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JANUARY 2010

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loudspeakers**



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AWARDS 2009**

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EMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT-8b

- EXCLUSIVE!** Wharfedale Diamond 10.3 loudspeakers
- EXCLUSIVE!** Goldring Legacy moving coil cartridge
- EXCLUSIVE!** Stereonow LFD NLE Sig. stereo power amplifier
- EXCLUSIVE!** Audion Silver Night Duo valve amplifier



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11 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)

A LEGEND IS REBORN

WILSON
AUDIO

'THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING'

Alan Sircom – Editor, Hi-Fi+ (issue 67)

'A COMPELLING, EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE'

José Victor Henriques – Editor, Hi-Fi Clube (October 2009)

'THE PERFECT LOUDSPEAKER'

Floorstanding Loudspeaker of the Year – Hi-Fi+ Awards 2009 (issue 68)



There comes a moment in every product sphere when a truly iconic product is created. In the case of high-performance speakers, that product was the original Wilson Audio WATT/Puppy.

Now David A. Wilson has reengineered the speakers that defined audio excellence for a generation. The Sasha W/P boasts the same uncompromising approach to design as its illustrious predecessor but with newly devised innovations such as the resonance minimising material that has been specially created for the cabinets, a revised motor/magnet assembly to bring new dimensions to the bass and a redesigned crossover that dramatically increases midrange clarity.

The result is a loudspeaker with holographic imaging, free-breathing dynamics and unrestricted sonic detail. A speaker that takes sound onto a new and rarefied plane. A speaker for people who don't know the meaning of ordinary.

The new Sasha W/P joins Wilson Audio's other extraordinary designs, including the Duette – probably the best 'bookshelf' speaker in the world – the compact floorstanding Sophia 2, the imposing MAXX 3 and the peerless Alexandria 2. Speakers without compromise, brought to you by Absolute Sounds: premier importer of the world's finest hi-fi.

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verdicts

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



It's that time of year again, when the team looks back over the products released in the past twelve months, and agonises over which to pick for our coveted Awards Special!

I have to say that it's one of the more onerous tasks I have to perform as editor, as in a good year such as this, it's like choosing between fine chocolates at the very best confectioner. Right across all categories and at most price points, there have been some *extremely* strong contenders. To

find which ones emerged triumphant, see our 13-page *Hi-Fi World* Awards Special starting on p15.

One product with a real chance of picking up a gong this time next year is Eminent Technology's LFT-8B loudspeaker. It's certainly one of the most impressive designs we've seen in a while, being quite unlike your average high end box. For a start, it's a panel design with ribbon mid and treble panels for an amazingly open and accurate sound. You can get this technology on £10,000 Apogeess, for example, but we never expected it to appear on a £3,000 product. Read all about it on p10.

At the other end of the market, one tenth of this money buys you a sophisticated small floorstander in the shape of Wharfedale's £299 Diamond 10.3. Read our full review on p68, along with an interview with its chief designer Peter Comeau, who regular readers will know from his World Designs projects.

Another exciting new release is the Naim DAC. A thing many thought they'd never see, it brings surprising technical sophistication and versatility to the £2,000 digital convertor market; it's the first DAC to offer direct bit-for-bit output from an iPod, for example. You'll find it on p36.

Amplification this month comes in the form of Audion's Single Ended Silver Knight valve amplifier on p32, which is a specialist tubular belle if ever there was one, and LFD's Stereo NLE Signature power amplifier on p40. This is an affordable device voiced to give an especially lucid sound. Like an SE tube amp, it's not for everyone, but does what it does remarkably well.

Factor in Monitor Audio's excellent RX8 loudspeaker on p58 and Goldring's brand new Legacy moving coil cartridge on p105, plus many more, and this issue of *Hi-Fi World* looks like a rich source of potential award winners for next year. Enjoy!
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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This excellent mid-price floorstander is reviewed by Noel Keywood.

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"The whole auditioning process took about 30 seconds. Play a piece of music on GII Mini Sub. Play it again on Aquarius and wonder why you were so attached to the GII Mini Sub." "Very highly recommended"

HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



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BOX SET

The Beatles 'Box Of Vision' is the deluxe companion to the newly remastered Beatles CDs, and is described as the ultimate Beatles gift in the UK and Europe this Christmas from www.BoxOfVision.com and www.HardDaysNightShop.com, plus select retailers. Officially licensed by The Beatles' Apple Corps Ltd., the collection, previously only available in North America, includes special collectible content. The first book in the box is the LP Sized Album Artwork Book, which includes 200 pages of the Beatles' LP artwork – the first time all the Beatles' UK and US album artwork has been collected together in one LP sized book. The Album Artwork book includes front and back covers, gatefolds, inserts and the complete LP booklets from Magical Mystery Tour and many more. The second book, 'The Catalography', is an extensive, all-new, full-colour guide jam-packed with photos, text and track-listings providing the first-ever side-by-side presentation of the UK albums and their US counterparts. The third book is entitled 'The Box of Vision Storage Book', and is a unique and stylish way for Beatles fans to organise and display all 32 discs of The Beatles' core catalogue. Beatles fans will have the opportunity to insert CDs and booklets from their existing Beatles collections or the recently released digitally remastered versions. Ideal for fans, collectors and Christmas gift giving, all three Beatles books are housed in an elegant black, linen-covered box with silver embossed Beatles logos and faux Beatles LP spines. The 13x13" box features the iconic image of The Beatles photographed by Robert Freeman.



MEDIA STUDIES

The MediaServer MSI is the flagship media server from Imerge, said to be "currently the most advanced such unit available anywhere in the world", no less. It is described as a highly flexible, infinitely scalable AV server system capable of storing, sorting and playing back a huge library of uncompressed music and HD movie content. Its GUI (Graphical User Interface) is powerful yet intuitive, its firmware is fully upgradeable via downloads, and it will automatically contact the installer if any maintenance is required, thus making the end-user's experience completely 'transparent'. Price for a system based around the MediaServer MSI system varies according to the user's required specification. The MSI itself – the master control unit – retails for £5,507. If you wish to take content into multiple rooms, you then add an MSI client for each 'zone', at a cost of £2,500 each. The matching hard disk storage components are dubbed XiVASafe. Customers at this level will want plenty of ultra-secure storage, and the Imerge XiVASafe hard disk storage components are the only such devices for domestic use that are specified at RAID 6, for ultimate piece of mind.

This storage is infinitely scalable according to the end user's requirements, and starts at £9,882 for a 3TB RAID 6 unit (enough for 800 hours of video), with prices rising according to the specified capacity. Together, the MediaServer MSI and XiVASafe hard-disk storage system deliver the world's most advanced management and archiving solution for high-definition music and movies, the company says. For more details, see www.imerge.co.uk.



REVO-LUTION

Revo has just launched two impressive products, in the shape of the Heritage multi-format radio and iPod dock, and the Domino radio. The £229.95 Heritage is said to be "a contemporary reinterpretation of classic European table radios". Underneath its traditional wood and metal exterior beats the latest multi-platform digital radio technology running DAB, DAB+, FM and Wi-Fi internet radio – as well as offering wireless audio streaming and docking for all current iPod models. Its cabinet is constructed using a combination of aluminium, soft rubberised plastics and real walnut veneer. Audio is delivered by a custom 3" Neodymium speaker driver, driven by a 7W amplifier. There's a large 'secret-until-lit' graphical OLED display and innovative joystick control system for maximum ease of operation. In addition to its extensive terrestrial and internet radio capabilities, it also provides access to online music service Last.fm, for which a free 30 day Last.fm trial subscription is provided, thereafter a £3.00 per month subscription charge applies.

Domino is described as "a thoroughly modern table radio", with tactile soft-touch rubber and flowing curves. At its heart is an innovative, joystick-based control system, enabling quick and easy navigation around the radio's many advanced features. The inclusion of a graphical OLED display not only looks fantastic but aids navigation through the thousands of available radio stations. Full functional support for all current and popular iPod and iPhone models is provided via the integrated dock. Domino comes in three flavours; D1 receives DAB, DAB+ (where available) and picks up FM with RDS; D2 takes you online via your wireless network, to access over 11,000 internet radio stations from around the globe and can stream audio from your computer; D3 takes all the features of D1 and D2, combining them in a single radio which does the lot. For details, call +44(0)1555 666161 or click on www.revo.co.uk.



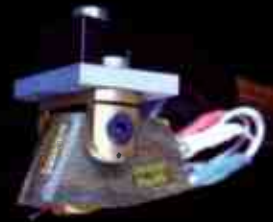
OOH LA LA!

The iDWI is YBA's stunning looking new £149 iPod docking station, built in solid aluminium with no plastic parts. It has an Apple Universal connector for extended compatibility including iPhone, iPhone 3G or Nano, plus a Composite video output, full function remote control allowing not only standard playback features (play/pause, track+/-) but also the ability to browse the content of your iPod (according to the model) such as browsing playlists/albums and gold-plated RCA outputs. There's also a USB type A input to connect to a USB power adapter or a PC/MAC computer (supply and iTunes synchronisation or supply only). For information, click on www.ybadesign.com.



THE SMITH

Inspired by Frank Schroder, the new Soundsmith Sussurro moving iron cartridge is said to "represent an exciting new fusion of state of the art analogue architectures", no less. The novel moving iron design is Soundsmith's first low output cartridge designed especially for MC preamps, it is claimed. The ultra low effective moving mass cantilever and stylus assembly used throughout the company's magnetic cartridge line has been further refined. This architecture ensures the cantilever's resonant frequency is further above the audio band than found with many high end cartridges, and it provides the ultra low inertial design required for explosive dynamics and faithful, intimate tracing of the groove. The 0.3 mV output is ideally matched to a pair of 10:1 step up transformers and tube or solid state phono stages with 1k load or higher. Partnered with high quality components, the Sussurro's performance transcends expectations, the company says. Recommended impedance load is 1k Ohms minimum; 1k to 4k typical. There's a Single Crystal Ruby Cantilever with a selected "Optimised Contour" nude Contact Line diamond stylus; recommended VTF from 1.8 to 2.2 grams. Each cartridge handmade by designer Peter Ledermann, and costs £3,995. For more information, click on www.sound-smith.com.



HI NRG

The £3,500 2NRG is Densen's new high end power supply. The company has always had a special interest in power supplies, resulting in Densen's own power supply capacitors which are designed specifically for the circuits they are being used in. The focus has always been on several separate supplies providing clean power to all stages of the products, and the transformers have always been custom-made, with most encapsulated in epoxy to minimise vibration on the PCB. Now Densen takes this attention to detail to another level, with the introduction of the 2NRG, it is claimed. It will

work as a dual mono power supply for the audio circuits in the Densen B-250, and will at the same time be capable of upgrading a B-800. Several Densen models are already prepared for external power supply upgrades; the B-110, B-1130, B-150, B-175, B-250 and B-800 can all be upgraded with the DNRG power supply. The parts are said to be "the best possible", with Vishay metal film resistors, ultrafast precise rectifying diodes, and the 2NRG contains three custom-made transformers, each with two separate windings. Each audio channel of the B-250 get its own dedicated power supply, with transformer and no less than 200,000µF and rectifying by the use of ultrafast diodes. The third transformer and power supply are used to feed a B-800 FM tuner if wanted; all in all the 2NRG has no less than 510,000µF in the form of 51 custom made capacitors. For more information, click on www.densen.dk.

TWO THE POINT

News comes that Naim's fine sounding CDX2 CD player has been improved, to coincide with the forthcoming launch of the Naim DAC [tested on p34]. This is the first major revision for this product in seven years, and is said to take the CDX2 into new markets, delivering greater performance and increased flexibility, while the price remains at £3,250. The new version CDX2 adds a switchable S/PDIF output on a 75 Ohm BNC connector for the correct impedance match. Depending on the switch position on power up the CDX2 is either a CD player or a CD transport. The CDX2 improved is easily spotted by the BNC connector on the rear panel. Other significant improvements to the CDX2 include a new four-layer board for improved ground planes and isolation, improved power supply regulation and lower noise on the critical circuits. For ease of control, the infrared input on the rear panel is compatible with modulated and unmodulated signals. Smaller improvements have also been implemented in the CD tray, board mounting and wiring to boost musical performance, Naim says.

For details, click on www.naimaudio.com.



FREE FIVER!

Nosound have just completed the recording of their third album, 'A Sense Of Loss', described as, "epic soundscapes, which fuse elements of progressive, ambient and post rock". Band leader Giancarlo Erra has decided to distribute one of the tracks from the album as a free high quality DTS 5.1 surround quality download that can be burned onto a normal CD and played on almost any home theatre system or DVD player. The track can be downloaded from www.thebenchmarkmusic.com/nosound.

I TIME



Arcam's rDock was the first ever 'audiophile' iPod dock, and now it returns in a universal design, with a remote handset and performance improvements, as the irDock. It is said to draw on Arcam's "decades of high-end design experience" and is built with a high quality cast aluminium enclosure for optimum RF shielding and stability. This is a no-compromise approach to iPod playback, using audiophile grade amplifiers to achieve the best sound quality possible, whilst remaining simple to use and connect, the company says. The new machine charges latest generation iPod & iPhones, has an RF choke for added sonic quality, prevents interference via the PSU lead, boasts enhanced RF suppression overall, improved sound quality

and retains 'intelligent charging'. As before, it bypasses the iPod's nasty headphone amp, and runs the line out signal past a built-in audio preamp with high performance op-amps, audiophile-grade low-noise double-regulated power supplies. The same diecast aluminium anti-vibration enclosure is used, along with the damped rubber base. For more information, click on www.arcam.co.uk or call +44(0) 1223 203200.



BACK ON THE BLOCK

Yamaha has a range of new audio visual products out, including the £1,099 RX-V2065 7-channel AV receiver [pictured], which offers 1080p-upscaling HDMI (5 in/ 2 out), ultra low jitter PLL circuitry for accurate digital audio reproduction and a new easy-to-use GUI and Network functions. There are also two new Blu-ray players. The £550 BD-S1900 supports BD-Live and BonusView, HD Audio full decoding, and has 1080p/24Hz-compatible HDMI video output, 7.1 multichannel out. The £450 BD-S1065 is said to give "top video and audio quality", with 1080p HDMI video output, full HD Audio decoding and 7.1 audio output. The new £490 MCR-640 Micro Component System comprises a receiver, CD player and two speakers. Features include iPod direct docking, USB Port, high quality CD with player 30-station FM / DAB preset tuning, minimum RMS output 65W+65W. For more details, click on <http://hifi.yamaha-europe.com/>.

KLIPSCH MARKS THE SPOT

"Compact and easy to set up" is how the Klipsch HD Theatre 500 surround sound speaker package is described. The £499.99 kit sports main and surround speakers in sealed enclosures finished in high-gloss piano black with a 2.5-inch IMG woofer and a MicroTractrix Horn-loaded 0.75-inch aluminium dome tweeter inside. The magnetically shielded centre channel shares the same attributes, except it employs dual woofers. The speakers come with adjustable wall brackets that provide a 40-degree range of motion and inserts for stand mounting. The centre channel includes a cradle base, giving it a 45-degree range of motion. Available in a black pica vinyl finish, the subwoofer is a bass-reflex design with a rear-firing flared port. It employs a down-firing 8-inch driver. For further information, call 0845 0822454 or visit www.klipsch.co.uk.



BLU TONE

Denon's new £399.99 DBP-1610 Blu-ray player features full support of Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio and offers a high definition video experience, even from regular DVDs. It sports a 1080p/24 video output and supports Deep Color for realistic images and has high bit video processing including 1080p scaling for normal Standard Definition content such as DVD-Video to improve picture quality. There's a dedicated two channel analogue audio output, equipped with high-class Burr-Brown D/A converters and superior analogue componentry. The rigid chassis and centre-drive mechanism ensure total reliability and optimum performance at all times, the company says. For details, click on www.denon.co.uk.



Angular Ribbon

Noel Keywood is pleased to announce that Eminent Technology's new LFT-8b loudspeaker sounds as striking as it looks...

The Eminent Technology LFT-8b is a flat panel loudspeaker that uses

large ribbon drive units to cover most of the audio range, eliminating at a stroke crossover problems in conventional loudspeakers, not to mention the box. It's much like an electrostatic, but without the complication and high price. Think just £3k for a high end loudspeaker, one you don't need to connect to the mains. Shipped in from dem at the Audio 09 show at Whittlebury, I was delighted to get them because I am a fan of the flat panel approach, knowing you can get extraordinary sound quality, and the Eminent has some unusual and interesting features that I couldn't wait to hear...

Eminent are a U.S. company and like their American cousins Martin Logan, ally an open panel to a box bass unit. Where Martin Logan use an electrostatic panel though, Eminent use a form of ribbon drive unit where a light Mylar film with an aluminium track etched onto it

sits between magnets, placed at front and back. It's an old idea, one I first encountered in the 1970s on Leak 3090s with their Isodynamic tweeter; it was as smooth as silk. You can hear exactly the same great treble today from Audiosmile's superb Kensais.

Many companies around the world, like Visaton for example, make this form of ribbon drive unit. Eminent, however, take the whole idea further. On the LFT-8b reviewed here they use two very large ribbons of their own manufacture, one placed above the other, to cover most of the audio range. This eliminates the need to cross over between drive units in the midband, giving a smooth, consistent sound free of phasiness. This is great for vocals and - especially - for stringed instruments that get so mangled by modern loudspeakers. Our pictures show this large, two-part drive unit stretches from top to three quarters down the flat panel. Below it lies a box

bass unit, to provide bass power. And to one side lies a ribbon treble unit, there to provide only super high treble above 10kHz. Eminent make the ribbon drive units, but they buy in the high power bass unit.

The LFT-8b is large and a little less than lovely to look at. It comes from the functional school of design and a panel 1.6m high is not something easily hidden in the average lounge. Width is limited to 385mm and the simple cloth grille seen in the product shots (ours came without grilles, explaining their absence in our pics) is surrounded by a simple wooden trim. The bass cabinet and front



big, open ribbons go low right down to 180Hz so quite a lot of sound energy is radiated rearward.

Unlike an electrostatic the LFT-8bs don't need a mains connection and carry no dangerous voltages. Much like an electrostatic though they work on the basis of a flat diaphragm uniformly driven across its surface, what Wharfedale once termed 'Isodynamic'. It's a normal motor in fact, using magnetic interaction (Fleming's right hand rule) and in this case magnets are placed both at front and rear of the diaphragm, explaining the unlovely appearance. The black bars in front of the diaphragms house magnets and there are similar bars at rear. So the sound squeezes out between them as it were.

the Mid position was flat at least close up and sounded fairly neutral alongside modern loudspeakers. High doesn't mesh raised or peaky treble as it would with a conventional loudspeaker and most people would probably find High quite an easy balance to live with, with Low sounding distinctly soft. I used High with our MB845 valve amps, because at a distance and off axis this seemed normal enough in contrast to the loudspeakers I most commonly listen to.

Like so many big panel loudspeakers, including electrostatics, the LFT-8bs need a lot of power to go loud. Eminent Technology quote a minimum of 75 Watts no less, but although the loudspeakers are very insensitive I found myself using 10-

"one of the purest and least coloured loudspeakers I have ever heard..."

Does it matter? Well, you can use magnets at rear only for a clear forward sound path, as do Magneplanar I believe, but this then introduces distortion, although I have yet to measure Maggies and cannot confirm this. What I can confirm though is that the LFT-8bs produce much less distortion than other loudspeakers and have an exceptional performance in this respect [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. It bodes well for sound quality, suggesting the wideband ribbons will sound smooth and clear. Squeezing sound between bars isn't so good, causing local interference effects, and this causes the wiggles you can see in our frequency response plot. However, this isn't readily audible and although the LFT-8b would doubtless be better without them, the front magnets are necessary to maintain linearity.

The LFT-8bs come in 'handed pairs', meaning there's a left loudspeaker and a right loudspeaker. The high frequency unit is positioned on the inside to avoid cancellations across the panel. This gives better defined stereo images.

Connection is made through a pair of not very nice copper plated terminals that will accept 4mm banana plugs. The loudspeaker can be biwired, by removing a pair of wire links. Our well used review samples came without these. At rear lies a row of screw terminals that provide users with three tweeter output levels, labelled High, Mid and Low and no indication as to which was nominally 'flat'. Measurement showed

20 Watts with them at most and our SPL meter was peaking at a loud 90dB at my listening position 2 metres away. Eminent quote a maximum of 200 Watts but this really would be pushing them hard I feel.

SOUND QUALITY

My first impression of the Eminents was that they are all but 'silent' loudspeakers. If this sounds as useful to you as a chocolate teapot, let me explain. There was such an absence of any colour, character or mush that the LFT-8bs sound 'dark' and barely there; as a loudspeaker they are peculiarly 'silent' against all else. So much so that I decided to check that something peculiar hadn't happened between testing and listening, so I set up our measuring microphone and sure enough both tweeters were working perfectly, right up to 20kHz with Nils Lofgren singing 'Keith Don't Go'. Lofgren's deft fingerwork was made starkly apparent by the Eminents and some of his more strenuous moments sent harmonics shimmering way up to 20kHz, so all was well with the system.

I mention this because the loudspeakers show what amplifiers are doing and there are some small things to be borne in mind. All was sweetness and not 'light' but dark, with our Icon Audio MB845 amplifiers, with the big graphite anode triodes glowing like lighthouses. Intertransient silences were very dark and the sound almost over damped, yet as always the Icons sounded clean and very dynamic. It was only when I tried



stabilising feet account for its 710mm

depth and all up weight is a reasonably high 41kgs apiece.

Although the LFT-8b isn't small, neither is it the largest loudspeaker we've reviewed. It would fit fairly easily in a medium sized lounge, preferably with some distance between it and a rear wall in order to 'lose' some of the rear sound. The

to turn volume right up that some strain set in. I know the MB845s distort progressively: they are superb at low and medium levels but move into overload smoothly at higher powers, as low feedback valve amps do. The Eminents made this quite clear subjectively, partly because they are so insensitive and demand power, also because they introduce little colouration or distortion of their own to mask amplifier behaviour.

Our resident Leema Pulse (84 Watts) transistor amplifier sounded happier delivering high levels (over 50W) into these loudspeakers. Otherwise, the Eminents sounded every bit as even, characterless and just 'there' with music as I had expected from my time in front of Isoplanar, Isodynamic or whatever you might want to call them, ribbon tweeters. The sheer absence of 'anything' is a little disconcerting at first, hence my comment that the loudspeaker itself is 'silent'.

Singers and instruments are - if you can imagine this - starkly clean, with no colour or embellishment at all. There was less coming out of this loudspeaker than others and even electrostatics have more obvious 'sparkle' to them, yet the LFTs are not dull. Far from it, there was a wealth of fine detail and lightly struck cymbals rang with a simple, sweet delicacy that was entrancing. It was so easy to pick out fine details in a performance because of the lack of 'anything' that all became clear in a

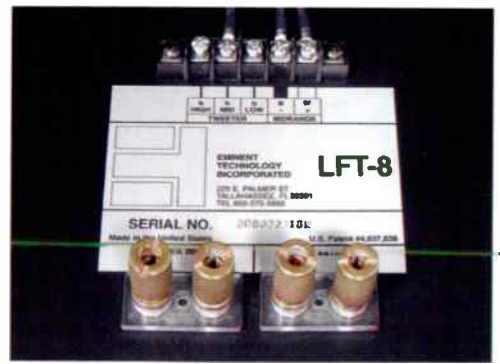
simple manner through the Eminents.

As the rapid fingerwork of Nils Lofgren on guitar had been made so obvious, so I found that deft fingerwork of Arcadi Volodos across a piano keyboard came across with beautifully clean simplicity. There was less to listen to, less to hear, but what was there was pure and correct. Here the LFT-08bs are in a world of their own and quite unlike any other loudspeaker I have heard. They are not even like Martin Logans, being more stark and matter of fact, and more simply pure. Martin Logans have a 'sound' of their own, something the LFT-8bs lack.

The Eminents are probably the purest and least coloured loudspeakers I have ever heard and in a way this makes music sound a little barren: where has everything gone? They don't have any emphases at all - and this too borders on perplexing. Where the B&W CM9s I reviewed in our December issue were conspicuously 'hi-fi-ish' the LFT-8bs have all but no character. Yet this is not to say they are flat, boring or lacking in dynamics. The simple clarity of Hugh Masekela singing and whooping 'Stimela' was transfixing and no listener could deny that the loudspeakers place vocalists centre stage with an easy and believable presence, if not with that razor sharp precision of a full ribbon tweeter. Like all else the LFT-8bs image with laconic ease but complete confidence: the singer is 'there' and the cymbals are 'there', without enhancement. The absence of character and sense of ease gave me the subjective impression that there was zero distortion, meaning no distortion of any sort, no reflections, echoes, disturbances, perturbations or non-linearities. Again, here is a 'silent' loudspeaker, an almost uncanny experience.

Of course I had to apply that most stringent of tests: Nigel Kennedy! Modern loudspeakers manage an approximation of violin only; the Eminents were a world apart, delivering a firm, stable sound that made Nigel's violin seem broad and solid. This highlighted the vigour of his playing, making some of his stronger down strokes cut out with real power.

If there was any slight colour I suspect it came from the anodes of the 845s, for when I swapped to our Leema Pulse not only did I have to



The bi-wire rear terminal panel also carries High, Mid and Low tweeter settings.

reset treble level down one notch to Mid (pesky transistors!) but the extra brightness made violin that little bit shinier. Quite which amplifier was right is impossible to say, but the point is the LFT-8b ribbons add so little you do end up listening to the amplifier and this is either a dream or a nightmare, according to the amplifier and what sort of power you use. The Leema Pulse wasn't as clear and dark as the MB845s, nor as dynamic, and there was slight muddle too, but it did sound happier as volume went right up and output started to swing way past 50 Watts on the meter I used to monitor output power. So MB845s, or Quad I I-eightys would be fine unless you really want to go for it, whereupon any strain will likely come from the amplifier, not from the loudspeaker.

Whilst listening to Nigel Kennedy playing Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1 I was aware that the Eminents can be a trifle remorseless in tone if brutally correct; there was such an absence of euphonic accompaniment that the sound was at once detailed, insightful yet dark and stark. Yes, I know it's quite a combination to grapple with but really, these loudspeakers are way different to the norm.

Orchestral music was handled with the same frank approach: kettle drums thundered nicely in The Planets, trumpets and horns were fruity and strings sounded smooth and vivid. I was always struck by the rightness of the sound, but bear in mind that if a recording is bad the Eminents do tend to show it: rather more than box loudspeakers. You might have more visceral fun in front of other loudspeakers; in front of these their surgical precision is, in spite of being breathtaking, also reductive. Euphony of any sort doesn't exist, except perhaps from a bass unit that does a very good job, sounding solid, powerful but well integrated. That apart though, the LFT-8bs struck me as needing the best amplifier in the world to drive





the 'Supernature' LP. There was an altogether sweeter, easier and more convincingly organic sound from LP using a Goldring Legacy moving coil cartridge (reviewed in this issue). The loudspeakers differentiate less between the differing tonalities of LP and CD, but LP is more obviously analogue and CD coldly digital in character.

With a Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A power amplifier the LFT-8bs became a precision instrument. Fed by an Icon Audio LA3 valve preamp replete with neutral 6SN7s I preferred

treble output set at High. The LFT-8bs were placed wide apart and well away from a rear wall, by the way. With wide resolution of the timbral richness of various instruments, a feeling of absolute neutrality, lovely deep soundstaging and the peculiarly dark, easy and jitter free treble I think I was in audio heaven. The AMS50 exerted total control and kept everything tidy, from deep bass up to the highest of highs. This underscored the excellence of the loudspeaker and the need for top quality matching components.

CONCLUSION

The LFT-8bs are a loudspeaker in a world of their own. Arguably, they are one of the best loudspeakers available at any price – but you have to be careful to understand what that means. Without all the funny noises and subtle enhancements we are so used to from the standard box loudspeaker, the LFT-8bs seemingly give less. You are suddenly left with just the music and it is an intriguing and fascinating experience. So what you are looking at here is surely one of the very best loudspeakers available for £3,000.

them and that in my books would be a valve single-ended design from, perhaps, Almarro or Audionote – perhaps an Ongaku. For most of the time I used no more than 20 Watts; only if you crank volume right up does power suddenly jump upward.

Spinning the slightly grungy sounding Duffy CD 'Rockferry', the Eminent did little to disguise the presence of distortion that I believe was added in deliberately. Duffy was clear centre stage, if placed a little further back than usual, but only because there is no midrange lift in these loudspeakers. The balance seemed warm yet there was plenty of treble.

Rolling bass lines in Angelique Kidjo's 'The Sound of Drums' were very well maintained, the box bass unit hanging on nicely to what the panels were doing. There is perhaps a slight character change as the dry sounding panels cross over to the small bass enclosure but I didn't find it disconcerting. There is a lack of lower midrange tubbiness that comes from ordinary boxes so the LFT-8bs are tonally neutral and dry.

I was happier spinning LP with these loudspeakers, feeling their slightly stark and revealing nature did CD few favours. Alison Goldfrapp's breathless vocals drifted ethereally between the Eminent and sounded deliciously haunting in 'Time Out From The World', from

VERDICT

Especially impressive listening tool free from most vices, giving a stripped down, starkly correct sound. Exceptional value for money.

EMINENT TECHNOLOGY

LFT-8b £3,000

+44 (0)23 9225 7759

www.eminenttechnology.co.uk

FOR

- deeply revealing
- free from all colour
- simple, clean sound

AGAINST

- demands superb amp
- power hungry

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response from a large area, open panel like the LFT-8b is always going to be a little different from the usual closed box loudspeaker. In electrostatics I look for smooth output across the audio band, from 200Hz up to 20kHz. For reasonable subjective balance bass is often raised, possibly to match the total acoustic power output of the dipole panel. And like the Princesound Prince II and Martin Logan CLX the LFT-8b gives even output across the audio band our analysis shows. This is with the tweeter panel set to Mid. The peak at 1kHz is a small concern.

Like other large panels, the LFT-8b drove our test room well, producing a response balance like this many metres away. The magnets in front of the ribbons introduce small interference effects that produce the undulations, but otherwise the LFT-8b is fundamentally an accurate loudspeaker in terms of tonal balance.

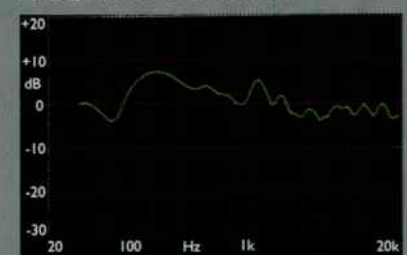
Bass from the closed box (infinite baffle) bass unit measures around 5dB up below the crossover frequency of 180Hz and extends smoothly down to 50Hz, below which cutoff is steep. This suggests bass will be prominent, but it looked well damped on a third octave pink noise analysis and bass distortion was very low, less than 1% down to 50Hz and 2% at 40Hz, so sonic results should be good. Distortion was also ultra low - less than 0.1% - across the audio band, way better than any other loudspeaker we have measured.

Being the closed box the impedance curve is fairly smooth but the loudspeaker's Achilles heel shows here. The panel has an impedance around 12 Ohms our analysis shows, so its voltage sensitivity is poor. It has been matched

with an 8 Ohm bass unit, giving a measured overall impedance of 10 Ohms - very high. This contributes to a very low volume of 80dB SPL from one nominal watt input (2.8V), meaning the LFT-8b will need a lot of power - 60 Watts or more - to go loud. It really needs a 100 Watt amplifier unless run at low-ish volumes. It is an easy load though.

The LFT-8b is well thought through and engineered. As a load it does not exploit the current delivery of modern amplifiers though, so sensitivity is very low. Sonically, it looks superb however. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



IMPEDANCE



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AWARDS 2009



Welcome to Hi-Fi World's annual Awards special, where you'll find our favourite products reviewed over the last twelve months. Here's our pick of the past year's best offerings in specialist separates hi-fi...



HI-FI WORLD
AWARDS
2009

TURNTABLE:	EAT FORTE/IKEDA IT-407
TOEARM:	SME 312S
CARTRIDGE:	ORTOFON CADENZA BRONZE
PHONO STAGE:	ANT AUDIO KORA 3T LTD
DIGITAL:	DCS PAGANINI
TUNER:	ARCAM FMJ T32
INTEGRATED:	SUGDEN MYSTRO
POWER AMPLIFIER:	ELECTROCOMPANIET NEMO
LOUDSPEAKERS:	USHER BE-10
SYSTEM:	NAIM UNITI
COMPUTER AUDIO:	MERIDIAN SOOLODS 2.0
INTERCONNECT:	MNT CVT TERMINATOR 2
SPEAKER CABLE:	BLACK RHODIUM JIVE
ACCESSORY:	ORIGIN LIVE UPGRADE MAT



TURNTABLE: EAT FORTE/IKEDA it-407

Everything about the £12,400 EAT Forte is bold; its giddy price, the imposing physical size, its not inconsiderable weight. The EAT simply takes the best practice from just about every superdeck made since the mid nineteen seventies and puts it together in one package. And to underline its evolutionary approach, it comes fitted with a tonearm that epitomises this same design philosophy, the flawless but unflashy Ikeda it-407.

What's special about this design is the way it packages good ideas together to such a high standard. To obviate the many problems of suspended decks, the Forte simply doesn't use springs, relying on its

vast weight, including a 20kg platter, to take it out of the loop. To reduce noise to vanishingly low levels, it uses twin low torque motors, generating 2,700Kj of torque via twin pulleys and long diamond cut string belts to spin that massive platter. This delivers superlative wow and flutter figures. To accommodate its massy platter, the inverted main bearing, with a ceramic ball mating to a Teflon cup, is vast - and augmented with neodymium magnets to lower the pressure on the bearing. The Ikeda arm is a superbly damped 12" with exquisite bearings of almost no friction.

At first listen, the Forte sounds underwhelming, with nothing particularly distinct about it to hook on

to. But get past the first few bars of the music however, and you find yourself being carried off into the music. The deck simply lets you lock on to what's going on in the groove, making no attempt whatsoever to editorialise. The only way to describe it is 'mastertape-like'; there's simply no sense of listening to recorded material, as the music itself shines through so strongly. All of which is to be expected if you're spending the equivalent of a Ford Focus on a turntable, of course. But however you look at it, this is a very special record player. Imposing on the eye it may be, but there is immense strength in depth here. Subtle and unshowy it sounds, but sublime also.

E.A.T. FORTE/IKEDA 12"
Absolute Sounds
www.euroaudioteam.com
tested:

£12,400
+44(0)208971 3909

May 2009



TONARM: SME 312S

This past year has seen a procession of new tonearms, all attempting to advance the black art of vinyl in one way or another. And as the last decade has progressed, we've seen ever more attempts to make the world's best arm, using a number of different approaches from air bearing designs to unipivots. Sassy, headline grabbing stuff, but given that some of the best pickup arms we've ever heard have been of conventional design, you sometimes wonder if the hype is justified. SME obviously don't think so, as they've stuck with their time-honoured formula pioneered in the late nineteen eighties with the remarkable Series V, for the new 312S, and

with dramatic results.

Whereas the 312 was essentially a 'long wheelbase' 309, the new S variant sits rather closer to the Series V in the family tree. It features the same superlative bearings as the aforementioned tonearm, and the same ultra light, non-resonant magnesium alloy armtube, but this time with an effective length of twelve inches instead of nine. The new £1,750 arm retains the 300 series counterweight system and detachable headshell, making it able to easily accommodate most cartridges between 6 and 15gm of average compliance. Effectively then, the new SME 312S is an exceptionally useable twelve inch arm, offering much of the Series

V's superlative build with the all important (for users of big turntables) extra three inches for reduced tracking distortion.

The result is an uncannily stable sound; if ever there was a tonearm that could be labelled 'transcription', this is it. Smooth and svelte is how the new design performs; with almost any cartridge you care to put in it, gone is the nervous, fidgety sound that most nine inchers provide. Even the nine inch SME V, brilliant as it is, cannot quite offer the stability and ease of this, with its expansive, deep soundstaging and inky black tonality. Given the right platform, the new SME 312S shows just what high end vinyl replay can do nowadays

SME 312S
SME Ltd.
www.sme.ltd.uk
tested:

£1,750
+ 44(0)1903 814321

October 2009



CARTRIDGE: ORTOFON CADENZA BRONZE

Further proof, as if we needed it, that vinyl is one of hi-fi's most fertile plains, is the large number of new cartridges coming out. Whereas just five years ago, we'd have struggled to have found one great new product in a year, 2009 has seen many. What's moving the game along is the steady advances in generator design, materials technology and stylus quality. Designers now realise that the goal is to have the quietest, most non-resonant body possible, allied to the most efficient coils, with the best wiring. More than this however, much joined up thinking is now going on. Manufacturers are voicing their cartridges using specific can-

tilver materials and stylus profiles, offering a range of 'flavours' having got the basics right. The epitome of this modern approach is Ortofon, whose new Cadenza range left us giddy earlier this summer...

All Cadenzas share the same basic structure, but there's a range of different varieties, our favourite of which was the £1,250 Bronze. It's been carefully set-up for a certain sound, as Ortofon's Leif Johannsen told us, "some people want a more romantic sound, and for them we produced this". In its generator, the Bronze sports Ortofon's Aucurum gold plated 6NX copper wire. A Field Stabilising Element is used for optimal linearity, and an Ortofon Replicant 100 stylus mounted to a

conical aluminium cantilever. Tracking at 2.5g, the result is a richer and even more musically engaging experience than the other Cadenza models, sounding quite sumptuous for a modern cartridge. And yet the Bronze never fails to remind you of its state-of-the-art nature with superb resolution of low level detail, crashing dynamics and a vice like grip of what's going on in the groove. It's an infectious combination this - an eerie sort of lazy calm allied to tremendous insight and grip when the time's right for it. The Ortofon Cadenza Bronze shows just how beautifully finessed a modern phono cartridge can be, and as such is a worthy winner of this year's award.

ORTOFON CADENZA BRONZE
Henley Designs
www.henleydesigns.co.uk
tested:

£1,250
+44 (0)1235 511166

August 2009



PHONO STAGE: ANT AUDIO KORA 3T LTD.

The phono stage breed has flourished in the past ten years. Just as with turntables, there have been ever more of them, at a time when digital was supposed to be making all the running. Of course, valve phono stages are the current flavour of the month, and why not? The well executed ones use very simple circuit designs and high quality passive components, leading to a beautifully smooth and three dimensional sound. So why isn't this year's winner - the A.N.T. Audio Kora 3T Ltd. - a valve design? Well its super-simple circuit and meticulously selected componentry follows the general approach, except it uses special Field Effect Transistors

instead of glowing glass bottles. Put simply, designer Alex Nikitin has come up with a devilishly simple circuit using specialist transistors, giving enough gain to do the job without the associated complexity of rival solid state designs. There are only three transistors per channel in the Kora 3T circuit, using local negative feedback in a single-ended Class A circuit with passive EQ in a single stage voltage amplification arrangement.

Proof positive that 'less is more', the £995 Limited edition variant of the Kora - hand made to order only, with tightly toleranced capacitors and Holco resistors throughout, Black Gate bias capacitors and special power supply - sounds

splendid. There's an inky black silence to it that so few others boast, along with a wonderfully smooth tonality. But the Kora Ltd. is not dull; far from it. Cue up your favourite LP and sit back in awe as the music issues from the groove. It's an exceptionally musical device, bristling with energy, but never does it sound forced like many solid-staters. This has much of the natural musicality of the best valve designs, with most of the grip of the very top, cost-no-object solid-staters. As such, its £995 price makes it exceptional value, and the stand-out choice for phono stage of the year. In the great pantheon of vinyl accoutrements, the A.N.T. Audio Kora 3T Ltd. has surely earned its place.

KORA 3T LTD
Sound Hi-Fi
www.soundhifi.com
tested:

£1,000
+44 (0) 1803 833366

April 2009



DIGITAL: DCS PAGANINI DAC

There's now more than a sporting chance that in five years, many of us will be running hard disk (or even solid-state memory) based digital playback systems, with optical consigned to the dustbin of history, looking as quaint as open reel tape does now. The question then presents itself - what do you buy? What sounds superb both with 'legacy' 16bit going all the way back to 1982, and those 24bit, 192kHz downloads we'll be buying in 2012? The answer is surely dCS's Paganini DAC.

What differentiates this £9,599 box from the fray is its bespoke design that's quite unlike anything else you'll see - or hear - today. The

Paganini is the proud custodian of the company's patented Ring DAC, which uses around forty integrated circuits, none of which are DAC chips. Instead, the circuitry uses Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) chips, Digital Signal Processing (DSP) chips and a microcontroller system, all of which run code developed and maintained by dCS. So the Ring DAC is essentially custom software stamped into programmable memory chips, rather than a mass produced integrated circuit. Essentially it's a clever working compromise between multibit and Bitstream DACs, being the 5bit, 64 times-oversampling system first seen in the nineties dCS Elgar, able to produce exceptional linearity.

The moment you switch it on, your ears tell you this is digital - but not as we know it. Just as with the best turntables, it has superlative smoothness, solidity, confidence and clarity, yet all sounds so easy and unforced. The big surprise is that this holds just as much for 16bit as it does for 24; there's magnificent accuracy and openness to even the humblest Compact Disc recording. The dCS Paganini is a big, expensive box that doesn't easily blend in with your home decor, yet it is surely the state of the digital art. It's very expensive, but justifiably so. Highly flexible, extensible and upgradeable, this breathtaking DAC is one that digiphiles can confidently commit their futures to.

dCS Paganini DAC
DCS Ltd.
www.dcsLtd.co.uk
tested:

£9,599
+ 44 (0)1799 531999

October 2009



TUNER: ARCAM FMJ T32

With the wide uptake of DAB+ on the continent, how long can DAB in the UK survive? This question has exercised potential radio purchasers for years, but this year Arcam came up with the answer with its new £600 FMJ T32. When launched in April 2009, it was the world's first hi-fi tuner to support the new DAB+ format. Although this is of no immediate benefit to UK listeners, as the government and its radio regulator OFCOM are currently insisting that the UK shall stick with DAB, it's good to know that the T32 can do it if and when the situation changes, as it surely will. Yet the new Arcam

also does plain old DAB as well as can be reasonably expected (that format's native MPEG 2 codec is never going to win friends and influence people), and ye olde FM very passably too. In short, it's a jack of all trades, and an accomplished one at that.

Of course, Arcam has a long history with DAB, as it produced the world's first ever Digital Radio tuner, the Alpha 10, which celebrated its tenth anniversary last autumn. Since then, the company has provided some of the very best DAB tuners in the business, and the FMJ T32 is no exception. The Radioscape RS223 DAB/DAB+ receiver module fitted is of excellent quality, giving crisp and detailed sound and decent

sensitivity, whilst the bespoke analogue section gives super FM stereo with a smooth, expansive and natural character that's hard to beat at or near the price. Even AM reception isn't bad. The final flourish is its iPod connectivity. Arcam do excellent iPod docks, and the FMJ T32 comes equipped with special connectors, so you can feed your Apple player through, without taking up another input on your amplifier, and control it via the tuner's supplied universal remote control. Overall, this is a very classy package. Everything about it, from that silky aluminium front panel and clear display to sonics and connectivity make it an essential purchase for the mid-price tuner buyer.

ARCAM FMJ T32
Arcam
www.arcam.co.uk
tested:

£550
44 (0)1223 203265

April 2009

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'They're big - but not too big -
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KEF
INNOVATORS IN SOUND



INTEGRATED: SUGDEN MYSTRO

It's amazing how parochial different hi-fi markets are. In Japan, tubes reign supreme, and if you're running a solid-state amplifier then it's practically unthinkable for it not to run in full Class A mode. In Britain, the reverse has been true until recently. As a nation, pretty much all our modern amplification has been punchy Class AB solid-state, with a few notable exceptions. Sugden is one of them; the company has built its reputation on amplifiers that get hot under the hood like few others. The benefits of Class A operation are myriad of course; negligible switching distortion because the transistors are on all the time means a very clear

sound, one that can seem quite a revelation after the grey 'mush' that emanates from most Class AB designs.

It was with no little surprise then, to discover that Sugden had done a Class AB amplifier. Indeed, they themselves were initially quite bashful about it. Yet we found this amplifier auditioned exceptionally well. We run the far more expensive IA4 as a reference, and the Mystro, at just one third of the price, wasn't giving way. Of course, the IA4 has immense clarity, as befitting a pure Class A amplifier, which the Mystro could not match, but there's still something fundamentally very right about the way this £1,225 integrated

makes music. For starters, the amp has a big, bouncy and tuneful bass that's apparently unphased by what's going on elsewhere in the frequency spectrum. It bounds along, happy to follow the tune. Further up, and the Mystro is tremendously lucid. Whilst there's not the greatest level of detail, it still throws up an expansive soundstage and shows energy and dynamism that's simply exceptional at the price. Its treble performance isn't as smooth as the IA4, but it's nicely atmospheric and gels very well with the rest of the recording. All in all, Sugden's Mystro is a most aptly named new contender in the mid-price integrated amplifier category. We wish it well.

SUGDEN MYSTRO
J.E. Sugden & Co Ltd.
www.sugdenaudio.com
tested:

£1,225
+44(0)1924 404088

November 2009

The RX Factor

This is Silver RX:

a brilliantly creative union of
chic contemporary design and
naturally pulsating audio that will
satisfy and endure.

Seven models
Six finishes
One breathtaking experience

RX6

"A debut to remember
from Monitor Audio's
newest additions."

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision November 2009





POWER AMPLIFIER ELECTROCOMPANIET NEMO

Dysfunctional high end systems can often be explained by one thing; the mismatch between loudspeaker and power amplifier. It's all very well buying the best reviewed example of both breeds, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee great results. Efficient high end loudspeakers can make nice noises with valve amplifiers, yet these same power providers simply won't pull the skin off the proverbial rice pudding when asked to drive harder, less efficient loads. That's why there's always a need for a really good amplifier that's utterly unphased by anything connected to it, yet doesn't cost the earth. The Electrocompaniet AW600 Nemo is

precisely this.

The princely sum of £3,450 seems a lot, until you remember just what it does, and the rivals it is competing against. It's the epitome of a solid-state power house; at 41kg and a claimed 600W RMS per channel, a shrinking violet it is not. Indeed, its output is heavily protected by a current sensing circuit to prevent it becoming an arc welder if its outputs are short circuited. Running substantially in Class A mode, there's a lot of heat generated, and you'll notice it on your electricity bill too, but once warmed up all that effort and expense is worth it. The Nemo has a devastatingly fast and clean sound, along with an iron grip on

even the most truculent, obstinate loudspeakers. Designs that routinely spin up the cooling fans on other 'super amps' are a mere bagatelle for the AW600, as it shakes their bass drivers like a lion with a deer in its mouth.

You'll need to match this massive power amplifier carefully however; it's not exactly rose-tinted in its presentation. Any failings in the source side of things are ruthlessly exposed by its icy clear tonality and blistering transients. Still, as sound per pound goes, there's not much that can touch the big Electrocompaniet, at or near the price. That's why it's the obvious recipient of this year's best power amplifier gong.

ELECTROCOMPANIET AW600 NEMO
NSS Ltd.
www.electrocompaniet.com
tested:

£3,450
+44 (0)20 8893 5835

February 2009



LOUDSPEAKERS

USHER Be-10

Loudspeaker design is both a science and an art. Of course, if the perfect speaker could be concocted using just the former, then we'd have a world of perfect £119 boxes. For this reason, in discriminating audiophile circles, there's a huge amount of prominence paid to the latter intuitive side. Loudspeaker designers often like to think of themselves as artists - or at least master chefs - but not even they can transcend physics. With speakers, the quality of the drive units is paramount. You can make a half-decent sound from a bad box, but you'll never pull bad drivers up with a good cabinet. It's where Newton calls the shots...

Still, it's amazing how many high end speaker designers forget this. Perhaps it's because of budgetary constraints, allegiances to drive unit manufacturers or mere convenience, but there are many premium boxes out there with cheap, substandard or just plain poor drivers inside. Usher's Be-10 is not one of them. Of course, it's a dashing looking piece of furniture, but unlike so many derivative 'me too' designs, it runs superb drive units too, intelligently designed for the job in hand. Its treble and midrange domes are fashioned from Beryllium, which is both very expensive to produce for consumer loudspeaker applications and ideal for moving air at higher frequencies. As the lightest stable

metal on the planet, few materials work better here, giving a dizzyingly fast and uncoloured sound.

Usher's Be-10 is a big box alright, weighing no less than 92kg, but it needs this to be the true full range loudspeaker that it is, with flare flapping bass, breathtaking levels of detail and an almost supernaturally expansive soundstage. It is unremittingly dynamic too, making music sound 'live' in a way that nearly all hi-fi loudspeakers fail to do. Its massive visceral punch, allied to real silky smoothness and sophistication (when given the right ancillaries to work with) makes it an exceptional loudspeaker by any definition, and a worthy winner of its Hi-Fi World Award.

USHER BE-10
 HIAudio Distribution
www.hiaudio.co.uk
 tested:

£10,500
 0845 052 52 59

May 2009



SYSTEM: NAIM UNITI

In the old days, it was simple. If you wanted an all-in-one system then you bought yourself a music centre, and if you wanted something better then it was the Bang & Olufsen version of the same. Now though, there's a recognition that some people actually want a serious sounding modern one box machine, such as Naim's new £1,995 Uniti. As its name suggests, it brings together a host of music sources; CD, FM, DAB, internet radio and computer audio, and it's even got a built in DAC with five 24/96 capable inputs, two analogue inputs, a bespoke phono input and iPod connectivity, plus a USB input for memory stick or MP3 player, and one of those quaint old 3.5mm

inputs for your Walkman. It's got a litany of inputs then, but that's not what distinguishes it - it's how it brings them together...

Naim call the Uniti an "audio source hub", but effectively it's a Nait 5i amplifier and CD5 CD player sandwiched together, along with all that extra radio and networking functionality. But it's very well done, so for example you can set the radio presets regardless of source (FM, DAB or Internet Radio). The CD mechanism swings out in its sturdy draw beautifully, and spins up quickly, and the Naim n-Link iPod connector works a treat. The bright green fascia mounted OLED display is lovely, as are the front panel buttons, and the compact non-resonant, non-magnetic

aluminium casework confers a sense of solidity.

A solid 50W per channel underwrites the performance, giving a fast, strong, dynamic sound from any of its radio sources, Compact Disc or one of the vast number of music files it supports (including WMA, MP3, AAC, Apple Lossless (from an iPod), WAV, FLAC and OGG Vorbis). Naim devotees may criticise it for not having the absolute, out and out performance of the company's specialist separates, but it's excellent at the price all the same, and makes most so-called 'style systems' sound distinctly past their sell-by date. An excellent all-in-one from a company that's very much on the resurgent.

NAIM UNITI
Naim Audio Ltd.
www.naimaudio.com
tested:

£1,995
+44 (0) 1722 426600

May 2009



Brainy and good looking!

According to the world's press, this is one of the very best CD players, even at twice the price! And now the "made for high-end audio" digital "engine" in this CD 8 SE has just been awarded "Technology of the year" by Hi-Fi Plus. Recognition that reinforces the fact that each of our three CD models are recognised as "best in class" all around the world.



The new Cyrus 8 XP amplifier has just been awarded "group test winner" by What Hi-Fi. The XP platform is upgradeable from the £900 6XP all the way up to the amazing DAC equipped 8 XP d Qx model with USB and SPDIF options, making this new amplifier range the darlings of both audiophiles and computer based music lovers alike.



The rack is the new HARK2. Like all Cyrus products it is expandable, so if you start with just a couple of our die-cast magnesium audio components, you can rest assured the rack will be able to expand all the way up to 8 boxes!

Our website has the contact details for our appointed retailers who will be happy to demonstrate why these new audio components set new standards.



Did you know?

You can custom design your Cyrus amplifier? Select the output power you want, maybe choose DAC options such as a USB input so you can stream digital files from

a PC. Or select paint and finish options so you can have exactly the system you want most. You can even upgrade later on if you want to!

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2009	WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2009	WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2009	WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2009	WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2009
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NETWORK: MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.0

For the past few years, we've seen audiophiles in the odd position of being way behind the curve. Whilst the rest of the world has apparently moved to iTunes and hard disk based (i.e. computer) music playback, most of us have continued to insert small silver discs into Compact Disc players. After all, we argue, where's the sonic benefit with computers? They're full of electrical noise, with less than ideal grounding paths, and the quality of their internal components is a world away from hi-fi separates. In 2009 however, we began to see computer-based audiophile music playback systems appear in

earnest, the most striking of which is Meridian's Sooloos 2.0.

Here's a product that does more than play MP3s from its hard drive; it offers a great new way to access your song library, with super sonics too. Central to the Sooloos is its large touchscreen user interface, which works seamlessly with its bespoke software to give a far more intuitive way of accessing your albums than scrolling down a list of artists or album titles. Yet it's so much more than just a pretty face, because when Sooloos rips music to its hard drive in FLAC format, it polls five different databases for information about the artist and album. You can then cross reference

this, and search your music library very powerfully; for example, it will find every album you own produced by Rick Rubin, or every recording with Matthew Seligman playing bass guitar. As well as being a compact, single-package hard disk-based music system with unusually powerful search and playback facilities, it's also an impressive music maker.

The Sooloos 2.0 sounds easy, open and organic, with oodles of detail and strong dynamics. Whether you slot it into your existing system, or partner it with Meridian active loudspeakers, it's a brilliant twenty first century music centre.

MERIDIAN SOOLOOS CONTROL 10/ENSEMBLE
Meridian
www.meridian-audio.com
tested:

£6,990
+44(0) 1480 445678

November 2009

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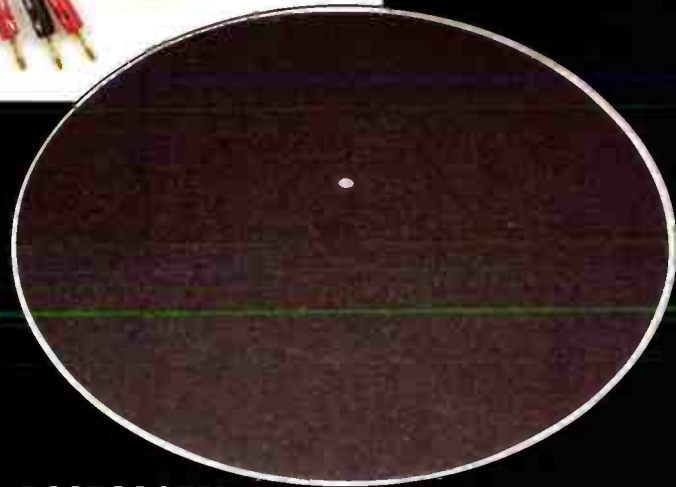
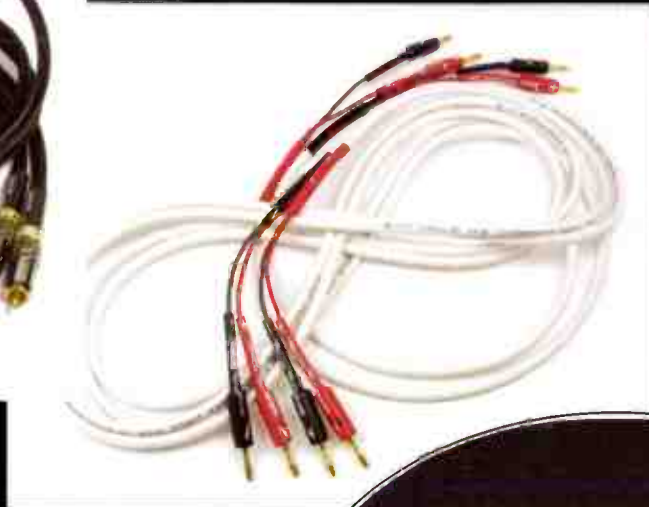
t: 01403 782221 (Studio)

e: uk@vividspeakers.com

w: www.vividaudio.com



VIVID audio



INTERCONNECT:

MIT CVT TERMINATOR 2

Benefitting from MIT's Multi Pole Network' technology, which aims to expand the bandwidth of a cable by increasing the single frequency pole of a conventional wire to a multi-pole type, this £440 cable is a complex design nicely wrapped in a stylish, sturdy package. The sound is distinctively energetic and explicit, putting a tiger in the tank of any smooth sounding system. Music bubbles with enthusiasm, while bass is superbly articulate, detailed and punchy, bracketed by a crisp and spry top end and wide open mid. An expensive interconnect, but a striking one nonetheless, the MIT is a real winner.

LOUDSPEAKER

CABLE:
BLACK RHODIUM JIVE

The second step up in the range, this very affordable speaker cable consists of 24 tinned copper conductors, 0.2mm in diameter, twisted together and held in a silicone rubber sheath. It is distinctively smooth sounding, which is just what most budget and mid price systems need. The tone is well judged and nicely balanced, offering insight but without heading towards sharpness, and the impressively weighty bass, and a lilting natural rhythm mark, mark this out as very special at the price. A great entry level wire - and a worthy Hi-Fi World Award winner.

ACCESSORY:

ORIGIN LIVE UPGRADE TURNTABLE MAT

This turntable mat is described simply as a 1mm thick disc made from a "mystery material mix"; we can only add that it's slightly floppy and smells like a wheelie bin liner! It comes with a money-back guarantee if bought direct, and no-fuss packaging. Despite its low price, it damps resonant, bell like platters down with aplomb, making for an altogether more smooth tonal rendition, but it doesn't store energy and sully a turntable's rhythmic push. An excellent, surprisingly effective, cut-price vinyl tonic!

MIT CVT TERMINATOR 2 £440
Audiobility +44(0)870 777 2991
www.audiobility.co.uk
tested: August 2009

BLACK RHODIUM JIVE £82
Black Rhodium +44(0)1332 342233
www.blackrhodium.co.uk
tested: August 2009

ORIGIN LIVE UPGRADE T/T MAT £39
Origin Live +44 (0)2380 578877
www.originlive.com
tested: September 2009

Single Life

Noel Keywood goes it alone with Audion's Silver Night Duo Single-Ended Class A valve amplifier...

If you have been reared on solid-state power and are puzzled by the very existence of an amplifier that produces just 9 Watts with a following wind, then Audion's Silver Night Duo may well intrigue you. I am a valve aficionado but even I baulk at power levels as low as this. However, the simple fact is that I rarely use more than 10-20 Watts in practice and, providing I never wanted to turn up volume, the Silver Night would be perfectly adequate for my purposes and likely adequate for most others too (I listen quite loud, just not mega loud). Giant solid-state power amps may well have power, but they don't have a sound like the Silver Nights, of that you can be assured; it's not even similar. The two are worlds apart...

Single-ended (SE) valve amps are the simplest type going, and are pure Class A by definition and have no crossover distortion. Typically, SEs like this one have a sound with a sweet fluidity that is unmatched by all else, which is why people still like to use them. Their sound is totally unique and if you like it, there's no alternative.

To get the Silver Night into context within its own field, it is an inexpensive introduction to the

breed. Much past 20 Watts per channel, SEs become huge and very expensive - check out the famed Audionote Ongaku. Note too that top ranking SEs are arguably the most esoteric of all hi-fi amplifiers and very, very special. If I was a rich footballer (hah!), probably ensconced in some expensive Manchester suburb, then an Ongaku would be the thing to have. The Silver Night is for those who struggled to make the B Division, or you and !!

This version of the Silver Night is labelled Duo by dint of the fact that it is able to accept two types of output valve, the expensive 300B audio triode that costs around £80 apiece minimum, or the cheaper but still much admired 2A3 at around £40 apiece minimum. As lovely as the 2A3 can sound, in the Silver Night it

produces just 4 Watts into an 8 Ohm loudspeaker and this really is at the bottom of usability I feel. Also, these output figures are at a generous 3% distortion

threshold; go above this and you run into audible muddle with feedback-free, SE valve amps like this one, if not the sort of ear shredding distortion produced by high feedback solid-state amplifiers. So my figures are really the upper limit and they apply only to 8 Ohm loudspeakers, not 4 Ohm loudspeakers, with which the Silver Night was unhappy. As a result I used it with a pair of Neat SX1 loudspeakers which have a minimum impedance of 7 Ohms.

The Audion is an unprepossessing package, simply built from sheet mild steel with

one big volume control at front. It isn't especially heavy, nor bulky. One set of inputs through phono sockets are provided, so you can use it with CD or LP, but not both. This is to eliminate the complexities and drawbacks of input switching: in effect the Silver Night is a power amplifier – albeit a sensitive one – with a volume control up front. Multiple sources could be channeled in via a passive preamp like the Creek OBH-22 for example. The valve line up comprises the popular 6922 double triode acting as preamplifier, feeding either a single 300B or a 2A3, both triodes. The output transformers and mains transformers sit beneath a single cover. The rear panel carries the power switch, input sockets and loudspeaker terminals that accept 4mm plugs, spades and bare wire. There are 8 and 4 Ohm options. Twin fuse holders are used to preset the amplifier for 300B or 2A3 valves, providing the latter with a lower HT voltage, the fuse being inserted into whichever is required. On our sample this left the unused holder open and HT accessible, not the best idea and likely in contra-



Bit Prefect

After twenty years of protesting that they'd never do a digital-to-analogue convertor, Naim Audio have just launched one! David Price finds the new Naim DAC to be a cut above the crowd...

Naim Audio's view of life and how to live it is a sometimes controversial one. The vexed issue of DACs is a case in point; right through the eighties, nineties and noughties, Naim would patiently explain to anyone who'd listen that they "don't do DACs", because of all the imponderables and unknowns that any possible Naim digital-to-analogue convertor would have to work with. After all, they could hardly guarantee its sound if it found itself on the end of a Freeview box running 32kHz sampling frequencies, connected up digitally by one half of an old RCA phono lead bundled free with a Hitachi cassette deck circa 1983 now, could they?

Fair enough. But when they used to say this, there was always a slight doubt in my mind; possibly the reason they didn't do a great standalone DAC was that, just perhaps, they couldn't? Well, just to be really annoying, a close look at the brand new Naim DAC shows complete consistency with what the

layout, grounding and power supply issues, they've only gone and done a highly bespoke design from the ground up.

This doesn't happen very often because it's blooming difficult and very expensive. It bespeaks, on Naim Audio's part, a certain seriousness of intent. And so at last, the Salisbury company has come up with a no-holds-barred digital convertor, designed to work with just about anything that produces a stream of ones and noughts. Designed by Naim's Steve Sells and Hjalmar Nilsson, whose recent notable work surfaced in the DSP used in the Naim for the Bentley project, it sports a very fast and powerful SHARC digital signal processing 'brain' running Naim authored code. This has given Naim the freedom to get full control of the digital domain, rather than leaving it in the hands of third party manufacturers.

The traditional problem with a separate transport and DAC has always been the disconnect between the two; the DAC has to recover the clock from the S/PDIF signal,

in its own right, rather than just a waiting room for the data stream with its random flow in and out.

Interestingly, this 'digital transport' has, you could say, 'adaptive cruise control'; it can vary its own (clock) speed according to the rate of flow of the data coming into it. The SHARC DSP chip assesses the rate at which the data is coming in then nominates one of ten precisely set master clocks to send it through the DAC.

In this way, Naim say, the data entering the DAC chips is completely isolated from the incoming jitter. Only in rare cases will none of the Naim DAC's selectable master clocks be closely enough matched to the incoming data rate, in which case an asynchronous sample rate converter (ASRC) is used. Integer oversampling is used to as high a frequency as is possible given the source; for example, 44.1kHz CD is oversampled 16 times. The DAC chips themselves are two mono true multibit Burr-Brown PCM1704Ks, as used in all Naim high-end CD players including the CD555, and are capable of running with an input data clock of 25MHz, which allows sample rates of up to 768kHz.

As you'd expect, meticulous attention is paid to circuit board layout from an electrical point of view. Star earthing is used extensively, while the 210VA toroidal transformer feeds 26 regulated low impedance supplies. When the external PSU upgrade option is used (XPS or 555 PS) with the Naim DAC, power supply separation is increased by the use of a dedicated supply for the master clock circuits. It also provides a bigger toroidal transformer and bigger reservoir capacitors, and the DSP remains

"Its clarity, insight and depth are far more than is expected at the price..."

company was always saying. This new product is designed specifically to deal with jitter issues (eliminating one great variable), but puts two fingers up to doubters like me on another front too. Instead of just doing a very well implemented proprietary design, adding those distinctive Naim qualities by meticulous attention to circuit board

which itself is very prone to timing errors. In the new Naim DAC, the data isn't recovered directly from the S/PDIF signal, but read in and stored in solid-state memory, then clocked back out to the DAC chips using a fixed-frequency local master clock. Essentially then, the DAC's master clock and memory structure becomes a kind of digital transport



powered from the Naim DAC transformer to give even more separation from the analogue section.

The circuitry has also been designed to reduce mechanical noise (i.e. vibration). The starting point is a rigid aluminium chassis with 3mm-thick panels, with the fibreglass printed circuit boards screwed to the chassis only at certain points, with other parts of the PCB resting on pillars to reduce energy transfer. To isolate vibrations associated with reservoir capacitor charging, the power supply PCB is separate from the main PCB. Analogue stage filter capacitors are mounted to minimise microphony.

GETTING CONNECTED

The Naim DAC isn't conventional on the outside either, coming as it does with a host of connectivity options, most interesting of which is the USB facility. Notably, it is the world's first Apple authenticated high-end DAC, offering full digital play out of iPods via their docking connector feeding the Naim's USB input. Put simply, hook your iPod up to the Naim via USB, and it plays the digital datastream bit-for-bit, bypassing all its analogue playback circuitry (iPod charging is switchable for best sound quality; not charging sounds better). As you can use the iPhone and iPod Touch as uPnP streaming clients, then these will give you high quality streamed music (or internet radio), off your home network, via the Naim DAC. There are even 'transport' controls for the iPod, front mounted on the DAC, and it also works via the Apple Remote.

Additionally, the DAC will also play out USB memory files, with audio of up to 768kHz sample rates, via the two type A USB inputs (one

on the front panel, the other at the rear). It will not play USB music direct from computers however; Naim say this is too noisy for serious sound, and suggest using an optical digital feed from a USB soundcard. For those of a more conventional bent there are eight S/PDIF inputs (two 75Ω BNC, two RCA and four TOSLINK optical).

For the purposes of this review, DAC was fed variously with digits from a Naim CDX2 (new type), Sony CDP-R1 CD transport and Sony DTC-59ES DAT player, although I also tried a memory stick with some hi res 24/96 files too. Unusually, the new Naim DAC is ground-switchable, via a small two-way toggle switch on the back. Naim don't recommend either position as such, leaving the user to decide. In my system, the standard setting worked best.

SOUND QUALITY

Having heard the new Naim DAC at the factory launch in September for several hours, I was intrigued to see if it sounded similar in my own reference system. My initial findings in Salisbury were of a digital source of quite exceptional clarity and resolution, and my own listening tests subsequently confirmed this. It's a very modern, contemporary sounding device, devoid of any romance, mystery or euphony; rather the Naim DAC cuts to what's going on in the recording like a hot knife through butter. Even via ye olde sixteen bit Compact Disc sources, it gives astonishing insight into the music. But here's a thing; in some ways I don't think it sounds like a Naim!

Let me elucidate. The company has always had a 'house sound'; traditionally of course this was bracing, bright, fast and forward. In

recent years the company's electronics have moved to a deeper, darker and more velvety place, but still with the accent on (the Holy Trinity of) pace, rhythm, and timing. Whilst not radically different, I still think the new DAC edges towards a more crystalline, super-neutral sound than we've heard from this marque...

For example, cue up Sonar Kollektiv Orchestra's cover of 4hero's 'Universal Love', and there's a glassy clarity to it that's completely at odds with the Naim CDX2 CD player. Whereas the latter delivers, you might say, a somewhat editorialisised rendition of the music, making things a little warmer, fuller in the bass and fluffier in the treble, as well as adding a louche but rather seductive rhythmic swagger, going to the Naim DAC is like switching from a well kept pair of Hush Puppies to the world's lightest running shoe. Things are tighter, firmer and more connected with the road - or music, if you get my drift?

Tonally, the Naim DAC isn't a million miles from any modern Naim digital product; it's dry and neutral like the CDS3, for example, with dark silences and a light, shimmering upper midband when it's called for. But it has an icy clarity; everything is picked out in a cool, unromantic way and just read straight off the disc (or memory stick). This doesn't mean it's in any way cold or uninviting; it's just that the way the Naim DAC goes about its business isn't clouded by the need to charm or beguile the listener. It's brutally matter of fact, but in the best possible way.

Prefab Sprout's 'Bonny' showed what a remarkable sounding digital product this is. This is a complex, polished pop production courtesy



Music Store

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www.naimhdx.com

World Radio History

Naim HDX
November 2008



of Thomas Dolby, and yet the Naim DAC unpicked it like a car thief screwdriving an eighties car door lock. Everything in the mix fell instantly and immediately into its rightful place, whereupon it sat with tremendous poise. The song starts with simple vocals and guitar, adds drums and bass, then gets ever more complex as more and more layers are added. Few DACs I've heard have ever given such a detailed picture of how this process works, and fewer still have done it with such apparent ease. Yet it's not simply a deconstructive process, where everything is laid bare, as the new Naim strings everything together in such a musically coherent way. In short, it does very 'hi-fi things', but not in an obviously 'hi-fi way'.

One thing that impressed me particularly strongly was how the DAC handled vocals. Obviously, we humans are totally attuned to our own voices, so their correct rendition means more to us than a particularly dextrous handling of the sound of a china boy cymbal, bass guitar or suchlike. With the Prefab Sprout track, singer Paddy McAloon's vocal strains were exceptionally clean and natural sounding. The Naim carried his highly distinctive phrasing particularly well, and spotted his dynamic subtleties. Likewise, when I moved to Kate Bush's 'Running Up That Hill', so this new DAC unpicked the dense, slightly murky mix of this classic eighties song and revealed the singer's voice in all its sullen, chilly glory. Once again, the track was rendered with superlative clarity, yet the Naim carried its emotional force in its entirety.

So how would this redoubtable new digital device cope with that most analogue of experiences, jazz? Interestingly, it worked very well - underlining my findings that, whilst it may have massive insight and analysis, it's not a slave to this. Lou Donaldson's 'Alligator Bogaloo', a classic late sixties Bluenote recording, was a joy. The Naim set up a powerful double bass sound, silky treble and a fat, funky Hammond organ groove. Bass notes stop and start on a sixpence, so to speak, with this digital to analogue convertor; it's very fast and tuneful, yet things still sounded decently sumptuous, reflecting the original flavour of the

recording. The midband was majestic, the Naim accurately reconstructing the soundstage (so crisply captured by that original crossed pair of cardoid microphones) in all its three dimensional glory. Saxophones rasped, yet retained a beautifully realistic 'patina' to them that's so rare via sixteen bit CD, and snares shuffled along beautifully. The DAC caught the dynamic contrasts of the brass instruments with ease, giving a captivating performance. Meanwhile, treble was unexpectedly atmospheric (for CD), and the ride cymbals had a smooth yet tactile quality.

Wonderful stuff, but upping the ante - digitally speaking, you understand - produced an even finer sound from the Naim DAC. 24/96 PCM from Naim's own Naim Label website, and from others, showed the new convertor off as an even more subtle and detailed performer than before. The superior depth was palpable; the soundstage hung behind the speakers rather than

around them, giving a more natural listening experience. Many people who've never heard hi res expect sonic fireworks the first time they set ears on 24/96, or suchlike, and are often disappointed because instead of sounding 'higher fi' than CD, it 'just' sounds more natural and 'less hi-fi'. The Naim DAC illustrates this, becoming less showy as it effectively does a disappearing act...

The quality it squeezed out of my Apple iPod Touch was impressive. We are not, as some had hoped, at the point where an iPod via the Naim's direct digital link is as good as a CD player, as the iPod has all sorts of internal issues that don't predispose it to being a brilliant digital transport, but it certainly wasn't bad. An uncompressed rip of The Verve's 'Lucky Man' came over with

a good deal of delicacy and was very listenable, even if it did sound fractionally 'out of focus' compared to the CD-based original.

CONCLUSION

Having spent a lot of time with some very high end digital sources this year, I can only say I am very impressed with this in its standard (i.e. non-power supply upgraded form). No, it's not going to upset a £10,000 dCS Paganini, but it's closer to this than its price suggests. Its clarity, insight, depth, space and natural musicality is far more than would be expected at the price, and better than the great majority of DACs currently on sale. And the fact that it brings a slightly more detailed and finessed sound to the Naim brand, whilst retaining all of those trademark rhythmic and dynamic qualities, means that it's one of the few Naim products that can easily go out and reach a new audience. The new Naim DAC doesn't just make sense in the context of an all-Naim system, but is truly able to go forth and mix with just about any other high quality ancillaries, with convincing impressive results. Another cracking product from Naim then; one that's destined to be a great success.

VERDICT ●●●●●
Innovatively designed, superb sounding DAC with exceptional connectivity and excellent feature set.

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www.naimaudio.com

FOR
- superb sonics
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- nothing at the price

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Naim DAC was flat from 2Hz to 21.1kHz, with the usual small roll down at high frequencies that Naim prefer, imposed by the anti-alias filtering used. This ensures an absence of obviously bright or spitty treble, always useful with CD.

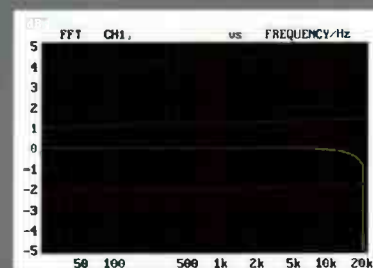
Distortion levels were low at higher music levels but rose above the expected value of 0.22% at -60dB, measuring a high 0.53% with a 16bit signal. With a 24bit signal this figure should drop to below 0.1% or lower, but with the DAC it remained a stubbornly high 0.38%, so the DAC isn't especially linear in itself.

Output was a normal 2.3V and EIAJ dynamic range a modest 106dB due to the mediocre performance at -60dB. The Naim DAC should sound smooth enough. It isn't a low distortion design however and is unimpressive here. NK

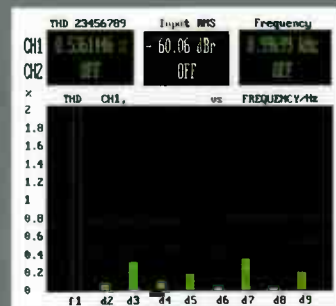
Frequency response (-1dB)
CD 2Hz-20.1kHz

Distortion (%)	
0dB	0.001
-6dB	0.001
-60dB	0.52
-80dB	4.6
Separation (1kHz)	122dB
Noise (IEC A)	-110dB
Dynamic range	106dB
Output	2.3V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION





STEREONOW NLE-Signature by **LFD**

Fuzzy Logic

If you'll pardon the linguistic licence, there is no better description for LFD ('Low Fuzzy Distortion') than 'uber specialist'. They are so specialist that they make your average low volume high end Brit-based purveyor of exotica look like the hi-fi equivalent of General Motors. Without trying to stretch the point too far, LFD basically hand make amplifiers for their friends, who became friends by first becoming customers. The company commands great brand loyalty and gets a great deal of repeat custom, and thus never seems to bother to tell anyone else about its very existence...

Designer and managing director Dr Richard Bews is an electronics engineer of no small pedigree, as is his technical director Professor Malcolm Hawksford. Both men went beyond the nineteen seventies orthodoxy that 'a component is a component' many years before others started feigning enlightenment. For many years, they've been paying forensic attention to the selection of passive componentry, while working as hard to keep things simple. "Less is more" is a phrase that suits the LFD philosophy better than most. Factor in a general dislike of feedback, an obsession with subjective voicing

Despite being wildly off hi-fi's beaten track, the Stereonow LFD NLE Signature power amplifier still makes a compelling case for itself, says David Price...

rather than measured performance, and add careful signal routing and obsessive earthing to the formula, and you get the picture.

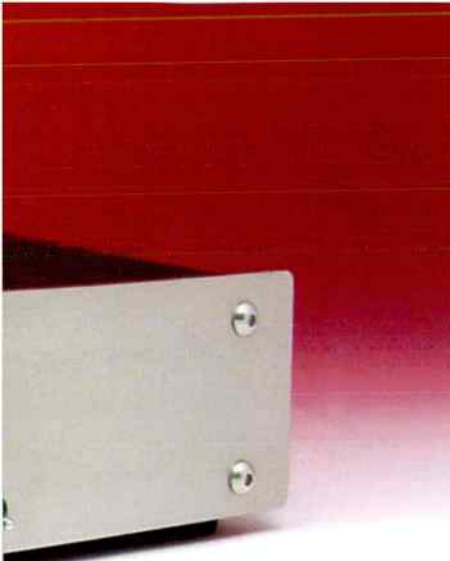
The good doctor describes the NLE as "a simple circuit", with the layout of the printed circuitboards determined by the signal path, so it's as short as possible. The power supply uses multiple capacitors in parallel. The Zobel inductor uses two different diameters of solid silver wire, while the input wiring uses nine different diameters of silver wire to try and take as much of the wire's sonic signature out of the picture. This is again balanced by PC-OCC solid core for grounding, and LC-OFC ribbon conductors for signal wiring. The list of passive componentry is like reading Ken Ishiwata's Christmas wish list, with Roedstein loading and feedback resistors, Elna capacitors in parallel and top quality wirewound resistors in critical locations. Richard adds that, "listening tests provide the information on parts selection, not the perceived wisdom from the hi-fi

industry, which is often incorrect. As the old saying goes, 'the harder I work the luckier I get'!"

Another aspect of the LFD package is the, ermm, rather 'utilitarian' packaging. Unboxing this power amplifier was something of a blast from the past for me, reminding me how I used to live back in my hairshirt eighties 'flat earth' hi-fi days. The NLE is a relatively light pressed steel black box, with a slice of brushed aluminium adorning the fascia, some silk screened print and a blue LED. It's not bad, but exposed allen bolts on the front panel and on the sides underline this is not Esoteric's latest £5,000 power amplifier we're playing with here. "Why produce great boxes and average chocolates when with a little thought you can produce the reverse?", quoth Bews.

SOUND QUALITY

Cold out of the box, the NLE was a crude sounding device, but I found within several hours, a new power amplifier had duly taken



REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Marantz TT1000 Esotec/Origin Live Enterprise C/Lyra Titan i turntable
 A.N.T.Audio Kora 3T Ltd. phono stage
 MF Audio Silver Passive Preamplifier
 Sugden IA4 integrated amplifier
 Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers
 Yamaha Soavo I.I Piano loudspeakers

was swiftly pulled away to Gabriel's voice, which again sounded eerily tangible. The NLE talks straight to you, giving a single-ended triode-like immediacy; by comparison most transistor amplifiers make him sound like he's been bound and gagged in his vocal booth.

Rhythmically too, the NLE was quite distinctive; it's not a blood and guts, fire and brimstone performer. It doesn't knock you back in your seat, amazing you with its towering command of the bass line. But suddenly, as with 'Solsbury Hill', I found myself tapping my feet almost as if I'd been smoking silly cigarettes. As Gabriel himself sang, "...had to listen, had no choice". In short, its ability to pull out subtle dynamic accents in a song is exceptional, making for an addictively musical sound. Every little expression in the lead vocals seemed pregnant with rhythmic significance, whilst the tiniest tap of the cymbal or flick of the guitarist's wrist seemed to be monumentally important to the song's gait. A very distinctive and unusual sounding product...

Air's 'All I Need' merely served to underline this; from Sugden's IA4 to name but one, I've heard a far more spacious rendition, and one also tonally more sumptuous too, but I again found myself transfixed by the NLE's rendering of this classic piece of nineties electronica. Tonally, this amplifier is generally very agreeable, with a warmish, if not terribly energetic bass, and decently sunny midband and crisp treble. Yet I have to say through my loudspeakers, I could detect the slightest grain on strings, and a fraction too much rasp on brass. Yet despite an upper mid that can certainly wake a dull speaker up, I never found myself obsessing about the NLE's lack of consummate smoothness, or indeed that of the recording. Fascinatingly, despite being decently detailed, this is one of the most agnostic amplifiers I've ever heard in terms of how it handles recordings. So many amplifiers will bend over backwards to tell you how the disc you're playing isn't as good as it should

possession of my loudspeakers, and the results were worth the wait. I found this to be a most interesting and characterful sounding amplifier, the like of which I haven't heard for a while. The best way to describe it as a kind of solid-state version of a good KT88 valve amplifier. It simply doesn't have the pedestrian rhythms and nonchalant delivery of most transistor designs, being a most lyrical performer, yet it's not quite neutral and has something of the energetic-but-edgy nature of the aforementioned tube...

For example, Andre Zimma's cover of 4hero's 'Cosmic Tree' proved gripping. The track is underpinned by a double bass and piano groove that bounced along like a puppy on a pogo stick; something I've heard with few transistor amps. Yet as well as being fluid, it was quite tight and precise, injecting the song with tremendous energy. The vocals were very direct and tactile, and the percussion raw and totally unmediated. Strings were a little too wiry perhaps, and a touch more opaque than I've heard from other similarly priced designs, but again had tremendous immediacy. There was a great detail of detail bristling through - it's almost as if the NLE has let the cork out of the bottle - yet there's no sense of a loss of control, as everything stays very precisely in its place.

When cold, I was quite underwhelmed by this amplifier's soundstaging. It started off as dual mono, but with a seemingly rather limp central image hanging between the two speakers. Duly warmed up however, things moved outwards and forwards, with the NLE giving a convincing spread. Still, I was never totally convinced by this power amplifier in this respect; it proved okay but not outstanding. Cueing up Peter Gabriel's 'Morbund the Burgermeister', I didn't get the massive, cavernous acoustic I've heard elsewhere, but my attention

be, but the exuberantly musical nature of this LFD amplifier seems able to eke out vast amounts of emotion from even the most mediocre of pressings.

CONCLUSION

Stereonow's LFD NLE Signature power amplifier is one of the most distinctive sounding power amplifiers I've heard for a long time. It has obviously been set up to do one thing brilliantly, with all else coming after. It's a compelling companion that lets you 'lock on' to the emotion in almost any recording, taking you direct to the scene of the musical event without stopping to read the show notes first. In this sense, it's an unalloyed success, but in other respects, you might find it less so. Despite quite a warm bass, there's a sharpness to its upper midband tonality that some systems, or listeners, won't appreciate. So, more than almost any other amplifier I've reviewed in the past year, it's essential to audition first. Another tantalising product from LFD, which when matched carefully can sound majestic.

VERDICT ●●●●£

Quirky, characterful power amplifier with an exceptionally musical nature - but needs careful matching and demands an audition first.

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 +44(0)20 8447 8485
 www.stereonow.co.uk

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- superb rhythmic fluency
 - captivating presentation
 - unfazed by poor recordings

- AGAINST**
- sharp upper midband
 - prosaic build and finish
 - requires careful matching

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Stereonow NLE-Signature power amplifier from LFD produced 70 Watts into 8 Ohms and 90 Watts into 4 Ohms under test, without even getting warm. It has very high efficiency, it seems. Bandwidth was very high, the upper limit being 370kHz, and there was no sign of a switching residual that would indicate Class D working. With a lower limit of 3Hz the Stereonow amplifier is ultra wideband.

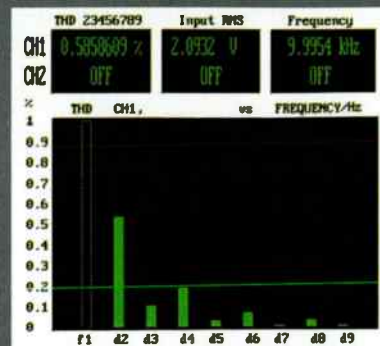
Distortion was very high at high frequencies, measuring no less than 0.6% at 10kHz, from 1 Watt all the way up to full output. However, the unusual distortion residual was dominated by innocuous second harmonic and barely changed in harmonic structure with signal level changes, a good sign as the ear hears changing patterns rather than steady harmonics. So in spite of poor figures the power amplifier may well sound clean and easy on the ear.

Sensitivity was a usefully high 400mV, making all preamps compatible. Noise was low and damping factor high at 43.

The Stereonow NLE-Signature power amplifier measured well and should sound clean, easy and well controlled in its bass. NK

Power	70 Watts
Frequency response	3Hz-370kHz
Separation	71dB
Noise	-112dB
Distortion	0.6%
Sensitivity	400mV
Damping factor	46

DISTORTION



MUSICAL FIDELITY

AMS CD CD/DAC

New from Musical Fidelity. Quad dual differential DACs. Balanced Class A analogue stages. Mega technical performance



mail



LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

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A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to **GEOFF LE GOOD**, Letter of the Month winner in our December 2009 issue.

Letter of the Month



Metric Halo preamp with 8 channels and ADCs, as well as DACs, plenty of lights (natch!) and high speed Firewire connection.

COMPUTER WORLD

I was intrigued by your November issue heralding the arrival of the new Naim DAC and the review of the Meridian Sooloos. In a sense, these new high profile arrivals from two of the absolute stalwarts of British hi-fi confirms the credibility of computer based hi-fi, but it also shows the chasm that exists in its implementation.

Taking the Meridian first, your comment on its 'not quite silent presence' and not quite Apple class slow and unresponsive touch screen. This, in a package that costs £6200.

Naim's fascinating new DAC also has idiosyncrasies, namely a strange USB interface that prevents it being connected directly via USB to Mac or PC.

Compare this with the more main stream approach; a humble Apple Macbook Pro, itunes plus Sonic Studio's dedicated audiophile playback system Amarra and an itouch or iphone and you have an outstanding playback system with an Apple class leading interface for something around £2000, that will do all the clever remote and around the house stuff wirelessly and more.

Furthermore you can order your Macbook with solid state storage (SSD) providing even better playback and an absolutely silent presence.

Couple this with the new generation of studio based firewire DACs, such as a Metric Halo, and suddenly you have a system that not

only plays very, very well but can also record at high resolution, allowing the intoxicating proposition of digitising the only mass high resolution media – vinyl, with promised goodies from Amarra like digital RIAA correction (it should be said Pure Vinyl already offers this).

The real issue here is one of philosophy - compatibility rather than exclusivity. Apple has invested billions in operating systems and software so why not build on it rather than reinvent it?

Recording studios have been using Macs and PCs for years to produce the music we listen to. All the manufacturers of studio equipment build to well established protocols and interfaces. Again we can benefit from this investment and commonality as well.

The computer industry is a global business and the challenge worthily taken up by the likes of Sonic Studio, Weiss, Wavelength Audio and Empirical Audio amongst others is to build genuine audiophile products within the parameters of Apple and Windows.

If the British hi-fi industry wants a part of this future it needs to work with it, not against it. I fear from these examples in the November issue this may not be happening.

Adam Stanhope

Hi Adam, yes I take your point. but I still feel you're being just a little tendentious in the way you make it. First, the Sooloos doesn't have "a slow and unresponsive" touchscreen per se; it's just not as majestically

'tactile' as Apple's. Even so, it's a step change forward for hi-fi; compared to list-based music management software, it's a revelation.

Second, the Naim DAC doesn't take direct digital in via USB for reasons of noise; computers are very noisy, and so it's best to use a USB digital interface adaptor that gives you an S/PDIF out via TOSLINK (i.e. electrically noise-free) into the Naim.

I'm not totally sold on Amarra (yet), and I don't think a Mac, love them as I do, is an ideal top-level digital audio source; computers generate loads of sound quality-destroying RF and don't have grounding optimised for hi-fi. You can get half-decent computer audio very cheaply, and spend a little and the results are better still, but to push from the equivalent of a £600 CD player to a £1,500 one, it seems you need to spend an awful lot of time and money faffing around; that next twenty percent of performance becomes very hard to achieve.

Still, it's early days, and I'm fascinated to see if - in the long term - the hi-fi manufacturers will make the world's best audiophile computer playback system, or the computer manufacturers will. Linn have done brilliantly with their DS system, Meridian have another excellent and distinctive platform via Sooloos, but I suspect Apple could - possibly via a joint venture with a specialist - seal the deal on audiophile computer audio if they really wanted to. I fear, however, that they don't. If the iPod is anything to go by, it's transforming the user experience they're about, not transforming the sonics. We'll see!

DP



REEL LIFE

I'm writing to tell you how much I enjoyed Paul Rigby's feature on the Beatles box set. I bought the stereo version on the day of issue and although I can appreciate the work that has gone into it I do feel that the sound is a little too bright and hard. I've found that transcribing the discs onto a quality mid 60s stereo open reel recorder (I use a Beocord 2000) results in a warmer and more authentically "period" experience, a bit like having original and mint first-pressing LPs but at a fraction of the cost and with no worries about wear, dirt and scratches. Has anyone else tried this approach?

thanks for a great magazine!

Revai Mativavarira

Hi Revai. And thank you for taking the time taken to send us a lovely picture. Paul Rigby was very flattered; I think you made his day. Like you, not everyone is convinced about this release, as you'll find out below. **NK**

BLINDED BY SCIENCE

In light of recent suggestions that all the Beatles remasters are suffering from the loudness war, I have not yet bought any of them. Doing some research, I found the following site, which has data on the dynamic range of many albums - <http://www.dr.loudness-war.info>

I was just wondering if you could clarify this situation one way or the other? If it indeed is the case that they are mullered, a high profile condemnation of such important albums would be the perfect way to stop the tide so that future reissues concentrate on sound quality.

Secondly, is there any chance you could somehow plug the site above? It relies on user submissions for the raw data, so the database would improve and be more useful if there were more people injecting CDs into it.

Richard

Hi Richard. Thanks for the info on the site, which I found very interesting. The site itself is a nice idea, if weakly executed. I could find no explanation

of where the Dynamic Range (DR) data came from, nor any introductory or informational material at all; it's a bit bare bones.

However, ferreting around I did see an allusion to an on-line dynamic range meter used to derive the figures published, at - <http://www.dynamicrangemetering.com>.

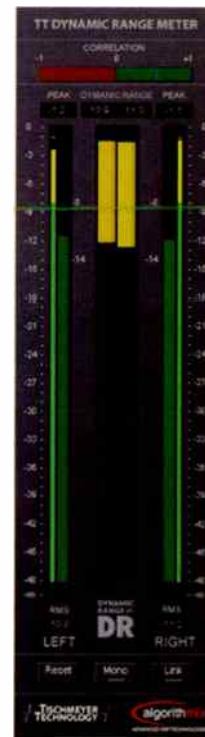
Started in January 2009 this site and its DR meter are new to me I have to admit. Readers interested in measuring the DR of a CD might like to take a look. My only concern here are the figures quoted. Numbers from 5-15 are used to describe dynamic range and one reviewer of the site, John Atkinson of Stereophile, thinks they are dB units. It seems unlikely to me that any track could have a DR of 5dB; it would barely be recognisable as music, but I stand to be corrected. The site example shows Peak-to-Mean values, mistakenly labelling them dynamic range. I did e-mail the site about this, but got no response. The meter seems to measure Peak-to-Mean also.

Peak-to-mean values are not Dynamic Range as it is usually understood: the range between maximum and minimum. Peak-to-Mean relates more to peak limiting and peak clipping.

When I covered this topic in our December 08 issue (p47) I measured 21dB Dynamic Range for an ordinary CD, and 44dB for a quality recording. So there's some discrepancy between my results, made with a Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser, and the on-line DR meter results, as you might expect. Anyone interested in making comparisons can use the free Audacity sound editor to measure DR and help sort this out.

Whatever, my own personal take on the Beatles CD re-masters is that I have never enjoyed the CD versions of any track that originally appeared on LP and long ago stopped bothering to buy such stuff. If the master tape was analogue and commercial release was on vinyl then it should be kept this way. I go along with the U.S. Library of Congress view that historical artefacts should not be tampered with and that doing so is damaging to their veracity. I don't think you could pass this argument in front of the UK music biz however and get any useful response.

Measurements I made recently show that LP has, in any case, superior performance to CD. CD's 16bit word is laced with quantisation distortion, one reason it sounds so hard and unnatural. So reissuing on CD is simply perpetuating an original



A Dynamic Range meter - or is it? It shows peak-to-mean values.

sin (as it were!). Re-mastered LPs are a better idea all round, especially if they are cut at half speed and pressed onto new, quiet virgin vinyl from decent stampers. **NK**

RARE BOX SET

I recently purchased a pair of vintage Yamaha NS890 speakers. They are in excellent condition. What I would like to know is where they stand in relation to the famous NS1000s, seeing as I was told when I bought them that they are the four-way version of the 1000s. The tweeter and the midrange look to be Beryllium. They sound very, very good considering my main speakers, up to that time, were ELAC 203.2 monitor type speakers which are also very good, but without the bass!

I am using a Consonance M100 Plus integrated valve amp with a max. output of 40 watts which seemed to be a struggle with the Elacs, but more than a match for the Yamahas, in fact a very good match for them.

Could you also tell me the best position for the Yamahas in my small to medium sized room, close to the wall or out into the room?

I have never had speakers this size or as heavy before. I have them on low (30cm) metal stands. I am using Kimber 8TC speaker cables with a Yamaha CDS-1000 CD player (Nordost Red Dawn interconnects), Project RPM-5 with Ortofon Salsa MC cartridge with Consonance PM2 moving coil phono stage (Chord Company Chameleon interconnects) and various locally made power chords and power filters.

I hope you can give me any info on these speakers, which I am now using as my main speakers as they have a beguiling sound that is hard to tear

away from and as good as any current speakers I heard.
thanks

**Daryl
Australia**

These are real rarities! I'd thought they were Japanese market-only speakers actually, but some obviously escaped the Land of the Rising Sun and made it down under! They are what Yamaha groaningly referred to as "tall boy" speakers; which is a sort of horrible Japanese-English way of saying 'column type'. But they only resemble column speakers as far as Japanese boxes of 1978 are



Yamaha NS890, with additional lower midrange cone driver, beneath the Beryllium dome.

concerned; by today's standards their 375x745x317mm (w x h x d) dimensions are like fat, squat, wide baffle retro boxes. They're also very 'period' for being of four-way closed box design; this is not how modern speakers are done! The driver line up comprised a 30mm Beryllium dome tweeter (2kHz-20kHz), 50mm Beryllium dome 'mid high' (2kHz-6kHz) driver, 120mm mid-bass lightweight paper cone (600Hz-2kHz) and a 30cm conical type pulp cone (20Hz to 2kHz). The 55 litre sealed particle board enclosure gave a claimed sensitivity of 92dB, with 80W input power maximum. You're right to say the tweeter is 'a la NS1000', but the 'mid high' driver is a smaller version of the NS1000M's, Beryllium of course. Then paper takes over with the next two drivers. Selling for Y98,000 in 1978, it was cheaper than the NS1000M, the 55L particleboard cabinet lighter. It was designed more for domestic use, with the 'Ms more of a studio tool. They're still excellent speakers, and very rare. Run them about 20cm from the rear wall, on

rigid frame type stands - and enjoy! **DP**

GREAT SHOW

As Supertramp said so many years ago, "Crisis? What crisis?" It was indeed difficult to see signs of the global recession at the National Audio Show in Whittlebury Hall. Valves and vinyl everywhere. Electrostatics and other huge box (and round!) speakers, with equally sized price tags in almost every room. A great show, including the HFW presentations.

I was especially heartened to hear that vinyl has moved on technically both from the cutting process and the quality of "quiet" vinyl used.

The icing on the cake was surely to hear the great Rick Wakeman live. I am not a particular Yes fan, being more Purple/Sabbath/Zep, but I was not going to miss this. And a wonderful comedian too. On the one hand we were in stitches with his anecdotes and the next minute we were close to tears with a moving story and musical piece about Chernobyl. Yet so few "music lovers" turned up. Pity.

**Manolis Koussaniotakis
Cyprus**

Ooh Manolis! Is that a sting in the tail? We discussed going to the concert (six of us at a hotel 15 miles away) but knackered from Friday set up and a long day Saturday the vote was to get to bed in order to cope with the next long day effectively. I well remember the popularity of the Yes album on release and sometimes play it now, so regret not being there. Glad you enjoyed it though.

NK

...AND AGAIN

My system is stuck in time but I am looking to update two components (at least). Rock/Excalibur (Mk2) with currently an Ortofon MC15SII (which was a stop-gap for your recommended MC25FL - and what a great cartridge that was until my 3yr old thought it was for scratching records), an EAR 834P MM/MC with volume control (again your recommendation but you have since relegated it to "woolly bass"), a Quad 405-II and ESL 57s with new treble panels from Quad Wiedergabe Germany and used, but checked bass (!) panels from them too.

The Ortofon has to be replaced. I am toying between Goldring, Dynavector, Ortofon and ZYX.

I was also wondering what current crop of lower cost amps (s/s and valve) would suit the 57s? Any used ones worth looking out for?

I was also wondering if an external power supply for my Rock turntable was



An obvious choice for Quads is a Quad II-forty valve amplifier, says NK

worthwhile?

**Manolis Koussaniotakis
Cyprus**

An obvious choice for your Quads is a Quad II-forty and as they have been around for some years you may find them second hand. Any good KT88 based valve amp suits the ESL-57s however, with their clean, modern sound and 35-40 Watts per channel.

I think you have to choose between an Ortofon Rondo Blue, an Audio Technica AT OC9 FLII and perhaps a Dynavector 10X. The Rondo is a class act, very smooth, if not as lively perhaps as the OC9 FLII. The Dynavector is lively, if not so couth by today's standards. **NK**

STEVEN'S GLEE

I have just finished reading the November issue and the article by Steven Green. His obvious glee at the possible switch from DAB to DAB+ is both worrying and annoying.

I should start by saying that I am not a full-on Audiophile. Your magazine was the only good thing to come out of my recent visit to the dentist. This, however, may give me a clearer vantage point than Steven from which to describe the possible outcome from dumping yet another Wunderkind.

The majority of today's consumers are not interested in CD, let alone SACD. They want quick, easy MP3 downloads and have little interest in pure sound. They do not live in your world of valve amps, electrostatic speakers, £25k CD players and exotic cartridges, the cost of which would feed the average family for a year!

The reason two thirds of the UK does not own a DAB radio is not that they doubt the quality or the coverage or any other perceived technical failing. It is because they have no interest in owning one. In the same way that thousands of people pay £500 on a football season ticket but thousands wouldn't go to watch a game if it was free.

Changing to yet another system will not increase the interest. It will decrease it further. Some of the 33% who bought into DAB will realise they spent too

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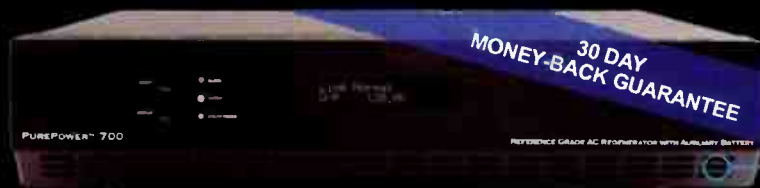
PurePower 1050

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Sujesh Pavithran, TheStar.com



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- 2100 Watts Peak

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* terms & conditions apply

much hard earned cash on what they believed was the radio of the future, only to have it reduced to a token service and then no service at all. They won't keep making that mistake.

Remember one crucial difference. You can continue to play your cherished vinyl, deleted CDs, old cassettes and even Betamax videos. But not your outdated radio. Switch it on... interference.

I am one of only three people in our office who own a DAB tuner. It works just fine. Two of us have already said we will not be buying a DAB+ radio if it goes that way. By the way, six people did not even know what we were talking about. So your third becomes a ninth. With the advent of "DAB+2. The Return" this will decrease again. Until, at the grand unveiling of "DAB+8.... This Time It's Personal" there will only be two of you there.

Hugh Mc

Sales are swinging to downloads, granted, but since MP3 and compressed formats are all that is available via the narrow channel of the internet at present, it does not prove quality is not an issue. Quality is an issue generally, from quality of finish on your car, to quality of your TV picture and quality of camera pictures. This is just one reason why DAB was unacceptable: it traded quality for quantity and - worse - that quality was both poor and outdated at introduction - and fixed in stone. The system was neither extensible, like DTS for example, nor software upgradeable, like Blu-ray. As quality was worse than the system it was designed to replace, I am not surprised people see no reason to buy DAB. And if they buy it in London, where I live, close to a transmitter no less (Alexandra Palace), they still won't hear DAB, because the transmitted signal is so weak there's as much "burbling mud" distortion as there is intelligible information.

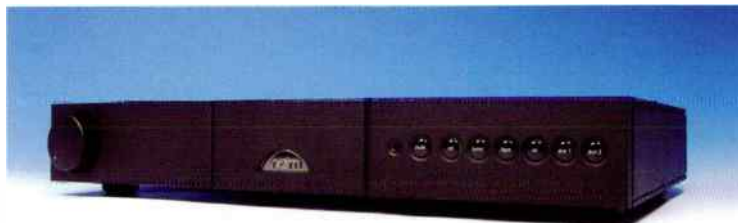
Two important points little appreciated are that for this step backward in transmission technology license fee payers will have to fork out hundreds of millions, for that is what installing the DAB network nationwide will cost. And as if all that was not enough it will almost certainly be sidelined into unused obscurity within the next few years by internet radio, at home, and possibly streamed though the mobile phone network to cars.

So Steven Green's "glee" hasn't much to do with it, even if it does annoy you. You might like to consider what the huge amount of money wasted on DAB could have done to

improve, say our hospitals, equipment for the armed forces to stop people being needlessly killed, etc, etc.

It is the feebleness of the decision making that lies behind all this that is infuriating. Neither the Government nor the BBC are either able or willing to defend this ongoing fiasco. It is one they could and should stop tomorrow, as the Germans have done. **NK**

Hear hear! I think Noel's just summed up the real tragedy of DAB; there could be upwards of a billion pounds spent on a new radio infrastructure that [a] the listeners



Naim's Nait XS has smooth treble and may please after a valve amplifier.

don't want [b] the broadcasters don't seem to want and [c] the people will soon find outdated. Just think of that money invested elsewhere, and all the good it could do. To add injury to insult, this profligate waste of money has an additional sting in the tail; it will (in theory) result in the obsolescence of millions of perfectly good radio receivers; the mass wholesale scrapping of an entire genre of consumer durable. This of course, is something we'll have to pay for. So we'll be paying the government to install something that's not as good as what we've got, that renders our better equipment redundant and that we'll have to pay to replace with inferior stock. Just what planet is this Government on? **DP**

GOING SOLID STATE

My present system is about six years old and comprises a Sugden Masterclass CD player and a pair of Ruark Solstice floorstanding speakers. The amp is an excellent valve unit but, for reasons which need not weary us here, has to be replaced with a solid-state amplifier. I would rather not spend more than around a grand on the replacement and have considered the new Leema, Naim and Sugden models off recent reviews.

At present I am using a Musical Fidelity X-A1 as the amp, as I have always liked its sweet, open sound, although it is lacking somewhat in the lower registers and I would like to address that. It does, however, have a pre-amp output so I could always simply

add a decent power amp to it (along the lines of a Quad 909, maybe) and to some extent this is my preferred direction.

I listen almost exclusively to jazz from the forties to mid-sixties (with all their attendant recording idiosyncrasies). Obviously the sound must be acoustically faithful to the recordings, have a good tonal balance and resonance and, above all, swing musically. So what think you, gentlemen, of my options?

Rod Bushell

I know of few exceptional power amplifiers Rod. NAD power amps do a good job at a low price and

might suit. Naims are a little on the expensive side, but a Naim Nait XS amplifier may also be to your taste. Both NAD and Naim don't do 'stingy' treble, a feature of their sound you will likely appreciate after valves. **NK**

The Quad 909 is a fine sounding affordable power amplifier; this would be my choice if you wanted to go the pre-power route. If it's an integrated you want, the Sugden Mysterio is the obvious choice; it's a very musical design. The Leema is slightly warmer and more expansive, but not quite as grippingly musical. Either would be most worthwhile investments. **DP**

GOLDEN GEAR

I have a hi-fi that has been built up from inherited and secondhand items that saw me happily through my student years but is now in desperate need of upgrading. However, like many in the current climate, I need to operate within a very tight budget.

Here is my current system: Systemdek HXE with acrylic platter, Rega RB300 arm, Nagaoka TS11, Arcam Alpha 5 + CD, Musical Fidelity A1, Mission 752 loudspeakers (original). Cables are Atlas Questor and Monster Z2 reference. My room is 12' by 21', with speakers firing across the short axis. CD and turntable take a fairly even share of source duties and my musical tastes are extremely wide!

My current budget for upgrades is around £600 (possibly more will be available later) and my thinking is

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that turntable, arm, CD player and speakers are being held back by the amplification and cartridge, so what would you suggest?

From digging through my back issues, I found that when the Audiolab 8000s was first reviewed it was found to work very well with the Mission 752s, does this still hold true or would I be better looking elsewhere? I am also assuming that whichever amplifier I go for will require a phono stage: would the Cambridge 640P suffice? Also which cartridge would you recommend and is it better spending £200 (approx) on the cartridge (i.e. Goldring G1042) or would I get a better return out of a cheaper cartridge (Ortofon 2m Red?) and fitting a Technoweight/wiring mods to the Rega?

As you can tell I am in a bit of quandry so your response will be greatly appreciated and followed to the letter!!

Paul Tuerena

Hi Paul - tricky, this. Your Musical Fidelity A1 is still a fine amplifier by modern standards, and you'll need at least £1,200 to properly upgrade it (Leema Pulse, Sugden Mysterio). To make matters 'worse', it's also exceptionally well matched to the Mission 752s. They are very efficient with their High Definition Aerogel mid/bass drivers, and suit the Musical Fidelity's spry sound. Actually, your sources are the main offenders. The Systemdek/Rega is good but £1,000 on a Michell GyroDec SE would product a dramatic upgrade in almost every respect. Likewise the Arcam Alpha would be substantially shamed by a modern Cyrus CD8 SE (£1,000). I'd save up your cash, and go for one of these two. **DP**

REHAB RELAPSE

Following years of successful rehabilitation, I experienced a relapse of my hi-fi addiction after hearing (and seeing) a pair of Sonus Faber Cremona Auditors at a local dealer's shop. They were well above my budget at the time, but 6 months later, when the original owner upgraded, I negotiated a deal with my partner. Using her feminine cunning she told me I was allowed to choose: cigarettes or speakers... Needless to say, I've quit smoking that day and purchased the Auditors (I think my partner wishes that I was still smoking, now that the house is full with hi-fi bits and pieces).

The Auditors are long gone from my main system (they do a fantastic job in the kitchen) and, inspired by your magazine and a local master-tweaker, I am now on the verge of completing a lovely sounding 'retro' system. It includes a pair of Quad ESL57s (tweaked, on



Garrard 301 - bass with pace, but needs a good arm.

custom-made stands), refurbished Radford STA25, Audio Innovations P2 phono stage, L1 preamplifier (I alternate the latter with a Creek OBH22) and a souped-up Esoteric P - 500 transport with matching D - 500 DAC.

To complete this set up I have recently acquired a Garrard 301 (in a sturdy hardwood plinth) and a Hadcock GH228 tone arm (early model; rewired).

Cables are a mixture of Goertz Alpha Core (speaker cables), high purity silver/copper interconnects and improved mains cables. The whole set up is supported on a Lovan stand with Mikado isolation cones. With its refurbished components, new tubes and a careful set up, I find this system to be miles ahead in terms of musicality and sheer enjoyment compared to my previous 'up-to-date' system.

The last piece of the puzzle is choosing the cartridge to go with this system. I'm currently using an ageing Denon DL-305 (the previous owner advised me it was professionally re-tipped with a parabolic tip). The Denon does the job, but I suspect it lets the side down in terms of resolution and dynamics. As my budget is limited at present to \$A800.00, do you think I'll be better off saving for a top-notch MC cartridge in the future, or would I gain significantly from purchasing a modern, entry-level MC cartridge (reading your magazine for few years now, I had the AT OC9ML II in mind)? I listen mainly to Jazz, Classical and pop/soft rock music.

**Roel Plaves
Adelaide,
South Australia**

I was never a Hadcock fan and suggest you try a Rega RB301. It leaves all else behind at the price. Your Garrard 301, if in good condition, deserves and arm a little less flacid and noncommittal sounding than the Hadcock. Both the Garrard and Rega have real, man sized bass, with breathless pace and are a symbiotic combination.

There are few budget MCs I feel worthy of recommendation,

the Audio Technica OC9 MLII and Ortofon Rondo Red or Blue being about it. Otherwise, the first decent MC, price wise, is the Ortofon Cadenza Blue. This really does showcase the strengths of a good MC, but it isn't cheap at around £1000. Both the Goldring and Audio Technica cost half as much. **NK**

VIEWS OF THE WORLD

I have some sympathy for the dilemma posed for you in the November issue by the question from Bart of Belgium, when he asked why we never saw straight comparisons between DIY designs and similarly priced commercial designs. The risk taken by a DIY enthusiast is that he'll spend money and put a lot of effort into building something that will fall short of a commercial design; and of course commercial manufacturers will be happy to leave him in fear of that risk.

Conversely, a commercial manufacturer, on whom you are reliant in difficult times for advertising revenue, would hardly be amused to see his product up against one of your own designs, and being slaughtered by it for quality. This is not just about the revenue. You'd be open to all sorts of accusations of self interest.

In short, even if you have some brilliant designs on offer, the dilemma means you can't actually promote them properly, even if you hive off marketing of the related kits to a separate company. This is the way the world works.

Loudspeakers are funny things, and after a hobby that has already sustained me for over forty years, I've drawn the conclusion that not many designs really work - they don't really sing, they don't really make every new and unfamiliar piece of music an excitement to hear, turning a love of music into a journey of discovery which constantly enriches our lives. Years ago, Malcolm Jones put a design into the old HFNR called the Tabor, and I upgraded to it from my Wharfedale Unit 3s. My response to Bart: they sang; they made almost anything commercial at the time sound just a little less liquid by comparison, even at a multiple of what they cost. But HFNR could not have told its readers that. When my Tabors died one night from an overdose of watts - I wasn't there to protect them - I was living overseas without a workshop, and had to replace them with a vastly more expensive commercial design.

By the same token I suspect that anyone with a budget of £2500 to spend on an amplifier and speakers - not an unreasonable sum today, even in a recession - would be bonkers to buy anything other than the World

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Designs WD88VA and the WD25T EX speakers. But you can't tell them that, and I suspect World Designs' turnover is not what it should be.

Peter Comeau's tantalising last article on the WD25T promised a full review in the magazine, but I suspect Peter's move to IAG was one reason why it never materialised. With his



WD25Tv2 – Peter Comeau's last World Design loudspeaker before going to China (see p70). Will the story continue?

energy gone from WD, I note that the advertisement in the magazine has not been updated to reflect the development of the "WD25Tv.2 EX", and though you can apparently buy the ingredients from the website, the blurb does not go beyond the XL version. The great irony, of course, is that WD will build these things for you, and even at the extra £500 you'd probably have to spend twice as much in total to get anything half as good. And as if we needed any reassurance, reviews of the new Wharfedales voiced by Peter are proof of his ability to offer us a design that really "works".

And so to digital. I share Noel Keywood's disappointment about where we have got to with digital music. Back in the 1970s I remember excited discussions about the digital future. A University friend working with the BBC described how they had sampled music and recorded it onto tape. They also stuck a time reference on the tape, which meant that they could file a flat on the capstan and still get no wow and flutter – they actually did it. Then Sony's PCM F-1 arrived in 1981, which sampled at just under 44.1 kHz, with a depth of 14 bits, and it sounded pretty good – somewhere I still have some analogue cassettes derived from PCM F-1 live recordings. I eagerly awaited the advent of CDs.

But when they arrived, to my ears, they just didn't "work". It wasn't the

brittle brightness. Intuitively I felt it was something to do with the effect on the fourth dimension of chopping music up into little bits. It felt like the music was being slotted back into a piece of real time that wasn't quite consistent with the piece of real time it had come from. Later, I learned that this was called jitter, and drew the conclusion that for some

reason probably related to its survival, the human animal is extraordinarily sensitive to distortions of the dimension of time. Analogue worked because any distortion of time was internally consistent. Digital didn't because there were constant little inconsistent distortions. This slightly wacky view was reinforced when I came across the notion of putting a proper clock into my Marantz CD-63, and installed an Audiodom superclock. This did seem to address the underlying artificial quality of CDs; but you still had the apparent limitations of a 44.1 kHz sampling frequency and 16 bit depth.

I reasoned that with the advent of 24bit/196kHz or even 192kHz recordings, the ability to play WAV or FLAC files

through a decent system (with a proper clock) would finally enable me to archive my vinyl without loss of quality, and thereafter download commercial WAV files to store on a string of hard drives. So, like Noel, I'm a bit bewildered that it hasn't worked out that way.

Yet the solutions are out there. All the genius of the PCM F-1 has been packed into a little box called the Sony MZ-RH1, which has cropped up in your pages a couple of times recently. The memory capacity is small, by today's standards (but exchangeable), and the interface isn't brilliant, but you can hook it up to the tape loop of your amplifier and record vinyl, or analogue FM.

Whether you use WAV files or the latest version of Sony's ATRAC codec, it's pretty good. You can of course also rip your CDs onto it, to WAV, ATRAC or MP3 files. This little box sings, and sustains me on long haul flights well beyond the range of an iPod's ability to induce ear fatigue. It's such a shame that Sony have achieved this with a virtually defunct storage medium and a minority interest codec. The thing is, it's not in the sampling rate or the bit depth, it's in the execution. Those glorious FM broadcasts we've been listening to for years were actually squirted to the transmitters as 13 bit 32kHz digital. In the MZ-RH1, Sony have got the execution right, and I'd say to anyone with analogue music they want to archive: rush out and get one of these things before they

discontinue them, and you might even find it replacing your iPod on journeys. It's an awful lot easier than the Audigy/M-audio/Terratec routes.

What does all this tell us? Probably that there's nothing inherently wrong with chopping up music provided you put it back properly. The BBC managed it somehow with their 13 bit/32kHz material. Despite Noel's despair, the promise of buying a perfect copy of a 24/96 or 24/192 studio master – and even of graduating to greater bit depths – is still out there (despite the copyright challenges). The one company that could fix all this nonsense – with its technological heritage and back catalogue – is Sony, if it had the will. But no one's produced the relatively simple box that converts analogue sound, rips upsamples of CDs and allows us to download and store 24/96 and 24/192 WAVs (it's actually not much more than an RDR-HXD series with a proper audio section).

There's still a "compression" mentality out there, which dates back to when memory was limited and expensive. The technology companies are mesmerised by video, and the Web – and who can blame them, as that's where the demand is. But at some point consumers may wake up to the disparity between their quest for ever more "HD" video and the quality of their daily audio, and then – who knows – Noel and the rest of us will be able to witness that digital promise we first glimpsed in the 1970s.

Charles Haswell

Hi Charles. You are – sadly – right about political issues with World Design. Many manufacturers have eyed it with suspicion and voiced concerns about it being "unfair" competition. World Design (originally World Audio Design) started by accident, in response to reader requests for a Mullard 5.20 amplifier kit. We were overwhelmed with orders and then found the amplifier really needed re-designing (to K5881). We were, all of a sudden, in the DIY business! We were not in ordinary commercial manufacturing nor ever set out with any intent to be so.

Not everyone saw it like this, however; a sale made by us was a sale lost to them, they felt. It was unfair because we seemed to be promoting our own products, and this is a sensitive point. But as you have found out, ultimately, DIY is the only recourse, and an end in itself for those with the skills.

Hi-Fi World did not invent DIY, we simply revitalised a long ignored interest. DIY has since become a mainstream activity, mainly on the



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Another good reason to build a valve amp, according to diyAudio.com. Is this why DIY will never die?

internet via forums, including the WD forum and the diyAudio forum (115,000 members no less!). It's a great hobby interest, one that's both engaging and very satisfying, as you have found. What a shame that manufacturers and most magazines prefer to ignore it.

I asked two people involved in studio recording why modern digital sounded so bad and both blamed mixing desks, especially their mic. inputs. In other words they were saying it was down to sloppy studio practices, not the digital coding schemes. I'm not quite convinced, but I would like to think 24/192 could deliver the best sound I have ever heard, which came from a high speed analogue master tape. **NK**

Thank you for your kind compliments on the World Designs WD88VA and WD25TEX products. They certainly offer an interesting alternative to amplifiers and speakers that you can normally buy on the commercial market.

Actually my energy hasn't completely gone from WD! Chris, my manager at World Designs, and I correspond about a number of matters, including new designs, and I do visit the UK office frequently. Perhaps when I've settled down more at IAG I can start finding some spare time to turn towards publishing articles in Hi-Fi World again!

In the meantime Chris is happy to accommodate visitors to the World Designs office who wish to hear the WD products. So you don't have to 'buy in the dark' so to speak and can make comparisons with anything else you have heard.

And I'm always happy to make my speaker designs 'sing', as you put it, as surely that is the real purpose of music reproducing equipment?

Peter Comeau

SOURCE DISTRESS

I have recently built the World Design VA88 power amp, Phono 3 MM/MC

and Pre 3, all with upgraded components, which replaced a Dino phono stage and MVL A2+ amp.

The front end is a Linn LP12, Serial Number 037862, that has been with me since the early 80s (updated with Circus and Origin

Live DC motor). Arm is a Hadcock 228 Super, one of the early arms from the late George Hadcock, (circa 1979) with a Music Maker Mk3 cartridge. Speakers are World Audio Design KLS 9. Cables and interconnects are all quite adequate.

The addition of the valve amplification made an enormous improvement to the sound, leading me to many late nights playing just one more LP. I particularly value the detail, space and emotion that this lot provides. However, it has now made me wonder if improvements could be made to the front end, so I feel that perhaps an upgrade to the arm, cartridge and possibly even the deck may be required.

I like the music that the Hadcock (old as it is) with the Music Maker produces, it is lyrical and beguiling but may lack some detail, bass tightness and extension, possibly due to the arm. It does however, seem to suit the Linn well and I am certainly used to setting up this arm.



Audax HDA bass/midrange unit of KLS9 gives great sound. Don't scrap 'em.

The KLS9s have managed to sound better and better with each upgrade to other components so I was not thinking of replacing them unless you really think that it is necessary,

I had thought of putting an Origin Live Encounter on the Linn using the

Music Maker for the time being, then perhaps adding an Ortofon Cadenza at a later date. However, is the Encounter a match for the Linn? Or should I bite the bullet and change the Linn for a Michelle Orbe with Origin Live Encounter, using the Music Maker for now. You may have other suggestions for arms to put on the Linn.

I am reluctant to go via the Linn Keell/Radikal route as I feel that Linn are "extracting the urine" with the price they are charging for this.

My music room, which is dedicated to the hi-fi system, measures 3.05 meters by 4.55 into the bay window, and 2.56 high, with curtains, soft furnishings and shelving placed to improve the overall sound.

I use a Moth record cleaning machine to keep 1000+ LPs in as good condition as I can. These range through rock, folk and classical. I do have a CD player and tuner but these are secondary to LP.

The budget for these improvements is up to £2500 but I could at a pinch stretch to £4000. I look forward to receiving your wisdom on these questions.

Thanks for a first rate magazine
Robin H Wright

Hi Robin. I agree with you that the arm and cartridge need changing and David can say more about Linn mods, as I use a Garrard and always have, so am no Linn expert. I recommend an Ortofon Cadenza cartridge, the best model you can afford.

Do keep those KLS9s. I have a pair and enjoy them. The Audax High Definition Aerogel (HDA) bass/mid unit is superb and you will find little to match its neutral tone even now. The cabinet goes low; only the tweeter could be sweeter, but it is still a good one. Use external crossover networks, in plastic or aluminium cases. The KLS9 is sensitive and has an even impedance, so it gets the best from valve amps, including your excellent World Designs VA88. That's a very civilised and natural sounding system you will not easily improve upon. Best to tweak it, using better valves and special components. **NK**

Hi Robin - the crux of the matter is how happy you are with your Linn. If you love what it does, I'd counsel a set up, a new arm (Audio Origami PU7, which is a peach on an LP12) and a new cartridge (Lyra Dorian, Ortofon Cadenza Blue). The OL arms don't work famously well on Linns, I have found. They're not at all bad on LP12s, but not quite a match made in heaven. The place where I've enjoyed OL arms most is on a

Michell Orbe; that and an Encounter are a truly lovely combo. The result is an altogether tighter, tauter and more solid, master tape-like presentation via the Michell/OL combo, but you won't quite get that infectious Sondek swing. The SME Series IV is a gorgeous pick up arm, but to my ears sounds a little too matter of fact on an Orbe, whereas Origin Lives simply boogie, making this the most palatable for someone 'switching' from an LP12. **DP**

TIP OFF

My system built over the last ten years comprises a Townshend Rock Reference turntable with Excalibur 2 tonearm (van den hul silver wired), Reson Mica cartridge, Sugden A21 (1995 model), Trichord Diablo phonostage, Castle Conway 3 loudspeakers and Marantz DR17 CD recorder/player. The connection from turntable to phonostage is Chord Chameleon interconnect. Given the quality of the front end, I am somewhat disappointed by the sound which is tiring after an hour or so and whilst the turntable has more detail and air than the Marantz it can sound harsh on some recordings. I feel the Rock should be way ahead and it's not. I'm not sure whether the problem lies with my cartridge (would a moving coil be better?), phonostage which is very full on (would a valve phonostage such as the Eastern Electric or Icon Audio be better?), Excalibur Arm (not seen much written on these - how good an arm is it - would an Origin Live Illustrious make a significant difference?), or is the Sugden/Conway combination not a good match?

I've also thought of replacing the Rock's AC motor to an Origin Live DC one as it takes several revolutions to get up to speed. I'm reluctant to sell the Rock as I love its unusual design. Any ideas on my best way forward?

**Trevor
Surrey**

I have suffered similar results from a silver wired arm, feeling it suited older style moving magnet cartridges like Shures (M97 etc) only. I do not know the Reson Mica, which is a tweaked Goldring I believe, but you may be hearing Goldring 1042 explicit treble through silver wire and a phono stage that is good, but not especially forgiving. The quick and dirty fix is to buy a Shure M97XE, a great tracker and a smooth, warm and slightly opaque "sound of the 70s" cartridge for just £100. An Icon Audio PS1.2 phono stage would help too, but not a Minimax, with its brighter sound. David will say more! **NK**

Yep; I'd say the Mica is the root cause of the problem; it's a little crude and

hard by today's standards. The Rock is of course capable of superb results, so the best thing to do is to buy a modern MC for it; I'd counsel the Ortofon Cadenza Bronze or AT OC9 MLII for this job, allied to an Icon Audio PS1.2. **DP**

GAINSAY

Perhaps if you have a moment you could answer the following.

I noticed in a recent review of a loudspeaker in your magazine that you pair the NuForce Ref. 9 V2 SE with a Music First Passive Preamp.

On the NuForce blog carried in the Audiocircle sites I ran across a note from Jason at NF to the effect that the company does not recommend the use of passive preamps with their products. I guess that you have a different opinion. Would you mind throwing some light on the question?

**Prof. E.M. Swiderski
Switzerland**

The MF Audio Passive Preamplifier I have used with the NuForces is not a simple 50k Ohm potentiometer in a fancy box (which sums up most passives). Rather, it is a transformer design, so it does actually have gain (up to 6dB). As it happens, I use the NuForce Ref 9 SEs at the 0dB setting (i.e. no gain) with the MF, as I find it sounds best. Indeed, I've found they're a super combination; the MF Audio outperforms the recommended matching NuForce P9 preamplifier, in my view. **DP**

BIG BOTTOM!

Thanks for a still excellent magazine, I have been a reader for well over 5 years now and whilst not a big fan of the PC stuff, readily acknowledge the increasing influence it is having on the market. I was pleased to see the great review of the Auranote Premier and the Audiosmile speakers, what a boost for "partner acceptable" hi-fi!!

I have seen reviews of this little music centre with some amazing speakers on the front of it in the 'States, all of which have been mightily impressive!

On this subject, much as I love the little Kensais, if one did wish for some more "oomph" what would you suggest as a suitable sub woofer?

I also have a few requests for future articles, one of which follows on from the increasing interest in Direct Drive decks, of which there are a plethora on ebay, some look fab, some look gruesome, so maybe a "dos and dont's of Direct Drive"?

I know a few of the good Japanese ones, but there are a great deal around. Any advice would be greatly appreciated methinks!!

Also, everyone knows how much the mains can have affect sound quality, so why not review a system that cuts all this out? I know Red Wine do battery amps, and the French firm Amazon (no not THAT one!!) do very good turntables, some of which are battery powered, so I think that would be of interest to many readers.

Keep up the good work!!!

David Prior

There are a number of decent subs out there; we still tend to prefer the RELs (the R205 being a good start for a smallish room). Ultimately though, you should run the Kensais with a chunky amp and position them right next to a real wall. This done, you'll get quite surprising bass for the size of the speaker; subwoofers can often cause more problems than they solve, so beware!

I'll certainly put my thinking cap on regarding your suggestion of a guide to good direct drives, David, although the abridged version reads thus, "buy a Technics SL1200"! There are many rubbishy Japanese DDs out there, and the few that are excellent have patchy spares support - so the SL1200 is the obvious, reliable, 'quick fix'. You can do better, but you have to spend a lot of money, and do a lot of fiddling! **DP**

HIGH FIDELITY

In the October edition, Noel Keywood wrote about his belief that digital audio, high res or not, may never surpass analogue.

I have also experimented with high res digital and also found it ultimately lacking when compared to analogue. Then I remembered that one of my favourite LPs was actually recorded digitally at 16bit 44k in 1986.

It's a version of Otello conducted by Lorin Maazel sung by Placido Domingo on EMI. I was lucky enough to meet the recording engineer, Tony Faulkner, at last year's London Hi-Fi Show and asked him why the vinyl version sounds so much better than the CD version. He thought it was either that my system didn't handle digital well or that the mastering engineer who cut the record had adjusted the sound to make it more appealing.

I'm not sure if I agree with these answers and would be grateful if you can give me/find the definitive answer. It might be the answer to finally hearing beautiful natural sound on CD!

Rex Pointon

Hi Rex. I am not able to provide any definitive reason. What Tony Faulkner said is correct and, additionally the master tape sources can differ. LP is often derived from an equalised

cutting master on which treble is lifted to compensate for stylus tracing loss. Sometimes "travelling masters" are badly derived and one of these may have been used for CD, but not for the LP.

Also, LP has a distinctive sound due to its use of RIAA pre-emphasis during recording and de-emphasis during replay. The replay characteristic makes surface noise 'warm' and lowers replay distortion by diminishing upper harmonics. If you try listening to LP without RIAA it is quite unpleasant - a nasty, spitty sound! So LP has its own sound too and this may well influence matters. I find digital recordings 'less unpleasant' on LP, if you see what I mean, but often still unpleasant. **NK**

SHOWING UP

Having opened the latest copy of the magazine, I enjoyed the pictures of the Whittlebury Hall show (although you didn't have pictures of the Cabasse La Sphere - what a stunning looking and sounding speaker. The other half didn't seem to appreciate the idea of selling the house to buy a pair - I can't work out why!). I hope you've received a lot of positive feedback from the show, and if you haven't, I personally think you should have. Compared to Heathrow, the venue was far more pleasant, car parking was excellent and coming from North East London, the venue was actually easier to get to than Heathrow! I suspect the attendees travelling from the Midlands and further North will also thank you for making their journey less troublesome, and feel the show should become one of the hi-fi highlights every year. Congratulations.

Secondly, I wrote a while ago about my luck in being given a Garrard 401, and since then I've been agonising over what to do with it. Originally I'd thought of putting a slate plinth under it as my local stone mason could provide a twin deck plinth for £200. However, I was concerned about the possibly cold clinical sound this could provide, and as I want to get a clean but warm sound I've bought some top quality 18mm birch ply and am currently in the process of using 6 pieces from this to make a 108mm deep birch ply plinth (which also carries favour with the other half (an important point!)).

Since the show, I have also decided that I will get the deck serviced by Loricraft, purchase a Roksan Nima arm and Ortofon 2M Black cartridge. Ideally I'd like to also get an Icon Audio PS3 phono stage but suspect this will be beyond my budget so will have to settle for a PS1.

As I said earlier, I'm looking for a clean sound, but not a coldly clinical one. I'd be most interested to hear your



Garrard 401 in a slate plinth - sounds good and looks good.

thoughts on the combination I've chosen, and whether you think it will match my expectations.

The rest of my system is Micromega Dual CD 2.1 transport into Musical Fidelity Tri Vista DAC, Musical Fidelity CR3 pre amp and CR300 power amp into Totem Audio Arro speakers with Supra Ply cables and I am completely happy with the sound of the CD side of my system as it currently stands.

Lastly - what are your thoughts about the acoustic difference that different materials of manufacture make? I'm thinking about the use of carbon fibre against metal against wood (of different types) in the construction of tone arms, or wood (again, of different types) versus slate etc for plinths. As you're a magazine that caters for the DIY hi-fi enthusiast, would you consider producing articles using your scientific measuring instruments (and the best instrument of all, your ears, of course!) comparing the different materials?

Phil Cowling

Hi Phil. Glad you enjoyed the Whittlebury Show; we certainly did and hope to be back again next year. It was not organised by us however.

Your choice of components is fine, including the phono stage. I would not obsess too much about materials. They do affect the sound, but you have to accept limits and influences as part of hi-fi life: we are far from perfection.

Different materials will affect sound quality but I cannot quite see us measuring such phenomena. Let's put it down to part of the fun of DIY. Good luck with the Garrard; I am sure you will like it. **NK**

STAGED UPGRADE

I've recently borrowed a Naim XS amplifier as a replacement for my ageing Linn LK1/LK100. My CD player is a Naim CD 5X with Flatcap, and the improvement in the sound of my CDs was instantly noticeable. However, I then listened to my LP12/Ittock/Lyra

Lydian via a Naim Stageline, and was unconvinced. Vinyl is my main source, and if I'm to buy the XS I will need a phono stage. Is there anything out there for under £400 which will give me as involving a sound as my LK1, or should I be looking at a Majik integrated? Is the only, and rather inconvenient answer to play the Stageline through the Flatcap and uncouple it and plug in the 5X when I want to listen to CDs?

Alan Thorn

I can't say why you were unconvinced by the Stageline, as it's a very decent product. I suspect when it's run in and your deck 'bedded in' with its new amplifier, things should get better. If not, it's worth saving up for an A.N.T. Audio Kora 3T phono stage; this should easily be better than in your Linn LK1. **DP**

BRING ME CLOSER

Your correspondent Zap raises an interesting question about the comparison between hi-fi equipment, particularly high-end equipment, and the "original sound", arguing that the higher the 'fi' the more alike it should all sound.

This reminds me that the advertising strapline for Quad equipment used to be "the closest approach to the original sound". But personally, I don't think that is what hi-fi is about at all.



"For the closest approach to the original sound" - a memorable Quad slogan, but is this what we really want, asks Tony Cantlay?

Firstly, a recording mike has to be placed somewhere, often very close to the source it is recording. This in no sense gives a result anything like the experience of sitting in a real live concert hall (my own preference is for classical music). Indeed, even within a real concert hall, where one sits can make a huge difference. Last week I sat in the very last row of London's Wigmore Hall for a chamber concert by the Nash Ensemble, rather to my annoyance as I prefer to be nearer the front and see what is going on! To my surprise, all my neighbours had made a point of specifically booking seats in that row, on the ground that it sounded better! Acoustics have a part to play in original playing venues, just as much as they do in the home listening room.

And it is arguable that we don't want the original sound. The whole point of attending a live concert is to get the excitement of going to a show. This is partly based on seeing rather than just hearing the musicians, and partly on the effort one has had to make to get there - I think we derive pleasure from an experience in proportion to the effort we put in to achieve it.

Finally, not everything about hearing a real live experience is good. What about the coughing, shuffling, and rustling of sweet papers? And what about the musicians making mistakes?

So I would argue that the job of a hi-fi system is to give the listener an enjoyable home listening experience, in terms of offering only a facsimile, of one take on the original sound, less the extraneous factors which spoil a live concert. In particular, I think a hi-fi system needs if possible to offer not the same, but more excitement and presence than the original, to compensate for everything that is missing when one is listening at home. Possibly listening at home would sound better if we got dressed up, walked round the block, and bought a ticket. But I have never tried this.

The dreaded word psycho-acoustics raises its complicated head, but I will leave that to others.

Tany Cantlay

Yes, I'm not sure I want to come back in another life as a microphone. Being bellowed at must be quite painful. It isn't how we would normally listen to a singer, from 6in away, so it isn't a very natural take even to begin with. But as studio performances are always burnished by a wide range of effects, to add depth to vocals and what have you, as you say the "Closest approach to the original sound" always was a bit



"Should I buy a quality CD player for the Martin Logan Summit loudspeakers?" asks Mark Ferrier.

contentious if you started to prod the idea. But as a slogan it sounds good and got Quad's message across elegantly. **NK**

MOVING STORY

I am moving to a new house in the next few weeks that has been in the making for about 3 years ... arrgggh.

I used to be a very simple guy whose musical delivery requirements have remained fairly steady since the late 1970s when I purchased a set of Gale 'speakers powered by a Quad amp and preamp and a Rega turntable. In the late 70s it was my only possession except for 1974 Alfa Spider, a bed and a chair to sit in while listening to my beloved Gales.

So fast forward to 2009. The Gales, amazingly, still sound good and the Quad stuff still works. The Rega was replaced by an Arcam 7 CD player a few years back. But of course in preparation for the move it is time for a change ... I now want two systems:

1. One system for my main living room to listen to great music intently/critically of all types. Mostly classical during the day and jazz at night but not always and sometimes rock n roll is on the menu too. I have purchased recently and replaced my above system with Martin Logan Summits powered by a Sanders Electrostatic amp and Parasound JC2 preamp. My CD player, the Arcam 7 above, doesn't

read Super Audio CDs (I don't have many SACDs but they are certainly my best sounding CD recordings), misbehaves regularly and probably needs to be looked at. So how to best deliver CD quality to this set-up?

A second system that is an integrated one. Many of the rooms in the new house have Boston Acoustics ceiling speakers. These speakers are tied into a 'whole house' system being set-up now by a 'smart wiring' guy. For this system there are various components that allow for multi-zone, multi source, delivery of digital TV's, radio, digital sound, security cameras, lighting, etc. — you know, the works. All the bits for this type of system have been ordered (except for the amps) and are about to be installed.

For a guy who had always asked "when is the last time you heard a quality orchestra on your ceiling" and "why would I want sound all over my house", I certainly have fallen (my own fault) into a wiring quagmire of digital stuff!

So my dilemma now is how to deliver quality digital files to my Martin Logans and how to take advantage of the multi-zone, multi-source aspect of the 'total house system'? Should I buy a quality CD player for the Martin Logans and utilize a digital server for the other system. Or, can I just have one server delivering to both systems? Could the Sanders and the Parasound do double duty as well? I guess I don't fully understand how the two systems could be integrated. Ideally, if the sound was similar, I would prefer the convenience of the media server to a CD player - but only if the sound quality doesn't suffer too much. With media servers now being manufactured to store music, photos and DVD's/Blue Rays, maybe this is an obvious choice? It just seems a little excessive to me to store DVD movies (I don't own one). I hardly need more reasons to sit in front of a TV even though I have three in the house. I'm a sad case.

Maybe I should stay where I am with my two channel system, dig out my vinyl and get the latest Linn turntable?

The furniture gets delivered in a few weeks, the piano is getting moved - the big move has begun. I can't go back to a simpler time now unfortunately.

Mark Ferrier

Hi Mark - I think it's got to be a Linn DS system, hasn't it? A central Network Attached Storage Device (possibly a RipNAS), controlled by the Linn GUI and streaming music to any number of Linn Sneaky DS



You need a Linn DS system, David says to Mark Ferrier.

boxes (one per room you need music in), will give you true high quality multiroom. You can control the whole lot from iPod Touches in each room. You can of course retain your existing amps and/or speakers, as the Sneaky provides a line output that's fed into the auxiliary input of the amp. Alternatively, the Sneaky has a low power stereo amp built in, that's excellent for second rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc. **DP**

CHI FI WORLD

The world of hi-fi is as we all know is very diverse these days. While I do think that Hi-Fi World is good at displaying this in your tests and features there is however one area in which I feel your focus is lacking, namely that of the very cheapest Chinese hi-fi. I'm not talking Cayin or Jungson here but rather all those more or less obscure brands popping up on ebay etc. A couple of years ago I purchased a Yaqin MS12B pre/RIAA and a Yaqin MC100B intergrated/poweramp and I feel they are a pretty good match for my Yamaha NS1000Ms at a very low price! Wouldn't it be interesting to explore this "niche within the hi-fi niche"? It has



Yaqin valve amp. with "300W power supply". It uses EL34s in push-pull, so will deliver 30Watts at most. Available for £299 - from China direct.

to my knowledge remained untouched by the hi-fi press. If you can review a £20 Tesco midi system surely a obscure Chinese tube amp can't be off limits!

**Niels Østergaard
Denmark**

Er, yes it can be. We usually only cover items for which there is some protection under UK consumer laws, which I suspect are much like those of other European countries. This means we usually do not review or actively promote products not handled by a UK importer, which means cheap Chinese product on ebay. It may well work, some of it well perhaps, but you

buy at your own risk. **NK**

Hi Niels, well we've done a few in our time, and I have to say we haven't found them good quality at all. In addition to this, for family reasons I regularly visit Beijing and never miss an opportunity to visit the hi-fi shops and audition all the latest wonder ultra-cheapo brands you see on eBay, etc. Suffice to say, even some salesmen, in a gloriously off-message Chinese sort of way, have described them as "rubbish" to me. And this description is borne out by a quick listen. Heaven only knows what noise you're getting through your Yamahas! So, to be honest I'm not desperate to try them, formally in the magazine at least, but maybe we should do so, simply to put my thoughts and experiences to date 'on record'. **DP**

TOP DECK

I have a modified Technics SL-1200 MK2 with a fully modded Origin Live OL1/RB250 arm (new end stub/counterweight, internal rewiring, external rewiring and slotted armtube), Isonoe feet, Denon DL304 low output moving coil cartridge (tracking at the recommended tracking force of 1.2g), Linn Linto phono stage (purchased second hand from an authorised Linn dealer via eBay), Audiolab 8000Q pre-amp (the latest Chinese-made version) and a modified and upgraded QUAD 405-2 power amp (upgraded op amps, capacitors, etc.) and KEF RDM2 speakers.

Having got rid of my CD player a couple of years ago (a Cyrus DAD7), all my digital music now comes via Apple Lossless

audio files played by iTunes running on a PC. Digital output is via a USB connection to a Sony PCLK-MN10 which then feeds an optical digital signal to my Sony MDS-JA20ES minidisc player which I use as a DAC.

I also have a Sansui TU-9900 tuner and a Kenwood KT-7020 tuner. The two tuners both sound superb and well-balanced tonally as does my computer audio via the Sony PCLK-MN10 and MDS-JA20ES set up.

The problem is that I find vinyl replay rather light-weight in the bass department compared to the same turntable and arm with a Goldring 1012GX that I was using previously with a Cambridge Azur 640P phono stage (although in other respects the sound is improved). I have experimented with different tracking forces but increasing it to the recommended maximum of 1.4g just rolls off the treble without making a significant improvement to the bass. A lower tracking force makes matters worse.

I recently asked for advice from a dealer and he advised me to change the arm to a SME 309. This seems a bit drastic to me especially when both the SL-1200 MK2 and the modded RB250 are both supposed to have strong bass performance. I feel that the Denon DL304 is probably to blame – what do you think and can you recommend a more compatible MC cartridge? I don't want to pay silly money (about £500 max.). Your advice will be greatly appreciated.

Gordon Hamilton

Well the problem is that the Goldring had a 'fruitier' bass than your Denon, and it made a synergistic match with your otherwise rather dry and bass-light system. The Denon, which is perhaps a tad lighter low down, has suddenly corrected the system. Actually, I'd try a change of turntable mat before anything else. In this particular case, Sound Dead Steel's Isoplatmat should work a treat, offering a fuller, smoother and more silky sound to the stock Technics. Also, add an Audiophile Furniture Base isolation platform, which the SL1200 seems to love. Then come back to me for upgrading advice; we'll have that Audiolab 8000Q in the classifieds in no time!

DP

I am uncertain about modded Rega arms, but as you say a basic RB250 will give very good bass, as you have found in the past with a Goldring 1012GX. The Denon tracking at 1.2gms is a little bizarre; MCs don't track well at such low downforces. The Goldring Legacy MC is a possibility I believe. **NK**

New Music



Noel Keywood finds Monitor Audio's new RX8 loudspeaker a thoroughly modern mover...

If you are looking for an affordable floorstander that delivers the goods in a very obvious way, then look no further. Monitor Audio's new Silver RX8 costs just £1,000 – no

fortune for a good hi-fi loudspeaker – and will bring a big smile to most faces. Yes, it even did to mine! This is a loudspeaker that hardly puts a foot wrong, and is more obvious in what it does than the floodlights at

Wembley Stadium. But it's also spot on engineering wise: a few Watts into the RX8 will have your cat straight out of the room!

Monitor Audio do a great job with finish and presentation so this

weighty floorstander comes with a separate plinth to aid stability, adjustable floor spikes or polymer pads, and a single foam port bung. You can leave its shiny, dimpled alloy cones on display to intrigue onlookers or hide them behind a grill cloth for an altogether more discreet appearance. In this case the attractively veneered cabinets with smooth rounded edges will not jar the senses, because the standard of finish Monitor Audio achieve is about the best in the business, a nose ahead of both KEF and B&W methinks.

If you choose to leave the grille off then what confronts you is an intriguing array of hi-tech drive units entirely of Monitor Audio's own manufacture. At top is a one inch (25mm) gold dome C-CAM treble unit sitting behind a black protective mesh grille. Beneath it sits a large cone midrange unit, with chrome plated, bullet shaped dust cap at centre. Behind lies a sealed chamber.

Beneath this midrange unit are two similar drivers that handle bass duties, each loaded by its own rear reflex ported chamber. One vents through a front port close to the floor, the other through a rear port at top.

"thoroughly modern, high technology loudspeakers with a matching level of performance; in my view they achieve their promise..."

With stylishly angled descriptive legends and neat, gold plated bi-wire connecting terminals, at rear the RX8s look the part. They are conceptually positioned to be a thoroughly modern, high technology loudspeakers with a matching level of performance and in my view they achieve their promise.

But let us pause for a moment of reflection. 'Modern' surely means, ermm, obvious to the point of being brash, in your face and with inflated extremities to attract attention? Yep, the RX8s are a cock bird in season, with colourful plumage and a lot of noise to make. This is their *milieu*, and one they strut confidently, and with good reason. They are not all show and no go; there's plenty of go to match their show. But their sound is very 'distinctive'...

SOUND QUALITY

Metal cone loudspeakers need a lot of running in and I am not quite sure what Monitor Audios really

need, but we gave ours forty hours of heavy music and pink noise, as well as the company's own DeTox disc to get them well down the exponential run-in curve for metal cones. B&W say their loudspeakers need far less - fifteen hours will do - and most loudspeakers will loosen up to usability in five hours or so, ten hours being enough to say they are behaving representatively. After forty hours I think my views of the RX8s are fairly representative and Monitor Audio had already put some time on them, we were told later.

I mention this because the RX8s have a conspicuously bright aura about them that dominates their character and running in softens the sound. These loudspeakers are not neutral by any means, but shiniely metallic in their patina. It's a nice light sort of zing that infuses their sound, but it is there all the same, as it has been with many previous Monitor Audio loudspeakers. To say they cast a bright light over music is to understate the case: they make it vivid. How a listener will react to this will be a matter of taste and expectation. I somehow feel that the RX8s are for younger listeners that want music thrown at them in high

high damping factor of solid-state and I ended up using a Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A power amplifier, that both gripped the bass cones tightly and was sufficiently neutral to avoid adding to the RX8's candlepower.

It isn't just their tonal colour that is so obvious. They are very sensitive and a few Watts will produce extraordinary dynamics. The RX8s are lightning-fast and dynamically strong, giving sudden

orchestral *fortissimo* real bite; both the vigour and pace of an 'allegro molto vivace' movement within Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6 was beautifully captured. So whilst the RX8s might be brightly lit and a tad brash, they nevertheless are able to capture the spirit of music and this is important in making them a fun listen, as well as a convincingly accurate one.

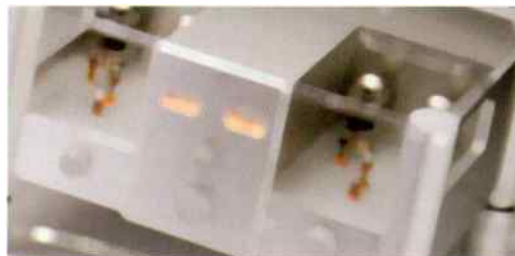
Stressed by the complex percussion work within Santana's 'Yaleo', from the Supernatural CD, I became aware that whilst the presentation was both forward and explicit, the soundstage did not fall away backward as far as it can do, especially with a loudspeaker like the Eminent Technology LFT-8bs also reviewed in this issue, for example. There was a slight edginess at times - the brashness I refer to earlier - and treble was 'obvious' shall I say, if not spiky or peaky. I noticed also that faced with complex music arrangements such as Yaleo, or much orchestral music, the midrange unit did develop a little colour - a slight haziness - and here I suspect its rear chamber and/or the damping within was making itself known, something I have encountered in



collective excellence

“...I don't know anything that comes close in performance terms to the Marten once the walls close in. Expensive yes, but for the listener who demands and will cherish its unique blend of strengths then I suspect that price will become secondary. Despite appearances, is this the best mini-monitor in the world? Probably...”

The Marten Coltrane Soprano Review by Roy Gregory, Hi-Fi+ Awards 2009 Issue



Almarro, Dr Feickert, Emillé, Marten
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the past when mounting a midrange unit in a chamber whilst prototyping World Audio Design loudspeakers (a common solution is to use an open back chamber). Sinking back to the simpler, slower 'Put Your Lights On' the RX8s came across as precision reproducers, thrusting Santana's guitar out into the room, underscoring dynamic contrasts and imposing a sharply focussed sense of timing that bolted down the track's rhythmic progression. This gives the RX8s an eye-popping sense of life and vigour, a property they possess in abundance, and conspicuous strength.

Contributing strongly to their weighty, full blooded delivery is a bass performance that will please most people I believe. Like all Monitor Audio loudspeakers bass is strong and quality very good. My usual Angelique Kidjo torture tracks had the bass cones kicking but Musical Fidelity's AMS50 amplifier remained in charge of the situation and drove the walking bass guitar line down the frequency scale with firm authority. The RX8s have more bass scale than B&Vs, although a little less control, Monitor Audio ensuring kick drum and bass guitar are always apparent in a performance. The RX8s go low too, although whilst they have strong deep bass they do not do subsonics. Like B&V, Monitor Audio tune their ports high (55Hz) in order to

preserve bass speed and avoid room boom. I was occasionally aware of box 'whoomph' with heavy bass though, probably coming from the front port, a small colouration that passed unnoticed much of the time, but is obvious in our measurements. The single foam bung supplied would suppress this if used in the front port.

The tonal accuracy of the RX8s was apparent and welcome in their handling of vocals. The intrinsic sheen had some interesting effects, sending Renee Fleming's highs spiralling upward it seemed, so intensely were they projected. I'm not quite sure it was all natural; the RX8s are strong in the upper midband and seemed to make her higher notes fly. But the overall effect wasn't unpleasant and I noticed that generally the RX8s handled female vocals very well. Toni Braxton was pinpoint sharp centre stage singing 'Spanish Guitar' from The Heat CD, and even her whispered Spanish phrases were spotlit. Guitar strings were cuttingly fast and the slow tempo still razor sharp in its timing. Moving down the musical scale a little, Mark Knopfler's gruff vocals were equally well described centre stage, strong in dynamic contrast against a clean background. This made for a great intelligibility.

I marvelled at the speed of Arcadi Volodos

as his fingers flew over the keyboard playing Shubert's Sonata in E Major, the RX8s giving the instrument a fine sense of scale as well as luminous presence in our listening room.

CONCLUSION

The RX8 offers a larger than life performance from just a few Watts, a trick only a good floorstander can pull off. As affordable floorstanders go it has to be amongst the best in its price class, even though I have to say it is very distinctive in what it does and may just be a little too Wembley Stadium for listeners who like a gentle delivery. There's no getting away from the fact that their razor sharp timing, basic accuracy and energetic bass will be the stuff of dreams for many and I can vouch that it's one very enjoyable listen.

At the price this is one very accomplished, high energy floorstanding loudspeaker that infuses music with life. Whether you like Rock or Classical it's a fun listen that shouts "high fidelity", whilst at the same time staying carefully within the bounds of accuracy. That makes Monitor Audio's Silver RX8 a great loudspeaker at the price.

VERDICT

Entertaining floorstander that brings light, pace and timing to all forms of music, making listening fun. Superb at the price.

MONITOR AUDIO RX8 £999

+44 (0)1268 740580

www.monitoraudio.co.uk

FOR

- light, bright presentation
- good bass
- superb finish

AGAINST

- zingy
- edgy at times
- lack subtlety

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Monitor Audio Silver RX8 is a lesson in accuracy, our analysis shows. Little attempt has been made to enhance or 'voice' the loudspeaker distinctively; the Silver RX8 is close to tonally neutral and should sound detailed without being brash or shouty like so many modern designs. A small amount of lift around 12kHz will ensure treble is clearly present, but not excessive. There is a small dip below 300Hz that is related to an internal cabinet mode, peaks in our port output analyses show and bass rises quite substantially around 80Hz, an underdamped response that will ensure the RX8 has lively bass. The ports peak at 55Hz, a high value, and with output from both 6dB up on forward output at 80Hz they contribute substantially to bass energy in the room. Absence of low bass means the RX8, much like B&W equivalents, swaps subsonics for bass speed. Bass distortion measured a low 3% at 40Hz and the ports were linear too, delivering 6% at 40Hz.

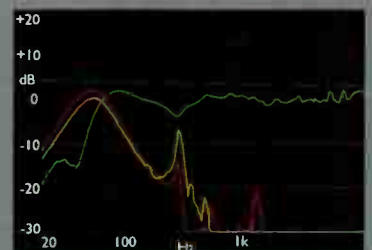
Sensitivity was very high, with 90dB sound pressure level produced from one nominal watt (2.8V). With impedance minima of 4 Ohms and an overall measured value of 5.3 Ohms this is a 4 Ohm loudspeaker but it's largely a resistive load that will be easily driven by modern amplifier, returning little energy to them. Our 200mS spectral decay analysis shows the RX8 also enjoys very low levels of

colouration across midband and treble, close to electrostatics, although it is inevitably 'hot' in the bass.

The Silver RX8 is a very neat and directed piece of loudspeaker engineering. With plentiful bass, obvious but not accentuated treble and a clear, smooth midrange it should offer excellent clarity and accuracy with a sense of dynamic liveliness.

NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



**WIN A PAIR OF ACOUSTIC ENERGY
RADIANCE 3 LOUDSPEAKERS
WORTH £1,500 IN THIS MONTH'S
SUPER COMPETITION!**



Here's your chance to win an exceptional pair of floorstanding speakers in this month's great giveaway! Here's what Adam Smith wrote about them in the December 2009 issue of Hi-Fi World...

"These are as conventional as they come, being a three way, four drive unit design in a floorstanding enclosure. Bass duties are handled by a pair of 160mm pressed alloy drive units, each mounted in its own rear-ported enclosure and above this sits a similar 130mm drive unit which handles the midrange. At the top of the cabinet is a brand new tweeter, which bears very close visual resemblance to the Scanspeak Discovery unit. AE have, however located it at the centre of their own new 'DXT' acoustic lens, which they claim matches the way the high frequencies are dispersed into the room environment to that of the mid/bass woofer, thus promising excellent directional capabilities across the frequency range. These units are housed in a neat floorstanding cabinet with curved sides and this sits atop four outboard feet to improve stability. Vital statistics for the Radiance 3s are 920x230x297mm (HxWxD) and 18kg each.

Naturally, with a big cabinet, the Radiance 3s go much lower than most and generally do so in a pleasing manner. The very bottom end has real weight and punch to it, whilst the upper bass is lithe and detailed. Higher up the frequency range, the midrange driver was

doing sterling work and handing over seamlessly to the very smooth and inviting tweeter. There was no sign of any harshness here and the AEs' treble is a very fine thing to behold indeed, combining detail and crispness with an assured sense of fluidity very neatly indeed. Across the mid, vocalists were placed nicely centre-stage and the image of their backing companions pushed off into the distance very nicely.

This gives traditional big loudspeaker strengths with an extra sense of polish, all of which makes for a highly musical floorstander." For a chance to win these great little speakers, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 30 December 2009 to:

**January 2010 Competition,
Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit
G4, Argo House, The Park
Business Centre, Kilburn Park
Road, London NW6 5LF.**

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- ONLY ONE ENTRY PER HOUSEHOLD
- MULTIPLE ENTRIES WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFIED
- PURCHASE OF THE MAGAZINE IS NOT A PRE-CONDITION OF ENTRY
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QUESTIONS

[1] What type of design is the radiance 3?

- [a] three way, four driver
- [b] two way, three driver
- [c] two way, coaxial
- [d] one way, single driver

[2] What material are the bass units made from?

- [a] alloy
- [b] Kevlar
- [c] paper
- [d] carbon fibre

[3] What type of tweeter is used?

- [a] Acoustic Energy's DXT Acoustic Lens
- [b] Isoton^o
- [c] Focal
- [d] KEF

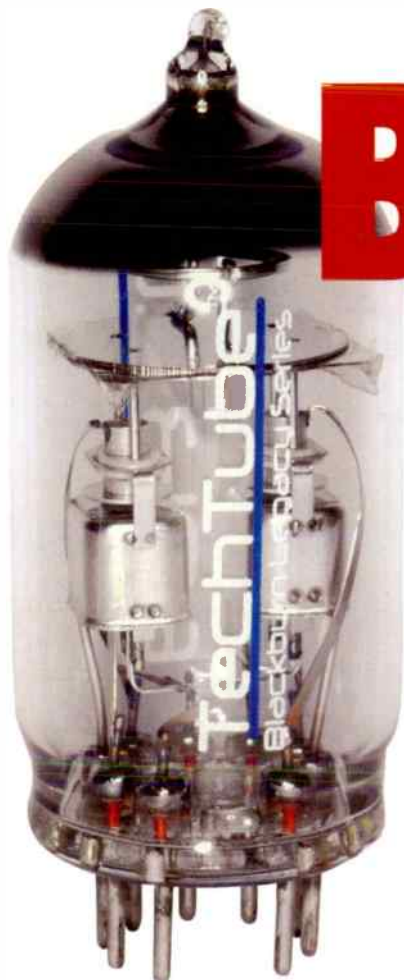
[4] Adam concluded that the speaker is what?

- [a] "a highly musical floorstander"
- [b] "a lovely little looker"
- [c] "not a bad box"
- [d] "cheap at twice the price"

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

entries will be accepted on a postcard only

**OCTOBER 2009 CYRUS 8 XP D INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER WINNER:
Ms. Joanna Trivett, Felixstowe**



BOTTLE TOP

Not all vacuum tubes are born equal, as Neville Roberts finds out when he auditions a number of different ECC83s in his World Design Phono3 phono stage. Rolling valves is a quick and easy way of upgrading, he finds...

With the growing interest in valve-based audio

equipment, it's not surprising that the demand for audio valves is also increasing. Web-based trading has made it even easier to obtain tubes from all over the world. As a consequence, it seems that not a month goes by without news of a new factory appearing on the scene, or a new range of valves emerging from one of the established manufacturers.

It's been a few years (five, to be precise!) since I have indulged in some serious 'tube rolling', and with the recent flurry of new products hitting the market, the time was right to check out a selection of currently available offerings. For this exercise, I decided to focus on one of the most popular driver valves that are employed in modern amplifier designs, namely the ECC83 double-triode. My World Designs Phono3 makes use of three ECC83 valves (aka 12AX7 tubes) and so I chose this as the platform to test a variety of makes.

With such a large number of different manufacturers and each

manufacturer often offering several grades of the same valve, coming up with a shortlist was quite a task in itself. The difference in sound quality made by valves of the same type from different manufacturers is substantial. Some valves can exhibit quite outstanding qualities, while the kindest thing one can say about others is that they amplify! The latter should be treated like a bottle of wine from a mediocre vineyard – laid down and avoided!

So, what you see here is the

"there are profound sonic differences between apparently identical valves; if you've never tried rolling your tubes, you'll be amazed at the difference..."

shortlist. Apologies if I have not included your favourite bottle; as with many things, personal taste has a part to play. So what I have included here is a variety of makes that demonstrate a broad spectrum of audio presentation with a summary of each valve's particular strengths and weaknesses.

The ones that made it through to the final are, in no particular order: Mullard (Old Shield) ECC83, TJ Full Music 12AX7, Siemens E83CC, Harma 'STR' and 'Retro' ECC83 (normal and cryogenically treated), Harma DR250 7025 (normal and cryogenically treated), Blackburn MicroTech Solutions TechTube E813CC (normal and cryogenically treated), JAN Philips 12AX7WA (normal and cryogenically treated) and Sovtek 12AX7WC (cryogenically treated).

The cryogenic treatment process was undertaken by Watford Valves & Speakers Ltd. of St Albans and involves placing a batch of valves in a chamber and taking them down to -195°C with liquid nitrogen and then slowly raising the temperature to ambient over a forty eight hour period. This will change the molecular

structure of the electrode assembly which will result in subtle changes to the performance of the valve. Whether these changes are beneficial or not, we'll see...

THE SHAKE OFF

To put the valves through their paces, I chose three great recordings that I know well. These would exercise the valves across a range of instruments and musical styles, while minimising the risk of fatigue. They were, variously, Concertos No. 7 & 8 from Vivaldi Opus 7 (from a Philips boxed set 6700 100 of Vivaldi Op7, I Musici with Salvatore Accardo and Heinz Holliger), Stravinsky's 'The Firebird Suite' (The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra - Telarc digital recording DG-10039) and a direct-to-disc live recording from the 1970s of 'Lincoln Mayorga and Distinguished Colleagues Volume III' (Sheffield Labs LAB-1 SL5/SL6).

SIEMENS E83CC

These have always been great all-rounders, up there with the other German premium make – Telefunken. They produce masses of detail with no strain or unpleasant edge to the sound. I can sit and listen to these valves for hours as they seem to work effortlessly to deliver the music to my sitting room.

BLACKBURN TECHTUBE E813CC

At the time of going to press, we have just heard the sad news that Blackburn MicroTech Solutions has gone into administration. This



The Blackburn Microtech Solutions TechTube E813CC

company had a strong research and development pipeline, built from the company's forty-plus years of experience, and this was channelled into their innovative audio valve designs. The administrators are hoping that a buyer can be found for the factory and it is my sincere hope that one will soon come forward. In the meantime, stocks remain in shops and so we've decided to include them in this feature.

I previously reviewed these valves in the October 2009 issue of Hi-Fi World and remain very impressed with their performance. They demonstrate superb openness and detail, although the extreme top end was very smooth – arguably a little too smooth for some types of music.

I have now had the opportunity to try a set of cryogenically treated TechTubes. Not surprisingly, they sounded very similar. However, as a result of the treatment, both the bass instruments and percussion became a lot clearer and well defined. In particular, high-hats were much brighter and in proportion to the rest of the music.

TJ FULL MUSIC 12AX7

The TechTubes were unplugged to make way for the TJs. The headline for these is that they have all the benefits of the Siemens, but more so. They present a sound stage with great depth, openness and spaciousness. The music is clear and refined; individual instruments in the Vivaldi recording were clearly discernible. The deep bass drum roll at the beginning of the Stravinsky was deep, clean and very believable. Similarly, in the jazz music of the Lincoln Mayorga, bass was tight, punchy and once again very realistic. In fact, I couldn't really find anything to criticise about these valves – they certainly have the wow factor.

JAN PHILIPS 12AX7WA

Next in line were the JAN Philips in their untreated state. I soon realised that I had been spoiled by the other



The TJ Full Music 12AX7

valves I had been listening to. In comparison with the previous makes, the strings on the Philips sounded a bit harsh and 'in your face'. On a more positive note, the midrange was generally clear and forward in the sound stage. However, the image placement of the instruments was less clearly defined and bass was not as extended and deep. In the jazz pieces, there was a noticeable lack of crispness - it was as if a cloth had been draped over my tweeters. After a while, I found the sound tiring and I could not really listen to these valves for an extended period of time.

Moving on to the cryogenically treated versions, I noticed a definite improvement. The string section had changed into evening dress and they were considerably more refined; the cats had been locked away out of earshot and the sound was overall easier on the ear. However, as with the untreated valve, the gain of the Philips was noticeably lower than any of the others and the performances lacked excitement and vitality.

HARMA 'STR' ECC83

I have to confess that I tried Harmas several years ago and wasn't particularly impressed with them in hi-fi applications, although I accepted that they were most probably better suited for guitar amplifiers. The Harma brand is Watford Valves'



A trio of triodes - The JAN Philips, 'Old Shield' Mullard & Sovtek



The Harmas: from the left - STR, Retro, DR250...

house wine label and these valves are selected and tested versions of well-known brands. In the case of the 'STR', they are now specially selected J/Teslas. So, with an open mind, I started auditioning the Harmas...

They sounded good! A bright, clean sound, with a good rendition of strings. Lovely midrange and clarity in the lower-midrange gave a warm and involving presentation of oboes in the orchestra. On the downside, I didn't find the front-to-back positioning of the instruments to be very clear and some might find the bright presentation a little tiring after a while. Time to move on to the cryo version.

The first thing I noticed was that the depth reappeared and there was definitely front and back separation again. Although the extreme bass was a little indistinct, it was very well extended. There was a great realism to the sound and even though the bright timpani was still there, it was somehow less strained and easier on the ear than with the untreated versions. I wanted to keep these in, but it was time to move on...

HARMA RETRO ECC83

The Harma 'Retro' are actually made by Reflector in their Saratov Factory in Russia, but selected for the Harma brand. Reflector also makes most of the valves marketed by New Sensor Co. of New York under their Sovtek and Electro-Harmonix brands. These have a totally different presentation to the STRs. They offer a very full midrange and a 'less formal' top end - altogether a much smoother performance, with good image placement. Bass was punchy, but a bit

recessed. The cryo versions retained the 'smooth' theme, but notably wind instruments were sweetened. These valves were really at home with jazz, giving a relaxed and effortless sound - nice!

HARMA DR250 7025

Also made by Reflector, the Harma DR250s had apparently the highest gain of all the valves tested. They had the best deep bass performance of all the Harmas and the addition of a bright top end resulted in a sonorous, yet very musical performance. Clarity in the upper registers suffered a bit when the music got loud.

Swapping them for their cryo-treated counterparts immediately improved the image placement. However, I think the extreme deep bass suffered a little as a result and, again, they seemed to run out of steam during the loud passages.

SOVTEK 12AX7WC CRYO

These had superb instrument placement across the whole orchestra, with lovely clear strings and wind sections. I did feel that some of the detail was missing, but the bass was well controlled and the overall performance was lovely, smooth and thoroughly enjoyable.

MULLARD (OLD SHIELD) ECC83

Finally, it was time for the joker in the pack - the Old Shield Mullards! I have to say that they still are valves that stand up and demand to be counted. Great image placement, open and accurate sound stage, fantastic detail, tight bass, great top end, effortless sound - I could go on.

In many ways, they are quite similar to the TJs. The only comment I would make is that they don't quite have the extra sparkle that I get from the TJs, which is extremely difficult to define and leaves you with a sense of real excitement.

CONCLUSION

All in all, this proved a very interesting exercise. At the top end of the market, you do have to part with some serious cash to fit out your equipment with your chosen audiophile components. Also, as with many choices, it is all about balance and what sounds good in your particular system, as well as what sounds good to you. I therefore think it would be most appropriate for me to list my winners and losers, as any attempt at putting them in order of one to fourteen would only reflect my personal preferences given the styles of music I enjoy.

I'm afraid that in my opinion, the Philips would have to go in the 'losers' category. Generally speaking, the standard set by most of the valves on trial was pretty high and they had too many flaws to justify them ranking with the top professionals. So that leaves twelve to consider. They all have their various strengths and weaknesses, but to my ear, there are four that rise to the top of the pack...

The Harma 'STR' cryo-treated are really a great all-rounder. Superb realism that you could listen to for hours. The Old Shield Mullards have proved that they can still hold their own with their modern counterparts. If you can find some NOS ones - grab them while you can, but you may have to pay a premium for them. Then we have the TechTube cryo-treated. These are truly great performers in a hi-fi system and well deserve their place on the podium. Finally, the TJ Full Music 12AX7s seem to have that 'X' factor that makes them really stand out from the crowd. All in all, this test proved that there are profound sonic differences between apparently identical valves; if you've never tried rolling your tubes, you'll be amazed at the difference it can bring.

THANKS TO:

Derek Rocco of Watford Valves (www.watfordvalves.com) for supplying, fully run-in, the majority of the standard issue and all of the cryogenically treated valves used in this review!

Cutting Edge

Noel Keywood auditions Wharfedale's new Diamond 10.3 loudspeaker and talks to the company's design chief Peter Comeau...

pair, the Diamond 10.3 is as cheap as chips as floorstanders go, but Wharfedale always offered great quality at a low price and with the new 10.3 I found they still do...

Standing 800mm high (31in) the new Diamond 10.3 is a loudspeaker that would fit a small lounge nicely and look unobtrusive in a larger one. Wharfedale supply a set of conical spikes which can be height adjusted, but not pads to protect wooden floors so anyone not wanting to use spikes will have to improvise. It is common to use furniture cups that go under castors, coins and even plastic caps. The gentle curve of the cabinets is there to disperse internal standing waves and add rigidity to the side panels in order to minimise colouration cause by panel vibration. It's a relatively expensive form of cabinet to be using on a loudspeaker of this price, but Wharfedale have from their earliest days – and I remember Lintons and Dentons – always kept quality high and continue the tradition. With a front panel 194mm wide and a cabinet depth of 278mm the Diamond 10.3 is a neat package, made visually attractive by its shiny black lacquer front panel, punctuated by the bright alloy drive units trims.

The 10.3 uses two drive units, a 125mm Kevlar coned bass/mid driver and a 25mm tweeter that sits behind a protective grille that Wharfedale interestingly call a 'diffusion grid'. Our measurements do confirm relatively smooth treble, with a complete absence of the sort of peaking that is common from budget tweeters, but in spite of this I did not feel the 10.3 had a warm sound, probably because output is strong across the upper midband.

The bass/midrange unit has a

were not automatic caps on quality; good engineering did not have to be abandoned.

I remember early Diamonds also exploited small cabinet size to provide excellent imaging. The only thing they didn't quite manage was seismic bass. The new Diamond 10.3 loudspeaker reviewed here goes some way to fixing that problem; it's a mini floorstander with stronger low bass. Priced at just £299.95 per

Wharfedale's Diamond loudspeaker has a long history since the first model back in 1981 opened everyone's eyes to how good a small loudspeaker can sound. Even back then the Diamond was well developed technically, showing that low price and small size

bullet shaped parasitic dome (dust cap) at centre to handle its higher frequencies.

Small grilles are supplied to cover the drive units if wished. The standard of finish was very good, with no sign of the slight raggedness that can be seen on goods out of many Chinese factories, but then the International Audio Group who now own the Wharfedale brand have plenty of experience in meeting worldwide standards and are aware of what is expected.

The rear panel carries a pair of gold plated bi-wire terminals with bridging links so there has been no skimping on facilities. The terminal posts are good quality and able to accept 4mm plugs, bare wires and spade plugs.

SOUND QUALITY

In a thoroughly modern way the Diamond 10.3s throw out a wealth of detail from a performance. I found myself made aware of Alison Goldfrapp's quick intakes of breath in 'Fly Me Away' as she sings breathlessly into the microphone, for example. There's a strongly etched quality to the upper midband that makes the Diamond's sound very clear and concise. With Goldfrapp's voice sounding quite close, the sound stage was slightly ahead of the loudspeakers and spread around them generously, with a good, if not cavernous, sense of depth.



With the deeper vocals of Steve Earle singing 'This Highway's Mine', I became aware that the 10.3s are tonally dry and lost a little of the richness and depth of his voice, as well as the density of his Gibson guitar, but with smooth and nicely extended bass that was supple and strong this track still had both the weight and bite it demands to really rock; a fine performance for a £299 floorstander. The balance became fuller when I moved the cabinets from 3ft in front of a rear wall to 1ft (to the rear of the cabinet) and they are better off close to a rear wall. However, I did then at times detect some boxiness from the port, but it was slight. The Diamonds were consistent between amplifiers I found but they got a bit snappy with our Leema Pulse, due to its strong treble. Our Icon Audio MB845s managed best providing power was kept down, but a Musical Fidelity AMS50 remained clearest of the three playing with 'Mars' from The Planets at high volume, because the Diamonds do like a bit of power.

I was always aware of low colouration, as well as technically correct sense of tonal balance where everything was evenly presented, from bass guitar right up to cymbal crashes. What you have to bear in mind is that accuracy and lack of colouration does also mean the loudspeaker tends to fall out of the equation more than one that has been euphonically 'tiddled' by its designer. The Diamond 10.3 is balanced, clear and concise, albeit with the ability to throw out higher frequencies when they had been captured in a recording. Cymbal crashes in Steve Earle's 'Esmeralda's Hollywood' fairly ricocheted around the room from these loudspeakers. Their ability to throw out highs also went a long way to ensuring stereo images were well etched across the sound stage.

With the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing a full bodied 'Mars', from 'The Planets' by Holst, kettle drum came across cleanly, if lacking the lowest octave, horns blared out clearly and bassoons were full and fruity. Again, the Diamond 10.3s were impressively smooth and balanced, and as I turned up volume the orchestra just grew and grew

without unbalances like peaky treble becoming obvious. As I said earlier, apart from an 'obvious' midband that made the 10.3s very detailed and insightful, the Diamonds have little colour or character of their own and are remarkably accurate as loudspeakers go, especially at the price. It's only realistic to expect bass to not to have seismic depth, but the Diamonds did a good job all the same and never seemed to lack heft. Bass does not have the resolution you'd get from a bigger cabinet, granted, but the speakers made a game stab at providing quality with satisfactory level, rather than sounding large and plummy. Wharfedale don't trade quality for quantity in the Diamond 10.3. We measured higher than usual bass distortion, known as 'bass doubling' in measurement, but this lightens timbre and was difficult to detect in practice.

The Diamond 10.3 captures the spirit of the original Diamond by offering a standard of performance commonly unmatched by much else on the market. It's an extraordinarily accomplished design that offers superb balance and a great raft of strengths as modern floorstanders go. At the price it is a svelte bargain.

VERDICT

Accurate and correct budget floorstander that tells it like it is. Superb sound at a silly price.

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND

10.3 £299

01480 447700

www.wharfedale.co.uk

FOR

- balanced and natural
- clear and detailed
- firm, tuneful bass

AGAINST

- some bass doubling
- slight midband hardness
- power hungry

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

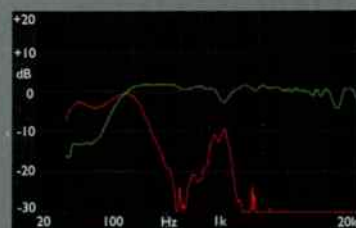
The Diamond 10.3 has a very smooth frequency response punctuated only by a small dip imposed by what looks like a cabinet mode, visible as a peak in port output (red trace). Important features are a perfectly smooth transition from bass/midrange unit to tweeter, and unusually smooth output in the treble regions above 1kHz. Most loudspeakers - even the best - undulate strongly as their drive units struggle to give a decent approximate result, explaining strong differences between them. The Diamond 10.3 is quite different here, but its flatness does mean an absence of character imposing mechanical reactances, the corollary being it will have less of a 'sound' than many. Treble output is smooth too and the overall trend is slightly downward with rising frequency, suggesting a full bodied and even balance. Bass from the driver reaches down to 60Hz (-6dB) aided by a port that is heavily damped and broadly tuned around 75Hz, an unusually high frequency, but it makes the Diamond a substantially resistive load.

Sensitivity was very low at 84dB so a powerful amplifier of 50 Watts or more is needed for high volume. Impedance

measured 6 Ohms, dropping to 4 Ohms minimum. Our 200mS decay spectrum shows colouration is very low, as expected. However, bass distortion was high, measuring 8% from driver and port at 40Hz.

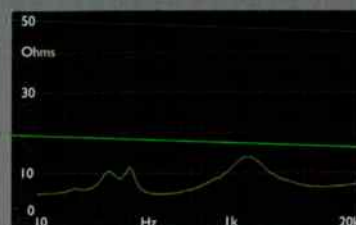
The Diamond 10.3 needs power, but it offers an unusually smooth, accurate and colouration free sound, measurement suggests. Some lightness of bass timbre may be evident too. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE





Peter Comeau,
Director of Acoustic Design.
IAG, China.

IAG

Q. How can you make a budget loudspeaker so accurate, when everyone else has peaks and dips everywhere?

Loudspeaker design has come a long way since I first started designing speakers in the late 1970s. Then the premise was to go into the anechoic chamber with a bucketful of components

and a soldering iron and try things out until they worked! Then you built the crossover and listened to it, made changes because it never sounded right first time and then took it back into the chamber to measure it. And repeat until satisfied. It took me six months to design my first pair of speakers this way!

Thankfully we now have a faster method. We measure the drivers in the cabinet in an anechoic chamber as before. Then we import the measurements into sophisticated crossover simulation software, for example the LspCAD Lite that I've recommended in Hi-Fi World speaker design articles. Now we can design a 'virtual' crossover, on the computer screen, without having to visit the anechoic chamber at all. In a few minutes we can have a working, first sample, crossover designed, assembled and ready to go.

Using the 'virtual crossover' simulation means that I can sit in my listening room, with a laptop PC and soldering iron, and make changes while listening at the same time as seeing the results on screen. That way we can fine tune the crossover both by ear and measurement. Usually I'll make some changes by listening to get rid of an audible problem, then see the effects of those on the measurements. Then I'll tweak the crossover values slightly to give me a better measured result and listen to that.

It's still a process of iteration, between listening and evaluating the measured results, but the whole process is a lot faster. And we can 'see' where the problems lie as well as hear them. This system enables us to closely match the crossover to the drivers, so on that basis, whether the speaker is budget or not, it should still be accurate in its performance.

Q. How can you make such an elaborate loudspeaker, complete with frilly bits like bi-wire terminals, for such a low price?

I know, it amazes me sometimes. IAG has developed what we call a 'vertically integrated' factory in which to make all of IAG's products. 'Vertically integrated' means that nearly everything that goes into our speakers is made in the one factory, from the ground up. So we make not just the drive units and cabinets, but all injection mouldings, the grilles, the coils, cable, circuit boards, even the packaging; it's all made 'in-house'. I estimate that less than 5% of the components in a speaker come from outside suppliers.

That has a terrific advantage for me as a designer. I can have full control over every aspect of the speaker construction that might affect its performance. And, of course, we can put together fairly sophisticated parts for very low cost, for example the bi-wire terminals.

This control over the cost/performance ratio means that we can bring very high quality products with sophisticated levels of engineering and performance to market and give

'bookshelf' speaker, is designed to give an extended bass response in free space. The bass tuning allows you to move the speakers closer, or further away, from the rear wall until you achieve the level of bass power that you like. Push the speakers closer to the wall and you'll raise the bass power in the room; move them away and you'll lower any 'boominess' caused by the room.

In terms of room placement you'll get the most solid stereo image from speakers like the Diamonds if you, and the speakers, form an equilateral triangle. So, if you're sitting 2 metres from the speakers, place them roughly 2m apart. This rule is only for 'near field' listening. At distances over 2m distance from the speakers you, the listener, will start to enter the 'free field' of the room and so the equation changes. You probably don't want the speakers more than 2m apart or the stereo image starts to become hazy.

This rule will only give you a starting point. For example it's a good idea to have the speakers a significantly different distance from the side walls than the rear walls. This helps reduce the excitation of bass standing waves in the room. So play around with the speaker placement until you've achieved an optimum



The IAG factory in Shenzhen, China.

terrific value to the buyer. We're very proud of that.

Q. Where do you think the Diamond 10.3 is best placed relative to a rear wall, or in a room?

For the Diamond speakers we recommend placing the speakers between 0.5m and 1m from the rear wall. The Diamond range, with the exception of the 10.0 which is a true

performance; every room is different in this respect.

Having said that, with the Diamond range you don't have to sit dead centre between the speakers to appreciate the solidity of the stereo image. We've shown bemused listeners that they can sit way off axis and still enjoy the sound from the speakers. This is part of our design philosophy. I like that aspect of the performance because it means the whole family, or group of friends, can



Wharfedale founder Gilbert Briggs (right) out, with goods being airfreighted out, after Rank had taken control.

enjoy the music without having to sit in the 'sweet spot'.

Q. How do you manage to achieve such low colouration?

Actually that partly comes from what I've just been describing. During the design process I'll always make sure the performance of the speaker is practically the same off-axis as it is when measured directly on-axis. When we do a final check of the performance we'll measure the speakers from a variety of angles, for example 30 degrees horizontal, and make sure it has the same characteristics as directly in front of the speaker.

That has two benefits. One is, as I've mentioned, that the speakers can be enjoyed over a wide listening area. The other is that it automatically gives low colouration.

Most people think that colouration is solely caused by imperfect drive units and/or the cabinet. It's only partly true. You can design exceptionally low colouration drivers and cabinets and still hear colouration when you put the speakers in a typical room.

This is due to the way the human ear and brain decodes the sound in the room. The first sound you hear is, of course, that directly from the speakers themselves. That is the initial transient of the musical note and it gives your brain the ability to appreciate the way the note is being played and the 'position' of the musician. Following that you'll hear the sound from the room, which is the off-axis sound of the speakers

bouncing off the side walls, floor and ceiling. This 'later' sound is summed by the brain together with the direct sound to give the 'timbre' of the note. For example it will tell you not just what instrument is playing but also the type or make of instrument, whether it is a Bechstein or Steinway piano, for example.

Now consider if the off-axis characteristic output of the speaker is skewed compared to the forward axis. In that case the reflections from the room will have a different audible 'character' to the direct sound. This sounds unnatural, and so we perceive it as colouration, and it makes it more difficult to appreciate the type of instrument being played or the exact nature of a singer's voice.

But you still have to have good drivers and cabinets, of course. That is all part of the initial design process of the speaker. We can control colouration using sophisticated materials like the woven Kevlar cones of the Diamond series. The 'diamond' pattern of the bass/mid surrounds, by the way, isn't there for decoration. It helps control the way the surround flexes and plays an important part in reducing colouration.

Then there is the cabinet. The curved sides are not just there to make the speakers look good. They are formed from a multi-layer 'sandwich' of differing wood materials all designed to reduce the audible effects of panel resonance. In addition the curved sides scatter the standing waves inside the cabinet more effectively while the multi-layer composite panels block sound from leaking through the cabinet walls.

The result is, as you'd expect, lower colouration – you get to hear what the drive units are doing without the cabinet interfering.

Q. The Diamond range is very big. How will you resolve this with other upmarket Wharfedale models, like a new Airedale, or such like? The Diamonds seem to cover all possibilities.

I like to think that each of our ranges has its characteristic performance goals, and we can raise the sights higher for more expensive models. The Airedale, for example, is a classic high-end speaker for Wharfedale, even in Gilbert Briggs's time, and we can plough more engineering resources into a product like that. For example we can use special magnet materials which are just not viable in the ultra large quantities that the Diamond range sells in. And the speakers are much, much bigger, of course, which allows us to use more generous baffle areas and bass unit sizes to achieve a fuller sound and higher sensitivity.

Q. How well do Wharfedale loudspeakers sell around the world? Is the name still known outside the UK? Does it have brand value in major countries?

Wharfedale has been a well known brand name around the world for several decades. Our website shows a picture of Gilbert Briggs, the founder of Wharfedale, standing in front of a plane being loaded with speakers for overseas shipment. That was in the days when the brand was owned by the Rank Organisation which did much to publicise Wharfedale internationally.

Today Wharfedale is one of the best known hi-fi brands in China and has a strong and loyal following. Speak to anyone on the street in a major city anywhere in the world and the chances are they'll have heard of Wharfedale. That's quite an achievement for a company that started out with Gilbert and his wife putting together drive units by hand!

I'm very happy that we are carrying on Gilbert's inspiring success in bringing good quality music reproduction in the home to millions of people worldwide.

Peter Comeau, Director of Acoustic Design, International Audio Group, Shenzhen, China.

SHOWTIME

The Rocky Mountain Audio Fest was held at the Denver Marriott Tech Center Hotel from October 2nd to the 4th, 2009. The ever-intrepid Robert Kelly sleuthed through 150 exhibition rooms housing products from 479 manufacturers, on Hi-Fi World's behalf...



EMM Labs' new XDS1 CD/SACD player was sounding very detailed and musical. It uses their own technology to eliminate the pre and post ringing that occurs with conventional reconstruction filters, along with improved analogue and power supply sections. Most interestingly they don't use a PLL in their D/A converter, which they say allows them to eliminate jitter. At \$25,000 this is not cheap, but is probably one of the best disc players currently available.

TT Weights Audio make parts for military aircraft so understand precision engineering. Their Christine turntable is superbly engineered. The 32kg brass platter provides a huge flywheel effect and is fitted with a carbon fibre record mat. The plinth is machined from a solid block of aluminium and incorporates cavities filled with brass and silica to damp vibration and provide a stable location for the micro grain solid carbide main bearing. This player is full of interesting features, which explains the \$60,000 price!



The Jolida FX 10 12W stereo integrated amplifier provided another example of super value at just \$450. The output stage is an ultra linear type driven by two EL84 valves. It has two standard inputs plus a 3mm jack for MP3 players as well as a headphone output, all housed in a very natty blue chassis with heatproof glass sides. The volume, input selection, mute and on/off functions may be operated via the front panel or a remote control.

Dodd Audio's compact new battery powered preamplifier at \$1,590 showed excellent value at the other end of the price range. It uses two 6DJ8 type valves, has three inputs and even has a remote volume control. It runs off a 12 volt supply, which the user has to provide, but that is no great problem. I can imagine resourceful users running cables out to their cars. It also has a beautifully finished front panel, giving it a high 'Wife Acceptance Factor'...



Win Analog's beautifully made Z845 preamplifier looks like a power amplifier on first glance due to the use of the output valve it is named after. They say it will drive low impedance lines and I am sure it does. A frequency response from 10Hz to 80kHz \pm 1dB, ceramic valve sockets with 24k gold pins, silver wound transformers and



Teflon® insulated point-to-point silver wiring are some of the features. Mated with the 833 monoblocks it was sounding very impressive. Price is a suitably exotic \$45,000!

Bamberg showed their Series 5 TMW loudspeakers. The top module uses a 25mm SEAS Millennium tweeter and an 18cm SEAS woofer. The subwoofer is active and is driven by 370W externally housed MOSFET amplifier. The driver complement is a 26cm Peerless woofer and two 26cm Peerless passive radiators. The design uses an active crossover, which is also externally housed. The sound was very good in all respects, the cabinetry to a high standard and all for \$8,275/pair.



This innocuous looking box is the Acoustic Technologies Classis Series loudspeaker. It uses a single 3 inch titanium cone driver run full range and is presumably inspired by the work of E.J. Jordan, whose excellent full range drivers are still available. It uses solid silver internal wiring and the cabinets are well finished. The sound was fast and clean with good imaging and this belied the speaker's small size. They are priced at \$2,450/pair.

The Tocaro 40C is a simple single driver design from Germany that uses a 10 inch paper that is run full range in a bass reflex enclosure. Unusually the spider is made from wood. The maker quotes a sensitivity of 97dB, but no frequency response figures. The sound was dynamic and musical and the price including stands Euro 5,760/pair.



This is the Raal Salaja omni directional loudspeaker. It generated a lot of interest both because of its unconventional looks and its surprisingly good sound. The upper enclosure houses a 3 inch ribbon of their own design and manufacture and four 3 inch mid-range drivers firing vertically. The enclosure on the floor houses two 6.5 inch woofers. A complete system of these speakers with the maker's amplifiers and active crossover is planned to sell for \$4,000 in the U.S.



This is the Tripoint Audio Troy passive mains filter. It connects to the power outlet ground and the chassis of each of the system components. The designer was vague about how it works, but it produced a very noticeable improvement in detail, dynamics and an apparent lowering of the noise floor. The price has not been fixed yet, but it will not be cheap. It is a good option for very high-end system owners who are looking for their next major upgrade.

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WORLD CLASSICS

DIGITAL

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CDI 1986 £1500
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD4SE 1998 £200
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

LINN KARIK III 1995 £1775
The final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally dry.

MARANTZ CD73 1983 £700
A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 14x4 DAC -super musical



MARANTZ SA-1 2000 £5,000
The greatest argument for SACD. This sublime Ken Ishiwata design is utterly musically convincing with both CD and SACD, beating most audiophile CD spinners hands down.



MERIDIAN 207 1988 £995
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA 2002 £4000
When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSD design. CD sound is up in the £1000 class, too! Future classic.

MERIDIAN MCD 1984 £600
The first British 'audiophile' machine was a sweeter, more detailed Philips CD100. 14x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.



NAIM CDS 1990 £ N/A
Classic Philips 16x4 chipset with serious attention to power supplies equals grin-inducing sonics.



SONY CDP-101 1982 £800
The first Japanese CD spinner was powerful and involving. Brilliant transport more than compensated for 16x2 DAC, and you even got remote control!

SONY CDP-R1/DAS-R1 1987 £3,000
Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.



SONY CDP-701ES 1984 £890
Sony's first ever bespoke high end audiophile machine used a 16x2 DAC to provide a clinically incisive sound; supreme build quality allied to the pure unadulterated luxury of a paperback-sized remote control.

TECHNICS SL-PI200 1987 £800
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

YAMAHA CD-X1 1983 £340
Nicely built 16x2 machine with a very sharp and detailed sound; sometimes too much so. Excellent ergonomics, unlike almost every other rival of the time.

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

TEAC VRDS-T1 1994 £600
Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.



In this heavily revised section, you'll find the great and the good from audio's glorious past. Most are seminal designs which have earned their place in hi-fi history, but you'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price. Think we've overlooked something? Then write in and let us know!

ESOTERIC P0 1997 £8,000
The best CD drive bar none; TEAC's Tokyo boys pushed the boat out in style. Brilliantly incisive, ridiculously over engineered.

KENWOOD 9010 1986 £600
The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully done and responds well to re-clocking even today.

DACs
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 1995 £99
Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.



DCS ELGAR 1997 £8500
Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.



DPA LITTLE BIT 3 1996 £299
Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.



PINK TRIANGLE DАCАP0 1993 £ N/A
Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!



QED DIGIT 1991 £90
Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RD115 1972 £94

Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original superdeck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300

Bonkers 1970s direct drive that uses an infra red beam to allow track selection and programming. More of a visual and operational delight than a sonic stunner.

PIONEER PL12D 1973 £36

The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this bought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600

Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

DUAL CS505 1982 £75

Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound.

GOLDRING LENCO GL75 1970 £15.65

Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TD124 rivals.

LINN AXIS 1987 £253

Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86

For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price..



MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £ N/A

Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.



MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599

Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79

Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Acos-derived S-shaped tonearm. 1983 saw the arrival of the RB300, which added detail at the expense of warmth. Superb budget buy.

GARRARD 301/401 1953 £19

Heavy metal - tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down. In many respects, better than the seventies 'superdecks' that succeeded it.



ROKSAN XERXES 1984 £550

Supposedly the first to 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

SONY PS-B80 1978 £800

First outing for Sony's impressive 'Biotracer' electronic tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

THORENS TD124 1959 £ N/A

The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck', this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass.



TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 £ N/A

The product of academic research by the Cranfield Institute, this novel machine has an extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

TRIO LO-7D 1978 £600

The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made. Trio/Kenwood threw their 'engineering best practice' book at this one with startling results. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

TONEARMS

ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46

The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120 1978 £75

Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

ALPHASON HRI00S 1981 £150

First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.



SME 3009 1959 £18

Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

GRACE G707 1974 £58

This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound. Imported by Linn, fitted to early LP12s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

REGA RB300 1983 £88

Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.



SME SERIES III 1979 £113

Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

HADCOCK GH228 1976 £46

Evergreen unipivot with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253

Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

NAIM ARO 1986 £875

Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.



TECHNICS EPA-501 1979 £ N/A

Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS**DELTEC 1987 £1900**

Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

ROGERS A75 1978 £220

The prototypical Audiolab 8000a – lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 £625

Seminal mid-eighties Exposure pre-power, offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness and sweetness. Still, it's by no means 'sweet' by today's standards, being lean, punchy, musical. It's also possessed of that quintessentially eighties look – frumpy black steel boxes with rough silk screened logos!

**SUGDEN C51/P51 1976 £130**

Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300

Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

A&R A60 1977 £115

Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.

**CREEK CAS4040 1983 £150**

More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 £495

Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.

**MCINTOSH MA6800 1995 £3735**

Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

SUGDEN A21 1969 £ N/A

Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 £299

Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A11985 £350**

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.

**NAIM NAIT 1984 £350**

Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

NAD 3020 1979 £69

Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.

**MYST TMA3 1983 £300**

Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

ROGERS CADET III 1965 £34

Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves

**ROTEL RA-820BX 1983 £139**

Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

CHAPMAN 305 1960 £40

Smooth pre/power combo with a sweet and open sound. Not quite up to Leak/Quad standards but considerably cheaper second-hand.

PREAMPLIFIERS**AUDIOLAB 8000C 1991 £499**

Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-8 1982 £1,400

Beautifully designed and built high end tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

CONRAD JOHNSON**MOTIV MC-8 1986 £2,500**

Minimalist FET-based preamplifier from the Yank valve specialists is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry, light balance in the mould of Sugden high end stuff. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

CROFT MICRO 1986 £150

Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £ N/A

Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fi!

LINN LK-1 1986 £499

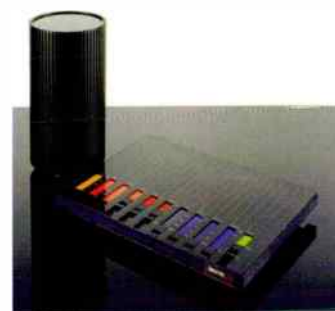
A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not half bad for under £100.

NAIM NAC32.5 1978 £ N/A

The Salisbury company came of age with this, their classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

LECSON AC-1 1973 £ N/A

Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.

**QUAD 22 1958 £25**

The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

QUAD 33 1968 £43

Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

POWER AMPLIFIERS**HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110**

Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £ N/A

Leak's biggest valve power amp offers 35 Watts per channel and more low end welly than the smaller Stereo 20. Despite concerns over reliability their rarity means high prices are the order of the day.

LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £31

Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.



LECSO API 1973 £ N/A

Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'tower of power' pretensions, but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

MARANTZ MODEL 9 1997 £8000

Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

MICHELL ALECTO 1997 £1989

Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this sounds delicious!

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 £28

Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR

200W of sweet smooth transistor stomp in a grooved tube! Under-rated oddity.



QUAD II 1952 £22

The all-time classic valve amplifier, with a deliciously fluid and lyrical voice. In other respects though, it sounds hopelessly dated. Low power and hard to partner properly



QUAD 405 1978 £115

The first of the current dumpers is a capable design with smooth, effortless power and a decently musical sound. 606 and 707 continue the theme with greater detail and incision.

QUAD 303 1968 £55

Bullet proof build, but woolly sound. Off the pace, but endearing nonetheless. Some pipe smoking slipper wearers swear by them!

RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE 1986 £977

At the time, very possibly the least cool amplifier on the planet – and we're not talking heat dissipation here. This reworking of Radford's original late sixties design was possessed of a wonderfully rich, old school valve sound with enough power (25W) and lots of subtlety.



KRELL KMA100 II 1987 £5,750

Ludicrous monoblock version of the giant KSA-100 is one of the seminal eighties transistor power amplifiers. Massive wallop allied to a very clean and open Class A sound makes this one of the best amplifiers of its type, ever.

PIONEER M-73 1988 £1,200

Monster stomp from this seminal Japanese power amplifier, complete with switchable Class A and Class B operation. Clean, open and assured sounding, albeit a tad behind the pace on high speed dance music. Rosewood side cheeks and black brushed aluminium completes the eighties-tastic experience.



PHONO STAGES

CREEK OBH-8 SE 1996 £180

Punchy, rhythmic character with oodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile classic. Partner with a Goldring G1042 for an unbeatable budget combination.



LINN LINNK 1984 £149

Naim-designed MC phono stage built to partner the original Naim NAIT - yes, really! Fine sound, although off the pace these days.

MICHELL ISO 1988 £ N/A

This Tom Evans-designed black box started the trend for high performance offboard phono stages. Charismatic, musical and punchy - if lacking in finesse.

TUNERS

BEOMASTER 5000 1967 £100

B&O's first serious FM stereo tuner was at least a decade ahead of the game. Its detailed, open sound and precision build mean it's still an aural and tactile pleasure today.

MARANTZ ST-8 1978 £353

Marantz's finest radio moment. Warm, organic sound plus an oscilloscope for checking the signal strength and multipath.



CREEK CAS3140 1985 £199

Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

NAD 4040 1979 £79

Tremendously smooth and natural sound allied to low prices and good availability make this budget analogue esoterica. Needs a good antenna to work properly, however.

NAIM NAT03 1993 £595

The warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners.

PIONEER TX-9500 1976 £295

Another of the serious classic solid-staters. Boasts the usual high end Jap package of fine sound, brilliant sensitivity and superb build.

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 £25

Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.



YAMAHA CT7000 1977 £444

Reputedly the best of the classic Jap analogues, this combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.



QUAD FM4 1983 £240

Supreme ergonomics and styling allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.



NAD 4140 1995 £199

Brilliant affordable digital tuner has a smooth, detailed musical sound plus sensible real-world facilities.

ROGERS T75 1977 £125

Superb mid-price British audiophile design, complete with understated black fascia. Fine sound in the true Rogers mould - smooth and sweet with fine dimensionality.

REVOX B760 1975 £520

More of a semi-pro machine than a domestic bit of kit, the Revox offers superlative measured performance although the sound isn't quite as staggering as the numbers. Fine nonetheless, and surely the most durable tuner here?



SANSUI TU-9900 1976 £300
A flagship Japanese tuner designed to steal sales from the likes of Accuphase and Revox, it boasts superlative RF performance and an extremely smooth and lucid sound, along with very fine build and finish.

SONY ST-5950 1977 £222
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, a format that came to nought. Still, it was Sony's most expensive tuner to date, and boasted a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.

SEQUERRA MODEL 1 1973 £1300
Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.



TECHNICS ST-8080 1976 £180
National Panasonic's specialist hi-fi brand was a big hitter back then, and this is no exception. Superb FM stage makes for a very clean and smooth listen with lots of detail and depth.



ANALOGUE RECORDERS
YAMAHA TC-800GL 1977 £179
Early classic with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!



AIWA XD-009 1989 £600
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!
UHER REPORT

4000 SERIES 1961 £97
Uher's little Nagra beater was made for decades and sold over a million. Brilliantly packaged with bullet proof German engineering and a clean, transparent sound.

PIONEER CTF-950 1978 £400
Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.



REVOX A77 1968 £145
The first domestic open reel that the pros used at home. Superbly made, but sonically off the pace these days. B77 better, but couldn't match the Japanese.



SONY TC-377 1972 £N/A
A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards



NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 £800
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



SONY WM-D6C 1985 £290
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.



DIGITAL RECORDERS
SONY MDS-JE55ES 2000 £900
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 £500
Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.5; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 £599
Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

LOUDSPEAKERS
ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AR18S 1978 £125
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers ABI subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!



HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

LOWTHER PM6A 1957 £18 EACH

This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

TANNOY WESTMINSTER 1985 £4500

Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in tautness but can drive large rooms and image like few others.



JR 149 1977 £120

Infamous cylindrical speaker that was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEFT27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



SPENDOR BCI 1976 £240

Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit – and the result is a beautifully warm yet well focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH

Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.



KEF R105 1977 £785

Three way Bextrene-based floorstander (complete with castors!) gave a truly wide-band listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace. The quintessential nineteen seventies loudspeaker.

IMF TLS80 1976 £550

Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800

Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 £375

Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs. Warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.



MISSION 752 1995 £495

Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstanders combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

HEYBROOK HBI 1982 £130

Peter Comeau-designed standmounters with an amazingly lyrical yet decently refined sound. Good enough to partner with very high end ancillaries, yet great with budget kit too. A classic.



CELESTION SL6 1984 £350

Smallish two way design complete with aluminium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding, albeit course at high frequencies and limp in the bass. Speakers would never be the same again...



LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH

Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200

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YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532

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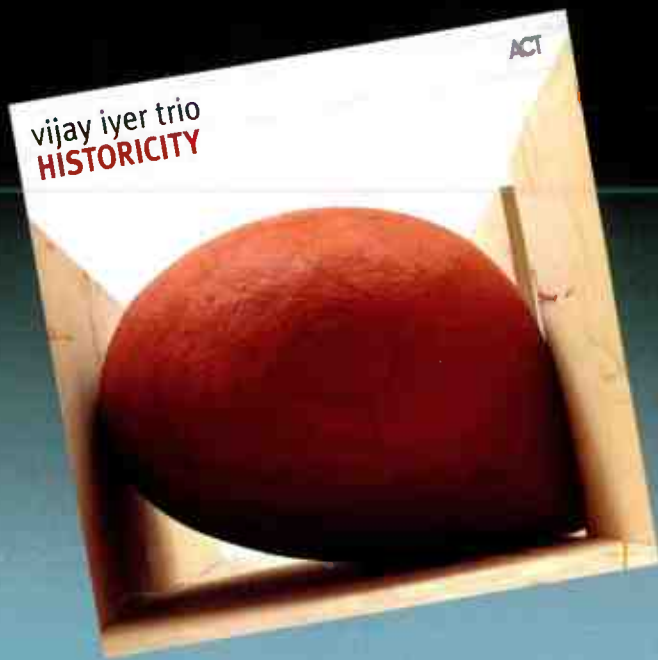
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VIJAY IYER TRIO
Historicity
Act

This jazz album is dominated by Iyer's piano stylings. He is both strong and aggressive in his approach, giving everything he's got at times, so that as a listener you can become quite breathless. His relentless, although never brash, style is heard well on the pounding 'Smoke Stack' while his interpretative abilities are well presented during the Leonard Bernstein/ Stephen Sondheim track, 'Somewhere' from the musical 'Westside Story'. Iyer progressively chops connecting notes from the melody, jumping from chord to chord and allowing his sidemen – Stephen Crump on bass and Marcus Gilmore on drums – to interject, imaginatively, either on the margins of a chord or in an around the missing notes.

Sometimes, this approach can border on the dissonant, yet Iyer often manages to hang on to a central theme. In fact, he admits to this approach himself within the liner notes. "Most of these works have a disruptive quality that we aim to reproduce with the trio", he writes.

The product is presented as a double album, coming in a gatefold sleeve, and the vinyl itself (which appears to be heavyweight but no attendant labels betray

just how heavy) is contained in paper inners, which was a little disappointing. I would have liked to have seen polythene or wax lined inners, as these are *de rigueur* for long term audiophile use. Yet I'm happy to say that the music is far from disappointing, however. Indeed, it's both a roller-coaster ride of interconnected ideas and a simultaneous disassembling of conventional structure. So why not dive in?

SLADE
Slade Alive!
Salvo

Possibly the most unpretentious band in the history of rock, Slade have a simple style and offer an honest message: fun. This album was recorded in 1971 in London and issued as a live vinyl LP in 1972. It found immediate success, hitting the No.2 spot in the UK charts and then stayed in the charts for over a year. It's a beautifully recorded album and shows how vinyl can really enhance a live experience. The actual soundstage which, after all, is one of the most important aspects of any live gig, is immense both horizontally and vertically with tremendous, almost cavernous, space all around the vocal. Yes, the band covers their own works such as 'Hear Me Calling', 'In Like

A Shot From a Gun' and 'Keep On Rocking' but they're not afraid to tackle other artists' material such as a long, glorious run at the classic 'Born To Be Wild' and, somewhat surprisingly, John Sebastian's low key 'Darling Be Home Soon'.

The LP arrives in a hated paper inner sleeve, but with a rather lovely gatefold cover featuring a large cartoon which was reportedly the winner in a Sun newspaper competition to design cover art for this album! It certainly sets the seventies tone, and is a very nice touch.

The energy from the band is interesting. A very young Noddy Holder actually sounds a little nervous. Maybe the live album was a little daunting. Maybe he was afraid of being 'found out' as confidence faltered because, despite the usual self-assured, vibrant vocal, Holder continually tries to gee-up the audience. He almost pleas with them to have a good time. He should not have had any fears however, because the audience had a ball – as indeed you will, listening to this live classic. If you do nothing else, you'll certainly walk away smiling. It's a lovely snapshot of a most underrated band, at their early best.



YES
Something's Coming: The BBC
Recordings 1969-1970
Lillith

The album follows the CD version, which was initially released under the NMC record label back in 1997. Comparing the two is interesting, and in this case important, because both are of relevance to dedicated Yes fans, due to the archival nature of the recordings. The sound quality of both releases is not the best. In some cases, such as 'Beyond And Before', a rare French Radio Broadcast, the sound plumbs the depths to croaky bootleg quality while on others, such as 'Sweet Dreams' and 'Then' via the Dave Lee Travis Show, there is at least a semblance of dynamic range. The rest of the tracks settle somewhere in between the two.

I wish the sleeve had been set within a gatefold or included a slip-sheet because what the vinyl misses is Ian Rowe's full liner notes (you only receive edited highlights here). Also missing are images of numerous newspaper cuttings and a set of notes, spanning six pages of the CD booklet, from ex-Yes guitarist, Peter Banks, who declares that *The Sunday Show* tracks, (Side C and part of Side D on this vinyl edition) are the most representative of the group at the time.

What the vinyl version does give you, however, is both a softening of some of the harsher elements of the tracks but also a slightly deeper soundstage – although it remains about as wide as a paper cut. The new vinyl issue also provides a far superior, higher resolution, cover shot and rear mounted images.

Presented with a different running order due, no doubt, to enable Lillith to fit all the music onto each vinyl side, including the original CD issue's bonus tracks, this is an important archival release that is an essential purchase for Yes fans.

COCTEAU TWINS
Garlands
Vinyl 180/4AD

I have a confession. Back in 1982, when this album came out, I spent my time wearing 'Garlands' out due to overplaying, hunting down elusive EPs issued by the band and falling madly in love with the lead singer Elizabeth Fraser, despite the fact that I'd never seen her face or could understand a word she was singing about [you and me both - Ed.]. That didn't matter, as Fraser's ethereal, uplifting vocalisations that formed themselves around a language that seemed to spring from a land populated by angels and apparitions seemed to solve the question of communication.

Her invented language and operatic delivery succeeded in imparting emotion directly from her mouth to your brain, cutting out all the rubbish in between. Robin Guthrie's soaring, intense, soundscape-drenched guitar fitted Fraser's voice so well they often seemed to appear from the same source. The result was epic. These records were magnificent, glorious and spirit-lifting. I was too often left a babbling wreck, incapable of flipping the record from Side A to Side B.

Now 'she' has returned, like a lost lover, standing in silhouette in the doorway backed by a brilliant unearthly light. Vinyl 180 has re-released 'Garlands' on heavyweight vinyl, instead of the wobble-board of the 4AD original, sitting within a card inner instead of the paper original. Playing the new Vinyl 180 version is a revelation – it is vastly superior to the original pressing. The original had a pleasing bass punch with the vocals a little set back. The new version keeps the punch but lifts the lower bass and widens and broadens the soundstage giving the music across of room to move around. Fraser's vocals are more balanced in the mix while appearing to have more body. A superb reissue that improves on the original issue in every way imaginable.

PR

First Report



Tim Jarman remembers the remarkable Uher Report 4000 portable tape recorder, which is surely the nineteen sixties precursor to the Sony Walkman Pro...

Even if you've never owned or used a Uher Report, you've heard one. Not so long ago it was the standard machine used by radio stations from BBC Radio 4 down to local independents for outside work, so it goes without saying that it's very difficult to avoid its output, either live way back then or in archive clips still used today..

At a glance the little Uher looks rather basic. It certainly doesn't have all the professional jewellery of the competing machine that Nagra produced, in fact there is little on the outside that you wouldn't find on any basic domestic cassette recorder. Inside things are different, the very finest German engineering is put to use to make a recorder of quite superlative quality. Rigorous design at the same

time ensured that the packaging and feature mix made for ease of use and relevance to the task: it was a tool, not a toy.

Introduced in 1961, the original Uher Report 4000 was a high-tech masterpiece. Compact and fully transistorised, it represented a thoroughly modern concept at a time when transistors had been little used outside the field of tinny portable radios. As well as using a transistorised amplifier, the Report also had an electronically regulated motor to ensure speed stability under all conditions. Although commonplace in later years at the time this was revolutionary; the Sony professional portable recorder of the day was still driven by clockwork for example!

The motor drove a large but lightweight flywheel through a series of belts and pulleys that

together formed a four speed transmission. Shifting the speed also automatically adjusted the equalisation so that in all cases recordings were made correctly. Such a wide range of speeds meant that the user had a choice that encompassed very high sound quality or an exceptionally long recording/playback time (up to six hours using triple-play tape). The lightweight flywheel was necessary because it avoided speed disturbances caused by inertia effects as the machine was carried. Some weight was still required in the drive train however to damp the fluctuations produced by the motor and so this was placed in one of the pulleys whose axis was not affected if the user walked (or ran!).

The mechanism was built up onto a diecast chassis that also formed the main body of the unit.

Power came either from five U2 flashlight cells or a rechargeable pack, initially lead acid but later nickel cadmium in the interests of ease of maintenance. Flashlight cells, as Uher pointed out, are available in every corner of the world, details like this and the tough build made the Uher 4000 the adventurer's tape recorder of choice for decades.

Electronically things were surprisingly straightforward. A simple transistor amplifier gave both recording and playback, either through external equipment or a small built-in loudspeaker. The heads were made by Bogen, a famous German manufacturer of the day and it is the quality of these heads combined with the stability of the mechanicals that give the Uher its excellent performance.

The original model was soon updated and became the Report 4000L. The L (Luxus) model added amongst other things cast metal transport keys and a three digit tape counter to the mix, and would soon become the definitive version of the early generations. Later on the 4000 IC appeared with an integrated circuit output stage as well as three automatic recording level control modes (speech/ music/ manual). The basic 4000 models were always 2-track mono but they were soon supplemented by the 4200 and 4400 series machines with two and four track stereo recording and playback respectively. 4 track open reel is not a professional format but the 4400 did find a following in the industrial and amateur fields, not least because if it was used in mono mode the recording time per reel went up to an impressive 24 hours. The final models were the Report Monitor series, which had three heads and so offered off-the-tape monitoring during recording. Easily recognised by their much larger round VU meters, the Report Monitors were far more complex electronically than their predecessors and had more plastic parts in the mechanism that could be fragile.

SOUND QUALITY

The Uher's sound is distinctive and familiar, possibly because you have heard it so many times already! Recording speech returns a sound that is full of warmth and authority, ready to go straight out on the air in a busy newsroom. The microphone stages are basic and functional but Uher's own microphones were often criticised for being of indifferent quality.

Still, it wasn't like Germany was short of other quality microphone manufacturers during the Uher 4000's reign. Although naturally at home on the picket line or amongst mud and bullets the 4000 is also a natural with music. The stereo versions are the best choice for this of course and the 4200 in particular makes a fine recorder, it can just about accommodate an LP's worth of music onto one of its little reels at 3 3/4 i.p.s.; remember with the two track format only one side of the tape can be used. Four track machines get around this limitation but because of the way the tracks are interleaved there is always some crosstalk between the two sides. This manifests itself as an incoherent rumble during the quiet pieces of the music which is subjectively very annoying. 7 1/2 i.p.s. give the ultimate recording quality but at this speed the reels empty very quickly, it's best reserved for live recordings that are going to be edited later. The sound is typical of German equipment of this period with pin-sharp treble and big, fat bass. Even the built-in loudspeaker, made specially for Uher, performs extremely well. Although today there is an endless choice of tiny equipment, the Uher is still remarkable for the quality it packs into such a small space.

BUYING

Uher claimed that over 1,500,000 Reports were sold so it comes as no surprise that finding one isn't exactly difficult. The very scruffy 4000L seems to be the most common of the breed, often with untidily engraved numbering, randomly drilled holes for extra connectors and bits of trim missing. Such examples are best viewed as either sources of parts or restoration projects for the brave. For the beginner a clean, original and tidy one is worth holding out for. Mono machines greatly outnumber the stereo ones with the 4200 being the easiest of the latter type to find. Report Monitors need to be inspected with care as it was common for parts of the speed change mechanism to be removed and discarded to render the machine suitable for use at 7 1/2 i.p.s. only. This of course makes tape costs very high for the private individual and there's not much that can be done about it unless a donor machine is available.

Apart from cabinet damage and obviously missing parts there are a few other things to look out

for. The first thing to inspect is the battery tray, as rusty contacts and other corrosion damage is common and in advanced cases this can spread to the aluminium casework too. If a Dryfit or NiCad pack is included don't count on it being any good; these days five NiMH D cells are the best choice for portable use. The correct AC power adaptor fits into the battery tray for home use but it can also be connected externally using a special cable for charging; try to find an example that still has all these parts. Various car adaptors were made too; some of them use resistive cable to drop the car battery voltage down to the

"the Uher is remarkable for the quality it packs into such a small space..."

correct level so it therefore follows that the lead mustn't be shortened, even if it is inconveniently long.

For portable use you'll need the carrying bag. Various styles were made in quality leather but failing this a simple clip-on metal handle was also available. As with all the accessories it is easiest to buy them as a complete outfit with the machine, don't bank of finding them separately later. The mechanism can get noisy if the rubber tyre around the flywheel gets hard. This doesn't seem to affect the sound too much but new flywheels are still available (at a price). The same goes for the belts; replace all three if you are going to use the recorder seriously. As for the electronics, the Report IC models are the easiest to deal with as most of the transistors are silicon types which are reliable and easy to replace. Earlier versions use Germanium transistors which can fail and are tricky to get hold of. However, there are persistent rumours that the early models do sound nicer... Finally the motor can be damaged if the machine is dropped; it is a special part and cannot be replaced with anything else. Luckily, in many cases it can be dismantled and repaired, although this is not an easy job.

CONCLUSION

From the deserts of Africa to the dark corners of the cold war to the listening room of the cultured audiophile, the Uher report was always there, decade after decade. You've heard other people's many times, now's the time to acquire your very own!

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"my 2001 prediction that CD was on the way out was finally coming true"



David Price

Time flies when you're having fun, as they say! Looking back through my past hi-fi writing related activities recently, I discovered that the first year of the new millennium saw me penning a curious article entitled, "Farewell to the Silver Disc Spinner". It predicted the death of the Compact Disc, thanks to the rise of MP3, Napster and this new fangled format called MP4 (which I felt sure would supersede MP3; it did as that's what came to be called AAC). I was also convinced the 'new fangled' Windows Media Audio format was going to be huge, and that as such the world would shortly see the end of Compact Disc. "After nigh-on twenty years the CD player looks, to put it politely, fatigued. Basically, it's gone as far as it can go", said I. But hang on, I then stepped back from predicting its imminent demise, arguing that the one thing that could save it was, errmmm, recordable CD...

Around one year on, in January 2002, yours truly was playing with one of the very last generations of Sony MiniDisc recorders, the MDS-JE770, concluding that it was great. At that time, it was perfectly fine to take MiniDisc seriously; how we'd laugh if we knew then what we know now. Elsewhere on the optical disc front, I was praising the Rega Jupiter CD player, which I regarded very highly; true, its tonality was a tad dry but it was a curiously musical sounding machine. These days it's not so rare, but back then most CD spinners still sounded mechanical.

By 2003, I was beguiled by Origin Live's new Illustrious tonearm, which had ousted a Linn Ekos from my Michell Orbe turntable, and was making delightful music. This was already well past the craze for Origin Live's 'Structural Modification' to the RB300; now the company was making serious high end arms and, with my Ortofon MC30 Supreme at least,

they really impressed me. So too did the Cyrus DVD7+, a pint sized half width Digital Versatile Disc spinner that had a lovely picture (via SCART) and a decent sound too...

In January 2004, we were still deep into the SACD/DVD-Audio thing. At the time, a vast number of reissues were coming out, as were the first universal players (that played both formats); it was a great time to be a hi-fi hack, being invited to every recording studio from Air to Abbey Road to hear the latest surround sound mixes of this or that classic album. I remember the studios very well, but the surround mixes I have mostly forgotten. It was the summer of 2004 when I found myself at the Groucho Club in London's West End, talking to producer Rhett Davies about his surround remastering of Roxy Music's 'Avalon'. He let the cat out of the bag, confessing they'd lost the original stereo masters and had to take the SACD master from the 16bit, 48kHz DAT master; so much for Direct Stream Digital! It was at this time I realised that so called hires wasn't the universal panacea for audiophiles; actually, most record companies viewed it as a marketing tool to sell 'old product'.

By 2005, 'Chi-fi' had hit this country, and we were all (it seemed) going mad about valve amps for hundreds of pounds when we'd previously paid thousands. But the Ming Da MC-7R valve preamplifier, costing just £288, got a mixed review in the January issue. Seeing (and hearing) one in the flesh resulted in some of the gloss being taken off. We were still soldiering along with DVD players back then, Pioneer's DV575 getting a glowing review, but there was a sense that the decade was beginning to turn; we'd had MP3, the new Apple iPod, DVD-A, SACD, digital surround and cheap Chinese hardware, but this was all looking a little old hat.

Indeed so, as it was a return to our roots with the Quad QC24/11-40 valve pre-power tested a year later; here was one of the first truly modern valve amplifiers, we opined. It had serious output transformers, excellent wiring and passive componentry, and was quite affordable too. Another thing that seduced from that time was Mission's e82; this was a high end floorstander that had been designed by a man I once used to recognise as a hi-fi reviewer, back in the late 1970s, and then the designer of the Heybrook HB1 - one Peter Comeau. He visited my house, set up the speakers and we didn't stop talking - about turntables, for an entire afternoon. Where is he now?

January 2007's issue was very 'zeitgeisty'; I did my famed 'eBay Survival Guide' which warned folk of the countless perils of buying old hi-fi online. I was amazed to receive no small amounts of vitriolic mail, calling me elitist for being 'anti eBay'. This was a bit confusing as at the time I'd bought and sold some 250 things on eBay, to supply this magazine with Olde Worldes for nigh on ten years. I was merely pointing out how bitter experience had taught me that when someone says something is "mint" on their auction listing, it isn't necessarily so...

Finally, this time last year the future of music was beginning to come to pass; my 2001 prediction that CD was on the way out was finally coming true, albeit at a rather embryonic level, with the Ripfactory Ripserver. A hard disk-based, network attached digital transport, it didn't catch on, but the RipNAS that followed certainly has. By way of completing the circle, we awarded the Cyrus CD8 SE our CD player of the year award - thanks in no small part to its brand new, bespoke CD mechanism. ●



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"this set will make many a Dad a happy chappie this Christmas..."



paul rigby

If you have read this issue's Classic Cuts column, your eyebrows may have risen a touch. Six CDs and a big, hardback book devoted to a long forgotten group of singing cowboys, totting a gee-whizz smile and a twinkle in their eyes? Oh, come on!

I know... isn't it wonderful? Wonderful because it could be done at all. Wonderful because of the passion and commitment it took to create the box set in the first place from the German record label, Bear Family. Wonderful because most kids believe that the music industry began with Leona Lewis and their parents with The Beatles so it's heart warming to declare that quality is a whole lot older, and stretches back far longer than the early sixties.

That was a box set that the major labels wouldn't have released in a hundred years and, even if they did revisit the group, they would never, ever, produce a box set of such quality and luxury. But that's Bear Family. Just check out its website (www.bear-family.de) and be amazed. Populated by legendary stars and wholly obscure artists covering the entire spectrum of musical history, Bear Family not only produces quality fare but does so backed with many of the world's foremost experts to make sure that details are correct and mastering is right on the nail.

And it doesn't stop there because Bear Family has just produced a new, luxurious box set which, as we're on the subject of the company, I couldn't resist examining. Imagine – a box set packed with ten CDs, a DVD and a 464-page, LP-sized, hardback book devoted to the actor, John Wayne. To gaze upon it, you really can't help but laugh at the sheer opulence of it all.

Commemorating the thirtieth

anniversary of his death, the 316 featured tracks are packed with soundtrack music from Wayne's westerns such as 'The Searchers', 'The Alamo', 'The Sons Of Katie Elder' and 'True Grit' plus title songs by the original artists such as Sons Of The Pioneers (yes, them again), Glen Campbell, The Limelickers, Ed Ames, Johnny Cash and Marty Robbins, along with songs inspired by the movies such as Frankie Avalon's 'The Ballad Of The Alamo', Gene Pitney's 'The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance' and Claude King's 'The Comancheros'. The bonus DVD is packed with trailers from Wayne's films and, for hardcore Wayne fans, many outtakes from his films, which are exclusive to this set.

But why does this box set exist at all? I asked L-P Anderson, who was heavily involved in the project itself. Speaking from his home in Sweden, Anderson revealed that, "as with all Bear Family stuff, 90% of any project is derived from label boss Richard Weize. Sometimes people can talk him into projects that he's not into personally but you've got to be very persistent. Just about everything on Bear Family is Richard's work. The first time I heard about the John Wayne set was when he called me up at 1am to tell me all about it. That's how he works, it's not like a regular record company where you have meetings with executives".

Another reason for the adoption of this Wayne project is that Bear Family has experimented with Western themes in the past and have found that they sell very well. For example, the company has a large box set devoted to the popular Bonanza TV programme plus single CDs and smaller anthologies based upon the genre.

One of Anderson's jobs was to

track down posters, cinema lobby cards and memorabilia for ultimate inclusion in the magnificent book. He had *carte blanche* to track down collectors all over the world to buy their collections. He searched far and wide, sourcing rare items from the USA, Argentina, Japan, Australia, England, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy and Sweden. "Richard never scrimps and saves in these areas. If he's got his mind set on something, he goes for it – there's no turning back."

Hence, when researching these massive sets, money tends to be no object. Which lends some truth to the story that the Bear Family accountant moved his office several miles from the Bear Family HQ because he was starting to suffer from nerves. The result is that Richard Weize himself, has an enormous archive. Working on a farm estate, Weize has a converted barn devoted to just his collection (including 60,000 albums) and the company's own archive, thousands of more items stuffed into a second converted barn.

There is method in the madness, however. Bear Family box sets might be lavish but they're rarely bootlegged. Downloads of these works are not popular because anyone receiving such MP3s are literally losing 50% of the entire package. As such, the sets offer excellent value for money, despite their high prices. Excellently mastered with the priority relating to sound quality as opposed to deadlines, the illustrated collections from some of the foremost Wayne experts in the world and a featured biography of John Wayne by acclaimed movie historian Richard W. Bann, this set will make many a Dad a happy chappie this Christmas. ●

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" the government's fake FM switchover date has failed spectacularly to deliver an increase in DAB sales..."



steven green

I have some good news to bring you about DAB for a change: three commercial radio groups have decided to campaign against the Government's plans to switch off FM stations in 2015. And the chief executives of the companies certainly didn't pull any punches when they aired their views on the subject. William Rogers, the chief executive of two of the companies opposed to the plans, UKRD and The Local Radio Company (TLRC), had this to say: "The proposal that there should be a review in 2013 which might lead to a switchover in 2015 needs to be exposed for the completely ridiculous proposal that it is. This industry has been lurching from one ridiculous position on the digital question to another. We have been subjected to poor planning, little realisation of the consequences of some of the decisions taken, and more worryingly, a complete lack of regard for the smaller to medium sized commercial stations". He added: "It is complete fantasy to suggest that the industry will be able to sort all the issues by this date." Well said that man!

The other senior radio industry figure to reveal his opposition to the plans was Scott Taunton, the chief executive of TalkSport-owner UTV Radio. He began by listing a number of issues that he didn't think would be resolved by 2015, such as that with only 10m DAB sales to date, there's no chance that the public will have replaced the estimated 180m FM devices in-use by that date, and nor will all cars have DAB by then. He also questioned the use of DAB itself: "DAB is not necessarily a next-generation service. There is already DAB+, and in order to launch DAB+ in the UK you would have to make

the vast bulk of DAB sets redundant. The future at the moment is FM – the next generation is about iPhones with FM receivers." (Actually, it is possible to launch DAB+ services without removing DAB services, if DAB stereo stations switched to using mono to free up space.) He concluded: "Talk of having the [switchover] in 2015 is just farcical".

Both chief executives are absolutely spot-on, of course, because there's no chance whatsoever of FM stations being switched off in 2015. The biggest problem they face is getting DAB inside the 30 million cars on the road. The DAB industry claims that 3% of all cars in the UK now have DAB (based on previous estimates, I think that's an inflated figure). But it's taken seven years just to get to that level, so do they seriously expect us to believe that the remaining 97% will all get DAB in the next six years?

The DAB industry held meetings with the car manufacturers recently to try and persuade them to fit DAB as standard in all new cars as soon as possible. But the manufacturers said they would only commit to making DAB available as an "optional extra" for all new cars by 2014. Big difference. Overall, I would be surprised if a quarter of all cars had DAB by 2015, and, in my opinion, this issue will end up putting the switchover date back to beyond 2020.

The reality of this situation is that the Digital Britain report simply fabricated a completely unrealistic switchover date to grab consumers' attention, so that the next time people buy audio equipment they would look to buy devices that support DAB – around 80% of all audio equipment that contains

a radio tuner still only supports FM/AM. The date was also intended to help the broadcasters persuade manufacturers to put DAB into more of their products – although the car manufacturers clearly haven't played ball. Another reason was because when a switch-off date was announced for analogue TV it led to a surge in digital TV set-top box sales. So, setting a switch-off date was nothing more than a ploy to boost DAB sales.

However, the latest figures published by the radio audience measurement body RAJAR showed that the number of DAB receivers in the UK actually fell in the third quarter of 2009. In other words, they sold a negative number of DAB radios in Q3 2009. Impressive! I very much doubt that more DAB radios were discarded than were purchased in Q3, and the discrepancy would be explained by the statistical inaccuracy of RAJAR's measurement methods. Statistical errors can only explain so much, though, and one thing that can be said with confidence is that DAB sales in Q3 must have been incredibly low.

Consumers have been fed a pack of lies about DAB for many years now, so it's made a hugely refreshing change for senior members of the radio industry to break cover and expose the Government's ridiculous plans to switch off FM stations in 2015 for being the complete fantasy that they clearly are. And the fact that the announcement of the fake switchover date failed so spectacularly to deliver the increase in DAB sales (the figures even showed that sales were negative – how embarrassing is that!) that they're so desperate for shows that there is some justice in this world after all. ●

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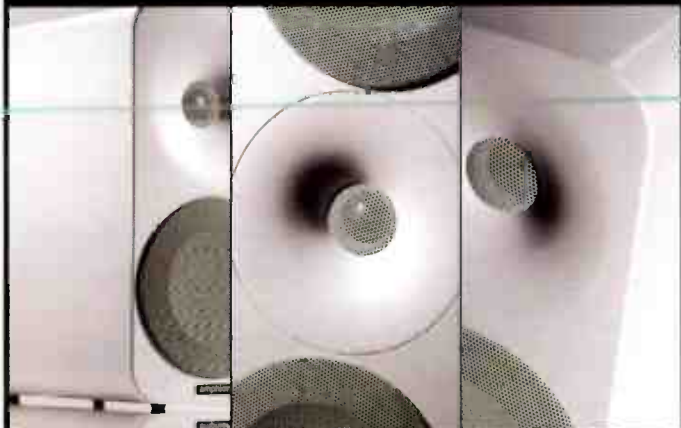
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"World Audio Design kits were unusual and different in their conception from what had gone before..."



noel keyword

At the end of 633 Squadron, where they attack the heavy water installation at the end of a fiord, there's a delightful sequence, described by some as "the world's worst special effects", where firecrackers curl through the sky and explosions are continuous. When I see it I'm reminded of our days building prototypes furiously for World Audio Design kits, many moons ago. Yes, DIY can be an explosive business alright, in more ways than one, as a reader touches upon in our Letters pages this month. It was also Hi-Fi World's daftest, if also greatest moment, because WAD DIY became very, very popular.

The explosions came literally from doing all the things we accidentally did when working at speed on valve amplifiers circuits, like discharging 500V, 100µF capacitors accidentally by short circuiting them. This releases enough energy to cause a big flash and a crack that had me keeling over backwards on the odd occasion. All this was going on while others were trying to write sensible articles in another part of the office [tell me about it! Ed.], it was a scene of suppressed madness at times. At one point whilst developing the 300B amplifier I currently and likely will always use, we pleaded with Tim de Paravicini, who designed its inter-stage transformers, not to use eighth inch thick steel cases with ball bearings potted inside to prevent them being sawn open and copied (paranoid, moi?), because it would cost so much, readers would never be able to afford the kit! Tim, however, was convinced his transformer design would be set upon either in Huntingdon or Hunan and his secrets made public for the world to feast upon. Er, yes, alright Tim!

DIY kit production was a complex business, both in the design

and implementation of the actual item, but also in instruction writing. This was a large and important task that built products do not need. In an often labyrinthine build sequence one wire occasionally got misrouted in the plans and an error like this could cause real difficulties, since no kit would then work if the instructions were followed to perfection.

Luckily, for better and for worse, they weren't! Experienced engineers would follow the circuit diagram, spot the wiring diagram error and let us know. Most purchasers fell into this category so on the odd occasion that a mistake arose it was caught and rectified pretty quickly, I'm glad to say, but in some ways the instructions were as important as the kits.

The kits sold well through the U.K. and Europe, but best to Australia. Why Australians were so interested in DIY I never found out. I had visions of bored mining engineers in remote Kalgoorlie deciding this was a great way to kill time...

Real problems came from enthusiasts whose enthusiasm exceeded their ability by a large margin. These poor souls would build something resembling a rat's nest built by an inebriated rat. Needless to say the nest would not work and in many cases it was easier, faster and more sensible economically to give them a built version than try and rebuild the nest into something that worked. We simply salvaged what we could of the remains.

Our enthusiastic customer was happy, but sadly they would never be able to really get the best from a kit, which we always felt was to use it as a basis for tweaking and tuning to a state that satisfied the owner. In this respect WAD kits were unusual and different in their conception from the what had gone before.

Kits were and still are seen as a way to save money, low price being the main concern. Ours never were:

it is not an approach that appealed to us or would fit in with the outlook of a hi-fi magazine. We found the best parts, or designed them in the case of transformers, and supplied what was a quality framework to which mods could be applied. Valve amplifiers are very parts-sensitive, differences in sound quality between components being readily audible, much more so than in the one and only solid-state amplifier we designed and built. Both Editor David Price and I to this day have our revered World Audio Design tweaked amplifiers we would not part with. Why? Because when you tune an amplifier or loudspeaker it seemingly moves into another realm sound quality wise. Our amplifiers are not text book perfect, in fact they are 'characterful' but that character cannot be bought. With its Black Gate capacitors, Jensen paper-in-oil capacitors, no feedback, Tim de Paravicini trannies and what have you my 300B amplifier is a sonic work of art – and this is what you get from a good kit.

But DIY is also political, I was to find, and it still is. World Audio Design grew at an alarming pace – and some manufacturers were not happy. As I explain in our Letters pages, a sale by us was seen by some as a sale lost to them.

In the end WAD became so big it was going to overwhelm the magazine, something I realised when a van arrived sitting on its bump stops because it was carrying many tons of transformers. So it had to go. Peter Comeau now owns and runs it as World Design of course. A new twist to the tale came when he was recently offered a plum job as Head of Acoustics at IAG in China. As Peter says in our Letters pages World Design is still offering specialist kits. For me the fireworks are over, but DIY will always offer something special.

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"What exactly do we want from our hi-fi systems – accuracy or pleasure?"



adam smith

A couple of audio related incidents recently have resulted in me pondering one of the hi-fi fan's greatest conundrums, namely, what exactly do we want from our hi-fi systems – accuracy or pleasure? The seed for this was first sown in my head when my father was heard to ponder over the final destination of one or two of my recent acquisitions. I believe his actual words were, "what are you doing with all that junk at the back of my garage?" but you get the gist. Anyway, on sorting through said treasures I stumbled across a long forgotten gem, namely a Bang & Olufsen Beomaster 2400/2 from a car boot sale over a year ago.

Well, in need of a break from turntables, this delight of 1970s engineering was duly transferred to the workbench for a session with the cleaning products, and a few hours, two bulbs and a capacitor later, was found to be in excellent working order. Consequently, up it went to the listening room for a full check and no nasty noises, hums buzzes or screeches were detected, however I was aware of a bit of a problem. You see, firing up my high tech 1970s beast of a top-end Akai tuner, fed with an amplified FM aerial, through my Naim Supernait and down some posh loudspeaker cables to my Ferrographs, I was aware that Messrs. Radcliffe and Maconie were sounding scorchingly vivid. Every throat clearance made me jump, every shuffle of paper was a distraction and the compression put into even our FM signals not exactly well hidden – all in all a marvel of insight. I was impressed.

And then I switched to the Beomaster. With a short length of wire stuffed into its aerial socket, and through a couple of lengths of basic pre-made loudspeaker cable to

the Ferrographs (DIN loudspeaker plugs, you see) there was less insight but more smooth sophistication. Radio 2's evening jocks seemed to have moved back a bit, loosened their ties and chilled out a tad. The shuffling of paper now wandered off into the background and, as for the compression – well, it was suddenly less obvious. So clearly, this old Danish relic is something of a let-down in hi-fi terms, then? Well, maybe it is when it comes to telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but all I know is that I could have sat and listened to it all night without a moment's hesitation! Suddenly, my stark and uber-revealing main setup seemed rather less appealing than usual, and I hit the 'off' button on the Akai fairly quickly.

These thoughts came back to me with a jolt in Las Vegas, no less, a few weekends ago. In our lovely, sleek, woefully underpowered American hire car I switched on the radio to be greeted by a blast of hideousness. Further searching revealed that, as with every other car I have ever hired in the good old US of A, someone had cranked bass and treble on the stereo to maximum, the midrange to one away from its top level and switched the 'Loudness' on! Now, a few minutes of fiddling and I had things sounding far more normal again, but if someone likes to listen to their music like this, who am I to moan at them? This seems to be a predilection for our U.S. cousins, as more than one post on the very fine AudioKarma online forum have revealed. I cannot help but be confused by a poster's assertion that their loudspeakers are "brilliant" whilst on another thread they are joyfully admitting that their preferred listening setup is with the bass and midrange cranked, the treble cut and the graphic equaliser

sliders resembling a cross section of the Alps. Enjoyable, maybe, but I'm not quite sure this is revealing those loudspeakers' true character!

The problem all stems from deciding what we want to hear. Is it really necessary to have a recording dissected right in front of you, mistakes and all, in order to really feel that you are part of the action, or is it rather better to have those inadequacies and distractions glossed over a little, so that the message contained within the actual music itself can be concentrated on more fully? Of course, as a reviewer, it is invariably necessary to hear the good and the bad, otherwise pretty much anything will sound respectable through our lovely rose-tinted and 'friendly' setups. This might make our jobs even more pleasurable, but it doesn't tell us, or you the reader, much about what you need to know!

All in all, I cannot help but feel that the two situations can coexist, or even a nice middle ground option is no bad thing. There seem to be an increasing number of components, particularly loudspeakers, on the market these days that actually can dig right into the heart of a recording to pull out its very finest details but without really rubbing your nose into the fact that it isn't perfect. There are plenty of components out there that really will dissect your music right in front of your ears with the alacrity and precision of a top surgeon. Equally, though, in the same way that it is sometimes nice to climb aboard a big luxury limousine and be wafted from place to place in comfort and smoothness; in the same way, that rather warm and soft sounding component you're really not sure about can be just the ticket in the right situation. And in case you're wondering, yes – I'm keeping the Beomaster! ●

vinyl section

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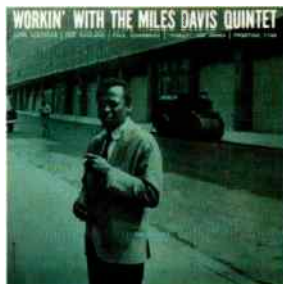
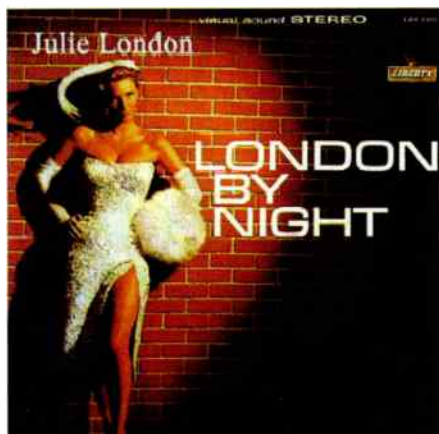
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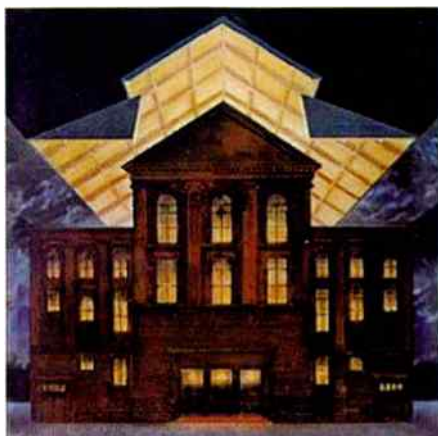
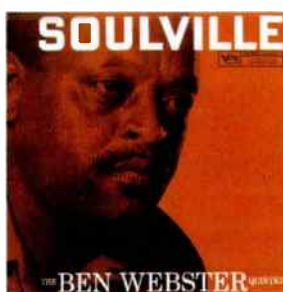
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Paul Rigby auditions Decent Audio's wall shelf, while David Price reads Tim & Nick Jarman's 'Bang & Olufsen' book.

news



Milt Jackson: Plenty, Plenty Soul



RARE ROCK

Direct from the Italian record label Rave Up (www.raveuprecords.com), these new releases have a punkish, 3-chord smell about them; regular weight paper inners, pint of lager and a packet of crisps please John! First out are the Nervebreakers and 'Hijack The Radio!', Volume 15 under the 'American Lost Punk Rock Nuggets' imprint. This album features rare session work from 1977 and 1978 and live cuts from 1980. Jumping along and Volume 56 in the same series belongs to Philadelphia's The Warm Jets. 'Wanna Start A War' is filled with psyche pop, punk acetates and rare live cuts from 1979 and 1980. Volume 55 features rare cuts and radio sessions via Boston outfit, The Dawgs'. 'Outside Of Time' highlights the group's specialised roots-based rock/punk. Also look out for the Readymades' 'San Francisco: Mostly Alive' from 1978 and the pleasantly monickered The Shit Dogs' 'World War III' a 'Definitive Anthology' from 1980-1983.



CLASSIC JAZZ

Hot from the Discovery (www.discovery-records.com) stable in the UK are these European imports on 180gm vinyl that feature a selection of classic jazz including Julie London's 'London By Night' (WTR; 1958), a superb sequence of downbeat originals and standards, carefully paced to end in an upbeat redemption. Away from vocalisations, Charlie Parker's sparkling 'Jazz At Massey Hall' (Jazz Beat; 1953) features Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and Max Roach at the Canadian venue, remastered without Mingus' later, over-dubbed, bass parts. 'Workin' With The Miles Davis Quintet', featuring Miles, John Coltrane, Red Garland, Paul Chambers and "Philly" Joe Jones (52nd Street Records; 1951), was the third in the four albums that the Quintet would record. Featuring studio sessions of live works and improvisations, this is an important work from an essential period of Miles' works. Also look out for Milt Jackson's 'Plenty, Plenty Soul' (52nd Street Records; 1957) that highlights the vibraphonist, being packed with fervour and passion. Finally, look out for 'Soulville' from The Ben Webster Quintet (52nd Street Records; 1957), featuring Oscar Peterson, in which the tenor sax man plays piano!

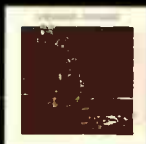


HELLO YOUNG VINYL LOVERS...

One of the most interesting record labels in the world is Vinyl Lovers. It has the habit of reissuing a range of rare and interesting titles including this new batch. Originally released in 1969 via Page One, Vanity Fare's 'Early In the Morning' includes the hits, 'Hitchin' A Ride' and the title track. Excellent rock-based harmonies. Anne Briggs – who influenced every important folk singer from the UK, from Norma Waterson to Sandy Denny – was a legend when she retired at just 27. 'Nottinghamshire Tales' is an important 'lost' album from 1973, originally unreleased.

From rock to folk to jazz and Charles Mingus' 'The Complete Sessions Of The Clown' from 1957 expands the original album from four to six tracks. A work of genius, it is draped within a cape of fervour and energy.

Also look out for space rockers Ozric Tentacles and 'Strangitude' (1991), a complex, synth-based composition; the country roots-rock debut, 'First Album' from Roger Morris (1970) which sounds very Band-like; The Family Dogg's 'A Way Of Life' (1969), British-based harmony rock featuring Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones. Finally, Shirley Collins' 'False True Lovers' showcased this British-born, eclectic folk artist's debut from 1959.



A ROCK ODYSSEY

It's interesting to see the variety of new vinyl available, even within a single genre. Take rock, and the choice is broad, encapsulating the likes of Young Marble Giants' 'Live At The Hurrah' (Get Back; 1980). This unique indie new wave outfit presented their stripped tones within this New York club. Another live cut, via Audio Fidelity, is J. Geils Band's 'Full House'. Recorded in 1972 at the Cinderella Ballroom, Detroit, USA, this album shows the band at their best because, like the Grateful Dead, they were best heard live.

Bob Dylan's 'Self Portrait' (Sundazed; 1970) was much criticised and, arguably, undervalued. Sprawling and haphazard, yes, it retains an odd fixation...

Finally, the rather more energetic 'Parole' via Motorhead was the band's original, explosive debut with the original line-up of Lemmy, Lucas Fox and Larry Wallis, it was shelved in 1975. This double LP edition includes four alternative takes.



AND FINALLY

Vinyl80 has released two classics from the eighties. The first presents the cynical scowling poetry of Mark E. Smith via The Fall's 'This Nation's Saving Grace' (1985), featuring his then wife, Brix Smith, whose vocals are highly complementary. Dead Can Dance's 'The Serpent's Egg' (1988), also via Vinyl80, took the band's mix of ambience, pop and world vibes weaved with vocal brilliance, to new heights.

New out is Moriarty's 'Gee Whiz But This Is A Lonesome Town' (Naïve). French based multinationals, they offer a sound that pulls at the roots of American folk but with a distinct edge that removes them from the bland – worth investigating.



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ISO TONIC

Neville Roberts is refreshed by the new Isokinetik Modular One turntable...

"If it sounds better, it is better!" Such is the design philosophy of Isokinetik, a company with experience in both the audio equipment and sound engineering industries, which has earned a fine reputation for developing enhancements and upgrades to audio products, and especially turntables. So I guess it was only a matter of time before the company developed its own vinyl spinner from scratch...

According to designer Karl Smith, the product is based on a careful choice of materials allied to strict adherence to mechanical, electrical and acoustic engineering principles. The end result, he claims, is a product that is designed to maintain the absolute integrity of the original music signal.

THE PACKAGE

The Modular One is the first in what will be a series of Isokinetik turntables, and can be supplied as an entry-level unit which can then be



high quality diecast inner platter and spindle...

upgraded by the user in stages, as funds allow. Alternatively, it can be supplied with all the modifications and upgrades already fitted. The deck can be supplied with either a Jelco or Rega arm; prices start at £429 without an arm or £525 with the ISO251 tonearm. The model reviewed with its extensive options list costs £999 with the ISO251C tonearm and £1,139 with the Jelco SA-250ST tonearm and cable.

Jelco's Japanese engineering is superb - they even make their own jewelled bearings. Many well-known brands have marketed Jelco arms under their own names. The Jelco SA-250 has an S-shaped arm and a removable headshell, but the version supplied by Isokinetik is the SA-250ST, which has a straight arm and a fixed headshell; this magazine has found it to measure better than its S-shaped brother. The Jelco uses the standard 5 pin DIN connector in the base, giving a choice of interconnects. This unit was tested with the Jelco 90 degree tonearm cable.

The Rega RB250 which was supplied as standard on the Planar 2 and P2 turntables, is legendary. The new RB251 is an enhanced evolution of the RB250 and uses hand selected high quality vertical and horizontal bearings. It is also the first in the Rega range to use their high pressure diecast silicon alloy arm tube and the three point fixing technique, based on the mounting system of their flagship tonearm, the RB1000. This mounting system is designed to reduce stress on the plinth and tonearm in order to give the arm greater stability. The ISO251C tonearm used here is the RB251 upgraded

with the ISOtone wiring, incorporating Cardas golden section Litz wire, ISOweight asymmetric counterweight and ISOend stainless steel end stub.

The turntable is designed as a fully customisable, upgradable base on which to build according to the user's personal taste - and pocket! The resulting unit, it is claimed, will compete favourably with its more expensive competitors.

The plinth is CNC machined from highly polished billet acrylic, giving it a great finish. The feet are machined from Delrin and have dense sorbothane anti vibration pads. Incidentally, Delrin is an acetal resin and, according to the manufacturers (DuPont), it bridges the gap between metals and ordinary plastics with its unique combination of strength, hardness, resistance to solvents, low wear and low friction. The bearing assembly is made of phosphor-bronze and incorporates a ceramic ball. This assembly is fitted to an aluminium and ground-steel sub-platter which is precision engineered to exacting tolerances with 0.001mm concentricity between the axle and hub.

A high quality asynchronous motor spins the platter at either 33rpm or 45rpm. Like many other turntables in its class, this speed change is accomplished by moving the drive belt on the pulley. However, better results can be achieved by using the ISOdrive quadrature-quartz speed generator turntable motor drive system as an upgrade to bring greater pitch stability and speed





accuracy, as well as a push button speed change facility.

The turntable benefits from having a tonearm transfer plate, which allows the user to fit almost any tonearm to the turntable. This also facilitates the comparison of various combinations of tonearm and cartridge which, once mounted on a transfer plate, are simply dropped into place.

The basic model is supplied with a 12mm diamond polished acrylic platter, which is said to have a neutral character. Upgrades to this are available, including a 25mm thick acrylic platter, as well as platters manufactured from Delrin or ply materials, together with a number of colour options.

GOING FOR A SPIN

The turntable supplied for this review had the ISOdek S1 acrylic shelf, ISOdrive offboard PSU, the ISOplatter 25mm acrylic platter and ISOlube spindle oil to drop into the bearing assembly after insertion of the ceramic ball and before insertion of the 'ISOsub' sub-platter. It was also supplied with two tonearms and associated transfer plates: the ISO251C tonearm with integral cable and the Jelco SA-250ST tonearm and Jelco 90 degree cable. A Goldring 2400 moving magnet cartridge was used, along with my trusty Lyra Clavis DC moving coil.

The ISOdrive is a neat little unit that takes your noisy 240VAC mains, converts it to a 24VDC and uses this to power a quartz oscillator to produce switchable 50Hz or 67.5Hz and steps the result up to 115VAC to run the synchronous motor. The drive belt can then be left on the upper '33 1/3rpm' pulley as depressing the button on the front of the ISOdrive changes the indicate LED from red to green and increases the oscillator frequency from 50Hz to 67.5Hz, thus increasing the turntable rotation to 45rpm.

The whole unit looks impressive; it is apparent that everything has been manufactured and finished to a high standard. Although the style is simple and uncomplicated, it looks elegant with just the right use of black and transparent acrylic with splashes of silver aluminium around the motor pulley assembly. Of course, looks can be deceiving, so it was time to power things up and start spinning some vinyl...

Before this however, it was essential to properly set up both arms on their transfer plates, with my chosen cartridge. VTA, cartridge alignment, tracking force and bias all required careful adjustment before any meaningful comparisons could take place. Once done however, it meant that swapping between the

arms was relatively straightforward as they each had their own transfer plates and I just needed to realign the cartridge in the headshell after fitting.



ISOtone wire for ISO251C tonearm...

SOUND QUALITY

I chose three albums for the tests: 'Vivaldi Concerti Volume 2' by Concerto Amsterdam (Telefunken Das Alte Werk 6.42355), 'Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4' by Lorin Maazel



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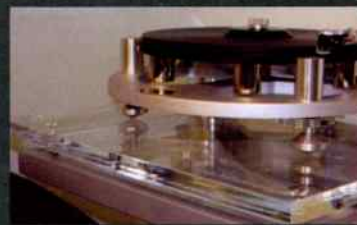
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and the Cleveland Orchestra (Telarc Digital 10047) and for something a bit more upbeat, the classic 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' by Simon and Garfunkel (CBS 63699 Half-speed Mastered Audiophile Pressing).

First up was the Modular One fitted with the Jelco SA-250ST arm in place. Starting off with the Vivaldi, the Modular One/Jelco combination set the bar high. The baroque music had a real openness and transparency – breathtakingly realistic. Instrument positioning was excellent, both side to side and front to back. The trumpets in the Tchaikovsky symphony were extremely clear and open, yet strident as indeed they should be. The lower middle range was well controlled and tight. Moving down in frequency, bass drums were punchy with great grip and also very well extended.

The CBS recording of Simon and Garfunkel can easily sound muddled and confused, especially as the sound engineers in the late '60s - early '70s had a penchant for messing around with the mix using their new-fangled electronic gadgets! I chose this recording as it does take something a bit special to untangle the mess – and I have to say that the Modular One/Jelco did an excellent job. The usually muffled midrange and limp bass were cleaned up and the bass was brought to life in a way I had not heard before with this recording.

At this point, I brought out my copy of Image Hi-Fi's 'Vinyl Essentials' test record to check the tracking and tonearm/ cartridge resonance. With the Jelco arm, the cartridge managed to track 80 microns before showing any signs of breaking up with the characteristic buzz on one or both channels. The arm resonance was at about 12Hz, which is fine. Anything over 14Hz and you're getting too close to a real-world signal and anything around 6Hz and below will produce subsonic noise and



The Modular One's ISO251C arm option...

the harmonics of this will inevitably interfere with the audio signal.

Swapping the arm was indeed a very simple process as this just entailed unscrewing the four screws holding the transfer plate. Out went the Jelco and in went the ISO251C. Playing through the same series of records demonstrated that the ISO251C offered an arguably cleaner top end than the Jelco. Bass was very tightly controlled and drums packed a real punch. However, I wondered if it was almost too controlled as, overall, I felt the Jelco went down a bit deeper. As with the Jelco, the vocals on the CBS recording managed to be extracted from the processed mush and the solos on 'So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright' were beautifully clear with a great presence. The 'Vinyl Essentials' tests gave an identical tracking ability result and the arm resonance was at 10Hz – comfortably in the acceptable range.

CONCLUSION

The Modular One is a great looking turntable and its performance reflects the elegant and refined styling. Careful thought has been given to a product that can be upgraded easily by the user as funds permit. Attention to

detail in the manufacturing processes ensures that all the elements of the unit and its upgrades blend together perfectly. A unit of this quality can only be made by people who take pride in their work, as well as having professional skills. I'd say it's a very competitive product at the price indeed.

It was a tough call to say which of the two arms I preferred. On balance, I felt that the Jelco won me over with its smooth and extended bass performance. However, I can see many people preferring the tightness and openness of the ISO251. It's great to have an option either way, and in this case the ability to swap arms so simply was also appreciated. Overall then, a welcome new contender to an increasingly crowded 'affordable' turntable market, the Isokinetik Modular One deserves to succeed.

VERDICT ●●●●£
Impressive affordable turntable with a vast range of cost effective upgrades.

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- OPTIONS**
- ISO251C tonearm (Rega RB251 upgraded with the ISOtone wiring incorporating Cardas golden section Litz wire, ISOweight asymmetric counterweight and ISOend stainless steel end stub)
 - Jelco SA-250ST tonearm with Jelco 90 degree tonearm cable
 - ISOdek S1 acrylic shelf
 - ISOdrive offboard PSU
 - ISOplatter 25mm acrylic platter
 - ISOlube spindle oil



ISOdrive offboard PSU.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

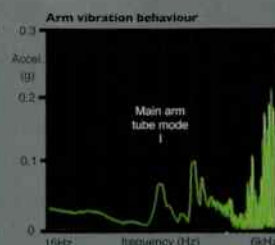
The Isokinetik's Jelco SA-250ST arm, which we have tested before, is a very effective design. It has a main arm tube mode at 450Hz that is very well suppressed, our vibration analysis made with an accelerometer shows. This suggests it will provide a wide stereo stage at lower frequencies, as well as good bass dynamics. There is the usual third order bending mode at 1300Hz too, again well suppressed.

The low-ish level of headshell vibration above 1kHz shows the headshell is well damped. So in spite of its simple appearance the Jelco SA-250ST arm fitted to the Isokinetik Iso gives good results.

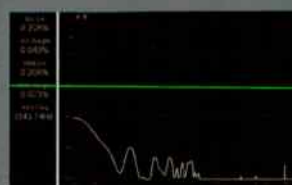
The turntable has a low rate wow component at rotational frequency of 0.56Hz (33rpm) but at around 0.2% (IEC Lin) it isn't excessive. The IEC weighted wow value of 0.043% in our analysis represents what the turntable was doing at higher speed variation rates and is an excellent result, suggesting a clean enough sound. Speed was accurate, a negligible -0.2% error being shown in our analysis.

The Iso and Jelco SA-250ST arm both measured well and should give a clean, stable sound together. NK

JELCO SA-250ST ARM



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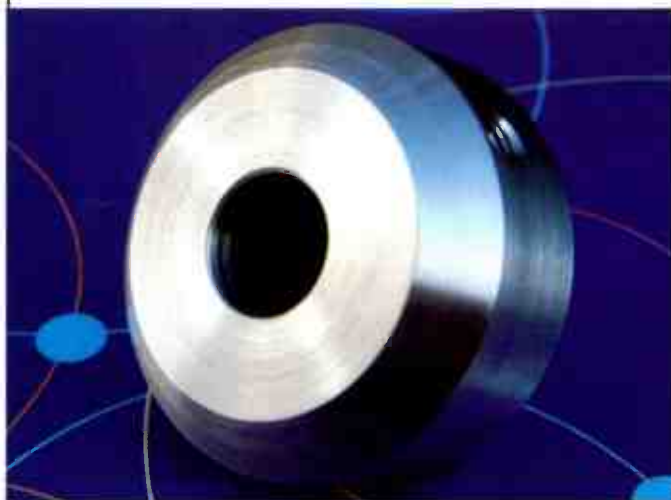
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JUNE 2009 ISSUE

HI-FI WORLD





Legacy Playback

Noel Keywood reviews Goldring's new Legacy moving coil cartridge...

The revival of vinyl is a high-end phenomenon. It's the big ticket items that are selling well, SME telling me the other day that their SMEV arm outsells all else. "People want the best; they don't want to upgrade" Cameron Robertson Aikman said. Well, the Goldring Legacy here isn't in that league, but it is firm foot on bottom end of a ladder that leads up to vinyl heaven. That's because it is a moving coil cartridge and, with a price tag of £595, one that many of us are able to afford.

I'm a Goldring fan and love their 1000 Series moving magnet (MM) cartridges in particular. But their higher quality moving coils, or MCs, have never struck a chord with me. There's nothing out of the ordinary here, though, since budget moving coil designs from famed manufacturers like Ortofon also tend to fall flat, in my estimation. You are better off with a decent MM, which can give a great sound and is a far simpler and considerably less expensive proposition than an MC.

Decent budget MCs are the renowned and infamous Denon DL103 which many swear by – but we just swear! The DL103R is a better and altogether more reasonable proposition sound quality wise but is a lot more expensive than the cooking '103, moving into price contention with the impressive Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII. This cartridge is the one to beat as budget moving coils go and I see it as the one against which the Legacy is in

effect pitched. Luckily, there is a clear difference between the two that may act as a clincher either way for those faced with choosing between them.

The Legacy comes sturdily protected in a heavy leather case containing a solid wood insert, the cartridge bedded in a cradle of foam sitting in a machined cutout. Packed beneath it are mounting screws and a hex key, whilst on top sits a small handbook.

The handbook explains the Legacy uses a rigid, lightweight magnesium body. Weighing just 8gms the cartridge is fairly light and will balance out in any arm, as all designs accept up to 10gms. However, whilst our office Rega RB301 accepted it with alacrity, an SME312S with heavy counterweight to balance an Ortofon Cadenza Blue really needed its rear weight lightening to properly accept an 8gm cartridge. I did most of my listening with the SME, via an Icon Audio PS3 phono stage, World Audio

or cranny to roll into. This is one of the joys of cartridge reviewing, one I tackle on my hands and knees with torch and magnifying glass. But not with current Ortofon MCs. So thumbs up to blind tapped fixing holes (it's the simple things that get reviewers excited!).

To protect the stylus there is a clear plastic removable guard that slides on from below and was easy enough to use; some guards are very awkward.

Goldring say the Legacy requires 1.5-2gms tracking force and 1.75 is nominal. I used 2 gms and found tracking was superb, as our tests suggest. The Vital profile stylus is quiet in the groove, groove noise lacking the hissy, spitty quality that comes from some tips, especially when there's a high frequency peak in output. However, output is so low volume had to be wound up and I did hear a little hiss from the phono stage, even though it has a low noise input. This was close to the loudspeaker though, not at my listening position 3 metres away.

The stylus is visible from the

"fundamentally well balanced, it was nothing other than silky smooth..."

Design 300B amplifier and revamped World Audio Design KLS9s.

The Legacy body has blind tapped holes so the fixing screws must not be too long, but a tapped body does make fixing much easier. There are no nuts to fiddle with – you know, those things that can be relied upon to drop onto the floor and find the most obscure nook

front, allowing accurate cueing, always a useful feature. Goldring recommend the Legacy feeds a 100 Ohm load, an industry standard value for MC phono inputs, so there's nothing unusual in its phono preamp requirements. However, our measurements did show the Legacy has very low output, so a quiet modern phono stage is required to

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Adcom G4 D-575 class A CD disc player. Boved.	£129	Maratz CD636. KI signature with remote.	£149
Avision RD11 turntable with lid. Good condition.	£149	Grax G707 tone arm. Nice condition.	£199
Phoneme PD-91 CD player. Ex condition & remote.	£449	Maratz CD63 CD player and remote.	£80
Meridian 306 CD player and remote. Boved.	£549	Garrard 4HF headshell. Boved.	£39
Linn Kank CD player. Stunning. Ex condition.	£349	Linn Numark DC. Excellent condition.	£349
Mission 7755 turntable. Cut out for 774 SME. Boved.	£349	Rotel RCD9708 BX CD. Ex condition. Remote.	£399
Mission CDP-911E CD player. Remote book. Cost £300	£119	Audionite Arm 2. Silver wired. Costs new £29400	£199
N/A Audio. Audio experience Concerto plus MC2 MM/MC. Valve	£799	phono pre-amp. Well reviewed. Mint. Boved.	£279
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Sony MDSJ920 mini disc player. Ex. Mint & Bvd.	£129	SMI 3049 series II improved non improved in m.	£199
ST12 3055 with SME mount. Black. Mint.	£129	Maratz CD73 CD player. 1994. Ex condition.	£275
Avision RD20 turntable. Reads to fit SME tone arm.	£149	Thorens TD164B MM. Black. SM1 cut out.	£149
Nad 504 CD player. Ex condition. No display.	£49	Cambridge Audio CD5. Black finish. Boved. Remote.	£59
Rotel KCD 965 BX CD player. Tweakers dream.	£149	Rotel RCD 865 BX CD player. Superb condition.	£99

SPEAKERS

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Celestion 100 speakers. Nice condition.	£299
Quad ESL57 speakers. Black. OTA served. Ex con.	£799
AKAcoustic linear speakers. Ribbon speakers.	£399
BXW DM2 MK1 loudspeakers. Awesome sound	£175
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Ken C20. Black finish.	£49
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OTHER ITEMS

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Thorens TD126 MK2 electronic & Sine series 3 arm	£449	HQ balanced phono pre-amp. Awesome.	£249
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Arcom Diva 161 tuner in black. AM-FM-RDS	£89	Sony ST-S370 FM-RDS Tuner. Ex condition.	£29
Ken T271 tweeters. X2. Good condition.	£45	Ken B300 units X2. Good condition.	£49
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Ken B139 bass unit. Race track design.	£35	SME Fluid adapter kit. Complete & Boved.	£69
1 emtek battery operated MC pre-amp.	£59	Quad FM1 stereo tuner. Serviced by One Thing Audio and fitted with top quality stereo decoder. Good condition.	£149
Quad FM1 stereo tuner. Serviced by One Thing Audio and fitted with top quality stereo decoder. Good condition.	£149	Ortofon MC4 76 MC pre-amp. Late condition.	£45
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Small Talk



From Talk Electronics comes the diminutive Edwards Audio MC1 phono stage; Tony Bolton listens carefully...

A new name in the hi-fi shops is Edwards Audio, a venture for Talk Electronics, long time UK based manufacturers of amplifiers and CD players. The Edwards range consists of three phono stages, the MMI (moving magnet only), the MC1 under review here which caters for moving coil (MC) and moving magnet (MM) cartridges, the MC2, and the HA2 (headphone amp with passive line level inputs). The optional PSU2, tried in this review, costs a further £249.95.

The MC1 comes housed in a compact 114.5x47.5x160mm extruded aluminium casing with a white plastic fascia containing the logo. Instead of the customary LED to indicate the presence of power, the whole fascia glows. The back contains two pairs of RCA phono sockets for the signal in and out, an earthing post and the small circular socket for the power supply. This can be fed either by the supplied 'wall-wart' power supply or by the optional PSU2 unit. The former is not a normal 'off-the-shelf' example but is custom made using a split rail design

using + and - DC power outputs to reject RF noise. The gold-plated PCB is populated with high quality diodes and snubber caps.

This is housed in a matching alloy case, with, again a backlit white fascia, the back being populated by two power output sockets and an IEC mains input. There is also a switch for lifting the earth connection. There is no hard and fast rule for using this, the best way is to try it and see which setting gives the most silent background.

The phono stage circuit topology is described as a fully discrete input gain stage followed by a proprietary op-amp based active/passive RIAA filter, followed by a totally buffered output section with very low output impedance.

A little care is required when siting the unit to avoid mains hum from other components. It was not as sensitive to this as some phono stages that I have used, but still responded to a little experimentation in positioning and cable layout. Changes between MC and MM usage are accomplished by unscrewing the back of the case, gently pulling the circuit board out and simply changing

the position of a pair of jumpers, mounted just in front of the rear of the input sockets.

SOUND QUALITY

After the customary couple of days running in, I started listening in earnest. Finding myself in one of my occasional 'guitary' moods I started off by playing a couple of Coral label Buddy Holly LPs. These were mono originals released around the time of his premature death at the age of just twenty two. As a musical innovator he was well ahead of the crowd, starting off with straightforward rock and roll tracks such as 'That'll Be The Day', and within two years breaking new ground by introducing strings into the genre in the posthumously released 'It Doesn't matter Anymore'. He was encouraged in this by his producer Norman Petty, who provided the rhythmic accompaniment in the track 'Everyday' by slapping his hands against his knees...

All of this fell out of the Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers in a very energetic manner. The energy of this beat-driven music seemed to suit the MC1, rhythms being presented in a very engaging and foot-tapping



manner. The soundstage was well defined, occupying the central area between the speakers and having moderate depth. The absence of a mono switch meant that surface noise was left to occupy the extreme edges of the sound but was sufficiently muted that the listener was left with an awareness of it, rather than it being intrusive. Vocals and Holly's lead guitar were very defined.

Staying with guitars I came rather more up to date with the Fun Lovin' Criminals first LP 'Come Find Yourself'. The opening track, 'The Fun Lovin' Criminal' again showed off the MC 1's delight in projecting the beat of music and a stereo soundstage that showed off the position of each performer in an area that filled the space between the speakers, but was again very sharply defined in both size and performer positioning. Again I felt the midrange to be particularly well focused, Hughie's vocals seeming to come from a spot a couple of feet forward into the room.

I felt that there was a tendency for the upper mid to be projected a little more strongly than the surrounding frequencies, and a change of music to the D'Oyly Carte performing Gilbert and Sullivan on Decca records confirmed this. The massed voices of a female chorus, and the banks of violins in the orchestra were a little too intensely reproduced for my taste, causing me to turn the volume down fractionally from my customary listening level. Male vocals, although quite firmly reproduced and placed, stayed within the bounds of acceptability. The plus side of this was the perceived extra definition given to the words being sung.

Up to this point I had been using the MC 1 powered directly off the mains. I plugged in the PSU 2 and ran through the same tracks again. The

first and most obvious difference was the opening up of the soundstage to a more three dimensional space. Overall width remained similar, extending to the inside edges of the speakers, but there was more blackness in between performers, and greater depth. Lead vocalists and instruments seemed to stand a bit further forward of their companions, and some of the sensation of crowding in the upper midrange frequencies was lowered. I think this was helped by the perception that the high frequencies extended further and had a smoother presentation.

Going back to the mono Buddy Holly recordings and this feeling of greater smoothness and openness was confirmed. The sound of Holly's guitar lost a little of its sharpness and slightly jangly sound, but gained in shape and texture. The shape of rhythms also improved, making the urge to move to the music more impulsive. Fine detail, such as the way Petty was altering the shape of his hands as he patted out the beat of 'Everyday' became more obvious, and little subtleties of vocal intonation were displayed for all to hear.

The no-nonsense, slightly dark presentation of The Fun Lovin' Criminals' music suited the tonal balance of the MC 1/PSU 2 combo. The bottom end drive of the music flowing in uninhibited manner, the bass notes

stopping and starting bang on cue.

Back in the July 2009 edition of Hi-Fi World, I did a group test of six phono stages ranging from £325 to £2,000. This Edwards Audio pair seemed to combine the sense of timing of the A.N.T Kora, with the definition of the Trichord Diablo. I felt that it lacked the overall smoothness across the frequency range of the former, even with the PSU 2 attached, and didn't match its innately musical nature, but with PSU the Edwards combo was still £275 cheaper so the usual trade-off of price versus performance held true. In terms of definition and focus it gave the £1,213.62 Trichord set (including Never Connected Power Supply) a run for its money, but the latter had less focus on the upper mid, instead giving a slightly spotlight effect across all the frequencies.

CONCLUSION

In terms of sound per pound, at £250, with the option of either type of cartridge being catered for, the MC 1 offers good performance (certainly better than the Lehmann Audio Black Cube Statement at £325) but lacked the overall polish of the more expensive competitors. Adding the PSU 2 brought the cost up to £500 in total but resulted in a far superior standard of reproduction and is well worth budgeting for. I would however, put in the caveat that a little care be taken with equipment matching. An amplifier or speakers that tended to be forward in their sound would not be well served by the MC 1/PSU 2, whilst a system that was lacking in definition or was a bit laid back would probably benefit.

VERDICT ●●●●

Detailed and engaging sounding budget phono stage that's considerably improved by adding the optional PSU.

EDWARDS AUDIO
MC1/PSU 2 £249.95
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- FOR**
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 - optional PSU
- AGAINST**
- upper midband hardness

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our frequency response analysis shows a lift above 1kHz and plateau droop below, MM being flatter than MC, hence the differing bandwidth limits. With a 1dB variance the MC1 will have an obvious light balance, with treble emphasis, but likely a good sense of detailing. It isn't as accurate as most though. There is no warp filtering, although MC is -5dB down at 5Hz. Gain was very low at just x60 (36dB) for MM and x850 58dB for MC. This is inadequate for use with amplifiers having 400mV input sensitivity, and just adequate for 200mV types; in both cases volume will have to be set near maximum. Most phono stages offer x100 & x 1500. Noise (equivalent input noise, or e.i.n.) was low with MM at 0.3uV, but high with MC also at 0.3uV. Most phono preamps offer 0.08uV, no less 11dB less hiss than the MC1. Output overload was on the low side at 5.7V (10V is common).

The MC1 did not measure well against rivals. NK

Frequency response	
MM	8Hz-77kHz
MC	20Hz-30kHz
Separation (MM,MC)	52, 65dB
Noise (e.i.n.)	0.3uV, 0.3uV
Distortion	0.004%
Gain	
(MM,MC)	x60 (36dB) , x850 (58dB)
Overload	
(MM,MC)	94mV, 6.7mV in/ 5.7V out

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DECENT AUDIO ONE DECENT WALL SHELF £249

For those with wobbly floorboards or acoustic feedback problems, a wall shelf is your best bet. There are plenty on the market made from MDF and glass, but this new model from Decent Audio takes another route. After testing various materials, the company decided upon acrylic as its preferred material. Based upon a steel frame (that can be injected with 'filler' to deaden it), the shelf features an acrylic top isolation plinth, measuring 25mm thick, which is decoupled from a lower acrylic shelf by specially selected cones or Elastomer squares, both supplied. Fitment is quick and hassle-free, mainly because of the centrally placed frame screw holes, in addition to the left and right holes, to aid levelling. Final construction is remarkably sturdy, stiff and supportive. In fact, the One Decent Wall Shelf has the capability to support even the heaviest turntables: up to 40kg. A heavy Avid Acutus experienced no problems, for example.

The shelf was tested with a variety of music genres and a number of aspects were immediately apparent. Firstly, no more shaky turntables! I jumped up and down

like a mad man and the Acutus never batted an eyelid, so to speak. Next, was the absence of distortion – this was a big surprise because I didn't realise it was there in the first place! Coupled to the floor, my original hi-fi rack was not only picking up vibration from the speakers but from all over the rest of the house, with the wooden floors acting as an amplifier. Moving the turntable to the Decent Audio shelf produced a beautifully open presentation with impressive clarity across the midrange and treble plus firm and focused bass. Make sure you try the cones and Elastomer squares, however, as this is critical to the final sound. I prefer the Elastomer, as the cones produced bass that was so warm it began to veil detail. The Elastomer, on the other hand, was far more balanced, producing



real emotion over all frequencies. Providing super sound quality, the One Decent Wall Shelf also offers excellent value for money. One of the cheapest methods of transforming your turntable on the market. **PR**

[Contact: info@decentaudio.co.uk, 0845 601 9390]

soundbites



'BANG & OLUFSEN', TIM JARMAN & NICK JARMAN £18.95

For this writer, one of the great mysteries of the hi-fi world is how, given the obvious quality of their products, Bang & Olufsen have come to be ridiculed by so-called audiophiles. Whilst it's fair to say that the company's current output is uninspiring, the Danish marque has made countless beautiful, and beautifully engineered, products over many decades. Given this, and the paucity of imagination shown by many competing Japanese, British and American brands, along with often patchy quality, it's odd that B&O has garnered derision from

hi-fi snobs. This superb hardback book underlines this point, giving the reader an exhaustive, encyclopaedic account of its unique, inspired, often trendsetting and sometimes genre-defining products.

The author, latterly of this parish, tells the story in a clear, concise and affectionate way, showing obvious technical knowledge without alienating those who are non-technical. Along with superb colour photography, there's a mass of information here, making it invaluable as a buying guide for newcomers to the brand or an ideal companion for B&O completists. Lovingly researched, forensically detailed and superbly illustrated, this fine tome is perfect holiday reading for those interested in sound and vision with a difference. **DP**

[Contact: www.crowood.com]

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Pathos; Digit £2495, Endorphin £6000.

Unison Research; Unico CDP £1200, Unico CDE £2195.



Unison Research Unico CDP

○ **Amplifiers**

Pathos; Classic One MkIII £1975, Logos £3495, Cinema-X £5875, Adrenaline £15500.

Unison Research; Unico Primo £1172, Secondo £1730, Unico Pre £2160, DM pwr £2880, S8 £4995, Performance £7500.



Pathos Synapse

○ **Turntables**

Thorens; TD-295 £695, TD-700 £975, TD2030A/TP300 £2425. *Benz-Micro Carts*; Gold £265, Ace £495, Glider £745.



Triangle Quartet

○ **Loudspeakers**

Opera; Mezza £830, Grande Mezza £1260, Seconda £1835, Callas £2880, Grand Callas £5856.

Triangle; Altea EX £1195, Quartet £2550, Magellan Cello £7975. *Diapason*; Karis £1820.

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World Radio History

LCD & PLASMA SCREENS



Philips 42PL9664 LCD TV

This new model features built-in Wi-Fi web access, full HD, 200Hz motion smoothing and with a cutting edge 1ms response time. Native contrast is 80,000, although the new Ambilight Spectra 2 rear projecting coloured LEDs are claimed to give a further 'perceived' improvement in contrast. And at only 49mm thick, the 42" 64 is easily wall-mountable.



Samsung 6000 • 7000 • 8000 Series

Samsung's 2009 range includes both full 1080p LCD/LED models including the award-winning UE46B8000.



Panasonic VIERA TX-L37510

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Panasonic DMP-BD60 & 80

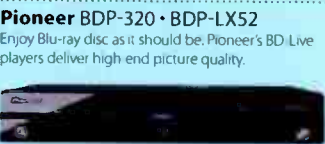
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Sony STR-DA5400ES • STR-DH800

These two award-winning AV receivers from Sony deliver exceptional performance. Pictured ITR DR-SIQUEL.



Yamaha

Yamaha's new 2009 range includes five new AV receivers, a home cinema soundbar, and two TV stands with built-in surround sound.



Onkyo

Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its **TX-SR607** which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



Denon AVR-2310

This award-winning AV receiver combines fine specification, solid build with breathtaking low-level dynamics and detail.



Pioneer SC-LX82

Bringing studio quality sound to your living room. Pioneer's goal is for you to experience film and music just as the creators intended.

HI-FI SEPARATES

Pro-Ject Genie MKIII

Replacing the Genie 2, the MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OM3e Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



Cyrus

Following the remarkable 'Servo Evolution' CD players, Cyrus has introduced a range of amplifiers featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP. The **8XP d** and **Pre XP d** include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, **6XP**, is based on the 8XP but without the digital option. All also include two-zone multiroom capability.



Marantz CD/PM6003

This new CD and amplifier pairing continues Marantz's tradition of building superb budget products.



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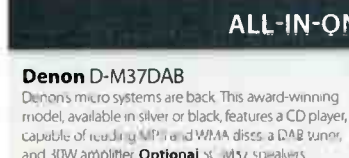
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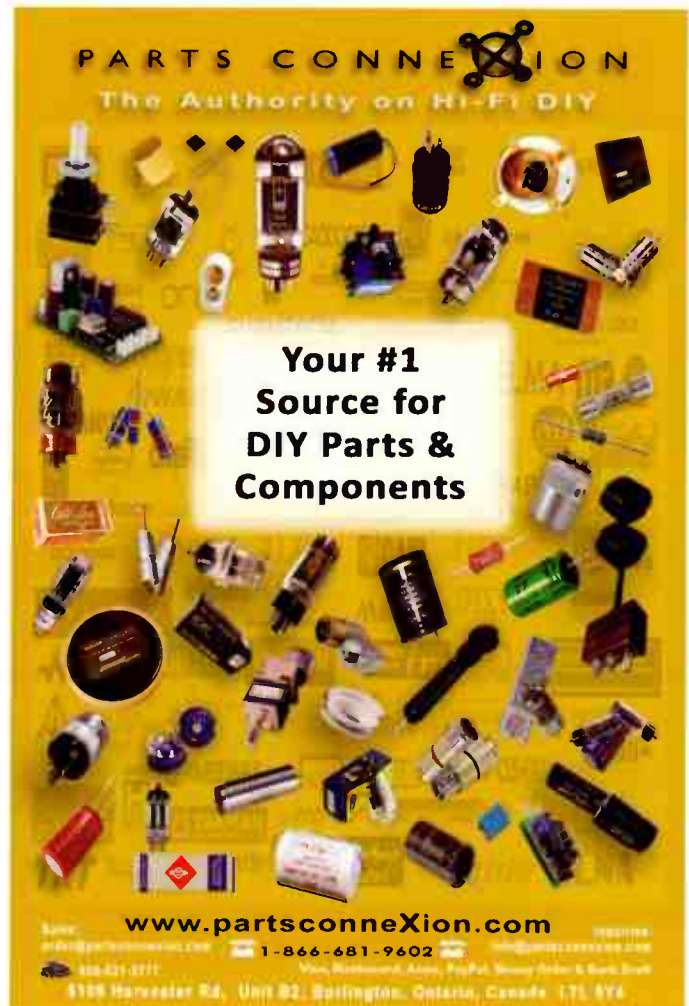


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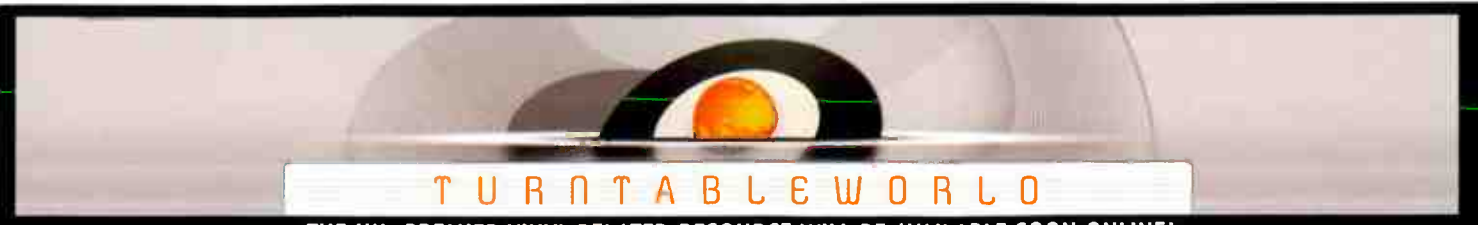
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When only the **best** will do

SEVENOAKS - for the ultimate sound and vision



NEW A-Line get MORE from your music

The new Spondor A5 and A6 are compact high performance floor standing loudspeakers. Each model benefits from important advances in Spondor's drive unit technology, cabinet design and crossover engineering.

The Spondor A5 offers exceptional performance in relation to its compact dimensions, while the A6 lifts performance to an even higher level with noticeable improvements in clarity, resolution and bass extension. Each model has excellent power handling and the easy-to-drive 8ohm loading ensures complete compatibility with a wide range of amplifiers and cables.

Engineering innovations include Spondor bass-mid drivers with ep cone technology, wide-surround tweeters and dynamic cabinet damping. 4th generation Spondor linear flow port technology gives the Spondor's an unrivalled ability to deliver deep articulate bass in almost any listening room, even if they are placed close to a wall.

With their clean modern styling and natural veneer finishes the new A5 and A6 will blend comfortably and confidently with almost any room décor.

A6

- 2-way system
- Spondor 18cm bass-mid driver
- 29mm wide-surround tweeter
- Mono-bloc crossover module
- WBT terminals
- Designed and manufactured in UK
- Black ash, cherry, light oak, wenge

A5

- 2.5-way system
- Spondor 15cm bass-mid driver
- Spondor 15cm bass driver
- 22mm wide-surround tweeter
- WBT terminals
- Designed and manufactured in UK
- Black ash, cherry, light oak, wenge



SPENDOR

SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

With 37 years' experience, nobody knows more about getting the most from music. Whether you're looking to upgrade an existing system or buy a system from scratch, you can listen in peace and quiet in our comfortable demonstration rooms with Sevenoaks' experts on hand to help you choose the components that are right for you.

*Some products are not available in all stores or via mail order. Please call before travelling or visit www.ssav.com to check. Advert valid until 10/12/2009. E&OE

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Bromley 020 8290 1988

Cambridge 01223 304770

Chelsea 020 7352 9466

Cheltenham 01242 241171

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Exeter 01392 218895

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Kingston 020 8547 0717

Leeds Wetherby 01937 586886

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Oxford 01865 241773

Plymouth 01752 226011

Poole 01202 671677

Reading 0118 959 7768

Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield 0114 255 5861

Southampton 023 8033 7770

Swindon 01793 610992

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Yeovil 01935 700078

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SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION

 **WWW.SSAV.COM**

the experts in home entertainment

WANTED: MICHELL FOCUS

Uni Pivot pick-up arm in good condition. Email: james.white240@ntlworld.com

MARK LEVINSON 38.S pre-amp, new (£6500) now £1400 ono. Mint condition. XLO Signature speakers cable 1.8 metre pair, new (£1800) now £500 ono. Very good condition. Tel: Tony 07868 714 812 (London)

CROFT MICRO 25 pre, one month old. Phone 07716 139 026 leave number. Will call back.

ELECTROCOMPANET EC1-5 integrated amp, £1800. Electrocompaniet ECC-1 CD, £1100. Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge £50. Tel: 01474 326 220

LINN EKOS Mk1 tonearm for sale. Excellent condition on Linn armboard, £650, including delivery. Linn armboard cut for Rega 300 arm new style armboard £25 including delivery. Tel: 01925 470 619

ESL 63s, black ash with stands £680. ono. Perfect condition, can demo. REL Strata Two subwoofer £290 ono. One eight metre pair speaker cable Van Den Hul Teatrack. Tel: Graham 01482 641 261 6pm

WANTED: ALPHASON HR100S. Must be in good condition. Swap or sell four Scanspeak bass/midrange 21W/8554 and two 02905/970000 tweeters. Tel: Roy 01452 501 955 (Evenings)

UNISON RESEARCH Unico 'R' FM/RDS/AM valve tuner, absolute bargain, £450 (currently retails at £1275) Mint and boxed. Lovely smooth sound. Spare remote controls for Quad 99 and Primare CD110 systems. Offers? Tel: 023 8073 8935

SONY SCD1, fitted with over £2000 of Audiocom modifications including the Ultralock £2000 (£4800+). Sony SCD-XA9000ES, SACD/CD player. Stereophile A+ £900 (£2400). Both boxed as new. Jim 01462 670786 (North Herts)

WANTED: TOP quality Hi Fi separates and complete systems, Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. Please call me on 0781 5892458

TANNOY REVOLUTION R3 speakers, Ariston Q Deck, Denon DCD-825, Denon DR-M07, Rotel amp RA-8208x2. sold as one. Mint condition, buyer collects, £250.00. margaret_corr@hotmail.com

QUAD ESL 63 speakers, Nos 028821-028822, stands, leads, boxes. excellent condition. £950. Quad FM3 tuner. £50. Quad 405 power amp. £110. Mission 702E black speakers £75. Tel: 01278 459556 (Somerset)

FOR SALE: Perpetual Technologies P-1A Upsampler and Enhancer £400 (Boxed). Musical Fidelity X-10D £150 (Boxed). Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Signature CD Player £180. USB Digital Bypass and DAC (Russ Andrews modified) £100. Offers accepted! Anton 07956236455

QUAD QC 24 valve pre amp. 2X Quad 11 40 valve monoblocs. superb condition boxed with instruction books. £3,500 total. Tel. 01202 481386 Michael. (Dorset)

NAD C350, NAD C270 Power Amp, Arcam Alpha 7se CDP. All perfect condition and working. Demo's welcome. Rutland area. Any offer considered. Any questions ring 07789 480370

KUZMA STABI/Stogi plus DNM Reson Reca. under 2 years old mint £1150. plus vinyl collection £850 for the lot will not split. phone for details. 01323 461432. Andy.

MUSICAL FIDELITY MVT preamp with power supply £175. Fourteen Sheffield Labs Direct to Disc Lp's. Mint. £200. Tel 02392 453382.

AUDIO PHYSIC Luna Sub. Maple. Superb condition. Regarded as the best 2-channel sub available. Original box, instruction booklet and 2m of DNM cable. £595. r.sinton@talktalk.net, 01625-611639

NAIM 252 Preamp in mint unmarked condition. S/n 240xxx late 200 with original box, Burndy, Snaic and Narcom remote £2750. The preamp requires a Supercap to power – also available, s/n 240XXX in mint unmarked condition with original box and mains lead £2350. Recent upgrade forces sale. Teac tuner TR450 in immaculate condition hardly used since new. Original box and manual. Bargain £30. Tel 07970078653 (Sheffield)

KEF CARLTON Mark One matched pair speakers in rosewood £175 VGC. Photos to hand. Need space. Collect from near Reading Berks UK. Further info Tel 0118 983 1402

PURESOUND A30 Integrated Valve Amplifier - as new. Approx 30 hours use. £999. 01892 530830 (Kent).

PURESOUND P10 Valve Phono Stage + Stepnote Step-Up Transformer -both as new, hardly used. £595. 01892 530830 (Kent).

RUARK TALISMAN II floorstanding loudspeakers. Owned from new, rosewood, c/w original boxes/packaging/leaflet/links. Four terminals for bi-wiring if desired. Sand loaded. £225 ovno Tel: 01606301398 [Cheshire] dave.bowley@hotmail.co.uk

CHORD ELECTRONICS BLU transport and DAC64 (silver), Lavardin IT integrated, Living Voice OBX-R2 speakers (maple), StarBASE rack, Lavardin cables, etc. All immaculate condition. Factsheet, photos, prices from: audio.nirvana@yahoo.co.uk. Private sale.

PMC IB1 speakers with stands £1500, Conrad Johnson Premier 17LS preamp with new valves £1695, Arcam DT91 tuner £400, all immaculate condition. 01582 460512 (Herts)

PASSLAB 1.5 Aleph P Audionote ANS611 Transformer Altec 604 Altec 417 Audionote io Ortofon MC3000II Cello Cartridges Trio KT815 TimDe Decoder Rolling Stone Box Set MFSL Ariston RDII Turntable 07944909209 stevehifiman@hotmail.co.uk

CHORD COMPANY Indigo 2 Interconnects 1m. RCA new/boxed £499pr. Signature Interconnects 1m. RCA mint/boxed £299pr. Chameleon Silver Plus Interconnects 0.5m. RCA mint/boxed £55pr. Odyssey 2 loudspeaker cables 4m. RCA mint £79pr. Tel. 01984 640588

FOR SALE Meridian 508 CD, AEI Mk2 Speakers with AE stands, Aragon 2004 Power Amp, MF X-Pre, all £1000. Would sell as separate items. E-mail eduval@generic-software.com

PS AUDIO POWER plant premier: award winning ac mains regenerator that converts Poor incoming AC to pure 230v AC. New Boxed upgraded model. Big improvement in sound & picture. This is not a passive filter but a mains waveform re-builder, Cost £2000, Ask £1300 ono. Tel: 07859388167

TRANSPARENT AUDIO MusicWave Plus speaker cables (8 foot set) & Transparent Audio MusicLink interconnect cable new/ mint condition LFD interconnects (2 no.) & mains cables (3 no.) Stuart T: 07870 912 963 e: stuartdarshan67@googlemail.com Bedfordshire

FOR SALE: Rel Quake, Black Crinkle finish, Mint. Original box, instructions and 5m HF Cable – Neutrik Speakon (worth £25). Yours for £150 plus postage (about £20) or collect from Bucks/Berks/W. London. garry_capon@yahoo.co.uk

FOR SALE Quad FM4 Tuner DIN Output, Naim Naxo 2/4, Sony Minidisc recorder MDS-JE510 c/w 70+disc Collection preferred Basingstoke area Now jobless, offers please to Rickkate46@googlemail.com or 07813 101254

REGA 3 with RB300 and CS split slab upgrade £200, 18mm Acrylic platter (for Systemdeck/Rega) £60, Goldring Elite MC Cartridge £50, Soundstyle XS105 dark green 5 shelf support £85, mike.hannibal@ntlworld.com

ELECTRONIC HOBBYIST requires for project a faulty or non working Quad 44 preamp, cosmetic condition unimportant but cabinet and interior electronics must be complete. Contact Mike with reasonable offers on 01758 613790.

MARANTZ SA7001 KI Signature SACD/CD Player £280 Usher S520 loudspeakers in gloss black, including stands £150 Squeezebox Network Media Player £55 NVA A90 + 2 X A70 pre / power amplifier £ 275 Tel: 01962 880424 (Winchester)

LINN KABER Aktive speakers & 3x Linn LK100 power amps in black. All in (A1) excellent condition. Aktive cards included and all cables. (over £4000 new) Asking £1100. Tel 01647 61421. pat.tranter@yahoo.co.uk

FOR SALE 2 x Black Nuforce reference 9V2 SE power amplifiers. Good condition. Amazing reviews. Were £4200. Would accept £2100 ono. Contact : 07968254119 or email dave.mcewan@sky.com.

FOR SALE Pair of Magnepan MMG speakers in original condition. Could deliver within 30mils. of Teesside otherwise best if buyer collects. Offers around £550. Email casnnon9@ntlworld.com or Tel: 01287632279.

CHORD ELECTRONICS Blu transport and DAC64 (silver), Lavardin IT integrated, Living Voice OBX-R2 speakers (maple), StarBase rack, Lavardin cables, etc. All immaculate condition. Factsheet, photos, prices from: audio.nirvana@yahoo.co.uk. Private sale.

WDKEL84 Valve Amplifier Kit

"The quality that can be gleaned from this amp is a fine introduction to the joys of the valve sound"

The WDKEL84 features a pair of EL84 valves in Push Pull configuration per channel, providing two channels each 18 Watts into an 8 Ohm load. Available as a 5 input integrated amplifier with ALPS volume control.

WDKEL84 kit £499

WDKEL84 built and tested £649



WD88VA Valve Amplifier Kit

"The result is an amplifier that combines majesty, transparency and rhythmic boogie factor with the ability to swing and sing on all types of music"

Often described as a 'sweet sounding' valve, our particular implementation of the KT88 makes sure that it is driven to its ultimate performance. Available as a 35W stereo power amplifier with single input volume control, or as a relay switched integrated with five inputs.

WD88VA kit £989

WD88VA built and tested £1289



WDHD3S Headphone Valve Amplifier Kit

"WDHD3S is a single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added purity and is as quiet as a mouse"

A beautifully simple stereo headphone amplifier design using Mullard ECL83 valves. It works directly from any source. The circuit uses twin high specification E/I output transformers that can be switched to drive any headphones between 16 to 300 Ohms.

WDHD3S kit £398

WDHD3S built and tested £528



WD25A Standmount Speaker Kit

"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) £349

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 Millennium treble unit.

WD25A STD kit (pair) £269

WD25A EX kit (pair) £699



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) £549

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.

WD25Tv2 STD kit (pair) £329

WD25Tv2 XL kit (pair) £499



All our kits are complete with pictorial easy-to-follow instructions.
All parts are included - all you need is a screwdriver and soldering iron.

www.world-designs.co.uk
Tel: 01832 293320

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 dual mono amplifier. Superb sound, A1 condition. £350 onvo, if collected. Will send by courier but due to weight will be additional £25. Emigrating forces reluctant sale. Tel 01255 473135, evenings only.

ROKSAN KC1 mk3 cd player, black with Van den Hull connecting leads. Beautiful natural sound. A1 condition, £350 onvo if collected, £15 to send by courier. Emigrating forces reluctant sale. Tel 01255 473135, evenings only.

MISSION 752 bi-amp speakers. Some cosmetic damage to top of cabinets hence low price of £150. Ask for postage Emigrating forces reluctant sale. Tel 01255 473135, evenings only.

MARANTZ, CD 52 VGC with remote plus Musical Fidelity X DAC boxed with manual, recently serviced by Musical Fidelity £100:00 for both Tel. 02392359808

NAIM NAP 300 late 2005 mint £3,250 ono NAIM NAC 252 early model and supercap late olive very good condition £3,750 boxes and leads Tel 02380470107 lesliestubbs@tiscali.co.uk

CHORD INDIGO interconnect 1m RCA to RCA. Multiple award winner. Cost new £930. One pair £395, two pair £750. Call Ian 07789 712775

STANDS UNIQUE Hi-Fi stand 4 shelves includes isolation platform. Beech legs, glass shelves, excellent condition, suit Linn or Cyrus. Leicester - £100. 0116 2780836.

WANTED PLEASE help looking for Sony TA-F7B integrated amplifier or similar pre/power from 60s/70s onwards £150-200 depending on model/condition uk collection thanks robert robpark9@yahoo.com 07548894033 mobile

FOR SALE: World Audio Design HD83S valve headphone amplifier, 18 months old, current RRP £528, sell £220 o.n.o.-WAD built. Tel. 01782 333926, or ktennispixie@aol.com. (Staffordshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY NuVista 3D CD player, mint condition with all accessories, box and packaging. One careful owner. Very low serial number. List price £3,000, Accept £1,350 ono Tel: 01303 863 424 (day/evening)

QUAD 66 Pre Amplifier, Control Panel, FM4 Tuner and 606 Amplifier. All units in excellent condition Offers considered Contact ian.usher2@btinternet.com or telephone 01844 342455

LEAK 2075 speakers immaculate teak £595 JBE Slate Mk3 direct-drive turntable £395. 01798 813133 or reconcile@bdlrs.freeseve.co.uk

SANSUI G9000 rare classic receiver. Fabulous tuner, 160wpc amp, pre-power separator, just serviced, vgc. Original packaging, owners and service manuals. £750ono. 01798 813133 or reconcile@bdlrs.freeseve.co.uk

WANTED:- STELLO DA220 DAC in good working condition or possibly Stello DP200 Dac / Pre iif price is right. Telephone Alan on 07725525001.

KEF XQ1 in silver. Matching stands. Excellent condition, as new. Genuine reason for sale. £500ono. Telephone 07766 078281 (London).

WANTED FAULTY or non working Quad 44 preamps, Quad 405-2 amplifiers, Also required Quad 33 boards, Quad fm2 tuners. Contact Mike 01758 613790.

ROKSAN KANDY KAI MK111 Amplifier 'L' Series and CD Kandy KC1 MK 111. Bought as package. £750 ono for both. Boxed with instructions. Clive 01253 734075.

KLS10 SUBWOOFER kit light use only, sold as parts to reduce postage (or pickup with enclosure), Audax HM2102Z twin coil driver, crossover, port etc, £25 oto +p&p. swho@orange.net

MYRYAD MXI 2150 amp silver serviced oct 2008 excellent condition 150 wpc included in price pure silver jumper leads fully boxed £725 ono tel 01652618420 (north lincolnshire)

GOLDRING Lenco GL75 classic turntable in original box, mint condition. Goldring Lenco arm and teak plinth. Cartridge included. £75. tel: 01442 384346 (Herts)

FOR SALE Turntable Rega Planar 2 + Super Bias Hardly used and as new £95.00 Tel 01922 455004

FOR SALE Arcam CD82T CD player, boxed superb condition, £400. Musical Fidelity X Can v3 headphone amp boxed £250. Phone Norfolk 01493-665761

WANTED: Transparent Audio Musicwave Ultra (XL) speaker & Musiclink Ultra (XL) interconnect Cables. Stuart - 07870 912 963 (Dunstable, Beds) e: stuardarshan67@googlemail.com

TOM EVANS amplifiers Linear B mono-blocks. 55 watts per channel. (new £8000) £4000 the pair, also Vibe Pre (new £2750) £1500 Tel 01689 819 455 t.plank@ntlworld.com

MINT CONDITION Marantz CP430 tape recorder / monitor. Have had it 10 years, I got it from my old employer East Midlands Arts when they had a big clear out of unused kit. I am 95% it has only been used 6 times, as was bought and well never used. Still perfect as just tested with an old beatles cassette. If you need images of it I can send you some Make me any offer and its yours, to do with what you will. Simon 07930 685 957

AESTHETIX CALYPSO Valve Preamp as new and boxed (£4150) £1750 Gamut D200 Mk3 as new boxed (£7,250) £3,250. Both items new in Feb 08. Pete 0775 7174120

ROKSAN KANDY KAI MK111 Amplifier 'L' Series and CD Kandy KC1 MK 111. Bought as package. £750 ono for both. Boxed with instructions. Clive 01253 734075.

CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all those companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

GT AUDIO
(Graham Tricker, Bucks)
Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.
Tel: 01895 833099
Mob: 07960 962579
www.gtaudio.com

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL
(East Sussex)
Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges.
Tel: 01892 654534

CARTRIDGE MAN
(Len Gregory, London)
Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges.
Tel: 020 8688 6565
Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net
www.thecartridgeman.com

AUDIOLAB
(Phil Pimblott, Leeds)
Renovation, repair and restoration. Specialist in valve hi-fi, radio transmitters, cinema amps, kit building.
Tel: 0113 244 0378
www.audiolabs.co.uk

QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS
(Cams)
Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first.
Tel: 0845 4580011
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

ARKLESS ELECTRONICS
(Northumberland)
Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.
Tel: 01670 829891
Email: arklesselectronics@btinternet.com

SOWTER TRANSFORMERS
(Brian Sowter, Ipswich)
Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services.
Tel: 01473 252794
www.sowter.co.uk

WEMBLEY LOUDSPEAKER
(Paul MacCallam, London)
Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing.
Tel: 020 8 743 4567
Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk
www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

EXPERT STYLUS COMPANY
(Wyndham Hodgson, Surrey)
Stylus replacement service for all types of cartridge. Including precise profiling for 78s
Tel: 01372 276604
Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

ONE THING
(Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad lls.
Email: one.thing@ntlworld.com
www.onethingaudio.com

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI
(Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex). Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.
Tel: 01903 695695
Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk
www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

HADEN BOARDMAN
Repair, service & modifications; classic & modern. Collection available. Redundant / faulty equipment purchased, selected new equipment available.
Tel 01942 790600
www.audioclassics.co.uk

Dr MARTIN BASTIN
(Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc.
Tel: 01584 823446

D.K. LOUDSPEAKER SERVICE
(Dave Smith, Hornchurch, Essex)
Re-cone of hi-fi loudspeakers, high quality loudspeaker systems, P.A., power loudspeakers.
Tel/Fax: 01708 447 344

LOCKWOOD AUDIO
(London)
Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.
Tel: 020 8 864 8008
www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

LORICRAFT AUDIO
(Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)
Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service. Tel: 01488 72267
www.garrard501.com

REVOX
(Brian Reeves, Cheshire)
Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.
Tel: 0161 499 2349
Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk
www.revov.freeuk.com

CLASSIQUE SOUNDS
(Paul Greenfield, Leicester)
ESL-57s restored, rebuilt, fully renovated or improved. Leak, Quad valves amps etc.
Tel: 0845 123 5137
Mob: 0116 2835821
Email: classique_sounds@yahoo.co.uk
www.flashbacksales.co.uk/classique

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING
(Bristol)
Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol.
Tel: 0117 925 6015
www.octave-aw.co.uk

NEXT MONTH

February's Hi-Fi World is a veritable winter wonderland of new products. We lead with an exclusive review of the superb Klimo Tafelrunde turntable and Marantz's special KI Pearl SACD player and integrated amplifier system, but there's so much more - including a headphone supertest where some great new designs face off our established favourites across a wide range of prices, and Onix's innovative Concerto 1 loudspeakers. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you



HEADPHONE SUPERTTEST: AKG701 REFERENCE, AUDIO TECHNICA SOVEREIGN W1000, BEYERDYNAMIC RSX700, GRADO GS1000, SENNHEISER HD650, SHURE SRH240 EFS PRO STUDIO, STAX SRS202

**MARANTZ KI PEARL SACD PLAYER/INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
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ONIX CONCERTO 1 LOUDSPEAKERS
KLIMO TAFELRUNDE TURNTABLE
ONKYO TX-NR1007 AV RECEIVER
SONY TCWE475 CASSETTE DECK
MICROMEGA CD-10 CD PLAYER
NEAT ELITE SX LOUDSPEAKERS
NAIM NAT 05 XS TUNER**

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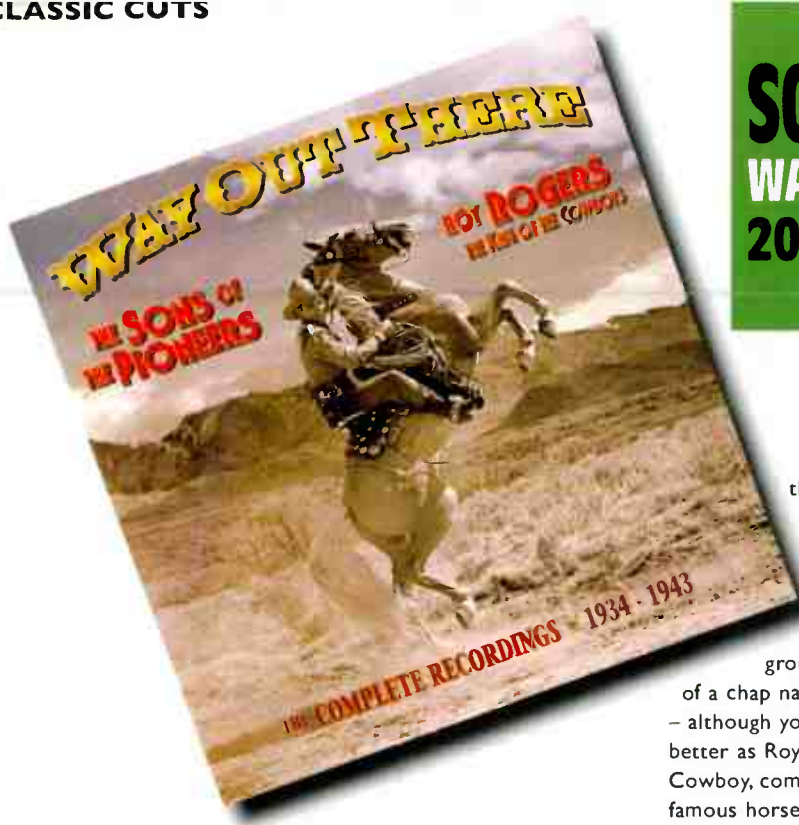
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FEBRUARY 2010 - 3RD DECEMBER 2009

MARCH 2010 - 5TH JANUARY 2010



SONS OF THE PIONEER

WAYS OUT THERE

2009

the result of a ten year project on this Western harmony outfit. One of the most notable aspects of this group was the inclusion of a chap named Leonard Slye – although you might know him better as Roy Rogers, the singing Cowboy, complete with his equally famous horse Trigger!

The Sons of the Pioneers first found fame in the mid-thirties and had a long life, being active in the sixties and remembered and honoured during the mid-nineties when they were inducted into the Western Performers Hall Of Fame. You may have even seen them without even realising it because, if a Hollywood Western film ever required a group, singing in the background, the Sons were often called upon. They, in fact, starred in or sung the title themes for over 150 films.

pitch of every recording by comparing with a standard-pitch instrument (i.e. electronic piano tuner), as the original companies, via the Decca and ARC labels, were not known for exact workmanship in this respect. At 78rpm, many tracks came out slightly sharp or flat and had to be corrected by changing the playback sample rate and then resampling to CD standard.

Generally, the sources derived via the original ARC label were much poorer than the Decca examples, "they used badly underpowered or ill-constructed tube amps, resulting in an unpleasant amount of clipping - almost like an overdriven hard rock guitar amp - that made voices very harsh when heard on modern wide-range equipment. On a phonograph of the time, the defect was probably not very audible; maybe it was even treated as 'a feature, not a bug' because it

Despite the inevitable fuss caused by The Beatles Boxsets, music didn't actually begin with The Fab Four. There are plenty of artists who produced sublime works beforehand of course, many of which will never see a Beatles-style retrospective. In fact, many won't see the light of day from their original vinyl release. More than that, there are plenty of top artists whose work will never see a reissue beyond their original 78rpm release! This is where companies like Bear Family (www.bear-family.de) come into play.

This German-based outfit is famed for spending time and resources to highlight artists who may have been groundbreaking, innovative or popular in their day but have since fallen into obscurity. Yes, the company produces works on celebrated artists such as Johnny Cash and Nat 'King' Cole, but also reissued works on the likes of Cliff Bruner and Joe Dowell. Names whose CD releases will have a few leaping for joy and many others scratching their heads...

The Bear Family label produces standard CD albums but the company's box sets are a cause for notice. Each box set is an event: stuffed with multiple CDs, a well researched hardback book and superb packaging. Expensive maybe, but they're most definitely worth it.

Now, the company has set its sights on the Sons of the Pioneers,

"this box set provides a quality archive of an important Western group..."

This celebration of their art is a magnificent tribute to a classic outfit featuring six CDs that includes all of their recordings from 1934-1943. It also features all of Roy Rogers' earliest solo recordings from 1937 to 1942. The excellent 160-page LP-sized, hardback book tells the story of the group alongside a range of rare pictures.

Christian Zwarg was the mastering engineer on the project – and a mighty project it turned out to be with lots of unforeseen problems. "I spent many hours comparing the multiple copies available of many tracks with each other, to determine the best-sounding source for each item. Also, I had to check the musical

subjectively might have made the sound of a small portable seem louder and thus more satisfying than a clean recording. Up to this day, there are no means of reverse-engineering this kind of overload, so all I could do was try and find a compromise between restoring the treble response, as I usually try to do as far as the source allows, without bringing up screeching distortion."

The result is a tribute to Zwarg and his hard work because the box set provides a quality archive of an important Western group. It's so easy to lose cultural artefacts like this – Bear Family should be applauded for not only keeping it current but doing it in style. **PR**

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2-way system

1.25" be dome tweeter

two 7" woofers

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nominal impedance: 4 ohms

frequency response @ -3dB: 28 Hz - 40k Hz

dimensions (w x d x h): 34 cm x 48 cm x 123 cm



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