

# HI-FI WORLD

MARCH 2010

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**MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50**  
amplifier



**DELTEC CA1/SA1**  
pre/power amplifier



**USHER**  
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- > INSPIRE i2 TURNTABLE **EXCLUSIVE!**



**13 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF IQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)**

# SET YOUR MUSIC FREE



MARTIN LOGAN

*'Seduces the listener with realism and a sense of scale...  
The Summit X will own your heart from its first notes'*

*Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News (November 2012)*

*'Reference-grade performance that you'd struggle to match  
at double the price'*

*Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi+ Issue 60*

*'The Summit X is just too addictive to live without. I'm putting  
my money where my mouth is and buying the review pair as  
my new reference loudspeakers'*

*Howard Kneller, SoundStage! (September 2009)*

**N**othing brings music to life like MartinLogan speakers. Unique technologies, seamlessly fused to create a sound so spacious, so open, it makes ordinary speakers seem hopelessly constrained.

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# welcome



Well it's official! The unofficial general election campaign has started, and the British public now has to endure months of 'he said, she said' type banter from our illustrious public servants, selflessly putting themselves up for re-election. So in the interests of journalistic balance, I shall attempt to be scrupulously apolitical in what I'm about to say; don't think of it as a comment on this government, but rather on politicians *en masse*...

My point concerns Digital Radio and the so-called 'analogue switch-off'. You might remember that last autumn, the government announced its 'Digital Britain' report which laid down a projected date for FM radio switch-off of 2015. Given that it was so soon, many of us were recoiling in horror; the sheer awfulness of losing analogue in just five years was too nasty to contemplate!

My own feelings towards DAB are of general indifference; it's a mediocre technology that's already (in my home) largely been replaced by internet radio. Where it hasn't, I still listen to FM for sonic reasons or those of poor DAB reception. So by suddenly taking away the option of FM, the government would significantly impede my ability to listen to decent sound radio at home, or any radio out and about. I was crestfallen; how could this happen?

Well it seems that, erm, it's probably *not* going to happen after all now. As Steven Green remarks on p93, the powers that be have very quietly taken the switch off date *out* of the Digital Economy Bill. So the position is now, as the Malcolm Tucker character from the BBC political satire *The Thick of It* would put it to his minister of state, "just tell them it's going to happen, and then when it doesn't happen we can say we didn't tell them *when* it was going to happen"...

So, seeing as the brave new world of Digital Radio has suffered a legislative setback, we thought we'd look at some olde world analogue tuners. On p15, we round up some really nice ones which will give years of listening pleasure, including several FM-only designs. If these become obsolete within the decade then I will publicly eat my latest copy of the *Radio Times*!

Radio's a brilliant medium, and far too important to be left to politicians to screw up, so get out and vote with your chequebooks. So I implore you to invest in a good analogue tuner now – your country needs you to!

**David Price, editor**



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## verdicts

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

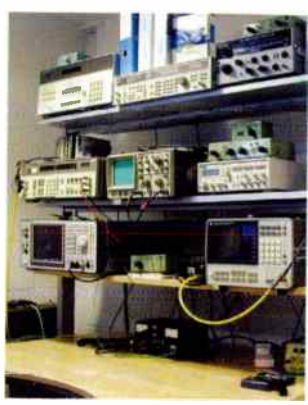
## testing

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 Clío-based computer

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

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



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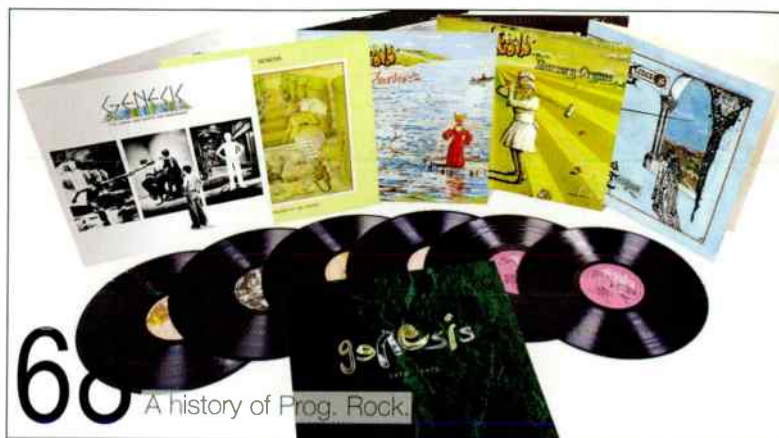
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Come and visit us at the Bristol Sound & Vision show on the 26th - 28th February 2010 in Room 209, Marriot City Centre Hotel.

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HI-FI NEWS

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HI-FI WORLD

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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,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



ORION



VISION



SIGMAS



TITAN

news@hi-fiworld.co.uk

# news

## ICONOGRAPHY

Icon Audio's Stereo 40 has been one of the company's most successful and longest running models, having been on the market for almost ten years. It has just had a significant upgrade, and now appears in Mark III. guise. The Western Electric 274B valve is employed for rectification, "bringing a new level of smoothness and delicacy, whilst retaining both the power and speed of previous Icon Audio solid-state rectified designs", the company says. The bespoke, hand-wound tertiary output transformers feature an extra winding that effectively compares input and output and cancels distortion. This allows the Stereo 40 MkIII to operate without global feedback, injecting more life and verve into the performance without the associated distortion that normally exists within low or no-feedback designs, it's claimed. Every amplifier is finished and tested by Icon Audio's team of engineers in Leicester, and can be specified with either EL84 or KT88 output valves. Extra cost options include premium or 'new old stock' valves as well as Jensen oil in paper capacitors. Prices are £1,099 for the EL34 version and £1,199 for the KT88 version. For more information, click on [www.iconAudio.com](http://www.iconAudio.com).



## DEF ARTICLE

Marantz's new £2,299 UD8004 universal High Definition player is said to "bring together the best of Blu-ray and reference quality CD replay". It uses a host of technology from the company's flagship reference universal player, squeezed into a smaller and less expensive package. Offering Blu-ray/CD/Super Audio/DVD-Audio playback, the Profile 2.0 design sports an Anchor Bay ABT2015 processor. A newly developed, proprietary, high precision mechanism offers extraordinarily accurate disc reading. The tray is constructed from a polymeric alloy whose robust characteristics achieve an ultra-rigid platform that removes all vibration that degrades the picture signal. This mechanism is just as important in achieving the UD8004's impressive sound quality. Audio replay is handled by three separate audio circuit boards, featuring Current Feedback technology and all powered by their own transformer. These feature 192kHz/24bit Burr-Brown DACs, symmetrical circuit topology with short mirror imaged signal paths for precise stereo imaging, Marantz's proprietary HDAM-SA2 compact signal amplifiers, and customised components, before reaching the gold-plated outputs. Further improving performance is an audio 'pure direct' mode that turns off all non-critical electronics. The M1 chassis features a new aluminium/reinforced resin front panel allied to a dual layer top cover and bottom plate for rigidity. This helps minimise vibration for stable images and undisturbed audio reproduction. The design incorporates HDMI 1.3a connectivity for 36-bit Deep Color support, Profile 2.0 for BD-Live capability, built-in decoders for Dolby True HD and DTS HD High Definition audio format replay, and 24FPS capability. The player also sports a SD-Card slot ready for SD-HC (high capacity) cards, offering the playback of WMA, MP3, AVCHD and JPEG. For more information, click on [www.marantz.co.uk](http://www.marantz.co.uk).



## BOX SET GO!

Pro-Ject's Stereo Box integrated amplifier is designed to meet the demands of the most discerning audiophile both in terms of looks, size and sound quality, the company says. It's a PWM Class D design, sports gold plated RCA connectors and a metal case. Claimed power output is 20W per channel, size 103x38,141mm and weight just 720g! Available in silver or black, there's also a matching tuner. For more information call +44(0)1235 511166 or call [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk).

## STEREO TYPES

NAD's new 'Classic Series' hi-fi stereo pre and power amplifier combination is back to basics for this popular marque. The new C165BEE stereo preamplifier, which also shares a lineage with the NAD Master Series

M3 integrated amplifier, features an MC/MM input with three-position resistance and capacitance loading for phono cartridges, an upgraded headphone amp, and a heavy gauge steel chassis. It draws less than 1 Watt in standby mode. The recommended retail price is around £700. The new C275BEE stereo power amplifier delivers 150 Watts to each

of two channels at 4 or 8 Ohms continuous power, and is bridgeable to 400W with the new matching NAD C375BEE power amp. Additional features include Automated Turn-On (ATO) Logic, and an eco-friendly power draw of less than 1 Watt in standby mode, the company says. Price is £900. For details, call +44(0) 1279 501111 or click on [www.armorhe.co.uk](http://www.armorhe.co.uk).



## A MATTER OF FACT

PMC's new Fact8 loudspeaker uses the company's Advanced Transmission Line technology and hand-built twin bass drivers "to provide an untainted mid range and phenomenal bass experience at all volume levels with no distortion", the company says. High frequencies are handled by a high-tech wide surround Sonomex soft-domed and feather-light tweeter. Controls at the rear of the speaker can tailor bass and treble to ensure they sound ultra-clear and crisp when partnered with any hi-fi electronics, ensuring they are the ideal match for any room. The speaker comes in a range of contemporary and beautiful, hand lacquered premier veneer finishes including Rich Walnut, Natural Oak, Tiger Ebony and Graphite Poplar – all hand selected and matched from sustainable forests. Price is £4,600. For more details, see [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com).



## JITTER BUG

M2TECH's hiFace USB-S/PDIF interface comes to these shores via Purite Audio. This little device plugs into any spare USB port and creates an extremely low jitter digital output signal, using "kernel streaming to provide a bit perfect output from PCs", it is claimed. Proprietary drivers mean that it is capable of playing any file up to 24/192 resolution. Just add a DAC for a high end hi-fi source! Price is £100 including VAT and UK delivery. Presently, Windows XP, Vista and 7 Windows drivers are available, but Mac and Linux drivers will follow soon. For more information, see [www.puriteaudio.co.uk](http://www.puriteaudio.co.uk).



## CASHBACK!

Henley Designs and Roksan have announced the introduction of a new incentive scheme to reward brand loyalty. All Roksan K2 CD players and amplifiers purchased will qualify for a money-off voucher against their next K2 purchase; included in the box will be a voucher which when completed, may be produced at the dealer of the customer's choice and redeemed against any K2 product. The following discounts will apply; £150 for the Integrated amplifier, CD player, loudspeakers and £100 for the power amplifier. Assuming that a customer purchases a K2 integrated amplifier he or she may at the same time, or at a later date, purchase another K2 item and claim the relevant discount off the new item. The customer and dealer simply complete their sections of the voucher and return it to Henley Designs, along with a copy of the customer's purchase receipt for the new item. For more information call +44(0)1235 511166 or call [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk).



## REVOLUTION

Apple Corps Ltd., the company owned by The Beatles and EMI Music, released the digitally remastered Beatles catalogue on December 7th in digital form via Beatles Stereo USB Apples. The limited edition product has a run of only 30,000, and comes with a "specifically designed Flash interface" that uses 16GB of capacity to provide the audio in both lossless FLAC 44.1kHz 24bit and MP3 320kbps formats. Priced at £200, it's compatible with both PC and Mac. This unique, apple-shaped USB drive has the remastered audio for The Beatles' 14 stereo titles, as well as all the remastered CDs' visual elements, including 13 mini-documentary films about the studio albums, replicated original UK art, rare photos and expanded liner notes.





## POWER PLAY

The Densen B-350+ has at its heart a "huge" toroidal transformer, designed to have low mechanical vibration and to be very stiff in the delivery of voltage. The transformer contains separate outputs for each important stage of the amplifier. Working together with four rectifiers and over ten custom made power supply capacitors, the B-350 is "a true powerhouse", Densen says.

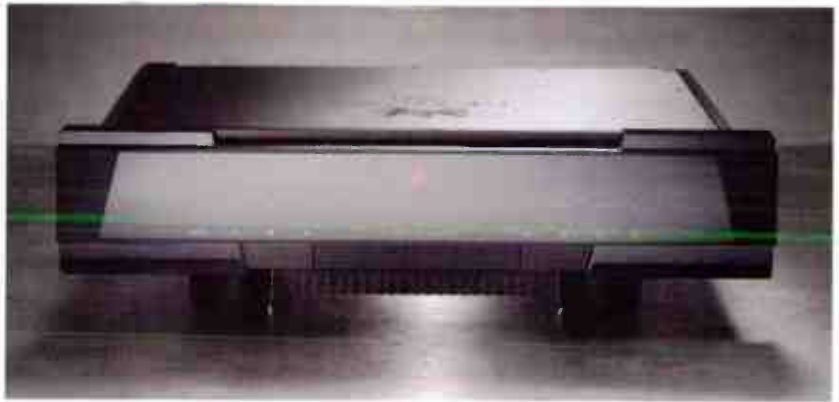
The amplifier itself is a true non feedback

amplifier, with a rated output of 125W into 8 ohms, and 250W into 4. The slim aluminium cabinet is relatively lightweight, thereby reducing stored energy for superior sound. The circuit itself uses surface mount devices with all components mounted with a precision of 0,02mm and soldered in an artificial atmosphere using nitrogen, to avoid oxidation over time. The parts are the best possible the company says, with resistors being Vishay metal film, the transistors being "ultrafast and precise" types, and the capacitors mostly Densen custom-made types optimised for the circuit in which they are operating. For more details, click on [www.densen.dk](http://www.densen.dk).

## IT BITES!

Celebrating the brand's twenty fifth anniversary, Gryphon Audio Designs' new Scorpio CD player "proudly flies in the face of current trends towards networked music servers and universal DVD or Blu-ray players", the company says! "Adding a second Compact Disc-only source component to the Gryphon line-up at a time when other brands are making a big song and dance out of abandoning the CD player altogether is just another instance of Gryphon's willingness to pursue our own path when we perceive it to be the most direct path to better music in the home," explains Gryphon founder and CEO Flemming E. Rasmussen. "None of these trendy solutions can match

a well engineered, dedicated CD player that reaps all the benefits of a mature, tried and true technology, built for music and nothing but music", he argues. It sports the same asynchronous 32-bit/192 kHz sample rate conversion found in the digital reference standard Gryphon Mikado Signature. Timing issues are addressed with two independent, specially designed, temperature-compensated crystal oscillators accurate to better than five parts per million. The fine European transport mechanism is specially constructed for silent running and effective vibration damping. Recommended list price is 6,950 Euros. For more details, click on [www.gryphon-audio.com](http://www.gryphon-audio.com).



## NOISE ANNOYS

News comes that the European Commission is calling for a suggested maximum volume to be set on MP3 players, to protect users' hearing. The commission wants all MP3 players sold in the EU, including iPods, to share the same volume limits. This follows a report last year warning that up to 10 million people in the EU face permanent hearing loss from listening to loud music for prolonged periods. EU experts want the default maximum setting to be 85 decibels, according to BBC One's Politics Show. Users would be able to override this setting to reach a top limit of 100dB. In January, a two-month consultation of all EU standardisation bodies will begin on these proposals, and there's a final agreement expected in the spring. Some personal players examined in testing facilities have been found to reach 120 decibels, the equivalent of a jet taking off, and no safety default level currently applies. Although manufacturers are obliged to print information about risks in the instruction manuals, Modern personal players are seen as more dangerous than stationary players or old-fashioned cassette or disk players because they can store hours of music and are often listened to while in traffic with the volume very high to drown out outside noise, it is claimed.

## brian and trevor's house of hi-fi

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

## HOUSE OF FUN

Hi-fi buffs in the Manchester area and beyond will be interested to know of Brian and Trevor's House of Hi-Fi, a brand new specialist hi-fi consultancy. For more information, click on [www.brianandtrevorshouseofhifi.com/](http://www.brianandtrevorshouseofhifi.com/).

## SOUND & VISION THE BRISTOL SHOW

### GO WEST...

Life is peaceful there, at the twenty third Bristol Sound and Vision 2010! Brought to you by Audio-T, it runs from Friday 26th to Sunday 28th February 2010, and features over 150 brands. The UK's largest consumer AV show, admission is £8 for adults, £4 for children, with the doors open from 10am to 5pm every day. Car parking is now easy with 2,600 local spaces, and the show is five minute taxi ride from Bristol Temple Meads station. Read more about it at – [www.bristolshow.co.uk](http://www.bristolshow.co.uk).



# Tec Talk

**David Price welcomes back Deltec Precision Audio, and auditions the brand new CA1/SA1 preamplifier/power amplifier combination...**

It's a great story. For those whose memories fail them, Deltec Precision Audio Limited was one of those quintessentially British names of the nineteen eighties, making specialist hi-fi that was both low in volume and unique.

Started in 1984 by Adrian Walker and Rob Watts, while both men were studying for a BSc in Electronics at UWIST (now called University of Cardiff) in 1980, the company began selling in 1984. It became famous for transistor amplification which had a distinctively clean yet musical sound. The products espoused the electronic and aesthetic minimalism which was the meme of the day; Adrian Walker comments of his classic DSP 50S preamplifier, "compared to all other preamplifiers in was like a piece of wire with gain"!

Adrian recalls the company's philosophy as being, "to create audiophile products that are sonically neutral, very transparent with exceptionally detailed treble, midrange and a fast, agile controlled

bass", and this to my ears isn't far off the mark. DPA products always had a distinct sound; not Linn, not Naim, not Exposure, but DPA. Those who liked it loved it; at times in the nineties the company was more of a fanclub than a commercial manufacturer, it seemed...

Now, a whole decade since the demise of DPA Ltd., the company has relaunched again as Deltec Precision Audio, with the CA1 stereo preamplifier you see before you, the SA1 stereo power amplifier (likewise) and the DPA MA1 monoblock power amplifier. The company also has a new RF mains noise filter, the Power Plus, a new power cable, the Power Slink and an interconnect cable, the classic Black Slink. "We have a number of digital products in development to add to the above range", Walker adds.

Fascinatingly, if the CA1 preamplifier had come out in 2000, it would be universally panned for its appalling styling. A dour black box, tidily made, it's devoid of fancy silver panels, chintzy detailing and big 'blingy' badges. Now though, it looks

deliciously retro. DPA electronics always looked *uber-cool* in the eighties, and so it is now. They're so out of time and so of their time that perhaps the 'teenies' is their time.

As per company tradition, it's a minimalist preamp with the signal handling circuitry as simple and direct as possible. There are six line level inputs for sources, two record monitor outputs and two play monitor inputs (a lovely eighties touch; remember three head cassette decks?). As a concession to the nineties, there are twin outputs for bi-amping. The volume pot is a Penny and Giles affair, and the DH-OA37 voltage amplifier is a thick film hybrid designed and developed by Deltec. Physically much smaller than conventional PCB layout, it allows RF filtering and decoupling to be closer to active components, Walker says.

A specially constructed screened audio grade low noise toroidal transformer is used, and RF decoupling and filtering techniques have been applied to the supply inputs and outputs. The front panel is



"their combination of grace under pressure and wonderfully propulsive rhythms, allied to subtlety and insight, is an unusual one..."

sculpted by precision machining from a solid billet of aluminium, and the control knobs come from a solid rod of the same. Surface parts are then hand gloss painted and lacquered to a high lustre. The fabricated envelope and chassis are accurately laser cut and folded, then finished in a finely anodised satinwood black. Case dimensions are 460x100x350mm. It's impressively well done, aside from the fact that the casework is resonant; wrap it with your knuckles and it clangs like a bell, which is not ideal. The company would do well to damp it, I feel.

The matching new SA1 power amplifier is a 39W per channel [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE] stereo power amplifier for the princely sum of £2,800. In the best DPA traditions, this is not a lot of bang for your buck, but I'm sure they'd politely ask you to look elsewhere if you're into power games. Like the preamp, at its heart is Deltec's own DH-OA37 hybrid voltage amplifier. The output stage uses Current Mode Class A, claimed to offer "a ten fold improvement in distortion by the use of a high speed Class A driver and current amplification circuitry".

Loudspeaker output is via two WBT CE compliant binding posts. The power supply has RF filtering at every stage, and again a specially

screened audio grade toroidal transformer is employed.

### SOUND QUALITY

The sound of this pre-power was fascinating to me, insofar as it took me right back to my memories of hi-fi's last heyday back in the late eighties, when all the world seemed to be obsessed with finding a musical sounding transistor amplifier to compete with those from Naim (as was), but one which was smoother and more neutral. The DPA combo, in a nutshell, is precisely this, offering up a sound that's very finely etched, apparently bristling with detail and unerringly propulsive. It has a dark tonality, although little details like the leading edges of electric guitars suddenly jump out at you, as if they've been caught in the spotlight in a concert crowd. The result is a spry, crisp and dry sound that's both clinical in one sense yet emotionally expressive in another. The interesting thing is that so many modern transistor amplifiers simply don't do this sort of thing anymore, seeking to be warmer, smoother and more euphonic, almost as if they've had to be voiced more like valve amplifiers to gain market acceptance...

Genesis's 'Follow You, Follow Me' was a perfect example of the Deltec's distinctive sound. Phil Collins' vocal was as dry and clean as I've heard

it, making even my reference (full Class A) Musical Fidelity AMS35i sound a tad thrummy and falsely full. Yet it wasn't coarse as such, rather it seemed a bit of make-up powder had been applied, to smooth it and take out just a touch of colour. At the same time, the percussive guitar work was carried with forensic accuracy; this pre-power seems really adept at picking out guitar tracks, and so it did here. It's superb on leading edges of notes, catching them very early on giving an almost LED-like 'on-off' quality, which makes for rhythms that almost get the spine tingling.

Likewise, it can pick out the difference between tracks in the mix really adeptly; the keyboard part on Al Stewart's 'Time Passages' was allowed to chime away in splendid isolation from the guitars and vocals, while the sumptuous strings throughout the song's bridge soared apparently a million miles away spatially from the saxophone solo. The DPA combo has an amazing ability to float everything in space very precisely, giving instruments/tracks their own allotted place in the mix which is never deviated from. In this respect it's one of the tidiest sounding transistor amplifiers I've heard; other good amplifiers can do this trick too, but seem to be less precise (albeit large in physical



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scale) all the same. The result is that, unlike so many rivals, you can do the 'listening to one track in the mix' trick all the way through the song, should you so wish. As such, this the amplifier to have if you want to settle all those schoolboy arguments with your friends about what the real lyrics were to this song or that.

Prim, proper, tidy and with everything in its place, surely then this is the sort of amplifier your mother would have chosen for you? Well yes and no; because for something that does so much so well and so precisely, it is immensely

Orchestra's 'Technopolis' was a joy with the DPA twosome faithfully rendering this bouncy Japanese slice of early electronica. Its sinuous low frequencies pulsed in perfect time with an expansive midband, peppered with subtle detail about when each instrument started and stopped, and where it was located in the mix. Once again, I've heard this track carried in a more fulsome way; the Deltec combo seemingly losing that last few tenths of tonal colour and adding a touch of 'papery whiteness' to the proceeding, but it didn't detract from the song one jot. Rather



musically satisfying in its way. It's not as 'louche', as colourful, as ebullient or emotionally gushing and forthcoming as the excellent Musical Fidelity reference I'm currently running for sure, but the strange thing is that you don't miss all the AMS35i's 'hearts and flowers' stuff when the DPA combo is at its forensic best. It's amazingly detailed like a lot of Japanese high end, but really is lots of fun too. Indeed I am intrigued by how it makes its own 'third way'; no syrupy sumptuousness *a la* tubes but none of that 'analysis paralysis' you get from transistors either!

The SA-1 isn't a powerful amplifier; it just seemed to be able to aspirate my 91dB Yamaha NS1000Ms, but I wouldn't sign it up for speakers of dramatically lower efficiency. Bass isn't in the 'sledgehammer' category, lacking the sheer motive force of some rival designs, but even if its quantity gets flagged up then there are no complaints about its quality. Unlike so many power amplifiers, even high end ones, it integrates beautifully; it simply doesn't come semi-detached from the rest of the music. In this respect it truly impressed me, and convinced me I'd take light but tight low frequencies every time over big bruiser power amps that can do nothing but advertise their size to the listener, at the expense of a cohesive musical experience.

Electronic music showed this in no uncertain terms; Yellow Magic

than marvelling in the sumptuousness of the songscape, I found myself enjoying the way the bassline seemed to have acquired a rubbery texture and was bouncing along like an early TV game set to 'ping pong'.

Whilst I enjoyed the treble performance of this combo, sounding as it did as clean and crisp and some of the best Class A amplifiers in some respects, I feel it important to point out that it shouldn't be used with hard or bright sources. There's an interesting contradiction going on here, inasmuch as the DPA generally sounds quite velvety, but bright and hard sounds can 'set it off' a little. Although it never sounds strident as such, hard saxophone solos, top-of-the-fretboard guitar work and cranked up female vocals are certainly 'keenly picked out' in the mix. It's not a fault so much as a characteristic, and one which means the DPAs work best with smooth CD players and warm turntables, where there is real synergy. Whereas the Class A Musical Fidelity can make an iPod Shuffle sound smooth and sweet, the

**HISTORY**

The original Deltec Precision Audio Ltd. went bankrupt on May 29th 1992, but was reborn as DPA Ltd. Classic Deltec products have glossy grey casework, with the serial number on the rear as opposed to the base. Later DPA designs had a flat powder-coated faceplate and matt grey cases. Late DPA boxes had a black Perspex faceplate with polished stainless-steel casework. The last DPA products were manufactured in 1999, until the company in its current incarnation - Deltec Precision Audio - relaunched last year.

Deltecs won't, and will remind you that you're better off giving them something serious to work with.

**CONCLUSION**

The new Deltec combination is certainly one of the most *distinctive* amplifiers I've heard in a long while. Whilst currently being a fully paid up member of the Class A club, I really liked the DPA CA1/SA1 combination, even though I'd feared that I might not. As well as being massively detailed and clean, it's a rollockingly good listen, with a wonderful rhythmic poise that you simply don't hear very often from any amplifiers regardless of price. When the musical going gets tough, the Deltecs keep going rather than throwing a shrug and storming off, so to speak. Their particular combination of grace under pressure and propulsive rhythms, allied to subtlety and insight that's unexpected at the price, is an unusual one and well hearing for yourself. As such, the company's return is a most welcome one.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

This highly distinctive, charismatic and engaging sounding pre-power combo marks the company's welcome return.

DPA-CA1	£2,650
DPA-SA1	£2,800

Deltec Precision Audio Ltd.  
 ☎ +44(0) 1793 238 085  
[www.deltecprecisionaudio.com](http://www.deltecprecisionaudio.com)

- FOR**
- speed, grip, poise
  - midband composure
  - peppy, propulsive bass
  - endearing musicality
- AGAINST**
- resonant casework
  - needs smooth sources

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Power output of the SA-1 power amplifier measured 36 Watts into 8 Ohms and 70 Watts into 4 Ohms, showing fine regulation that will likely give lively bass. High damping factor of 84 will help to impose control over bass.	SA-1 power amplifier	Power	36watts
		Frequency response	2Hz-43kHz
		Separation	82dB
		Noise	-86dB
		Distortion	0.12%
		Sensitivity	1V
		Damping factor	84
Distortion was classic crossover both in the midband and at high frequencies, peaking at a high 0.4% from 4V - 5V at 10kHz. Our quoted value of 0.12% is for 1 Watt output at 10kHz into a 4 Ohm load, a revealing test and a fair distortion result. All the same, the SA-1 was unusual in its distortion behaviour and crossover distortion at the levels measured may well impact sound quality. There was some variability in levels generated as the circuits responded slowly to signal level changes.	CA-1 preamplifier	Frequency response	1Hz-30kHz
		Separation	105dB
		Noise	-109dB
		Distortion	0.0002%
		Gain	x6
		Overload	8V

**DISTORTION**



The preamplifier measured well all round, having very low distortion, useful gain of x6 (15dB), plenty of output swing and adequate bandwidth at all volume control positions, although there was variation here. Our figure is the lowest value, at 1 o'clock.

Whilst the DPA CA-1 preamp works well, the SA-1 power amplifier suffers crossover distortion. NK



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# Tuner Bake Off

A few months ago, the government's 'Digital Britain' report forecast a world with FM radio switched off by 2015. Happily, this doesn't now look at all realistic, meaning it's a fair bet that good old analogue radio will be giving fine sound well into the decade after this. With that in mind, we decided to round up some serious hi-fi radios. Tim Jarman is your guide...

**E**very hi-fi system needs a tuner; along with comedy, news, sport and chat, they let you painlessly explore the world of music at minimal cost. FM broadcasts offer the best sound quality, and despite what the DAB propagandists would have you believe, there are still plenty of FM tuners out there to choose from...

You can of course buy a tuner that covers Digital Radio as well but as things currently stand the sound quality is still second best compared to FM. Even FM broadcasts vary greatly in quality; most chart

pop stations use a device called an 'Optimod' which makes the sound seem louder by compressing it and then broadcasting it at a uniformly high level. Some national stations, especially the likes of BBC Radio 3, can offer superlative sound quality however, and be a valuable window on the world, letting you get so much more from your hi-fi system.

By way of a tribute to the wonder of radio, we decided to line up five FM tuners (although the most expensive here, the NAD Master M4, also has DAB), in an effort to find out how much bang you get for your buck. All the tuners in this

test were auditioned via a roof-top omni-directional FM antenna rather than relying on the various lengths of wire that some of the manufacturers include in the bottom of the boxes. Duly set up and fed by a decent twig, they all provided a refreshingly high level of enjoyment, as we shall see...

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NAD M4	p23



## CYRUS FM6 £450

**T**he elegantly shaped Cyrus range is undoubtedly a design classic. The dimensions are instantly pleasing and functional, as is the backlit display and crisp acting control knobs. Cyrus make a big thing about their diecast enclosure, but the resin baseboard was less reassuring. Thin and resonant, it's not as nice as that found on pricier Cyrus boxes. I also noticed that the aerial sockets were loose as the wrong type of screws had been used. Hopefully this was a sample fault; it did not affect performance.

### SOUND QUALITY

The FM 6 uses a very similar OEM front end unit to the Naim NAT05 XS [see *Hi-Fi World*, February 2010] and in a similar manner this provides the left and right signals in raw form to the Cyrus circuit, which is more generous than the Naim inasmuch as it allows the AM section of the unit to be used as well! Continuing the unavoidable comparisons with the Naim XS, the little Cyrus brings to the fore more bass. It is nicely smooth and rounded, but you could never call it 'over full' all the same.

The upfront, slightly papery midrange presentation is also similar, as is the excellent stereo decoder performance which with a strong aerial signal instantly gives a pleasingly open soundstage. But where the FM 6 does fall behind the more expensive NAT05 XS however is in the treble, which is slightly grittier and lacking in sophistication when compared directly.

Our frequency response measurement clearly shows the reason for this, Cyrus have decided not to roll the response

of the FM 6 completely off at its main (amplifier) outputs at around 15kHz, something that is usually done to avoid the stereo pilot tone at 19kHz. Arguably, substantial response beyond 15kHz is pointless as no audio content is broadcast there, only the strong 19kHz pilot tone certainly adds a hard edge to programme material. There is a filter built in, and its output is available from a second set of phono sockets, but the manual recommends that these are used only for a cassette recorder (the operation of noise reduction systems like Dolby is adversely affected by excess 19kHz content).

Cyrus obviously likes the unfiltered sound; as it avoids any phase issues, but I preferred the sound through the filtered output, which did a good job in suppressing grittiness in the treble. Yet it was still not as finessed in doing this as the

more complex Naim circuit. Feeding the unfiltered output of a stereo radio directly into an amplifier is unconventional; most will use the filtered option I suspect.

It was reassuring to find that Medium Wave stacked up well, with BBC Radio 5 coming through cleanly. You'd never call AM radio hi-fi but the presentation was enjoyable all the same; a good AM stage is well worth having I feel and it's fair to say that many so-called hi-fi tuners don't have one!

The Cyrus FM 6 is instantly likeable; it's a fine little package that offers good sound and superb aesthetics and ergonomics. It will certainly suit systems that are otherwise dry sounding, as well as all-Cyrus ones of course. At the price, only what is undoubtedly the cheapest looking remote control unit in this test detracts.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

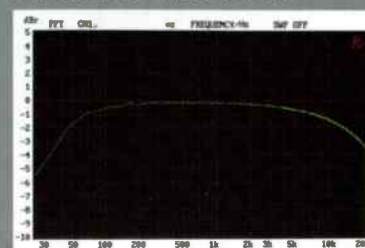
The Cyrus FM6 lacks pilot tone filtering at 19kHz through recommended OUT1, giving extended treble shown in our frequency response. A slow roll down in high frequency output will give the FM6 a smooth sound, but at -1.5dB at 10kHz, not a dull one. Pilot tone measured a high -33dB due to the absent filter, but some prefer the less phasey, open sound of a filter-less tuner. Bass also rolls down below 200Hz and this may well make the FM6 sound 'light'. OUT2 gives a pilot tone filtered output, but with the similar treble and bass roll off as OUT1.

Distortion levels were low and channel separation wide. At -65dB the FM6 is not especially quiet and slight hiss may just be audible at times. Sensitivity was good, with full quieting (minimum hiss) reached at 0.6mV p.d. from the aerial. The stereo -50dB IHF sensitivity was 60µV, a satisfactory if unexceptional value.

The FM6 will sound smooth, open but possibly a bit light in balance. NK

Frequency response	60Hz-8kHz
Stereo separation	35dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.15%
Hiss (CCIR)	-65dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.6mV
Sensitivity	
mono	4µV
stereo	60µV
signal strength meter:	none
output	0.64V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### VERDICT

Pleasantly styled, decently engineered and affordable tuner.

**CYRUS FM6 £450**

Cyrus Audio Ltd.

+ 44 (0) 1480 435577

www.cyrusaudio.com

### FOR

- easy going sound
- open soundstage
- design

### AGAINST

- gritty treble through unfiltered outputs





## CREEK DESTINY £650

**T**his is Creek's most expensive tuner, and is a brand new design. Whilst the quality of the cabinetwork is of a much higher standard than that of the cheaper

Evolution model, some of the key parts inside are much the same. The front end unit (essentially a complete radio in a small metal box that provides raw left and right signals to the rest of the circuit for filtering, etc.) and the microcomputer that controls it appear identical, not only to the Evolution but to the Myryad MXT4000 as well. What sets the posh Creek aside however is what else is in there too. It uses the same power supply unit as the Destiny CD player, so you get three mains transformers (two of which are switched off by a relay when the tuner is in standby mode, saving power) and a twelve element mains filter circuit. No other tuner in this test has anything like as comprehensive an arrangement. Also impressive is the construction of the filter and buffer amplifier, which is studded with German Wima film capacitors of the highest quality.

The Destiny's FM tuning works in 50kHz steps, which like those of the NAD M4 are finer than UK conditions require. This, along with a rotary encoder (the big knob) that is imprecise and sometimes overshoots or counts the wrong way when turned slowly, means tuning is fiddly. The encoder knob is also used for preset programme selection and this could be easier too; as things stand the action is awkward.

### SOUND QUALITY

Whilst Creek's entry-level Evolution tuner is well liked, it is not completely to my taste.

I found the sound a little on the bright side and it is also burdened with a high output level which makes matching a nuisance and calls for a quick hand on the volume control of the amp when switching between sources. It does come with a nicer remote control than the Destiny though: who'd have thought you'd be swapping metal for plastic as you move up the range?

Listening to the new high end Destiny though, and the first piece of the good news is that the output level is far more sensibly set than it is with the Evolution and can be regarded as standard. The tonal balance is also greatly improved, the glare has been suppressed and there is a greater feeling of bass presence, giving a sound that overall can be described as more refined. Compared to the Myryad, the Creek proved to have better controlled treble and more

bass but I did at times sense that the bass could get a bit out of hand and descend into boom in a way that the MXT4000 avoided. The Creek's other big strength is midrange insight, in this respect it was the best tuner in this test. As there is a lot of stereo image information in the midrange it will come as no surprise that the Destiny had one of the most vivid soundstages too. AM performance, as with the Myryad, was obscured by the extended bass response and fell short of the clarity displayed by the Cyrus, although it remained perfectly usable.

A well made, full bodied tuner that's ideal for those with a penchant for bass, or indeed brighter sounding systems. I have no reservations in recommending the Destiny for a serious audition. It will be a good partner for any well balanced, high quality system.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Destiny had a slow roll down in high frequency output, measuring -1.5dB at 8kHz, caused by pilot tone filter mistermiation. Although output recovers due to the usual ripple caused by mistermiation, overall treble energy is down and the Destiny will sound a little smoothed as a result, if not overtly dull.

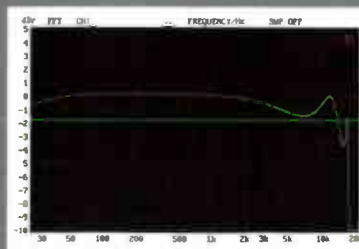
Distortion was satisfactorily low at 0.18% at 50% modulation, and being low order harmonics (2nd & 3rd) it will not impact the sound significantly.

Hiss measured a very low -72dB and sensitivity was good, full quieting being reached at 0.75mV. The IHF -50dB stereo sensitivity was a decent 42µV, so the Creek is up with the best in terms of sensitivity.

The FM-10 will sound smooth. It is a good all-rounder, well engineered and should give amenable sound quality. NK

Frequency response	20Hz-5kHz
Stereo separation	37dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.18%
Hiss (CCIR)	-72dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.75mV
Sensitivity	
mono	3µV
stereo	42µV
signal strength meter:	none
output	3V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### VERDICT ●●●●£

Excellent mid price tuner with powerful, expansive sound and fine build.

### CREEK DESTINY £650

Creek Audio

+44 (0)1442 260146


[www.creekaudio.co.uk](http://www.creekaudio.co.uk)

### FOR

- fine midrange performance
- polished treble
- build and finish

### AGAINST

- overly fulsome bass
- imprecise tuning action



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## MICROMEGA FM-10 £700

**T**his has a surprisingly sombre appearance for a French product. Bland it may be but the cabinet is certainly solid; there appears to be more metal in it than in an entire Renault 4! Inside, Micromega have chosen *not* to go down the OEM receiver module route, instead they've used a small 'tuner' unit to feed an intermediate frequency amplifier, detector and stereo decoder circuit of their own design, based mainly around integrated circuits from Sanyo.

Micromega haven't provided a remote control unit or much in the way of cables but they've tried to make up for this by including a pair of white gloves instead; whether this means that the surfaces are particularly sensitive to finger grease or that an unusually large number of Micromega owners are also snooker referees, I don't know. The instructions are also only written in French, which is not a trivial point, as I was to find out later. Donning the white gloves, one soon discovers that the controls are a tactile delight. The rotary encoder tuning knob is perfectly scaled, just the right amount of twiddling is required to tune between the stations, it is neither laborious nor imprecise. The six metal push buttons are also just about perfect in their feel and weighting, even if their marking and functions are less than clear to the new user.

### SOUND QUALITY

The Micromega's front panel has a little emblem that says 'HD Audio'. It's not clear exactly what this is (new owner Didier Hamdi's initials in reverse perhaps?) but the text looks a lot like the logo for HD television; let's hope that the Micromega circuit conveys emotion better than HD TV

conveys motion (e.g. not very well)! Our measurements show that the FM-10 has an extended and broadly flat bass response and a sloping off treble which kicks up again just before the 19kHz pilot tone filter cuts things off completely. This profile gives the Micromega a sound quality that is pure high end European; a wave of warm bass rolls out of the loudspeakers, bringing a toe tapping quality to music that so many tuners completely fail to capture. This is as nothing to the treble however, which is just about as creamy as I've heard from a modern design. Because the Micromega begins to roll off slightly earlier than is strictly necessary it doesn't have the sparkle of some of the tuners in this test but what is there is simply sublime. Amongst all this the midrange does sound a little recessed, but that's simply because it's not brash or 'in your face' like many rivals. Soundstaging also nicely expansive, with fine depth

perspective too.

Initially I was annoyed to find that whilst the FM-10 would tune into most of my favourite stations, it would instantly mute LBC Radio, even though I lie outside the service area it normally comes in okay with just a little background hiss on most tuners. Searching through the menu I found that the tuner comes set to 'cable' mode from the factory, you have to change this to 'antenna' to retard the muting action. Doing this also reveals a digital signal strength meter; the only other tuner in this test to have this feature is the NAD at twice the price. Accessing the setting is easy, changing it is less so until you discover that the standby key is the one you have to use, *Sacre Bleu!* Confusing menus aside, the FM-10 impressed me a lot and can be especially recommended for use in systems that tend to sound a bit dry with other sources - but do invest in a good aerial.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

A conspicuous weakness of the FM-10 was unusually low sensitivity. It needed no less than 3.8mV to reach full quieting (via Antenna), where most tuners need 1mV at most. Given the sort of signal level common from a decent aerial, around 0.6mV, hiss measured an audible -55dB, not a good result. The FM-10 needs a very good aerial and/or use close to a transmitter to get hiss suppressed to the decent -69dB it is capable of.

With falling treble visible in the frequency response plot, measuring -2dB at 10kHz the sound balance will be on the warm side. Low frequency extension was good however, so the FM-10 may well sound quite full bodied.

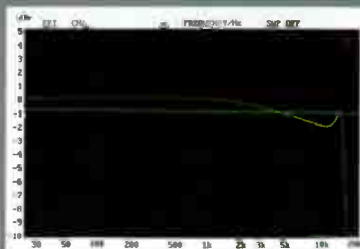
Distortion was very low, even at full modulation (i.e. music peaks) and pilot tone is effectively filtered out.

The signal strength indicator registered 0 only with aerial disconnected and maximum (9) with 1uV or just a finger on the aerial socket. It was useless.

The FM-10 will sound quite warm, possibly full bodied. But low sensitivity will make it hissy unless given a very strong aerial signal. NK

Frequency response	5Hz-5.5kHz
Stereo separation	37dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.07%
Hiss (CCIR)	-69dB
Signal for minimum hiss	3.8mV
Sensitivity	
mono	42µV
stereo	300µV
signal strength meter;	none
output	1.7V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### VERDICT ●●●●£

Outstanding sounding tuner with superlative construction quality at the price, but needs a good aerial to sing.

### MICROMEGA FM 10 £700

Absolute Sounds

+44(0)20 8971 3909

www.absolutesounds.com

### FOR

- bass richness
- treble refinement
- excellent build quality

### AGAINST

- mediocre sensitivity
- confusing keys and menu
- instructions in French only!



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on tel: +44 (0)1980 625700



## NAD M4 £1,400

**T**his chunky AM/FM/DAB tuner is a real heavyweight. Its thick alloy front panel casts the mind back to nineteen seventies Japanese exotica, as does the sheer amount of stuff inside. Indeed the M4 is the size it is in order to cram everything in; there are three large and well stocked printed circuit boards and two mains transformers for a start. The analogue side of things is taken care of by a beautifully constructed discrete front end followed by a pair of integrated circuits similar to those that the Micromega uses surrounded by reassuringly traditional looking circuitry. Being the only tuner here that also receives DAB, there's a special section that's dealt with by NAD's own DB I DAB adaptor, a stand-alone unit that is mounted, fully encased, inside the main cabinet.

As well as providing the usual line level analogue outputs, the M4 also has both optical and coaxial S/PDIF digital outputs which work on DAB only. If top quality is the aim you will still have to make analogue connections to use the FM section anyway. Tuning the M4 is a fiddly process, not least because the controls on the unit itself work in extremely small 12.5kHz steps. Despite being technically impressive, such fine steps are not needed in the UK and in any case a well designed automatic frequency control (AFC) circuit should have a pull-in range of around 1/-100 KHz, making manual fine tuning unnecessary. Fortunately the remote control can be used to enter station frequencies directly using its numerical keys.

### SOUND QUALITY

On paper the NAD has an almost perfect frequency response but when I listened I did feel it had a rather heavy sound. Despite being generous in scale, it failed to pick out important musical clues in the midband, and vocals sometimes appeared pushed back in the mix. Often a perfect response in the frequency domain comes at the cost of problems in the phase domain; I suspect that this is what is going on here. Indeed I discerned a rather mechanical quality to the NAD especially when compared to the embracingly fluid Micromega, for example. Ironically, not only does the M4 look like a high-end Japanese

tuner, it sounds a bit like one too!

NAD pithily describe their DAB receiver as being of "CD-like quality", but in fairness the DB I receiver gave a respectable account of itself, although vocals sounded a bit spitty and the bass a little clumsy when compared to FM and background pops and gurgles proved difficult to eradicate, despite trying the supplied antenna in positions all over my listening room.

Overall, the NAD M4 would certainly suit gadget lovers, and boasts a big if unobtrusive sound across radio formats. Allied to the rock-solid build and five year UK warranty inspire, it's an impressive package, but not the best here.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The NAD M4 frequency response is academically smooth, but a small amount (+0.5dB at 6kHz) of high frequency lift will improve detailing. This will be a very smooth sounding tuner, if a bit brighter in its tonal balance than many. A deep pilot tone filter at 19kHz reduces pilot to -76dB, keeping the tuner's output hash free.

Distortion was very low, even at full modulation, a figure here of 0.16% being an unusually good result by current standards. At 50% modulation, our quoted value, it fell to just 0.05%.

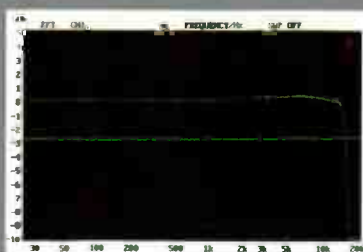
Hiss was well suppressed, measuring -72dB, again as good as the best tuners in this group, and broader market.

Unfortunately, although the M4 has a 13 segment signal strength meter, it is little use, having been set to read maximum with an extremely weak signal of 8µV, to give the impression of great sensitivity (the meter will read maximum with all stations, no matter how weak). Such meters should read maximum at full quieting 600µV with the M4.

The M4 is well engineered all round, except for its signal strength meter. It will likely have an even sound with a bright sheen. NK

Frequency response	5Hz-15.4kHz
Stereo separation	37dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.05%
Hiss (CCIR)	-72dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.6mV
Sensitivity	
mono	4µV
stereo	30µV
signal strength meter:	
output	8µV max 0.7V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### VERDICT ●●●

Big, imposing, do-it-all design but not the class of the field despite its premium price.

**NAD M4** £1,400  
**NAD Electronics**  
 ☎ +44(0)1905 831 6555  
[www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com)

### FOR

- fully featured
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- sturdy construction

### AGAINST

- heavy tonal balance
- ease of use

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VIVID audio



*Micromega FM-10; surprise winner of the test, and a worthy one too!*

**F**irst things first; there were no *bad* tuners in this test. Because of this, if you already have any other components in the manufacturer's range (the amplifier for example) then you may well find that the matching tuner is the best bet. Not only will this give a neat appearance and be a good match electrically, there is also a strong chance that if you liked the tonal balance of the other components then the tuner should also be right up your street. In some cases (for example the Myryad) the tuner can also add useful extra functions to the system as a whole as well.

The Cyrus is notable as the only model in this test that is both designed and built in the UK. This was evidenced through it being a thoughtfully styled and pleasantly performing product that was sullied slightly by Cyrus's advice about the choice of output sockets; I'd counsel that the filtered ones are the ones to use to get the best performance. Despite the technical similarities it isn't a half price, half size Naim NAT05 XS, but it is the most visually appealing unit in this test. If you are not an obsessive radio listener and don't want to have to devote too much space to the tuner then it is surely ideal. Considering its modest £450 price and pleasing aesthetics, it has to be regarded as very fine value for money.

At the other end of the physical scale, the big NAD would be ideal for those that mourn the passing of the heavyweight Japanese tuners of the nineteen seventies. Complex and technically impressive, the M4 has the same strong points as the oriental greats of thirty years ago and should also be the longest lasting and most reliable model in this test, especially with the importer's generous five year guarantee. Unfortunately, despite the

excellence displayed in its measured performance the sound quality is unremarkable, lacking as it does the lightness of touch of the best here. On the plus side you do get DAB coverage as well and if used with a more sensitive antenna than the one supplied this can be considered as a useful addition. The FM tuning resolution is excessive for UK use but this could theoretically be cured by a software tweak, I suspect? NAD owners seeking a do-it-all high end design should consider it.

Styling and ergonomics aside, the Myryad and Creek are difficult to separate; unsurprising as technically they are very similar. Without doing a direct A/B dem you would struggle to tell them apart sonically, but under the microscope the Creek just takes the honours. The Myryad is arguably better for spoken word programmes with its perfectly constructed bass but for music the Creek just pips it with that delicious midrange insight and polished treble. It is a touch

Creek and Myryad, this test still has a stand-out winner - the Micromega FM-10. The refinement of its sound is startling; it's a welcome return to form by the French marque. It reminds me of the days of European supremacy in electronics design, when the likes of Philips were pouring truly monumental sums of money into R&D and churning out genuinely mould-breaking products along the way. To be offered an alternative to the rather sterile sound that characterises so much of what is available today is a real tonic. To find that this comes from a realistically priced European design that uses bespoke circuitry rather than OEM modules only adds to the pleasure. Coupled with outstanding audio performance comes the best tactile experience of any of the models in this test; each control is perfectly weighted in its response. The cabinet is also nicely finished and importantly not overly large. The only blemish is low sensitivity and the need for a good

"Despite the excellence of the Creek and the Myryad, this test still has a stand-out winner - the Micromega..."

bass heavy in a way that the Myryad isn't, and some listeners may prefer this. Try to audition both if you fancy either. The Creek is certainly more compact and more modern in appearance; this may just swing it if you can't decide between them aurally. Only the clumsy rotary encoder control counts against it. Either way, you get an excellent sounding analogue tuner that should give many years of pleasure.

Despite the excellence of the

aerial. Perhaps most tellingly, the FM-10 is the only tuner here that I will be genuinely sad to have to give back...

This test has another winner as well, the FM stereo broadcasting network. Never again will so much quality listening been given so freely and made so accessible. With comparatively simple equipment and complete privacy you can fill your every waking hour with top drawer entertainment; back it and treasure it whilst you can!



# Biggy Talls

**Top of their budget range, Usher's lofty V-604 floorstanding loudspeaker is a big hitter at a small price, finds Noel Keywood...**

**W**hat fun the big Rigonda RR FS-100 loudspeakers were, in their short visit to the UK market. Usher's big V-604s reminded me of them. Like the FS-100s they are big, if not quite as big. Also like them they come in close to £1,000, in this case £1,150 to be precise. Also like the Russian Rigondas, the Taiwanese Ushers offer a lot of bang for the buck. Well engineered at heart, they offer a standard of reproduction that's in tune with rivals, with all the wallop you expect from such a big floorstander.

Being quick to jump on any aircraft flying East at the flimsiest of excuses, I found myself in Taiwan a year ago, visiting the Taipei Audio Fair and Usher's loudspeaker factory. Their export factory was almost alarmingly vast, having three floors connected by lifts able to carry 10 ton forklift trucks. Usher work on a huge scale as an OEM producer, but they have their own Usher brand and the V-604 sits at the top of their budget range. It represents very good value as it benefits from their extensive facilities. These include a huge anechoic chamber for development purposes and access to an enormous range of drive units. As a budget design the V-604, like Rigonda's FS-100, may not carry the swishest finish but it comes from an impressive background of ability in the field, if not one very visible in the West.

Standing 117cms high, compared to the 100cms or so of most floorstanders (3ft or 1m), the V-604 is 20% higher than most of the loudspeakers it will find itself compared to in a showroom. It looms larger and although not quite an RR FS-100, it doesn't fall too far short either. At 30kgs it's hefty too, so once in place it isn't the easiest loudspeaker to move. The front is 24cms wide and cabinet depth measured 33cms.



Our samples were finished with a rosewood veneer and had removable black grilles, with a gold anodised Usher badge at bottom. These cover the drivers, not a front mounted slot port that is simply painted black; there's no port tube.

Hidden by the grilles were two 180mm bass/midrange units using fibre cones that work up to 2.3kHz according to Usher's specification. Above this a 25mm fabric dome tweeter takes over. The drivers sit above and below the tweeter in a D'Appolito arrangement that gives better sound consistency in a vertical direction, although this does broaden the sound image vertically compared to a point source. However, the broader focus isn't perceived as a bad thing and you'd need a KEF or Tannoy alongside to hear the difference between a D'Appolito and a point source, something I have done in the past. The point of D'Appolitos is that they give a consistent sound whether sitting or standing, from a fairly simple drive unit arrangement. Twin bass drivers obviously help boost bass power handling, and increased cone area reduces excursion.

The V-604s come with spikes for stability. Their rear panel has a normal enough connection panel carrying twin gold plated screw terminals that accept 4mm banana plugs, spade terminals and bare wires. Removing a pair of gold plated straps enables biwiring.

Although the V-604s are little known in the UK, they have been available for two years, importer Hi-Audio told me. A popular model that sells well because it offers a lot for the price, they suit the times we are in I was told! That means they are not going to be replaced any time soon. The £1,000 price slot for floorstanders is well populated and I'd guess Usher see the sheer size of these loudspeakers being enough to get them onto a buyer's radar. They loomed over Monitor Audio PL200s and RX-8s in for review. Of those it would be the RX-8s the V-604s typically compete against and the Ushers are well enough developed to be in the race.

## SOUND QUALITY

Usher have tailored the V-604 to sound conspicuously powerful, and lively too, our measurements suggest, and this is fully reflected in its sound. Driven from the 4 Ohm tap of our not overly heavy sounding MB845 valve (tube) amplifiers, they had big bass that went down low, but with a small amount of under-damped emphasis so repeated notes on bass guitar from Angélique Kidjo's 'Sound

of the Drums' set up a rhythmic thump that shook our listening room firmly. Small repeated phrases were nicely conveyed, each note well differentiated, the big Ushers showing laconic ease in the way they could deliver a strong bass line with the bass player's intentions kept in place. That there's some emphasis to deep bass is discernible, but it

"in every sense of the word, a big hearted loudspeaker that makes its presence known..."

isn't overpowering by any means; the V-604 just makes its case well known! By way of contrast other loudspeakers rather pale against it, but a small caveat is that the V-604s may well over drive a small room to boominess.

Substituting the MB845 valve amps for our resident Musical Fidelity

AMS50 Class A solid-state amplifier surprised me.

Faced with a 4 Ohm load like the V-604s the big MF usually delivers a torrent of current and bass of sledgehammer proportions. But not this time. Quite the reverse in fact; its high damping factor seemed to dominate, tightening bass and exercising an iron grip over it to make the Ushers sound nicely balanced at low frequencies. They were still hefty but lows integrated a little better and were less wayward than with the MB845s. Treble was given bite however, and the 'speakers became more incisive.

Moving to our also resident Leema Pulse,

which being a £1,000 amplifier is most representative of what the Ushers may find themselves driven by in real life, I found looser bass than the AMS50 but still nicely balanced and tuneful, suggesting the Ushers will work well with a good cross section of amplifiers.

What I was drawn to in these big Ushers was their smooth, yet

densely wrought midband that fleshed out vocals beautifully. This gave Renee Fleming a wonderfully rich, dense delivery over quite a large centre stage area - the D'Appolito effect - that I found entertaining in its own way. There's a fine sense of clarity that allowed individual musical strands from the orchestra

to be easily resolved, whilst she

delivered a belting performance from Madame Butterfly centre stage. I guess, looking at the measured performance, some of her forwardness on the stage was due to midband emphasis, but this is quite common nowadays. It makes for a highly explicit vocal delivery, by lifting intelligibility. But that's the V-604; it has been engineered to be obvious, if not overwhelming - Usher know what they are doing alright. I usually prefer the MB845 over most else for vocals and here they were predictably superb, the V-604s looking right into what they were capable of delivering.

The same properties put Alison Goldfrapp under the spotlight too, every word of her sensually crooned 'Lovely to CU' from Goldfrapp's 'Supernature' CD being conveyed with crystal clarity. Again,

she took up a large area in front of me, an effect that gave





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the loudspeaker's presentation great scale, as well as electric clarity. By this I mean that there was a crystalline edge to the sound that helped light up detail and boost the sense of insight into lightly hit cymbals and tinkling triangles, especially noticeable with the nifty stick work behind the Zuton's 'Valerie', this time from LP. Big differences didn't exist between CD from our Stello CDT-100 and DA-100 transport and DAC combo, and a Rega Planar 3 with RB301 arm and Ortofon 2M Black cartridge. However, to pull treble back a little I did swap out the Eastern Electric Minimax valve phono stage and put in its place the darker sounding Icon Audio PS3. The Ushers did a fine job with both LP and CD quite frankly, always sounding smooth but intense across the midband with vocals, making for strongly detailed and fleshed out rendition that brought performances to life.

The tweeter often made its presence known and could bring a glassy hardness to treble at times, but I am particularly sensitive to this sort of thing and know some listeners like a bit of boost to strengthen incision, and lift detailing a tad. Well, the big Ushers have this and quite whether it appeals or not is going to be down to taste I feel, since the degree of emphasis is not overwhelming, either under measurement or subjectively. It is there though, and it is clearly discernible and sometimes the glassiness it lent to high treble had me gripping the edge of the settee a little!

However, raised treble only becomes subjectively obvious when there's strong high frequency content in music, and classical microphone arrangements, especially in orchestral works, commonly don't capture strong highs. So listening to Tchaikovsky's 'Marche Slave' for example, I was rarely aware of this phenomenon. Instead I noticed how the '604s differentiated nicely between the brassiness of the horns, to the trilling of the woodwind and flutes. Being low in colouration and neutral of colour, the timbral properties of instruments were nicely defined. However, I became aware that the wide spacing of the bass/midrange units made violins come from discernibly separate sources if I got closer than 9ft to the loudspeakers, a problem with D'Appolito arrangements. To avoid this the Ushers need

to be kept at a good distance, but then they are not meant for small rooms.

**CONCLUSION**

In every sense of the word the V-604 is a big hearted loudspeaker that aims to make its presence known. At the price it achieves this end well, Usher being able to keep everything sufficiently in check to avoid the sort of excess that is just too pronounced to be anything other than obvious contrivance. The V604 has strong, deep bass, but not too much of it. It has a gorgeously clear yet intense midband that I found thoroughly enjoyable and this for me was the



loudspeaker's outstanding strength. Get the V-604 and you'll have a hard job hearing anything convincingly better in this area, making upgrading difficult. It will make most buyers happy I suspect.

Only did a little glassiness in the treble have me on edge at times and less than ecstatically happy. But even this wasn't so obvious that it will challenge all listeners; many might even like the effect. And it can be ameliorated by using warmish sounding source components, even if warm CD players are as rare as

square Ferrari wheels.

On balance then this is a fun loudspeaker with solid strengths. Well engineered, the Ushers have a lot to offer at a reasonable price.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The V-604 has an even response trend across the audio band, free from the broad lifts or dips that upset overall tonal balance. However, there are some distinct effects, the most obvious subjectively being a broad plateau lift from 600Hz up to 1.2kHz that will push vocals forward and enhance intelligibility. Output from the tweeter rises steadily to a peak at 12kHz and this should add a bit of top end sparkle to treble; so the V-604 will not sound dull but the peak is neither high or wide enough to encompass sufficient energy to contribute anything more than a minor brightening of the sound. The lower midband is smooth and even, always a good sign as this is where the ear is sensitive. Bass reaches down to 50Hz (-6dB) and there is some peaking around 80Hz, a sign that bass will sound lively as this is a slightly under-damped response. Output from the port isn't especially high, just +2dB above each bass driver at 80Hz but it is broad and the port exerts good damping on the bass units as a result, our red port output trace reveals.

The impedance characteristic tells a similar tale, motional impedance damping out much of the bass unit's resonant peak, leaving just two small side peaks. This, and a small midband lift, makes the V-604 unreactive as a load, always a good sign. It is, however, a 6 Ohm loudspeaker with minimum of 4 Ohms so it will consume current from an amplifier. Sensitivity was high at 88dB from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input power, so the V-604 will go loud at low volume settings and does not need high power amplifiers; 40 Watts will do.

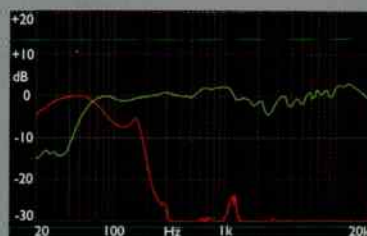
Our analysis of spectral decay shows there is little colouration,

although there is a peculiar narrow band box mode overhang at 200Hz that can also be seen in the red trace of port output. Subjectively, this isn't likely to be very obvious.

Distortion from both bass drivers was remarkably low at 0.5% at 40Hz and around 0.1% right up to 6kHz. The slot port was less happy, returning a 5% figure, but as its output is low and effective only at very low frequencies this will have little impact. The V-604 is a very low distortion loudspeaker, measurement showed.

The V-604 measures very well all round. It should give a clean, low distortion sound with punchy bass, projective midband and obvious treble. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



**VERDICT** ●●●● £  
A big delivery graced by a lovely midband marks out the V-604. Glassy treble enhances detailing, but can be obvious.

**USHER V-604** £1,145  
HiAudio Distribution  
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www.hiaudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- deep, powerful bass
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- AGAINST**
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World Radio History





### REVO HERITAGE £230

If there's been one good deed that the so-called 'DAB revolution' has done, it is to force us all to reassess exactly what we want from radios. Of course, it's true to say that what we don't want is poor reception,

the curious gurgling sound that Digital Radio makes as it struggles to rebuffer a dropped-out signal, and terrible sound quality from its MPEG2 codec, one that's seemingly as old as the solar system itself! On the upside, the instant tuning, where we simply select the station rather than have to worry about technicalities like radio frequencies, is a boon, as is the extensive radio text and station identification markers. Oh, and we also like the auxiliary inputs and iPod connectivity than some of the more recent DAB designs have come with...

Well, distill all the aforementioned down, add Internet radio, network music playback and FM for more choice and better sound, put everything in a highly classy package

and you have the Revo Heritage. Think of it as a sort of 'greatest hits' of radios gone by. Its small-to-medium size oblong case (described by Revo as "a contemporary reinterpretation of classic European table radios") is perfect for the job in hand; it doesn't get in the way, yet is big enough to pack a decent sized speaker. The real metal finish is superb as modern radios go, and the large OLED display is peerless. The Revo's radio section is excellent too; that big display, aided by a small joystick, makes navigating Internet radio a breeze, and it's easy to switch between sources. The unit is packed with features and yet doesn't seem gimmicky in the least. The only criticism is the sound quality; whilst the 7W speaker will fill up your kitchen with music, it's not quite as good as some of the top Vita rivals, for example. I'd have liked a tad more midband clarity considering that premium price. Still, it's a lovely radio all the same, and one of the few premium designs worth having. **DP**

[Contact: +44(0)1555 66 61 61, [www.revo.co.uk](http://www.revo.co.uk)]

# soundbites

### ARCAM IRDOCK £140

When the original Arcam rDock surfaced a couple of years ago, it was undoubtedly the best sounding iPod dock around. Aside from the excellent build quality, it had a properly buffered audio output and a very clever system to switch off the battery charging - should you wish it - to give better sound when playing back. There was a clearly audible difference, and this feature alone seemed to justify the product's premium price tag. Since then however, there have been ever more iPod docks appear, and even some now offering direct digital output, such as Onkyo's ND-S1 (£150). So Arcam have replied with this new improved design which adds a remote handset and performance improvements.

The high quality cast aluminium enclosure is retained, now with better RF shielding and an RF



choke fitted, while 'audiophile grade' op-amps are fitted and there's a wider compatibility with the latest generation iPod and iPhones, with 'intelligent charging' retained. The result is, once again, the finest sounding iPod dock we've tried, the irDock lending a subtly smoother, warmer and more powerful sound to an Apple iPod Classic running ALAC lossless files. The rough edges get smoothed off, and there's a greater sense of ease and musical fluidity. It's not dramatic, but it makes an iPod listenable through a hi-fi system, which is no mean feat. Obviously, if you have a high quality DAC, even better results can now be had running a digital output through the Onkyo ND-S1, but for those wanting a simple plug and play analogue iPod dock, this remains the ultimate. **DP**

[Contact: +44(0)1223 203 200, [www.arcam.co.uk](http://www.arcam.co.uk)]



# Power Station

Class A amplifiers are often huge and heavy but sound superb. Musical Fidelity take this formula to the limit with the massive AMS50 power amplifier, finds Noel Keywood...

**H**ere's a power amplifier that will bewilder many but delight some. I was one of the 'some' delighted by it. But then, I enjoyed its charms whilst avoiding one of its drawbacks – an £8,900 price tag! If you have the money and are prepared to spend it on good sound quality, as many still are I'm constantly assured, then Musical Fidelity's new AMS50 Class A power amplifier is required listening. I've been using it now for many months across a wide range of loudspeakers and it has become my tool of choice for driving loudspeakers with a quality and equanimity I have been unable to find elsewhere in solid-state amplifiers.

Bewildering? Yes, I haven't

mentioned yet that this monster power amplifier weighs a truly massive 60kgs, or 132lbs, and is a two or three person lift. But it produces just 40 Watts!

Adding bewilderment is the fact that although its power output is limited, it actually sounds very powerful. I'll attempt to explain this, insofar as any definitive explanation exists. On offer here is a pure Class A amplifier. Class A consumes maximum power all the time and both sides of the push-pull pair swing the full voltage cycle. There can be crossover discontinuity in Class A but it is usually benign, producing low order distortion harmonics only. I say 'can' however, because this depends on the circuit used. Single-ended working is Class A, but there is no

crossover region.

The beauty of Class A is good sound quality, especially at low levels, where good designs have an easy lucidity and unstrained clarity that makes for relaxed listening. The big drawback of Class A is heat production, especially when the circuits are what is known as full Class A, as used in the AMS50, where each output pair shares the entire duty cycle. The output devices then stream heat and to keep them cool a lot of heatsinking is needed – and that's one reason the AMS50 is so heavy, Anthony Michaelson of Musical Fidelity told me. But it does run fairly cool.

The other reason is that it uses a massive mains transformer. However, knowing that Musical

Fidelity understand the need for quiet power lines and have in the past used chokes to achieve this – valve amplifier practice – I couldn't help but ask whether the AMS50 had chokes onboard, but was told it hasn't. Whilst a choke version may well be produced, it's best to understand that chokes compromise regulation, often seen as all important in solid-state amplifiers. The big AMS50 has superb regulation, as you'd hope, and that allows it to double its power output into a 4 Ohm load, from 40 Watts into 8 Ohms to 76 Watts into a 4 Ohms. Since most loudspeakers nowadays use 4 Ohm bass units this is what the AMS50 will actually be delivering in use, rather than 40 Watts, one reason it seemingly goes louder than its spec. suggests. Chokes will alter all this, as well as make the amplifier even heavier, so heavy lifting equipment would probably be needed, but then Musical Fidelity have made such things in the past! I'm thinking of an A-470 I once used and its bigger brother that even I had to keep away from, an A-570.

Another reason it goes loud is that modern loudspeakers need very little power; a 4 Ohm floorstander needs just 1 Watt for a loud 90dB one metre away. This falls to 80dB or so at a normal listening distance of 4 metres. The AMS50 would produce 98dB, 4 metres away from 76 Watts – and that is very loud. I listen at 90dB maximum at home and rarely use more than 10 Watts (I monitor electrical power with a 'scope and loudness with a Bruel & Kjaer SPL meter, to ensure I am not overly stressing either loudspeakers or amplifiers when reviewing them, and to inform myself of course).

For those of you wondering, we never supported Musical Fidelity's recent campaign to persuade people a lot of power is needed in the home. True, powerful amplifiers often sound that way, even though in most circumstances only a fraction of their output is being used, but the big AMS50 also sounds powerful. It might not deliver voltage swing but it can deliver plenty of current.

Not only do its fully complementary push-pull output triple bi-polars (they are not MOSFETs I was told) share the load fully, they work in bridged pairs. Bridge amplifiers often sound quite chunky yet smooth in what they do and the AMS50 has this quality about it, plus some. With bridge amplifiers both positive and negative loudspeaker terminals are 'live'; negative is only a convention. On most conventional amps the loudspeaker negative

terminal goes to ground; on a bridge amplifier it does not. If the negative is grounded accidentally then the channel goes silent; if the positive is grounded sparks fly I found! Protection circuits exist to avoid damage.

There are two pairs of output terminals per channel, provided to make biwiring easier. They are chunky, gold plated affairs that cater for 4mm banana plugs, spade terminals favoured in the U.S., and bare wire.

In line with today's preferences the AMS50 has balanced XLR inputs in addition to unbalanced phono inputs. The amplifier is unbalanced internally, so the balanced input runs through a balanced-to-unbalanced receiver chip, as most do. What's the benefit? It is to be able to use balanced cabling. Sceptics – usually electrical engineers! – need to listen first before jumping to conclusions. Just the fact that the signal line is symmetric and earth currents passed through an independent ground helps. Then there's cancellation of common mode interference, a subject that's off the radar of high fidelity engineering

balanced signal cabling is a sensible one. For this review however I used both a Creek OBH-22 passive preamplifier and Icon Audio LA7 valve preamplifier, connected through short, phono terminated unbalanced cabling.

My initial interest and final appreciation of this power amplifier revolved around its ability to match and drive a wide variety of loudspeakers. Loudspeaker reviewing demands use of a decent power amplifier sufficiently neutral in itself, yet of deep ability, to act as a blameless drive amplifier. The AMS50 turned out to be near perfect for this purpose, suggesting it will give consistently fine sound with whatever loudspeaker it is partnered with. It didn't quite score 100%; some loudspeakers, like the Usher V-640s in this issue, didn't suit it I felt. But it got a lot closer than most solid-state amplifiers at being able to get the best from most loudspeakers and regular readers will know I've used the AMS50 for some months now as a solid-state benchmark, a reliable, top quality workhorse for

"the AMS50 has an array of qualities that mark it out as superb, no matter what speaker it is paired with..."

and talk, even though increasing amounts of radio frequency hash surrounds us.

Musical Fidelity would like owners to use their Primo valve preamplifier of course, which has balanced outputs. Bearing in mind the AMS50 is so heavy it will normally sit on a floor, the signal cable to it will likely be a long one and therefore best as a well screened, balanced type, I believe. Just how important this is may well be down to location. For example, radio breakthrough into hi-fi amplifiers used to be common in the Crystal Palace area of South London, due to the presence of the powerful Crystal Palace transmitter. Both loudspeaker leads and phono stage cabling acted as an aerial, rectification occurring across the base-emitter junction of the first preamplifier transistor. That both low level input and high level output cables were culprits in this demonstrated that radio frequency pickup can occur anywhere. With Wi-Fi transmitters all around us nowadays there is a need to pay attention to connection methods and cables in top quality set ups and for this reason the move to

loudspeaker reviews, alongside our Icon Audio MB845 valve amplifiers.

No they are not alike! They are not even similar in sound quality. But the big AMS50 has an array of qualities that mark it out as an utterly superb amplifier no matter what loudspeaker it is paired with.

## SOUND QUALITY

In broadest outline, the AMS50 has a taut, clean cut delivery with monumental grip. Reviewing loudspeakers with it, it consistently drove them lower than other amplifiers, without bloom or warmth. This isn't a full bodied sort of bass, and certainly not a bloated one, but a sense of total control in keeping the strong bass line of Santana's 'Love of my Life' perfectly timed, as if in a rhythmic vice, placed clearly apart from all else so it took up position as a backing line, rather than a deep sound of indeterminate origin, and finally a very obvious extra depth that sent low notes downward with pile driving determinism; I almost wanted to grab the arms of the settee. As Santana picked off the simple motifs, leading edges from the his guitar were sudden and strong, the follow



# Tape End

**Tim Jarman tries out what could possibly be the very last ever new cassette deck on sale, the Sony TC-WE475...**

**N**o, this isn't the Olde Worlde page, the Sony TC-WE475 is a cassette deck that you can buy *brand new*. It's a proper cassette deck too, not one of those dreadful 'tape to USB' devices that cheap shops sell. It has two transports, both with auto reverse and their own digital memory tape counter, Dolby B and C, automatic or manual recording level control, type I (ferric), II (chrome) and IV (metal) tape compatibility with automatic selection, music search and much more, in fact it's what you might call 'fully loaded'.

Sony has been making cassette recorders for over forty years but don't run away with the idea that the TC-WE475 is the peak of the

evolution of the species. Instead, see it as a rationalised model which covers the basic needs of the cassette user in the twenty first century. I was impressed to see that the review sample was made in Japan, this is always a good sign with Sony equipment...

Before delving into the details of the machine itself the first question is "why should you buy a cassette recorder at all?" There are many answers to this, the most obvious of which is to listen to a library of much loved recordings built up over the years, quality material laid down using high end machines in the heyday of cassette still lives on after all, even once the original recorders themselves become worn out or irreparable.

You may also, for example, wish to make fresh recordings to archive LPs. There's no point investing in an all-analogue system and then mangling the pure signals in a computer soundcard or suchlike; cassette is ideal for this.

Similarly, if you are a classic car buff (and many audiophiles are) and wish to use the original audio equipment that came with your beloved vehicle a quality home cassette deck is essential, as it is if you want to use a Sony Walkman or other cassette personal stereo.

Why not buy a second-hand superdeck from the golden years? There are still plenty about and they can be amazingly cheap for what you get. Certainly when new some of them would have made the





"if all you are used to is compressed MP3 then this will blow you away..."

TC-WE475 look decidedly 'junior league' - but there's the catch, as I said, "when new". Old cassette decks often need major mechanical work and careful recalibration if they are going to even approach their original levels of performance – and that's before one gets involved in things like head wear and evolution of the cassette standard over the years.

The TC-WE475 on the other hand, being new, comes with a factory guarantee, new heads, belts, rollers, clutches, etc., and is freshly calibrated to match the currently available tape types, all at a price that is much lower than the cost of a serious overhaul of an older model. In motoring terms it's like comparing a new Golf GTi with a twenty year old supercar, they can be bought for similar money but going for the new option and forgoing the chance to own something really exotic can involve far less pain in the long run, and is ultimately more satisfying.

A double cassette deck is traditionally used to copy recordings and indeed the Sony can do this, at normal or double speed in the best eighties-tastic 'high speed dubbing'

tradition. Even if you never do this, having two decks is still an advantage. Technically minded users can tweak the azimuth setting of the playback only deck to match their old, potentially misadjusted recordings whilst retaining the recording deck as a reference, thus ensuring that the playback only deck can be reset to the factory adjustment point with the minimum of fuss. The playback only deck also offers variable speed, so clean and fresh sounding recordings can easily be made from old ones made on recorders that suffered from a number of faults or inaccuracies.

Making new recordings is easy too: a 14 segment per channel level meter and the choice of either automatic or manual level control is a good level of specification and with auto reverse 1 1/2 hours of almost non-stop recording can be made on a C90 without further intervention. The auto reverse mechanism is rather basic however and waits for the tape to stop turning before reversing, older models sensed the presence of the transparent 'leader' tape and thus imposed a shorter gap

in the programme material.

Recordings can be made on any of the three main tape types but given the current availability of new blank media type II cassettes such as TDK's SA are going to be the best choice. Sony have generously fitted Bang & Olufsen's HX Pro recording system to the TC-WE475. This automatically optimises the amount of recording bias used depending on the signal content and magnitude. Although contentious amongst the purists HX Pro does give improved results with basic tape types, so there's no need to go scouring ebay for unused packs of rare high end formulations!

### SOUND QUALITY

I started listening to the TC-WE475 by playing back recordings made on a recently calibrated Sony TC-D5 Pro II. I was pleased to find the Dolby level and head azimuth adjustment were reasonably accurate although the speed of both decks was a little fast, 0.5% in the case of the playback one and 1.2% for the recording one. The error was at least consistent in both directions and could therefore

# MUSICAL FIDELITY

## AMS50 Power Amplifier

New from Musical Fidelity. 50 wpc. Pure Class A.  
Fully balanced. Bridged. Dual mono. High current.



be trimmed out by a competent dealer. A 1% speed error can be considered average for machines in this class and is not immediately objectionable. I found that the Sony gave a soft sound with some extreme treble detail absent. Imaging however was good, as was the rendering of fine midrange detail, this suggests that the nature of the sound is a characteristic of the replay amplifier rather than the effect of misaligned heads or poor Dolby tracking. The moulded plastic flywheels used in the mechanisms didn't inspire much confidence but apart from a slight amount of 'dirtiness' around certain sustained notes I did not experience any particularly objectionable speed-related disturbances during my listening tests. Overall the sound was more laid back than pacey, the machine was clearly more at home with Carla Bruni than Kraftwerk!

I first tried recording on TDK SA tape without Dolby. This of course introduces background hiss but if the music you like is of a sustained high energy level the trade off against less processing in the crucial upper midband may be one that is worth making. Trust me, you won't hear tape hiss at -57dB in the middle of a Metallica concert if you record it properly! Not wishing to deafen myself completely I opted instead for Depeche Mode and the album version of 'Strangelove'. Throwing caution to the wind and allowing the peak signal to hit +4dB at times resulted in a well balanced recording that while lacking the sheen of the CD original, possibly as the result of the replay characteristic mentioned earlier, but was nevertheless highly credible. I felt that the soundstage had contracted a little too but if all you are used to is compressed MP3 then this will blow you away. Predictably the run-up to the main part of the track was marred by tape noise but this soon became inaudible once things got going. Playing the recording back in the reference TC-D5 Pro II demonstrated good compatibility and, predictably, a little more treble.

Calming down a little, cueing up Kate Bush's 'The Man I Love' and turning the Dolby (B) back on revealed excellent record/replay tracking, another sure sign of an accurate factory setup. There was again a very slight dulling of the treble but it was scarcely worth worrying about, given how creamy smooth the rest of the presen-

tation was. Once more compatibility with the TC-D5 Pro II was good; for the price I can't see anyone being anything other than delighted with the performance of this machine.

Dolby C of course gave even less hiss but in my experience compatibility problems between recorders are worse with 'C' than 'B' and as many can only process the former anyway

the sound to some extent. Manual control allows one to set the peaks at +2dB (the recommended setting for type I and II cassettes) or +6dB (for type IV).

**CONCLUSION**

I can't recommend the Sony TC-WE475 highly enough. It is well made, sensibly specified and works correctly



unless you are only going to play your recordings on the TC-WE475 I'd recommend sticking with 'B'

Before leaving the subject of recording it is worth mentioning that Sony are clearly confident that their HX-Pro circuit works correctly, the auto-level system allows the music to peak right up to 0dB on the meters and such devices normally have to allow for a bit of extra headroom on top as well. The quality-conscious should of course always use the manual setting; automatic level controls that adjust themselves continuously (like the Sony one does) all compress the dynamic range of

in all the key areas. To use it is a joy, it makes you feel grown up in the same way a proper turntable does and the sound quality never failed to exceed my expectations. My only concerns centre around the durability of the heads and mechanisms. I suspect the heads are Permalloy and this is not as wear-resistant as the ferrite or Sendust types that one finds in older high-end machines, therefore the commendably accurate factory calibration may not stay that way forever. Not state of the art then, but nevertheless a very good recorder with many uses. Buy one whilst you can.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Replay frequency response was flat to 10kHz and fell a little above that frequency. Head azimuth was also well set, this shows, equalisation was correct and the head had few low frequency 'contour effect' bumps. Together with adjustable speed and good speed stability pre-recorded tapes will play well on the Sony. The 0VU level was also in perfect accordance with IEC0dB level, as it needs to be.

There was some small treble roll off with TDK D (IECI ferric) that will give warm-ish sounding recordings, but the advantage of ferric, especially high coercivity TDK AD and AR, is low distortion (0.6%), due to the low bias requirement, as the record head in Deck B was unhappy with chrome (thd=2.7%) and metal (thd=2.5%) bias levels, as budget decks often are. Both chrome and metal tape gave flat, extended high frequency response and less hiss though, metal returning a -70dB hiss level with TDK-MA and Dolby C engaged.

The Sony was surprisingly well fettled and adjusted for high quality replay of prerecorded tapes, as well as the production of very good quality recordings. Its greatest weakness is a record head unable to accept high signal levels, so recordings made into

the red will sound messy, especially with chrome and metal tapes. The 0VU reference level is best used as a maximum for quality recordings. NK

**REPLAY**

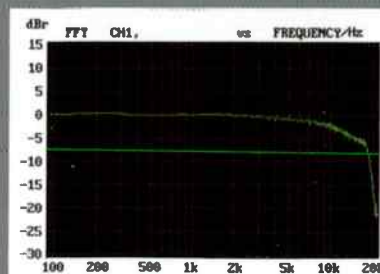
Frequency response 20Hz-18kHz  
Speed accuracy +0.85% (Pitch Off)

**RECORD/REPLAY**

Frequency response  
Ferric (IECI) 16Hz-10kHz  
Chrome (IECII) 16Hz-18kHz  
Metal (IECIV) 16Hz-20kHz

Noise (IEC I, II, IV, Dolby out) -46, -50, -52dB  
Distortion (0dB, TDK AD) 0.6%  
Speed stability (W&F, Wtd) 0.12%

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE, IECI (TDK D)**



**VERDICT** ●●●●● £

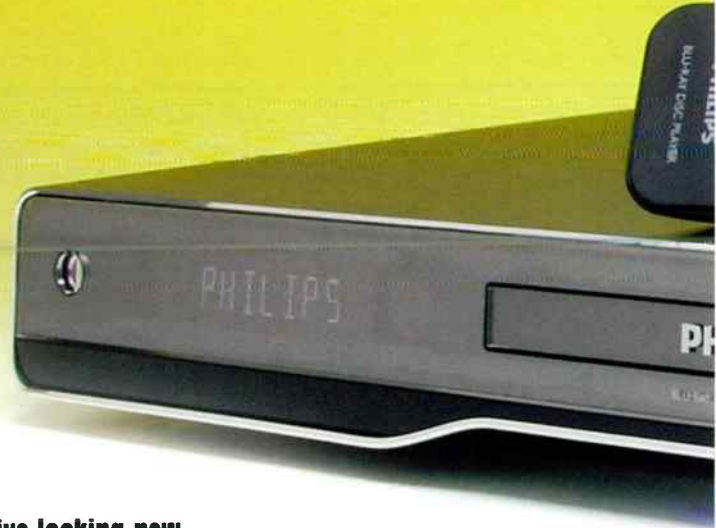
An essential purchase for the committed cassette user, this deck performed way better than expected in every way.

**SONY TC-WE475** £130  
Sony UK  
☎ +44 (0)1932 816000  
www.sony.co.uk

- FOR**
- fine sound
  - accurate factory alignment
  - well specified
  - easy to use

- AGAINST**
- basic transport
  - auto reverse recording gap

# Bling Ray



**Noel Keywood auditions Philips' distinctive looking new BDP7500 Blu-ray player...**

**P**hilips new BDP7500 sits just above the £100 entry level players. Like most players this one spins more than just Blu-rays. It plays DVD video, upscaling it to high def. quality, and audio CD, plus a whole slew of other formats that you can see in the specification on p22 of the User Manual that you can download from [www.consumer.philips.com/c/blu-ray-dvd/bdp7500bl\\_98/prd/my](http://www.consumer.philips.com/c/blu-ray-dvd/bdp7500bl_98/prd/my). These include the ability to play CD and DVD RWs (rewrite-ables), so like its rivals the BDP7500 will spin all silver discs, except that notorious duo, DVD-A and SACD.

The higher price brings a wide variety of older format signal outputs, to broaden compatibility with older product. The BDP7500 has 7.1 format (seven channels and subwoofer) multichannel analogue outputs, for connection through phono plug terminated cables to a receiver. I was very surprised to see an onboard loudspeaker set up menu, to set loudspeaker size and distance, for use in conjunction with these outputs.

There are analogue stereo outputs, which receive a fixed internal mix down from multichannel programme, or a stereo mix from the disc (which is preferable). And both electrical and optical S/PDIF digital (stereo) outputs are fitted.

On board decoding is provided for all the latest movie soundtrack compression formats, including Dolby Digital Plus, TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio. These are only needed in the player if the receiver doesn't have them, or if the analogue outputs are to be used.

On the video side, a composite output is provided, plus higher quality Component outputs and HDMI. Both Scart and S-Video are missing,

at least on this European model. The BDP7500 should connect up to any receiver, no matter how old.

Headline features of the player mostly relate to video features I'm not especially concerned with here, notably Bonusview, which offers picture-in-picture, and BD Live (Profile 2) where the player can download content from the website of the movie producer. Yes, the BDP7500 has an ethernet socket for internet connection and this player connected seamlessly to my Netgear router, unlike the BDP3000 before it. Manual settings are not available. Nor is any MAC (hardware) address declared so it can be easily located on the router's client list, unlike Samsungs for example. So fiddling is impossible! My sample checked for software version update successfully. For BD Live content 1GB of memory is fitted, so content can be stored onboard, rather than on an external memory stick.

Philips fit a front USB 2 socket for memory sticks, so the player can access music and video files, including DivX Ultra media files (compressed video). MP3 and WMA compressed music files can be played from this source, or PCM from a WAV file. There's no mention of AAC, Ogg Vorbis or FLAC though.

## PICTURE QUALITY

Like the BDP3000, the 7500 delivered a richly detailed picture and was able to handle the slowly rotating propeller of a Tiger Moth at standstill without the image breaking up, from 50fps interlaced HDV video. Where the Philips produces the expected blur of each blade, Samsung players break up, showing the Philips has superior motion handling within its noise reduction circuits. Noise was

low and detail in grass and trees in and around Duxford's parking aprons was superb, making a Samsung BDP-1600 look a little blurred. Test videos in a park from a steady tripod mounted camera confirmed excellent detailing in grass and trees. The picture had slightly enhanced black level, even with Black Level set to Normal and was 'contrasty'. This wasn't apparent in an SMPTE grey scale test chart from our HQV Blu-ray video test disc. With 0% luminance (full black) and +5% levels discernible, all seemed well enough set. This didn't change even with Black level set High, however, so it wasn't picking up what was visible. All HQV disc tests were passed with alacrity, jaggies being non-existent, even when frame stepping.

The player upsamples DVD to Blu-ray resolution and I've always found this very effective, and it was on the BDP7500. I ran the complete gamut of tests from our HQV test DVD and more comprehensive Burosch professional test DVDs and the Philips player was all but flawless. The player handles 24fps progressive film and output John Meyer's concert as such.

The player read Verbatim BD-Rs and Panasonic BD-REs without difficulty, as well as commercially duplicated Blu-ray discs. Loading times were fast, the heavy Java menu of John Meyer's 'Where The Light Is' loading in thirty seconds from Draw close. Draw open was reasonably speedy too.

## SOUND QUALITY

Philips BDP3000, reviewed in our November 09 issue, would not play PCM in surround-sound, reproducing Andrea Bocelli's 'Live in Tuscany' Blu-ray in stereo only, for example.



So I popped the same disc into the BDP7500 and its 24/48, 5.1 PCM soundtrack played in full surround, via HDMI through a Marantz SR8002 receiver:

I thought the stereo gremlin had gone but a residue seems to remain. Set to Auto the player decoded all tracks of my 2L BD of 'Divertimenti', from the Trondheim Soloists, recorded in 24/192 PCM, DTS HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD. The Philips sent PCM to the receiver, as it should.

However, setting output to Bitstream, meaning passing the native undecoded signal out via HDMI to get the receiver to do the decoding, worked with PCM and DTS HD Master Audio, but not Dolby TrueHD, which locked into stereo again (even with the TV disconnected to eliminate HDMI influence). My Samsung correctly handles this track. Fortunately, the Philips did output Dolby TrueHD correctly at lower data rates, so 24/96 code from a Dolby Labs test disc played correctly, in full surround-sound via decoding in the receiver and commercial recordings such as the John Meyer concert in TrueHD 24/96 were fine. An Audio button on the remote switches between track formats during play, a convenience.

As this problem affects only 24/192 code most people will never encounter it, because very few 24/192 spec. discs exist, but Philips still lag Samsung here and should be able to ensure a European produced high quality audio Blu-ray disc plays properly on what is meant to be a player of good quality.

If you want to play CDs on a Blu-ray player it's best to use either HDMI or S/PDIF digital outputs, not the analogue outputs. I used the BDP7500 to play CD via S/PDIF into

the SR8002 and got fine results. Its lack of jitter is evident as a pristine clarity and sharp sense of timing, giving everything, from the Eagles 'Long Road Out Of Eden' through to Leif Ove Andsnes delightful playing of 'Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2' a shiny clarity and nice spatiality I found very acceptable. It was the super low jitter of Samsung players that originally alerted me to this way of using Blu-ray to play CD and the Philips BDP7500 manages an equally good job. You do of course need a decent external DAC or receiver.

The analogue outputs weren't so sparkingly see through or dimensional, but both gave a smooth sound free from coarseness. I could just detect the greater bandwidth of the Multichannel L&R over Stereo L&R, the latter having a slightly warmer tonality, due to the alias-filter ripples. Both were enjoyable enough though and Philips have paid attention to analogue quality.

I checked to see if differences existed between decoding DTS HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD in the player and the receiver, but they were slight and subtle; the Philips compared well with the Marantz in decode quality.

Fed SACD, the 7500 played the stereo layer. Fed DVD-A it

played Dolby Digital 5.1 surround-sound or stereo, but would not read high res. PCM content, as expected. But I tried just in case!

### CONCLUSION

The new Philips BDP7500 worked well all round. I found it easy to use and both audio and picture quality were excellent. Only those expecting to output native 24/192 Dolby TrueHD for decoding in their receiver will be disappointed, but this will affect few users.

**VERDICT** ●●●●● £

Great picture quality and handles most discs and formats. A good value player with a wide range of abilities.

**PHILIPS BDP7500** £250

**Philips**

+44(0)800 331601

[www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk)

- FOR**
- detailed picture
  - fast loading
  - easy to use
- AGAINST**
- no 24/192 TrueHD
  - strong black contrasts

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The BDP7500 has two sets of audio outputs and they run through different converters. The stereo outputs exhibit strong filter ripple before reaching the usual 21kHz anti-alias limit. This reduces treble energy and gives a warmer sound, even though response reached 21kHz within 1dB limits. The multichannel analogue output was smooth to 43kHz with a 96kHz sample rate signal, a good result. With low distortion from both outputs, down to 0.07% at -60dB with 24bit resolution, the Philips offers good results from its analogue outputs.

The S/PDIF digital output was usefully free from jitter, measurement showed. Random jitter was a minuscule 10pS whilst signal related jitter hit just 40pS with a -60dB, 1kHz tone. Results via the HDMI connection are set by the receiver's performance.

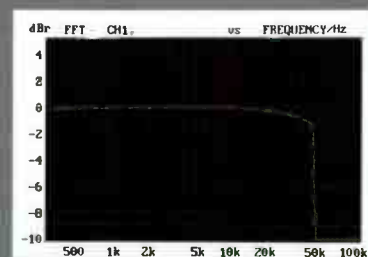
The Philips measured well from its analogue outputs, showing it is well engineered. Jitter was low on its digital output too. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD / DVD 1Hz-21 / 43kHz

Distortion, CD (%)  
0dB 0.005  
-6dB 0.004

-60dB	0.2
-80dB	1.8
Separation (1kHz)	102dB
Noise (IEC A)	-109dB
Dynamic range	97dB
Output	2V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (96k)



### DISTORTION (24bit)





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BEST LOUDSPEAKER**



Dancer Be-10



Dancer Be-10



Dancer Be-10



## Dance with an Usher

Jordan Acoustics are proud to have been selected as one of a handful of Reference dealers for the revered loudspeaker brand Usher.

Top notch build quality and packed with technology, Usher has become a significant player in the UK high-end loudspeaker market in the last few years. Their use of beryllium and kevlar for their drive units really does add an extra dimension of realism. Those looking for that 'air and space' to the top end should look no further. They are so good that Hi-Fi World recent announced the **Be-10** as their loudspeaker of the year! Quite an achievement considering how densely populated the loudspeaker market is!

Our demo pair of Be-10's has just arrived so come and hear for yourself...

Hi-Fi World in a recent review of the Usher Dancer Be-10 wrote:

**" 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. "**

Hi-Fi World Awards 2009

**USHER**

# mail



## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

Visit our website at [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) or send your emails to [letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk](mailto:letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk). Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers.

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to **PETER GRAVES**, Letter of the Month winner in our February 2010 issue.

## Letter of the Month

### CHI-FI

I write with regard to the letter from Niels Ostergaard and the responses from NK and DP. While I do agree in principle with NK's remarks about consumer laws, it should be noted that many of the Chinese brands do have E.U. distributors and I would mention A.A.A.V.T ([www.aaavt.it](http://www.aaavt.it)) in Italy who distribute Yaquin, Yarland and Aria, among others.

Regarding DP's remarks, while bowing to his obvious greater experience, his comments are highly generalised and certainly shouldn't be taken to apply to all such brands. Many Chinese manufacturers produce products re-badged as much better known brands, e.g. Aria as Sophia Electric (Baby) and Korsun as Red Rose (Rosette). I myself have a Korsun U2, which I imported directly from Hong Kong and which I have found excellent quality, both for sound and build.

I would point Niels (and yourselves) to some of the online sites, such as TNT Audio and 6 Moons which often cover Chinese brands and highlight in particular the good reviews that Yarland have been getting recently. I, like Niels, would welcome more coverage of such equipment and would be happy to accept the constraint that it had to be available from an E.U. source.

Finally, DP's comment about the 'noise' that Niels is getting from his equipment cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. While, I hope, it may have been somewhat 'tongue in cheek' (?), I don't think it is acceptable to criticise another enthusiast's choices or taste in this way, at least not without personal experience of the actual set-up. Even then, sound quality is highly subjective and 'one mans meat ...' etc.

regards,  
**Stephen Murphy.**

Hi Stephen - regularly visiting the People's Republic as I do (for reasons of friends and family), I get plenty of chance to see Chinese hi-fi 'at home', and talk to Chinese hi-fi buffs and indeed Chinese hi-fi salesmen when I visit the fast growing network of hi-fi dealerships there. I'm afraid their

indigenous product is not universally well regarded. There are, as you point out, some very good Chinese brands, but most - as a number of Chinese dealers have told me (even those who sell it!) are poor. They're highly derivative of Western designs, and often they manage to copy the 'headline features' like chunky casework and huge toroidal power transformers, but miss the subtle things which are just as important to sound such as high quality passive components. Indeed, at the last Whittlebury Show Ken Ishiwata



**Korus T2 amplifier, imported from Hong Kong by Stephen Murray. It has now become the Dussun T2.**

and I were comparing notes; he told me that they simply lack designers who can 'finesse' their products, fine-tune what's basically a box of decent bits into something half-decent. He believes they will move forward, and in some cases have already done so, but it's (if you pardon the phrase) rather like 'the Wild West' at the moment. As such, buying blind off eBay (or wherever) is risky. It's great if you're tweeky and you want a project, but don't expect hi-fi heaven at a knock down price.

**DP**



**Auranote "looks like my old Alba record player from the 60s!" says Eric. "No, it's retro chic" says David, "like Sophia Loren!"**

### TASMANIAN DEVIL

David Price drools over the AuraNote box in the Systems Shoot-out in the latest (well down here in Tassie anyway) issue. He cites all sorts of awards for the designer. But look at the thing ... a bloody box with a few shiny knobs on it. It looks like my old Alba record player from the 60s! I've seen nice design from Chord and Lecson and love the beauty of old SMEs and Stax arms. But function usually triumphs over form in our hobby. To think that box is wonderful....come on. It was bad enough in the shoot-out but to follow up with your column.... aarrghhh!

I admire your ears, Dave. They've brought me the truth on loads of gear over the years. But your eyes, mate, your poor eyes!

**Eric McCormick  
Hobart,  
Tasmania**

Hi Eric - well, as they say, each unto their own! This AuraNote is - to my peepers - a deliciously retro (think Sophia Loren, Beatles' 'White Album', Maserati Ghibli, James Bond!) take on a 'music box' and, importantly, beautifully built. It's certainly something a bit out of the ordinary, and along with my love of its style and build, I was delighted to hear that April Music had engineered it well on the inside too. I can see now that it's obviously not de rigueur in Tasmania, though! **DP**

### BEATLES:

I read the article on the Beatles re-issues with interest, and would like to produce a counter argument to some of the comments and views. I am a long term Beatles fan, and would generally applaud any initiative that improved the accessibility and quality of their back catalogue. For a wedding present I received the entire set of Beatles CDs, 15 years ago. Apart from the fact

that the packaging was incredibly poor (over-enlarged copies of cover shots, no notes whatsoever - the exception being Sgt Peppers), I thought the sound was pretty good. Sure, these were 20 year old recordings re-issued at full price, but then EMI aren't a charity and have to please their shareholders.

I do, however, feel that they are really going too far with their recent releases in trying to fleece the public, by trying to get us all to buy them again! These are just re-issues, the cost behind the new transfers must be minimal. Even if they had to get a couple of engineers to work with them, why the full price? Furthermore, why muck around with the equalisation? I may be cynical but I am sure that this is similar to the old show-room trick of increasing the volume in A/B comparisons. It sounds louder, it's better - must buy!

Secondly, the mono issues sound interesting, and probably worth a spin, certainly for the *Hard Days Night* to *White Album* period. To produce them as a stand alone full price set is really despicable.

By comparison, the really excellent 60s Beach Boys re-issues on Capitol include both the stereo and mono mixes on one disc, and I can see absolutely no reason why EMI didn't do this, except to try and extract more cash from their customers, once again. Perhaps this is one reason why the re-issues haven't really set the charts on fire, and if so it serves them right.

Your review highlights the dodgy quality of the early stereo mixes, especially *Rubber Soul*. I think this is missing the point - this is what the sixties sounded like. These are period pieces and not modern, multi tracked, digital stereo (which quite often sound ghastly anyway); listen to *Run for Your Life* on *Rubber Soul*, Lennon's vocals are blistering, miked up close, hissing out of the right speaker on their own. Staggering stuff!

I believe that recordings come out of copyright after 50 years. If so, I look forward to really creative re-issues from Naxos and Dutton Labs etc, at a decent cost and with full packaging!

Lastly, which ones should we buy? I don't think we should replace any of the original 80s transfers, which to my ears sound clean and dry, a bit BBC 3 in their balance rather than *Classic FM*, but none the worse for that. Anyway, the gullible amongst us will have to start saving up for the re-mixes, which are undoubtedly being worked on even as we speak, in the depths of *Abbey Road*. They will be issued at full price, trust me.

**Peter Norrie  
Leicester**

Hi Peter. I totally agree with your assertion that the stereo set is over priced. Both EMI and The Beatles' estate are maximising income before the copyright on their works expires. Why couldn't they have created a box set in the vein of Neil Young's recent 'Archives' release, packed with value-for-money rarities and (Blu-Ray) video? Then again, maybe that's to come...?

On purely sound terms, I would argue that, in fact, the eighties' releases "mucked around" with the sound to a greater degree. They



**Mentioning dodgy quality of the early Beatles stereo mixes, especially *Rubber Soul*, misses the point, says Peter Norrie.**

may be more benign but the new re-issues restore much of the clarity, drive and energy of the original master tapes. The eighties releases masked a lot of original detail. The problem is that, in my view, the stereo 'enhancements' of the new reissues went too far in certain, but by no means all, areas.

As for the mono box set? No matter what the stereo box set provides, the mono box was always intended to be sold as an audiophile edition for purists and should be viewed as a separate entity. Think of it as a specialised Japanese collectable because, essentially, that's what it is.



Every major artist(s) has featured in similar sets sold, in the main, via specialist retailers for an awful lot of cash.

As for my comments on early 60s mixes? This is a perennial audiophile argument. Many original 60s stereo mixes were produced by inexperienced engineers on deficient equipment for playback on anaemic Dansettes and transistor radios. We now have the technology to restore that music to the artists' original wishes. We should always take advantage of it. If you want a slice of the sixties, buy an original LP second-hand. **PR**

I have to say it's one disappointment after another with CD re-releases - certainly the ones I'm interested in. I think the record companies simply don't understand that compressing the signal and 'normalising' it right up to 0dB does not constitute an improvement in sound. Very often the packaging is also poor; the paper and/or cardboard might be good quality, shiny and with a nice new smell, but often the repro is bad, almost as if someone had put in on the office scanner! The Beatles boxset is sort of a nice idea (especially issuing the mono mixes) but done rather insensitively, methinks. I am now reading the same about the new Kraftwerk boxset release; 'The Catalogue', which only goes to depress me more... **DP**

### VINYL QUEST

My present listening gear is as follows: Naim CDX CD player, NAC 102 preamp with NAPSC power supply, NAP 180 power amp, B&W DM603 floorstanders. Although a sensible option might have been to upgrade my speakers next, I have decided to hold off on this and spend money in reacquainting myself with vinyl instead. Hopefully I can spend around £1500 on speakers later next year. But for now vinyl seems to have become a necessity. In fact vinyl already is a reality. I have been steadily collecting second hand vinyl and some new release stuff for some months now. I think as much as a genuine interest in the sonic possibilities of a good vinyl system, I have also yearned for some years to reacquaint myself with this aesthetically more pleasing, physically tactile medium; not to mention its connection to my own formative years of buying and loving music. I have spent some £400 and am now eagerly awaiting delivery of a Teddycap power supply which will act as a HI-CAP type power supply to the 102 and as a power supply to a Naim Stageline phono amp.

Next up I need to decide on a

vinyl spinner/cartridge set up. I have to confess I am at a total loss. Most puzzling I think is even where to begin in terms of allocating money in a balanced way to the constituent parts of the turntable, tone arm and cartridge. And I am really unsure of what budget I should begin serious consideration of potential purchases at. My one overriding requirement is that this set-up should not be significantly inferior to my CDX CD player. And this has to remain true when I upgrade the speakers too. I don't suddenly want new loudspeakers exposing the weakness of my vinyl set up when compared to CD. I have considered partnering a Rega Planar 3, new RB301 arm with power supply, with a really good MM cartridge such as the Dynavector DV10X 52003 or even the Ortofon 2M Black. This would cost in the region of £800-£900.

Although I am aware that some claim that the Planar 3 is capable of

even prepared to look a second hand or ex demo models. I often see Linn Axis turntables without a tonearm selling on e-bay for £200 or so. Would partnering one of these with a decent new tonearm be a viable option?  
best wishes

**Timothy Cook**

Okay, here goes! The best value new turntable on the market is, in my humble opinion, the Technics SL1200. The trouble is that its tonearm isn't great, so you'd need to fit a Rega RB301 (or suchlike) to get it to give of its best. There are a number of specialists who can do this for you, and who advertise in HFW. If you wanted an off the shelf solution, then the Rega P3 is surely the best at the price. It is an inferior turntable to the Technics, with a superior arm, all in a lovely sleek package. Fitted with an Audio Technica AT-OC9



**"How can I get LP to sound better than my Naim CDX?" asks Timothy Cook.**

shaming CD players far more expensive than itself, would I be right in assuming that the CDX would ultimately prove a substantially better all-round performer than this proposed set-up?

If that is correct how much more money would I seriously need to invest, in order to attain a level of vinyl playback which would not leave me feeling marginally disappointed? How about the Planar 5 with power supply? Is this a considerable improvement over the revamped Planar 3? The planar 5 with one of the aforementioned cartridges would be costing me around £1100-£1200 mark. To be fair I was hoping to keep my spending to under £1500. Is that realistic?

And although I have already allocated money for the Stageline, I can't quite fully decide whether I should go for a MM or MC model? Help, I am confused!

If I need to I am prepared to extend my budget to higher level decks if you feel anything less would sound a poor second to the CDX. More expensive decks which have caught my eye include the Rega Planar 7, the Roksan Radius 5 or the Avid Diva II. Could you advise me on the relative merits of these designs and how they might fit in with my present amplification?

Any advice at all in fact!!!! I am

MLII (although the MLIII is out next month), it will give a sweet, smooth, precise and musically engaging sound. In some ways it will be better than your Naim CDX, especially in terms of its musical cohesive and sweet upper midband and treble. The Technics/RB301 combo is an altogether more bombastic combo; with a massively powerful and punchy bass, a far more incisive and grippy midband and a cleaner (if not so sweet) treble.

However, if you don't want to go down the Technics route, but do want something better than the Rega, something that's comprehensively better sounding to the Naim CDX CD player, then I refer you to an answer I gave some years ago! Yes, I still think Michell's GyroDec is still the benchmark for 'entry level high end' vinyl playback. In its latest SE form, this deck offers a blissfully expansive and open midband, a deliciously subtle and sweet treble and a bouncy, propulsive bass. The build quality is superlative; some decks five times the price aren't as well finished; and the Gyro is easily upgradeable to near-Orbe spec when you're feeling flush. The Gyro, in my view, is the basic 'start point' for top notch vinyl. These days, some other rivals sound as good, or even better,

in some respects, but its combination of qualities is still hard to beat. Were you to go this way, you'd make your CD's laser last a lot longer! **DP**

Hi Timothy, I will make a few comments.

Firstly, the new Rega RB301 arm is very, very good – absurdly so at the price. The Planar 3 is a fine starting point, although it must be placed in a firm, vibration free surface as its mass and isolation are minimal.

In view of the quality of your system and your obvious desire to have the best, a Moving Magnet (MM) cartridge will leave you hankering for what you will know to be better – a moving coil or MC cartridge. The question is – which one? An Ortofon Rondo Bronze comes to mind, or possibly an Audio Technica AT OC9-MLII, both costing around £500. I'll note quickly that the OC9 will be upgraded to MLIII status soon.

And finally from me. I do not agree with the view that LP 'shames' digital. The two are different and good digital has its merits. I happen to prefer LP and with a top quality MC cartridge it is a lovely aural experience, natural, enveloping and deeply communicative. Digital is generally (and I am generalising) more pristine, colder and more mechanical, sometimes quite unconvincing. So I would not expect to 'shame' the CD; it may just be however that you'll find LP a more convincing and fulfilling experience.

**NK**

### LISTENING METHODS

*I have been a hi-fi enthusiast for more years than I want to remember, having started back in the 1950s in the era of DIY loudspeakers and even amplifiers. I have been an avid reader of magazines but only came to Hi-fi World comparatively recently. And a refreshing experience it has been!*

*I realise that I am probably not your typical reader, being twice if not three times his average age, and also listening solely to classical music. Recently I upgraded some aspects of my modest kit which has always been devoted to giving me the highest standard of music reproduction that I can afford. A Quad CDP2 CD player (connected directly into a Quad 606 power amp.) and Spondor A6 loudspeakers have done wonders for even my ageing hearing. But I have been wondering whether I am missing even greater things by not going in for downloading from the internet uncompressed files that can outdo even the high(ish?) standard of CDs. So I have spent much time searching for help to that end and have arrived at a position of complete bemusement. May I set*

**Blu-ray authoring is in its infancy, but TMPG Authoring Works 4 does the job and TMPG (Japan) say it will author audio.**

*out my needs and ask for your reaction as to whether I can satisfy them or whether I should just be content to soldier on with what is, after all, a modest but satisfying system?*

*My computer is in a separate room distant from my hi-fi set-up and this controls some of the following. The way I listen to classical music is to look at my rack of CDs and LPs and then decide which suits my mood at that moment. I take down the chosen disc whether silver or vinyl, put it on and sit rapt in the magical sound which results.*

*So I am not keen on storing my music on my computer for sending when needed to the hi-fi via wireless. What I really want to do is to download it off the net and make a disc of it in the computer for storage in my CD rack for future use. I thought I had found the solution to this from Oppo who were producing a wizard machine which would play almost anything (except FLAC for some reason) but they have now decided not to introduce their kit onto the UK market. So how do I now find a method of making a disc of superior digital quality onto which I can download the wonderful music out there from people like Passionato and others and then replay it on my hi-fi set-up?*

*Linn have something mysterious called DS but try as I might I cannot find that it will actually play discs.*

*Also, there is Squeezebox to which the same applies. There are DACs from Cambridge and others but they won't play discs, will they? And of course down the road there is, or ought to be, the need for Blu-ray capability since that*

*seems to be the obvious way to upgrade the CD format.*

*So I need to find something to play discs that I have burned myself as FLAC or WAV files, as well as those of any format such as Blu-ray, HD audio and all the others. Does such a thing exist? At a relatively reasonable price?*

**James Bruxner**

Hi James. Denon make a Blu-ray transport that will play all discs, and you can buy the Oppo BDP83 in the UK from CRT Projectors, who will be legally obliged to provide support if it fails. You would have to ask them about this. It is a U.S. Region A player but most Blu-ray discs are All Region or Worldwide so will play. However, this does not apply to commercial DVDs, which were generally zoned. The BDP83 works on 240V. A hack is available to make the player multi-region.

I have just learnt from Hi-Audio they are to import both a BDP83SE (£800) and something known as a BDP83SE NuForce (£1200). The latter comes from a tie up between Oppo and NuForce, both of which are Taiwanese. I'm told the respective MDs went to school together, are good friends and there's a lot of co-operation between Oppo and NuForce as a result. We hope to review the BDP83 NuForce very soon.

Authoring music to Blu-ray is in its infancy and something I have limited knowledge of. Blu-ray write-once discs (BD-R) currently cost around £8 each and I've already

turned many into coasters trying to author video to them. However, Panasonic BD-REs erasable discs are now available so this problem has vanished, as I can run test burns on an erasable disc first. This again has been successful, so the technology works! You will need a Blu-ray burner for your computer of course. I encounter no problems burning video (HDV) to Blu-ray in BDMV format using TMPG Authoring Works 4. This programme isn't the easiest to use for editing, but it is comprehensive in what it does, has a superb MPEG coder that delivers better picture quality and costs little. However, I have not used it or even tried to use it for audio authoring. TMPG, Japan, told me in response to this query that Authoring Works 4 in latest form handles 5.1 AAC compressed surround-sound and up to 20bit PCM at 192kHz sample rate. They aim to accommodate 24/192 in future issues. There is a two week free trial available on-line and instruction on its use on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n26AEkW00Zk&feature=related>.

Alternatives are generally more expensive. Sony has Blu-print and the Vegas series, and Adobe has Moviemaker, but whether they can author audio to disc I am uncertain. If any readers have experience of authoring music to Blu-ray, please let us know. **NK**

### MARANTZ TT-1000

Hallo! I live in Norway and buy your magazine every month. I have been a reader of Stereophile, HI-FI News, Absolute Sound and many other Hi-Fi magazines but now I only by Hi-Fi World.

I read that your editor David Price have a Marantz TT-1000 MKI. I also own this lovely turntable and I see in your issue for December that the editor's TT-1000 is recently been restored. I think my TT-1000 plays very good but I wishes to do some tweaks to make it play better. So I wonder if you can give me some advice on this matter. I use a SME 3009 Improved and an Audio Technica AT 1010 on my TT-1000. I also read that your reference system often uses the TT-1000, so it has to be a very good turntable.

regards

**Ragnar Philip Rosenlund  
Norway**

Yes, it is a very good turntable, one that compares well in sonic terms to every modern high end turntable I've reviewed for this magazine. Costing four times as much as a Linn LP12 when it first came out, it's an expensive device and durable too. Basically, it's a heavily tweaked Micro



**Marantz TT-1000 "plays very good but I wishes to do some tweaks" says Ragnar Philip Rosenlund from Norway.**

Seiki, which is a good thing as they're fairly straightforward to rebuild (as high end Japanese direct drives go)! My own deck was serviced brilliantly by Richard Peachey of Vantage Audio of Taunton ([www.vantageaudio.com](http://www.vantageaudio.com), 0845 4294643). **DP**

### EFFECTIVE MASS

I have recently upgraded my Goldring 1042 moving magnet (MM) cartridge to a MC and was originally considering Denon DL-103R or Audio-Technica AT-OC9MLIII.

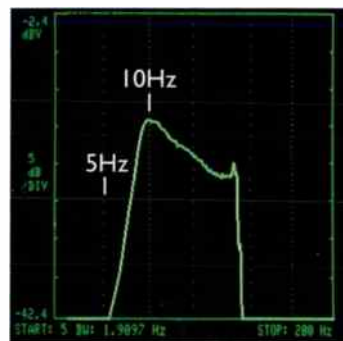
After deeper investigation into Arm Effective Mass and Resonant Frequency due reports that the Denon only being suitable for med to high mass arms I found that my Roksan Tabriz (standard model) at 11g mass would not be suitable. (cartridge/arm matching is very well explained @ [http://www.theanalogdept.com/cartridge\\_\\_arm\\_matching.htm](http://www.theanalogdept.com/cartridge__arm_matching.htm))

My system consists of Meridian 502/557 pre/power amp, 507 24bit CD player, Sony ST-SDB900 Tuner, Manticore Mantra with Origin Live standard motor upgrade/Tabriz/ AT33PTG via Cambridge 640P phono stage and Wilson Benesch Orator speakers with Chord Silver Siren/QED Silver Anniversary cables and own made screen power cables and junction box. Part of the reason for the upgrade was due to a recent upgrade to the 502 with a MC board on board which replaced my existing 551 which had a MM board. I was going to swap the boards over but found out that they are a different fitting, the 502 MC being the same as fitted to newer G0 series.

I would imagine that the Meridian MC unit will sound a lot better than the 640P as the old MM fitted to my existing 551 sounded quite a bit better than the 640P does now, hence the upgrade. I know that there are better phono stages than the Meridian one but at this time upgrade finances are a little tight and I'm sure Meridian wouldn't fit any sub standard item, especially as the

board alone costs £290 if purchased separately!

Getting back to the cartridge, after some research and due to price constraints I actually bought an Audio-Technica AT33PTG which from reviews was quite tolerant to mass/resonance and was better or at least as good as the AT-OC9MLIII. I was originally going to purchase the OC9ML for around £250 through Vinyl Engine membership but due to the recent financial crisis the price has risen to around £370 which is a substantial increase. I managed to buy the AT33PTG for £240 all in from a highly rated eBay seller in Japan. I do



**Arm resonance - Ortofon 2M Black cartridge in Rega RB301 arm. At 10Hz this is an octave above warps in the 5Hz region; the arm will ride warps, not read them.**

quite a bit of buying from auctions and selling on eBay to pay for salmon fishing trips and hi-fi so I know how to avoid the mishaps of buying through eBay.

It sounds superb and after being burned in sounds even better with great depth and separation, though one thing I will point out I have now installed a spacer under the cartridge seat which adds weight (5g) as I found that there was a slight bit of distortion/resonance which I presumed was due to lack of arm mass which has now been eradicated so maybe the ATs aren't quite so tolerant as first thought. This

increases the arm mass to 16 grams and still leaves plenty of movement on the counter balance weight.

My system is situated in our L shaped living /dining room which measures 7 x 9 metres, the 9m being the depth into the L section which is 4m wide, the speakers are toed in and .5 metre away from the corners firing across the room as I work on my computer with my back to them in the opening of the L section. I listen to it all day most days, to the wife's annoyance!

My music tastes being most types of music except classical via Radio 2/4, CDs and Analogue as the mood takes me, I also now listen to quite a bit of Spotify Premium (320kbps) which I read about in your or one of the other magazines and find it excellent and very user friendly, the only drawback being no licence to access The Beatles music. Hopefully, this will change in the near future once enough of the Beatles remastered music has been sold.

Mainly as a trial I invested in a Hong Kong eBay purchased 24/1/92 DAC supposedly made by or labelled Onkyo in the Eastern market. I got an audio electrician friend to peruse over the specifications which he thought was very good considering the price of £95 all in. It arrived after a couple of weeks and works a treat and once again was very easy to install through my highly upgraded Dell Studio 17 laptop running Vista.

I have just read the letter from Steve Trowbridge Dec 09 and I too like to buy old hi-fi and have a fiddle, probably my best purchases being my current Manticore Mantra bought complete but with broken RB250 arm and very dirty for £6, a JR149 Subwoofer bought for £22 re-foamed and sold to a German hi-fi enthusiast for £380, a set of Quad III/Quad amp & tuner/Garrard 301/SME 3009/V15/ Tannoy Lancaster corners bought for £185(!) and a QED A240 CD amp which I still have, as it sounds superb in my shed through my homemade LSSas.

As a matter of interest, in your opinion what would be the next upgrade step? If you say speaker cable, please note that they have to turn a few corners and measure 9 metres each and are bi-wire.

Keep up the good work.  
regards

**Alan Vincent  
Rickmansworth,  
Herts**

Oh dear Alan! The notion that arm / cartridge matching is just about where low frequency resonance falls is overly simple and very outdated. Your Roksan Tabriz, at 11gms effective mass is actually just below the 12gms benchmark "normal" value



**Tannoy Lancaster corner cabinet, now fetching big money.**

nowadays and would suit an AT OC9 MLII well enough. Moving coil cartridges have lower compliance, higher tracking force and greater ability to tolerate massy arms, although nowadays even a large 12 inch like SME's 312S comes in at 14gms.

Historically, cartridge manufacturers stopped pursuing high compliance in the cantilever hinge a long time ago, allowing arm effective mass to rise without arm/cartridge resonance sinking to dangerously low values (below 8Hz). This means the pairing ride over warps and do not try and trace them as a signal, something that would introduce excessive cantilever movement. I measure arm/cartridge resonance and these days it commonly hovers around 10Hz, which is acceptable. To be specific, a compliant Ortofon 2M Black cartridge in a Rega RB301 arm resonate at exactly 10Hz (vertical modulation). With a Ortofon Cadenza Black moving coil this figure rises to 12.5Hz. Since the Rega has an effective mass of 12gms



**Roksan Tabriz arm would suit a budget moving coil cartridge like the AT OC9 MLII.**

the Roksan would have given a value much like the Cadenza, with an AT OC9MLII.

Arms have a characteristic sound determined by many other factors, including arm wiring, vibrational behaviour of the structure, geometry and such like. Silver wired arms can sound a bit zingy bright, whilst acrylic arms often sound well damped and neutral, and long arms just very smooth and easy going. I am generalising here of course, to

make a point. Not everyone likes the Rega arms, mainly for a midband less smooth than is possible elsewhere, but I love their lower midband separation and dynamism. So you can be a bit more adventurous with your Roksan Tabriz, which is a decent arm.  
**NK**

### FINAL UPGRADE

I am about to embark on what could well be my final upgrade (musically that is ) and would very much appreciate your help. I have been an avid reader of your magazine for many years and I know that you have helped many Audiophiles through the upgrading minefield.

I have a pair of Klipschorn corner speakers that were born in 1972 and still with their original crossovers that must be feeling their age. My dilemma is, do I just replace the capacitors or would it be better to purchase new networks built by the likes of Bob Crites ([www.critespeakers.com](http://www.critespeakers.com)) which I am quite happy to do, as long as they will justify the extra cost. I believe other people in the States also build them?

My amplifiers comprise a Croft super micra preamp about 18 years old, a Croft Series V power amp, and a pair of Leak TL 10 Point Ones rebuilt by Glen Croft about 20 years ago.

Record deck is a Garrard 301 (Bastinised) with a Tom Fletcher arm and an ancient Decca London cartridge. I cannot afford to change the deck, neither can I afford to upgrade to a moving coil, plus phono amp with a budget of around £400 at the moment. That figure will be increased if I am lucky enough to find a good second hand S.E. amplifier.

I would welcome your suggestions for a replacement M.M. cartridge please.

I still enjoy my Leak Troughline Stereo Tuner so I am not concerned

about changing that. I sometimes play CDs and have a AH! Njoe Tjoeb 4000 player.

My speaker cables and interconnects are cheap and cheerful so I really must upgrade them and I am thinking of going the D.N.M. route. This is just a gut feeling plus financial consideration of course. The problem is that I won't be able to audition them at home, so it's pot luck.

Now for the big one. I have always wanted to try and hopefully buy a Single



### **Almarro 318B single-ended amplifier gives a great sound.**

Ended Amp or amps which I understand could be a match made in heaven with Horns. Would you agree with that?

The Almarro 318B has had great reviews and must be high on my shopping list. This is at the top end of my budget and at least I can audition it at home. The amount of heat it produces may be a bit of a concern though, (35C?).

Something like a 2A3 based Yamamoto could be interesting, as could some of the many 300B designs, but I guess they will be too expensive for me.

We listen mostly to Jazz, Classical, Opera, Big Bands and also 50's, 60's and 70's vocalists. Obviously I am looking for the most realistic reproduction possible.

Very, many thanks in anticipation.

kindest regards,  
**Terry Mason**

I have no experience of the Bob Crites crossovers so cannot comment. If funds are tight my tendency would be to remove the crossovers and rebuild them using quality Solen capacitors, or a brand you may prefer. I also like the neutral sound of carbon film resistors, but you may like to experiment, as quality metal films can be good. Put the crossovers in Maplin plastic boxes, external to the loudspeakers so they are unaffected by vibration. Use good cable, again of your choice according to budget. You really should use at least budget loudspeaker cable from Chord or such like. I have tried Maplin Shark cable and found it sounds very vague.

Decca London? Ouch! Yes, I know its hair-trigger fast sound and great bass, but original London Blues mistracked terribly and left significant groove damage in their wake. This was inaudible with the Decca, but not with any cartridge that followed it. Later, improved Deccas overcame this to some extent, and hopefully

this is what you have, or you are in for a shock. I suggest you buy a Goldring 1022GX which does a fine job at a very reasonable price.

Single-ended amplifiers are a world of their own and the sweetest thing you'll ever hear. The models you mention are all worthy contenders and I loved the Almarro. Just don't expect to turn your house into a disco, but then I suspect those days are over! You may be interested in the next letter, where I seem (regrettably) to have upset a dedicated SE user. Such things raise passions. **NK**

### **DARK NIGHT**

I was rather disappointed by Noel's review of the Silver Night. I don't think it gave a fair picture of using an SET amp and it could easily give the wrong impression.

Just as background, I have a WAD 300B Push-Pull (18W), Arcam power amps (solid state), Naim power amps, but my main system is the Audio Note Quest Silver SET (7W) and so I have a reasonable understanding and experience of the topic.

Noel gives the impression that the reason for choosing 2A3 valves is that they are cheaper than 300Bs. That's really not true if you compare like-for-like quality, for example, good quality meshplates, where the 2A3s are slightly more expensive. It is true that the cheapest 2A3 is cheaper than the cheapest 300B but few people would choose to run the cheapest valves.

Noel mentions distortion levels and this shows up the problem of relying on objective measurements. Yes, valve designs do have higher levels of distortion than solid state. But the distortion from solid state tends to be high order harmonics which even at low levels makes the sound harsh and is intrusive. Distortion in valves is of low order harmonics and is much less apparent and can even enrich

the sound. And so comparing the objective measurement of THD between valves and solid state can give a very misleading impression.

Noel mentions using a passive pre to allow switching, but here again it is misleading. I have used the MF Audio passive pre (both copper & silver versions) with Naim and the WAD 300Bs and Audio Note Quest Silvers and whilst it is a very transparent pre it does seem to bleed the life out of the music when used with valves – it is very good with solid state. And so really the front end of a valve power amp should be a good valve pre-amp – try it with the WAD Pre II or III (I've got both) and it brings the music to life. Move up to an Audio Note M3 and it will really sing – but not a passive.

Noel mentions the lack of inputs well here again I think he's missing the point and being misleading. The volume pot is simply there for convenience and acts as a simple passive control (not ideal) in a one source system. In reality the pot would be turned up full (i.e. bypassed) and a good valve pre would be the front end.

There is also a question of horses for courses in terms of music choice. An SET power amp driven by a good valve pre creates an incredible musical experience on acoustic music, especially vinyl jazz albums. But if you really want to rock then get a Naim which boogies better – I've got both.

But the strangest comment in Noel's review was the Verdict with three globes... "It's inability to drive lower loads is unacceptable at this price." This is totally misleading and completely misunderstands SET amps. If you want more power then use a simple 300B Push-Pull (I have the WAD 300B PP) at 18W of valve-power it will drive all but the most insensitive speakers. BUT the sound does not have the delicacy of an SET. Noel seems to be looking at the Power Amp and Speakers as two separate and unrelated components and nothing could be further from the truth. You have to match speakers to power amp. Indeed Naim use their speakers to load the output stage of their power amps – including specifying a 3m long single run of speaker cable to ensure correct loading.

If you want to achieve the true beauty of sound and outright musicality that a SET power amp can give then you have to choose a speaker that has been designed with high sensitivity to work with SET amps. For example, a good quality single driver horn, or Audio Note AN/IJ or AN/IE.

Therefore to really review an SET power amp you must review it in a system with a valve pre and high quality speakers designed to work with SET amps.

# MUSICAL FIDELITY

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**Audion Silver Night single-ended amplifier. Just a two globe review from Noel, says Edward.**

Therefore, sorry Noel, but this review is rather woolley and confused, written in a bit of a hurry perhaps? But only makes a two globe review. regards,

**Edward**

Hi Edward. I designed early WAD amps so am well acquainted with the characteristics of thermionic v solid-state. 2A3s have a lovely sound but produce half the power of a 300B as I clearly stated, so little power the Silver Night amp was unusable on the 4 Ohm tap.

A valve amp is load matched by the output transformer and can supply the same power into 4 Ohms as 8 Ohms. If it doesn't the output transformer hasn't been designed or wound properly. Most loudspeakers nowadays are 4 Ohms and a real world amp needs to be able to handle them, as can WAD amps and Almarros etc. The Silver Night simply could not, hence 3 Globes.

best regards

**NK**

Dear Noel,  
Many thanks for your reply, I do appreciate you taking the time to reply in person to me. I do understand the points you've made, and of course accept your judgement.

My main point, perhaps not well expressed, was that SET power amps are specialist and niche products therefore they should be evaluated using niche speakers designed to work with SET amps rather than the majority of speakers which are really aimed at high power solid state amps.

My main criticism of Audion power amps is that they have solid state power supplies. I think this gives them a very "clean" and precise sound but it doesn't engage - I find my mind wanders during prolonged listening. If I compare them with the lower-end Audio Note amps which have valve power supplies (e.g.

Quest or Quest Silver) then I find I stay up all night listening. Of course there are other differences as you mentioned in the wiring methodology and component quality of the Audio Notes.

Final point on speakers: among the pairs of speakers I own (approx: 24) I have a pair of Audio Note ANJ. They are rated at 93db sensitivity and designed and developed to work specifically with AN Quest Silver SET amps. And the sound when coupled with the AN amps really is, in my view, outstanding in all respects - very musical. They are reasonable but not great when driven by WAD 300B PP monoblocks. But sound quite thin and horrible almost lacking all musical qualities when driven by Naim (NAP200 or 250) or Arcam (Delta 290 + 290P). They are also OK when driven by Audion Silver Nights but nothing special. Indeed Mission 753s sound far superior with the Naim & Arcam amps but poor with the SET or PP monoblocks.

It was this experience which led me to argue that power amps and speakers should really be seen as a single component.

best regards, and thanks again for your response,

**Edward**

Edward - it's always nice to hear from a true enthusiast. You have 24 pairs of loudspeakers! Where do you keep them all? To be fair to me though (!) I did clearly say I liked the Silver Night driving 8 Ohms loudspeakers. Even by SE standards it was very sweet. But it fell flat on its face with 4 Ohm loudspeakers and as most are 4 Ohms nowadays that would have been the common experience, which I feel obliged to report upon. **NK**

**DAB IS OFF**

I'm sure Steven Green would be interested in seeing and commenting on this, if he hasn't already.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/6616161/Digital-Economy-Bill-No-date-for-radio-digital-switchover.html>

The article appeared today, and has attracted lots of user comments, mainly referring to many of DAB's failings. But the main point is that Lord Carter is now contradicting his own report, saying there is no set date for FM switchoff.

Confused? I know I am.

But FM lives on, and I'm glad it does. (I still don't think that the BBC should have a monopoly on drama etc, though.)

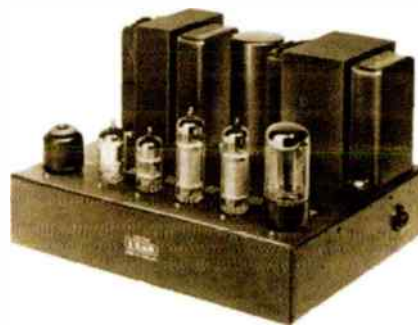
Best wishes,

**Melvyn Dover.**

FM does indeed live on - as this month's group test shows! Don't believe the government's hype about FM switch off; I'll believe it when I see it! **DP**

**FIXING A LEAK**

I am enquiring about info on the output transformer for this amp. I have a TL12 plus but there is no LIS impedance selector on the top of the o/p trans. It looks exactly as the ones with such a selector ...underneath there is a row of three soldering pins and a further two. In connecting these pins as in the diagram I have i.e. 4.8 and 16 ohm taps. Can you tell me the ohmic resistance of the windings on the normal output transformer. In talks with people there is the suggestion that it is a 100



**Leak TL12 Plus, a successor to the excellent TL12.**

volt line output. The number on the base is, the same white print as the mains transformer, is 8382. I would be a happy man if you can help or perhaps point me in the right direction. Thanking you in anticipation.

**Edward Ashton**

We do not have a TL12 Plus available for a measurement of D.C. resistance, but output transformer secondaries use few turns of heavy gauge wire and typically measure around 0.5 Ohms. As you can see from the circuit diagram reproduced here there is a basic 4 Ohm winding, and a tapped 16 Ohm section. You can identify the latter by the feedback line that comes off it. The 4 Ohm

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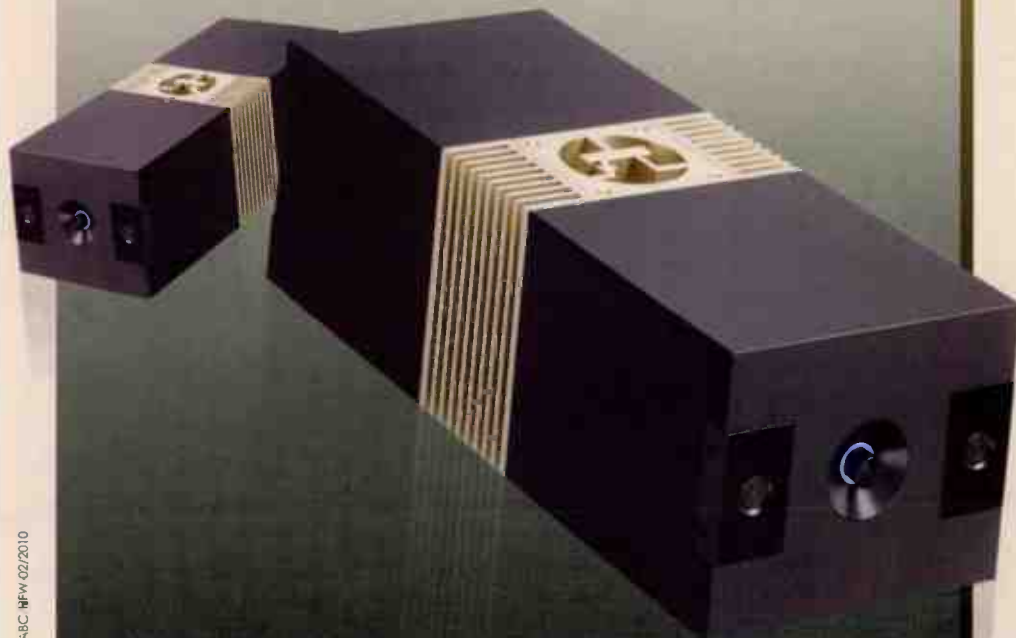
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Jason Kennedy  
Hi-Fi Choice Dec 09 Issue

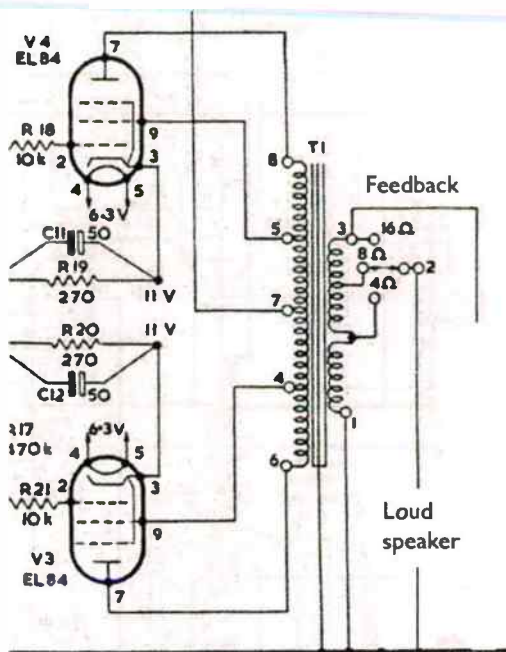
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Output stage of Leak TL12 Plus amplifier showing output taps.

winding will have the lowest DCR. Only if windings all measure out at many ohms would I be suspicious about the nature of the output transformer. Leak did make special versions for the BBC and perhaps some line drive types, but if there are many terminals then the likelihood is that these are provided for loudspeaker matching purposes. **NK**

## OLD RECORDERS

Gufs. As the grateful recipient of your recent "Geek Chic" award by using a reel to real tape deck at the Whittlebury show, and then using a DAT Walkman at the A.O.S. bash, I have a question. To add to my eclectic collection I would like Elcaset and Minidisc. What are the most desirable home and also Walkman sized machines? I'm not averse to a bit of bling, direct drive motors, anything, Sony/Technics and solenoids.

regards  
**Dave Cawley**

Hi Dave - you're a compulsive gadget hoarder by the sound of it, so you're in good company here! The 1977 Sony EL7 was of course the favourite Elcaset machine of its day;



Sony EL7 Elcaset player - open reel tape performance from cassette.

a fast three head, dual capstan behemoth with build to put a Revox to shame. They're rare now, and most don't work, so expect to get the screwdriver out when you wrest one from the clutches of an eBayer! The slightly simpler, but physically almost identical Sony EL5 is also a fine thing to have. MiniDisc wise, it's a case of the later the better; the ATRAC processors improved dramatically over the years. Decks before ATRAC 3.5 (circa 1996) are best avoided; ATRAC 4.0 really kicked off things nicely. The Sony MDS-JE500

was the first machine with this; I remember reviewing one in '97 and was amazed at its sound; very close to DAT, and much less fussy. These are now peanuts on eBay and are a great first step into MiniDisc. As far as the portables went, the Sony MZ-R55 was the Rolls Royce of that time; it's a fine sounding device and beautifully made with an all-metal case; a brand new iPod Classic looks cheap by comparison. These go for around £20 second-hand, and made in Japan, they've aged well.

There's also the Sony MZ-RH1; this is still current and available new for £230 approx. It's a Hi-MD, so plays old MDs plus newer high capacity ones; this one will do full uncompressed 16/44.1 digital recording in extremely high quality; it's a brilliant outdoor recording tool. Read the full review in our July 2009 issue. **DP**

## CABLE CHOICE

I have built a second system which comprises a Beogram 8000 with SMMC20EN, a Beomaster 6000 (thanks Tim and Adam) and Arcam One speakers (I know, off the pace, etc.).

CDs are played through a Pioneer DV-717 (off the pace again, I know) or a Beogram CD-3300.

I also have an as-new condition Revox A77 to transfer some difficult CDs onto tape to make them listenable...

I really like this system, to the point where I wonder whether it is not better than my Technics SL-1200/RB3001 Expressimo/Goldring 1022GX, Hiraga Le Tube, Ampliton TS3000/GE 6CA7 all-valve setup with the same speakers)... plus it's got remote! I am becoming a B&O fan, I'm afraid...

Anyway, what speaker cable should I use with the B&O/Arcam system? I was thinking DNM solid core, because

## B&O Beogram CD-3300, an elegant way to play CD.



my pockets are not too deep at the moment. Also, do you think the B&O DIN cables can limit the system's abilities somehow?

Thanks so much for a really great mag I've been reading (and subscribing to) since august 1991!

**Jacques Frantz**  
France

I'd go for Black Rhodium Tango cables; these are superb value at £12/m. Add some sexy shielded metal DIN speaker plugs at the amplifier end (available from Radiospares, 534-5392, £1.32 each), and you have the ultimate B&O cable loom! **DP**

## VALVE PROBLEMS

I am need of your expertise as I have some questions regarding running a valve amplifier.

I have, for some time now, been interested in changing from my Primare A30.1 amplifier to a valve based amplifier. For a while I have listened to a few valve amplifiers and have been impressed with the way they present music from either CD & vinyl but am not sure how much "maintenance" they require.

I have been reading the various articles available about auto & manual bias adjustment and am a bit confused?

With manual bias, does this mean every few months I would have to attach a volt meter and readjust the

bias setting for the valves or does it only need adjusting when new valves are fitted?

I am also a bit concerned about every reviews comments on the sensitivity of the speakers attached. I am using KEF XQ20 standmounts, which have a stated 88dB sensitivity. If I purchased a valve amplifier with a rating of 35/40 watts per channel would this sufficient to drive my speakers? I would also say that I don't/can't listen too loud (about 30-40 max displayed on my current Primare, but this is 100Watts

popular because they keep the valves balanced both initially, and as they age; no adjustment is needed.

Power valves have a life of a 2-3 thousand hours; small signal valves around 10,000 hours. Power valves like KT88s do a great job and are not overly expensive, hence their popularity. It sounds like the 40Watts or so available would be fine for your purposes. Curiously, valve amps sound more lively and dynamic at low powers than solid-state amps so will suit you in this respect.

machine.

I see the ELP Company who make a laser turntable also have a declicker box to go with it. It is quite expensive, but is it any good? Why aren't there masses of declicker boxes on the market? Many years ago a turntable manufacturer (I believe it was Garrard) offered built in declicking but it was apparently not a great success. Why?  
**Christopher Cook**  
**Switzerland**

Hi Christopher. I am glad you are a happy man music wise. But I am a little surprised that tick and pops upset you so, and a quiet CD is a better proposition than a noisy LP. Play vinyl with a cartridge that does not emphasise highs (i.e. has no treble peak in its response) and they should be hardly noticeable. The hissy, fizzy sound that afflicts LP is usually down to this, as well as groove damage and dirt. The Ortofon Cadenza Black I review in the next issue produced little obvious noise. Groove noise during low level passages was always cited as a strong reason for using CD, but not everyone agrees, including Rafael Todes who, from his experience playing in the Allegri String Quartet, for the London Philharmonic, et al, says vinyl is more natural. So it isn't just audiophiles that claim vinyl is more natural; perhaps we are not all deluded after all!

Anyway, I did listen to the ELP laser turntable many moons ago and was terribly disappointed. Not only did it play groove noise and dirt, as widely reported (cartridge styli push muck out of the way) but it had the sonic properties of a poor CD player; the sound was coarse and flat, as if dominated by poor electronic circuitry. It made me realise how pure a moving coil cartridge is as a source, as you state. **NK**

### FRUSTRATING

My search for audio nirvana is proving frustrating the constant pain in my frontal lobe coming from the continued banging of my head against a brick wall.

First things first, my system comprises the following; Technics SP10 MkII \ Slatdeck plinth \ SMEV \ Denon DL304 \ Trichord Dino for vinyl duties, Esoteric X03se CD spinner, Linn Klimax Kontrol pre, AV5125 power running active Keilidhs. Cables are Linn Silvers and Chord Odyssey.

Now I've heard many systems that get close to what I want, the stand outs being Quad electrostatics driven by Quad IIs and a rig pieced together using old Exposure amps into Proac ISCs both different but both very special. How do I get from where I am now to



**Quad 2905 electrostatic loudspeaker offers hi-fi nirvana, says Christopher Cook.**

per channel)) as my neighbours may take exception. With my basic knowledge I would assume that if a solid state of 30-40 watts can drive my speakers then a valve amplifier should also?

I have looked over many reviews and listened to a few examples and with the sort of money I can stretch to I would be looking at the following models;

Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk III, the KT88 based integrated sold by WAD (although I would buy a completed one), Puresound A30 or ... looking over ebay for a few months I could purchase a previously more expensive type second hand such as the Audio Research VS55 or similar.

Any answers you can give me would be greatly appreciated and would hopefully help me narrow down my options.

Thank you for any help you can give me with my query.

**Andrew Burtchaell**

What are known as 'fixed bias' amplifiers give a little more power but need regular re-adjustment, every few months. It isn't difficult, but you must have a voltmeter. They also need adjustment when one or both valves are changed.

Auto-bias amplifiers are most

Although the Audio Research VS55i is more expensive new I would not label it clearly better than the other models you mention. It is tight and punchy, though. I tend to favour good KT88s WAD or Icon Audio are the ones to audition I feel.

**NK**

### CLICKS & POPS

I reached hi-fi nirvana many years ago. My recipe is a good moving coil pick up and Quad electrostatic speakers. There is a huge choice of bits and pieces to put between them but, within limits, they make relatively little difference to the emerging sound. I do, however, have a very sweet spot for a pair of WAD 300B PSE amplifiers, but like the Quads they are large, ugly and difficult to position. I now have the amplifiers mounted directly behind the speakers which, at least, means one can do without loudspeaker cables.

Like many of your readers, I prefer to listen to vinyl but a scratched record remains scratched for ever and ever and it is difficult to live with repeating clicks. It is very simple to remove clicks once the record has been digitized but one ends up with a clean CD which disappears inside a box when you want to listen to it - this is not like vinyl which revolves for all to see on a beautiful

that spacious, rich, wondrous experience both these systems gave me? I have a maximum budget of £4000 and I don't mind buying used; my concern is I may need to ditch the lot to move forward. I should point out that the room in which this will be plonked is a small 4.5x3m, kind of rules out ESLs then. Any ideas? many thanks,

**Stuart Ainsworth**

Hmmm! Linn's clean and precise sounding amplification and speakers are excellent for those who love that sound, but folk who like "spacious, rich" systems should not apply! I wonder how you came to own such things, with your seemingly opposite tastes? Don't ditch the lot; your turntable and CD player are superb. I'd do this in stages, looking

a very fine tuning of the speed. With a base frequency 50 Hz: - the regulation at 50 mHz gives 0.1% change for every turn ( $50\text{mHz} / 50\text{Hz} = 50\text{mHz} / 50,000\text{mHz} = 0.001 = 0.1\%$ ) - the regulation at 5 mHz gives 0.01% change for every turn ( $5\text{mHz} / 50\text{Hz} = 5\text{mHz} / 50,000\text{mHz} = 0.0001 = 0.01\%$ )

We are sorry for the inconvenience of 45 RPM not working. This is caused by a malfunctionment of the external power supply. This constitutes of: 1 power supply board, 1 control board; 1 amplifier board. Basically it transform 220 VAC into DC, then it splits into two oscillating stages (one for 33 RPM and one for 45 RPM), then back again into one single amplifier driving the turntable at 115 VAC. The cause of the problem can be: bad connection of the flat cables

the horizontal bar that actually lifts the tonearm: this is common to most of the tonearms lifts. I've included a picture showing the other two points A and B. By rotating these you should get the lifter in working conditions. We have never experienced this problem before.

Headshell offset was not factory set. In the instruction manuals there are instructions to carry out this adjustment: 1) Position the shell straight in relation to the arm tube (tighten the shell screw very slightly). The correct setting is the point on the template nearest the centre of the record (use the included template), obtained by sliding the base of the arm among the bars that enter in the rectangular plate. 2) Move the needle to the second point on the template (the point furthest from the centre of the record). At this point, the setting is not correct. To fix it, turn the shell until you have the correct setting at this point (tighten the shell screw again very slightly) 3) Move the needle to the first point, nearest the centre. At this point, the setting is not now correct. Then move the base of the arm along the bars which joins it with the pin again until you have the correct setting. 4) If you move the head to the point on the template furthest from the pin again, the situation in point 2 above returns. Turn the shell as described in point 2 above. Obviously, when we verify if the setting is correct, moving from the furthest point to the nearest one, and conversely, we must slightly move the template making the turntable rotating. Continue to repeat these two operations, moving from the point furthest from the point to nearest to the record, always moving the arm base when you check the head on the template at the point nearest to the centre of the record and modifying the angle between arm tube and shell when you check the head on the template furthest from the centre of the record. Repeat this operation 4/5 times. The setting is perfect at the two



**Icon Audio MB845 power amplifiers, equipped with graphite anode 845 triodes.**

to move to a pair of Icon Audio MB845 power amplifiers (£2,499) driving a pair of One Thing Audio modded Quad ESL57s (from around £1,500) as painlessly as you can. Start with the MB845s, retaining your Linn preamp. Then get the modded Quads, then when you've got some more cash shell out for a MF Audio Silver Passive Preamplifier (£2,400), and finally an Icon Audio PS3 (£1,500) phono stage. By this time, you'll have one of the biggest, warmest and most expansive systems known to man!

**DP**

The following letter was received from the manufacturers, in response to our review of the Klimo Tafelrunde turntable in the February 2010 edition of Hi-Fi World.

#### **TAFELRUNDE TIPS**

This turntable was sent to Hong Kong before being shipped to you. Some settings, like the tone arm ones, were not carried out as they are usually done on location at the factory.

The speed regulation is meant to be

inside; broken oscillator; broken quartz; broken PIC.

Lift/lower problems. This is the only regulation not covered extensively in the manual: we do apologize, but usually the set-up is carried out by a specialised dealer. You may regulate the lift in three different points. First you may regulate



**Klimo Tafelrunde turntable, reviewed in our February 2010 issue.**

points of the template where no move is required (neither the distance between the record player pin and arm nor shell angle moving required). You now have the right setting for the angle of the shell and the correct distance between arm pin and record player pin. The head is now set.

yours sincerely,  
**Luca Gombi**

We included Luca's lengthy explanation for setting Lancellotto arm geometry for the sake of completeness. This is what we encountered in the instructions too, at which point it was time for the pub!

As explained in the review, we calculated correct head shell offset angle and overhang using Stephenson's equations and applied the result to minimise tracking error in the arm. This was checked using a protractor, to ensure the zeros in the graph were zero in practice – and they were. We sent the equations in a graphical spreadsheet to Luca in Italy, to explain and illustrate the process,  
**NK**

### ITALIAN OR GERMAN?

In the Feb '10 issue much play is made of the Klimo record player being Italian whereas, Klimo is a German company



### Boffins at Klimo in Germany.

located in Reutlinger. I know this because I own a pair of very good Klimo 'Beltaine' 300B monobloks (bought from Walrus). The Italian company Suono e Comunicazione s.r.l. appears to be their agent or distributor - they also represent Rega, Bosendorfer and Epos. Or am I missing something?  
regards,

**Nick M Jones**

The following reply came from Luca in Italy, in direct response to your query. We were aware of this but perhaps should have explained it.  
"Klimo is a German company, based in

Reutlingen. Dusan Klimo, actually, is of Slovakian origin and he moved to Germany in 1968. We started many years ago as their distributor, but the cooperation became closer and closer till this stage where, roughly, the electronic part is made in Germany and the mechanical part is made in Italy: the turntable is made in Italy".

**Luca Gombi**

### CANNED HEAT

The headphone review published in February's issue had me laughing out loud when I read it. Was the reviewer serious? I was surprised to see a Sennheiser PX100 used as a 'reference.' What does the reviewer normally use himself? Is he a headphone user?

Two amps used - both low output impedance, one being solid state and the other with a valve buffer. Is the reviewer aware of the differences that the output impedance can have on headphones?

The headphones chosen varied in price from £160 to £1,000. How is this a fair comparison given that cheaper headphones may have to make some compromises in comparison to a £1,000 pair of headphones (where it looks as though the compromises were made on its build/looks)

The headphones varied from wireless to open to closed to electrostat. Each designed in a totally different way. No mention of different impedances and sensitivities of the headphones.

Choices of music seemed a little strange - a mono recording from 1958, a Beatles recording and an 80's recording.

Did the reviewer manage to wear in the headphones for any time?

I have the same set up as the one the reviewer was using and switch between many headphones via an Earmax, X-Can V8 and V2 (Modded) both also with beefier power supplies and one of my Headphones, the K701 took a long time to settle. What the reviewer seems to be describing is how they sound out of the box. Did he also miss the 'airiness' that the 701's produce. Had he worn in any of the headphones before launching into this article?

I used to think that your magazine was more serious about hi fi than



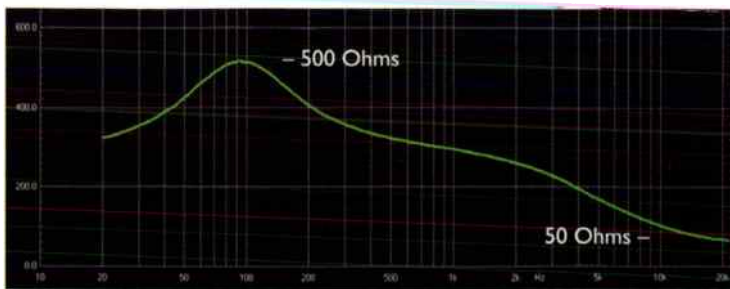
**Sennheiser PX100 - more of a 'benchmark' than a 'reference'?**

this. No measurements taken, just a reviewer and his rhetoric. Could the magazine please take headphones a little more seriously and ask someone with proper experience of them to do some fair reviews of like with like, the effects of output impedances on them, the impression of 'space' in the sound presentation, how each headphone has been designed to be used and make sure that they are fully 'loosened' by playing them for some time before reviewing?

**Ian (Oxted)**

Perhaps we should have said the Sennheiser PX100 was a 'benchmark' rather than a more difficult and nebulous concept to define, a 'reference'. We have this problem with loudspeakers, using Spondor 58es as benchmarks for quality, because they set good standards all round. This is quite different from saying they are quality references - and what is a reference is very subjective in any case. For example, I would nominate a good electrostatic or ribbon loudspeaker, because they measure well and sound right. However, most listeners prefer boxes, making my choice academic as far as everyday experience goes. A benchmark is a better everyday yardstick than a 'reference'.

A low impedance source does not interact with varying load impedance, which is why headphone amps have low output impedance, and why we used two headphone amps with low output impedance.

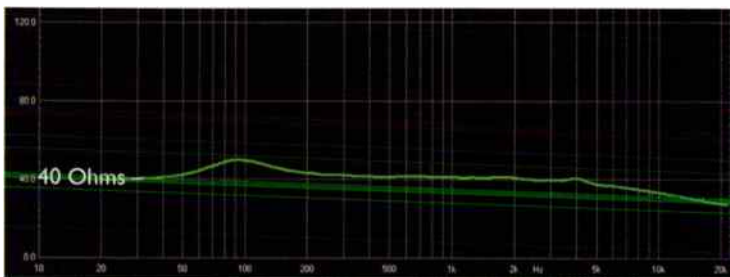


**Sennheiser HD650 impedance, not flat but very high at 500 Ohms maximum, and 50 Ohms minimum.**

Headphones have either a very high non-flat impedance, like the Sennheiser HD650s, which vary from 50 Ohms to 500 Ohms, or a lower but flat impedance of around 40 Ohms (all the others in the group) which does not react signifi-

cantly with a low output impedance

source. We measured impedance and frequency response but impedance is of little consequence for the reasons stated and frequency response strictly non-flat unless a dummy head is used, which we do not have. Finally, with transducers such as loudspeakers and headphones, there are so many variables that it is impossible to make any judgement of them except subjectively. We use the widest



**Audio Technica W1000 impedance, flat and 40 Ohms. Most headphones measure like this.**

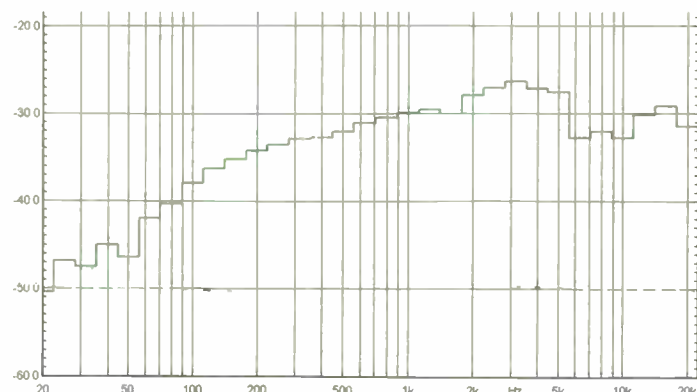
cantly with a low output impedance source. We measured impedance and frequency response but impedance is of little consequence for the reasons stated and frequency response strictly non-flat unless a dummy head is used, which we do not have.

The review was a broad look across the price spectrum, an approach that is useful for spotting bargains.

We run in all transducers, but commonly do not mention it, because it can be a little tedious to read about and consumes valuable page space. Cartridges are run in, however, loudspeakers often run very heavily with pink noise and the Monitor Audio De-tox CD, overnight and over weekends. Amps are run to

range of the most sophisticated measurements with loudspeakers, including swept distortion spectrums, decay spectrums and much more, measurements beyond the capabilities of many manufacturers, yet still we describe them in subjective terms. The same applies to headphones. So at the end of the day it is one person's judgement. In this case that person was musically experienced, uses headphones, and used low output impedance sources to avoid interaction. The headphones had been measured too, to ensure they worked normally. **NK**

Hi Ian. The reason I asked Paul to use the Sennheiser PX100 as a reference is that, in my fifteen



**Sennheiser HD650 frequency response. Bass rolls off because they are not on-head (i.e. measured in open conditions).**

years of testing headphones for Hi-Fi World and The Sunday Times, I've yet to find anything anywhere near as good at its £40 retail price. Feed it a good source via the likes of a Musical Fidelity X-CANS v8 and you'll see what I mean. As such, it's an excellent choice; if any of the headphones tested weren't as good (despite being far more expensive), then they'd be swiftly discounted from the running. Unsurprisingly, the PX100 is also extremely popular; a great many thousands have been sold; so why on earth not use an affordable, much loved and fine sounding product as a 'reference'? Makes sense to me!

The reason we routinely run a 'spread' of prices in group tests is to give a sense of perspective onto the subject. Obviously, we are not expecting the £160 phones to be better than the £1,000 ones, but an interesting question is 'how much better is the most expensive than the cheapest?' I think 'we tell you the best £1,000 headphone'-type group test is too narrow in its remit, whereas our approach throws open the possibility of a surprise or an upset; sometimes the cheapest isn't the worst. Again, different types were used, to give a sense of what is possible with different engineering philosophies. Paul very accurately conveyed the difference between the Stax electrostatics and the other dynamic headphones, I thought. When auditioning, the music wasn't limited to just that stated in the test; Paul chose to single out the tracks he did for the purposes of brevity in the write-up because again they epitomised key differences between the 'phones.

Paul had the headphones for over six weeks before he filed his report, so yes, he did have plenty of time to bed them all in, and - importantly - time to experiment to see which ones suited the valve buffered Musical Fidelity phono stage and which suited the ANT Audio Amber 3T solid-state stage.

This magazine has been reviewing products for nearly two decades Ian, so we're quite familiar with issues of running in; to audition an un-run-in 'phone would be a schoolboy error! Please don't assume this just because Paul's subjective findings don't tally with your own, obviously strongly held, views. If there was no difference of opinion about the relative merits of a product then there wouldn't be any need for hi-fi magazines at all, so let's accept informed subjective opinions for what they are, rather than attempt to discredit them. **DP**

Tony Bolton reviews an obscure alternative to the usual pre-power amplifier fare, the Valvet L1 and A1r...

# Valvet Underground



**S**ocial class, that great bugbear of British society, raises its head in the most unusual places. One wouldn't think of the world of audio electronics as being subject to such things, but you would be wrong. Like the majority of the population, most amplifiers fall into the AB category. At the fringes of society are the cosmopolitan Class Ds, and at the top of the technical and social pile are the Class A amps. These are relatively rare beasts, that may not betray their breeding by outward appearance, but when listened to, display the impeccable accent and cut glass vowels of the higher social echelons.

Class A amps tend to be expensive and have quite low (often single figure) power outputs, which makes speaker matching vital to obtain reasonable listening levels and to find a transducer that will be responsive enough to display the sonic benefits of single ended operation.

A relatively new name on the audio scene is Valvet, based near Hamburg in Germany. The company was founded by Knut Cornils, who also designs all the products. It

grew out of his dissatisfaction with commercially available designs so he decided to create his own. Several years later, the company has a range of three monoblocks and two pre-amplifiers available. They are divided into two categories, the high end "Blocks" and the more affordable "Bricks". This latter group contains the L1 preamp and the A1r power amp under review here.

Both the L1 and A1rs have similarly shaped extruded aluminium casework, which gets very hot as it acts as a heatsink for the electronics. The 120x60mm width and height are the same for both products, however the preamp (and its outboard power supply in matching casework) are 320mm deep. The power amps are 400mm deep. The unusual length of these may cause some awkwardness in siting them, since there has to be several centimetres of space left behind them for the cables. Available finishes are black or silver anodised. The front panels have the same choices of finish, or can be chrome plated at extra charge. The backlighting of the V logo can be in red or green, or blue as in these examples. Apart from the logo, all of the units have plain fascias, except for

the preamp, which has two metal knobs on the front. The left one selects source, and the right adjusts the volume (remote control of the volume is available for £120 extra). Internally there is one ECC 90 dual triode valve per channel, which is a more powerful version of the well known ECC 82.

Power switches are located on the back panels of the L1 PSU, and the two monoblocks, alongside the IEC sockets. The preamp has numbered pairs of RCA phono sockets for the four line level inputs. Beside these are two pairs of output sockets. These are configured at the factory with either parallel outputs for bi-amping or with one set up as a tape loop output. The A1rs have a single phono socket input per unit, alongside two substantial speaker binding posts. Knut Cornils was quite secretive about the internals of the power amps - merely stating that the circuit is bipolar solid-state and does not use MOSFETs...

## SOUND QUALITY

In deference to the rated 25W output [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE], I first tried the Valvets through my Kelly KT3



"tonal textures can be sensuous, rather like running your fingers through deep-pile velvet..."

speakers. These are a fairly easy load with a nominal 6 Ohm impedance and 95dB efficiency. I started off listening with a good jazz sesh, and spent a very pleasant day wandering through the genre, from the New Orleans style of the nineteen twenties through to the post-bebop sounds of Dave Brubeck. I was

immediately impressed with the speed and accuracy of the timing. The KT3s are no slouch in this department, but set a new speed record with the A1rs connected. Music did not sound rushed, but it had a meticulously correct, and very snappy beat to it which made dance music live up to its name, and had

me quite happily boogying along the record shelves selecting the next track until 'silly-o'clock' in the morning!

Apart from the zestful pacing I found myself enjoying the deep and rich tonal colours emanating from my speakers. Stringed instruments had a full and resonant sound that almost

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Valvets fall into the latter category. I initially perceived them as a warm friendly amplifier, and gradually came to appreciate the delicacy of the detailing that was pouring out of my speakers. There was space and air around sounds, supplemented by lots of fine detail. Little background noises in the studio, or, in the case of the Aida LP, the different ambience of the seven different stages used for the recording, all came through in a pleasantly unobtrusive manner.

**CONCLUSION**

Everyone's idea of audio nirvana is different. If you want no holds barred raw studio sound then look elsewhere for an amp. If, however, you like good imaging, snappy and energising timing and tonal textures that can be sensuous, rather like running your fingers through deep-pile velvet, then try the Valvet L1 and A1R monoblocks. I would recommend extended listening to fully appreciate them, and to be aware that quick back to back comparisons with other amps will not show these unassuming "bricks" at their best. I gave them four globes, knowing that some readers will feel that I understated things and should have given five, whilst others will feel that I should have awarded three. These are amps that will polarise opinion. Some will love them, others will wonder what the fuss is about. Either way, have a listen - but don't blame me if your wallet is suddenly £3,300 lighter!

made me believe I could see the deep gloss of the polished wood bodies of violin and double bass, whilst clarinet and brass glowed through the mix. Given the age and recording standards of some of the records I played I was slightly surprised at what seemed to be a slight forwardness in the upper mid. It had the pleasant effect of pushing solo instruments and vocalists to the front, but on a couple of occasions, with the volume fairly high, caused me to question this seeming emphasis, as some trumpets, and a couple of female singers came across as nearly shouty. Returning to more normal listening levels restored some equilibrium but still maintained this slight spotlighting of certain frequencies.

The next day was spent in the classical environment, starting off with Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' and finishing with Verdi's 'Aida', performed by Tibaldi and Bergonzi, with Von Karajan at the helm of the Vienna Philharmonic. This 1958 Decca recording was one of the showcases for stereo when it was introduced in June of that year, and still stands as a good demonstration of the medium's capabilities. Act 4 closes with 'O terra adio', where Aida and Radames are walled up in a tomb, with priests chanting outside and Amneris (contralto) providing a counterpoint to the centre stage tenor and soprano. Imaging was excellent, with the soundstage spreading beyond the speakers and into the room almost as a physical entity. Voices appeared from a very dark silence, and then decayed back into silence again in a natural and unassuming way. This pensive piece did not feel rushed, or unnecessarily drawn out, but just flowed in a totally convincing way.

Having discovered that the 25W output was a particularly muscular one I moved the Valvets downstairs and plugged them into the Chario Ursa Majors. These five

foot tall monsters are rated at 91dB efficiency, but contain two 7 1/2 inch subwoofers in the bottom of each cabinet which can prove a little draining of some amplifiers' current capabilities when the volume is turned up. Hence the manufacturer's recommendation of a minimum 60W to drive them properly. I am pleased to say that the A1Rs gave a very good account of themselves. The Class A operation produced volume levels that seemed out of proportion to the somewhat modest output figures.

At high volume levels there was a tendency to a little forwardness in the upper mid, again provoked by sopranos and trumpets, and when pushed really hard there was some blurring of the edges of the sounds, but at more normal levels this continued to be perceived as a slight spotlighting of a performer, rather than a major sonic imbalance.

Changing musical gear to more modern recordings and music, Amy Winehouse's LP 'Back to Black' proved highly enjoyable. The slight emphasis to her vocals, moving them out just in front of the band, to create a realistic staging of the performance. Guitars jangled as appropriate, and shakers and snare shuffled the rhythms along, driven by a deep and rich bass sound.

Some amplifiers are quite obvious in what they do, others repay long term listening as you get to know them, and become aware of the subtleties of a recording laid out for your perusal. The

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
**VALVET L1** £1,450  
 Neat little tube preamplifier with impressive sonics.

**FOR**  
 - minimalist design  
 - dual triode valve per channel  
 - optional volume remote control

**AGAINST:**  
 - price

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
**VALVET A1R** £1,850  
 Interestingly styled, fulsome sounding power amplifier that needs partnering with efficient speakers.

**FOR**  
 - vibrant timing  
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 - fine imaging  
 - sleek design

**AGAINST:**  
 - low power

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**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

This small, light but very long solid-state Class A monoblock produces a modest 24 Watts into 8 Ohms and 36 Watts into 4 Ohms, around the levels of a EL34/KT88 valve amp that it supposedly mimics. Damping factor was very low, measuring 3, a bit lower than that of a feedback valve amp. (8). Although distortion levels were low at 1 Watt they rose very quickly, especially into a 4 Ohm load reaching 3% at 6W for example. Although the spectrum was dominated by second harmonic, upper harmonics falling in level steadily, a characteristic that is musical instrument like, these levels are far higher than that of a good valve amplifier, which will be producing 0.3% at most, one tenth the distortion. Distortion like this usually impairs clarity and cleanliness, due to intermodulation products. The power amplifier is direct coupled, bandwidth stretching from d.c. to 45kHz.

The valve preamplifier also distorts heavily at higher levels, producing 0.25% at 200mV in and 1% at 800mV in, but produces only second harmonic products. It can swing plenty of output,

more than 34V, but again with high distortion. Frequency response exhibits bass roll off below 70Hz (-1dB) but is not volume dependant, high frequency output rolling down above 100kHz, a very high upper limit. Gain was a very useful x15.5 (+24dB), allowing low output sources like phono preamps to be used. NK

Power	24 Watts
Frequency response	70Hz-45kHz
Noise	-103dB
Distortion	2%
Damping factor	3.2
Sensitivity	30mV

**DISTORTION**



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earpieces. Grado has apparently produced them to not only allow the ear to fit inside without any undue

of 'Taxman' showed that, despite the forward nature of the CD, the Grados maintained a sense of decorum while ducking and diving with all of Paul McCartney's bass convolutions and, at the same time, keeping the boisterous rhythm guitar in check and not allowing it to dictate proceedings. During Kraftwerk's 'Numbers', the GS1000i showed great precision in how the track was presented. The Grado GS1000i headphones certainly tick all of the boxes when it comes to exploring each section of the aural spectrum. Without any apparent sonic weakness, they are comfortable in the company of any music and take you joyously close to the original recording."

pressures but also to give the ears the best chance to find the aural 'sweet spot'. I must admit, popping the Grados on my head, the headphones felt comfortable, despite the relatively heavy weight of 311g; long-term listening was a pleasure.

The Grados produced an immense sense of midrange/treble clarity and detail along with lower bass power that provides a suitable support but never overpowers or dominates. They are transparent; there is no colour plastered on the music. The Beatles mono version

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

**QUESTIONS**

[1] What type of design are the Grados?

- [a] dynamic open air
- [b] dynamic closed back
- [c] electrostatic open air
- [d] piezo electric

[2] How many conductors in the cable?

- [a] eight
- [b] seven
- [c] six
- [d] five

[3] What is the weight of the phones?

- [a] 311g
- [b] 301g
- [c] 113g
- [d] 103g

[4] Paul said the Grados take you...?

- [a] "joyously close to the original recording"
- [b] "up, up and away on my beautiful balloon"
- [c] "on a highway to hell"
- [d] "to heaven and back"

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**H**ere's your chance to win one of the best modern headphones, Grado's stunning GS1000i, as tested in February's *Hi-Fi World* magazine! Here's what Paul Rigby said:

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David Price beholds the Q Acoustics 2020 mini monitors...

# 2020 Vision

**A**part from a select few - such as the 1987 Mordaunt Short MS10, the Mission 760i from 1992 and the 1996 KEF Coda 9 - I don't like cheap speakers. Well, you wouldn't, would you? At this price point, it's less a question of how much they get right, and more about how little they can get wrong so as to sound bearable. The sad truth is of course that most get a *lot* wrong and are a chore to listen to. True, recently we've seen some fine exceptions - Wharfedale's Diamond 10.1s being a case in point - but by and large it's still the same old story...

Of course, this is just as you'd expect. The budgets involved in producing a £139.90 loudspeaker such as the new Q Acoustics 2020 are tiny; not much more than a fistful of dollars before you've factored in transportation, distribution and dealer margins. Anyone who can make something half decent with this sort of cash is more magician than engineer. Happily, all Q Acoustics

speakers seem to emerge with a big hearted musicality, a clean and smooth tone and an almost perplexing lack of nasties.

And so it goes for the 2020. A usefully compact box at just 264.5x278x170mm, they're classic standmounters. Although not the most solid speakers yet made at just 5kg, there's little sign of crass cost cutting; everything seems to be as well hewn as it needs to be. There's a little 'surprise and delight' too in the detailing. The single rear port comes with an optional foam bung (to prevent yours truly having to reach for the sock drawer); this suddenly makes them usable in both near wall and free space environments. Underneath is a recessed 'cable tunnel' (sorry, I don't know what the official Q Acoustics phrase is for this) which means the biwired binding posts can be located underneath the speaker, making for a very clean and elegant looking rear, should the speakers be standing in the middle of the room. Clever stuff.

There's nothing technically

remarkable about the 2020s; they're two-way bass reflex designs with a 125mm treated paper mid/bass unit and a 25mm cloth dome tweeter crossing over at 2.9kHz. Claimed frequency response is 64Hz - 22kHz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE], and sensitivity is quoted at 88dB with a recommended power span of 25 to 75W. The graphite black finish of the review pair was good if not remarkable; I'd be tempted to shell out an extra £20 for the lavish piano black gloss version. A removable grille completes the picture; there's no strict rule but generally I prefer grilles off; in this case, in my room, they sounded smoother and more 'of a piece' when on. General construction standards are high though; about as good as you'll get at this price.

## SOUND QUALITY

Nothing I've not come to expect from this brand, the 2020 proved at once couth, gently musical and satisfying to listen to over long periods. Their crowning glory is their

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# SOUND & VISION

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World Radio History



balance; they present the sound of a mid/bass unit working in sympathy with the tweeter, rather than doing a spot of freelancing on the side. Genesis's 'Follow You Follow Me' showed them to be an expansive and open sounding design, throwing out a strong image even into quite a big room. So well integrated, it was almost like listening to a dual concentric; Phil Collins' vocals were very believable and devoid of chesty coloration that plagues most products at this price.

The 2020s have a fine rock sensibility; they're good at the snare/cymbal interplay on Al Stewart's 'Time Passages'. Their drum sound is punchy and possessed of decent body, especially when the bass bungs are taken out. There's obviously a 'sweet spot' in the nether regions sans bung, but it's not too intrusive (I could hear the lower cello notes getting just a little lively, but nothing more) and nothing like the effect of hitting a loudness button. Cymbals were impressively finessed, sounding nothing like the treble unit of a cheap loudspeaker; ultimately its sins were those of omission, as it merely lacks some atmosphere and delicacy in absolute terms. Even on this song's saxophone break, there was nothing in the way of screech, even at quite high volumes.

These new Q Acoustics loudspeakers are plenty of fun rhythmically. Fleetwood Mac's 'Tusk' shuffled along with all the gusto of a rockabilly band, positively pushing forward to the song's climax with real commitment. It's an interesting test track this, as through the wrong replay chain this song can become a nine minute long dirge, rather than the dreamy, trippy aural feast it really is (and to think they released it as a single in 1979; it wouldn't happen these days!). The song also shows up a loudspeaker's subtlety, or lack thereof. Here the 2020s again did well, giving a lovely creamy tone to lead vocal Stevie Nicks and all those ethereal backing vocal overdubs. The keyboard work

sounded rich and resonant, the bass guitar light but liquid, and the percussion was delicately rendered. True, these speakers did sit on dynamic peaks slightly, showing a slight compression to the strongly hit snares at the end of the track, but this was still trivial considering the price of the things.

Indeed, it's hard to find a harsh word to say about this budget boxes, given their modest position in the great hi-fi scheme of things. Listening to Robert Plant's towering vocals on 'The Big Log', and the way the 2020s threw it confidently out into a large space in such a nonchalant way, unsullied by horrid ringing colourations from the drive units or tragic cabinet interventions seeking to derail the musical process, was a joy. I had to keep kicking myself to remember that these cost less than some people charge for a stylus balance. The 2020s just want to play music in a smooth but beguiling way, throwing out as many musical clues as they can for a speaker of their simple means.

In absolute terms, yes there are some issues. Unsurprisingly perhaps, there's almost nothing in the way of low bass, but the upper bass is so well behaved, so finely timed, that you really don't mind. The high treble isn't exactly deleterious to bats or other creatures of extended auditory capabilities, sounding ever so slightly rolled off, manifesting itself as a lack of atmosphere, air and space. The midband, beautifully integrated as I've said, can nevertheless be 'set off' at very high levels when it becomes a little shouty with some notes on the harmonic scale. Still, this isn't much of an issue unless you're planning on using them with a Krell and starting up your own nightclub. Even at loud volumes, Kraftwerk's 'Tour de France Etape 1' didn't have me running for the door, despite me having put my running shoes on and scoped the quickest way out in anticipation of

them performing like most other budget boxes. And wide and proud their stereo imaging may be, it's not precise enough to vector in GPS coordinates for a missile strike for the 1st flautist of the Royal Philharmonic...

**CONCLUSION**

Another depressingly familiar verdict then; regular readers know we're fans of the Q Acoustics marque and the new 2020 loudspeakers aren't going to change our view. Along with the Wharfedale Diamond 10.1s, they're surely the best of the new breed. The Wharfedales are a little more dry and tidy sounding, with slightly more pronounced dynamics, while the Qs are bigger hearted and fractionally tonally warmer, giving poorer recordings or lesser ancillaries an easier ride. My preference, in my system and with my room lies with these - just - but yours might not, because there's little between them in terms of sheer ability. So as always we'd suggest a dem if you can possibly get one. If not, buy with confidence that there are few, if any, better examples of the budget speaker breed.

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
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 Enterprise C/Lyra Titan i turntable  
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 Musical Fidelity AMS35i amplifier  
 Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Superb budget mini monitors with a svelte but punchy sound that goes straight to the heart of the music.

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  - drive unit integration
  - expansive soundstaging
- AGAINST**
- nothing at the price

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Like earlier Q Acoustics loudspeakers the 2020 has a very flat and even frequency response, free from sudden variations and particular emphases, so it should sound smooth, uncoloured and natural. There is a small amount of midrange emphasis from 650Hz up to 1.6kHz that will ensure good intelligibility with vocals and speech. The upper midband is well maintained so detailing will be strong but there should be no stridency. A small amount of treble lift exists above 10kHz, but at +1.5dB or so it is barely enough to do little more than add a gentle amount of sparkle to upper treble.

Bass rolls down below 180Hz, a sign that the loudspeaker has been designed for near-wall mounting. Output from the port peaks at 55Hz and as the port delivered a very high +9dB output above the bass unit at 80Hz, it makes quite a big contribution to low bass, more than most loudspeakers. This suggests there will be a useful amount of low bass.

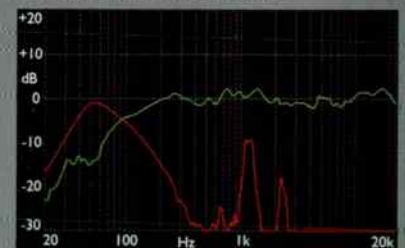
Impedance measured exactly 6 Ohms overall, but the bass unit has a 4 Ohm d.c. value, like most. The port damps bass unit resonance quite effectively, its wide dip shows. Otherwise, there is the usual rise in inductive reactance toward 2kHz, before the treble unit kicks in. Not especially reactive, and with good sensitivity of 86dB the 2020 is a

civilised amplifier load, fairly easy to drive.

A decay spectrum over 200ms showed the 2020 was very low on colouration, as is to be expected from its smooth frequency domain response.

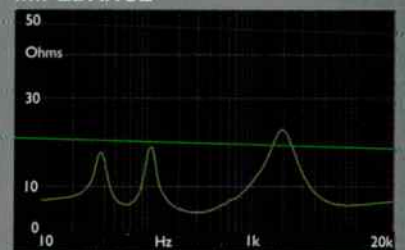
The Q Acoustics 2020 is a very well developed budget loudspeaker that is better balanced than most. It should give a highly accurate sound. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
 Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



# iChoose quality?

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

## The Music Chain

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

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

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

## Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

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

## LISTED BELOW IS OUR SELECTION OF THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK.

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

### Future of Recorded Music

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

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**Exeter**  
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Carl Palmer



Black Widow

# Forever Change

Arguably the most uplifting, the most complex, the most challenging and, certainly, the most derided of all musical forms, Paul Rigby, spins a quick history of what's come to be called 'progressive rock'...

**T**o attempt to tell the story of 'progressive rock' in a few pages is surely to invite accusations of hubris, and yet hubris was just one of the charges levelled at its principal proponents and creators. Never has a genre of music been so divisive in public, artistic and media circles and yet, simultaneously, never has one been so responsible for forging so many diverse elements of musical history into one new form and giving life to so many variations of its own basic form: a single celled musical genre, splitting and multiplying into new, independent, genres! So where did 'prog' come from? Why did it appear in the first place? Who were those early sonic explorers?

"If you go right back, the term was used by Richard Strauss, to describe Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' premiered in the Fatherland in the early 1900s," offered ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett. "Strauss described the work as 'progressive'. The term has been with us for over a hundred years. Maybe because it was programmed music in that it tried to tell a story, as psychedelic a story as you can get. It's your first concept album, in a way."

This early Elgar piece is by no means anachronistic to 'modern' Prog. It, in fact, explains a lot. It explains how 'long form' music was used to tell a story. Up until 1968, the most popular musical structure

was the 'short form' - the three minute pop ditty consisting of a verse, chorus, bridge, chorus - or variations thereof. During the period between 1968 and 1970, psychedelic explorations evolved, as Carl Palmer, drummer for prog legends, ELP, remembers. "In 1968, I was in a band called The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown. We had a big single called 'Fire' which was No.1 in the USA - as well as the album. At that time, we were experiencing a lot of rock'n'roll theatre, where people were dressing up and performing on stage, which was more than just music." Arthur Brown, you might recall, was often regaled in a wonderfully affected outfit topped with a 'fire hat' - "I am the god of hellfire...". etc.

Even The Beatles were bedecked in their Sgt. Pepper finery. Others joined in wearing, at the very least, their Edwardian frills and paisley accessories. Music was becoming a visual feast. The likes of Peter Gabriel (Genesis), Ian Anderson (Jethro Tull) and future members of ELP were taking notes.

Music was also becoming serious. Even blues-based outfits such as Cream were becoming more introspective, introducing more and longer solos into both their live and album releases. Deke Leonard, singer and lead guitarist with Man, often described as a prog outfit, but who preferred to be looked upon as space rock practitioners, experienced the change first hand, "When we



Steve Hackett



Deke Leonard



Black Widow



Initially went to Germany, we had the usual hour and a half set prepared. Germany was a huge market for hippy bands of all sorts. At that time, they loved a bit of the abstract. However, they expected us to play for five hours at a time. We didn't have time to learn new numbers so we decided to extend the solos until,

at the end, the solos became the central part of the song. Soon, we would establish a theme, do a vocal and then improvise upon that for twenty minutes and then bring the number back at the end. That

was only, originally, a rehearsal piece, not something we'd even play live. The whole thing was twenty minutes long. When we eventually played it on stage, it was greeted with open arms."

Hence, there was now a realisation that, quite apart from the blues-based extensions, as pushed by the likes of Cream, with its blues structures and long guitar solos, you could experiment, widen your vision and try new things, as Clive Jones who played flute and clarinet with the prog outfit, Black Widow, confirmed, "Prog allowed you to experiment more with songs, you could give them three or four different time changes, it also allowed the realistic use of lots of different instruments and offered the opportunity to solo with those different instruments. There was certainly a lot more freedom to be had."

The democratisation of instruments often became a signature feature of bands themselves – some almost rose to iconic status: Jethro Tull's flute and Van Der Graff Generator's double saxophone being just two examples.

Prog fell onto hard times during the punk explosion, in 1977. Fashion, by its very nature, changes in a cyclical manner, which marketing departments of record labels smile upon as they bring in a fresh injection of new income. Prog's stars, especially those resident in the UK, such as Yes, Camel, Barclay James Harvest and Genesis, suffered as a consequence.

New and upcoming artists didn't ignore prog totally, however; some modified it to their own ends. This neo-prog was led by outfits such as Marillion, Saga and, it may surprise

## PROG – THE CRITICISM

Prog has received more than its fair share of criticism. There is good and bad rock, good and bad soul, good and bad reggae and good and bad prog. Yet prog is, somehow, singled out for a particularly concentrated brand of vitriol. ELP were often in the centre of it. "ELP, were always considered to be too extravagant," said Carl Palmer. "But consider the sort of shows the likes of U2 have put on, David Bowie and Rolling Stones. How do they compare? We were putting all our money back into the art – to give a great live show. We got banged on the head a lot for that. We also got attacked for using and adapting classical music. We were accused of sabre rattling. That it was pretentious. Because we wouldn't play 12-bar stuff. However, they were played with the most sincerity and we had to change certain things because we were only a 3-piece band. In fact, I believe that we introduced a lot of young people to classical music who might never had heard it."

The source of much of this early criticism is due to two things: location and ageism. Prog criticism is a very British thing because these isles were such a punk stronghold. You ask a Brazilian, for example, in this case Angra's guitarist, Rafael Bittencourt, and he'll say, "I'm not aware that prog has a bad reputation. Here, prog's reputation is well acknowledged as a positive thing."

As for the ageist question, Steve Hackett explained that, "in Britain, I think most of the journalists who are writing were growing up in the punk era and you have the corollary of that. What you need is another generation who missed out on that whole debate without any of those prejudices. Then you will find the hybrid of styles coming back again, as sure as the pendulum will swing."

Angra's Rafael Bittencourt



ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett



Emerson, Lake & Palmer



Deke Leonard

audience demand actually established our style. Although the vocabulary was not jazz, the mechanics were, with that improvising style."

Hence music genres away from the rock fold were beginning to influence its principal artists, mainly because rock musicians were becoming bored, they needed to quest for the 'next big thing' and, with the improvements in technology, mainly in the field of keyboards, they were well armed to tackle it. "It was a case of trying to borrow from something which has already been done and mix it with an area where you wouldn't expect to find it so you'd get some sort of surreal mix of the two. Prog always tried to be surprising," added Hackett.

Despite many additional genres, such as folk and world music, joining the prog alliance later, the initial influences were jazz for its both improvisational stylings and affected time signatures and classical music, as Palmer attests. "Keith [Emerson] had already done a little bit of that with The Nice and we decided to carry it on as ELP. That Mussorgsky piece ['Pictures At An Exhibition']



Angra

some, Kate Bush, whilst former prog members found they needed to adapt their prog stylings to retain a living. ELP's Carl Palmer and Yes' Steve Howe joined the power/pop/prog rock of Asia, for example, experiencing major success in a land then ruled by MTV. Success, that is, until the corporate takeover of the media began to marginalise creative work in a detrimental manner. "We started having silly things said to us such as one Geffen (their label at that time) guy who said to us, 'Every second line in the chorus has got to rhyme... oh, and any intro can't be longer than twenty seconds.' We said that the intro would be as long as we think it should be but that we could cut it for a radio edit, if required – but they

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**THE MAJORS**

Of course, the major labels' back catalogues are still awash with classic prog. Warners has a full selection of Yes material, now in an extended format with extra tracks. It can also offer CDs by Rush and Dream Theater. Universal has reissued the first two albums from Soft Machine, 'The Soft Machine Volume One', which offers elaborate psychedelic fantasies amongst the early prog fumbblings and 'Volume Two' which features Kevin Ayers and leans towards classic Canterbury prog. Also look out for the new edition of Camel's self-titled debut with extra tracks plus 'Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal', an Island Anthology including tracks from the likes of Jethro Tull, ELP and Quintessence.

Sanctuary, on the other hand, is distributing the whole ELP catalogue including deluxe editions of 'The Works Volumes 1 & 2', which focused on solo pieces from each member of the band, plus 'Welcome Back My Fiends...' a triple live album taken from the 1973-1974 tour. EMI is positively heaving with prog releases. It wasn't too long ago that it reissued the entire Gentle Giant discography online as digital releases along with extra tracks but the company has a wide selection of great tracks from the likes of Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, Barclay James Harvest, Egg, Marillion, Van Der Graff Generator, Hawkwind (space rockers, I know, but there's prog in there too), Hatfield & the North and so on.

**ON DVD**

On DVD, look no further than Eagle Vision, which has a wide variety of discs on offer from classic outfits. For example ELP's 'Birth of a Band: Live At The Isle of Wight 1970' is still available, as is Steve Hackett's 'Once Above A Time', which features behind-the-stage bonus features. Eagle Vision also has a selection of bonus editions featuring DVD and CDs in the same case: both Tangerine Dream's 'Live In America, 1992' and Jethro Tull's 'Living with The Past' are just two examples. Both sets are packed with extra DVD features too.

**THE INDIES**

Prog is everywhere – if you look. There are many classic albums that should keep any prog fan happy for some time to come and much praise has to be given to the smaller indie labels for keeping these albums alive and available. For example, Esoteric is run by Mark Powell, a reissue consultant for many of the major labels. For those acts/albums which are assumed will not sell in quantities, Powell guides them to his company. This is where you will find the electronic prog outfit, Barclay James Harvest (such their stripped 'Live' album that revealed their true skills), Egg's self-titled piece that exhibited a Canterbury influence and will appeal to ELP fans, Camel's 'Breathless' successfully added a pop ethos to the prog overtures and Jonesy's self-titled album combined jazz and complex prog tracks.

Similarly, Voiceprint has established an enviable reputation for an extended catalogue featuring the likes of After Crying, Galahad and Gentle Giant. This is where Jadis's 'As Daylight Fades' can be found, Man's 'Greasy Trucker's Party' can be purchased and Mother's 'Gong's Tree in Fish' can be grabbed. In addition, don't neglect the excellent reissue label Hux. As well as featuring the likes of Focus, Caravan, Gentle Giant and Gryphon, Hux also feature projects such as rare takes from the BBC. Soft Machine's '1967-1971' BBC takes, for example or Pentangle's 'Lost Broadcasts' from 1968-1972.

**ON VINYL**

Vinyl is resplendent with prog – which is fortunate because the genre sounds best on this format. I have already reviewed high quality releases such as the Genesis box set, '1970-75' (Virgin/EMI), in the Classic Cuts column and the 'Something's Coming: The BBC Recordings 1969-1970' (Lillith), via Yes, appeared in the January 2010 issue. Other new issues are already in the offing including a superb Jethro Tull box set from Classic Records, featuring the album, 'Aqualung' spread over four LPs and pressed in its innovative Clarity process, which is played at 45rpm. The label also features albums by Peter Gabriel and Genesis. Sigur Rós's new issue of 'Takk' (Smökkleýsa) has just appeared as a three LP set while Yes's 'Relayer' has been released via Friday Music. A new label, Music On Vinyl, has released Moody Blues' 'Live At The Isle Of Wight', a live album that apparently featured the support of Justin Heyward plus Kevin Ayers' 'Unfairground', a recently released album (2007) from this legendary artist including members of Teenage Fanclub and Gorky's Zygotic Minci as well as stalwarts such as Robert Wyatt and Phil Manzanera.

wouldn't have it. Where did they find the magic number of twenty seconds? This guy said, 'We've investigated that there are no DJs in the whole of the USA who can talk for more than twenty seconds.' And we said? Go and stuff it up your arse. Then the band promptly folded. This and other, similar, policies ruined a lot of bands such as Journey and Fleetwood Mac."

Yet Prog was not done for, yet. A new third wave of prog appeared during the nineties, despite a complete lack of media promotion. Outfits such as Flower Kings, Porcupine Tree and Spock's Beard proved that there was still life in the old dog yet. More recently, progressive metal has flowered, bringing in fresh ideas. Often inspired by the prog efforts of bands like Rush, the newer outfits, such as Dream Theatre, are taking prog to areas of music yet

unexplored. Add to that, the post rock elements of the bands such as Sigur Rós and Godspeed You! Black Emperor which investigates the more electronic spaces of prog plus the modern indie prog of Radiohead, Mars Volta and Tool and the dozens of excellent European and world-based prog bands based from Sweden to Italy and from Japan to Argentina and the genre hasn't looked so healthy in a long time.

As Rafael Bittencourt, guitarist in the Brazilian prog metal band Angra, explained, "Prog is certainly not dead, because I see many people making their living out of it. I think that things are transforming, changing, shaped by time. It won't die, don't worry, but it might change its name or its approach. Think positive and long live rock'n'roll!"

Well, you can't say fairer than that can you?

**CONTACTS**

Deke Leonard/Man:  
[www.manband-archive.com](http://www.manband-archive.com)

Steve Hackett  
[www.stevhackett.com](http://www.stevhackett.com)

Clive Jones/Black Widow:  
[www.blackwidow.tk](http://www.blackwidow.tk)

Carl Palmer:  
[www.carlpalmer.com](http://www.carlpalmer.com)

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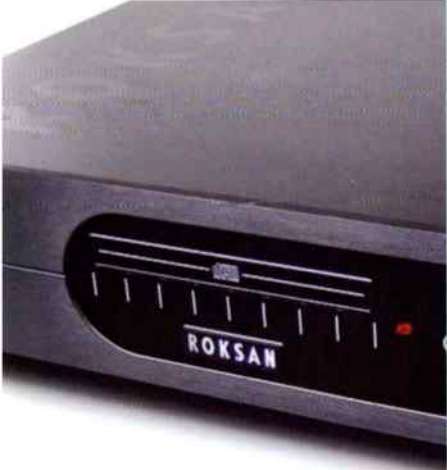
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For a general overview of  
classic and underground  
prog bands, take a look at  
Prog Archives:  
[www.progarchives.com](http://www.progarchives.com)

New Gibraltar Encyclopedia  
of Progressive Rock:  
[www.gepr.net](http://www.gepr.net)



# Roksan

## Warranty Notification

Effective 1st November 2009, all Roksan electronics and turntables supplied via authorised dealers are to be covered by a 5 year parts and labour warranty.\* As a gesture to existing customers, this will also be extended to all current owners of K2 products.

In an age where product longevity and second hand resale values are constantly under threat, Roksan wish to reward their loyal customers by allowing their warranty to be transferrable from owner to owner. Thus, the warranty stays with the product from initial date of sale to 5 years old as long as it remains within the country of origin.

\* terms available upon request



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### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO SONATA DV30 £200

If it's possible to make such a thing as a niche DVD player, this is it. The DV30 is instantly apparently holed beneath the water line because it is not a Blu-ray player. Why on earth buy a DVD spinner that plays only old formats, you ask? And it's a tricky question, but the DV30 does answer it, in a way. The reason is that it's a Cambridge Audio design, with some very clever fettling work done to the audio side by the company's arch tweaker Matt Bramble. He himself confided to *Hi-Fi World* that he was surprised by how good the DV30 has ended up, sonically, and he's right. Used as a CD player, the latest Wolfson WVB8746 DACs he's fitted (and carefully laid out on the board with better than expected passive components and lots of attention

paid to signal routing and grounding), gives a surprisingly svelte musical performance. It's not going to knock the top Cambridge Audio CD player off its perch, but suffice to say the DV30 doesn't sound plain nasty like most DVD spinners at its lowly price point. There's a decent amount of detail, at least an attempt made at throwing out a soundstage with a degree of depth, and a reasonable musical gait to the way rhythms are handled. It's also tonally smooth too, with no nasties up top. The overall effect is of a digital player that's *just* listenable in a serious system, one that's not so obstructive with the music that it has you running for the stop button.

The figure of eight IEC socket at the back means you can use an audiophile power lead (not logical if you don't have one already, I know,

but it certainly helps if you do), and the Cambridge also really enjoyed a pair of Missing Link Cryo Reference interconnects which smoothed things even more. Most rival machines are so bad they simply don't reward any tweaking. The 1080p upscaling video quality is superb at the price (remembering the fact that it's not Blu-ray, of course), with a clarity, crispness and colour that high end Denons would struggle to provide five years back. It's a decent transport then, via HDMI. The half size dimensions of the DV30 (270x285x67mm) are welcome (why have a full size machine when most are full of air?) and the build is decent for its price; I particularly liked the chunky brushed aluminium front panel, and the metallised remote feels nicer than that of most high end hi-fi CD players. It supports CD, DVD-V, CD-R/RW, DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW, DivX and MP4 formats. So providing you're not desperate to invest in Blu-ray, which really only comes into its own on truly large TVs, and want a fine do-it-all disc player that sounds better than it should, this is one to consider. It's an unusual machine alright, but not unendearing. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0)845 900 1230  
[www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)]

# soundbites

### MAD MY ENGLAND IEC £399/1M

Another quirky cable from the MyAudioDesign stable, this sports the company's proprietary 'Hexial' woven construction, with Golden Section, Constant Q & Crossfield Technologies invented by Cardas Audio. It uses multiple strands of 6N 1.35mm oxygen-free copper, Teflon coated, surrounded by a polyester monofilaments braid that's very attractive looking, if you like that sort of thing! High quality mains plugs (3-pin and IEC) are used at either end. The stated aims of the design are simply to make sure the cable isn't susceptible to RFI or cable resonance; certainly the later feature works well and isn't to be sneezed at, because cables feed ground and air-

borne vibration into hi-fi equipment, muddying the sound. This unusually named cable works very well, even given its serious pricing, providing a very clean and open sound, and one that helps good equipment 'incise' into the recording. Tonally it's very neutral, with a nice fluid bass and strong dynamics. An unusual product, but well worth trying all the same. **DP**

[Contact: 0208 1239 789 /  
0778 2137 868  
[www.madengland.com](http://www.madengland.com)]



# collective excellence

**“ With a sense of great power plus extraordinary insight and resolution, it paints a strongly lit canvas of sound on which instruments and singers are portrayed with striking clarity. If you want to hear a rather special kind of valve amplifier this is one worth auditioning. ”**

The Emillé Labs KI-40L Review by Noel Keywood, Hi-Fi World August 2009 Issue



**Almarro, Dr Feickert, Emillé, Marten  
ModWright, Raysonic, Tri**

these products are available exclusively through the dealers below

## specialists



**Acoustic Arts**  
01582 485 316



**AngelSound Audio**  
01923 352 479



**Mayflower Sounds**  
01302 711 528

# WORLD CLASSICS

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!

## 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 paperbook-sized remote control.

### TECHNICS SL-P1200 1987 £800

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

### YAMAHA CD-X1 1983 £340

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

## COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

### TEAC VRDS-T1 1994 £600

Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.



### ESOTERIC P0 1997 £8,000

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

### KENWOOD 9010 1986 £600

The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully done and responds well to re-clocking even today.

## DACs

### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 1995 £99

Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.



### DCS ELGAR 1997 £8500

Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.



### DPA LITTLE BIT 3 1996 £299

Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.



### PINK TRIANGLE DACAPO 1993 £ N/A

Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!



### QED DIGIT 1991 £90

Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

**TURNTABLES**

**ARISTON RDI 1S** 1972 £94  
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

**ADC ACCUTRAC 4000** 1976 £300  
Bunkers 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 PL112D** 1973 £36  
The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this brought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



**PIONEER PLC-590** 1976 £600  
Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

**DUAL CS505** 1982 £75  
Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound.

**GOLDRING Lenco GL75** 1970 £15.65  
Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TD124 rivals.

**LINN AXIS** 1987 £253  
Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

**LINN SONDEK LP12** 1973 £86  
For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price..



**MARANTZ TT1000** 1978 £ N/A  
Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.



**MICHELL GYRODEC** 1981 £599  
Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

**TECHNICS SPI0** 1973 £400  
Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SPI0 will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

**REGA PLANAR 3** 1978 £79  
Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Acos-derived S-shaped tonearm. 1983 saw the arrival of the RB300, which added detail at the expense of warmth. Superb budget buy.

**GARRARD 301/401** 1953 £19  
Heavy metal - tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down. In many respects, better than the seventies 'superdecks' that succeeded it.



**ROKSAN XERXES** 1984 £550  
Supposedly the first to 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

**SONY PS-B80** 1978 £800  
First outing for Sony's impressive 'Biotracer' electronic tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

**THORENS TD124** 1959 £ N/A  
The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck', this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass.



**TOWNSHEND ROCK** 1979 £ N/A  
The product of academic research by the Cranfield Institute, this novel machine has an extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

**TRIO LO-7D** 1978 £600  
The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made, Trio/Kenwood threw their 'engineering best practice' book at this one with startling results. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

**TONEARMS**

**ACOS LUSTRE GST-1** 1975 £46  
The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120** 1978 £75  
Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

**ALPHASON HR100S** 1981 £150  
First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.



**SME 3009** 1959 £18  
Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult. Used prices unjustifiably high.

**GRACE G707** 1974 £58  
This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound. Imported by Linn, fitted to early LP12s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

**REGA RB300** 1983 £88  
Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.



**SME SERIES III** 1979 £113  
Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

**HADCOCK GH228** 1976 £46  
Evergreen unipivot with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.



**LINN ITTOK LV11** 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 LV11 version worth seeking out.

**NAIM ARO** 1986 £875  
Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.





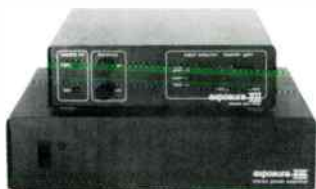
**TECHNICS EPA-501 1979 £ N/A**  
Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

## 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 80V per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

**ROGERS A75 1978 £220**  
The prototypical Audiolab 8000a – lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

**EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 £625**  
Seminal mid-eighties Exposure pre-power, offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness and sweetness. Still, it's by no means 'sweet' by today's standards, being lean, punchy, musical. It's also possessed of that quintessentially eighties look – frumpy black steel boxes with rough silk screened logos!



**SUGDEN C51/P51 1976 £130**  
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

**VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300**  
Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

**A&R A60 1977 £115**  
Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.



**CREEK CAS4040 1983 £150**  
More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

**AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 £495**  
Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.



**MCINTOSH MA6800 1995 £3735**  
Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

**SUGDEN A21 1969 £ N/A**  
Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

**MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 £299**  
Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.



**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 1985 £350**  
Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.



**NAIM NAIT 1984 £350**  
Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

**NAD 3020 1979 £69**  
Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.



**MYST TMA3 1983 £300**  
Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

**ROGERS CADET III 1965 £34**  
Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves



**ROTEL RA-820BX 1983 £139**  
Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

**CHAPMAN 305 1960 £40**  
Smooth pre/power combo with a sweet and open sound. Not quite up to Leak/Quad standards but considerably cheaper second-hand.

## PREAMPLIFIERS

**AUDIOLAB 8000C 1991 £499**  
Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.

**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-fit!

**LINN LK-1 1986 £499**  
A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not half bad for under £100.

**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.



**LECSON API 1973 £ N/A**

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

**MARANTZ MODEL 9 1997 £8000**

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

**MICHELL ALECTO 1997 £1989**

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

**LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 £28**

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



**MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR**

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



**QUAD II 1952 £22**

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



**QUAD 405 1978 £115**

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

**QUAD 303 1968 £55**

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

**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-JE555ES 2000 £900**

The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



**PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480**

For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.



**MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100**

Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



**KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 £500**

Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.5; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

**SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 £599**

Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**ACOUSTIC RESEARCH 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 KEF T27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



**SPENDOR BC1 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**

An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics



**YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532**

High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!



**MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499**

The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!





# Ear Ear!

Paul Rigby wonders if the A.N.T. Audio Amber 3T Special Edition can lift your headphone output onto a new aural plane?

It's all very well buying a great set of headphones, but where are you going to plug them in? Are you thinking about inserting the phono plug of your new Grado GS1000s into the headphone socket of your integrated amp? Think again, my friend. The better the headphones, the worse in relative terms they will sound via a basic headphone link. It's at this time that you need to seriously consider investing in a separate amplifier, specifically for headphone use...

There are plenty of units around and, building upon their success with the Kora 3T phono stage, A.N.T. has now released a new example called the Amber 3T which sits in a chassis very similar in style to the Kora 3T. It arrives in two flavours: the basic edition with a green LED, Panasonic FM series capacitors and a switch-mode univoltage power supply or the Special Edition reviewed here, with an amber LED, that sports a very natty 27mm Alps Blue Velvet volume knob, a tiny, adjustable, FET biasing knob around the back of the chassis, upgraded ELNA Starjet output capacitors and a linear power supply.

The front of the Amber 3T chassis features that Alps pot, the power LED and a full size, quarter inch headphone socket. Around the back is the biasing knob, a socket for an external power supply, two monitor and two input ports.

## SOUND QUALITY

Heaving a pair of Sennheiser HD650s onto my shell-likes, I plunged 'head-

long', as it were, into the poodle haircuts and mascara-covered mugs of early eighties-era Yes and the highly complex arrangement of 'Changes' from the album '90125' (Audio Fidelity; the best master of this album currently available). The Amber 3T offered a balanced performance with a distinct analogue tone. Granted, it was not as warm as the Musical Fidelity X-Can V8P (£400) or as sharp as the Musical Fidelity V-Can (£100) but sat somewhere in the middle. The V-Can shines very brightly on the master providing an almost clinical rendition. The ANT doesn't go that far but still retains an exciting midrange interpretation and the promise of more comfortable, long-term listening. The X-Can, on the other hand, could be accused of 'going soft' on this dynamic rock track, lacking the speed and drive present via the Amber 3T, which also excels in its broad soundstage and deep bass response.

Switching to the more contemporary electronic sounds, with noticeable synth distortion, of Haxan and 'Centre Of The Universe' ('Bronnt Industries Kapital', Static Caravan), the Amber 3T doesn't lose that kid glove treatment that is sometimes necessary to successfully convey a low-key, ambient wash atmosphere but it sharpens the image, when compared with the rather smudged X-Can, that offers a water colour to the Amber 3T's sharp focus photograph. The V-Can, on the other hand could again be accused of being clinical in comparison, responding to the synth distortions with a brightly

lit output. So as it stands, the Amber 3T is the king of the CD output!

Moving to the higher resolution of vinyl and Crosby, Stills & Nash's self-titled album, a 45rpm edition via Classic Records appeared to place a gentle frown upon the Amber 3T, denting its confidence a tad while the X-Can suddenly sprang to life. The Amber 3T did reveal its solid-state DNA during vinyl play, suffering just a hint of upper-mid hardness during harmonic climaxes while the X-Can revelled in the extra information, proving more tonally appealing.

Bass flowered, however, on the Amber 3T, improving on the already impressive, detailed, output of the V-Can with an added layer of information and more character. Tweaking the Amber 3T FET bias did aid the other frequencies, supplying an extra layer of warmth that enhanced the upper mids and treble response, combining excellent detail retrieval with a lively, more confident presentation.

## CONCLUSION

While the ANT Audio Amber 3T doesn't quite have the maturity and self-assuredness of the X-Can on vinyl, it does offer the most performance of any all-transistor headphone amplifier I have yet heard, featuring a sense of smoothness and warmth that most solid-staters wouldn't recognise. This extra sumptuousness works well on vinyl but brilliantly on CD, lifting most CD playback to a whole new audiophile level. Highly recommended, then.

## VERDICT ●●●●●

Offering an enticing blend of solid-state and valve-like characteristics, the Amber 3T is timbrally informative and musically invigorating.

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# Class Acts

Haden Boardman remembers the classic Class A Richard Allan and J.E. Sugden A21 integrated amplifiers...



**M**y conversion to the world of the vacuum tube was pretty much complete by the time I was twenty one. My early teenage years had been spent building ever bigger transistor amplifiers, until the discovery of a dusty old Radford valve amp stopped all of that. Oh what openness and dynamics! And as for that thermionic glow...

But then, into my arms a good friend thrust a rather quirky wooden boxed Sugden A21 transistor amplifier. Intrigued I plugged it in, and there began a twenty year long admiration for the marque. Introduced in 1968 as the Richard Allan A21 to celebrate twenty one years of that particular Yorkshire company's history; the A21 is, of course, still in production today.

Early transistor hi-fi amplifiers have a justified reputation for sounding rubbish. Germanium transistors are horrid devices that should be mashed by the nearest sledgehammer whenever you come across one. No offence to Leak Stereo 30 fans, but they do little for me. The Quad 303 has a reputation with some, it may be silicon, but overall to me it is soapy, soft and soggy.

Now the ten watt per channel A21 was launched on quite a different ticket. Jim Sugden, its creator, was a talented electronics engineer who started life marketing professional test equipment. His early demonstrations involved playing pure test tones on his amplifiers and those of his rivals, with the distortion

clearly audible on his competitors' designs.

The tie in with Richard Allan was short-lived and bizarre. J.E. Sugden & Co already existed and traded. The year previous an amplifier called the Si 402 had been supposedly manufactured (although I have never actually seen one), and Mr Sugden had written quite a good article arguing Class A and Silicon as the way ahead.

While researching this article it became quite clear that in the mid to late nineteen sixties the original post war D.T.N. Williamson valve KT66 amplifier was still considered the reference. Also there seemed to be some kind of mild war going on in the published world between the electronics and high fidelity press. The other well known Class A addict was of course John Linsley Hood; who at a similar time was pushing, frankly, a quite similar amplifier. But no mention in the electronics magazines at this time for Sugden. No doubt about it, it was Jim Sugden who first marketed and sold a Class A amplifier.

The A21 was not the only amp marketed by Jim Sugden. Also sold was the A41 pre-power amplifier, (later replaced by the A51). Circuit-wise it was all very similar; effectively three stages, all capacitor coupled, with low overall feedback applied. What is impressive for the age is the dual mono construction; and internally the preamp section is completely separate; with two power amplifiers bolted to the back of the case with shared mains transformer (separate windings per channel). The output stage is a classic single ended

push pull circuit, using two BD151 per channel. The earliest versions have unusual three pin DIN inputs for everything except tape (standard five pin), a mains outlet for tuner (another stonking Sugden product when fitted with the Motorola MCP1340 PLL decoder chip – covered some years back in *Hi-Fi World*) and four millimetre banana sockets for speaker terminals. Build is impressive; think military levels.

The first changes to the design came with the Series Two in 1969. The original A21 delivered ten Watts in to six ohm loads, while the Series Two delivers twelve into eight ohm speakers. A change of output transistors to BDY38 necessitated a change in supply rail to one with slightly higher voltage, but marginally less current; we are splitting hairs here. Conventional five pin DIN sockets, a headphone socket, and a change to the output bias circuitry, incorporating an extra transistor with adjustable bias, which replaced a couple of diodes to make component choice less fiddly on manufacture (and possibly less noisy in operation), were the only tweaks to the original classic design.

As mentioned before, there is very little between both the A21s, the A41 and the A51 in terms of design and overall sound. All use a near identical circuit. In theory the A41 and the A51 offer more power, but this is only true with speakers of higher impedance. Also, a more sophisticated power supply is utilised. In today's world of low four ohm average loads, there is no real advantage of the larger Sugdens;



some pundits regard the earlier Series One A21 as the hot ticket...

Well, of course being pure Class A all of these amplifiers run hot, consuming the same power from the mains supply if playing music or not; hence the rather large heatsinks. Sadly, Class A was (temporarily) removed from the A21's operation by the mid nineteen seventies Series Three. The demand for more power, less efficient speakers, saw the introduction of Class B operation. In comparison to the early amplifiers they simply sound flat. From the front, they look identical to Series Two, but they run hand warm, rather than finger burning hot, and you cannot see the transistors exposed on the rear heatsinks, they have a little black cover over them. Avoid! Find the later A28 hybrid Class AB design if you need more power, or go for a new next generation A21...

## SOUND QUALITY

Plugging a decent source in to an early original Richard Allan A21, and using a combination of original Quad ESL63s, LS3/5A and Diatone P610 loudspeakers proved the point that the earliest A21 is still valid. Even given the challenge of a much more modern B&W 686 loudspeaker this little amplifier displayed guts and soul that few amplifiers can match at any price. Sheer musicality that any A21 owner can instantly recognise, even in the latest version...

Ten Watts is not a massive amount of power, but within its remit, carefully matched to speakers, I can think of no other vintage transistor amplifier that comes close to this level of performance. On digital sources, a comparison was made to a new rival amplifier costing well over the two thousand pound mark, with around twenty times the rated power; as well as comparison to the latest Sugden A21.

The newer amplifiers are much cleaner, especially in the bass. The early Sugden's Achilles heal is its capacitor-coupled output stage. On the wrong speakers, and the wrong music material the sound will appear bloated and fat. The usual ABBA ('Day Before You Came'), Jimmy Smith ('Organ Grinders Swing') and a K&D session ('Heroes' remix) tracks played incredibly well through both the early A21s in to the given choice of speakers. They were totally engaging. Only that 'damp bass' mildly spoiled anything. Treble seemed to have more edge on the earlier Series One compared to Series Two, and I would say the earlier amp had more overall attack, and a tiny bit more *joie de vivre*.

Comparison to the latest Sugden A21a S2 amplifier revealed a surprising amount of house sound. The new amp had more power; although still no giant, it could play louder, and was cleaner, lighter on its feet, more dynamic when needed, more sophisticated, more modern. But there really is something quite special about the early amplifiers; and despite my initial doubts about differences between the two, I do think the earlier S1 had a very marginal edge over the later S2. It could simply be down to electrical condition of the amplifiers, but if anything the later S2 used was in better physical condition (after all, the Richard Allan had literally been rescued off the tip).

Quality of components used in these amplifiers is high by the standards of the era. An A21 cost a similar amount to a pair of Quad 11 valve amps; not cheap. However, electrolytic capacitors have never been a favourite coupling device of mine, especially in the output stage. In addition they age badly and should all be replaced by something more modern and better. These output capacitors have a significant effect on the sound; even modern types have sonic signatures I am not keen on. While replacing these, it is worth bypassing them with smaller non-electrolytic capacitors. The matching pair of power supply reservoir capacitors have a similar effect on the sound, and should be given the same treatment. If you are on original

"I can think of no other vintage transistor integrated that comes close..."

capacitors, change them now! Any amp that sounds a bit strangled and distorted will need these four large capacitors changing; fit the best you can. Reliability wise, other than worn preamp controls, this is the only issue; these things are bombproof.

Using the onboard phono stage revealed just how far we have come in semiconductor development. The preamp section is frankly *not* that good, certainly sub-2010 standards, and the phono stage is bordering on rubbish. These early transistor preamp circuits cannot seem to do low level detail, whereas the power amp section clearly gets away with it. As an experiment the entire preamp section was bypassed; an easy trick to do, it uses a small four pin plug; a thick veil was instantly removed, leaving only the bass lacking by modern standards. I do love the simple input switching arrangement,

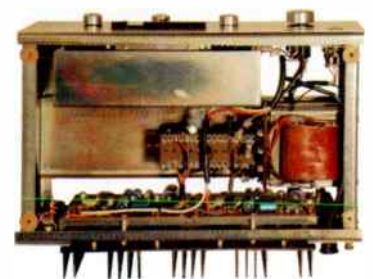
I do not like the combined mains/volume control one bit, nor the tone controls. But by fitting an ALPS blue 47K potentiometer in place of the original volume control, bypassing the entire preamp section, it was amazingly hard to fault.

Second-hand these little amps can turn up in 'boot sales' (or your local tip!) for not a lot of money. There are a surprising amount of them about. However, there is already quite a strong global following for these Class A amplifiers; the average price for an early A21 seems to hover around the £200 mark on certain websites; and as more leave the country, so prices are bound to rise.

The 'new' A21 remains something of a bargain, and in my opinion one of the few transistor amps worth owning. The older amplifiers are limited in power, and are getting tired. Even so, they can show much more modern devices something about soul and passion that most transistor amplifiers totally miss out on, frankly more similar to valve sound than solid state; certainly more Williamson than Audiolab. They tend to be incredibly reliable, even given my hatred of the electrolytic capacitors; they tend to hang together; and frankly even at a couple of hundred quid, these amps are a bit of a bargain. With preamp bypassed and better capacitors, their ten Watts performance is simply awesome, in certain areas bettering the current model.

## CONCLUSION

Jim Sugden got this amplifier incredibly right; it is bombproof and a sonic delight. By the end of the 1970s Sugden got fed up with the audio industry and sold out to the current owners, and he has never been seen since. The current owners have done an amazing job by reintroducing Class A operation, keeping the Jim Sugden design ethos alive and in servicing all of these old amplifiers that keep turning up at car boot sales. A solid recommendation and a fine second hand buy!



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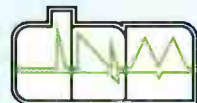
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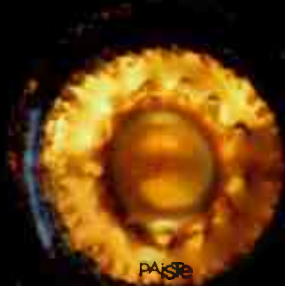
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"I managed to assuage my new listening room's deviant sonic behaviour with a 'smash and grab' raid on Ikea..."



## David Price

**T**hey say that moving house is second only to divorce in the amount of stress it generates. So I'm pleased to say that my recent relocation to the wilds of Wiltshire hasn't been too traumatic. In truth, the most annoying part of my move was catching a cold, and therefore not being able to set my system up properly, as I explained last month. To recap, I'd just got it all unpacked, and was about to set it up when Mother Nature intervened by giving me a nasty dose of the sniffles, thus rendering my finely tuned auditory capabilities null and void. My cold was such that I could hardly hear myself sneeze, so hi-fi fettling simply wasn't going to be a practical proposition for a week or two...

Well, despite the intervention of one of the coldest winters since 1981 with more snow than Val d'Isere surrounding our new cottage, the good news is that I finally put down the Lemsip a couple of weeks later, and with my newly decoked lugholes began to set my system up. As I'd noted, the new listening room is dramatically different to the last. Whereas my old place had a wonderfully wide front room, but with a low ceiling, the new one has precisely the reverse. The good news is that the ceiling is upside-down 'v-shaped', which seems to break up standing waves better, and has less of a 'zing'. Any Yamaha NS1000M loudspeaker user will instantly know this to be a good thing!

Still, the room isn't without its resonances; there's definitely something going on. But happily I have managed to assuage its deviant sonic behaviour by mounting a full on frontal assault - or was it more of a 'smash and grab' raid? - on Ikea. One icy afternoon just before the new year, I emerged from the Bristol branch floundering under the weight

of countless furry rugs, sheepskins and scatter cushions. These were then duly deployed in critical areas of the listening room, and lo and behold, my system sound improved in leaps and bounds! As well as the obvious sonic benefits, I like to think of my Yuletide spending spree as part of my patriotic duty as an Englishman, to 'reflate' our ailing retail sector.

Large amounts of soft, fluffy furnishings duly procured - making my listening room look curiously reminiscent of a set from *Barbarella* - the next task was the simple expedient of subtly repositioning my loudspeakers. Well, it would be simple, were they not to weigh (along with their sand-filled Custom Design stands) the best part of fifty kilos apiece. But the removal men had just dumped them where I'd asked them to (i.e. "over there please mate"), and I really had to face up and risk life and limb (and back) to get them positioned properly...

You see, they both stand either side of a fireplace, and had been pushed back too far into the recesses going back to the room's rear wall. Needless to say, moving them out slightly, toeing them in very subtly and then sitting on each one for five minutes (so as to bed the speaker stand spikes into the floor) has worked wonders. The NS1000Ms' treble and midband level pads sit almost exactly where they did in the old house now, telling me I've got the tonal balance of the room close to where it should be, whilst its echoic properties are - if anything - now slightly better than before.

Finally, the rest of my system came off the floor and onto the superb Quadraspire stands they'd previously resided on. The Musical Fidelity AMS35i amp got its own dedicated subtable closest to the speakers (a mere seven metres away!), and the vexed issue of cables then

reared its ugly head. Obviously, my last 'installation' of the system had been arranged around the geography of my old listening room; but now suddenly I was finding I couldn't use that 0.5m Silver Arrow interconnect, or that 1m Silvermann power IEC. My amp is now powered by the longest cable I have in the house - a 4m Clearer Audio Copperline - and very good it is too for a cheapie.

Intriguingly, right behind the amplifier sits a mains socket of the type you don't normally see in this country; a 15A type D. The house has several of these, which I last saw when I lived in Hong Kong in the late eighties. Given that the plugs aren't fused, I am wondering about the suitability for hi-fi applications; I can't see why not as almost all foreign plugs aren't fused either (any advice much appreciated), but a short 0.5m power cable run from this socket right into the back of the amplifier would surely be a nice way to give the Musical Fidelity its juice!

Next begins the laborious process of fine tuning. Whilst the prospect of listening to umpteen different mains cables and interconnects hardly fills me with relish, I'll grudgingly admit that they do make a big difference, but the trick is getting the right combination. In the same way that motorbikes suddenly 'come on song' when you've got the right mix of tyres, tyre pressures, damper preload and rider weight, so too hi-fi never fails to hit a 'sweet spot' when you've slavishly tweaked everything to within an inch of its life. The trouble is of course that, at my old house my system had the cumulative benefit of six years of trial-and-error experimentation, whereas now in my new place I am well and truly back to square one. Forget broken cutlery, lost belongings and distressed pets; for me, this is why I don't want to move again in a month of Sundays! ●



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## paul rigby

**R**ight, I'm going to sound like your Dad, wagging a warning finger into your face, but that old chestnut, "don't believe everything you read", is true and you should always remember it...

It's an odd psychological response, but speaking as a journalist of over twenty years experience, I do continue to find it incredible that if I stood next to you at the bus stop and declared that Tapioca Pudding was a cure for cancer you'd run home to your wife declaring, "Hey Martha, you have no idea how many cranks take bus rides these days. Lemme tell ya, there was this guy, today!" But, if I wrote the same in a newspaper or a magazine you may well declare, "Hey Martha? You passing Tesco's today? Get me some Tapioca! Whaddya mean? There might be something in it!"

People behave like Pavlov's Dog. Print something on a piece of paper and it must be true. Why? Because it's written down. Why should that make any difference? God knows. But it does...

"But, newspaper and magazine journalists have to check all of their facts before they print them", you retort. Well, we certainly do our best in this journal, but that doesn't hold for everything issuing forth from printing presses. I'll give you two examples of what I mean.

I'm a big fan of vinyl and have welcomed the resurgence of the format over the past few years. One of the most visible and much trumpeted associations with the new fashion for 'audiophile vinyl' is the bragging by manufacturers and many retailers that this here LP is pressed on a record weighing 180gms. For years, various flavours of

industry experts and journalists have trumpeted that 180gm vinyl sounds better than standard weight vinyl. I admit it – I initially fell into the same trap. And then, one day, I had real good listen and now I'm not so sure.

It feels great, there's 'perceived value' for money when buying a heavyweight vinyl album and there also possible benefits in the reduction of warping but sound quality improvements? The jury is still out and, to be honest, I'm not convinced. More so, I use an Avid Acutus turntable with a clamp. Thinner records mould better to the turntable with the clamp than thicker, heavier records. So, for clamped decks, will thinner records sound better as they're more integrated within the turntable chain of components?

Here's the second example. If you see a CD for sale – a new CD, that is – and it declares that the music within has been remastered, will you buy that in preference to the same CD that has not been remastered? Most people will always go for the remastered version. However, remastering is not always desirable or necessary. In fact, I'd lay odds that some albums are remastered purely for marketing reasons.

Take the new series of Perfect 10 reissues that parade the very best of the Rounder Records label in celebration of its 40th anniversary. The first batch of ten (more will follow in March) includes 'best of...' compilations from great artists such as Johnny Adams, Johnny Copeland, Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, Mississippi John Hurt, Solomon Burke and Ruth Brown. You'd think that the first thing Rounder would do would be to remaster the lot wouldn't you? Well, they *haven't* done so and,

you know what, they don't need it because the original mastering was pretty darned good to begin with.

Producer for the original recordings Scott Billington, speaking from the Rounder studios in the USA, confirmed that these recordings are not "tricked out" in any way. "We used really good microphones, most of the recordings were analogue-based so we used 2" tape, run at 30 ips. Even using ProTools, I still mix to tape. There's something so pleasing about how sounds react with analogue tape. Analogue tape is almost an 'effect', it compresses the sound a little bit without unpleasant artefacts – I hate to hear compressors switching on and off. It's more pleasant than listening to raw, digital files."

Which is why these Rounder reissues – which have experienced precisely *zero* remastering – sound so good today. Because they were created properly in the first place. Just the fact that they haven't gone through the horrible 'make it louder' mastering should make the series appealing to music fans of this magazine.

So remember to think and think again when you hear the 'facts' about hi-fi, music and life in general. Always question. Never forget, the expert in the broadsheet is but a piece of paper away from being a crank at a bus stop. There are no blacks and whites, only greys and variations along a scale.

If, on the other hand, I've done nothing more than confuse the hell out of you and rocked your certainties about life in general then I can only advise you to keep reading *Hi-Fi World*. Where the crap is cut, the facts are solid and the real truth is revealed about Tapioca Pudding. You heard it here first! ●

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"the Government's plans will leave the UK lagging behind in digital radio technologies used..."



## steven green

**T**he House of Lords Select Committee on Communications has launched an inquiry into digital switchover of TV and radio. On the digital radio side, the inquiry is seeking views on "the current state of the Government's plans for switchover to digital radio", and on "the outstanding technical issues, including the appropriateness of DAB as the digital radio standard". The inquiry will close for written submissions on 1st February (see <http://tinyurl.com/y9bsow5> for more details), and below is a summary of the points I will be making in my submission.

First of all, the main justifications for digital radio switchover to take place are completely flawed. One of the main arguments put forward by the broadcasters is that radio somehow "needs to go digital" to avoid being left behind other industries that are switching to digital. In reality, the UK is seven to eight years *ahead* of every other large country on earth in terms of the sales and development of digital terrestrial radio. For instance, none of the other large Western European countries have even commercially launched digital radio yet, and the commercial radio broadcasters in both France and Germany have been vociferously arguing against the need to launch digital radio in recent months. It is simply dishonest to suggest that radio needs to go digital in the UK when digital radio hasn't even been commercially launched yet in the vast majority of countries on earth!

Furthermore, I have yet to see the broadcasters provide a shred of evidence to show that the public is in favour of FM being switched off, whereas there is a significant amount of evidence that points to the contrary. Firstly, there was a huge outcry from listeners when

the 2015 FM switch-off date was first announced last summer (a date for FM to be switched off has conveniently disappeared altogether from the Digital Economy Bill, by the way). And a market research survey conducted by Ofcom last year showed that 91% of people were "satisfied" with the amount of choice that they could already receive on the radio, and only 3% of people were "dissatisfied". In my opinion, the public does not want FM to be switched off at all.

The other main justification put forward is that the cost of transmitting on both analogue and digital is supposedly crippling the broadcasters financially. Yet it only costs from around £5,000 per year to broadcast a small local station on FM up to around £60,000 per year to cover a large city on FM, whereas it costs around £100,000 per year to broadcast on a local DAB multiplex (£200,000+ in London!). Do they seriously expect us to believe that paltry sums in the region of £5,000 to £60,000 per station per year are enough to "cripple" the radio industry's finances?

Turning to the technical side of things, the official line is that the UK is sticking with DAB for the foreseeable future, despite the fact that DAB is a completely outdated system that delivers lower audio quality than FM, a lot of people suffer from poor reception quality, and around 100 smaller UK radio stations can't afford to transmit on DAB because the jump in transmission costs is too high. Switching to DAB+ would either solve or hugely improve upon each of these problems.

Technology hasn't stood still over the last few years, either. For example, the new DVB-T2 system (the successor to the transmission standard used for Freeview, but which is also suitable for broadcasting radio

to mobiles/portables/fixed receivers) is ten times as efficient as DAB, and it is over three times as efficient as DAB+. The DRM+ digital radio standard was also standardised last year, and DRM+ would be the ideal digital system for stations with small coverage areas to use. Neither DVB-T2 nor DRM+ were mentioned at all in any of the reports published by the broadcasters or the Government on the subject of digital radio switchover, and I would expect that the consequences of the decision to accelerate the move towards digital radio switchover now will be that the UK will end up using technologies that are one generation behind the rest of the world – i.e. we will end up using DAB+, whereas the rest of the world will end up using DVB-T2 or an equivalent next-generation digital radio system.

Last but not least, there's the issue with the broadcasters excluding Internet radio from the recommendations they made to Government about the future of digital radio. The broadcasters did this to kill off the threat posed by Internet radio, and in order to push as many people as possible onto the DAB platform where their stations face the least amount of competition. A more blatant piece of protectionism would be hard to find.

In summary, the Government's plans for digital radio switchover are an excellent example of the kind of short-term decision-making that got us into the DAB mess in the first place; they will leave the UK lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of the digital radio technologies used; the only people to benefit are the big broadcasters and the receiver manufacturers; and the UK public is expected to foot the several billion pound bill, in return for which the audio quality will be reduced. How kind! ●

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"I look forward to seeing puzzled commuters, as they ponder this latest tube ad, on the Tube..."



## noel keywood

Sitting on a Bakerloo line underground train recently I was amused to see that the dear old thermionic valve - tube to our U.S. readers - had finally made it to overground status, if you see what I mean. Opposite me was an advertisement for a valve adorned Fatman i-Tube iPod docking station!

That tubes should suddenly become a part of modern cool, instead of an energy chewing anachronism Granddad had to put up with, made me smile wryly. Did all the iPod wielding, earpiece studded commuters around me, peering intently into tiny screens whilst solemnly pressing buttons, really relate to this yesteryear technology? It would seem so because the very same docks are available in HMV's gadget shop at their flagship store on London's Oxford Street.

But more amazing than this by a long margin - and so bizarre that I had to write a column about it - is an announcement by Panasonic. Yes, the mighty Panasonic, a corporate leviathan I would have thought was immune, even blind, to the whims of the outside world. Perhaps I am being unfair, as they do actually make very nice products and I fell deeply in love (sad, I know) with my first ever camcorder, a Panasonic NV-GS70B. But even its name speaks of numb corporatism, of an organisation so vast it can't even come up with a name that relates to purpose and is memorable to buyers. All the same, Fatman is going to have to move over because now Panasonic have caught 'thermionic disease', and have issued a product statement that almost unbelievably links Blu-ray to valves! Huh?

On reading this I wondered if, perchance, drinking too much coffee to try and keep my brain cells on their toes might have unexpected consequences if taken too far. Could

Panasonic, a world leader in vacuum cleaners, really be talking about valves? Would anyone in that giant organisation really be aware of the modern day existence of such things? And why would they try and relate them to Blu-ray players, for heaven's sake? I have a tendency to prattle on endlessly about the wonders of the tube if provoked, but to date I haven't quite tried to link them to Blu-ray players. They must be drinking very strong coffee in Japan. This is what the product statement says -

"The DMP-BD85 is the king of Panasonic's new 2D Blu-ray players. Audio is where the BD85 really shines. It decodes the usual assortment of audio formats but adds a HDMI Jitter Purifier to ensure clear robust bass sounds. It's also got a built-in Digital Tube Simulator, that helps reproduce those warm tube amplifier sounds. The BD85 even has 7.1 channel analog outputs to complete the audio experience."

So now we can own a Blu-ray player with the sound of a 'warm' tube amplifier, courtesy of Panasonic's Digital Tube Simulator. Hah! I nearly died laughing.

Of course, the simple truth is that Japan never quite forgot the wonders of tube sound, Lux making many historical bridging products in classics like their SQ-38 and a 40 Watt Lux power amplifier I used happily for a long time. Then Lux designer Tim de Paravicini returned to the UK from his sojourn in Japan and designed the EAR PL509. He brought his knowledge and experience back and confirmed my suspicion that when engineered properly valve amplifiers had something transistor amplifiers did not have - and it wasn't a warm sound!

The myth of warm sound lives on however, a property originally induced by lousy output transformers that saturated and had a rolled off

frequency response, due to excessive winding capacitance. But that's another story.

That the 'tube sound' has become so widely acknowledged that Panasonic - of all companies - should try and incorporate it into Blu-ray players is extraordinary to me. I never thought I would ever see the day and cannot imagine what we are going to get next on this trip back to an early technology that just happens to give superb results. I just hope it isn't an E.U. ban because of energy consumption!

What is also interesting here though is that Panasonic have *finally* twigged that good sound quality is important and sells BD players. Good on them! At least they are awake to what's going on in Blu-ray, unlike all rivals except Oppo. Up to now the audio capabilities of Blu-ray players have been assessed and summarised by whether Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio are on their Features tick list. Not any more if this product statement is read and understood by other manufacturers and AV journos around the world. Panasonic now relegate these commercial compression schemes to 'the usual assortment of audio formats' - ouch! Their importance has been downgraded, rightly in my view, because they do nothing for audio quality, only add to a player's cost through royalty fees. I'm not sure Blu-ray in dual layer, 50GB format needs audio compression; PCM should do.

Add in Panasonic's use of HDMI jitter reduction (jitter is induced by the video content) in addition to 'tube sound' and - *voila!* - you have a Blu-ray player that looks very tasty audio wise. I wonder if it'll be so overground it'll make it to the Underground? I look forward to seeing a lot of commuters with puzzled expressions on their faces as they ponder this latest tube ad. on the Tube. ●

# it gets better and better



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World Radio History

"an interesting month at Smith Towers, and not all of it involving vinyl either..."



## adam smith

It's been an interesting month audio-wise at Smith Towers, and not all of it involving vinyl either. However, I can safely say that all of the following events can be directly linked to one person – a certain Mr H. Boardman of this parish! On the vinyl front, I am thrilled to report that I am now the proud owner of a Sony PSB-80 Biotracer turntable, and not any old one but the very one that graced the *Olde Worlde* pages of *Hi-Fi World* back in March 2007. "Big deal", I hear you cry, but the problem was that, not long after the Sony's return from the office for photography for that very feature, it stopped working and, in that typical over-complicated nineteen seventies electronics type way, obstinately refused to start again...

However, last year, Haden began the great clearout of his abode as he is moving to new premises later this year and the Sony was offered to me. Naturally I couldn't say no as, if nothing else, it would make a lovely paperweight (although I'd need a bigger desk...) and so it came my way around a year ago. I tentatively poked round inside it, scared by its fearsome reputation more than anything else but, with no service manual around and other things to do, it was carefully put into storage. However, just before Christmas, another fellow *Hi-Fi World* scribe, Tim Jarman, invited me to spend the day in his 'B&O bat-cave' attending to a few technical jobs. Given that Tim also knows anything anyone could possibly know about Sony, plus the PSB-80's service manual had finally dropped into my inbox. I decided to set him the ultimate challenge!

To cut a long story short, he didn't even break a sweat and after a day or so, a brace of new capacitors, and IC or two and some repairs to

the very fine wires that run to the arm's linear motors, the Biotracer lives once more and I can't wait to hear it, when Tim hands it back to me at John Howes' Audiojumble in February (Sunday 14th – get the date in your diaries)!

Other things have been happening right in the Smith abode however, involving large loudspeakers, much to my good lady wife's distress, and I also have Haden to thank for these. Back last June he rang me to say, "I have a pair of distressed B&O Beovox MS150 speakers that are in a bit of a state. If you don't want them, they're going to the tip". Now this was like a red rag to a bull, so I duly expressed my interest and finally gathered them up in October last year. "Bit of a state" wasn't kidding either – the cabinets were scratched, there was a thick layer of dust on them and the foam surrounds of the bass driver and subwoofer on each were long gone. However, these were B&O's last big passive loudspeakers before they moved to active technology and are very impressive. Statistics like power handling capacity of a genuine 150 Watts, a four way design incorporating a monitor-quality Peerless ten inch subwoofer driver and a weight of over 30kg per cabinet tell only a part of the story, so I knew these had to be saved and, at the time of writing, I have completed woofer and subwoofer restoration and I am just in the process of specifying new crossover components and wiring, before screwing them all back together. But of course, this opened up a new can of worms...

You see, I had been planning to perform a similar task of recapping and rewiring on my own reference Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers but had never managed to work up the

enthusiasm to start pulling them apart. The placing of an order for components for the B&Os was just the impetus I needed, however, and so I pointed my screwdrivers in the direction of the S1s. I now have the list of components I need, but I also have a KEF B139 with a terminal panel that disintegrated in my hand, a resistor on the crossover PCB that now only has one leg after it came apart as I leaned it to one side to read the value on it, and a couple of PCB pins dangling in mid air with midrange and tweeter wires still connected to them, after they parted company with the rest of the PCB as I dismantled it. I suspect this is nature's way of telling me I should have attended to my loudspeakers sooner, but am at least secure in the knowledge that they can't fail to sound even better once reassembled!

I would love to end here by saying that this is the end of my transducer travails but no, sadly not. You see, last October's Audiojumble saw me whiling away a quiet ten minutes perusing the long printed list of an enthusiast's 'stock' that had to be passed onto a new home before he could move house – yes, it was that Mr. Boardman fella again (he's a bad influence on me, clearly!). I am pleased to report that I did resist the lure of the several items of Bang & Olufsen on there but then I spotted a loudspeaker name and model number I knew very well. They conjured up memories of the pair I used to own and how I bitterly regretted selling them, so I found myself helpless to resist as I uttered the words "I'll take them".

And what are they? Well, I'll reveal more when I collect them in a few weeks time, but let's just say they start with 'Leak' and could end with me sleeping in the shed... ●

# vinyl section

## contents

MARCH 2010

[www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk)

### SIMON YORKE S10 100

Adam Smith is beguiled by this high end vinyl spinning package.

### REGA RB1000 105

Neville Roberts celebrates a superb mid-price tonearm.

### INSPIRE I2 110

David Price tries out a fine 'plug and play' budget turntable.

## news



### PURE DUO

Jazz and blues from Pure Pleasure ([www.purepleasurerecords.com](http://www.purepleasurerecords.com)) this month spans the ages. Bluesman, Eddie Boyd, came to London to record '7936 South Rhodes', an LP featuring the early incarnation of Fleetwood Mac (i.e. Peter Green, John McVie and Mick Fleetwood) where both Boyd and Green excel. Next, the sultry sounds of Stacey Kent, a lady with a voice to send shivers up and down the spine. 'In Love Again' (2002) covers the works of, composer, Richard Rodgers in an innovative manner.

### BACK ON BLACK TRIO

Three excellent rock albums from the Back On Black ([www.backonblack.com](http://www.backonblack.com)) vinyl label include Deep Purple's 'Live At Montreux 1996' including Ian Gillan, Roger Glover, Jon Lord, Steve Morse and Ian Paice. A 2LP set, two tracks actually come from a 2000 gig, 'Sometimes I Feel Like Screaming' and 'Fools'.

Next is UFO's 'Strangers In The Night' a great name for a live album and, yes, a great album — one of the very best live works but little known. Starring Michael Schenker, it was originally released in 1979. Finally, The Black Label Society's 'Skullage' is a two LP, twelve-track compilation with four extra tracks including the vinyl-only 'Slightly Amped', a live cut via a Lehigh Valley gig.



### GENRES A GO-GO

New from the Doxy label are four new LPs covering a gamut of styles. One of the first female country and rockabilly singers, Wanda Jackson, recorded this self-titled

album in 1958 mixing country, pop and ballads in with her recognised rockabilly style. The album exhibited her many recording talents.

'The Meeting Of The Soul Brothers'

might alert you to some early sixties Detroit outfit but, in fact, it was the 1957 release of a relatively unlikely pairing: the great Ray Charles (who doesn't sing but does play sax) and jazzman Milt Jackson (who plays guitar for the first time on record). One for the collectors. Also look out for Harry Smith's 'American Folk Music Volume Two: Social Music' and John Coltrane's jazz piece, 'Africa'.



### WALK BEFORE YOU KRALL

Based upon the album released in 2006, Diana Krall's 'From This Moment On' (Classic Records/Verve, [www.classicrecords.com](http://www.classicrecords.com)) presents her Peggy Lee-like

credentials as a cool interpreter of the Great American Songbook with classics such as 'Willow Weep For Me'. In fact, Krall's ballad work is superb here. It's made even sweeter by the superior 'Clarity' mastering employed by Classic Records.



## IT'S A MAN THING

Four diverse but equally creative male artists to present to you; a barrage of blokes, in fact! The first is a brand new album from Tom Waits. 'Glitter And Doom Live' (Anti) on 180gm vinyl, is taken from his recent tours to the USA and Europe. It splices together performances from the whole tour. Although the edits can be a little odd, it's still an enjoyable set. Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival (Speakers Corner, [www.speakerscorner.de](http://www.speakerscorner.de)) is a 1968 release that mixes originals and standards – the highlight is the interaction between Evans and bassist Eddie Gomez.

Now two from Mobile Fidelity ([www.mofi.com](http://www.mofi.com)). Tenor Sax jazzman, Michael Brecker's 2007 release, 'Pilgrimage', includes talents such as Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny and Brad Mehldau. Fans of this fusion master will be surprised to hear his take on straight ahead jazz. Finally, Beck's 'Sea Change' (2002) was a soft, almost melancholic release – his own magnum opus, a many layered piece that rewards repeated listening.



## THEY'RE ACE!

...no, they really are! Ace Records ([www.acerecords.co.uk](http://www.acerecords.co.uk)), that is. The company doesn't often release vinyl but, when it does, they're always interesting. Take 'Harlem Bush Music Uhuru' via Gary Bartz NTU Troop, featuring the sax playing man himself, a student of Charlie Mingus. This re-release of an original 1970 album includes the funk-driven bass from Ron Carter and vocals from Andy Bey. Next is 'Jungle Fire!' from Pucho & The Latin Soul Brothers. A soul/latin release, it includes some excellent funk-based vibes derived from catchy songs via Motown men, Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong. Also look out for Idris Muhammad's 'Black Rhythm Revolution!', his 1970 debut and frenetic guitarist, and Link Wray's 'Early Recordings' from 1963-1964, including the 'Batman Theme' and Ivan 'Boogaloo Joe' Jones's funky 'Black Whip'.



## ...AND FINALLY

Direct from Diverse Vinyl's ([www.diversevinyl.com](http://www.diversevinyl.com)) own imprint is The Duke & The King's 'Nothing Gold Can Stay'. Created by Felice Brother, Simone, the album might be low-key but



it arrives with quality lyrics and bountiful harmonies. Next, a rather bizarre compilation of Swedish/Australian rock from the likes of The Specimens and Rio Grande: six from



each country, via Bootleg Booze Records ([www.bootlegbooze.com](http://www.bootlegbooze.com)). Four hundred copies will be available in black vinyl and one hundred copies will be sold with an accompanying logoed canvas bag. Also, don't forget to check out Slayer's latest album via Sony Music. 'World Painted Blood' is the band's eleventh album featuring, wait for it, melody!

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# Yorkie Star

**Simon Yorke's new high end S10 turntable is a veritable vinyl feast, says Adam Smith...**

**W**e have often mentioned in the pages of *Hi-Fi World* that the meeting point between the professional audio market and the domestic one can be a rather uncomfortable one, particularly in terms of amplification and loudspeakers. But what of the sources? Here things are slightly different as, if one considers some of the all-time classic turntables for a moment and makes an audiophile's dream wish list, one might come up with the likes of the Garrard 301 and 401, the Technics SP10 and, of course, rarities like the Sony PS-X9 and the EMT 948 and 950. However, these were all intended for professional use and have been found in recording studios and radio stations across the globe for many years. Simply put, it seems that the crossover of high quality professional and domestic sources is much more noticeable because, regardless of what you want to do with the results, it's getting the information off the record that counts.

Fast forwarding to today, it is a simple but sad fact that the professional turntable is no longer the necessity it once was. CD, MiniDisc and now HDD have all taken its place, and most radio studios nowadays resemble more of a computer server room than a showroom for the very best audio equipment. There is still, however, the need to preserve the recordings that are stacked away in the record

libraries across the world, and for this most people in the know turn not to a huge company in the 'Silicon Valley' of Japan, but rather closer to home and the agreeable location of Alicante in Spain.

It is here that Simon Yorke bases his operation, following a move away from England a few years back, and with him taking great delight in telling me that the temperature when he shipped the S10 turntable was a balmy 17 degrees whilst we in the UK shivered under the weight of winter snow and ice; I can see why he did it!

All Simon Yorke record players (not 'turntables') are hand made to order by Simon and his son Spencer and a read of the words of wisdom on the website (the aptly named 'www.recordplayer.com') gives an insight into the man, his ethos and the driving force behind his creations.

I take time to mention the professional connection as, although to the untrained eye the S10 may appear to be a rather fancier version of the S9 that I reviewed back in the May 2007 issue of *Hi-Fi World*, the opposite is true, as the S10 is actually a slightly more 'domesticated' version of the full-blown professional 'CAT' Compact Archival Turntables that Simon makes for record libraries and archival centres all over the world. Although lacking the computer-controlled 16-100rpm abilities of the latter, the S10 still, as Simon puts it "comes in many guises", with a platter of up to 20 inches in diameter

and arms of up to 16 inches in length. For this review however, we were supplied the most usual home version, with twelve inch platter and a nine inch S7.1 tonearm plus spare arm wand for easy cartridge changing.

As standard then, the S10 offers 33, 45 and 78rpm speeds with individual fine adjustment from a belt drive system that will also spin the platter in either direction. The platter itself is an 8kg sandwich variety, consisting of layers of stainless steel and aluminium separated by a graphite disc, plus a further graphite disc as a record mat. Switches on the motor controller are unlabelled, so it's worth remembering that it's the left hand one that selects platter direction – flicking this inadvertently is not a problem if your Ortofon happens to be an OM Pro S, but less good if it's a Kontrapunkt b! The S7.1 arm is a unipivot device but with a handy bracket that limits its free movement in the



"one of the most revealing record players I have ever encountered..."



lateral plane; naturally this does not affect it when playing but makes it feel far less wobbly than most when being handled. Its output cables plug into a termination box that, as standard, has phono sockets, but Simon Yorke Designs can supply a balanced XLR version on request.

A certain amount of assembly is required for the record player, but the instructions for both deck and arm are clear, concise and easy to follow. It is also worth mentioning that build quality and finish are both stunning and the whole unit is an absolute pleasure to assemble, giving the feeling that every single aspect of it has been carefully thought about and designed to integrate perfectly. As an example, I did question the fact that the two metal halves of the platter have different finishes; one matt and one shiny. It was only when I sat down to begin listening that I realised this matches exactly the finish of the two layers of the main base – shame on me!

### SOUND QUALITY

As editor DP put it in his EAT Forte review in the May 2009 issue, at this price level the question is not of good or bad, but *what kind of good?* So, with this in mind and remembering how much I enjoyed the S9 model, I sat back as stylus hit groove expecting to be bowled over, and was a little disappointed to find that, whilst I was in some respects, I wasn't in others. To cut a long story short however, it turned out not to be the fault of the S10 in the end, but the spitty treble and rather flabby bass actually turned out to be my ageing Ortofon Kontrapunkt b being rather unhappy in the S7.1 arm. I was rather surprised by this and, given that I have found so far the Ortofon works well in arms that previously housed my Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII, it was with some trepidation that I bolted the latter in. Fortunately, the results of this pairing were simply divine.

Some turntables have an

immediate sonic signature, be it the bass of a Garrard, the wide soundstage of a Michell or the precision of an Avid and some, such as the Roksan Xerxes seem initially to lack the wow factor of these designs but it gradually becomes clear that they are quite simply superbly competent in pretty much all areas. The S10 actually seems to lie inbetween these points as I found that it never put a foot wrong once it was in its stride but, equally, it had a couple of little gems up its sleeve.





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The first of these showed itself during my standard equipment warm-up period, when I always let any review item play away to itself for a good few days before taking time to really listen to it, but the S10 captured my attention more than any other, simply by the amount of detail and impact that it offered at low volumes. More often than not, when the volume control drops, the deepest bass tends to fade away and subtle high frequency details drift quietly off into the background; this is simple physics explained by the Fletcher-Munson loudness curves that show how the ear is more sensitive to midrange at low levels, but somehow the S10 manages to ignore these laws and keep everything absolutely vivid, no matter how low the listening level.

In fact, 'vivid' was a word I kept jotting down in my listening notes, as I spent a thoroughly captivating few weeks with the S10. Pushing the volume control back to normal listening levels revealed an intimacy, scale and sheer sense of effortlessness that is rarely heard in a domestic environment. We at *Hi-Fi World* have encountered turntables that spread the sonic image off into the distance, and ones that pull things in closer but arrange all the performers within that space brilliantly. The S10 seems to do both at the same time, and I am still recovering from the shock of hearing Patsy Cline apparently singing 'Crazy' straight out of my phono stage on the shelf in front of me!

The S10 has no time for things like listening room boundaries or the limits of the recording studio, and playing my favourite LPs on it was like switching from a standard television picture to a widescreen one; it seems to simply conjure up so much more detail than I had heard before and slot it all into place. The action from the 'Winter' suite of Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' zipped round the front of my listening room like a hyperactive mosquito through the S10, with strings and brass blessed with real organic, lifelike form and

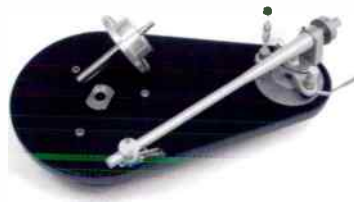
body. Even with a cartridge like the AT-OC9MLII, which can be a little exuberant at times, the top end was sweet and fluid, but *oh* so taut and precise – almost CD-like in some ways, but in the very best sense.

Down at the low end of things, the S10 also held firm in its sense of poise and control. Bass was magnificently deep and authoritative, which was an impression I received even through the unhappy Ortofon cartridge, but with the Audio Technica fitted, everything just simply fell into place. The S10 offered a metronomic sense of timing and pace to the synth bass line from the Kane Gang's 'Motor Town' and served up a suitably grungy rendition of Metallica's 'The Day That Never Comes'. However, with some simple acoustic bass from Charlie Haden, I

could hear every single string pluck, the slightest movement of finger upon fretboard and the fabulous decay of each note through the instrument's body, but without the S10 ever losing sight of the overall result of these, namely the tune being played. It may have the ability to dissect a bass line with surgical precision, but it certainly knows how to put it all back together again before it reaches your ears.

## CONCLUSION

It is easy to detect the professional archival DNA lurking within the Simon Yorke S10 when listening to it, as it is one of the most revealing record players I have ever encountered. However, this does not mean that it is all insight and no music, as it has the ability to take these two requirements of ultimate musical satisfaction and blend them together like virtually no other turntable I have heard before. €15,000 is no small amount to pay for such a device, but I strongly suspect that, if the Simon Yorke S10 and S7.1 cannot find something within the grooves of your records, then it most likely isn't there.



### REFERENCE SYSTEM

Garrard 301 turntable  
Alphason HR-100S arm (Cardas wired)  
Ortofon Kontrapunkt b and Audio Technica AT-OC9MLII cartridges  
Anatek MC1 phono stage  
Naim Supernait amplifier  
Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

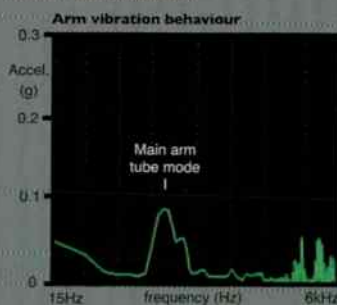
Clamping a cartridge to an arm tube direct, as in the new Simon Yorke Series 10 tested here, might look Heath Robinson against more structurally sophisticated solutions from Rega and SME, but measurement consistently shows it is devastatingly effective. The tapered Simon Yorke arm tube has a well damped main mode at 250Hz our analysis shows, but not the usual accompanying third order mode, which in this case would lie at 750Hz. Instead the Simon Yorke arm is vibrationally silent, both here and at high frequencies where headshells develop strong modal patterns. The lack of peaks at right in our trace clearly shows a very 'quiet' high frequency performance and this translates into a smooth sounding, deep midband and treble. Bass dynamics, instrument separation and stage width across the lower midband should be good from this arm.

The turntable was speed stable and accurate (-0.2% slow) as delivered (it is adjustable), wow and flutter measuring a low 0.159% unweighted, our analysis shows. The IEC weighted value was just 0.055%, so the S10

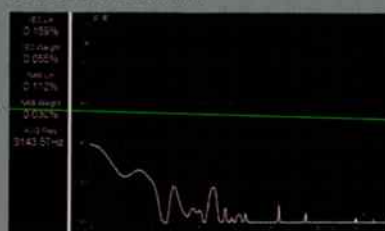
runs smoothly enough.

The new Series 10 turntable and arm are well developed our measurements show. It's up with the best. NK

### ARM VIBRATION



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# Millenium

**At over seven times the cost of the venerable RB251, is the flagship of the Rega tonearm range worth its premium price? Neville Roberts investigates the RB1000...**

**A**sk yourself which company has made the greatest difference to the art of vinyl replay? Garrard, Thorens, Dual? Linn, SME, Ortofon? For my money, it would have to be Rega. Of course, they've sold bucketloads of excellent budget turntables for decades, but their real contribution of course was the now ubiquitous RB300 tonearm. Launched in 1983, as a significant upgrade to the Planar 3 turntable, it grew legs and ran away. Indeed, it ran all over the hi-fi landscape! The world's first budget superarm, it is fair to say, even now nearly three decades later there are many wondering about whether to get one (or its RB301 equivalent), or have their existing one tweaked. Put simply, it isn't just a tonearm, it's a phenomenon.

Of course, Rega haven't stood still since the time The Police were at Number One with 'Every Breath You Take'; the company - after denying there was much that could be done to improve the RB300 for many years - duly built a number of

variations on the theme. The RB1000 is the ultimate; a development of the RB900, it benefits from more stringent quality control, a top quality finish and improved bearing specifications. The arm tube is polished aluminium with no external coating applied and is fitted with a new style rotary bias control. The arm wiring is a continuous run from cartridge tags to phono plugs and is a low capacitance and high performance audio cable made by Klotz. The phono connectors are Neutrik ProFi Gold featuring a "ground before signal" function, achieved by a special spring-loaded shell element which protrudes out of the shell around the centre pin.

It is manufactured using modern computerised CNC engineering centres and assembled and checked by hand. The bearings are of an extremely high quality and are hand-graded; in fact, they are of a type normally found in navigational gyroscopes. The precision stainless steel shaft onto which these bearings fit is ground to a tolerance of within 5 microns. The bearings are selected

and fitted onto shafts by hand and this results in the fit between the shaft, bearing and one piece arm tube all being interference fits with zero tolerance.

The base has a 3 point stainless steel mounting block and vertical bearing housing, which is CNC machined from solid stainless steel. This holds the second set of bearings which are hand fitted and into which the vertical shaft is fitted. These are also interference fits. Incidentally, this base is the same as on the RB700, but is ever so slightly larger than on the rest of the range. The arm pillar tube is a slightly larger diameter too.

As with all Rega arms, no provision is made for fine adjustment of the VTA, other than by the use of optional shims fitted underneath the 3 point fixing. Evidently, Roy Gandy is not a great believer in VTA adjustment, other than what is basically required to suit a particular make of cartridge. However, there are many - including myself - who believe that VTA fine-tuning is one of the many essential adjustments required for an optimal tonearm/cartridge

# RETRO

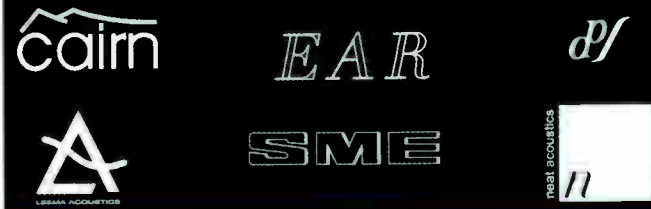
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E A R 864 valve pre amp x dem	£1495	KEF Reference 1s black finish	£95
Gammud D200 MKII as new boxed	£195	KEF Celest 3	£995
Korato renaissance mono blocs 30W class A	£995	Leema floorstanding speakers rosewood finish £2000 new	£895
Leema Pulse integrated amp	£995	Leema sub ex-dem	£495
Leak TL60 power amp mint condition	£995	Leema Zen speakers ex-dem	£795
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Mendian 201 pre amp	£145	Mission 775s boxed	£295
Mendian 100 series pre amp	£95	Mono Pulse 32A 8 months old ex dem.	£495
Mendian 100 Series power amps 2PSU (needs attention)	£95	Musical Stones Italian Solid Marble floorstanding speaker with Dynaudio drive units	£495
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Linn Ittok Arm

setup procedure. If the arm is too high (VTA too great), the sound will be harsh and thin with poor imaging. If too low, the sound will be dull with 'boomy' bass, lacking detail and again with poor imaging. The correct point is unmistakable where the instruments and vocals snap into focus and everything sounds clear. To cater for us tweakers, there are several solutions out there in the form of VTA adjusters for the older RB250, RB300 and RB600, such as the Michell Engineering VTA Adjuster. However, the only company I am aware of that makes adjusters for the entire current range of Rega 3 point fixing arms is ISOkinetik. These are of a particularly high quality and one was fitted to the arm being tested.

## SOUND QUALITY

For the audition process, I had to hand an original RB300, and an RB250 modified by Audio Origami (highly recommended by this magazine), plus a new sample of the RB1000, all installed on an ISOkinetik Modular One turntable and fitted with a Lyra Clavis DC moving coil cartridge. After carefully setting up the '1000, the arm/cartridge resonance was checked and found to be around 10Hz, which is ideal. Tracking ability was the same as I usually get with this cartridge at 80 microns, as one would expect.

The stock RB300 has a dry and tidy presentation. It is quite dynamic and obviously detailed, with a very accurate image placement and a decent sense of depth. Considering its price (the original 1983 model cost just £90!), it is superb, which is why it was recommended so strongly from the off. Indeed, there were some respects in which the RB300 was better than the (then) superarm to beat, the Linn Ittok. The Rega simply had a tidiness, a sense of unflusteredness, that was special - particularly for those who listen to classical music.

The AO modded RB250 shows you what was wrong with the original, however. The stock

Rega is tidy alright, but it's almost too constrained. It seeks to put everything into a box and keep it there. Tonally, it's obviously too dry for its own good; you can't tell the difference between the rich sound of a nineteen seventies Stax recording (i.e. Isaac Hayes's 'Hot Buttered Soul') and the clinical precision of an early eighties Sony PCM-F1 digital one (think Madonna's first album). The AO modded RB250 unlocks the flavour of a recording, and also its groove. There's real rhythmic alacrity here, whereas the stock arm sounds like it's being timed by a metronome with only one beat. Ditto dynamics; the AO modded RB250 lifts a veil, letting the emotion of the music run free whereas the stock Rega arm keeps it all under lock and key.

As such then, the Rega RB300/301 is a great entry-level arm, and the AO RB250 modded arm is a superb progressive, really pushing the basic design to another level. Why then should one want a Rega RB1000 at £998; does it really take the Rega platform up to SME levels, or is it just a mere sideshow, pushing a good arm a little further than it should go? Well, to find out, I slipped a copy of my old favourite Stravinsky's 'The Firebird Suite' (The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra - Telarc digital recording DG-10039) onto the turntable. The results were superb; it was as if the orchestra was singing to me. I was sure that a couple of extra musicians had somehow slipped into the orchestra while I was changing over the arm. There's a whole new level of ambient detail, and a sense of ease and naturalness that the cheaper variations on the Rega theme simply miss.

My three LP set of Laurent Garnier's 'Tales of a Kleptomaniac' (Pias Recordings PIASR 160 TLP) is a great piece of classic techno;

"there's an unmistakable openness to the sound, and it's more lifelike compared to more junior Rega arms..."

especially on the first LP, there is an amazing synth bass line, but with some acoustic saxophone, trumpet, trombone and guitar mixed in for good measure. Here the RB1000 served up an incredibly tight bass, and while my woofers were massaging my kneecaps, the top end was coming through with crystalline clarity. Again, this whole new dimension of finesse and insight showed the RB1000 to be a revelation. Interestingly, there

was no tendency for the top end to be swamped by the bass - it was all there - power and detail faithfully reproduced.

Moving back onto home territory with some baroque music, I once again had the impression that I was hearing more from my records that I had been used to.

Since the arm was the only thing that I had changed, this was the only possible variable that could have made the difference. The RB1000 has an unmistakable openness to the sound and the performance is more 'lifelike' when compared to the more junior arms of the range. Although the 1000 will set you back a lot more than an upgraded basic model, the result is something with just that bit more refinement in both looks and performance.

There's plenty to say about the RB1000's rhythmic ability too; it has an ease that you simply wouldn't recognise in the RB301; there's a far less mechanical quality to the way it strings together the tune. Granted, it's not as organic as some; this arm will never be confused with a good unipivot, but there's no sense of it having a 'technical sound' in the way the cheaper Rega arms have. The interplay between hi-hat cymbals and snare drums on The Smiths' 'Girl Afraid' was deeply satisfying, the Rega really getting into the groove where the cheaper RB300/301 would sound more dispassionate and analytical.

## CONCLUSION

Rega arms are not for everyone; committed users of Hadcock unipivots should pass over the chance of an audition. But if you like a really well balanced and fully rounded presentation - namely one that doesn't major on one facet of the music to the exclusion of all others - the Rega RB1000 could well be for you. It is a jack of all trades, and master of some. There's an enjoyably





## REGA: THE YEARS...

Rega Research has stamped itself indelibly on the British hi-fi landscape. As a young man, Roy Gandy, had the vision of designing a turntable that was better made and more reliable than the ones he had been selling as a part-time hi-fi retailer. So in 1973 he formed a partnership with a colleague, Tony Relph, and registered the company name 'Rega' (formed from the first two letters of their respective surnames). Although this partnership did not survive for long, the company nevertheless continued with Gandy at the helm and, in 1975, the Rega Planar 2 turntable was launched and quickly established itself in the market as one of the finest budget turntable around. By 1980, Rega was employing thirteen staff, exporting to twelve countries and had twenty UK dealerships.

In 1976, Gandy turned his attention to designing and manufacturing his own tonearm. To this end, he found a casting company that worked with him to develop an entirely new production method that enabled the accurate casting of the one-piece arm tube. All this culminated with the launch in 1983 of his Rega award-winning 'Britain' series of arms and the legendary RB300 and RB250 (prior to this, Rega had used Japanese and Danish manufactured arms on their turntables).

The lower-cost RB250 used the same arm tube as the RB300, but saved money by not including a tracking force adjuster and by utilising a lower-cost plastic end stub to hold the counterweight, rather than the stainless steel end stub of the RB300. The RB300 can be easily identified by the combination of black arm tube and silver counterweight together with the large tracking force adjuster on the side of vertical pivot. Although the RB250 requires the tracking force to be set using the counterbalance weight position, this does have the advantage of allowing the

arm tube's vertical bearings to be supported on both sides of the bearing housing, which is one of the reasons that many consider the RB250 a better design. Neither arm provided any means of adjustment of the vertical tracking angle (VTA), but more about that later...

The RB100 is Rega's entry level arm, fitted as standard to the Rega P1 turntable. It has a simple machined aluminium arm tube with the headshell bonded to it. It also features a three-point arm base fixing, in place of the threaded arm pillar of the RB250 and RB300. The RB301 evolved from the RB300 tonearm; as with the RB100, the armboard mounting features a three-point configuration rather than a 23mm arm pillar. The counterweight is stainless steel and VTA is adjustable by using shims inserted underneath the three-point fixing.

Next came the RB600, which was a higher specification version of the RB300, manufactured to higher tolerances and with a silver finished arm. This was also the first arm to utilise high quality tonearm cable and phono connectors, instead of the 'el cheapo' cable and connectors of the previous arms! Tonearm cable was Klotz GY 107 and the interconnects were terminated with Neutrik phono connectors. This arm was subsequently replaced by the RB700, which sported a newly developed coating for the arm tube and the bearing housing was redesigned and manufactured to higher tolerances. Additionally, there was a new rigid stainless steel three point mounting block to support the arm as well as a new, bias adjuster. Finally, the RB900 was similar to the RB600 but had a better finish to the arm, employed a rigid three point mounting system and was fitted with higher specification bearings. This arm was finally replaced by the RB1000, reviewed here.

an enjoyably powerful and tight bass, an open and expansive midband and a nice svelte treble. It tracks demanding cartridges like my Lyra well and generally gives a very polished feel to the user.

Although considerably more expensive than other arms in the range, the RB1000 is very much a 'fully upgraded' product, that's head and shoulders above the budget Regas and their tweaked variants. The only extras that should be considered are a means to set the VTA accurately and perhaps a nice underslung counterbalance weight. Other arms benefit from upgrades to the tonearm wiring, interconnect cable, phono plugs, foam filling, etc. and when you add up the cost of all these upgrades, it makes the RB1000 a very attractive proposition indeed.

The sound quality reproduced by this arm is fantastic, which only goes to prove that, as someone once said to me, there is always something more that can be

extracted from a good mechanical analogue recording medium, such as an LP. At around £1,000 (or less for OEM variants such as the identical ISOkinetik ISO1000), it competes very favourably with other arms and upgraded hybrids with a four-figure price tag. But I still think it needs a proper VTA adjuster as standard though – sorry Roy!

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

ISOkinetik Modular One turntable  
Lyra Clavis DC MC cartridge  
World Designs Phono III & Pre III preamplifier  
World Designs 300B PSE monoblock power amplifiers  
Rogers designed PRO9-TL loudspeakers

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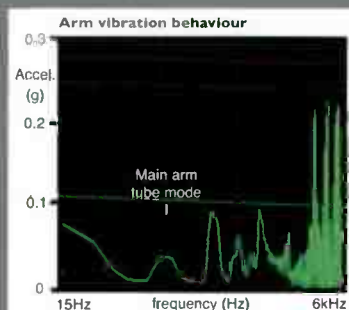
REGA RB251	£136
REGA RB301	£221
REGA RB700	£450
REGA RB1000	£998

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Rega RB1000 has much the same vibrational signature as other Regas we have measured, with a main arm tube bending mode at 300Hz, and peaks at 600Hz and 1200Hz. The latter is a little high, against the RB251 on the Inspire turntable for example, if not too bad as arms go in general. An RB301 we measured was less peaky however – something of a mystery. Perhaps the VTA adjustment collar is responsible. The main tube bending mode at 300Hz is very well suppressed and the two higher peaks do not embrace too much energy. Together with all else the RB1000 remains an impressive

performer, although it is not comparable to an SME V in vibrational terms. NK

## ARM VIBRATION



## VERDICT ●●●●●

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## FOR

- well-controlled bass
- detail and clarity
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## AGAINST

- no built-in VTA adjuster

# i Time

David Price lives with Inspire's new i2 budget turntable...

It's hard to review a product like this. When I was last in the market for a £399 turntable (including a fitted Sumiko Oyster MM cartridge), I had to sell my moped to buy it. These days, I'd consider myself a vinyl veteran, and not naturally concerned with - to put it in a rather matter of fact way - 'entry level' record players. But thinking about it, if you're in the market for a device to play LP records well but without a lavish budget, then (to borrow a line from a well known daffodil wielding Mancunian), "how to start, where to go, who do you need to know?"

Well, the Inspire i2 is of course the answer to that question - or at the very least an earnest attempt to answer it. It's essentially a tricked up Rega P2. As serious students of the black art of vinyl reproduction know only too well, this is no bad thing of course. Indeed the Rega is my nomination for the world's best ever budget turntable, and I don't say this lightly. Having bought a Dual CS505 (also described as such) in the early eighties and then sold it to upgrade to a Rega, which then totally beguiled me with its smooth, svelte sound, I

can tell you all the remarkable things it does at the price. Indeed, I could bore for England on how to set it up, tweak it and push it to the limit...

Inspire's Bob Isherwood could also do the same, I suspect. So perhaps it's ill advised to put me and him in the same room together; and should our paths ever cross in a hotel lift at a hi-fi show, it would be interesting to see who'd be the last man standing by the 8th floor. One thing's for sure; anyone else in there would be pleading for a speedy end to this mortal coil before we'd even got to the subject of belt tension!

So, the Inspire i2 starts with the best budget platform, and adds "all the mods", according to Bob. It's effectively the equivalent of buying a Rega P2 then getting a host of little tweaks done to it, to eke out all the performance it's capable of giving. "We're doing it all for you," says Isherwood, "so you're buying a ready made tuned up turntable instead of having to mess around upgrading from scratch. It appeals to Rega buyers who want something a bit extra".

The headline modification is the 12mm clear diamond polished acrylic

platter, which replaces the Rega's unlovely conventional one. As it has been often observed, acrylic works very well when deployed as a platter; it's very dead sounding which is why companies such as Michell use it for bases and isolation platforms. On top of this is an Inspire 3mm 'ACRI MAT', which is a high quality acrylic platter mat with recess for record label. Atop this sits a 'Puka' platter weight, which adds mass but it is not sufficient to tax the main bearing or slow the motor. All this sits on a rigid plinth, made of "very dense" MDF, which is then finished in grey acyclic. The new Inspire (nee) Rega 251+ tonearm gets a bespoke counterweight and end stub, and comes fitted with a Sumiko Oyster cartridge (although other cartridge options are







available). For the purposes of this test, we ended up with an Ortofon 2M Red.

For those readers who already own a Rega P2 or P3, the various mods are available separately, comprising the Acrylic platter (£40), the Acric mat (£20), the Arm stub and end weight (£60), the Puka platter weight (£40) and the Sumiko Oyster cartridge (£40). Inspire also sells the Ortofon stylus balance (for £15) and a set of two VTA 'risers' (£15).

### SOUND QUALITY

For those unschooled in the delights of the original Rega P2, it's about the lowest you can go before you leave the realms of hi-fi. I don't mean that in a bad way however, as it

does just enough across the board to not 'fatally' obstruct what's in the groove. Put a record on the P2 and it plays it with happy abandon, without wowing, rumbling or skipping. There's a simplicity and a directness to its sound, but none of the coarseness you'd get from anything much cheaper. It simply gets on with the job, without drawing attention to itself, so much so that you can put it through a relatively high end system and the Rega will sound nice, when almost all its price rivals would be nasty. That's why I rate it so highly, given its lowly position in life.

What then of the Inspire i2? Well, obviously the modifications package (for that is what it is, in essence) adds a good deal to the basic deck, making

the listener just a little less aware of its humble origins. It's a testament to the decent basic build of the P2 that so much can be achieved so simply, in fact. But it only goes to show how little there is that's actually wrong in the first place. You do need to get the deck level though; that's a basic prerequisite, as it affects both the arm/cartridge tracking and the perceived speed stability, and also the i2 (and Rega P2) really, really benefit from a good place to sit. A wall mounted turntable shelf is best, but in the absence of this a good turntable table; I used my favourite flavour of this in the shape of Quadraspire. I repeat - siting and levelling this deck is *critical*. Properly set up things just snap into focus. Oh,

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Ride's 'Twisterella' is a jaunty, energetic guitar pop song, and that's precisely how the Inspire i2 presented it. There was a nicely propulsive bass, with a touch of warmth and softness for good measure. The deck doesn't quite start and stop bass notes like a Technics SL1200 (or any other good direct drive), yet it doesn't slur things too badly either. Instead, the bass guitar was able to push things along in a gently enjoyable way. Further up the frequency spectrum, the deck showed a surprising amount of detail; this classic piece of 'shoegazing' pop is a tad muddy yet the i2 picked through the dense wash of electric guitars and pounding ride cymbals better than I'd have expected considering its price. Vocals decently smooth too, the whole song coming over as enjoyably as it should do.

K-Klass's 'Rhythm is a Mystery' on 12" showed the deck's willing nature once again. It proved nicely clean and open across the midband with a smooth, slightly softened treble and a bass that was warmer than many budget turntables, but had just enough grip to get the gist of the powerful sequenced house bassline. The female vocal, which can sound a little cold or dispassionate on a stock Technics SL1200 was again sweeter than expected, the i2 really showing how nicely polished a good budget belt drive can be. It was also surprisingly dynamic; not the most pronounced dynamic contrasts I've ever heard admittedly, but considering the lowly price the deck was good at carrying the song's subtle accenting that give it that hypnotic quality.

Spinning a bit of Miles Davis again reminded me this was a budget Rega I was listening to, albeit a well fettled one. There was a wide, spacious feel to the proceedings, just enough insight into what was going on at the back of the soundstage and a fair sprinkling of detailing with 'So What'. I'd have liked a slightly more secure,

grippy feel to the double bass, but I did enjoy the rasp of the brass and the deck's generally engaging feel. Piano showed just the *tinest* amount of pitch instability, but that's to ears spoilt by the almost terrestrial stability of a high end direct drive. Certainly it wasn't easily audible unless you listened for it.

The baby Inspire deck also made a fine fist of classical music. It's impressively clean and open across the midband and this, coupled with that trademark Rega smoothness, made for a pleasant sounding recorded acoustic in the first movement of 'Spring' in Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' (The English Concert, Simon Standage). Violins had a crisp, believable tone, while cellos displayed decent body and weight. There was a good sense of atmosphere, although

"it hides its limitations well; the overall impression is of a civilised yet enjoyable deck..."

of course the deck was especially extended in the treble - only pricier tonearms with moving coils do this well. Stereo imaging was good; it always is on Regas; instruments being well located and pushing out of from beyond the plane of the loudspeakers when called up so to do. Ultimately of course, in terms of left to right stage width and front to back stage depth the Inspire was limited, but it hid its limitations well, and the overall impression was of a civilised yet enjoyable deck.

## CONCLUSION

Therein lies the strength of the Inspire i2; it tidies up a few rough edges that the stock Rega P2 possesses, taking the level of performance up a notch and making it a far more believable tool. This isn't bad,

considering the base P2 is already a strong product at the price, and has far fewer weak points than it should.

The result is a 'plug and play' (well, nearly) budget turntable that works very nicely with minimum fettling and turns in just enough of the sound to be called 'real hi-fi'.

The only problem for the Inspire i2 is that, at its price, it's in direct competition with Rega's own P3-24 (£390), which is Rega's own view of how the P2 should be upgraded, rather than Inspire's. Effectively, it's swings and roundabouts; the P3-24 gets a better motor but the Inspire's

platter is superior, I'd say. The P3's plinth is nicer but the Inspire's record weight brings solidity. I'm sure that Inspire would argue that the intended markets for each deck are subtly different; and that you're sort of comparing apples with eggs. In truth the Inspire i2 is more of 'plug in and then leave it at that' product, whereas the stock P3-24 has more scope for modding, but at extra expense. A fine little deck then, well worth considering if it's the sort of thing that you're after.



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- Rega P3-24 is cheaper

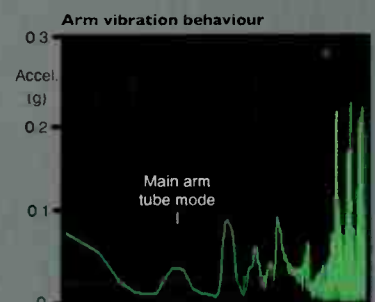
## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Rega RB251 arm has its main bending mode at 200Hz, quite low suggesting low stiffness. It is however, very well damped, likely due to the tapered tube which appears to distribute resonant energy well, acceleration reaching 0.1g. The usual third order bending mode can be seen as a peak at 600Hz, again low in amplitude at 0.1g and above this are a series of lesser modes. Above 4kHz the Rega headshell starts to get lively and this results in a forest of small spikes at right in the trace. Overall, it is a very good result for a budget arm, showing why the Rega arms are so well regarded.

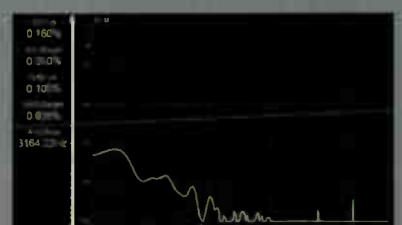
The Inspire turntable ran 0.4% fast, not a large error. Wow measured a very low 0.16% unweighted and just 0.06% IEC weighted, both very good results showing basic speed stability is excellent.

The Inspire i2 and Rega RB251 are a strong combination; both work well measurement shows. NK

### ARM VIBRATION



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Meridian 506 CD player and remote.	Boved.				£549
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SME 3009 Series II arm.	Early split weight version				£349
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Ker Coda 2.	Black finish.	Boved & mint				£199
Celestion 111e one speakers.	in white.	Boved.	£99			£49

#### OTHER ITEMS

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NEW

**Cyrus** CD Xi SE | 8XPd | 6XP  
Cyrus award-winning CD Xi SE and DAC X have been upgraded with a + suffix. The transport now features an additional transformer, said to make it equivalent to adding a PSX R power supply, while the DAC has a dedicated power supply for the re-clocking system.

The XP amplifiers are based on the circuitry of the top of the range DAC XP. The entry-level 6XP includes 6 line level inputs along with a zone 2 feature while the 8XP d combines the XP series pre-amplifier with a newly revised power amp, and contains an onboard DAC for digital sources.

The Servo Evolution CD players, along with the 6XP and 8XP d amplifiers, continue to receive awards including the coveted What Hi-Fi? Product of the Year for the CD Xi SE and 6XP.



**Marantz**  
CD6003 CD PLAYER  
PM6003 AMPLIFIER

Replacing the highly-regarded 6002 series, the new PM6003 amplifier and CD6003 CD player, come housed in Marantz's stylish 'M1' casing. The CD player features a front mounted USB socket allowing improved performance from devices such as an iPod or MP3 player while the amplifier has five line-level inputs along with a MM phono stage and two sets of speaker terminals for ease of bi-wiring.



**Leema**

Antilia II CD PLAYER  
Tucana II AMPLIFIER

With stunning sound quality and captivating good looks the new Antilia II CD player features unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology to provide breathtaking realism.

The dual mono designed Tucana II uses three heavy duty toroidal power transformers, has a refined bipolar output stage and is capable of swinging over forty five amps of current, ensuring a vice like grip and precise control of the speakers.



**Michell Gyro SE**

Based entirely on the GyroDec, but without the costly acrylic plinth and dustcover, the Gyro SE brings the same qualities in a more affordable and compact package. A Gyro SE can always be converted into a GyroDec by purchasing a plinth and dustcover.

**Pro-Ject Genie MKIII**

This MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OMB3 Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



**Arcam FMJ**

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and a level of reproduction far beyond that of budget separates systems, Arcam's FMJ range includes two CD players, three integrated amplifiers, mono bloc and stereo power amplifiers plus a DAB/FM/AM tuner. A range of home cinema components is also available.

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**Roksan Kandy K2**

The K2 amplifier sounds more accurate, more delicate and even more powerful than its award-winning predecessor, the Kandy LIII. The matching CD player is an impressive performer and is the ideal partner.

The K2 speakers feature a custom designed woofer and ribbon tweeter. These are housed in solidly built piano lacquered cabinets for outstanding performance.



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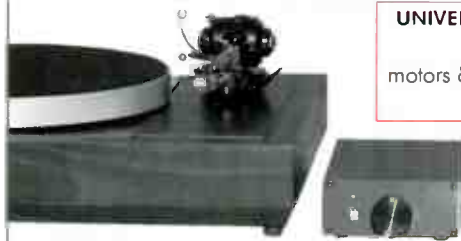


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Transparent Balanced Reference 2x30ft x-demo	6345	3499
Transparent Music Link Super XL 1m RCA S/H	599	299
Transparent Reference SC 2x10ft x-demo	6192	3399

### Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies

Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	395	199
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We have a large record collection mainly Jazz and Classical from £3.00 up to £20 for some boxed sets. Please call for more details.

Midland Audio X-change are looking for All high end audio separates best prices paid for good examples.

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Midland Audio X-change are looking for Audio Research, Krell, Mark Levinson, Naim Audio, SME, Wadia.

# FREE READER CLASSIFIEDS

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** Only one advert per reader. No Trade adverts. This section is strictly for readers selling secondhand hi-fi equipment only. Maximum length per advert is 30 words, Adverts over 30 words will not be accepted. Telephone numbers and E-mail addresses are treated as one word. Model numbers are treated as one word i.e. Quad 303 = two words. Email your advert to; [classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk](mailto:classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk) or fill in the form on page 129 and post it to Hi-Fi World Free Readers Ads, Suite G4, Argo House, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF. Sorry, we cannot accept adverts over the telephone. The Publisher reserves the right to judge submissions.

**WANTED: MISSION 767** loudspeakers. Condition relatively unimportant (within reason!) but must be in good working order and preferably complete with original LFAU amplifier. Email: [audiolaurel@yahoo.com](mailto:audiolaurel@yahoo.com) Telephone: 07906 336176

**EASTERN ELECTRIC** Minimax power amplifier, mint condition, boxed, £400 plus postage. Also Quad QC24 preamp, new, unopened box. £600. Tel: 07710 737 232 (East Lothian, Edinburgh area)

**EXCHANGE SUGDEN CD21**, Rogers LS7's and Atamcama's, Cyrus II and PSX for Castle Howard S3's. Monetary exchange for value differences acceptable. Sugden is 3 years old. Tel: 01246 277 394 (Chesterfield)

**EXCELLENT ENSEMBLE** 1m interconnects, sprung RCA's, boxed, £450 secondhand, offers. Exchange Acoustic Zen RCA Silver Reference Twos. Wanted Classe CDP10 CD player, vgc, gwo, w.h.y. Exchange KT88 valve amplifier vgc boxed. Tel: 07951 553 091

**LOVELY MUSICAL** Fidelity preamp, MM/MC, all inputs, XLR and RCA outputs, £150 ono. M.F. X-LPS phonostage, MM/MC, mint £100. Sony belt turntable, vgc, £30. Technics D.D.T.T £70. Vinyl collection, 70 albums, offers. Unico sensitive valve R.D.S. tuner, remote, mint, boxed, £450 (£1275) Super sound. Wanted: Acoustic Zen Silver Ref II interconnects. (not 0.5m) W.H.Y. Tel: Stanley 07951 553 091

**AUDIOLAB 8000 P/C** UK built, well cared for. £375. Tel: 01952 728 773 (Shropshire) Email: [iggioatz@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:iggioatz@tiscali.co.uk) for more information

**PRO-JECT RPM4** turntable, excellent condition, included Pro-Ject Speedbox MkII, Pro-Ject Phonobox SE, Linn Adikt cartridge, Ringmat. Requires interconnect. £300. Tel: Steve 07790 717 820

**CROFT VITALE** pre-amp, heavily modded. £220 ono. Pair Leak Stereo 20's, bridged in Triode mode, mods by Classique Sounds. Townsend Isolda speaker cable, 2.5 mtrs. £200 ovno. All must sell. Tel: 01530 272 801

**REGA AMPLIFIER** Bird 3 £190. Advance Acoustics UM20 speakers, £99. All as new. Boxed. Tel: Mick 01782 785 734

**MERIDIAN 507** CD player for sale. Excellent condition with user guide. Superb sound. Bought for £1100, selling for £500 ono. Tel: 0151 281 3051 or 07845 395 396

**PINK TRIANGLE** turntable, Nakamichi Dragon auto-reverse cassette deck, Pioneer 90 tuner, amplifier, KEF speakers with storage unit. All vgc. Selling complete, will not split. £1250. Tel: 01580 831 758 (East Sussex/Kent border)

**WANTED: NAKAMICHI CR-7E.** Also Marantz DR17 CD recorder or similar. Tel: 01395 576 644

**PAIR OF Linn kan** speakers with stands excellent condition £125 Tel 01253358955 [tecass@hotmail.com](mailto:tecass@hotmail.com)

**SONY ST88** tuner, needs attention. Leak Stereo 30 Plus. Intermittent channel fault. LP's, singles machine cleaned. Classical, Pop, Easy Listening etc. Tel: Paul 01570 471 422

**HI-FI SHELVING**, 4 clear glass shelves with 50mm diam. chrome support. Pillars 600mm (W) x 470mm (H) x 450mm (D). £40. Tel: 0151 677 3521 (Wirral)

**ATACAMA STD** Nexus speaker stands, matt black, footprint 250mm x 300mm, top plate 145mm x 180mm, height 500mm. £45 ono. Tel: 01663 763 521 (Disley, Stockport)

**WANTED: LOWTHER** speakers and/or amplifier. Also Leak Stereo 20. Tel: 07958 939 424

**DUE TO** a misunderstanding: For Sale: REL Strata Two subwoofer £275. Ring Graham after 6pm on 01482 641 261

**WANTED: DEAN** Alto Pro loudspeakers. Will pay good money for units in good physical working condition. Walnut, black ash finish preferred. Will consider others. Will collect. Contact Shaun 01226 244 341 (evenings)

**TANNOY 3LZ** Monitor Golds owned from new, offers over £600. Sansui 1001 SP, 3 way speakers, tone controls, £150. Demonstration. Collection only. Tel: Derrreck 01455 220 214 (Coventry)

**NAIM CDX**, VGC, light use. Includes remote, manuals and packaging £750. 01276 503994 Surrey [andyuk777@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:andyuk777@yahoo.co.uk).

**AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE3** and PS3 DAC and dedicated power supply. HDCD enabled, coaxial optical inputs, superb audiophile sound. Boxed. One owner. Manual. 1996 vintage. Cost £975. First £150 secures. Tel: 01299 832 154

**THE LEGENDARY Meridian 200** CD transport. Philips CDM4 motor. Sorbothane suspension. Coaxial optical outputs. Bullet proof build. Full working order. Remote, boxed, manuals. First £150 secures. Call Robert 01299 832 154

**NAIM NAC102** Serial 139XXX, remote, manual, boxed, £395 ono. Focal JM Lab Electra 906 with genuine (silver coloured) stands, vgc, £495 ono. Micromega Stage 2 CD player with reote, £125. Tel: 07981 030 946 (Junction 5/M6, West Midlands)

**BEHRINGER REFERENCE** amplifier A500, 230 WRMS dual mono, grey/black, only £138, Arcam 7R amp, black, £179. Sony 630ESD heavyweight, black, £199. Teac VRDS10 CD, black, excellent, POA. Meridian 596 MSR + M30 active speakers, black, £1600. Yamaha CDX750E, Made in France, black, £99. Grado SR80's, £60. Kef C3's cherry floorstanders, £100 (£300). Poss. exchange. Tel: 01206 510 392 or 07765 264 381

**AUDIOLAB 8000Q /** Audiolab PX Pre & Power Amps. British made in very good condition with original boxes. Upgrade results in sale for £450 ono. Phone Mike on 01778424327 (South Lincs)

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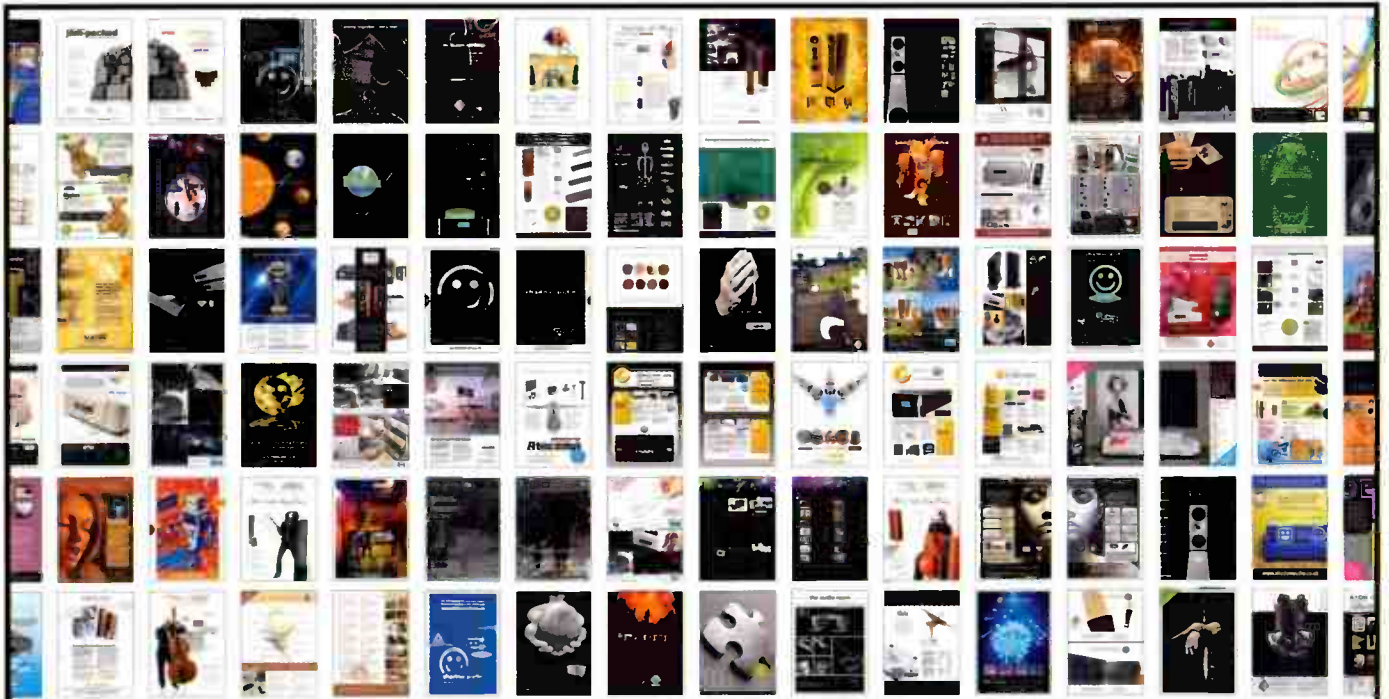


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CHORD ELECTRONICS DAC 64, brilliant silver, cost £2750 sell £1200. Boxed. Used once only. Para Sound C2 controller, mint condition, cost £3500 sell £1200. Downsizing forces sale. Tel: 020 8874 6310 or 07790 909 728

HYDRA 4 into 1 mains lead using 'Naim' cable (sweeter treble) (£160) £80. LAT International ICT 100 1/2 metre silver interconnect with 'Naim' DIN (£170) £80. Celestion Centre 2 A/V speaker (£150) £65. QED X-Tube 400 £50. Tel: 07872 955698 (Junction 7/M6)

BLACK RHODIUM Opera DCT interconnects (£440) £250. Technics SL1210 MkII professional conversion, Origin Live OLI tonearm, Rondo Bronze, MC, bargain, £595. Tel: 07784 701 629 (Stockport)

MUSICAL FIDELITY KW phono stage last edition purchased new, used once, £1200 no offers. Pioneer A400 amplifier £120. Bang & Olufsen System 5500, £499. Pioneer 112D turntable, £40. Tel: 01708 457 691

FOR SALE. 213 Hi-Fi magazines. Hi-Fi Review September 1987 to January 1991. Hi-Fi World March 1991 to January 2001, including DIY supplements, plus miscellaneous others. £100 Tel 0161 437 9489

MERIDIAN 208 CD player. VGC £300. Audiolab 8000A intergrated amp good working order. £200 Lowther Accolade 2 speakers, new drive units silver speech coils. £500. Jamo 507 floorstanding loudspeakers, rosewood in beautiful condition. £250 Tele. Ray 07956 688906 e mail raymondsadler1@yahoo.com

THE SOURCE (MRM) Turntable. Bronze platter. Belt drive. Suspended subchassis. Pabst DC motor. Avondale regulated power supply. Linn Rega armboards. Original packaging etc. £395 Tel: 02920403844 Cardiff

RUSS ANDREWS Silencer 3 for £100, Superpurifier with hubble port attachment £220, other items, no time wasters call Mike 01902 884694.

JBL LX33 floor-standing two-way hi-fi loudspeakers. Featuring Rosewood finish and 1" titanium dome tweeters. Unused. In original boxes. Bargain £200. tel: 01922 644775

ONE PAIR of Mission 733 Speakers £200 o.n.o. Marantz PM-54-SE amp £50 o.n.o. and a Marantz CD-63 Compact disc player £30 All in Excellent condition owned by myself from new, phone Phil on 07824878321 any time

KRELL FPB700CX upgraded from 600cx by absolute sounds. Perfect condition and boxed. £4500 Bryston SST9B 5 channel amplifier and SP2 processor. Perfect condition and boxed. £4000 for the pair Sonus Faber Cremona M floor standing speakers. Mint Condition withboxes. £4000 Tel: 0035318373490 email: kennyrob70@hotmail.com

LINN LP12 ittok LV11 Lingo power supply serviced recently new springs Audio Origami bearing oil isolation baseboard looks and sounds great can demonstrate £895.00 Surrey home 01306 884107 work 01737 779938

PS AUDIO POWER PLANT PREMIER: Award winning AC mains regenerator that converts poor incoming AC to pure 230v AC. New, boxed, upgraded model. this is not a passive filter, but a mains waveform re-builder. Cost £2000, Sell £1250 ono.

NAD C520 CD Player. Immaculate condition. £100. 01702-520015.

SUGDEN A21a1 pure class A series 2 line amplifier and series 2 CD21 plus audio controls. Hand built titanium finished matched pair. Boxed in excellent new as condition. £1900.00 ono tel: 01527 876514 e-mail: b2bc@btinternet.com

FOR SALE LINN AXIS excellent condition no tonearm/cartridge no offers pick up can be posted manchester areamobile 07967265487

Project record deck + project phono amp/ Music Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/ Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £2350 ono Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 87 637 6623

WANTED Arcam AVR200 or similar. Please mail graflyn@gmail.com

DAC, CEC DAIN, state of the art 15kg High End DAC, (£2800). Separate word, bit, master clock & audio data input (like Esoteric). Superlink, USB, AES, SPDIF & Toslink inputs. Balanced & unbalanced out. www.cec-international.de. 7 months old boxed as new, £1749, BRISTOL, 077776 28426

WANTED:- RATA cartridges with or without stylus Peter Cheshire, Tel 01606 784767

FOR SALE. Sony STR-DB790 AV amp in silver, remote, box and instructions. £150 inc postage Tel. 07908 056978 e-mail the.mains.man@sky.com

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.) Bargain opportunity Stuart Bedfordshire T: 07870 912 963 e: stuardarshan67@googlemail.com

MERIDIAN 566 24bit dac with xlr outputs £350.00 Meridian 504 tuner £250.00 please ring for details, dave on 0191-4171669 after 6pm.

KOETSU BLUE Lace. Never mounted, brand new platinum coiled very limited, finest ever Koetsu. Boxed. Pictures on request. Sell for £5995.00 ovbo (rrp £11,000.00) Contact Neil on 01925 656990 or nermal1@aol.com

SILTECH FTM4 Gold SG3. 1.00m Perfect condition, boxed, very little use. Surplus to requirements. Demonstration/ Pictures on request. Sell for £995.00 ovbo (rrp £3200.00) Contact Neil on 01925 656990 or nermal1@aol.com

QUAD ESL 2905. Absolutely perfect, 2 hours use only from new (4 weeks ago). Black/Silver. All accessories. Demonstration/Pictures on request. Sell for £5500.00 (rrp £7000.00) Contact Neil on 01925 656990 or nermal1@aol.com

NAIM 555PS rare opportunity to acquire this amazing upgrade on the used market; comes with CDX2 and burny cable all boxed and immaculate £5500 no offers might split HASTINGS 07850351714.

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp/ Music Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £2350 ono Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 87 637 6623

SUGDEN CD21se CD Player. Boxed and unused since purchase. £1600 New. Sell for £999 or best offer. 07515512230 or email pghockett@yahoo.co.uk Can Demonstrate, will travel within reason. Bristol

SUGDEN MASTERCLASS INTEGRATED. 4 months old. Boxed. A legendary Pure Class A amp, but owner defecting to valve monoblocks. New £3675. Sell £2000. 07899721899. Email: yatestherapy@googlemail.com. London.

CYRUS 6VS2 amplifier / Cyrus CD6S cd player. Both one year old in quartz silver, boxed in perfect condition £700 (£1350) Lee West Midlands 01384 412234 leet2009@hotmail.co.uk

WANTED Gates CB 500 16 inch turntable. must be in working order. Call Steve - 07910 434876 or email stephen.murray5@blueyonder.co.uk

MINT CONDITION Arcam Solo Music, Monitor Audio RS6 speakers (walnut), and QED Silver Anniversary XT bi-wire with Airloc plugs. All boxed with manuals. £1,350. Can split. Call Alan 07747473608

MARANTZ MA500 Mono blocks x 4 380 wpc. Superb sound, mint condition. Boxed with manuals £650 Tel: 02380 224003 Kingsound Queens Electro Static Speakers, 6 months old, as new condition. Fantastic open sound (£2000) £950 Tel: 02380 224003

AVI S2000MC Reference CD Player. Late version. Virtually unmarked. Low use. Natural 'vinyl' sound. With two non-AVI remote controls. £300 tracked/insured. PayPal 4%. Enquiries/ more information/photos klugheit.123@gmail.com.

HARBETH HL Monitor Mk 3, vgc with stands £75. Work perfectly and sound great. Selling due to upgrade. Tel: 01780 720530.



## 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.

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NAIM DVD5 cd/dvd player 2005 £795ono.1l2x pre-amp £249 150x power amp 2008 £499 or £699 the pair. CHORD Indigo interconnects 1m.RCA unused £495pr. Signature interconnects 1m.RCA £295 pr.All mint/boxed & prices shipment inclusive.Tel.01984 640588.

WANTED:TOP quality Hi Fi seperates and complete systems, Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/ pay cash Please call me on 0781 5892458

PIONEER CT-S670D 3-heads Stereo Cassette Deck £100, Teac CR-H250 CD Receiver with B&W DM-303 Speakers £150. Boxed as new condition. 01273 736070 eves/weekends

GARRARD 301 turntable in classique sounds plinth. Complete with SME 3012 arm. Speed knob snapped but otherwise fine. £1500.00 ono. Tel 07521733655.

NAIM NAIT 5i mk2 amp .1 year old.s er no 268xxx. smoke, child & pet free mint condition and very light use.£495.can deliver in wessex area.Tel Steve 01722-742113 (Wilton)

GARRARD 401 record turntable £300, SME3009 tone arm £150, Quad 33 / 303 amplifier / preamplifier £140. Michael. Jewson@aspiredefence.co.uk

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp/ Music Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £2350 ono Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 87 637 6623

TAG MCLAREN T20 Analogue Tuner for sale (in perfect working condition).All serious offers considered. paul.j.kingsleysmith@gmail.com

KEF XQ1 in silver. Matching stands. Excellent condition, as new. Genuine reason for sale. £400ono. Telephone 07766 078281 (London).

ELECTRONICS HOBBYIST requires a faulty or non working Quad 44 preamp for project. Also Shure V15-3 or 4 cartridges, Denon DL103 cartridge. Contact Mike with reasonable offers 01758 613790.

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp/ Music Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £2350 ono Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 87 637 6623

BOSE ACOUSTIMAS series 5 speaker set (subwoofer and two satellite speakers), black, very good condition with stands. £300 ono. Ring 0115 8549677.

KENWOOD L-09M 2 pcs monoblock 300 W 8 Ohm works perfect email to Peter at epv@netatonce. net price 1000£ buyer pays shipping. Amps are in Sweden. Paypal possible.

CAMBRIDGE AZUR 640P phono stage, black, brand new in box, mm and mc, £60. Marantz CD65II Special Edition CD player, renowned 1989 Ken Ishiwata uprated machine, mint, remote, £75, 020-8366-2647>

ARCAM CD82T cd player, silver, excellent boxed with manuals £425. Tel David 01493 665761

SUGDEN STAGE One MM & MC Phono Amp in brand new condition, has had very light use. Requires an A2ISE to power. Superb sound. £130 07850735292

HARBETH HL Monitor Mk 3, vgc with stands £75. Work perfectly and sound great. Selling due to upgrade. Tel: 01780 720530.

LINN SONDEK for sale. Ekos arm, Cirkus/Nirvana, Valhalla power supply. Brand new motor and drive belt. V.good condition, lovely sound. £ 900 Call 01492 515863 N.Wales

LEEMA TUCANA2. Black, two months old and A1. New £3450. Instructions, remote, box and unsigned warranty card. Genuine sale. £2500 ono Joe 07976 261576.e-mail: raeljon@aol.com.

BOWERS AND WILKINS DM 602.5 S3 floorstanding loudspeakers, black ash, immaculate condition, boxed, owned from new with manual, £140, buyer collects. 01229 584509 (Cumbria/Lancs)

TANNOY MONITOR GOLD 3LZ speakers, crossover network and switch panel plus mounting screws. Mancheser area. Photos available. Offers to grovesdj@live.co.uk

CHORD INDIGO interconnect 1m RCA. One pair £299, two pair £549. Call Ian 07789712775

WANTED: MISSION 767 loudspeakers. Condition relatively unimportant (within reason!) but must be in good working order and preferably complete with original LFAU amplifier. Email: audiolaurel@yahoo.com Telephone: 07906 336176

WANTED Arcam AVR200 or similar. Please mail graflyn@ymail.com

MERIDIAN 566 24bit dac with xlr outputs £350.00 Meridian 504 tuner £250.00 please ring for details, dave on 0191-4171669 after 6pm.

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-ripping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges. Tel: 020 8688 6565 Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net www.thecartridgeman.com

**AUDIO LABORATORIES (LEEDS)** (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. (Also Audioliab, Mission & Wharfedale). 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 lts. Email: one.thing@ntworld.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-coneing of hi-fi loudspeakers, high quality loudspeaker systems, P.A., power loudspeakers. Tel/Fax: 01708 447 344

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# NEXT MONTH

As the chilly winter lingers on, what better excuse do you need for staying indoors with the latest copy of your favourite audiophile monthly?

April's Hi-Fi World is full of the joys of spring with the usual host of great products for your perusal. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you next month...



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APRIL 2010 - 5TH FEBRUARY 2010

MAY 2010 - 4TH MARCH 2010



# MARTIN SIMPSON

## PRODIGAL SON

### 2007

"Simpson is of a certain age and is, himself, a card-carrying lover of vinyl..."

**T**his album is a contemporary classic, winning many plaudits, not least the Best Album at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards in 2008. One of the highlights of this particular folk recording is Simpson's guitar playing. He's recognised as one of the best exponents of the instrument. In fact, this Scunthorpe-born lad moved to the USA in the eighties and further expanded his repertoire, adding to his guitar skills by absorbing forms present in that country.

Simpson has released an array of albums, commencing in 1976 with 'Golden Vanity' (Trailer Records) and taking in works alongside noted artist June Tabor, and his wife Jessica Radcliffe Simpson. On these and this featured release, Simpson works best when he can draw both upon the past, with traditional folk songs, and his own new works whilst mixing cultures from the UK and America. 'Prodigal Son' also showcased his instrumental virtuosity as his acoustic guitar gives way to electric guitar, lap-slide and banjo. Simpson's own vocal delivery should not be ignored, either. He has a gentle style, low key, presentation that slides easily into the songs he sings without any apparent effort.

His cohorts enhance the whole experience: Kate Rusby, Jackson Browne and Kellie White back Simpson on vocals while Barry Phillips (cello), Andy Cutting (melodeon) and Alistair Anderson (concertina and pipes) provide worthy instrumental accompaniment.

Originally released as a CD on Topic Records, the new vinyl version has just been issued by Three Black Feathers, a new vinyl-only record label dedicated to releasing classic British folk records. MD of the

company, Chris Heard, has always had the Simpson album high on his list when he was compiling his initial release list. "I felt that, because of the warmth and inherent acoustics, the album would really lend itself to vinyl. Include the packaging and the aesthetics of the release and you have an LP that provided me with a clear vinyl vision, probably more than any other title. Simpson is of a certain age and is, himself, a card-carrying lover of vinyl. It's the album that he wanted to be released on vinyl."

Relating to that, Heard stated that he wanted to plug into an emotional musical resonance that the vinyl version provides but which, he believes, is missing on CD. The vinyl version has been mastered by Steve Rooke, who also worked on the recent Beatles CD remasters. After chatting with Chris Heard, Rooke recommended that all of Heard's initial vinyl releases should be released on 200gm vinyl and mastered using the contentious DMM process. Direct Metal Mastering was developed jointly by Telefunken-Decca and Georg Neumann GmbH and asks that, instead of utilising a lacquer-coated aluminium disc, you cut straight to 'metal', normally copper, instead. Apparently, Abbey Road owns the only two working DMM lathes in the UK.

The great thing about DMM is the enhanced bass, the theoretical extended frequency range, inky black silences and no groove distortion which means the removal of any 'pre-echo' which many standard

vinyl albums suffer from. However, if the greatest of care is not taken, a vinyl DMM release can sound like the worst CD master: metallic in personality, lacking in any real timbral breadth and depth while offering a screechy, bright tone that's quite offensive.

Hence, I was eager to road-test the new vinyl issue and also to compare it to the original CD release. To quickly summarise both formats, listening to the well mastered CD version is like watching a firework display. It's full of individual highlights that smack you in the face, an emotional vocal here, an acoustic guitar bass thump there, brilliant string plucks and more. The vinyl version, however, is like gazing upon a beautiful landscape portrait. The individual highlights are there if you wish to look for them but the complete picture can be viewed as a whole without any effort. Or, put another way, the vinyl version is a far more relaxed production. Both offer tremendous dynamics with a broad soundstage but the CD version can spotlight effects while masking others. The vinyl allows you to hear all of the instruments all of the time. Hence, the CD makes a great demo disc but, if you're looking for a complete listening experience then you really have to buy the vinyl version.

Featuring a new interview with Simpson, organised especially for this new vinyl edition, Three Black Feathers' release of 'Prodigal Son' is highly recommended and should be actively pursued by folkie vinyl fans.

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