

HI-FI WORLD

DECEMBER 2010

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PALMER 3 turntable



DECEMBER 2010



- BENZ MICRO WOOD SL MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE ▲
- STANDMOUNTING SPEAKER SUPERTEST ▲
- REVOLVER SCREEN 3 LOUDSPEAKERS ▲
- OLDE WORLDE: DYNACO STEREO 70 ▲

	<p>ICON AUDIO MB845 MKII Signature power amplifier</p>	<p>NAIM UNITIQUTE Network music system</p>	<p>WEISS DAC202 Firewire digital converter</p>
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10 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)

"...a significant breakthrough in high performance audio."

The Absolute Sound, U.S.A.

"...performance that lifts them above the competition."

Hi-Fi News, U.K.

"...hits the sweet spot head on"

Stereophile, U.S.A.

"Black Velvet...a big 5 stars"

Sound & Vision, Greece

"...OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD GOOD."

Tone audio, U.S.A

"FIRST CLASS.."

Audio Review, Italy

"...from the first few notes, (you're) hooked."

Hi-Fi+, U.K.

"...what I heard blew me away."

The Audiophile Voice, U.S.A.

"A little champ of price/quality ratio: available at an affordable price, especially for a tube amplifier of more-than-usual power.."

Audio Review, Italy

"PrimaLuna ProLogue One is now my 'affordable reference amplifier'. With apologies to various British and Italian geniuses, this amplifier has to my ears no equals at its retail price."

Hi-Fi News, U.K.

"A refreshing change from the transistor competition with a captivating presentation. Excellent finish and build quality makes for a package strong on value."

Hi-Fi World, U.K.



Prologue1 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue2 40 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88



Prologue3 Dual Mono Valve Preamplifier



Prologue4 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue5 35 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue6 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue7 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with KT88



Prologue8 Valve CD Player



Dialogue1 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Dialogue2 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88

PrimaLuna

Music is a universal pleasure that should not be denied to anybody. So, too, the beauty of music reproduced by valves. To make available to a wider audience the seductive, silky sound of the vacuum tube, PrimaLuna has developed a range of all-valve amplifiers with the construction, power and sonic performance of high-end electronics, but with one unique, inimitable feature: prices that can only be described as 'entry level'!

Since the arrival last year of PrimaLuna's first model, the ProLogue One, the audio community has been unable to contain its joy nor reign in its praise, because PrimaLuna has revolutionized the whole concept of 'affordable audio.' Commencing with a pair of integrated amplifiers with prices more typical of mundane, solid-state products, PrimaLuna has shown other manufacturers that compromises in fit and finish, styling and facilities are unnecessary.

And PrimaLuna has shown the music lover that 'high end' performance and pride of ownership can be made available to aficionados on a budget. But don't take our word for it. Audition your preferred ProLogue or the newly-launched Dialogue models at the PISTOL Music dealer of your choice. And prepare your wallet for a pleasant surprise!



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verdicts

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



I was recently lucky enough to get 'Gig', a rare chance to see studio 5 (Geoff Downs) perform his 1979

Famous for the video that launched 'Star', the album is thirty five minutes. Trevor's idea of a sci-fi future. A thirteen year old schoolboy's inspired visions of a brave new technology.

So, if you'd asked me in 1979 what a 2010 hi-fi magazine would have looked like inside, I'd have answered you with a romantic vision of stacks of equipment looking like computer banks, sporting flashing LEDs and display screens, soaked in laser light...

Who'd have thought then, that in the last month of the first decade of the twenty first century, this hi-fi magazine would be celebrating a valve amplifier using tubes first released by RCA in 1931, and a turntable spinning the same discs that originally launched in 1948?

So the future didn't quite turn out as expected! With a few notable exceptions, the only hi-fi that sounds dramatically better now than it did then is that which follows very traditional technology, thought to be 'old hat' even when The Buggles first sang 'The Plastic Age'...

The new Icon Audio MB845 MkII David Shaw Signature power amplifier's simple circuit, excellent passive components, quality transformers and that lovely radio transmitter power triode all conspire to make a stunning sound. Read all about it on page 12.

The Palmer 3 record deck [p100] wouldn't have been my idea of a high tech turntable. In 1980 Sony had computerised 'Biotracer' arms, quartz locked direct drives and all manner of other wizardry; in 2010 the Palmer is effectively a few very well matched bits of wood and metal. And yet its sound is sublime, reinforcing the continuing superiority of analogue.

Still, we do like new technology too; Naim's UnitiQute [p28] shows how you can blend wireless networked music playback with a genuinely good sounding and reassuringly simple to use system. So there's hope for the future still! Enjoy the new age of high fidelity.

David Price, editor

testing

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

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

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

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



ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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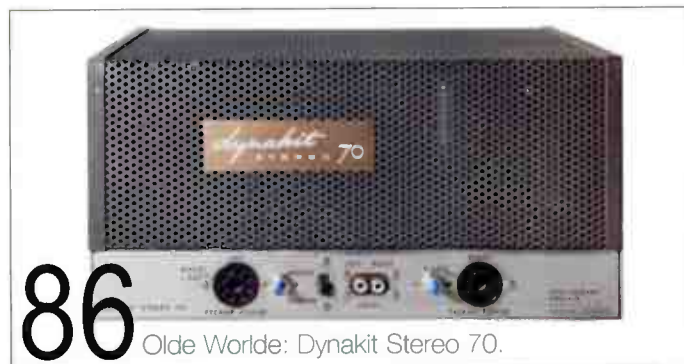
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iDecco *from Peachtree Audio*

“The Peachtree Audio iDecco is a great purchase for those heavily into Digital Audio”

“A serious grown up DAC and integrated amplifier that's been magically shrunk into a lifestyle box”

David Price, HiFi World, October 2010



peachtree audio

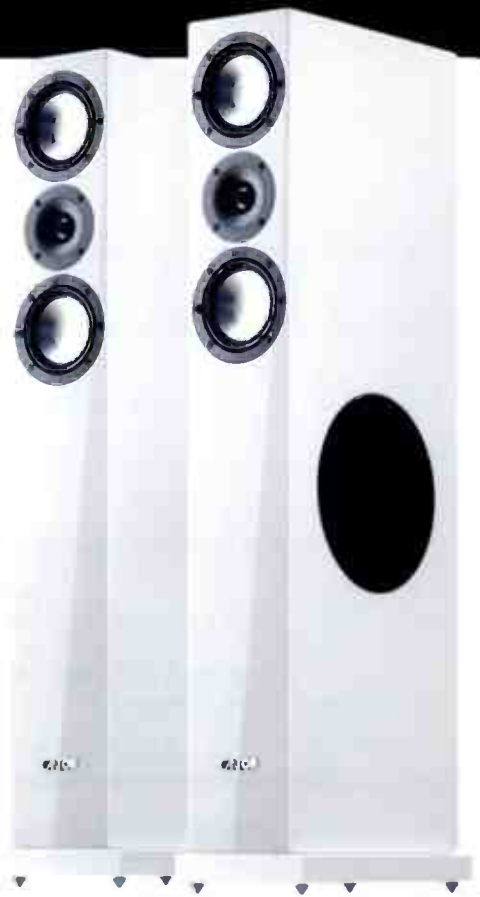
Karat Series

Slim and perfectly formed

An elegant loudspeaker that offers outstanding performance from its slim profile. The Karat Series answers the question of style or function with a resounding "both".

Our patented "wave" surround allows twice the driver excursion of a Standard half role design without Cone distortion.

CANTON
pure music



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news



PACIFIC STATE

The new £11,000 Pacific 3 SA is the first tower loudspeaker from Cabasse to feature the BC17 coaxial drive unit, originally developed for their Riga design. Complementing this are two 21cm (8") low-frequency units. The inverted honeycomb domes, manufactured from Nomex, are said to be ultra rigid but very light, and are developments of the 55cm (22") unit from the £108,000 flagship La Sphère. The drivers are actively driven by a 450 watt Cabasse designed amplifier, hence the SA (Semi-Active) appellation. This provides powerful, controlled and adjustable, low frequency output down to 37Hz, in a cabinet that is 20% less deep than would otherwise have been required in a passive speaker, the company says. Finished in a piano black or gloss pearl finish, the 1,290x290x490mm cabinet has a curved front baffle and fluted side panels to reduce standing waves inside. Initial impressions at the Paris launch were of an extremely well voiced large loudspeaker than should fit bigger British listening rooms very well. For more details, click on www.cabasse.com.



SANCTUARY

Audio Sanctum has announced the arrival of Cayin Audio products to the UK. "Hand built to exacting specifications, Cayin Audio specialise in both valve amplifiers and vacuum tube driven CD players", the company says. Products range from £840 for the CD-50T CD Player to £10,840 for the Mono Valve Amp and everything between. Cayin Audio products are available exclusively through Audio Sanctum (www.audiosanctum.co.uk) and Musicarch (www.musicarch.co.uk).



Q HERE!

KEF has announced the introduction of its eighth generation of Q Series loudspeakers, said to offer "a quantum leap in performance" due to the use of technology originally developed for the Concept Blade loudspeaker. At the heart of the all new model KEF Q Series is the latest Uni-Q driver array sporting a new, vented tweeter mounted at the acoustic centre of a new resonance damped, metal cone LF/MF Driver.

The new Q Series bass driver uses a diecast aluminium chassis, and the large (50mm) voice coil ensures impressive power handling and output levels. The first two speakers to be released from the new range are two standmounts, the Q100 and Q300 at £380 and £450 per pair respectively. Finishes are Cherry, Black Oak and European Walnut. For more details, click on www.kef.com or call +44 (0)1622 672 261.



TURN IT ON AGAIN

Tom Fletcher, previously of Nottingham Analogue fame, has a new company called Fletcher Audio, and with it two new turntables designed by himself and made in Denmark. The Omega .3 and Omega .5 are said to "attain a new level in audiophile analogue replay, being advanced technologically and musically-involving designs that offer excellent value for money". Partnering the turntables there is the Zero Arm, an advanced design that can be matched with either model. In addition, a variety of armboards can be made to order for those wishing to use an existing or alternative arm option. Prices are £2,599 for the Omega .3 and £3,699 for the Omega .5; the Zero Arm is £1,999. Fletcher Audio is distributed in the UK by The Audio Boys, a new distribution company with strong links, past and present, to Tom Fletcher. See www.theaudioboy.com.



N JOY

The NDX is Naim's first dedicated network music player, "designed and engineered to integrate into Naim's range at a similar quality level as Naim's HDX hard disk player and CDX2 high-end CD player", the company says. Technically, it draws significantly from the Naim DAC, sporting SHARC DSP-based buffering with fixed clocks, along with 16 times oversampling and Naim's proprietary, low-generated noise, digital filtering algorithms. The NDX also sports three S/PDIF digital inputs to support connection from computers to set top boxes to CD players, and internet radio supported by vTuner's five star full service. You can connect an iPhone or iPod digitally to allow the NDX to control and play all the stored music, podcasts or audiobooks. Play music on a USB stick, even hi-resolution WAV or FLAC files, with full onscreen control. It is controlled by front-panel buttons, the supplied remote control or an iPhone or iPod Touch running the optional n-Stream app, which also allows control of a Naim system's inputs and volume.

There's an optional FM/DAB module to add terrestrial radio stations. The £2,995 NDX sports a 200VA toroidal transformer with four secondary outputs, with separate power supplies for digital, analogue, and DSP and clock, and is performance upgradeable by the addition of a XPS or PS555 power supply and/or Naim DAC. There's a ground selector switch for optimum performance.

The reservoir capacitors are larger than would typically be used to reduce the unregulated voltage noise and provide increased short-term current capability. The four separate PSUs form part of the electrical isolation of the digital DSP section from the DAC chips and analogue circuits. Low noise LM317/337 regulators smooth the unregulated voltage from the reservoir capacitors. Voltage supplies to many of the digital circuits are double or triple regulated to further reduce noise; quadruple regulated if using an external supply. When the PSU upgrade option is used with the NDX, power supply separation is maintained as the external power supply also has independent power supplies and ground connections. It also provides a significantly larger toroidal transformer and larger reservoir capacitors.

The NDX streams and plays WAV, FLAC, AIFF, AAC, WMA, Ogg Vorbis and MP3 files, via its Burr Brown PCM1791A DAC which is used in 16 times external oversampling mode and runs at a maximum sample rate of 768 kHz. The analogue output filter is multi-stage seven-pole filter, using Burr Brown OPA42 opamps to perform the filtering. For more details, click on www.naimaudio.com.

ICONIC

Icon Audio has launched its first CD player, the Icon Audio CDX1. Designed by David Shaw, the new machine completely separates the digital and analogue sections, with the analogue valve section "having a dedicated power supply sympathetic to the best traditions of valve design", the company says. This involves a "massive" choke regulated power supply with valve regulation and rectification. The output valves are 6SN7, a rugged long-lasting design, and the valve section has its own hard-wired chassis, completely separated from the digital circuitry. The digital section features a 192kHz 24bit upsampling DAC, with two digital inputs. Every CDX1 can be ordered as a 'David Shaw Signature' version featuring Jensen copper foil oil-in-paper capacitors and premium valves. For more details, call +44(0) 116 244 0593 or click on www.iconAudio.com.



Icon Audio CDX1

HEADS UP

Sennheiser has three new headphones, the HD 598, HD 558 and HD 518, featuring the company's specially developed Ergonomic Acoustic Refinement technology; acoustic baffles inclined at a slight angle guide the audio signal directly to the ears. Powerful neodymium magnets and proven Duofol diaphragms are fitted, while low-vibration plastic materials prevent distortion. The HD 558 and HD 598 [pictured] also feature a sound reflector that optimises the spatial sound effect. For more information click on www.sennheiser.com.

NATURAL SOUNDS

Yamaha has two new stereo amplifiers and an entry level CD player just out. The £329 A-S500 integrated is said to have "the look and feel of the A-S2000", and there's a built-in iPod dock. The £229 A-S300 is a lower specified variant, also available in black or silver. The £229 CD-S300 CD player sports features like Pure Direct, Intelligent Digital Servo, "high quality parts" and iPod and USB compatibility. For details see www.yamaha.com.

ADVANTAGE

AudioSmile's much respected Kensai mini-monitor has grown legs, in the shape of the new Advantage bass section, which together forms a fully three-way semi-active speaker. The company claims "improved level capability and dynamics, cleaner, more involving sound throughout the range" for the system, thanks to dual amplifiers delivering a total of 120W directly to the twin woofers, so your amplifier "can focus solely on the midrange up". Interestingly, Advantage is a sealed design for tauter bass, but the company claims it can go "below 30Hz with a gentle roll-off". Price is £3,100 all in. For more information, click on www.audiosmile.co.uk.



MONO MINI

Surely one of the most compact monoblock power amplifiers on the market must be the new Cyrus Audio Mono X200 and Mono X300, described as "substantial engineering projects that challenge accepted benchmarks". The Mono X300 is a very powerful amplifier, yet is still housed inside just one magnesium diecast chassis. It is able to drive over 300 Watts into real world speaker loads, the company claims, while the smaller X200 variant is claimed to put out 200 Watts. For more information, click on www.cyrus-audio.com.



KONICHIWA!

At the National Audio Show at Whittlebury Hall in Northamptonshire, Graham Nalty of Black Rhodium announced distribution of audio connectors and cables from the excellent Oyaide Electric Company of Japan. For further information click on www.blackrhodium.co.uk or call +44(0) 1332 342233.

THE MIGHTY ZOUC

Zouch Audio's Christmas Show is on Friday 10th December from noon till 8pm. They will be working with Henley Designs (Roksan, AudioVector and Olive), Kog Audio (Focal JM Labs, Black Ravioli and Storm Amplification) and Black Rhodium cables, with representatives from these companies running demonstrations throughout the day. All Hi-Fi World readers are welcome; for details contact Zouch Audio at The Old Coach House, Off South Street, Ashby de la Zouch LE65 1BQ. Phone +44(0) 1530 414128 or click on www.zouchaudio.co.uk.

CANTON EASE

Germany's largest speaker maker has launched no less than forty new products for the coming season, including three new ranges of hi-fi loudspeakers! The Karat Series is described as a "high-end speaker range with slim facing profile, implementing trickle-down technology from the Reference range", and runs from the £749.99 720.2 DC standmounter up to £2,399.99 for the 770.2 DC floorstander. The Chrono SL Series is a mid-priced speaker range with chrome design features and high-gloss finishes, the highlight being the £1,299.99 SL570 [pictured]. The new Chrono series is an affordable speaker range from the £499.99 502.2 up to the 509.2 DC floorstander at £1,299.99. Canton products are distributed in the UK by the Digital Home division of Computers Unlimited, tel: +44(0) 20 8358 9593, www.unlimited.com.



a class above

With the same innovations as KEF's revolutionary Concept Blade technology showcase, the all-new Q Series from KEF performs like speakers from a higher price class in terms of realism, musicality and off-axis dispersion.

Q Series

All new Uni-Q array.

Sweet, spacious and true, wherever you sit

A large vented tweeter in the centre of the bass/midrange driver; with a 'tangerine' waveguide and unique Z-flex surround to combine unrivalled dispersion with generous travel for the aluminium MF/LF cone.

Advanced bass technologies.

Deeper, tighter and more accurate bass

Inside the fashionably rectilinear cabinets, the new bass driver combines a rigid superlight cone with a massive vented magnet assembly and an oversized voice coil for exceptional sensitivity and distortion-free power handling.

Total system design.

A holistic approach, with no compromises.

These advanced new drivers only need first order crossovers, maximising fluency and transparency, and KEF's legendary attention to detail extends from innovations for easier bi-wiring to environment-friendly finishes.

GREEN FISHING

NAD's new C426 is described as "an energy saving audiophile FM tuner", offering ultra-low standby power, a new sleek design, and a host of convenient features. It uses a MOSFET RF front end with high quality components and a careful PCB layout, which gives excellent sensitivity with low intermodulation distortion to provide a musically satisfying performance, NAD says. The company has completely

redesigned the power supply for improved efficiency and extremely low power consumption during standby while still allowing all remote activation and control interfaces. The C426 also has 30 available presets in any combination of AM and FM stations, nameable presets (up to eight characters) for AM and non-RDS stations; RDS PS (Program Service) that automatically displays the name of the radio station; RDS RT (Radio Text) that displays additional information broadcast by the radio station (such as the artist and/or song); Auto Search for optimised tuning, and a 'Blend' feature that narrows stereo separation and improves noise. The tuner is available now for £230, in graphite or titanium finish. See <http://nadelectronics.com>.



SACD REVIVAL

Decca has released a limited number of Super Audio Compact Discs (SACD), described as "a milestone of Super Audio CD/CD remastering, bringing a new experience to all listeners - brought to you by the experience and technology of Esoteric".

High end Japanese brand Esoteric supplied their flagship D-01VU digital converters and G-0Rb Rubidium master clock generator, plus Esoteric MEXCEL cables, for the remastering session. "This combination of highly advanced technology greatly contributed to capturing the high quality sound of the original master tapes with the performer," it is claimed. Titles include Mozart's Piano Concerto No.20 K.466 & No.27 K.595 (Clifford Curzon/Benjamin Britten), Antonin Dvořák's Symphony No.9 in E minor, Op.95 "From the New World" (István Kertész Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra) and Manuel de Falla's 'El sombrero de tres picos' (Ernest Ansermet L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande Teresa Berganza (Soprano)). *Hi-Fi World* can confirm that they're of absolutely impeccable fidelity and are superbly presented. The discs cost £29.95 each and are available from Symmetry Systems; call +44(0)1727 865488 or click on www.symmetry-systems.co.uk.

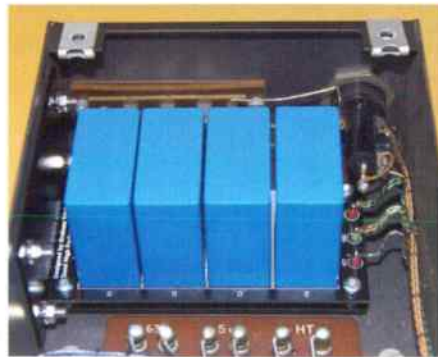


REVO-LUTION

Revo's new sub-£200 colour touchscreen digital radio has just been announced, boasting multi-format reception and iPod/iPhone connectivity. The AXiS is said to "represent the next generation of 'connected' digital radio devices that combine advanced multi-format radio reception, iPod and iPhone docking, wireless audio streaming and access to premium online music services such as Last.fm", the company says. It is capable of receiving a full range of digital radio standards including DAB, DAB+ and internet radio (over 13,000 stations from around the world) – as well as conventional FM radio with RDS. AXiS will also stream digital music files from a PC or Apple Mac. This compact radio features a 3.5" colour TFT touchscreen display, and is controlled via an icon-driven user interface, enabling quick and easy navigation around the radio's many advanced features. It has an 8W Class D amplifier and NXT's patented Balanced Radiator (BR) loudspeaker technology inside. Completing the hardware picture, AXiS provides connectivity for all generations of iPod and iPhone, and is equipped with stereo RCA, aux in, 3.5mm headphone and iPod/iPhone video out connectors as standard. AXiS costs £199.95 and is available now from John Lewis, Marks and Spencer, Apple Store, Comet, Selfridges, Harrods and Next Directory.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Designed to elevate the performance of the popular vintage Quad II power amplifier, GT Audio's new Quad II power supply capacitor is a direct replacement for the original Quad item. The upgrade is said to deliver a large improvement in sound; more detail, better resolution, larger soundstage width and depth, plus faster transients. The bank of high performance capacitors are mounted on a bracket which mounts behind the original badge using the same screw holes and fixing hardware. The original power supply capacitor is simply removed and replaced with the high performance unit. The parts used in the new one are of very high quality, will not deteriorate over time like the original or replacement electrolytic capacitors, and will outlast the life of the amplifier, says Graham Tricker. For details, call +44 (0)1895 833099 or click on www.gtaudio.com.



SPOTTED:

Rumours that *Hi-Fi World's* editor had a keen interest in old cars caused an eagle-eyed reader from Cambridge, Simon Hewitt, to send in this little gem. Could DP be audio's answer to Arthur Daley? "Leave it out, Terrence!"





Radio Activity

The 845 valve makes glorious music in hi-fi applications. And Noel Keywood feels this, the new Icon Audio MB845 MkII 'David Shaw Signature' power amplifier, is its finest hour...

Just two years after I reviewed Icon Audio's lovely MB845 valve power amplifier in our January 09 issue, there's a MkII version. In important areas the original design has been radically upgraded. But the upgrade isn't just physical: where the original MB845 power amplifier was an audiophile bargain at £2,500 per pair (at the time) the new one has been 'repositioned' as a high-end power amplifier and priced accordingly; it now costs £4999.95 in standard form.

Phew! That's some price increase. But we have run the original alongside a Musical Fidelity AMS50 transistor amplifier – price £8,900 – for a year and it often prevailed, as in a recent review of Tannoy's Definition DC10T loudspeaker for example. The new version is a stunningly good amplifier, and easily able to justify its

new price alongside the competition, but at the same time it moves out of reach for many potential buyers I suspect; this is a pity...

Why would anyone consider paying such money for these monoblock valve amplifiers? Easy! The most obvious reason is visual: the 845 glows brightest of all valves. It's a veritable lighthouse and with the amplifiers on, no one is going to miss them. Friends will gasp and onlookers be impressed in a way that eludes all other amplifiers, bar a smattering of boutique rivals. This directly heated triode, with its thoriated tungsten filament, is a monster from 1931 that proclaims its presence and power with a vivid orange glow from a large glass envelope. The MB845 MkII is a big chassis that provides an appropriate industrial backdrop for it. Together they are an impressive sight.

The other reason to get one is

sound quality, as perhaps you might hope! Appearance in this case doesn't deceive. The MB845 MkII is a big hitter of a valve amplifier whose appearance perfectly speaks its ability.

If all this looks very retro, a relic from the steam age with the same sort of puff, let me explain. It is retro, but brought up to date to exploit the relaxed, full bodied yet easy going sound of valves that were designed for audio use. Unlike transistors, designed for general industrial use, possessing inadequacies for audio amplification covered over with an electronic sticking plaster called feedback, the big 845s possess no intrinsic weaknesses as far as audio amplification is concerned. Their drawbacks are the obvious ones of size, weight and heat. An emerging 20th century radio industry soon demanded smaller size and power consumption so valves like this

were quickly superseded, but sound quality didn't benefit from miniaturisation. That's why this amplifier also uses the early, large bulb 6SN7 and 6SL7 triodes. They sound better – smoother, more relaxed and fluid than later, smaller 1950s B7G and B9A based valves. And if you spotted that the two 6SL7s have charred black glass envelopes that make them look like burnt out seconds, they are in fact new, top quality 'Treasure Series' Shuguangs from China. The black staining comes from improved gettering, a process that eliminates gas residues after evacuation of the bulb.

Yep. This amplifier may look retro but every valve in it is a new variant of an old design, using best quality modern materials and construction techniques. Designer David Shaw told me he tried the latest metal anode Shuguang 845s (845C) that have higher power handling but preferred the graphite anode originals, albeit in improved 845B form as fitted to our amplifier. This doesn't surprise me in the least. A sonic feature of the 845 is the characteristically dark, damped sound of its graphite anode, a quality many listeners remark upon.

So the MB845 MkII is not what it seems to the casual eye. It is in truth a highly tuned up, modern variant of a classic valve amplifier, using materials and even techniques neither affordable or even available when such valves first came into use 80 years ago. It is also unlike other modern valve amplifiers based on later 1950s valves like the KT88. The big, old triodes are pigs to use because they demand high voltages and this multiplies component costs all round, but they sound wonderful, and an added bonus is that supply is good and costs not exorbitant (unlike the 300B for example).

Valve enthusiasts may by this point be wondering why our amp had Treasure Series valves in the first place. It's because it was a David Shaw Signature tuned variant that costs £5,999.95. It lacks the Signature badge, because it had not arrived from the badge manufacturer! But it did not lack the higher quality valves or Jensen paper-in-oil, copper foil coupling capacitors...

When we fitted Jensens to World Audio Design amplifiers back in the early 1990s they had a big impact on the sound and my WAD 300B uses them, so I know their sonic footprint. An amp fitted with Jensens isn't going to sound like anything commercially available though and it's useful to bear this in mind with regard to this amplifier's sound quality.

Whatever component you

look at in an amplifier like this, it is radically different to most else on the market. Every component is optimised for audio use and much of what is used, especially the custom designed and built output transformers, are horribly expensive. So you'd expect it to sound different – and believe me it does! This is no cooking transistor amplifier.

“a modern variant of a classic valve amplifier, using materials neither affordable or even available when such valves first came into use 80 years ago...”

The new amplifier is an altogether larger beast than the old one. Most noticeable is a new weight of 37kgs, up from 23kgs of the original. Where the old amplifier was an awkward lift, being close to the HSE recommended safe maximum of 25kgs, the new one is nearly impossible to lift and even difficult to move. It isn't just weight and price that have gone up though. Icon Audio have knowingly increased power to the 100 Watt figure many listeners believe they need.

To deliver this amount of power with valves you need a serious output transformer if it is to stay clean right up to maximum power and this is the main reason weight has increased so much. The new output transformer is a monster, but because of it the amplifier now delivers an easy 100 Watts of bass power without core saturation and the soggy bass that results. The old one, I noted, became unhappy much above 65 Watts at bass frequencies, so Icon Audio have not only rectified this weakness but upped the maximum power output as well. As a result the new MB845 is a really heavy hitter; it's a muscle amplifier with a sound to match. It isn't out of puff at 100 Watts, where the old one was struggling much past 65 Watts so there's a big difference between them.

Higher power output from a single pair of 845 valves demands a more serious power supply so the mains transformer has grown substantially too. The H.T. is frightening 1250 Volts and uses diode rectification plus choke smoothing. Driving an 845 is no easy task; often a 300B valve is used but this is a ridiculously expensive solution. Designer David Shaw has instead used two 6SN7 double triodes, each strapped as a single, one per phase, each choke loaded for maximum

voltage swing. The three chokes are now housed in their own screening cans on top of the chassis and you can see them as three smaller units sitting alongside the giant mains and output transformers.

The front end paraphase splitter is a 6SL7 and it provides gain too. Running as recommended in low sensitivity mode, input sensitivity is a

normal 1V for full output. Icon Audio continue with their unusual sensitivity switch that in its Up position turns feedback off (enough to make a transistor amplifier designer swoon!). Using this switch alters everything, not just sensitivity, and if this was a transistor amplifier its performance would collapse if you did this.

Not so with valves, however. Designed a long, long time ago for audio (and radio) amplification the 845 works well without feedback and differences are less than any classically trained audio engineer would expect. Gain and therefore sensitivity rocket up, but bandwidth narrows and both distortion and output impedance increase. But not by great amounts and certainly not to any easily appreciable subjective degree either, which is perhaps the bigger surprise.

My World Audio Design 300B push-pull amplifier has a feedback switch. The biggest subjective change is bass quality, which noticeably softens when feedback is switched off due to increased output impedance imposing less electrical damping upon the loudspeaker.

This, and a slight cleaning of the sound, is the reason why Icon Audio recommend feedback is left on. The small amount of feedback used (6dB) perceptibly improves bass control, with little loss elsewhere. In practice, with my amplifier, I've found listeners initially prefer the tidy, tight sound with feedback on,





but end up changing their minds and preferring the more relaxed, organic flow apparent with feedback off.

Whether bass quality remains acceptable depends upon the loudspeaker's own acoustic damping; in some cases less damping sounds better, not worse. So this is not a cut and dried issue.

I found much the same occurred with the MB845 MkII. Switching feedback off changes the sound slightly, but it's no big change within the overall picture and not what you'd expect from the change in measured performance. Icon Audio fit this facility, they say, to provide extra gain so a passive preamplifier can be used. However, all silver disc players deliver 2V nowadays and many other sources manage 1V out so even with feedback on the new MB845 will match just about anything.

The side mounted rocker style power switch has now become a front mounted push button, and bias adjusters and a hum buckler are all top mounted. This is a fixed-bias amplifier which, confusingly, means it must be adjusted! Only occasionally though, every few months at most. Icon Audio supply a small multimeter for the purpose and it's just a quick tweak.

The hum buckler is fitted to minimise hum that is an inevitability with directly heated triodes running from a 50Hz a.c. heater supply, as these do (d.c. lessens heater life). Measurement showed that both monoblocks managed the 1mV hum figure we used as a rule of thumb maximum with World Audio Design amplifiers. So although a slight hum is apparent, it should be inaudible at normal listening distances, unless you are using super sensitive big Tannoy's perhaps. Even then 1mV will not be readily apparent.

The output transformer's secondary winding basically matches 8 Ohms and has a 4 Ohm tap. It's usually best to use the lower 4 Ohm tap and, with this amplifier, although power output was identical (meaning no coupling losses) I was surprised to find **distortion** was lower from the 4 Ohm output, so this is what I used.

From a usability point of view 845s get hot, but not scolding hot like 6C33Cs for example. Icon supply protective covers, a must if there are small children around.

Our in-house MB845 has been switched on an off endlessly and beaten hard in its year as a review mule, with no ill effects.

In theory, if a valve amp is properly designed it can be switched on and off endlessly without loudspeakers connected and this was a standard test I applied brutally to all World Audio Design amplifiers without ever encountering a problem (it tests insulation layer breakdown in the output trannies, and resistance to back emfs in power supply components). You can also short the output terminals of a valve amplifier for a small time (few seconds) and get away with it, but best not to! Drawing excess current through output tubes overheats the anodes, they warp, short – and there's then a big bang. This can destroy the output transformer. However, the 845's machined graphite anode is unlikely to warp I feel. It is a rugged valve. I'm less caring about a valve amp than a transistor amp and they take it.

For £5,999.95 you don't get swathes of machined alloy and cute fluorescent displays with this amplifier, you don't get clattering relays nor a remote control. Its standard of finish is good; the chassis are all welded and burnished to give smooth edges. An alloy top plate carries screen printed valve types and all lettering and printing meets a high standard, as does the switch gear and rear output terminals; these are gold plated and accept 4mm plugs as well as spades and bare wire.

SOUND QUALITY

Initially I felt the new MB845 had drier bass than the outgoing model and this is the case. It is less rounded and fulsome, but it now goes deeper than before, carries stupendous weight and provides vivid dynamic swings that are quite extraordinary by everyday audio standards. Watching the cones of our Spendor S8es flap back and forth when playing CD showed deep subsonics were present – and I felt them too. The new MB845 MkII runs very, very deep and there's enormous weight to

its delivery, something that brought real fright to the heavy synth work behind Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance'.

The lone click of a castanet stood forward on the stage, in well lit relief to the hard pounding of the **background bass synth** in 'Bad Romance'. When this stopped to give Lady Gaga space to shout and croon into the microphone her voice lanced out centre stage. The way this amplifiers mines detail, exhibits a richness of tonal colour and emphasises dynamic inflections was made obvious at the end of the track where the heavy backing suddenly stops to leave Gaga to finish the song in a barren soundscape, to add drama. The Icon stretched every sinew here, giving her a tremendous sense of fleshed out power, a big bodied presence that had her vocals tearing out centre stage.

It was all so fulsome and powerful, yet held under great control, I couldn't help but be amazed by this amplifier. It's gained muscle compared to its predecessor, but in true valve amplifier style it has neither the hardness or mechanical sterility transistors display. With great insight that paints a detailed picture and makes Gaga's amusingly suggestive lyrics so clear they were laid out in 3D in front of me, this was not just a fantastic audio experience but a totally convincing picture of a real person at the microphone. In that sense the amplifier is also deeply communicative and emotionally involving.

It was also a very 'turn it up' experience. The combination of super smooth treble and vast bass, backed by endless reserves of power had me winding up to insane levels at times; 100dB rms and 110dB peaks came up on our Bruel & Kjaer Sound level meter – and that's loud. I was often aware that the outgoing amplifier could suffer a little muddle as volume went up, when driving insensitive loudspeakers. That's not a problem any more. The bigger output transformer and better feedback system have cured this limitation, and it makes the new model subjectively much cleaner at very high listening levels.

I used the Spondors because they are lightly damped and the MB845 MkII gripped them strongly, even if it did not sound as dry as Musical Fidelity's transistor AMSS0.

With deep subsonics from Jackie Leven's less synthetically produced 'Extremely Violent Man' I could not help but wonder where the MB845 MkII was actually finding this information. The presence of extended subsonics marks the MkII

out and brings threatening presence to its delivery.

Bass apart, the entire balance of the amplifier has changed. It is now smoother and more cohesive sounding overall. The slight hardening of midrange information that added some extra bite has gone, making for a more svelte delivery, and I was surprised that treble is now gentle in its nature. There's still plenty of treble power but it has been smoothed out and made less obvious, an effect that usefully counterbalances the shout of today's loudspeakers. I suspect also that the lessening of high frequency distortions the new feedback arrangement introduces 'simplifies' the treble, as it were.

Nigel Kennedy's violin was soft and smooth in Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No1, but also richly detailed and again unusually forceful and expressive, Kennedy's controlled bow work being made delightfully obvious by the fluency with which the amplifier could express dynamic changes. The new amp's seeming softness of high treble gave violin a lovely silky sound. But Jensen paper-in-oils do produce dark inter-transient silences, plus a richly textured midband and no hardness or screech in upper treble. It's all a little different from the norm and not run-of-the-mill. I don't believe I have ever heard the copper foils

(mine are aluminium, I recall) and somewhere this amplifier had a very dark, soft tonality. I was sold on Jensens when I first heard them but they do damp the sound down and ringing, stinging treble disappears – or so it seems. But not always. Jensens are sonically quite obvious and may not suit everyone. But the lustrously rich midband and strong resolution of instrumental timbre, stretched dynamics and clean tempo changes all militate in their favour. Both Kennedy and the London Philharmonic accompanying him gained as much from Icon's talents as other genres. Perhaps more so if hard, edgy and tonally barren violins tire you.

Spinning a track like Steve Earle's 'Esmeralda's Hollywood' with its stinging tambourine challenged my suspicion of softness. Quite the opposite: the tambourine was viciously hissy; it sounded like a bag of angry rattlers. But it was also big and bold on the soundstage and when instead of being hit it was shaken in time with the beat this was forcefully obvious. Then the next track started I nearly jumped out of the settee with the opening drum roll.

The MB845 MkII has a peculiar nature that lulls you into thinking there's no power to treble – then it comes out and hits you! It is highly damped by the Jensens, but at the

same time they seemingly stretch dynamic contrasts, causing sounds to leap out of a darkness free of hash and muddle. And all music is so affected. This is a characteristic of the amplifier that sets it apart.

Just like its predecessor the new amp has extraordinary midrange dynamics that brought a crashing end to Earle's 'This Highway's Mine', where instruments seemed to fall out of the loudspeakers. Great fun, and very heavy Rock wise, mountains of turbo charged power making for a visceral experience.

CONCLUSION

The 845 valve remains a brute of a valve to listen to: it's dramatically powerful sounding, much more so than the relaxed 300B. Icon Audio have wrung much more from it in this MkII David Shaw Signature version of the MB845 power amplifier. It's become an altogether larger experience because everything has gone up, cost, size, weight and power. In effect the amplifier has been repositioned – but what a position! This is one of the most dramatic amplifiers you could wish to hear and can justify any price in some respects. It is a pity it falls out of reach of many, because it's a testament to what a hi-fi amplifier can sound like and is worth hearing by one and all.

VERDICT ●●●●●

Smooth, silky and full bodied yet with enormous dynamics, this muscle amp boasts extraordinary sound quality.

ICON AUDIO MB845 MKII DS SIGNATURE £5,999.95
Icon Audio Ltd.
☎ +44(0)1162 440593
www.iconaudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- powerful sound
 - tremendous insight
 - solid imaging
 - endlessly deep bass

- AGAINST**
- difficult size and weight
 - needs adjustment

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MB845 MkII produces 100 Watts exactly (1% THD), from both 8 Ohm and 4 Ohm taps so there's no coupling losses associated with the latter. This is a small increase over its predecessor, tested in our January 09 issue and is a lot of welly from a valve amplifier, but the graphite anodes of the big 845 output valves can handle it easily.

The upper frequency response limit was 27kHz (-1dB) with feedback on (low sensitivity setting) and 20kHz with it off. The amplifier is best used with feedback on, Icon say, input sensitivity then measuring a normal 1V, making a preamp useful but not vital with 2V sources such as CD players. Input sensitivity doubles with feedback off, the amplifier needing just 0.5V to deliver full output.

The lower frequency limit is undefined, the amplifier measuring flat down to 4Hz or so and producing 5W or so output at this frequency. Like many valve amplifiers the MB845 MkII suffers core saturation in the output transformer if asked to deliver anything more than a few Watts at subsonic frequencies (below 10Hz). This may only become a problem when large LP warp signals are flapping the loudspeaker cones. Switching feedback off (High sensitivity) ameliorates the problem.

Like its predecessor the MB845 MkII produces little distortion until high volumes are required. However, what it produces remains largely second harmonic, correlated with the music and this is subjectively benign. The

bigger output transformers allowed the MkIIs to deliver 100 Watts at 40Hz with alacrity however, a big improvement upon the Mk1s and quite an achievement by valve standards. The use of a tertiary feedback winding feeding the 'cathodes' likely helps here too.

Power at high frequencies was, however, less than maximum and I suspect the larger core and winding stack has increased reactance (leakage inductance or inter-layer capacitance). Unusually, the MkII delivered lower distortion figures from its 4 Ohm tap and could still deliver 80 Watts at 10kHz for 3% distortion. Although 3% distortion sounds high it was predominantly second harmonic and again music correlated. In use the amplifier would be unlikely to be pushed to deliver more than 20 Watts or so at 10kHz and at this level distortion was around 0.3% second harmonic. Crossover distortion was completely absent; there were no high order harmonics at all.

Hum buckers are used to keep hum down from the directly heated triodes and at 50Hz measured exactly 1mV, an acceptable upper limit and less than the MkI, the MB845 has been quietened in this area. There's no hiss at -109dB.

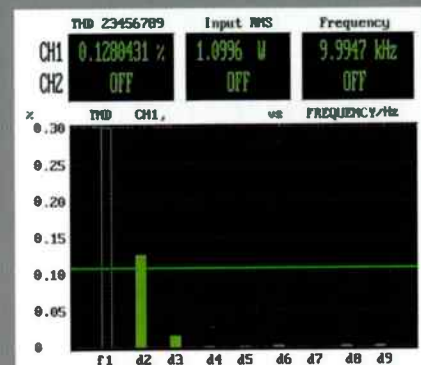
Output impedance measured 0.62 Ohms with feedback on, giving a damping factor figure of 6 with 4 Ohm loudspeakers and 12 with 8 Ohm loudspeakers. Switching feedback off increased output impedance to 1.4 Ohms and this will provide little audible loudspeaker

damping.

The new MB845 MkII will have more slam than before and likely sound cleaner at high levels. It remains a heavy slugger, but this is an iron fist in a velvet glove, as distortions have been reduced and the circuit refined in a very effective way. NK

Power	100 Watts
Frequency response	4Hz-27kHz
Noise	-109dB
Distortion	0.12%
Sensitivity	1V
Output impedance	0.62 Ohms

DISTORTION



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HI-FI WORLD

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HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



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TITAN

Stand Up

Tony Bolton entertains six of the finest new budget standmounters



Surely one of the most hotly contested areas of the hi-fi market is loudspeakers, especially those at the affordable end. Price is a factor of course, but also the need to partner student systems, life-style products and as rears for AV installations. There's also the very salient consideration that if you spend less on the speakers, you can buy yourself a better source...

So, keen to explore all vistas of the hi-fi world, we have assembled a selection of six baby boxes from well known manufacturers, ranging in price from the Tannoy Mercury V1 at £150, through to the Focal 705V and Mordaunt Short Aviano 2, both costing exactly twice that price, at £300 per pair. In between are examples from Acoustic Energy, with the Neo 1s, KEF's little C3 model, and the latest incarnation of Wharfedale's Diamond, the 10.1.

After a quick initial listen they were set up with every available spare amplifier in the house running them in using a mixture of an Isotek burn in disc and classical CDs, after which the serious listening began. This was done using the Clearaudio Master Solution turntable and the Leema Acoustics Antilla CD player, via a Tucana II amplifier. They were wired with Philosophy Cables Nebrion interconnects and Organon speaker cable. The speakers were mounted on sand filled Atacama stands.

After wandering through various chunks of my record and CD collections I ended up using a 1961 RCA recording of Van Cliburn playing Beethoven's '5th Piano Concerto (The Emperor)' with Fritz Reiner conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Mamas and the Papas 'Live at the Monterey International Pop Festival' and a CD of Morcheeba's 'Big Calm' also figured in the listening. So here we go; are you sitting comfortably?



THE CONTENDERS

TANNOY MERCURY V1	£150	p18
KEF C3	£180	p19
WHARFEDALE 10.1	£200	p21
ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 v2	£225	p23
FOCAL 705V	£300	p24
MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2	£300	p25



TANNOY MERCURY V1 £150

The Mercury V1s take over from the previous F1 series, boasting slightly bigger cabinets than the previous models, new 13cm pulp fibre bass/mid cones and a 25mm soft dome tweeter.

Inside the cabinets have extra bracing and silver-plated wiring. The capacitors in the high frequency part of the crossovers are damped with what is described as 'Differential Material Technology'. Two finishes are available, Dark Walnut or the Sugar Maple pictured. They're the smallest here, measuring 300x170x254.5mm (h x w x d) and weighing 4.5kg.

SOUND QUALITY

I was immediately impressed by the size of their delivery; the sound was projected out well and extended several feet backwards. Playing the Beethoven (a mono recording), the orchestra was placed across the centre two thirds of the area between the speakers. I did not expect floor shaking bass from such small cabinets, but was surprised to find reasonable extension of some tunefulness. Piano was handled well, avoiding nasty jangles and clangs, but things got less defined when the full orchestra joined in. At this point things started to get a bit crowded and definition fell away

somewhat.

Moving to the Mamas and the Papas LP, and things were less satisfactory. It's a difficult recording, with a very questionable balance to the sound. Given such source material the little Tannoys did their best but were tonally thinner than hoped. Meanwhile, stereo placement was good, with the musicians located well within the soundstage, but there was little sense of space between them.

With Morcheeba's 'Big Calm' things improved; fed with well recorded material the Mercury V1s sounded altogether happier and made a fine job of relaying the music. Skye's voice had its trademark smooth velvety sound, although it still felt a little shallow compared to the almost tactile depths that I am used to hearing from this recording. Still, a surprisingly even and competent performance from such small units, especially considering the price.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

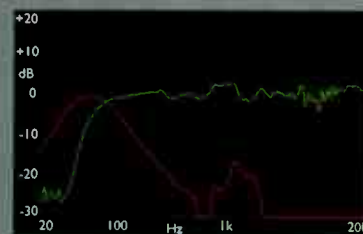
The Mercury V1 has an unusually flat frequency response our analysis shows, free of major trends, except for a midrange peak that may just push vocals forward a bit. A small amount of upper midrange droop will soften the delivery a tad, whilst the tweeter will deliver obvious but not excessive treble.

Bass extends down to 60Hz and the port pushes this down to 40Hz. As port output is high it may well dominate bass quality, making the Mercury V1 quite bassy.

A 200mS decay analysis shows low colouration, except for overhang at 80Hz. Sensitivity was normal at 86dB sound pressure level from one nominal watt of input (2.8V) so 40 Watts or more is needed to go loud. With impedance measuring 7.3 Ohms and the impedance curve not too peaky, the Mercury is an easy enough load.

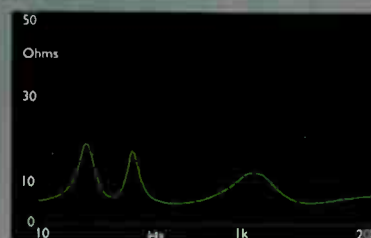
The Mercury has been carefully engineered to provide an even, smooth

and accurate sound. Measurement shows a very balanced design. **NK FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●●

Well finished and designed budget speaker with good manners.

TANNOY MERCURY V1 £150

Tannoy UK

+44(0)1236 702503

www.tannoy.com

FOR

- well balanced sound
- open soundstaging
- decent bass

AGAINST

- lacks detail



KEF C3 £180

The handsome C3 comes in two finishes, European walnut and the Black Ash of the review sample. Measuring 290x177x256mm the cabinets are armed with a 130mm bass driver and a 19mm aluminium tweeter with 'tangerine wave-guide' attached, a segmented cover for the tweeter claimed to disperse output. Bass output is supplemented by a forward firing rectangular bass port mounted below the bass/mid driver.

SOUND QUALITY

With Beethoven, I was greeted by a forward sound at higher frequencies with decent rumbling bass, but not a lot of definition in-between. Violins were sharp to the point of shrieking on a couple of occasions; as the music rose to a crescendo the speakers could get shouty. Stereo imaging was impressively wide, though.

Cueing up the Mamas and the Papas LP and things improved, although this recording's thinness was exacerbated by the unflinching output of the tweeters. The best part was the stereo imaging; the shape of the soundstage was well marked. I was very aware of who was standing next to who in the line up, though I didn't get a great impression of space between them.

The Morcheeba album fared better. 'Big Calm' is a very well recorded piece of work, and I was immediately aware of the texture of Skye's voice, although felt that it was not sounding quite a smooth as it can. I'd normally describe it as sounding like thick pile velvet, with a slight gloss to the surface; if it was a material, you'd instinctively run your fingers through it for the sensual experience! Here though, it had a tactile quality, but some depth was missing, making

seem a bit more like velour.

Bass was fast and had real energy, but lacked much in the way of shape, and served merely to give some sort of balance to the higher registers. Listening to everything again with the speakers bi-wired improved things subtly, so I'd urge C3 owners to do precisely this. Here's a bouncy, vivid sounding small floorstander that's great for rock or pop, but one not to all tastes, especially if you crave smoothness and finesse.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Output from the C3 rises upward above 1kHz to 3kHz, then the tweeter repeats this pattern above 5kHz. With a small amount of bass lift around 80Hz, according to a pink noise analysis not shown here, the C3 has both bass and treble enhancement, although the latter will be most obvious; it will have an audibly bright balance.

Our frequency response analysis shows strong port output (red trace) at 750Hz, suggesting a colouration here. Low frequency output from the port peaks at 65Hz and since port output was quite high the C3 is likely to have port dominated bouncy bass that's quite sprightly. A spectral decay analysis over 200ms shows the port effect at 750 is small, but the C3 has strong overhangs at 180Hz and 60Hz and may have some boominess or boxiness.

Sensitivity was normal at 86.5dB and impedance quite high at 8 Ohms.

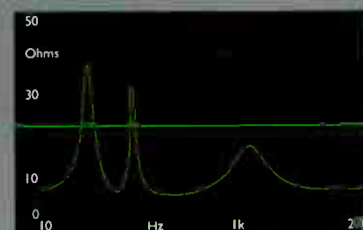
The C3 will sound bright but quite fast. Colouration may be apparent. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●●

Compact, well finished standmounter with energetic pace, but lacks grace.

KEF C3 £180

KEF UK

+44(0) 1622 672261

www.kef.com

FOR

- fast, vivid bass
- well defined imaging

AGAINST

- lively treble
- lacks finesse

AMPLIFICATION

Marantz PM-Ki Pearl Integrated Amp. Boxed, mint, only months old. One owner. (£2500) £1895

Luxman L-550A. Excellent condition, boxed, one owner. Amazing review in HiFi News - (Editors Choice). (£3495) £2495

Boulder 865 Integrated. Regarded by many as the best integrated amp you can currently buy. (£10000). Mint, one owner, original boxes. £POA

Chord CPM-3300 Integrated Amp. One owner, excellent condition, integra legs, silver with gold badge. 5yr warranty. (£7575) £2995

Parasound 275 Power Amp. Only a few months old, one owner, mint, boxed. Bargain at £199.

Parasound Halo P7 Pre-amp. Only a few months old. Mint, boxed, one owner. Cost new £1990, a bargain at £995. (Current model)

Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp. 250 wpc. Black with wooden side accents. Excellent condition, very recent service from Chord. Original box & packing. (£3950) A rare opportunity at only £1395.

Bel Canto Pre 3 Pre-Amp. Black, aluminium face. Original packing & manuals. Single ended input/outputs. Immaculate. (£1850) £995.

Eastern Electric M520 Integrated Amp. One owner, 8mths old, perfect condition. Original packing, manual & remote. Group test winner & Editors Choice Hi-Fi News. (£1995) only £1195.

ECA Technologies Vista Pre & Lectern Power Amps. Black, gold logos. Immaculate. Very musical combo. (£1700) only £650.

NuForce P9 reference 2-box Pre-Amp. Silver, mint, ex-demo. 5yr warranty, fantastic reviews, current spec. (£2500) A bargain at £1250.

Creek EVO2 Integrated Amp. Black. Boxed, Ex-display, new with 5yr warranty. Last one remaining. (£680) only £499.

Quad 909 Power Amp. One owner, silver, boxed, mint, only months old. (£1000) £649.

Quad II Eighty Valve mono blocks. One owner, unmarked, stunning performance, great reviews. Original packing. 5yr warranty. (£6000) £3595

Chapter Audio Preface and Couplet Pre/Power Combo. Boxed, original flight cases, excellent condition. Cost new over £9k, so less than half price and amazing value at £4295

Art Audio VPI Pre Amp (with MM Phono Stage). In highly desirable chrome, spectacular condition, original boxes. (£2600) Only £1295.

Deltec DPA50S Power Amp. With Deltec 500S Slink speaker cable. Boxed, manual etc. (£990) £495.

Eastern Electric MiniMax Pre/Power Combo. One owner, supplied new by us, unmarked, as new, only 2mths old, 5yr warranty. Stunning performance, amazing reviews. (£2195) £1295.

DIGITAL

Naim CDX2 CD Player. Excellent condition, boxed, manual, remote. Huge saving at £1495.

DCS Verdi Transport. New laser, recent service within the last 4 months. Only £1895.

Benchmark DAC1 USB. One owner, unmarked, huge saving on new price, only £795.

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Bel Canto CD-1 CD Player. Black, aluminium face, original packing & manuals, perfect condition, optical, coaxial, BNC and AES/EBU Digital Outputs. (£4000) only £1095.

Cyrus DAB 8 Tuner. Quartz finish, mint, boxed only 4mths old. Bargain at only £395.

Cyrus CD8x. Mint, one owner, quartz finish, boxed, manual, great reviews. Only £449 with a 5yr warranty.

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Klipsch P. 39f Palladium Series. Ex-demo, one of the best you're likely to hear. Cost new £14750. £POA

Sonus Faber Minima Amators. One owner, teak, boxed, excellent condition, with matching stands. 5yr warranty. (£2000) £995.

Focal Electra 1037 Be Speakers. One owner, mint. Boxed, manuals. (£7495) be very quick at only £3695!

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Audio Physic Virgo V. One owner, originally supplied by us, excellent condition. Original boxes and packing, maple finish. (£5500) £3495

ATC SCM 50 ASLT (towers) Active Speakers. Yew (premium finish), 2010 models, mint and boxed. (£10815) £POA

ATC SCM19 Speakers. Cherry, one owner, 6mths old, excellent condition (few marks). (£1700) Only £995.

Amphion Argon 3L Speakers. Scandinavian Birch, original packing & accessories. 8mths old, Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy & Group test Winner. (£2600) only £1595

Audio Physic Scorpio II. Latest model, cherry, ex-demo, unmarked. (£3773) £2750

Quad ESL 2905 Speakers. One owner, mint, boxed, very low hours. Amazing reviews. (£7000) only £4990 with a 5yr warranty

Audio Physic Tempo VI Speakers. Maple, one owner, 6mths old, completely unmarked, original packing & literature. (£2612) bargain at £1895.

Audio Physic Scorpio. Boxed, Cherry, one owner, good (very minor marks) condition. (£3800) £1695

ANALOGUE

LFD MCT Phono Stage. Mint, one owner, sensational performance, 18mths old, very low hours. (£3400) Very tasty indeed at £2500!

Linn LP12 Arm Board. Original, as new. £35.

Linn Lingo PSU. For Linn Sondek LP-12, wonderful condition, comes with LP12 Switch, Circuit board and interconnecting power lead, full recent service). £495.

Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage. Boxed, unmarked, one owner, only months old. Simply sensational (£1495) £920.

Quad QC 24P Phono Stage. A mint, one owner example, as new. Great reviews. (£1200) £795

MAINS CONDITIONING

Kemp Electronics Power Source. Almost unused, as new, one of the best. (£1395) Bargain at £620.

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Supra LoRad 1.5 Power Cable. 1m. (£40) only £19.

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Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links. Set of 4 Links with 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module. These links are simply sensational. (£540) £395

Chord Signature Speaker Cable. One owner, boxed, as new, 2.5m, ace reviews. (£775) £445

Transparent Reference Digital BNC. 75 ohm, red sleeve, 1m. (£850) huge saving at £279.

ACCESSORIES

Naim Headline, with NAPSC. Boxed, mint. (£643) a bargain at only £349.

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WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.1 £200

Diamonds are forever, apparently, as the new 10.1 continues the long line. The curved cabinet walls are retained, but have been made stronger with extra internal bracing; it's made of multi-layer MDF, and comes available in black, rosewood, cherry and walnut finishes. The bass/mid driver is unusual at this price point in employing relatively expensive Kevlar for its 125mm cone, and above sits a 25mm soft dome tweeter fitted with a metal diffusion plate. At the back are twin reflex ports, and below this a set of very substantial biwirable speaker terminals. The Diamonds measure 296x194x278mm and weigh 5.2kg.

SOUND QUALITY

Playing the 'Emperor' Concerto through these speakers proved more satisfying than with either of the previous contenders. Piano was more realistic, displaying greater body and shape, and the rest of the orchestra gained greater insight. The orchestra were all placed centre stage, but weren't as hemmed in.

Moving to the Mamas and Papas LP, and the Diamonds delivered more detail and shape to the sound, making me more aware of the deficiencies of the recording than of the speakers. There was still a hint of splash

and bite at higher frequencies, however.

'Big Calm' sounded just that; bass, although not the deepest to be heard within this group, was fast and shapely, guaranteed to get the feet moving, and provided a solid enough platform for the rest of the music. Midrange was well defined, vocals sitting centre stage surrounded by the other performers, with air and space around. I was impressed by the width of the soundstage, which extended well beyond the speaker

boundaries, although of limited depth. I felt that I was listening from a better seat in the auditorium, with the added enjoyment that brings. Biwiring seemed to enhance these attributes and certainly made these speakers sing out in a more relaxed, but unrestrained manner.

A creditable performance then, being generally well mannered and musical when partnered with smooth sources. Added to this is chic styling and it all adds up to a good package.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Diamond 10.1 has +2dB plateau lift in treble output above 1.5kHz, enough to give it a bright sound – quite unlike an earlier sample that measured flat. Raised tweeter output will add some sharpness to the general presentation. Detailing should be strong.

Bass output extends down to 65Hz (-6dB), good for a small cabinet. The twin rear ports work across a broad area around 48Hz our red trace shows and damp the bass unit well.

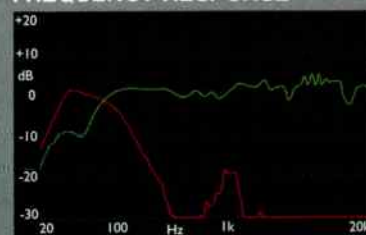
Sensitivity was mediocre at 85.5dB, impedance measuring 6 Ohms. The impedance curve is free of large peaks and fairly unreactive, making the 10.1 an easy enough load.

Our 200mS decay spectrum (not shown) displayed no overhangs or undue colourations. Bass distortion was 7% from the bass unit and 9% from the port at 40Hz, a fair result for small cones.

The Diamond 10.1 will have a bright sound with some sharpness. Bass

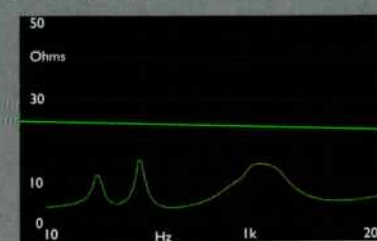
should be good. This sample was less accurate than an earlier one. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Spacious and musical sounding budget box.

WHARFEDALE 10.1 £199.99

Wharfedale UK

+44(0) 1480 447700

www.wharfedale.co.uk

FOR

- sophisticated styling
- engaging swing
- vocal presentation

AGAINST

- lively treble

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ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS NEO ONE v2 £225

The Neo 1 v2s are available in either Black Ash or the Vermont Walnut of these examples. They measure 357x182x231mm and those braced MDF cabinets weigh in at 6kg. The drivers are a 25mm Neodymium Ring Radiator for the treble, and a 130mm pressed alloy cone, with a Neodymium magnet for the bass/mid driver. Behind is a reflex port and one set of binding posts.

SOUND QUALITY

Starting off with the Van Cliburn recording, and I was presented with the most cohesive and balanced rendition of the music so far. I was impressed with the smoothness of the sound; upper notes of the piano, and the entirety of the violins, came forth in a calm and almost reserved manner, which showed off their textures. This extended right across the sound of the orchestra allowing me to choose where I focused my attention, rather than feeling that I was being directed to certain parts, as I had been previously. In the bass, cellos were deep and well shaped, having a certain agility that had been missing up to this point.

The Mamas and the Papas proved an altogether more interesting experience. The smoother tonal balance allowed more detail through, and the recording seemed to acquire a more structured sound. Previously

hidden aspects, such as Michelle's vocals were revealed. Denny Doherty's voice had more body, too. The only negative that I could find was a slight tendency to show a little too much forwardness at the extreme high frequencies around cymbals and tambourines.

'Big Calm' was an enjoyable listening experience, bass being quite sprightly, loping along through the track 'Friction', propelling the sounds

in an unflustered but seemingly precise manner. Skye's vocals had more of the sensation of a three dimensional human body behind them, subtle details in the sound being more openly displayed. So despite being only single wireable, the AE's seemed to match anything that the other competitors so far could manage biwired, and retained an engaging musicality throughout the proceedings that I found most enjoyable.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Aegis Neo One has an unusually smooth frequency response, suggesting it will sound cohesive and uncoloured. An upward trend toward high frequencies and restrained bass output will enhance clarity, without the effect being too obvious due to the absence of peaks. The ring dome tweeter's output is especially smooth, producing aurally palatable treble of very good quality.

The loudspeaker's port operates over a wide frequency range, the red trace shows. It applies broad damping to the bass unit around 55Hz. With port output +6dB above driver output at 80Hz it makes a strong contribution and bass quality should be good.

Sensitivity was high at 87dB and impedance quite high at 7.5 Ohms, making the loudspeaker an easy load needing around 30 Watts or more to go loud.

The Neo One is a neatly engineered all rounder. It will sound

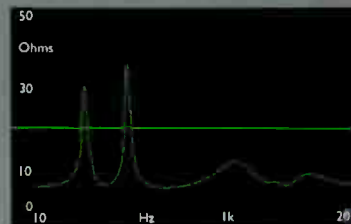
smooth, clear and colour free, with a balance leaning toward speed and detail. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Civilised sounding speaker with fast and quite tuneful bass.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY

NEO 1 V2 £225

Acoustic Energy UK

+ (0) 1285 654432

www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

FOR

- detailed sound
- smooth and focused
- fast and responsive bass

AGAINST

- nothing at the price



FOCAL 705V £300

These attractive little French loudspeakers have pleasingly chamfered cabinet edges, with a 130mm polyglass bass/mid driver and a 25mm aluminium and magnesium alloy inverted dome tweeter, and a single reflex port. Round the back is a single pair of loudspeaker terminals. Vital statistics are 315x192x248 mm and 5.7kg apiece.

SOUND QUALITY

Starting with the Beethoven, I was surprised by the lively treble; there seemed to be an emphasis to the ring of the piano notes and the sound of the violins that seemed at odds with the generally well balanced sounds occurring below. When the music swelled up this sometimes resulted in a congested feeling; the midrange sounds were in balance with the bass, which had enough presence to be pleasantly big and satisfying. Soundstaging was impressively wide for a mono recording, filling the space between the cabinets, and extended well back with ease.

This became more apparent playing the Mamas and the Papas, where the stereo placement of the performers was good. However, despite this I remained curiously disengaged from the music, which surprised me

because this recording is very 'human'. There was plenty of detail in the sound, but nothing that 'got under my skin' as it were, things sometimes sounding a tad detached despite the obvious quality of the loudspeakers.

Playing 'Big Calm', and the combination of the smooth and rich vocals and full bodied production of the instruments is, I usually find, the audio equivalent of settling down in front of a cosy log fire, yet the Focals

didn't seduce. Still, the general tonal balance was pleasing, with a satisfyingly gentle lower and high frequency emphasis. Timing was quite energetic and lively too, but oddly this speaker still didn't quite get into the swing of things despite its good, strong bass.

An interesting and distinctive design then with power and space, but still potential purchasers should get an audition to see if the Focals are to their tastes.

VERDICT ●●●●●
Attractive, well built loudspeaker with a spacious, energetic sound.

FOCAL 705V £300
Focal-JMLab
+44 (0) 845 660 2680
www.focal-uk.com

FOR
- fulsome bass
- well displayed imaging
- energetic sound

AGAINST
- can sound forward
- emotionally unengaging

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Focal 705V has a little lift at low frequencies and high frequencies, to add a little zing to the sound.

Bass unit downward extension isn't great, but the port is fairly broad tuned, extending output down to 30Hz. As port output was quite high, +4dB above the bass driver at 80Hz, it makes a strong contribution and bass quality looks good.

The impedance curve confirms good port damping, the usual residual twin peaks being well suppressed to give an almost resistive load.

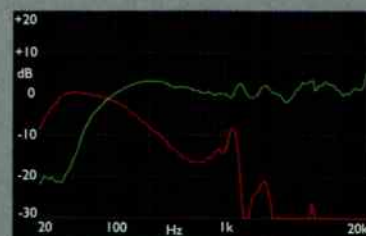
The frequency response curve is a bit ragged, more so than many designs in this group and sound will not be so smooth either.

Sensitivity was fair at 86dB, overall impedance measuring 6.5 Ohms.

Our 200mS decay spectrum (not shown) displayed a few small overhangs, or colourations.

The Focal 705V will have a lively sound with good bass and obvious

treble. It is not the smoothest or colour free in this group however. NK
FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE





MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 £300

The latest little box from MS measures 320x205x298mm, making it the biggest in this group, and the heaviest at 6.4kg. It comes in a choice of black, rosewood and the walnut finish used here. Behind the grill lurks a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter and beneath this is a 162mm CPC aluminium bass unit. The back contains the reflex port and biwireable speaker terminals.

SOUND QUALITY

Settling down to the Beethoven, I was confronted by the most cohesive and comprehensive sound I had yet encountered in this group. Music flowed effortlessly, with a smooth sophistication that was very engaging. I felt that there was a more even balance to the sound than the AEs had managed, allied to a grace that I usually associate with more expensive designs. The soundstage was well populated but relatively uncrowded. Whereas a lot of the speakers here had displayed the full orchestra in a fairly huddled together manner, here I felt there was better separation of the different strands of sound, that neatly combined to create a cohesive group.

This separation did wonders for the Mamas and the Papas LP. It seemed to allow me to disentangle the jumble of musical information presented

to me. Little details, submerged in the messiness of the original recording, became more accessible, helped by the space within the stereo soundstage. It was huge, spreading well beyond the speaker edges, and flowing forward into the room and backwards. Within this, the band seemed to have space to do their job of making music properly, and the result was the most approachable and enjoyable performance of this recording I had yet heard.

The Morcheeba LP was a

pleasure, flowing from the speakers effortlessly and gracefully. Bass was purposeful, although not the fastest here (that honour goes to the AEs), and had depth and solidity that made it more believable. Above this I luxuriated in the warm but descriptive midband, putting flesh and blood onto the vocals. Treble was the smoothest here; relaxed, but detailed and shapely. Biwiring lifted the performance up another level, adding to the general feeling of this being a well thought out and classy design.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Aviano 2 has been balanced to sound just a little warm our frequency response analysis suggests, but third-octave pink noise analysis, not shown, in fact puts the Aviano 2 as absolutely accurate, in the same category as Tannoy's Mercury V1.

Bass output runs smoothly down to 70Hz before the port takes over. It provides some output at 35Hz, but at just +1dB above bass driver output at 80Hz a little less than many rivals. Although port output looks peaky, the impedance curve suggests acoustic damping upon the bass unit is high and the Aviano 2 may well have quite tight sounding bass. It is not a bass heavy/boomy loudspeaker.

A 200mS decay spectrum showed no major overhangs or colouration mechanisms. Sensitivity was normal at 86.5dB, with impedance measuring 6.5 Ohms. It will need around 40 Watts or more to go loud.

The Aviano 2 is super accurate,

very clean and has well damped bass. It is a quality design. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output

Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Extremely classy sounding standmounter at the price.

MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 £300

Mordaunt Short UK
(C) +44(0) 2890 279830
www.mordauntshort.com

FOR

- sophisticated sound
- speed, detail
- better still biwired

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

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Now comes the difficult bit, deciding a pecking order for this group. There will obviously be performance differences when covering a price range like this. After all, the cheapest one here is only half the price of the two most expensive. This is done to give a sense of market perspective, to see if the pricier designs really are better than the less expensive ones. However, price differences are small, all are affordable, and all have something to offer at their respective price points...

So in the usual manner in ascending order, we start with the KEF C3s, which had a functional sound but lacked delicacy, thanks to a prominent treble which could make listening tiring over long periods of time with some types of music. When presented with complex material, such as a full orchestra the sound lost some cohesiveness and focus, although they were undeniably fun with simpler pop and rock. A good baby box is the KEF C35, especially when you remember its price.

Next on the list was the Tannoy's. For the money they're also impressive - after all, £150 these days is the cost of two tanks of petrol in your average family saloon car! They have a decently bouncy and fun sound, but in the context of this review they were ultimately lacking the levels of smoothness that more expensive designs displayed. They fared well with expertly recorded pop, but were out of their depth when faced with full scale classical music, suggesting that lovers of the latter might wish to spend more.

In fourth position were the Focal 750Vs. I was initially very impressed with them, but as listening progressed I felt that they lacked that all important element in music - emotion. A bit Mr. Spock-like to my ears, they do most things correctly, but failed to make a connection with the music in a way. I was slightly perplexed by this, since as the joint most expensive components here I did expect more. A class act, the Focals, but they won't lavish the listener with charm; it's a speaker for people wanting a cerebral sound.

Onto the winners' rostrum, and in a creditable third place are the Wharfedale Diamond 10.1s. Particularly when biwired they seemed to offer very good performance for £200, having a certain zestfulness that suited the more pop based genres of music. They tried their best, and did quite well, with classical but ultimately were outclassed here by the silver medal



Mordaunt Short Aviano 2; excellent all rounders!

winners, the Acoustic Energy Neo 1 V2s.

Here, spending £25 more seemed to produce even more sound per pound, with a level of delivery that took some beating. They were capable with classical music, and seemed unflustered by Beethoven getting a little worked up and passionate, yet retained a certain air of 'street cred' when playing the Morcheeba. They also managed a very credible rendition of the Mamas and the Papas,

being neither over emphasised or too restrained and mindful of its manners. It seemed to sit in a harmonious way on top of the sounds, connected to the rest of the frequencies below. They also displayed the most detailed soundstage of all the speakers here, creating a listening space that prompted me to listen to the music, rather than to the transducer describing it. A very creditable effort, but perhaps it should be considering their price.

“the Mordaunt Short Avianos had easily the most sophisticated and engaging presentation...”

despite the obvious drawbacks of the source material.

And so the winner is the Mordaunt Short Aviano 2s. These speakers stood out against the others even when single wired. They displayed the best tonal balance of the group and, to my ears at least, had easily the most sophisticated and engaging presentation of the music. When biwired they really seemed to open up, revealing layers within the material being played that the AEs sometimes passed over. I found few, if any vices, and the only drawback that I could hear was a slightly slower bass when compared with the Acoustic Energys. However this was compensated for by a greater sense of depth to bass notes. The treble was very good for this class of speaker,

Given the price range under examination here, it was unsurprising that the cheapest two came furthest down the list. As I said at the beginning, this is one of the most hotly contested areas in the hi-fi market, and at these levels, a matter of a handful of pounds in the price can make a seemingly disproportionate difference to the performance on offer. However, most will find fans somewhere, and some of the more forward sounding designs may well be the moderating tonic needed to a woolly or bass heavy system. However, in overall performance the three podium contenders have a lot to offer and should be auditioned against each other where possible, since personal preferences will always vary.

Come Together

David Price gets up close and personal with Naim's new UnitiQute...

As I remember, it wasn't so long ago that I had a Naim box similar in dimensions to the UnitiQute which did nothing but amplify music signals, and by not very much I hasten to add! The 1985 Nait 1 put out about 7W per channel, whereas the equally diminutive 2010 UnitiQute puts out 45W per side, and throws in DAB, FM, uPnP and USB sources, and sports a built-in DAC and analogue inputs for good measure. Yet the new UnitiQute is no technological marvel; these days there are plenty of affordable ways of playing music files off your computer into your hi-fi these days, not to mention USB memory sticks, DAB, internet radio and what have you...

Instead, what this little box attempts is the bringing together of many sources in one (small) place with sound quality on another level from your average PC World-bound 'computer audio' gadget. And it also sports a quality of build and overall operating sophistication that is simply unknown to users of such products. As its name neatly suggests, Naim are trying to make this an able all-rounder in a lovely little package.

Its versatility is undeniable; hidden deep within its chunky case, the preamplifier sports two analogue inputs, five 24bit/192kHz-capable digital inputs (via a Wolfson DAC), FM and DAB tuners and the ability to play music from an iPod or MP3 player via its front panel-mounted USB socket (with digital iPod playback, Apple authenticated); the USB socket also plays (up to) 24/96 music files from a USB memory stick. An Ethernet socket and integrated Wi-Fi also comes as standard.

The power amplifier claims

45W RMS per channel into 4 Ohms, 30W into 8 Ohms [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. Naim say it has a linear power supply with 200VA toroidal transformer with three separate windings, and there are separate power supplies for digital, analogue, and power amplifier. There's also a ground selector switch for optimum performance. All this goes into a beautifully neat, non-resonant, non-magnetic case, fronted by a superb green (what else?) OLED fine pitch dot-matrix display that's exceptionally easy to read, despite modestly sized characters.

So the Naim UnitiQute is a dinky do-it-all design that's going to be bought not just by Naim *aficionados* but by 'civilians' to whom the Naim name means nothing. They'll likely come across it in trendy retail establishments or Sunday newspaper colour supplements, wonder what it is, be beguiled by its diminutive dimensions and superb display, find out it has a massive feature set and (finally) fine sound – and then produce their plastic. With this in mind, I decided to subject it to the 'David Price Lifestyle Challenge' (©1995), namely to set it up completely without *any* resort to the instruction manual whatsoever, in under fifteen minutes...

Top marks for size (87x207x314mm) and weight (5.6kg); it's just big enough to not be a toy, just small enough to pick up without worrying about dropping it on your foot, just heavy enough to have been hewn from something that doesn't melt when you stub a cigarette out on it, just light enough not to have me phoning the osteopath. There's a manual, a bundled IEC mains lead, a Wi-Fi aerial and a couple of socket

adaptors thrown in, and that's the package...

Switching on (the mains rocker is on the back) yielded a few uncooperative front panel messages, but a bit of fumbling on the remote (i.e. pressing the 'spanner' button; highly self referential in my case when it comes to getting uPnP players working) had me in network setup mode. I managed to 'intuit' the text entry and within five minutes the little Naim had found my flaky old Netgear router, and was shaking hands with my MacBook Pro, duly equipped with my trial version of TwonkyServer 6.0.23. Having tried to set up the very first Linn Klimax DS some three years ago with an early PC-bound Twonky app that was on the verge of expiring, and a nasty old Ethernet cable, I have to say this was an altogether more civilised experience. We had Wi-Fi lift off!

Then it was a case of turning the volume down before plugging in the speakers; measurement man Noel had kindly left it at 100/100 in a bid to blow up my beloved Yamaha NS1000M speakers on switch-on! Off went the power, in went the speaker leads, on went the power (only a very light switch on pop was heard) again and we were away; I selected uPnP, the Naim showed my Twonky 'account' on its display and off I went into my Mac-based music library. Select 4hero's 'Escape That', press the 'OK' button on the remote and bingo, we had sound! The whole process took about ten minutes, which isn't much by proper hi-fi standards; consider it as having achieved a 'pass', then.

Well, sort of. Whilst the UnitiQute surprises and delights





"a great crossover design that should entice newcomers into the wonderful world of real hi-fi..."

in many ways (24/96 from a USB stick is cool), it wouldn't play out Apple Lossless (which much of my computer music is stored in), although it would play the Lossless files digitally from an iPod. I'm not holding Naim responsible for this; I suspect it's an arcane Apple rights/licensing issue; but it was a pain. Yes, I know, I should be using FLAC. Well, actually, I've decided not to use any compression in my future computer music recording exploits as FLAC (to my ears) slightly degrades the sound too; why not just do bit-for-bit copies, which were once the Holy Grail of the audiophile? The little Naim also plays WAV, Windows Media-formatted content, AAC and FLAC from any suitable uPnP device. MP3 is also available for those who wish to wallow in the mire...

SOUND QUALITY

The UnitiQute's sound is a tricky thing to triangulate. In the great scheme of things, it's much better than any other product of its type (not that there are many), yet it's still not quite as nice as perhaps you'd wish it to be in absolute terms. The paradox is that it's good enough to be treated as seriously expensive hi-fi, and to be assessed as such, when of course it simply shouldn't be

subject to such rigour. This is akin to criticising a Golf GTi for not being as stable as a Ferrari over 120mph, and then thinking, "oh hang on, it's only a Volkswagen after all!"

With most all-in-one music systems, the question of whether the sound is any good or not is about how well they cover their tracks. The little Naim by contrast doesn't set out to put up a smokescreen; it tries and largely succeeds to get you closer to the music. It has a dry and clean tonality, erring perhaps just on the 'cool' side of neutral, but isn't harsh in any way. Unsurprisingly perhaps given its DNA, there's a strong, taut and punchy bass which doesn't let any type of music - drum'n'bass included - get the wrong side of it. Sunday paper standfirst writers will doubtless describe it as a "bantamweight belter"...

Appropriately enough then, Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang' on LP (via the analogue in) was first off, and the size of the soundstage, the punch of the bass and the general speed and exuberance of the performance was breathtaking considering its modest price and status in life. Those classic analogue EDP Wasp synths buzzed all around and Q-Tip's staccato rap stabbed forth as the UnitiQute gave a gloriously propulsive and spirited

rendition of this great little pop ditty. It's not the world's best recorded song this, but whilst the Naim was detailed enough to tell you this, it didn't perform a live autopsy as you listened, refusing to let the recording quality spoil the fun. Indeed, it seemed made for thumping pop such as this.

Moving to Galliano's 'Coming On Strong' on CD, a higher fidelity all analogue Acid Jazz outing from the early nineties, and yes, you could hear the little Naim pulling just a touch of tonal colour out of the overall picture, reducing the palette slightly and spraying a smidgen of grey all over. Yet I still felt like I was listening to a 5 series Naim amplifier; such was its grip, solid bass and general midband articulation; the 'Quite let the song flow better than many similarly priced amplifiers, making for a gripping and bouncy rendition. Slightly disappointed about its subtle greying of the tonal palette, I then had to remind myself I wasn't listening to a grown up hi-fi...

Whilst the UnitiQute wasn't the warmest of performers, it's certainly not hard or unpleasant. Felt's 'Primitive Painters' via the digital input (from CD) was very entertaining; here's a load of jangling eighties Rickenbackers topped off by

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TANNOY

the beautiful but shrill tones of Liz Fraser (Cocteau Twins) and a densely layered production from Robin Guthrie (ditto). This is something of an indie rock assault course, and the Naim passed with flying colours; the DAC isn't quite up there with the very best but it does the job dutifully and certainly doesn't disgrace itself; early nineties budget CD players, for example, would get a big boost. Its sound is detailed, crisp and there's a decently finessed treble which makes for a mature sound.

Trying the direct digital iPod connection, my Classic went in and some Groove Armada was called up from the supplied Naim remote; 'At the River' in Apple Lossless made a very nice noise, running the CD source surprisingly close. As ALAC (to my ears) degrades the sound slightly, it was an impressive performance against the same via a Marantz KI Signature feeding the DAC the real thing (i.e. 16/44 PCM uncompressed). There was plenty of depth and width to the soundstage, and a good deal of detail; just a couple years ago, sound of this quality from an iPod would have been unimaginable, tied as you were to the vagaries of its onboard DAC and analogue output stage. It sounded less convincing playing 256kbps AAC; the Naim is not a natural flatterer and simply reminded me of the evils of compressed audio. It did play out a 24/96 FLAC file of The Beatles 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' via a USB memory stick impressively, with a wider and deeper and smoother sound, making this a very versatile music maker.

Playing via a home network, using Twonky as a uPnP on a Mac (with iTunes selected; it won't play otherwise), the UnitiQute worked almost seamlessly; it would hang up just a couple of times of an evening and recover its footing easily. I'll give it the benefit of the doubt here, as my router isn't exactly in the first flush of youth. I found it sounded practically the same via wired Ethernet but Naim say this is better. Most of my listening was done with AAC files (it won't play ALAC via uPnP) but still made a decent noise; intriguingly it delivered my 320kbps file of 808 State's 'Ancodia' at 322kbps according to its 'Stream Info' display menu option - the streaming equivalent of going up to eleven? Fed a good quality, non compressed computer audio file the UnitiQute came very close to CD; no small feat. FM and DAB were both passable, with a decent level of detail and fair sensitivity, but there was little sense that FM was dramatically



better (which there should be). Still, there's always Internet radio if digital fans can't be doing with the latter's paleolithic MPEG 2 codec (kind of like still running MS-DOS on your 'IBM PC!'); the Naim impressed with a variety of stations I'd never come across before. It's a pretty good implementation too, as you can configure it to work with all sorts of obscure stations and preset them into its memory banks, after which time it will recall them without fuss. My only criticism is that a graphic representation of an analogue tuning dial would be nice; if a £60 Samsung MP3 player can do, why can't Naim? Something for the software boys on a wet Wednesday afternoon in Salisbury, perhaps?

CONCLUSION

Here's a brilliant little music box; the best I've tried since the Arcam Solo Mini a couple of years back, albeit offering a far higher level of functionality. In strict sound quality terms, the Solo Mini is a tad sweeter but ultimately less grippy and incisive, the Naim showing its ancestry just as the Arcam did. Ergonomically the Naim is excellent too; I can't think of any simpler ways of offering such a wide range of sources with such little fuss. Its display is superb, its menu system crisp and you can even rename the source names should you wish, which is a great touch.

Everything works very well, there's no sign of bugginess and the UnitiQute emerges sounding like a baby Naim, just

as it should. Perhaps it could have been just a touch more euphonic on the ear given its likely partnering loudspeakers, but then again Naim owners would be clamouring for more grip and punch. So overall then, I think it's a cracking little product, and a great crossover design that should entice newcomers into the wonderful world of real hi-fi.

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- FOR**
- superb build
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AGAINST

- lacks tonal warmth

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The amplifier section is very Naim, bandwidth limited to 30kHz (-1dB), with a low damping factor of 16, good power supply regulation and also very low distortion at all output levels and frequencies. You will get very much the Naim sound here. That means smooth treble, quite a 'dark' presentation free from hardness and fulsome bass with some power behind it; 56Watts into 4 Ohms. It will be svelte by general standards.

The digital converters measured well, offering flat frequency response and very low distortion, right down to 0.1% at -60dB with 24bit, and a normal enough 0.22% with 16bit.

Only the VHF/FM tuner was a bit adrift from the norm. Characteristics were unusual and this looks like a Software Defined Radio solution, probably as part of the DAB module. Noise was high, measuring -57dB (IEC A weighted), at which level hiss will be just audible in Radio 3 silences no matter how strong the aerial signal. This is little better than cassette without Dolby. Otherwise, performance was good, a slightly lumpy frequency response (caused by digital filtering) reaching 11kHz before imposing massive pilot tone rejection (-109dB).

Full quieting (minimum noise) was maintained right down to an extremely low 42µV, a benefit of SUR, and sensitivity was also very high, the tuner needing just 24µV for -50dB noise on stereo. This means the tuner will be quieter than most with a poor aerial, but hissier than most with a good one!

The UnitiQute measures well, concealing some neat electronics, except VHF/FM. NK

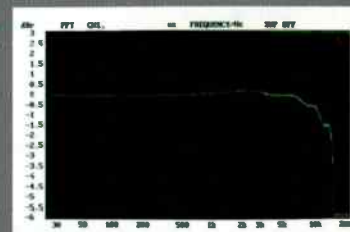
AMPLIFIER	
Power	34 Watts
Frequency response	6Hz-30kHz
Separation	71dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	290mV

DIGITAL		
Frequency response		(-1dB)
CD (44.1)		2Hz-20kHz,
PCM (192)		2Hz-45kHz
Distortion	16bit	24bit
0dB	0.008	0.008
-6dB	0.009	0.009
-60dB	0.22	0.1
-80dB	4.6	1

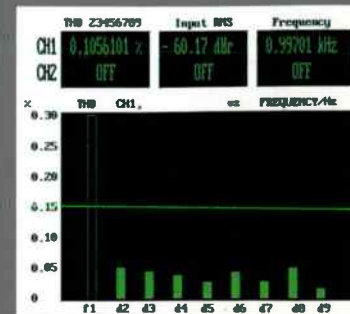
Separation (1kHz)	77dB
Noise (IEC A)	-102dB
Dynamic range	99dB

VHF/FM TUNER	
Frequency response	10Hz-11kHz
Stereo separation	25dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.6%
Hiss (CCIR)	-57dB
Signal for minimum hiss	42µV
Sensitivity	
mono	12µV
stereo	24µV
signal strength meter	none
VHF	

VHF FREQUENCY RESPONSE



24 bit DISTORTION



2010S2

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Integrated Amplifier
Power Amplifier



3010S2

CD Player
Integrated Amplifier
Stereo Power Amplifier
Pre-Amplifier
Mono Power Amplifier



Colour : available in **TITANIUM** and **BLACK**



PHILIPS DS9000 £400

It's rare to find the name Philips in the pages of a hi-fi magazine these days which, given the company's epic contribution to the hi-fi world in general, is a crying shame. The company that brought us two of the biggest music formats in history, Compact Cassette and Compact Disc, seems to have walked away from the audio market. Well not quite, because the DS9000 is a genuinely serious attempt on the company's part to make the best iPod dock in the world. And the surprising thing is - given their recent history in consumer electronics

and the stiffness of the competition from both B&W and now Arcam (see below) - is that they've nearly succeeded. The DS9000 is a superb product, one that's worthy to wear the illustrious Philips name.

Rather than trying to be all things to all people, the 9000 is simply a lovely iPod speaker system. There are no built in CD players, wireless streaming or anything else; it offers pretty much the same functionality as the original (and best) B&W Zeppelin. The dock connector plays the digital music directly off the iPod, or a line input via a 3.5mm jack, and that's your lot. Aside from

an exquisite curved real wood case that wouldn't disgrace a decent hi-fi speaker, that is, plus a natty control panel that lights up when you move your hand towards the unit, and dims when you walk away. The unit is also controllable by a free-to-download iPhone app, as well as the supplied remote control.

Build quality of this largish (562x214x216mm, 6.5 kg) unit is superb; everywhere you look there is evidence the design team have harnessed hi-fi 'best practice' where possible. And so to the sonics. Great across all music genres, the Philips fills rooms with clean and natural sound, showing no signs of stress even at full tilt. There's oodles of detail, which is delicately but decisively delivered. Happily, it sounds slightly warmer than the original Zeppelin, and also a touch more inviting and less incisive; many people will actually prefer its character. A big surprise this, don't let the company's general move away from hi-fi put you off. **DP**

[Contact: 0906 1010 016,
www.philips.com]

soundbites

ARCAM RCUBE £500

It wasn't so long ago that the idea of spending £400 on an iPod dock would have seemed bizarre, but the B&W Zeppelin created a 'Bentley' niche that has proved successful. I'd call Arcam's rCube a Range Rover Sport; it introduces go-anywhere capability thanks to its built in rechargeable battery (which gives about eight hours of playback), has a neat built-in carrying handle that cantilevers out, and wireless operation, which makes its portability even more useful. For example, you can stream your favourite tunes to it, as it sits in the garage playing full bandwidth CD quality sound. Helping here are an optional Arcam rWand dongle at £69.95 for iPods, while computer users need the rWave wireless dongle at £79.95.

A compact 200x200x200mm and weighing 5kg, it's not exactly pocketable but it is certainly moveable; I found it the ideal size as it's big enough to pack serious speakers and amplification; if it was any smaller it wouldn't be anywhere near as capable.

Sonically, it's excellent, as indeed it should be at this price. Its aluminium composite casework makes for a robust cabinet for its two high quality side-firing mid-woofers and twin forward facing dome tweeters. 150W RMS of amplification is on tap, with DSP used to 'trim' the response. There's also a bass boost button which Arcam say should be used in open spaces, but switched off when the unit is sitting in corners. I found the rCube to be a great product; sitting outside in the garden, it delivered a lipsmacking rendition of Felt's 'Spanish House', sounding majestic with fulsome chiming Rickenbacker guitars ringing around the outside walls of my house whilst providing genuinely high sound levels; certainly good enough for a garden party. Indoors it's no less impressive, and you can really enjoy its delicacy, smoothness and lack of any rough edges. It's also a good deal warmer and more euphonic than the Zeppelin, although its stereo imaging isn't as defined; instead, the Arcam just goes for filling the room with big, fulsome sound. The only criticism is

its finish, which is good but shows up fingerprints and isn't really tough enough for the rCube's dual purpose indoors/outdoors role. **DP**

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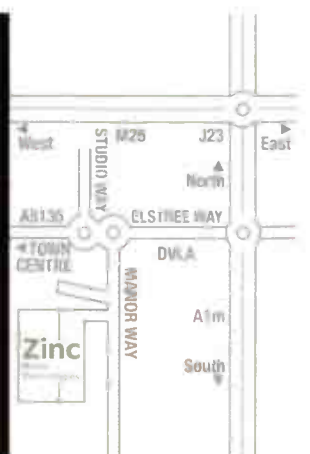
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Letter of the Month

TOP KNIGHT

Thank you for the speaker recommendations for my Cyrus 7 set-up in the August edition. I have auditioned your recommendation of a Tannoy DC8 and can confirm that they are a lovely speaker. I even sourced an ex-demo pair from one of your advertisers for only a little above my budget.

However, in search of David's cable recommendation I happened into Audio T in Cardiff. Mentioning my problem, they suggested I try the new Castle Knight speakers. They had a pair of Knight 5s, as reviewed by Noel in the October edition, on demo with Cyrus source and amplification in a room similar to mine so I had a quick listen. I found the bass and treble far too fulsome for my tastes but was assured that the stand mount Knight 2 had a different voicing and was the pick of the range.

Back in Cheltenham I arranged to listen to the Knight 2 at the local branch. I admit that I did not have very high hopes, but was immediately impressed by a sonorous quality which gives body to piano, strings and woodwind, a relaxed midband and the very even progression from mid to treble. This I attribute to different cone materials (not the aluminum of my Monitor Audio GR 8s) rather than warmth. The sound was not identical to the old Castles (which I found rather lifeless) but reminded me a little of a pair of large KEF Reference stand mounts I had temporary custody of in the early 1980s.

In a room 50% longer than mine and on the end of Naim amplification bass seemed a bit excessive and a touch woolly, although it improved with grill on and bungs in ports. I thought that what David described as the "dry and over precise" approach of the Cyrus

equipment might tame this and so arranged a home demonstration.

Audition at home confirmed the strengths noted before and added new ones. Bass was now well balanced and tuneful and imaging was excellent. A major strength is the ability to play soft and loud without losing the character of the music. With my Monitor Audios there is an optimum volume for each recording (even for each track) - a narrow aperture between dull and in your face which is sometimes too loud. The Castles on the other hand are very even handed with source material and volume setting, and quite dynamic at all volumes, which my wife

appreciates strongly as she prefers to listen at lower levels than I do.

This might suggest a degree of loudness contouring but this does not seem to be the case. A frequency sweep test tone from a hi-fi test record showed a very even perceived progression in my room. The only very minor drops in perceived volume were at precisely those points where speaker/room resonances set in - certain high notes of

the female voice and violin. Either this is extremely fortuitous or Peter Comeau is a genius.

There were of course losses as well as gains. The speakers are apparently slightly less detailed than the MAs though this may be a result of their evenness. Detail is still there, but is not spotlighted in the same manner. Bass is fuller and musical, it very easy to follow bass guitar or double bass for example,



Tannoy DC-8. "I can confirm they are a lovely 'speaker", says John Hurley.

but not quite as fast. The upper midband and treble sweetens some voices and instruments a shade too much, Kate Westbrook's voice lacking the underlying rasp I am familiar with from live performance. Brass too is very slightly softened with the merest hint of a quacky colouration. But a sweeter upper mid and treble is one of the things I was seeking so this is an acceptable compromise. The only serious casualty is harpsichord which on one record sounds more like a child's toy piano, missing the authentic clang which metal domes give. But this is at least in part recording related and mostly harpsichord is just a little less precise.

The Knights are not in the same league as the Tannoys but given the price difference they would not be. I would not say they are better than my MAs but they are different in a way that suits my room and amplification better. The real wood veneer cabinet construction is almost as good as my MAs. At half the price I paid eight years ago for the MAs they are a bargain and I have bought them. I hope you find space to review them in a future edition because the Knight 2s offer a real alternative to the dominant sound of speakers.

Dr John Hurley

Thank you John - it's good to hear someone espousing the good old 'try before you buy' approach, allied to some careful system matching! So there you go - not a single mention of you buying a recommended 'fave rave' product online at a discount and then having to sell it three weeks later at a loss because it sounded rubbish in your system! **DP**

AN EAR FULL

It was the March 2009 issue that brought me to the idea of complementing my EAR 8L6 with a suitable preamp. That issue of Hi-Fi World features a test of the EAR 868PL preamp complemented with the EAR 890 power amp. Your review was quite enthusiastic about the dazzling speed, the delicious intricacy, transparency. These are audio properties I recognise from my 8L6, which has a beautiful transparency in itself. Could providing it with a suitable preamp lead to further sonic improvement?

My original system (mentioned in my letter in the November 2009 issue of HFW) consists of a EAR 8L6 integrated valve amplifier with Music Hall CD transport and DAC, connected via Nordost Frey and Silver Shadow. Loudspeakers are EdMa modified Phonar Veritas 5.5 biwired via Nordost Frey to the EAR.

In the meantime, I had found out that the pre section of the 8L6 is

actually passive and consists only of the attenuator and the selector switch. Because the 8L6 has the advantage that pre and main section can be decoupled, turning it into a pure Class A push-pull valve power amplifier, I was willing to test run some preamps. It has to be said that I was rather sceptical, for I could not imagine that adding extra components in the signal path could bring me any sonic improvement. Very much like Noel claims in his column less is more in the same November

turned out that although the Nordost was fine with respect to sonic detail, the soundstage was somehow unnaturally split into left and right. Also the sound was a tad too airy, a bit like the air on top of the mount Everest. The silver core cable brought back coherence and musicality without losing any detail, bien au contraire! Surely, this was the consequence of a poor impedance matching issue for which only my inexperience was to blame (surely not the Nordost company).



Rudy Deblieck's neat looking system with EAR valve amplifier at top.

2009 issue. On the other hand, if this were true, why would Tim de Paravicini bother making separate active preamps anyway? Fortunately, besides a sceptic I'm also a scientist and so I'm open to new insights.

My first idea was to try the EAR 868L, following Noel's review. But as it happens, my good friend and high end guru, Edwin Maas (Edma) from the Netherlands, who builds, modifies and improves high end gear starting from, amongst others, Audio Note kits, had a preamp ready for testing and so we did somewhere last April. Edwin also brought along a modified Audio Note 2.1 Level C DAC, to compare it with my Music Hall DAC 25.2, which I thought was performing nicely.

The first thing Edwin got rid of, after hearing my setup, were my very expensive Nordost Frey interlinks and the evenly expensive Nordost Silver Shadow digital link. He replaced them with, equally expensive, self made solid core silver, silk insulated cable, featuring rhodium plated, Inakustik RCA plugs soldered with Audio Note Silver. It

Anyway, with this set straight, Edwin coupled in the preamp and much to my amazement and stupefaction the effect on sound quality was huge. A wealth of extra resolution on an inky black background became audible. So, adding the preamp to my setup had really improved the sound. As a scientist I tried to explain this by an analogy with an electron microscope, where the quality of the pre-magnification by the objective lens is critical to the final resolution. Leaving the objective lens out (emulating the analogy of a passive preamp) will not improve the image, quite the contrary.

The sound was already hugely improved and I should have been happy, were it not that Edwin suggested to me to also try his modified Audio Note DAC. So it was done and the sound improved further with a clearly wider and a more focused sound stage, with more depth. The tonality also became much more musical, analog like and lost quite some digital hardness. This digital hardness I originally attributed to room reverberations and the sonic character



Chord Electronics DAC64 reached 16kHz but sounded wonderful.

of my very revealing Phonars. With the digital hardness replaced by a svelte, well resolved midband, I could start hearing the small nuances in the timbre of different instruments.

Needless to say, I was lost and in love and I had to have this Edwin Maas modified Audio Note gear. Being a really good friend, Edwin built the preamp and the DAC combination for a friend's price which allowed me to acquire both at the same time, although it was still quite a drain on my finances so shortly after acquiring a new setup (less than a year ago), for high end components are not really cheap.

Currently, I am the proud owner of a beguiling sounding setup that is continuously improved as Edwin comes up with more or less affordable upgrades such as internal silver wiring, high end potentiometer, audio grade Vishay resistors in critical places (these perform even better than the famous AN tantalum resistors), a modified preamp valve, higher end audio grade capacitors in critical places and so on...

The very nice thing about this is that now I am able to upgrade my sound by spending amounts of the order of 200 to 500 Euro without having to sell former equipment and acquire new stuff at full high end prices.

Needless to say that I became very fond of the effortless, natural, organic sound that comes out of my upgraded setup that is obviously the product of good old UK based engineering, by the Tim de Paravicini and Audio Note, lovingly modified by my good friend Edwin Maas.

Rudy Deblieck
Opglabbeek
Belgium

Thanks for that Rudy – another interesting epistle. Rafael Todes just phoned me and we ended up talking about the sound of (Danish) Jensen capacitors and how good / beguiling they are. I see you are going the same way. In the end the science has

to take a back seat to the experience. I'm glad you are enjoying it. **NK**

LAND LINES

The assertion made by Mr. Hogkinson (Letters, October) that listeners who celebrate the analogue quality of FM stereo radio are in fact demonstrating that they are happy with digital, is an interesting one and is worthy of further examination.

Even a live acoustic performance, starting life as an analogue signal in the studio, will be digitally encoded for distribution to the various radio transmitters in the network. On arriving at a transmitter, the digital signal is decoded and is transmitted in the form of an analogue FM radio wave. The celebrated analogue quality of FM stereo therefore relies on a lot of digital processing!

So why introduce the digital processing in the first place? The reason is that the old land lines, which distributed analogue signals adequately in the early days of radio, produced unacceptable levels of corruption when asked to carry more complex analogue signals. The replacement of these land lines by more robust digital links guaranteed the integrity of signal transfer for the era of FM broadcasting.

The BBC was one of the first broadcasting organisations to employ digital encoding of the analogue signals originating from its studios. The first 13bit, 32 kHz digital links were installed between its FM transmitters in the late 1960s.

The signal bandwidth in FM stereo broadcasting, due to the multiplexing of the two channels, is restricted to 15kHz. This explains why a 32kHz sample rate must be used. The signal's high frequency content is preserved with a 32kHz sample rate. **NK**

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quality of LP records. Since it was as early as 1973 that the first 13bit digital recordings were released on LP, you may not always be listening to pure analogue quality from LPs pressed after that time.

This, of course, explains why the procedure of transferring the original master tape recordings direct to vinyl is so popular with audiophiles!

Alan RJ Scott

Sometimes I think it is best not to get too involved with the numbers and stand back a little. The fact that the BBC uses digital land lines is one of those hoary old "proof that digital is okay" examples. Well, quite obviously it is okay, but no better – and is that good enough? Hook up a good tuner and listen in and you hear back to source well enough.

When this is a live talk from a studio what we hear is almost virgin, unprocessed basic audio and, having done a few radio talks in my time, I know fairly well that what we hear is close enough to the damped sound of a studio, as well as the slightly embarrassing oral behaviour of the various souls at the microphones.

Similarly, live broadcasts can be astonishing. The digital landline may well be degrading this slightly, but the source material is so arresting it hardly matters. And that's why VHF/FM radio can sound so good.

Back to figures. CD can be band limited to 16kHz (Wadia, Chord Electronics DAC64, Denon Lambda processing and Pioneer Legato Link players) and VHF/FM tuners can have a frequency response that extends past 20kHz. That CD makes 21kHz as a statement means little; everyone liked the Chord Electronics DAC64 that reached 16kHz.

The world has moved on, thankfully, and now we can start hear the improvement brought by 24bit, and it is quite a significant improvement. I am less of a fan of higher bit rates than 24/96 then this may be. I think of the limitations of 'Where's the power? Differences between the CD and the DVD-A (24/96) of the CD almost unbearable.

The signal bandwidth in FM stereo broadcasting, due to the multiplexing of the two channels, is restricted to 15kHz. This explains why a 32kHz sample rate must be used. The signal's high frequency content is preserved with a 32kHz sample rate. **NK**

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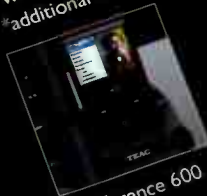
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LIVE IN VIENNA

I write this letter, because singer Rickie Lee Jones was here in Vienna last week and gave a wonderful concert. I recorded her onto DSD on a mobile handheld MR-1 from Korg with very good results. But listening to RLJ on the analog track of the Laserdisc sounds quite close to a real live event itself. Laserdisc was able to carry an analog movie signal, but also an analog audio signal (besides digital audio tracks). I was always wondering what could have become of Laserdisc if Pioneer had developed pure music discs without digital tracks and without video signal. I guess they could have been the size of CD, carrying two analog audio tracks, difficult to copy and therefore automatically copy protected and with awesome analogue sound...

I own nearly 100 music Laserdiscs. A lot of them are astonishing: you should hear the difference between Bob Dylan MTV on the analog tracks of the Laserdisc compared to the same content on Vinyl or DVD!

I also own an awful lot of prerecorded reel-to-reels for my two Revox G36 recorders. More tape hiss than Laserdisc, but sound wise similar exceptional quality.

Since I play all formats on all kinds of equipment I dare to give a rating for listenable audio – how my ears and soul feel about it. I ranked from 1 to 200. Top 1 is live concert. Last place 200 is MP3 at 320 kbps. LT III means Leak Troughline III VHF/FM tuner. I am really happy with recording live operas or live rock concerts through my wonderful Leak Troughline III onto DSD-files. I left ranking-places empty to represent the differences in sound quality between the formats more pregnantly:

1	Live without amplifying
8	Live with amplifying
22	Live through LT III
24	Prerec. Reel 15 ips 2 Track
28	Prerec. analog NTSC Laserdisc
29	Rec. Live LT III 7.5 ips 4 Track
33	Prerec. Reel 7.5 ips 2 Track
36	Prerec. Reel 7.5 ips 4 Track
38	Prerec. Reel 3.75 ips 2 Track
40	Prerec. LP on TD 124, mono Ortofon SPU on Ortofon arm
42	Prerec. LP on TD 124 Decca Gold London, Hadcock Unipivot
44	Prerec. 78s on TD 124 with Shure mounted on a funny Panasonic
45	Live direct to DSD 2.8MHz
52	Rec. Live LT III on DSD 5.6 MHz
60	Prerec. LP on Oracle Delphi IV Lyra Clavis on Graham 2.0
65	Rec. Live LT III on DSD 2.8 MHz
68	Blu-ray 5.1 HD
70	Rec. Live LT III on VHS-Super
80	Rec. Live LT III on 24/192
85	Rec. Live LT III on 24/96

90	Prerec. MusicCassette
100	Rec. Live LT III on 24/48
110	Prerec. SACD
135	Prerec. DVD-A 24/96
160	Prerec. CD-source
165	Rec. Live LT III on 16/44.1
200	Prerec. mp3

You might wonder why I placed DSD quite high ranked, but SACD far behind. Simply, I never got a commercial SACD (and I own a lot) that sounds like DSD as recorded via my KORGS.

The same is true for DVD-A: my own recorded 24/192 burnt onto DVD-A sounds much more promising than the commercial ones.

Looking at today's available digital and analog formats it is remarkable that the best sound I can get nowadays from classical music is from good old FM-radio!! Live listening in front of my Leak Troughline III beats everything that is on the market. I recorded operas



Record your own DSD, as Erwin does, using the amazing Korg MR-1.

and bought them half a year later on Blu-ray (Netrekos Figaro). And the FM recording beats the commercial Blu-ray content. Happily, Austrian Broadcasting is still delivering the analogue signal via FM and transmit it digital only for satellite surround-sound 5.1 (sadly, simultaneous transmitted television pictures and the analog FM sound do not match, because for television also the digital audio signal is transmitted, and therefore the television picture always lags behind the analog FM sound). For live events I record the analogue FM sound on DSD-files and the television on HD-movie files...).

So here I am, the great audiophile, waiting for the moment when the radio 'speaker stops, to press the record button as I have done in my childhood (I'm 44 now).

Thanks for all the help over the years. Your magazine transformed my system from a clinical Oracle Delphi and Krell system into a wonderful sounding tubed, vintage audio system with some modern sources. It is 5.1 surround with all channels direct into tubed power

amps with source Oppo 83 SE from Nuforce. My Thorens TD 124 has three tonearms: for stereo played through Tannoy 700D speakers and mono and 78s played through a Tannoy center speaker combination. Back speakers are all Tannoys.

Keep up the great work. I love your non-professional professional style! regards,

**Erwin Pani,
Vienna.**

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Could you please clarify the situation regarding the quality of the audio signal recorded on Blu-ray, DVD-A, SACD, etc and the effect of DRM, HDCP copyright protection on the quality of the signal output to the loudspeakers?

At present I have a Denon DVD-2900, a Pioneer PL-550 direct drive turntable, Goldring 1042 cartridge, Pioneer CT-W202 double cassette deck and a Roberts WM-201 internet radio, all of which I play through my 1981 vintage Sansui AU-D9 stereo amplifier to Yamaha NS1000, or Richard Allen BBC LS315A plus Yamaha YST-SW45 sub-woofer speakers.

I also have a Denon AVR-1610 receiver and have been considering purchasing a Samsung Blu-ray player and extra speakers, to play CD and Blu-ray surround sound through it.

The AVR-1610 handbook states that the receiver supports HDCP and will not work unless other devices connected to it also support HDCP.

My Denon-2900 handbook says that copyright protected DVD and DVD-A are played at 48kHz/16bit or 44.1 kHz/16bit no matter what the resolution is on the disc.

I understand that Blu-ray players, or the AVR, will similarly downgrade any copyright protected digital signal.

I currently live in Sri Lanka but on a recent trip to the UK I inspected Blu-ray discs on sale both in Dubai and in HMV Oxford Street and, as far as I could tell, all the Blu-ray discs were copyright protected.

Your magazine often remarks upon the high quality of the audio sound output from Blu-ray discs and players with resolutions of up to 24/192. My question is, if all discs are copyright protected, how can any digital disc sound any better than a CD?

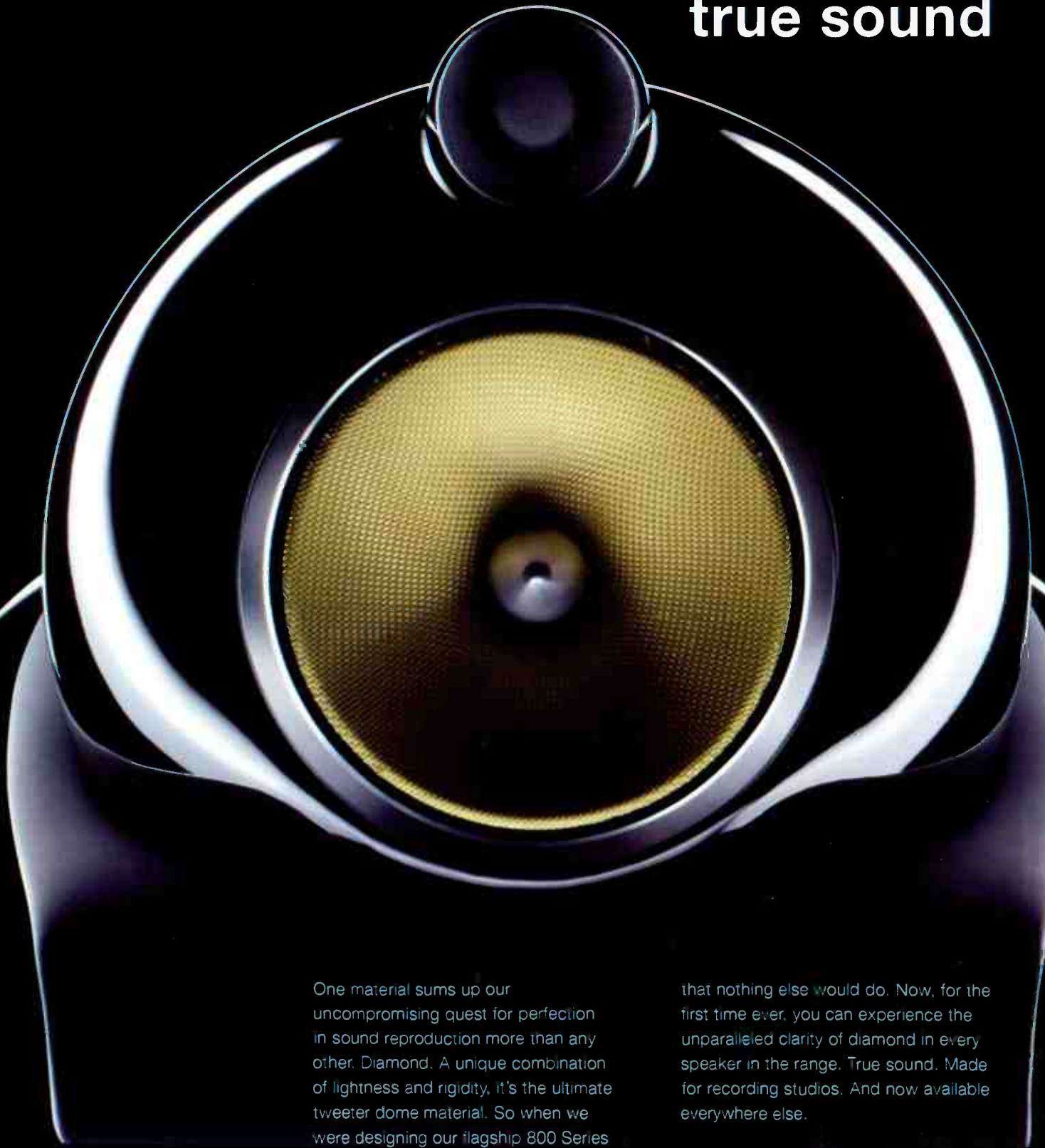
I have raised this query in a number of hi-fi retailers and all their representatives deny having any knowledge of there being any inbuilt restrictions on Blu-ray or similar high definition output signals.

Any information or clarification you are able to provide will be greatly appreciated.

Not withstanding your reply on

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This modest looking Samsung BD-C6900 Blu-ray had very low measured jitter and a great sound, we found.

DRM/HDCP, I have been considering buying a Samsung Blu-ray player on which to play my CD collection. From reviews and remarks in your magazine it seems that the Samsung Blu-ray players are on a par, as far as CD playback quality is concerned, with many of the best new dedicated CD players, up to around GBP £1,000

Is that your view, and would such a player be significantly better at CD reproduction than my Denon DVD-2900 through my system?

Another thought is to copy both my 300 or so classical LP collection and larger CD collection to a good quality hard drive. As a civil engineer I move around from country to country so there would be distinct advantages in preserving my music collections, and equipment, and in reducing my shipping costs.

Do you have any suggestions on the best way of achieving this?

I would prefer to keep down costs but quality of sound is important, plus portability, or transportability, and reasonably robust equipment. I would consider spending up to £2,000 if there were audible benefits.

John Walker

Hi John. To date I have not run into any problems caused by HDCP, or High bandwidth Digital Content Protection. The purpose of this system is to prevent copying of the digital stream, in particular to frustrate the sort of piracy that is common in the Far East. Blu-ray players and receivers handshake and then pass data between themselves, but the deciphered digital stream is not made available to the outside world, to prevent copying.

To avoid a "no signal" scenario via HDMI, if the receiving device is non-HDCP compliant then lower rate/quality data is sent as a substitute. With modern players and receivers however, including your Denon AVR-1610, high resolution digital is transmitted between devices. Receivers flag the stream they are receiving and 24/96 and 24/192 come up, and in a great many cases signal quality is audibly above, sometimes way above CD standards, confirming that everything is working perfectly.

Our measurements show that

Samsung Blu-ray players consistently have very low jitter, lower than most CD players and Blu-ray players. Their digital stream does sound appreciably more pristine and composed than others too, as our recent Blu-ray player test reaffirmed in listening tests. You will get great sound quality from CD using this stream, although do be aware that your AVR-1610 isn't the last word in quality. Once you start playing music in 24/96 from Blu-ray you will hear the improvement over CD and I suspect over the Denon DVD-2900 DVD player too.

Unfortunately, going Blu-ray and surround-sound is going to raise your shipping costs, with extra loudspeakers, disc collection and player. Don't you really need an iPod? **NK**

ON SAFARI

As I set out on my own audio safari (the old Leak and Celestion system a distant memory), yours is the publication bagged after elbowing my way through the gaggle of magazine browsers at my local W.H. Smith. The HFW teams discovery, be it Noel getting stuck into a receiver or Adam picking something out of the audio jumble, never fails to revive the audio aspirations. As for my next step, Cambridge Audio are turning out attractive entry level equipment. But I digress.

Maybe I'm not sufficiently "expert" to be reading HFW, but my favourite guessing game as I turn the pages is Form and Function. Of course you publish dimensions and give explanations but as I dip into the articles, I often find myself wondering where in the chain does this (usually digital) box fit in, closely followed by how much living room will that floorstander need? Magneplanars physically featureless MG12s (with a picture of the

disembodied connection panel not giving the size game away either) is a case point.

I appreciate your distinctive, clutter free pages but wonder how other readers feel about the occasional connection-diagram for computer separates and a sense of scale in speaker photos? regards

Richard Sowden

Hi Richard. Putting scale into loudspeaker pictures would mean using set props or furniture, or a saucy model T3 style. To be frank, we are not equipped for such photography. All pictures are taken in-house, not manufacturers stock shots, so we keep control of appearance and style, but we do not have the space for anything more ambitious, at least for now. We do print size and weight information though, so you can get an idea of scale from this.

NK

BIG PLAYER

Following on from Vincent Hibberts letter (August 2010), could you please help with the following query: is there a sub-£500 USB media player that offers 24/96 FLAC playback via SPDIF, with internet radio a desirable option? Or do I simply wait for the Cambridge Audio NP30?

regards,

**Dr Paul Harris
Whitehall
London**

Hi Paul - I think you've answered your own question! Right now there's a range of different products out there, but the possible permutations are legion and few if any seem to do it all. I have heard rumours that another major manufacturer is about to introduce such a product, but I am sworn to secrecy so best wait a few months! **DP**

HIBERNATING 1210

It's a big thanks to Mr. Price (and that photo on Sound Hi-Fi's website) that about 8 months ago I had my hibernating Technics SL1210 turntable serviced and pimped a little: new rear



Should I get the new Cambridge Audio NP 30 asks Dr Paul Harris?

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box to take RCA ,AT440ML cartridge, plus new Isonoe feet and mat from Sound Hi-Fi.

The rest of my system is Naim I121150, CDS, Stageline MM plus a look-a-like Hi-cap thing (that works very well indeed) and Lumley Lampros 100 speakers.

Interconnects are standard Naim, but I have recently taken delivery of BlackLink speaker cable from Avondale and what a difference that has made over the NACA5.

Overall, I like the Naim sound, though at times I do find it a little – how shall I say this without offending Naimites everywhere – too precise. My kit lives on a hefty Target stand and resides in an average size living room. Since the turntable refurb I've hardly played a CD and have been buying some fantastic 60s/70s soul, funk and reggae from boot sales and charity shops. So, what next for the I210?

My dilemma is this. I have some money (managed to save about 1k), cloth ears (too many concerts and clubs, long ago) and a quest for something better. Having read your magazine for the last couple of years I admit that I understand little in the way of the technical stuff (surely I'm not the only one), but I like what I read and the pictures are nice. Each issue only confuses me more about what I'd like next, so your guidance would be truly appreciated.

Your magazine often gives glowing references to Icon Audio's phono stages and I'm wondering how (if at all) it would work with my system. What would it do to the Naim sound? Would it take the edge off? Would it make it sweeter? I like to play my music loud (when I can) and wonder if the Icon connected directly to the I50 would work.

Or do I stay with the Naim Stageline phono stage and invest in an arm upgrade? And which one, bearing in mind that a new arm would probably mean a new cartridge (more money) and, probably, an MC phono stage (even more money)? My musical tastes seem akin to Mr. Price's so would value his opinion, along with you all of course. thanks in advance,

David Higgins

If it is any help, I once put a Croft preamp in front of a Naim NAP150 and the two worked brilliantly together. I was quite taken aback. Naim power amplifiers are quite amenable to a different front end and the outcome can be worthwhile. When I told Naim about this I met a deathly silence! **NK**

Hi David – whilst a move to an Icon Audio PS1.2 phono stage (£1,045) would likely have a very beneficial

effect – bringing more atmosphere, scale and warmth, your real weak link is the Technics arm. It's not bad and can be made to sound better, but ultimately you'd best replace it with a superior one. I put a tweaked Audio Origami Rega RB250 on my Technics, and along with a Lyra Dorian, SDS plattermat and Isonoe feet it sounded stunning. A number of manufacturers visited my house whilst I was running this deck and they just couldn't believe their ears! So I think this is your way to go; happily the arm, the Audio Origami workover and the Lyra would come in at around a thousand pounds. **DP**

NOISY CHRISTMAS

Forgive me for bothering you, but my dearly beloved has pledged to buy me a new pair of speakers for Christmas, and I've to decide which ones I'd like. I have, at the moment, a pair of Pioneer floor standing speakers which were part of a Pioneer system I bought 26 years ago (the rest has long since been replaced). They are Pioneer CS767s. Has anyone ever heard of or remember them, and are they still any good? They still sound OK to me, but after so many years, I'm probably missing out on sound quality and not realising it.

Finally, if I've to replace them, could you recommend something in the £400-£500 bracket. If it's important, heavy rock music is my genre of music. Many thanks for your time.

Alasdair Mackenzie

Hi Alasdair. These loudspeakers go way back to the early 1980s and you can be assured they are bettered by modern designs. Quite a lot has changed since then. Ideal for you would be Q Acoustics excellent 2050 loudspeaker, priced at £430 or so. A step up price wise is KEF's shiny new Q500 priced at £700 and coming soon is an interesting Epos Epic 5 at £750 (see our Whittlebury Show report in this issue). Both should be good and well worth a listen. **NK**

UPGRADE

I've recently upgraded my Cambridge Audio based system with a Cyrus system comprising of a CD8SE CD player, Pre X Pd QX pre-amplifier, 8 power amplifier and matching PSX-R power supply for the CD player. As you can imagine, I'm very happy with the results and am enjoying the sonic improvements that my new system delivers. It is however the improvement to the analogue side of my system that prompted me to write.

My turntable is an inexpensive Goldring GR2 complete with the standard 1012GX MM cartridge and a Goldring PA-1 phono stage. I used this set-up with my Cambridge system

and didn't originally plan to upgrade it as I listen to vinyl relatively infrequently. Hearing the Goldring through the Cyrus pre/power amps however, provided an unexpectedly pleasing result. Although not able to match the CD8SE for detail retrieval, it's the sheer "ambience" of the sound provided by the turntable that impresses me (a quality that was not overtly apparent when partnered with my Cambridge system).

I am now contemplating how the sound can be further enhanced by either adding a price comparable turntable to the Cyrus system or modifying the Goldring with some of the many after-market upgrades for Rega derived turntables on offer from companies such as IsoKinetic and Origin Live. I must confess that the latter option appeals to me more as this will allow me to make improvements in stages, as funds allow.

It is this conundrum that forms the basis of my question. I'd like to draw upon your years of experience with hi-fi and ask your opinion. If you believe that buying a new turntable is the better option, what would be a sensible price bracket of turntable/phono stage/cartridge to partner my Cyrus equipment? If you believe that upgrading the Goldring is a viable option, where would you start and what products would you recommend? Any guidance that you can provide would be gratefully received.

Grant Hatcher



Large sound at a low price, the Q Acoustics 2050 loudspeaker.

My priority here would be to improve the phono stage, then the cartridge. If you like ambience then an Icon Audio valve phono stage such as the PS1.2 is an ideal choice. Contributor Rafael Todes insists on

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the 'phone to me that the PS3 is way better and the best phono stage he's ever heard, so you may want to ruminate on this. But you should then upgrade the turntable to at least a Rega P3-24 and fit a Goldring 1022GX or 1042. I'll leave David to elaborate! **NK**

I'd go for a Rega P3-24/TT PSU (£585) as an absolute minimum; this will give an obvious improvement to your GR2 and is a better basis for future mods if that's the path you want to take, compared to the seriously paired-down GR2. If you don't mind a larger footprint turntable, then of course the Michell GyroDec SE (£1,149) is a bargain; you could pull the arm and cartridge off your GR2 to use pro temps, possibly with a 1042 stylus upgrade when it's time to renew.

The Michell is a dramatic upgrade to the Rega and is effectively a stripped down superdeck that's upgradeable to one of the best turntables around, in some respects, at any price. So it's a great launchpad to the high end vinyl world. Trouble is, you'd not be listening to your excellent Cyrus CD8 SE CD player anymore, methinks! **DP**

UPGRADE TO VALVES?

I need help to avoid making what could be a mistake. You see, I have got the upgrade bug again. In 40 years of hi-fi I have never had valves in any part of my systems and I have been pretty lucky when adding or changing a piece of kit.

My present system is VPI Scout, Dynavector 17d2, Lyngdorf CD 1, Whest audio PS.30 RDT SE phono stage. Amplifiers are PS Audio PCA2 Pre and HCA2 power. Loudspeakers are Zingali Prelude 4 with REL Subwoofer Britannia B3. I also have Isotek Sigmas and all kinds of cables.

My room is 8m by 3.1m by 2.5 high. Behind the listening position at 5 meters, one wall cuts back into the room to take off a corner; it forms a kind of triangle at that end of the room. To the right of the right hand speaker

is dining area 2.4m by 2.1m. This space used to be a terrace and was converted into living area. It is 50% glazed with hard surfaced walls and a timber floor. Believe or not, it isn't as lively as you would expect and is one of the best rooms I've ever had for hi-fi.

I'm happy with my present vinyl source and as the Whest is brand new I feel it can only be the PS amps that go onto ebay. The Zingalis are 92dB sensitive so maybe borderline for Yamamoto 2watt SET amps (but oh so pretty). You see how that bug works,

My budget could be stretched to £5k but that is very much top wack and less is more, as they say, Life threatening sound levels are not an option so quality over quantity would be the preferred route.

My musical tastes are quite varied but mostly Rock/Pop from the 60s up to present day Alt stuff like Midlake or Interpol, but throw in some Vivaldi or Bach and I'm happy. As I am out of my comfort zone with the valve scene any help in avoiding this potential mistake, such as buying those Yamos, would be much appreciated.

regards,
John Fishwick.
Murcia,
Spain

Heavens, you do not want to start out using valve based equipment by

purchasing a 2W Single-Ended! It's aimed at people who have a pair of Tannoy Westminster Royals in their bedroom, most of whom are to be found in Japan. This is where Tannoy sell most of their Prestige loudspeakers.

Take a look at an Almarro A318B if you are interested in an amplifier that looks great and delivers a wonderful sound. But it does need a 90dB sensitive floorstander at least, as it possesses a power output of just 12 Watts, we measured in our September 07 issue review. Your Zingalis should suit. **NK**

SOB STORY

Hello gents! I used to pick up your magazine every now and then at a local newspaper stand, then lost sight of it altogether and now for the past two years (has it been three already?) I have been a subscriber. It seems I just cannot live without it...

The "problem" concerns the sound of violin music when played on my vinyl front end: solo violin sounds great, but massed strings sound so strident that I have to turn the volume down. This problem does not occur when playing violin music via CD. Since I do not want to repeat the mistake of buying stuff suspecting that it might sound good in my system, only to find that it did not, I thought I had better get your advice.

My present system consists of: Naim NAC 202 / NAP 200 with Napsc + Hicap power supplies, Thorens TD124 in open slate plinth sitting on RDC spikes and ditto cups, Rega RB250 tonearm with upgraded counterweight and Incognito wiring (I think copper, but I'm not sure since I had this mod. ages ago), Goldring 1042 MM cartridge, Trichord Dino+ PSU with dedicated connecting lead, van den Hul M.C. D102III Hybrid Interconnects, Tannoy D500 'speakers, TEACVRDS-T1 into Bel Canto DAC 1, BTC KIMBER Special Edition Speaker Cable (hyper pure copper), all fed via a HMS Energia power distributor and



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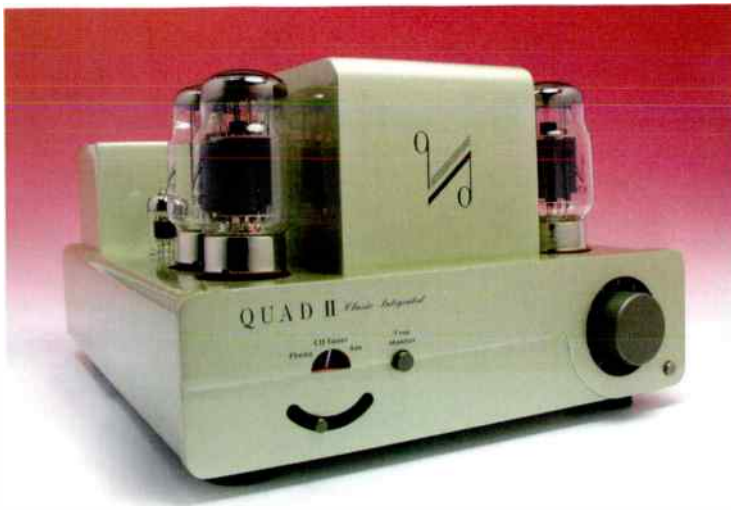
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A low-ish powered valve amplifier suits sensitive Tannoys.

Energia power cables (sorry for this long and over detailed list...).

My guess is that somewhere along the vinyl replay chain I have one or more components that are not quite feeling at home in this setup, but which one (s)?

I have checked and rechecked my cartridge setup, but this seems to be fine. The cartridge is relatively new too. My first suspicion was that the Trichord Dino+ phono stage might be a little forward, and replacing it with a Project Tubebox II did seem to bring some relief, but this is not in the same league in other areas.

So, are tubes the way to go? In addition, if you were asked to further improve the sound of this system, where would you start and what would you do, given a total budget of approx. 4000 euro? Mind you, I would like to hang on to the turntable and amplification, if at all possible, but if they have to go, so be it!

I would be most grateful for any advice you might be able to give me.

Peter Inghels
The Hague
The Netherlands

Hi Peter. That is a little odd. A Goldring 1042 pickup cartridge has an excellent stylus with great tracking and superb high frequency resolution. It should be able to track massed violins properly and an RB250 should not hold it back. I wonder whether something is amiss.

If the arm has been rewired it is worth checking that it is OK and moving freely. To do this, set tracking force to zero so it floats, then deflect it laterally and vertically (use a light tap) to make sure movement is unhindered. You will need to remove the stylus first, or put the cover on and secure it with a piece of Sellotape.

If all is well here, ensure tracking force is 1.7gms or 1.8gms maximum.

Use a stylus gauge; they are cheap.

Finally, you may need to take a close look at the stylus in case there's a problem with it. Unfortunately, it takes very high magnification (> x100) to do this, and light and depth of field become issues with high magnifications.

Would you be able to borrow another cartridge? Or perhaps take an LP to a dealer and listen to it on another turntable? If you've played your LPs in the past with a budget cartridge, mistracking at high levels may well have damaged the groove walls and the Goldring 1042 cartridge is just playing this imprinted distortion. The only solution here is to replace the LPs. Changing the phono stage will not provide a solution.

It would be easy for me to suggest you spend lots of money upgrading the turntable and indeed better arms are available. To improve upon the Goldring 1042 you really need to use either an Ortofon 2M Black, or move up to Moving Coil cartridges. **NK**

(Peter's next letter came in after the above reply had been written)

...AND AGAIN

There has been some development on this front. I decided to put the Tannoys on SoundCare spikes and what do you know: for the most part the problem is gone! Now, the Tannoys were always on spikes, the ones supplied by the manufacturer, but apparently SoundCare were doing something right when designing theirs!

Still, I am wondering whether the Naim transistor pre amp and power amp paired with the high-sensitivity Tannoys (92 dB according to the manufacturer) makes for a happy marriage per se. I probably do not need all those watts in the first place with sensitive speakers like the Tannoys.

A handful of clean valve watts would suffice. So, if I were to decide to sell the Naim's, would you recommend a valve amp take their place? What about the power consumption of valve amps? Is there such a thing as an environmentally friendly valve amp or is there no need to worry?

thanks again,
Peter Inghels
The Hague
The Netherlands

Big Tannoys sound best with valve amps; they're a perfect match. I'm constantly begging Tannoy not to demo their loudspeakers at Shows with humongous transistor amplifiers. The loudspeaker is running from the first Watt or two of output and this is the dirtiest bit, blighted by noise, colouration and crossover products – that's why I test amplifiers at 1Watt output at 10kHz. It gives the worst result!

So listen to a decent valve amplifier like a Quad and see what you think. Mains power consumption lies in the 100W-200W region for Quads and this is fairly typical, which amounts to just two bright light bulbs (of the old fashioned sort!).

NK

DEAD K9

Due to a moment of madness I have broken the stylus of my Linn K9 cartridge; I understand the stylus / cartridge is no longer available. What would be a comparable cartridge or even improve on the K9? I am out of touch with hi-fi and prices today; would I be looking at £100 - £150, or more? Would I be better with a MC cartridge or stick with an MM cartridge?

My system is a LP12 Valhalla deck, Basic Plus arm, Audio Analogue Puccini amp, Monitor Audio R352 speakers.

I also have an Acoustic Research deck with a Basic Plus arm and K9 cartridge. Would it be better to put the K9 on my LP12 and fit another cartridge to the AR. If so, which would you recommend?

What speaker cable / interconnects would you recommend for my system?

Finally, I have a Marantz CD65 player (purchased second hand). I would like to upgrade to a newer player with more warmth and musical smoothness. Could you advise any players around £300 - £400 or do I need to save and purchase something costing a bit more? I play rock / pop and a small amount of classical. I am not against purchasing second hand if you could advise me what to consider.

Any help you can give me would be appreciated. Thank you in anticipation.

yours sincerely
Keith Russell



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Goldring 1042 Moving Magnet pickup cartridge, a great replacement for a dead K9.

Hi Keith - buy a Goldring G1042 moving magnet (£200) for your Linn LP12/Basik Plus; it should make a fine combination. This cartridge is so far ahead of the K9 that you should ideally have one on both decks! Basically, put the K9 on your least favourite deck!

I'd recommend Black Rhodium Tango loudspeaker cable, or Chord Odyssey 2 if you want a sharper, ballsier sound. At the affordable end of interconnects, buy the best Missing Link cable you can stretch to.

As for CD, well I'd go for a Musical Fidelity M1 DAC, an excellent affordable upsampling design at around £400; it should work a treat with your Marantz CD65, giving a far smoother and more finessed sound.

DP

STONE ARM

I'm a long time subscriber and reader and followed your recommendation previously, purchasing the Cyrus CD XT SE to partner my Theta DAC. The story gets complex but my sixth replacement machine is very good (failure to read discs or even give me them back); thank goodness I bought from a good dealer (Leicester Hi-fi) who was brilliant!

My first, and probably only direct enquiry, stems from your repeated comment re the SMEV in the World Standards section that the arm does everything except beguile the listener.

I've spent 10 years building (or at least feeding my willing, valve expert and silver soldering friend, food and wine as small recompense for the application of his skills) a valve/horn system.

I'm debating which tonearm to buy to complete the development. My budget (ideally) would be around the £2000 mark with some flexibility upwards and lots of flexibility downwards. My options so far include the SMEV, the Graham Phantom (would have to be second

hand) and the Origin Live Illustrious to bracket the SMEV. I'm leaning towards the SMEV on the basis that everyone in my circle of hi-fi friends has this arm (in the SME 20) and recommend it. My hesitation stems from your comments, backed up (from other sources) that not everyone will like its matter of factness and my own experience having heard the SMEV in very good systems where I can't fault it but...

I'm currently running an SME 3009 II on my Garrard 401 (in a hefty birch ply plinth) with my (dare I admit it?) Koetsu Red in place. I know it's not right but there's been so much else to do! The signal passes through a pair of lovely Hashimoto step up transformers via Transparent Super RCAs.

The system is otherwise as follows. Listening room is the living room and is 6 meters X 3.5 meters. It has been treated with curtains, settees and rugs by my partner (in the interests of good sound quality, these were all were quite expensive upgrades). Software: is mostly classical/orchestral with a little soft jazz (but definitely not the sort that wanders around). Power amp: Art Audio 300B SE: Tom Willis designed and built this double mono-block amp with 2.5 inch stack Western Electric output transformers running WE 300Bs and I've replaced the original chokes with Audionote versions (adding two more), installed Alan Bradley resistors and rolled tubes endlessly to finish with 5U4WGB rectifiers (wonderful) from Watford valves and EH 6H30s in place of the 6922s.

Speakers: Lowther DX3s in a quarter wave loaded Koronglay cabinet (designed by a nice chap called Brian in Essex) supplemented by two B&W 610s which integrate very well but hum a lot - another question for another time (B&W can't help).

I know Noel has reservations about Lowthers but 8 watts limits choice and if you get them right they'll beguile 'til the cows come home!

Pre-amp: Audionote Kit 1 pre completely upgraded with Audionote interstage and output

transformers and silver wiring, stepped attenuator (Tantalum resistors), Mungdorf Gold/Silver caps, 6SL7s in phone stage and octal 6H30 (EH) in line stage, etc, etc you get the idea I'm sure!

CD Transport is the Cyrus XT SE + with PSX power supply. DAC is an old Theta Probasic II. I have tried contenders but none have bettered it yet.

Tuner: Leak Troughline regrettably without the decoder.

Speaker cable is from Kondo

(Audionote Japan) not the silver one as I couldn't raise a second mortgage) but it is annealed for 10 years in a cave, so its got plenty of magic?

Interconnects are Transparent Super Plus balanced interconnects from DAC to pre and pre to power. I would add streaming, etc but haven't got a clue what Steven Green bangs on about! Mega things and bites?

Overall, the system has its faults (what one doesn't?) but it is pretty much right for me and my listening tastes. In fact, I've not heard better for beguilingness and beguiling is very much what I want!!

Anyway, back to the question: if the SME doesn't beguile, what does? I'm still tempted by the SME's build quality and vice like bass. The tonearm I select will probably never be replaced and will be a synergistic match for the Koetsu Red and Garrard 401.

If you think I should purchase the SMEV (taking all of the above into account) then I will. If not then would you shortlist two alternatives. Changing arms and swapping my Koetsu is not a skill I possess or desire to acquire as shipping it to Japan for remedial work is not an attractive part of experimenting with a tonearm (no matter how good). many thanks in advance,

Geoff Jennings

Hi Geoff. That's some system you have; it gave my eyeballs a good workout!

My simple solution to your problem is to buy an SME312S arm. It is silky smooth and less emphatic in what it does than the SMEV. We all know the 401 should be used with a 12in SME arm in any case: you'll be happy forever! Some of the higher quality Ortofon Moving Coil cartridges are worth considering too. They are



The SME312 S 12in pickup arm has a lovely smooth presentation.

ultimately smooth.

I'm no great fan of Lowthers, I have to admit. They're too ragged across the upper midband, where the cone breaks up. For tuned up valve amps a pair of big Tannoys are worth hearing and the DC10Ts I reviewed last month come to mind, but they would be a radical departure to Lowthers and perhaps too much of a

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culture shock for you.

I do hope you have a really good aerial for the Troughline. Sensitivity is poor and selectivity almost nonexistent. Both can be ameliorated by using a high gain, directional multi-element array pointed toward the local transmitter, then the dear old Troughline is unmatched for sound quality.

Great to spend lots and lots on furnishings! You end up listening to music is sumptuous luxury and sound quality always benefits I have found. Lucky you! **NK**

Sorry to confuse matters by contradicting Noel, but I'd advise you to buy a Funk FXR II tonearm. You've spent ten minutes telling me you want to be beguiled, and if that's the case then the SME simply does not do it (for me). I've heard the Funk in a direct A to B comparison with the same turntable(s) and cartridge(s), and the difference is stark. The Funk is far more musical and mellifluous; it's Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young playing 'Wooden Ships' to the SME's Kraftwerk's 'Man Machine', if you get my drift! Simply put, the SME V is lovely, and in some ways the best arm I've heard, but if you want a lyrical, charming, seductive listening companion then the SME is not your arm. It is wonderfully precise and technical in its sound, offering a type of clinical perfection, but it is not beguiling! The Funk is far more tuneful, as if it's talking to you personally, where the SME is reading from a pre-prepared script. I believe Funk also do a twelve inch version of the FXR, too.

The other arm to consider at this price is the Audio Origami PU7, which also comes in twelve inches, and has the lyricism of the Funk, but with a polish and a delicacy closer to that of the SME - plus delicious, near-SME build quality; it's considerably more expensive than the Funk, though, but still just about within your budget. **DP**

SHELVING IT

I thought you would like to know my experiences in hi-fi and ask for your opinion on new speakers.

I caught the bug as a teenager in the 70s having badgered my parents to buy a music centre. I then discovered a local store which sold second-hand stuff and managed to acquire a 60s Rogers amp and a Garrard 301 with a SME arm/Shure cartridge. At the time, I don't think anyone held the deck in such high reverence as they do now as the hi-fi publications then did not mention it at all and I just saw it as a step to the next stage in getting the best out of my

record collection.

On leaving school and having money to burn, I then ransacked my local KJ Leisuresound for a Thorens T126 deck, an A&R Cambridge A60 amp (this was 1979 so a new product then), a Yamaha tuner and Audiomaster speakers. This system did many years service with various upgrades, most importantly the first top loading Meridian CD player, a Mission arm/Dynavector cartridge and various cassette decks.

The next big change was a Marantz CD63 and Rega Planar 3 with A&R cartridge at some point in the late 80s, then changing the speakers for Infinity standmounts.

The A&R Cambridge (now Arcam) A60 gave me 30 years service and is now with my brother, having been reconditioned. It was replaced along with the CD player by the Cambridge 740 combo which I got as a pair for £500 new from Richer Sounds - a great bargain. In the meantime, the cassette deck had turned into a Pioneer CDR 609 CD recorder and the tuner was replaced by a Pace freeview box with

Diamond 10.1s. Would one of these match the Cambridge better than the other? And what should be between them and the shelves? I feel that squash balls sawn in half may be the best bet.

Reading the Blu-ray review in the current issue has also made me wonder if electronics manufacturers are missing something by not having a stereo amp with HDMI connectivity. For those who are unable (or don't want) to go down the multichannel route, an amp that could input DSD or PCM in pure form would be just the ticket. I note that a number of the players did not have dedicated stereo outputs so a digital connection to the amp would make sense.

keep up the good work

Mark Vaughan

The Cambridge 740 needs a quality loudspeaker and both models you mention are good, but they are budget designs. Of the two I would choose the Diamond 10.1s, my only reservation here being that shop samples are the same as our original review samples. There has been some



A loudspeaker for the bookshelf, the Wharfedale Diamond 10.1.

hard drive. This I have found great for recording radio programmes to listen to later (better quality than DAB) and anything which I wish to archive can go onto CD courtesy of the Pioneer which is a fantastic recording machine, though not so good for playback.

I also got the high-res bug and have a Denon DVD 2910 to play my small collection of DVD-As and SACDs.

I am now in the market for speakers (up to £200) which will literally be placed on top of bookshelves. I have in mind Q Acoustics 2020 or Wharfedale

drift between batches, this issue's group test shows.

It would be handy if normal stereo hi-fi amps could accept and process sound from Blu-ray players, but this would increase cost quite substantially. Most players have analogue stereo outputs and those that don't will mix down to stereo and send it out through the Front Left and Right surround-sound outputs. Better to choose the stereo mix down on a disc if possible though.

NK



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Meet The Ancestors...

The hi-fi industry refers to racks and other equipment supports as "isolation devices", going to great lengths to describe how these products protect electronic components from the outside world. Unfortunately, structure born mechanical energy is the least of your system's mechanical problems!

In fact, the greatest damage to sound quality is done by vibration generated within the equipment itself; from the mains transformer, the power supply caps charging and discharging, every resistor or transistor that passes the signal. And although that vibration might be small, it's also right where the fragile audio signal is, right where it can do most damage. And to make matters worse, most of your equipment comes with soft rubber feet, meaning there's nowhere for that vibrational energy to go. It just carries on circulating round the unit's internals until it finally dissipates. That's why hard cones or couplers work under audio equipment; they offer an exit route for that energy, so that it can dissipate in the supporting surface.

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Exposed!

David Price tries Russ Andrews' ReVeel CD enhancer...

There's more to CD surfaces than meets the eye, apparently. For a long time I as a vinyl fan have known about the joys (or otherwise, depending on your point of view) of Mould Release Agent (MRA). This is a silicon-based 'gunk' that's used to help vinyl LPs come out of their presses more easily. Record cleaning machine devotees religiously use alcohol in their cleaning fluid solution to rinse off the MRA from record grooves, the result being a crisper, sharper and more detailed sound. What I hadn't realised was that CDs come with a similar substance, impregnated during

Protocol outlawed the use of the solvent used in the cleaner, so he collaborated with an industrial chemist to research a 'safe' product to dissolve MRA. Using it is simple; just wipe the disc with ReVeel repeatedly to create a lather, and then rinse it in cold tap water; place the disc on a piece of kitchen towel to absorb the excess, until it's dry. One box contains twenty sachets which is said to be enough for one hundred

"even if you already keep your discs meticulously clean, ReVeel will still bring sonic rewards..."

manufacture...

The idea of Russ Andrews' ReVeel is not only to clean the disc but remove the MRA. Russ says the amount deposited on discs is "variable", with some having more than others, but these little cloths are designed to ensure that after cleaning, your little silver disc won't have any at all. The point being of course that MRA can impede the laser's reading of the disc, causing the error correction circuitry to 'work harder', as it were, making for an inferior sound. Russ claims that there have been measurements that show a reduction in jitter of between 3% and 7%. The only way we could verify this was by recourse to listening, so that's precisely what we did!

ReVeel is the product of many years of work; back in the nineteen nineties Russ found a solution that removed MRA which was more effective than conventional alcohol-based wipes, but the Montreal

discs. ReVeel can be used on CD, DVD, SACD and DVD-A discs.

Auditioning a selection of discs showed a general improvement in the sound after treatment. I won't for a minute pretend it was dramatic, but it was still pleasing nevertheless. In all cases, across a range of CDs, things never got worse and with some discs the difference was marked. The changes that ReVeel brought to the sound were always pleasant, with a slight smoothing and easing of the tonal quality, a subtle 'edge' being stripped out of the sound. There was a greater sense I was listening to music, rather than CD. Of course, discs that were already slightly dirty or marked seemed to respond best, the treatment 'killing two birds with one stone', so to speak. The Mould Release Agent was gone, as were the fingerprints! Overall, this is an excellent product; even if you keep your discs meticulously clean this will still bring sonic rewards.



ABOUT RUSS ANDREWS

The company's website is a veritable oasis of hi-fi tuning tools and tweaks; there's a vast selection of products for improving the sound and picture quality, from cables to supports and system set-up accessories. They offer a sixty-day home trial on all standard-length cables and accessories to allow you to try them in your own system at home. There's also a unique cable upgrade scheme which allows you to get up to 100% of the price you paid back on a cable if you upgrade to one of a higher quality within one year, or up to 75% within two years and 50% back more than two years. Customers receive two Russ Andrews Catalogues and four copies of their customer magazine *Connected to Music and Movies* per year – to be included, request a catalogue on www.russandrews.com or call 0845 345 1550.



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School's Out

...and university's in. But can student sound systems cater for budding audiophiles? Paul Rigby goes back to the bedsit with two from Sony and Panasonic...

Compact, all-in-one systems are all some people can accommodate, not least students confined to beer-bottle strewn bedsits.

That's why there's a market for products such as Panasonic's SC-HC40DB [shown above] and Sony's CMT-MX550i [p57]. While similarly priced, both target a slightly different audience...

The Panasonic is a compact unit (500x201x102mm) with integrated cone speakers, a reported 35W of power and a wall mount option. Featuring a CD player, iPod/iPhone dock, FM/DAB radio and a USB port, the most interesting aspect of the Panasonic is its general design. As the CD player is mounted vertically the slim, wall-like, countenance gives you the impression that this is a space-saver of a chassis... and you'd be right. Everything about the Panasonic shouts "trim". A frontal door moves to the left to expose the CD player and then, uniquely, moves to the right to reveal an internally mounted iPod dock, then back again to hide both features. A fitted iPod is visible through an access window for

monitoring. CD transport and other controls are mounted along with the top and, just to the rear, is a basic but neat little door. Behind which lies the vertically mounted USB slot. A plastic, but relatively large and fully featured remote control is included too.

In addition to the primary features, the Panasonic includes a Bluetooth option to allow you to connect up to six compatible pieces of hardware such as a mobile phone. Once connected, you will be able to play your mobile content through the Panasonic speakers. Other features include a pseudo-surround sound option, AUX port, a sleep/play timer and a headphone socket.

The Sony, in comparison, looks positively prosaic but will find easier recognition as a piece of hi-fi arriving in a standard chubby box with a horizontally-mounted CD plus two external stand or bookshelf-mounted, two-way, speakers that pump a reported 25W into 6 Ohms and are connected to the central unit via two cheap and nasty spring connectors. Spanning 309x122x247mm, the front fascia features a large volume knob, function selector, stand-by and

CD transport options plus buttons to tune in the FM/DAB radio and something called DSGX that acted as a loudness feature and was, thus, ignored.

To the left is a door that exposes the iPod/iPhone dock. A play/sleep timer is also included. The smaller, plastic, remote offers relatively basic functions, when compared to the Panasonic.

SOUND QUALITY

Grabbing a jazz-infused, Claire Martin live CD, 'Off Beat' (Linn), the first impression I had with the Panasonic was a disappointing lack of bass, apart from a smattering of lower mids and upper bass. The double bass should have played an essential part on this track and it was noticeable by its absence. There was, however, a sense of space which is aptly filled with airy treble via delicate cymbal work, even though it tended to dominate the mix because of the lack of counterbalancing bass. Vocals were pleasantly nuanced, though. The essential added breath details that give the voice emotion and character were also present. Upper mids were admirable

VERDICT

An interesting design in a compact box, the decent sounding Panasonic is a surprisingly impressive package.

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with piano being particular impressive for the price.

Switching to The Cure's 'Bloodflowers' (Fiction) provided a splendidly dynamic performance, despite the bass-light anaemic nature. There was plenty of content and detail on offer, nevertheless, with verve and vivacity that involves you in the performance. On to John Foxx and Louis Gordon's 'The Pleasures Of Electricity' (Edsel) and a synth-based presentation that tracked the delicate and fragile arrangement very well with particular speedy attention to the numerous bleeps and blips that are caught and offered to the listener like a fitting butterfly in a net. Yes, there was a lack of essential warmth normally heard in Foxx's voice due to the bass deficiencies but, that said, the detail and transparency provided by the Panasonic was very impressive with every tiny synth twist and turn tracked with precision. Great for those looking for a more forensic examination of their music...

With the Sony, Claire Martin

complex virtual, aural pictures across the stereo space. The added bass also allowed the sometimes complex synth-based modulation recipes to be fully presented for the first time. So, when a polyphonic synth sequence was played the essential bass element completed the picture making the whole mix more satisfying.

Installing the iPod into the Panasonic's dock revealed how poor MP3s are via this unit, no-matter what the genre. Its penchant for transparency and lack of bass – which can often act as a form of cushioning for the stripped bare data file – revealed the MP3 for what it is: a musical ghost, stripped of form and substance. The prickly presentation sounded nothing less than strangulated. WAV file playback, however, was more pleasant, adding that desperately needed level of integrity, without the MP3's listener fatigue.

Switching to the Sony's iPod dock, MP3s sounded far more approachable, the added bass acting

roof-mounted aerial. The DAB-based station autotune was also straight-forward on both units.

Taking DAB's own, inherent, sound quality problems into consideration, both units performed relatively well, for the price, but the basic sound signature of each model oozed through. DAB did sound detailed but a little thin on the Panasonic but rather fuller with meatier bass on the Sony. Similarly, via FM, the Panasonic proved very musical with a good blend of detail and energy. On the Sony, FM sounded richer and more exuberant via a selection of music stations while, on vocal-dominated stations such as BBC Radio 4, the Sony gave the human voice more gravitas and texture. So, while the Panasonic had a TV screen feel to vocals, the Sony resembled a full screen, cinema presentation.

CONCLUSION

Those taking a quick look at the ratings may conclude that the Sony



sounded much fuller and more rounded, resulting in a much more balanced output. Of course, the Sony has the advantage of generating said bass from two independent cabinets. Nevertheless, the result successfully introduced the double bass for the first time, giving the music substance and drive. Student parties beckon!

That added bass brought The Cure to life, adding a sense of low frequency threat to the arrangement and an added weight that introduced an entirely new personality to the music. Bass wasn't the whole story, though. Mid and treble detail was present in abundance and, because the Sony utilises a standard speaker configuration, the stand placement enhanced the soundstage and improved the stereo image when compared to the Panasonic.

That stereo image and soundstage enhancement allowed John Foxx's synth output to paint

as a crutch to the MP3 sound, making it far more palatable and less offensive to the ears. WAV file playback enhanced the sound further, the better boost, when compared to the Panasonic, introducing a more balanced sound.

Moving to the USB port via a plug-in keydrive containing MP3 files was intriguing. In fact, if you must play MP3s via the Panasonic, this is how to do it. It's more direct playback facility, bypassing the iPod's cheap digital guts, improved overall sound quality. The Sony improved matters further, offering a richer, more satisfying sound over all frequencies.

Finally, the radio section of each unit was tested. Both offered surprisingly good reception via DAB and FM while fitted with the 'bootlace' aerial that arrives bundled in each box. However, both also suffered from FM hiss which was largely removed upon plugging in a

has 'won' and pick that as the unit of choice. Be advised, however, that the results are not as simple as that. The rating reflects the superiority of the Sony, yes, but the Panasonic is an excellent nearfield performer. Hence, for anyone who has a small flat or wants some sort of music reproducer in a den, studio or bedsit, the Panasonic may be the better choice. For larger rooms, installation in a family front room or entertainment area, the Sony can fill the larger space with alacrity and produce, for the price, fine sound over a variety of genres. Horses for courses, in fact...

So, in between the wild parties, excessive alcohol consumption and long bouts of sleeping, it's not much fun being a student. Thank heavens then that units such as these can give this nation's brave students a crumb of comfort to brighten their otherwise tortuous lives!

VERDICT ●●●●●
Well balanced presentation allied to a delicate midrange makes this a great entry level student system.

SONY CMT-MX5501 £220
Sony UK Ltd.
☎ +44 (0)845 6000 124
www.sony.co.uk

FOR
- balanced sound
- bass
- musicality

AGAINST
- prosaic looks

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WORLD STANDARDS

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

TURNTABLES

PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

A masterpiece of minimalism, this is well made for the money and includes a decent Ortofon OM3 moving magnet cartridge. Great sound per pound.

REGA P2 2008 £220

Some say the cheapest real hi-fi turntable money can buy - excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound.

TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £495

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



REGA P3-24 2008 £400

Seminal affordable audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and really sings with optional £150 outboard power supply.

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

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

ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2010 £1,399

Effective, if expensive, update on the original formula. Highly musical, yet detailed and dimensional mid price turntable with a naturally open and easy sound.

FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

Innovative engineering gives a nimble, pacy and musical sound that's one of the best at the price.



MARANTZ TT-15S1 2005 £999

Cracking deck/arm/cartridge combination, this must surely be the best sounding 'plug and play' package at this price point.

MICHELL GYRODEC SE2005 £1,005

Design icon with superlative build and finish. Sound is beautifully smooth, effortless and exceptionally expansive. No longer peerless at the price, but still a brilliant platform.

ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD

2008 £1,350

Majoring on impact, punch and drive, this is an impactful mid-price turntable in sonic terms as well as physical size.

REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

New twin belt drive and power supply make this an even more commanding performer, although there's a substantial price hike. Its speed, dynamics and detail are hard to beat anywhere near the price.

MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

The top Michell disc spinner remains a superbly capable all rounder with powerful, spacious sound that's delicate and beguiling.



LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

Surely hi-fi's most iconic turntable, the legendary Sondek goes from strength to strength. New Keel subchassis and Radikal DC motor add precision and grip to one of the world's most musical disc spinners.

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £4,495

Quartz locked Direct Drive makes for master-tape-like speed stability, plus wonderful clarity and pace. Upgradeability and excellent build complete a formidable package.

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

Stylish high end vinyl spinner with industrial strength build quality and a sound to match. Exceedingly neutral yet powerful sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

Big, expensive, controversially styled and glows more than some might consider necessary, but an astonishingly good performer.

EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

TONEARMS

REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

Expertly fettled Rega is still the 'affordable audiophile' choice, with an even, transparent and tuneful sound.

SME 309 1989 £767

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

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300

The classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble astound, although some don't like its matter of factness!

LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700

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

SME 312S 2010 £1,750

Twelve inch magnesium alloy armtube plus SME V bearings makes an impressive transcription tool with a highly insightful yet composed sound. Superlative build completes the package.

GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495

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

TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600

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

OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500

Few if any pivoted arms come close to this arm's combination of liquid musicality and forensic grip.

CARTRIDGES**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-95E****1984 £25**

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

ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE**2007 £60/£120**

Modern, high resolution budget moving magnets that are always an engaging listen.

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

DENON DL103R 2006 £200

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

DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250

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

ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350

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

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLIII****2010 £399**

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

LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595

Incisive and musical, this baby Lyra is one of the most powerful and revealing MCs at its price point. Beware the sharp treble, though!

ORTOFON RONDO**BRONZE 2005 £500**

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

ZYX R-100H 2005 £625

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

BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650

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

TRANSFIGURATION AXIA**2007 £890**

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

ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE**2009 £1,000**

Musical, out of the box sound, allied to real finesse, makes this a great do-it-all high end moving coil.

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799

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

KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE**2007 £2,399**

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

DIGITAL SOURCES**MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC £170**

Clear, concise, low distortion sound belies giveaway price. Superlative value for money.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO**DACMAGIC £229**

An innovative and flexible new DAC, this is a svelte, rhythmic and impressive performer.

**STELLO DA100****SIGNATURE £675**

Superbly finessed sounding DAC at the price, with strong driving bass and plenty of air and space.

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

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

NAIM CDS1 2008 £895

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

ROKSAN KANDY**K2 CD 2010 £900**

A charmingly musical performer at the price, this is a surprisingly sophisticated CD player for the money.

BENCHMARK DAC-1S 2009 £930

Power, precision and poise - allied to real seat-of-the-pants musicality, this DAC justifies its premium price.

CYRUS CD8 SE 2008 £1,200

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

SIMAUDIO MOON 300D**2010 £1,290**

Lovely fluid sounding DAC with a deep, dark, velvety tonality.

**NAIM DAC £1,995**

Painstaking design has yielded a brilliant 'affordable high end' performer that throws bright sunlight on the recording, yet remains unremittably smooth and musically engaging.

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000

Bespoke architecture gives a truly uniquely musical sound that's beguilingly musical in nature, with dizzying incision and grip.

ELECTROCOMPANIE EMC-1UP**2003 £3,450**

Quirky yet extremely capable high end upsampling CD spinner, with a musical fluency that beguiles more than it impresses.

**ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2****2007 £3,985**

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

ESOTERIC X-05 2010 £4,495

Superlative 'affordable high end' CD/SACD spinner with excellent build, massive detail and great poise.

NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950

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

NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050

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

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

Superbly built high end CD transport and DAC combo that shows just what the format can be capable of. Very tangible, musical sound with wonderful dynamics and glistening harmonics. Only curious styling and clunky build detract from its brilliance!

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



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

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



RECORDERS

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

SONY TC-WE475 2010 £130
 Essential tackle for committed cassette users, this well calibrated double deck sounds way better than expected!

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250
 Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for no-nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

PHONO STAGES

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

GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V 2004 £460
 Wonderfully warm, open and musical nature makes this an essential audition for those wanting a top value mid-price phono stage.

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



ASTIN TREW AT8000 £880
 Expansive, detailed, powerful and musical sound makes this a surprise entrant to the first class sub-£1,000 phono stage club.

ANATEK MCI 2007 £850
 Excellent MC phono stage that offers serious insight underpinned by powerful and tuneful bass.

QUAD QC24P 2007 £995
 Dynamic performer that can be used on its own as a complete phono-level preamp.

TRICHORD DIABLO + NCPSU 2006 £1,198
 Highly musical performer, this is one of the best phono stages at or near the price, but lacks the polish of the rival Whetst.

ICON AUDIO PS3 2008 £1,500
 Super sounding valve phono preamplifier, with an expansive, engaging and organic nature that makes vinyl sheer joy!

EMILLE ALLURE 2010 £2,495
 Just as the name suggests, this is a lovely way to play LP with an exceptionally open and lucid sound.



A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD 2010 £995
 Exceptionally musical and natural sounding all discrete transistor phono stage, with highly lucid, valve-like presentation.

AMPLIFIERS

SUGDEN MYSTRO 2010 £1,225
 Sugden's first Class AB integrated in a long time surprises; rollickingly good fun to listen to, it loses surprisingly little in smoothness to its Class AB siblings.



ICON AUDIO STEREO 25 2008 £500
 Cracking entry-level valve integrated, with a warm and engaging sound. Limited power so needs careful partnering, though.

ROTEL RA-06 2008 £550
 Vivacious sounding device that, whilst lacking the finer musical points, wears its heart on its sleeve and has plenty of power to match.

NAIM NAIT 5i 2007 £725
 The italic 'i' version remains one of the most musically competent and dynamically engaging integrations at the price.

CAMBRIDGE 840A V2 2007 £750
 Version 2 addresses version 1's weaknesses to turn in a mightily accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

JUNGSON JA-88D 2006 £899
 Stunning value for money Class A monster integrated; extreme power and clarity at a puzzlingly low price.



AUDIOLAB 8000S 2006 £400
 In other life, this sold for three times the price, making it a stand-out bargain now. Very clean, powerful and tidy sound but not the world's most beguiling.

SUGDEN A21A S2 2007 £1,299
 More power and greater transparency improve even further on the already impressive A21a to give truly impressive results

NAIM NAIT XS 2009 £1,250
 With much of the sound of the Supernait at half the price, this is powerful, articulate and smooth beyond class expectations.

ELECTROCOMPANIE T PI-2 2008 £1,430
 Powerful integrated with seriously solid bass and impressive dynamic abilities. Superbly musical.

SUGDEN A21A S2 2008 £1,469
 Crystalline clarity, dizzying speed and forensic detailing makes this seminal design the most musical at the price, but power limited so needs sensitive speakers.

ANATEK A50R 2007 £1,600
 Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

VINCENT SA-236MK 2010 £1,749
 Big, powerful and expansive sounding hybrid transistor amplifier, with bright, spry and musical nature.

MOON I-3RS 2008 £1,890
 Grippy and clean performer with fine sound-staging and build quality.

COPLAND CSA29 2006 £1,998
 Unfailingly svelte, sophisticated and smooth - both to listen to and look at - this is a truly desirable high end integrated.

NAIM SUPERNAIT 2007 £2,475
 Integrated *tour de force* from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with super sound.

LUXMAN L-550A 2007 £2,800
 Monster Class A integrated with powerful and revealing sound and a whole host of useful features, including a highly competent MM/MC phono stage

AUDIO RESEARCH VS160 2009 £3,298
 Load of tube power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a grin-inducing listen.

LEEMA TUCANA II 2010 £3,495
 Polished high end integrated amp that combines power, detail and genuine musicality with a good range of facilities.



SUGDEN IA4 2007 £3,650
 Goodly amount of Class A power, icy clarity and a breathtakingly fast, musical sound make this one of the very best super-integrations.

QUAD II CLASSIC 2010 £4,500
 Beautiful retro styled integrated amplifier with a subtle, supple sound - although needs matching to speakers that are easy loads.

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS351 2010 £6,000
 Gorgeous, liquid sounding solid-state full Class A integrated with a supernaturally sumptuous bass; surely one of the very best integrations ever made!

AV AMPLIFIERS**ARCAM AVR350** 2006 £1,500

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

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

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CAN V8 2008 £350

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

SUGDEN HEADMASTER 2003 £600

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

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

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

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1,500

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

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

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

NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200

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

**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

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

MELODY PURE BLACK 101D 2007 £3,295

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

MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU 2010 £5,995

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO 2009 £7,900

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

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

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

QUAD 909 2001 £900

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

NAIM NAPI50 2002 £795

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

SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER 2003 £1,300

Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2** 2006 £1,750

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

**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

Hugely powerful digital amp with neutral midrange and a wonderfully spacious treble

CHANNEL ISLANDS AUDIO D100 2005 £1,595

Clean and musical Class D monoblock power amplifiers in a neat, small package.

ICON AUDIO MB845 2009 £2,499

Creamy and seductive yet blisteringly fast and musically lucid, this pair of 845 tube monoblocks is staggering value for money.

GRAAF GM20 OTL 2003 £3,300

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

ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO 2009 £4,450 (EACH)

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

**DPA SA-1** 2010 £2,850

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

SILK GLOWMASTER KT88 2007 £1,699

KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass feet.

**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230

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

QUAD II-80 2005 £6,000

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMSSO 2010 £7,000

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

LOUDSPEAKERS**Q ACOUSTICS 2020** 2010 £140

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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I 2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

B&W 686 2007 £279

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

KEF IQ30 2009 £330

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



USHER S-520 2006 £350
Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3 2010 £299
Great small standmounters for audiophiles on a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive soundstaging at the price.

XTZ 99.25 2010 £640
Disarmingly open and refined at the price, these standmounters bring unexpected civility, refinement and insight to the price point. Exceptional value for money.



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

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

RRR FS100 2007 £1,055
Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM 2010 £3,400
Distinctive coaxial standmounters with wonderful soundstaging, bright lucid midband excellent musical insight.



REVOLVER RW451 2006 £1,199
Very musical floorstander that's clear, concise and truthful, whilst being exceptionally amplifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

ONE THING AUDIO ESL57 2007 £1,450
One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of the game.

KIBRI NAIMA 2007 £1,550
Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers with an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

GURU QM-10P 2007 £1,595
Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but amazingly capable at playing a tune and pulling you in to the music.

USHER BE-718 2007 £1,600
Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE 2008 £1,599
Brilliant entry level electrostatics, giving a taste of loudspeaker esoterica for the price of most moving coil boxes. Tremendous clarity, evenness and delicacy, although not the world's most powerful sound.

MONITOR AUDIO GS60 2008 £2,000
Still a great rock loudspeaker after all these years, with a vivid, lithe and engaging sound.

SPENDOR S8E £1,895
Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.



ISOPHON GALILEO 2007 £2,100
Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

YAMAHA SOAVO 1.1 2009 £3,000
Musical, transparent large floorstanders with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent build and finish.



MONITOR AUDIO PL100 2008 £2,300
The MA boys pull out all the stops for their flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter with stunning results.

PMC OB11 2008 £2,950
Cleverly updated floorstanders give scale and solidity in slim and well finished package.

EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT8B 2010 £2,300
Brilliant ribbon/moving coil hybrid with seamless, delicate and expansive yet tremendously musical nature.

MOWGAN AUDIO MABON 2007 £3,995
Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

B&O BEOLAB 9 2007 £5000
Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.

ARS AURES M1 2006 £5,995
Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

QUAD ESL-2905 2006 £5,995
The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

SPENDOR ST 2010 £5,995
This classy sounding, superbly presented big floorstander will appeal to those seeking high end sonics with subtle looks.

REVOLVER CYGNIS 2006 £5,999
Revolver pull out all the stops and show what they can do with this magnificent flagship loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

USHER BE-10 2009 £10,500
Clever high end moving coil design with immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...

B&W 801D 2006 £10,500
In many respects, the ultimate studio monitor; dazzling clarity and speed with commanding scale and dynamics.



ISOPHON CASSIANO 2007 £12,900
Drive units featuring exotic materials allied to superlative build quality result in an immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy load to drive, however.

REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD 2010 £14,995
Big banger with enormous scale and vast power, although requires the right room and doesn't cohere as well as a panel.

ACCESSORIES
MONITOR AUDIO IDECK 2006 £200
Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly musical sound make the iDeck the current iPod dock champion.

ISOTEK AQUARIUS 2010 £795
Highly accomplished premium priced mains conditioner that delivers the sonic goods, unlike so many others.

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800
Classy ribbon supertweeter with flexible level settings and cool styling - you'll be amazed at the difference it makes, especially with Quad electrostatics.

HEADPHONES
SENNHEISER MX-550 2005 £19
Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

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



GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70
Excellent build and fine sound makes these budget cans superlative value for money.

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199
The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250
A super all round reference design with crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000
The ultimate expression of the Sennheiser philosophy offers massive speed, clarity and insight, although lacks some of the charm of the softer, more beguiling rival Staxes.



STAX SR-007T OMEGA II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890
Simply the best headphones we've ever heard at any price, these sweetly translucent electrostatic earspeakers are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...

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

WIREWORLD OASIS 52003 £99/M
Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

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



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

VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST 2004 £260/0.6M

Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.



TCI CONSTRICTOR 13A-6 BLOCK 2003 £120

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

MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE 2008 £375

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

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



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T2005 £250
Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550
Excellent hybrid FM/DAB+ tuner with a smooth, engaging sound. Factor in its fine build and it's a super value package.

CREEK CLASSIC TUNER2006 £550
No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800
Truly sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

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



SYSTEMS
YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200
One heck of a lot of quality performance on DAB, CD and FM for £200! Optional matching £120 NX-E300 loudspeakers aren't too shabby either.

TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329
Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!

NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429
Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650

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

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249
Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250
Neat update of the original and best one-box stereo system; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500
Fantastically built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/AM unit, designed in conjunction with Ferrari. Ignore nay-sayers who sneer that it isn't a 'proper' hi-fi product; most see sense when they listen to it...



AURA NOTE MUSIC CENTRE 2007 £1,500

Lovely shiny CD/tuner/amplifier with fine sound quality and dynamic abilities.

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650
Quite possibly the cutest all-in-one around with fine performance from the CD player, tuner and MP3 player input. Very low power, though.



NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995
Uniquely versatile one box music system with excellent ergonomics and sonics to match. A landmark product for Naim.

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

MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1 2010 £6,990
Thanks to its crisp styling and bright, colourful touchscreen, plus excellent search facilities this is one hard disk music system with a difference. Best partnered to Meridian active loudspeakers.

MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000
The combination of SA-751 disc player, SC-752 preamp and MA-952 monoblocks delivers a truly jaw-dropping performance. Start saving now...



Show Time!

David Price and Noel Keywood report from the National Audio Show 2010, held at Silverstone's Whittlebury Hall in late September...



Inspire Hi-fi's Vivid LP12 kit includes a brand new real wood veneered plinth, arm board, Hercules power supply, acrylic subchassis, acrylic mat and base - fully fitted for £699. The modded Sondek sounded dramatically different to stock; tight, taut and incisive. DP

AudioFreaks had a very fine sounding room, including this mouth watering Magnum Dynalab MD107 analogue FM tuner. DP



The fine sounding MF Audio room was augmented by a superb 'low mileage' Revox A77 open reel! DP

Dartzeel's gorgeous CTH-8550 integrated amplifier was a highlight in one of several memorable Absolute Sounds rooms. DP



The Creek WyndSOR programmable phono stage can be set to match any pickup cartridge, MC or MM. Just dial in the details and they are stored onboard. Price is £1,500. NK



In the Inspire room I spied these Fidelity Audio HPA100 headphone amplifiers; no prizes for style but the build quality sure looked good. DP



DCS's Puccini CD made a nice noise with VTL's IT-85 integrated and Focal Diablo Utopia speakers. DP



Avid were showing their new electronics; the vast Reference Pre and Power amplifiers reminded me of nineteen seventies superfi in their styling and build. DP

Spotted lurking in the Icon Audio room was a new 805 based Single-Ended, Class A high-end valve amplifier, under development. NK



Creek were keen to tell us about the new Epos Epic 5 loudspeaker, price £750, which designer Dave Berriman said will be a high quality, accurate floorstander without the treble lift of so many modern designs. NK



Martin Warsop stands proudly in front of Deltec Precision Audio's glorious battle wagon, a Rolls Royce Shadow 2. Funnily enough, the ebullient Martin had accidentally parked it in a disabled bay and signed himself the 'Duchess of Northampton'...



The new Kingsound Queen II hybrid electrostatic loudspeaker, imported by Icon Audio, uses an electrostatic midrange/treble panel, coupled to a box bass unit. Should be good. NK

"Hipness is not a state of mind, its a fact of life"
Cannonball Adderley



Fidelity

with SOUL

Chord Indigo Plus Digital

Whilst most hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts are happy to accept the influence that interconnects and speaker cable can have on the performance of a system, many people struggle to accept that a digital cable can be equally influential.

The common reaction is that since the cable is only carrying a digital signal, the design and quality of materials used in the cable will have far less influence. Listening tests however, show this is not necessarily the case. Repeated listening tests using high quality digital to analogue converters and home cinema receivers have shown that digital cables can and do have an effect on the sound quality of the system in which they are used. Digital cables are capable of affecting levels of detail, dynamics, sound staging and the rhythmic and tonal characteristics of a system.

The improvements that the Indigo Plus Digital can bring to a system should not be dismissed lightly.



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Tucked away in a room on its own we spotted the new Martin Logan Ethos electrostatic loudspeaker, driven by Audio Research valve amplifiers; it sounded divine, as Martin Logans usually do, displaying fabulous clarity and celestial imaging! NK



One small speaker that surprised your editor was Raidho's lovely little Ayra C-1. Watch out for a review soon. DP



Tim de Paravicini told us his new EAR V12 amplifier uses six EL84 output valves per channel in parallel push-pull to deliver 50 Watts through a balanced bridge output transformer. Price is £6,550. NK



Tannoy's new flagship Kingdom Royal was a true show-stopper; huge, loud and proud! DP



The German AcousticPlan Vadi CD player, imported by GT Audio, has special analogue filtering and valve output stages with balanced output using audio transformers, all to achieve a more natural sound than is usual from CD. NK



Remember the Garrard Zero-100? Look closely and you'll see this Thales Simplicity tonearm, imported from Switzerland by GT Audio, is similarly articulated, to eliminate tracking error distortion. NK



DBA's 'green room' was packed with interesting products such as the carbon fibre hewn Envy 3 loudspeakers, and the DBA guys won first prize in the Whittlebury Hall Gary Numan lookalike competition! DP

Floorless

Noel Keywood struggles to find so much as a blemish on the sonics of Revolver's Screen 3 'wallstanding' loudspeakers...

Here's an unusual idea. A flat panel loudspeaker that isn't a flat panel loudspeaker! It's actually a box loudspeaker squashed flat. Most panels are open backed, but Revolver's Screen 3 is not; it's a conventional loudspeaker with cone drive units and a sealed box enclosure, but the box has been squashed to a depth of just 110mm (4.3in) deep. The idea is that it mounts against a wall, or hangs from it, freeing up ever valuable floor space in the way wall mounting flat screen TVs kicked out bulky Cathode Ray Tube televisions. Placing a loudspeaker against a wall runs against the grain a little, but Revolver surprised me with this one. They have made a really good job of the Screen 3; it had a lovely sound.

The cabinet stands no less than 1.4m high, nearly fifty percent higher than your average floorstander. It is a generous 500mm wide too. As bass units need a volume of air behind them I imagine Revolver had to make the cabinet this big, to compensate for loss of depth. Otherwise, bass would not go low enough. Each cabinet is very heavy too, quite a difficult lift at 32kgs, so wall brackets would need to be very strong. We stood ours against a wall for measurement and listening but Revolver intend to produce floor stands, which seems like a good idea. Our review samples came without any bracketry, or stands, or instructions even. We were initially quite baffled by them!

The tweeter is straddled by two midrange units in what is known as a D'Appolito arrangement, after its inventor Joseph D'Appolito. It gives a very even, phase-free spread of sound vertically, if a large and diffuse vertical image. However, Revolver have used this, together with a very high acoustic centre – the tweeter stands 1m above ground – to give the Screen 3 an unusually high and fabulously large sound stage, more of which later...

Accompanying a really big 42in TV screen



the really big Screen 3 will give an equally big sound and that, I think, is the point. You can forget your point source, bookshelf super monitors with their pinpoint focus; the Screen 3s paint it large, Hollywood style.

Just as I hauled a big screen onto my wall many moons ago to get both a great picture and valuable floor space back, so the Screen 3s have been designed to give you more for less. But if it's that simple why haven't others done it?

Well, that's what I ended up wondering too. Having designed many box loudspeakers, using cabinet depth and absorbent wadding like industrial long haired wool (moths love me) to lose rear radiated energy from the cone I admit to looking at the Screen 3s and thinking "Nah, this won't work, they are too shallow. The sound from the cab. will come straight out through the cone". But it does work! I have had to eat my thoughts.

Whilst the 25mm tweeter and two 165mm midrange units fit the shallow cabinet, the sizeable custom 10in bass unit has had its motor assembly inverted to do so, a neat trick. It uses a powerful Neodymium magnet. The rear carries a bi-wire input terminal block and if used with an AV receiver the Screen 3s may well benefit from being bi-amped, an arrangement possible with high quality modern receivers.

SOUND QUALITY

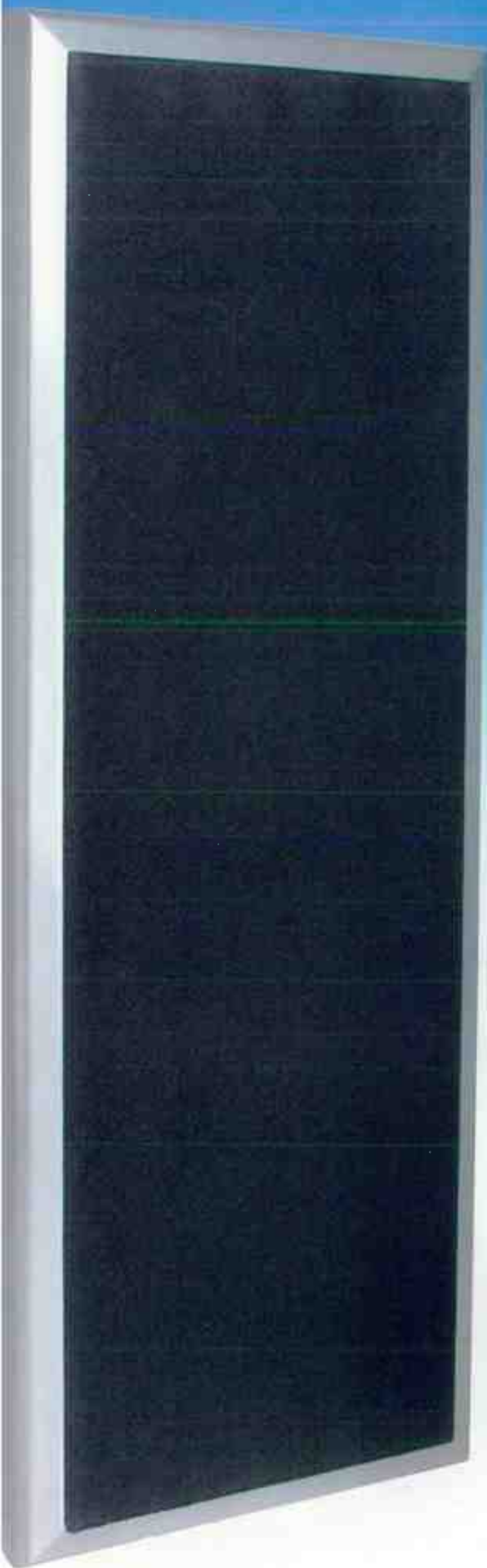
The Screen 3s have lovely sound staging. The D'Appolito drive unit arrangement spreads sound vertically and, with drivers mounted high, I was confronted by a wide spread of sound, Steve Earle singing 'I'm the Other Kind' from 'The Hard Way' CD just above head height, a nice bit of celestial positioning. The drive units sound as smooth as silk and had lovely ease of delivery, allowing Earle's jangling guitars in 'Promise You Anything' to sound convincingly like

"accompanying a really big TV screen, the really big Screen 3 will give an equally big sound..."

musical instruments, rather than instruments of torture. Like all Revolver loudspeakers the Screen 3s had less of their own sound and delivered more instrumental timbre, making for a nicely broad tonal palette. Raised upper treble from the tweeter made cymbals hiss a little, but again the effect wasn't especially unpleasant and although I would have hoped the Screen 3s could manage better at the price, many expensive loudspeakers have wayward treble.

Generous dynamic resolution allowed 'Hopeless Romantics' to open with a powerful flourish, Earle's Gibson sounding lovely and rich. This was as good as heavy Rock gets in many areas and I was just very impressed. There was no part of this loudspeaker's performance I didn't want to listen to; instrument separation was superb, tonal balance even and natural across the midband without nasties, except for the slight hiss of strong upper treble.

Just as our measurements had predicted, bass was not heavy, yet it was tight, fast and clean. Kick drum was punchy and characterful, not the soft boofing representation that is so common. In our large listening room where the main mode lies at 24Hz the Screen 3s were unable to exploit 'room gain' and this is why bass seemed light; they need rooms no larger than 18ft long. But this did depend upon recorded balance. Spinning Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance' had its heavy bass pounding the room like Hurricane Katrina. The Screen 3s held onto the heavy synths with the grip of a bulldog, spitting out seismic pulses many loudspeakers



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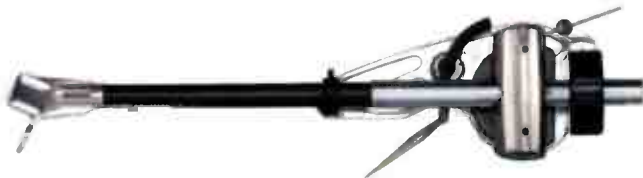
HI FI WORLD MAY 2009

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could not match. The big bass drive unit does a fine job and wouldn't shy away from

producing some explosive screen sound

tracks with awesome power. I did detect a bit of boxiness at times but this is to be expected with a cabinet wall so close behind the bass unit.

Lady Gaga's vocals were deliciously clear and alive in front of me, the excellent timbral resolution of the Screen 3s capturing her with beguiling ability. Wall positioning does limit apparent sound stage depth, but this isn't a great drawback. Fed a wide range of Rock, the Screen 3s sounded dynamic and exciting, ably propelled by our reference Musical Fidelity AMS50 amplifier. The easy delivery and lovely timbral resolution of the Screen 3s painted a Steinway large and clear in front of me and nothing intruded to spoil my enjoyment of hearing Arcadi Volodos playing Liszt, punishing the keyboard in extraordinary fashion. A giant image with wonderful dynamic scaling and rich timbral resolution put the Steinway in our room in gloriously full bodied form. The Screen 3s did this so well I was a little shocked in some ways. Such an unlikely looking loudspeaker, but here they were delivering a wonderful performance. The complete absence of bass waffle made for a tidy and clean sound that had Volodos playing with a snappy precision unsullied by a loudspeaker unable to keep up.

The easy, smooth sound of these speakers delivered violins in the Emerson String Quartet with a silky richness that was an object lesson for cone loudspeakers; how I wish such a svelte delivery was more common. There was perhaps just the slightest hint of boxiness and a flattening of stage depth perspectives but to such a small degree it was trivial in the overall scheme of things. The effect was again a little noticeable in quieter moments of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing Mars, from The Planets. As the tempo grew I was impressed by the sheer scale of their presentation and

the clear way in which instrumental strands were kept nicely apart. The richness and strength of the horns and thunderous rolls from kettle drum, all sharply timed with nary a hint of imprecision would bring a smile to the face of any classical listener, I believe.

CONCLUSION

I found the Revolver Screen 3s massively impressive in the grandest sense – and supremely enjoyable. They bring a sense of scale to performances that would catch anyone's attention. Creamily smooth yet delicately detailed and timbrally rich I found them lovely to listen to. With some of the best bass I have heard for a long, long time; even if it didn't go too low in our large room, the Screens got so much right. High treble could have been less obvious, but its presence only became known with recordings possessing strong treble, mainly close miked Rock. So they may be large and expensive, but for sound quality Revolver's Screen 3s had me totally impressed. They were lovely – and you get your floor back.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our frequency response analysis shows the Revolver is nicely flat across the audio band, but has plateau lift in output above 4kHz and then steeply rising upper treble that measures a substantial +6dB above 10kHz. In all then, Revolver's panel has strong treble and will sound obviously bright, even sharp with music possessing strong treble energy.

Bass output rolls down smoothly when measured against a wall, but the roll off is slow and quality should be good, although this loudspeaker is unlikely to sound bass heavy. There is no port to augment low bass; the cabinet is sealed.

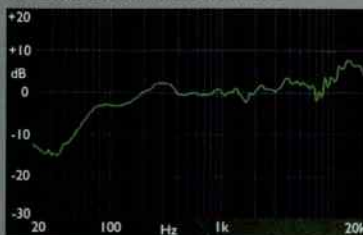
Placing drive units close to a rear reflecting surface usually induces strong phase reinforcement and cancellation from the rear reflected wave that affects forward response and adds colouration from the time delayed reflection. Revolver seem to have overcome this difficulty; the forward response shows no sign of the usual peak/dip expected and our decay spectral map was unusually clean and free from overhangs, even at low frequencies. The panel produced no funny honks whilst pulse testing either so it performs surprisingly well in this respect.

Midband distortion hovered around 0.2%, with a few peaks of 1% suggesting small mechanical effects. Bass distortion was unusually low, just 1% at 40Hz and less than 0.5% above 50Hz with no peaks. The big bass unit does a good job here.

Sensitivity was high at 88dB Sound Pressure Level into a measured overall impedance of 7.5 Ohms, although bass unit DCR was 4.5 Ohms and a response peak at 80Hz corresponds with an impedance dip to 4 Ohms our impedance trace shows, meaning there's strong current draw here. Otherwise, the Revolver is an easy load, unreactive and undemanding current wise.

The Revolver panel measures well, but its frequency response is far from flat or even and this will likely be audible as a bright sound with restrained bass. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT

Panoramic sound of high quality from an unusual panel loudspeaker. Great entertainment all round.

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 - tight, tuneful bass
 - smooth as silk

- AGAINST**
- big
 - heavy
 - explicit high treble

WORLD CLASSICS

Here is our list of the great and good from audio's glorious past, products that have earned their place in hi-fi history. You'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price.

We do not sell these products. It is for your information only.

DIGITAL

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

TECHNICS SL-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-XI 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-TI 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 RD11S 1972 £94
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300
Bonkers 1970s direct drive that uses an infra red beam to allow track selection and programming. More of a visual and operational delight than a sonic stunner.

PIONEER PL12D 1973 £36
The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this brought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



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

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

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

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

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



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



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

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400
Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

TO NEARMS

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253
Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

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



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

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS

DELTEC 1987 £1900
Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

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

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



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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

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



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

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

PREAMPLIFIERS

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

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-8 1982£1,400
Beautifully designed and built high end tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

CONRAD JOHNSON MOTIV MC-8 1986 £2,500
Minimalist FET-based preamplifier from the Yank valve specialists is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry, light balance in the mould of Sugden high end stuff. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

CROFT MICRO 1986 £150
Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £ N/A
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fi!

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

NAIM NAC32.5 1978 £ N/A
The Salisbury company came of age with this, their classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

LECSO 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-S0D 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

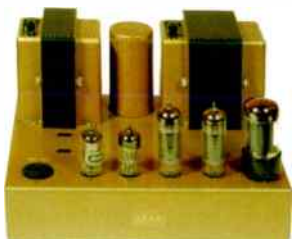
Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

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 5TA25 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

MARANTZ ST-8 1978 £353

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



CREEK CAS3140 1985 £199

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

NAD 4040 1979 £79

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

NAIM NAT03 1993 £595

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

PIONEER TX-9500 1976 £295

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

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 £25

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



YAMAHA CT7000 1977 £444

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

QUAD FM4 1983 £240

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



REVOX B760 1975 £520

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

NAD 4140 1995 £199

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

ROGERS T75 1977 £125

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

SANSUI TU-9900 1976 £300

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

SONY ST-5950 1977 £222

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

SEQUERRA MODEL I 1973 £1300

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



TECHNICS ST-8080 1976 £180

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



ANALOGUE RECORDERS

YAMAHA TC-800GL 1977 £179

Early classic with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!



AIWA XD-009 1989 £600

Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 £800

The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



PIONEER CTF-950 1978 £400

Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.



REVOX A77 1968 £145

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



SONY WM-D6C 1985 £290

Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.



SONY TC-377 1972 £N/A

A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards

DIGITAL RECORDERS

SONY MDS-JE55ES 2000 £900

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



PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480

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

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100

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



KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 £500

Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.S; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 £599

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

LOUDSPEAKERS ACOUSTIC RESEARCH

ARI8S 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 BCI 1976 £240

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

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH

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



KEF R105 1977 £785
Three way Bextrene-based floorstander (complete with castors!) gave a truly wide-band listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace. The quintessential nineteen seventies loudspeaker.

IMF TLS80 1976 £550
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800
Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 £375
Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs. Warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.



MISSION 752 1995 £495
Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstanders combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

HEYBROOK HBI 1982 £130
Peter Comeau-designed standmounters with an amazingly lyrical yet decently refined sound. Good enough to partner with very high end ancillaries, yet great with budget kit too. A classic.

CELESTION SL6 1984 £350
Smallish two way design complete with aluminium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding, albeit course at high frequencies and limp in the bass. Speakers would never be the same again...



LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH
Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200
An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics



YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532
High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499
The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!



CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

GT AUDIO
(Graham Tricker, Bucks)
Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.
Tel: 01895 833099
Mob: 07960 962579
www.gtaudio.com

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL
(East Sussex)
Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges.
Tel: 01892 654534

CARTRIDGE MAN
(Len Gregory, London)
Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges.
Tel: 020 8688 6565
Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net
www.thecartridgeman.com

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 Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).
Tel: 0845 4580011
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

DR MARTIN BASTIN
(Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc.
Tel: 01584 823446

ARKLESS ELECTRONICS
(Northumberland)
Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.
Tel: 01670 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 IIs.
Email: one.thing@ntworld.com
www.onethingaudio.com

LORICRAFT AUDIO
(Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)
Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service.:
Tel: 01488 72267
www.garrard501.com

HADEN BOARDMAN
Repair, service & modifications; classic & modern. Collection available. Redundant / faulty equipment purchased, selected new equipment available.
Tel 01942 790600
www.audioclassics.co.uk

LOCKWOOD AUDIO
(London)
Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.
Tel: 020 8 864 8008
www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI
(Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex). Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.
Tel: 01903 695695
Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk
www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING
(Bristol)
Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol.
Tel: 0117 925 6015
www.octave-aw.co.uk

REVOX
(Brian Reeves, Cheshire)
Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.
Tel: 0161 499 2349
Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk
www.revox.freeuk.com

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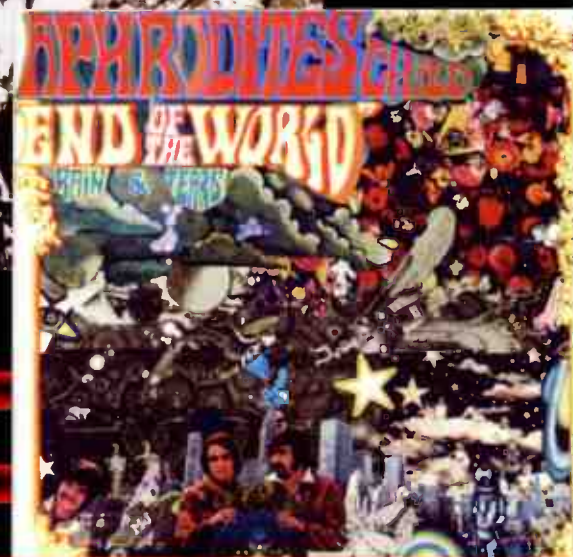
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THE FALL
The Wonderful And Frightening World Of...
Beggars Banquet

Fans of The Fall take note of this brilliant box set which features four CDs situated in a 140x190mm box. The CDs themselves are placed in colour card sleeves and include the original LP, which was released in 1984 and is presented here in a remastered form via the original master tapes. It was the band's eighth album and a career highlight. Mark E. Smith shared the songwriting duties with his then wife, Brix — complete with bitterness, cynicism and biting humour...

Next is a CD devoted to Singles/Rough Mixes which includes sixteen tracks, six of which have never been released before. Rather startling is the third CD, a BBC Sessions disc. These include the expected John Peel sessions (Peel adored The Fall and always termed them as 'The Mighty Fall') but there's also sessions from shows fronted by Janice Long, Kid Jensen and the Saturday Live show. Except for the Peel tracks (which can also be found on the old, six disc 'The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004' via Castle Music), all of the other session songs have never been released before. Finally, the fourth disc includes a ten track live gig recording:

'Live At Pandora's Music Box Festival' created by VPRO radio in Holland. Would you believe it, at 3:15am on a Sunday morning?

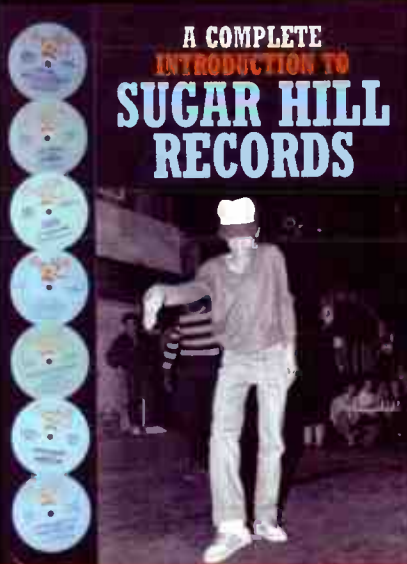
In addition to the music, the box includes an excellent 48-page book which includes plenty of images of memorabilia, posters, photos and artwork. It also includes a sort of diary of late 1983 and 1984, detailing events and including interviews within each diary entry. In addition to that lot, the band discuss the album, song by song. The book is finished off by single artwork and full production credit information for each single and album track. Phew!

APHRODITE'S CHILD
End Of The World/
It's Five O'Clock
Esoteric Recordings

A fascinating band featuring a bunch of blokes from Greece. They included Loukas Sideras plus sometime member Anargyros 'Silver' Koulouris. The other two might ring a bell with you, though. The first was Evangelos Odyseas Papanthassiou who we know better as Vangelis, yep the 'Chariots of Fire' composer plus the Greek with an Egyptian extraction, Artemios Ventouris Roussos, or Demis Roussos as he was known over here during a popular solo career he had with

hits such as 'Forever and Ever'. Poor Demis also spent much of his time being ridiculed on UK TV comedy shows because of his rather stout proportions. Well, back in 1968, when he was part of the prog rock outfit, Aphrodite's Child, Demis was a rather svelte character. During 1968, the band released 'End Of The World', featuring the distinctive vocals of Roussos. At this stage, the musical output was more akin to psychedelia with the use of a Mellotron and decidedly hippie-like imagery. You know the sort of stuff, 'The grass is not green', 'the birds are singing' and so on. It includes late-Beatles type arrangements.

The sequel, 'It's Five O'Clock', moved the band's style on apace, pushing them forwards to their prog-related conclusion. This album still retains elements of their psyche background however, so there is a crossover element to the music. An exploratory album, the band sounds like they are prodding here, prodding there while trying a bit of this and that. Each track sounds like a sonic investigation as styles vary so much. The ultimate prog-like end would be the cult classic, '666' which was released in 1972 and gave the band a deserved underground following. Both of these new reissued albums provide a fascinating build up to that album.



A COMPLETE INTRODUCTION TO SUGAR HILL RECORDS

Various
Universal

Part of a series of themed box sets covering a wide variety of labels and genres, this 'Introduction To...' looks at the US-based Sugar Hill label and does so over four discs. This was the rapping soundtrack of my teenage years with classic tracks such as The Sugarhill Gang's 'Rapper Delight' featuring Big Bank Hank's superman rap, Mike's rap on bad food and Master Gee's lines as his place as the youngest of the group. This set includes the long version of almost fifteen minutes. The group's '8th Wonder' also features the much sampled signature brass hook.

Like some Victorian gentleman finding the source of the Nile, disc two introduces what some term as the source of hip hop, with Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel'. Samples are scattered all over the place including Chic's 'Good Times', Queen's 'Another One Bites the Dust' and Debbie Harry's 'Rapture' plus many more. When that band's seminal, 'The Message' hits the spindle then you know that you're in the presence of greatness. "It's like a jungle,

sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under." And, "Don't push me 'cos I'm close to the edge," burn into the mind. And then there's the drug culture commentary, 'White Lines (Don't Do It)'. This list goes on...

Also look out for the 'A Complete Introduction To Chess', which also spans four CDs and includes a 36-page booklet secured within. Each CD is packed with classic music from Chuck Berry's 'Maybellene' and Howlin' Wolf's 'Evil' to Little Milton's 'We're Gonna Make It' and Elmore James' 'Something's Got A Hold On Me'. Covering the years 1948 to 1975, there are 100 tracks to feast upon in all.

35!!! YEARS *Various* **Bear Family Records**

To celebrate the 35th anniversary of the birth of Germany's premier reissue record label, Bear Family has released a gloriously self-reverential box set that includes 3 CDs in a LP-sized box. The music itself has been created by friends of the label. There are sixty-eight original recordings from the likes of Charlie Pickett & The Mothers of Propriety, Deke Dickerson, Nancy Apple, Richard Bennett and Martin Belmont.

Normally, the star of any box set

is the music but not this one. It's the hardback book that makes this box set so desirable. Spanning 208 pages, it is quite a production and is worth the entry price on its own, to be frank. After an introduction and some tributes to 'Lost Friends', colleagues who have passed away over the years, there is a 'fun' list section which asks a selection of notables; if your house was on fire, what Bear Family records would you rescue from it? Well, you can see my choice on page 39!

Next is a list of Top Billboard chart artists that feature on the label covering varying genres and then, the *pièce de résistance*, the Bear Family catalogue, covering firstly vinyl and then CDs. This section covers over 100 pages all on its own and features every single Bear Family release and an image of every single LP and CD cover too. For collectors, this portion of the book alone is almost priceless. Looking at those early vinyl days, the roster is fascinating; Bill Clifton, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Waylon Jennings, Ted Herold, Marty Robbins, The Carter Sisters... I'm sure many of these early releases will be new even to hardened Bear Family collectors. Quite a set for Bear Family fans, then. Oh, and don't forget the best bit... page 39! **PR**

American Dream

As popular as hamburgers in the States, this European influenced design is almost unheard of in the UK. Haden Boardman dons his chinos to regale us with the story of the long lost Dynakit Stereo 70 'tube' amplifier...



Most Stereo 70 chassis sold were supplied as kits; note early cover on our model...

Introduced around 1960 by David Hafler's Dynaco Corporation of Philadelphia in the good old US of A, in pretty much unchanged form, you can still buy a version of this amplifier brand new today; rivalling the Klipsorns, Denon DL103s, Ortofon SPU and Beyer DT48 as one of the longest surviving hi-fi components of all time. It also has a reputation of being a major driver in the US marketplace, influencing and inspiring other audio designers along the way.

Although now in MkII guise, any variant of the amplifier is instantly recognisable with shiny chrome chassis and dark coloured chassis cage cover. Technically the differences between old and new are a change of driver valves from the hard to find 7199 to the easier 6GH8A

(technically a TV valve, but one that sounds great in this set up – not interchangeable, it should be pointed out!) both dual triode pentode valves. There's also sold state power

supply rectification on the MkII with increased reservoir capacitor capacity, as opposed to the MkI using a valve GZ34 rectifier.

Both models operate the EL34 output valves in fixed negative grid bias, user adjustable. On the MkI a voltage meter has to be plugged into test points, on the MkII an inbuilt

LED telltale does that job. The later MkII also has a more sophisticated bias power supply.

Over the years the name has passed through several hands, but delightfully the product and all the parts remain available. Initially available as both a factory wired item, and as a home constructed kit, for the past forty years the amplifier has been available only in do-it-yourself form.

The design is rock-solid, the chassis rigid enough to cope with the powerful and weighty transformers. It has a compact footprint of 13 inch wide by 9 1/2 inch deep (6 1/2" tall). The plating of the chassis is to a very high standard, shaming the vast majority of British counterparts. It is also pretty advanced for its day, using one of those new fangled printed circuit boards for all of the drive section circuitry, and most of the amplifiers passive components, with power supply and output valves neatly hard wired on the compact chassis.

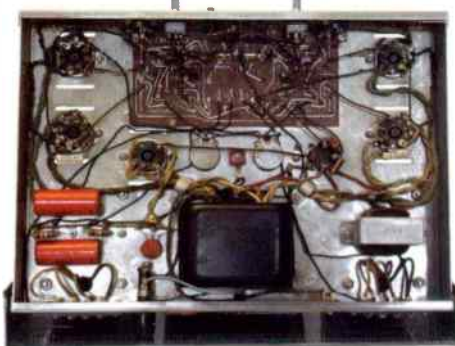
Over the years across the pond there have been more modifications than you can shake a stick at. Most concentrate on replacing the original printed circuit board with a different drive circuit. The original board was tightly specified, not allowing huge scope for the tweaker wanting to upgrade coupling capacitors, and not everyone liking the pentode driver, and classic split load cathode follower circuit.

In Europe, the Philips/ Mullard 5-20 design was a much more popular use of the EL34 valve, as was the

Radford STA15 and 25. The latter does get compared quite a lot to the Stereo 70. Both use fixed bias EL34 output pentode valves in an 'Ultra Linear' configuration (itself invented by Hafler), and both use triode pentode drive valves; but the drive circuits are much more apart, Radford using a more sophisticated Bailey modified Philips/ Mullard circuit, while the Stereo 70's drive circuit can be traced back through the famous Williamson to Cocking's original 'Quality Amplifier' circuits in *Wireless World*.

In comparison to most European amplifiers of the period, the Stereo 70 is a power house, producing 35 watts per channel from 1.3 volts of signal, a frequency response of 10Hz to 40kHz, and distortion of 1%. Despite the power, this is quite insensitive, and the Stereo 70 does need to be used with a preamplifier with gain, Dynaco offering the classic PAS2 and PAS3 valve preamps to match.

Common to all American vintage amps, the MkI uses fairly tight screw terminals for the 4, 8 and 16 ohm loudspeaker outputs, which are sensibly located on the rear of the chassis along with mains input fuse and power switch. The front contains the input sockets and test points. The input phono connectors are also very tight together, and are a bit of a pain, *nee* impossibility, with the vast



Highly original layout of the Stereo 70; volume controls not standard!

majority of decent modern phono plugs.

Although the amplifier was sold in the UK from 1965, it was not cheap; £52 10 shillings in kit form, and £59 17 shillings factory wired. A pair of Quad IIs cost £44 20 shillings, and a Radford STA25/II a straight £50. The UK launch also coincided with much of the UK audio trade going over to 'The Dark Side' and the launch of solid state transistorised amplification! As such most of the models you are likely to see for sale second-hand in the UK will be ex-US 117V specified units, needing the use of a step up transformer (or autotransformer). Over 300,000 of these animals got sold in America, and of course you can still buy the MkII new in kit form direct from the factory in both European and US mains specifications for around \$700, and a bit of screwdriver/ solder work to get the unit in to full operation.

Although Dynaco have always designed their own transformers, later models sourced transformers manufactured in Japan, and the *aficionados* seem to hold the earlier 'made in the US of A' types better performers (identifiable by the cotton covered, rather than plastic coated cables).

Reliability wise these units are very good. By British standards the quality of passive components is in a much better league. The amplifier in our pictures is virtually untouched since original build, some forty five years ago. I have never seen a 'factory wired' Stereo 70, they have always been kit versions, and not one has been problematic. The clever use of a printed circuitboard results in the minimal amount of cable work underneath the compact chassis. The cathode resistors on the output valves will fail to protect the transformers if an EL34 output valve goes wrong and collapses. The selenium rectifier used for the Mk I bias voltage can fail, blasting all four output valves, causing the aforementioned fault. All coupling capacitors measure slightly leaky with age, and in my opinion should be changed for newer types.

SOUND QUALITY

I did not have a suitable preamp about to drive the Stereo 70; passive was not satisfactory in any form, so I ended up rustling up a small ECC82 anode follower circuit as a preamp! Driving small, modern B&W 686 loudspeakers the amplifier was competent. Clearly vintage in sound, it was solid but exhibited a 'rose tinted spectacles' view on most things, not ultimately gelling

with this small modern speaker. However, it was a different tale altogether with a pair of twenty year old Heybrook HB1s, which at higher levels almost seemed scared for their life; especially on some Blu-ray discs of 'Tiesto'. A pair of JBL TLX9s, in its day a cheap and modest sized efficient three way speaker, suited the amp right down to the ground. The speakers have an easy to drive paper bass unit which was knocking the glass out of the window frames on the end of the Stereo 70!

Bass had more than a hint of colour; it was fast by most vintage EL34 standards, but tubby and rounded. This was most noticeable on drum'n'bass tracks, but was in evidence on classical, jazz or pop. The usual Jimmy Smith Hammond stuff played like it should; sharp key pop from those fast fingers of the master. Jacques Lousier's classic early Decca recording 'Plays Bach' hit all the right notes. The amplifier did lack a touch of air and atmosphere; the Lousier's Trio, double bass, drums and piano, merged a little within the soundscape; still fine by 1960s standards, and quite amazing for a totally original amplifier.

Dinah Washington's version of the Noel Coward classic 'Mad About The Boy' was amazing; on the more subtle Ella Fitzgerald track 'Solitude' some colourations and softening in the midband occurred, best described as a slight plumping up. The high frequencies displayed great height and a lack of compression. Totally sibilance-free, cymbals remained crisp and clean with plenty of air, but again soft by modern standards. The worst thing about the amplifier is the mechanical noise from the mains transformer; perhaps a victim of the switch to UK 50Hz mains, rather than the native US 60Hz mains. The unit was run with an 'autotransformer' which added no real noise of its own.

Technically the amplifier performed fine, but I was intrigued to how a mild workover may change the sound. A quick poke around with a digital volt meter revealed a few discrepancies between the two channels; swapping the 7199 drive tubes did not swap over the faults. The impedance of the higher value resistors within the amplifier had slipped a little with time and use, or were simply not that tight in the first place. I replaced all the anode and cathode resistors for carbon composition two watters, matching them up on the multimeter. I also swapped out the grid leak and stopper resistors for 1% 1 watt metal film types (I like to use a mix



Under the cover, PCBs hold small signal components, high power parts hard wired.

of generic types when rebuilding an amp). The original coupling capacitors replaced with new metallised polyester layer. The valves checked out on an AVO valve characteristic meter, the output stage rebiased, and the whole thing given a 48 hour soak test...

Returning to Jacques Lousier was a delight. The stereo image was much tighter, the whole sound more musical, more held together, and frankly more dynamic. There was still a touch of rose tint to the sound; but it was a genuine and worthwhile improvement. The vocals of both Dinah and Ella came forth; it was a fine performance, leaving most solid state amplifiers sounding cold and uninvolved, if not quite as lucid or as breathable as the Radford '25. On bass heavy material, it was again less plummy than original, with more depth complete with stronger perceived attack and punch, now beating the Radford in the bass department.

CONCLUSION

The Dynakit Stereo 70's biggest problem is lack of sensitivity, needing the use of a decent active preamp. Along with the British Quad II power amp, preamplifier choice is a deciding arbiter in the final sound. In addition, within a quiet room the ambient chassis noise of the unit may be a problem for some, along with the possible need for an autotransformer. But bulletproof build, and complete parts availability in addition to the fine overall quality make this amplifier a top vintage consideration.

The really good news is that second-hand you can buy a good working example for less than £500, and much less if you are prepared for Internet auction hassles and shipping one in from the 'States and giving it a good service. There are a lot more potential modifications and tweaks available, it is capable of driving modern real world speakers, and for its power, by valve amplifier standards, it's very compact. Pretty much dismissed and underrated; this massively influential amplifier is a sound second-hand buy, and new it is a real bargain.

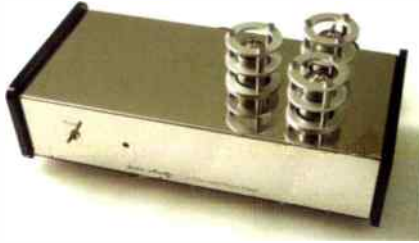
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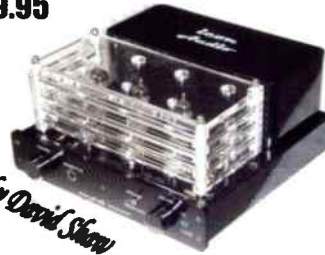


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"we heroic soldiers of the secondhand and conquerors of the classic, lived to fight another day.."



David Price

Ah, autumn, season of mists and mellow fruitfulness! But what the great John Keats forgot to include in his ode to one of the finer seasons of the British year, is hi-fi shows and audio-jumbles. Well, fair enough I suppose; if you're an opiate fuelled romantic poet and thinking beautiful thoughts all the time, the prospect of trudging round a crowded hotel or a grubby town hall isn't exactly foremost in the mind...

For this writer however, September and October have their own special attractions. The Whittlebury hi-fi show is turning into one of the highlights of the calendar, thanks in no small part to its pleasant 'country house hotel' location, where alongside the chirping of the late summer crickets you can hear the howling of superbikes and racing cars pounding around a nearby track known to the locals as Silverstone.

The show has to all intents and purposes replaced the late September show at Heathrow's Park Inn. It's the second year of the National Audio Show, as it has now been named, and it was well attended, with plenty of interesting manufacturers and punters alike. You can see *Hi-Fi World's* highlights of the show on p66. Suffice to say that our report could have filled twice as many pages...

One high point for yours truly was interviewing Eleanor McEvoy; I came away charmed and inspired to delve deeper into her back catalogue. A more unprepossessing person you could not meet, yet she's so obviously talented. I think what initially swung it for me was the enthusiasm she showed for my Sony Walkman Pro; being an analogue kind of guy I am loathe to carry round the modern 'memory sticks with microphones' that are twenty

first century dictaphones, so I opted to tape our chat with my WM-D6C, plus an excellent little stereo dynamic microphone and a Maxell metal C90. It was certainly the best sounding interview I've ever made and I was gutted that she didn't burst into song; it could easily have been turned into one of the best recorded 'unplugged' sessions ever heard!

Speaking of cassette recorders, was it Tim Jarman I saw creeping out of the Tonbridge Audiojumble a couple of Sundays later, with an unfeasibly large mid-seventies Sony 'pro' cassette recorder hanging from an appropriately thick shoulder strap? I think it was! This twice yearly gathering is something of a pilgrimage for a certain type of hi-fi fan, and is a sort of cross between a car boot sale and a classic hi-fi boutique. There's a lot of junk that should be at a 'booter' being offered for boutique prices, and there's a lot of junk that's offered for boot sale prices, but just occasionally you find a special piece that's not commensurately priced...

At the previous audiojumble in the spring, I walked around fit as a flea but didn't see anything I wanted, whereas this time I was still recovering from a bad cold but my luck was in, big time. Maybe it was all that Paracetamol racing around my veins, but I happened upon an exceptionally tidy Rega Planet turntable circa 1975, sans pickup arm, being offered for a very nice price. Needless to say I quickly reached into my pocket, thanking the kind vendor between my sneezes! Now all I need is the matching original silver Rega R200 S-shaped arm; if you know of one then do let me know (by emailing editorial@hi-fiworld.co.uk); it would be good to get the 'train set' back together again! This said, I suppose an original Supex-sourced Rega R100 cartridge would be asking too much...

Then, just when I'd parted with my dosh, something terrible happened! I spied a Sony PS-8750 turntable sitting in the corner and almost needed to sit down. Earlier, Adam Smith, who's a regular audiojumbler and who had a stall, said there had been one on sale for £150 earlier, which knocked me for six as soon as I'd arrived at around 10.30am. Sadly (and not unexpectedly) it had 'gone', but amazingly another had surfaced for £275! Well, given this was likely Sony's most expensive integrated turntable ever, the first to sport quartz lock and also boasted a sublime carbon fibre tonearm with sapphire bearings and a build quality little short of a Continuum, I still thought it worth the wonga. Needless to say it has issues; a flickery strobe and a few bits missing, but that's all part of the thrill of the classic hi-fi chase!

My bank balance visibly contorted with pain (I should have given it my last Paracetamol), I made for the audiojumble door, only to be cruelly confronted with an Aurex Microsystem. Partly not working, it was going for £35 and – as Oscar Wilde used to say – 'I can resist anything except temptation'. A good friend has now restored it to its former glory, leaving me to do the finishing touches with Mr Sheen, giving a £600 (in 1979) high end miniature hi-fi for less than the price of a decent mains plug.

As I cowered out, under the weight of my various purchases, I saw many other brave warriors emerging from the audiojumble, open reels or quadraphonic receivers clutched tightly under their arms. Like lions returning to their pride with freshly-caught prey, we heroic soldiers of the secondhand, ninjas of the not-wanted and conquerors of the classic, lived to fight another day. Albeit frugally until next pay day...●

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"The Runaways were part of that interesting American scene before punk broke in the UK..."



paul rigby

Never judge a CD by its cover. Put together by music maverick, Kim Fowley, in Los Angeles around 1975, The Runaways were a girl band featuring Joan Jett, Sandy West, Lita Ford, Cherie Currie and Jackie Fox. Given a somewhat sleazy image by Fowley, the band were often dismissed by many critics. This may be because the band were created and honed while still in the public eye. Hence, their early work can be termed raw and primitive but it would also be nearer the truth to say that most of the girls were still learning how to play their instruments during recording and gigging.

"I started Cherry Red in 1978," said Cherry Red Records chairman Iain McNay, explaining how he established links with the band. "I was a fan of the group and I first saw them supporting the Stranglers at the Roundhouse. They had done four albums and were on the brink of splitting. Cherie Currie, the singer, had already left and Joan Jett was doing the vocals. I then heard of an album that had come out in America that was not available in Europe. This was pre-Amazon so it wasn't so easy to get American imports in those days. So I licensed the album from the management company, Toby Maxis and Peter Leeds (who also managed Blondie), which proved to be their final album called 'And Now... The Runaways'. When it came out we issued five different coloured vinyl editions and we got pretty good press. We even took a single off it called 'Right Now'."

Cherry Red then released another album called 'Flaming Schoolgirls' which contained outtakes from previous sessions, licensed from

Phonogram in Holland and released the following year. Time passed until six or seven years ago when Cherry Red managed to obtain the licenses for all of the band's earlier albums, via Universal. "That wasn't a door that opened very easily but, one thing we are at Cherry Red is persistent and we're reputable; we always pay people on time. In the end we managed to get the albums we were after. It was the start of what is now an excellent relationship with Universal. Hence, The Runaways were special releases for us."

The Runaways were part of that interesting American scene before punk broke throughout the UK during that famous summer of 1976 when the Sex Pistols, The Clash, Siouxsie & the Banshees and rest played the 100 Club over a single weekend in Oxford Street. That's when the UK variant of punk began to gather momentum. The Runaways had already been over here with their punk attitude. Not the greatest musicians, sure, but they created a magical sound and an energy that really worked. The Runaways, like their compatriots such as Johnny Thunders & the Heartbreakers and Television, were the inspiration for the UK version of punk.

All of the band's CDs have now been reissued by Cherry Red off the back of a recently released film, called 'The Runaways', based on a memoir written by Currie, which has now been released as a DVD in the UK. The CDs – seven in all – include 'The Runaways', the 1976 debut; 'Queens Of Noise', the 1977 follow-up; 'Waitin' For The Night' in which Joan Jett took over the lead vocals; 'Live In Japan' which was only originally available as an import; 'And Now... The Runaways'; 'Flamin' Schoolgirls', which was

originally released on vinyl by Cherry Red in 1980, and has been released on CD for the first time plus 'The Japanese Singles Collection', featuring all the band's highly collectable Japanese picture cover single sleeves, lyrics, discography and sleeve notes. This CD features two bonus tracks, the UK single 'Right Now' and its B-side 'Black Leather', the band's last single release.

And now you're expecting me to say that the whole line of CDs has been remastered and sounds better than ever. Well, I'm not, but they still sound good. And that's the point. There is a growing fixation on remastering that is starting to dominate the CD market to such an extent that some music fans won't touch a CD without it. It's a sort of technological snobbery or, alternatively, a feeling that, somehow, without the sticker proclaiming the fact, they've been short-changed. Yet, it doesn't always follow that remastering should be imposed on every new reissue. Why? Because not every reissue actually requires it. These CDs, for example, were first remastered via the original masters and, so Cherry Red say, that's good enough for them. That is, any further tinkering might not improve the sound quality. In fact, it might actually lessen it.

So I've dragged you down this column with a non-story? Well, if you're not a Runaways fan then, yes I have. But with the best of intentions. This is the reason — and here I blow my own and *Hi-Fi World's* trumpet — for the inclusion of our audiophile CD and vinyl review columns, this column and *Classic Cuts*. To not only separate the wheat from the chaff but to also give you an insight onto sound quality that other magazines may ignore. ●

**WIN 1 OF 3 PAIRS OF
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Here's your chance to win one of three pairs of £500 Monitor Audio BX5 floorstanders, which Noel Keywood so liked in the November 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World*. Here's what he said...

"The narrow 166mm wide cabinet houses one 140mm (5.5in) bass driver, one similarly sized bass/midrange driver and a 25mm (1in) gold plated aluminium dome tweeter, fitted with protective grille. Both 140mm units use Monitor Audio's C-CAM cone material where an aluminium/ magnesium alloy is heat treated then ceramic coated to improve stiffness. The tweeter also uses C-CAM formed into a dome and gold plated.

There are two bass loading chambers. The lower bass unit is front ported and the upper bass/midrange unit is rear ported. Foam bungs are supplied; you get just two and they are meant for the front ports. Monitor Audio quote a 30W-120W power requirement and a high 90dB sensitivity and we measured 89dB – very close.

Our measurements showed the BX5s were almost academically correct under measurement. In practice this results in a loudspeaker that's less overtly dramatic, but an easier and convincing long term listen. Booming bass and zinging treble catch a listeners attention in the showroom, but it is the home experience that matters and in excess can get tiring.

Imaging is in the plane of the loudspeakers but the aura of the soundstage was large and stage depth convincing. Bass went deep, it was well controlled and about as fast as you could expect, making

the BX5 a fun rocker. Reproducing the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing 'Mars' from 'The Planets', the BX5s managed to capture orchestral scale and power nicely, especially in the rumblings of the kettle drum. With a well cut album like the first from the Scissor Sisters, bass was firm and very musical, individual notes perfectly captured and well expressed. Bass guitar rolled down the scale with an even step all the way down in 'Comfortably Num'.

The BX5 is a fun budget floorstander. Graced with a big sound yet a strong sense of balance and control it works well as a high fidelity all rounder. With a wide range of ability, from its stereo imaging through to a great sense of scale and control with big performances it will appeal to all those who like their music strong and fast."

If you'd like to win one pair of



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QUESTIONS

[1] Noel said the cabinet is...?

- [a] "narrow"
- [b] "wide"
- [c] "small"
- [d] "humungulous"

[2] What cone material is used?

- [a] C-CAM
- [b] ATRAC
- [c] HICAP
- [d] N-JOI

[3] How many bass loading chambers are there?

- [a] two
- [b] three
- [c] four
- [d] five

[4] Noel described the BX5 as what?

- [a] "a fun budget floorstander"
- [b] "an interesting proposition"
- [c] "a passable stab at speakers"
- [d] "a thing of beauty"

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**SEPTEMBER 2010 WINNER: CAMBRIDGE AUDIO BLU-RAY PLAYER
Ms Yaz H. of Sheffield, Yorkshire**

"It's certainly welcome to see the BBC delivering higher quality on digital radio where possible to do so..."



steven green

After receiving positive feedback from the recent 'XHQ' (extra-high quality) Internet radio trial (which Noel wrote about in last month's column), with over a thousand people providing feedback via an online questionnaire, the BBC has announced that it intends to launch the service on a permanent basis in December. The service will be called 'HD Sound', and it will initially consist of the same 320kbps AAC Internet stream carrying a live simulcast of Radio 3 that was used in the XHQ trial.

The 320kbps AAC format to be used for HD Sound is at a considerably higher bitrate than the 192kbps used for Radio 3 on DAB and the digital TV platforms, and just as importantly it uses the modern and efficient AAC audio codec as opposed to the ancient MP2 codec used elsewhere, so there's no question that the HD Sound stream will provide significantly higher quality than the other digital platforms do.

The BBC's use of the term 'HD' is controversial, though. I consider the term 'HD audio' to mean one of the high-resolution audio formats, such as Dolby TrueHD or DTS HD Master Audio that use 24bit resolution, and a high sampling frequency of 96 – 192kHz with the audio losslessly compressed.

The BBC's HD Sound format fails to meet those exacting requirements in a number of ways; the resolution is limited to that of the source audio, which is invariably 16bit CDs for music radio, and although 320kbps may be a very high bitrate for perceptual audio codecs to use, AAC is still a lossy audio codec, so the resolution wouldn't even be 16bits. And the sampling frequency is only

the standard 44.1 or 48kHz.

Having said that, it must be remembered that this is radio we're talking about, so people's expectations of quality aren't as high as they are for music they've purchased.

The public also clearly understands that the 'HD' tag signifies higher quality, which the HD Sound service does deliver. Furthermore, any step up in quality from 320kbps AAC would require a move to using lossless audio codecs, where a bitrate of the order of 1 Mbps would need to be used, so such a move is a long, long way off. To be quite honest, I'm undecided at the present time whether the BBC should use the term 'HD' for this service or not, because there are valid arguments both for and against.

Once it's been launched, Radio 3's HD Sound stream will initially be available on a web page that's linked to from the Radio 3 home page. Then, after an initial period where the BBC will monitor usage and iron out any problems, the HD Sound stream will be made available via the BBC iPlayer, as well as via the forthcoming 'UK Radioplayer' – the latter is planned to launch in February, and it will consist of a common website/web application where listeners will be able to access around 400 UK radio stations that also broadcast on FM, AM or DAB.

HD Sound streams will also be available for the BBC's other national radio stations when special events are being broadcast – the first such planned event will be a Radio 2 stream relaying the Electric Proms on 28th to 30th October. As with the Radio 3 HD Sound stream, the intention is to eventually integrate live HD Sound streams for all of the BBC's national stations into the BBC

iPlayer and UK Radioplayer, and it is planned to extend HD Sound to the on-demand (listen again) streams on the iPlayer, too.

It's certainly welcome to see the BBC delivering higher quality on digital radio where it is possible to do so, because they've badly let down listeners in this regard over the last decade due to their utter intransigence over the issue with DAB's audio quality.

The launch of the HD Sound service also bears out a point that I've been making (banging on about might be a better description) for quite a while now, which is that the Internet is the platform that holds by far the most promise in terms of the audio quality that digital radio will be able to deliver – as Moore's Law reduces the cost of Internet bandwidth exponentially over time, and that enables the broadcasters to deliver higher quality without increasing distribution costs. For example, the quality of the BBC's national radio stations superseded the quality that DAB+ is ever likely to deliver last year when the 128 and 192kbps AAC live radio streams were launched on the BBC iPlayer; and now, just 18 months further on, this HD Sound service is about to set the quality way beyond that which DAB+ will deliver, let alone the quality that will be available via DAB.

The BBC still has a lot of work to do in this area, though, as HD Sound needs to be rolled out to all radio stations, and to the on-demand streams, plus the BBC needs to make these higher quality streams available on Wi-Fi Internet radio devices (the only device that can receive them is the Squeezebox). But they do deserve credit for at least moving in the right direction. ●



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**BASICALLY
 SOUND**

"I'm intrigued and gratified that at last audio engineers are revisiting the transformer..."



noel keyword

Battling with two slabs of French country bread formulated to prevent the chicken salad between being eaten, at the same time I had to ask other hi-fi hacks attending the Paris show why they thought that an amplifier with Class D twiddly bits up front and a Class A output stage was likely to sound good. The conversation didn't get far!

The best hi-fi in my experience is no hi-fi. In other words, the simpler the signal chain the better it sounds. In this vein the cleverest idea floating around at present isn't the amplifier that my colleagues thought so good because of its complexity, but its exact opposite, a transformer based passive preamplifier like the Music First Classic that can provide gain, or should I say voltage step up. As most sources are low impedance and loads high impedance this can be done without matching problems and what you get is a preamp that amplifies without any amplifying devices inside, and with no need for a power supply. Magic!

I love ideas like this. They run a coach and horses through an industry standard view. Initially, a transformer based preamp sounds very whacky, or it did to me. But that just goes to show how ingrained ideas tend to assume a mantle of normality. To get gain we need transistors or ICs or, even better, some amazing Class D whizzy device that's only whizzy because it has a funny name. Back in the late 1970s Japan's big CE companies exploited this by using largely meaningless descriptive titles like 'super parametric Class A amplifier'. Listening to this stuff long ago, I became a deep sceptic. Most of it sounded prosaic, to say the least.

We don't actually need overly

complex technology. Jumbo jets do, space probes do, but hi-fi doesn't.

The drawback is there's nothing sexy about a few coils of wire in a box. Well, there is to me, but that's my problem! To the average music lover, categorically not intrigued by the art of transformer winding, the absence of lights, knobs and displays will be a huge disappointment, even a complete turn off. But the three dimensional, electro-mechanical art form that is a transformer is notionally a very pure approach to high fidelity and a transformer based preamp is a great idea. Better, as this idea gets developed the results seem to bear out my view that less is more in high fidelity.

It wasn't just my little argument in a Paris hotel bar that had me thinking this. In this issue you'll see another example of simplicity that you may like to argue isn't simple. But its designer, David Shaw, said, "I like to use as few stages as possible and that's why I used a paraphrase splitter up front". He was talking about designing the Icon Audio MB845 MkII amplifier I review in this issue. It too relies on transformers and circuit simplicity, employing as few amplifying devices as possible.

A paraphrase splitter was used up front because it has gain, David explained. This eliminated the need for another valve in the circuit. And more was squeezed from less by using choke loaded drivers to swing big volts into the 845 output valves. A choke is another coil of wire so the MB845 MkII is very much a transformer based amplifier and I find it interesting to find that yet again eliminating active devices and substituting coils of wire pays dividends in audio.

Could solid-state amplifiers be made this way? Yes, they could and

Musical Fidelity tread down that path a little way, which is why their amplifiers are heavy and expensive! But generally to those who believe the 'black box' parameters of packaged solid-state devices are good enough to do the job, a transformer is a nightmare! There is a completely different design philosophy that unsurprisingly gives a completely different sound as well. And the Icon Audio MB845 MkII amplifier was a startling example of how far apart the two different approaches to hi-fi amplification can sound.

Solid-state amplifiers could use small signal transformers to advantage I believe, and choke smoothed power supplies, with their ultra low noise. But so far I haven't mentioned cost. Parts wise a transistor amplifier is cheap to build, the biggest cost being its heatsinks, believe it or not, and the main transformer. All the other bits come in at pennies. You can't even mention audio transformers in this environment. They are bulky, heavy and expensive items from yesteryear that the transistor, plus a lot of design ingenuity, consigned to the dustbin of history long ago, alongside steam engines.

So I am intrigued and gratified that at last audio engineers around the world are revisiting the transformer and reinventing it. Korean Emille are another company with great ability here and now even manufacturers of electrostatic loudspeakers are taking note that this ignored component is worth taking seriously.

What is complicated isn't necessarily clever. Elegant simplicity wins the day in audio – and it doesn't even have to cost much. The only exception to this is French country bread and its zealous defence of the Gallic chicken. Next time I'll pay for something less basic! ●

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"...the object of my affection? The mighty FriscoDisco record player!"



adam smith

A couple of conversations that I had with people have come together in a rather interesting way this month, and unfortunately resulted in me spending more money on that famous auction website that everyone knows and loves! Well, I say 'loves' but as I was outbid on one of my dream turntables less than twenty four hours ago and am still sulking, I've dropped to being only 'fond' of it for the time being...

Anyway, the first of these conversations took place with a buyer of one of my turntables at the recent Tonbridge Audiojumble. I'll let you all recover from the shock of me actually selling a turntable before elucidating further...

The buyer and I were chatting about said item, a Sonab 65S, and it came out that he was buying it because he thought it looked interesting. This started me thinking, as this was the precise reason that I bought it as well; having spotted it in a *Hi-Fi Year Book* a number of years ago, I thought it seemed worthy of further research and, when one cropped up on that aforementioned auction website, I snapped it up.

This is not the first time I have done such a thing, and I am sure it won't be the last; it reminded me how easy the likes of eBay have made grabbing things that 'look interesting'. I cannot help but feel that it has widened the audio appreciation circle of many people other than myself and so, for that it should be applauded. Admittedly the response of partners and the regular depletion of funds go some way to limiting the joyousness of the whole experience, but on the whole I think it's a good one, and I shall continue to enjoy it until my good lady wife works out my Paypal password and closes my account [not long now - Ed.].

The second conversation I had was with a few fellow enthusiasts and the topic came round to, "what was your first record player?" Now, the one that sticks in my mind was my Amstrad (yes, I know...) RP10 with its BSR (yes, I know...) turntable but I suddenly realised with a jolt that I had a pride and joy before this. When my interest in records and music became apparent at an early age, my mother managed to acquire a very nice Bush SRP31 portable player from the loft of a friend of hers that had a lovely Garrard RC210 autochanger on it. Ironically, I would give my eye teeth to have that player now but at that time and at the tender age of four, I was scared of it! You see, whilst I now realise that said RC210 was an engineering marvel and its record size sensing and autochange facilities are to be appreciated, at the time it was loud, clunky, seemed to have an unnecessary amount of arms that flipped backwards and forwards too much, and I wanted nothing to do with it.

Fortunately, my grandfather and the Mettoy toy company came to the rescue as, back in the late 1970s, they introduced a whole range of record players for the discerning but youthful audiophile and one of these caught my eye in my mother's John Noble catalogue, no less. Not for me the basic Music Maker, or even the Music Maker with Radio that added an AM radio to the mix. I even skipped past the bright green Music Maker Stereo with its twin speakers to the object of my affection – the mighty FriscoDisco! This traded the sombre black colour scheme of the basic models for funky blue and red, added headphones and a microphone and depicted some cool and funky dude on the box spinning a hot tune or two, whilst clearly giving it his best popstastic local radio DJ style intro!

Well, I was a good boy for

the rest of the year. I did as my mummy told me; I went to bed on time without a murmur and was unfailingly polite and helpful. The result on Christmas morning was my very own FriscoDisco and I loved it! It mattered not one jot to me that it chomped its way through its six large torch batteries with alarming speed, or that the battery compartment showed a propensity for coming unclipped and depositing those batteries all over my floor. I was barely aware that its ceramic cartridge was probably tracking at about half a kilogram; I had sounds to be proud of! The unit was indeed my pride and joy for many a year until that dratted Amstrad came along and replaced it in my affections, whereupon it fell into disuse and eventually went the way of many a child's toy into the charity shop.

You can all see what's coming now, can't you? Well, you're right – the memory stirred up something in me and I was mildly surprised to find that, within a week or two of starting the search, a boxed and unused FriscoDisco turned up on eBay and was mine for £15! Even worse, I also managed to find a Music Maker and a Music Maker with Radio, so I now only have the Music Maker Stereo to find in order to complete the set... or so I thought. You see, amidst my research I discovered that my FriscoDisco was not quite the 'daddy' after all; that honour goes to the Corgi Discosound Roadshow – basically two FriscoDiscos stuck together and with a basic mixer in between. I am almost ashamed to admit that, thirty something years on [? Ed], my heart leapt just like it did when I first turned the page in that John Noble catalogue years ago. Consequently, the search is on – wish me luck, just in case my wife, or indeed the men in white coats, get to me first! ●



Three's Company

David Price joins the brand new Palmer 3 turntable for an extended interview period...

Ah, yet another new turntable! This must be at least the tenth new deck of the year to come into my purview, and I suspect not the last. Right now, all the world and his wife has apparently always loved vinyl and they were always fighting the good fight, even in the darkest days when CD was at its height!

Yes folks, it's profoundly *fashionable* to be a big fan of the black stuff, a die-hard devotee of the dark disc. Of course, whether this has anything to do with the fact that turntables are one of the few areas of hi-fi separates where sales are actually rising, well you might think that but I couldn't possibly say. Suffice however, to point out that vinyl is now officially cool again, and all's well in the analogue audiophile arena...

So is Jonathan Palmer just another opportunist, setting out

to make a quick buck to cash in on the analogue bandwagon with a premium priced product? Well if he was then he wouldn't be the first, but I've spoken to him at length and I have to say I can't see it myself. Rather, he seems a very considered, thoughtful type who has obviously been so completely immersed in the many-year-long design process of the Palmer Three that he's barely given a thought to commercial considerations. That's a nice way to do it; I have encountered a number of other manufacturers who, shall we say, give me the impression they decide how much profit they want first and then work backwards to arrive at the finished product...

I was particularly intrigued that the Palmer *doesn't* have any standout design features. Think back to how the Japanese used to sell everything; design a feature, give it an acronym, think of a reason for it then slap it

into the product, complete with a logo! The Palmer is the exact reverse of this; simply an exceptionally well built, handmade turntable that's devoid of carbon fibre this or quartz-locked that. Jonathan describes it as "a ground up design taking an holistic approach to the design process", arguing that it's necessary to view the turntable as a whole, rather than simply an assemblage of parts. So on first inspection you might be



underwhelmed by the Palmer, in the same way that most nineteen seventies Mercedes Benz cars came with austere vinyl seats and wind-up windows but were better made than any other automobile on earth.

No trendy DC motor here; a low torque AC design spins the 10kg platter, hewn from a solid billet of aluminium alloy via a 'loose touch' peripheral rubber belt; you'll need to spin the deck up to speed, or at least give a good shove from start off if it's ever to reach thirty three and a third! "We do not treat the motor as the drive system," Jonathan says, "instead we take the motor, pulley belt platter and bearing as the drive system as it is these components that fulfil the task of delivering the groove to the cartridge."

Jon has chosen a "modified AC synchronous motor and thrust pad", which he believes "is by far the best type". He argues that, "DC motors need to be told what they are doing and are chasing their tails constantly correcting themselves. AC synchronous motors can only run at the synchronous speed, hence their use in other timing dependent devices such as clocks". This motor sits on one 120x350mm sub-base unit, and is mounted in a stainless steel housing. Its large pulley is engineered from aluminium alloy for the utmost concentricity and its damping effect upon the motor, says Palmer.

This motor plinth sits next to the main 350x350mm plinth, which together (480x350x75mm) are designed to create long paths of dissipation between the main bearing and the tonearm mounting. This is done by fixing the bearing to a different element of the plinth to the arm. The unwanted vibration no longer has such a direct route and has to cross larger areas of mismatched surfaces. These are separated by bonding resins and layers of natural wood. The platter and spindle locate on precision machined conical surfaces ensuring complete concentricity, vital, as all the parts complete the drive system.

Much of the weight of the heavy platter is magnetically supported so it presents much less vertical mass to the bearing, whilst maintaining a fixed reference to it. This prevents any oscillation which can happen when magnetic support is used as it becomes a spring, Jonathan says. "All its mass is retained in its rotation which is exactly where we need it for a stable speed control". The main bearing is a combination of brass and phosphor bronze custom matched bushings, while the spindle

is supported by what Jon calls a "costly" tungsten carbide ball which has superior sphericity and tolerance.

There's a separate offboard power supply with a matching wood fascia, and a matching wood topped stainless steel record clamp is also provided. The total weight of the turntable, including main and motor plinths and platter, is around 23kg. Currently, the Palmer 3 is available in real cherry wood finish but other

"you're immediately struck by the clarity of an classic early eighties analogue recording, the texturing of the guitars and the immediacy..."

finishes are available as bespoke options, such as walnut, birch and mahogany. Armboards are available for most common types such as SME, Rega, Linn, Hadcock and other mounts can be supplied on request.

SOUND QUALITY

One thing I love about turntables is how different they can sound. Whilst you can easily hear the difference between a £1,000 CD player and a £10,000 one, generally the sound between two different units of a similar price isn't profound. One will be a bit better in one way, the other superior in another, perhaps. With turntables however, you can get *night and day* differences between two designs at similar price points, with respective strengths and weaknesses so pronounced it can have reviewers grimacing! And so it proved with the new Palmer 3, and price rivals such as - for example - Avid's Volvere Sequel. I spent a long period with the latter and still have its striking sound burned into my memory banks, and it proves an excellent counterpoint to the Palmer...

Put simply, the Palmer 3 has a lovely organic sound, which veers very gently into 'warm' territory - or perhaps it's better described as 'not cool!' It's the sort of deck that takes the spirit of the vinyl LP and runs with it, rather than trying to turn it into a sort of higher resolution version of DVD-Audio or SACD, which is what both the aforementioned Avid does, and also the many high end direct drives that I seem to spend my time with these days. The Palmer is the Quad II valve amplifier to the Krell monoblock that is the Avid; it's a sweet, subtle, beguiling, genteel performer that lets the romantic flavour of vinyl flood out, rather than its amazing technical

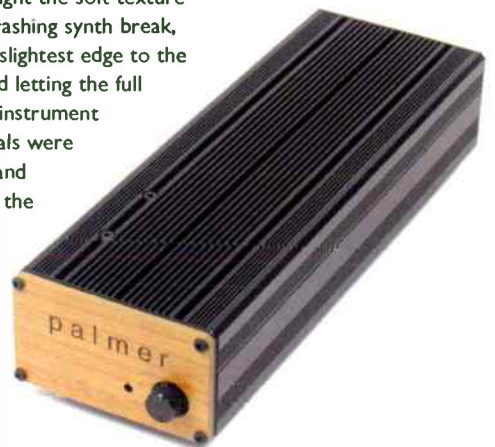
pro prowess it is also capable of.

For example, cueing up 'New Year's Day' by U2, and you're immediately struck by the clarity of that classic early eighties analogue recording, the rich texturing of the guitars and an immediacy that makes Bono's voice sound quite endearing (this is not



something I usually notice, I must say). I also found myself being amazed by the energetic cymbal work, and their metallic sheen, and the damped thunk of the snares, and the fruity bass guitar. In short, the Palmer delivered an essay into the natural sound of the instruments in the studio, and went on to carry the way the band played together brilliantly. It wasn't trying to tell me where the respective instruments were located with millimetric precision (although it was still excellent in this respect); instead of tying itself up with analysis it just got down into the groove and delivered a beautiful rendition of the song.

So it's a very 'human' sounding deck, the Palmer, if it's possible to anthropomorphise things which spin bits of plastic at constant speeds. This was underlined with a 12 inch of Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang'; Ronson is one of my fave contemporary pop purveyors and is obsessed by retro keyboard sounds; his new album is like a greatest hits of late seventies/early eighties synths. The Palmer caught the soft texture of the song's crashing synth break, adding not the slightest edge to the proceedings and letting the full warmth of the instrument ooze forth. Vocals were taut and clean and rhythmic, while the drum machine sounded as fast as a machine gun. This is interesting; whilst the Palmer is fractionally warm and smooth, it's in no way slow, suggesting it's telling you what's going



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on in the groove rather than editorialising on its own. Rhythmically the Palmer has an easy gait. Whilst it starts and stops very quickly, it doesn't throw up a heightened sense of this. The Avid practically lives for the chance to tell you how fast and grippy it is, whereas the Palmer is less concerned about grandstanding to the audience and more self-effacing. In some ways it's less thrilling to listen to, although this in no way means it's less fun.

"there are no stand out features or eye catching contrivances, yet it works extremely effectively to make music magic..."

Rather, it's like that superstar football striker who doesn't have to run all over the pitch to chase the ball; he always happens to be in the right place at the right time to put it in the back of the net effortlessly. Give it Kraftwerk's 'Man Machine' and the deck just flows, showing metronomic precision but also a sense of the song being written by humans for humans.

the Spendors like a tipsy rock star out of a London taxi cab. I was presented with a wonderfully wide and expansive soundstage, with boldly located instruments which just oozed texture. The solo flute sounded lovely; it was supremely sweet and full yet had a certain raunchy steeliness too, telling me it was a real, living, breathing, woodwind instrument. Drums had a fantastic live quality, and double bass filled the

room and flapped my flares.

Well recorded classical music was a treat; 'Autumn part 1' from a DG pressing of Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' proved both a musical joy and a veritable festival of the senses. This turntable's naturally easy and unforced delivery made for an almost caressing rendition; rather than being assaulted by visceral power or speed, or being informed to the nth degree about the squeaking chair in the orchestra pit, I found myself enraptured by the tangible nature of the musical performance. At the same time I basked in the sound of massed strings, dripping with harmonics and sporting that most delicious woody timbre, positively lilting through my loudspeakers.

CONCLUSION

The new Palmer 3 is a welcome new entry into the vinyl revival fray, and one which I suspect will

be around when many others have exited for more lucrative or apparently fashionable vistas. The

deck is, as its designer suggests, very much 'all of a piece'; it's the amalgam of an awful lot of subtle,

intricate design work allied to rigorous finessing and meticulous build. There are no stand out features, bulleted unique selling points or eye catching contrivances, yet it works extremely effectively to make music magic. I think many vinyl fans will find its supremely delicate but detailed, mellifluous but musical sound addictive; it just pulls you into the recording, soothes you and makes you never want to leave.

My only caveat is simply that because it is such a subtle, gentle, self-effacing performer, it's rather at the mercy of its ancillaries. It performed magnificently with the (£1,700) Audio Origami PU7 tonearm - one of the best tonearms on sale in my view - but with a Project 9cc (£495) which is a fine budget design, the deck as a whole sounded rather insipid and limp, with an overly loose bass. My early worry was that it was the deck that was responsible, but the change to the PU7 delivered a profound change to the sound. Because the Palmer 3 is so backward in coming forward, it rather throws the spotlight on the other performers on stage, so to speak. As such, get a good dem and match carefully; this done vinyl fans won't be disappointed. It's expensive at £3,750, but I feel it is good enough to justify the price; it's perfectly possible to spend a lot more and get far less from your music.



I'd liken its style to a unipivot tonearm that has less apparent grip than some conventional designs, yet still seems to deliver the rhythmic goods better. Subtle and self-effacing then, but no less fun with it.

Across the genres, the Palmer seemed to work very well, although I think its sweet, open, gentle nature suits jazz best of all. I put on a pressing of Herbie Mann's 'Summertime' and was enthralled. It has oodles of low level detail - the Audio Origami tonearm and Lyra Dorian moving coil being a particularly synergistic combination here - and duly set up a wonderful recorded acoustic that seemed to stretch back miles, whilst falling out of

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Although slow to reach speed, the heavy platter driven by a low torque motor through a very compliant belt worked very well. Once up to speed, basic speed stability was very good our spectral analysis shows, low rate variations being comparatively small. This kept unweighted Wow & Flutter down to 0.114% as shown in our analysis. The weighted value was a very low 0.047% and again our spectral analysis shows little above 3Hz variation rate. The small 10Hz peak is likely due to arm/cartridge resonance, meaning there are no higher frequency effects at all - very impressive.

The Palmer turntable displays

superb speed stability under measurement; it works very well. NK

Speed accuracy	adjustable
Wow & flutter	0.114%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.047%

WOW & FLUTTER



VERDICT

Charmingly subtle and effortlessly musical performer which offers a lovely, lilting listening experience; a seriously impressive debut.

PALMER 3 £3,750

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FOR

- mellifluously musical sound
- expansive soundstaging
- instrumental timbre
- delicately finessed

AGAINST

- needs a good tonearm
- conservative styling

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Good Wood

Tony Bolton spruces up his record collection with Benz Micro's superb Wood SL moving coil cartridge...

Sometimes, just the name of a country can evoke images of top quality, bespoke engineering. Mention Switzerland and watches in the same sentence and names like Patek Philippe and Jaeger LeCoultre spring to mind. In the audio world, this home of precision engineering has produced Benz Micro, manufacturers of hand made pickup cartridges. Designed by Albert Lukascheck, who personally tests each unit before it leaves the factory, the range of products runs from models costing a couple of hundred pounds up to those costing several thousand.

Situated approximately half way up the range are the wooden bodied S series. These come in three versions, high, medium and low output, and it is the latter that is under review here. Although the models have been around for a few years, recently the stylus profile has been changed from a Geiger S to a Micro-ridge design. This shape has several claimed advantages over other designs, including a very small contact area with the groove wall, promising good detail retrieval, and the curvature of the tip (3 micron radius) ensuring that wear to the tip does not alter the profile, giving long life and minimal wear to both stylus and records.

As the name suggests, this series of cartridges comes clothed in a wooden body. The official description calls the material Bruyere, and a little research found the English name: Briar-root wood (*Erica Arborea*), better known for making the bowls of tobacco pipes. Encased inside is the generator, a crossed-coil design as found in other Benz Micro products. The solid Boron cantilever with 'side-bonded' stylus, grooved rear pole piece and countersunk O-ring damper are carried over from the previous version of this unit.

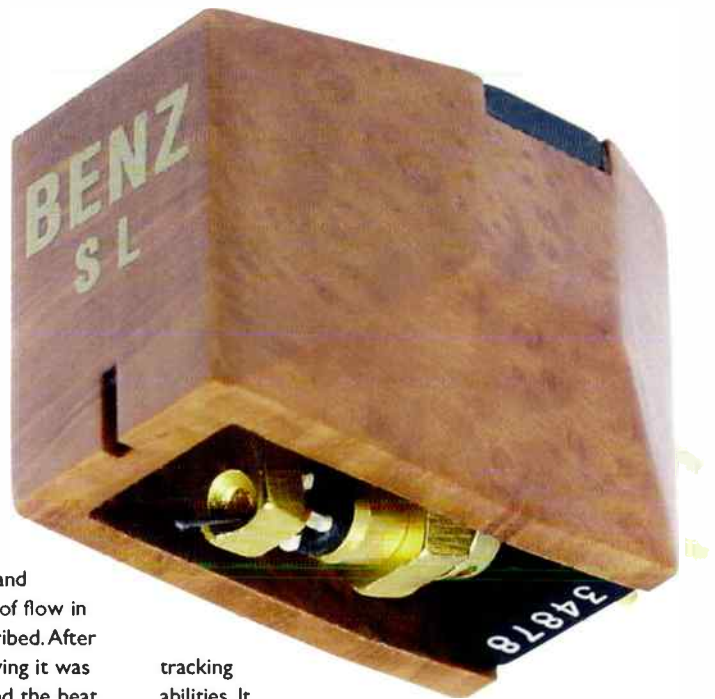
I initially installed the Benz on

the Hadcock 242 Cryo arm attached to my Sondek, where it fed the Sutherland 20/20 phonostage that I reviewed a couple of months ago. First impressions were good, although the sound was a little tight and lacked a certain degree of flow in the rhythms being described. After about twenty hours playing it was sounding a lot looser, and the beat of the music seemed more natural. At this point it was relocated to the Clearaudio Carbon Satisfy tonearm on the Master Solution turntable, the signal being amplified by the Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage, running into the Tucana II and Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers. After about another twenty five hours playing, and a commensurate level of further loosening up and settling down to the sound, I started doing some serious listening.

SOUND QUALITY

The first LP was an old favourite, The Benny Goodman Trio playing a live concert in aid of the Fletcher Henderson Fund. (He was Goodman's arranger and a band leader in his own right, who unfortunately died of a brain haemorrhage, so the band did a fundraiser which was recorded and transmitted on radio station WNEW in the 'Make-Believe Ballroom' series.)

This is a mid fifties mono LP in average condition, and usually plays (via the Ortofon Kontrapunkt a) with a subdued background of crackles and the occasional pop. My first reaction as the run-in groove played was disbelief. Most of the background noise seemed to have disappeared. As the tracks played through, and a couple of the usual 'crunches' failed to materialise, I became more and more impressed with the Benz's



tracking abilities. It seemed to follow the groove wall extremely accurately, digging into the groove to produce one of the best renditions that I have heard of this record.

The musicians seemed to be working together in a particularly cohesive manner, and the whole experience demonstrated the reason that Goodman was known as the 'King of Swing' for over twenty years. The timing was immaculate and the presentation vibrant without being forward or fussy. This was perfectly demonstrated on track four of the second side, 'I Found A New Baby'. Towards the end, Gene Krupa executes a superb drum solo which gets the band so involved in listening that Krupa has to repeat a phrase, and can be heard calling out "that's your cue". As Goodman and Teddy Wilson (piano) rejoin the music, Krupa inverts his drum beat and plays the rhythm backwards through to the end of the track.

Over the years I have heard a lot of cartridges stumble at this, the beat seems to get a bit messy, and the whole thing can sound a little cacophonous. This time there was no such loss of definition, and the whole thing came smoothly to a close to shouts of appreciation from the audience, followed by enthusiastic applause.

Staying in the nineteen fifties, I moved into the world of stereo

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with the 1959 Renata Tibaldi/ Carlo Bergonzi recording of Verdi's 'Aida' on Decca. The sleeve notes (by the respected producer John Culshaw) are interesting. Anxious to show off the special capabilities of the then new stereo medium, the engineers used multiple studios, each with a different acoustic, with Von Karajan's direction of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra being relayed through closed circuit television. The results of these efforts are impressive. The Grand March seemed to take place outdoors in a large space, whilst the closing aria 'O Terra Adio', where Aida and her lover Radames die, walled up in a tomb, had a close intimacy. As the track draws to a close, there is the background chanting of the priests, and the lamentations of Amneris as she realises the full extent of the results of her jealousy.

It was magical. The two leads occupied the centre stage, whilst Giulietta Simionato's heartbroken contralto seemed to hang in the air, high up to the right, with the priests' chorus murmuring at a similar height, but from the left and centre. I can honestly say that this is the best I have heard this record since the demise of my Roksan Shiraz cartridge several years ago. Bear in mind that the current list price of a Shiraz is about twice the cost of the Benz and you'll see why I was so impressed.

A day or two later and I was in a very different musical mood, enjoying the Progressive Trance beats of 'Electric Roundabout' by Human Blue. This LP starts with a deep pulsating bass that seems to get louder and bigger, until it suddenly breaks into the track proper. The Benz romped through it, propelling the music along with an even handed analysis of the electronic noises and effects, seeming to project some of them almost from the far sides of the room. The limits of the image, firmly placed, were a

little beyond the outside edges of the speaker cabinets, with some noises seeming to start way back and rush forward and almost past me before stopping and performing their dance on the carpet in front of me.

Intrigued to see just how much provocation the Wood SL would take before losing its composure, I put on some recently acquired 1960s seven inch singles. Not having had time to put them through the cleaning machine, for once I broke my cardinal rule, and played them as found. I was expecting an ear crunching mess, but found instead the Benz gamely disentangling four and a half decades of dirt from the music, and playing these average condition discs with a degree of refinement and finesse that amazed. Yes, there was surface noise aplenty, but it was in the background, and only really obvious bits of groove wall damage intruded into the music. In the meantime I was more entranced by the levels of definition and energy in the sound, and the sheer amount of detail retrieval being displayed.

In case you haven't guessed, I think I'm in love! I've never had a Benz cartridge to play with at home before, and I have been won over by its exemplary manners, unshakable tracking ability and sheer musicality. I have always considered the Ortofon Kontrapunkt range masters of the art of putting music before a description of the condition of the grooves (and my old Kontrapunkt b was particularly adept at this) but here I think there is a new claimant to the crown. The Benz Micro Wood SL seemed to be unperturbed by record condition or musical genre, and a master of playing the tunes encased in the grooves in a particularly enjoyable and engaging



way. It seemed unfussed by aged recordings (or vinyl) and just rolled up its sleeves and got on with the job in hand - that of making highly enjoyable music.

CONCLUSION

With a price tag just the right side of £1,000 it isn't cheap, but the Benz Micro Wood SL offered a performance that, I think, would cost considerably more to achieve elsewhere. The stylus profile has claims of longevity, so the cost should be ameliorated by a longer than usual usable lifespan. Overall, a truly impressive product, and one I recommend for audition without any hesitation. In fact I would say it was an essential listen if you are in the market for a fabulous piece of Swiss precision engineering.

VERDICT

Smooth, well defined and very musical moving coil cartridge from respected Swiss manufacturer.

BENZ MICRO

WOOD SL £949

Select Audio

☎ +44(0) 1900 813064

www.selectaudio.co.uk

FOR

- musically highly involving
- particularly well mannered
- very low surface noise

AGAINST

- nothing

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Benz Micro Wood SL has a supremely flat frequency response our analysis shows, quite an amazing result. It will sound evenly balanced and likely smooth and svelte. The stylus suffers very little tracing loss, so behaviour on inner grooves (red trace) was little degraded, a treble loss of a few dB above 10kHz serving to give this cartridge a ruler flat frequency response here.

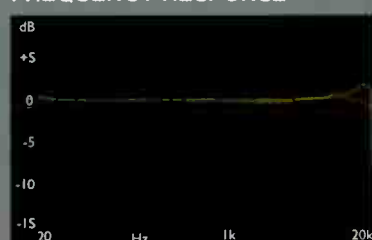
Tracking was very good at 2gms, if not quite up with the best in the midband. At the recommended downforce of 1.8gms the Benz still managed well, if not quite as well as the best. However, mistracking shouldn't occur.

Output was on the low side at 0.6mV on a 5cms/sec rms cut, so quite a lot of external gain is needed in a phono stage, as well as low noise.

With wide channel separation and low distortion, due largely to a vertical tracking angle set exactly to 22 degrees measurement showed, the Wood SL measures extremely well in all areas. It should sound very even, perhaps tonally neutral, peak free and with strong detail retrieval. NK

Tracking force	1.8gms
Weight	9gms
Vertical tracking angle	22degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 20kHz
Channel separation	34dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	90µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	22cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	0.8%
vertical	1.6%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.6mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - outer grooves
Red - inner grooves



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MISSING LINK VINYL PASSION DUST BUSTER £15

Well, here's a thing. The last interesting and innovative stylus cleaner I tried was the infamous 'green sandpaper', back in the depths of the mid-nineteen eighties. Like many ideas from that heady time, it was great in principle but not in practice. Whilst we were assured that its fine-grade abrasive couldn't possibly wear down the hardest naturally occurring substance on earth (i.e diamond), over-assiduous use of it on my part produced a coarse sounding cartridge and (I'm sure) a slightly reprofiled stylus tip!

The Vinyl Passion Dust Buster comes at the same problem from a different angle; it's basically a little tub of sticky goo that sucks the grunge from your stylus. Okay, it's not goo, it's "a specially formulated polymer-gel-hybrid" that you simply place under the stylus – lowering it onto

the gel and then lifting straight off for a full clean. The company assures me it hasn't broken a cantilever yet, and certainly during the test period none of my cartridges ever got stuck in the pot, or showed any sign of cantilever grief.

Sonically, the results are excellent; this is as good as a laborious full wet clean with isopropyl alcohol and a top quality stylus brush; records sounded clean and clear and smooth and open. The other bonus is of course that it's not alcohol based, so there's less risk of fluid ingressing up



into your cartridge suspension. When the goo dries out you can apparently wash it under a tap to restore its magic properties, although mine didn't get dry enough to require this over the two week review period. An excellent and interesting tweak.

DP

[Contact: +44(0)1623 844478,
www.the-missing-link.net]

soundbites

SUTHERLAND TIMELINE £349

Over the years most audio enthusiasts will have used a strobe disc to assess the accuracy of their turntable's rotational speed. The advent of modern electronics has advanced this technology from being a cardboard disc with dots printed on it into some quite sophisticated devices. The latest incarnation of this is the Sutherland Timeline. This is a circular puck measuring 3 inches (7.2cm) in diameter and 1 3/4 inches (4.2cm) tall and weighing approximately 10 oz. (280g). The top part is made of machined aluminium, the lid being retained by nine recessed hex-head screws. On the top is a switch marked 33/45 and off.



Approximately half way down one side is a hole through which a laser flashes every 1.8 seconds at 33 1/3 rpm (on-time of 1.8 milliseconds) with a time base accuracy of two parts per million. The lower part is made of a material called Delrin, (first synthesised by Dupont in 1952, and since used for everything from guitar picks and the plucks on harpsichords, through to the 'Hot Wheels' on 1970s Matchbox cars!)

The Timeline is placed on the centre of the turntable and the laser is activated. As it rotates a red light flash is projected onto the wall, or surface behind the turntable. If the light stays in the same spot as it

flashes then the speed is correct. If it moves to the right then the speed is too high, and conversely low if it moves to the left. Adjustments to speed should be made with the record being played, since the drag of a stylus in the groove may affect the speed slightly.

Once the playing speed is correct the laser can be switched off and the Timeline then becomes a clamp, damping the vinyl and improving the coupling between the record and platter. I normally use the supplied Cleverclamp on my Clearaudio Master Solution. The Timeline seemed to give a little more depth and solidity to the sound, without losing the sense of space and air around the performers. The Sondek suspension required a little adjustment because of the extra weight, and displayed a similar sonic result. Costing £349, the Timeline is not cheap, but it is beautifully engineered, and can likely claim to be one of the most accurate speed testers on the market. **TB**

[Contact: +44 (0)1992 573030,
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Heart Beat

David Price talks to the highly acclaimed Irish singer/songwriter Eleanor McEvoy about matters music, recording and life...

DP: Rumour has it that you're a vinyl fan...?

EM: Oh yes, I love vinyl! I've just got the new album vinyl in my hands – it's a bit of a thrill. We've done it from the fourth album onwards; we did 'Yola' on vinyl... and it's fun to sign! Also when you get the album you get a code and you can download



the album for free, digitally. I do love vinyl, but sadly you can't go jogging with it!

I really like good sound, to the point where I now find it hard to listen to bad sound. My dad was into good speakers, so I think that's where the rot set in. I am shocked that musicians go along with the bad quality that is MP3, it is horrible... perhaps it's an element of not being exposed to good sound. You don't know what you're missing. I'm thrilled to have albums coming out on vinyl, because it does mean a lot to me.

DP: Are you familiar with the technical side of the recordings you make?

EM: For years I only used two inch analogue tape, but I had to disband it because trying to find studios that had two inch tape machines, and that actually maintained them, well you couldn't get them! We went to Metropolis in London for mixing the last album, and we said "two inch" and they went "oh" and they asked around their tape ops and there was one guy who knows how to work a two inch machine there. And there were whizzes in Protools, these nineteen year olds, and they don't know how to spool a reel of tape. And I asked the tape guy, "when did you last do a two inch session?", and he said "the last time you were in"!

DP: How do you go about recording a song?

EM: I've always tried to do everything at the same time; where we have a band, we always try to play together. On 'Yola', we didn't do any drop-ins at all. 'Out There', because I was doing it all myself, we had to. I'd never intended to make an album myself, I'd made demos to show what I was going to ask other people to do. This new album, I wanted to get a live feel across; I got a bass player and a drummer and then I went back in and layered things on top. The violin plays a very important part of this album, so I layered many tracks on top. You can hear it on 'I'd Rather Go Blonde', which has a huge string sound. There's very little processing; I had a beautiful old antique ship's bell on 'Take You Home' that was just a little off-pitch so we slowed it down to tune it to the track – apart from that there's very little in the way of effects.

DP: How did you start off in the music business?

EM: Well, my aim was to write songs for somebody else to sing. The singing is a means to an end; not that I don't love it because I do love it, but the writing is my thing. When I was a violinist in the RTE National Symphony Orchestra a very sad thing happened one day; there was a man in my section who was moved back. There's a kind of hierarchy in violin sections; people at the top are the best and it goes down to the dregs down at the back. And he got moved back because his hands were going, as he got old. You look at these fantastic players and they get moved back the older they get. And so I thought, if I want to do the songwriting, now's the time to do it; I thought I'm going to have to go for it so I quit my job! I was gigging at the same time I was in the orchestra, then things kicked off.

'Only a Woman's Heart' came out the week I signed to Geffen. Geffen was the only company with the A&R guys at the top; they were in charge. Normally the sales guys are on top; they were the hippest, coolest label on the planet. The second album was very different to the first album; it comes to keeping your spirit alive. I think you have to follow your heart; in the second album I had a Telecaster Electric, a Vox AC30 amplifier and a nose ring; I was so in to that! I was touring with the Fugees on the Columbia roadshow and listening to how they told their stories using rhyme really had a big effect on me.

So on the third album I went off with Rupert Hine and we made 'Snapshots', which I loved - it's one of my favourite albums. He was a fantastic guy to work with; with 'Sophie' another producer would have said put strings on it and make it a big production number, but he said "piano and voice", and he was right! When we delivered that album, I think Columbia Records nearly died; they had had this Telecaster wearing woman in mind and they got sequences and loops, a very different direction. They released it and didn't really do much with it. And that for me was the end of the major labels, I was broken hearted after that. In hindsight I have more sympathy for them now; they didn't get me – an artist like me shouldn't be on a major label.



DP: When you left the major label, did you start 'self publishing'?

EM: Yeah – the first one we set up on our own was Market Square. When 'Yola' got such a good reception, we started really going for it, so my partner set up Moscodisc and we got distribution worldwide. It was a slow, organic thing. The great thing about doing it this way is that I don't have to think, "oh I can't put this on an album". We did a really contentious song about religion, the hierarchy of the Catholic church, I really am having a go at them. You'll never get airplay with it, certainly not in Ireland, but at least you're getting out there to some degree. I have another song where I'm having a go at the establishment in Ireland; the banks, the government, and I'm having a go at them. So there are no chains on an indie label!

DP: Given that there's no one else to say no to you now, do you find yourself doing it?

EM: Yeah – you do have to be ruthless with yourself. For example one of the big challenges I set myself with this album was to keep the tracks really short. There's one that comes in at two minutes ten seconds, which is very difficult to do. But you can do it!

DP: In the eighties, that's one of the things I really loved about The Smiths; 'This Charming Man' was two minutes fifty five seconds...

EM: Oh yes... they were great. Fantastic! But I did still have some moments on this album when things began to get out of hand. Before we started this album I sat down with Ruadhri Cushman and said on this song I wanted a church organ, and a mandolin, and then I said I want a banjo, and then I said I want a choir singing a Gregorian chant in Latin. And at that point he just burst out laughing, and said, "I really can't see it working". But we did it – without so much of the Gregorian chant!

DP: So where does your creative 'essence' come from?

EM: For me, the real gems come when you're drifting off to sleep in the middle of the night. It's caused a lot of disharmony in my relationship. Now I have a notebook next to the bed!

DP: Is it possible to be Irish and not write about the Catholic church?

EM: The amount of power that the Catholic church had was very oppressive to me. They were bigger than the police. This is getting less personal to me now; one day I'd love to be ambivalent. But yeah, if you look at Irish people we're all slightly obsessed by it. I have a go at lawyers a little bit on this album, and I also have a go at the fashion industry with a song called 'Look Like Me'. I'm talking about people being dictated to what they should wear; being told that "ooh, brown is in this season". I was at an awards ceremony in Dublin and all the women were all wearing the same type of high heels, the same colour of fake tan, the same blow dried hair; I thought they've all spent thousands of pounds trying to look like the same

ABOUT ELEANOR

Eleanor McEvoy is a 43 year old singer/songwriter, born in Cabra, Ireland. Her career spans two decades, having recorded for variously Geffen Records, Columbia, Market Square and Moscodisc where she currently resides. One of Ireland's most accomplished recording artists, she's most famous for composing the song 'Only A Woman's Heart', which was the title track of 'A Woman's Heart', the best-selling Irish album in Irish history. She began music at the age of four playing piano, then took up violin aged eight, then later attended Trinity College, Dublin where she studied music by day and worked in pit orchestras and music clubs by night. After graduating with an Honours Degree in music, she spent four months busking in New York and was later accepted into the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra where she spent four years before leaving to concentrate on songwriting. During a solo gig in July 1992, she performed 'Only a Woman's Heart' in front of Mary Black who invited her to add the track to an album of Irish female artists. The album was subsequently titled 'A Woman's Heart' and the track was released as the lead single. This got her signed to Geffen Records and started her long and illustrious career which has seen her win many awards and accolades. Eleanor is famous for the care she takes over the sound of her recordings, and is an avowed vinyl and analogue music fan. Her new album is out now, 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' is on Moscodisc (MOSCD408); it is produced by Mick O'Gorman, Eleanor McEvoy, and Peter Beckett; recorded by Cianan Byrne; mixed by Ruadhri Cushman and mastered by Ian Cooper.

person next to them. I take great pleasure when people come up to me and say "I saw you in that dress in 1996"!

DP: With music there's also the impetus to present your music in a way that's fashionable too...

EM: I do make some quick references to what's going on, but not so much that it's going to date it. I always hope that I'm ahead of the game. I'm using pizzicato strings, which I think is going to be one of the things that people focus on. So in the next couple of years... you heard it here first! I do love pure pop acts, and the rap thing did – and still continues to – have a big influence. I still preserve quite a bit of my Irishness in my melody constructions, I think of a lot of my songs are intrinsically Irish. But yeah, I'm very influenced by what's on the radio today. In terms of over the last thirty years? Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Bruce Springsteen, Loudon Wainwright, Elton John here in Britain, his early stuff was absolutely incredible, in terms of bands, the Rolling Stones, the Byrds, The Smiths were great! Jimi Somerville's voice was great. Alison Moyet had an interesting voice, Kate Bush as a voice and a songwriter. And I'd come home from the orchestra and put on Nirvana!

DP: Where do you think the future will take you?

EM: I'd love to write music for the theatre, and sound design. And writing with surround sound in mind. I've got a lot of dates coming up next year and while I'm on the road I'll be writing the next album.

DP: Great. I'll be listening out for banjos and Gregorian chants...

EM: [laughs] ...and the pizzicato string thing might still be around!



Perfect partners

HI-FI SEPARATES



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Cyrus award-winning CD Xt SE and DAC X have been upgraded with a + suffix. In a recent review, this combination when used with 2+ PSX-R power supplies received the prestigious Editor's Choice award by Hi-Fi Choice magazine.

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The Stream III CD player features an all-new slot loading transport controlled by Leema's own custom firmware providing secure and reliable disc handling and the best retrieval of digital information this is coupled with the new Leema Quad DAC. It is a refinement of Leema's own highly successful MD2 Multi-DAC giving a shorter signal path and even better performance. The Stream III features a USB digital output enabling bit-perfect digital archiving.



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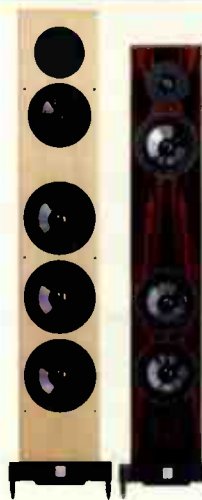
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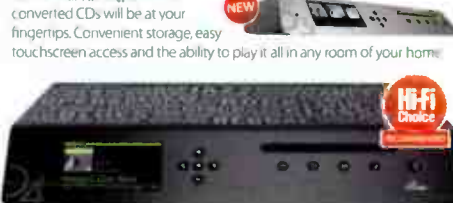
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Do it All

If only you knew it, how Furutech do it, says Paul Rigby as he plugs in their Alpha Design Labs GT40 phono stage/USB DAC/headphone amplifier...

Furutech is known for its excellent cable products and quirky accessories such as the Demag LP demagnetiser and Disc Flattener, both of which have been reviewed in this very journal. The company has now released an equally quirky new product, but this time under the new brand name of Alpha Design Labs. Compact at just 150x111x57mm and weighing in at just 785g, the GT40 is positively schizophrenic in the facilities it has on offer.

Firstly, you get a USB DAC, which is ideal to connect to a computer or laptop up to a resolution of 24bit/96kHz via plug and play. Next is a headphone amp that features a single, full-sized 6.3mm jack. Finally, there's a phono amp which allows you to connect both MM or MC cartridges, as well as Line inputs. There's also a phono A-D convertor that allows you to plug your turntable and your computer into the GT40 and then transfer your vinyl music to the hard disk.

The front fascia of the exceedingly well built chassis includes a beautifully machined volume knob for both playback and headphone volume, a headphone port, power button and source button selectors for phono or USB. On the rear, you have the phono/line inputs and outputs, phono ground and USB socket, 9V external power socket for the supplied integrated power supply/plug unit and a tiny input selection switch to choose MM, MC or line.

Connecting the GT40 to my PC was simple. I connected the USB port to the GT40 and the computer and the drivers automatically installed

themselves. You need to check volume levels, though. This involved entering the Control Panel utility on my PC and, on my Vista-powered operating system at least, selecting Sounds, then Audio Devices then making sure both of the correct devices are selected in the Playback and Recording tabs. You should also make sure that the levels are set to 100%. For some reason, mine was set to 24%!

SOUND QUALITY

Playing a range of ripped WAV files via my PC through a venerable set of hi-fi kit, viz. a Rega Mira integrated amplifier, Mission 70 speakers plus Chord Anthem 2 interconnect cabling, and the standard computer source offered a basic playback that struggled towards any sort of audiophile standard. Bass was decidedly wooden and one-dimensional while midrange sounded strangled and treble fizzy. Pushing a series of chart CDs through the system, all showing excessive peak limited compression, the vocals screeched with derision.

Switching to the GT40, I took an audible sigh of relief. Bass suddenly put on weight, the playback feeling a real heft in the lower frequency response which also offered more subtlety and integration within the overall presentation instead of the earlier 'tacked on' impression.

Midrange tones conveyed a detail and clarity that was severely lacking in the computer-generated replay. The GT40 not only broadened the soundstage but packed it with newly revealed information, while treble had a new found delicacy. With the chart CDs, the peak limited compression

was successfully toned down to such a degree to make each CD listenable.

Moving to the headphone amp, via a pair of Sennheiser HD650s, I wouldn't exactly describe the GT40 as delicate but I was surprised at the depth of the bass response. The HD650s are inherently no slouch in this department but the GT40 really gives the headphones an extra sledgehammer whack. The GT40 also provides an admirable 3D soundstage.

I tried the phono stage within my reference system and, while it didn't have the definition and transparency of the Icon PS3 (at around £1,400) it certainly wasn't completely shamed either. Upper mids positively shimmered while bass retained a strength and structure to hold any piece of music together with gusto. I'd say this is pretty much the equal of anything below Trichord's fine little Dino, which is no small feat, and considering the price of the ADL GT40, and all its other features, makes a strong case for it.

CONCLUSION

Packed with features and with a pleasing build quality, the Furutech-sourced ADL GT40 USB DAC is a winner on every level. The fact that the GT40 can offer so much within a small chassis will be welcome for those listening to music in cramped areas while the ability to record vinyl to computer via an audiophile accessory will be welcomed by digital fans. Sound quality is also good at the price. Overall, then, this new Furutech box should be investigated by format transfer fans, budget hi-fi users and audiophiles living in restricted spaces.



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audience



Overall, very impressive. Robert Townsend -- Stereophile Jan 08

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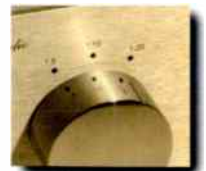
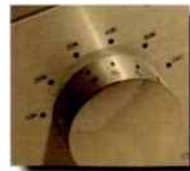
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Kuzma Stogi Tonearm x-demo	1390	799	JPS Ultra Dual bi wire 2x8 Spades to banana S/H	549	279
Mark Levinson No320s Phono Module x-demo	995	649	Jadis KT90 Valves x 4 BNIB	600	300
Roksan XPS7 PSU x-demo	369	275	Madrigal MDC1 1m AES/EBU 110 ohm Digital Cable S/H	420	199
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Audio Research SP16 Phono Preamplifier S/H	2499	1399	Siltech HF9 AES/EBU 1m Digital S/H	420	199
Audio research LS26 x-demo 3 months old	5465	4199	Spectral MI-350 20ft interconnect S/H	2100	899
BAT VK 52-SE Remote Controlled/Balanced Preamplifier S/H9350	5999	5999	Stereovox 2x2.5m HDXV speaker cable S/H	350	169
Conrad Johnson Classic Phono x-demo	2400	1750	Stereovox HDVX 0.5M digital S/H	199	75
Croft Vitale SC phono Valve Preamplifier S/H	750	399	Transparent Balanced Reference 2x30ft x-demo	6345	3499
ECS Finestra Preamplifier Phono S/H	N/A	399	Transparent Reference SC 2x10ft x-demo	6192	3399
Quad 66 Preamplifier S/H	N/A	375	VDH The Second 0.8m RCA interconnect BNIB	230	159
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90W MELODY Valve mono-blocks, piano black, 240v, under guarantee, (8k) accept £2200. Graaf WFB2 valve pre with MM/MC, £675, spare valves. Unico RDS valve tuner, remote, (£1275) £400. All pristine, boxed, o.v.n.o. CQ?. Tel: Shalom 07951 553 091

COMPLETE SYSTEM, Marantz PM40SE, Denon DCD625, Sony KC511 cassette, original Wharfedale Diamonds. All cables included. Offers please. Tel: 07743 326 559 or Email: martyngmiles@hotmail.com

SENNHEISER HD 650 headphones (Feb 10) (£295) £175. Creek OBH21SE headphone amp (£280) £125. Russ Andrews 4 metre upgrade cables (£210) £75 or £350 the lot. All mint condition and boxed. Tel: Dave 07729 600 847

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HI-FI+ ISSUES, 21, 37, 41, 56 to 72. 19 copies. Hi-Fi Choice issues 302 to 327, 26 copies. Hi-Fi News various dates, August 2008 to March 2010. £14. Buyer collects. Tel: 020 8590 8530

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SONY MXD-D3 recorder £100. Pioneer Laserdisc player CLD D515 £150. Sony surround sound processor D8930 £150. Sony VCR SLV E720 £35. Roksan Caspian CD player £200. Items in good working order. 40 laserdiscs. Tel: 01270 619 387

A R LEGEND turntable arm plinth cover £225. Marantz DR6000 CD recorder £125. Both very good condition. Buyer collects. Tel: 01925 824 307 (Warrington)

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MISSION 733 black, floorstanding. Thorens TD160 MkII, SME arm, Ortofon cartridge. Arcam Alpha 8 amplifier and Arcam CD73 CD player. Offers. Wife forces sale! Tel: 01978 357 215 or Email: jones1523@btinternet.com

ARCAM A38 integrated amplifier £850. (£1480 new). Arcam CD37 player £750 (£1350 new). Denon TU1800 FM/DAB tuner £150 (£300 new) Naim Uniti £1600 (£2100 new) All mint and boxed, Tel: 023 8073 8935

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REEL TO REEL tape recorder Sony TC399. Excellent condition with spare drive belts and 21 tapes. £110 ono. Tel. 01275 872777. North Somerset.

ATC SCM50a active speakers, rosewood, vgc (£9500) £2500 Stax 3050 Mk2 headphones and stand, silver, immaculate (£850) £500 New vinyl at 40% of RRP. For list tel. Roy 01453 519700.

PAIR IAS Lyndhurst speakers. Original tweeters and volt bass unit. Mid range replaced. Pair Tannoy Lancaster corner cabinets Good condition No speakers. Offers 0151 727 0606 rrplant@btinternet.com

LFD PAO SE power amplifier, black with grey speckled marble facia, 50w per channel mosfet design, silver solid-core toroidal transformer, boxed, mint condition. £525 ono. 01483 271669 (Surrey)

KEF iQ30 loudspeakers. Unused and boxed. £320 (£379). Tel David on 01530 833347. Leicester

REVOX B77 stereo open reel tape recorder. In superb condition and has just been fully serviced! Detailed photos available or can demonstrate. £495 ovno. Tel. 07813 960156 E-mail ob.mm@virgin.net

AUDIOPHILE BASE hi fi support system with vibration control technology. 4 platforms. £200 (£800) janhud16@talktalk.net 01270624008 (Cheshire)

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MERIDIAN 588 CD player. Owned for last 6 years. Very good condition including original packaging, £660 ono. Tel Rob on 01384 396657 (West Midlands).

GRAHAM SLEE ERA Gold V, perfect condition (boxed), Nakamichi DR10 classic three head deck, serviced last year, little used, excellent. Quantity of NOS 8" and 10" Goodmans TwinAxiom and Whiteley Bros Stentorian full range drivers. Email: classichificollector@gmail.com for more details.

QUAD ESL 989 speakers. Black cloth. Serviced by Quad in 2007. £1500. Tel: 020 8688 6397 (South London)

GARRARD 401 with Bastin plinth and modifications (upgraded bearing and lifted motor) cherrywood plinth with lid £950. Ortofon Samba MC with less than 30 hours use, bought while Koetsu was being retyped £110. Teac 2340R Reel to Reel £300 just serviced and in excellent working condition. 07940 507215

NAD T175 7.1 channel AV preamplifier for sale. £800 epistaxis@gmail.com

NAIM DVD 5 cd/dvd player, very limited usage, mint/boxed £695. 112x pre-amplifier £229. 150x power amplifier 2008 £479 both mint/boxed or £649 for the pair. Tel. 01984 640588.

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SONY SCD1 SACD/CD player. £2000 of Audiocom modifications including Ultraclock and associated power supply. As new with original packaging. £1850 (£5000). Contact Jim Roberts 01462 670786 (North Herts).

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NEXT MONTH

Another year over, and a new one just begun! January 2011's Hi-Fi World kicks off with a bang, thanks to our special Awards 2010 feature, in which the team will be handing out gongs to the latest and greatest from the past year. We'll also have a wide range of brand new goodies for your perusal, from the gorgeous Martin Logan Ethos electrostatics [pictured] to Dartzeel's stunning CTH-8550 integrated amplifier, and much more! Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...

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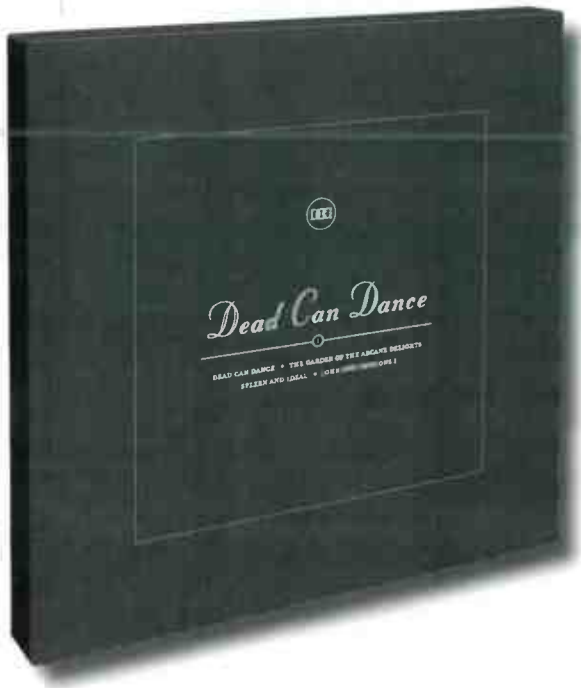
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JANUARY 2011 - 5TH NOVEMBER 2010

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DEAD CAN DANCE

DEAD CAN DANCE: BLACK BOX 2010



"a slightly off-the-wall, leftfield outfit that make interesting music with intriguing and attractive constructions and arrangements..."

Despite the fact that they featured a band of temporary members, Dead Can Dance are basically Brendan Perry and Lisa Gerrard, a duo who found fame on the respected 4AD label for their music that touched on electronic ambience, folk and world music. The group has always had a certain cache as a slightly off-the-wall, leftfield outfit that have always made interesting music with intriguing and attractive constructions and arrangements.

To celebrate the fact, within the analogue domain, the specialist audiophile UK-based record label Vinyl 180 has released a suite of individual albums by the band. Now, the label has released a new box set featuring the debut self-titled album, the 'Garden Of The Arcane Delights' EP, the band's second album 'Spleen & Ideal' and their first John Peel Session from 1983; the first time that this session has appeared on vinyl. Known as the 'Black Box', this release will be followed up by a second box set called, not unreasonably, the 'White Box', which should be out some time in Easter. The 'Black Box' will be available for a few pence short of £65 but, if you are a fan and you already have one or two of the albums, then you will be able to buy a Deluxe version of the box with just the EP and the Peel Sessions within for £35. Then, it's up to you if you want to add the additional records to the box...

This is an admirable attitude for

any record label to adopt, but isn't typical that a vinyl-only label would actually implement it. How many times have we heard accusations of record labels ripping off the fans by 'forcing' them to re-buy music they already own? Not here – Vinyl 180 should be applauded for the fact. The Deluxe option will only be available from the label's own shop outlet at: <http://shop.ebay.co.uk/merchant/heavyweightvinyl180>.

Audiophiles may be a little concerned to hear that the vinyl has all been mastered via CD quality digital files. Shock, horror, eh? Well, the reality is not quite that bad. The first album was originally mastered onto analogue tape but was seen to include too many problems. Hence, a remix was supplied by the original engineer, John Rivers, who added corrections, producing a CD master that was used in the recent CD reissues. All of the music after that was originally recorded, in the studio, as a 16bit digital file. The reason? Because Dead Can Dance were a forward thinking band back in the eighties and they, like many others around them, thought that CD was audio nirvana and so committed to the format in a wholesale fashion and recorded their works, after that debut album, on a Sony 1630 professional CD recording system!

So, do not be afraid – you are not being short-changed, on the contrary. The vinyl reissues might utilise the original digital files but some special attention, supplied by John Dent, mastering engineer at

Loud Mastering, has extracted a whole heap of extra magic.

"In the eighties every CD production created was very basic and, as time has gone on, A/D convertors have got considerably better," said Dent. "Studio output would have been very crude and poor. You can hear it on the original records, the fidelity is shaky, there's blurred sound with a lack of detail. Now, for vinyl transfer, we have a custom modified vinyl cutting system. Our 2010 chain is carefully looked after. Hence, even though there is a question mark over the resolution of these sources, this is why the Vinyl 180 stuff still sounds a lot better than the original releases."

The only aspect of the master that was altered was some slight de-essing to subtly minimise sibilance that enables even average turntables to play the records without a problem. Dent also took a view on how to play digital files back. "If you take a digital source," said Dent, "there's a number of ways that you can improve the quality of playback. So I use a high class digital clock and the right D/A convertors, built by Manley, with valve outputs: very high quality."

The result is the best sounding, commercially available source on these Dead Can Dance releases that is currently available on the market. Impressively, these vinyl editions also blow the Mobile Fidelity SACD editions (which were also sourced from CD digital files) right out of the water. Highly recommended. **PR**

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