the singing voice.

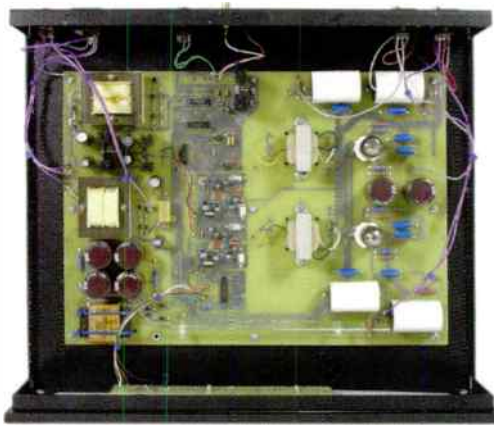
'And Dream Of Sheep' from Kate Bush's 'Hounds of Love' gave the Model 34MXL a chance to show its tribute to vocals, but didn't entirely win me over even here. True, it could show the considered delivery of words and the reverb tail after vocal lines, but a more revealing DAC would show how and where the artificial reverb sat in the stereo

mix. If you don't need to know how a producer has worked with available colours in their palette, that's not necessarily a problem. Yet I couldn't help feeling I was missing something vital as it polished off the freshness of reproduced sound.

Despite a kind way with the human voice, I also found there was something missing in its expression of both large-scale dynamics – almost certainly related to its underwhelming low frequency performance – and in the micro-dynamics and fine detailing that should flesh out a sound and bring it closer to life. In striving to make a naturally smooth digital converter devoid of the glare of bad binary, some element of the baby had been thrown out with the bathwater, methinks...

Inter-note blackness was another aspect of this, with the wide swing of contrasts between sound and no-sound seemingly blurred, such that dynamic shifts were not convincingly represented. As with the effect noted on four-hand piano, where it was difficult to discern where roles handed over, so too was there a hint of this broad spectrum smear underlying all music

Take the crisp-sounding and superbly played set of Zeppelin classics on Page and Plant's 'No Quarter', where the rock gods join forces with the distinctly dusky sounding Egyptian Ensemble. With North African drums punctuating 'Friends', the 34MXL had a mildly monotonic flavour, slurring the percussive complexity, masking the droning Hammond and rounding off the string section's incision. In its favour, the Audio Logic DAC could bring out the acoustic guitar strums and Plant's throaty delivery, but ultimately I yearned to return to more honest converters, even if I did have to listen through some edginess...



**CONCLUSION**

Despite a warmth that never succumbed to simple bass bloom, the Model 34MXL never quite delivered for this listener. In trying so hard to rein in the possibility of digital glare, it forgot to let the bright and dark contrasts of music show through, erring almost exclusively on the darker, smoother side. In straightforward stereo width and depth it fulfils, and has a calm and creamy tone which may seem a welcome relief from old-school digital dazzle. If this sounds tempting then by all means investigate further, but at this price point there are other contenders which can balance the virtues of revelation and musicality more capably, I feel.

**VERDICT** ●●●

Pleasant if rather un insightful sounding DAC with a smooth, balm sound – but off the pace compared to price rivals.

**AUDIO LOGIC CO MODEL 34MXL DAC** £2,950  
 Angelsound Audio  
 +44(0)1923 352479  
 www.angelsoundaudio.co.uk

**FOR**

- warm tonality
- gently beguiling sound
- build quality

**AGAINST**

- soft frequency extremes
- slightly opaque midband
- middling dynamics

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our analysis shows frequency response has a slight upward trend toward high frequencies, resulting in a high 21.2kHz upper limit. There is a small low bass roll down, placing the lower limit at 15Hz, compared to 2Hz of many CD players. I suspect this will not have much affect because valves usually bestow good low frequency dynamics and reclocking will reinforce this, as well as adding strong leading edges. Noise was a little higher than is common, again due to valves, but at -95dB it won't be audible all the same.

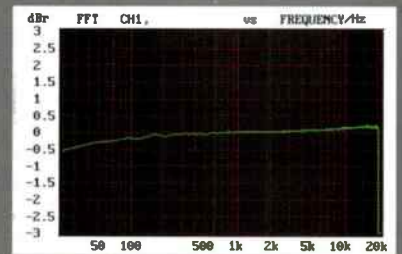
Distortion was low at 0dB peak level as valves commonly give 0.3% or so of innocuous second harmonic. The Audiologic 34MXL is as linear as the amazing Edgar CD1 here. At low levels it was very linear, hence a fine 111dB EIAJ dynamic range value from unbalanced out. From the XLR balanced output, however, this improved to 114dB, which is 2dB better than the best CD player or DAC we have ever tested, so the 34MXL has something special going for it. Whilst output from unbalanced was low at 1.6V, from balanced through XLR it was 3.2V.

This is a very interesting DAC under measurement, one that is likely to offer a good sound. NK

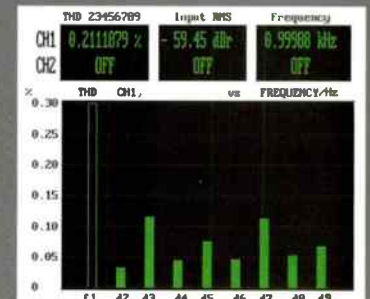
Frequency response (-1dB)  
 CD 15Hz-21.2kHz

Distortion (% , unbal / bal)	
0dB	0.013 / 0.006
-6dB	0.009 / 0.006
-60dB	0.21 / 0.18
-80dB	5 / 2
Separation (1kHz)	
	114dB
Noise (IEC A)	
	-97dB
Dynamic range (EIAJ)	
	111dB / 114dB
Output	
	1.6V / 3.2V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**





**Guru's new QM10P is a compact loudspeaker with a difference, says David Price...**

# Trance Music

**I**t is physics that determines the sound of a loudspeaker, not a marketing man's spin. I don't care if Albert Einstein was brought back from the dead, given a new brain ten times its previous power and was given an eternity to fill it – even he wouldn't be able to design a small loudspeaker that sounded like a large one...

So, it was with some trepidation that I found myself auditioning this particular compact box. As with every other small cube shaped transducer I am asked to review, I was told how different and special it is – thanks to all manner of clever tricks. Said to "rewrite the rule book for compact loudspeakers", this is "the world's first truly full range mini monitor, producing accurate bass right down to the bottom octave with the dynamics of a multi way speaker ten times its size", no less!

The product of "Swedish iconoclast" Ingvar Ohman, the QM10P is said to have been a cult product amongst the Scandinavian audiophile underground for a number of years. Ingvar founded his own institute and spent eleven years working with Swedish universities studying the intricacies of human hearing, researching psychoacoustics and how for instance the curvature of the ear and the damping effect of the shoulders and chest alter

frequency response. Based on these studies, Ingvar developed the QM10P to deliver a flat frequency response in real world conditions at the ear drum, the story goes...

The Gurus are said to harness the listening room's acoustics to enhance their performance, "by using the wall against which they are placed the QM10P's couple the room and use it as an extension of their own enclosures to produce the stygian bass traditionally only associated with the largest behemoth loudspeakers". Hmmm, so they like a bit of rear wall reinforcement to give some extra thump – just like Wharfedale Diamonds - then?

Okay, enough of the hyperbole – let's get down to specifics. They're a 300x252x232mm box with a single 102mm reflex port loaded plastic covered paper/pulp mid-bass unit made by Tympany in Denmark, and a 16mm modified Mylar tweeter from Visaton of Germany – weighing in at 6kg apiece. Very interestingly for this particular reviewer – and far more impressive than twenty pages of the purple prose the Guru comes with – is its wide front baffle. This runs counter to current loudspeaker engineering practice (i.e. fashion) – and is something I believe shows real independence of mind. With its width being its largest dimension, this speaker is in a gang of one in its

physical dimensions.

The MDF box, covered with matte or gloss piano black finishes, also has a grey plasticky material on top and around the drive unit surrounds. Running along the bottom of the speaker is a 'letter box' type bass port, and the speaker sits on four small, stiff foam cylinders, giving secure location on to stand tops whilst decoupling the speakers in a controlled way. Round the back, it's a return to the Flat Earth days with provision for banana plugs only – biwire enthusiasts or followers of the bare wire connection method can take a stroll.

## SOUND QUALITY

Given the Guru's Swedish DNA, I thought it best to start with my much played copy of Abba's 'The Album', specifically 'Eagle'. I'm sorry to say that – despite the claims of the odious press release – I didn't hear tracts of deep bass flat down to the earth's inner core, but fortunately what I did hear was particularly enjoyable – as was the Gurus' handling of the rest of the frequency range...

These are distinctive sounding loudspeakers, but not necessarily for the reasons touted by the manufacturer. Whereas most modern small boxes try to be miniature high resolution monitors, utterly devoid

of character in a bid to tell you everything about the recording, the QM10Ps plough a different furrow. They do have character – indeed I'd call it 'personality' - and a thoroughly fun one it is too.

The essence of it is musicality; switching from my reference Yamaha NS1000M speakers, I could hear problems in umpteen areas but none caused me to enjoy the music any less; quite the reverse in some ways. Starting with that bass, it isn't terribly deep – certainly not in my largish room – but it is decently fulsome for a smallish box, and more importantly it is bouncy. 'Eagle' romped along with glee – this long album track feeling more like a three minute single than its actual eight minutes. The Gurus can follow the tune, and integrated their reasonable upper bass with the rest of the frequency spectrum very well.

The midband is also quite hard to describe. Clearly lacking fine detail, it is nevertheless blessed with tremendous speed and cavernous space. The steel guitar strums at the beginning of Badly Drawn Boy's 'About a Boy' soundtrack were carried with lightning attack, whereupon the track shot along like a Greyhound chasing a rabbit. These speakers capture a huge amount of the music, making you want to uncork a bottle, light a cigarette and/or open the chocolate digestives and settle down for the evening – and beyond...

I found the treble decently smooth, and very well integrated with the midband. Hi-hats were gentle, crisply etched and not shouty. Indeed, their speed, in conjunction with that irascible upper bass made for much musical merriment. 'About a Boy' was rendered delicately but joyfully. It's a superb modern recording – and a super vinyl pressing – and the Gurus told you so, throwing a tremendously expansive stereo image into my room. Although treble level tails off slightly off-axis, instrument placement remains set in stone, showing that these speakers are generally very phase coherent. For small speakers they drive a largish room strongly and confidently.

My spirits lifted further when the stylus hit the groove of my Japanese pressing of Steely Dan's 'Gaucho', and the Gurus sounded positively exuberant. Once again, the size of the soundstage was such that it could have been my big Yamahas wired up and not the wee QM10Ps, and the sound was no less rousing. Dynamically, they can sound a tad compressed at highish levels in a large room, lacking as they do the

ability to signpost the fact that a snare drum has been hit particularly hard. However, they're so good at the subtle rhythmic and dynamic inflections of music that they more than make up for any absolute limitations. In the same way that a small, lightweight Lotus proves faster in everyday road conditions than a big Aston Martin V12, so the Gurus manage to stop and start on the head of a pin, with the fleet footedness of a flea.

Probably the weakest point of the Gurus is their tonality, which isn't terribly varied – they lack the ability to look right into the recording studio and tell you about the instruments being used. You can hear what they're doing very well, but you get little sense of the tonal 'flavour' of a particular bass guitar or piano, for example. With the modern jazz stylings of Herbie Hancock's 'The Prisoner', a slight 'cardboardy' colouration (or should that be discolouration) to the midband is noticeable, which shows that these speakers aren't universally exceptional. This said, using a warmer and more euphonic amplifier than the Sugden does help; the tonal colour of this is more bluey white than suits the Gurus. And so it proved that hooking up my World Audio K5881 valve power amplifier added deeper hues to the QM10Ps' tonal palette.

I found this most obvious on jazz, as I really enjoy the sensual, atmospheric feel of these acoustic instruments. With classical, their tonal greyness was less acute, and the Gurus managed to push along Beethoven's 'Pastoral Symphony' as fast as the driving drum and bass of Goldie's 'Inner City Life'. Factor in their expansive soundstage and confident image location and again they proved truly enjoyable musical companions.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the presumptuous press release, I really came to love the Guru QM10Ps. They are very distinctive loudspeakers – but for the right reasons. Rather these, with their characterful,

musically committed presentation than the countless anonymous, designed by numbers boxes inhabiting this end of the market, say !! In a way, they are very nineteen seventies sounding loudspeakers – but in all the right ways, not the wrong ones. By this I mean they have a straightforward musicality and natural directness, with scale and articulation – instead of giving the laser-guided, etched on your cranium sound that some noughties designs do.

All the time I listened to the Gurus, I was getting a slight sense of *déjà vu* – they reminded me of something else I'd once heard and liked. Then it came to me – another wide baffle, compact but very carefully intricately engineered box, the Heybrook HBI. The Gurus aren't that close, but do share key traits of musicality and scale – the Heybrooks were a rip-roaring success, so here's hoping the QM10Ps will be too.



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Distinctive, characterful, animated sounding music makers with scale, speed and *joie de vivre*.

**GURU PRO AUDIO QM10P** £1,595  
 The Sound Practice  
 ☎ +44(0)1727 893928  
 www.thesoundpractice.co.uk/Guru/

- FOR**
- easy musicality
  - bounce and speed
  - expansive soundstaging
- AGAINST**
- slightly veiled midband
  - compression at high levels
  - tonally homogenous

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

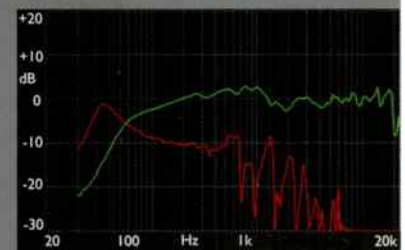
The Guru's front facing port outputs energy across a wide band and it appears to go in and out of phase with the bass unit, hence the peaks and troughs. The effect is a little less problematical than it appears here though, because port output is -10dB lower (at 80Hz) than a typical reflex port, so there appears to be resistive loss in the port. Bass rolls down slowly below 200Hz so the Guru is best used close to a rear wall. The box reaches quite low, down to 50Hz with the port adding a little lower down at 35Hz. Bass unit distortion was low, less than 1.5% down to 38Hz, a good result. The port hit 7% at 40Hz, about average, peaking at 12% below 35Hz.

Bass apart, frequency response was reasonably smooth and extended across the audio band, the tweeter looking especially smooth. It also had a clean decay spectrum. Unfortunately, the bass unit rang at 800Hz and 300Hz, visible in the short term (10mS) spectrum and extending into the long term 200mS spectrum, suggesting some colour. Distortion from 100Hz up to 6kHz hovered around 0.2% which is quite good.

Sensitivity was satisfactory at 86.5dB into a 4 Ohm bass unit, overall impedance measuring 6.1 Ohms, largely unreactive, making the Guru an easy amplifier load.

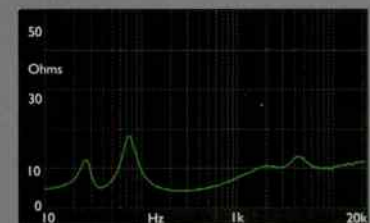
The Guru looks to have over damped bass that will likely sound clean, but the port outputs higher frequencies too and would be better firing rearward. The tweeter looks very good. Under measurement the Guru looks strong then, if with a few blemishes. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
 Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**





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## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ3 LOUDSPEAKERS

## Letter of the Month

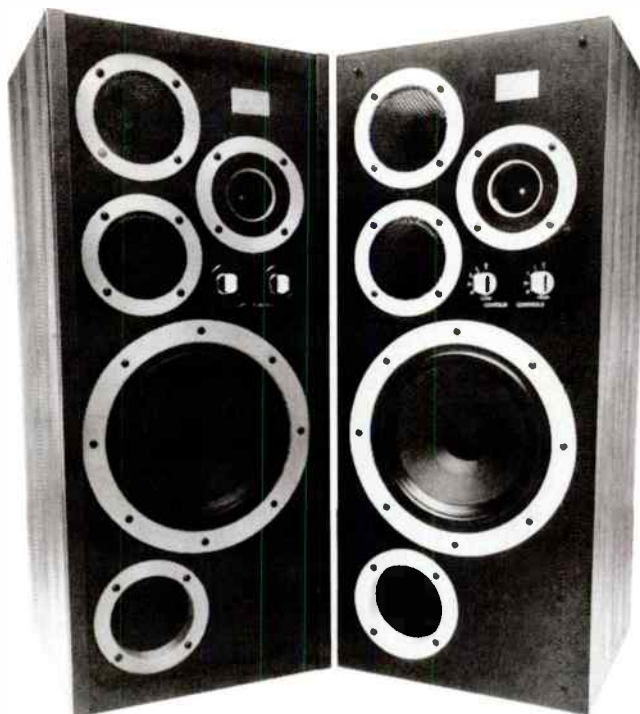
### FASHION VICTIM

I have just read Mr. Price's article on his friend's lust for a system that fashion forgot and it has inspired me to do the same, but there are some issues I need to address! Being only fifteen years of age and already a connoisseur of hi-fi, I'm always seeking to get the best sound for my buck. I have an Arcam FMJ & Linn Sondek system with Wharfedale EVO2-30 speakers at the moment and until a month ago, I was very content with it...

You see, whilst browsing the ever unavoidable internet auction site, something really did catch my eye - a 1979 JVC A-X5 integrated amplifier in mint condition. Being a very 'spur-of-the-moment' guy, I engaged in a bidding war and emerged successful, with my pocket £80 lighter. After roaring "yes!" for ten minutes, I sat down, recollected my thoughts and realised that I'd just wasted lots of my hard-earned cash on a metal box which was probably not worth its weight in wool. And then it hit me that I had to collect this thing somehow!

So the joys of e-bay were rather short lived, but as my supposedly 'mint-condition' amp' arrived home and I unpacked it from its box, I stared in amazement at the quality of this silver beauty. Everything was so logical; every intricate detail had been perfected with the utmost care and attention; the sleek, satin silver finish was exquisite and the air of quality that pervaded throughout this piece of vintage Japanese exotica was remarkable. It had something my Arcam didn't have. Its looks, put simply, were perfection.

I stopped drooling and told myself "the sound cannot be as good", but boy was I wrong! Here was an amplifier which played music, not sound. It delivered amazing grip thanks to its hugely oversized toroidal transformer, a honey-coated sweetness to the treble courtesy of the 'Super Class-A' design and a soundstage unlike anything I



Wharfedale E70 – not so much speakers as shrines for 1970s throwback Jake Hughes!

have heard to this date. To listen to it was like what hi-fi would sound on the Philadelphia Cheese advert; it was heavenly, saintly, pure bliss.

It therefore brings my attention to whether I should go retro with my speakers? My current Wharfedale EVO2-30s are very nice, but I remember being six years old and avidly reading your *Olde Worlde* article on the Wharfedale E70s and wishing for no other pair of transducers when I was older! Is it now time to fulfil my dreams, or will I be bitterly disappointed? Should I delve deep into a world twenty years before my time, or will I end up addicted to flared jeans and driving a vermilion orange TR7? Will I get more of the JVC sound, or will I end up with a system that fashion and audiophiles both forgot?

**Jake Hughes**

Hi Jake – good to see the younger generation are taking classic hi-fi seriously, and I hope that your JVC will spur you on to transforming your bedroom into a seventies 'show home', complete with brown curtains, a lava lamp and a copy of 'Razzle' on your glass coffee table, next to a chrome plated cigarette case full of Embassy No.6! Remember that when my generation has gone, you'll be there, all alone, flying the flag for the decade that fashion forgot!

This all said, actually, ermm, I wouldn't go for the E70s. Well, in truth it depends on the condition of the said loudspeakers. Put it this way, if they're more clapped out than a Morris Marina Super DeLuxe that did minicabbing from 1978 to 1985, then ended up in a field being

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World Radio History

driven around by juvenile delinquents, then I'd stay with the Evos. As with everything classic, 'condition is everything'. There's no point in buying a high end pig in a poke, or you'll just find it harder and/or more expensive to repair. If the E70s are mint, then yes they would be worth investigating – but look for a pair with the paper woofers rebuilt otherwise the Es won't please.

Whilst the E70s are an interesting and engaging speaker to listen to – you should be aware that they are not the world's smoothest or more accurate. Now, being fifteen years old, this may actually be an advantage. Me being thirty nine and three quarters (and a bit more), they're a tad harsh for my tastes. Actually they'd work well with a modern, low power valve amp – which would smooth them out but still go loud thanks to their fantastic sensitivity. I'm afraid the JVC wouldn't be an ideal partner, tonally.

So find a good pair and enjoy the sheer sense of nineteen seventiesness about them – slack back and pretend you're Burt Reynolds in 'Boogie Nights'. But don't expect them to be the world's best sounding speakers in your system. If you want a better tonal match, the smoother and more sophisticated KEF I04abs would do the job – not quite as racy looking but still as nineteen seventies as my friend's aforementioned TR7, which – shock horror – hasn't broken down yet! **DP**

You were doing what at six? Methinks you started life a little early Jake; what happened to SpongeBob Squarepants? Obviously David has had a bad influence on you, as you seem to share his fascination with the disastrous TR7, styled to mimic wedge shaped F1 cars of the period, but with somewhat less puff than either them or earlier TRs (on which I was weaned). Sad device!

I've also had a short affair with E70s and they were nothing other than exciting, especially in a time when heavy plastic cones accelerated as fast as an Austin Allegro and quacked like a field of ducks. But they were quite crude, as David warns.

Unfortunately, having lived through the Seventies listening to hi-fi of the period I am not especially romantic about it. Component quality was poor - remember components were deemed 'passive' and therefore did not have a sound - and sound quality usually murky and crude as a result. There were exceptions and I am glad the JVC A-X5 is one of them, but I would caution against being too over reaching in thinking that because

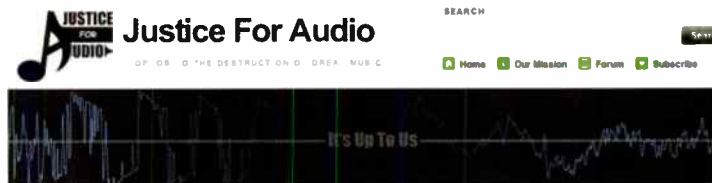
one item of the period works well then perhaps all do. You may well find the crystal clear Dali Lektor 6 loudspeakers I review in this issue are to your taste as they are fast and exciting. **NK**

## GRUNGE MUSIC

*I have been a big fan of Metallica for years and like many others looked forward to their latest release. You can only imagine my disappointment when reading your December edition of Hi-Fi World, you state how bad a production it is, and that the game console version*

is nowhere near perfect but it's the best version currently available on the market.

Adam Smith's reports in his column (December 2008) that Metallica themselves insisted that their new album 'feature' excessive Peak Limiting is not surprising but I wouldn't necessarily blame the band. I suspect that they are victims of bad advice from their producer. In my opinion, it is producers, not artist nor mastering engineers, who are calling the shots and ruining the audio quality of commercial CDs.



### FEATURED POST

#### BBC 4 Radio Report on Death Magnetic & Sound Issues

Today BBC 4 Radio in the UK aired a report by Joel Moors on the Consumer Affairs programme - You and Yours. The show interviewed some Metallica fans and also Mastering Engineer Ian Shepherd [Visit Blog]. Joel and Ian discussed the fundamental problems on the Death Magnetic CD and how it affects the music when played and [ ]

### LATEST POSTS

#### Metallica Albums Re-Mastered for 2008 - Exciting Sound?

Metallica's co-manager Cliff Burnstein is quoted as saying that fans find the sound on Death Magnetic exciting, and are really responding to it - Well if that is the case one of our supporters here have made this little video giving their past catalogue the Exciting makeover so you can judge for yourself if this is 'good' for music:

### WELCOME TO JUSTICE FOR AUDIO

#### RECENT POSTS

- Re: Ho Hum Records
- Ho Hum Records
- Linda Perhacs - Parallelograms
- Re: VICTORY!!! (well, its a start)
- Re: Justice for Audio - Website of the week @ Igloo Audio
- Justice for Audio - Website of the week @ Igloo Audio
- VICTORY!!! (well, its a start)
- Re: Audio

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- Hydrogen Audio
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- Expanded Interview With Longtime Mastering Engineer - MIX

### Website Justice for Audio campaigns for uncompressed music. Metallica's latest album, Death Magnetic, comes under its scrutiny.

*sounds better ('Guitar Hero')! However you also state in your vinyl section that Metallica have a five LP 45 rpm audiophile version. Do you know if this sounds any good, or is this a remaster or a copy of the Guitar Hero? Please don't tell me they slapped the horrible compressed version onto 5 LPs, this would really be taking use on a ride! Thanks for pointing out how bad this LP sounds, as a proud owner of a system in excess of £9,000 and my latest purchase a Project RPM 10 turntable, I really do expect much more from a rich famous and experienced band like Metallica. Please advise.*

**Jenny Johnson**

I was told by Mercury that the mix used to create the CD has, yes, been used to create the vinyl version. The downside is that the Metallica 45rpm vinyl will suffer from harsh Peak Limiting effects. However, as in my review of the new Primal Scream vinyl version of their new album release, 'Beautiful Future', merely pushing the Metallica album through a vinyl process will soften those harsh edges. The vinyl offering

The good news, however, is that this damaging effect may be reversible for audiophile listeners in the future. Linn Records, for example, is distributing indie-rock outfit, The Aliens' new album, 'Luna'. It's original CD issue suffered from similar, excessive, Peak Limiting effects. Linn requested a 'Studio Master', 24bit, 48kHz version for download from their website ([www.linnrecords.com](http://www.linnrecords.com)). Whereupon, the engineer went back into the studio, removed all the Peak Limiting and presented a crystal clear FLAC/WAV version to Linn for public download. Increasing broadband speeds present companies with an opportunity for a marketing 'edge' - audiophile quality music... and it can't come quickly enough for me. I want to get out and push! **PR**

Oh what an interesting subject from a hi-fi point of view! Best of all the furore over Death Magnetic is - apart from giving Metallica oodles of free publicity - prompting producers and mastering engineers to think again about the issue of quality. Check out what mastering engineer Ian

# A new star is born



Each year the European Imaging & Sound Association (EISA) assembles a panel of expert judges from some of the continent's leading hi-fi press to investigate the world's finest technology.

After rigorous evaluation they return to vote on one product in each category that they believe offers not only exceptional levels of performance but also provides incredible value. This year they chose the Cambridge Audio Azur 840A Class XD integrated amplifier.

"...a genuinely novel approach... a highly sophisticated, efficient and attractive-sounding amplifier" EISA citation



 **Cambridge Audio**



To find your nearest approved Cambridge Audio specialist, read extensive reviews and more, visit: [www.cambridge-audio.com](http://www.cambridge-audio.com)

Shepherd says at <http://mastering-media.blogspot.com> (there's no www in this url) and the very interesting Justice For Audio site ([www.justice-foraudio.org](http://www.justice-foraudio.org)) which I think is the best starting point for following this story on the internet.

In a nutshell, Metallica's producer Rick Rubin is cited for having chosen to make the mix as loud as possible, trashing sound quality in the process. At [www.gopetition.com/competitions18000](http://www.gopetition.com/competitions18000) fans have apparently complained about the album and want it re-mixed. Ian Shepherd interestingly highlights the schism in the music business over this issue where the engineers prefer to retain quality whilst the producers just want it "loud" - which means distorted. However, such is the strength of protest and the demand for better quality that Guns N Roses recently chose to release their latest album Chinese Democracy in uncompressed form. This is worth checking out. Wide dynamic range albums have real punch through a decent hi-fi system and can be breathtaking; this is the sort of material used at hi-fi shows to demo systems, because it sounds so good. You just have to be aware that in a track like Dadawa's Canton Story you'll be straining to hear the faintest whispers before suddenly being punched by the percussion, but it's a breathtaking experience and a demo of how wide dynamic range can be used for exciting effect. Music that stays at one level, in amplitude or temporal terms, becomes samey and boring; oft times what isn't there is as important as what is there; so silences and quiet passages have as much importance as crescendos or, in Metallica terms, thrashed guitars. As Paul Rigby notes though, as internet speeds increase - and Virgin Cable are to announce 50Mbps soon - so high quality music downloads will become a practical option.

I'm hoping the music business will embrace Blu-ray too as a medium suitable for music alone (Audio Profile 3), but there's a way to go here. As Ian Shepherd says though "here's to a future of better-sounding music" - encouraging words from a mastering engineer. **NK**

### SINGAPORE FLING!

*I'm in a quandary - what to do? My amplification is valve based, pre and power are self built. Pre is 6SN7 based with a 100x MM circuit based on the Marantz 5 with valve and choke/regulated HT supplies. Power amplifiers are either monoblock 6550 PPs with transformer phase split/6N7 driver/ GZ37, or a 6V6 single ended with*



**Dynavector DV-20X-H - an ideal high output MC for under £300**

*UCC85 driver, EZ81 and choke HT with MOSFET source follower regulator - this makes a very nice sound!*

*I have Monitor Audio GR20 loudspeakers, and my CD player is a Cyrus CDB SE/PSX-R. This is a real upgrade over my old CDBx which I traded in, and brings the CD real close to the vinyl sound. This, more than anything, has prompted me to change my cartridge as I find I like to listen to the new CD player more now than the old one!*

*My turntable is a Technics SL1200 Mk5 with Origin Live Silver tonearm and Ortofon 2M Red. There is a big choice of cartridges as I live in Singapore and go to the Adelphi shopping centre - the place here for audiophiles - but each shop says what is best based on his stock! I listen to everything from rock to blues, jazz and classical. Do I go for a more expensive Ortofon MM or try a Hi output MC? I am prepared to pay about £300.*

*What would I gain with a high output MC on my system? I read the reviews and listen in shops but most of them turn the nose up when Technics is mentioned - how could it possibly be any good! So all in all what do you recommend based on experience, I suppose really I'm looking for more insight and something to grip me and draw me into the music.*

**Anon**

Well, seeing as you're based in the Far East, I would suggest the Dynavector DV20X-H from Japan. This is the high output version of the affordable Dynavector moving coil, and very musical it is too. I've had one in my system before, and think it should work a treat in your Origin Live Silver arm. Expect more finesse than your already good Ortofon MM, and loads of detail and insight too - along with a very bubbly musical sound. MCs generally offer more detail, a more immediate and engaging sound. **DP**

### STRIKING THE RIGHT CHORD

*Hi David. Since you were kind enough to respond to my inquiry back last summer, I thought I'd let you know that I*

*have now invested in the Chord and it has blown me away! This is even with RCA/BNC adaptors at either end of my Kimber Select 2020 cable. I think my next step will be to get the balanced 2120 version so that I can make a direct AES connection. Thanks for your help!*

**Richard**

Thanks Richard - we aim to please. For those who weren't privy to this query, I recommended he buy a Chord QBD76, digital-to-analogue converter for CD and it looks like it hit the spot. **DP**

### VERY REMOTE CONTROL

*I've recently resurrected a Kenwood DP-X9010 CD transport that's been lying around for several years and impressed with the sound that emerges in conjunction with an Assemblage 2.5 DAC. I'm trying to locate a remote control for it (RC-PX9010) without much success. I've tried the usual sources such as eBay and other RC suppliers but nothing so far. I believe Kenwood pulled out of hi-fi several years ago; their spares supplier seems to deal mainly in domestic appliances rather than old hi-fi, understandably. I wondered if any of your reviewers would know a source where I could try to get this item or if there is any other Kenwood remote which would work with the DPX9010?*

**Ken Sharpe**

Hi Ken - well I am not surprised you are happy with the DP-X9010 transport - it was a fine product in its day. Unfortunately however, trying to find a remote control for a player made over twenty years ago, by a company that has changed beyond recognition since, is as the Americans would say, a big ask! There are several ways of attacking the problem - buy

**Philips Universal remote control, SRU8015, comes with a vast on-board database of codes used by products around the world and this includes Kenwood - see Very Remote Control.**





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Arcam FM1 DV139 upscaling dvd/cd	Black	1850	D & new boxed	1295
Arcam AVR 280	Silver	1250	D good	495
Arcam FM1 AVP9 Processor	black	3750	D good	2295
Arcam FM1 P7 power amp	black	2900	D good	1795
Arcam AVP700 processor	silver	1450	D v good	895
Arcam P1000 7 channel amp	silver	1700	D v good	995
<b>CYRUS</b>				
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CD XT (Silver)	Silver	800	D v. good	399
Discmaster 8.(silver)	Silver	800	D v. good	399
<b>AUDIO RESEARCH</b>				
Audio Research SP16 pre amp	Silver	2249	D v. good	1395
Audio Research VS 55 valve power amp	Silver	2499	D good	
			some marks	1595
<b>KRELL</b>				
Krell Showcase Processor	Silver	4495	D good	2495
Krell Showcase 5 channel power amp	Silver	4999	D good	2995
Krell Showcase DVD	Silver	3698	D good	1995
<b>AV COMPONENTS &amp; MISCELLANEOUS</b>				
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Denon AVR2807 Receiver	Silver	799	D. Good	479
Denon AVR 2106 Receiver	Silver	450	D. Good	259
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Pioneer LX 70 Blu-Ray		995	D. Good	549
Acoustic Energy Aelite 3 speakers	cherry	749	dem good	
			some marks	299
Acoustic Energy AE120 floor standing speakers	black	450	dem good	150
Acoustic AE73DS		350	new boxed	229
Monitor Audio S5 light oak	light oak	450	dem good	200
Mission 773 floor standing spks	light oak		dem good	
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# A Time For Change



The Audio Show '09 makes historic move

A major decision has been taken by the Organisers of the 'Heathrow' show, as it's affectionately known, to move the show lock, stock and barrel to a brand new venue for 2009. This was always an ongoing option for the Chester Group and something which had been talked about extensively with the trade . . . but an unexpected and exciting opportunity arose on the exact dates that were required for 2009 so the decision was made.

The key to the decision really comes down to available space; the Audio Show has to expand and there were only two ways that could be achieved at the existing venue: deploying converted bedrooms that were some distance from the main body of the show or by returning to a two venue event. The latter has been universally rejected by the trade and having tried the former in 2007 – exhibitors felt very isolated, so the Chester Group had a show they simply wouldn't be able to expand.

The new venue is located at Silverstone in Northants and is geographically perfect with its location being equidistant between two key arterial motorways (M40 & M1) and also equidistant from the M25 and South Midlands. Whittlebury Hall, built within the last 10 years, has free parking for up to 500 cars, over 65 suites of various sizes, the vast majority of which are one level, and a meaningful drop in venue hire will allow the organizers to lower exhibiting rates by a full 25%; it has several restaurants and bars, a superb support team, a whole range of exhibitor accommodation packages and a location that most people will enjoy driving to. For those that choose not to drive, shuttle buses will operate from Milton Keynes on a regular basis.

A whole range of onsite and offsite attractions will encourage visitors to stay the weekend. For the shopper Towcester, Buckingham and Bicester are all within easy reach, including the Internationally acclaimed Outlet Village. Milton Keynes is also only 20 minutes away. For the fitness enthusiast it has one of the biggest Leisure Clubs/Day Spa's we have ever seen! For the active there is an adjacent 36 hole Golf Course, Clay Pigeon shooting, Skiing, Go Kart Racing at Silverstone, Helicopter Rides, Hot Air Balloon flights, Horse Racing and Riding, plus Stowe Gardens - one of the finest Georgian Landscape Gardens in the country, and the list goes on . . .

Dates have been fixed as the 26 – 27 September which crucially ensures the show does not clash with any other International Audio event. Build up is on the 25th. A number of exhibitors have already seen the venue and echo the organiser's enthusiasm and commitment and anyone else that wishes to do the same only has to contact them for this to be arranged. Whilst not the primary reason for the change the current economic climate and a desire for a single top quality independently organized event are nevertheless timely and something the organizers are open minded about.

The Chester Group  
05601 126407 or [justin@chestergroup.org](mailto:justin@chestergroup.org)

another machine (with remote); you'll need a 'donor machine' for spares anyway if you intend to keep it. Fortunately these aren't as rare as hens' teeth – yet. Second, buy another Kenwood CD player of the same era (1987-88) and use its remote; the codes should be identical. Otherwise, buy a universal remote which has the codes in – these are available cheaply on the internet, as a Google search will confirm. **DP**

Happenstance put a new Philips Prestigo Universal remote control into my hand just before I read your letter. Normally I would greet a remote control with the same enthusiasm as a letter from the Inland Revenue, but I have a growing need for something to reduce the height of the pile growing in my lounge and this, with its big illuminated screen, looked like it would fit the bill nicely - and is also what you need. I will review it soon, but in the meantime I can assure you that under CD, Kenwood (Trio in the UK) is listed, so it seems to have onboard the codes you need to control a Kenwood CD player. Alternatively, it can find the right code by churning through its onboard database of them until the machine awakes; you do not need another remote to learn from. **NK**

### RELICS – SLIGHT REFRAIN

*It has been two years since I wrote regarding upgrading options to my main Linn-Naim system. That particular correspondence made Letter of the Month and was entitled 'Relics' in the January 2007 edition of HFW - thank you, that was a very pleasant surprise!*

*Whilst I have not totally followed your advice (mainly due to my not being able to justify the expense) I have taken on board some of your suggestions to very good effect. Noel and David maintained my OL modified RB300 and G1042 should comfortably see off the SME III/Shure M97XE pairing, so was it a pure coincidence a review of this cartridge appeared in the very same issue as my letter? I swapped turntables as suggested but was not convinced the sound was to my liking so I set about making myself a new subchassis for the LP12 and duly fitted the prototype, a constrained layer construction, but what a night and day difference! The LP12 boogie factor remains and bass was instantly improved, so too was imaging and sound staging - becoming much wider than with the old pressed steel subchassis.*

*Around the same time I was taken by your enthusiastic review of the little Usher S-520 speakers, so I got hold of a pair for a listen - very nice indeed! These*

*were purchased, suitably installed and run in. I then thought okay, now's the time to swap arm/cartridge combos... wow! Now I can hear what Noel and David were eluding to, these really are magical. I have since fitted an Incognito wired and OL counterweight modded RB250 in place of the RB300 for yet another improvement - but still with the G1042 MM. Thanks for opening my ears! Perhaps I should now look to move into MC territory when the time comes to replace the G1042. What would be your thoughts for a starting point - Denon DL160, AT OC9, Ortofon Rondo series?*

**John Ruggles.**

Hi John – my taste would be to go for the Audio Technica AT-OC9ML II. To my ears, this is the best value moving coil around (£225 from [www.SoundHiFi.com](http://www.SoundHiFi.com)) Remember that this is the improved version of a late eighties cartridge that cost £400 twenty years ago – it is very fast, punchy and full of life, but has real subtlety and detail too, more so than ever in its latest incarnation. If it's a budget low output MC you're after, then this is a no brainer in your Rega-derived arm. **DP**

*Bose Acoustimass 5 speaker set coupled to a Denon AVR-1907 amplifier. I want to improve the sound quality and I have been told to add an active subwoofer. Can you please advise if this good advice and if so can you suggest a make and model, or an alternative? As I live in the Middle East there is not much reliable information to be had, I would greatly appreciate your advice.*

**Alistair Malcolm.**

The Bose Acoustimass 5 loudspeaker system is a subwoofer / satellite arrangement where the satellites do not handle the full audio range. Each satellite has a 2.5in "wide range" drive unit Bose say, which is not enough to go low, so a separate cabinet handles bass. Adding a subwoofer will just give more bass, not improve the sound.

The best upgrade is to use full range hi-fi loudspeakers instead, the biggest ones possible. At the very least consider using four Q Acoustics 1020is which, at £120 each, will set you back little more than your Bose system and give much better quality. Set the receiver for Full Range loudspeakers and select None as the Centre loudspeaker.



### Q Acoustics 1020i – great as a small Full Range surround-sound loudspeaker, at a beer budget price.

Yes, and I will second that. At the price the AT-OC9 MLII really offers a superb sound. It does have a treble peak, so you will find treble 'obvious', but it is finely detailed and nicely finessed. It is probably best used with the dark sounding Icon Audio PS1.2 or 3 preamps. **NK**

### SUBSONIC

*I am a complete amateur regarding sound systems, therefore I would really appreciate some guidance. I have a*

Alternatively, get a dedicated surround-sound loudspeaker system from KEF, B&W or similar. You do not need a separate subwoofer for music. The 0.1 track of a 5.1 recording contains subsonics from explosions etc and is not strictly necessary with music.

If you want all the booming a subwoofer produces then do by all means get an active one to accompany the main 'speakers.

**NK**

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**Linn Sondek – David and Roger discuss its relative merits!**

### DUEL

Dear Mr Price, to write “the Linn makes every LP sound like it was recorded in the same studio on the same equipment” (page 55, *Hi-Fi World* December 08) is cavalier nonsense. It suggests both a poor critical faculty, and that you should take a serious listen to alternative amplification and speakers for your system. It also completely contradicts your publication’s recent reviews of the latest LP12 variants.

In fact, it brings to mind the comment from the Michell dealer in York when we (wife and I) were choosing our current turntable. We had already auditioned the LP12 and the Pink Triangle side-by-side at another dealer, finding them with different presentations but each with more strengths than weaknesses. Listening to the same LPs, my wife’s reply to the Michell dealer’s, “what do you think?” was, “it’s dragging, it’s too slow”. I knew exactly what she meant: compared with the other two machines, the Gyro lacked flow and bounce; it didn’t induce tapping of the feet. The dealer’s retort was priceless, “there’s something wrong with your ears, it sounds fine to me”. Needless to say, that dealer wasn’t patronised! I do agree with you, though, that the Michell seems to give a wider sound stage than many others.

As for the Linn, I recall a public demonstration by Superfi in Leeds in the early ‘eighties, when six turntables were fitted with identical, matched cartridges (Entrée moving coil) and hidden from view while a varied programme was repeated in turn. At the time we were using a Thorens TD150 at home, and I immediately identified the Thorens TD160 under test, which of course reinforced my trust in my discriminatory powers! But one table stood out for me as the most musical, and the least like the dreaded hi-fi sound, and that turned out to be the LP12. Which won? Well, I think it was a Technics model!

But it’s also true that combinations are important. Thus the worst LP12 I’ve ever heard was as the front end of an all-Naim system, using the then Naim flagship speaker. The sound was painfully strident, almost literally hurting the eardrums, and nothing like the closest approach to the original sound. But as NK says, how can anyone testing equipment know what the original sound was, unless the recording is of

unamplified instruments recorded in a well-known hall. I think this is what Peter Walker, who was a good amateur musician, remember, had in mind. Harry Pearson comes in here somewhere too!

One thing we can agree on, though, I too first heard the Quad electrostatic at Harrogate (and Quad were using an LP12 as it happens) and I was in no doubt it was the best reproduction of music I had then heard, and I’ve yet to hear a speaker since that I prefer to the Quad electrostatic range. And Walker himself embodied virtues that maybe are less prevalent today. One year the FM4 was a new model, so I asked Peter whether it was better than my FM3. His reply: “It may be a bit quieter re signal to noise, but otherwise you won’t hear much difference, it’s just got more features.” How many present manufacturers would take such a principled attitude? Needless to say, I ended up with both tuners.

**Roger Perry**

Dear Roger – having condemned a Michell dealer for suggesting your wife had poor critical faculty when she disagreed with him, you duly accuse me of having, ermm, “poor critical faculty” when I disagree with



**Garrard 301 and Michell Orbe turntables – both with a different flavour to the LP12.**



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World Radio History

you! Oh the poetry of it all!

But seriously, if you can't hear the tonal 'homogeneity of the LP12, I would suggest you look at the rest of your replay chain... Mine changes with umpteen amp/speaker combinations every month and the LP12 always sounds tonally 'samey'; can you say the same for the variety of your replay system? I think the LP12 is a lovely music maker with bounce (as you say) but neutral it is not; I don't think even Linn would claim that! **DP**

Dear David,

It sounds to me you're now playing a different tune. Your reply doesn't relate to what you wrote, i.e. the LP12 makes "every LP sound like it was recorded in the same studio on the same equipment". I interpret this to mean "you cannot hear the different soundstages/reverberation attributes/miking arrangements of different concert halls/studios". For example, a recording from the Albert Hall sounds the same as one made in St Johns, Smith Square. This can't be true of just about any turntable, let alone a half-decent one. But you now criticise the LP12 for having "tonal homogeneity", irrespective of the other equipment used with it. If you mean all guitars, say, have the same timbre as I call it, I don't hear that. How can Neil Young be mistaken for Albert Lee?

If you mean the LP12 always has its own sound which you can identify, irrespective of other equipment, I agree. But so does every turntable I've ever heard, even the most neutral. I reckon if you live with say a 301 and an Orbe, you'll usually be able to identify which is playing, whatever the amp/speaker. And if either sounds different to what you're used to, that'll be down to the amp/speaker, not the table. I should like to hear a "neutral" table, but how can any of us know when we hear it? The holy grail of the Absolute Sound, where's Harry Pearson when he's needed! P.S. Is the SME range especially neutral? I fancy one.

**Roger**

Hi again Roger – it is letters like this which take me back to semiological first principles. Just as Roland Barthes liked to point out, the transmission of meaning from the 'sender' to the 'receiver' is a perilous one! All I am trying to say is that the Linn has a tonal 'flavour' of its own. It's kind of like having a cup of tea in a mug that's just had coffee in – you drink the tea but you can still get a 'whiff' of coffee all the same. And so it is with the LP12. It has its own, slightly woody tonal colour. This is what I meant when I originally wrote what (wot?) I wrote, and so it remains. I can't be doing with fencing around,

with you suggesting I'm changing my story now. I am not, it's just that I obviously failed to explain myself better to you in the first place. So, move from a Linn to an SME (or Avid or Michell) and that metaphorical whiff of coffee – that aftertaste (or should it be 'pretaste') – is gone. These decks are more neutral, and have less colouration. Or more accurately, perhaps I should say that their colourations are less obvious!

Still, I – like you I suspect – regard the LP12 as an excellent deck, and one that has a uniquely musical presentation. Which is not to say that other decks aren't exceptionally musical too – witness the Technics SL1200 and Garrard 30/401, for example. Not sure what Harry Pearson's take on this would be – but my ears (and experience gleaned from hearing them all in my own listening room) tell me this, whatever other people may say.

Yes, I feel the SME turntables are very neutral, and utterly enjoyable to listen to, but I would suggest you may not get along with them if you're such an ardent LP12 fan. Right now, if it's tonal neutrality you crave, I'd counsel the Avid Volvere Sequel which sheds a brilliant, dazzling light on whatever recording you give it. Again however, an LP12 it is not – so I suggest an in-depth dem before you part with your cash. **DP**

### SNEAKY PEEK

I was very much looking forward to your review of Linn's Sneaky in the December 2008 issue, and when I read Patrick Cleasby's write up I was left intrigued as he compared it to each of its more expensive brethren...

I have a Trends UD10 and a Blue Circle "USB Thingee", these are both USB DACs and I have been playing with a laptop using EAC and Cplay (with CMP) to give the best possible record and playback quality via USB. I would

like to move my CDs over to a hard drive, preferably a NAS box elsewhere in the house and get music from that via preferably a cat5 cable or secondly a USB cable to a DAC and from there to my Almarro amplifier. So I have been looking to upgrade my DAC and my shortlist is Benchmark, Apogee and Linn Sneaky. I don't want to spend a fortune as that is reserved for LP. The Linn I was hoping would come out best as it is the only one that will work via cat5.

A long term reference used by yourselves and widely regarded DAC is the Chord DAC64, which I am also greatly familiar with having spent many hours listening to music at a friend's who has an extremely good system. And so I was hoping to hear your impressions of how the Linn Sneaky compared to preferably the Chord DAC64 and failing that to perhaps other DACs within its price range such as the Benchmark. If you can shed some light on the Linn's performance relative to the DAC64 I would much appreciate it.

**Jonathan Martin**

With pleasure Jonathan! The Sneaky isn't a patch on the Chord DAC64, but nor would I expect it to be, as it's like comparing a Land Rover Discovery with a Ferrari F40 – you're not comparing like with like. Obviously, the Sneaky DS is an all-in-one network music player with DAC and amp built in, plus network connectivity. The DAC64 is an, erm, DAC and that's your lot – plus it was nearly three times the price.

Does that make the Sneaky unlistenable by comparison? Not at all. The little Linn box is a couth, even sounding design that is very good at rhythms and dynamics – it's an embracing and animated performer. However, it lacks inner detail, atmosphere and a sense of natural musicality that the Chord has – as you'd expect, being far cheaper.

Of course, the Sneaky is a self



**Stello DA100 Signature – superb mid-price do-it-all DAC that's great for network music and CD alike**

contained network music player, but if you wish to use your computer for this, then the Stello DA100S (£650) would be ideal – it's a very smooth and sweet design with real finesse. It is cracking value and although a little more sedate sounding than the Linn, you'll be getting a slightly more atmospheric treble and fuller bass.

The Benchmark, at several hundred pounds extra, is a more animated music maker – it's more heavy rock to the Stello's easy listening. I think it's not as good as the former in the information retrieval or tonality stakes, but it's more fun to listen to.

Finally, the Chord QBD76 at £3,000 is breathtaking all round – a seminal listening experience that elevates 16/44 to the sort of intense experience that's normally reserved for live music or high end analogue. But it won't flatter poor source material or a bad network music player... **DP**

### TOAD SENSE

*I am a happy subscriber to the best magazine in town. The wit and vast knowledge of your contributors is outstanding, and they seem to know more than a little bit about music and hi-fi. Anyway, I live in Spain near to Gibraltar, which is a virtual desert for hi-fi. In the four years of living here the only two shops within easy access have closed. I am in the market for a new tonearm to replace a twenty five year old Ittok, this to suit my Oracle Delphi 11.*

*The rest of my system consists of Naim 102 / HiCap 250 amplification (old style but serviced by Naim before coming to Spain). Speakers are Vienna Acoustic Hayden when the wife is about and Magneplanar 1.4s when she is out! They are a bit intrusive in the lounge – in the UK I had a large attic room for them.*

*There does seem to be a plethora of excellent arms about from £600, however I see you are about to review the Jelco 250T in the February edition. I am visiting Glasgow for New Year and wonder is it possible to give me a quick sneaky idea what you think of it as it fits the Linn board I have? I also have an SME armboard but they are a bit expensive, as I am a pensioner.*

*I am using the great Goldring 1042 and I do agree it is very good after my DV20x rolled over - I did manage to catch my sleeve on the arm after a glass or two of excellent Spanish plonk.*

*This is going to be a pressie from my dear understanding wife as it is Christmas after all so I have to move fast and yes I won't be able to hear it first but with you guys vast experience...  
**Anon***



**Onkyo A-9755 – superb mid-price integrated complete with tone controls!**

Firstly, I have to give you a yellow card for toadying. You know, we're not like the other mags who only print the letters that say how great they are! In fact we positively discourage such weasel-like behaviour... but hey, thanks all the same and we're happy to help!

Okay – Jelco vs. Ittok. Well, as Adam finds out in this issue, the Jelco SA-750T is a honey of an arm, but is it as good as an Ittok? Good question, and having not done the A-B comparison I cannot say for sure, but I now have one in my system too and would guess not. That's assuming your Ittok is mint and as new though; if you've stuffed the bearings then even that NAD 5120 arm made from a printed circuit board would better it.

Personally, I would take it back to Linn and get it serviced, and get the new Linn tonearm cable instead. When funds permit, then go for an Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII cartridge as an upgrade to your Goldring MM. **DP**

### CONTROL FREAKERY

*I am searching for a good amplifier for my Celestion Ditton 44 loudspeakers. I wanted to know if you knew this model and you could advise me of a good amplifier to drive them with, with an accurate sound and tone controls? I'm ready to pay up to 1,000 euros.*

**Alex Gray  
Spain**

Hi Alex – without hesitation, if you must have tone controls then Onkyo's A-9755 is the automatic choice at this price (£700). It has oodles of power, which is what your ageing Ditton 44s need, and a lovely warm and expansive musical sound which should suit down to a tee. **DP**

### THIS MORTAL COIL

*I have £500 or thereabouts for a new cartridge. My dilemma is that I cannot make my mind up. The setup is Technics 1200 Mk 2 with Isonoe feet, Michell TecnoArm a and World Audio Design KLP-PI valve preamplifier/phonostage. An opinion would be very much appreciated for a moving coil. Names*

*I can think of are Lyra, Dynavector, Sumiko, etc. High or low output, not sure! Some coils mistrack, so I read. What the hell do you do – try the lot, no? Hi-Fi World, do ask them I think? Does that make me an anorak or what? Love it!*

**WAG**

Do I know the answer to this question, I ask myself? Try to have I go, I reckon. Think why not, I? Oh well, here goes. Alright!

Actually WAG, I'd go for the Lyra Dorian. I've recommended umpteen different MCs in this month's letters section, but in this particular deck, with your particular preamp and you



**Lyra Dorian MC cartridge - a crackingly musical, very finessed sounding MC, says David Price.**

not needing a high output design, and having a budget way over my current budget fave rave (Audio Technica's £225 AT-OC9), then it's got to be the Lyra. This is a crackingly musical, very finessed sounding MC that's got a lively top end. Fortunately, your Technics has a lively bottom end and your KLP-PI is very smooth too. So I think this will be a dream match – and your Technics will pull every last ounce of performance from this great MC. **DP**

### PASSIVE ACTION

*I noticed that Adam has used the Creek OBH-22 as his reference preamp in a few reviews of late. Can you tell me how good this unit is? I recently outlaid more than I should have on a DPS-3 turntable, and I'm looking for a preamp to complement my Denson B-330 power amplifier and Epos M22 floorstanding loudspeakers. I emailed David Price a few months ago asking about the Melody Pure Black, and he was glowing*



### Creek OBH-22 – the poor man's high end preamp!

in his praise, but unfortunately, that's a purchase for next year!

**Ric, Australia**

The OBH-22 is a superb little preamplifier, and one we regularly use at Hi-Fi World Towers. It is a giant killer, inasmuch as you'll have to spend over £1,000 to seriously better it – it's only when you get to the likes of NuForce's P8 or Musical Fidelity's A1 FBP that there's any sort of comprehensive improvement. Obviously, by the time you've reached the Music First Audio Passive section of the market at £2,500 plus, things get dramatically better still. In essence, the Creek is a clean and tight performer, with a fine grip on the music, excellent timing, good dynamics and flow. Essentially, it doesn't obstruct things too much, but in absolute terms there's a slight lack of air and space, a slightly curtailed stereo image and compressed depth perspective. Also, it has a subtlety dry tonality – it doesn't let the 'flavour' of the recording flood out. However, these observations are all relative to products costing ten times its £295 price. I would recommend one as being ideal for your predicament! **DP**

A "discussion" broke out about this at Hi-Fi World towers. Adam didn't much like the Creek, nor did Peter Comeau, both preferring active preamps. However, I do like the Creek. It is a "quiet" device with little character of its own, but it does lack any injection of sparkle and it is at the opposite end of the subjective spectrum to the amazing Melody 101d. I find the Creek completely unintrusive, much like the Van den Hul carbon sheathed cables I prefer, but being passive it allows other components to make their presence known.

Preamps are very curious devices though; I have come across few that can improve sound quality; most

degrade it and some of the more ambitious solid-state designs can strangle a system in my experience. I prefer passive or valve - and nothing in-between! **NK**

### BIT ISSUE

*After all the format wars, during which I have held off investing in SACD, HDCD and goodness knows what other formats, I must congratulate 'Reference Recordings' and 'Linn' for spotting the obvious. If you produce high resolution digital recordings in a format that has already been established as a standard that everybody can use and nobody can monopolise, then you will sell more recordings and we will all benefit.*

*'Reference Recordings' in particular have answered the one dissatisfaction I have with downloads, the CD booklet that I really miss, by supplying the data on a disc that doubles as a backup, with a booklet that brings that feeling of 'possession' you don't get with downloads.*

*The Reference Recordings stuff has very high resolution which brings me to the main point which is the hopeless state of affairs when it comes to knowing what digital gear is doing. You yourselves even admitted to 'leaving out' matters of bit rates in a recent reply to a reader's letter. The RR sound, downsampled to the 24bit 96k that my sound card can manage (feeding into a Lyngdorf all digital amp) made me crave for the full resolution of 24bit 176k that was offered. I bought an E-MU 0404 USB sound card that offered up to 24bit 196k. It had ADC DAC on*

*board (that I can't use without two lots of conversion with the Lyngdorf) plus optical and coax S/PDIF in and out. Simple! Or so I thought. No amount of fiddling could get the signal through; it kept greying out (on the computer control panel). The reason was deep down in the small print. A sort of 'by the way', as a margin note. 176 and 196k is NOT available through the S/PDIF. Misleading don't you think?*

*My question then is: how can I get 196k out of my computer and into my Lyngdorf? Many sound cards boast the ability but when it comes to delivery a politician would be more reliable.*

**Paul Williamson  
Nottingham**

I understand your frustration. Generally, with any sound-card those headline data rate figures refer only to Digital-to-Analogue Conversion, because DACs are cheap and plentiful these days, and because getting analogue audio out of a digital computer is the primary purpose of a sound card.

Limitations often exist on getting sound in, because Analogue-to-Digital Convertors are a more difficult and expensive technology. These days 24/96 input resolution comes fairly cheap however and is the minimum needed for LP, because cartridges have output to 30kHz and because at low levels LP is very linear, so 24bit resolution is needed to retain this property for those serious about recording their LPs.

On piping raw digital out from sound cards, or anything else, we move into new difficulties. S/PDIF (Sony/Philips Digital Interface) was specified long ago for low data rates, usually up to 48kHz sample rate, unless the material is compressed (e.g. Dolby Digital surround-sound - a 'bitstream' in AV parlance) to reduce data rate. However, both Meridian and Chord circumvent this limitation by using an S/PDIF link for each channel, making two links necessary for stereo.

Because of this historical limitation, S/PDIF receivers usually work to 48kHz only, so transmitting a higher rate is pointless, except within 'closed environments' such



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as proprietary preamp-power links and transport-DAC links. HDMI was developed to overcome data rate limitations, now and in the future. I hope this clears the mists a little.

Your Lyngdorf query can only be answered by them and here is their reply:

"On the standard TDAI-2200 we have three different digital inputs. AES/EBU, Coaxial and Optical. HDMI is not available. He can use any of the three available inputs and if his soundcard has an AES/EBU output we recommend he uses that. We recommend AES/EBU because of higher resistance to outside interference. With AES/EBU the quality of the cable – materials etc. is much less important.

With that said, it is important to understand also that many high-end products have poorly designed digital transmitters and receivers – this can make people believe that there are huge differences between cables, simply because the digital design is flawed. A few of our guys come from the pro. side where they understand these things very well, so all of our inputs and outputs are designed for the most robust performance. The TDAI-2200 "only" supports a bitrate up to 24/192, so he will have to downsample the 196kHz."

**Per Klausen, Lyngdorf, Denmark**

### GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

*Over the years I have created what is to my ears a well balanced and musical system, comprising Sonus Faber Electa Amator II loudspeakers augmented by Sonus Faber Gravis B1 subwoofer, driven by Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 300 power amplifiers. These are fed by either my analogue source of Michell Gyro SE/Origin Live modded Rega RB300 turntable, a Graham Slee Era Gold v5 phonostage, with Ortofon Black MM cartridge, or a digital source of Chord*

*Blu/DAC64 II. This is all hooked up with Musical Fidelity X-Link or Nu-Vista interconnects and AlphaCore Goertz MI2 speaker cable.*

*Over the years I have learned that upgrades don't necessarily deliver long term sonic improvements. The core of components of speakers, turntable and power amplification haven't changed for a considerable time, and I have no plans to unless they fail. My last upgrade was to my digital front end, and the Chords have given years of genuine musical pleasure, with an added connection to the music, my tastes being classic Jazz/Soul and Funk, so a dynamic, rhythmic sound with soundstage is essential.*

*With the current fiscal climate I'm not looking for major expenditure, and my system is pretty well sorted, so I'm looking for genuine improvements at reasonable cost. I read your very favourable review of the Chord QDB76, how much of an improvement over the DAC64 is it?*

*My speaker cables are in dire need of replacement as the Goertz MI2 construction makes them susceptible to damage. The Townshend Audio Isolda EDCT speaker cable appears to follow the same design principle as the Goertz, low impedance/skin effect, with the added benefit of cryogenic treatment. What's the verdict on these cables, as whilst not cheap they aren't asking the earth, and should fit my system?*

*Last but not least, my preamplification needs upgrading as I have been using a Musical Fidelity X-Pre v3 as a stop gap and have been looking for a suitable replacement. I am interested in the Musical Fidelity A1 FBP, as I have experience of the brand, like the house sound, and your favourable review seems to match my musical taste.*

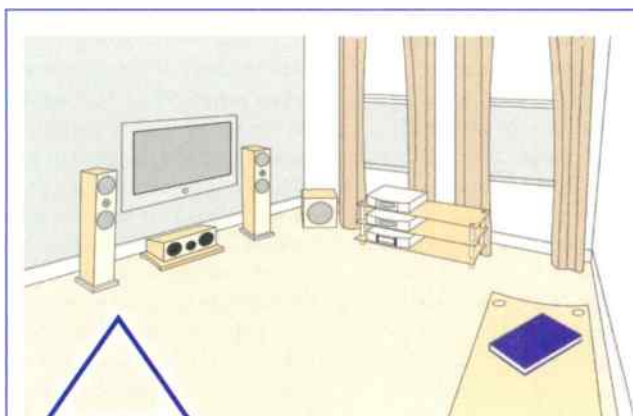
**David Waterman**

Hi David – well, what a good question! I have done extensive comparisons between the old Chord DAC64 and the new QDB76, and

am in two minds. Let me say that the former was – and still is – one of my favourite DACs. It is so good, in fact, that it finally got me into digital properly, meaning I would happily sit down and listen to an entire CD album with relish, not thinking about its 'CDness' anymore. The QDB76 is a surprisingly different beastie – it is a lot more focused, showing its predecessor up as a little vague and perhaps ponderous in some ways. There's considerably more low level detail, incision and atmosphere. I'd also say it is faster, tighter and tauter too. But is it better? Well there's a question! I am not sure it is. It is certainly more neutral and so I suppose it is superior in absolute terms, but in my system I have to say I rather enjoyed listening to the DAC64. I think the '64 has a rather Linn LP12-like quality to it – it is simply very nice to listen to, almost regardless of what it's asked to play. The '76 tells you more about the recording, warts and all.

If you're after a Musical Fidelity preamplifier specifically – as a visual match for your system – then the A1 FBP is an impressive bit of kit. It's not the last word in preamps – being a little well lit in the upper midband and loose in the bottom end in absolute terms – but it is nevertheless nicely propulsive and enjoyable, and still carries a good degree of the recording through. You'll have to spend over £1,000 more on an MF Audio Passive Pre to really do better, in my opinion.

As for speaker cables, I have found Black Rhodium's Tango (£15/m) to be excellent – don't let the low price put you off. In my system, they seem to work better than Townshend Isolda DCTs, with a smoother and more atmospheric sound that suits my preferred balance better. **DP**



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Room: majik



# Studio Time

**It's not hard to hear the professional pedigree of ADAM Audio's HM3 Monitor loudspeakers, says Adam Smith...**

**T**he relationship between the world of studio monitoring loudspeakers and the home hi-fi market has never been a truly happy one. Many people see this as a reasonable thing, after all the two end users require different things from their loudspeakers – the home listener wants to hear their music reproduced in the nicest way possible, sometimes even forgoing a smidgen of accuracy if the result takes the edges off poor recordings. On the other hand, the studio engineer wants to hear exactly how the recording sounds, warts and all, so that corrections can be made in order to make the result sound palatable through that domestic hi-fi system.

The problem is that these two worlds need not be quite so mutually exclusive. After all, isn't it fair to assume that a pair of loudspeakers that pinpoint recording and mastering issues might then reproduce the

corrected and final result rather well? It seems that I am not the only person who has explored this point of view and, as a result, there are more than a few loudspeakers that have successfully made the break from the studio and into the living room. Let us not forget that the classic Rogers LS3/5As originated in this way, as well as Spondor BC1s, B&W 801s, Yamaha NS1000Ms and also the Ferrograph S1s that I use myself – mine started out as the semi-professional version, finished in a hideous shade of grey, instead of a hideous shade of teak!

Furthermore, there are many loudspeaker companies that successfully straddle the professional and domestic environments. The likes of PMC and B&W are well known, but Germany's ADAM Audio are a relative newcomer to this side of the mixing desk, and are gradually establishing a strong presence. Last year I took a listen to one of the models in ADAM's top Tensor Range,

the Gammas, and they left a very strong impression on me.

Now the more affordable Home Monitor range is here, derived from the active 'S' series, and fitting in at the other end of the scale from the Tensor models. The first step on the ADAM ladder, they share technology with their bigger brothers, namely ADAM's ART tweeter, based on the Heil Air Motion Transformer principle, and the Hexacone material used as the basis of the twin seven inch bass drivers. The HM3s actually look like centre channel designs, as they are styled and designed to be used horizontally, but they can be used vertically – best keep the grilles on, though, as the 'ADAM' logos look a bit odd oriented sideways!

The HM3s are a full three way design, with one woofer only coming in below 150Hz. As a result, the loudspeakers are 'handed', although ADAM state that you can experiment with placing the low end woofer to the inside or outside as you prefer.



For vertical operation the speakers need to be positioned so that the lowest drivers are at the bottom, but this leaves one terminal panel at the top of the rear face of one loudspeaker and at the bottom of the other, which is a little odd!

Another tip that ADAM Audio passed on was that, when using them vertically, it pays to unscrew the tweeter and rotate it through ninety degrees so that the diffuser on the front of it is aligned horizontally, which is how the unit was designed. Bi-wiring terminals are fitted and a three position switch offers the option of running the tweeter flat, boosted by 1.5dB or cut by the same amount. The HM3s are available in gloss black or silver, tip the tape measure at 370x220x320mm and weigh a sturdy 14kg each.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Well run in, I commenced listening and straightaway realised that there is a definite family sound, as I could hear echoes of the Tensor Gammas in the HM3s' performance. Initially however, I felt that they slightly lacked focus across the centre of the soundstage, despite being very spacious and detailed. However, remembering ADAM's advice, I duly popped the tweeters out, rotated them and sat back down again. This was more like it; the central image had now gained impressive stability and everything had snapped nicely into focus – much better! The other thing I noticed during setup is that the HM3s are quite amplifier-sensitive. They never sound unpleasant, but one or two units I put through them really left them slumbering along rather disinterestedly. Luckily, my Naim SuperNait tickled them into life perfectly.

It was interesting to take a wander through my record collection with the HM3s, as they really let you hear into the secrets of the recording studio or concert hall that somehow don't quite seem to make it through other loudspeakers. I found myself shutting my eyes and looking at the aural picture they painted as well as listening to the music, as the HM3s seem just as capable as their bigger brothers at setting up the kind of image you feel you could get up and walk around in, without any trickery like stretching things off to the sides or into the distance unrealistically. After a little experimentation I settled on the -1.5dB setting for the tweeter, as the 0dB was just a fraction too glaring at times, and a brief play with the 1.5dB setting had the cat running from the room! Luckily I had the remote control in

my hand to bring things to a rapid halt, otherwise I wouldn't have been far behind him...

As a result of their intricate nature, the HM3s are quite different to many domestic loudspeakers. Their balance is forward without a doubt, but they are not hard or splashy, just incredibly detailed, focused and forthright. Intriguingly, they almost sound rather bass light on first encounter, but as I listened more, I realised that once again, ADAM have engineered such a solid cabinet and populated it with well designed drivers that you are hearing what you are supposed to without anything playing along. Bass guitars were astoundingly taut, fast and lithe with a swift rhythmical nature that almost had me holding my breath as my ears tried to keep up.

For anyone who still thinks that a loudspeaker with a hole or two in the box cannot start and stop on a sixpence, then they need to check these out - do you hear me DP? [beg pardon? Ed.] However, when a synth bass line came thundering along, or a kick drum pounded out, the HM3s were well up to the task of passing this event to my ears though the air, and also my derriere via the sofa. I suspect real bassheads might still feel the need for a subwoofer (ADAM sell a matching one), but for most of us the HM3s go as low as we could ever need; certainly I never felt short-changed, even though my Ferrographs do go noticeably lower.

Their monitor nature proved adept at detailing all kinds of instruments, and picking up those cheating artists who try and pass off an electronic facsimile as the real thing. This could be something of a mixed blessing at times, however; spinning some Antonio Forcione and Charlie Haden was a delight in terms of capturing the real essence of every single note they played, and

pulled everything perfectly together in a lovely musical parcel. Changing to Ravel's Bolero however, again gave stunning clarity to each of the players but somehow the essential emotion of the piece seemed to take a slight backseat as the HM3s strove to tell you what each individual instrument was doing, seemingly slightly glossing over why they were doing it. Other than this however, the ADAMs romped through dance, rock and some proper Kenny Ball style jazz with alacrity and never failed to put a big smile on my face when the occasion demanded.

**CONCLUSION**

The ADAM HM3s are an intriguing loudspeaker prospect. They are not as forgiving as their bigger Tensor brothers in terms of partnering equipment, and they can

occasionally lack warmth, but they offer detail, insight and stunning fleet-footedness when fed with a good rhythm. Like good old Marmite, they really will not be for everyone – I suspect the valves 'n' horns brigade will hate them - but I thought they were superb. Audition comprehensively and partner carefully, and you could be wondering how you ever listened without them.



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  - insight and clarity
  - spacious nature
  - build and finish
- AGAINST**
- can lack warmth
  - need careful partnering

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

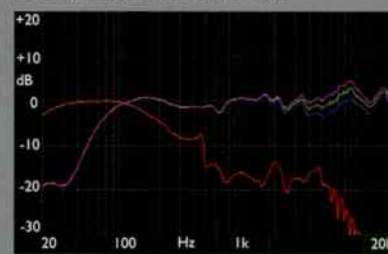
As per their larger brothers, the Adam HM3s have a generally even trend to their frequency response, with just a few undulations in the upper registers. None of these are larger than a couple of dB however, so should not give an audibly unpleasant result. The rear panel tweeter adjustment switch introduces a treble lift or cut of 1.5dB in two of its positions and it can be seen that this comes into effect above 2kHz or so. This will allow subtle fine-tuning for rooms or partnering equipment that are a touch too bright or soft, without unduly altering the balance of the loudspeaker.

At the low end, the lower driver commences rolloff around 80Hz and is reinforced by the twin ports that operate over a broad area down to their tuning frequency of around 35Hz. Port output is clean, and the HM3s should have good weight for their size, although the dip of 1dB or so from 300-600Hz may reduce the impact of the upper bass a little.

Electrically, the HM3s have an even response with little to upset a fragile amplifier. Their overall impedance is low, coming in at an average of 4.7 Ohms, and dropping

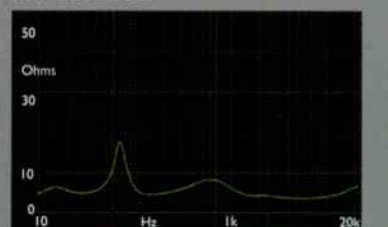
down to a minimum of around 3.5 Ohms, fortunately at higher frequencies where current draw is less of an issue. Their sensitivity is good however at 90dB, so they will not require huge amounts of watts to sing enthusiastically. AS

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
 Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**





# Northern Light

**Mikal Dreggevik is one hi-fi's rising stars right now, with a passion that shines through when you talk to him. David Price meets Electrocompaniet's main man in his native Norway...**



In today's austere economic climate, there's little good news emanating from manufacturing industry – and this picture seems to be universally bad across the whole of western Europe. Right now, no one making hi-fi is having fun...

Well, maybe Mikal Dreggevik is the exception that proves the rule. As the head of Electrocompaniet, for the past five years, he has presided over one of hi-fi's few recent success stories – and all from the high wage, high tax, high cost economy of Norway. Running counter to the current fashion, he has not outsourced his production to China or the Far East; instead he's skillfully grown the business up to one hundred plus employees, and won all number of prizes along the way...

Like all successful captains of industry, he is an energetic soul – smiling and positive – yet he exudes a sense of inner calm too. Whilst the mid November weather in Stavanger [pictured below left] on Norway's beautiful South West coast was icy, the tall blond Dreggevik is

not. Indeed he displays a childlike enthusiasm for what he's doing...

"As a kid I had older brothers that owned

their own hi-fi systems," he tells me, "and it soon became a dream of mine to have my own. As my brothers upgraded their systems I would inherit their old and outdated components. I also built my own loudspeakers. But it wasn't until my (Lutheran church) confirmation at the age of fifteen that I had the means to buy my own real stereo. Indeed, my parents were a bit frustrated that I spent all gift money on a hi-fi. It has been a passion ever since."

Well quite, because Mikal's passion for audio was so enduring that, nearly three decades later, it saw him buying his country's most illustrious hi-fi brand. In 2004 he became owner of Electrocompaniet, and injected a new sense of focus and purpose into what was a respected if rather sedentary hi-fi marque. And amusingly, he bought the company itself as a direct result of buying the company's top system!

Thanks to his love of music from an early age, he had been – like many reading this – on his own personal odyssey to get the sound he craved. "I started playing various instruments at an early age", says Mikal. That brought me through many different types of music, from classical to rock. Today, I don't play any more, but have learned to enjoy a wide range of music. My favourite changes through the year, and also after my personal mode. Typically, in the weeks before Christmas, Handel's 'Messiah' is my

favourite. But if you want me to give you just one name, then without question it is Pink Floyd. And for me, Roger Waters or David Gilmour doing their own version of Pink Floyd has the same standing or is even better."

His purchase of Electrocompaniet didn't come by accident, but by having made his fortune with Westcontrol [pictured above right] – an avionics defence contractor, supplying a number of militaries including Britain's Royal Air Force. He started this company by himself, back in 1994.

"In the beginning it was just me, doing everything from design, electronics, programming, and paperwork. Now, Westcontrol is ostensibly a research and development company with its own factory for production and assembling. We like to use the phrase "system house", which in Norwegian terms is a company doing everything from idea to product. So we do development, prototype, beta series and volume production in the same company. We cover a wide range of analogue and digital electronics. Examples include radio communication systems used in helicopters – the RAF has several products installed in their own choppers. We do different types of sensors, vision



systems, servo systems, etcetera.”

In the UK, Electrocompaniet is a relatively enigmatic name, associated by some audiophiles with clean sounding transistor power amplifiers stretching as far back as the nineteen seventies. In its native Norway however, the marque needs no introduction - it was the Electrocompaniet '2 Channel Audio Power Amplifier' that started the company's success. The result of a paper presented to a 1973 AES conference, which presented the idea of transient Intermodulation distortion (TIM), the story goes that Norwegian record producer Svein Erik Børja took this concept to Electrocompaniet, who refined it and produced a transistor amplifier designed to eliminate this type of distortion. The company duly made a name for itself, and built up its business to get the product into over forty countries worldwide.

After this early success, the company failed to capitalise on the momentum, and it wasn't until Dreggevik got involved five years ago that things started pushing forward again, allied with its powerful sister company Westcontrol. Mikal takes up the story, "Electrocompaniet started from the simple idea that it was possible to make a better sounding amplifier than was available on the market, back in the mid nineteen seventies. 'Close the gap to the master' has been the company's slogan for many years, and for me it encapsulates both the spirit and the style of the company."

Asked to describe the most important early Electrocompaniet product, he's convinced it is the iconic 25W amplifier launched in 1977. "A lot of people still speak about this, as one of the most significant in the history of high end. It was a technical breakthrough, and the sound was marvellous. In many ways, this product is the foundation of the brand name Electrocompaniet. I bought the company in December 2004, simply because I loved the product, and also because there was a perfect synergy with Westcontrol. I had been a customer of Electrocompaniet, and had the

products in my living room, in use every day!"

The association with Westcontrol is what really gives Electrocompaniet an edge, he tells me. "It works very well, because the former has a strong R&D department covering analogue and digital techniques at an advanced level, along with a modern factory. This of course is allied to over thirty years experience on the audiophile engineering side from the latter. It's very difficult for many high end companies to have all the necessary resources available on a daily basis, so by combining the two companies' research and development centre, we can have a lot more engineers employed than if Electrocompaniet was a separate unit. Westcontrol has a reputation as one of the most innovative companies of its type in Norway, with all types of qualification standards, covering ISO900, Aviation and military specification."

Electrocompaniet is based in the Stavanger area of Norway, known locally as its 'petro-capital' thanks to the country's highly lucrative oil industry. Although an industrial area, in typically Norwegian style it's very tidy and the city itself, the country's third largest, is very pretty. Anyone who's been to the Highlands of Scotland will get a familiar feeling - expansive 360 panoramic views, crisp air and a sense of wonder at the great outdoors. Set just a few kilometres out from Stavanger town is the factory, a fairly conventional looking affair but with one key difference. When I visited, there were heavy earth movers at work outside, cutting their way through the rock behind the factory to make a massive extension. Electrocompaniet is growing...

Given the prevailing economic circumstances, isn't it surprising that a high end hi-fi company can succeed - especially with the high wages and high taxes he has to pay? Mikal disagrees. "When you want production in Northern Europe, you need a modern factory, with robots doing most of the work. At our factory we have for the last ten years focused and worked hard with this. This type of production is less influenced by the labour cost. We find that with modern construction in a modern factory we are able to compete with the cost from the east, including China. But we have the benefit of in-house quality control. All our products are made in Norway and this is in fact a more and more valuable situation for us. There is less and less product made in the West today, and we use 'Made in Norway' as part of the product's very identity."

Electrocompaniet now has two main focuses. It is pushing hard to update its high end range. Whilst some amplifiers have been in production, largely unchanged for a great many years - underlining the basic rightness of the design

- there's a need for other new products which Mikal is working on now. But he's also very excited by what he calls "an exclusive new lifestyle series". These more accessible, 'plug and play' products are striking visually yet show great engineering depth and imagination. "With these in place, we will be competing in different areas of the market against new rivals - but I don't want to wake them up by giving out their name! By and large, they are makers of terrible sounding systems, sold to people that have never had the chance to listen to high end systems. Our goal is to get customers from this market, rather than just take ever more from the limited number of customers 'inside' the high end arena", he tells me.

Although something of an Anglophile (he spends much of his time in the UK and for some unfathomable reason is a lifetime supporter of Leeds United football club), I can sense that Mikal is very proud of his Norwegian roots. The country has staged something of a renaissance in recent years, and I think he's happy that the return of Electrocompaniet is one part of it. Not just to show his Scandinavian neighbours that Denmark isn't the sole superpower in consumer audio electronics (he has a watchful eye on the output of Bang & Olufsen), but to show the world that the country has a place in international high end hi-fi.

With over one hundred employees and a growing factory, plus a range of impressive new products coming up, Electrocompaniet doesn't look set to easily give up its status as Norway's largest hi-fi maker. Dreggevik is ambitious for Electrocompaniet, and senses the changing market. "The synergy with Westcontrol means we have a far bigger development team than is normal for a high end company the same size as Electrocompaniet. We want to be one of the major actors in the high end market - this is the goal and we will continue to focus on the best product, with the best quality, with the best possible service."



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#### NORWEGIAN GOOD - MIKAL'S HOME HI-FI.

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# Swinging Sixties



**Quad's ESL57 are iconic designs that need no introduction the world over, whilst its modern ESL988/989s and 2805/2905s are popular modern products with a big following. What then of the ESL63, asks Haden Boardman – as whichever way you look at it, this has become somewhat unloved and overlooked?**

**I**ntroduced for the princely sum of £1,000 (which very quickly rose to £1,200) the ESL63 was a vastly different beast to the original Quad ESL57. Still, there was so much right about the '57 (the line source imaging, the clean, fast and open bass) that Quad had an uphill struggle popularising the '63. The new design addressed the oldster's problems, namely the rattles and the limited bass output, and it required some different thinking.

As is well documented, the model number refers to the year Peter Walker started work on the 'new' ESL - 1963. Seventeen years is a long time to develop a product! Whatever I think about the sonic qualities of the delay line, the technology used is very clever. Colour TVs of the 1970s may have helped simplify development, as a similar delay line is used in PAL TV decoding. All the electronics are a major upgrade from the original, and are fitted with a pretty sophisticated protection circuit, one that is not too kind to amplifiers!

The electrostatic panels themselves are more rigidly held in plastic open frames, bespoke for the speaker. The ESL panel consists of two fixed "stators" formed more like a printed circuit board, than in the original. The diaphragm itself is made

from Mylar, three microns thick [or is that thin? *Ed.*] and is sandwiched in between the stators in a gap of around three millimetres. The voltage applied across the gap is around 6,000 Volts.

The ESL panel consists as a series of rings (the original was a line source tweeter panel in the middle flanked by two bass panels), and the delay line aims to position the sound image thirty centimetres behind the speaker. The idea is to produce a true point source, from what is, after all, a large, one-piece plastic diaphragm. As a desired side effect this bends the sound dispersion across diaphragm making it less directional in listening. Having said that, like all electrostatics, in comparison to conventional moving coil designs, these speakers are very directional, you really do need to sit on axis to fully enjoy and appreciate the sound.

## THE 63 TODAY

It's quite a revelation to see how cheaply ESL63s are selling for today. This is for two reasons. First, the new ones are such bargain prices so why bother with second-hand. Second are the service costs. It can cost more to re-panel a set of ESL63s than to buy them! Remember the oldest sets date from 1981. The set shown here, were purchased out of the back

of our very own Classified section, after being advertised several times. Luckily enough, they did not need much work.

Quad are totally happy to fully refurbish ESL63s. For around £1,300 you get what can only be described as a 'new' pair of speakers, with new panels throughout, and fully serviced. Of course parts are available on an individual basis. I am not saying DIY on this speaker is a no go area, but in comparison to the original models, it is much more sophisticated, and there are more than a few little pitfalls, just pulling the speaker apart. In all honesty, I would leave this one to the experts.

Sound wise, for comparison I had the latest 2805 and original ESL to hand. Amplification used was my EL84 PPP pentode monoblock design, EAR509/II monoblocks and original QUAD IIs. A mix of digital sources (Marantz CD/DA12 as usual) and Technics SPI0/II Alphason Xenon/Ortofon MC30/II home brew active RIAA valve phono stage were deployed.

Like all electrostatics, as much sound output comes out of the back as at the front; the speakers were positioned just under one third of the way down a five and a half metre long room, listening position about three metres back

again. All the speakers raised up twenty centimetres from the floor, and pointed precisely towards the listening position. Good stands are recommended.

It was pretty immediate just how good the '63 is. It is no powerhouse, sound output levels are really no better than the little BBC LS3/5a, but the level of clarity and sheer openness to the sound is in a different class from the vast majority of moving coil designs. Vocals and stereo image are just amazing with this speaker. Even the much criticised bass is simply awesome by most people's standards. What seriously lets this speaker down in the bass is the limited output level; below 100Hz it really cannot handle any serious amount of power past about twenty watts. That combined with a fairly miserable 84dB sensitivity, and none too kind a load, results in good clean low level bass of tantalising quality but with no real grunt.

ABBA's 'The Day Before You Came' was truly gripping, with Agnetha's vocals positioned precisely between the two loudspeakers, and the massive soundstage rising all around it. Playing the triple sax album 'In a Mellow Tone' by Ben Webster and Associates proved that the ESL63 is not just for digital; this classic 1959 album really punched the saxophones into the room with gusto. A little light opera courtesy of DG vinyl, Gioachino Rossini's 'Overtures', again was a real delight; however it was on small scale quartets and quintets that this speaker truly came alive. The freedom from distortion and phase coherence made the two loudspeakers disappear into my room. The most amazing sounds were to be had from the ECM recording 'The Dowland Project', a collection of mid seventeenth century stuff. This is not the normal 'fayre' around these parts I admit, but the track 'Accenti Queruli' just held the listener's attention to such a degree that even visitors more accustomed to drum and bass, and with an inbuilt hate of electrostatics, had to sit down and listen. It was totally compelling.

Indeed, playing a little drum and bass courtesy of Kruder & Dorfmeister proved the speaker can produce bass, but certainly not at the levels required for realistic playing of the K&D Sessions CD! I am no fan of subwoofers, but the poor old 63 struggled with this one. This was a shame, because again, the speaker tantalised with what could be on offer. And this is where the new '05 models win out. An increase in sensitivity, better construction and totally new electronics revealed a big

jump in bass performance, and lack of rattles. In fact, the mid and treble was a substantial and worthwhile improvement over the older '63 as well. But then at some cost - from £4,500.

Going back to the original nineteen fifties ESL57, I feel this has a certain quality to the upper midrange and treble that is better than any of the newer speakers. There is a very mild sound to the time-delayed panels that just colours the upper vocals and strings in comparison to the original. Bass is frankly not really that different to the '63, they both rattle when presented with too much signal; just in different places. The ESL63 goes down lower in the bass, allowing the low level playing of cathedral organs.

But of course it is simply not possible to stack the newer '63, something that transforms the original ESL from a great speaker to something fantastic: two pairs of original electrostatics is an amazing combo; a triple stack of original electrostatics is simply divine, if a little bit of a monster on the domestic front.

Having said that, for most domestic environments I would say the newer ESL63 is the easier speaker to service and accommodate, the fact Quad are more than happy to sort them out for you, gives them a cast iron mandate. The older 'speaker is one for tweekers and specialists; the newer '63 may well suit those after an easier life! Price wise, they now cost the same. I have seen ESL63s, claimed working, sell for a little as £300, and serviced sets up to £1,500. I would advise buying as low as you can, and sending to Quad for a full service. Then, for well under two grand, you are getting a virtually new set of loudspeakers.

Amplification wise, none of the electrostatics are easy loads, and all need to be matched quite closely to good quality electronics. Everyone knows my preference for valves; in this case I would not recommend low power single ended or triode, but higher feedback pentode/tetrode designs; the impedance of these speakers varies quite wildly.

Lots of ESL63s have been sold, including a more rigid PRO version. There is plenty of choice, bide your time, and buy at the right price. The 988 replaced the ESL63 some years back, it may look similar but only shares ten percent of the internal parts. Think of the ESL63 as the starting Quad model, a 'new' Quad speaker for under £2,000. If you can afford the extra for the 988/989 or even the 2805/2905 then go for it. If not, the ESL63 is a true bargain.



#### NOEL KEYWOOD SAYS -

I used ESL63s for many years and there are a few aspects to note. One major revision occurred in the model's lifetime, to the protection circuits. Before Serial No 29005 a crude electronic compressor circuit powered from the audio (!) introduced progressive muddle to the sound as volume was turned up. After 29005 high tension breakdown diodes were fitted to the audio transformer secondary circuit - a much better arrangement. If you buy an early model Quad can retro fit the later circuit

Basically, the ESL63 has very even output, with slightly falling high frequency content, so it sounds easy on the ear, but it is very clean and smooth, especially with violin. As a true point source it images well too.

Bass reaches down to 90Hz and there's not much below this, so a subwoofer helps, but subjective integration can be difficult.

The ESL63s were best raised up 12in or so on low, open stands. Ideally, they need plenty of rear space (3ft min.) to lose rear radiation, but I used a curtain of heavy carpet felt suspended 6in behind. Long narrow rooms suit, with the Quads situated close to and at right angles to side walls. This increases panel area and improves bass.



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**T**his month, we're delighted to be able to give away Arcam's super new FMJ A18 integrated amplifier (worth £500) and a matching bundle of top quality Chord Company cabling – comprising two runs of Chord's Epic Super Twin speaker cable (£78/m), a one metre long Power Chord mains cable (£130) and a metre run of Anthem 2 interconnect (£325). Just add speakers and CD player for a great sounding system!

Arcam's new £500 FMJ A18 amplifier is rated at 50 Watts per channel. It is based around a logic-controlled preamplifier and a toroid based power supply, all mounted in a case that uses Arcam's 'Mask of Silence' and 'Stealth Mat' SDS (Sound Dead Steel) based damped chassis to reduce both resonance and EMC problems; hence the FMJ moniker – it stands for 'Full Metal Jacket'. The A18 offers six line level inputs, plus an MM phono stage and auxiliary 3.5mm jack socket for MP3 players. Vital statistics are 85x430x275mm and it weighs a

sturdy 7.2kg.

Chord's Epic Super Twin loudspeaker cable sports two conductors, each made up of nineteen heavy gauge strands of silver-plated oxygen free copper conductors, 2.5mm in diameter, twisted together, insulated by Teflon and then surrounded by a silicone jacket. It gets Odyssey-style dual shielding, and it is then surrounded with a special PVC jacket to further improve mechanical damping. The pearl grey PVC jacket is highly pliable and acoustically inert. Overall diameter is 15mm for the Epic Super Twin. The lucky winner will get a stereo pair up to 5m in length (worth £849), with the terminations of their choice (i.e. bi-wire, single wire, banana plugs, spade connectors, etc.)

Chord's PowerChord is said to enhance the stereo image and improve the space around individual voices and instruments with hi-fi systems, and can even improve the picture quality of plasma TVs, LCD panels or projectors. A high frequency dual layer shielding system is used

to reduce noise pick up, and there's a high density vibration damping outer jacket to reduce transmission of ground borne resonance into the hi-fi components. The cable itself uses high purity copper conductors and it comes with a special 13 amp mains plug, with great attention paid to the routing and configuration of the internal wiring. A 1m lead is being given away, worth £130.

The lucky winner will also receive a one metre stereo pair of Chord Anthem 2 interconnects with RCA connectors, worth £325. This superb cable features silver-plated multi strand signal conductors and a silver-plated combined shielding system which extends the bandwidth that the cable will carry. The Anthem 2 also features internal and external Teflon insulation, resonance reducing ultra low mass silver-plated non compression RCA/phono plugs, and an isolated signal return path that reduces microphony. The Chord Company says the Anthem 2 will allow seriously low levels of musical detail to be heard, which adds immeasurably to the feeling and enjoyment of any type of music.

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**QUESTIONS**

[1] What does the FMJ moniker stand for on Arcam's A18?

- [a] Full Metal Jacket
- [b] Full Metal Jackplug
- [c] Full Micro Jacket
- [d] Full Microcomputer Jackplug

[2] What colour is the PVC jacket of the Epic Super Twin?

- [a] pearl grey
- [b] jet black
- [c] pastel green
- [d] matt mauve

[3] What type of conductors does the Power Chord use?

- [a] high purity copper
- [b] low loss silver
- [c] high mass lead
- [d] low capacitance carbon

[4] What shielding system is used on the Anthem 2?

- [a] silver plated
- [b] copper plated
- [c] tin plated
- [d] zinc plated

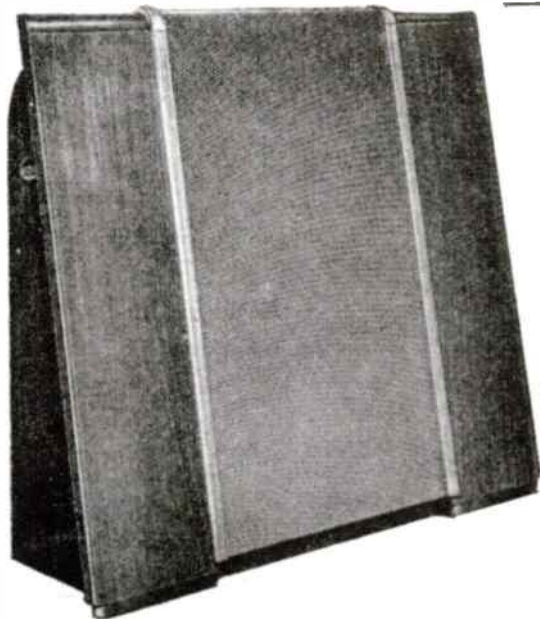
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# Designing

Open Baffle loudspeaker – drive unit choice By Peter J Comeau



## Wharfedale SFB / 3

Performs in Public with distinction  
before an audience of 1,600

PHILHARMONIC HALL, LIVERPOOL, JULY 2nd 1957

*Read what the Music Critic of the Liverpool Post had to say:*

“There was one completely perfect or completely deceptive doubling and that was Mr Leon Goosens in two delicious pieces for oboe and piano. Anyone who listened to this with closed eyes, as we did, would have been hard put to detect the change over from ‘live’ to recorded sound —

**E**ncouraged by listener's responses to my lecture demo of the Wharfedale SFB/3 at the autumn Heathrow Show I decided, rightly or wrongly, to get as close to the performance of the Gilbert Briggs bass and midrange section as I could.

Not surprisingly there are few bass units currently available that have the necessary specifications for a 12 inch or 15 inch moving coil unit that works in an open baffle. Bear with me while I go over the ideal requirements briefly.

The SFB/3 had a fundamental resonance in the 30 – 35 Hz region and a powerful magnet to keep sensitivity high. In addition the voice coil was engineered to give a long throw so that bass lift could be applied at the amplifier without ‘bottoming’ the bass unit. (Bottoming is where the voice coil movement exceeds its maximum travel (Xmax) and hits the

suspension limits or batters itself to death against the back of the magnet)!

Of course the SFB/3 was around when the majority of amplifiers had tone controls fitted and Gilbert Briggs was particularly thinking of the QUAD 22 which enabled the user to apply a judicious amount of bass lift without muddying the midrange too much.

Nowadays, with tone controls being considered something of an anathema to good sound, we don't have the ready opportunity to leave it to the user to apply a modicum of bass boost. Of course there are ways round this, for example we could supply a passive, or active, equalisation circuit to put in the tape loop circuit of the user's amplifier, much like Bose did with the 901. However I can't see this going down too well with the purist users of our open baffle speaker (and I can't say I much like this level of complexity either)! So, for the WD Open Baffle, I settled on a bass performance which was naturally balanced with the midrange without any amplifier boosting of low frequencies.

This means that we have to add one more factor in the drive unit specification, namely a relatively high Qts. By experiment I'd already

discovered that a Qts in the region of 0.5 – 0.6 would deliver the required bass performance in normal living rooms. The difficulty is in delivering this from a bass unit designed along the lines of the one in the SFB/3.

Put simply the standard way of achieving a high Qts is to either:

1. Reduce the electrical damping.
2. Increase the suspension compliance.
3. Increase the moving mass.

Of course you can use a combination of all three of these factors to achieve the desired end but let's look at the problems endemic in each:

1. Reducing electrical damping requires a reduction in magnetic force, with a subsequent loss of sensitivity.
2. Increasing suspension compliance runs the risk of the bass unit suspension becoming unstable either allowing the voice coil to ‘rub’ in the magnet gap and/or being more prone to ‘bottoming’.
3. Increasing cone mass reduces sensitivity and adds to the inertia of the moving system, again being more prone to ‘bottoming’.

I hope that you can see, from this, that it is no simple task to balance these factors into the drive unit makeup in order to achieve our objective. Yes, it's fairly simple to



**SEAS Exotic F8 full range drive unit with Alnico V magnet, papyrus fibre cone and ‘whizzer’ treble cone.**



# Loudspeakers

make a robust drive unit with an Fs of 30Hz, a sensitivity of 96dB and a Qts of 0.23. It's also pretty easy to make one with a Qts of 0.8 and still keep the sensitivity at 96dB but with the Fs at 85Hz. The difficulty comes in hitting the target of a low Fs and high Qts.

Scouring the drive unit market yielded a few examples which come close to the criteria but you have to remember, also, that the majority of modern drive unit designs are either aimed at the reflex box hi-fi loudspeaker or the pro 'guitar' loudspeaker. Most of these designs just won't work satisfactorily in an open baffle where there is no constraining force from the air mass and springiness in a box.

## DESIGNING TO A RECIPE

Accordingly there was little to do other than turn to a reliable speaker manufacturer prepared to make to a recipe. It's best, in these cases, to find a manufacturer that already makes something close to what is required in order that only the necessary adaptations need to be made to an existing driver.

Such drivers no longer exist in the hi-fi drive unit manufacturer's repertoire, so the Pro unit guys are where we start looking. Don't forget that, unlike hi-fi drive units, the Pro market requires robust, reliable and unbustable drivers, so finding a unit which will withstand the rigours of open baffle use is easier.

Now I'd love to tell you that the ingredients for the recipe turned out to be as tasty as I expected, but I can't. At time of writing I'm still to receive a driver that both myself and the manufacturer are happy with. At the moment it's a toss-up between a single 15 inch covering the required range or twin 12 inch units. I await developments!

In the meantime I can, at least, describe my choice of midrange unit. Again, keeping to the Briggs open baffle recipe, a 200mm (8 inch) unit is the ideal. This size of unit can encompass the necessary low crossover frequency to the bass units as well as keep the sensitivity high.

It would also be nice if this unit covered the majority of the frequency range to give the musical reproduction from our open baffle

design the seamless, effortlessly flowing quality that always seems to come from a well designed single drive unit speaker.

Having heard what an ancient Lowther full range unit could do in an open baffle, supported with two Goodmans Axiom bass units, at our WADFEST last year I've been eager to arrive at a design with a similar performance.

A few months ago the engineers at SEAS finally delivered a drive unit that had both the pedigree and performance that I was looking for. The Exotic range, from SEAS, encapsulates the combined experience of drive unit engineers ranging back to the '50s. Produced in small, handbuilt quantities the Exotics are totally unlike anything you've seen in a modern commercial loudspeaker.

The first design in this series is the Exotic F8, a full range unit with a lightweight papyrus based cone, special foam rubber surround and Alnico V magnet – all the hallmarks of a traditional design. Equally traditional is the use of a 'whizzer' cone to extend high frequencies.

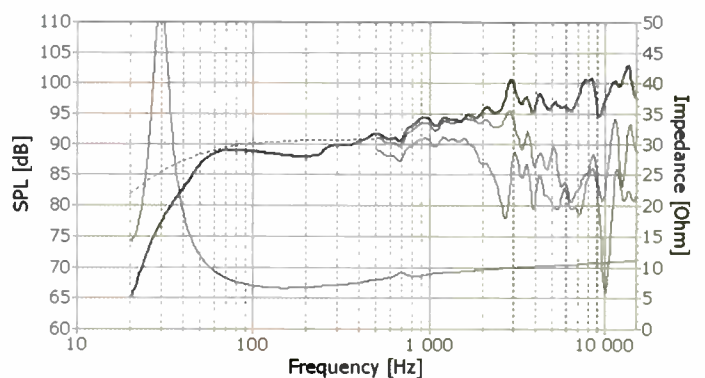
A 'whizzer' cone is a small cone attached directly to the voice coil just inside the major cone itself. It thus behaves as though it was a treble cone, adding to the output of the midrange section of the cone and taking over completely as the frequency increases beyond the range of the midrange cone.

Because the outer edge of the cone is unsupported and undertermined the term 'whizzer' originally described the typical resonant 'whizz' that the cheaper paper add-ons provided as basic additions to speakers designated for use in desktop radios and the like.

But that shouldn't rule out their use for hi-fi because a correctly designed cone can perform equally as well as the best cone treble units. Of course it doesn't have the radiation characteristics of a dome tweeter, but then nor does it have the cavitation and rear reflection problems of a dome either. Instead it presents a treble output closer in character to that of its supporting cone, which helps the drive unit achieve that seamless performance

that you expect from a full range unit.

At first sight the frequency response looks unpromising with its general rise from the midrange towards the treble. But remember, you are looking only at the on-axis response. Because of the narrowing dispersion of treble power as the frequency increases, and the corresponding increase in dispersion of midrange power as frequencies get



**SEAS Exotic F8 frequency response and impedance. The heavy line shows the on-axis response while the dotted lines below indicate the performance off-axis. Overall average sensitivity is 93dB when placed on a baffle.**

lower, the overall power response in room, and on a wide baffle, will flatten out.

Average sensitivity lies at 93dB for the 8 Ohm unit and 96dB for the 4 Ohm version, which gives us a choice to suit the bass driver sensitivity once the final units arrive. I'm expecting the 8 Ohm unit to match best as most of the bass unit's sensitivity will be used to bolster the very low frequencies with a deliberately engineered 3dB depression towards the crossover.

Qts of this unit is 0.44 which is ideal for this application and the maximum coil travel of 14mm means that we should be able to pump the long term power handling of 35W into this unit without problems, given a suitable crossover of course. However we won't know the exact outcome until the bass units arrive!

So, apologies that this particular project seems to be extending ever onwards but I never thought it would be easy to engineer something which meets modern performance requirements from a classic design. I am, however, convinced that this open baffle design is worth waiting for.

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# SOUND & VISION

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**CYRUS** - WORLD EXCLUSIVE see an amazing (currently secret) product from Cyrus to be released March 2009.

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**NAIM** - see and hear a number of new products, including the new NAIT XS.

**PMC** - launching a new high performance i series model.

**PSB** - launch of the Synchrony loudspeaker series.

**SENNHEISER** - the new IE Series in-ear headphones.

**SIM2** - demonstrating the new Domino D60 Full 1080p HD projector.

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*"The one aspect that stands out is the easy ability to resolve instruments and voices ... bass quality and definition is a revelation"*

**Cabinet kit (pair) £299**

The aperiodic enclosure offers the bass clarity and definition of a larger closed box, together with the efficiency and easy amplifier load necessary for users of valve amplifiers. Available with SEAS STD soft dome treble unit, or high performance SEAS Excel treble unit.

**WD25A STD kit (pair) £215**

**WD25A XL kit (pair) £398**



## WD25T Floorstanding Speaker Kit

*"The WD25T always sounds crisp and taut, but can 'rumble' menacingly giving impressive physicality reminiscent of far larger boxes. Imaging is superb, the midband is also special; it's very open with masses of detail about the condition of the recording"*

**Cabinet kit (pair) £469**

Cunningly arranged as an aperiodic enclosure leading to a lower sealed compartment, the WD25T combines the optimum damping of aperiodic loading with the bass extension of a large closed box. Available with STD soft dome or high performance Excel treble units.

Both the WD25 kits are based around a SEAS 26cm (10") paper cone bass unit with an efficiency of 89dB for 1W. The crossover has been developed for an easy drive 6 - 8 Ohm load making the system ideal for all types of amplifiers.

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# WORLD STANDARDS

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

## TURNTABLES

### PROJECT RPM1 GENIE 2007 £125

An absolute masterpiece of 'if you don't need it, don't include it' engineering. What's left is superbly made and turns in a staggeringly good performance, regardless of the low price.

### REGA P1 2008 £189

Rega undercut their own P2 with this new entry-level deck. Easy to set up and fine sound quality

### REGA P3 2000 £298

Great affordable audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and responds well to careful siting on a Base platform.

### TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £395

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

### MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £575

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

### PROJECT X PACK 2005 £650

Decently musical sound, fine build and blistering value for money turntable, arm and MC cartridge package.



### ROKSAN RADIUS S 2003 £750

Fantastic value allied to intelligent, interesting and 'out of the box' design makes for a wonderful entry-level superdeck. Open and musical sound is more inviting than Michell TecnoDec rival, and the bundled Nima Unipivot arm is a superstar.

### OL AURORA MKII 2007 £750

Seminal 'entry level high end' deck showing obsessive attention to detail. The result is an extremely wide open and natural sounding machine.

### FUNK FIRM VECTOR 2006 £760

Innovative attempt to produce the best sounding turntable at the price; highly musically enjoyable.



### MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £970

Design classic with superlative build and finish. Sound is beautifully smooth, expansive and effortless but lacks bass grip compared to some rivals now.

### MARANTZ TT-1551 2005 £999

This, the most musical sub-£1,000 turntable package, includes a fine tonearm and MM cartridge; plug and play vinyl at its best.

### ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE CHALLENGER 2006 £1,269

Heavyweight turntable in more ways than one; massive sharply focused soundstage allied to vast dynamic range makes it outstanding at the price.

### VPI SCOUT/9" JMW ARM 2006 £1,295

With a massive, solid and focused soundstage, superb transients and excellent musicality, this turntable is exemplary at the price.

### PROJECT RPM 10 2006 £1,500

Brilliant 'fit and forget' deck that gives everything it plays a clean, warm, enjoyable sound - but not quite as effective in absolute terms as some price rivals.

### REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

### SCHEU ANALOG BLACK DIAMOND 2007 £1,500

Stylish and highly capable turntable with seriously impressive bass. Comes with tweaked RB250 and high output Benz Micro MC cartridge as a package - superb value for money.

### CLEARAUDIO SOLUTION/ SATISFY 2006 £1,650

Wonderfully big, powerful and enthusiastic sound is tempered by a little over exuberance on occasions. Super value, with a great upgrade path.

### THORENSTD2030 2006 £1,895

Excellent design and a supplied Rega RB300 make this a highly capable vinyl spinner. Blue tint to the Perspex base is rather pretty, too!

### MICHELL ORBE SE 2002 £1,916

Ultimate evolution of the Gyro adds massy acrylic platter and two-stage isolation. Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge



### LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

New Keel subchassis is not cheap but brings the LP12 firmly into the 21st Century, with pace, dynamics and low end grunt.

### SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

### CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 2003 £4,000

The company's best value vinyl spinner; good enough to get the best from almost any tonearm and cartridge combination. Brilliantly open and neutral sound; superlative pitch stability; stunning build and styling - Michell Orbe does most of this at half the price, however.

### ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

### AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

Stylish and very well built vinyl spinner that measures well and sound spectacularly neutral and vivid.

### SIMON YORKE S9 2002 £4,995

Magnificently designed and built 'record player' that has musical abilities few can match. The arm is particularly impressive, despite its apparent simplicity

### McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

It's big, expensive, controversially styled and glows more than some might consider necessary! Fortunately it's also an astonishingly good performer...

## TO NEARMS

### REGA RB250 1984 £112

This is capable far beyond its price point, with a tight, lean and detailed sound. Responds well to counterweight modification, rewiring and general tweaking.

### MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £399

John Michell's brilliant reworking of the Rega RB250 theme, using blasting and drilling techniques usually seen in motorsport! The result is the best sounding arm at £400, and as good as some at four times the price.

### ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

This expertly fettled Rega boasts a superbly even, transparent and tuneful sound. Gives away only a small degree of finesse and dimensionality to top arms.



**HADCOCK 242 SE 2000 £649**

Latest of a long line of unipivots, with added mass, revised geometry and better finish. Musical like no others at the price.

**SME 309 1989 £767**

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

**SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127**

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

**AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300**

HFV's best tonearm of 2007 is a derivative of the classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

**NAIMARO 1987 £1,425**

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

**ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS 2002 £1,570**

A modern superarm with battleship build. Extremely strong, even and open sound in the mould of the late, lamented Zeta, plus fine tonal colouring. Exquisite.

**HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595**

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

**SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614**

The so-called Best Pickup Arm in the World isn't quite, but comes pretty close. Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble. Does everything except beguile the listener.

**LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700**

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

**GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495**

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

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600**

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

**CARTRIDGES****AUDIO TECHNICA AT-110E 1984 £29**

Great starter cartridge that's refined, detailed and musical beyond its price.

**ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE 2007 £60/£120**

The first new budget MM designs for many years, Ortofon's 2M Red and Blue are high resolution designs that are an engaging listen

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

**ORTOFON SAMBA/SALSA 2006 £150/£200**

Fine cartridges that offer that MC magic at an affordable price. Samba is more dynamic and forward, Salsa rather smoother but both are great performers and track well.

**DENON DL103R 2006 £200**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 2003 £250**

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLII 2007 £270**

New and improved stylus and cantilever plus serious price reduction equals stunning dynamics and clarity. A real bargain

**ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395**

The best modern budget MC combines deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.

**LYRA DORIAN 2007 £495**

Incisive and musical, the Dorian is one of the most revealing cartridges at the price.

**ORTOFON KONTRA' B 1999 £720**

Surprisingly articulate performer by Ortofon standards. All the brand's usual polish and detail allied to real vim. Loves making music!

**ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE 2005 £500**

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

**ZYX R-100H 2005 £625**

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

**BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650**

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

**TRANSFIGURATION AXIA 2007 £890**

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

**ORTOFON KONTRA" C 2004 £1,000**

The most secure tracking MC we've heard; its super clean, fast, detailed and neutral sonics make it a brilliant partner to warmer sounding turntables.

**ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799**

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

**KOETSU RED K SIG 2007 £2,399**

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

**DIGITAL DISC PLAYERS****CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640C V2 2006 £250**

Superb entry level CD player; crisp, composed, musical sound plus fine build and ergonomics.

**MARANTZ CD6002 2008 £299**

Revealing and open budget CD spinner, once the menus have been navigated to set the player up optimally!

**REGA APOLLO 2006 £498**

Highly rhythmic and beguiling performer, although lacks some warmth of tone. Superb ergonomics and design

**RUSS ANDREWS DAC-1 USB 2007 £599**

Not just a USB gadget, but a truly accomplished upgrade DAC that makes the best of CDs, MP3s and digital radio

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640H 2005 £599.95**

Fine sonics and decent build make this our favourite affordable HD music server.

**MARANTZ SA7001 KI SIG 2006 £600**

Brilliant CD/2ch SACD spinner with a big, sweet, analogue-like sound - CD is totally competitive at the price with the best dedicated machines..

**AUDIOLAB 8000CD 2006 £650**

Ultra clean and transparent sound with amazing detail retrieval; just a tad bright and analytical for some, though.

**SHANLING CDT-80 2005 £650**

Very impressive mid-price machine with a big, sumptuous, expansive sound - better still when tubes are changed.

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

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

**NAIM CDSi 2008 £850**

Naim's new italic 'i' variant improves even further on the original, offering superb performance in a very well built package.

**EASTERN ELECTRIC MINIMAX CD 2005 £925**

Highly accomplished tube-equipped all rounder with a clean, open and musically lucid sound; superb value.



**CYRUS CD81** 2005 £1,000

Highly incisive, engaging, grippy and dynamic sound, but needs careful matching to smooth ancillaries. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

**BENCHMARK DAC-1 USB** 2007 £999

Pro-biased DAC with useful range of inputs and impressive headphone outputs, too. Save £250 if you don't need the USB-equipped version.

**ELECTROCOMPANIET PC-1** 2008 £1,034

Tidy and polished-sounding CD spinner with strong bass and an assured sense of confidence

**EXPOSURE 3010** 2003 £1,200

One of the most 'analogue' CD players, second only to the Shanling. Wonderfully beguiling balance leaves you looking for the tube output stage.

**REGA SATURN** 2007 £1,298

Wacky looks surround a highly accomplished CD spinner that marries a smooth midband to excellent bass grip.

**EDGAR CD-1** 2007 £1,350

Quirky Slovakian CD spinner with all-valve output and a truly spine-tingling performance.

**STELLO DP-200** 2004 £1,495

Brilliant do-it-all upsampling DAC preamp with headphone output and phono in. One of the best digital to analogue converters around, allied to mind-boggling flexibility.

**MARANTZ DV9600** 2006 £1,500

Impressively accomplished universal disc player, that performs superbly on CD, SACD, DVD Audio and DVD Video

**RAYSONIC CD128** 2007 £1,599

Spaceship styling and fine build around a highly competent mid-priced CD spinner means a feast for the senses.

**CHORD DAC64** 2005 £1,995

Bespoke architecture gives a truly uniquely musical sound that's beguilingly musical in nature, if a tad tonally dry. Superb build and aesthetics too!

**SHANLING SCD-T2000** 2007 £2,250

Updated version of original SCD-T200C standardises upgrades optional on the older model and adds a few more tweaks for good measure. The result is a stylish player that works superbly with both CD and SACD

**TUBE TECHNOLOGY FUSION 64** 2006 £2,200

Unique digital and analogue audio engineering makes for an exceptional CD player that, on some programme material, is peerless.

**NORTH STAR MODEL 192 TRANSPORT/EXTREMO DAC** 2006 £2,918

Superbly finessed and loquacious sound allied to excellent build and finish make for a brilliant value high end buy.

**ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2** 2007 £3,985

Styling not to everyone's taste but build quality is impeccable and the performance is stunningly musical.

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2** 2003 £4,950

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

**LINN UNIDISK 1.1** 2004 £6,500

Surely the ultimate universal DVD player; superb in every department, but its CD playback shines brightest considering it's not a bespoke Red Book machine.

**NAIM CDS3** 2003 £7,050

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

**ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE 1 MK2/TUBE DAC 2** 2007 £7,980

Superbly built high end CD transport and DAC combo that shows just what the format can be capable of..

**ESOTERIC X-01** 2005 £8,995

Breathtaking feat of digital audio engineering, and surely the best sounding combination CD/SACD spinner money can buy.

**NAIM CD555/555PS** 2006 £14,000

Very probably the best CD player yet made - certainly the most expensive; a digital *tour de force*.

**DIGITAL RECORDERS****SONY RCD-W3** 2002 £250

Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for non-nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

**YAMAHA CDR-HD1300E2002** £600

HD means MD-style ease of editing, but compromises recording quality ever-so slightly. Add decent CD replay and it's a fine all rounder nonetheless - top value.

**PHONOSTAGES****PROJECT PHONOBOX LE2004** £99

Great little box that improves on most bundled phono stages found in budget integrated amplifiers, adding detail and definition and a measure of smoothness too.

**TRICHORD DINO** 2002 £299

Great all rounder with switchable MM/MC. Fast, fluid and smooth like no others at the price.

**JOLIDA JD9** 2006 £400

Hybrid tube/solid state phono stage with a good range of adjustability. Excellent value for money and a fine, dynamic sound.

**GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V** 2004 £460

Wonderfully warm, open and musical nature makes this an essential audition for those wanting a top value mid-price phono stage.

**LEHMANN BLACK CUBE SE2006** £495

Clean, smooth and even right across the frequency range, this phono stage represents super value for money.

**PURESOUND P10** 2007 £400

Guy Sargeant's new MM phono stage is an absolute belter. Simple but very effective.

**AQVOX PHONO 2 CI** 2006 £598

Brilliantly versatile yet affordable phono stage with a beguiling sound, but careful matching essential. Balanced operation of real benefit.

**ICON AUDIO PSI.2** 2007 £599

Excellent value valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.

**CLEARAUDIO SYMPHONO+** 2006 £809

Superb high resolution phonostage with a tight, grippy and engagingly musical sound.

**ANATEK MCI** 2007 £850

A spectacularly good MC phono stage that offers valve-like insight, underpinned by seriously impressive bass.

**EASTERN ELECTRIC MINIMAX PHONO** 2006 £1,099

A stunning phono stage with superb clarity and impeccable dynamics, allied to the atmosphere of valves. Can hold its own with even more expensive designs. A veritable bargain.

**LINN LINTO** 2000 £900

A musical and incisive performer, with more speed than the Delphini at the expense of detail and tonal colour.

**QUAD QC24P** 2007 £995

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

**TRICHORD DIABLO + NCPSU** 2006 £1,198

Highly musical performer, this is one of the best phonostages at or near the price, but lacks the polish of the rival Whest.

**AMPLIFIERS****NAD C315BEE** 2007 £180

A tough and highly polished budget amplifier with NAD's typically useful loudspeaker driving abilities

**MARANTZ PM6002** 2008 £299

Revealing budget amp with fine phono stage and tight, rhythmical bass.

**ONKYO A-9755** 2006 £700

Beautifully built, usefully versatile and truly enjoyable sonics make this another great affordable audiophile product from Onkyo.

**NAIM NAIT 5i** 2007 £725

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

**CAMBRIDGE 840A V2** 2007 £750

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

**JUNGSON JA-88D** 2006 £899

Stunning value for money Class A monster integrated; extreme power and clarity at a puzzlingly low price.





**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2007 £1,299

More power and greater transparency improve even further on the already impressive A21a to give truly impressive results

**AUDIO NOTE OTO SE** 2000 £1,199

This baby tuber is beautifully sweet and creamy, but lacks solid-state's clarity, detail and incision. Low, low power means speaker choice critical.

**SHANLING STP-80** 2007 £1,199

Well built and surprisingly muscular valve integrated. Engagingly musical.

**CREEK DESTINY****AMPLIFIER** 2006 £1,200

Superb build, useful power plus a deep full bodied sound make this an excellent mid-price buy.

**ELECTROCOMPANET****PI-2** 2008 £1,430

Powerful integrated with seriously solid bass and impressive dynamic abilities. Superbly musical.

**ANATEK A50R** 2007 £1,600

Simple integrated amplifier with spectacular bass grip and effortless dynamics.

**AUDIO NOTE SORO SE** 2000 £1,699

Wonderfully out-of-the-box sounding tube middleweight is all about sweetness and fluidity. Limited power and loose bass, but little the worse for it.

**UNISON RESEARCH S6** 2002 £1,625

Tremendously musical and lithe sound with real finesse and subtlety too. Very slightly upper mid forward encourages careful partnering with ancillaries (Revolver R45s are ideal), but overall fantastic value for money.

**MOON i-3RS** 2008 £1,890

Grippy and clean performer with fine sound-staging and build quality.

**SUGDEN A21SE** 2005 £1,995

Brilliantly musical hear-through sound makes this one of the best transistor amplifiers ever made, but be prepared to match carefully.

**RED WINE AUDIO SIGNATURE 70** 2007 £1,995

Battery powered, single input Class D mono integrateds that work superbly well. Sound most un-digital!

**COPLAND CSA29** 2006 £1,998

Unfailingly svelte, sophisticated and smooth - both to listen to and look at - this is a truly desirable high end integrated.

**NAIM SUPERNAIT** 2007 £2,350

A technological and sonic tour de force from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with superb sound quality.

**VINCENT SA-TI/SP-T100** 2006 £2,300

Impressively built and stylish pre/power combo that take any kind of music and make the best of it

**LUXMAN L-550A** 2007 £2,800

Monster Class A integrated with powerful and revealing sound and a whole host of useful features, including a highly competent MM/MC phono stage

**AUDIO RESEARCH VS155** 2003 £2,895

The Naim NAP250's tubular alter ego; oodles of power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a brilliant all round amplifier. Lacks the subtlety and finesse of the low powered single-ended brigade but makes up for it with sheer brio.

**LEEMA TUCANA** 2007 £2,995

Leema's success story continues with this integrated amp that combines power, detail and great musicality in a solidly built package

**SUGDEN IA4** 2007 £3,499

A goodly amount of Class A power and a breathtakingly fast and musical sound make this a high-end integrated to be reckoned with.

**NAIM NAC282/NAP200** 2004 £4,000

Wonderfully taut bass, lightning midband and incisive treble makes for an enthralling listen; this cracking combination looks great and is superb value too.

**AV AMPLIFIERS****MARANTZ SR6001** 2007 £700

Superbly built A/V receiver with a huge feature count and fine sound quality, even in two channel.

**YAMAHA DSP-AX861SE** 2007 £700

Highly capable A/V amplifier with mind-boggling array of surround sound options. Even has a decent MM phono stage!

**ARCAM AVR350** 2006 £1,500

Superbly accomplished do-it-all AV receiver package, with an uncommonly, warm, natural and musical sound. A winner goes from strength to strength.

**DENON AVR-4308** 2007 £2,000

Huge behemoth festooned with facilities and sockets, plus two remotes! Fortunately it's a brilliantly flexible and powerful performer.

**NAIM AV2/NAP 150/NAPV 175** 2002 £4,190

Brilliant audiophile multichannel pre-power amplifier combo; not as good with music as a two-channel Naim set-up at the same price, obviously, but surprisingly close. Elegant control layout plus a strong, clean and brilliantly engaging sound make this a serious crossover product. Ultimately lacks power compared to similarly priced Arcam gear, but is more musically involving.

**HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS****CHANNEL ISLANDS VHP-1/VAC-1** £390

A truly exceptional headphone output stage: the best at the price and an essential audition.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY****X-CANS V3** 2003 £249

Mr. Michaelson's best headphone amplifier to date, with an extremely open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive any phones to very high levels. Errs towards brightness with some headphones, so match carefully and use smooth cables.

**SUGDEN HEADMASTER****2003 £600**

Unusual combined preamplifier and headphone amplifier, this boasts a surprisingly smooth and open sound.

**PREAMPLIFIERS****CREEK OBH-12** 2000 £220

Brilliant value budget passive, giving little away in sonics to far more expensive designs. Connectivity and build aren't great, but what do you expect at this price?

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE** 2003 £1,500

Novel and effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison. Silver version at the twice the price adds eerie transparency, and is superlative.

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

Captivating sound quality that will transform your system. Build quality is equally impressive and value top-notch. Highly recommended

**NUFORCE P-9** 2007 £2,200

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

**MELODY PURE BLACK 101D** 2007 £3,295

One of the best preamplifiers we have ever heard. Takes the clarity and openness we expect from valves and adds a staggering level of grip and detail. Stunning.

**POWER AMPLIFIERS****ROKSAN KANDY LIII** 2008 £600

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight and can embarrass more expensive designs.

**QUAD 909** 2001 £900

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

**NAIM NAP150** 2002 £795

Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

**SUGDEN MUSIC**

**MASTER** 2003 £1,300  
Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. By comparison, tubes sound bloated and standard solid-state hazy and brittle. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**NUFORCE REFERENCE**

**9SE** £1,550  
Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three dimensional sound.



**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595  
Hugely powerful digital amp with neutral midrange and a wonderfully spacious treble

**CHANNEL ISLANDS AUDIO D100** 2005 £1,595  
Clean and musical Class D monoblock power amplifiers in a neat, small package.

**SILK GLOWMASTER KT88** 2007 £1,699  
KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass heft.



**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230PR  
Brilliant modern tube monoblock power amplifiers with plenty of power, wonderfully liquid and open midband and spacious, airy treble. One of the best tube power amp combos ever.

**GRAAF GM20 OTL** 2003 £3,300  
Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1** 2007 £199  
Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

**B&W 686** 2007 £279  
B&W's new baby standmounters offer a sophisticated and mature performance that belies both their dimensions and price tag.

**USHER S-520** 2006 £320  
Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions



**MORDAUNT SHORT AVANT 914i** 2007 £300  
Another pair of storming budget floorstanders from Mordaunt Short. Detailed, punchy and crisp.

**MORDAUNT SHORT AVANT 906i** 2006 £350  
Dynamic and impressive floorstanders with excellent insight and a lively nature.

**REVOLVER RW16** 2004 £400  
Outstanding standmounter with tonal accuracy and speed that totally belies its price; good sensitivity for a small box makes it great with valve amps too. A budget audiophile classic.

**LEEMA XERO** 2007 £650  
Superb mini-monitors that belie their modest price tag with a bold and finessed performance

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC** £845  
Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.

**SPENDOR S3/5E** 2004 £950  
A natural successor to the BBC LS3/5a, whose impressive neutrality, imaging and evenhandedness makes this a superior, if less charismatic, loudspeaker.

**WHARFEDALE OPUS 2-M1** 2007 £999  
Large standmounters with impressive mid-range dome and fine integration across the frequency range.

**RRR FS100** 2007 £1,055  
Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

**YAMAHA SOAVO 2** 2007 £1,200  
Just as capable as their floorstanding brethren, the Soavo 2s have an assured sense of sophistication and poise.

**REVOLVER RW451** 2006 £1,199  
Very musical floorstander that's clear, concise and truthful, whilst being exceptionally amplifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

**ONETHING AUDIO ESL572007** £1,450  
One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of its game

**KIBRI NAIMA** 2007 £1,550  
Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers with an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

**USHER BE-718** 2007 £1,600  
Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

**SPENDOR S8E** £1,895  
Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.



**NAIM ALLAE** 2002 £1,990  
Taut and grippy like few others, this speaker majors on transient speed. Surprisingly smooth for a Naim box, with nicely etched treble. As always, tonally dry.

**MONITOR AUDIO GS60** £2,000  
Brilliant modern rock loudspeaker with a fantastically lithe and engaging sound, but partner carefully with a warm front end.

**PINSH 2.1** 2006 £2,000  
Wonderfully neutral and self-effacing with Redoubtable low frequency articulation allied to the superlative hear-through clarity of the Pinsh ribbon tweeter makes for an extremely accomplished all round floorstander

**YAMAHA SOAVO 1** 2006 £2,000  
Musical and transparent floorstanders with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Fine build and finish.



**ISOPHON GALILEO** 2007 £2,100  
Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and bass agility. Tricky to drive, however.

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100 2008** £2,300  
The MA boys pull out all the stops for their flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter with stunning results.

**MARTIN LOGAN CLARITY** 2003 £2,895  
Supremely transparent and open, if dynamically limited, with middling bass punch, but that's not the point - that deliciously fluid and intricate midband wins great respect.

**PMC OB1i** 2008 £2,950  
Cleverly updated floorstanders give scale and solidity in slim and well finished package.

**MOWGAN AUDIO MABON** 2007 £3,995  
Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

**B&O BEOLAB 9** 2007 £5000  
Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.

**ARS AURES M1** 2006 £5,995  
Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

**QUAD ESL-2905** 2006 £5,995  
The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

**REVOLVER CYGNIS** 2006 £5,999  
Revolver pull out all the stops and show what they can do with this magnificent flagship loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

**B&W 801D** 2006 £10,500

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

**ISOPHON CASSIANO** 2007 £12,900

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

**ACCESSORIES****MONITORAUDIO IDECK** 2006 £200

Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly musical sound make the iDeck the current iPod dock champion.

**ISOTEK GII VISION** 2006 £550

A genuinely effective and surprisingly cost effective upgrade, but results could vary so a home dem of the power conditioner is recommended.

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM**

2003 £800

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

**HEADPHONES****SENNHEISER MX-550** 2005 £19

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

**SENNHEISER PX-100** 2002 £29

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

**GOLDRING DR150** 2006 £70

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

**SENNHEISER HD-590** 1998 £199

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

**SENNHEISER HD-650** 2004 £250

Not the best headphone in the world, but a superb all round reference all the same. Very crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and fine comfort makes all most people will ever want. Cable upgrade yields great results.

**STAX SR-007T OMEGA**

II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890

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## PURE EVOKE MIO £149.95

Pure was one of the very first to market with compact, affordable DAB portable radios. Then, for a while it seemed the company was resting on its laurels whilst being market leader. In the past few months however, we've seen several fresh new designs with the Evoke Flow being a standout DAB/FM/Wi-Fi hybrid product. The Mio is less complex than this, being a simple unreconstructed DAB/FM radio, but is none the worse for it. The accent here is on build quality and convenience, and no small amount of style. It comes finished in a two-tone leather and cream suede effect finish, in a range of colours that lift it from the status of mere 'consumer electronic goods' to a lovable lifestyle accessory - the five hues available are chilli, chocolate, moss, candy and midnight.

Still, it's not simply a reboxed Evoke 1; the Mio has an integrated rechargeable battery pack that gives up to 24 hours of battery life per

charge, as well as operating on mains. It's worth noting that it is the eighth Pure radio to receive an Energy Saving Recommended accreditation from the Energy Saving Trust. This shows it has satisfied an independent panel of experts that it meets strict energy efficiency criteria. A salient point, as until recently DAB radios have been horrendously power-hungry. Other features include an Evoke Flow-style OLED (Organic LED) display, which is crystal-clear from any angle. It even has both manual and automatic brightness controls. Intellitext and textSCAN is provided, letting you pause the scrolling text information display and store it for browsing at a later date. There's also an alarm, kitchen timer and thirty easy to use presets. An MP3 input completes the picture.

The Mio works beautifully. Small, compact, and unobtrusive in the room, it's far easier on the eye than some rival radios, and the leather and suede effect finish feels (and looks) superb, making it a joy to carry



around. The controls have a crispness that earlier Pures lacked, navigating through its many functions is straightforward. Sonically the Mio is good too - with a clean, inoffensive sound that's ideal for music and speech alike. Overall, this new Pure radio is a little on the pricey side but the quality more than justifies the cost. **DP**

[Contact: 0845 1489001, [www.pure.com](http://www.pure.com)]

# soundbites

## RINGMAT PURE POWER MAINS CABLE £386.60

Ringmat Developments are probably best known for their Ringmat LP and CD accessories in recent years, but have expanded their range of products to include interconnects, speaker cable and the mains cable under review here. There are two versions of mains lead in the range; the more expensive of the two is the Pure Power Mains Cable, retailing at £386.60 (including 15% VAT) for a 1.4m length. (1.7m and 2m lengths are also available as standard, and extra lengths cost a further £50 per metre.)

The design is unusual and builds on the company's research into the effects of phase anomalies in both signal and speaker leads. The main body of the cable consists of four PVC insulated conductors containing 56 strands of 0.30mm diameter high purity oxygen-free copper wire, giving a core size of nearly 4mm square. A single earth conductor of seven 1.35mm diameter strands of plain copper in LSF (Low Smoke and Fume) thermosetting insulation

runs alongside the main sheath of cabling; this has a core size of 10mm. Near each end are plastic termination blocks where the bulk of leads are reduced to 1.5mm five core mains cable, that will fit into conventional mains and IEC plugs (Other terminations are available on request).

The instructions note that there is a running in period of a few days before the best sound is obtained. I felt that the sound became settled and consistent after about five days use. This cable is bulky, and will not fit into tight spaces very easily, mostly due to the size of the termination blocks, so care needs to be taken especially if using it with lightweight equipment such as tuners.

The sonic effects were very pleasant, with a wide and detailed soundstage, underpinned by a driving rhythmic energy that was beguiling. In particular, I felt that the smoothness given to potentially shrieking instruments, such as the violin, was well balanced, whilst avoiding the unnatural creamy lushness that can be the signature of some other



leads. Separation was good, leaving no doubt as to the relevant location of each performer. Ringmat's Pure Power Mains Cable is expensive, and may require a little jiggling to fit it in behind your equipment rack, but it is also very effective, and worth auditioning alongside other similarly priced products. **TB**

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## WD Phono3S Valve Phonoamplifier Kit

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### MM and MC inputs

WDPhono3S offers you two inputs, selected on the front panel, for MM and MC cartridges. MC inputs feature high performance step-up transformers for the lowest noise, clearest output from any cartridge. Each input has individual impedance matching to obtain the best sound from the cartridge of your choice. In addition you can select the subsonic filter characteristic to give the optimum results from your turntable, arm and cartridge.



*Kits come complete with pictorial instructions for easy assembly.*

WDPhono3S kit	£399
WDPSU3 power supply	£229
WDPhono3S and PSU3 built and tested	£853

## WDPRE3 Valve Preamplifier kit

*"So there we have it, a pre-amplifier capable of driving any load and maintaining its linearity no matter what cables or partnering equipment you prefer to use."*

### The Active Preamp principle

This 5 input line level preamp is essentially an SE triode power amplifier in concept. WDPRE3 uses an ECC82 double triode arranged as input voltage amplifier and power output amplifier stages, the latter driving oversize 20:1 output transformers.

### Active vs Passive

Many enthusiasts assume that a 'passive' control unit (essentially just a volume control and switching system in a box) is the ideal 'preamplifier'. However this assumption takes no account of the interface between the source and the power amplifier, let alone the effects of partnering cables. The WDPRE3 effectively isolates the source from the power amplifier and provides the correct terminating impedance to optimise the musical performance.



*WDPRE3 requires the WDPSU3 power supply (shown above)*

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"comments about Naim's new HDX are a fascinating glimpse of where the great computer audio debate is right now..."



## david price

**T**he launch of the Naim HDX hard disc music server some six months ago has really put the cat amongst the pigeons on both the subject of the HDX itself and computer audio in general.

Lest we forget, the HDX is essentially a black box with a CD-ROM drive built in, plus twin hard disc drives storing music in either compressed or uncompressed formats. It has a natty little colour display on the front, internet capability with its Ethernet port, plus the ability to hook up to external hard drives and controllers. It's a lovely package as far as I'm concerned, and I said so in these very pages.

However, if you stick your head over the parapet I suppose you should expect to get it shot at. And so it was that yours truly has come in for some flack ('scuse the computer audio-related pun!) for pronouncing positively on the new Naim. Well, I'm a big boy now so didn't take umbrage – but I did take great interest in the nature of the adverse comments, as they're a fascinating glimpse of where the great computer audio debate is right now.

The first 'school' of Naim naysayers simply pointed out that computers don't do music. PCs are designed to number crunch and hi-fi plays harmonious tones in recognised patterns, and never the twain should meet. As such, if you're serious about high end digital audio, you need an optical disc player of the very best quality, so the argument goes. This perception that computers can't play music remains deep rooted amongst many audiophiles.

Of course, computers are electrically (and even mechanically) quite noisy environments. Hi-fi by contrast – especially the high end

variety – pays great attention to the suppression, absorption or dissipation of noise. For this reason, many argue against their use for audio purposes, but let's not forget Compact Disc players themselves are a form of computer, having as they do an optical disc drive sending binary digital data to a central processor (of a sort) 'on the fly' (i.e. in real time), as it were. You have a piece of plastic coated aluminium spinning at high speed, wobbling around inside on the spindle of an electric motor that's throwing vibration into the machine – along with a power hungry servo motor for the optical laser pickup. As such, it's not a simple case of one being bad and the other not so.

It's also important to note that the elimination of real-time optical disc reading (i.e. CD transports) removes a good deal of heartache. Basically, on-the-fly CD reading in a conventional CD player is 'death or glory' as far as the integrity of the digital signal is concerned, which is to say that the CD mechanism *must* read the disc right or it's forced to use error-correction algorithms that can degrade the sound. A computer hard disk however, can come back and try again until it's got it right.

The other big argument against the Naim HDX comes from a diametrically different direction. The claim is made that the HDX is basically a repackaged PC with commonly available hardware inside, all of which could be bought at a substantially lower price on the open market. As such, the argument goes, the new Naim is simply poor value for money.

Well, that's a bit like saying the Ford Focus has a number of sub-systems (engine, gearbox, electronics, rolling chassis, etc.) from a variety of different suppliers – all of which can be bought relatively inexpensively

– and so the car is a complete waste of money. The point of course is that it's the integrated *package* you buy, with all of that development time spent finessing the various bits so they work along with one another perfectly. Still, this line of reasoning cuts little ice with the HDX's critics. "What's the point in paying for something that does what we can already do on our own PCs?", they shout. To this I'd retort that – yes, you can get decent computer-based music playback systems for far less than the cost of a new HDX, but you're not comparing like with like. The Naim is an all-in-one, self contained solution.

Curiously then, the poor old Naim HDX has received incoming fire from both sides of this great debate. One, still sizeable chunk of audiophiles think it heresy for computers to be involved in hi-fi at all, whilst others regard it as so routine to use computers for hi-fi that the Naim is almost superfluous anyway!

It's going to be interesting to come back to this some years later and see where the debate has progressed to. I wonder if the 'Red Book Brigade' will still be tut-tutting at the ingress of hard disk music players into their audiophile idyll? Likewise, will we be thinking of the HDX as a curio, very much of its time – a dated stepping stone to the fully integrated, fully networked multimedia entertainment systems we all now run? Perhaps an evolution of the Linn model of 'open source' music systems – where the hi-fi aspect is nothing more than a network equipped DAC and some smart software – will one day hold sway?

In the great hi-fi scheme of things, it sure looks like we're in for an interesting next few years. ●

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## paul rigby

Some time ago, I came to a cross-roads in my upgrading methodology. I sat down and totted up exactly how much my baby-step upgrades had cost me over the years. Then I projected just how much my upgrades were going to cost me in the future until I reached hi-fi nirvana. The total was, frankly, enormous and rather scary. So I bit the bullet: I decided about 18 months ago that I would bypass the minor upgrades and leap to the end; I was going to buy one, ultimate, component at a time (i.e. turntable, amp, speakers, etc), the intention being that my choice would amount to the end of the upgrade path for that particular component.

My philosophy was this: it was going to cost me an arm and a leg now but, in the long run, I would save a lot of money in bypassing multiple minor upgrades. Psychologically too, it would represent commitment. Too often, in the past, I had saved for a hardware upgrade and then spent it on frivolities such as feeding my family, keeping them warm in the winter and the like.

Now? I would go into debt, with a credit card, to buy each component, then I would have no choice but to pay it back over a carefully calculated interest free period.

The process began with a chance encounter with One Thing Audio ([www.onethingaudio.net](http://www.onethingaudio.net)). They happened to have a completely refurbished and upgraded set of classic Quad ESL-57 electrostatic loudspeakers, utilising their own superb treble panels, which are robust enough to allow the Quad bass panels to sing for the first time. Yes, there are other, more expensive,

speakers on the market. However, I was after truth. I don't want my hi-fi to spin me a yarn, colouring the output to soften the edges. I want the facts. If a group had an off day in the studio or the engineer cocked up, then I want to hear about it. For such transparency, I would need the '57s. So, I had found my 'theme', the direction of my upgrade. I recommend that you find yours to aid synchronicity in all your hi-fi components.

Next? My priority is vinyl, so I found my desired turntable. The Avid Acutus ([www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)) arrived complete with a SME IV arm plus Benz Glider cartridge. Probably the best designed turntable on the planet, the Avid, with its belt drive, sprung chassis featuring a unique suspension and clamping system, exposed a wealth of detail. For example, the strumming of an acoustic guitar, for the first time, revealed the bite and attack of the action of finger hitting and scraping string. But this is one element in a long, long list of improvements. Every aspect of the musical presentation was improved, in fact.

Time passed and I was left with my old Naim NAC 112/NAP 150 pre/power and a Trichord Dino phono amp. I have been told that the Quads would really perform with a quality valve amp and so I endeavoured to demo one. By sheer coincidence, I got to hear about the new Icon Audio MB845 ([www.iconaudio.com](http://www.iconaudio.com)) monoblocks (see review in the January issue) and read the Icon Audio PS3 phono amp review in the November 2008 issue.

After hooking them up and playing one of my best vinyl albums I ignored the music, initially, because

I could hear an odd crackling. I initially thought that my Quads had developed a fault, so I powered down, swapped speakers and powered back up. The noise remained. I powered down, checked all connections and powered up. The noise was still there.

Well, I must have checked every piece of hardware for problems. I cleaned the contacts, my stylus...I even cleaned the record three times.

Then a thought occurred. I changed the record itself – which had always played fine. And you know what? The noise disappeared! I had, in fact, revealed a subtle pressing problem on the vinyl itself. The level of resolution had now reached such a high level that I was hearing musical information from the gods themselves. So I sat for a bit and listened to my new system with a silly grin on my face. I've never been so happy to have found a fault on one of my vinyl records!

Even if you decide not to follow my, admittedly, extreme method of upgrading, the bottle-neck example still stands. In my case the amplifier and phono preamp was holding back my musical progression. Post upgrade, both the Avid and Quad were let off the leash.

Do you have a weak point in your system? Is one box letting the rest down? As can be seen with my own independent review of the budget, Yamaha A-S700 in the January issue, careful pairing of the right components can get the most from your entire set-up. If you suspect that your hardware might be under performing, take a trip to your local dealer and ask his advice. You never know, for very little outlay, you could find hidden depths within your current system. ●

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"this could at long last significantly improve the overall audio quality of the BBC's stations on DAB..."



## steven green

**T**he *Media Guardian* has reported that the BBC is looking to move the Asian Network, plus possibly one or two other stations, onto the Digital One national commercial DAB multiplex. If correct, this could at long last significantly improve the overall audio quality of the BBC's stations on DAB, although how much the quality would improve by is heavily dependent on the number of stations that would make the move.

I'd say that the Asian Network is very likely to move, because the BBC wanted to move the Asian Network onto the second national commercial multiplex (which isn't now going to launch) last year anyway. However, the Asian Network only uses a bit rate of 64kbps, so that's also the amount of capacity that would be freed up on the BBC multiplex if the station were moved. That would allow Radios 1 and 2 to increase their bit rates from 128kbps to 160kbps, but this would still leave the quality of those stations seriously lacking. The bit rates of Radios 3 and 4 would no longer need to be reduced when Radio 5 Sports Extra goes on-air, though, because Radios 1 and 2 would almost certainly be reduced back to 128kbps instead. Overall though, only moving the Asian Network would still leave serious problems with the audio quality on most of the BBC's stereo stations, plus Radio 7 would still be in mono, so this would only be marginally better than the situation we have at the moment.

If two stations were moved to Digital One, the most likely candidate to be moved alongside the Asian Network would be 1Xtra, in which case 192kbps of capacity would be freed up on the BBC multiplex. This

would allow Radio 2 to increase from 128 to 192kbps, which would provide a significant improvement in quality; 6 Music's quality could also be improved and Radio 7 could start using stereo. This would leave 64kbps of capacity, which could either be used to increase Radio 1 to 192kbps, or it could be split equally between Radios 1 and 3, which would mean that the stations would transmit at 160 and 224kbps respectively.

If three stations were moved to Digital One, the BBC's national FM stations would then all be able to use the same 192kbps bit rate on DAB (Radio 3 would actually be able to use 224kbps, which is higher than originally) that the stations were using prior to 2002, when the BBC launched its five new digital stations, and massacred the audio quality in the process. 6 Music would also be able to transmit at a much more respectable 192kbps as well.

While not being ideal, I'd say that the bit rate levels just mentioned are about as high as we could realistically expect to see the BBC use on DAB given the relatively small amount of national capacity available. I would still say that FM would provide slightly higher quality than DAB though. It's also looking increasingly likely that the BBC will use decent bit rates for its live Internet radio streams starting in January, in which case the Internet streams should also provide higher quality due to their use of the superior AAC audio codec. Hopefully I'll be able to bring you some news about this next month.

However, it's far from being a foregone conclusion that multiple stations could be removed from the BBC multiplex, due to the fact that the Digital One multiplex doesn't cover Northern Ireland. The Asian

Network could still be removed without any problems though, because the Northern Ireland 'local' DAB multiplex has sufficient spare capacity on it to carry the Asian Network, so the station would continue to have UK-wide coverage. But removing other stations from the BBC national multiplex would either require the BBC to secure additional capacity in Northern Ireland, or else those stations would simply no longer be available in the province.

It's certainly possible that the BBC would be able to secure additional capacity in Northern Ireland, though. Firstly, Ofcom is strongly rumoured to be re-planning DAB spectrum as a whole in an attempt to reduce the overall transmission costs for the cash-strapped commercial broadcasters. And as the planned second national commercial multiplex is no longer going to launch at all now, this leaves a vacant channel in which a new multiplex covering Northern Ireland could easily be provided. Also, with the commercial radio industry being in dire financial straits, it wouldn't surprise me if stations in Northern Ireland would snap the BBC's hand off if it offered to relieve them of their capacity, and hence of their expensive transmission contracts.

It should also be said that the BBC's motives for moving stations onto Digital One are not purely to improve the audio quality of its stations, because another major reason is to help bail out Digital One, which is estimated to be losing around £5 million per year. Many would say that it's not the BBC's job to bail out commercial radio, and ordinarily I would agree. But as the BBC could finally be about to sort out its quality on DAB, for once I'll support them on this! ●

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## noel keywood

**S**uddenly sound quality is becoming important again, which is fine by me. Told not so long ago that the days of pure audio were numbered and that in tomorrow's shiny new world it would play second fiddle to video, I did start to wonder whether people really had given up listening to music. But there's been an almost complete about turn, and good sound quality is back in fashion - ignoring one or two stubborn pockets of resistance, such as DAB radio!

The limited acceptance of AV and the rise and rise of Apple's iTunes online music store seems to have given music listening a real boost. Okay, this has been predicted for a long time but only recently has it started to turn into reality. Apple now offer losslessly compressed files of better quality than the usual AAC fare and they can be transferred easily as full rights are conferred on the end user. As internet speeds increase this makes iTunes and services like it, such as Nokia downloaded music via your mobile phone and out through a Chordette DAC, interesting ways of playing downloads through a decent hi-fi.

I can't help but notice too how both the Naim and Linn music servers seem to be triggering a lot of interest amongst *Hi-Fi World* readers; both companies offer high quality music downloads also.

As someone who has been there, done that and lost an iTunes collection when a hard drive failed I've become a sceptic about music downloading, but perhaps it is time to try again and get stuck in alongside everyone else! My short love affair with iTunes happened many moons ago when it wasn't easy to back up, and listening to the downloads

meant either burning them to a CD for use in the hi-fi system or sitting bolt upright in front of the computer on a chair late at night which, if accompanied by wine, meant I was likely to fall off it eventually.

Leading my life in front of a computer in any case, I like to get away from it, so computer music or YouTube hold my attention for a short while only, then I am off to my beloved 300Bs which can be enjoyed in the comfort of a warm lounge.

But not always. Often I switch on a big solid-state receiver, hooked up to a Samsung BD-PI 500 Blu-ray player (and an Oppo DV-980H to spin my SACDs and DVD-As). Blu-ray is slowly catching my attention. Music on DVD never did appeal to me because sound quality was un compelling. The culprit was Dolby Digital surround sound, a strong music compression system that has a soft, flaccid presentation. DTS came into being on the basis of better sound quality and at this very moment I'm enjoying Within Temptation's latest 'Black Symphony' DVD with DTS 24/96 surround. However, whilst it's clean and gentle sounding, no matter how many of the 2,000 or so Watts I choose to use from Onkyo's latest TX-NR906 receiver I am reviewing, it still lacks visceral impact. Enter Blu-ray.

Just last night I was reminded how vicious high rate PCM can sound when I span the award winning soundtrack of 'Master and Commander: Far Side of the World'. The crack of the canons was almost too much to bear from this DTS HD Master Audio track. The same sort of presentation is apparent with the Nine Inch Nails Concert, losslessly compressed in Dolby TrueHD on Blu-ray. As a result I'm now lusting after 'Black Symphony' on Blu-ray, available

on U.S. Amazon at the time of writing, but not U.K. Amazon. It's obvious from watching the DVD that a lot of effort has been put into recording this live concert at Rotterdam's Ahoy arena and U.S. reviews give the Blu-ray sound a thumbs up for its impact. The prospect of an orchestra, choir and rock band playing music of Wagnerian proportions is exciting, especially with a lead singer as extraordinary as Sharon den Adel.

What Blu-ray shows is that when it contains high resolution digital music the result can be stunning.

So high definition digital does have appeal. I won't say at present it is perfect; there's still a clinical coolness and a hard edge that I don't quite buy as totally natural, but sound quality on Blu-ray is getting to be very interesting, shall I say. It's surprising just how much of an AV receiver is nowadays dedicated to sound processing schemes, from Dolby, DTS and now THX. Is AV swinging around to a source of good audio, accompanied by pictures? It is for me.

Soon the pictures may disappear. Perusing latest BPI sales figures shows that music videos account for a very small percentage of the overall music market. People want to listen to music without switching on the TV and I sense that Blu-ray Profile 3 music-only discs will start to appear soon. Will they ever become popular and take over from CD? Could they rival internet downloads? I doubt it.

Judging by the number of iTunes players I see being used on London's streets and Underground trains, downloading has it. But the Blu-ray music disc could also have much to offer: surround-sound in 24/192 anyone? Either way, music is back with a vengeance and quality is now an issue again. I'm a happy man. ●

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## adam smith

**W**ell, the fridge freezer has been sold, our new local radio station The Coast is still playing good music and the restoration of the Smith household back to a sense of normality continues apace. With painting and furniture replacement complete it was now finally time for me to turn my attention to the task that I had been looking forward to and dreading in equal measure – the re-establishing of my listening room...

Clearly there was excitement to a certain degree, as it meant a clean slate on which to arrange my equipment and set my system up in the best way possible. Why could I fail to be totally enthusiastic, I hear you cry? Well, if you've ever carried a Ferrograph S1 loudspeaker up a flight of stairs and positioned one whilst sat on a stand, you'll know that, whilst not exactly an insurmountable task, they're quite heavy and dimensionally a bit awkward! However, I set to with duster, vacuum cleaner and a healthy dose of elbow grease and soon I was looking at a neat, clean room, with an equally clean pile of hi-fi ready to position.

My listening room also occupies a secondary role as our third bedroom and so, consequently, has to have the facility to be made comfortable for visitors with a minimum of fuss and furniture heaving. However, in its previous incarnation, my loudspeakers were firing across the room and were positioned with their backs against the wall, which I felt was curtailing my imagery and atmospherics somewhat, even if it did put me right at the heart of the action. However, it did provide an ideal placement for my listening futon directly opposite them and made it easy to open out and make up as a bed for those lucky

enough to be invited to spend the night in my inner sanctum; with strict instructions not to touch anything, naturally!

However, I had something of a re-plan in mind. The room is rectangular and so I decided to rotate things through ninety degrees and fire the speakers down the length of the room. This would allow me to move them away from the walls to let them breathe more, maybe losing a little bass reinforcement, but I felt that KEF B139s in damped quarter wave enclosures surely had a few low end Hertz to spare! As a result, I rolled up my sleeves and carefully positioned everything. I made sure everything was level, cleaned all plugs and sockets with Kontak, made sure my cartridge was correctly aligned and finally unveiled my new loudspeaker cables that I had recently acquired and hadn't had a chance to use yet. I cued up some vinyl and left things to run in for a few hours. Returning later, I sat down to have a listen and was rather pleased; there was still a good level of bass (phew!) but the upper bass definitely had shifted up a gear to give more detail, a lightness of touch that had been missing and that sense of atmosphere I was hoping for was present and correct – excellent!

However, all was not totally well and it was at this point my wife stuck her head round the door, expressed delight that I was finished and how neat it all looked and, in that way that women have, cut straight to the chase by asking where all the midrange had gone!

Unfortunately she had a point. On quieter acoustic material things seemed fine, but spinning anything rather busier had main instruments and lead vocals shrinking off into the distance - not good. At first I started playing with loudspeaker positioning, which made changes, but

offered no significant improvements. I then remembered a long weekend playing with turntable mats on the Garrard 301 and so ran upstairs to the loft room storage area for my 3mm Funk Firm Achromat. On my previous experimentation with it, I found that this really brought out the midband but in my system's previous incarnation I felt that it was a little too much. On this occasion however, it worked very well indeed, moving things up into the centre of the soundstage nicely. Better, but still not quite there...

As I sat and pondered however, my eyes alighted on the one other thing that had changed – my fancy new loudspeaker cables. When I first encountered them, I was stunned by their sheer brio, dynamics, clarity and the way in which they really cut into the heart of the details lurking in the music, hence my wielding the Smith credit card on them. However, substituting my trusty old cables – some sturdy but anonymous Heco items that I acquired years ago in a big box of 'odds and ends' from a hi-fi shop's bankrupt stock auction - and all was well again.

This proved two things to me – firstly, that starting with a clean slate and setting up from scratch can often be a worthwhile activity – it may not be a convenient thing to do too often but the intervention of some construction work may not be quite the pain in the neck that it seems! Secondly, never assume that something you hear in the context of a different system will work in your own. My new cables are back in their boxes, but I will not be disposing of them too hurriedly – there may well be a day when they will be just the thing I need after a future upgrade. Right then, system sorted, now on to those eight turntables I mentioned last month... ●

# vinyl section

## contents

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### THORENS TD550/TPI25SE 100

Adam Smith takes Thorens' stunning looking flagship turntable and tonearm combination for a spin...

### JELCO SA-750D 105

A superb new S-shaped tonearm inspired by Sumiko's classic MMT gets the treatment from Adam Smith.

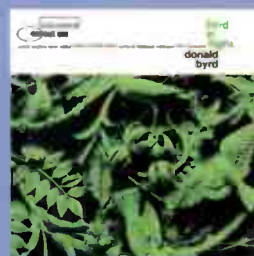
### PROJECT DEBUT III USB 109

Andrew Harrison reviews an affordable USB-equipped turntable.

## news

### JAZZED UP

Classic Records has similarly stepped up the pace with five new Blue Note jazz releases on 200gm vinyl. Freddie Hubbard's 'Open Sesame' was his excellent debut as leader from 1960, showing a maturity the belied his twenty-two years. Horace Silver's 'Horace Scope', also from 1960, and the third offering from his quintet exhibits tight, driving hard bop. A classic and just one of a range of top sixties Silver releases. Another Horace, Parlan this time, released 'Speakin' My Piece' in, you guessed it, 1960. Also playing hard bop, also on piano but this time in a more laid back, swinging fashion. Also look out for Jackie McLean's hard bop infused 'Jackie's Bag' (1959) plus Donald Byrd's trumpet bop 'Byrd In Flight' (1960).



### BACK TO BLACK

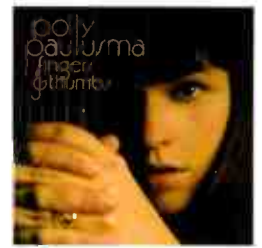
Universal has realised that vinyl hasn't, in fact, died and so has surprised itself by reissuing a blend of classics on a new reissue label called Back To Black which will also allow you to download a MP3 version of the album for portable use. Everyone's a gem including Cat Stevens' 'Tea For The Tillerman', a self-assured album that reflected on the spirituality that would direct his later embracing of the Muslim faith. Faith played a part in The Who's 'Quadrophenia', (1973) even though, for the young star of the film version, it was misplaced. A commanding work and another rock opera concept for the band's Pete Townshend. Also look out for Cream's 'Wheels On Fire' (1968) and John Mayall's 'Bluesbreakers' (1966), plus Guns N' Roses' 'Use Your Illusion 1 & 2' (1991) and Supertramp's 'Crime Of The Century' (1974).





**DMM IT!**

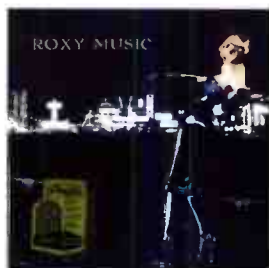
One Little Indian has released a new batch of 200gm DMM masters, via Abbey Road. Sneaker Pimps' 'Becoming X' took Portishead as a template and trip-hopped their way to stardom but with more edge to their production. Björk's side-project, 'Drawing Restraint 9', a collaboration with Matthew Barney for the film of the same name is both demanding but also satisfying. A conceptual piece.



Also watch out for Jesse Malin's excellent debut solo piece, 'The Fine Art Of Self Destruction' (2003), Dan Sartain's 'Join' (2006), a mixture of blues and rockabilly, The Twilight Singer's 'Powder Burns' (2006), a project for Afghan Whigs' frontman, Greg Dulli and Polly Paulusma's 'Fingers & Thumbs' (2007), the singer-songwriter who is maturing at a speedy rate.

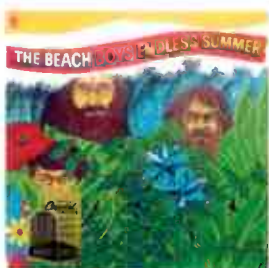
**ELBOW**

Elbow's 'The Seldom Seen Kid', their newly released album on Polydor, continues the band's mixture of early Radiohead-type prog and Coldplay-type melodies with plenty of oddness thrown in to keep things interesting. It tugs at the emotions and often carries you away on soaring wings of accessibility.



**CAPITOL VAULTS – THE SECOND BATCH**

EMI has released a new batch of releases under its limited edition, Capitol Vaults, 180gm, series. Currently recording a brand new album, Roxy Music also offer two classic reissues: the self-titled debut (1972) featuring 'Virginia Plain' plus the sequel, 'For Your Pleasure' (1973) featuring 'Do The Strand'. The Band – who had previously backed Dylan under their previous Hawks incarnation - are also present with two releases: the group's debut, 'Music From Big Pink' (1968) is pure mountain rock,



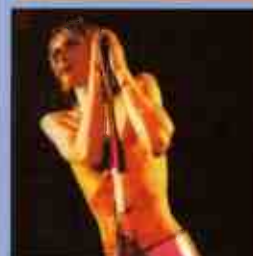
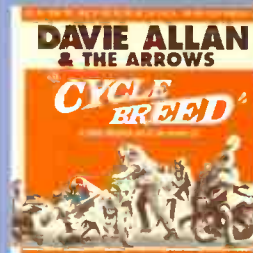
a mystical exploration into American culture, whilst the self-titled release follow-up (1969) continued to tell stories about people and places. Also look out for John Lennon's 'Rock'n'Roll', produced by Phil Spector and The Beach Boys hits compilation, 'Endless Summer' (1974).



**DAZED?**

**YOU WILL BE...**

This is a busy month for vinyl reissues and the pace shows no sign of easing off. US-based Sundazed is a good example with six releases here and many more to come. The most startling aspect of all the releases this month is the variety. Look at this lot. Firstly we've got Latin flavoured rock/blues/jazz from Santana with the classic, self-titled debut album (1969) and 'Abraxas' (1970). Remastered from the original master tapes, 'Abraxas' also includes the rare band poster.



On to the fuzz guitar warbling of Davie Allan & The Arrows and 'Cycle Breed' that features sixteen wild journeys into cult film soundtrack rarities and unissued cuts. Tracks such as 'The Angry Mob' and 'Wild In The Streets' say it all. Similarly wild – or just plain brutal - is Iggy Pop's 'Raw Power' (1973), co-mixed with David Bowie. Pop, the godfather of punk, gives a brilliant performance even though you'll be cowering behind the sofa to hear it. Also look out for Big Brother & The Holding Company's self-titled debut (1967) featuring Janis Joplin on vocals and Quatrain's self-titled album (1969), a mix of psyche, folk and rock.



# Flagship

The new TD550/TP125SE is Thorens' latest top turntable and arm combination. Adam Smith sails away...

**F**ollowing the great surge to digital towards the end of the nineteen eighties, things were not looking promising for Thorens. Let us not forget that this was a company that had been producing turntables for a long time, and was one of the great names from the heyday of vinyl in the nineteen fifties and sixties. The company that had given us the likes of the TD124, TD150, TD160, TD320 and the mighty TD520, all of which have a dedicated following amongst enthusiasts of classic vinyl spinners, seemed on the wane...

With the ascent of Compact Disc, Thorens' turntable range shrank greatly. Indeed, I have an old Thorens brochure from the mid eighties and it is a thing of wonder to behold. Model numbers like TD320, TD2001, TD3001 and TD521 are on it, as are a couple of oddities like the Thorens Concrete, and of course the mighty Thorens Prestige – 90kg of massive high end statement, capable of taking up to three arms, up to twelve inches in length. But move on a few years and the model line-up then mainly consisted of small, budget automatic designs that shared appearances with some of the cheaper Dual models.

Various electronics also came and went – often well received by reviewers but less so by the buying public, with tales abounding of

reliability issues and consequently casting a cloud over these stylish items. Many a lesser company would have closed its doors but Thorens never quite gave up and, since the resurgence in interest of black plastic, they have risen phoenix-like from the ashes with new designs, new ranges and some serious manufacturing. This is thanks in no small part to the helping hands of Dr. Roland Gauder, well known for his range of Isophon loudspeakers, amongst others.

Whilst there are still cheaper decks with varying degrees of automation, we have also seen the arrival of the TD800 and TD2000

more than that.

Most notable is the stunning 'Makassar' gloss wood effect finish of our review sample, complete with gloss black side panels and chrome plated front. If you wish however, the main deck can be black, as can the front, so you can mix and match to your heart's content. The platter weighs no less than 6.3kg, is fully filled with damping material and driven around its periphery by one of Thorens' clever synchronous AC motors, that gradually winds up the

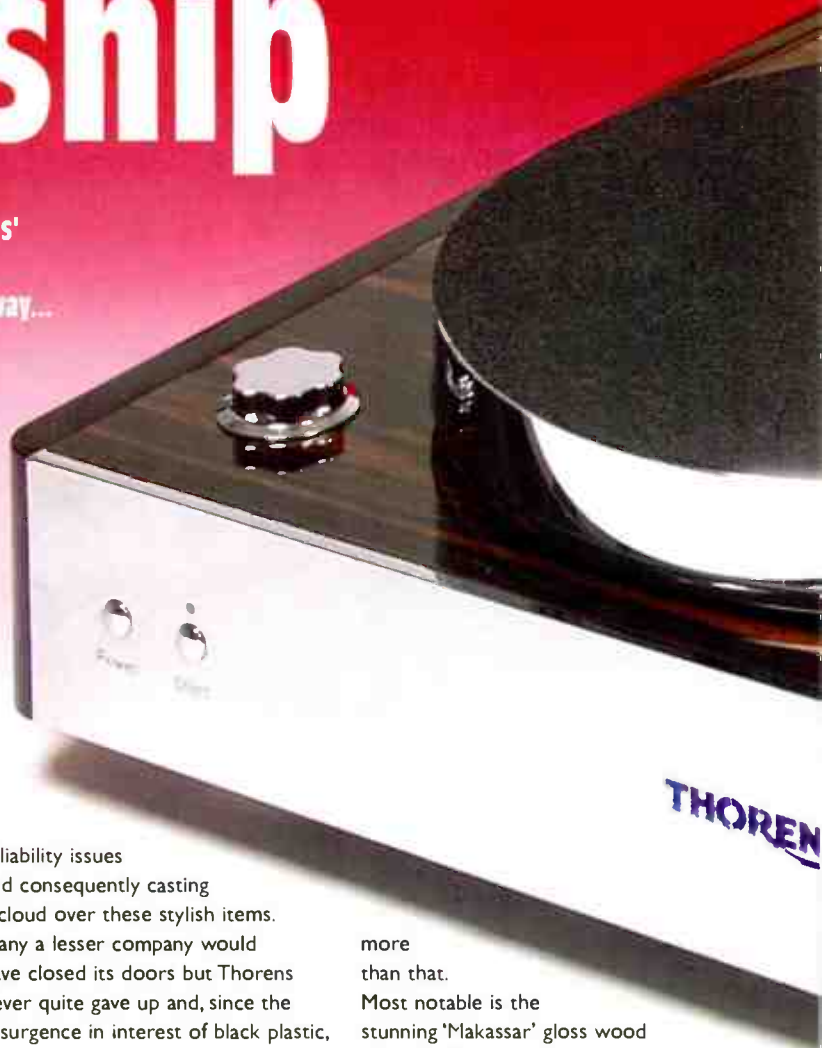
"It is great to see a resurgent Thorens back with a vengeance - and not before time...."

series models, as well as a nod to the past in the form of the TD350 and the resurgence of a true classic in the form of the TD160HD. However, the last year has seen Thorens re-establish their high end credentials. The £28,000 Jubilee may be a strictly limited edition to celebrate the company's 125th anniversary, but the TD550 is here to stay, and sits firmly at the pinnacle of the Thorens range.

In many ways the TD550 looks like a buffed up TD350 that has been through a photocopier with the 'Enlarge' button pressed, but it is

torque for a smooth start-up.

At the front are power and start/stop buttons on the left, and 33/45rpm selectors on the right, plus associated blue LEDs and a lovely blue illuminated 'Thorens' logo in the centre. At the rear are output sockets in both unbalanced phono and balanced XLR format, a five pin DIN socket for the external PSU and three screwdriver-adjustable trim pots – one for 33rpm, one for 45 and one for the illumination levels for the front panel button LEDs and Thorens logo. Finally, three hinges support a





solid lid, expertly shaped to match the front curvature of the plinth.

The deck's subchassis is suspended, as per so many classic Thorens designs, and is easily adjustable from the top of the plinth for level courtesy of three beautiful chrome adjustment knobs. The suspended armboard is made from carbon fibre and, as might be suspected from the deck's 190x525x415mm (HxWxD) dimensions, it will accommodate arms up to a foot in length. SME and Ortofon arms are available pre-fitted, but our review sample came with a twelve inch Thorens TPI 25SE. This is a brand new item, designed and manufactured for Thorens by Da Vinci Audio Labs in Switzerland and featuring a carbon fibre arm tube, aluminium bearing block, double

gimballed ruby bearings and magnetic anti-skating.

Both deck and arm are superbly finished and not difficult to set up. The multi-language manual is clear and concise, and I had the TD550 set up with cartridge fitted and a record playing within half an hour or so.

### SOUND QUALITY

As I mentioned in my review of the Roksan Xerxes 20Plus last month, listening to a capable and well set up high end turntable is a profound experience and, before the first track I chose had ended, I knew that I was in the presence of another vinyl great. The massive TD550 turntable once again did a more effective job than our builders at removing the walls of

my listening room and spreading the music out in a way that makes you glad to be alive.

Incredibly stable and self-assured like only the best turntables are, the deck provided a rock-solid



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## Sources

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We regard highly **CLEARAUDIO** vinyl components, from the "Plus" series rechargeable **BATTERY-DRIVEN PHONO STAGES** to the upgradeable **SOLUTION** or **CHAMPION** turntables. Expect stunning results from about £2500 for a complete Clearaudio package.

Vinyl lovers tend to denigrate CD but then we find they often have rather "ordinary" players – a self-fulfilling situation, a vicious circle.

We are vastly impressed with the **ESOTERIC X-05** CD and SACD player with TEAC's superb VMK-5 "turntable" transport that clamps the disc for better data reading.

"The X-05 achieves the fine balancing act of revealing what is on the disc, without exaggerating the unpleasant aspects of poorly recorded discs." *Hi-Fi Choice*

Bel Canto's **CD-2** and separate **DAC3** also bring hope to CD-haters with the unforced, natural sound common to the whole Bel Canto range – from a designer of **TRIODE VALVE** amps!

Both digital units (about £2k each) have the output to drive power amps direct. So – dump the preamp, **SAVE AND ENJOY!**

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### JUST LISTEN AND YOU'LL KNOW

**CD:** ACCUSTIC ARTS, BEL CANTO, ESOTERIC, GAMUT, RESOLUTION AUDIO, STELLO, WADIA. **VINYL:** AESTHETICS, CLEARAUDIO, DNM, GRAHAM, THE GROOVE, LEHMANN, MICHELL, SUMIKO BLUE POINT SPECIAL, TRANSGURATION. **TUNERS:** MAGNUM DYNALAB. **AMPLIFIERS:** BEL CANTO, CAT, DNM, ESOTERIC, GAMUT, HALCRO, HOVLAND, SONNETER, STELLO. **LOUDSPEAKERS:** AUDIO PHYSIC, DALI, ETHOS, GAMUT, NEAT, TOTEM. **CABLES:** CHORD Co., DNM, KUBALA SOSNA, NORDOST, SILTECH, VERTEX AQ. **MAINS** Vertex AQ. **SUPPORTS:** ARCICI, STANDS UNIQUE, VERTEX AQ

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rendition of the compressed studio recording that is Nelly Furtado's 'Say it Right', the soundstage stretching off into the distance like I have never heard before. The lady's

offered depth, warmth and the kind of atmospheric decay that turns a well recorded instrument into what seems to be a truly real one, sat right in between the loudspeakers. Feist's '1,2,3,4' bounded along with the enthusiasm of an excited puppy and Alison Goldfrapp seemed to be kneeling on the floor in front of me when I chose to spin 'Lovely Head' from her first album, 'Felt Mountain'.

Where I was used to hearing clear percussion, or plucked guitars, I was now hearing a wooden stick, tapping a metal cymbal, and clearly a plastic plectrum plucking life into a metallic guitar string. At all times, the

TD550 offered scale, insight

and atmospheric to everything I threw at it, highlighting the limitations of poor recordings, but without hammering home their deficiencies, and making good recordings soar effortlessly from my loudspeakers.

surprisingly easy to set up. As such, it's a worthy modern flagship for this illustrious company. However, whilst the TP125SE tonearm auditioned well on this turntable, we still have reservations about it in isolation due to some obvious resonance modes, and as such would have to give this a qualified recommendation. Overall, it's great to see a bold, resurgent Thorens back with a vengeance - and not before time.



vocals had form, scale and timbre, and each backing element to the track occupied a solid and focused space behind her.

Most surprising was the glockenspiel being tapped which came out of the depths to step right up to the loudspeakers. The turntable is very speed-stable, our measurements show, explaining the crisp, focused and punchy basslines. More intricate low notes from double basses also came through with feeling, alacrity and depth. Although it was very tight at the bottom end, it couldn't quite match the granite-like lows of my reference Garrard 301, however - not that many turntables can!

Although the Thorens TP125 tonearm is beautiful to behold, our measurements show its long 12" tube and headshell to be a little more resonant than is ideal. Still, affixed to the TD550 turntable it proved able to keep everything smooth, with no sign of artificial brightness that can become wearing after a while. Indeed, the Thorens combo imbued sweetness and openness to everything it played.

I almost felt a bit guilty bolting my £225 reference Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII cartridge to a £9,000 turntable/arm combination. However, not only do I truly believe that it can hold its own with many cartridges bearing price tags up into four figure territory, but this combo made it sound like a more expensive design, taking the AT's innate dynamics and pace and making sure that it never strayed towards hardness, something that can happen when mounted on lesser turntables.

As a result, I was left with music, pure and simple: Antonio Forcione's guitar

"the TD550 is stable and self-assured as only the best turntables are..."

**CONCLUSION**

There's no doubt in my mind that the new Thorens TD550 turntable is one of the very best at the price, offering a commandingly stable rendition of the music with smoothness, sweetness and insight in equal measure. It is also beautifully built, sumptuously finished and

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
 Garrard 301 turntable  
 Alphason HR-100S arm (Cardas wired)  
 Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII cartridge  
 Anatek MC1 phono stage  
 Naim SuperNait amplifier  
 Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers (modified)

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Thorens 12in long arm has a strong main mode at 200Hz our vibration analysis shows - quite a low frequency, as expected because of the extra mass and compliance. This sort of peak tends to blur low frequency imaging and impact. A very high but narrow peak also exists at 600Hz and another narrow and less consequential one at 1200Hz, possibly harmonics of the main mode. Relatively speaking this makes the arm look considerably less stiff than many current designs. The headshell looks quite lively too, with a dense cluster of peaks stretching from 4kHz up to 10kHz. Whilst all headshells suffer this to some extent, the Thorens is more lively than most.

Speed stability was good, IEC weighted wow and flutter measuring a low 0.045%, comprising mainly a 2Hz component our analysis shows. Speed accuracy was good at just 0.15% fast, an inconsequential amount.

The long arm is quite lively, both in its tube and headshell. The turntable looks good, however. NK

**WOW & FLUTTER**

**ARM VIBRATION**

Arm vibration behaviour

**VERDICT** ●●●●  
 Magnificently designed turntable that sounds like few others, but tonearm has limitations.

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# Brothers In Arms

Adam Smith checks out Jelco's new flagship SA-750D tonearm...

**R**ight then, let's start out with a quick quiz. Mobile phones away, please, no conferring and fingers on buzzers. "What links Acoustic Research, Revolver, Avid, Acoustic Signature, London Acoustical Developments, Sumiko, Audioquest, Pro-Ject and Ariston?" If you're thinking turntables, very good – award yourself a point. Now to part two – "who links all the above names?" Now, if you said 'Adam Smith', because I just mentioned them all in the same review, then frankly you're not really trying. However, if you said "Jelco" then go to the top of the class!

Jelco is a fascinating company, simply because it has been so influential yet remains largely unknown in the hi-fi world. In fact, the Jelco Ichikawa Jewel Company has a history stretching back to 1920 and Ichikawa-san himself holds a 1977 patent for a 'Pick-up arm rotary pivot bearing structure ("One Point Cross Suspension System")! This is clearly a company that knows their tonearms and deserves far more than to be dismissed as merely an OEM source of arms for eighties turntables.

Not only did the classic and sought after Sumiko MMT and Audioquest PT9 models roll out of the Jelco factory, but there are a couple of current models from one

or two prestigious manufacturers that are made there – possibly the distributors would rather you didn't know this, so my lips are sealed!

In a reaction to the renewed interest in vinyl however, Jelco have recently introduced a new model bearing their own name. Until now, their range was twofold – the SA-250ST straight arm, as featured on the Revolver Replay and Avid Diva II decks, and the S-shaped version of it, the SA-250, which can be found on decks from the likes of TV Acoustic. However, they recently upped their game somewhat and it appears that I was not the only person to sit up and shout 'I recognise that!' when they unveiled the SA-750D. Now I have heard that, although very well-meaning and helpful, Jelco are not the easiest company to deal with, mainly due to the language barrier, but several people have persevered and now, thanks to Dave Cawley at

Sumiko was quite clear as soon as I unpacked the SA-750D, but it has clearly evolved. Most obvious is that the arm has a common feature of older Jelco designs, the oil damping pot on top of the horizontal bearing. Jelco supply a pot of oil and give a guide to topping up and this can pay dividends in terms of damping out arm resonances and adding a modicum of extra control to more wayward cartridges. Other than this, the arm has Jelco's patented one point cross suspension system and comes complete with a detachable and sturdy SME-style headshell, which makes cartridge fitment nice and easy. Bias is applied by a rotary spring control, and the SA-750D mounts using a single 30mm diameter mounting hole – a solid base secured by three bolts is supplied.

The arm comes complete with the basics, namely a full-size paper mounting template and another

"I was taken aback at its sophisticated performance and sheer musicality..."

Sound Hi-Fi, a batch of SA-750Ds have made it to the UK. Not only did Dave supply a sample for review but he also trusted me with a recent eBay acquisition of his, namely a mint Sumiko MMT [see BOX].

The family resemblance to the

paper sheet, which serves as an all-in-one technical drawing/specification sheet/instruction manual – basic but effective enough. Finally, the most notable aspect of the arm is its glorious finish – an absolutely *pristine* dark chrome plate. The old MMT is

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Korato renaissance mono blocs 30W class A	£995	Tannoy Dimension 10 £5000 new 1 year old	£2495
Krell KSP7B pre amp	£395	Technics SB-F1 MKII honey comb disc speakers	£95
Leema Tucana	£2195		
Leak 12+ mono blocs restored	£495	<b>TURNABLES</b>	
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no slouch in style terms, thanks to its smart matt black finish, but the SA-750D definitely trumps it. As to actual build quality, regular readers will know that I have long used SME as a benchmark, but if I were them, I'd be getting nervous, as Jelco are creeping up. Finally, Sound Hi-Fi Also supplied a Jelco arm lead – a very solidly constructed item using gold plated connectors and high quality OFC cable for around £85 for a version with phono plugs (straight or right-angled arm connectors are available) or £125 for versions with balanced XLRs.

## SOUND QUALITY

At the Jelco's £400 price point there are two main competitors. First is a favourite of mine, the Roksan Nima unipivot and the other is actually more than one item, namely hot-rodged Rega variants from the likes of Mitchell (TecnoArm), Origin Live and Audio Origami. Sonically these are quite different and so I was keen to see how the SA-750D would fit in. The answer was intriguing...

Knowing the cheaper SA-250 variants are very fluid performers I was pleased to hear that the SA-750D upheld the family tradition but even I was not prepared for the sheer sophistication that the top model in the range brings. I have been playing with a Goldring 2500 cartridge for the past few months and it is an excellent performer but is more sensitive than many designs I have come across in terms of arm matching. Most recently it has been sat in my Audio Origami'd Helius Aureus Gold arm, but I gradually came to the conclusion that the two did not really gel. However, in the SA-750D, the sounds coming from the Goldring were nothing short of a revelation, and it gave truly the best performance I have heard from it to date. The Jelco is still a bit of a smoothie at heart, but this particular version has a real sense of authority and control to it, but without ever making you feel that it is doing so by aggressively hammering its point home.

Spinning a few favourite records, I was highly impressed by the way in which the SA-750D takes absolutely anything in its stride, and never seems to lose its sense of unruffled ease. Setting up a nicely judged, detailed and emotive soundstage, the result was to let you hear into records in a sumptuous manner. True, the Roksan Nima is an expert at this as well, and offers that tad extra unipivot-style airiness, but it is a little less assured at the low end and occasionally seems to struggle with

complex and weighty bass lines. Not so the SA-750D – it pumped out the synth bass from Rosie Vela's 'Zazu' with dignity and aplomb, adding a fulsome and depth to the underpinnings of 'Magic Smile' that meant the track held the attention perfectly. Equally however, Rosie's vocals were beautifully formed and stepped smartly out of the loudspeakers to capture my attention magnificently.

Across the top end, the SA-750D is a smooth yet insightful performer, and its treble blends seamlessly with the midrange to offer a beguiling and emotion-packed performance. Not a hint of splash ever passed its output plugs, but the Jelco was always in control of the finest top end details lurking within the depths of the mix. Tarja Turunen's vocals from Nightwish's 'Century Child' had the hairs on the back of my neck standing up and spinning Nick Drake's beautiful 'Northern Sky' had me sniffing. Regular readers will know that emotion and insight is where I feel the many Rega-based designs fall down, no matter how 'turbocharged' they are. Where they do score however, is in terms of bass dynamics and sheer low end alacrity and I have to say that the likes of the TecnoArm does still come out on top here, although I feel the differences are subtle and you would definitely have to go looking for them.

Swapping MM for MC and changing the Goldring for my Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII was a nice easy job, thanks to that detachable headshell. Suitably set up, the good things just kept on coming from the SA-750D and it proved that a high quality MC held no fears for it. The overall nature of the sound remained, with the AT adding a fine dose of MC-style insight and clarity, but it showed that the arm's character is a strong yet neutral one and it is one that seems merely to be fine-tuned by your choice of cartridge. I actually spent a whole evening swapping in and out a few more that were rattling round in the Smith vinyl toolbox and at no time did I catch it out - even a rather laid back Audio Technica AT-440MLa seemed to come out of its shell by just the right amount.

Above all, however, this consistent nature that the Jelco possessed did not result in a dominant sonic signature. In fact, I would say that the SA-750D's most notable feature is in the way it simply does not get in the way of the music. Obviously when reviewing, it is my job to try and listen to the item I am reviewing but with

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Garrard 301 and LAD GAJ942 turntables  
Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII & Goldring 2500 cartridges  
Whest Audio PS30R phono stage  
Naim SuperNait amplifier  
Modified Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

Wielding the toolkit and swapping the SA-750D for its ancestor, the Sumiko MMT, was an obvious step I just had to take. Firstly, the MMT was not quite a drop-in replacement for the SA-750D as it has a smaller diameter mounting pillar, but the sonic similarities were definitely there. The MMT has the same easy-going yet focused and detailed nature of the newbie, but seems to be just a little rougher round the edges, I suspect due to twenty-odd year old wiring. Equally, bearing use over the same length of time seemed to have reined in the SA-750D's spaciousness and fluidity a little. Interestingly though, there were both upsides and downsides to this; although the MMT could not match the SA-750D for scale and sheer clarity as a result of a slight graininess, the flipside was that when the music became darker and heavier, the MMT seemed happier to get down and grunge along, right in the heart of the mosh pit! All in all, the MMT is a worthy classic arm and is well worth seeking out. It also makes a fitting basis for Jelco's new top design.



the Jelco I found it incredibly easy to 'tune it out', sit back and really enjoy what I was listening to.

## CONCLUSION

I had a feeling I might like the Jelco SA-750D, but ended up quite taken aback at its sophisticated performance and sheer musicality. It is an easy arm to get the best from, simple to set up and beautifully built. However, what most surprised me with this review was the discovery that the SA-750D is only a little dearer than the SA-250 and SA-250ST. Excellent performers though these two designs are, I cannot help but feel that the extra hundred pounds or so buys you a sonic improvement that sounds much more. On this basis, not only is the Jelco SA-750D a very capable tonearm but also something of a bargain. Let's hope the likes of Sound Hi-Fi can keep the supply lines open.

## VERDICT ●●●●●

Jelco may be best known for budget OEM arms, but the silky smooth SA-750D shows they can mix it in the higher echelons with ease.

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**Plugging in to your computer via its Universal Serial Bus output, Pro-Ject's Debut III/Phono USB turntable is a handy budget transcribing tool, says Andrew Harrison...**

# Bus Station

**T**he Pro-Ject Debut turntable is a solid plinth design, closely resembling the eighties-vintage audiophile starter Rega Planar 2 by using a single slab of MDF for its plinth supported on four soft rubber feet. In contrast to the more colourful glossy options found on the standard-trim Debut, it's only finished in a choice of either matt black or silver paint.

A small AC synchronous motor is supported on a rubber trapeze, and a belt drives a plastic inner platter, with a pressed-steel outer platter sitting on top. To cushion a record and damp the ringing platter, Pro-Ject provide a thin black felt mat. Unusually, the main metallic platter is not the full foot across, but only 11 inches. This makes an LP look somewhat oversized when placed on top and viewed from the side.

The fitted Pro-Ject 8.6 tonearm is a smart-looking affair, using a parallel-sided alloy tube crimped flat at one end to support the

cartridge. Improved sapphire bearings are said to be an addition to the tonearm on its latest Debut III host. It's immaculately finished in satin black, and works smoothly from an accurate lift/lower cueing arm. For anti-skate compensation, we get the classic weight and thread setup to maintain required bias. The cartridge ready-mounted is an Ortofon OM5E, running 1.75g as optimal downforce.

So far, so conventional for a Debut. But over the years the basic deck has seen various extra fittings and trimmings to lift its presence, from onboard quartz-locked power supplies to auto arm-lift devices which raise the needle from the record at the end of side on what is, otherwise, a fully manual turntable.

The Debut III/Phono USB Phono gets two additions for its £230 package price. First, and perhaps most useful when it comes to adding a turntable to a modern amplifier, there's the onboard phono stage. But the headline news is the USB digital output. Soldered on the reverse of

the same little circuit board as the RIAA phono amp is an analogue-to-digital converter feeding a USB port.

All digital functions are handled by this single integrated circuit, a Burr-Brown PCM2904. This USB codec chip digitises the line-level output from the phono stage and pipes it out through a USB Type B socket, the same as found on most printers, for example. There's even the necessary USB lead supplied in the box to make the connection, which is more than can be said for most printers sold these days. You need only plug this into a Windows PC or Mac, and the computer will recognise the Debut as an external audio device. The complete deck is powered by a small external 16V wall transformer. This supplies all the deck's power requirements for the AC motor, the phono stage, and the A-D converter.

The first point to note is that a USB-connected Debut will not directly play music through your PC as if you had connected, say, an



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Goldmund SRM-250 monoblocks, ex demo. (£6590) only	£4995
Wavac MD-805 SET monoblocks As new. (£16500) our price	£7950
Kora Triode 100 SB Monoblocs	£3500

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EAR 834L pre-amp	£395
Audio Note Zero monoblocks with pre-amp (ex demo)	£595
Proceed PAV pre-amp	£495

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Accuphase DP 65 CD player	£995
Acoustic Arts 11 Reference CD transport with Acoustic Arts Reference Tube DAC 11 SE. These units are brand new, uk supplied in unopened factory sealed boxes. They are the latest models and come with full	

manufactures warranty. List price £11,950. offered for only	£6995
Tri CD player Ex-Demo	£995
Denon DVD A11 DVD/DVD Audio/CD/SACD player, mint/boxed	£695
Marantz CD 873	£65
Goldmund Eidos CD/SACD player ex demo, mint/boxed/full warranty (£3195) only	£2495

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iPod. With the turntable physically connected, you'll need to install software to make recordings. This is not to be confused with installing drivers – both Windows XP and Macintosh OS X operating systems will acknowledge the deck's presence without any additional drivers. But in order to play through the computer, or record music to it, you'll need digital audio recording software. Pro-Ject Audio doesn't provide this



software in the box but instead advises that you download the free open-source Audacity program from [www.audacity.sourceforge.net](http://www.audacity.sourceforge.net). This is available for Windows, Mac and Linux platforms, and while not the slickest program on the market, it can get the job done once you've learnt your way around the interface.

There's no need to manually set record levels, since this has already been lined-up in Pro-Ject's combined phono stage/A-D converter underslung box. The trickiest part of the software interface is probably negotiating the monitoring before you're ready to click 'Record'. First set your preferred input device as 'USB Audio CODEC' (this is how your computer will 'see' this USB turntable) in Audacity's Preferences settings. Then from Audacity's drop-down menu labelled Transport, you need to enable Software Playthrough, to hear what the deck is playing. Or, once the program is already busily recording, you should automatically hear this piped through your computer speakers.

In order to minimise digital distortions caused by unnecessary sample-rate conversion, it's wise to ensure that Audacity is set up to record at the same native sample frequency as the Debut III, that is, 44.1kHz. But you can raise the bit depth from the deck's inherent 16bit output, and record at 32bit floating. The benefits of this are maintaining available 16bit resolution if you should make edits and tweaks to the recorded audio later.

You can even compress 16bit WAV files to MP3 within Audacity. To commit this heresy to innocent vinyl, you will need to download

a separate LAME encoder plug-in (linked on Audacity website) and follow instructions to install within the program.

## SOUND QUALITY

Set up on a stable table and connected via its line-level outputs, the new Debut III plays records with ease, requiring little assembling or fiddling before its raring to go. The cartridge is already fitted and aligned so you need only remove a couple of transit screws that secure the rubber-band suspended motor, drop on the outer platter and set the counterweight and bias weight.

One issue I did encounter was a slightly higher than expected electrical hum level. This was heard through both analogue and USB digital outputs, and with the help of Audacity the background noise could be visually monitored, evident at around -54dB relative to full-scale 0dBfs output. This meant that with the system amplifier volume turned up, faint hum could be heard just below the music in quiet passages of orchestral music, for example. Environmental factors can't be entirely ruled out, although I've not encountered the same issue with other turntables in the same room. A second sample of the deck had identical-level quiet hum, which would prove an annoyance to listeners looking for pin-drop silent backgrounds.

The Debut III doesn't try to dazzle you with limitless bass power and treble extension. There's a good sense of warmth and drive in the bass, but it's contained and well-damped. The Ortofon cartridge may be a budget moving-magnet yet it can track well enough to show you what's happening on the record. Surface noise will also be higher than with more expensive offerings.

After a spell of listening to digital audio from CD, lossless WAV and DVD, it's always a pleasant surprise to come back to the sound of even a budget vinyl player, to hear how much music is hidden in the LP. There's that sense of openness in the midrange and treble, for example, which the Debut III showed aplenty, such that voices, guitars and strings always sounded unforced and in keeping with the rest of the music.

Playing through Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto, the piano sat stably in place amidst the orchestra, yet from the stereo miking of the 1973 Philips recording you could still pick out the pianist Orozco's

movements through the octaves by the finely drawn image placement, left to right, in the soundstage. Crucially, and without the aid of additional motor power supplies, speed was fixed rigidly with no hint of drift, wow nor flutter. Piano tone was rounded off at the top but music remained superbly timed and with effortless flow. On these critical grounds alone the Debut deserves attention.

Where the Debut III loses out to more upmarket offerings is in its slight congestion and overlapping of sounds, so that if you're trying to hear into the corners of a recording you find one instrument may subtly occlude another. So somewhat veiled, yes, but not in such a way that you'll feel especially musically shortchanged. In the fine art of component balance, Pro-Ject has successfully tuned the complete turntable/arm/cartridge system so that no distracting colorations will upset your day.

Used as a digital transcription deck, the Debut III performed well too, although inevitably recordings were limited by the narrower window of the digital sampling format. Comparing a live analogue



feed with one that had been through a 16-bit/44.1kHz A-D and D-A process, even using reference level DACs, I could hear some truncation and compression of the soundfield. For more earnest archivers of the black plastic, a better solution would be to find a quiet deck with better resolving cartridge, hooked up to a sound card capable of recording at least 20bit/96kHz resolution.

## CONCLUSION

The new Debut III is the smartest looking yet with its superbly finished tonearm and is an interesting addition to the line. It makes the chore of getting vinyl into a more transportable digital medium that much easier. In sonic terms, the core deck has an enviable balance of virtues which means that while it's far from the last word in vinyl playback, there's no single vice that stands out to interrupt your listening enjoyment.

## VERDICT ●●●£

Convenient and musically enjoyable solution for basic archiving of vinyl to computer, but some rough edges.

**PRO-JECT DEBUT III/PHONO USB £230**  
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- ease of use

## AGAINST

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- susceptible to faint hum

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VPI JMW MEMORIAL ARM (FEW HOURS USE ONLY)  
ORACLE DELPHI  
CLEARAUDIO EVOLUTION & TANGENT PARALLEL ARM  
VPI ARIES3 BLACK KNIGHT (£5000?) FEW HOURS USE  
VOYD VALDI/SEPARATE PSU  
ROKSAN XERXES/PSU IIII /PLINTH/LID  
ROGUE AUDIO STEALTH PHONO STAGE (£800)  
MUS.FID.XLPS V3 PHONO STAGE  
NVA TWO BOX PHONO STAGE  
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO STAGE 2-BOX  
MEXING NING DA MC767 RD MM/MC PHONO STAGE  
BILL BEARD MM/MC PHONO STAGE  
McCORMACK MINI PHONO DRIVE (MM/MC £600?)  
BILL BEARD BATTERY STEP UP  
MUSIC FIRST COPPER STEP UP (£1600?)  
MUSIC FIRST SILVER STEP UP (£3000?)  
GRAHAM SLEE ELEVATOR EXP MK 111 STEPUP

## DIGITAL

FORBIDDEN CITY ORFEO (3 MONTHS OLD)  
THETA DATA UNIVERSAL CD/LD PLAYER (RARE!)  
THETA PRO GEN III DAC GLASS & BALANCED OPTIONS  
PIONEER 505 PRECISION £500 TOM EVANS UPGRADE  
TRICHORD DIGITAL TURNTABLE  
PIONEER CLD 2950 CD/LD PLAYER  
ORACLE S-2000 TRANSPORT (£5800?)  
MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA SACD/CD PLAYER  
EINSTEIN THE CD PLAYER  
MERIDIAN 200T TRANSPORT  
PERPETUAL TECH .P1A/P3A/MODULAR PSU MODRIGHT SIG.2  
PERPETUAL TECH. P3A 24/96 UPSAMPLING DAC  
MODWRIGHT SIGNATURE-2 (SUPERB)  
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.III HDCC DAC  
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.I.2 HDCC DAC  
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.I.1 HDCC DAC.  
MSB LINK DAC-III 24/96 MODULE  
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V1 DAC & PSU  
McKINTOSH MKD-201 SACD/DVOLUME (£3500)  
CHORD 1500E DAC/DIGITAL PRE AMP (£6800)  
UNISON RESEARCH UNICO (£1750) NEW MECH  
MICROMEGA CLASSIC SOLO JLR/RCA (NEW MECH)  
ARCAM CD 82  
DENON 2800 MKII GOLD (HDCC)  
PRIMARE V-25 CD/DVD PLAYER (£1000 NEW)  
MERIDIAN 602/606 TRANS/DAC (STILL EXCELLENT)  
PROCEED (PDT) TRANS & DAC BALANCED/SE 20 BIT  
ACCUHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT  
RESOLUTION AUDIO CESCUM TRANSPORT (RARE)  
THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT  
THETA DATA II TRANSPORT (SILVER) AES/RCA ETC  
THETA DATA TRANSPORT (BLACK NO REM.)

## VALVE AMPS

MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE AMP (£3K?)  
AUDION REF. BATTERY POWERED PRE AMP & PHONO (£2500)  
BALANCED AUDIO TECH. BAT VK-60 POWER AMP (£6K?)  
ROGUE AUDIO 99 REMOTE PRE SPECIAL ORDER XLR/RCA OUT (£2700)  
ROGUE AUDIO 66 MAGNUM REMOTE PREAMP  
VACUUM TUBE LOGIC 225 WATT KT90 MONOBLOCS  
MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA PRE (WITH SPARE VALVES)  
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS AQ1001 KT88 INTEGRATED (EXCLT)  
ANTIQUE SOUND LABS AQ1000DT TWIN 845 MONOBLOCS (£5000)  
ANTIQUE SOUND LABS LJ01 PRE AMP/HEADPHONE AMP  
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO STAGE 2-BOX  
COUNTERPOINT SA-5000A LEGENDARY PRE/PHONO STAGE (2 BOX)  
UNISON RESEARCH FEATHER PRE/35 POWER  
TUBE TECHNOLOGY SYNERGY INT.AMP  
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9 C/W PHONO STAGE (RARE BLACK)  
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EXCLT £225  
EXCLT £395  
EX.DEM £299  
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EXCLT £349  
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DEM £1750  
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MINT £995  
EXCLT £695  
EXCLT/BOXED £695  
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EX.DEM £1850  
EXCLT £3750  
MINT/BOXED £2750  
DEM £2250  
EXCLT £2250  
MINT/BOXED £1395  
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TBA TBA  
BOXED £275  
EXCLT £125  
DEM £195  
DEM £195  
NOS £50  
£175  
BOXED £695

BOXED £349  
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EACH £120  
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BRAND NEW £245  
EXCLT £65  
BRAND NEW £65  
BRAND NEW £95  
£65

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£375  
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BRAND NEW £375  
VGC £149  
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EACH £40  
RING

EXCLT £325  
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EXCLT £500  
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# Showtime

Japan is a land of many surprises, and its leading hi-fi event – the Tokyo International Audio Show – is no exception. Roving reporter Robert Kelly is your guide...

**T**okyo's International Audio show is the highlight of the Japanese high-end audio calendar, when audiophiles find out what new goodies the main audio importers and domestic manufacturers have for them. Indeed, recently some of the major Japanese high-end makers have been participating seriously, making it an illuminating snapshot of the Japanese high-end market in general. The show was held at the centrally located Tokyo International Forum, and the building boasts some very interesting architecture in its roof [pictured right], hence its other name, "the boat".



#### AIRTIGHT

Japanese maker Airtight demonstrated their monster ATM-2001 class A valve mono blocks. Each channel uses no less than twelve 6550 valves and is rated at 338W into 8 ohms! This is totally point-to-point wired and the amplifier and power supply are housed in separate beautifully finished aluminium chassis. Price is a hefty ¥3,150,000 a pair, or £22,500...



#### ACCUPHASE

This renowned high end specialist brand showed their first phono preamplifier, the C27. This has three inputs, gain settings for MM and high and low output MC cartridges and eight load impedance settings. They also showed their new DP-600 SACD player, which uses their Multiple Double Speed DAC, and DP-400 CD player.



#### LUXMAN

Luxman, the company where Britain's own Tim de Paravicini spent many years, showed several new products. Their SQ-38u is an EL34 based 30W integrated amplifier with a MM/MC phono input and four line inputs and priced at ¥360,000 (£2,571). It is very attractively styled, in the manner of the Golden Age of audio! Also launched was their E-200 phono preamp which has two separate inputs and caters for MM and high and low output MC cartridges. It's priced at a very reasonable ¥98,000 (£700).



#### EMT

Japanese audiophiles have always had a fascination with professional products. Turntables from the German professional maker EMT are highly prized here and this accounts for the interest in the EMT 986 professional CD

player. This is loaded with features that are only of use to professionals, but this simply makes it more attractive to the Japanese audiophile!

CEC's minimalist new CD3800 represents the other end of the spectrum - a CD player with AES, Toslink, SPDIF and USB digital inputs.



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1012 GX	£139	£78		Prestige SR-325i £260
1042	£171	£120	Goldring	DR 50 £35
2100	£67	£46		DR 100 £45
2200	£88	£56		DR 150 £70
2400	£152	£119		Active Noise Reduction NS 1000 £140
2500	£180	£133		
Eroica LX/H	£185	£157	EX	N/A
Elite	£300	£230	EX	N/A
<b>Audio Technica</b>				
AT 95 E	£25	£18		
AT 440 MLa	£96	£70		
AT OC9 ML II	£270	£255	EX	
<b>Denon</b>				
DL 103	£105	£95	EX	N/A
DL 103R	£190	£170	EX	N/A
DL 110	£79	£69	EX	N/A
DL 160	£95	£83	EX	N/A
DL 304	£249	£225	EX	N/A
<b>Grado</b>				
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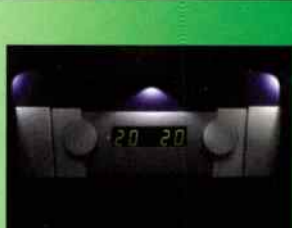
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**AUDIOMACHINA**

The Maestro is the second model from this American brand, and comprises two enclosures, each machined from a solid block of aerospace aluminium. The lower enclosure houses an active bass system, while the upper enclosure houses a passive midband/high frequency system. This was producing one of the best sounds in the show - dynamic and detailed with excellent imaging.



**TAOC**

This Japanese maker is more closely associated with audiophile racks and supports of the dreadnought variety, but recently they have also produced some quite respectable loudspeakers. This year they were demonstrating their new FC3100. On the demonstration I heard, this two way design was producing a fine sound with a decent bass for the cabinet size...



**VPI**

Another interesting turntable on display was the VPI HR-X, which uses two motors to drive a 5.5kg flywheel at 300 rpm, which then drives the platter. In addition it has a separate, massive, synthesised AC power source with a variable speed adjustment. A refreshing approach to the issue of belt drive speed stability, we say!

**KRELL**

Krell showed a number of new products at the show, including their amazingly versatile Evolution 707 AV processor, and their very practical S-150M monoblock power amplifiers. These will deliver 150W into 8 ohms and 300W into 4 ohms and achieve it all in a neat and compact chassis - unusual for this brand!



**DAVONE**

The Davone Rithm loudspeaker hails from Denmark. The intriguing cabinet shape is produced by gluing together a large number of thin layers of wood using techniques taken from the furniture industry. This construction combined with the unique shape is intended to produce a non-resonant structure with minimal internal reflections. It uses a 1 inch dome tweeter mounted coaxially with an 8 inch woofer - and sounds as impressive as it looks!



**ESOTERIC**

Japan digital specialists Esoteric showed a new phono preamplifier in the shape of the E-03. This has two inputs; one for MC cartridges only and the other for MC and MM cartridges. Each input has a comprehensive range of load impedance settings and interestingly there is also a demagnetiser function for each input...



**GOLDMUND**

...but the prize for the most unforgettable product of the show goes to the Goldmund Telos 5000 monoblock power amplifiers. They can accept digital as well as analogue inputs, use 72 power devices per channel, weigh 260kg each and can deliver 5,000W RMS continuously into 2 ohms - enough to weld very large bits of metal together. The price is ¥38,000,000 a pair [£271,462], which is the cost of a small apartment here. Understandably only twenty pairs will be made. My spy tells me they have already sold two sets in Hong Kong and another two are under offer!



**VIOLA**

Viola showed their new Legacy 100W Class A solid state amplifier. Unusually, it uses an output transformer enabling it to deliver full power into 8, 4 or 2 ohms. It was the last design by the legendary US designer Tom Colangelo who sadly died last year.

Tom worked on all the Cello designs and much of the early Mark Levinson products. The Legacy was inspired by his original ML2. The Legacy showed superb bass control and transparency and is a fitting memorial to a fine engineer.



**WELL TEMPERED**

The Amadeus GT is the budget model from this line of excellent turntables. The original fishing line supported unipivot arm has been refined over the years and on the simplified version fitted to this player, the damper paddle looks suspiciously like it has been

made from a golf ball! One wonders how many different types they listened to during development?



**AYRE**

To my eyes at least, the most gorgeous product at the show was surely the Ayre Acoustics KX-R preamplifier. Housed in a chassis machined from a solid block of aluminium, it showed an exceptional build standard. The volume controls use stepped attenuators of their own manufacture driven remotely from the front panel control by a motor system. It is easy to see why Ayre is becoming so popular around the world...

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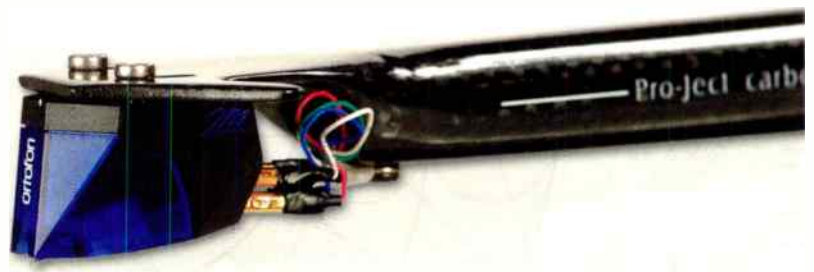
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Rego Ela, originals in black	149
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# 79<sup>79</sup>SERIES 79<sup>SERIES</sup>

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# NEXT MONTH

As the winter months drag by at a glacial pace, why not seek solace in the March issue of Hi-Fi World magazine? You'll be comforted by our review of EAR's superb 868PL/890 valve pre-power combination [pictured], and warmed by our sizzling integrated amplifier supertest with the latest and greatest from Cambridge Audio, Exposure, Leema, Marantz, Naim, Roksan and Yamaha. Then there's the dazzling Avid Acutus turntable to read all about, and Neat's unusual MFS Ultimatum loudspeakers – plus so much more! Here's some of what we hope to bring you:

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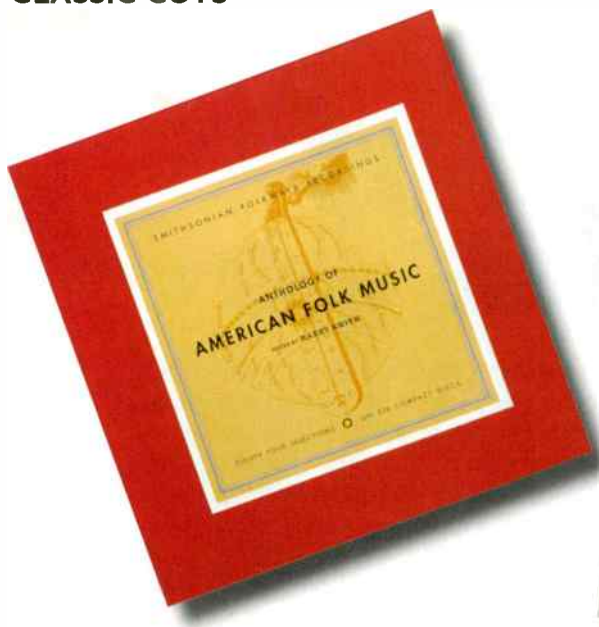
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# HARRY SMITH

## ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC

### 1997



**W**hat a mighty collection this 6CD box set is, and what ripples it created when it was launched in 1997 - amongst the public, industry and fellow musicians and artists. Created by the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings label, it staggered the world famous museum who had previously never enjoyed the gold record sales this Grammy winning box set provided. The box set itself highlighted a lost culture of American folk featuring names like the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers, Uncle Dave Macon, Bascom Lamar Lunsford and Hoyt Ming & his Pep-Steppers.

Senior archivist for the museum, Jeff Place, remembers the critical historical background for the box set itself. "The project started off with Harry Smith, a rather eccentric, beatnik character - even before there were any beatniks around. He tended to be rather obsessive about anything he took on and, at that time, he was collecting records. In this case, ethnic, folk records and so on."

Smith did this around the WW2 era, when the US government was melting down shellac discs as part of a project to collect spare raw material for the war effort.

"Because a lot of the discs were being sold for very little money," said Place, "Smith managed to gather thousands of these old 78s. Smith was always a sort of 'down and out' character and someone must have suggested that the Folkway's record label owner, Moses Asch, might be interested in actually buying these 78s from him. Moe suggested that Smith put a record together with

"This took around ten years to put together, but boy was it worth it!"

them instead." The suggestion was a good one, especially as the LP format was just arriving on the market allowing the formulation of the anthology theme.

The final 'Anthology' records appeared in 1952 on the Folkways label as a series of three, double albums, each themed (i.e.: songs, spirituals and social comment) and each sporting a unique colour behind a standardised artwork. Smith was interested in metaphysics and he considered himself an alchemist. Each release was supposed to be based on the elements of air, water and fire. As such, the covers themselves were coloured appropriately. There was supposed to be a fourth collection (earth) but Harry Smith fell out of the picture before that could be completed.

Along with the packaging, the running order itself was important, Smith took a long time to decide on it. In fact, there are a lot of people who approached this collection, from the world of Fine Arts, who considered the whole project a work of art - not just a great 'mix tape'. This is the reason that the CD box set mimics the six discs and its precise running order.

"People criticised us for that - they said we could have squeezed the music onto four discs. We said we couldn't do that because each LP was considered a distinct piece and you can't put half of side two alongside one without destroying the integrity of the work itself," said Place.

The music itself was a shock. Smith's production was another

world: raw, natural, stripped down, this was music from the very heart of the American soil. It also caught the cusp of a general folk revival in the USA and so influenced musicians of the time. The difference, to their ears, was profound, "like listening to mainstream rock'n'roll and then suddenly discovering punk. It was edgy stuff."

Hence, it was the musicians (everyone from Bob Dylan to The Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia), who leapt upon the anthology and started to play the songs from those records, that educated the public about the anthology's content. This led to the *cognoscenti* actively venturing forth and searching out the obscure musicians on the 'Anthology' (who, during the fifties, were still alive), dragging them to folk festivals and listening, agog. Hence, these previously obscure artists had a tremendous influence on the later folk revival and, ultimately, modern music that has followed since.

When The Smithsonian museum bought the Folkways label, a CD version of the original Anthology was top of the list of tasks. Original 78s were sourced from hardcore collectors in addition to a fair amount of music that had been originally transferred to master tape for the original vinyl version. Most of the time, however, was taken up trying to trace the copyright owners and seek permission to record - an essential task before general sale. "That took us around ten years to complete," said Place. It was worth it. Boy, was it worth it! **PR**

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