

# HI-FI WORLD

JANUARY 2011

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## ★ HI-FI WORLD AWARDS 2010 ★



HI-FI WORLD AWARDS



INSPIRE ECLIPSE SE12 turntable



PIONEER BDP-LX53 Blu-ray player




**COMPETITION**  
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# MARTIN LOGAN ETHOS speakers

- EXCLUSIVE!**
- > FLETCHER AUDIO OMEGA POINT 5 TURNTABLE
  - > DESIGN BUILD LISTEN PICCOLO DIY KIT
  - > DARTZEEL CTH-8550 AMPLIFIER

JANUARY 2011



**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."*  
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*"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.n"*  
**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 atube amplifier of more-than-usual power.."*  
**Audio Review, Italy**

*"PrimaLuna ProLogue One is now my'affiliate 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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# welcome

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## verdicts

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

## ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

Go to our website [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) to buy an electronic version of this magazine, individual issues, back issues or a subscription.



Writing this year's *Hi-Fi World* Awards 2010 feature [see p17] has caused me to reflect upon the various weird and wonderful designs that have come out in the past twelve months...

Whilst this past year hasn't seen any fancy new formats or technologies launched, the trickle-down of network music continues apace. Played off computer hard drives often via a home Wi-Fi network, it's really catching on now, as more and more audiophiles view it as a serious music

source option. Hats off of course to Linn for starting the specialist hi-fi computer audio ball rolling three years ago with their DS products, but now we see Naim in on the act and a number of other big names poised to take the plunge...

As well as its convenience, computer-sourced audio offers easy access to hi-res music. This, plus the emergence of Blu-ray has caused a renewed interest in something that was, after all, first introduced a decade ago! Whilst no one's mourning the end of DVD-Audio with its clunky navigation, its 24/96 (or 24/192) format is now reappearing on high quality download sites, and taking on a new life. Meanwhile its old rival SACD is having something of an Indian summer; second-hand prices of early discs are rising, there are still many great titles available new and it's possible to buy excellent sounding modern players from Marantz.

Amidst all this, vinyl continues to thrive. I've seen more than a few excellent turntables come out, and there's no let up in the LP reissue market. It's easier now to be a vinyl junkie than it was in 2000, and whilst the availability of black plastic might be lower than 1990, there's certainly not the sense of impending obsolescence that the format had back then. Who'd have thought that in 2010, analogue would rule the (sound) waves?

Finally, after a flourish of Class D transistor amplifiers over the past few years, valve amplifiers are back with a vengeance. There's more choice than ever; from affordable Icon Audios to new Quads and more. The trend is for ever bigger tubes; I've seen more new 845-based amps this year than in the past ten!

Overall then, 2010 was a good year for hi-fi. Our Awards show that many strong, thoughtfully designed and engineered hi-fi separates continue to be made, and that there probably hasn't been a better time to buy! Enjoy.

**David Price, editor**

## testing

To ensure the upmost 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.



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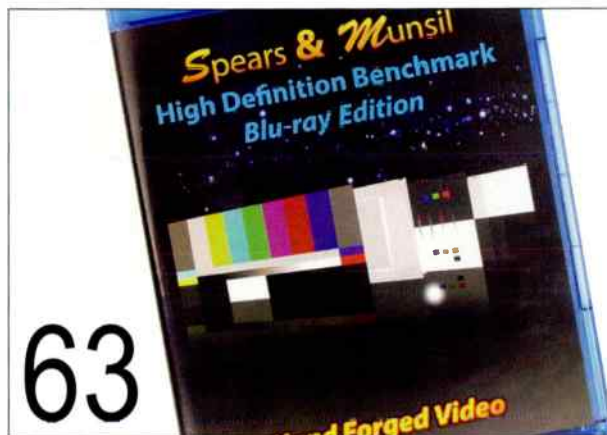
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# news

## BROADCAST NEWS

Spendor has applied "a substantial number of carefully considered refinements" to create their new Classic Series SPI00R2 loudspeaker. Many of the improvements are based on special technology developed by Spendor for the SA1 mini monitor and the new Spendor ST, the company says. At the heart of the SPI00R2 is a new 18cm Spendor mid/bass unit with an ep38 polymer cone. The midrange driver incorporates phase correction technology, in the form of a focusing magnet motor pole extension, to control spurious phase and frequency response variations in the crossover region. With improved phase matching, the result "is a very even and natural sound and a more holographic soundstage", Spendor says. A new 22mm tweeter combines the extended frequency response of a small diaphragm with the low frequency characteristics of a larger diaphragm to give stable low distortion response over a very wide frequency range, it's claimed. The new SPI00R2 also has a redesigned and thicker front baffle, and multi-layer elastomer damping is now applied to the rear of the woofer cone. The crossover network has been re-engineered to improve conductivity and signal routing and to eliminate magnetic interaction between inductors. All internal cables are heavy gauge, high purity multi strand copper conductors, individually silver-plated, with halogen free dielectrics. The SPI00R2 is said to be an easy 8ohm load. Each pair of Spendor Classic Series loudspeakers is still calibrated and matched to stringent broadcast reference standards, the company says. Retail price is £6,295 per pair, vital statistics are 700x370x430mm and 36kg, and the new loudspeakers come in a choice of cherry or black ash natural veneers. For more details, call +44 (0)1323 843474 or click on [www.spendoraudio.com](http://www.spendoraudio.com).



## TAPE END

News comes from Japan that Sony is to cease production of the Walkman cassette portable in its home country. Whilst the company will continue to manufacture a few niche models in specialised markets where cassettes are still in demand, the cassette Walkman is now to all intents and purposes discontinued. The Walkman (or Stowaway as it was initially called) was emblematic of Sony's golden age of engineering-led consumer electronics; instead of following trends with products designed by focus groups, Sony set the fashion with a host of original inventions. Sony in its great period was headed by a gifted engineer, Akio Morita, who also sported a sharp eye for marketing. Despite his obvious ability at popularising consumer products, his designs were always superbly built for their time; indeed the quality was such that NASA chose a Sony cassette deck to take to the Moon, something of which Morita was justly proud.

The very first Walkman, the TPS-L2 [pictured left] was a seminal machine; a well preserved example playing top notch tapes will outperform any iPod of today in the sonic stakes. Ironically though it was by perfecting another manufacturer's format - Philips' Compact Cassette - that Sony really made its name. Sony made the cassette format ubiquitous with huge numbers of high quality, affordable recorders of all sizes. They also made the original template for portable audio; without the Walkman, the iPod may never have happened. The interest for cassette Walkmen continues; there are many millions in circulation worldwide (in total, 220 million were made) and it will be a long time before all are gone. Such is the fine sound afforded by most models, for many people - including this magazine's editor - the iPod will never replace their Walkman! Sony Walkman RIP; gone but not forgotten.



*The 1979 Sony TPS-L2 was the very first 'Walkman', but early examples such as this weren't branded as such! Only slightly later did that iconic name arrive...*



*Hi-Fi World's Tim Jarman on BBC News 24, paying a tribute to the world's favourite Cassette portable...*



## DESK TOP

Audioengine's £169 N22 is described as a "premium desktop audio amplifier", said to be easy to connect to a Mac or PC with no software to install or settings to change. There's one simple volume control with an integrated on/off switch, and a USB power port that's perfect for powering Audioengine wireless adapters to stream your music wirelessly from your computer or iPod. Paired with passive speakers, it makes for "a compact and great-sounding personal stereo system". You can even connect a subwoofer and charge your iPod through the USB power port. 22W RMS per channel is offered, from a Class AB amp, and there's a built in headphone amplifier too. Vital statistics are 7x2.75x5.5", and the finish is satin black. For details, call +44 (0)845 004 5330 or click on [www.ecodigital.co.uk](http://www.ecodigital.co.uk).



## MINI MADNESS

Following on from their interesting and fine sounding MyClapton standmounter, My Audio Design has just announced a mini monitor sharing the same dimensions (and indeed a very similar style) to the classic BBC LS3/5a loudspeaker. The princely sum of £998 buys you an 8 litre box sporting a 5 3/4 inch "ultra wide dispersion turbo mid/bass" unit and "new neodymium supersonic tweeter" designed by Danish transducer freaks Per Madsen and Allan Isaksen (ex-chiefs of Scanspeak and Vifa) of Wavacor. It also boasts MAD ESA supercaps with MAD super conductors. Claimed frequency response is 58-40,000kHz. Available in hand polished Walnut and Cherry Danish oiled finish, for more details click on [www.madengland.com](http://www.madengland.com) or call 020 8123 9789.

## OBITUARY: TOM FLETCHER

Sad news comes that Tom Fletcher, designer and founder of Nottingham Analogue, has died. A popular figure, well known in specialist audio circles, Tom was involved with a number of projects, from the early Dias turntables of the late nineteen seventies to his latest company, Fletcher Audio, in the past couple of years. Designer Colin Wonfor told *Hi-Fi World* that he, "helped to encourage me from the late seventies to the nineties to develop my design skills, by being enthusiastic over every project I brought to him". He continues, "he helped me to design the Magnum, and then the Inca Tech range of projects. I and many others will have fond and long lasting memories of this lovely man". Tom leaves a wife and three children and grandchildren, as well as legions of music fans the world over.

[For an exclusive review of the Fletcher Audio Omega Point 5, turn to p100.]



## TRI THIS

The new ET3 Enhanced Triode Preamplifier by conrad-johnson is said to be a "baby" version of the company's flagship line-stage preamplifier, the GAT. With voltage gain provided by a triode vacuum-tube, the zero-feedback line-stage circuit of the ET3, along with its DC voltage regulators, closely replicates the circuit of the GAT. Finally, and especially noteworthy, the ET3 features a relay operated discrete stepped attenuator level-control circuit of the type found in the GAT and CT5; absent only is the balance control function found in those more costly models. Functionally, the ET3 provides highly flexible I/O facilities with six separate line-level inputs, while premium quality component parts are specified inside to optimise performance, including precision metal-film resistors and polypropylene capacitors. "It would be fair to say that the only thing entry-level about the ET3 is its price", says conrad-johnson, which is £2,450 in the UK. For further information, click on [www.audiofreaks.co.uk](http://www.audiofreaks.co.uk).



## WAVE BREAKS

L'Océan from Cabasse is the company's very first fully 'digital' loudspeaker system, and said to be the result of a close Cabasse/Canon collaboration in research and development. The €80,000 L'Océan "combines elegant aesthetic design with a performance that is beyond expectations and guaranteed to please music lovers", the company says. It uses the TC23 3-way coaxial drive unit from the flagship La Sphère, together with a new 38cm honeycomb dome diaphragm woofer and 2,250 Watts of digital amplification per speaker. L'Océan can reach sound pressure levels of 117dB with no distortion, it is claimed. Mounted in the base of the speaker, the digital amplification is connected via optical S/PDIF to the preamplifier and CRCS controller. This unit is fitted with 96kHz digital and analogue inputs, with all analogue signals being digitised before signal processing. The CRCS (Cabasse Room Compensation System) hardware and software enables easy automatic adaptation of the loudspeakers' response to the acoustics of the room through parametric modules. To ensure natural and minimum correction, the software takes into account psychoacoustic parameters and the specific characters of the drive units. Each loudspeaker is fitted with a phase linear digital filter and an accurate time alignment to create a true point source system, it is claimed. Vital statistics are 1,200x51x610mm and 80kg. For details, click on [www.cabasse.com](http://www.cabasse.com).



## STOCKFISCH

Apologies for a misspelling in our Stockfisch Records article in November 2010; the company owner's name is Günther Pauler. If you missed the article, then check out the company's fine range of audiophile discs at [www.stockfisch-records.de/](http://www.stockfisch-records.de/).

## HI FIDELITY

A new headphone stage from a new company; Fidelity Audio's £350 HPA-100 is hand built in the UK, and sports a low noise power supply, toroidal transformer and HexFred diodes. "All components from the Blue Alps volume pot to the superb op-amps are audio grade", says the manufacturer, and the signal path "is also very simple and clean", with no capacitors. Size is a compact 104x56x245mm, and weight is 1.04kg. For details, call +44(0)1302 739998 or click on [www.fidelityaudio.co.uk](http://www.fidelityaudio.co.uk).



## SUB SONICS

REL Acoustics' new £425 T5 'Sub-Bass System' is described as offering "the traditional REL sonic and connectivity strengths at an affordable cost". For all practical purposes, the T5 replaces the Quake, but is said to "dramatically outperform it", thanks to a rigidly braced cube-shaped enclosure. Finished in high-gloss lacquer in black or white with contrasting aluminium feet, the new T5 packs a 125 Watt Class A/B power amplifier and custom-designed 8" down-firing woofer, with both high and low level Input options. REL's new £2,999 G1 Sub-Bass System is housed in a "sumptuous furniture-grade enclosure" finished in gloss piano black lacquer, inside which resides a 12" long-throw carbon fibre driver and 600 Watt Class AB MOSFET power amplifier. Employing an extensively braced enclosure, REL describe the G1 as "inassivc, yet elegant". The tight-wind carbon fibre 12" drive unit is capable of a piston stroke of 1 3/4 inches. Adding to the overall user experience is the G1's IR remote control. The unique round disc-shaped remote features three rotary encoder dials that control all adjustments. Located on the bottom front of the G1's enclosure is a large, bright LED readout providing a visual indication of all the G1's current settings. For further information, call +44 (0)1656 768 777 or click on [www.rel.net](http://www.rel.net).



REL T5



REL G1



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## LOOK SHARP!

Yamaha's new £299 BD-S667 Blu-ray player [pictured right] has "magnificent audio performance", the company says! It plays all HD formats, giving direct bitstream and multichannel Linear PCM output via HDMI, and analogue 2-channel down-mixed audio output, via a 192kHz/24bit audio DAC. The company also claims high picture quality via the 1080p/24Hz-compatible HDMI video output, with 1080p playback for DVDs, photos and personal video data. Audio formats supported include AVCHD, WMV, JPEG (HD), MP3 and WMA. The unit comes in black, titanium and silver finishes.



The company also has a new affordable integrated amplifier. The £329.99 A-S500 [pictured left] sports the attractive design language of the larger A-S2000, with classic nineteen seventies styling Yamaha touches. Inside there are dual aluminium-extruded heatsinks, gold-plated speaker terminals and RCA socketry. The 2x85W RMS amplifier has a Pure Direct button which uses the shortest signal route, and there's Yamaha's Continuously Variable Loudness Control for listening at low volumes. Vital statistics are 435x151x387mm. There's also the option of Yamaha's YDS-12 universal iPod dock which has an independent power supply for a high signal to noise ratio. For details, click on <http://uk.yamaha.com/>.



## MARSHALLING SUPPORT

"Nothing has been compromised when expanding the Marshall heritage of big stage performance to the individual enjoyment of good music", says Marshall about its new headphones. Design priorities include ruggedness and the aesthetics, "making the headphones ooze that iconic Marshall look", the company says. Click on [www.marshallheadphones.com](http://www.marshallheadphones.com) for more information...



## WORLD PARTY

Nevada's new £59.95 Sinfonie II is described as a "future proof" radio with FM, DAB and DAB+ bands, plus the interesting long range digital DMB-A system that works in the majority of countries offering Digital Radio and VHF FM radio (see [www.worlddab.org/](http://www.worlddab.org/)). Easy to use, it sports an alarm clock and automatic time settings, plus "a large, single full frequency range speaker" and comes with a multinational UK/European mains adaptor for travelling people. For details call +44(0) 23 92 313090 or click on [www.nevadaradio.co.uk](http://www.nevadaradio.co.uk).

## PURE AND SIMPLE

Pure Sound's £2,447.95 L10 Line Stage Preamp uses "a sophisticated full valve rectified, twin choke smoothed power supply". It also offers remote control of the volume via a separate handset, while source selection is via "a high quality switch located near to the input sockets". The chosen source is routed to a "high quality motorised, film potentiometer" and from there on to the audio circuit. This consists of a single ended triode stage loaded by a custom wound wideband output transformer which steps down the amplified signal allowing it to be coupled to the power

amplifier at a manageable level and as a low impedance source. The output stage is said to be impervious to long interconnecting cables or lower impedance power amplifier input stages.

The company also has a new pair of monoblock power amplifiers out, the £6,854.95 Pure Sound M845 Mono Amplifiers. This single ended design is based around the 845 power triode. Operating in Class A and giving 27 Watts of output power, it will complement a wide range of medium to high efficiency loudspeakers, the company says. The 845 triode was originally developed by RCA in 1931 as a radio transmitting and audio amplification valve.

The anode is machined from solid graphite to allow high power dissipation. It has an extremely linear transfer characteristic. In recent years, a renewed interest in this kind of valve has resulted in them being manufactured again by various factories in China. Implementing the 845 in a sympathetic circuit which takes full advantage of its capabilities is not straightforward. The output transformer is an in-house design that underwent extensive trials using a variety of core materials and winding techniques before the final configuration was chosen, it is claimed. The M845 incorporates a driver stage based on the 6SN7 triode coupled via a custom wound, wideband, interstage transformer. The amplifier's input stage is directly coupled to this driver meaning that there are no coupling capacitors used in the circuit at all. The circuit also operates without any negative feedback. "The end result is an amplifier capable of reproducing the full measure of instrument tone with extraordinary dynamic contrast, energy and colour", says Puresound. For more details, click on [www.puresound.info](http://www.puresound.info).



Puresound L10



Puresound M845

# Ideal Type

**Noel Keywood finds Martin Logan's new Ethos electrostatic hybrid loudspeaker another step closer to perfection...**

**B**eing *aficionados* of the electrostatic loudspeaker at *Hi-Fi World*, we have tested and used most of the Quads ever produced, plus a good number of Kingsounds and many Martin Logans too – and Martin Logans are as good as electrostatics get. So the announcement of the new Martin Logan Ethos had us scrabbling for the phone to get a pair for review.

There's not been one Martin Logan I have not enjoyed, so I had high hopes for the Ethos – and they weren't dashed. It's expensive, costing £6,498, but we're looking here at a model quite a way up the Martin Logan range and for a top quality loudspeaker of its great and unusual abilities this is a reasonable price.

If you're wondering what an electrostatic loudspeaker is all about, just think 'transparency'. As in transparency of sound and with a Martin Logan panel, physical transparency too. Here's a loudspeaker that physically communicates its strengths: how many loudspeakers can you see through? Electrostatic loudspeakers produce sound from a sheet of 'Clingfilm' hung in the open air (well, sort of). There's no cone flapping around and no box to honk – so forget colouration!

Notionally, an electrostatic loudspeaker is perfect – and believe me, they sound divine. What you get with the Ethos is Martin Logan's top quality XStat electrostatic panel, mated to a powered subwoofer, in a room-friendly package. Although standing almost 5ft tall each unit weighs 19kgs, or 42lbs, so once in place they are not immovable like some top quality monitors. A little under one foot wide, they don't dominate the domestic landscape either and that's how Martin Logan play it. Look at rivals and you'll find they are more visually intrusive, including Quads of course. The main reason is that Martin Logan choose not to produce bass from their electrostatic panel (except in the large CLX), but from the small box that supports it, in which there is a conventional bass unit that works below 375Hz. That makes the Ethos a hybrid electrostatic, unlike Quads and the bigger Kingsounds.

Like all electrostatics each Ethos needs mains power, to charge the panel

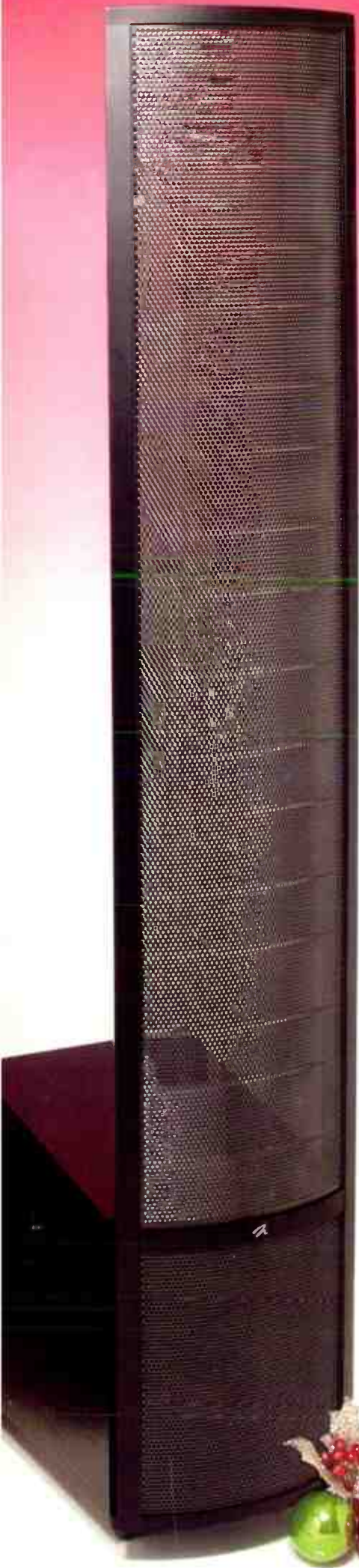
stators to a high static voltage and to drive the internal Class D 200W bass power amplifier. Mains power connection is through a normal IEC three pin socket and power consumption at idle is just 1 Watt. This model has a bass level control able to apply both boost and cut. It doesn't simply cut signal level to the woofer, but affects deep bass output below 100Hz, offering substantial amounts of boost or cut when set to maximum.

I should quickly mention that the Spire, sitting above the Ethos in Martin Logan's premium Reserve ESL Series, has more bass control functions, whilst the new and less expensive Theos below it has a passive subwoofer and can be bi-wired or bi-amped, so is more flexible in the bass department. The Ethos is a quality model aimed at those who don't want to fiddle. It has just enough bass control to allow easy adjustment with a self evident outcome. The bass knob, which has a centre zero detent, is turned one way or t'other to suit both taste and room conditions. It's zero position will suit bigger rooms and a position far from walls. In our 28ft square listening room -3 to -4 was about right, on a scale of +/-10, so there is plenty of leeway.

The only criticism I would make of a hybrid like this is that small bass cabinets have limitations and putting a 200 Watt amplifier inside doesn't solve them. Quite the reverse. Martin Logan have taken the opportunity to force the bass unit to produce subsonics it would not otherwise have produced, resulting in very large cone excursions and a huge amount of rear radiated energy that has to go somewhere; back out through the cones, making for a boxy sound. You can't trap an elephant in a small box and hope it won't be heard. Our measurements confirm this and if there is one criticism of Martin Logans it is that their bass tends to be not too well matched to the lithe electrostatic panel.

You have to accept that there is a





trade-off here. The Ethos is compact and domestically friendly, yet it's still a fabulous sounding electrostatic loudspeaker. You get a sensible marriage of principles that gives results to die for in many ways, at a sane price too. But small boxes do not produce superb bass and they cannot be forced to do so. Also, electrostatic panels are open backed 'dipoles' whilst bass bins are closed box 'monopoles' with entirely different radiation patterns and you'll always detect a difference between them. That's why Quads are full range panels, as are the bigger Kingsounds and Martin Logan's top model, the CLX. Such loudspeakers are both big and room sensitive though. The Ethos is a domestically acceptable and adaptable package. To speed bass up they really needed a high pass filter at 40Hz and this would have been a useful option in the onboard DSP. However, turning bass level down helped improve quality all round so some amelioration is available.

The great Martin Logan XStat electrostatic panel is the crucial part that is an almost-invisible wonder. That it is see-through is not a trivial fact. I found out long ago whilst progressively stripping my Quad ESL-63s that every layer degraded the sound. Off came the cosmetic brown cloth sock: it sounded better. Then I removed the perforated metal safety covers and suddenly I felt I could hear a pin drop through these loudspeakers. Finally, off came the dust covers and it just got better again. Martin Logan stripped the panel right back to basics very cleverly, so what looks simple is in truth an ingenious design extremely well engineered. The charged stators, those perforated outer black panels, have a protective coating so the cat will survive contact with them, and Martin Logan says the panels and films can be vacuumed to remove dust. The curve improves lateral dispersion and smooths response by lessening phase cancellations/additions. A special film from DuPont onto which a conductive coat is applied is used.

Inside the bass enclosure there's polarising power supply and an audio step-up transformer and a crossover that keeps bass out of the panel, usefully limiting excursion of the film. Any electrostatic is complicated and the technology, especially of film coating and

behaviour, is obscure and difficult to implement. Which is why there are so few electrostatic loudspeakers around, why the Ethos XStat panel is particularly clever and why this loudspeaker is also keenly priced for what it is. Measurement revealed a smoother response than the less expensive panel of the Purity and Source models in the ESL range, which we tested in our Sept 08 and Nov 08 issues. It was also very consistent off the main listening axis, so as I walked around the basic tonal balance remained the same. This made the listening sweet spot uncritical and it made the Ethos enjoyable to others in the room, rather than dull except to those in the favoured spot on the settee.

Although a lot of audio religion surrounds electrostatic loudspeakers they are simple enough and fuss free to use, the Ethos especially so. Where my Quad ESL-57s and their doppelgangers, a pair of Brauns I owned for a short time, both sparked viciously if I got too carefree with the volume control, Martin Logans avoid this scenario. They turn on quietly and do not so much as murmur in use. A small LED at the rear lights red or blue indicating no-signal/signal, but nothing is visible from the front. I didn't push the bass bin too hard but both the bass unit and especially the underside mounted ABR (auxiliary bass radiator), moved large distances and were obviously working very hard but Martin Logan told me the onboard DSP monitors amplifier and drive units to prevent overload.

Where Quad ESL-63s would 'crowbar' an amplifier if overloaded, causing it to blow up, the Martin Logans do no such thing. And where Kingsounds are very insensitive and need high drive voltages (i.e. very powerful amplifiers) the Martin Logans managed a very healthy 91dB sound pressure level from just 1W of power in our tests, putting them on par with the best box loudspeakers. So the Ethos can be used with low power amplifiers: 20 Watts will do and 40W should be enough.

Some of you may be wondering, as I did, how Martin Logan have arranged signal processing in the Ethos. From the single pair of input terminals the signal goes via a 375Hz high pass filter into the audio step-up transformer and direct to the electrostatic panel. Our impedance curve confirms this; if there was any buffer device it would not sink to one ohm at 20kHz! So the XStat panel works direct from whatever amplifier is being used to drive the loudspeaker.

Matters are very different below 375Hz. The amplifier's output

is attenuated, converted to digital via a 24bit ADC, processed in a Digital Signal Processor (DSP), then converted back to analogue via an DAC before being fed to a Class D amplifier which drives the bass unit that reaches up into the low midrange in the Ethos, so you are faced with listening to a heavily processed signal below 375Hz, and Class D solid-state amplification. I guessed, when measuring the Ethos, that Martin Logan had equalised it electronically to boost bass for an extended subsonic response, because small boxes don't reach flat down to 20Hz on their own, and they confirmed this.

I tried both our resident Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A solid-state amplifier (50 Watts) and the also resident Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifier (100W). Valve amps are known to be a good match to electrostatics, quality wise and because they tolerate a capacitive load that sinks to 1 Ohm or less at 20kHz (this is a freakout for solid-state amps., so most have protective Zobel networks to cope). As expected, the valve amplifier gave best results, with its slight sense of warmth from the Jensen paper-in-oil, copper foil caps perfect for the XStat panel.

I was only listening to the valve amplifier above 375Hz of course; below this frequency I was listening to a signal that had been converted to digital, processed, turned back to analogue then passed through a 200W solid-state amplifier.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The Ethos were run in thoroughly as always, using pink noise and then Monitor Audio's De-tox disc, for a total of forty eight hours. Because an electrostatic fires sound backwards as well as forwards they need plenty of room to lose the rear energy and should not be placed too close

to a wall. The rule of thumb with Quads was one-third the way up the room, so in an 18ft long room they would be placed 6ft from the rear wall. I always arrange rear absorption of some sort and behind the Ethos I placed large acoustic panels against

the wall to damp the rear wave. In a living room this could be a wall hung decorative carpet, curtains or drapes. Electrostatics are not ideal for small rooms.

When using loudspeakers with wide dispersion I prefer to aim them straight down the room, and not at the listening position but the Ethos sounded best set wide apart – around 8ft – and angled inward slightly. This gave an intense but clean sound stage. Curiously they did not sound right closer together, the stage seeming a little muddled. I listened carefully at all heights and found little difference over a wide range. The Ethos is far more consistent with height than any box loudspeaker, bar the coaxials from KEF and Tannoy.

"the panel in the Ethos is probably the best electrostatic driver I have ever heard..."

The sound stage hung linearly between the loudspeakers, forming no celestial arc between them. However, a high stage height placed singers from Renee Fleming to Lady Gaga above me, giving a large canvas. Electrostatics image very well and Martin Logan's XStat panel is as good as it gets here. I sat in front of a pair at this year's Whittlebury Show and they sounded utterly superb. There's a concise yet relaxed quality to the outlines of singers and instruments, so they are precisely 'there', without shouting about it. There are two reasons; a single panel eliminates phase anomalies, whilst smooth, clear treble free from the ringing qualities of a metal dome tweeter makes for a easy, natural presentation.

This leads on to another quality of the Ethos; it is creamy smooth and unforced in an unremarkable way. More so than the less expensive ESL models. But what you have to bear in mind here is that the panel adds just about nothing to the sound and brings no character to the table. You end up with stripped bare clarity, with no intrinsic character. It's almost a shock, as if there's nothing to hear! Where did all the 'loudspeakeriness' go? And singers sit back on the sound stage because the tonal balance is mild and there's no midrange lift to artificially push vocals forward, a popular new trick in the lexicon of today's designers.

To listen to Skln from Skunk Anansie sing 'Hedonism' sounding clear as a bell, from a large strongly embodied image just a little above me was a lovely experience. The

simple musical arrangement worked well, with graunchy guitar chords chiming out at left, kick drum sounding tight and powerful and bass guitar believably weighty.

A small loss of warmth and body affected Jackie Leven's gruff delivery of 'Extremely Violent Man'; the timbre of his voice was lightened. The backing bass line was solid and nicely powerful, though. Hand drums hung centre stage with chiselled form that spoke of the electrostatic's utterly superb imaging and the smack of hand upon skin was palpable.

As his CD 'Fairy Tales of Hard Men' drifted by I was captivated by hearing Jackie singing centre stage with a startling clarity and solidity of form that only an electrostatic can

manage, and the XStat panel is about the best I have ever encountered for hearing the finest of details, totally pure and unembellished by colouration of any sort.

With the lament 'Poortoun' some diminution of lower midrange body was again discernible but it was hard to fixate on this with so much else going on. Strummed guitar strings cut out with ringing clarity and I could close my eyes and say "yes that does sound like an acoustic guitar, not a *simulacrum*". The simple yet utter purity of Martin Logan's XStat panel was breathtaking and to date I haven't heard better. As electrostatics go, this panel puts the Ethos in a world of its own.

I wasn't always happy about sound quality but this was usually because either the source or amplifier wasn't quite right. Connecting up a pair of Icon Audio MB150 power amplifiers immediately hardened the sound and at times there was some edginess, for example with Santana's 'Put Your Lights On' but then I realised that I wasn't using the MB150s optimally for loudspeakers like this; I had to select triode mode and switch feedback off to get an easier, more relaxed presentation with less treble hardness. And I was spinning the 'Supernatural' CD, which is a mess compared to the 24/96 DVD-A. The Ethos were simply making all this brutally obvious. It was only with an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil cartridge in my SME312S arm feeding an Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage that the sweet clarity



of the loudspeakers was apparent. I also connected up our Cambridge Audio 650BD Blu-ray to spin the Supernatural DVD-A and this confirmed I was hearing problems in the mix down to CD. So poor recordings sounded poor and with recording engineers adding graunch by using digital distortion (e.g. 'Rockferry') even recent releases can sound not-so-nice.

For the most part I was happy with bass output, the bass bin giving kick drum a well defined leading edge and plenty of follow up punch. Things only went awry with the emphasised walking bass lines used behind Angelique Kidjo and with 'Ago' for example, from the CD 'Aye', bass sounded decidedly one note. The bass bin tries hard and it is satisfactory most of the time but bass freaks might want to look elsewhere. And that may mean the Theos where more user control over bass quality will be available.

I wasn't surprised that the violin of Nigel Kennedy and accompanying English Chamber Orchestra were handled beautifully. The lack of differing drive unit characters, phase problems and all else makes an electrostatic panel the best way to listen to violin, giving an even and consistent tonality and a broad, stable sound. Strings in general sounded

detailed and clearly separated and tonal colours well differentiated, so horns were brassy and strings - well - stringy. There was some small loss of warmth with cellos and violas and here again the Ethos were a little short on lower midrange body, but not so much as to be overly obvious.

Electrostatics don't give a generalised sound though, they don't fill in gaps and they don't gloss over anything so results were recording dependent, and older digital recordings in particular were not so nice at times. Whilst horns would blast out with a fruity tone, strings could sound edgy and I found myself confined to using our tweaked up David Shaw Signature MB845 MkII amplifier with the Ethos. They demand an ultra smooth amplifier and thermionic Single-Endeds come to mind. They also need a very good source and a good recording too; upper treble output from the XStat is quite strong and this emphasises any harshness in the signal chain. So the Ethos doesn't honey coat music and can be quite forthright at times.

**CONCLUSION**

Martin Logan's XStat panel in the Ethos is probably the best electrostatic driver I have ever heard, and this alone hoists it way up above most other loudspeakers. Only

Tannoy's impressive Definition DC-10 comes close at the price (November 2010 issue), but it is very different in character, or the Eminent LFT-08b (January 2010 issue)



with its wide range ribbon driver come to mind as alternatives, but the Eminent isn't so well styled and finished. That makes the Ethos one of the best loudspeakers available at the price - quite an achievement.

It is for those who want obvious and extended deep bass, the dramatic sonic purity of a top quality electrostatic and a standard of design and finish high enough to grace a modern home. Then, given suitable matching equipment, for this is an unforgiving loudspeaker in some ways, the Ethos offers a startling musical experience and one you should try to hear if you can. In important ways this is one of the best loudspeakers on the market and, in some senses, a snip at the price.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

A fabulous sounding electrostatic loudspeaker, if with less than perfect bass. Great all the same, and all but unique.

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- FOR**
- breathtaking clarity
  - superlative smoothness
  - lack of colouration

- AGAINST**
- mediocre bass quality
  - limited bass adjustment
  - subtle lack of 'body'

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency analysis shows the Ethos possesses an unusually flat frequency response, here with bass level set 'flat' to 0. However, electrostatic dipoles are complex beasts and one measurement says little. We took many forward response measurements, at different mic heights and forward angles to look at dispersion, consistency, phase cancellation effects, bass integration and bass power. The sine burst response shown is representative, but low frequency windowing pulls bass level down a bit. A third-octave pink noise steady state measurement suggests the Ethos will sound a little bass heavy at 0 and flat at -4. Users will find their preference lies somewhere between, according to room gain and tastes. Our pink noise response at -4 was almost perfectly flat from 20Hz to 20kHz and looked astonishing. However, running flat down to 20Hz suggests large bass unit driver excursions and 'slow' bass quality.

What our many measurements showed was that the Ethos is smoother and more consistent on and off axis than the Purity and Source. There was some lift below 800Hz down to 400Hz, below which the electrostatic panel rolls down to the box bass unit. The crossover is not perfect and wherever the microphone was placed the dip at 200Hz seen in our analysis existed. This suggests less than perfect integration between box and panel. The bass bin goes very low though, flat down to 30Hz our analysis here shows, helped by the passive ABR tuned to 33Hz our red trace

shows.

Another interesting feature of the XStat electrostatic panel was that it measured flat at any distance, including many metres away, and across a wide forward angle. Sound into the room will be very consistent, unlike lower cost models, where sound balance changed considerably with listening position.

Electrostatics are known for low colouration and the decay spectrum over 200ms showed the Ethos is very impressive in this respect. Only below 150Hz does the bass bin get 'hot', hotter than most box speakers because it is so small, a lot of internal energy coming out through the cones.

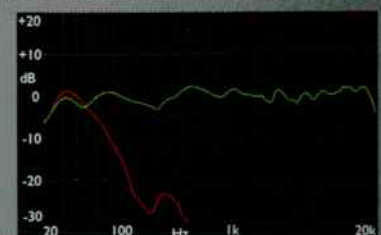
Sensitivity was very high at 91dB Sound Pressure Level for 2.8V (one nominal Watt) of input. Much of this is due to the powered subwoofer and its strong deep bass output. However, the panel is quite sensitive too, it seems. Measured overall impedance was low at 4 Ohms, in fact surprisingly low considering the bass unit is powered. This is due to the electrostatic panel that comes in hard at 400Hz our impedance analysis shows, careering down to 1 Ohm at 20kHz - ouch! A valve amp will shrug this off; solid-state amps need Zobel networks to cope. Most have them.

Electrostatics produce little distortion and the Ethos panel was no exception, around 0.2% up to 800Hz and down to a miniscule 0.05% or so above this frequency, much lower than cone drive units. The bass bin worked well down to 60Hz but below this distortion rises quickly,

measuring 9% from the forward driver at 40Hz and 2% from the passive radiator. Rock can have massive levels at 30Hz and here distortion was above 20% (94dB SPL at the cone), mostly bass doubling. This is a poor result.

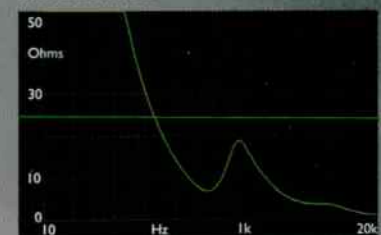
The Martin Logan XStat electrostatic panel measured very well and is quite exceptional in many areas. The bass unit manages quite well but has problems, running lower than is sensible. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
 Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



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## ★ TURNTABLE WINNER: PALMER 3

**A**t times last year it felt like someone had only just invented the microgroove LP, such was the torrent of new turntables. We saw acres of shiny perspex on plinths and platters, carbon fibre this and cast alloy that, with so many promising better sound through 'hi tech' design and build. Into this fray appeared, middle summer, the £3,750 Palmer 3. Fascinatingly, it sported none of the above; it wasn't an obviously cutting edge deck. Indeed its design was sober and conservative. Yet designer Jonathan Palmer, we soon found out, had gone meticulously through every variable in the vinyl LP playback chain and attempted to get it right. So you don't see any whizz-bang technology, just a number of superbly engineered sub-systems working together. Tellingly,

when the deck reached us, he hadn't even thought of a price for it; he'd just done what he thought was necessary to get the job done...

A low torque AC motor spins the 10kg alloy platter via a 'loose touch' peripheral rubber belt, and this sits on one 120x350mm sub-base unit, mounted in a stainless steel housing. This sits next to the main 350x350mm plinth. These are separated by bonding resins and layers of natural wood. The platter and spindle locate on precision machined conical surfaces ensuring concentricity; 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. The main bearing is a combination of brass and phosphor bronze custom matched bushings, the spindle supported by a tungsten carbide

ball. There's a separate offboard power supply with a matching wood fascia, and a matching wood topped stainless steel record clamp.

The result is a deck with excellent measured performance, which sounds neutral, open, dynamic and powerful, yet which plays music in a mellifluous and beguiling way. This is not an analogue player that secretly wants to be a digital one; it flows like wine at a good party and is no less enjoyable. It's a truly impressive first product from Palmer Audio, and one that was so obviously built with every concern for sonics and little regard for commerce. One of the real surprises of the year, here's hoping that it goes on to succeed.

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## ★ TONEARM WINNER: FUNK FXR II

Since its inception in 1983, the Rega RB300 tonearm has been a massive success. First came its almost universal adoption as 'cheap pick up arm of choice' in the eighties and nineties, and then as the precious raw material for modifiers and tweekers in the past decade. We've now got to the stage where some tonearms started life as Rega variants, but so much has changed that there are no longer any parts in common! The Funk FXR II doesn't quite go this far, but what it does do is surgically cut out the compromises of the original Rega design, liberating the arm's real strengths and in the process improving its sound radically.

With their new FXR II, effectively Funk Firm are acting as a bespoke custom tuning shop,

offering a package of mods expertly researched and implemented, just as Cosworth or AMG provide such a service for performance cars. The original Rega arm has to be carefully dismantled from the original setup using special jigs and tools, and the arm beam is then "parted off to a precise length" and the FXR tube is then jigged and bonded to the cut-down arm stub. The thin walled aluminium tube gets a carbon fibre cross section, tensioned within, which terminates in a custom headshell mount. The new bearing pillar is assembled with ABEC 7 bearings, adjusted and set. Once assembled, the chosen cabling and connector system is added.

For your £1,175 you get a tonearm that's unrecognisable sonically; it gives a big hearted,

powerful and energetic sound that lets the music's flavour flood out. Spatially the Funk is excellent, with something of a 'stereo wide' quality to it that makes instruments appear in the mix with boldness and power. The bottom is animated and tuneful, delivering lovely liquid basslines, and treble is excellent too, proffering crispness and silkiness in equal measure. This is an open, spacious and animated sounding tonearm that succeeds spectacularly in the extraction of music from the groove. For the amount of performance it provides at the price, it's a worthy winner of our best 2010 tonearm gong!

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*David Price, HiFi World, October 2010*



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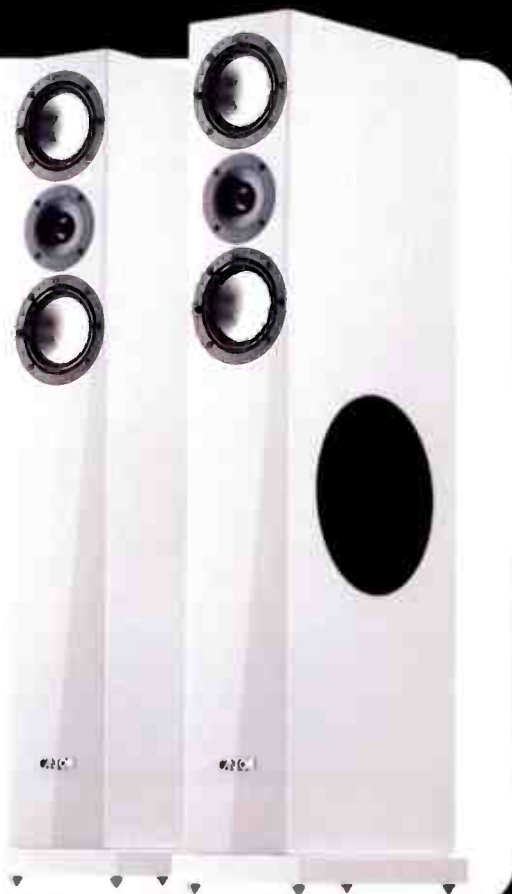
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## ★ CARTRIDGE WINNER: BENZ WOOD SL

**T**here is no black magic to moving coil cartridge design; MCs are relatively simple in their conception. But that in itself is no guarantor of universally high standards; through inexpert build and unimaginative materials choice it's perfectly possible to make a merely average transducer, and indeed many do. With that in mind, it's more than mere coincidence that some of the world's finest pick-ups come from countries that specialise in watches of superlative quality, such as Japan and Switzerland. In the case of the Benz Wood SL, it hails from the latter, a land that's established itself for miniaturised precision engineering.

Designed by Albert Lukascheck,

who personally tests each unit before it leaves the factory, the cartridge is hand built to faultless standards and sports some lovely design features which conspire to make a superb sound. As its name suggests, the Benz comes clothed in Bruyere wood, also found in the bowls of tobacco pipes. Encased inside is the generator, a crossed-coil design as found in other Benz Micro products. There's a solid Boron cantilever, with 'side-bonded' stylus, grooved rear pole piece and countersunk O-ring damper; the stylus is a Micro-ridge design with a 3 micron radius tip for excellent tracking ability.

The Benz plays music with riflebolt precision and times as accurately as Swiss railways. It produces a magical rendition of

whatever music you care to play with it, propelling the music along with an even-handed analysis of the recorded acoustic; even on average condition discs it delivers a degree of refinement and finesse that amazes at the price. Massively detailed, the levels of definition and energy in the sound, are hard to beat at or anywhere near the price. The Benz Micro Wood SL seems unperturbed by record condition or musical genre, and is a master of playing the tunes encased in the grooves in a particularly enjoyable and engaging way. A fabulous piece of precision engineering, this is a worthy cartridge award winner.

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# ADL

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Alpha design Labs Tokyo Japan

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## Sound Foundations

25 New Road, Blackwater  
Camberley, Surrey, GU17 9AY Great Britain  
Tel : +44(0) 1276 501 392 info@soundfoundations.co.uk



## PHONO STAGE WINNER: EMILLE ALLURE

There's a school of thought that says the worst thing you can put in the way of that tiny fragile signal issuing forth from your moving coil cartridge is a transistor. Conversely, the small signals phono stages deal with are very much in the tube comfort zone. Serious valve phono stages can sound quite stunning then, giving a 'greater than the sum of the parts' listening experience; they can be sublime in all-tube systems yet still have a strangely restorative quality in solid-state ones. And the Emille Allure is precisely this; few phono stages, tube or transistor, have made such an impression on us. Where we might have originally balked at its not inconsiderable price of £2,495, setting ears upon it had us rethinking our stance.

At just 318x330x170mm, it's a refreshingly compact device as valve designs go, but is heavy at 15kg. The chassis and front panel is aluminium, finely anodised, and the matching metal knobs on the front panel offer a moving magnet and moving coil switch and a variable gain control so the Allure can drive a power amplifier directly. Inside there's a Lundahl step-up transformer for moving coils, gold-plated glass epoxy printed circuit boards with 2oz copper thickness. Passive componentry is of a very high standard, with precision resistors, Jantzen capacitors, silver plated copper wiring and gold plated tube sockets for the four 6DJ8 or 6922 tubes. The transformers are designed and hand wound in house.

We've heard some fine phono stages in our time, but the Emille

is special even in this company. It's not quite as incisive or forensic as some of the best solid-staters, sounding just a tad rounded and rich, but it's not so much a listening tool and as a virtuoso performer in its own right when it comes to playing music. A massive soundstage, inside which you can almost pluck instruments out of the mix like fruit off a tree, is what first greets you. Yet it's the Allure's wonderfully fluid midband, making music flow in an effortless and organic way, that has you riveted to your listening seat. By comparison, almost all other phono stages sound forced and mechanical. As such it's a worthy winner of this years phono stage Award.

## AMPLIFICATION

**Naim HiCap 2** Mint, boxed with snaic (5-pin). Manufactured in April 2009. (£1100) £645

**Naim Supernait** Mint, boxed, one owner. Approx 12 mths old. (£2595) £1595

**ATC SCA2 Pre-amp** One owner, supplied by us! only 8mths old. Boxed, mint. (£4860) £3495

**NuForce P 8 Pre-amp** Black with remote. Excellent condition. (£1200) only £595.

**Ayre AX-7E integrated amp** Boxed, mint. Just over a year old, one owner. (£2795) £1395

**Icon Audio Stereo 40 mkII** One owner, KT88 model. Excellent, boxed, manual etc. (£1500) £595

**Bryston B4SST power amp** Excellent condition, in silver, one owner. (£3450) only £1850

**Chord CPA 2200 Pre-amp** Boxed in silver, excellent condition. (£2917) £1250

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

**McIntosh MA6500 Integrated amp** Boxed, excellent condition & reviews. (£4795) £2495.

**Marantz PM Ki Pearl integrated amp** Boxed, mint. Only months old, one owner. (£2500) £1695

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

**Boulder 865 integrated** Very rare. Regarded as simply best integrated amp you can currently buy. Mint, one owner original boxing. (£10000) £POA

**Chord CPM 3300 integrated amp** One owner, excellent condition, silver with gold badge. Aluminium remote. 5yr warranty. (£6795) £2695

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

**Chord SPM 1200B Power Amp** 250 wpc. Black with wooden side accents. Excellent condition, recent service from Chord. Original packing. Rarely available used. (£3950) Great at only £1395.

**Bel Canto Pre 3 Pre Amp** Black with aluminium face, original packing & manuals, immaculate. (£1850) only £995.

**Eastern Electric M520 Integrated Amp** One owner, 8mths, perfect condition, original packing, manual & remote. Just won Editors Choice in Hi-Fi News. (£1995) only £1195.

**ECA Technologies Vista Pre and Lectern Power Amps** Black with gold logos, immaculate. Very musical combination. (£1700) only £650.

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

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

**Chapter Audio Preface & Couplet pre/power combo** Boxed, original flight cases, excellent condition, less than half price, amazing value for money. (£9000) £4295

**Art Audio VPI Pre Amp** (with MM Phono Stage). Highly desirable chrome, spectacular condition original packing. (£2600) only £1295.

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

## DIGITAL

**MSB Platinum CDIII reference transport** Boxed, unmarked, 5yr warranty. (£4995) £1795

**Ayre CX-7e CD Player** One owner, mint, boxed, manual. (£3000) £1595.

**MBL 1621 CD Transport & 1611F D/A Converter** (factory upgrade to F in 2008), original flight cases, packing, manuals and SFCB remote. Arguably best combination available in the world today. Piano black & gold, some brassing & minor marks only. (£35560) be quick at £12995.

**Naim CDX2 CD player** Excellent condition, boxed, manual, remote. Huge saving. £1495.

**DCS Verdi Transport** (new laser and recent service within the last 4 months) £1895.

**Acoustic Arts DAC 1 mkIV** 66 BIT 1536kHz D, stunning spec, mint condition, boxed, one owner. Sensational value. (£4500) £1795.

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

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

**Acoustic Arts Drive 1 mk2** Current spec, boxed, mint, one owner, great at this price. (£4500) £1949.

## LOUDSPEAKERS

**ATC SCM 50 ASL Active Classic** Black ash, one owner, supplied by us, 8mths old, boxed, mint with stands. Balance of 6yr warranty. (£9470) £6495

**Quad ESL 2805** Premium Classique, stunning, one owner, few months old. (£6000) £POA

**ATC SCM 50 ASL Classic Actives** Walnut, ex-demo, mint condition. (£9870) £POA

**Celestion Kingston Speakers** Matching stands, one owner, v rare, 32kg each with stands. (£3250) £995

**Klipsch P-39f Palladium series** Ex-demo, one of best speakers you're likely to hear. Read Stereophile review to understand why! (£14750) £POA

**Sonus Faber Minima Amators** One owner, teak, boxed, excellent condition, with matching stands. 5yr warranty. (£2000) £895.

**Focal Electra 1037 Be Speakers** One owner, mint, boxed, manuals. (£7495) Be very quick at only £3595.

**ADAM Audio A.R.T. Pencil Speakers** Cherry/dark silver combo, astonishing articulation, excellent condition, original packing. (£3600) only £1795.

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

**Amphion Argon 3L Speakers** Scandinavian Birch, original packing & accessories, only 8mths old. HiFi Choice Best Buy Winner. (£2600) only £1495

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

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

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

**Audio Physic Scorpio** Boxed, cherry, one owner, some very minor marks. (£3800) £1695

## ANALOGUE

**Whest TWO phono stage** One owner, months old, mint, graphite. Great reviews. (£750) Only £495.

**LFD MCT Phonostage** Mint, one owner, sensational performance, only 18mths old, very low hours. (£3400) So £2500 looks very tasty indeed!

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## QUALITY PRE-OWNED.

**Linn LP12 Arm Board** Original and as new. £35.

**Linn Lingo PSU** MK1 For the Linn Sondek LP-12 wonderful condition, complete with LP12 switch, circuit board & power lead. Recent service. £395.

**Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage** Boxed, unmarked, one owner, only months old. Simply sensational (£1495) £980.

**Quad OC 24P Phono stage** Mint, one owner, as new. Great reviews. (£1200) £795

## MAINS CONDITIONING

**Kemp Electronics Power Source** Barely used, as new, one of the best at any price. (£1395) bargain at £620.

**Supra LoRad MD06-BS/SP** 6-way mains filtering block. (£149) only £75.

**Nordost Vishnu 1m mains cable** Excellent condition. (£404) £249.

**PurePower 700** Black, ex-demo. (£1595) £POA

**Vertex AQ Taga** 6-way distribution mains filter. Great reviews, one owner, unmarked. (£868) £595

## CABLES

**Vertex Silver Solfon 1m** One owner, excellent condition. (£1092) £499

**Shungata Research 'Altair' Cryo Interconnect (RCA-RCA)** 1m. (£650) only £255

**Ecosse M55.5 Bi-Wire Speaker Cable** With Monocrystal Spades, 2.9m. (£946) only £295.

**Siltech Digital Signature Golden Ridge AES/EBU 1m XLR** (£995) £249.

**Vertex Hi-Resolution Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect** 1m, ex-demo, sensational (£2047) only £1120.

**Vertex Silver Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect** 1m, ex-demo. (£1092) only £660.

**Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links** 4 links with 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module. Simply sensational. (£540) £395

**Chord Signature speaker cable** One owner, boxed, as new, 2.5m, great reviews. (£775) £445

## ACCESSORIES

**Grado PS1000 Headphones** As new, only few weeks old. Huge saving. (£1800) £1095.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**Mission m7ds Surround Speakers** Black, original packing & manual, perfect condition, fabulous bi-pole rear speakers with incredible dispersion. Only £60.





★ DIGITAL  
**WINNER: MARANTZ SA-K1 PEARL CD**

**T**here are two ways of doing CD players. The traditional Japanese way was to take a standard silver disc player, festoon it with bullet-pointed technological features (x times oversampling, y times upsampling, silver wired this, special digital filtered that) and then plaster them all over the fascia in the hope it would walk off the shelves of your local Laskys. The other way was of course to make a well engineered machine and apply careful fettling to critical parts of the digital and analogue stages, then listen to the results, and then come back and do it again until everything sounds just as it should.

The former approach proved successful in the short term, but many of those Japanese multinationals have now left the specialist hi-fi market altogether, such was the long

term robustness of their approach. Marantz on the other hand, have had enduring success with expertly voiced machines, one after the other, year in, year out. The £2,500 SA-K1 Pearl SACD player embodies this credo; it's a well engineered machine with no stone left unturned in the pursuit of serious sound. It succeeds not because of any specific techno trickery, but because it's a beautifully rounded design, voiced by some of the best ears in the business. This big (440x419x127mm, 14.5kg) machine sports a nicely aligned disc loader with a damped Xyron disc tray, the large aluminium feet confer a sense of solidity, as does the heavy copper plated chassis inside. An SACDM-10 mech drives a Cirrus Logic CS 4398 DAC chip, with a variable position digital filter and Marantz's HDAM-SA and SA2 op-amp modules.

In action, the SA-K1 Pearl not

only sounds sublime, with such an easy, lyrical gait, but it's also beautifully built and finished. Oh, and it even plays SACD exceptionally well; as any Super Audio Compact Disc fan knows, the format is capable of stratospheric sonic results, but not all SACD players are capable of unlocking them. The K1 Pearl most definitely is – and veritably soars with this special silver disc, producing a massively musical and expansive sound, getting close to the best of digital at any price. The K1 Pearl was created to commemorate Ken Ishiwata's thirtieth year at Marantz; if you were ever in any doubt about the contribution he's made to the company's house sound, then hear this.

Marantz UK  
 +44 (0)1753 680648  
[www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)



★ TUNER

# WINNER: MICROMEGA FM10

2010 was an important year for radio here in the UK; it began with FM fans feeling increasingly concerned for the future of their beloved broadcast standard. The previous government's 'Digital Britain' report outlined a proposed FM switch off, and even named 2015 as the target date, even if few industry insiders ever thought it was possible. But the new government that replaced it in May, arguably motivated by the massive cost of switching the whole country over to DAB, kicked things into the long grass, effectively signalling that there was now *no* intention to switch off analogue radio whatsoever. FM lives on to fight another day!

As you might imagine, all this uncertainty has hardly worked wonders for sales of analogue tuners. But it's fair to say that

the breed has soldiered on, and somewhat ironically it now seems that DAB is in more peril; it's very hard to make the case for a format that offers few advantages over internet radio yet sounds inferior, offers some 17,000 fewer stations and is non-upgradeable. It was nice then to see Micromega launching a new analogue tuner this year, and better still to find out what a star it was in the sonic stakes. Aside from a few purists who'll lavish a couple of thousand on a Magnum Dynalab, the £715 FM10 is just about the maximum that most people would ever spend on a tuner. But it's superbly engineered at the price; whereas most manufacturers fit an OEM receiver module, Micromega have their own bespoke intermediate frequency amplifier, detector and stereo decoder circuitry. This goes in a cleanly styled

metal box, that's easy to use and fuss-free.

Sonically it's pure high end European; a tidal wave of warm bass rolls out of the loudspeakers, bringing a toe tapping quality to music that so many tuners completely fail to capture, while treble is as creamy as the finest French *pâtisserie*. Across the midband, the FM10 is smooth and couth, and simply lets you get on with hearing the music or speech being broadcast. It's a fascinating and quirky little product, but the Micromega FM10 justifies itself by offering excellent sound per pound, doubtless coming from its designers' determination to do things differently. As such it's a worthy *Hi-Fi World Award* winner.

*Available online*  
 +44 (0)20 8771 1905  
[www.micromega.com](http://www.micromega.com)



# ★ INTEGRATED WINNER: MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS35i

**C**ontrary to the proclamations of legions of hi-fi designers around the world, it's not easy to make high end hi-fi. They argue of course that cost-no-object designs let you put in all the best components and do circuits as they should be done, with ifs or buts. Yet when all is said and done, if your high end hi-fi product is anything less than perfect, it simply has no excuse for its continued existence, end of. The fallings of a £600 amplifier can be logically explained and excused, but add a zero to that and the thing's got to pretty close to hi-fi heaven to be worth so much as a mention...

Not an easy life then, for Musical Fidelity's AMS35i. At £6,000 it's at a curious price point; most will simply expect that hi-fi cannot

get any better at this price, and are mortified to find that it can, providing you spend a bit more still. Yet it's still head and shoulders above most people's conception of their 'dream' integrated amplifier, such is its useable power, expansive soundstaging, wonderful 'hear through' clarity and fine filigree detail. It's the great, innate across the board strength of the AMS35i that makes it this year's World Award winner for integrations. In solid-state terms, there are better amps, but you have to spend a lot more to hear them...

It's not as compact as some; at 483x148x475mm and 28.3kg you'll need a larger hi-fi rack than normal, and you'll also need a commitment to the idea of running hi-fi as a household expense. The power consumption of the full Class A AMS35i is obviously more than

most transistor power amplifiers; it's enough to make some people's houses' lights dim on switch on. Indeed, in this respect it's similar to a big valve amp. Despite being full Class A, it doesn't sound like one, however. Yet nor does it sound like a conventional Class AB solid-stater. The Musical Fidelity AMS35i treads a skilful path between to the two, offering a good deal of the speed and liquidity of tubes with the insight and grip of a top transistor design. It's an infectious and at times totally arresting combination, and marks this machine out as having a most endearing character all of its own. Simply put, once you've heard one of these, it's hard to justify spending more.

Musical Fidelity  
+44(0)20 8700 2866  
[www.musicalfidelity.co.uk](http://www.musicalfidelity.co.uk)



# FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER

## WINNER: TANNOY DEFINITION DC10T

**T**annoy is what Tannoy does. One supposes that if you've been going since 1932 and your name has become both a noun and a verb in common parlance in the English language, you've a right to go your own way. Whilst the company makes some fine, and distinct, lower priced speakers, it's their high end dual concentric ranges that define the marque. Trouble is, they've almost become a victim of their own success; the styling remained defiantly antiquarian throughout the thrusting eighties and the cool, lifestyley nineties, and the result was that if you wanted to experience the company's distinctive, nee unique, sound, you had to go with the styling that wasn't to everyone's tastes. Not so with the new Definition DC10T...

Here's a big Tannoy that tries to

hide the fact. It carries a classic Tannoy Dual concentric drive unit, but in domesticated 10in form, allowing a 339mm wide (13in) front baffle to be used, making for an elegantly shaped Cherry veneered and gloss coated beauty that stands 1,125mm high and weighs 34.5kgs. A monstrous 94dB sensitivity means around 5W into the DC10s will set off neighbouring car alarms or blow toddlers off their feet; these speakers go seriously loud and are thus perfect partners for good tube amps, such as 20W Single-Ended designs from the likes of Audionote for example. This is down to the Dual Concentric driver, with a treble unit firing out through the centre of a 10in bass/midrange unit, loaded by hefty rear ports.

It's hard to mask the innate sound of a speaker; it's a direct result of their design. Which is why the

Tannoys sound most unusual, and unlike anything else on the market, except other big Tannoys of course! They're wonderfully wide and open and deep and dimensional, instruments hovering in space like a hologram inside a soundstage which you can practically walk around. They're super fast too, bouncing along with zest and proffering an amazingly engaging rendition of the music that makes you want to keep listening late into the night. Although not the absolute *last* word in refinement, these loudspeakers do so much so well that it was without hesitation that this magazine has awarded them the accolade of our favourite floorstanding loudspeaker of the past year.



## ★ STAND MOUNT SPEAKER WINNER: ELAC BS243

**F**or those reviewers ensconced in their audiophile ivory towers, a sub-£1,000 speaker can be a shocking thing. If you listen to Martin Logan electrostatics at ten times the price as a matter of routine, putting up with the vagaries of a budget box boofing and booming is a pretty unsavoury experience! With this in mind, it's rare to find a reasonably priced loudspeaker that isn't holed below the waterline, so to speak, by variously poor cabinetry, weak drive units or simply its box-loudspeaker-with-moving-coil-drivers orientation...

It was with great relief then, that we auditioned the £1,000 Elac BS243, only to find an exceptionally couth sounding small standmounter. It's no

flake either; Elac's use of their JET ribbon tweeter is the hi-fi equivalent of a turbo charger; it magically wipes away so many of the pitfalls of small speakers by using a superb treble transducer that wouldn't disgrace a speaker at several times the price. It's a great device and all it has to do is integrate well with a decent mid/bass driver and a solid (285x170x232mm) cabinet for big audio dynamite. Fortunately, unlike certain other ribbon/moving coil drive unit pairings, Elac have got it right; the JET tweeter integrates smoothly with the Elac Crystal AS-XR aluminium sandwich mid/bass unit and the cabinet doesn't draw attention to itself either.

Hooked up to a beefy transistor amplifier (if it's valves you're running they've got to be particularly punchy)

and a decent front end, the Elacs really take your breath away. They're far more sophisticated than is expected at the price, with none of the squawking, screeching and boofing of many sub-£1,000 standmounters. The BS243's inherently transparent nature, allied to realistic three dimensional imaging, rhythmic alacrity and extended, delicate and sparkling treble make them an essential audition for those looking for grown-up transducers that take up a small space. They proved an unexpectedly pleasant surprise, and as such are worthy winners of an already hotly contested category.

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## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

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

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to **DR. JOHN HURLEY**, Letter of the Month winner in our **DECEMBER 2010** issue.

## Letter of the Month

### I'M CURED

I read with interest the editor's piece on the first page of the November issue and the "what's best for you..." message struck a chord with me.

I know this is going to be a strange one but I am not writing for advice. In fact I am writing to let you know that Audiophilia Nervosa is curable, should you want to be cured. I have gone through the mill of pre-power amps, power supplies for everything, valve monoblocks, standalone phono stages, in-vogue set ups (Voyd, Audio Innovations, Snell), out of fashion set ups, mismatched, etc, etc. Once I had a valve amplifier rig that consisted of seven boxes, the lights almost dimming as it all powered up. It was so complicated if my other half wanted the radio on she resorted to a small portable!

My other half has been in turns despairing, co-operative, a great pair of ears, and uninterested (read bored by it all!). Even having uncomplimentary nicknames for some of the units I had. I have tried the latest flavours (Sugden A21SE) old masters (Audionote Es) and all points in between.

How was I cured? Well, I got fed up with all the boxes first. I got fed up with the power up and power down routines of power supplies with everything and bought a Luxman integrated amp with tone controls (yes I know...!! but once over the shock they are actually quite useful, a bit like having the ability to change cables at will) with it's dirty great big 1970's power meters, gold brushed aluminium, and an internal phono stage.

I bought decent and complementary wiring that doesn't intrude in any obvious fashion, LFD interconnects and speaker cables. I used these throughout, including the internal



Get a Luxman amplifier with tone controls to cure hi-fi addiction, says Greg. Here's a modern Luxman amplifier.

'speaker wiring.

I got my trusty old Impulse H6's crossovers redesigned by a local speaker designer using his equipment and knowledge. I run a simple suspensionless turntable (Kuzma StabiStogi) and run a venerable Marantz CD94 Mark 2 with a spare Mark 1 in the loft for breakdowns.

My dealer recommended I try a Benz Micro Glider as a good match for the Kuzma when it was new. A good match? It sounds ideally matched to me!

Now this hasn't happened overnight, but by some careful planning and some lucky accidents/discoveries/good dealer recommendations. I honestly think I am cured.

I occasionally wonder if I would like to replace an item but every piece of the jigsaw complements each other. I really wouldn't want to start again.

It is therefore possible to have the best for your own ears, with patience, an open mind/ear – and not all for a king's ransom.

However, I still buy the mag because it is a hobby after all. I buy the motorcycle mags but have had the same bike for 12 years. Once something is right and needs no further work you will know. A bit like painting

a picture, the trick is knowing when it is finished and not to keep tinkering or you will spoil it.  
regards

**Greg Gilding**

Hi Greg - I do actually think that hi-fi requires a lot more thought than some give it. Let's face it – it's a tool to listen to music, and if you're up for spending serious sums, then you obviously want to get close to your music. But – and here's the thing – 'getting closer' isn't simply about getting the best sound. Actually, you want an accessible, useable package that you can just enjoy without endless fiddling. That's why CD took over from LP, because for most it was the best compromise between sonics and ease of use.

I'm reminded of my earlier 'motorcycle years', where I pursued a bike upgrade path following all the latest and greatest bikes, getting ever bigger, heavier and faster ones. In the end, I think I realised that just about the most fun I ever had on two wheels was from an old 1980 Suzuki TS185ER trials bike. It was a wild, rough as hell two-stroke 'rat bike' (as we used to call them) which I took here, there and everywhere;

routinely fell off it in the snow and unceremoniously dumped my little brother off the back of it once, whilst pulling a ridiculous wheelie!

My point is simple; fun comes from something that's both good at what it does and really accessible too. Living with an Arcam Solo Mini last year reminded me of this. Not the best hi-fi in the world but just great for when you wanted some decent sounds when the only alternative would have been the telly or transistor radio. **DP**

### CARTRIDGE CONFUSION!

You kindly printed my letter in the January 2010 concerning a suitable cartridge for my system which now comprises a Townshend Rock Reference turntable with Excalibur 2 tonearm (Van den Hul silver wired), Reson Mica cartridge, Gryphon Callisto 2100 amplifier (replacing the Sugden A21a) and Castle Conway speakers.

My Trichord Diablo phono stage has been sold and I intend to take your advice and purchase an Icon Audio PS1.2 phono stage. The Reson Mica and the silver wired tonearm are the problem and Noel suggested a Shure M97XE (possibly too warm and I wanted to try a moving coil) and David an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze (too expensive) or an AT OC9 MLII.

I was thinking along the lines of the AT OC9 MLII, but in the September 2010 issue, in response to another letter, it was suggested that the AT OC9 MLIII (the replacement for the II) is fairly bright and not a good match for silver wired tone arms.

I'm confused! I just want a moving coil that is detailed, dynamic but not overly bright or fatiguing. Any other suggestions for a moving coil up to £500? Would it be worthwhile getting the Excalibur 2 rewired by Audio Origami with say Cardas OFC copper litz?

**Trevor Scull  
Surrey**

Yes, I have another suggestion that I am sure is right for you: get an Ortofon Rondo Bronze moving coil cartridge as reviewed in our May 2010 issue. It is smooth and peak free, performs well all round and is suitably priced too. Sorry about the confusion. I hope this resolves the issue for you. **NK**

I would say that, if you're going to use a smooth sounding Icon Audio PS1.2 tube phono stage, you're not going to run into brightness problems with an OC9. It's not the brightest of Audio Technica's range by far, and has fine tracking. My feeling is that the Rondo Bronze would be softer and

smoother still, but you may enjoy the Audio Technica's punch and pace if you're a rock or pop fan. **DP**

### GOING LOW

Hope you or one of your team can help with my dilemma. I've been putting some home systems together over several years. I've ended up with four

I most often use. Asrock Ion 330 computer (neat little black block design and external power supply), Foobar player (experimenting with cplay though), Emu 0404 USB DAC (or sometimes Benchmark DAC1 which is currently in lounge system), Winsome Labs mouse amp (tripath and 40watts or so), then Leema Xeros. The sound



**A fine floorstander at a low price, the Q Acoustics 2050 (see August 2010 issue).**

(five including the kitchen one) systems. I've got so many systems, partly as I like experimenting – though that inclination has quietened down considerably with current economics – and because, as I developed a fondness for some pieces of equipment, it became difficult to part with them.

I know its anathema to you, but I buy second hand without audition as a way of experiencing hi-fi equipment that would be too costly new. In discovering hi-fi, I've been through a number of speakers in the budget to mid price range, including Acoustic Energy Evo 1s and 3s, Wharfedale Diamond 8.1 / 8.3, Quad 111 and 121, Monitor Audio R852md, Triangle Titus Ex, Linn Keilidh, Monitor Audio Radius 1s, Mission m71i, Leema Xeros, Monitor Audio PMC 703s. Those I regularly use are the Leema Xeros, the Monitor Audio PMC 703s in my lounge, Monitor Audio Radius 1 in kitchen and Castle Isos in my study. I like all of them, for different reasons, but I haven't hit the jackpot with any of them and I'm a bit lost.

My computer set up is the one

is detailed, very clear, refined, lots of positives, but it is bright and could do with more body.

When I use my Sugden A21a amplifier, this goes very well with the Xeros, but as I leave the amp on constantly, I cannot in all conscience leave the Sugden burning Class A electricity when I may be watching a video as much as listening to music. Cables are reasonable enough, including DNM reson biwire.

Fiddler that I am, I put my cheap Mission m71i speakers on, just to see how they sounded. They serve as rear speakers in a home cinema setup normally. I was aware of less detail, less precision, and a wallowy bass, at times, but what I heard was musical, more organic, warm, smooth and highly enjoyable. Less hi-fi, in certain respects, but more musical. I listened to the setup for a week and really enjoyed it.

Today, I've reconnected the Xeros and once again, I can listen into the recording, hear a more precise soundstage, but the sound has gone from emotionally engaging to intellec-





**...or try one of KEF's new Q Series loudspeakers.**

ually stimulating. It has lost something important. The hi-fi fanatic in me tells me to stick with Xeros as they are clearly 'better' speakers than the Missions. Another part of me wants to put the Missions back. And the rational/emotional balance tells me that I haven't struck gold with my choice of speakers yet.

Though I've worked my way through bright-ish sounding speakers, I think I've been in denial of how important the lower registers are for me. I don't (I think) yearn for visceral bass, but I want a full sound with decent bass, a liquid midrange and a sophisticated but not overly conspicuous top end. If I start selling some things, I could be looking at spending up to £700 or so for a second hand purchase. As an aspirational aside, though not at all within my budget, I've lusted after the Mordaunt Short Performa 6 since I first saw them and read the glowing reviews. As a future wish list item, would this deliver what I'm looking for?

To give further perspective, my main system comprises: Nakamichi MB10 CD player, Benchmark dac1, Musical Fidelity Pre v3 and P200, Musical Fidelity x 10 v3 buffer, modded Technics SL1200 turntable and Monitor Audio PMC 703. The speakers sound very good, big soundstage, dynamic, decent bass, detailed top end, but I find the system difficult to sit with for any length of time. I want to feel like I'm bathing in the sound of the music, but still it veers towards the forensic approach.

I did try the Xeros in this setup and didn't like the loss of the lower ranges and the pronounced treble delivery. I've still got AE Evo 3s which front my home cinema setup. These sound very nice with my Sugden a21a for example, but they don't reveal enough musical information. I really like the easy way the Castle Isos make music, but they sound

too small for a larger room. What speakers would deliver immersive but reasonably accurate sound for my purposes? Thanks for your help  
**Chris Miller  
London**

Hmmm... You are asking a lot, in a market where loudspeakers are usually balanced to sound bright. My first reaction is to suggest you try a pair of Q Acoustics 2050s. They are civilised, well engineered and have the right balance, and are in your price range. As you like Monitor Audios you could well try and get a pair of Gold Reference

20s or perhaps 60s. I found them fast but easy to listen to and very civilised. KEF are bringing out new Q Series loudspeakers that promise to be interesting and Epos will release a new £750 floorstander soon that, they say, will be fundamentally accurate. Accuracy at low price, and especially with quality treble, is not easy to find. **NK**

**HIGH OR LOW**

My system consists of Atlas cabling, Proac 1sc loudspeakers, Bryston B100 amplifier with integral Moving Magnet phono stage, Pathos logos, Bryston bcd-1 and Roksan Xerxes 20+ turntable with a Funk Firm fxr11 arm and Goldring 1042 cartridge.

I am really happy with the CD playback of the system and am lucky to have the option of the valve warmth of the Pathos or the more analytical Bryston at my decision as the CD player has balanced and RCA outputs, both amps are connected and can be selected very easily.

The advice I am now after is on the next analogue upgrade path. I have been advised on one front the phono stage in the Bryston is of high quality and a Sumiko Blackbird or Dynavector 10x5 would deliver some real sonic gains by going high output MC. On the other hand I may as well take the jump into low output MC.

I find it really hard to get any advice in northern England and anywhere locally who can demo different phono stages and cartridges together.

A new phono stage would allow me to use both amps in the same way as I can with the CD player. Could you tell me if the jump is worth it?

If I go low output MC I would be looking at a Lyra Delos/Titan cartridge (as I have been told they are very good and deliver a real feel of what's on the

vinyl with little colouration) and a phono stage around £1000-£1500 tops and currently being suggested are the Whest .20 or the Astin Trew. Would these be good options? (the Astin Trew allowing both amps to be used via RCA/XLR in the same way as the CD player is an attractive proposition),

Should I consider any other stage at this price point? I'm really looking for something completely transparent, allowing the cartridge and final amplification to give the sonic characteristics? I read your recommendations on the Icon Audio but worry this will be too coloured?

Thank you for your help. I find your magazine very useful for people getting into analogue playback.

**Steven Summerscales  
Hull**

I always advise the low output Moving Coil route, because fewer coil turns are used and this improves sound quality and tracking. High output MCs are little more than an awkward way to build an MM. You just put lots of turns onto the cantilever, instead of onto stationary generator coils as in an MM.

The Lyra Titan i is quite a cool operator and very refined. Expect an extremely lucid if slightly cold sound. It is surgically precise and incisively fast and would go well with valves or a Whest phono stage. **NK**



**Lyra Titan i moving coil cartridge, one of the best MCs available says David.**

I would suggest the combination of the ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd. phono stage and the Lyra Titan i cartridge; this I ran in my Marantz TT-1000 turntable last year (along with an Origin Live Enterprise tonearm) and it produced one of the most breathtaking sounds I've ever heard in my life, anywhere! Substituting the Titan i for another similarly priced cartridge produced a noticeable step down in sound quality, leaving me to conclude that the Lyra is one of the very best Moving Coils ever made, no less. It

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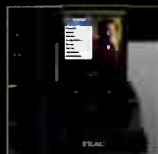
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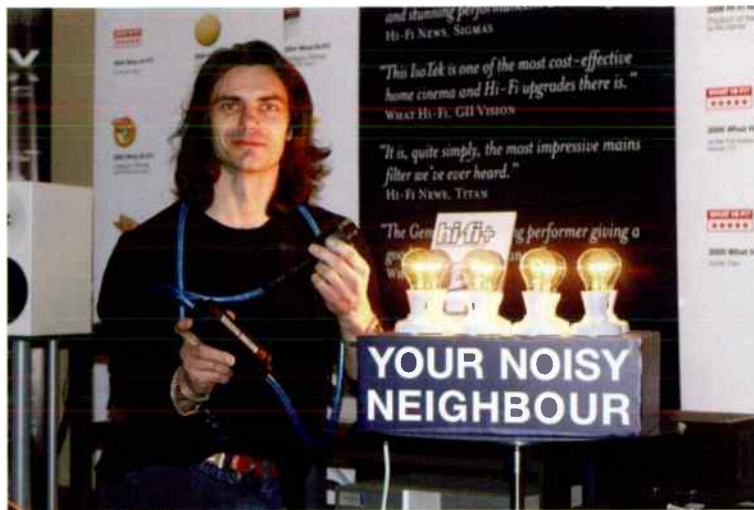


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is amazingly clean, delicate, neutral and forensic yet blisteringly fast and musical; true seat of the pants stuff!

The ANT phono stage is a great mix of the forensic solid-state Whest sound and the sumptuous Icon Audio flavour; it's sort of 'neutral but warm', if that's possible, and delightfully musical too. It sounds like you've got some fun coming... **DP**

### CABLE CURSE

I very much enjoy reading *Hi-Fi World*, which is attractively presented and, for the most part, intelligently written. However, I have become increasingly concerned that some of your reviews, particularly with regard to passive devices such as interconnecting cables, are written in a manner that severely compromises the integrity and reliability of your journal. In the past I've simply regarded these as a source of amusement and have let them pass by, but on reading your review of the Furutech Alpha PS-950 mains connector (October 2010, p. 87) I thought it was about time that something should be said.

Surely, you know as well as I do that a mains connector, no matter how elaborately conceived and constructed, can make absolutely no difference to the quality of the sound emanating from an audio system. Is it not apparent to your readers that behind the wall socket, into which this connector is plugged, lies maybe ten or twenty metres of a tatty piece of flat twin plus earth, and that this ridiculously expensive connector forms only a tiny fraction of the total domestic mains distribution network?

What concerns me is that to suggest that the cable enhances definition, smoothness, openness and speed (whatever these words actually mean) makes a mockery of the entire magazine and, sadly, makes the reviewer look like a fool.

Then, and rather more significantly, the question arises as to how seriously the reader should take your reviews of more substantial pieces of equipment. I appreciate that this places you in a difficult position with your advertisers, but could you not be a little more honest with your readership, and in this way gain their respect and credibility? (phrases like *more money than sense* and *laughing all the way to the bank* come to mind, but would be discretionary.)

My comments might equally well apply to other interconnects. The sole desirable quality of a loudspeaker lead is that it has low resistance to increase the damping factor. Nothing else really matters. In fact the best loudspeakers leads can be made from a few lengths of insulated copper flex-weave of the type made for transmitting antennas and costing around £2 per metre. And for phono interconnects, a length of 100U satellite coax soldered between a couple of Maplins best phono plugs will outperform anything on the market for a cost of around £8, with negligible capacitance, 100 percent screening and a frequency response extending to GHz. What more can one need?

And, while I'm here, just a final note about your amplifier tests. Virtually all amplifiers nowadays have a flat response over the audible range, and negligible distortion, so such tests tell you little about the real quality of the equipment. What are far more important, but appreciably more difficult to measure, are parameters like intermodulation distortion and, critically, transient response. In the early days, hi-fi magazines used to show square-wave tests, comparing input and output oscillograms at a variety of frequencies, which were far more revealing and not at all difficult implement. Could you not revive this approach?

I do hope, for the sake of the

reputation and reliability of your journal, that you take these comments on board. Do publish and reply to this letter if you wish, but I suspect that you won't.  
yours sincerely  
**Ray Howgego**

It is seemingly difficult to explain how a short mains connector can affect sound quality when it sits in such a long cable run, but their manufacturers claim they act as filters, removing higher frequency rubbish and I believe I am right in saying that this action has recently been demonstrated to the Advertising Standards Authority in a dispute that has arisen over cable claims. People buy these cables and are very happy with the improvements they hear. We publish these letters regularly.

The differences in sound quality between loudspeaker cables and interconnects is accepted by most people, and certainly by us, even if the exact mechanisms are difficult to explain. Sceptics usually say such listeners are deluded so I include one such letter for your perusal.

Basic lumped electrical parameters such as resistance and inductance appear to have little to do with it. Materials and dielectrics, as well as screens, appear to be exerting influence, but by what mechanisms we are all unsure. Personally, I suspect materials colouration affects all hi-fi and is an all-pervasive phenomenon, and current density is the stimulus. However, vibration and microphony, and radio pickup may also be influences.

Intermodulation distortion is a measure of non-linearity, as is



**U.S. Statesman Donald Rumsfeld had a few things to say about what we don't know, David observes!**

harmonic distortion. They measure the same thing by different means. It's just that intermodulation distortion comes in a wide variety of forms (second / third order sum and difference etc) and is awkward to measure (we are able to measure all forms). Harmonic distortion gives a single figure of goodness in this area, which is why it is commonly used.

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wave at the repetition rate and an associated extended harmonic structure. The shape of the square wave is altered by amplitude and phase changes of its harmonics. A square wave will induce and show ringing of a resonant system but this can usually be seen in the amplitude response. I well recall the square wave tests you talk about and have used them myself, but they reveal no new information over and above what we already publish.

Times have moved on and our instrumentation and understanding of underlying phenomena have also changed. I understand where you are coming from but there are plenty of highly skilled and experienced engineers working in audio who have heard cable differences and accept them.

We receive a regular trickle of complaining letters about the cable sound issue, asking or demanding we cease publishing 'misleading' information and, for the sake of openness we are happy to publish them. But I'm afraid to say that most people with any experience here accept sound quality differences do exist. The following view, opposite to yours, is from reader Rudy Deblieck. **NK**

*So, I get a bit angry with all these people who keep on telling us that the importance of cable quality is overrated, that burning in is nonsense and that it all comes down to 'psycho-acoustics'. They claim that 'one simply cannot measure these so called 'audible differences'...*

*For crying out loud: I am a solid state physicist myself and as a scientist I know very well how to conduct an experiment, how to compare setups and finally, how to be careful about not drawing conclusions from what has not been measured in the test.*

*The fact is that no measuring device actually measures what the ear-brain combination hears and we should be humble enough to admit that we are not able to do so properly.*

**Rudy Deblieck**

We often get letters from people who 'know' what constitutes a good cable/interconnect and what does not, reducing everything to a question of resistance, capacitance and inductance. Whilst this undeniably plays a vital part, I feel they'd do well to have an understanding of philosophy too, at this point.

There are, to quote the unlikely source of Donald Rumsfeld, "known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are

things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns; there are things we do not know we don't know".

The assertion that some engineers make is that we can know everything through present knowledge; their contention is that science is now 'finished' and what exists is measurable, and thus if it isn't measurable it doesn't exist.

This of course is a logical fallacy; in the 15th century people could not empirically 'prove' that the earth was a globe, yet that did not mean it was not.

Likewise, until fairly recently we couldn't detect the existence of Pluto; that did not mean it didn't exist until recently! So I think a degree of perspective is required; good scientists know that there are known unknowns. One of the fascinating aspects of science is finding those unknowns and then finding ways to know them. If ever they need any suggestions, they need look no further than hi-fi, which is full of them! **DP**

### SEARCH FOR COLOUR

*Can you suggest any current loudspeakers that give good portrayal of tonal colour, or 'good tone' as it used to be called, and what are you looking to pay nowadays? There are plenty of sharp, detailed speakers out there which can play 100bpm, but their monochrome presentation leaves me cold. Are paper cones still the way to go if you want a full, colourful sound?*

*I would be delighted to hear your views on this subject.*

*cheers,*

**Jaswant Gill**

I see it as you see it Jas: too few loudspeakers reproduce a convincing range of tonal colour and the drive toward an enhanced sense of speed, clarity and detail, obtained by boosting treble does not help. Electrostatics from Martin Logan



**Princesound Prince IIs, a full range electrostatic loudspeaker that is smooth and reveals tonal colours.**

and Kingsound, as well as Quad are strong in this area. I also rather like Spendor's ep38 polymer cones that have a damped sound lacking zing, found for example is the S8e we use as benchmark loudspeakers.

Pure paper cones are good in some areas but can have ragged upper treble when stiffened. These days manufacturers like Dali use pulp fibre cones that I've found surprisingly neutral in themselves and good communicators of tonal colour, but Dali unfortunately like raised treble too. Tannoy are a company that steadfastly refuse to produce a loudspeaker with raised treble and their fibre / polymer cones are pretty good at conveying instrumental colour.

Depressingly, both neutrality and the transmission of tonal colour are properties little considered in modern loudspeakers. **NK**

Hi Jaswant - aside from the Q Acoustics 2050 in the budget region, the most obviously tonally varied speaker I've heard recently is the MyAudio Design My Clapton Grand MM. It's expensive at £3,500 or so, but it has a great tonal palette, and this from paper drivers. The designer pays meticulous attention to passive componentry, wiring and materials technology, and you can hear it! **DP**

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**Ortofon Cadenza Black cartridge offers a very smooth sound. See April 2010 issue.**

### CADENZA QUERY

I have been reading your reviews of the various Ortofon Cadenza cartridges, Windfeld and A90, with great interest and in great detail (!). I find them very useful (some of the most comprehensive out there I feel). I find these reviews particularly useful in light of the fact that it is so difficult to find dealers that carry stock and are willing to A/B demo most of these cartridges.

However, I wonder if you might be able to clarify something for me. I own a Michell Gyro (fully upgraded to near Orbe status), with Origin Live Silver Mk1 arm, Ortofon Kontrapunkt b cartridge (all purchased 2002) and Tom Evans Microgroove Plus (later version using newer Lithos design) phono stage. I use AVI lab series pre-power and AVI Brio loudspeakers. So it is well and truly solid-state all the way. I do find the Kontrapunkt b to be cool and emotion free (via solid state amps), as you suggest in one of your reviews. I am therefore looking to soften the sound with something easier on the ear, and I am obviously now looking to update my cartridge after 8 years of light to moderate use.

I am aware that the b (whilst something of a benchmark) is not quite state of the art. So I am looking for something better than a straight swap for the Cadenza Blue. From what you have written I feel as though I should also steer clear of the Bronze because of its treble 'populist' presentation. This means that I have been considering the Cadenza Black, Windfeld and A90. I have discounted the A90, largely for reasons of price, availability and it doing so little more than the Cadenza Black sonically (and sometimes less) for a lot more money.

Therefore I think it is between the Black and the Windfeld. What I can't figure out from your review (no direct comparison is made) is which is 'better' generally speaking. From the frequency response graph I feel as though I should

opt for the Cadenza Black. Do you think this is wise, for a solid state system? Above all, my tastes are a truthful hires. tonally neutral sound, with nothing added.

In case you were wondering about my arm, I intend to upgrade my Silver Mk1 to Mk3c when I change the cartridge.

I would really appreciate any advice you might be willing to give. Thanks a lot for your time.  
best regards,  
**Chris Lloyd**

We are talking about fine difference here and where Ortofon wish to go with their high end designs. The Cadenza Black is a later design than the Per Windfeld and Ortofon have honed it for a slightly darker delivery. It really was very mild mannered but you have to listen in to cartridges like this to appreciate what they are capable of and the Black was pretty damn impressive in its sound staging, detailing yet good dynamic punch that gives solid bass that's tuneful. It's a fantastic cartridge and more even handed than the Kontrapunkt b, but whilst you will appreciate its qualities MCs like this need an Icon Audio PS3 to do them full justice in my view. Then you'll suddenly get a sound stage that opens right up, displaying cavernous depth. **NK**

particularly highlighted when you state that a piece of kit is ruthless about the quality of the source.

If you only have high quality recordings, no problem, but people will generally have bought music they enjoyed and not usually considered what studio/engineer recorded it and either not care, or just be disappointed. See where I am going with this? I think most people will see a few pieces of kit that get well reviewed, then decide which one they like hopefully after hearing it themselves. If there really was only one excellent bit of kit in each category, there would only be one hi-fi magazine. I personally, am glad it isn't so. It's one good reason I look forward each month to reading your mag.  
keep up the good work.  
**Paul Clewlow.**

Thanks Paul – your point illustrates something I always end up agonising over around October time – that of the Hi-Fi World Awards. It is so, so, so hard sometimes to come up with 'one' winner, and so arbitrary, and yet it must be done otherwise we descend into a world of seemingly complete subjectivity where we can't make up our mind about anything! I don't like doing it, I must admit, but just when I dwell on this thought then a product that's so obviously better in its category than any others comes along! Ultimately, the best hi-



**Ayre 5xe amplifier is fully balanced**

### DEALERS DO IT

I have just read Tim Jury's letter in your November issue re the different conclusions arrived at in different magazines about whether one piece of kit is the best at that price point etc, etc...

I too read other reviews and found this, though it never troubled me as I am generally not in the market to buy. However, I think I found one reason this is so whilst reading blind tests by the public in What Hi Fi and Video. Their question usually is: do you like kit A over B or C. In this type of review, they are deciding which setup makes the test music sound the best. A reviewer will try for more objective assessments. This is

fi is the what you like most in your own system, in your own house, with your favourite music. **DP**

### TRANSFORMER

I particularly enjoyed the November 2010 edition of H-Fi World, especially its review of the Music First Audio Classic II preamp fitted with silver transformers. I own the Classic model fitted with larger copper transformers and can vouch for the improvement the upgrade brings. It's a fantastic piece of equipment and I take great pleasure not just from its sound but also from its green credentials and bomb proof nature.

However, I have a hi-fi dilemma

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in that I am considering upgrading my current system and would appreciate your advice. I want to upgrade my power amp to one in the £3k - £5k price range but my head is spinning faster than the discs I play because of the complexity caused by connecting my sub. via its high level speaker binding post connections, to a power amp used in conjunction with the MF preamp. I would prefer to buy a power amp with properly balanced xlr inputs; I've put together a DIY lead that take the MF's balanced xlr outputs to my Quad 909's Quadlink balanced input and the sound is significantly better than the unbalanced connection.

My system consists of the MF preamp, Quad 909 power amp, Sony xa5400es SACD/CD (sounds great with 2 channel SACD), B&W 805s and a REL Storm 5 subwoofer.

The problem is as follows: most of the power amps in the specified price range are either monoblocks, fully balanced throughout or Class D type. These designs make it tricky to take a high level subwoofer connection of the type favoured by REL from the power amp speaker binding posts. REL have supplied me with a de-coupled lead that overcomes the danger of summing the outputs on monoblock amps, but I've no idea if the ground connection can be taken to the chassis of the preamp, given its passive design.

As for connecting power amps with fully balanced design such as the Ayre 5xe, how on earth is this possible without having to buy another sub? There so many possibilities here, most of which seem likely to blow up the equipment. Normally a line-level signal fed from the preamp would solve the issue, but the MF preamp lacks a spare line-level output.

I have considered the valve route and am curious to try Icon Audio's power amps. I'd appreciate your advice on running a sub from them. Any suggestions of power amps you have would be of interest, whether

transistor or valve based. Other models I've considered are the Karan KAS 180 and the Ayre mentioned above. I've not heard any of them, but they seem highly respected.

Another issue I have concerns matching power amp input sensitivity and impedance to the preamp. What levels should I look at in a power amp fed from the MF?

Perhaps I'm exaggerating problems here but the proliferation of 'exotic designs' in power amps within the chosen price range does make things more complicated, not least of all when using a passive preamp. Many thanks for your help. Best regards

**Paul Wizonski**

Hi Paul. Most power amplifiers are unbalanced in themselves (internally) and just use balanced-to-unbalanced input buffer chips. Their negative loudspeaker terminal is usually connected to ground. Very few are truly balanced throughout, although bridged amplifiers by nature must not have either output terminal grounded and nor can most Class D amps.

You can connect the REL from the positive loudspeaker terminal to amplifier ground (i.e. the casework) and this should work, but in most cases using the negative terminal will be just the same. All amplifiers have protection circuits, by the way, and they will kick in if things are not right, providing you turn volume up slowly (i.e. do not draw too much current instantaneously).

So your fears are largely unfounded and nothing should blow up. Do of course take a close look at manufacturer's warnings on what can and cannot be done with their amplifiers, before buying. Or e-mail them to ask whether the loudspeaker negative terminal can be grounded as this is a simple enough question to answer when a circuit diagram is available.

I am sorry to say I have not heard either of the power amplifiers you mention and both look very interesting. Fully balanced working in solid-state amplifiers does usually provide a great sound, very tidy and clean, but it is quite different to the presentation of a valve amplifier. I suggest you try and get a few demos. to see what you like, and don't forget Quad II-eighties either.

Most power amps have 1V input sensitivity and 10k input impedance and this is fine for the MF preamp.

**NK**

## DECISIONS

I'm hoping you can help clear my head a bit. I'm looking for a new pair of 'speakers, floor standers or bookshelf (can't even make that decision!). My room is 5m x 9m with the usual soft furnishings. The speakers would need to fit into a space about 2.5mtr apart firing down the room. Unfortunately they will be close to the side wall up to about 6" away from side and 12" from rear.

I'm looking to spend around £1000 but can go £1400ish. My kit (which I'm perfectly happy with - no plans to change) consists of Icon Audio Mk I Stereo 40, Meridian G07 CD, CA 640T and Project 5.1 rpm. Most of my listening is on the turntable and FM radio for back ground listening. Music is varied Rock, Blues, Classical, Prog, Acoustic and I want to get into Jazz (but that's another letter!).

Having only got into valves about 8 months ago I've since clogged my



**The Mordaunt Short Mezzo 6 offers a svelte sound and is worth hearing.**

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head with so much 'speaker research I shiver looking at any more and find my self beginning to hate speaker reviews! I know I should audition what I can but living in the frozen wastes of North East England my choices of suppliers is fairly limited. My plan is once I've got a shortlist of three or four to try to listen to them. But getting to the elusive three or four is proving to be very difficult. I'm basing my initial idea on something of at least 90dB sensitivity but the more I read the more I understand the ease of drive (cross over) is equally important?

At the moment I'm using Mezzo 2s, which I quite like. I borrowed some ATC 10s a while ago on the understanding they were a whole step up (at least) from what I was using but to be honest I wasn't impressed. They certainly pushed the sound into the room (it was like David Bowie was sitting next to me) but I felt as if they were 'restrained' somehow. I guess they need more than 40Watts to really drive them.

My short list at present is something by Living Voice (quite hard to find any info on these apart from their web site, and I imagine quite hard to track down a pair I can listen to) and PMC TB2i.

Also, my first thoughts before I started to get in too deep were Dali Ikon 6s. Oh yeah – almost forgot Icon Audio also do speakers which I guess would fit the bill – can you get a sense of the state of mind I'm in!

Can you recommend any more I should add to this list or give some guide lines (am I being too optimistic aiming for 90dB?). Hoping you can help,

**Graham.**

Mordant Short Mezzo 11s (I presume you do not mean Goodmans Mezzo 11s from the 1960s!) have quite an easy going sound and are very civil. If that's what you like – and why not – I would suggest you look further up their range, at the Mezzo 6 for example. ATC and PMC are altogether different by nature and may jar a little. Triangle have a new version of their fine Antal that would likely suit, and Epos are to introduce a new floorstander, the Epic 5, priced at £750, that they say will be accurate. I suspect that the presentation of your Mezzos will not be easily matched though. A Tannoy DC8 would certainly suit, but it is much more expensive. Modern floorstanders manage 90dB from one watt and it is a realistic target. **NK**

Another good modern floorstander with an open balance and fine, 90dB sensitivity is the Monitor Audio BX5 (£500). It's a little lower than your budget but the rest could be spent

on your front end at a later date – or even, perish the thought, music! **DP**

### PILOT

In reference to your MF Audio's passive preamp review in the Nov issue I use a tc electronic levelplot preamp (see <http://www.tcelectronic.com/levelplot.asp>). I just wonder if anybody has used one and what they think? I use it in lots of different systems and think its a great bit of kit, plus you can pick one up for about £50!

**Ian Park.  
Surrey**

Hi Ian. Their website say this is a Bourns potentiometer, which is slightly different, because it does not provide gain (i.e. will not make the music louder). The idea of a 'passive pot' (potentiometer) is an old one and it works nicely when there is enough spare gain in the system, lets say between a CD player (2V output) and a power amplifier (1V input absolute maximum). Nearly all CD players (and all other silver disc players) produce 2V or more, and nearly all power amps need 1V for full output so here a passive pot like the Creek OBH-22 which I like to use, works fine. The OBH-22 adds some twiddly bits by having switched inputs and remote control of volume, plus a mute function. That's all a lot of people need.

The MF Audio is altogether



*Try a Monitor Audio BX5 says David.*

different. It uses an audio step-up transformer and these things are more complex and more expensive than a potentiometer. The advantage is that it provides +6dB of gain (x2), as well as attenuation, just enough to put between many external phono stages, tuners (etc) and a power amplifier. It also breaks ground loops, providing complete isolation of source from power amplifier. There's much praise for the MF Audio; it's a great product. **NK**

### RUNAWAY

We have been experiencing the new Icon Audio MB845s for just over a week. This is an amplifier that does



*Icon Audio MB845 MkII once belonged to the SBS!*

# Definition

**Stereo Sound  
Grand Prix  
Award 2009**

Definition DC10T

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

Definition DC10T

**Image Hi-Fi  
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Definition DC8

**MEDIA  
TOTAAL  
AWARD  
2009  
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Definition DC8T



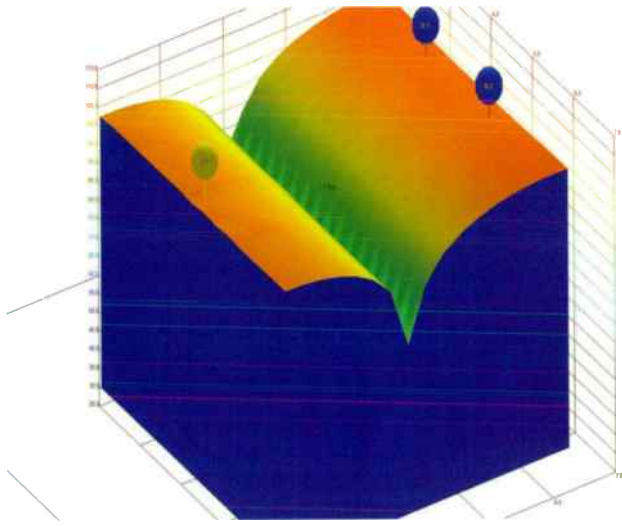
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# TANNOY



**A square room resonates strongly, giving boomy bass. This is a Cara wave tracing analysis that illustrates Matt's problem. High pressure points lie at the walls.**

everything. It can make you tingle with Wagnerian delight, or cause tears to roll down your cheeks from nostalgia driven Simon and Garfunkel. Its magic hits everything right between the eyes and expresses the miracles that sound can imbue, inflict, and bestow upon the emotions. The hooligan that was the first MB845 has been sent to Eton, ran away and joined the S.B.S., and has come back transformed beyond our wildest imaginations.

Thank you Noel for putting a picture of it in H.F.W. and suggesting that a reader should get it. The feeling it gives me is like skipping an ocean-going yacht in a Force Eight, close hauled, crashing from wave to wave, hitting the crest of one and down into the trough, the bows hitting the bottom like a shotgun blast: the whole boat shudders and the sails regain the wind and we're off again, the salt-stained magnificence of it all and the serene calm that follows as the dawn comes up.

I know if that Keywood fella says something is good it is, no question, and this amp turns the page on all others. Owing the Icon audio MB845 Mark 2 is another thing you've got to do before you die!

thanks again  
**James Gould (toned down by Cath Gould!)**

Well, thanks for that James. It is a bit special isn't it? I'm glad it hits you the way it hit me. Not many amplifiers sound like the MB845 MkII and David Shaw has done a great job. He's got the sort of dedication and determination it takes to get a valve amp right – and what a result. **NK**

### TIGHTER BASS

I am desperately trying to get my hi-fi system to deliver a full and tighter bass. At present it seems full but can seem a bit boomy at times.

My system consists of a Marantz 63 KI CD player, custom built turntable with Rega RB250 arm and Denon DL304 cartridge, a Separo p88i tube amp. (fantastic piece of kit and don't know why it hasn't been tested by a magazine before) and your very own KLS9



**Icon Audio LA4 MkII preamp uses early 6SN7 triodes for a svelte delivery.**

loudspeakers.

The amp has no phono stage so I'm running the turntable through my Audio Analogue Puccini se on board MC stage. Mains cable (Russ Andrews Classics) interconnects (Russ Andrews Crystal) loudspeaker cable is Russ Andrews 8vs. By the way, before I had the Separo amp I was running everything through the Audio Analogue Puccini and the boomy bass was present then.

My room size is 5m x 5m with 2.4m ceiling height and all kit is spiked on to a concrete floor. Have I heard somewhere before that adding a sub can tune the speakers?

I'm sorry to throw all this info at you and hope you can help.

With best regards

**Matt**

Hi Matt. The main problem is a square room that will boom strongly at 35Hz. Look at the first mode of your room as depicted by Cara; there are high pressure zones at the loudspeaker end and listener end. There isn't so much you can do about this, other than move house! KLS9 is a large loudspeaker with powerful bass so it will provoke your room's main resonant mode by putting a lot of energy into it.

A quick and dirty solution is to put a foam bung in the port; some even use an old sock. This will lower bass output and lessen the boom. Keep the loudspeakers as far away from walls as possible too.

Another aid is absorptive settees with deep internal foam cushions. I have a three seater, two seater and armchair stuffed into one room to damp down bass and they do it very effectively.

Alternatively, you can try corner absorbers from somewhere like Studiospares ([www.studiospares.com](http://www.studiospares.com)) where they have foam corner cubes for £12.90, as well as more expensive

bass traps. Stacks of cubes in two corners may work; in my experience you need sheer volume to absorb bass energy and this may well add up to almost £100 or so (6 cubes) as a treatment. I have not tried it, I must say, and can only speculate that it should help.

I rather doubt you'll cure the problem altogether, but you may well be able to lessen its subjective impact. I do hope this helps.

**NK**

### REPLACEMENT

Simple question. I am looking to replace valves (12AX7, 12AU7, 12FQ7 and 5AR4). I am looking for the best of these types. Can you point me toward what manufacturers I should consider



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as there seems to be quite a few in the marketplace?

I am getting a "whisper" sound, almost like a minor swirling wind coming through on one of my channels. When I swapped the preamp outputs, the noise changed to the opposite channel, implying that the preamp is at fault, and I would like to try new valves. I am not sure what valve it is likely to be, and I don't have a circuit diagram. The servicer is in the USA and the preamp is obsolete. It is, however, astonishingly good to listen to and the most musical piece of kit I have had so far. It left my old Audio Research stuff with a very sorry look on its face.

I can change these things out myself as I have Electronic / Electrical skills, but alas, my education started too late to grasp valve circuit topology. Your advice would be greatly appreciated and keep up the good work with the magazine. Having letters published in the magazine put a smile on my face, but, my missus thought I was just weird. She does however, like listening to the music.

**Ewan Scott,  
Aberdeen.**

Heavens Ewan, you ask difficult questions! I cannot honestly suggest the best tubes from personal experience. As you must be aware some of those tubes like 12FQ7 and 5AR4 rectifier likely won't come in premium versions. For the 12AX7 (ECC83) and 12AU7 (ECC82) the best are New Old Stock (NOS) from Philips and Mullard but these are now very expensive. You can pay £60 or more per item.

You obviously have an 'interesting' mystery preamp. Audio Research inhabit a unusual world of their own with tubes and 'are what they are'.

I suggest you listen to an Icon Audio LA4 MkII preamp sometime, with its 6SN7 triodes. It is very easy going and ultra smooth and is likely what will appeal to you as a valve head, **NK**

### DELOS A DELIGHT?

Due to the fact I know your Editor David Price is a bit partial to Lyra pickup cartridges, then surely you have had your mits on one by now I would imagine? When are we likely to read your thoughts in regards to the Delos. I've never owned a Lyra but on what bits of info I've gleaned so far in regards to the Delos, let's say I'm tempted to try one. But..!

Sorry if this is the nth time that you have been asked this question.

kind regards  
**Keith Burford**

Hi Keith - amazingly no, I haven't tried it yet. Let me assure you that I'm working to change this state of affairs ASAP! Still, I'd hazard a guess it will be superb. But then again, I am, as you state, a Lyra-phile! **DP**

### IN A SPIN

I've just retired, converted my garage into a dedicated listening room and have rediscovered the wonders of listening to vinyl LPs.

It all began when my architectural designer John Chapman came to measure up the garage and spotted my old Luxman turntable waiting to be shipped off to the local tip. Wiping a tear from his eye he ventured to ask about my interest in hi fi.

He, being a long standing audiophile enthusiast, was quick to point out that vinyl is not dead and is much more satisfying to listen to than CD. I was somewhat sceptical at this stage so I took him into the lounge and gave him a demonstration of my system. I thought my Rega Apollo, Rega Cursa and two Rega Maia power amps bi-amped into my PMC FB1 + speakers would sort him out.

However, he was only moderately impressed and suggested I have a listen to his Garrard 401, EAR Phono amp, Croft amp and Spondor BC1 speakers, which I duly did and was gobsmacked by what I heard.

By coincidence a short while later an old friend mentioned he had a 70's Transcriptor Hydraulic Reference turntable sleeping quietly under his bed - and would I like it? A good retirement project I thought, so with advice from John and Michael Gammon at Transcriptors I set about restoring it. It was also at this time I stumbled across



**New Old Stock valves like Mullards reputedly sound best and fetch the highest prices.**

the Letters page in your August 2009 edition where another reader had been on a similar path. I duly took your advice and fitted the Goldring 1042 cartridge to the now rewired SME 3002S2 arm. I installed the turntable on a purpose made shelf screwed tightly to a granite block wall and was duly rewarded by a lovely well balanced sweet sound.

So what's the problem? Well, if a 70's turntable can achieve this what more can I do to increase my listening pleasure?

Though the Rega equipment has served me well I am aware that it sounds a little cold and lacks the emotional engagement I experienced listening to John's system.

I listen increasingly to Classical LPs (usually bought locally from charity shops) but also some jazz and rock. I would like to achieve the same wide soundstage I get from the Apollo but with a richer, more subtle and articulate sound that is sympathetic to the likes of Sibelius, Mahler and Elgar.

I'm in two minds, hence my letter. Should I look to improve the phono



**Quad II-forty valve power amplifier is a good base for a valve system.**

stage (currently I'm plugged into the MM of the Cursa) and perhaps change the Transcriptor motor to a DC type etc. (I see Russ Andrews has an MM phono amp based on the Rega design).

Or should I take the leap and go for valve amplification (valve equipment is still a big mystery to me) with perhaps speakers that are better suited to the size of my room which is 2.85m by 4.6m and 2.9m ceiling height (a 1 to w ratio of 1.61, the golden mean ratio also mentioned in your letters pages of September 2004).

I'm about to start auditioning some options and so would very much appreciate your guidance on A, some system upgrade possibilities and B, how I could migrate to a comparable valve based system with a budget of around £5-6K.

Meanwhile, I'm in the process of making some sound traps (Rockwell Slab framed in 4" by 1" and covered in white linen) to help further tune the room acoustic.

Keep me busy in my retirement! All suggestions welcome.

Yours sincerely

**Alan Coddington  
Falmouth  
Cornwall**

Hi Alan. If you liked a Croft / Spendor presentation then I suggest you go down the valve route. That is a fairly classic combination and you can, with valves, come up with variants on it to suit your taste. For example, Quad II-forties with KT88s would be

suitable for your room and they give a clean, brisk, modern presentation. Quad II-eighties add more muscle and are fine amplifiers. For a gentler sound try an Icon Audio Stereo 300. Just bear in mind replacement 300Bs are expensive. Then try listening to modern Spendor loudspeakers fitted with their ep38 polymer cone. In a room of limited size you may need a stand mount loudspeaker to avoid bass boom. This will, I believe, get you on the road to a system that works well with classical music and also has more life and soul than what you are used to. **NK**

### MINI PROBLEM

Having read your replies to Leigh Penny's questions in the past two issues, I really feel you should take a long, hard look at yourselves when it comes to computer audio. You either embrace it or you don't. People write to you for advice because of your knowledge and expertise. And when it comes to most matters hi-fi, you display this admirably. So if you choose to give advice relating to computer audio, you owe it to your readers and to yourselves to research your answers more thoroughly or simply admit that you don't know.

Bob Hurst had it about right (I loved his "charmingly misinformed") but having printed his letter you then carry on regardless with your (Noel's) second reply.

Some comments here. You seem surprised that your Mac would only output 44.1 or 48kHz via USB to a "96kHz capable" Cambridge Audio DacMagic. Well actually it isn't. This device (as are many others) is limited to 48k via USB. In your defence Cambridge Audio don't exactly shout about this.

I also have a suspicion about your jitter analysis. You write that jitter from your Mini was fine at 44.1 yet not so good at 48kHz. But you don't say what files you were playing. My suspicion is that you were playing 44.1kHz files. Played back at their native resolution – no problem. But to play back at 48k, OSX would resample them real time. This is a BAD THING. And would explain your results (had you been able to measure 96k more badness would have resulted). Which brings us neatly back to Leigh Penny's (LP from now on) question regarding playback of files having different sample rates.

Here you write that output rate is set in 'Audio MIDI Setup' and that once set "you do not have to change it. All files are converted to this rate." Whilst technically true this is appalling advice (see BAD THING above). Here in particular you should hang your head in shame.

Fortunately there is a solution. LP doesn't offer any information as to what

software he's using for playback but with a Mac, iTunes is a fair bet. Until quite recently this would have been a delicious irony; the slickest of user interfaces coupled with the (allegedly – don't sue me!) worst sound quality. The solution is software available from either Pure Music or Amarra (Google them). They both do similar things. They interface with iTunes, taking over playback duties with a reported increase in sound quality whilst retaining iTunes' functionality etc. (I would like to make it clear, I use neither Macs nor iTunes so cannot confirm the sound quality issues but the weight of evidence from users is pretty overwhelming). My suggestion would be for Pure Music. It's significantly cheaper (\$129 vs \$695 for Amarra) and also available as a trial download, free for 15 days. Can't really lose.

There is also a second very worthwhile benefit; automatic sample rate switching. So your CD rips will play back at 44.1kHz and any hirez downloads or rips will be played at their native resolution up to 192kHz (hardware permitting) without having to change any settings.

Back to LP. All you need now is a DAC. And I'm afraid I'm going to have to disagree with Noel again. How best to get your digits out of your Mac seems a fair place to start. Cat, skin, ways, many! Without getting too involved, and especially if you will only be connecting your Mac to the DAC, then asynchronous USB would be my choice (not to be confused with asynchronous upsampling). I hear what Noel says regarding isolation from the noisy computer environment. Valid but now addressed by several non-optical options and only one of many issues.

An aside: Noel alludes to Naim Audio's website ref their own DAC. They don't like USB connection to a computer. I have no problem with Naim – they're a wonderful company. But they would say that wouldn't they? Watch them change their minds once they have their own implementation. Contrast with dCS for example, who use asynchronous USB; and they know a thing or two about digital.

For £330 or so the HRT StreamerII+ would seem to represent a fine mix of sound quality with value for money (and a 5 globe review from Patrick Cleasby in the August issue). It also claims a "completely isolated path between the computer and audio system" although the details here are somewhat vague.

I would suggest that for now there would be little to gain spending more until you reach the Ayre QB-9 at about £2k. USB only (asynch of course) the Ayre isolates from the computer using opto-couplers and also provides both balanced and single-ended out. I'm



**The transparent ep38 polymer cone of a Spendor gives a smooth midband suited to classical music.**



surprised Noel doesn't already have one!

Both these machines are currently limited to 96kHz but 192k will follow soon. The Ayre will almost certainly be upgradeable while HRT are supposedly bringing out a 192k version in the near future if this is important to you.

If other inputs are required then the new Arcam rDac might be worth a look (£299ish). Again it has asynchronous USB input (here licensed from dCS) as well as conventional optical and electrical S/PDIF inputs for plugging in set top boxes and the like.

Finally (to LP again) if you were to buy the HRT, with the money saved from your £1,300 budget you could further improve sound quality by replacing the Mini's hard drive with an SSD (solid state drive). It doesn't need massive capacity as your music files would best be stored on an external drive, preferably network attached (ethernet, not USB) and away from the system or even in another room. Isolate the computer from the mains with a power conditioner/filter, get a decent quality USB lead and buy an iPad.

Okay the iPad won't make any difference to the sound but what a controller it would make.

**Andy Holland,  
Manchester**

Thanks for all the info Andy – and your opinions. It is very interesting, if very much in the assertive computer audio / internet tradition based on internet folklore.

That USB outputs 48kHz maximum into a Cambridge DacMagic warns that what USB outputs is determined by what is connected, unlike S/PDIF. I should have made this clearer, but it gets very long winded if every option is catalogued and explained.

The Rohde & Schwarz generator output a 48kHz test signal to the Mac Mini direct and this was clearly stated in our reply; it was not upsampled from a 44.1kHz file as you have surmised. Your subsequent arguments rest on the assumption that the Mac will degrade the signal if asked to sample rate convert. Sample rate conversion is a mathematical process based on an algorithm. It does not necessarily cause degradation, unless the algorithm is a poor or compromised one. Internet folk lore might think otherwise but in real life these situations are never so black-and-white; it comes down to quality of implementation.

The most likely source of jitter above 44.1 sample rate lies in a clock multiplier; these can be very crude. The Mac Mini likely runs a 44.1 clock.

Noise isolation by optical S/PDIF

is a little confusingly explained in the terminology generally used. Noise in this case means earth currents. Non optical options will only provide earth current isolation through the use of transformers. Internal computer noise is entirely different in nature, comprising radio frequency hash, usually eliminated by low pass filtering.

What Naim think cannot be categorically rubbished because you or others 'think' differently. Have you seen the variety and sophistication of their internet products? At Hi-Fi World we listen carefully to what manufacturers say and try to make sense of their views in the broader scheme of things. They have the knowledge, experience, design skills and test equipment to understand today's digital technologies.

Sound quality will be improved by an SSD? Er, not necessarily. This again is another piece of internet folklore. Explained to me the other day

fact. We have been researching digital audio for many years and hard disk replay for enough time to realise that getting good sound from a computer or hard disk playback is relatively easy, but getting great sound quality is really difficult.

We have some problems with USB, yes, but maybe not the ones you think. Isolation is not easy, especially at extremely high frequencies.

Secondly USB playback is in its infancy and we have already seen significant steps forward in the past couple of years. We see it as far more sensible for a Naim customer who wishes to use USB to buy a USB to S/PDIF 'adapter' to feed a Naim DAC and to be able to easily change this as time moves on. This is better than having a DAC that could be out of date quickly. We can update the DAC's firmware and code but that may not be enough if we included USB.

We have also got some very



**The latest Mac Miini computer. Not purpose designed for audio.**

by a digital engineer, modern hard drives – the ones that spin round and round – might seem crude but their signal processing is sufficiently sophisticated to produce a clean and stable signal.

Is an SSD automatically better? That depends upon how well the data is clocked out. Also, SSDs do not have an infinite life span, their cells degrade. Catastrophic failure, hard drive style, is unlikely. But SSDs are not automatically an answer to a maiden's prayer. What the 'net thinks and what is an engineering reality are two different things.

Trying to maintain a stable, rf hash and jitter free signal down a long signal chain, especially within products like the MacMini not purposed for audio, is never going to be easy. But supposition and folk lore provide no enlightenment.

**NK**

**Hjalmar Nilsson replies on behalf of Naim:**

Andy, some interesting ideas and theories, but they are theories, not

good results with Firewire to S/PDIF and here again things are changing quickly.

Optical isn't changing nearly so fast and it is a simple, easy connection method that provides galvanic isolation, so we included it. We do have some concerns about the ultimate sound quality available with an optical connection. The speed limitations of the interfaces is limited and their current draw isn't ideal.

We class the Mac and a DAC (using optical) as it became known, using any DAC, including our own, as a good solution.

We still feel that the sound delivered by a Naim HDX connected with a coax BNC terminated cable to a Naim DAC takes a lot of beating. And we have the NDX network player due out very soon. The research and the development never stops.

In summary, don't believe everything you read and listen carefully to everything. Digital is not different from analogue in that every change is audible. If it isn't, question why. **HJ**

# SWISS Kit

There aren't many hi-fi separates that hail from Switzerland, and those that do are generally expensive, esoteric designs – just like Dartzeel's huge CTH-8550 integrated. David Price enjoys the sound of music...



**W**hilst I'm sure many readers imagine the editor of this magazine is permanently languishing in a state of high end bliss, impossibly expensive bits of kit stacking up from one end of the listening room, it's not *quite* like that. Until recently I'd been relying on my old Marantz CD273 (1984, bought on eBay for £22) as a digital source, for example; the trouble is that manufacturers have an annoying habit of wanting their stuff back, whether I'm ready or not! Happily I'm well served with amplifiers though, with a Musical Fidelity AMS35i on loan along with my gorgeous World Audio Design K5881 'Andy Grove Signature' valve power amp bought and paid for! So how then, I mused, would the visit of a £16,500 Dartzeel fit in with an already very good thank-you-very-much amplifying team? What could it possibly bring to a system already well served with serious sounding power houses?

The first thing you notice about the Dartzeel is its sheer physical size (440 x 335 x 170) and back-breaking 29kg weight. It's an impressive bit of kit alright, with a striking gold anodised 15mm aluminium fascia and red painted hammer finished 2mm thick Swedish grade steel casework. The four grab handles; one at each corner; seem a stylistic contrivance but soon prove essential when shifting it! It's very well built, although it doesn't have the silkiness of Japanese products; it feels more like rugged military communications hardware than a soft, silky slice of domestic high end, somehow

reminding me of my old BMW F650 motorbike with its Austrian army spec Rotax Type 804 engine. When the bomb drops, I dare say that only cockroaches and Dartzeels will survive...

The CTH-8550 features newly designed power output stages which include onboard regulated power supplies for a compact global layout, Dartzeel says, while the signal path has been carefully kept as simple as possible. The use of two paralleled output transistor pairs was chosen for hassle-free setup, whatever the kind of speaker used, the company says. The additional power gain provided by these two output pairs allowed them to reduce the number of silicon junctions in driver stages. So there are now only three in the power section, resulting in a claimed 220 Watts per channel under 8 Ohms [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE].

All regulated power supplies involved in the analogue section are located on the audio circuits, ensuring best possible ripple rejection and low noise floor, the company claim. All DC drift is compensated by digital means, allowing the compensation to be completely kept outside of the signal path, it is said. A huge toroidal power transformer feeds the dual mono power amp sections, while a second, smaller transformer caters for the low level signal. Optional phono sections (£1,000 MC, £650 MM) are implemented on same circuits for very short signal paths from the input RCA connectors; these are a factory upgrade.

The amp sports nine inputs,

accessed by a row of buttons under a fluorescent dot-matrix display. There's a record output (thumbs up!) with independent record source selection, and all switching can be done via the beautiful bespoke alloy cased full featured remote control. The central volume knob is curiously labelled the 'Pleasure Control', and is custom-made by Elma; the control electronics are said to use high quality semiconductor devices for best reproduction accuracy. Oh the Swiss!

Very quirky then, but it does work well and the whole amplifier certainly feels special to use, albeit it not in the sense of being transcendently smooth to operate and gorgeous to the touch, as with some Japanese high end. Each CTH-8550 is delivered with its own dedicated USB key which contains all customer information including the owner's name, the serial number and the firmware; I'm surprised there's not a remote control alarm with flashing light in the dashboard!

## SOUND QUALITY

I don't know if it's some covert puritanical streak in me, but I immediately took against this amplifier when I found out its vast price. Sure, it's an interesting and almost charming thing to look at and to use, but can one *really* justify the princely sum of £16,500 for a largish integrated amplifier? On switch on, and several hours thereafter, my verdict was a firm *no*. I was in no doubt that the Dartzeel, lovely object that it was, was almost sadistically overpriced, such were the sounds issuing forth from my Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers.



They were telling me that it's a powerful transistor amplifier, a bit opaque across the midband and constrained in soundstaging terms, which almost sounds less powerful than it really is. I cued up an original pressing of Sade's 'Diamond Life' on CD and sat down to a rather forced, harsh presentation of 'Smooth Operator', the Dartzeel sounding quite lacklustre. But then something strange happened, and as the album progressed, I began to find myself rather enjoying it. No longer pinned to my sofa with the harshness of the midband, the soundstage seemed to be expanding in all directions and Ms Adu seemed no longer to have a voice that sounded like she'd been on the fags the night before. The Dartzeel began coming alive before my ears in a way I've not heard as markedly before.

By the time we'd reached Sade's cover of 'Why Can't We Live Together', my system was singing in a way that had me on edge of the sofa for a different reason. I'd really hit the loud pedal (sorry 'pleasure control'), and whereas every other transistor integrated I've heard in this system has begun to sound strained in such a predicament, the Dartzeel almost seemed to be relaxing in to the job of making my bass drivers take major excursions forward and backward in time to the beat. Yes, it had been a

little edgy but it was getting creamier by the minute and the more the song emoted (and the dynamics peaked), the more this amplifier seemed to relish it. There wasn't a hint of stress, the CTH-8550 apparently completely unflustered and happy to spotlight dynamic peaks that almost every other integrated I've heard sits on. I can truthfully say I heard 'Diamond Life' in a way I've not before, and I've played it more than a few times since 1984!

On to more contemporary fare, and Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang', and I was now struck by just how deep and dimensional the Dartzeel was sounding. This is hardly a pinnacle of the pop album art in sonic terms, but the big Swiss amp didn't dwell on the weaknesses and instead chose to major on the track's deep, dark bass, thumping out massive tracts of low frequencies like it was going out of fashion. Excellent as my £6,000 Musical Fidelity '35i is, the Dartzeel showed what was possible with solid-state devices, sounding both tonally richer and far more commanding, especially at volumes; there was just no fear for the Yamaha's extra large pizza sized bass bins, which have most amplifiers doing a passable impression of an asthmatic ant trying to blow up a damp paper bag.

Along with a rock solid bottom,

transient peaks didn't knock the Dartzeel off its stride; it timed with metronomic precision (I'll avoid the Swiss watch analogy) where most other solid-staters seem closer to a worn out cuckoo clock.

Given its time to warm up (about two hours, all told), then tonally the Dartzeel proved unexpectedly rich – sumptuous even. Indeed it's richer sounding than some KT88-based valve amplifiers; if it glowed in the dark it would have 300Bs sprouting out of it like moss on a Morris Minor Traveller side window. It's quite dark and velvety, but yet somehow looped hi hats proved full of energy and not in the least subdued. I was most



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Arcam A38	black	£1,480.00	£895.00	D mint
Denon PMA700	black	£329.00	£179.00	D vgc
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Cyrus 8XP	quartz	£1,550.00	£895.00	D+N mint
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Cyrus CDXT SE	silver	£975.00	£579.00	D mint listed
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Musical Fidelity V Dac	black	£170.00	£119.00	D+N
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it just plain nice to listen to music of any type. It's rare that I say that about any amplifier, let alone a high power transistor one.

**REFERENCE SYSTEM:**  
 Sony CDP-X77ES/dCS Debussy DAC  
 Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier  
 Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

impressed by its tonal palette too; here's an amplifier that lets you hear the instrument (or sample's) original harmonic signature, rather than sucking out the colour or adding too much flavouring of its own. This is one of only a few solid-state amplifiers I've heard that take you to a completely different world when you switch discs; from early eighties Power Plant with 'Diamond Life' to Dunham Studios, Brooklyn, last year, different recordings come with a totally different flavour, just as they should.

Moving from Q-Tip's recent rapping on Mark Ronson to his contribution to Stanley Clarke's '1, 2, To the Bass', back in 2003, and the Dartzel was allowed to fly. This album's production values are superb, rendering crystal clear the contribution of Joe Satriani on guitar; I heard dazzling speed allied to wonderful rhythmic dexterity and a delightful warmth and graunch to his instrument. Behind this we had Stanley Clarke's sublime bass



guitar and keyboard work and a pounding drum machine, making for a mesmerising track that fuses jazz and rap in a fulfilling way. The following 'Simply Said' is a more traditional acoustic track, which the Dartzel carried with delicacy; oboes had a woody quality to them but didn't grate, the acoustic drum kit was a delight with a fantastically tight snare sound and smooth and crisp treble, and the bass guitar sounded supple and insistent, yet not overpowering.

Overall, this amp delivered an engrossing performance, being both delicate and effortlessly powerful at the same time. As before, if anything it was just a touch on the dark side tonally, yet had a speed and incision and bite that could only come from an amplifier of great transparency.

Moving to beautifully recorded classical piano music, and Gottlieb Wallisch's debut on Linn Records, 'Mozart in Vienna', 'Sonata in D major, K.576 - I Allegro' rang through into my listening room like bells in the night. As you'd expect of this label, recording quality was beyond reproach, letting the Dartzel do its stuff. The result was an admirably wide recorded acoustic, with commendable depth too, and an accuracy of imaging such that the concert hall's boundaries seemed as real as those of one's own listening room. The piano was sparkling with harmonics, about as good as it's possible to get from Compact Disc at least, and yet there was a tremendous delicacy to the playing too; rhythmically this amplifier proved superb. Once again, at high levels it showed absolutely no sign whatsoever of stress, it was as if it had barely noticed the immense spread of sound it was producing in the room. Those with large listening rooms will want to try this amplifier cranked up with its foot to the floor!

It's normally at this point that I add my caveats, but if you remember this is a high power solid state device and not a 3V parallel single ended tube amplifier, then it's actually very hard to fault. You will find slightly sweeter, and/or more incisive designs around, but you'll pay the price for them in either a concomitant lack of power or ear-achingly unpleasant tonality. The Dartzel simply does so much so very well, and yet is more than the sum of its competencies; it has something intrinsically very endearing all of its own which makes

**CONCLUSION**

Perhaps I wouldn't be so effusive if I'd come to this review expecting this amplifier to be amazing. Frankly, I didn't, even though I did think it would be good. As it turned out, it is more than this; the Dartzel CTH-8550 is an excellent all rounder with a charm of its very own. Combining the intricate textural detail and velvety tonality of a fine tube amplifier, with a take no prisoners approach to supplying vast sums of power with grip and gusto, it makes for an interesting listen. Just be sure to partner it with excellent ancillaries - and warm it up thoroughly before taking the 'Pleasure Control' up too high.

It's hard to assess the value for money of something so crazily expensive as this, but if you're lucky enough to be contemplating such sums then frankly I don't think they'd be wasted on this amplifier.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Charismatic and quirky high end solid-state integrated amplifier with superb sound and a charming visage.

**DARTZEEL**  
 CTH-8550 £16,500  
 Absolute Sounds  
 +44(0)208971 3909  
 www.absolutesounds.com

- FOR**
- neutrality, insight
  - fine tonality and texturing
  - engaging musicality
  - soundstaging

- AGAINST**
- styling not to all tastes?
  - price!

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Dartzel CTH-8550 is massively powerful, producing 210 Watts into 8 Ohms and a massive 361 Watts into 4 Ohms. Powers like this are for playing very loud in large rooms and it takes a big loudspeaker to absorb such power without damage, so the Dartzel is aimed at ambitious setups, or it must be (under)used carefully. Distortion levels remain low and second harmonic predominated at all frequencies and levels, even up to full output, so the roughness of crossover distortion has been avoided and the CTH-8550 should sound smooth in its treble. Damping factor was surprisingly low at 16, much like that of a Naim amplifier, and bass may well sound a little larger as a result.

Input sensitivity is adjustable and reached a maximum of 160mV via the unbalanced line inputs, and 330mV via the balanced input.

The phono stage was adjusted for MC use in our amplifier and had a high sensitivity of 0.3mV maximum, making the amplifier able to cope with low output designs. The overload ceiling was high at 14mV so overload will not occur. Frequency response was flat from 5Hz up to 32kHz (-1dB) and equalisation accuracy across this band good, with just a mild treble lift of +0.5dB from the 75µS curve. Gain was maintained down to 5Hz so disc warps

will be amplified; there is no warp filter. Hiss was low at -68dB.

The Dartzel is very powerful and well engineered all round. It is likely to deliver good sonic results. NK

Power	210 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	3Hz-71kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-89dB
Distortion	0.13%
Sensitivity	160mV
Disc	
Frequency response	5Hz-32kHz
Separation	63dB
Noise	-68dB
Distortion	0.08%
Sensitivity	0.3mV
Overload	14mV

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# Trip Recorder

Tim Jarman is most impressed by Olympus's go-anywhere LS-5 portable digital recorder...

Olympus, they make cameras don't they? Well yes, but they have also been a big force in portable audio. The micro-cassette, a format that eventually became a world standard, was originally part of their PearlCorder system and though the PearlCorder never really escaped the businessman's briefcase in the UK it was a big hit in Japan, where once you could also buy micro-cassette hi-fi decks and Metal tapes to use in them!

Like the PearlCorder, the LS-5 is really at heart a superior dictating machine, but those neat little tapes are now gone, replaced by a built-in solid state memory of 2GB and the facility to plug in an SD card, giving extra storage and the benefit of easily exchangeable media. Olympus don't call it a dictating machine though, they refer to the LS-5 as a Linear PCM Recorder, which is where things start to get interesting. An obvious potential use is that of digitising analogue music sources (LPs, cassettes, radio broadcasts etc) for subsequent uploading onto a computer and for this Olympus has thoughtfully provided a range of codecs and a stereo line input connector.

Recordings can also be made from the built-in stereo microphones, which are of excellent quality and offer a range of modes to suit most applications. It can also be used as a portable music player for MP3 and WAV files which may appeal to some; it is more *Dragons Den* and less *Hollyoaks* than the typical iPod!

First impressions are good. Olympus do not mess about, as anyone who has ever owned or used an OM10 camera will tell you, and the LS-5 has a no-nonsense quality feel with large, simple controls and a very clear backlit LCD display. The range of codecs is sensible, the default being 16bit PCM at 44.1kHz (CD standard) with up to 24bits at 96kHz being available for those who wish to experiment with higher quality recordings. Other choices

include MP3 at up to 320kbps and WMA at up to 160kbps but given the storage available it is possibly best to record in PCM and then transcode on a computer later if necessary.

For uploading the recordings the LS-5 connects to a host computer via a USB cable where it appears as an extra drive from which files can simply be added to or transferred elsewhere. There are five folders for recording and an extra one called 'music' for downloaded content, Windows Media Center, iTunes or Olympus's own Sonority software (which is included on a CD and also performs track dividing and waveform editing) can all be used as a basis for this function.

Making a recording from an analogue source is very easy. Once the folder and codec are selected all you have to do is press the Record key, set the rotary level control (there are no fiddly up/down keys here!) and then press the Record key again – and off it goes. The input sensitivity does seem a little low, if your preamp or phono stage has a low output then you may struggle to get the meters up to the recommended -12dB(fs) average level.

The volume control for playback is also of the rotary type and once again the headphone stage is not the most powerful that I've ever encountered; sensitive headphones are a must if this machine is to be used in noisy environments.

Recording quality reached a high standard; LPs copied at 16bit/44.1kHz were nicely rendered with plenty of detail, the files making a creditable addition to any computer based music library.

Moving up to the maximum resolution of 24bit/96kHz added an enhanced sense of smoothness and slightly less digital grain, at the cost of larger file sizes and compatibility restrictions with some other equipment of course.

In its role as a compact digital PCM recorder the LS-5's natural competitor is the Sony MZ-RH1, which although limited to 16



bit/44.1kHz recordings has nevertheless proved itself capable of making some really superb recordings. The larger Olympus is in some ways easier to use but as it lacks the Sony's ability to divide the incoming signal into tracks as it records and has no track marker function, it can be tedious to edit the long and large files that it makes.

The Sony can also record from optical S/PDIF sources (which the Olympus can't), has a better headphone stage and is more conveniently sized for use as a personal music player. The LS-5 on the other hand has a more useful choice of codecs, clearer controls and a clearer display, far greater storage capacity, a pair of decent built-in mics and feels sturdier and more rugged.

Priced at just under £200 (including the Sonority editing software) it is also very good value and is therefore recommended.

## VERDICT ●●●●●

Excellent all-round recording tool that's ideal for LP to computer music transfers.

**OLYMPUS LS-5** £199.95  
 Olympus UK  
 ☎ +44(0) 800 111 4777  
 www.olympus.co.uk

## FOR

- hi res 24/96 recording
- superb build quality
- useful bundled software
- keenly priced

## AGAINST

- insensitive analogue input
- weak headphone stage

# Forward Notion

Noel Keywood reviews Advance Acoustic's MAP-101 integrated amplifier...



**T**he French constantly tell me that they do not have a hi-fi industry like Britain's, and yet there is a small but growing flow of interesting products arriving on our shores from France. And they remind me of Renault cars: good quality based on sound engineering, a little chic, plus a low price. That's what is on offer with this budget starter amplifier in the Advance Acoustic range, the MAP-101.

These days 40 Watts is enough for most homes and loudspeakers; the MAP-101 produces 55 Watts our measurements show, and that's a minimum. Into low impedance loudspeakers this £280 amplifier can manage 81 Watts so it isn't challenged on the power front. There's sufficient for most listeners, from an amplifier that is neither heavy nor large, so it fits into the domestic landscape easily enough, being 435mm wide at the fascia. Weight is a manageable 7kgs.

Build quality is on the lightweight side, but the MAP-101 is well finished. All the controls work smoothly, the loudspeaker sockets are sturdy gold plated types able to accept heavy cables, 4mm plugs and spades and there's even remote control. This is an unusual convenience on a budget amplifier and it is supported by a bright blue fluorescent display showing volume level as a two digit number, with 63 representing full volume. It's easily seen at a distance so a user can guess whether they are about to be blasted or not when changing inputs, for this function is under remote control too. Also available is a remote control mute



function, useful when the phone goes.

Advance don't stop there though, for this amplifier also has a phono stage so you can run a turntable from the off, when setting up a system. It isn't any great audiophile stage but it does a decent job I found, faced with an Goldring 1022GX cartridge mounted on a Rega P3-24 turntable. There are Tuner, CD and two Aux inputs too, plus a headphone output.

There is also a Pre-out and Amp-in split that allows processors or other power amplifiers to be used, contributing to general flexibility.

Switch on is greeted by a few blue lights shining eagerly from what is a somewhat sombre fascia, since Advance unfortunately use spindly grey lettering on a black brushed aluminium finish, a low contrast combination that results in illegibility in low lighting. So whilst French products usually have some visual 'je ne sais quois' this one does not, falling into the same pot of visual mediocrity so thoughtlessly occupied by Far East products. Advance will have to try a little harder here, taking more notice of what their countrymen do and less notice of what everyone else does. In an ever crowded market product differentiation is important...

Switch on is also greeted with a little something else; heat. Advance run this amplifier into Class A by using a high quiescent current through the output stage and this causes it to run warm, although it does not stream heat like a full Class A amplifier. The benefit, in theory, is better sound quality. Class A amplifiers have a slightly more solid, less edgy quality than Class Bs and light A/Bs. They often sound a little clearer too; a small veil of mush can be cleared away to give sharper, more definite outlines at low levels. The gains are subtle, but they are usually there, all other things being equal.

Running transistors hot also stabilises them thermally and this may well be important too, as short term thermal variation upsets their behaviour quite considerably. Valves avoid this by running very hot all the time of course. The baby Advance did not quite fit this picture I was to find.

The MAP-101 gets little more than warm even with High bias switched on. In case you don't want to run the amplifier like this Advance fit a small slide switch on the rear that allows high bias to be switched off. A blue warning light on the front panel warns of status because if the amplifier heats up by being run at high volume, High bias automatically switches off and the light goes out.

Measurement showed that High bias had most affect at low volume levels, halving high frequency distortion, from 0.18% to 0.07% at 1 Watt for example, when feeding a 4 Ohm loudspeaker. Run the amplifier hard though and bias change has no affect; this is a subtle adjustment that affects only low level sound quality.

With an absolutely standard set of inputs and outputs and no funny French ideas like SCART or SEACAM to get in the way, the MAP-101 was easy to connect up and use I found.

## SOUND QUALITY

As the amplifier warmed up its sound coalesced into a solid, well wrought sound stage with firm images set out clearly. The MAP-101 has a crisp and assertive midband; Jackie Leven sang firmly planted centre stage with fine resolution of his expressive delivery, vocal textures being nicely conveyed whilst hand drums beat out a steady rhythm. Like many modern amplifiers the MAP-101 does not have sharp or obvious upper treble; in fact at high frequencies it seemed quite understated, yet cymbals rang clearly and bells had convincing sonority. Faced with a wall of strummed guitar





chords it wasn't as composed, clear and fuss free as our Musical Fidelity AMS50, but it is one thirtieth of its price so it did pretty well! There's a vaguely industrial greyness about its tonal palette, but budget transistor amplifiers are rarely sweet and I don't think this would be especially noticeable to most listeners; I spend most time with a specially tuned valve amplifier, the Icon Audio MB845 MkII and against this the poor MAP-101 is a little disadvantaged, because most amps are.

With orchestral works like Tchaikovsky's Symphony No6 strings stood out clearly and sounded unmuddled, flute floating out clearly from centre stage, right a bit!

Where the MAP-101 was on the vague side of things was in its bass delivery. With both Rock music and classical there was a gentle warmth to bass and a nice, easy going gait, but not one temporally chiselled in stone. This amplifier for much of the time has a gentle bottom end that passes unnoticed. Here it is unlike typical UK amps where a beefy toroidal transformer and power supply is used to provide solid low end grunt, for the clear maintenance of rhythm. That's not to say the MAP-101 did not do dynamics. At times it pushed some strong dynamic changes through our Spondor S8es as horns suddenly blared out and kettle drums rolled in 'Pathetique'.

You'd be hard pressed to criticise its rendition of the deep rumbling bass synth in Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance' or its driving beat, yet the MAP-101 was not tightly gripping our acoustically undamped Spondors, so the fright of the AMS50 or the thunder of our MB845 MkII wasn't there. But I found the performance

enjoyable and liked the way in which this little amplifier cleanly resolved Gaga's vocal antics, spreading her refrain in a wide arc across the room between the loudspeakers as she crooned, "I'm a free bitch baby". Mind you, La Gaga overdrove the output stage causing it to switch from High bias down to normal bias to prevent overheating; perhaps it was those lyrics that did it! A short spell muted brought the blue High bias light back on with a soft click. Turning Gaga right back up to spit out 'Monster' showed the MAP-101 hardened up when really pushed hard and took on an edginess, a sharpness to its upper midrange, but if cranked down to sensible levels it recomposed itself back to a brisk, focused sense of midrange clarity.

With a simpler composition like Celine Dion's 'A New Day Has Come' I was again aware of a fine but brittle clarity that had Celine Dion singing out clearly centre stage, but with a presentation that was less than couth, a tad raucous in a way. At this point I switched to Low bias and was not surprised to find that this ameliorated the problem. Under test the amplifier was happier at low bias and it sounded more composed in use too.

I fancy it also had a little more slam and dynamic life.

**CONCLUSION**

The Advance MAP-101 is a fun listen and a fine all round budget amplifier I feel. With a good range of useful facilities and decent basic sound quality especially strong in midrange resolution and absence of nasties this is a well balanced package and worth considering if you are after a starter amplifier.

**VERDICT** ●●●●

Good budget amplifier with plenty of useful facilities and respectable sound quality.

**ADVANCE MAP-101 £280**

Advance Acoustic

+33(0) 160 185 900

www.advance-acoustic.com

**FOR**

- phono stage
- clear midband
- remote control

**AGAINST**

- dull styling
- raucous at high volume

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The MAP-101 produces a modest 55 Watts into 8 Ohms and 81 Watts into 4 Ohms. Since most loudspeakers are nearer the latter it still manages very useful power output from a small package.

With low bias, distortion was reasonably benign in its harmonic structure and in the mild changes that occurred as signal level changed. Even at 10kHz there was little high order crossover distortion, second harmonic always dominating, as our analysis shows. Levels were not low, but then this isn't necessarily so bad, as valve amps demonstrate. So whilst the MAP-101 produces 0.2% distortion at 10kHz, it was mostly innocuous sounding 2nd harmonic. High bias reduced distortion level but increased third and higher harmonics, not a good sign as they are more audible than second harmonic.

Interestingly, damping factor was very low at 21, suggesting less feedback than is common, and this tallies with higher distortion figures, suggesting good sound quality and quite generous bass.

The MM phono stage was reasonably well equalised, just remaining within 1dB limits across the audio band, treble being prominent. There is no warp filter, full gain being

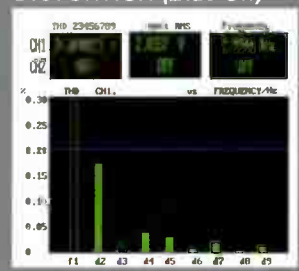
available down to 12Hz. Sensitivity was very low at 8mV though, so high output MMs like Ortofonos will best suit.

As budget amplifiers go the MAP-101 produced an interesting set of figures and is likely to sound good. NK

Power	55 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	13Hz-77kHz
Separation	82dB
Noise	-86dB
Distortion	0.18%
Sensitivity	200mV

Disc	
Frequency response	13Hz-77kHz
Separation	62dB
Noise	-84dB
Distortion	0.1%
Sensitivity	8mV
Overload	40mV

**DISTORTION (Bias Off)**





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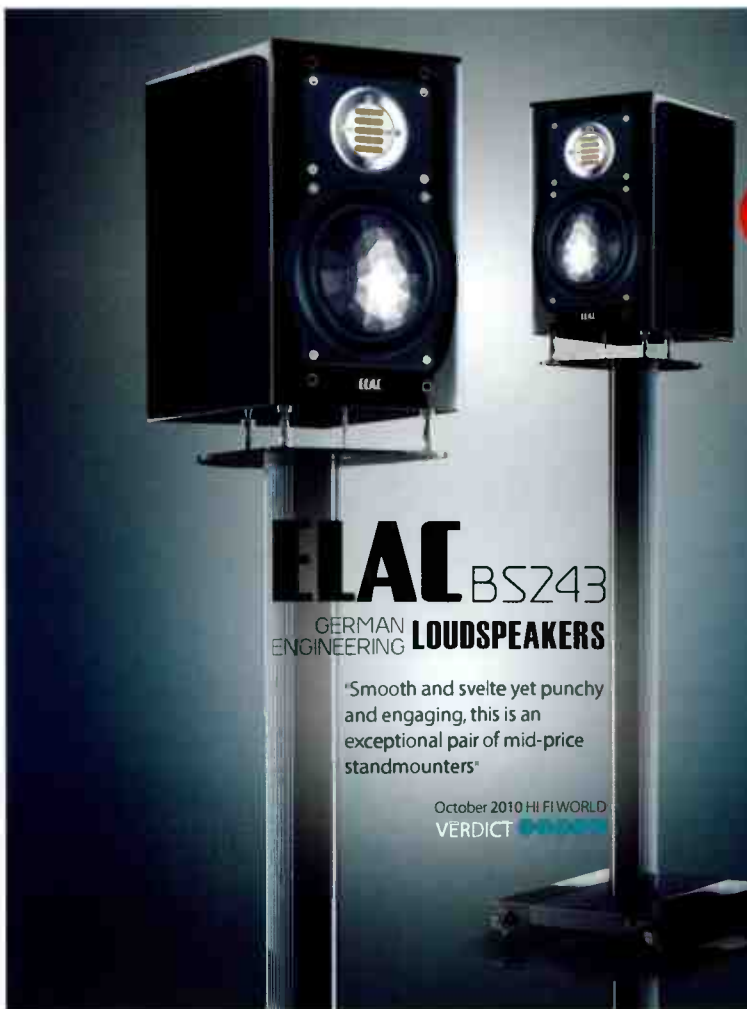
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# Definitive Article

**Noel Keywood tries the Spears and Munsil High Definition Blu-ray test disc for size...**

**M**odern Blu-ray players like the Cambridge 650BD I use possess picture adjustment controls: brightness, contrast, hue, saturation and sharpness, and colour TVs commonly add to this with tint, noise reduction, dynamic range enhancement and colour temperature. This amounts to a bewildering array of adjustments and they disguise some peculiar goings on. TV sets in particular come tweaked up as standard, their pictures artificially enhanced to give a dramatic, rather than accurate picture. Which is a pity, because modern HD TVs really are very good and offer a lovely picture that's plenty good enough without enhancement. Where high fidelity never quite accepted the artificial enhancement of audio as being desirable, keeping it as something you switch on rather than off, life is different with video. It comes with enhancement on and, if you want a good picture, then it's time to switch it all off.

And that's what this disc helps you do. Of the many test discs I have and use when testing Blu-ray players, this one has the most comprehensive set of adjustments and test sequences to aid in the adjustment of brightness, contrast, colour balance and all else, and this is especially useful when trying to find the optimal settings for modern TVs. Having said that, the many geometric patterns on this disc refer to older CRT equipped sets that have issues with corner geometry and colour alignment, as well as overshoot and ringing on vertical black/white transitions that don't affect LCD and LED TVs. Today's TVs need all picture enhancement processes turned off, then progressively switched back on, one by one, with a disc like this used

to show their impact and provide guidance on what is best.

There are five test sections on the disc. Setup & Evaluation carries no fewer than twenty one luminance and chrominance tests, as well as geometric patterns and it's a good way to judge both picture quality and setup accuracy. My disc came with blue tint glasses for use with the colour bars.

The second section is a bit more arcane, with de-interlacing tests and film to video pull down cadence handling, with a wide variety of cadences provided to assess the ability of players and TVs to recognise and handle the pull down process. This is a test section that acts as guidance for Blu-ray player 24p output settings amongst other things and can help with receiver video processing if it is enabled.

The third section covers edge adaptive de-interlacing with tests for trailing edges, jaggies and such like. This carries both artificially generated patterns and outdoor video sequences. Pressing Enter brings up an explanation of what to look for, in addition to the booklet liner notes and website help available.

The fourth section has audio demonstration tracks in basic PCM, DTS HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD coding, but there are no channel identification tones or pink noise bursts for tone matching assessment, etc., so this is not an audio test disc.

The final section is a disc Setup menu where playback conditions can be changed.

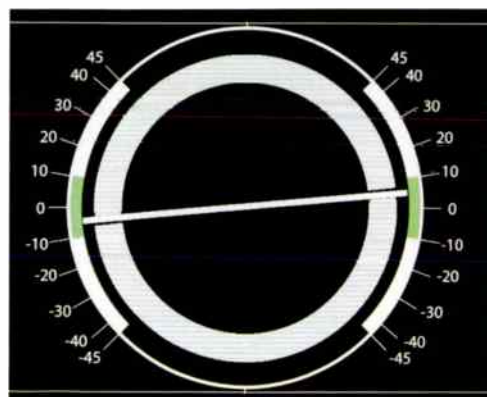
The disc has some beautifully sharp video sequences shot with an ultra high definition Red camera, showing dense, noise free colour and detail that takes you breath away, even on a boggles high def screen.



There are bewildering time lapse sequences that look like speeded up video, the point of which escapes me. I felt some of the colours were suspiciously over saturated for effect too; my own HD MPEG video on Blu-ray disc of local park scenes are more naturally balanced, if not so silky smooth and hard outlined by the presence of dense blacks.

This is a fascinating test disc that's well worth its £24 asking price I feel. It will give you hours of happy fiddling time trying to coax a better picture from TV and Blu-ray player and you will likely succeed with its guidance.

Available from Amazon.  
[www.spearsandmunsil.com](http://www.spearsandmunsil.com)





# Clear Blu Water

**Is Pioneer's new BDP-LX53 Blu-ray player sufficiently good to put it a fair distance ahead of its competition? Noel Keywood finds out...**

**K**nown for some great audio products in the past, including some of the finest VHF/FM tuners ever in the TX-9500 and 9800, I was hoping Pioneer's illustrious audio past would feed through into this 2010 season Blu-ray player, the BDP-LX53.

Priced at £299 and available for around £250 it would seem, the Pioneer sits above the £160 jobbies stacked in HMV but below audiophile specials like the superb Cambridge Audio 650BD at £399.

But as my group test of Blu-ray players in our October 2010 issue revealed, there are some nasty surprises out there for anyone wanting to swim in Blu waters. They come from big fish like Samsung and Sony who have very well engineered products on offer at knockdown prices. It's a fierce market, but some minnows have done well, for example Swedish Oppo who marketed a Mediatek based solution in the popular BDP-83, unavailable in the

UK, and Cambridge who jumped into the market gap using the same formula to come up with the 650BD. This is my player of choice and the benchmark used in this review.

For those new to Blu-ray, all players will spin CD, DVD and Blu-ray discs, making them universal players. The BDP-LX53 is no exception, so it will play your old audio discs. Unfortunately, at this price it does not reproduce the high definition DSD layer of an SACD, only the low resolution stereo track used to ensure backward compatibility. In their handbook Pioneer state otherwise, that SACDs are not played, but they are – well, sort of!

Anyone with an SACD collection needs to know that Sony's excellent BDP-S370, price just £120, plays SACD in full, outputting high resolution DSD code via the digital HDMI line to a receiver and many receivers can decode it into that lovely smooth sound SACD is known for, a real plus point if you have such a collection. It isn't a big issue

perhaps, but SACD still has a strong following around the world, especially for classical music.

Pioneer miss out on SACD replay with the BDP-LX53, but they are hardly alone as few players other than recent Sonys, Oppos and the Cambridge will give the delicious sound of SACD in full surround sound glory.

The Pioneer does of course spin Blu-ray audio discs up to the maximum resolution of 24bit at 192kHz sample rate, in raw LPCM form or losslessly compressed by Dolby TrueHD or DTS HD Master Audio. That means it will replay highest resolution surround sound audio, both from movie discs and from dedicated Blu-ray audio discs from companies like 2L of Norway. So you'll get high fidelity cannon balls recorded in DTS HD Master Audio crashing through your lounge from 'Master and Commander', 'The Far Side of the World', or the Trondheim Soloists playing all around you in highest resolution digital audio,



"If I said it sounded bad and you heard it, you would say I'm mad!"

with no sign of a moving picture to distract. It's what all Blu-ray players offer nowadays and onboard decoding makes all this available from the analogue outputs of the player, tests showed, so you do not need an AV receiver. The Pioneer has only analogue stereo audio outputs, not surround sound for older receivers, so you get an onboard mix down unless you play the dedicated stereo track of a disc, should it have one.

Our measurements showed that the benefit of lower distortion from 24bit digital recordings is retained by decent internal digital-to-analogue converters, so connection of the analogue stereo outputs to a stereo amplifier is not out of the question, more of which later.

As I have a DVD-Audio disc collection I was disappointed to find the Pioneer does not handle them, but then few Blu-ray players spin DVD-A, only the Cambridge 650BD and Oppo players.

Curiously, Pioneer list BD-RE and BD-R discs in both BDAV and BDMV format as playable, then say they are not playable, or is it that their wording is ambiguous? I suspect the latter because as part of my disc compatibility test routine I loaded both BD-R and BD-RE discs with BDMV videos on them and they played perfectly. What I do not have and could not test was compatibility with AVCHD camcorder video on Blu-ray discs. Pioneer list it as compatible on DVD discs alone.

Build quality of the Pioneer was on the down side of mediocre. It is lightweight and a bit tinny, the draw is flimsy and the front panel controls plain nasty, with sharp edges and

poor visibility. Most players manage better, at any price.

The remote control is satisfactory; it feels good in the hand, but legibility of small grey legends on a black background was poor and not suited to subdued lounge lighting. Backlighting was not provided either.

A draw open/ close button is fitted to the remote, which is handy, but with a Blu-ray disc the player would not start from a Play command with the draw open. It does, however, auto start from draw close, which may or may not be convenient. CDs played immediately without a track total appearing and track number selection from the keypad isn't provided. To see a total you must turn on the TV and from here any track can be selected. Again, this isn't uncommon with Blu-ray players.

Load times were hopelessly long, as lengthy as first generation players from many years ago. John Mayer's 'Where the Light Is' Java menu disc of his concert in Los Angeles loads in twenty to thirty seconds on modern players, but it took an agonising sixty seconds of chuntering from the mechanism of the Pioneer before it loaded. Even films without Java were slow, my own simple BDMV menu discs taking thirty seconds against a common time of ten seconds.

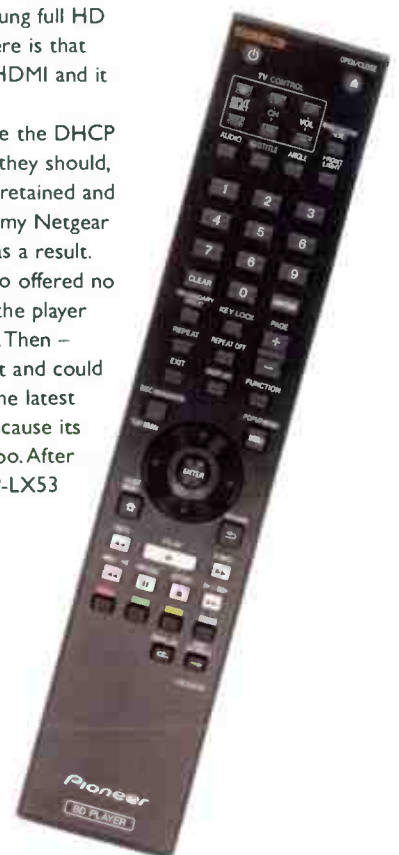
Unfortunately, I was made aware of other drawbacks through this player arriving direct from another user with settings that made it unusable in my system. I was greeted by a blank screen and a

'signal incompatible' message from the TV. I went for a Reset to get back to HDMI output, the usual default factory setting, but the screen remained resolutely blank. I had to use the Composite video output to get up a menu for the player and found it had a switchable video output option (why?) that had been set to Component and 4:3 for an old analogue connected monitor.

Switching manually to HDMI got a picture up on my Samsung full HD 42in screen. The point here is that Reset should default to HDMI and it did not.

Nor did Reset change the DHCP settings to Automatic as they should, so old LAN values were retained and the player could not see my Netgear router, nor the internet as a result. Manually changing to Auto offered no cure until I switched off the player then switched it back on. Then – bingo – I had the internet and could update the software to the latest version (BP10072600) because its software was outdated too. After all this malarkey the BDP-LX53 worked properly!

Pioneer fit BD Live functionality for those that want it, and YouTube is available too, which is always fun. Well it is, when you can get it. The player's poor operational methodology and even worse handbook played havoc here. With YouTube on-screen I navigated to Search and



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found the keypad would enter only numerals. Great if you want to find the 123 band, but no use otherwise. And no word in the Handbook of how to enter letters from the alphabet (you can download the manual from Pioneer's website). I was baffled. Much button pressing later I discovered an Enter button brought up an on-screen keyboard and was at last able to enter performer and band names.

Only YouTube is available. The player will not access computer hard drives via a home network. It will however, play MP3s from a memory stick, but only MP3s and no other format. WMA and AAC are *verboten!*

Rear panel connectors comprise an HDMI output, an optical S/PDIF digital audio output, Component video outputs and a Composite video output, accompanied by stereo analogue audio output sockets.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Much as usual the stereo analogue audio output sounded a bit vague and diffuse in its temporal progress and its imaging. So some of the sharper timed Eagles tracks on their 'Long Road Out of Eden' CD, like 'Last Good Time in Town', were not quite so tightly timed, leading edges being a tad smoothed over.

The orchestra behind Percy Grainger on 2L's Edvard Grieg Blu-ray sounded a little messy too. Switching my Marantz SR8002 receiver over to read the player's S/PDIF optical output immediately cleaned things up, as it often does. Rock music took on firmer timing, with better accented rhythms. Complex classical orchestral arrangements became more intelligible too. The Pioneer sounded clean and tidy and was enjoyable, but to be pedantic it wasn't as clean as possible on digital and the quality gap between analogue and digital was larger than the directly competitive Samsung BD-C6900, which sets an impressive standard at this price point.

Switching again, but this time to HDMI, showed the Pioneer was much the same in sound quality between its two digital outputs, in basic parameters such as cleanliness,

temporal progress and muddle, or lack of it. Whilst stereo CDs benefitted little when moving from analogue to S/PDIF digital to HDMI digital, surround sound recordings of course opened out into the room. Playing high definition Rock concerts in 24/96 like Elton John's 'Live at Madison Square Garden' and John Mayer's well recorded 'Where The Light Is' the Pioneer was clean enough, if not up to the pristine digital standards of our benchmark Cambridge 650BD or the Samsung BD-C6900.

The BDP-LX53 played well recorded top resolution 24/192 music Blu-rays like 2L's impressive and lovely Percy Grainger revival/tribute with aplomb and even if it wasn't fractionally the best it was plenty good enough to be thoroughly enjoyable. If I said it sounded bad and you heard it, you would say I'm mad! So, in a nutshell, the Pioneer played all discs and sounded good via its digital outputs, if fractionally below the best.

Picture quality was good. My test BDMV Blu-ray of an idling Tiger Moth at Duxford airfield, shot in HD with a Canon HV30, showed a pleasantly light colour balance; low colour saturation made grass lightly green and luminescent red airfield warning bollards not too garish. Detail in foreground grass and background trees was good, if not matching Philips players in particular whose noise reduction best retain detail and gave amazing results with this video.

Blu-ray test discs from HQV and Spears & Munsil backed up this assessment. The Pioneer's handling of film pull downs wasn't great; our Cambridge

managed better, but this is nit picking. Jaggies were absent. Picture quality was good, if not quite up with the best.

**CONCLUSION**

The BDP-LX53 justifies its modest price tag in terms of sound and video quality. In build quality and operational methodology it is behind the pack though. Load times were hopelessly slow and operational methodology poor; I wrestled to use the BDP-LX53 at times, even after learning its foibles. So whilst you may enjoy what the Pioneer does, getting it to do it can be a challenge. The brutal truth is Samsung make a better player at the same price in the BD-C6900 I reviewed in our October 2010 issue, and Sony make a less expensive player in the BDP-S370 that offers more all round.

**VERDICT** ●●●

Acceptable audio and video quality plus YouTube make this player fair value, but it's too slow to load and sometimes awkward to use.

**PIONEER BDP-LX53 £299.95**  
**Pioneer GB Ltd.**  
 +44 (0)1753 7897894  
[www.pioneer.co.uk](http://www.pioneer.co.uk)

**FOR**

- decent sound
- fine picture quality
- YouTube functionality

**AGAINST**

- long load times
- awkward to use
- lightweight build

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response with CD was flat to 20.8kHz with no peaking, so the tonal balance was accurate and CD will sound natural in this respect. With 96kHz sample rate the upper response limit, -1dB, measured 45kHz, a good result that gets the best from modern 24/96 recordings.	Distortion % (CD)	0.002
	-6dB	0.0012
	-60dB	0.19
	-80dB	4.2
	Separation (1kHz)	-101dB
	Noise (IEC A)	-102dB
	Dynamic range	99dB
	Output	1.97V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE (24/96)**

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work 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... 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. All this goes into a neat non-resonant, non-magnetic case, fronted by a superb green OLED fine pitch dot-matrix display that's exceptionally easy to read. Top marks for size (87x207x314mm) and weight (5.6kg).

In the great scheme of things, its sound is simply much better than any other product of its type; the paradox is that it's so good that you actually start treating it like a highish end bit of hi-fi! The little Naim tries and largely succeeds to get you closer to the music. It has a

dry, clean tonality, but isn't harsh or laced with distortion. Unsurprisingly 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"... With Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang', 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. Playing via a home network the UnitiQute came close to CD on good AAC files; no small feat! Here's a brilliant little music box... a great crossover product that could just pull in 'civilians' into the wonderful world of separates hi-fi at a later date."

If you'd like to win this superb system then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries by postcard only by 31st December 2010 to:  
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 Hi-Fi World magazine,  
 Unit G4, Argo House,  
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 Kilburn Park Road,  
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- MULTIPLE ENTRIES WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFIED
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**QUESTIONS**

**[1] What type of DAC is fitted...?**

- [a] Wolfson
- [b] Analogue Devices
- [c] Burr Brown
- [d] Sanyo

**[2] Where is the USB socket?**

- [a] front
- [b] back
- [c] top
- [d] side

**[3] Is Integrated Wi-Fi?**

- [a] standard
- [b] optional
- [c] not available
- [d] a pipe dream

**[4] David described the Naim as what?**

- [a] "a brilliant little music box"
- [b] "not bad if you really must"
- [c] "okay if you like that sort of thing"
- [d] "not as good as an iPod"

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From the *Stereophile* report by Jason Victor Serinus at the influential US Rocky Mountain show in October: “...the CD playback was nothing short of wondrous. This was the best digital reproduction of the soprano voice I have ever experienced. It was impossible to listen to that track without understanding why Sutherland was dubbed *La Stupenda*. All I could do was shake my head in awe.

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**VINYL:** AESTHETICS, CLEARAUDIO, GRAHAM, LEHMANN, SUMIKO BLUE POINT SPECIAL.  
**TRANSFIGURATION:** **TUNERS:** MAGNUM DYNALAB.  
**AMPLIFIERS:** BEL CANTO, CAT, GAMUT, HALCRO, HOVLAND, SONNETEER, VTL.  
**LOUDSPEAKERS:** AUDIO PHYSIC, ETHOS, FOCAL, GAMUT, NEAT, TOTEM.  
**CABLES:** ARGENTO, CHORD Co., DNM, KUBALA SOSNA, NORDOST, SILTECH, VERTEX AQ  
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and decrease sound quality. In effect, the Jaya 'shunts' RFI back down the mains. Vertex AQ has made the Jaya to be part of a larger, more integrated, system to tackle all aspects of damaging RFI and microphony. We wondered, however, if the Jaya could have an effect on sound quality on its own? Getting the best results from the Jaya is a very personal thing. So, you need to experiment with it to find its best position. This means that you need to plug the Jaya in several different sockets to see where it makes the greatest difference.

I began by plugging it into the adjacent wall socket that was feeding my hi-fi. The Jaya sounded like a good power conditioner, removing some glare. I found some upper frequency content slightly curtailed though, resulting in a less exciting presentation. So I tried the

main power block which fed the majority of my components, placing the Jaya somewhere in the middle. The effects were more dramatic at this point; greater transparency and an improved stereo image. The left channel detail was also boosted significantly. I was now hearing more detail and things sounded more relaxed, with bass cleaned up and offering more punch, weight and speed. Plugging the Jaya into the block socket nearest to the mains cable proved the most effective position, a lovely cohesive stereo image, beautifully seamless across the room. The Jaya is surprisingly effective for what looks like a lump of metal with a lead, improving overall sound quality and making me wonder what other improvements are possible.

**PR**

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# soundbites

### ORIGIN LIVE LINEAR FLOW 2 'SHIELDED' £380

Origin Live is best known for its fine turntables, tonearms and upgrade kits, but did you know the company also produces cables? The Linear Flow 2 'Shielded' interconnects reviewed here are based upon a balanced design that aims to reduce the amount of inductance present within the cables by twisting the leads. It's interesting to see that the Linear Flow 2s utilise high purity copper as the principal component instead of silver or even a silver coating. Many users see copper as more tonally balanced, which should provide a more neutral flavour. The addition of over five dielectric insulators promise to enhance that balanced sonic aim by providing an even response.

The samples sent to me by Origin Live featured good quality Eichman Bullet plugs. The Linear Flow 2s arrive in both shielded and unshielded forms. I listened to the former, coated with 95% nickel plated copper braid (plus an attached

earth lead for each interconnect) superior in that they target RF interference promising further detail enhancements

During sound tests, I hung the cable off my Icon Audio PS3 phono amp which, in turn, connected to an Avid Acutus deck with SME IV arm and Benz Glider cartridge. This high resolution source would highlight any obvious and subtle changes found when compared to the reference Chord Anthem 2s. In sound terms, over varying musical genres, the Origin cable exhibited an obvious firming of the bass which became more solid and well sculptured. The effect was to give the lower frequency regions an obvious character as well as power. This extra layer of aural detail was also transferred to the midrange frequencies. Here, tonal information was enhanced, sometimes with a fine etching that linked into the Origin Linear Flow 2's admirable transparent qualities. It's also the latter that helped the cables to offer a more open presen-

tation, giving the soundstage a less constricted feel. In fact, listening to the Linear Flow 2s felt like a box lid had been lifted, allowing the sound to soar forth. Do audition this when next you consider upgrading your interconnects; its an excellent cable.

**PR**

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# 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 paperbook-sized remote control.

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

**YAMAHA CD-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 bought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



**PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600**

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

**DUAL CS505 1982 £75**

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

**GOLDRING LENCO GL75 1970 £15.65**

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

**LINN AXIS 1987 £253**

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

**LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86**

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



**MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £ N/A**

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



**MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599**

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

**TECHNICS SPI0 1973 £400**

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SPI0/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 80V per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

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

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



**SUGDEN CS1/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.

**CROFT MICRO 1986 £150**  
Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

**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.

**LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £ N/A**  
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fit!

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

**LECSON AC-1 1973 £ N/A**  
Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.



**QUAD 22 1958 £25**  
The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

**QUAD 33 1968 £43**  
Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

**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.

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

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

**LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £31**  
Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.





**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.

**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 ALEÇTO 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!

**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.

**RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE 1986 £977**

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



**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-JE555ES 2000 £900**

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

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**JR 149 1977 £120**

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**IMF TLS80 1976 £550**

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**MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800**

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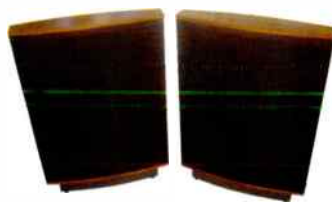
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Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



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**YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532**

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**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!

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# Motor Head

Tony Bolton finds Audio Engine's P4 to be a zesty little loudspeaker...

**A**s the variety of audio sources expands from conventional audio equipment to include computers and portable digital devices such as iPods, so the need for a variety of speakers for different listening environments has developed. American company Audio Engine have recently introduced a passive version of its active P2 and P5 models. This, the P4, is available in either black or white, as pictured here, for £179 or in bamboo finish for £235. This latter model is made of carbonised bamboo and is claimed to be voiced to give the same sound as the other two versions.

The speakers are compact,

measuring just 228x140x165mm (h x w x d) and weigh in at 2.75kg each. The cabinets are made of 20mm thick, high-resin MDF and internally braced to provide a rigid, low resonance case. Rapping them with my knuckles certainly seemed to confirm this with a dull thud being all that I heard...

The cabinets are well finished with a chamfered edge around the front panel, and curved corners. The underside is thoughtfully protected by a soft rubbery material and mounting holes for brackets are provided at the back and underneath. The front contains a 101mm diameter bass/mid driver and a 20mm silk dome tweeter

which uses neodymium magnets. Below the cones is a narrow bass reflex port. At the back are a pair of quite substantial binding posts which will take the usual range of 4mm banana plugs, spades and bare wire connections.

## SOUND QUALITY

After about fifty hours of running in on the usual diet of classical music and burn-in discs, I set the P4s up in my front room on sand filled Atacama stands powered by the Leema Acoustics Tucana II amplifier. Sources included a Clearaudio Master Solution turntable and Leema's Antilla CD player.

I started off listening with a

"the bass notes from cello, double bass and piano were well shaped, especially given the size of the cabinets..."

compilation of Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Pachelbel and Debussy pieces played by the New Cologne Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra on CD.

First impressions were good. The sound was very open and, with a small ensemble like this, detailed. I was very aware of the different tonalities and characteristics of each of the nine instruments in the orchestra. This was aided by quite precise imaging which seemed to place each player in their relative space in the classic horseshoe arrangement. The bass notes from cello, double bass and piano were quite well shaped, especially given the size of the speaker cabinets, but unsurprisingly lacked really deep extension. However the sound was sprightly and quite melodic. The treble was at least as accurately defined, with each breath of the two flautists clearly displayed, along with odd little noises from the instrument's mechanism.

At civilised listening levels this was acceptable, but when I turned the volume up only a bit, the 'uber' definition of the high frequencies ceased to be as pleasant and caused me to back off the volume control somewhat. Midrange seemed a little reserved when compared to the vividness of the higher and lower frequencies, almost as though there was a slight dip in output around the octave centred on middle C.

This was confirmed when playing Blondie's track 'Denis'. The rather forward nature of the higher midrange and treble sounds gave Debbie Harry's voice a slightly lighter sound than I would normally expect to hear, making it seem a little two dimensional. The bright production values of recordings from this period aggravated the forwardness of the treble, letting me hear the detail of tambourine and cymbal, but not integrating it with the sounds happening below very well.

A brief foray into pre-war jazz via LP proved a slight disappointment. Any surface

noise on the record was added to by that present in the recording, insufficiently muted during the transfer from 78.

Moving the speakers from stands onto a solid oak desk seemed to calm things down somewhat, confirming (to my mind at least) that these speakers are at their best on solid furniture, at close quarters and relatively low volumes. Since they are descended from active units designed for use with computers this did not surprise me.

**CONCLUSION**

When powered by a reserved sounding amplifier and source, particularly a valve amplifier which appreciates these loudspeakers' fine sensitivity, I think Audio Engine's P4 is capable of very reasonable results. But the design emphatically does need careful pairing to avoid sounding a bit overblown. Placement on a solid piece

of furniture is recommended and I would feel these units will be better suited to small listening environments.



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The small Audio Engine P4 stands out in a few ways. It is enormously sensitive, delivering 89dB sound pressure level from just one nominal Watt of input, outstanding for such a small loudspeaker. It will go loud from 20 Watts or so and will suit small computer audio systems and such like. It also has a substantial +6dB step up in output above 1kHz our frequency response analysis shows, an effect that will give it a bright or even fierce sound balance. So the P4 is not an accurate loudspeaker by any means and there appears to be little attempt to make it so.

The narrow slot port applies broad damping to the bass unit, extending output down to 50Hz. However, port output was not high so although bass appears to go deep for such a small cabinet in practice this small Audio Engine will only manage 'bass' if placed close to a rear wall.

Impedance was low and this is really a 4 Ohm loudspeaker, even though the peaks lift measured overall impedance up to 6 Ohms.

The P4 is dominated by raised treble output. This apart it measures well. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**

Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**

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# SUN DIAL



## Nino Rota: *Music for Federico Fellini*



### SUN DIAL

#### *Sun Dial* Headspin

Formed in 1990 and with several album releases under their belt, this self-titled vinyl LP precedes a planned CD reissue campaign of their back catalogue via the Shrunken Head label, so keep a look out. This album reveals the band's dirty, grungy, messy rock ethics that resemble a Nirvana-like vibe. Lead singer Gary Ramon provides gritty vocals to front the band's no-nonsense approach. In fact, Ramon himself is an interesting figure, especially with his extra-curricular works with the likes of Coil and Current 93. His eclectic tastes mean that his delivery is always interesting while his take on a lyric is imaginative. To that extent, his interpretative abilities of the lyrics are interesting. Yes, they are simple but Ramon gives them more legroom.

That sense of space is not provided by the music – no, the music itself constructs a wall of noise – the space is only created by the lyrical constructions which are short and sparse, relying on repetition to get the message across. Something our own ex-Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, was a major advocate of, incidentally. Which means that either Ramon has a media savvy approach to his song creations or Brown really

needs to pick up a guitar. This album introduces a barrel load of desolate riffs that move from darkness to the intense and then, bouncing between the pair, creates a sort of sonic rock pendulum.

Check out the CD reissues via the group; 'Reflector', the band's second album which here arrives with bonus tracks plus an extra disc of outtakes and live cuts; 'Return Journey' was supposed to be the band's second album but the project was abandoned (these are the lost sessions in full plus the deluxe edition of the debut) and 'Other Way Out' with outtakes and unreleased tracks.

### NINO ROTA

#### *Music For Federico Fellini* Get Back

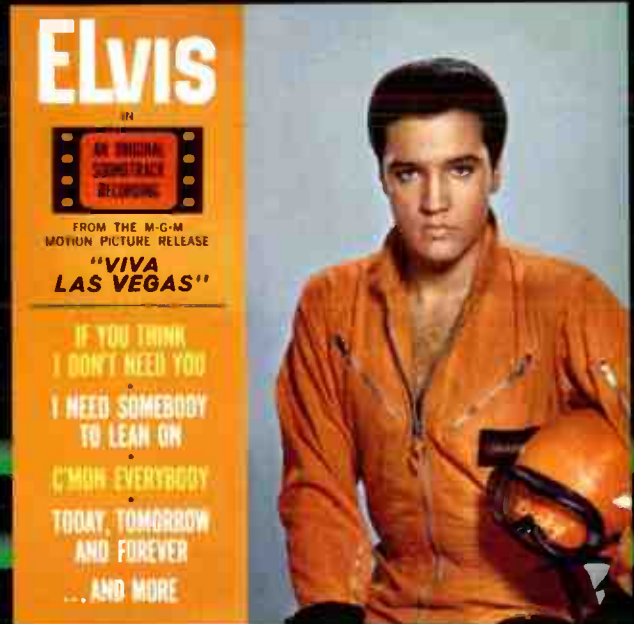
Federico Fellini was an iconic film maker who became a friend and ally, during the sixties in the UK, of the alternative culture, a symbol of intellectual cool and a hero for the aspirational film goer. His work spanned his neo-realist period of the forties and fifties in which real people were portrayed in works showing poverty and harsh living conditions to his late period neorealism including the then shocking 'La Dolce Vita' (a journalist's search for love and happiness), his examination of dreams during the sixties with films such as

'81/2' (in which a director, suffering from writer's block, experiences dreams and flashbacks) and the late period, seventies works including the vulgar comedy, 'Amarcord'.

All these films featured soundtracks by the composer Nino Rota and all are now presented in this magnificent box set. Contained in a pizza-style container, the trio of soundtracks are presented as individual albums within their own sleeves and incorporating their own artwork while the records themselves are included in the national colours of Italy: one record in white, another in red and a third in green. Like many vinyl productions in coloured vinyl however, this does result in a rather noisy playback, I hasten to add.

Rota's works plug directly into the contemporary culture. They can be deceptively inoffensive as in 'La Dolce Vita' because, despite their often upbeat and pastoral nature, there is often depth to be had for the patient with disturbing angularity inserted to keep things interesting. Variety is another Rota weapon with, on '81/2', a sprawling array of styles from European brass bands to waltz-time orchestras and rock'n'roll. 'Amarcord' is wholly more intimate with solo work or small ensembles dominating. A significant box set.





**THE TREE PEOPLE**  
*It's My Story*  
**Guerssen**

I have to hold my hands up and admit that I'd never heard of this outfit before who hail from Oregon, USA. After some investigations I found that they released their first album (self-titled) in 1979 and then followed that up with another ('Human Voices') five years later. I knew that teachers had long holidays but this is ridiculous because this album is the band's third release – was it worth the wait? The current incarnation consists of Stephen Cohen (acoustic guitar), Jeff Stier (flute) and Rich Hinrichsen (double bass) with the added occasional voices of Maevie Stier and Nicole Campbell. Their music is basically folk but it's not as simple as that. There's too many tweaks in their work for them to be labelled with such a simple word. Which is why you will see the words 'freak folk', 'psych folk' and 'alt-folk' tagged, rather uncertainly, to them.

Whatever you call them, 'It's My Story' is a wholly engaging album that, right from the off, pulls you into their head space. Beautifully melodic, the album is both busy and calming in its presentation. The title track, the first on Side One, grabs

you immediately with a delicious selection of hooks while the next track on the side, 'Sunday', takes you on an organic ambient journey of flute, double bass and acoustic guitar. And so it goes on, mixing instrumentals and vocal tracks, throughout, in a wonderfully dreamy manner. For those wondering what the band was up to during its earlier days, you can get a flavour by checking out the track, 'Space Heater', which sits on Side Two and is a remake of the track that appeared on their debut release. A series of complicated ideas simply executed to form a magical album.

**ELVIS PRESLEY**  
*Viva Las Vegas*  
**Music On Vinyl**

Ah, the Elvis films, eh? I spent half my life watching those things during summer holidays as a kid where Elvis would always be called Johnny or somesuch, take part in a few Bond-like action moments (racing in a car, etc.), get into trouble, get out of trouble and then break out into song during inopportune moments while dreamy eyed girls would swoon. Then he'd get into a bit more trouble from which he and his chums would have to extricate themselves. He was Norman Wisdom with shiny teeth and

perfect hair. And, of course, there were the songs. The king for the King just *has* to be 'Viva Las Vegas' which tends to be the hook that just about every Elvis impersonator latches themselves upon sooner or later.

The principal feature of this release (and the other two albums listed below exhibit the same characteristic) is the quality of the pressing. For example, playing the first track of this album, a particularly toe-tapping case of the movie-derived ditties within the Elvis soundtrack fraternity, I heard the left-hand channel spring to life. Thinking that I'd lost the right speaker channel because of a pulled speaker cable or somesuch, I began to get up from my seat to investigate when the King's warblings sprang from the same right channel. Of course, there was no problem, I was, in fact, facing an example of early stereo programming which offered the star vocal performance in one speaker and the backing track in the next. What struck me, though, was the total silence from this 'dead' channel that lead me to believe that it was faulty. High praise indeed! Also look out for two additional Elvis LPs from Music On Vinyl: 'Girls! Girls! Girls!' and 'G.I. Blues'. **PR**

# Crystal Ball

**David Price remembers Sony's PS-8750 turntable from 1975, one of the very first quartz locked direct drive designs made...**

It's hard to overstate the significance of turntables back in the nineteen seventies. In today's multi format world, realising just how important the humble vinyl LP was back then requires real contortions of the mind.

We were ten years into the widespread use of stereo LP in this country, and vinyl was living through in its harvest years. Sales records were constantly being broken (if you pardon the pun), as the likes of Mike Oldfield, Pink Floyd and Electric Light Orchestra produced mega-selling albums with lavish packaging, whilst Queen and Wings shifted hitherto unseen amounts of 7" singles. There was a sense that vinyl had no rival; open reel was for studio use and police surveillance, cassettes were for cars and Radio 3 FM aside, radio wasn't able to touch vinyl's soaring sonics.

That's why every new high end turntable release had real significance; here perhaps was a product that just might take us even closer to the original sound than anything else yet devised? Because vinyl was limited only by the engineering precision and innovation of the products built to play it, rather than some notional line

"an essay in the way the Japanese could manufacture a domestic hi-fi product like a military-grade precision instrument..."

drawn in the sand by its inventors at a certain point in history (as with digital), it was perfectly possible that the latest top notch turntable could take us closer to perfection.

By the mid nineteen seventies, the turntable breed had really

evolved into what we'd recognise it as being today. The first Technics SL1200 appeared in 1972, offering direct drive in a package far more affordable than the broadcast standard 1969 model SP-10, which is where the technology first appeared.

The race was on, during this decade, for Japanese manufacturers to offer the technology in ever more affordable products. By 1975, only budget Japanese turntables, such as Pioneer's PL12, were belt driven; quite a contrast to the UK audiophile market which was dominated by belt driven Thorens-type models.

Sony's 1975 range offered a twist, however. As expected, the mid priced PS-4750 and higher end PS-6750 were direct driven, but sitting right at the very top was the breathtaking PS-8750, sporting direct drive augmented by a 'X-tal Lock'. This was Sony-speak for what came to be

universally known as quartz crystal lock, a clever refinement to the direct drive system, adding complexity but allowing it to achieve vanishingly low wow and flutter figures, and the associated rock-solid speed stability. Two separate circuits were

used in the servo control system of the turntable; one was the conventional servo and the other, switchable, was the quartz lock. The latter wasn't affected by voltage and temperature variations during use, making for breathtaking wow and flutter measurements of 0.025% WRMS, when generally it was said that the ear couldn't detect beyond 0.1%.

The system worked by the use of a 'tape head' mounted just inside the rim of the 320mm diecast alloy platter, with the platter's inside rim sporting a magnetised material. This sent pulses to the magnetic head which fed them into the servo control circuitry in real time, telling it whether the deck was running at all slow or fast. Normally this would be referenced off the mains supply, but the 'X-tal lock' system had its own quartz crystal, oscillating at a very precise frequency, which gave a 'fixed' reference time independent of the mains. Sony's innovative take on this drive system even became the subject of an Audio Engineering Society paper by Susumu Hoshimi and Hisashi Suwa.

The system worked brilliantly,





and proved both an instant (albeit subtle) improvement in sound and a great showroom sales feature. Ironically, Sony's implementation of the direct drive system in its high end decks was so good that the 'X-tal Lock' was of marginal effectiveness; the cheaper PS-6750 also gave an extremely solid and pitch-accurate sound, but all the same the quartz crystal was the crowning glory to a turntable which - until the arrival of the later (and arguably inferior sounding) Biotracers, was the Sony Corporation's biggest, most expensive and best integrated turntable ever.

The deck is an essay in the way the Japanese could manufacture a domestic hi-fi product like a military-grade precision instrument. The torquy direct drive motor spun the platter up to speed within half a revolution, with a built-in brake circuit to stop the turntable quickly when the stop or reject buttons were activated. The 237mm statically balanced PUA-160S tonearm's

jewelled trunnion mount and carbon fibre arm and headshell gave it the feel of Japan's finest cameras, when hand cueing; the lift-lower mechanism even had its own silent motor! There was a photo-electric activated end of side auto stop, to save the (surely very expensive) stylus on your phono cartridge, should you be unable to wrest it from its run out groove. Most PS-8750s came supplied with optional Sony XL55 moving coils.

Such finery didn't just stop with the direct system and tonearm; the deck is beautifully built from a mix of materials; polished aluminium surrounds a frame made from Sony's Bulk Mold Compound material. Even the dustcover was a thing of beauty; heavily smoked acrylic complete with an 'anti-static' metal grid inset - somewhat reminiscent of a heated rear window in a mid seventies limousine! It's a largish beast too, at 458x184x395mm and heavy at 14.2kg. All of which made for an impossibly expensive turntable, with levels of

precision and finish to put almost every British deck to shame.

Sonically, the Sony is extremely clean and open, with little in the way of coloration right across the frequency band. It has the feel of a very delicate, finessed performer, with an unerringly strong and grippy bass, a lovely silky high treble, and a neutral, open and expansive midband. Indeed, it's surely one of the best sounding integrated turntables, giving way only to even more expensive and advanced machines that followed in its wake later, such as Kenwood's Lo-7D.

It's certainly true to say that the PS-8750 is a rare turntable; it's unlikely to turn up in your local free-ads paper for £15. But despite its vast £800 (in 1977) price when new, they do turn up every now and again for less than the cost of a new Technics SL1200. Due to its pedigree and position in life, the PS-8750 can be seen as one of the true aristocrats of Japanese turntables.

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"despite what the song says,  
things don't always necessarily get better!"



## David Price

**F**or many years, it was my deepest, darkest secret. I'd try not to mention it in polite company; I'd agonise about when - or even whether - to tell girls I was dating at all. It was, you see, awfully difficult to come out of the closet and confess to people who'd regard my lifestyle as bizarre. What on earth would they think of me, when I mentioned at a party or in a pub? "Hi, my name's David and I don't have a TV"...

Auntie Beeb certainly found it hard to understand; she kept sending me letters telling me she was going to come round and check I wasn't hiding my (non-existent) television. If I was, she said tersely, I'd get a huge fine from the BBC Witchfinder (or was that Director?) General. When I simply told the TV Licensing people I didn't have a telly, they looked at me like I was Keith Richards launching a healthy living video...

The funny thing was that my quality of life was really rather good. I didn't have a TV not as a political statement, or to dodge the licence fee; instead I didn't have a TV because I'd moved back to the UK, set up my hi-fi and just not got round to getting a TV. Life was nice; whereas otherwise I'd be watching some twaddle on the goggle box, now I'd simply cue my GyroDec, pour a glass of vino, spark up the occasional Silk Cut and sit back with my system, enjoying the finest of times. What on earth was the point of forsaking an evening with my original Japanese pressing of Crosby, Stills Nash and Young's 'Deju Vu' for the tri-weekly fix of Brookside? Well, quite...

Still, things changed. In 2003 I clocked 24 at a friend's house, and adored it. Whereas I'd previously listened to radio late into the night, now I would sometimes sit back and watch Jack Bauer blasting baddies, from a DVD spinning inside my

computer. I found that running a USB soundcard out into my hi-fi system, sitting with my laptop PC fairly close up and in-between my Quad ESL989 loudspeakers, I could enjoy amazing audio-visual sensations. By 2005, I was getting seriously into DVDs, helped by new Mac PowerBook with its super screen and glitch free video playback...

Finally I succumbed. A Sharp Aquos 32" LCD telly arrived, and in conjunction with any number of review DVD players, I got more and more into the viewing experience. I'd gone fifteen years without a 'box', and now I was like a kid on Christmas day. Repeated visits to Fopp made for a rapidly expanding video library, and a fine time was had by all. Piping my DVD sound through my hi-fi was a transformational experience, making the video all the more enjoyable.

Yet still there was something wrong; I couldn't help thinking that the old picture I used to get on my eighties 14" Sony Trinitron was better. Somehow the blacks were blacker, the colours more colourful, the definition more striking, the contrast more vivid. This LCD panel just didn't quite do the business.

Warp forward five years and I've lived with DVD for seemingly an age, and do like it. I now have a current Sony Bravia 40" LCD TV, and this is fed via HDMI from any number of DVD players. I was very happy with this, until a friend of mine kindly donated a Sony Profeel; this is a classic eighties cathode ray tube monitor with a brilliantly aligned Trinitron tube. It absolutely hammered my new Bravia LCD; it's so diverting to watch, such is the richness of its colours, the precision of its outlines, the stability of its motion. I suddenly realised that my beloved DVDs via LCD flat panel TVs weren't quite as good as I thought...

Just recently, I've gone Blu-ray. Yes, I know it's a bit late in the day, but to be honest I'm not a TV geek

and didn't want to buy one until there was something I really wanted to watch on this much-vaunted new format. And so it was that one of my all time favourite TV shows appeared on Blu-ray recently. Gerry Anderson's *Space 1999*, shot on glorious 35mm film, was the most expensive-to-make science fiction show ever and a veritable visual feast, even if the slightly meandering plotlines interspersed with psychedelic dream sequences aren't your thing! The model making was brilliant, the sets superb, the special effects on another level from previous Gerry Anderson pictures.

Watching *Space 1999* on Blu-ray, I am finally seeing the show in all its glory; the already impressive DVD version bought four years previously now seems mushy and washed out. Indeed, it's now strangely reminiscent of viewing the show on a quality cathode ray tube TV like the Profeel, broadcast live, with sparkling colours and amazing definition to actors faces and planet surfaces. Now I can see that DVD via LCD TV covers its tracks well, not explicitly drawing attention to its faults, but somehow it just doesn't do it like it should.

This strikes me as having a fascinating parallel with listening to music on hi-fi. Most folk are happy to watch DVD on modern LCD flat screens having completely forgotten just how good tube TVs used to be. It's only when you move to Blu-ray that you realise what you were missing, as it spookily reminds you on how fine your original viewing experience once was. Ditto people thinking CD sounds good simply because they've forgotten how sublime vinyl could sound. Only when they hear 24/96 and/or SACD do they feel some of the magic of their own vinyl discs again. Despite what the song says, things don't always necessarily get better! ●

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"there are gems to be found if you take the time  
and dig deep enough..."



## paul rigby

**M**usically, there are no real surprises anymore, right? New music is trotting out well oiled and practiced formulas and familiar reissues merely remind us of what was once exciting. Yet there are gems to be found if you – or, rather some dedicated passionate music enthusiast – takes the time and the effort to dig deep enough.

And gems there are in one of the most impressive box sets I have had the pleasure to clap my eyes upon in many a long year. And it's a compilation. Not the usual genre to get the blood flowing. Out now via Germany's Bear Family record label ([www.bear-family.de](http://www.bear-family.de)), '...Next Stop Vietnam - The War On Record: 1961-2008' is quite simply magnificent. Arriving in a large slip case is a multi-folding gatefold containing 13 CDs plus a CD-ROM of lyrics. You also receive an LP-sized, hardback book that deserves plaudits all of its own.

The aim of the box is to track the history of the Vietnam war and to record the songs that were being released year on year. As you can see by the dates covered, those songs include later works that dwell on memories of the conflict and for those who have fallen.

Hugo Kessing, the reissue producer on the project, explained how he undertook his research. "By 2006, I had listened to 800-900 Vietnam-related songs. As this project has come to fruition, I have finally heard over 3,000. I thought that I was pretty knowledgeable on the music of the Vietnam War but found that that was not the case."

The most exciting element of this box set is not the famous, commercial

titles from the likes of Country Joe And The Fish (Country Joe McDonald supplies the forward to the included book), Joan Baez and Donovan, which are all included, but the gamut of obscure songs from unknown artists that are sometimes disturbingly direct: 'Claymore Polka', 'Khe San', 'Grunt', 'The War Keeps Draggin On', 'Dear Mr President' and more, "That has been the exciting part of this" said Kessing, "That there has been so much new material and so many new artists. Apart from the few commercial recordings, this body of music has been completely unknown."

Interestingly, the majority of this content, the obscure songs, are studio-produced country creations with strong emotions flowing through them. With many – you might be surprised to hear – raging against the anti-war protestors. So many of these songs celebrate the American flag, motherhood and anti-communism; a right-wing presence that is unexpected. In fact, this area of studio recording also produced 'answer songs' to well known anti-war hits. Remember Barry McGuire's 'Eve Of Destruction'? Often seen as an anti-war ditty, there appeared, within weeks, an answer song called, 'The Dawn of Correction'. "These records represented a right-wing backlash. Similarly, Buffy Saint-Marie's 'The Universal Soldier', which was also a hit for Donovan, triggered an answer song called 'The Universal Coward' by Jan Berry of the popular surf guitar duo, Jan & Dean. "His partner, Dean Torrence, thought it so right-wing that he even refused to have his name on the label," said Kessing. This all appeared around 1966, when the support for the war was fairly high.

The majority of the most obscure

songs were released in Nashville and were quickly recorded and pressed, normally in numbers of around 100 each. "These records were far more immediate than books of the time, which would often be affected by corrections and changes. Songs could be recorded in a matter of hours producing unfiltered sentiments." Instant history, in fact.

This music gives you a much better idea of the degree of polarisation in the country at the time than many textual histories out there. Further interest is supplied on disc seven, the 'In Country' disc which was written and recorded by the US military while they were in Vietnam, plus two discs created by Vietnam veterans: non-commercial sources that have previously been largely ignored. They deal with their part in the war and how they have been treated since they returned back home. So, here, you'll find songs dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, the long-term impact of the biological warfare chemical product, Agent Orange (e.g. grandchildren born with birth defects) that are, "... both personal and completely unique. I'm reasonably knowledgeable of war-related music from WW2 but I cannot find any music, and I have an archive of 10,000 sheet music copies, where veterans wrote music and recorded them about their wartime experiences."

So what we have here is not just a jolly selection of gallows humour music and doom-mongering from the likes of The Doors and Pete Seeger but a complete cultural record of the ordinary people who put their thoughts into song; direct, affective, often devastating but always riveting. An incredible production. ●

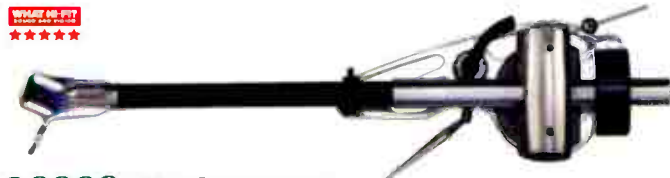
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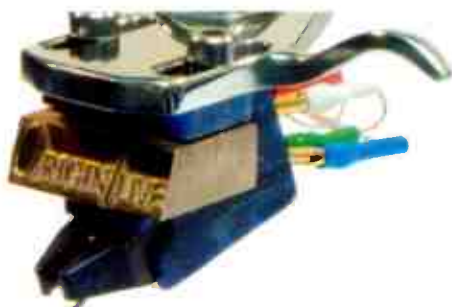
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And just look at those lovely Martin Logan Ethos loudspeakers in this issue. What perfection – there's nothing there – you can see right through them for heaven's sake! And that'll be £6,498 please.

By way of contrast I've just got one of those i-thingies that takes calls from outer space, or would do if the aerial worked properly. But it doesn't. No problem I thought; I know all about aerials and a bit of wire or perhaps a longer headphone cable will allow me to receive telephone calls in Central London. Typing "i-phone 4 tear down" into Google to find where Apple have hidden the aerial socket brought up <http://www.ifixit.com/Teardown/iPhone-4-Teardown/3130/4>, plus some even more complex descriptions on other websites, of the 'phones internal workings...

All of a sudden I was glad to be working in high fidelity. I nearly swooned at the complexity of the thing, and that's just the bits you can 'see' like a gyroscope and motion detectors using MEMs technology. There's a complete computer onboard made by Samsung we are told, a proprietary Apple design based on an ARM core that first popped up in the BBC Acorn I believe. And – I knew it – an FM radio. But it isn't used, probably because there's no space left for an aerial socket.

This is where the modern world

went wrong of course. It's too involved in the science of everything. Apple engineers must get terrible headaches designing in that lot and you get something potentially able to reach out across the universe, if only it had an aerial socket, for just £400 or so I believe.

I think I prefer the contrary approach adopted by enlightened audio manufacturers that the less you use the better it will sound, because each and every component introduces degradation. Then when designing said product as you throw out yet another component, sound quality improves and the price can be put up! This is one of the delightful ironies built into audio design, one that eludes modern day engineers – now known as traditional engineers – who reach for yet another silicon chip to solve a problem. That isn't the way to do it. Just look at my shiny new iPhone: stuffed with chips and it doesn't work well.

The truth is a little more complicated of course. We contributed to the valve amplifier design lexicon back in the early 1990s with our first 300B World Audio Design kit amplifier. The idea behind it was to use as few amplifying or 'active' devices as possible. The place for electronic components was on the floor, not in the amplifier. But what actually happened was that we substituted simplicity with complexity, it's just that it doesn't look that way.

You don't design anything with silicon chips; all the work is done for you by boffins at Texas Instruments and National Semiconductor; they even tell you how to use their bits in helpful Application Notes. What we had to do with 300B was design and build ever more complicated transformers, including inter-stage driver transformers. The result was an amplifier with almost no components

inside and that's the amplifier I choose to use today. That's what Icon Audio have done with their MB845 amplifier: it's a medley of transformers, each one a fundamental design job. They are so difficult to build there are fewer factories on this planet able to do the job than there are able to make iPhones.

And that's the beauty yet the difficulty in Martin Logan's XStat panel. The fact that there's almost nothing there, little to see, is testament to the effort this company has put into perfecting the electrostatic transducer. Their electrostatic panels rely on unusual proprietary processes developed by the company and from what I have been told in the past, by Quad in particular, about the difficulties of designing and building electrostatics I have nothing but the greatest admiration for Martin Logan and their solution.

You don't have to take my word for its sound quality. Rafael Todes, who plays a Strad, in the Allegri String Quartet, ran off with our review pair directly I switched them off and he confirms their rendition of violin and viola is unsurpassed and that they are a very special loudspeaker.

The truth is a little more complicated with the iPhone too. People in my area – a lot of them – recently objected to a proposal for a phone mast to improve signal strength. The iPhone isn't as sensitive as my outgoing Samsung and drops calls earlier as I walk into a steel reinforced concrete building, but at least I can play Tiddlywinks on it using an App, when it's impossible to reach the cosmos.

The science of nothing runs exactly counter to a lot of what we grapple with today, especially mobile phones. Its simplicity is deceptive; in my experience though it gives the best sound quality, as Martin Logan and Icon Audio demonstrate. ●

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"I don't think it's ever been easier to access music, be it via a physical album, a virtual track or an artist's name..."



## adam smith

So, as the spherical stylus of destiny approaches the runout groove in the LP of time that is '2010', and the autochanger of fate gets ready to whip the arm off and drop the 2011 disc on, I can't help but wonder what the next year, and indeed the next decade, have in store for us in sonic and technology terms. In his live show that I enjoyed recently, comedian Dara O' Briain made the observation that we are overloaded with technology and the means by which to enjoy music, films and entertainment generally. I have to say, he has a point...

After all, consider for a moment the hobby that all *Hi-Fi World* readers undoubtedly enjoy the most, namely music. If you want to listen to an album or track, there are a huge number of ways that one can go about this. If you prefer a physical format, you can buy it on CD, certainly, but there is an ever-increasing chance that you will be able to buy the LP; a limited edition one that is rather pricey possibly, but the option is there nonetheless. The pre-recorded cassette option seems to have largely fallen by the wayside but the cassette in general seems to be staging a slight comeback, so recording one yourself is as easy as it ever was. In fact, it would appear that home taping didn't actually "kill music" after all – who'd have thought it?

Moving further afield, if you're one of these people who aren't all that fussed by a physical format, then there are a myriad of further options open. Digital downloads are becoming cheaper, more easily available and in increasingly higher quality. It doesn't take too much effort to quickly develop a whole hard drive full of music that offers a better selection of tunes than most people who stick to the 'proper' formats

(well, at least until your hard drive conks out and you lose the lot!). Heck, you don't even have to buy them if you don't want to – pay £10 per month to the likes of Spotify and you have an almost infinite jukebox of songs at your disposal whenever and wherever you want them, the latter thanks to the various smartphones and digital music players with their appropriate 'Apps'.

The story is the same when it comes to films and live music concerts. You can buy them on video, DVD or Blu-ray, you can rent them in all of those formats, or you can digitally download or stream them over the interweb. Add in the radio stations available in their dozens (analogue), hundreds (DAB; well if you can manage to pick up a signal, anyway...) or thousands (the internet) and frankly, it's a wonder that any of us manage to get anything done with all these distractions at our beck and call.

Now, as many readers undoubtedly realise, I am something of a traditionalist. I like a physical format, I remain dubious over the reliability of hard drives, having lost more than one load of files due to their failure and I still think that quality can tend to take a back seat to convenience, which is a compromise that I am still not willing to make. That said, though, the situation is steadily improving and I can feel that it is only a matter of time before I finally dip my toes into the murky water of digital music. Heck, you might even see some musical content on my iPhone one day [I thought you didn't approve of Apple products, Adam? Ed.].!

Talking of that infuriatingly addictive portable device, I have to say that there is one piece of music-related technology on it that I would find very difficult to live without. Imagine if you will that

you are sat watching something on television and a lovely song crops up in the background or during a title sequence. The chances of the programme makers telling you what it is in the credits are as slim as they ever were and often the internet draws a blank, especially if the music is buried somewhere in the programme. May I therefore recommend the App that I have purchased that is only beaten in frequency of use on my phone by eBay? It's called Shazam and it couldn't be simpler to use – you simply hold the microphone up to the music playing, hit the 'Go' button and the phone records a short sample and sends it off to a database that is probably hidden somewhere on Tracey Island or one of Captain Kirk's favourite Starbases. In a matter of seconds it tells you artist, title, album and even gives you a direct link to the iTunes store so you can buy it there and then. Frankly, this is how I want my technology to work for me and despite throwing some seriously weird stuff at it, I can count on the fingers of one hand the times it has drawn a blank. It's brilliant and I cannot recommend it highly enough!

So there we have it. Regardless of what you think of it all and what your preferred methods of acquisition and reproduction are, I don't think there is any doubt that it has never been easier to access musical entertainment, whether that be a physical album, a virtual track or even just an artist's name. Goodness knows what 2011 and the years following it will be bringing us, but all of us here at *Hi-Fi World* are very keen to see what materialises. That's for next year, though - in the meantime, I suggest you sit back, pop on your favourite tune, maybe pour a wee dram to go with it and simply enjoy, because that is what it's all about. Merry Christmas! ●

# vinyl section

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JANUARY 2011

[www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk)

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**ORIGIN LIVE ALADDIN 104**

Tony Bolton tries out a fine new mid-price phono cartridge.

**INSPIRE ECLIPSE SE12 106**

This fine 12" turntable goes for a spin with Tony Bolton.

**ALL MIXED UP 111**

Paul Rigby has some new vinyl LP compilations for your perusal.

## news



### ELEVATOR BATH

Featuring left-field music which explores soundscapes, textured ambience and the downright weird, Elevator Bath ([www.elevatorbath.com](http://www.elevatorbath.com)) has an interesting suite of limited edition vinyl picture discs on offer. Each, supplied in a plastic cover, features artwork created by the LP's own creator, giving you a sense of the visual as well as the aural. They include Dale Lloyd's 'Akasha For Record' a drone-based field of ambience that incorporates found sounds; Matt Shoemaker's 'Isolated Agent/Stranding Behaviour' which investigates a feedback world of noise set within a fractured setting, plus Keith Berry's 'The Cartesian Plane', a haunting emptiness, a void on wax.

### DOXY HALF-DOZEN

Six new releases from Doxy span blues, country and jazz. Beginning with Ornette Coleman's 'Tomorrow Is The Question' (1959), featuring Don Cherry, Percy Heath, Red Mitchell and Shelly Manne, this LP removed rhythm and relied on textures to promote his own version of free jazz. Thelonious Monk's 'Brilliant Corners' (1957) is, in fact, a brilliant album and an essential purchase for any jazz fan: it evokes an energy and strength fused, even today, with an unsullied approach to Monk-flavoured jazz.

The Angola Prisoners' Blues – via a prison in Louisiana – features detainees Robert Pete Williams, Hogman Maxey and Guitar Welch. Recorded in 1959, the album features songs like 'Electric Chair Blues' and 'I'm Gonna Leave You Mamma'. Also look out for a Hank Williams trio: 'Nashville Sessions' (1949-1952; demos plus rare radio cuts); 'Shreveport Sessions' (1948-1949, Louisiana Hayride radio recordings) and 'Montgomery' (1939-1949; demos and radio recordings).



### CHERRY PICKINGS

Three LPs from the Cherry Red stable. Judging by the sleeve art, you might be fooled in thinking that this first album features a late-sixties psychedelic band musing groovy thoughts when it is, in fact, the post-punk indie outfit from the eighties and nineties, Teenage Filmstars. Their 1992 debut, 'Star', on Creation will be welcomed by any My Bloody Valentine fan.



Next? The Times' 'Pop Goes Art' (1981). An album that was, in fact, a release from an earlier incarnation of the Teenage Filmstars: a glorious pop frenzy. Finally, Teenage Jesus And The Jerks' 'Shut Up And Bleed' were a no wave, post-punk outfit from New York, featuring the legendary Lydia Lunch. Noise was their friend and this collection (the band never released a full length album) is packed with 7" rarities, EP tracks and live works.

## ECLECTICISM

Taking the word 'variety' and skipping through the daisies with it, Music On Vinyl's ([www.musiconvinyl.com](http://www.musiconvinyl.com)) latest releases include the Manic Street Preachers' 'Know Your Enemy' (1991), an LP that attempted to re-create their political and dissenting personality. The Afghan Whigs' '1965' (2001) proved to be their first release on the Columbia label but the last album for this soul-infused indie band – it was a cracking way to exit, though.



Gov't Mule's 'Déjà Voodoo' (2004) gave new life to this rocking roots-based band with their effective blues crunching guitars and power riffs and more mature lyrics while extreme rockers, 'Alice In Chains' (1996), and neo-soul man, Maxwell (1997), both offer 'MTV Unplugged' fare. Then there's Jay-Z's 'Reasonable Doubt', a special edition that also includes a limited bonus 10" disc featuring the track, 'I Can't Knock The Hustle (Fool's Paradise Remixes)'.

## ...AND FINALLY

This issue's end piece includes The Gipsy Kings' self-titled masterpiece (Audio Fidelity; [www.audiofidelity.net](http://www.audiofidelity.net)) which is notable for the best rendition of 'A Mi Manera' – or 'My Way' – this side of Frank Sinatra. An excellently mastered edition. Next is Ray Charles' 'The Great Ray Charles' (Atlantic), an instrumental sollection that sees Charles as a jazz pianist. This is a welcome change from the usual soul-man explorations. The Sword's new album, 'Warp Riders' (Kemado; [www.kemado.com](http://www.kemado.com), which includes a download MP3 card) is gracious, a stoner rocking concept album! It's all rather SF and epic and, despite it not being the best release of the year, shows ongoing progress for this relatively new band. Kohoutek's 'Losslessloss' (Prophase; [www.myspace.com/prophasemusic](http://www.myspace.com/prophasemusic)) offers improv rock with guitar heroics and electronic weirdness with vocals that often seem part of the instrumentation. Mastered by Ray Staff, who handles the Pure Pleasure audiophile albums, Jim Guthrie's album from 2003, 'Now, More Than Ever' (3 Syllables; [www.myspace.com/3syllablesrecords](http://www.myspace.com/3syllablesrecords)) takes a sweeping pop ethic with string attachments, surrounded with a downbeat vibe but a thread of genius that runs through the entire project. Finally, Erlend And The Carnival's self-titled album (Static Caravan; [www.staticcaravan.org](http://www.staticcaravan.org)) brings a modern twist to folk rock with a English eccentricity that resembles The Kink's Ray Davies with a straw hat and a further strand hanging from the corner of his mouth.



## SPV DUO

Two new vinyl releases from the German-based SPV label includes the incomparable Zodiac Mindwarp & The Love Reaction's rocking 'We Are Volsung' which is scornful of life in general, dark and heavy.

## WE ARE VOLSUNG



Also look out for Angra's new release, 'Aqua', offered here in coloured vinyl as a limited edition, the prog metal outfit's seventh album release that follows Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with a water-fuelled album that combines heavy riffs with prog-laden melodies.

# Point Source

**Rafael Todes reports on the legacy left by the late Tom Fletcher, in the striking shape of the Fletcher Audio Omega Point 5...**

If this sounds more like an obituary than a review, I apologise, but the Fletcher Audio Omega is the product of Tom Fletcher's (formerly the designer and owner of Nottingham Analogue) final few years of work, and is as such the crowning legacy of a highly innovative career. Tom died earlier in October from cancer aged 72, following a fight of several years. Having left Nottingham Analogue, he forged a partnership with his former Danish distributor to form Fletcher Audio, and to realise the fruits of the work he had begun around the time when his illness started.

As you might expect considering his previous work, the Omega Point 5 has visually as well as aurally Nottingham Analogue DNA. Tom Fletcher had a fascination with how different materials sounded. In the Hyperspace he used a combination of alloy and graphite for the platter and MDF for the plinth. In the Omega Point 5, there is less mass, but the chosen material is a hardwood of some description for the plinth and the same material for the body of the turntable, which looks like a half-moon. The platter is weighty (10.5kg and 59mm thick) and made of an aluminium alloy. It has a sacrificial bearing made

of phosphor bronze with a stainless steel pin – the soft material will 'wear' into shape – and should last an estimated twenty years.

The motor is a similar type to the Hyperspace, and is connected by a substantial silicone band. Fletcher believed that it should be powerful enough to

maintain momentum, nothing more. It has the same eccentric lack of an on and off switch. To switch on, you give the platter a 'push', to switch off, you manually brake it. A similar set of bands circumnavigate the platter as with the Hyperspace to damp the 'ringing'. A small felt mat sits on top of the platter – the Hyperspace sees the record touching the platter directly. There is a curious piece of rubber which looks like a rat's tail, which brushes the underside of the platter during rotation, which according to the designer assists with phase issues. The three adjustable feet and armboard are made with Acetal (Polyoxymethylene - POM). A secondary armboard can also be fitted.

The deck was supplied with the Fletcher Zero arm, which is a hybrid design said to "combine the sonic attributes of a unipivot and a gimbal bearing arm" and retails at around two thousand pounds. It has a highly original anti-skate mechanism, which works like a rubber band on a balsa wood plane propeller and is operated by rotating a screw at the highest point of the arm, to add compensatory rotational force. There's an SME V-like screw for adjusting VTA on the fly. There is a "lite" version of this, the Point 3 which has a less substantial platter and retails at £2,599. In the New Year, the entry-level Point 1 is scheduled for release at around £1,500.

## SOUND QUALITY

One of the attractions that drew me to the Hyperspace is the sense of air and space it creates for the music. It is a sound that appears as if from a cloud. How would this new opus fare by comparison? Well, the Omega Point 5 took less than a couple of seconds to declare its hand. Listening to the opening of the Mozart Sinfonia Concertante for Winds, (the

lesser known one) on Philips (6707 020), I was immediately aware of the soundstage opening up massively. It was always fairly grand with the Hyperspace, but this took the performance space to epic dimensions. The separation between instruments was more clearly defined, creating a believable sonic image that turned my living room into a concert hall. After sampling this spacial feat, it may be difficult to return to a more compact space I fear!

Next up was the early Bernstein recording of 'Rhapsody in Blue', with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, conducted from the Piano by Bernstein (CBS60135). The piano had a rock-steadiness to it; it made me think that Steinways have changed since the nineteen fifties, the sound was more mellow, less brittle than today, but utterly convincing. The brass was more extremely located to the right than I am used to on the Hyperspace, there was more interplay between the orchestral sections, and seemingly greater distances between the instrumental sections too. How convincingly this turntable creates space is almost like a magician's trick.

I did notice on the downside that the 'weight' of the string section is more substantial with the Hyperspace; in its quest to achieve ultimate airiness, there are inevitably casualties. The Omega 0.5 does, however, have its half-brother's ability not to make heavy weather of anything, it never gets bogged





down in rhythms and is never leaden-footed; it bounces and springs along and often I found myself smiling at its jollity!

Tom Fletcher was a great music lover, and the two areas he was most interested in were classical and jazz. Turning to the 1958 recording of 'High Standards' (JASS Records),

Coleman Hawkins and Red Allen, I was instantly struck by how amazing this recording is. The instruments are *humongous* in the room, the energy, communication and spontaneity the musicians generate stopped me in my tracks. You have the illusion of being bathed in their sound. The piano sounded, like the previous recording, utterly solid, not at all honky-tonk, and mellow. The double bass just sounded right; not exaggerated, not showing off or sticking out, it was integrated to the correct degree – taut and tight, never bloated.

Listening to Sir Clifford Curzon's recording of the Schubert Impromptus (Decca Jubilee JB140, the Ab op 142 No2), a recording I had previously written off for its odd timbre, suddenly made perfect sense. It is Schubert at his most tender, soul-searching and poignant; the Omega expounds the microdynamics perfectly, showing the extraordinary range of colours that Curzon uses

to tell this melancholic tale. Isn't that the point of it all, to get to the heart of the music, and open the window to the performer's communing with the composer?

Raymond Leppard's recording (Philips 6747 166) of the Bach Brandenburg Concertos provide for some interesting insight. In the 3rd concerto, there are some beautifully sculpted spacial effects written by Bach; you hear a cellular unit being passed through the band, like a decanter of port being passed clockwise with every solo instrument having his or her say, virtually locatable in space. There is an evenness and excitement created by its precision. It's an old-fashioned way of playing Bach which you don't hear these days since the period/



“The Truth, nothing more,  
nothing less...”



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## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace turntable  
SME Series V tonearm  
Ortofon Kontrapunkt A cartridge  
Icon Audio PS3 Signature phono stage  
VAC Auricle Musicblocs power amplifier  
B&W 802D loudspeakers

## VITAL STATISTICS

Thickness of platter: 59mm  
Diameter of platter: 300mm  
Weight of platter: 10.5kg  
Width of plinth: 525mm  
Depth of plinth: 370mm  
Overall height of TT and plinth: 185mm  
Height of TT without plinth: 145mm

original instruments took over, but is not without its charms!

In the same set, there is a recording of Brandenburg no 5, with solo harpsichord, violin and flute, I had a feeling that the turntable was really 'on song', as it documents the interaction between the solo trio and the orchestra. When you go to a live concert, you don't just hear instruments playing, the most compelling thing is to feel the forces

"it bounces and springs along, and often I found myself smiling at its jollity!"

and tension between the different parts. It is rare to find this on reproduced music, and it's one of the first things to disappear with slick 'hi-fi' systems. This turntable seems to have this elusive quality in spades; not on every recording I've heard it reproduce, but when it does, you sure know it. I think this is where real musicality of a component lies; musicality is in my humble opinion too frequently abused as a concept. It is used as an undefinable, which is unquestionable.

However, and there is *always* a however, listening to Mahler's 6th Symphony last movement, which is a

massive, highly creative and original collection of orchestral colour, I miss the incision that I remember from the combination of the Hyperspace and the SME V, or even better Len Gregory's Conductor, an air-bearing parallel tracking tonearm. With both of these arms on the Hyperspace there is more grunt to the bass section, the bite of the beginning of the attack of the sound when the fugue starts. It's almost as if the

strings are using less rosin! More than likely this is down to the particular design of arm and not the turntable.

Tom Fletcher used to argue that if you reproduce a string instrument using metal, it is as if you were to make the instrument out of metal, which of course would sound awful. The fact that the plinth and the body of the turntable is made of wood I'm sure contributes to the

more 'organic' nature the sound has over the Hyperspace, and so many other turntables I've heard.

## CONCLUSION

This turntable represents the final chapter in a life's quest for the designer Tom Fletcher. Right from his work on the Dias decks of the late nineteen seventies, he was obsessed with the quest for a transparent, airy sound, and finding the heart and soul of the music he loved. He was not a marketing man and didn't play the game necessary for market domination. Instead, his success was largely based on word-of-mouth. This is his final statement – maybe with it posthumously he'll achieve the recognition he so deserved while he was alive.

## VERDICT

Superb high end turntable with a lifetime's design expertise contained within. A fitting testament to the late Tom Fletcher.

**FLETCHER AUDIO OMEGA POINT 5** £3,699  
Fletcher Audio  
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[www.fletcheraudio.co.uk](http://www.fletcheraudio.co.uk)

## FOR

- naturally musical
- organic tonality
- sense of ease
- design integrity

## AGAINST

- hand start



## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

With a first bending mode at 380Hz the Tom Fletcher arm is quite stiff, helped by being short and light. Tube damping was good, if not up to SME standards, the tube resonance causing a peak acceleration of 0.2g at the headshell, which is quite low. There is a small energy plateau above this and a rise in activity at high frequencies, like most arms, likely due to headshell modes, but all were well under control so the arm should sound clean and reasonably character free.

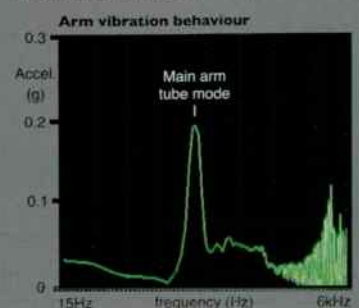
The turntable span at exactly the right speed; there was negligible error. Unweighted wow was very low at 0.1% and this performance was maintained irrespective of motor position and belt tension, making the result very stable. Weighted wow and flutter was very low at 0.043% and this was a nice steady result too, as well as an exceedingly good performance. This is as good as it gets, at least when measuring from a test LP.

The Tom Fletcher Omega 0.5 was very speed stable and speed accurate too. The arm measured well, although it

was not quite up with the best. NK

Speed accuracy no error  
Wow & flutter 0.1%  
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted) 0.043%

## ARM VIBRATION



## WOW &amp; FLUTTER



# Swing-ometer

**Tony Bolton gets down to the beat with Origin Live's Aladdin moving coil cartridge...**

**O**ver its twenty-four year existence Origin Live has introduced products that encompass most of the audio replay system, from arms and turntables through to loudspeakers and cables. One of the few missing links in the chain has been the lack of an in-house pickup cartridge – until now. Founder Mark Baker commissioned Peter Lederman of SoundSmith in the USA to create a special model purely for Origin Live. The result is the Aladdin, a Moving Iron design that combines design elements from two of SoundSmith's own range.

Based around the Carmen model but using an energy management system, found on the range topping Sussurro cartridge, which controls the dissipation of energy travelling up the cantilever, the Aladdin is housed in a blue body made of a material that Peter described as "a Dupont material - similar to Corian". There is a gold coloured bar that runs across the front and leading edges of the body just below the mounting block. This both helps to damp resonances in the already pretty inert body, add a little mass and provide a secure location point for the mounting screws.

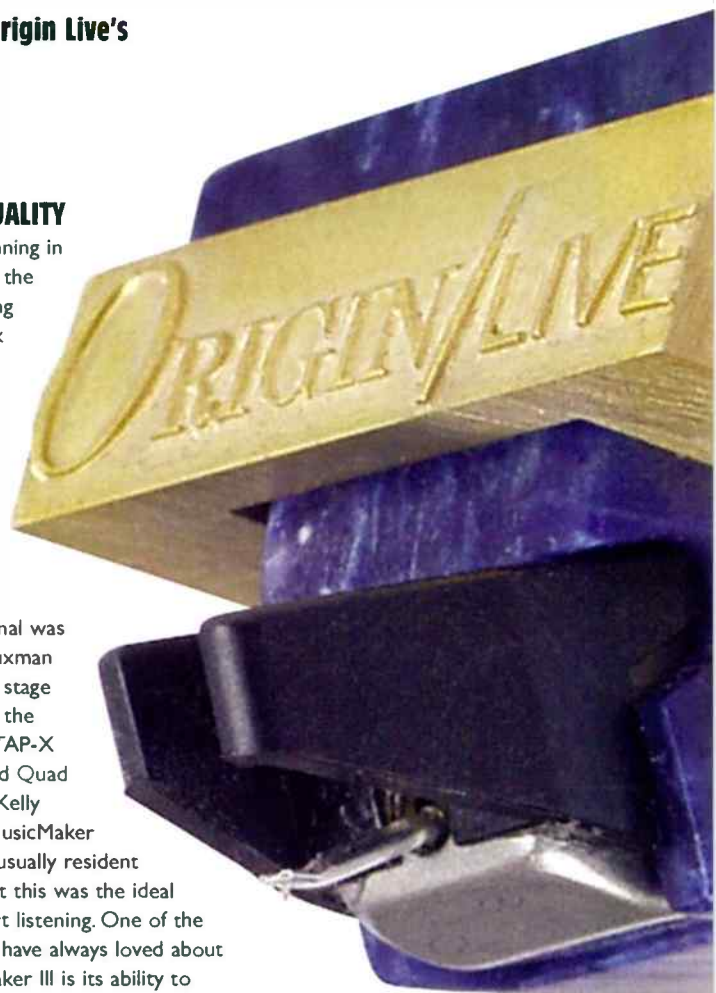
Internally the Aladdin utilises the moving iron principle for its generator. In this design both the magnet and coils are stationary, whilst a small piece of ferrous metal, usually iron, attached to the cantilever, moves within the magnetic field and produces a signal within the coils. This has the advantage of being able to be engineered with a very low moving mass - in this case the moving mass is claimed to be lower than that of a lot of moving coils - which should help tracking ability and reduce record wear. Output is high enough to drive any moving magnet phono stage easily. In this case it was adequate, seeming to output less power than my MusicMaker III Moving Iron unit, so requiring a small rotation of the volume control to compensate.

## SOUND QUALITY

I did the running in and most of the listening using the Hadcock 242 Cryo arm on the Sondek, which sports an Origin Live DC power supply. The Aladdin's signal was fed into a Luxman E200 phono stage and through the Bent Audio TAP-X and bi-amped Quad 303s to my Kelly KT3s. The MusicMaker III (£725) is usually resident here, so I felt this was the ideal place to start listening. One of the things that I have always loved about the MusicMaker III is its ability to transmit not just an accurate rhythm, but to do it with a certain subliminal energy that makes the sound quite invigorating. Moving magnets generally do a similar thing, but, for me, in a somehow slightly less sophisticated way. The moving iron designs that I have tried tend to have a more sinuous nature when required, and seem to delight in sonic fireworks.

The Aladdin proved no exception to this, and I found myself working my way through quite an acreage of jazz LPs and thoroughly enjoying the drive, pace and snap to the beat imparted by this device. The records varied in age from the nineteen fifties onwards, although the majority of the recordings were from that decade and earlier. The Aladdin seemed unphased by such old material, producing a smooth and tonally rich sound from both mono and stereo grooves alike.

Along with its 'romp along' nature, I found the bass had a pleasingly full bodied and slightly round sound that proved easy to listen to and very satisfying. Above



this propulsive foundation the midrange had an equally well shaped framework in which to hang the rasp of saxophones or the reserved sound of muted trumpets. A joyous few hours, in which I played and enjoyed the tunes for the music's sake without worrying about the high fidelity aspects of the sound.

The following night I was still playing dance music, but of the



modern variety, wandering through a selection of progressive and psychedelic trance. Here the stereo staging abilities of the cartridge showed through, with sound moving around a big area in front of me. Perceived depth was good, as was width, with odd effects suddenly swooping a sound in from the extreme

It would have provided better separation of some of the more complex strands, but it does cost nearly half as much again. The Aladdin just rolled up its sleeves and waded in with typical gusto, presenting the sound in a capable and pleasingly comprehensive manner. If you like the refined, sometimes cerebral, delicacy of some of the MC designs then this cartridge is not for you. It can be beautifully delicate when required,

allied to plenty of get-up-and-go. Think of it as one of your more bohemian friends, who is more worried about enjoying the music, than giving an intimately detailed account of the frequency extremes. Combine this with a reasonable disregard for the condition of records, surface noise being well controlled and unobtrusive, if not generally eliminated, and you have a cartridge with a certain uniqueness

"well worth a listen, it has a very persuasive sound..."

but in a more earthy, organic way than the more gossamer, floaty presentation of the MCs.

This cartridge seemed to handle the scale of the piece in a convincing and even handed manner, not being flustered by the unleashing of the full power of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (conducted by Zubin Mehta) and the chorus of the Vienna State Opera, nor trying to 'big up' the soft interludes of solo voice.

### CONCLUSION

Origin Live's new Aladdin cartridge will not suit all tastes or systems. It will provide a vibrancy, and full cream tonal

to its character.

The sound is full and a little rounded off, but not sluggish, having a sylph-like dexterity, particularly in the bass and lower midrange. Staging is good, although not the airiest around, and the higher frequencies are well detailed but not overly analysed. It is a persuasively musical sound that I found easy to live with and enjoyable. There are more detailed and less obviously passionate sounding cartridges around, but that would miss the point of the Aladdin. Its *raison d'être* is to make music in an enjoyable manner, and leave some of the detailed niceties to others to worry about. It may not be the last word in ultra wide bandwidth audio, but it did what it did so well, that I really didn't care. It is certainly worth a listen, it is a very persuasive sound.

left or right before moving it around the area like a demented, electronically synthesised bee.

Subsequent listening erred more towards the classical and culminated in Mahler's epic Symphony No.2 'The Resurrection'. The 4th movement of this is probably the best known, having been used as one of the major themes in Visconti's film, 'Death In Venice', however I love the 5th movement, starting with its growling basses, incorporating, to start with very quietly, the chorus, and gradually building up and down again until it finishes with full orchestra and chorus combined. It is a complex piece and can be demanding on both the tracking and staging abilities of a cartridge. This one made a good job of it. The MusicMaker

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

There was a large 1.7dB difference in output level between the channels of this cartridge, suggesting a difference in coil turns. Supporting this, the lower output channel (yellow) had a flatter frequency response due to reduced generator loss than the high output channel (green), differences being equalised in our analysis so the channels can be easily compared. Both channels exhibit falling high frequency output, sufficient to soften the sound and give a warm tonal balance. Inner groove tracing loss (red) was not great.

Tracking was good at 300Hz but fair at 1kHz. Tracking force was set to 1.5gms for this result, as the recommended 1.4gms is too low for a low-ish compliance hinge. There was visible triangulation of sine wave test tones, caused by third harmonic distortion, and lateral distortion measured 2%, double the usual 1% or so from second harmonic, not a good result. Distortion on vertical modulation was fair, being determined by a vertical tracking angle of 27degrees, a little high but this is not unusual.

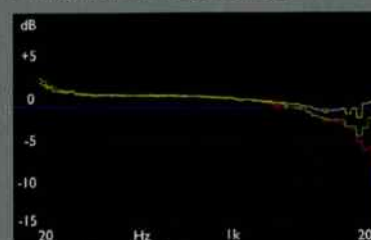
Output was low at 3.5mV at 5cms/sec rms; modern Ortofons manage

twice as much.

The Origin Live Aladdin from SoundSmith did not measure especially well by today's standards. NK

Tracking force	1.4gms
Weight	6.8gms
Vertical tracking angle	27degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 6kHz
Channel separation	24dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	63µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	16cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	2%
vertical	3.4%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	3.5mV

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



# Supersize Me

The twelve inch supporters club will cheer the arrival of Inspire Hi-Fi's Eclipse SEv2 12 turntable, fitted with matching extra long Audio Origami PU7 tonearm. Tony Bolton stretches out in front of it...



**A**lthough only in existence for twenty months, Inspire Hi-Fi have established themselves as a producer of highly regarded and finely engineered turntables. Adam Smith favourably reviewed the Eclipse deck in the September 2009 issue of *Hi-Fi World*. This model was equipped with Inspire's own take on the 9 inch Rega RB1000 tonearm. Since that review, Robert Isherwood, founder and managing director of the company, has been busy developing the Eclipse SEv2 12 you see here.

As the name suggests, the SEv2 12 is designed to take 12 inch tonearms, and Inspire offer a range of choices, including the SME V12, SME M212 and the Audio Origami PU7 fitted to this example (armboards to fit any other suitable length arm can be made on request.) The other main option included in this package was the outboard power supply unit. This costs £350 if bought separately, but only £250 if ordered with the turntable. An optional lid is available for £150.

Since Adam's review various 'under the bonnet' changes have also been made to develop the Eclipse

into SEv2 format. These include the bearing, spindle shaft and subplatter now being machined from one billet of stainless steel (previously the subplatter was of aluminium with the spindle bonded in) and further use of stainless steel in the mass loading to the acrylic platter.

Some other features have been carried over from the previous model, notably the Sorbothane feet under the lower plinth, and the cone feet supporting the upper plinth, with their built in Sorbothane 'shock absorbers'. The points of the cones rest in little recesses in the lower plinth and seem very effective in isolating the unit from external disturbances. I briefly tested this, by placing the turntable on a lightweight table, with the needle resting in the groove of a stationary record, and even with the volume turned up quite a lot, there was no sound of disturbance through the speakers despite some moderately heavy footfalls quite near to the deck.

As well as paying a great deal of attention to the engineering of this record player, the same level of care has obviously gone into the fit and finish of the various components. From the precisely machined detailing of the alloy armboard to the mirror finish polish on all of the black acrylic, and the exquisitely finished record weight, I found the deck difficult to fault. The overall effect was topped off with the superbly presented, and equally well engineered Audio Origami PU7 tonearm; the mixture of chrome, polished to the point that it looked almost liquid, gleaming gloss black, and some deceptively simple looking designs in both arm and deck, complementing each other perfectly.

Assembly and setup were very easy. The deck arrived semi complete, needing just the two plinths placing together and the belt and platters putting on – with two drops of the supplied oil added to the bearing housing. I transferred the Benz Micro Wood SL from the Clearaudio

Master Solution, swapped the decks over on the wall shelf, plugged the pickup lead into the Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage and settled down to listen.

## SOUND QUALITY

Although the phrase, "from the moment the needle hit the groove..." has been done to death in magazines over the years, for once I'm tempted to repeat it. Playing a 1950s HMV copy of 'Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Rogers and Hart Song Book' (let's just say although it looks to be in quite good condition the inner tracks can get a little edgy in a couple of places), I was immediately impressed with the lack of grain and general spaciousness of the sound. Although a couple of noises did catch it out in the inner grooves, even here there was a sense of separation and clarity that I am not used to hearing on this particular pressing. The instructions advise at least twenty hours of use to run the SEv2 12 in properly, so this I did, and returned to the Ella recording as a reference point...

The second time around, I felt that the essential character of a smooth, spacious, detailed and well balanced sound had remained unaltered, but the subtle detailing that separates the good from the very good had begun to show through.

I think subtle is an appropriate word for this deck and arm combination. Some players try to impress with cavernous bass upon which the higher frequencies teeter in an ungainly manner, whilst at the other extreme there are those that are more focused on midrange and treble detail, often at the expense of rhythmic drive.

The Eclipse seemed to do neither. Bass was deep, agile and well formed, and although not the fastest that I have heard, possessed enough





bounce to get the feet moving, and enough unforced depth to be satisfying. Twenty hours in, and the timing seemed a little tighter, adding a certain snap to the gently swinging dance rhythms of 'Manhattan' that moved its sense of rhythm from being something that left the listener static, to one that made dancing a consideration.

Keeping the sounds a little jazz influenced, I next played 'Mack The Knife' on a 1964 Atlantic pressing of 'The Bobby Darin Story'. In better condition than the Ella record, but still not in the first flush of youth, this forty six year old piece of vinyl belied its age with minimal extraneous noises and a soundstage that seemed to be just there, occupying a believable amount of space in front of me. Although a mono pressing, the openness and depth of the soundstage was impressive, but again without seeming to be overblown and towering over the listener.

Moving to stereo and modern recordings, I played the Fleet Foxes' eponymous LP from 2008. This was the Seattle based folk band's debut LP, and caught my attention when I first heard it at a friend's house with its combination of late sixties West Coast styling and harmonies. Imagine the vocal blending of the Beach Boys or the Vogues, combined with the more balladic sides of Jefferson Airplane and you get the idea. The combination of electric and acoustic guitars, occasional mandolin,

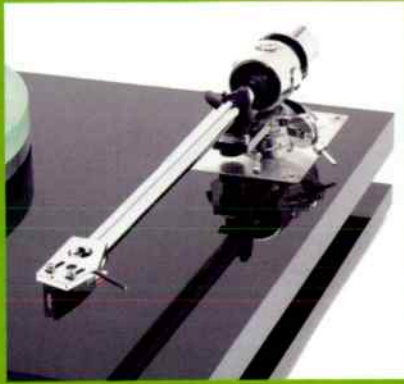
keyboards, bass and drums were easily and accurately described in front of me. The stereo spread was both wide and deep, extending well beyond the speakers, and seemingly through the wall and into the driveway. The performers appeared to be realistically spaced and sized and the whole effect was quite convincing. Playing a mint condition record, the music emerged from an impressively dark background, instruments and voices flowing with a convincing conviviality.

The last record that I played before writing this was the 1959 stereo Decca recording of Curzon playing Greig's Piano Concerto. This is one of my favourite performances of this piece and I found myself immersed in it from the first distant rumble of the kettle drums, through to the final hard struck chords. The sound felt natural and easy, impressive and intimate by turns, leaving me to resist the urge to play yet one more track before sitting down at the keyboard.

I find myself left with one slight dilemma, which is where to attribute this impressive performance. The cleanliness of the sound, especially when playing the inner grooves of a record, owes a lot to the superior arm geometry inherent in the 12 inch design. Tracking error is hugely reduced, and here the example was very obvious. However, any arm, no matter how good, will fail to perform well







### AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7-12

This 12 inch tonearm is the long version of Audio Origami's PU7 which won Best Arm in our 2007 Awards (*Hi-Fi World* January 2008). There is a price differential of £350 between the two arms, meaning the 12inch model costs £1,999 with the standard bead blasted and anodised finish. This is available in pretty much any colour that you can think of - the company's website shows, amongst others, a pink example, and they have also made arms in the colours of both Watford and Sunderland Football Clubs no less! The internal wiring is Cardas 33GA although there is the option of a Kondo loom for an extra £350, as fitted to this example. The chrome plated finish cost an extra £1,000 (gold is also available for the same price) resulting in this particular arm costing £3,349. It's expensive, but the finish is stunning by any standards.

The acoustic-foam filled arm tube itself is made of aircraft grade aluminium or brass, as is the bell housing in which the bearings sit. The chosen arm mass and, occasionally, finish dictate material choice. The bespoke nature of these arms is demonstrated by the fact that the mass of the arm can, if required, be fine tuned to match a certain cartridge. Designer and maker John Nilsen tells me that each arm takes about one hundred and sixty hours to make, and that certain other tweaks are available dependent on the purchaser's choice of cartridge and deck. The headshell, also of aircraft grade aluminium, is described as a push fit into the arm tube - using approximately half a ton of pressure on a 10 ton press in the factory! The arm sits in four, 7 ball-race bearings that are mounted within a twisted cage rather than the more conventional crown mounting. These are very finely tolerated to within a few microns. On the other side of this sits the counterweight - brass for the plated arms, stainless steel for the anodised models, on a stub connected to the arm tube by a sleeve. Mounting is by either a 23mm Rega mount or a 30mm Linn one.

if mounted on a poorly designed or unsympathetically chosen deck, and here I think the combination of the two are both mechanically and aesthetically very well matched.

Both are subtle self effacing performers, that don't try to impress but reward the listener with a flowing, natural sound. Part of this is the effortless depiction of scale in the music, whether it is a solo voice with a mandolin, or a full orchestra and piano. At no time was there a feeling of showing off in the sound, rather a well balanced presentation that seemed to spread its favours evenly over the frequency range in a smooth and detailed manner. The only real quibble is over the practicalities of siting the power switch at the back of both the turntable and the

optional power supply. I found reaching behind either annoying and occasionally awkward and would prefer to see this rather essential control at the front.

### CONCLUSION

I would recommend this 12" turntable and tonearm combination to anyone wanting a simple to set up record playing system that doesn't need constant tweaking, sounds lovely, and looks beautiful. The optional power supply is worth having, bringing a little perkiness to the timing. Overall, a well thought out and executed design from Inspire Hi-Fi that can hold its head high even in the super competitive world of £2,000-plus turntables.



### VERDICT ●●●● £

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### FOR

- well timed & detailed bass
- three dimensional imaging
- 12" tonearm capability
- fit and finish

### AGAINST

- power switch location
- faces stiff competition

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

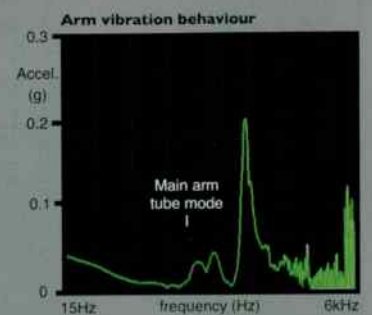
The first bending mode of the supplied 12in Audio Origami arm was surprisingly well damped; it is hardly visible in our accelerometer vibration analysis. The high (0.2g) but narrow peak at 900Hz is likely the common third order bending mode but there is little energy in it, so colouration will be minimal. The basic excellent stiffness and good damping of the arm at low frequencies and across the midband suggests firm bass, good dynamics and excellent stereo staging. The small energy plateau from 900Hz up to 2kHz may add a tad of character, but it may well be undetectable. Above 2kHz the arm is again remarkably clean and will likely have smooth, stable treble.

The turntable span at exactly the right speed; there was no error. All the same, there was some low rate cyclic wow at the rotational frequency of 0.55Hz even though the disc was centred, giving the 0.285% IEC Lin (unwtd) wow value seen in our analysis. This resulted in an IEC weighted value of 0.88% which is good, but not exceptional.

The Inspire Eclipse se12 with Audio Origami 12in arm should give a fine sound. It measures well. NK

Speed accuracy	no error
Wow & flutter	0.285%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.888%

### ARM VIBRATION 12in Audio Origami



### WOW & FLUTTER







# All Mixed Up

**For the first time in a long time, the vinyl-based compilation has begun to make a mark in terms of numbers and sales. Paul Rigby reflects on the continued maturity of the vinyl industry...**

In the physical format world of Compact Disc, the music compilation genre is notorious. Often viewed as the creative dustbin of the musical retail sector, the image of these products is poor. CD-based compilation music has been seen as throwaway and of little or no value: a judgement normally associated with downloads. Yes, there are good compilations out there, but they are rare, which has meant that the entire genre has become suspect...

The last time vinyl compilations had any sort of meaningful presence was sometime in the seventies but, incredibly, the vinyl-based compilation is making a comeback! Is this important? Definitely. In fact, vinyl may, single-handedly, be about to save the compilation as a musical sub-genre.

Mike Gething, boss of the UK office of the audiophile vinyl label, Music On Vinyl ([www.musiconvinyl.com](http://www.musiconvinyl.com)), agreed and reflected on how the industry has changed from a tentative beginning. "I did a stint at the Simply Vinyl record label, about five years ago, and it didn't work at all. We did a Steve Marriot tribute concert with the likes of Oasis appearing on it. It featured interesting cover versions and so on but didn't sell a bean."

At that time, when most reissue labels were still within their early stages of development, many concentrated on the

classic albums to fill their catalogue.

Even newly released albums tended to focus on classic artists. That was an essential 'level one' stage of development for just about every vinyl label on the market.

Then, things began to move. Level Two has seen an examination of contemporary artists. A variety of reissue labels have looked towards releasing new albums from indie and rock bands. Level Three includes soundtracks which have sometimes acted as bridging 'pseudo-compilations'. "The Bob Dylan soundtrack album we did, 'I'm Not Here' is a good example," said Gething, "which features covers of his songs via different people."

The fact that this record sold well made Music On Vinyl take notice. The company decided that the sales were not derived from soundtrack fans but, "...because it was a compilation of Dylan songs. It was from that point that we asked ourselves: what compilation ideas fit both the format and the label?"

The answer was a new Northern soul series which took a basic CD concept via Sony but then went a step further by offering the series as a double album limited edition, coloured vinyl for the first 500 copies with further copies pressed in standard black."

The records flew out of the door as it was bought by collectors but, more interestingly, the compilation series has continued to sell to general music fans in its black vinyl guise. In fact, the first two



volumes of the Northern soul compilation have all sold out while the newly released third volume has already sold more copies than either of the previous two volumes.

Other record labels are finding similar success in a variety of other genres. For example, Doxy has released a new blues-based album featuring Willie Dixon called 'Walkin' the Blues' which features cover versions of his work sung by a variety of artists and it is reportedly selling well and, on a jazz theme, UK-outfit, Pure Pleasure, has recently released a variation on the compilation theme with a jazz-flavoured compilation based upon the work of Billie Holiday. The selling point is not so much the various Billie Holiday tracks that are bundled upon the LP but the star side-men that played with her. This release was carefully considered.

And this is the point. Not only does the resurgence of the vinyl-based compilation reflect the maturity and confidence of the vinyl market and, hence its health, but it also shows you that you can trust the compilation genre once more, at least within the vinyl sector.

Why? Because a vinyl album, any vinyl album, is expensive to make: unlike CD compilations which cost pennies. So, if a vinyl label is going to release a compilation, it will have to make sure that the LP will sell. Hence, that company will carefully craft and hone it. Real thought will be put into it.

So welcome the compilation back into the fold. It may be a previously derided concept but, under the vinyl wing, it may have found a natural home...

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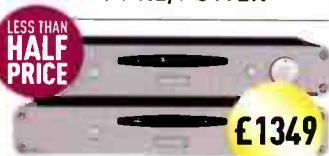
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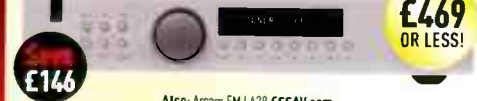


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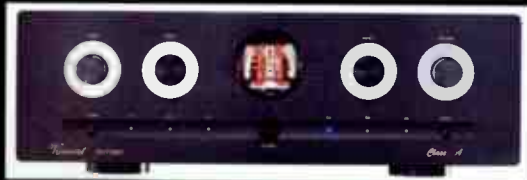
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Roberts' range of analogue, digital and internet radios is frankly baffling, so vast is its size. But it's worth looking at, as there are some really impressive products hidden within! The Colourstream is a case in point. It's bang up to date in design, with FM, DAB (DAB+) and Internet radio capability, plus an iPod dock and an auxiliary input. Then there's a little hinged flap under the fascia controls, hiding a USB socket for playing MP3, AAC, WMA or FLAC music files – a nice touch. Indeed it's bristling with features, leaving no stone unturned. Despite this, it proved surprisingly easy to use thanks to its excellent touchscreen control panel, which is a far less fussy way of navigating around

the 17,000-plus stations available on the 'net than your average button-festooned radio. Indeed, it provides surprisingly quick and easy access to loads of features, including particularly well implemented Podcast functionality.

Of course this doesn't attempt to be a hi-fi product, but with twin

decent quality speakers the Roberts fills the room well. It doesn't go as loud as you'd expect given its size, and isn't as good as Vita Audio's R2i in terms of clarity when playing music, but it is of course a far more versatile device at the price. For smooth, easy background listening across all sources, it makes a nice noise and does the job ably. Overall, it's an easy to use, decently well made and feature-packed design, that should find its way into many Christmas – or New Year – stockings! **DP**

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# soundbites

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The digital output of a CD transport is a totally unprotected square wave signal which represents the basic binary data, and is sent in a series of numeric blocks. Digital cables, due to the effects of capacitance, inductance and resistance, can 'round off' the hard corners of the square wave, which can create ambiguity over the original start and stop points of the square wave, mildly delaying the data. This can have real sonic effects, not dissimilar to that of digital clock jitter. Chord's Indigo Plus digital cable is designed to protect this signal as much as is possible. It uses solid core oxygen-free conductors, precision cast with multi-strand silver-plated signal conductors with two lots of silver-plated return signal paths. On top of that the whole lot is shrouded in a fully floating (and again silver plated – the same High Tech wire is used through out construction) high

frequency shielding system, Teflon insulation is used both internally and externally.

Via a tweaked Marantz CD16 CD player feeding my Marantz Project DI balanced multi-bit DAC, I found the results surprisingly pronounced. There was a sense of the soundstage enlarging, slightly superior detailing being heard, although there was no sense of the tonal balance being affected of course. In fact the cable seemed to have an inbuilt sibilance filter, removing 'spit' and edginess from the sound, but preserving, almost enhancing, the smallest nuance. At this price level, value for money does not really enter the conversation; a serious commitment to music replay is needed to even consider purchasing a digital interconnect

at this price. A fine product then and audiophiles with top-notch CD transports and DACs will find this a worthwhile purchase, but they will have to get the rest of the system sorted before it makes any useful difference. **TB**

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Overall, very impressive. Robert Townsend - Stereophile Jan 08

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ACOUSTIC ZEN Hologram 2 speaker cable, 2x 8 feet, excellent condition, (£950) £350 nearest offer. 90 watt valve mono's, guaranteed, Graaf WFB2 valve pre, RDS valve tuner, remote, S.E. valve integrated, etc. High end, all very cheap, pristine, boxed, offers welcome. Tel: Shalom 07951 553 091 (London)

ORACLE ALEXANDER turntable, Rega arm, Goldring 1042 cartridge. Fifteen years old. Offers. Tel: Allan 01323 520 205 (Eastbourne area)

HARBETH SUPER HL5, new £1200. Icon Audio PSI-2 phonostage £30. Cambridge DacMagic £100. Creek OBH-12 passive pre-amp £100. Shure V15MR, under 10 hours use. Tel: 07879 463 060

MARANTZ CD12 CDA12 transport DAC owned from new, boxes, all accessories, £1500. Amateur tape recorder magazines 1959 binder complete Volume One £50. Technics SL5 turntable, vgc, £60. Tel: 01708 457 691

MELODY SP3 Mk2 valve integrated amplifier. 38 watts RMS. 5881 x4, sweet, detailed, punchy. 19 kilos. Only 6 months old, mint, boxed. Have upgraded. £450. Tel: 01273 541 462 (Brighton)

FOR SALE: Isotek Orion 2way mains filter £100. Also wanted: Troy Ambisonic Decoder. Tel: Peter 01642 559 078

PROJECT X-PACK. Fitted Ortofon Rondo Red cartridge. Speed box, manual. Boxed. Mint condition. Buyer collects from Slough, Berkshire. £450 ono. Tel: 07941 174804 after 6pm

DENON DCD 920 CD player. Excellent condition. £55 ovno. Rotel RT840L tuner. Good condition. Nice sounding tuner. £40 ovno. Creek 40-40 amplifier. Excellent condition. New volume pot and serviced. £75 ovno. Tel: 0161 865 9607

WANTED: BATTERY/Mains reel to reel tape recorder. Sony T.C. 800 Fi-Cord or Telefunken in good condition. Tel: 07847 573 031

KIMBER DIGITAL and analogue interconnects. Russ Andrews filters and Yello mains cables. Genelec active studio monitors. Other items many less than half price. DAB tuner, RRP £350. Offers. Tel: 07813 953 874

AUDIOLAB 8000DAX HiDef DAC for sale in very good condition including manual and recent service by Audiolab. £345. Tel: 01924 272 104 (West Yorks)

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 540c Version 2 CD player for sale. Silver finish. Absolutely mint condition. Sale due to upgrade. £80 ono plus P+P. Tel: Peter 01729 822 480 after 3pm

CYRUS 8VS2, black, remote, manual, original package, very good condition, £300. Tel: 0797 024 8050

GALE 401 speakers, professionally reconditioned by Wilmslow Audio. Original boxes and paperwork with custom made stands. £590 ono. V.D.H. Teatrak speaker cable, 11 metre pair, £200. Tel: 01825 722 936

CONTEMPORARY STYLE black glass & chrome 9 shelf hi-fi unit. Top shelf adjustable for levelling record deck. Size: H-98cm x W-60cm x D-45cm. £95. Tel: 0151 677 3521 (Wirral)

SME IV tonearm, 6 months old, as new condition, still under warranty, boxed, instructions, tools, £995. 1/3 off new price. Tel: Mike 01246 209 578 or 07780 888 686

REVEL SALON I speakers with original packaging (£15,000) £5250 ono. Shanling Omega CD with Cryovac valves (£4,000+) £2150 ono. with original metal case complete. All in immaculate condition. Tel: 01594 822 597 or email: [clivej634@btinternet.com](mailto:clivej634@btinternet.com)

60's-80's Hi-Fi. Some need attention. Leak 30+, Armstrong 521, Garrard DD75, Technics HD M253 + remote, tech gear 4 chan, downsizing, ill health. Tel: John 0161 442 5449 (Stockport)

1 METRE PAIR Madrigal CZ Gel balanced interconnect. Boxed. £110. Tel: 01772 315 723

UNIVERSAL DVD SACC player Arcam 137. Mint condition. Box, instructions. Colour black. Upscaling 1080 HDMI socket on back. £300. Tel: 0789 161 2918 (Mobile)

UNWANTED PRIZE: Kimber Hero cable, 1 metre Ultraplate phono plugs, unopened. £110. Tel: 01772 315 723

LOWTHER SPEAKERS 36x25x81 cms high, folded horn design with front and rear PM6 drivers. Rear drivers not working. Teak veneered cabinets with dark mahogany finish. £195. Tel: 020 8361 3435

WHARFEDALE PASSIVE sub-woofer twin 6" speakers in push-pull with vents at rear. Twin 4mm terminals for stereo or mono. £30. Also Cambridge 70 watt amplifier to suit. £30. Good condition. Tel: 020 8979 1484 (Hampton Court area)

HITACHI MUSIC centre SDT-7820R with Garrard deck includes speakers. Genuine offers only. Minimum £100. Tel: 024 76370528

ICON AUDIO MB845 Signature monoblocks. £1400. Icon Audio LA4 MkII preamp £350. Icon Audio CDXI valve CD player £450. Tel: 0787 946 3060 South London



CASTLE HOWARDS SE2 rosewood finish, vgc, £625. Audiolab P amp UK version £285. Audiolab Gray C&P £325. Pair. Technics SL1200 fitted with RB250 modded Ortofon 2M Red £370. Tel: 01255 421 589

SONY MDS-JE440 MiniDisc player Atrac-DSP coding system £50. Remote, manual, etc. Excellent condition. Buyer collects. Tel: 07854 003347 (Wirral)

NORDOST RED Dawn interconnects. 1 metre RCA, two pairs available, £50 a pair or two pairs for £90. Tel: 01986 895 940 (South Norfolk)

M.F.AUDIO silver passive pre-amp. cossetted by elderly owner for 5 years. £1500. Tel: 01752 773369 (Plymouth)

SANSUI SP10001 3way speakers. Walnut cabinets, tone controls. Can be tri-amps. Very good condition. Any demonstration. Also hi-fi odds and ends clearout. CD players, hi-fi stands. Speakers £150. Tel: 01455 220 214 (Coventry)

RUSS ANDREWS Yellow cables, mains filters, digital interconnects, analogue interconnects plus hardware including active speakers, DAB tuner and other home studio items. Many half price. Tel: Mike 01902 884 694

V.D.H. THE SOURCE hybrid interconnects (3 pairs) £60. Celestion AV (centre speaker) (£150) £65. (Surround) free-standing speakers (£150) £65. USA LAT Int'l IC-100-D (silver interconnect) with Naim DIN plugs (£180) £85. Toshiba 1080P HD DVD player, boxed inc 12 films (as new) £150. Tel: 07872 955 698 (M6 Junc 7)

LINN KEILIDH speakers, rosenut finish, with Ku-Stone bases £450 ono. Tannoy Eyris 2 speakers, sycamore finish £425 ono. Q-Acoustics 1050i speakers £150. All are floorstanding models and in superb condition. Tel: 023 8073 8935

PAIR CELESTION 15 speakers, teak, Garrard 401 turntable, Acos tonearm, Rogers Ravensbourne amplifier 35w + 35w, Rogers Series II tuner £200. Tel: 020 8594 8306

SWAP ROGERS LS7 (mint) for Spondor SP2 Mk I. Tel: Toni 07971 953 628

FOR SALE Electrostatic Woofers Gradient SW-63 - £500 DAX audio synthesis-d/a converter - £300 Denon Super Audio CD Player DCD-2000 AE - £200 Excellent condition. Cash. Collect S. London. Tel: 07931 526 106.

QUAD ESL63 electrostatic speakers, virtually mint condition. Sound perfect, no clicks or pops. You will not find a better example of these legendary speakers. With boxes. £1200 07747697414 bazadams@hotmail.co.uk

QUAD FM4 tuner mint condition with manual no scratches or marks £150 ono contact Ron Finch 07935673395 Redhill Surrey

REGA RB300 Tone arm, with extra counterweights, Excellent condition. £100. 01923855359 (Herts) wombat.jr@tiscali.co.uk

NAKAMACHI cassette Deck CR7E, Excellent condition. Boxed. One Owner. Recently serviced by Nakamachi Worthing. Very little use at present. But willing to demonstrate. Price £800 o.n.o. Contact: 07971 600237 Essex.

WANTED: TOP quality Hi Fi separates and complete systems, Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/ pay cash Please call me on 0781 5892458

FOR SALE. . 2M pair chord odyssey 4 bi-wire speaker cable. £100.00 Ono. 2M pair chord odyssey 2 single wire speaker cable. £50.00 Ono. Chord terminations. Tel (01483) 728657 before 9 pm. (Surrey).

JPS ALUMINATA 1m RCA interconnect 6months MINT £1800 incl certificate, box and packing materials. Newprice £2400,-, goes for £1800,-. Audibly better isolated (no noise), great detail, http://www.jpslabs.com/aluminata.shtml. Mail robaudiolover@gmail.com.

NAKAMICHI CASSETTE DECKS CR7 £775 (inc blank quality unopened tapes and none working 480z) and Stax SR5 with SRD6 £125 ono. Owned from new Nak buyer collects Alan 0121 602 1067 evenings.

LINN SONDEK LPI2 turntable with SRM acrylic base, Origin Live Encounter mk3 tonearm and Grado reference sonata moving iron cartridge. Everything boxed, mint with manuals and accessories. £1195.00. S.Clifton, Llandudno (01492) 878107.

YAMAHA NS-F700 loudspeakers for sale. Brand new and boxed. Floor standers with superb piano black finish. £700 ono. Tel. Pete on 01245 264248.

LINN Hi-Fi 4x Klout Amplifiers Keltik Speakers Kairn Pre-Amplifier Karik CD Numeric DAC Cherished system everything in mint condition. Location; West Sussex. Post Code BN44. £4000. Tel: 01903 816408. ashleyfearon@hotmail.com

TWO WORKING Duel Concentric Loudspeakers: 15L Tannoy Reds and their Cross Over Units; \$6,500.00. McIntosh Stereo System and FM Tuner. One PreAmplifier C22, Serial Number: 50A80, \$5,700.00, FM Tuner, Model: MR71, Serial Number: 62B46, \$3,500.00, Two McIntosh 75 unity-coupled Transformers, Type M-212 and M211, Serial numbers: 318B6 & 318B7, \$7,500.00. This system is clean and working and purchased by my Father in 1958. Kathleen Bertrand kathleenbertrand@sbcglobal.net

FOR SALE. . 2m PAIR cable talk concert 2 speaker cable. £50.00 Ono. 3M pair cable talk concert 4 bi-wire speaker cable. £100.00 Ono. Tel (01483) 728657 before 9 pm. (Surrey). Dave.

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 Mk 3. Like new boxed. £180. Musical Fidelity A1 Mk 1. £140. boxed. Audiolab 8000P uk made. Mint. £275. Linn Intek. £180 Linn Basik, Akito arm and K5. £180 Rogers LS4a £80 Mission 760. £30 Contact. Mike 0161 291 9331 or 07743442821

MARANTZ CD94 MkII, wonderful and beautiful (£395), Graham Slee ERA Gold V and Elevator EXP with custom battery power supply, stunning and flexible (£550), Nakamichi DR10 classic three head deck, serviced last year, excellent (£195). Email: classichificallector@gmail.com for more details.

AUDIOLAB 8000 Dax HiDef Dac F sn for sale in very good condition. Inc manual and recent service by Audiolab. £345.00 Tel 01924272104 WYorks. From. Len Parker 1 Ings Croft. Low Fold. Ossett. WYorks. 01924272104.

CYRUS 8XPD integrated amp with upgraded Qx DAC module, for £950 - less than half price. Black. Immaculate condition. Call Martin on 07722 871945 or e-mail martin.summers@ymail.com

QUAD 22L2 Speakers Quad 606 Amp and Pre Amp Luxman PD300 Deck Luxman T103 Tuner Nakamichi BX300E Tape Deck Sony 557ESD Tape Deck Jonathan Sinclair on dalbhuie@hotmail.com or 01458 412 949 evenings

REVEL SALON I speakers (£15,000) with original packaging £5250.00 ono. SHANLING Omega CD with cryovac valves complete with original metal case (£4,000+) £2250.00 ono. Tel: 01594 822597. e-mail: clivej634@btinternet.com

# audio T

While many of our competitors have chosen to focus on home cinema and TV, at Audio T we've never lost sight of our roots... set down in 2 channel over 44 years ago. We sell home cinema, of course, but we also have a range of 2 channel brands that is second to none together with streaming products from Naim, Arcam, Olive, Linn and Sonos.

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\*Subject to status. Ask instore for details. Not all brands are available in every shop so please check our website before travelling.

[www.audio-t.co.uk](http://www.audio-t.co.uk)

World Radio History



ARCAM ALPHA 10 for sale. Excellent condition, fully working, 100 British watts per channel, includes remote, no phono stage. £220 plus £10 postage, tel Peter 0116 2249282.

MICROMEGA STAGE 2 CD player in excellent condition visually and mechanically. Original price £700 Supplied with owners manual, remote control and power lead. £250 ono Please phone: 07952257335

QUAD 606 Power Amp. Perfect working order and cosmetically very good. Slight paintwork damage to some edges, visible only close up. Pictures on request. £285. Carriage (UK) £16. gavin@grete.wanadoo.co.uk 01683 221002

PURESOUND A30 amplifier, very good condition, boxed, instructions included. £750 01638668299(suffolk)

QUAD 33/303 amplifier and FM3 tuner £200, SME 3009 tone arm £200. Telephone 01189 413708.

REVOX B77 Qtr Track 3.75/7.5 Speed Ex. Condition Only 2 Owners From New, Iconic Tape Recorder Full Working Order Can Demonstrate. Buyer Collects Peterborough £355 Ray 01733347308

PAIR ROGERS ABI Subwoofers Black Good condition. Also pair Wilmslow Audio LS3/5a clones fully assembled and tested. All original KEF units. Will split Sensible offers please 07870 411604 SW London

AUDIOLAB 8000 Dax HiDef Dac F SN for sale in very good condition. Inc manual and recent service by Audiolab. £345.00 Tel 01924272104 WYorks.

EASTERN ELECTRIC Minimax valve phono stage. Only 6 months old. As new. All packaging. £950. Tel: Martin 01268 764 542 (Essex)

WANTED A faulty or non working Quad 44 preamp, Quad 44 c.d input module 500mv 500k, Quad 405-2 modules, Quad 33 preamp. Contact Mike 01758 613790.

SHANLING CDT 100 cd player. Valve or solid-state output, also valve headphone output. Onboard preamp if required. Mint condition, boxed with manual. New £1,650, £550. Can email photos. 01424 446282

LINN FOR sale: Kremlin Tuner £550 Kudos Tuner £200 Majik Amp (LK style) £200 Trikan centre speaker (black) £225 Call 07500 220726 (Chris)

NAIM DAC, almost new (July 2010), fully boxed and unmarked £1600. Chord Prodac digital interconnect, BNC plugs £60. 07967-031286.

TUBE BOX 2 (Project) MM/MC phono valve pre amp. As new condition, boxed, manual. Great sound £210 ono Hertford 01992 589315.

GARRARD 401 £1000ono, Turntable power supply £300ono, Technics Equaliser £150, Class A Amplifier power supply £300ono, Arcam 9 Power amplifier £250ono, Maplin 50W board £25. Tel 0207 499 8729

SIMAUDIO MOON i-5 amplifier £1250 (not boxed), Dynaudio Contour 1.3 mk2 £650 (not boxed). North London. Jonathan 07751529070.

SME MODEL 10 precision turntable with Series V Tonearm (£5700) £3200. One owner. Superb condition. Will demonstrate. Photos available. Original packaging. Buyer collects. Tel 01604 410726 or 07711 702836 (Northants)

Hi, I'M looking for a good used Graham Slee Reflex gold MC, phono stage at a reasonable price. Thanks Marco mamuze@alice.it

DENON DCD1500 mk1 I CD player immaculate hardly used since new very good sound and built to last £125 or £200 if bought with my rtl3 transmission line speakers rich 07751537148

FOR SALE TDL transmission line speakers absolutely mint no scuffs or scratches whatsoever not been used for a long time with all packaging £125 contact rich 07751537148 oxon

I'M SELLING My B&W CDM7 floorstanding Loudspeakers in cherry wood finish. in good condition as i had them from new original rrp £1000. selling £375 Waliat 07523 289766 Lancs;

QUAD II FORTY Monoblocks in unmarked, as new condition. Svetlana Cryogenically treated KT88's Valve Upgrade. Absolutely fantastic condition. Boxed with Manuals cost £4000 accept £1,850 Tel Tony 02380 224003 Southampton

4m PAIR DNM bi-wire speaker cables c/w 4mm banana plugs £135. 1.0M Chord Signature digital co-axial interconnect £165 4M pair Chord Epic twin speaker cables c/w Signature jumper cables £250. 01483 271669 (Surrey)

AVID DIVA II turntable with Avid flat cover (no tone-arm). Less than two years old; boxed; excellent condition. Buyer collects. £700 ono. Contact Stephen Morley, phone 01253 859257 (Blackpool), email stephen.morley1913@virgin.net.

LEAK TL12 Plus blank chassis, £45. 'Sound Organisation' TV/AV/Hi Fi stand, steel frame in silver, three opaque glass shelves, on castors. W90cm, H61cm, D40cm. Cost £200, £42. Eastbourne 01323 500174.

WANTED: QUALITY headphones and or headphone amp rayspink@supanet.com 01909 730 681 or 07783 327 689

AYRE CX7 silver CD player, very lightly used, mint condition, boxed, looks and sounds wonderful, genuine sale. Latest version costs over £2,400, bargain at £1,200 tel: 07851 715446 (Watford, Herts)

BORDER PATROL MB psu coupled with Audio Innovations L I Valve Preamp + 2 x Lavardin p.s. cables ST 600 Derek 0035 318210896

PROFESSIONAL TRANSMISSION line high end monitor speakers Kef & TDL units, bi-wired, light oak, condition as brand new space required hence only £1250, no better sound, demo Tel: 020 8951 3178

WANTED: TOWNSHEND Audio super tweeters. 01909 730 681 or 07783 327 689 rayspink@supanet.com

WANTED: SONY ES DAT recorder. Must be in full working order and in excellent condition. Willing to travel up to 200 miles by train from my home in Portsmouth. Tel: 0750 495 3555 or Email k-allen@hotmail.co.uk

FREE TO good home! Pair Hacker speakers, mint condition on stands. 20" x 13". Also pair B&W Model DM3 teak on castors. Lovely condition. Person to collect. Tel: Terry 0793 939 4380 (South Yorks)

MFIDELITY A1 Mk3. £180. MFidelity A1 Mk1. £140. Audiolab 8000P uk. £275. Linn Intek. £180 Linn Basik, Akito, K5. £180 Rogers LS4a £80 Mike 0161 291 9331 / 07743442821

REGA P3 'Super Bias' turntable incl arm & cartridge mint condition £110 Project pre-amp mint condition £20 garry1963@talktalk.net

WANTED: TOP quality Hi Fi separates and complete systems, Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/ pay cash Please call me on 0781 5892458

## NEXT MONTH

As the chill winds of winter cause a shiver, what could be better to defrost your extremities than February's Hi-Fi World magazine? We've a bumper treat of high end delights, such as the stunning EAR V12 tube amplifier [pictured], B&W's thumping great 804D loudspeakers and the exotic Dr Feickert Woodpecker turntable. But we haven't forgotten those seeking less esoteric pleasures, as our reviews of Creek's brand new Destiny 2 integrated and Yamaha's BDS-667 Blu ray player attest! There's much, much more too; here's some of what we hope to bring you:



NAIM UNITISERVE NETWORK MUSIC SERVER	£2,000 CD PLAYER SUPERTTEST
AUDIOENGINE P4 PASSIVE LOUDSPEAKERS	AVID PULSARE PHONO STAGE
DR FEICKERT WOODPECKER TURNTABLE	MARK GRANT POWER CABLE
AMPHION ARGON L3 LOUDSPEAKERS	CREEK DESTINY 2 AMPLIFIER
TEUFEL ULTIMA 800 LOUDSPEAKERS	OLDE WORLDE: EMPIRE 598
YAMAHA BDS-667 BLU-RAY PLAYER	B&W 804D LOUDSPEAKERS
TRIANGLE ANTAL LOUDSPEAKERS	EAR V12 VALVE AMPLIFIER
GT AUDIO TRON 7 PREAMPLIFIER	DCS DEBUSSY DAC
VINCENT PH-08 PHONO STAGE	ARCAM RDAC DAC

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# FREE READER CLASSIFIED ADS ORDER FORM

## STOP PRESS

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** Only one advert per reader. Maximum length per advert is 30 words, Adverts over 30 words will not be accepted. No Trade Adverts. This section is strictly for readers selling secondhand hi-fi equipment only. Telephone numbers and E-mail addresses are treated as one word. Model numbers are treated as one word i.e. Quad 303 = two words. Sorry, we cannot accept adverts over the telephone. The Publisher reserves the right to judge submissions.

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or write or type your advertisement copy in block capitals with one word per box and post it to us at:

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FEBRUARY 2011 - 3RD DECEMBER 2010

MARCH 2011 - 5TH JANUARY 2011



# BRIAN ENO WITH JOHN HOPKINS & LEO ABRAHAMS

## SMALL CRAFT IN A MILK SEA 2010

**S**omething a little bit different for you this month. This album isn't so much a classic as a future classic. Alternatively, if you disagree with that premise, Eno him-

self is a classic. Co-founder of Roxy Music, inventor of an entire genre of music, ambient, collaborator with a string of influential artists on often ground-breaking productions such as Germany's electronica legends, Cluster, David Bowie, King Crimson's Robert Fripp, Talking Heads' David Byrne and *avant garde* artist Laurie Anderson, producer for such groups as U2 and ex-Velvet Underground man John Cale, plus soundtrack artist for influential film creators such as Derek Jarman, Brian Eno has lead a startlingly significant career.

This new album sees the man issuing his debut release on the respected Warp label (warp.net) with an improvised work of ambience that sees Eno back to his very best. In fact, the last time he hit these creative heights was back in the late seventies.

Leo Abrahams, guitar maestro and one of the contributors who also acted as a co-editor and co-producer for the LP, described how the project came about. "I met Brian in a guitar shop ten years ago, I introduced John (an electronica artist with classical training) to Brian five years ago. Brian likes to get together and just play music. Projects then tend to overlap where music, intended for one project, will end up as part of another. Last year we did a series of improvised concerts around the world called 'Pure Senius'. That was a larger group. However, it was such a positive experience that the idea of

"the analogue interpretation, he believes, has produced almost a different album..."

the three of us improvising together formed, then later the idea for this record."

The album is available in a number of formats, including a basic CD. What I looked at however, was the limited edition box set which will set you back around £85 and is magnificently designed and presented in a Birch paper-covered slipcase with printed and foil-blocked cover and spine. Inside you receive digital and analogue copies of the album plus extras. More specifically, you get the full CD album plus an extra disc featuring four extra tracks, two 180gm vinyl discs of the full album plus 24bit WAV files and 320kbps MP3 files. The physical formats are contained in separate full colour case-bound hard covers that both slide into the slipcase cover. You also receive a third hard cover which features a square lithographic print of a new Brian Eno artwork, printed on 352gsm Mohawk Superfine stock. This receives additional tissue-paper protection.

"Brian Eno studied visual art at University. Increasingly, his projects have been outside of the UK which is why he is not known quite so well in this country as a visual artist. His last solo work did feature his photography and his art and the one before that featured a print of his on the cover but, generally, England has an unwillingness to let someone who is perceived as a rock musician be involved in art. The media over here

don't like people who cross over," said Abrahams.

A word about the extra CD in this box set. The content of this disc includes a track to be found in a Japanese edition, a couple of download-only tracks plus a release that was available, for a limited time, via Rough Trade. This CD features them all.

"The LP itself is long and spacious and sounds open-ended, in fact it sounds almost like the central snippets of a longer soundtrack. You can put the CD on shuffle, in fact. The additional musical entries, on the second CD, are not to be classed as outtakes but genuine pieces of work that were not approached with different attitudes to the pieces that can be found on the main album."

Abrahams made a point of noting the vinyl discs available in this set. The analogue interpretation, he believes, has produced almost a different album, with a wholly different bass approach due to the analogue warming. As such, because of the nature of this music, the vinyl version almost creates a remix of the CD version!

A superb box set release that not only offers packaging quality that can be viewed as a piece of complex art in itself, but a total of three sound formats that offer audiophile sources and, when comparing digital and analogue, a production process that actually impacts on the music itself as a creative entity. **PR**

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