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JUNE 2011

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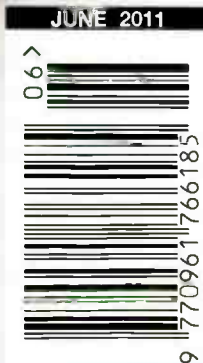


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10 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)

World Radio History



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Royal weddings, economic recessions and surging energy prices – it's the early eighties all over again! But it's in straightened financial times such as these that people often show their natural resourcefulness, and why shouldn't that include hi-fi?

With this in mind, we thought it would be a good idea to issue a challenge to three *Hi-Fi World* scribes to build fine sounding 'budget audiophile' systems using a secondhand source component to save money and/or improve the sound. The challenge went out to Adam Smith and Paul Rigby, and then yours truly volunteered too...

Actually, it was fun. There's a curious 'iron curtain' amongst audiophiles; many would never countenance buying secondhand whereas others have nothing else but. Personally, I've long since run a mixture of old and new in my system (a Marantz TT-1000 turntable from 1980, a Musical Fidelity AMS35i from 2010, and a 1986 vintage pair of Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers are my current staple), so I know that clever planning and matching can get a great sound that you couldn't necessarily have by buying all old or all new. See p17 for the results; I think you'll agree that we came up with some weird and wonderful stuff.

Elsewhere in this issue, we have some great new kit that whilst expensive, also represents real value for money. For example, Leema's brand new Antilla IIS Eco [p46] is up with CD players at twice its £3,000 price tag, and gives a wonderfully organic sound from silver disc that you simply don't expect from this format. German Physiks' Limited 11 [p52] offer most of the heroic performance of speakers twice as expensive up their model range, with an epic, cathedral-like sound from their omnidirectional drivers for £7,800. Back to the real world and Mission's MX-2 mini monitors work brilliantly considering their £200 price tag [see p64] and Ortofon's Vivo Blue (£275) is one of the best entry level moving coil cartridges we've heard in a long time [p107].

As ever then, this new issue is packed with great kit, old and new, across the generations. Enjoy!

David Price, editor



hi-fi world

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verdicts

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simply the best
extremely capable
worth auditioning
unremarkable
seriously flawed
keenly priced

Testing

see www.hifiworld.co.uk for full explanations of all our tests

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. See www.hifiworld.co.uk for more detail.



ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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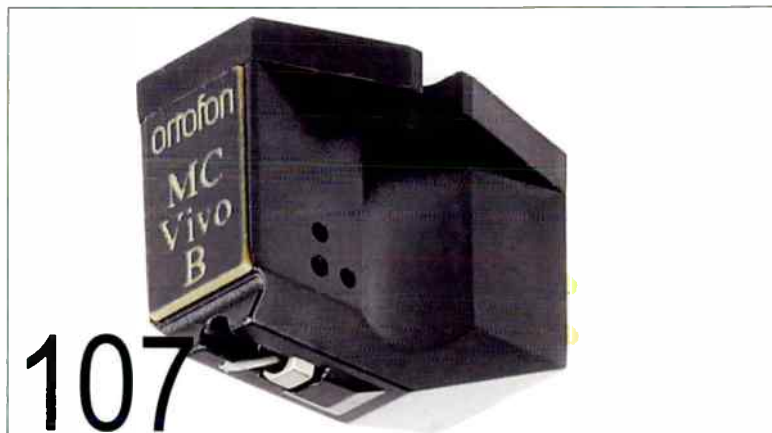
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QAT

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MS5 AUDIOPHILE MUSIC SERVER

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World Radio History

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news

HEY JO!

JoSound's new JO 45/1 was one of the most interesting new loudspeakers we saw at the recent Heathrow hi-fi show. It uses a single Jordan 100mm aluminium cone operating full range, into a large transmission line cabinet hewn from beautiful Chinese bamboo. Claimed sensitivity is 85dB at 1W, frequency response 20Hz-25kHz, +/- 6dB. Vital statistics are 1,134x440x320mm and the price is £3,995 including VAT. It joins the larger £5,995 JO 45/3 in a growing range. As bamboo is self regenerating, no re-planting is required and the leaves from the bamboo are trimmed and left on the forest floor to feed the new growth, says JoSound. For more details, see www.josound.net and watch this space for a *Hi-Fi World* review!



I SAY, DING DONG!

Arcam's new rWand and rWave dongles deliver lossless, uncompressed CD sound from iPod or computers, and add to the flexibility of the Arcam rCube iPod system and rDAC. Unlike Airplay, the rWand dongle brings streaming to all 30-pin iPods, not just the Wi-Fi ones. Unlike Bluetooth the sound is stunning, say Arcam. Unlike Wi-Fi there is no interference or dropout, it is claimed. The £79.95 Arcam rWave is the USB wireless streaming music dongle for PCs & MACs giving full room coverage; the Arcam rWand (£69.95) is the iPod/Phone/Pad 30-pin version, using iDevice as source and controller, and gives whole house coverage. They use Klear lossless technology, giving full bandwidth CD quality wireless streaming and operate in the 2.4GHz band minimising drop outs; a Klear radio channel occupies only 3MHz of spectrum, allowing 16 such channels across the 2.4GHz ISM band. Channel switching is accomplished in less than 800 microseconds. For details, see www.arcam.co.uk or call +44(0) 1223 203 200.

LOOK SHARP!

Clearaudio's new Magnify tonearm is said to incorporate many ideas pioneered in previous Clearaudio designs, not least the use of magnetic arm bearings. However, the Magnify takes this technology one step further; introducing a hybrid arm bearing combining vertical precision ball races with a magnetic horizontal bearing featuring adjustable magnetic horizontal damping. The two-piece carbon fibre arm tube incorporates precision micrometer adjustment of tracking force and adjustable azimuth. The Magnify is terminated with either an RCA junction box or with 1 metre of Clearaudio Sixstream cable and non-magnetic phono plugs. The Magnify is supplied as standard with a Linn-type mount or can be used with the Clearaudio VTA adjuster, which allows fine adjustment of VTA, even during play. A Linn mounting is used. Price is £2,375. For details, call +44(0) 1252 702705 or click on www.audioreference.co.uk.

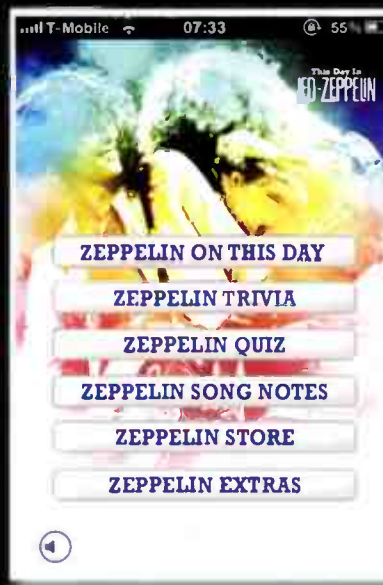




SIGNATURE SPEAKER

PMC is adding to its special edition £7,315 Signature Series with the launch of the PB1i Signature model. Peter Thomas, founder and owner of PMC, has reworked the 24dB crossover to provide finer detail and transparency to the mid vocal range from the professionally proven 75mm soft-dome driver. Coupled with the high frequency output from the PMC/SEAS developed 27mm tweeter, the PB1i Signature has the ability to reproduce every nuance in the performance, the company says. Each component in the 31-element hand-built crossover is carefully selected, measured and recorded to ensure perfect performance and conformity to the original design. PMC's research into drive unit design produced a 170mm bass driver specifically for the PB1i, with an ultra stiff lightweight cone and huge magnet assembly. With two units working in tandem in a newly developed Advanced Transmission Line, the low frequency output of the PB1i is clean, fast and extended right down to 24Hz, it is claimed. Supplied with a personally signed certificate of authenticity from Peter Thomas, each PB1i Signature comes with a brushed aluminium serial number plate. The handcrafted British made cabinets are finished in a distinct and rare Rose Palissandre veneer, only available with the Signature Series products. The first Signature models came with a 10 year warranty, double the norm, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the production of the original versions and this has been carried over to the new PB1i Signature. See www.pmc-speakers.com.

WHOLE LOTTA LOVE



'This Day in Led Zeppelin' is described as "the indispensable app for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch". If this App was a book, it would be over 1,000 pages long, the makers say, as it is packed with info that's compiled by the team who run the award-winning This Day in Music, (the website, book and iPhone app). This Day in Led Zeppelin is a celebration of one of the biggest and most successful rock acts the world has ever seen. Described as "a complete interactive experience", it lists every gig the band ever played, including set lists, recordings, gigs, TV performances - the daily Zeppelin diary. It has a Zeppelin quiz with hundreds of interactive quiz questions, scored out of 10, with unique score soundclips. It includes a detailed critique of every studio track and every Zeppelin album with a unique link to play any Zeppelin track contained in your own iTunes library within the App, or you can instantly buy the track to complete your library via iTunes! There's a free rock ringtone unique to this App. (not performed by Led Zeppelin), a Zepp career overview from former Melody Maker editor Chris Charlesworth and free unique Zeppelin art wallpaper. See www.thisdayinmusicapps.com.



HART TWO HART

Hart's Improved Loudspeaker uses "massive crossovers constructed from the finest components available including three highly prized Gold/Silver in oil Mundorf capacitors and three huge OFC Foil/Wax Inductors" in each. The crossover is mounted on vibration control beams inside a cabinet damped with 14x1mm coats of Bitumen and a highly innovative standing wave control internal baffling. All components are hardwired with silver wiring and solder throughout. The audio path has high purity precious metal gold alloy voice coils in both the high frequency and low frequency driver units. These modifications have yielded a true purist monitor with a sensitivity of 98dB/W, it is claimed, making it especially suitable for Single Ended Triode low power valve amplifiers. Hart's Improved Loudspeaker comes with a designated stand able to accommodate lead shot vibration control. "All in all everything for the true enthusiast", the company says. See www.hartaudio.com or call +44 (0) 1983 612 924.

SPOT MELD

Onkyo has become the first consumer electronics brand to offer direct access to music service Spotify through home cinema receivers. Over a million Spotify Premium subscribers in seven countries (UK, France, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, and Norway) already use Spotify to expand their musical horizons. Now Spotify is available from today on the £450 TX-NR609, and Onkyo will also be introducing other networked Spotify-ready products in the near future. All you need to enjoy Spotify on Onkyo is an internet connection and a Spotify Premium account. The addition of Spotify music service offers subscribers instant access to over 10 million songs in excellent sound quality. It's simple and intuitive to operate via the television screen connected to Onkyo home cinema receivers; album cover art is displayed onscreen and subscribers can explore further to browse artists, albums and tracks.

The company also has three new stereo components, the £450 TX-8050 network stereo receiver, the £300 TX-8030 stereo receiver, and the £200 C-7030 CD player.

The former two employ a discrete amplifier design with custom-built circuit boards. On each model, a massive EI transformer and large 8200µF capacitors ensure a stable power supply, driving 130V through each of the two channels. Both receivers feature Onkyo's proprietary WRAT amplifier technology, which

incorporates a low negative-feedback design, closed ground-loop circuits, and a high instantaneous-current capability. Together, these work to reduce distortion and cancel circuit noise, ensuring cleaner and more accurate signal amplification. The TX-8050's network functionality enables owners to incorporate streaming PC audio and internet radio into their main entertainment system. Supported file types include MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC, and LPCM audio.

The new C-7030 CD player is described as a quality playback solution that incorporates a new high-precision clock to dramatically reduce timing errors, along with Onkyo's original VLSC to reduce pulse noise. Driving the system is a custom-built EI transformer that provides a clean and stable power supply, it is claimed. Build quality is exemplified by a 1.6 mm-thick flat chassis base that helps reduce unwanted vibrations. Like the two stereo receivers, the C-7030 sports a sleek aluminum front panel that makes a robust yet elegant design statement, the company says.

Call +44 (0)1628 473350 or click www.onkyo.co.uk.



Onkyo TX-8050



Onkyo TX-NR609



Onkyo C-7030

DOCK ON!

The new Ozaki Nautilus IPK919 (£79.99) is one of the most striking Apple iPhone4 docks we've seen; it docks, syncs and charges iPhone4 from Mac/PC via USB, has an integrated passive speaker to amplify the iPhone by a claimed 15dB and needs no external power. The swirling organic design is made of made of heavy zinc-alloy, providing a safe foundation for desktop docking; there are three adjustable feet for accurate level and position. It's available now from UK retailers such as Amazon and audioout.co.uk. See www.ozaki.co.uk.



SPRING TIDE

Audiofreaks is now importing the latest mains conditioner from Running Springs Audio, the Elgar. Described as an entry-level unit, it has 4 outlets, 15A with carbon fiber faceplate and the same basic filters that are used in other RSA products. Using 100% passive, non-current limiting topography, four isolated outlets give quieter backgrounds, increased inner detail with raw dynamics, it is claimed. Running Springs Audio power devices do not use on/off switches, meters, lights, or dials, components that are generally known create noise in the line rather than remove it! The Elgar retails at £1,295, is supplied with a quality UK Powercord and is available now. The other three models available in the UK are the Duke (2 outlets) £1,995, the Jaco (4 outlets) £2,995 and the top of the range Dmitri (6 outlets) at £4,295. Call +44(0) 20 8948 4153 or click on www.audiofreaks.co.uk.



GOLDEN AGE OF LOSSLESS

Thomas Dolby is offering his latest album as a hi res download. 'A Map of the Floating City' will be downloadable in 24bit stereo 96kHz AIFF/WAV formats, as well as FLAC. "I will not however be offering 5.1 or similar formats," he says, "as I feel stereo is my medium. I could fool myself into thinking surround sound would offer me a new canvas to paint on, but that fact is, the majority of listeners would never hear surround mixes as they were intended, due to the discrepancy between speaker systems and listening environments". Before this release, the influential electronic music pioneer has two digital EPs 'Amerikana' and 'Oceanea', which are intended for hardcore fans to get an early peek into the recording of the album in progress, available for download in 320kbps MP3. This lo res format was chosen as he wants the eventual album release "to feel like a major step up", in addition to the added value of its previously unreleased songs. For details, click on www.thomasdolby.com.



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World Radio History

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

HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



ORION



VISION



SIGMAS



TITAN

MEDIA STUDIES

Eminent's new EM7167 is a media storage device that also plays HD movies on TV; it will connect to your computer as an external storage device to copy movies, music and pictures. The user may build in a hard disk or choose the version with a built-in 500GB or 1TB hard disk. It's one of three new Eminent HD media players; the EM7195 is fitted with a DVB-T twin tuner, USB 3.0 and a backlit remote control. Ease of use, extensive file support and high image quality are all said to characterise them. They support many different file formats including MKV and H.264 and "play clear sound" too. For details visit www.eminent-online.com.

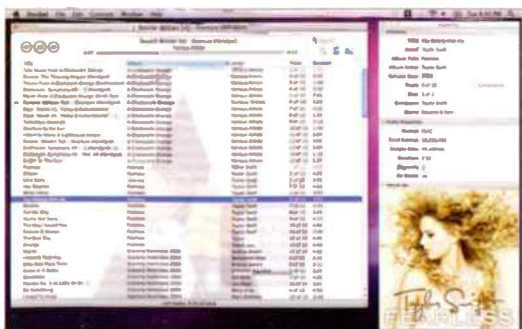


WIRELESS WORLD

KEF's Universal Wireless System 2.0 transmits CD quality sound to two speakers using "advanced, proprietary technology to eliminate interference with potentially conflicting devices", the company says. As well as featuring enhanced software and a more powerful transmitter, the all-new KEF Universal Wireless System 2.0 is available at £449.99. The unit can also transmit "CD quality" sound from devices like computers and MP3 players, with a signal capable of powering speakers in nearby rooms and even outdoors. There is no need for wiring between speakers, as it includes two receiving units, each of which features a 50W amplifier that ensures rich sound with minimal latency, it is claimed. To guard against interference from devices such as Wi-Fi routers, microwave ovens and mobile phones, the KEF system uses a narrow signal band. Coupled with advanced error correction technology, this results in robust delivery of audio. Advanced Frequency Hopping Spread Spectrum is also used, where a detector continually searches for potentially conflicting transmissions, and if any are found the system hops to a different channel, keeping the signal stable. For more details, see www.kef.com.

ON THE LEVEL

Decibel is a new Apple computer audio software player that's said to be "tailored to the particular needs of audiophiles". It supports all popular audio formats including FLAC, Ogg Vorbis, Musepack, WavPack, Monkey's Audio, Speex, Apple Lossless, AAC, MP3, WAVE and AIFF. For lossless formats such as FLAC and WAVE, and for Ogg Vorbis and specially tagged MP3 files, Decibel supports gapless playback with seamless transitions between tracks. Decibel processes all audio using 64bit floating-point precision, providing the highest possible playback quality for files sampled at all bit depths, it is claimed. Decibel has an intentionally minimal user interface designed to be intuitive and non-intrusive. For audiophile users desiring more control over their audio, Decibel can take exclusive control of the output device (using its hog mode) and send audio in the device's native format. Importantly, Decibel can automatically adjust the output device's sample rate to that of the playing track, preventing audio quality degradation associated with software sample rate conversion. Finally, Decibel can load and play files entirely in memory, eliminating audio glitching associated with disk access. The full version of Decibel is available for \$33, and there's a free trial version from <http://sbooth.org/Decibel> for Mac OS X 10.6 (Snow Leopard) or later.



GOOD KHARMA

Holland's Kharma has a new speaker in the shape of the Elegance dB7, described as "a high-end loudspeaker that combines an elegant design with optimised functionality". It sports the company's own carbon drive unit called KCD (Kharma Composite Driver) inspired by space-travel and Formula-1 racing, where materials have to be as light as possible, yet very strong. The implementation of this material in a loudspeaker has resulted in previously unheard of dynamics, speed and control, it is claimed. There are two new 7-inch KCD drivers in the Elegance dB7, plus a pure Beryllium tweeter. The new Spike Disk Suspension System stand (SDSS-stand) was specifically designed for the Elegance series. The standard version comes in a luxurious aubergine high-gloss lacquer, with subtle details of chrome-plated and black metal. For more details, click on www.kharma.com.



I ignore the curvy shape if you can, as I did when I first saw the Pearl Evo Ballerina a few years ago at Munich's 'High-End' show, and look at the drive units. "Aha!" I thought, I know what this designer is trying to achieve; I wonder if he managed it? If so, this would be a loudspeaker worth hearing...

Somewhere at home, lying on a computer hard drive gathering dust, I have a folder full of dome midrange drive units from around the world, because knowing they can provide great midrange quality I decided to design a loudspeaker using one. But it got no further than an idea, damped partly by some dodgy looking response curves. The Ballerina 401 uses two domes, no less, one above and one below a ribbon in D'Appolito configuration to give even inter-driver phase matching at any

the Ballerina easily moveable. It is built from a laminated wooden frame attached to the curvy front baffle and carries a set of HiVi drive units. These come from a U.S. headquartered Chinese manufacturer, as the drive unit notes give away in their patchy translation to English. The 50mm treated fabric dome driver works from 800Hz up to 10kHz, HiVi say. That's the important upper midband and it means there is no crossover to a tweeter around 3kHz – one great benefit. It eliminates phase problems in an area where the ear is sensitive but wavelengths short enough to make physical alignment of drive units difficult. This helps make violins in particular sound more solid and of one piece.

The other benefit is a wider dispersion angle that fires more treble sideways and upward to give a brighter and more open demeanour

as they called it, way back in the late 1970s. More recently I have seen, heard and been impressed by Audiosmile's Kensai planar treble driver, also of Chinese origin, and like the 3090s, it was just super smooth and characterless. As Pearl Evo use their Isodynamic tweeter above 8kHz I would expect smooth upper treble from the Ballerina and that – happily – is what they gave me.

The bass unit is also from HiVi, it is an M8a 8in unit with gold anodised magnesium/aluminium alloy cone, in this case loaded by a small rear chamber with a front mounted reflex port.

Standing 115cm high, 43cm deep and 44cm wide the Ballerina 401 will fit medium size rooms, for which it is best suited. Bi-wire terminals are fitted and they accept bare wire, spades or 4mm banana plugs.

Dance Party

Pearl Evo's Ballerina 401s are an exotic take on the high end loudspeaker breed. Noel Keywood experiences their Italian flair...

height and a consistent sound. Would it suffer the classic dome problem of a dodgy response curve though?

It looked good to me at Munich and it sounded pretty darn fine in London recently, when reviewed. Midrange domes have great strengths and an intriguing sound, but they also have problems, which is why you don't commonly see them on hi-fi loudspeakers. But confusingly perhaps, you do see them in studio monitors where domes dominate, if you'll pardon the alliteration. Looking at the Ballerina in Munich I wondered how well Pearl Evo of Italy had managed to exploit the strengths of a dome whilst minimising its weaknesses. Whilst pondering this a kind man from Pearl approached me, spotted my *Hi-Fi World* emblazoned shirt and asked if we would like to review them. I did not say "no"...

I recall he asked me whether I liked the curvy shape and I replied wryly that I thought it was very Italian! It's a little odd as loudspeakers go and not an easy match in a traditional home, but it makes its own statement and is visually intriguing. Most surprising is a low weight of 22kgs that makes

to the sound. Domes produce a lively, open sound stage, with sharp imaging and that's one reason why studios like them. In the Ballerina 401 Pearl Evo have used two, one above and one below the tweeter. The idea here is to give the loudspeaker an even dispersion pattern that makes its sound consistent between sitting and standing.

The dome(s) push crossover downwards in frequency to a longer wavelength of 1kHz, and upwards to a much shorter one at 10kHz where the ear is less sensitive. Above 10kHz Pearl Evo use an Isodynamic tweeter from HiVi and these things always give a lovely smooth sound. The first I ever sat in front of were in a pair

SOUND QUALITY

That the Ballerina 401s have a forward and projective midband was obvious directly the awkward 'Rockferry' track started. Duffy was nice and clear, forward on the soundstage and I could hear her every explicit word. No doubts here that the Ballerinas image strongly and project vocalists forward into your lap, great if they're Duffy but perhaps I'll pass with Meatloaf! This isn't an especially well recorded album in some ways, tinged with the graunch of added digital distortion – and the Ballerinas did nothing to alleviate this effect. They're not super smoothies to be frank, having a slightly abrasive quality that didn't complement either

"if you want a loudspeaker that's hard on the pace, dry and projective, this is it..."

of Leak 3090s I lived with happily for many years, for Wharfedale produced both a tweeter and headphones incorporating an Isodynamic unit,

the 'Rockferry' album or the song. Strings, likely synthesised, were none too sweet either. All the same the Ballerinas were vividly explicit and

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yet horns blared out strongly with the basic theme and were attention grabbers.

Like most well damped loudspeakers the Ballerinas livened up when played loud and good sensitivity meant that even though I never got more than 10V (12W) into them from our Musical Fidelity AMS50 they bounced along vigorously.

With an uncluttered vocal such as that in 'Put Your Lights On' the Ballerinas put Carlos Santana up on the soundstage in full body and under a bright light. Providing I kept volume up the Ballerinas picked up every plucked guitar string, every hand drum and every shake of maracas with forensic accuracy and here I could hear the quality that a studio would appreciate; nothing mamby pamby here – these loudspeakers are able to throw a performance out with a power and precision that captured my attention and had me listening intently. Ultimately couth they are not, exciting they are and also quite unusual as hi-fi loudspeakers go; few have dome midrange units and few quite match the Ballerinas in what they do well. If you want a loudspeaker that is hard on the pace, dry and projective then this it.

These strengths suited classical music, in that individual orchestral sections were lifted right up out of the mix, making very plain the role of strings, horns and pipes in Tchaikovsky's 'March Slave', as well as bringing gusto to the performance. The Ballerinas were light on their feet, pirouetting nicely with the music. Sudden orchestral crescendos were well supported, imbued with both strength and agility.

The same qualities brought Nigel Kennedy's deft bow work out into the room, exposing it to reveal every little nuance clearly, as well as sudden changes in emphasis. Without sounding overpoweringly sharp or edgy these loudspeakers make it very plain what an artist like Nigel Kennedy is doing, giving an analytical view, one that would impress

any listener I suspect. Domes are detailed, projective and image well and all these strengths were on display with the Ballerinas.

Spinning Angelique Kidjo's 'Sound of the Drums' again underscored the loudspeakers dry, light balance, and restrained bass power. However, bass lines were clean and tight all the same, and clearly defined. I put the Ballerinas within 2ft of a rear wall in our 28ft listening room to help support lows and they did well enough, but subsonics were absent, as is to be expected from a small bass chamber.

CONCLUSION

From its curvy Italian style to its selection of drive units the Ballerina 401 is unusual. Whether you like it or not will be a matter of taste. And that's how it was sound quality wise too. Those big domes build a generously proportioned and precisely rendered soundstage right out in front of the cabinets, putting performances almost into my lap whilst listening to them. They aren't the last word in low colouration or silky smooth balance; domes never were strong here and the Ballerinas couldn't escape their weaknesses whilst enjoying their strengths. All the same, they are exciting in their own way and Ballerinas may be just the performer you wanted.

held my attention by making me aware of every little vocal twist and turn of Duffy's expressive delivery. They have penetrating insight, making both the gymnastics of the singer and the work of the musicians very obvious on this album. Duffy's fascinating natural tremolo on 'Syrup & Honey' was highlighted by the Ballerinas, and by spotlighting this they made clear her unique vocal qualities.

Spinning another disc just like the last disc, with another female singer Eleanor McEvoy, yet very different too, distinguished by excellent sound quality, swung the picture around. The Ballerinas pushed the performance out at me and whilst they remained far from electrostatics in terms of smoothness, Eleanor's voice was bathed in a bright, clear light centre stage, a step forward toward me that made her seem closer than is common.

Muted lower midrange output gives the Ballerina 401 a dryish quality; this is not a warm sounding loudspeaker, yet further down the frequency scale bass that was lively and well controlled made for a satisfying sense of balance. The rolling bass line from Benny Rietveld behind Carlos Santana on 'Yaleo' wasn't as liquid nor as powerful and succinct as I would have liked at the price,

VERDICT ●●●●
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FOR
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AGAINST
- uneven sound balance
- lack warmth

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Ballerina 401 has raised midband output, our frequency response analysis shows, an effect that pushes vocals out and strengthens intelligibility, with a peak at 5kHz that will add a little sharpness. This is likely the frequency at which the ribbon comes into play, its output adding to that from the two dome midrange units. Unusually, output from the ribbon rolls away gently up to 20kHz which will give an impression of mild natured upper treble.

A drop away in lower midband output will cause the Pearl Evo to sound somewhat lean, short on body and warmth.

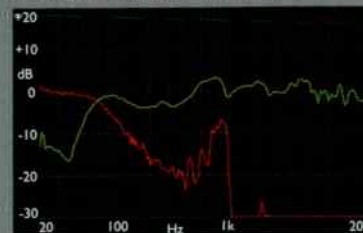
The bass unit provides smooth output down to 55Hz and the small port goes very low, but its output is weak compared to that of larger ports; most measure +6dB at 80Hz but this one was -1dB down. A peak in the red trace of port output that corresponds with a dip in main output suggests an internal resonance exists here.

Sensitivity was high at 88dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input, and in this case because the Pearl is very high impedance, measuring 9.5 Ohms overall with pink noise, it was actually receiving less than one Watt. The Evo will go loud with little power and needs no more than around 60 Watts in most situations to deliver high volume. The

impedance curve shows it is an easy load, drawing little bass current and the port damps the bass cone broadly, suggesting even sounding bass.

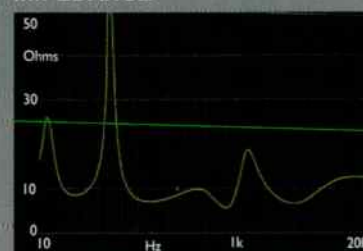
The Pearl Evo Ballerina 401 is unusual in its characteristics but it has no great weaknesses and some interesting strengths. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



AMPLIFICATION

Mark Levinson 380 pre & 334 power amp. Excellent, boxed, original packing, factory metal remote. [£12000] £5998

Quad II Eighty reference valve mono blocks. Mint, supplied by us, balance of 5yr warranty. [£6000] £3895

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Pioneer A6 mk2 integrated. Black, ex-display, mint, boxed, full warranty. [£499] £299

Luxman L-507u. New model, mint, boxed, 6 wks old, 4hrs use, supplied by us, genuine reason for sale, please contact us for details. [£4795] EPOA

Raysonic C200 all valve pre-amp. Boxed, unmarked, stunning performance. Cost new £2595 so a complete bargain at £1195.

ATC CA2 pre with P1 power. Mint, amazing reviews, originally supplied by us. Balance of 6yr warranty. [£2860] EPOA

Eastern Electric M520 mkII Integrated Amp. Our demonstrator, 6mths old, perfect condition, original packing & remote, won Hi-Fi News group test, awarded Editor's Choice. [£1995] only £1295

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ATC SCA2 pre-amp. One owner, supplied by us, only 8mths old. Boxed, mint. [£4860] EPOA

Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp. 250 wpc, black with wooden side accents, excellent condition, recent service from Chord. Original box & packing. Rare as used [£3950]. Opportunity at only £1395.

ECA Technologies Vista Pre and Lectern Power Amps. Black with gold logos, immaculate. Very musical combination. [£1700] only £599.

Deltac DPA505 power amp. With Deltech 5005 Slink speaker cable, boxed, manual. [£990] £495.

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

Naim CD2. Excellent condition, remote, boxed, din interconnect, 12mths warranty. £595.

Cambridge Audio DAC Magic 1. Boxed, excellent condition, perfect for computer audio. £79.

Densen B-420. Black, ex-demo, mint condition. [£1800] £1195

Benchmark DAC1 USB. One owner, silver, excellent condition, boxed, packing [£1295] £795.

NAD M5 SACD/CD player. Part of the NAD Masters Series programme, great reviews. One owner, originally supplied by us. [£1600] £895

TEAC VRDS 25 CD player. Stunning condition and amazing player in black. £695

TEAC VRDS 10 SE. One owner, as new, original packing, 12mth warranty. VERY rare. £595

DCS Verdi Transport. Aluminium RSD remote, as new, warranty for the new owner. Original box, packing, remote, manual. [£9000] £1895.

Densen B-410 CD player. Mint, Gizmo remote (costs £175), one owner, black, great reviews. [£1295] £795

MBL 1621 CD Transport & 1611F D/A Converter. Original cases, manuals & SFCB remote. Arguably best combo in the world today. Piano black & gold, some brassing, minor marks. [£35560] be quick at £12995

LOUDSPEAKERS

Quad ESL 2905. Higher cost Classique finish, one owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed, original shipping cartons. [£7500] EPOA

B&W 802D. Rosenuit. Months old (Nov 2010), mint. [£9500] A huge saving on new price £6990.

Wilson Benesch Curve Loudspeakers. Excellent condition, packing, one owner. Boxed. [£5950] £2995

Quad ESL 2805. Brown, one owner, boxed - a rare opportunity. [£5000] £2695 with full warranty.

Verity Sarastro mk1 Speakers. Ex-demo, high gloss Makore (premium finish). Mint with flight cases. [£37995] £13895.

ATC SCM 50 ASL Classic Actives. Walnut, ex-demo, mint condition. [£9870] EPOA

Klipsch Heresy III Speakers. Walnut, one owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed, 99db efficient and a 5-globe HiFi World review! [£1998] £1495

Klipsch RB-81 Reference Speakers. Ash Black, unused, only removed from boxes and re-packed, incredible opportunity. [£540] Only £295.

MBL 121 Speakers. Satin black, one owner, supplied by us, months old. Mint, original factory crates. [£10600 with stands] EPOA

Klipsch P-38f Palladium series. Ex-demo, one of the best speakers you will ever hear. [£9870] EPOA

ADAM Audio A.R.T. Pencil speakers. Cherry/dark silver, astonishing articulation, excellent condition, all original box and packing. [£3600] only £1695.

Audio Physic Virgo V. One owner, supplied by us, excellent, original packing, maple [£5500] £3395

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

Quad ESL 2905 speakers. One owner, mint, boxed very low hours. Amazing reviews [£7000] only £4990 with a 5yr warranty

Audio Physic Tempo VI Loudspeaker. Maple, one owner, 6mths old, unmarked, original packing. [£2612] bargain at £1895.

ANALOGUE

Restek MR1A+ Phono Stage. Ex-demo, mint. [£1195] £695.

Tom Evans Groove Phono Stage. Boxed, excellent condition, [£1900] £1095

Michelle Orbe SE. Gold towers & motor, latest spec platform, NC PSU, excellent condition, one owner, boxed. [£2250] £1195

Whest Two Phono Stage. Boxed, as new, ex-display, unused [£795] only £595

Dr Feickert DFA-105 10.5" Tonearm. Stunning, boxed, excellent condition, one owner. [£650] £395

Jelco SA-750E 10" Tonearm. Boxed, new, unused, fantastic reviews [£550] £295

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Michell Iso MC Phono Stage with Hera PSU. Original box and packing, excellent condition. [£900] and now only £295

Linn LP12 Arm Board. Original and as new. £25.

Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage. Months old, one owner. Sensational [£1495] £1095.

MAINS CONDITIONING

Pure Power P2000 mains regeneration. Ex-demo, silver, mint. [£2595] EPOA

Van Den Hull BS Hybrid Mainstream mains power cord. 2m, 2 available, both one owner, excellent condition [£350] £199 each.

Pure Power PP700 mains regeneration. Ex-demo, boxed. [£1595] EPOA

Naim Hi-Cap (Olive). Excellent, one owner. £359

CABLES

Vertex Hi-Res Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect. 1m, ex-demo, sensational [£2047] only £1120.

Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links. Set of 4, 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module - simply sensational. [£570] EPOA

Eichman Express Six 1m interconnect. Boxed, excellent condition. [£195] £99

Nordost Valhalla Speaker cable. 2wks old, box & original cable, main dealer supplied. 2.5m spades both ends. [£5700] £2990 - be quick!

Chord Optichord Optical Cable. Toslink to Toslink - 3m, 50 MHz bandwidth specification. Only £54.

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

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

Chord Signature speaker cable. One owner, boxed, as new. 2.5m great reviews. [£775] £445

ACCESSORIES

Stax SR5-4040 Signature System II with SRM-006t II. Kimik upgrade [£200]. Mint, boxed, as new. [£1449]. Bargain at £895!

Sennheiser HD600 headphones. Excellent condition, one owner. [£395] £195

MISC

Mission m7ds Surround speakers. Black, original packing and manual, perfect condition, with incredible dispersion. Only £40

Tuner Fishing

David Price goes for an unconventional FM radio-based system comprising Yamaha and Q Acoustics components...



What better value at the moment than classic FM tuners, maybe because of the widespread misapprehension that FM is going to be turned off in a few years?

You can pick yourself up an old Creek CAS-3140 for under £50, which will make a very nice noise with FM. Spend another £100 and you're into classic Japanese tuner territory; an all analogue Pioneer TX-7800 (a vast late nineties behemoth) sounds very nice indeed and throw a couple of hundred spons more into the equation and it's an absolute top of the range, no holds barred reference design you can buy.

The best classic Japanese turntables are now thousands of pounds a pop, whereas £500 will get you a mint tuner equivalent. That's pretty much what the Yamaha CT-7000 is worth; this model is legendary in the great scheme of radio things, and a quick poke around shows why.

First, its design and ergonomics are superlative; the 436x144x352mm machine looks as clean and as fresh as it did when new in 1974; it's barely dated. Only a slight patina of age on this example shows it as something from another era. But as well as its timeless styling, its build quality is generally believed to be

the high watermark for hi-fi tuners. The thing is immaculately screwed together and unusually heavy (13kg); being a harder lift than most big integrated amplifiers! You can forget your tin can Pioneer TX9500s and your Accuphase T-100s, this is exceptionally sturdy!

Inside, there's little in the way of free space (unlike so many other tuners from all eras); extensive use is made of separate circuit boards for each stage of the tuner, with careful shielding and fastidiously screened wiring. Given that the machine cost around £500 in 1974 when launched, it's unsurprising to find it full of high quality passive components. It even has a good quality headphone amplifier (and 6.3mm jack) fitted as standard. The circuit design is unusually complex, showing Yamaha's desire to throw the kitchen sink at the problem of making the best radio possible. (Lest we forget this was a high point in the company's hi-fi history, coming around the same time as the B1 V-FET power amp, NS1000 loudspeakers and TC-800GL cassette deck, masterpieces all). Its main board sports a 7-gang tuning capacitor, 7 IF filters (a mix of ceramic and LC types) and a discrete MPX decoder. This includes a switchable muting circuit with adjustable threshold, and there's a signal meter that also works as a multipath display. The rear panel

even has multipath outputs for an oscilloscope.

Given that I'd spent a lot of money on my source, even if it is 'secondhand', I had to keep a keen eye on my budget for the rest of my system. But at the same time, I wanted ancillaries that complemented my beautiful front end. So Yamaha's AS-700 was the obvious choice; just look at it. Given the thirty seven year age gap between the Yamaha CT-7000 tuner and the Yamaha AS-700 amplifier, it is *amazing* that the two look so comfortable together. Can you think of any other manufacturer, especially Japanese, whose products have such a strong visual tradition?

The new AS-700 costs £495 and measures 435x96x316mm. Amusingly, it's quite a bit lighter than the tuner at 5.8kg, but still seems very decently screwed together. It's claimed to put out 2x90W RMS per channel (into 8 ohms) which is plenty enough for most loudspeakers and listening rooms. Five line inputs plus a phono stage make it usefully versatile, and these are handled by a very attractive front panel. There's a CD direct button plus Pure Direct; the latter bypasses all the tone controls and loudness switches, the former short-circuits an extra layer of switching. I've heard its bigger AS-2000 brother in action, so I had high hopes.

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an excellent source than many budget rivals which are intrinsically more coloured and

liable simply to mask what's fed into them.

For example, Enrique Granados's 'The Ghost's Serenade' on Radio 3 showed the Yamaha CT-7000 tuner at its best; despite the slightly limited bandwidth on FM (which only extends up to 15kHz), piano had a delightful sparkle to it, with rich and sonorous harmonics falling out of the loudspeakers. It's on music like this that digital radio, in any of its bitrates, stumbles and falls, those nasty number crunching algorithms stripping the music of one of its finest assets, namely the 'overtones' that make acoustic instruments sound real. Via FM, I heard a lovely recorded acoustic, real space around the concert hall and ocean going power thumping out at me. It's fair to say that the 'rich' tone of the tuner and speakers complimented the lean and punchy amp very well.

'The World Tonight' on Radio Four showed voices to be real and believable; again no nasties courtesy of the compression codecs. I was struck by the immediacy of the female presenter's tones; she sounded as if she was sitting in the

just a touch overblown in the bass. Q Acoustics thoughtfully supply little foam bungs to go in the bass ports, which I duly inserted to get a tonally slightly lighter and brighter sound that suited my room better, and I also noticed a speeding up of the bass. The result was a taut, lithe presentation whilst retaining four fifths of the low frequency power.

My tuning duly concentrated on tightening up the bass, pushing for greater midband clarity (which was already very good) and attempting to get just a touch more treble air. Moving from Black Rhodium Jive to the same company's Tango

that I was aware of, it was that the AS-700 would likely have a dry, spry and possibly bright sound. Given that the CT-7000 sounds precisely the opposite, I felt they'd be a good match, but I still wanted a warm and full sounding set of small loudspeakers. This led me to the door of Q Acoustics, which are doing some of the very best inexpensive boxes around right now. This is largely to do with the fact that they're designed by Karl Heinz Fink, a German analogue addict who's a wizard at crafting his own bespoke drive units. All his loudspeakers, to my ears, sound the same; smooth and clean and tonally inviting. Compared to so many budget designs which are precisely the opposite, the contrast is all the more marked.

That's why I had no qualms going for the very bottom of the range. At £115 (£140 for the gloss black finish seen here), they're very compact at just 34.5x203x150mm and weigh only 3.5kg apiece, and yet are finished to very high standards indeed, with a reassuringly dull thunk when rapped with your knuckles.

A simple two way reflex, they sport a 100mm mid/bass driver crossing over at 2.8kHz to a 25mm cloth dome tweeter. Claimed frequency response is 68Hz-22kHz with a nominal impedance of 6 ohms and a sensitivity of 86dB; this means they need all the welly the Yamaha AS-700 can supply.



room with me. Indeed I could hear all around her studio, the system conveying not just her every intonation but the effects of her voice on the confines of the studio walls. Tonally there wasn't a hint of shrillness or nasality; the system had a wonderful composure and tactility that I simply wouldn't be hearing with a £500 digital source of any type, I fear.

Lovebox's 'Bestival' on Pete Tong's Radio One show came over loud and clear, with a thumping sequenced bass that had me questioning how the little Q Acoustics speakers could do it; indeed if anything I found them



loudspeaker cable (£6.45/m to £13.50) produced a wholly positive result, with a silkier and more airy high end, adding some welcome sparkle to cymbals. Black Rhodium's Prelude interconnect (£65/m) added more life to the mix, giving a crisper rendition of rhythms, but the real clincher was cleaning the aged and very tarnished RCA phono sockets on the Yamaha with Kontak; oodles of black gunge came off on the pipe cleaner, unlocking an additional layer of low level detail which had the soundstage positively shimmering. It never fails to surprise me just how much difference this £15 bottle makes.

CONCLUSION

Quite an *odd* combination, if the truth be told, but this didn't stop this £1,150 system being charming to listen to. I have to say that much of the magic came from the classic Yamaha tuner. In a way it rather reconnected me with my past; I grew up with hi-fi sounding warm and smooth and naturally musical, in a pre-digital era. This machine really has something quite lovely about it, being as delightful to use (and indeed to manually tune) as it was to listen to. The two modern components dutifully did the job without a word of complaint, faithfully rendering what they were supplied with from the golden oldie. I shall refrain from pithy comments about marriages between partners of wildly different ages, but suffice to say in hi-fi terms at least the honeymoon looks set to last!

SOUND QUALITY

Not one of the most common system combinations, the mix of an esoteric but ancient analogue tuner with a brand new budget amplifier from the same brand, and a pair of small but perfectly formed entry level loudspeakers was nevertheless a surprisingly effective one. I found it very well balanced, just as I'd hoped, and the Q Acoustics 2010 loudspeakers responded far better to

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Adam Smith goes all futuristic with his Bang & Olufsen, Cyrus and Elipson system...

Space Race

At the heart of my system I needed a high quality amplifier obviously, but I wanted something with a known pedigree that looked superb. No problem then – the answer came straight from Huntingdon in the form of the wee Cyrus 6XP. Offering six analogue inputs and an output of 40W per channel, the £950 6XP is a perfect first building block to a system like this. It has twin sets of loudspeaker terminals for bi-wiring, a preamplifier output for bi-amping or use as a preamp and a tasty LCD display that offers the option to name the inputs accordingly; it is a well-specified unit that sounds super. It is fully remote controllable but, most importantly, it's beautifully built, neat and stylish!

Loudspeakers for the system initially seemed to be a trickier proposition. After all, there's a wealth of manufacturers to choose from, making fine designs of all

shapes and sizes. Mind you, whilst there's certainly a wide variety of sizes, ninety nine percent of modern speakers remain defiantly box shaped! Suddenly however, my mind wandered back to the recent Bristol Sound and Vision show, and a fine sounding room containing what appeared to be a couple of bowling balls on stands. What these actually turned out to be were the new Planet L loudspeakers from Elipson, and I knew I had to have them...

Elipson are a French company, around since the 1930s, that have carved themselves a very strong name in the semi-professional monitor market. A two way ported design, the Planet Ls use a coaxial drive unit of Elipson's design comprising a 6.5 inch doped paper cone bass/midrange unit crossing over to a centrally mounted 1 inch soft dome tweeter at 3.8kHz. Available in Gloss Red, White and Black, the £600 Planet Ls come with

the support ring shown, in order to stop them rolling off your bookshelf, or you can purchase the optional stands, which are incredibly heavy and to which the loudspeakers bolt securely. Remembering their smooth and detailed sounds they were making at Bristol, I felt sure they would go perfectly with my Cyrus. All I needed now was a vinyl spinner...

I chose a Beogram 6000, resplendent in a deliciously 1970s shade of white, no less! This was a later variant of the range that started in 1972 with the Beogram 4000 – not only Bang & Olufsen's first tangential tracking turntable but one of the first commercially available linear trackers, full stop. The 4000 was replaced by the simpler and restyled 4002 in 1975 and the 6000 was the quadraphonic version of this designed to match the Beomaster 6000 quad receiver. As a bonus therefore, it also has a very high quality built-in phono stage that is switchable between

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stereo and quadraphonic modes, so there is no need for any external phono stage. In fact all I needed was a 5 pin DIN to 2 phono plug adaptor lead to allow successful interface between seventies Danish and modern British.

The 4000 series of decks are fine performers and crop up reasonably often for sale secondhand. They are complex beasts in terms of amount of components shoe-horned into a small space, but use no unobtainable or rare parts. Equally, service information is plentiful on the internet and there are more than a few specialists around who are happy to service them or dole out repair tips.

After spending around £200 for the Beogram, another expense to consider is the cartridge, as the decks only take B&O proprietary types, and then only the MMC20xx/MMCx000 series. SoundSmith in the USA are Bang & Olufsen's approved supplier of replacements, or your existing cartridge can be rebuilt by Axel Schurholz in Germany. Luckily my own MMC4000 is in fine health and so I was ready to begin.

SOUND QUALITY

After warming everything up and admiring how lovely it all looked, listening started in earnest but in the nicest possible way. You see, whilst I knew Paul would be battling with ancient operating systems and 'Are you sure?' type messages, and David would be squinting at tuning meters, I merely popped my LP onto the Beogram's platter and applied a gentle finger to the 'Start' button, leaving the deck to sort out speed and size, which it did with consummate ease. Consequently, the first bars of the track were just starting as I parked myself in my listening seat – who said vinyl was a stressful experience?!

Starting with some suitably

seventies grooves courtesy of the Love Unlimited Orchestra, I was very pleased by the way the system was more than capable of setting up a beautifully wide

soundstage at the end of my listening room.

The spherical shape of the loudspeakers obviously works wonders in eliminating boxy

colourations inside the enclosure that can degrade the sound and the result was a surprisingly pure and open performance that seemed to float in the air in front of me in an almost mystical manner. The cohesiveness of the point-source drive unit worked well in tandem with this to really offer a delicious sense of scale and precision to instrument and vocal placement within the soundstage, whilst the Cyrus worked effortlessly to keep rhythms pacy and perfectly timed.

As a result, upper bass was snappy, taut and beautifully detailed, whilst the mid-range never missed a thing and yet also retained the smooth and delightfully velvety nature that a well-fettled Beogram of this type is known for. What this meant was that instruments were natural and vivid, yet well placed within the soundstage and never lost in a jumble of information; the loudspeakers and turntable worked perfectly together to keep everything just as it should be. At the low end, bass was solid and well controlled, if ultimately limited by the relatively constrained dimensions of the Elipsons, of course. Sadly, whilst rounding off the corners removes the boxy reflections, internal volume goes as well, and this will impact on low end performance. Still, the Planet Ls never sounded lightweight, strangled or uncomfortable when I pushed the volume control higher with a disgracefully unruly racket playing. They merely rolled off in a dignified and, indeed, stylish manner, apparently fixing me with a reproving stare to reprimand my thoughtless behaviour!

The treble is where B&O turntables can be a mixed bag for some listeners as, whilst they are very sweet and smooth, they can

occasionally lack that last little ounce of crispness unless carefully partnered. Fortunately here the Cyrus came into its own, gently nudging the right amount of pizzazz into the treble performance but without ever straying over the top to make things uncomfortable. This left the Elipsons with the easy job of pulling these aspects together and this they did with ease, resulting in a spry, detailed and flowing performance. Popping Vivaldi onto the platter for the essential 'violin test' had the system pass with flying colours. Strings were vivid and beautifully placed centrally within the soundstage but without a hint of screech or unpleasantness. At the same time though, the MMC4000 pickup pulled the finest details from the depth of the background to make sure nothing was missed.

CONCLUSION

All too often, some audio enthusiasts I have encountered can have a tendency to make the mistake of blindly pontificating that either modern hi-fi equipment is unequivocally superior to vintage items, or vice versa, without ever stopping to



consider the possibility that the two can actually coexist very happily on the very same equipment rack. Not only have I always believed this myself but I think it would be difficult to find a system that better illustrates it than this one.

In sonic terms the Cyrus 6XP is a lively and exciting sounding performer with plenty of pep, verve and pace and is just the thing to bring the generally rather smoother and more languid performance of a classic turntable like the Beogram 6000 up a notch or two. Putting the result through neutral and effortlessly musical loudspeakers like the Elipsons provided the icing on the cake to result in a beautifully balanced system that I thoroughly enjoyed listening to and would happily go back to in a second. Quite simply, I think this system proves conclusively that good sound quality and even style are most certainly not determined by age.

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Paul Rigby decided to do things differently, using an old PC as his music source. Read on to find out how it mated to a Peachtree Audio amp and Canton loudspeakers...

Bit Steam

Thinking tangentially, I decided to put together a computer audio system; after all, everyone's got an old PC, haven't they? Editor David Price reviewed the Peachtree Audio iDecco last year, a do-everything iPod/DAC/amp all-in-one. Its £850 Decco 2 relative doesn't have iPod functionality (not needed here), but does have a fine internal DAC and amplifier, which connects to computers via USB. Better still, it's not just some generic computer audio product straight off the boat from Shenzhen. It has a large amount of design input from John Westlake (responsible for the Pink Triangle DeCapo and Cambridge

DACMagic, amongst others).

It's a well made product; nicely finished in shimmering piano lacquer black and hefty at 11.5kg (it doesn't use Class D; Westlake chose AB on sonic grounds). Despite its compact 375x110x290mm dimensions, it sports a 40W amplifier, preamp and a DAC which opens upgrade options further down the line. There's even a switchable 6N1P triode valve in the preamp stage (visible in a window at the front but, rather curiously only triggered via the remote). The Decco2 features power and input buttons plus a headphone socket and a volume control on the front with a power cable socket, optical, coaxial and USB inputs, two sets of auxiliary

sockets, preamp sockets, remote input/output, speaker terminals plus a jitter button to optimise DAC connections; it can be switched to a narrow setting with high jitter sources.

A Digital Filter Slope button is also included which is useful for listening to compressed audio downloads, letting you trim the sound slightly to your taste.

To partner my PC front end and Peachtree DAC/amplifier, I chose the £350 Canton GLE 420.2 bookshelf speakers, weighing in at 4.2kg and spanning 170x290x260mm. They are a solid design and an in-house creation, the cabinet and drivers are all bespoke. Using a silk-dome tweeter,

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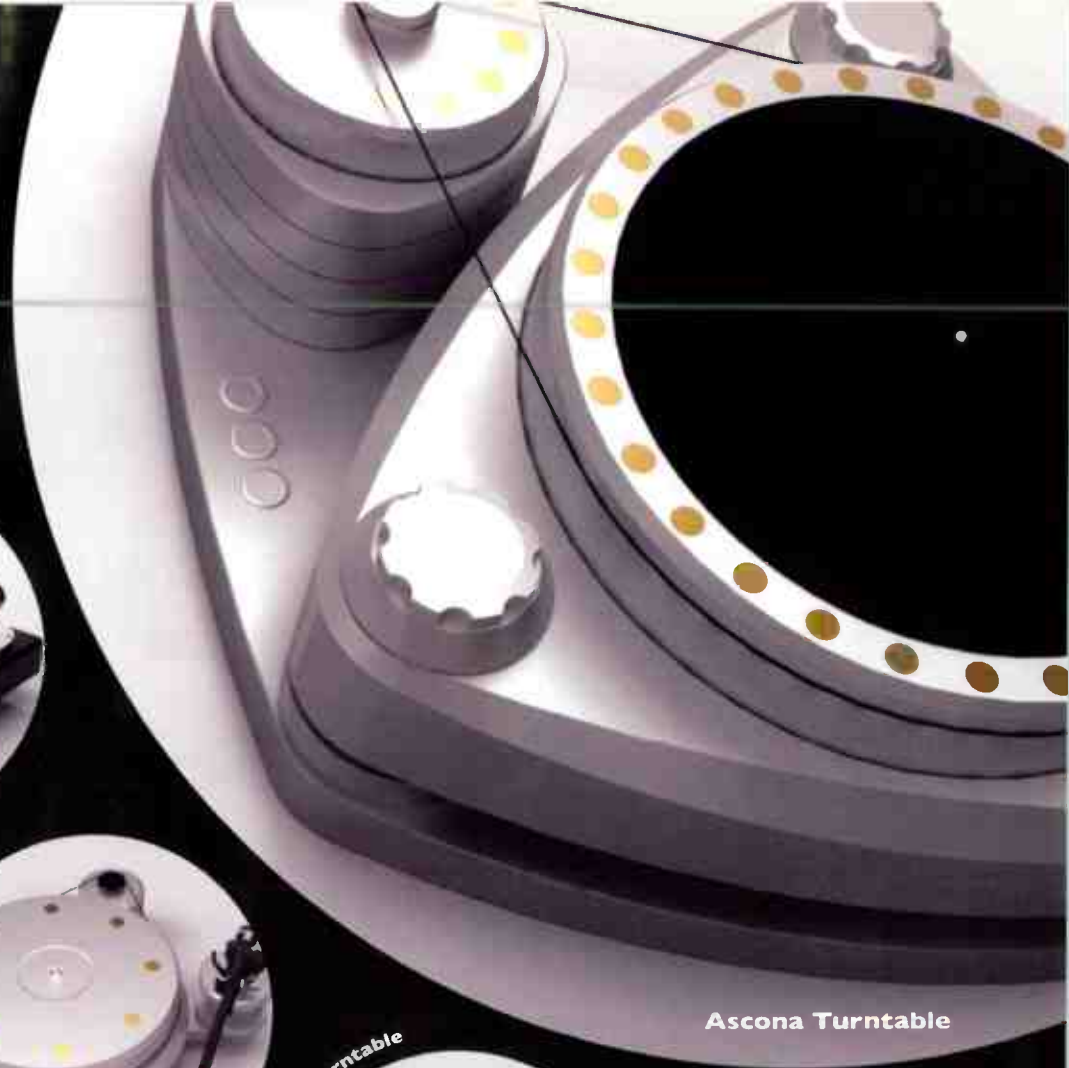
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the mid/bass unit comes complete with a Wave Surround.

Hooking that lot up to an old laptop PC with a set of Chord Epic Twin speaker cables plus a cheap USB cable, I dragged out a selection of compressed chart CDs plus a well recorded jazz vocal CD by Marilyn Scott called, 'Nightcap'. All were ripped with basic Ashampoo software and tested as WAV files, so as to avoid compression or data reduction.

SOUND QUALITY

I wanted to hear the system 'stripped' as it were, in its basic form, which meant disengaging the valve, switching off the jitter and digital filter slope. Before play, I disabled the PC's Vista software volume control to prevent sonically damaging signal processing while the Sound section within the Control Panel was examined to switch off any so-called sound enhancements. In my case a minor bass boost was disabled.

Playing the Marilyn Scott WAV file, on a superficial level I was highly impressed with sound coming out of the loudspeakers; it's certainly fair to say that it sounded 'hi-fi' (you wouldn't think you were listening to a computer), with a very clear and detailed presentation.

Still, further audition began to throw up a number of reservations; for starters the midrange was a little harsh and treble slightly sibilant. The chart CDs, suffering from varying degrees of compression, highlighted the fact that this system was not particularly forgiving in this configuration, refusing to mask any imperfections. The bass driver of the Canton coped admirably however, offering a powerful, substantial lower frequency reproduction that flattered poor source material.

So, how to improve things? My first tweak was to return to the drawing board. Not for the PC but the rips themselves. I installed Exact Audio Copy (www.exactaudiocopy.de), an audiophile-friendly ripping program which features error correction, anti-jitter routines, tests on your PC's ripping drive plus a wide variety of file naming conventions and support for WAV,

MP3, FLAC and WMA.

Restarting the test, all music provided a dramatic improvement. For the chart CDs, presentation was calmer, the upper mid lift was reduced and the bass exhibited less colouration while the better recorded Scott jazz vocal was more focused with less clutter occupying the soundstage. I was frankly amazed that a ripping application could make this much difference; after all "a digital copy is a digital copy", as a number of sceptics tell me at hi-fi shows!

Next, I activated a few buttons on the Decco2. Pressing the Digital Filter Slope acted like a low quality mains conditioner, restricting midrange dynamics, so I left that one alone. The Jitter adjustment did add extra air around the midband and more freedom to the vocal performance. So I left that on.



Things were sounding smoother and more even handed, with just a little fiddling...

I next placed the loudspeakers on a pair of Atacama HMS 1 stands (£180) for greater stability. With the Cantons no longer wobbling around on a cheap pair of supports, this made a substantial improvement to the bass grip, depth and overall stability of the sound, plus dramatically increasing midband clarity and image focus.

Peachtree Audio is proud of its USB connection, which is certainly not an afterthought. It is said to be isolated, reducing noise triggered by ground problems and power supply switching from the PC.

Running with this theme, I reached for two new Furutech USB cables; the Formula 2 (£55) and the GT (£95). Surprisingly, replacing the standard USB with the Formula 2 added a slightly richer and smoother sound over all of the test tracks. Swapping the cable for the more expensive GT enhanced the system still further, boosting bass power, reducing the bass lift a little more while strengthening the stereo image and providing extra 3D effects to the soundstage.

A pair of low distortion AE Radiance 1s (£600) saw the solid state version of the Decco2 for what it was: an amp similar to Naim in style and with strong, rhythmic bass.

Looking to balance the midband further lead me to attach a pair of Spondor S3/5R speakers (£750) which, although harder to drive, calmed the midband, offered deep, throaty bass, lots of power while the midrange and treble now had more time and space to reveal extra detail.

Plugging in a pair of Sennheiser HD650 headphones to the frontal socket proved how penetrating the Decco2 is in this configuration.

ration, offering incisive detail which is enhanced by the HD650's natural lower frequency power.

CONCLUSION

Wow, what a journey! This experiment proved that a bog-standard PC can work convincingly as a front-end. After a fair bit of fettling it really gave a clean, smooth and capacious sound that let me really get into the music. I believe this system provides a good stab at an audiophile standard. With the right tweaking, your computer audio system can go to the ball!

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If ever there was a 'cult' interconnect, this is surely it. The 8mm thick cable is constructed from sixteen individual 0.4mm silver-plated OFC solid cores insulated with Gore expanded PTFE material, said to have an extremely low dielectric constant compared to normal PTFE/Teflon. These are arranged into four wound quads of which two are reversed to make the Black Slink non-directional. These

quads are further bound with Gore expanded PTFE material before twisting all four quads and binding them with another layer, the company says. The cable is then annealed to reduce mechanical stress, and a silver plated braid is added to provide a screen which is then covered with a glossy flexible polyurethane jacket. The effect is a largely unimicrophonic cable; an important point as many cables are stiff enough to transmit vibrations from the air (or ground) right into the hi-fi component. It comes terminated with either gold plated WBT Phono, Neutrik XLR connectors or a combination of both types, in lengths of 1m upwards.

It's been a while since I've heard Black Slink, and many systems have come and gone since then, so I was intrigued to audition it in my modern

set-up. Fascinatingly, it's still much as I remember it, which is to say very clean and detailed with a deep and slightly velvety tonality; in this respect it's quite different to many modern cables (i.e. Nordost) which light up the sky and ignite the fireworks. The Black Slink resides slightly on the dark side of the moon, letting neutral systems remain precisely that; it doesn't add pizzazz or infuse everything with an artificial glint. Instead, it lets the music flow without embellishment, in a rhythmically precise and exacting way; you're suddenly well aware of the leading edges of notes and music becomes more propulsive, somehow snatching your attention when otherwise you'd have overlooked it. It's also very good dynamically, signposting subtle inflections, such as the weight with which drums are struck, in a way that can take you by surprise. It's an excellent partner to DPA's fine range of electronics but actually works brilliantly in already well balanced systems from other makes. **DP**

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soundbites

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Although the spikes fitted to the base of most types of loudspeaker and speaker stand are helpful in isolating the speaker from the floor, vibration is still passed through to the supporting surface. At low volumes it will have the effect of clouding and slowing the sound of the bass, at higher volumes the resonance will contribute to that annoying thrumming bass that can penetrate walls and ceilings. The Spike Shoes from Blue Horizon aim to not only disperse this resonance but also protect uncarpeted surfaces from unsightly holes. They're made from an aluminium casing inside which is a reinforced plate to allow loads of up to 100kg per shoe. Beneath this is a composite material described as a dense composite chaotic mix of cork and rubber, for isolation purposes.

Placed underneath my Kelly KT 3s, which stand on polished black

granite plinths, the sound showed noticeable improvements in both the tonal depth of all instruments, and in the focus of the soundstage. They also seemed quite effective when placed underneath the spikes on my 60kg Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers, and my equipment rack, both of which stand on carpet. The

precision of the imaging improved, as did the perceived speed and depth of the bass. An effective value for money product that displays considered thought and attention to its quality.

TB

[Contact:
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With metal foil in its treble transducers rather than conventional cloth domes, Robson's Regis are futuristic in design, yet conventional in appearance. Noel Keywood finds it an alluring combination...

Blade Runner

Robson's Regis is a compact, liftable but solidly built loudspeaker that will fit most rooms easily and blend in well. But it is a quality design graced with a ribbon tweeter of exceptional ability, I found. For this you pay a price: £2,500 no less. This is identical to that of Monitor Audio's PL100 I see, another compact quality design sporting a ribbon tweeter. The two are the same, but character wise could hardly be more different as well!

The Regis is a stand mounter, one that sits firmly due to its 9kg weight. Getting the Regis onto its stand is hardly a problem all the same since it is a manageable 42cm high, 20cm wide and 32cm deep. The rear face carries a port, as this is a bass reflex design, plus a set of (single wire) input terminals. Solid wood top and bottom plates contribute to the sense of solidity and with the machined front name plate finish was superb.

The ribbon tweeter has a long diaphragm, but it still works from a high 4kHz upward our measurements show, like most ribbons, so most of the audio band is handled by the 152mm polypropylene coned bass/midrange driver in truth. Yet the sonic contribution of the ribbon is very obvious all the same, I found – and welcome!

Ribbons commonly don't reach down far enough to match a bass/mid driver and they're also insensitive, making the whole 'speaker insensitive – and both difficulties affected the Regis I found. The upside is that ribbon drivers deliver wonderfully pure, sweet and insightful treble, properties the Regis delighted in.

Our samples were run in for 48 hours and driven mostly by our Musical Fidelity AMS50 power amplifier, via a Creek OBH-22 passive preamp from an Electrocompaniet ECD1 DAC. Our Icon Audio MBB45 MkII was used also, and a Leema Pulse III, but in this case I felt the big Class A AMS50 was the best partner, even though it ran out of Watts at one point (more later).

SOUND QUALITY

Like any ribbon treble unit that of the Regis is smooth, sweet, detailed and tonally even. Kept in good balance with the bass/midrange unit by Robson, the result is a loudspeaker that comes across as free of the added sheen and apparent speed that metal cone loudspeakers have. The Regis is gentle, full and even a little warm in its nature, and quite different to most commercial loudspeakers on

the market today in being so. There's no extra light on the upper midband, no peaky treble nor anything to add 'character' – and this makes for a loudspeaker 'quieter' than the herd and especially a highly tuned loudspeaker like a Monitor Audio PL100 – say – with its treated alloy cones and forward ribbon tweeter. The Regis represents another, quite contrary approach.

Vocals were a little warmed by the gap between upper midrange and the ribbon unit and there was a feeling of loss from the less than perfect cohesion between the bass/midrange unit and the ribbon: this

"too many modern loudspeakers are attention seekers whose presence can fast become irritating; these Robsons are the opposite..."

was responsible for the 'warmth' in the sound. Yet the Regis is deliciously detailed; I was transfixed by the gentle but sonorous ring of a cymbal being hit in Angelique Kidjo's 'Bitchifi'; I could tell it was planished brass and it rang out in its own space on the sound stage. Each strike was instantaneous too, starting in a way that defies dome tweeters, whilst the decay was clearly illuminated. The Regis has treble detail to die for. What you get so uniquely here is real detail, swathes of it, with absolutely no emphasis or colour' just a smooth sweet stream of activity that is easy to listen to hours on end.

Renee Fleming was a little back on the sound stage singing 'Quando me n'vo' from Puccini's 'La Boheme' and there was again a little sense of warmth that comes from loss due to that dip in the response, but you'd not easily notice this. It's a sin of omission, rather than addition and would have flown beneath my aural radar were it not for the fact that I consistently use the same test tracks in loudspeaker reviews and the Regis played things differently to much of what I review. Fleming's sustained high at the end of 'Signore, ascolta!' was strong yet gloriously pure, flowing from the loudspeakers with an easy clarity that would have any opera lover drooling.

Whilst the Regis comes across

as warm and even a little tubby in its upper bass, and also possessed of a little boxiness, lower bass lines were taut and powerful. I was surprised at this, in view of cabinet size. The strong walking bass lines on Angelique Kidjo's 'Fifa' album punched out nicely and I rate the Regis highly when it comes to both bass power and control.

Our measurements suggest good bass tuning and in use the Regis worked surprisingly well in this area. Lows from Lady Gaga's 'Monster' swirled around the room, their threatening presence underpinning Gaga's spoken parts, the Regis

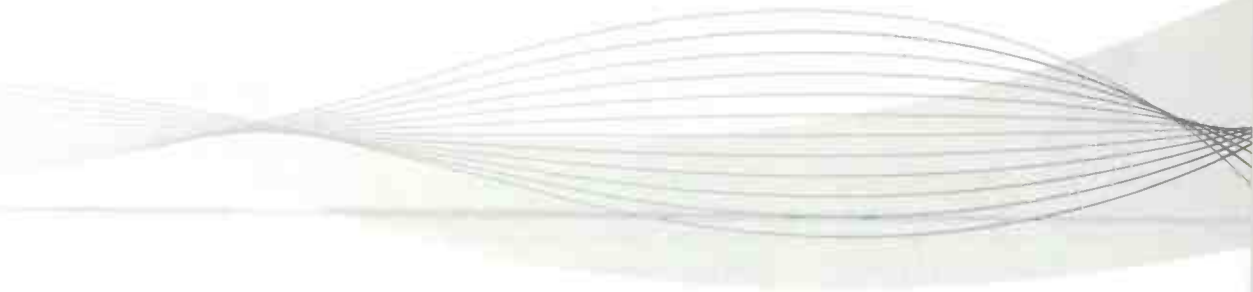
sounding both firm and strong here, with plenty of depth too. But as 'Monster' got into its stride and I turned volume up, as I always do with this track to see how a loudspeaker hangs together at high volume, the Regis started to sound a little thick.



then some coarseness suggested our Musical Fidelity AMS50 was reaching its limit and clipping. Sure enough hanging a voltmeter onto its outputs showed the insensitive Regis was gobbling volts; I saw 20V (50W and



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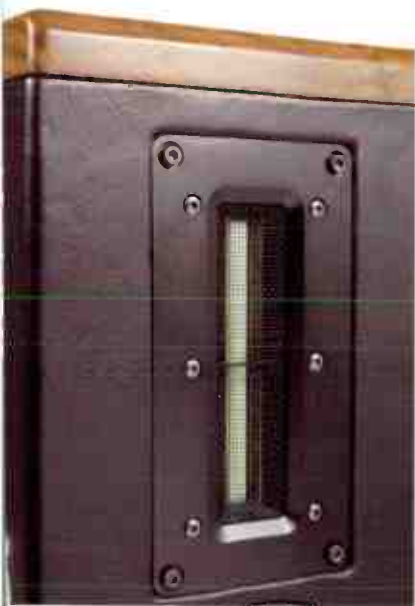
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well into clip) come up at one point, far higher than the 5V (3W) or so I normally see at high volume with an 88-90dB sensitive loudspeaker. I swapped to our Leema Pulse III for a high level session and the Regis held together well enough, although they aren't ideal for very high volume Rock.

With 'Monster' there was a notable softening of Gaga's enunciation; at times the Regis sounded a little overly warm and bland; Gaga spits her words out and the Regis noticeably softened this delivery. Yet the stage was wide, it was deep and the performance came over as powerful, as it should.

Spinning Nigel Kennedy playing Vivaldi's 'Spring' from 'The Four Seasons' saw the Regis ascend to a realm inhabited by few modern loudspeakers, courtesy of its ribbon drive unit. Its insight into Nigel's violin was peerless, strings were clearly separated and had their own discernible character, instead of being painted in by the loudspeaker. The lack of fizz, sizzle and other roughening effects was remarkable; the ribbon was utter class here and streets ahead of other loudspeakers. I was more than impressed in fact: the sound stage was wide and open, extending beyond the cabinets, and individual sections of the backing English Chamber Orchestra were outlined with precision. With both violin and orchestra the Regis romped away from most other loudspeakers, sounding sweet as a nut, natural in balance and very engaging in delivery.

CONCLUSION

Above all the Regis is a smooth, easy and warm sounding loudspeaker to sit in front of. It simply encourages long term listening and for this alone I thought it a lovely design. Too many modern loudspeakers are 'in yer face' attention seekers whose presence, after a short while, can become irritating. These Robsons are the opposite: they sooth a listener, yet impress at the same time. Much of this comes down to the speed and cleanliness of the ribbon driver; rimshots on The Stranglers 'Always the Sun' were lightning fast for example, but naturally so, not forced. Largely because the Robsons handle strings so well and image superbly, Classical music was a delight to listen to.

The Regis is not perfect; it is characterful and Robson haven't solved the thorny problem of getting a bass midrange unit to seamlessly match a ribbon driver. Yet this hardly seemed an issue with much of the music I played. With some exceptions: Gaga sounded a little muffled; enunciation wasn't as specific as it should have been and intelligibility suffered. At the same time this

small blemish helped give the Regis an easy aural demeanour that made for relaxed listening. So this is a loudspeaker that must be auditioned first; it isn't perhaps for everyone. For most of the time and in most ways I thought it was lovely and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to its great abilities.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Regis has a basically flat response trend across the audio band, our analysis shows. Output from the ribbon tweeter matches that of the bass/midrange unit in terms of level, so this is not a loudspeaker with emphasised treble and a bright balance to its sound. It does look as if the ribbon reaches down no lower than 4kHz, like most ribbons, and the bass/midrange unit struggles to get past 2kHz, creating a large dip in the response curve between these frequencies. This will add warmth at least and lessen detail, although the peak from 1.5kHz-2kHz will likely disguise this by adding emphasis a little lower down. This aberration apart however, the Regis looks to be a tonally accurate loudspeaker with smooth ribbon treble and a fairly even bass midrange region. The peak in output at 200Hz is caused by an internal resonance (standing wave) that is clearly visible in a decay spectrum (not shown) as an overhang and may colour/warm the upper bass a little.

Port output (red trace) is broad, showing the port adds a lot of acoustic damping to the bass unit, and this is indeed reflected in the impedance curve. Port output measured +4dB above the bass unit at 80Hz (this is not shown in the graph) and the port reaches down to 30Hz – a low value for such a small cabinet. However, the drawback is very low sensitivity of just 81.5dB from one nominal watt of

input, meaning powerful amplifiers of 60W or more are needed to go loud. Our impedance curve barely gets below 10 Ohms; the bass unit had a 7 Ohm DCR and overall impedance measured 12 Ohms, no less, an unusually high value.

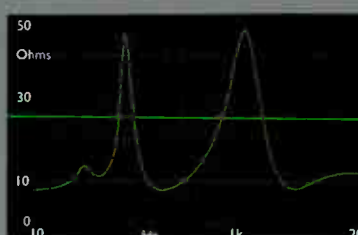
The Regis is a compact, wide bandwidth loudspeaker with few blemishes. However, it is fundamentally accurate and offers quality results from a compact design, albeit demanding high power amplifiers. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●●●
A smooth, mild mannered loudspeaker with lightning fast transients and delicious treble. A great listen.

ROBSON REGIS £2,500
Robson Acoustics
☎ + 44(0)1768 484000
www.robsonacoustics.co.uk

FOR
- evenly balanced
- fast, pure treble
- precision sound stage

AGAINST
- soft midband
- needs power

mail



LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers.

For more advice see Letters from earlier issues at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/letters

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers are on their way to **FRANKIE**, Letter of the Month winner in our May 2011 issue.

Letter of the Month

GREAT LP SOUND

As an avid record collector, I've been thinking about the varying quality of recordings in general and how useful it would be to have some kind of guide to a particular recording and its sound quality.

As the replay quality of my hi-fi increased, I found that so did the differences between good and bad recordings – to the point now where I try to limit my listening to the best quality recordings.

Yes, I know it should be all about the music, but my serious listening is through headphones and any bad recordings are brutally exposed so I leave the bad recordings to my laptop system which doesn't highlight them so much.

For example, I bought The Cure's 1989 LP 'Disintegration' when it came out, and on my old Hitachi stack system it sounded okay, but having played it recently on my Voyd / SME IV / Audio Note IQ3 / Pure Sound P10 / Sugden HeadMaster / Grado SR225s, the LP is just about unlistenable. The sound is shrill and compressed. I was tempted to buy a recently remastered version on vinyl but David's idea that the original issue being best sounding is spot on and matches my experiences, so I couldn't see how a remastered version would sound any better than the original.

Anyway, I digress. What would be really useful would be to know which recordings sound great. Perhaps readers could pitch in with their top ten recordings and over a period of time you could build up a database. I know

mark knopfler



kill to get crimson

A recent Mark Knopfler wonder, the 'Kill To Get Crimson' LP has superb sound quality.

it's all subjective, but I'm working on the basic assumption that your readers know a good recording from a bad one.

To kick off then, here are some of my top recommended recordings based on sound quality (in no particular order):

Beatles – Abbey Road (first pressing) – a wonderful recording, deep deep lows, sweet highs, and a great soundstage.
Jean Michel Jarre – The Concerts in China – forget surround sound, this stereo mix will have you wondering where you hid those rear speakers.

Pink Floyd – The Wall – awesome dynamics and sound effects, plus great music of course.

Dire Straits – Love Over Gold – Worth buying purely for Telegraph Road and Private Investigations – a masterful recording.

Peter Gabriel – So / Us – forget the expensive Quix reissues, they don't sound any better than the originals.

Miles Davis – Kind of Blue – I have the Quix reissue, which is awesome.

Roxy Music – Avalon – a superb recording, just dripping with atmosphere.

Jacques Loussier – *Plays Bach* (number 3) – simple trio, well recorded.

Radiohead – *In Rainbows* – *Nude* is particularly special.

Depeche Mode – *Violator* – a seminal album and an amazing recording given it was 1990, when most pop recordings were awful.

Kraftwerk – *Tour De France* – most Kraftwerk stuff is recorded well, but this is special.

The Cure – *Faith* – great recording, pity things went downhill later on.

And the ones to avoid? Don't get me started !!!

Laurence Robertson

Thanks for that list Laurence. I recognise and own many of them and agree with you about sound quality. I regularly spin the recent 'Kill to Get Crimson' LP from Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits) and it is another utterly superb transcription. Eleanor McEvoy LPs are also something special you will find. It's great when musicians are into and properly understand the issues behind sound quality: the final result is heaven. **NK**

Great idea, Laurence. Watch this space for more on the difference between various vinyl pressings of the same album... **DP**

WARMTH NEEDED

I'm hoping you can give me some advice regarding the most suitable cartridge that will be compatible with my system. I am using an Origin Live Sovereign turntable together with a Conqueror Mk 3 arm. The cartridge at present is a new Denon DL304. The phono stage is the Icon Audio PS3 upgraded with Jensen capacitors and NOS valves. I also use Mastersound 845 Final Monoblocks with a mastersound Line In Preamp, Wilson Benesch Chimera Loudspeakers with MIT Terminator Cables; all other interconnects are pure Silver. My CD Source is a McIntosh 1000 with the 1000 DAC.

I know my speakers are very revealing and at times a little forward with the treble so I'm looking for a cartridge with a warm presentation. I would appreciate any suggestions that you might have.

Peter Amor

Hi Peter. Very few cartridges have a warm sound; most are the opposite: too bright. An old classic with a warm sound is Shure's M97 xE, but it is a design from yesteryear that is a little bland by today's standards. The only other cartridge that approaches a warm sound is Ortofon's Cadenza Black moving coil and this appears to be the best solution in the context of



Ortofon Cadenza Black lacks brightness or treble emphasis.

your system, albeit an expensive one. The Cadenza Black with Icon Audio PS3 phono stage are made for each other though, especially with those 'dark' sounding Jensen capacitors.

NK

I'd counsel the Dynavector DV17D3 (£750); you don't specify your budget but I'd think this is the sort of sum you'd have in mind judging by the rest of your system. If you can spend twice this or more, then think about the Koetsu Red series. Both these Japanese cartridges are beautifully artisan made transducers with a 'classic' sound that's on the fruity side

first stepped into the minefield called hi-fi at 16 when I spent pretty much all that I had (£100) in Richer Sounds, Stockport, on a Sanyo/Wharfedale Rotel set up. So for 28 years I've been desperately trying to reach a point where I think "wow – that sounds perfect".

I'm at that point now. The final parts of my hi-fi jigsaw came in the shape of the heavily modified TRI -VISTA 21 done by JS Audio. I'm no electronics engineer and no hi-fi guru, I'm not an expert and I'm no boffin, but to these ears (and those of my over critical and cynical wife) it really sounds outstanding. It has also got even sweeter since the mods were carried out late last year.

Frankie did make a valid point regarding the type of 'sound' that I was after, but here the blame lies with me and not JS Audio. I wasn't as clear as I should have been in the first place. However when I expressed disappointment in what they had done, (it wasn't crap or worse than the original, it was just different and not to my taste) they pushed me much more on what I was after, what exactly I was looking for. I asked for a really detailed sound, erring towards analytical even, but also with the big soundstage advocated by Frankie and obviously on his 'wish



Musical Fidelity's Trivista 21 responded well to being tuned, says Dave Mayer.

with a warm and rich tonality; they're not super forensic excavators of detail but are very musically satisfying all the same. The Koetsu adds just a touch more life and a certain romantic quality that's completely unknown elsewhere in the moving coil world. **DP**

TRI BEFORE YOU BUY

I would like to respond to the somewhat pointless comments contained in your April issues 'letter of the month'. You kindly published my own original letter earlier this year (Re: upgraded Tri-Vista DAC2.1 etc). I think that 'Frankie' has missed the point and has got rather wrapped up in his own beliefs.

First things first. I can only speak as I find and the sound coming from my current system (including the brilliant upgraded Tri-vista DAC) is absolutely truly wonderful. I'm 44 years of age and

list'. And that is exactly what I got back. To be honest, it was better than I could have imagined, right from the first few hours of use I was amazed by the detail coming through.

To respond to Frankie's comment about liking the original Tri-vista's sound, then the answer is "yes I did". I thought it was superb, but as my original letter stated, the unit had become faulty and needed repairing, hence the reason for contacting J.S. Audio. The opportunity to upgrade and to build on its strengths was born out of its need to be repaired first and foremost.

Good sound is subjective though. A friend of mine who owned and ran a Linn dealership for 20 years until last year listened to my system recently. He commented that he found the sound incredibly detailed and analytical but that he didn't particularly like it. He knows me pretty well and I have



Cables were needed to 'keep them coming into the stores' says Joe Wdowiak.

purchased from him on many occasions, and he said that he knew it was the sound that he'd always known me to want. But as I'd talked with him and discussed hi-fi with him for over 15 years then he's well placed to judge my requirements and preferences. So if he could have 'tailor made' a system for me to fulfil these priorities then my current system is what he would have recommended... he knew it was exactly what I'd been looking for.

The fact that J.S Audio did it after two conversations and two sessions with my Tri-vista to me is nothing short of remarkable, I think that they worked wonders.

As we always say, and read hundreds of times in magazines including this one, if it sounds good to you then it is good ... simple as that.

What I know for sure is that since the Tri-vista was modified I've never been happier and so impressed by what I hear. Also, for the first time in over 20 years I don't feel the need to change anything; I really think that I'm where I want to be with the sound, it ticks every single box.

So I still maintain my comments in my original letter, don't always look to upgrade to brand new boxes of electronics. Before doing so take a look at what you have and look at the component upgrade opportunity that may be available. Google is brilliant for this!

Dave Mayer

Couldn't agree more Dave; you're spot on! **DP**

CABLE COMMENT

In the January issue a reader wrote expressing his 'displeasure' with the emphasis on cables, interconnects, etc. Without letting my feelings be known on the subject, I'd like to propose a theory for the said reader, as follows – at some point the hi-fi industry ran out of things to flog, so home theatre was invented to make more sales and then when the market for that dried up something else was needed to 'keep them coming into the stores'... voila high-end cables, power conditioners, etc.

Nowadays there are very few stores that sell hi-fi equipment, at least on this side of the pond. Two decades ago there were many. The general public is into MP3, iPods, etc., mostly using music as a background to do other things, but not really listening.

Joe Wdowiak
Canada

That's a bit uncharitable Joe! Cables interest people, especially those who have changed them and heard the difference and been surprised by it. Those who have not done this by-and-large remain sceptical, and I understand why, although because we cannot explain something does not mean it doesn't exist – but I won't get into this yet again!

It isn't only hi-fi that has gone down the drain but a lot of the music business too. Big studios like Olympic have disappeared and even Abbey Road is struggling. The whole landscape has changed and I am not certain why. Digital portables and downloadable music synchronised to their use – notably iTunes – are not the only reason people do not listen at home seriously. Leisure time habits have changed and this is reflected in buying priorities. It's a fickle world!
NK

Hmmm... I think that's a little unfair Joe. It's easy to poke fun at the cable industry, because it's so amazingly variable, not short of hype and in many cases rather ridiculously presented to the outside world (the nineties fad for day-glo purple and green interconnects didn't help, methinks!), but the fact remains – to anyone who's bothered to audition a wide variety – that cables do make

a difference. Notice that I say 'difference' and not 'improvement'; sometimes they can make things worse, and at others they can vastly boost your system's sound. It's all a case of which ones you choose; this is why we do review them and try to describe their respective sound. Of course, it's very system dependent, so our reviews have to be an entry point into your cable buying odyssey and not a universal proclamation. **DP**

QUAD CLASSIC

In your last magazine I found your "World Standard" listing and I can say that I agree with you because I have One Thing Audio ESL-57 loudspeakers and Furutech Gold IEC inlets and Furutech Carbon/Gold binding posts, and it was really worth it. I also painted it as a classical look but in a contemporary style. Now I am making an oak/stone stand for my Quad ESL 2905 speakers, which I use with stax SR007 electrostatic earspeakers and a Magnum Dynalab MD-100T tuner, also mentioned in your magazine. In an office I have an Arcam Solo Mini with Arcam amplifier.

I want to ask you kindly for help about Quad ESL 989 and Magnepan 20.1. In my country, frankly speaking, it is like mission impossible. Last time for one week I gave ESL57 to one hi-fi shop to show them how something can do this.

Grzegorz Janta
Poland

I love your ESL-57 Peter Walker tribute Quads. It is the first time I have seen a picture of the company's founder on his most famous product. Very nice. **NK**

I haven't heard Magnepan 20.1s, so can't comment on these, but I know the Quad ESL989s to be excellent loudspeakers; albeit flawed by their



Quad founder Peter Walker on his most famous product, the ESL-57 electrostatic loudspeakers of Grzegorz Janta in Poland.

slightly rickety cabinets which aren't as rigid as they should be. The later 2905s addressed this problem, while the earlier 57s and 63s are a lot smaller and so less susceptible to cabinet flex anyway. But I still think the best Quad electrostatics I've ever heard are the One Thing ESL57s; there's something unique about these that I've not heard elsewhere, although the 2805s come closest. They're just so clean and fast and open and powerful and even in a way that you simply can't hear from almost all other loudspeakers. **DP**

MANGLED CASSETTE

Having a big sort out during a house move, I discovered a load of my cassettes. I haven't had a player for ages, but I could not bring myself to throw the tapes away. So I resolved to seek out a secondhand one, with the specific capability of making a decent fist of playing back the pre-recorded cassettes I bought as a teenager in the 1980s. I might even get some blank tape and give recording a go for the fun of it one day.

So anyways, I purchased a second hand NAD 613 from a local second hand shop specialising in hi-fi. In my set up it sounds a treat, at least with the tapes that I have had success with playing. The best of my pre-recordeds sound open, lively and fairly present and "outside of the system". The rest of the system is Rega P5/Goldring 1042/Creek OBH-15 vinyl front end, Rega Apollo CD player, Rega Mira 3 amp and Rega R3 speakers. In this context, pre-recordeds are never going to match my records and non-loudness war CDs, but the cassette source is no disgrace, despite (or perhaps because of) it being a basic, no superfluous features deck. It is further confirmation for me that digital downloads et al are just plain wrong.

However, it is the worst of the pre-recorded tapes that I am writing to ask for your advice about. Funnily, I can pinpoint the problems to one label – EMI. In the 80s they used a system called XDR which was supposed to tighten up quality of duplication. They had a series of bleeps at the beginning and end of each tape, and according to Wikipedia they used "I" tape to make copies from. Indeed the signal on these is healthier than other pre-recordeds – almost up to the standard I got when I used to make recordings onto blank tapes as a student.

The thing is... they don't jam as such, but most of them play okay for a few moments, then I get extreme flutter, then wow, then they sound really mangled and they stop playing! They will fast forward and rewind OK. The uneven speed of playing will occur if I



NAD 613 cassette deck "sounds a treat" says Mark Pearce.

try again, but in a different place from where it first occurred. As I say this is almost always with XDR cassettes but some non-XDR EMIs will do the same. (I also tried them on a Sony machine with the same results – except that the Sony sounded worse, even with the good pre-recordeds I have).

This is a shame because I have many Beatles albums on tape. Although I have them on LP – and my Rega P5/Goldring 1042 plays them rather stonkingly, it would be nice to have working versions of the tape editions! And it is these that were re-issued on XDR cassette when the first CD issues of the albums appeared.

Is there something I can do to rescue them, short of transplanting them to other shells – something that sounds rather time consuming and messy. And too difficult for my butter fingers.

Also, it would be lovely to have a few features in your magazine devoted to cassettes. I think it is David who doesn't need to be convinced of their worth, and maybe he could do an article about classic decks (would my NAD appear?) and cassette care in general. He could investigate the availability of blank cassettes these days. And maybe even a few comparisons with modern gear would show up the strengths and weaknesses of both. File compression codecs may be a controversial subject these days, especially with those who want to either download albums or archive LPs and tapes, but back in the day it was noise reduction methods. What are your opinions on Dolby NR, for example? Is it best kept turned off, or are there certain decks that do not make a total pig's ear of decoding it? The truth is out there!

Hopefully you can advise with my tape problems and perhaps run a cassette feature!

Mark Pearce,

Hi Mark. As you suspect this problem is attributable to the cassette shell, or C-zero as it was called. It would appear that EMI used a poor shell. The usual remedy is to wind the cassette fully forward and then fully backward. This realigns the tape inside, eliminating the ridging that builds up with continual stop/starts. You may have to do it a few times.

If this doesn't work then the tape would have to be transferred to a new and better shell, but as you say

this is a big hassle. And quality shells are likely hard to find nowadays. **NK**

If you need to transplant the tape, best buy brand new cassettes with screw shells; most of the currently available new tapes like TDK Ds no longer have screw shells, but the last batch of TDK SAs I bought (last year) still did; at just 85p a pop for a C90 they're a bargain, although in truth I don't think the shells on these latest SAs are as good as the ones fitted to SAs some ten to fifteen years ago; they're still well worth experimenting with, though! Check out www.totalblankmedia.com. We'll certainly be keeping our cassette coverage going, don't worry... **DP**

BACK

After an absence of some ten years or so I am once more a subscriber and eagerly look forward to my copy dropping through the letter box each month. As you may have surmised my return coincides with the aim of upgrading my current system. My set up consists of Linn



Buy TDK SA cassettes with screw shells, says David, so they can be opened.

LP12/ Circus/ Lingo/ Ittok and Ortofon MC25fl. A Trichord Dino feeds my Sugden A48b amplifier (circa 1993) and speakers are Castle Pembrokes. Speaker cable is Linn K20. I recently had the Linn rebuilt by Peter Swain at Cymbiosis of Leicester and would recommend him to any Linn owner.

I do feel a little out of touch and would appreciate some help. My own feelings are that the Sugden may be the place to start. I have always liked the sound of the Sugden and considered a straight swap for one of their newer models, the Mystro being the obvious choice, Or would the A21a be the one to look at? Noel's recent review of the Creek Destiny 2 certainly interested me as well. Naim amps I don't like. Budget

is around £1,500 to £2,000. With the right record my system is really enjoyable to listen to but with another recording splashy and muddled highs spoil things. Any and all advice welcome. My listening room is small, about 11 by 9 feet and I listen to classic rock and blues with a touch of folk and occasional Bob Marley. Any help would be greatly appreciated. Really enjoying the mag and glad to be back!

Steve Chapman

The Ortofon MC25FL and Trichord Dino phono stage are a bit off the pace by today's standards. As good as the Ortofon was under measurement, its sound was always a disappointment, being somewhat lifeless and one dimensional. The Dino is good but would do the cartridge no favours in this respect.

Things are hotting up in the budget Moving Coil market. The Benz Micro Ace we reviewed last month is a cracker Tony Bolton loved and Ortofon have just introduced the Vivo, reviewed by Tony in this issue. An Icon Audio PSI phono stage would improve stage depth too.

The new Creek Destiny 2 was one of the best solid-state amplifiers I have ever heard, no less! You just have to bear in mind here that I judged it from a valve amp perspective and loved its sumptuous, but clean sound, free from the coldness or glare of most transistor amplifiers. Creek are in my experience alone in getting such a sound from transistors, but then Mike Creek has been at it a long time and is more than a little talented and experienced in the field. The Destiny 2 is fabulous if you want a big, lusty sound that doesn't shout and I recommend you hear it. **NK**

I think you've got to try to audition the amps for yourself, Steve. This is because they all have quite different sounds; the latest A21 S2 is icily clear and amazingly detailed, with a silvery treble that you just don't get from Class AB amplifiers, no matter how good. It's an amazingly incisive tool, but sometimes too much so for some tastes. What amazed me was the Mysterio, which is a little smoother, more diffuse and slightly deeper in tone, yet amazingly bouncy and fun to listen to in a way which the A21 simply is not! I think it comes down to music taste here; rock and jazz fans would probably go for the Mysterio, whereas classical lovers would definitely want the A21. The Creek I think is more musically lucid and tonally inviting than both, but less intricately detailed than either; this is why an audition in the context

of your own system (or at least speakers) is the right thing to do. **DP**

CABLE CONTROVERSY

In last month's Letters page you discussed the complicated issue of how cables carry electrical energy. It's fair enough to say you don't know how it works but please don't then give room to any of the fringe wacko notions! The ether is a bogus concept from the days before modern electrical engineering allowed us to build excellent audio equipment!

The confusion here is due to the fact that all electrical energy is carried by current flowing in conductors, but all current creates an associated electro-magnetic field: you can't have one without the other. But the field does not normally transmit the power – that's why copper wires are so essential. Next time your car battery gets a bit dodgy, just try telling the AA man that the wires don't matter; it can flow through space not wires!

Of course there are exceptions where electro-magnetic circuits are specially engineered to transfer power, as in motors and transformers, but even then conductors are essential components to channel, transmit and recover the energy.

Like many Hi-Fi World readers, I have heard definitive demonstrations at audio shows where a high-end outfit was played with and without special cables. Even mains cables, for goodness sake! How can a mains cable possibly affect the quality of a flat DC supply from a top-notch power supply? Many of us will also have heard the naysayers (often

fiddle, then they will be detected in the spectrograph. Note that we are testing the total system, so it is what comes out of the speakers that is being compared; we won't know how the difference is being produced but we will know if and what kind of difference really exists. As DP says, we can't measure cables directly in sonic terms, but we can measure a sonic change due to a single cable switch.

Should this test prove that the cables do indeed have a sonic effect then we will have concrete evidence. Furthermore the engineers can then begin to probe the audio system and eliminate items until the cause is properly understood.

Mark Lee

Thanks Mark. The usual way of doing this is to compare the input signal to the output signal and see if there is a difference. There are difficulties though. Spectrum analysers have their own limitations and they show only one time domain slice. Averaging over a period of time helps here. It is doubtful, however, that time delayed information or non-linearity would be picked up by such tests. Modern analysers, including our own Rohde & Schwarz UPL, can subtract one input from another and look at the difference between the two and this may well reveal differences, but then such differences must be related to sound quality and this is another hurdle. All-in-all, some quite serious test methodologies and equipment must be used. I remain forever uncertain about such matters,



Creek Destiny 2 amplifier is one of the best, says Noel.

engineers) protesting loudly that no difference is possible from a few metres of 13-amp lead, while others (myself included!) believe they did hear an audible difference.

Well, it is high time this controversy was properly put to the (scientific) test. We could do this quite easily with modern equipment. First, we need to find a friendly electronics lab with an audio spectrogram instrument. Then we run the high-end kit with and without the cables in question and compare the two sonic spectra produced. If we really did hear that extra bit of definition on the guitar chords, or a few more notes from the accompanying second

having set up Peter Walker's test for amplifier sound quality in the past, convinced myself the amp under test sounded just like the piece of wire to which it was compared, and then heard precisely the opposite later!

NK

UPSIDE-DOWN UNDER!

I thought David might get a chuckle from the editor's lead in piece in the current issue of Australian Hi-Fi magazine. It would seem that one man's piece of ground breaking design creativity is another man's obsolescence.

By the way, I would like to finally take the opportunity to congratulate

you all on a great magazine. I have been hooked since 2003 and can thank you over this time for the purchase of my cherished Gyro SE and the dusting off of my 1990s Luxman tape deck. Yes, I know it's all Alpine on the inside but it still delivers a wonderful sound, especially to taped live broadcasts on A.B.C. classic F.M. The only catch is that I can't purchase TDK SA 90s in Oz any longer, and to make matters worse cannot seem to purchase online overseas and actually get them to ship to Australia?!?!

I have had to resort to getting a mate in Shrewsbury to buy some and post them over on the sly (very sneaky!). Anyway, keep up the good work. And keep up the references to Aussie bands in the equipment reviews (Icehouse, Empire of the Sun etc.).

Phil Rigby
Australia

Greg Borrowman of Australian Hi-Fi says – "Why in 2011 would you want to buy a cassette Walkman? In Australia, where almost everyone has access to a computer, owns a mobile phone, has a solid-state MP3 player of one sort or another and MP3 recorders are inexpensive there would seem to be no reason at all.



A reminder of the pinnacle cassette reached: Nakamichi's Dragon recorder.

However, in less-developed countries, perhaps there are some reasons to prefer old-fashioned tape over solid-state. But I can't think of any. If you can, e-mail me at – hifi@next.com.au"

Er, yes, thanks for that Phil. In spite of its sins, cassette tape was enjoyable and if you ran a Nakamichi with metal tape and Dolby B, results could be superb. Mr Borrowman sees the whole thing from a different perspective of course – and hardly a hi-fi one.

Over on this side of the globe tape is making a comeback as a convenient analogue sound source at hi-fi shows in particular, where anything digital is beginning to be viewed with suspicion, as if it was diseased! Musicians in particular seem to be reverting back to analogue open reel recording, where high speed tape can give devastating results. At last year's High End Show

in Munich there were many Revox open reel recorders in use I noted. Cassette is of course way down the food chain (pity about Elcaset) but it can still sound good. A full bodied comeback is unlikely methinks. **NK**

Well my retort to Greg, who apparently 'can't think of a reason' for using cassette', is sound quality. I've reviewed most of the modern 'MP3' portables, and I simply don't think any of them sound as good as, say, a Sony WM22. I bought one in 1986 from Boots for £30 and they're on eBay for half that now (they often turn up in car boot sales for a pound), and it comfortably outperforms any solid-state player, even running WAV files. The point is of course that the recordings you play on it must be to a high standard, and the deck itself must be in good condition with its head and transport clean; so cassette may not be as convenient but it's certainly better sounding!

I'm a big fan of Aussie bands like Icehouse, The Go-Betweens and latterly Empire of the Sun, Phil, but I do draw the line at Men at Work! By the way, you're not 'our Paul's' long lost Aussie brother are you? **DP**

transistor amplifier with integrated phono stage but since 2 years I'm the proud (and very happy) owner of an integrated PSE triode 300B valve amplifier. However, this does not have a phono input which means I now have to start looking for an outboard phono stage.

How important is the role of a phono stage compared to the record player, tonearm and cartridge? Is it equally important or less or even more? Can you recommend some likely candidates I might investigate, taken into account that these will also have to work with the new record player I was talking about previously. I'd rather buy a good quality one now than buying a cheap(er) phono stage first and later have to upgrade to a better one. I'm thinking of spending around €1,500, perhaps stretching to €2,000 if something really good comes along. Other equipment I use are my WAD WD25T speakers with the Seas Excel tweeters (very good sounding) and the new Icon Audio CDX1 CD player with Jensen copper foil caps. Yes, I'm totally into tubes nowadays! Thanks in advance for any advice you're willing to offer.

Ben van Baaren
Netherlands

That's funny Ben. You have an Icon Audio CDX1 CD player but you seem to have missed our continual praise of their PS3 valve phono stage! A pickup cartridge produces a very weak signal and the subsequent phono stage has a big impact upon sound quality. An Icon Audio PS3 or even a tuned up PS3 with Jensen paper-in-oil capacitors is the one to go for, although there are solid-state alternatives with a less sumptuous and organic presentation, but more concise sense of analysis, transistor style; Whest Audio and ANT come to mind. As you are a happy chappy with a Parallel Single Ended 300B tube amplifier though, I suspect valves are the way to go.

On the subject of the Technics, it is best to rip its arm off(!), install something decent and laugh at all else as you spin your way into the sunset. Raphael Todes was almost apologetic the other day about what he heard from an SL-1200 so modded; he could hardly believe it sounded so good. The Technics has a clean, tidy and well ordered sound I recall. With a decent modern arm, often a modded Rega, it is 'a cracker', as we say in the UK. **NK**

I agree with Noel; before spending vast sums on a new deck, consider fitting a new arm (a £600 Origin Live Silver is a good place to start) and of course cartridge (ditto the

CUPBOARD

After 25 years of hiding in the cupboard and gathering dust (the turntable that is, not me!) I decided to reinstate my old turntable. The latter being a 35 year old Technics SL-1500 Direct Drive with Stanton 681EEE cartridge. I have no idea how my turntable compares with the current offerings: is it still any good? The Stanton has seen better days so I will have to buy a new cartridge, can you perhaps recommend some that will be a good match with the Technics?

By the way, I do intend to purchase a new turntable in the future when my funds permit. I'm considering a more upmarket player costing somewhere between €2,000 and €2,500 (excluding cartridge). My preference is for a high mass table. I guess I should be able to find a decent turntable for that kind of money...

The record deck has been stored away for all that time, but the rest of my equipment went through various upgrade stages. I no longer have a



Fit an Origin Live Silver arm to a Technics SL-1500 turntable says David.

Benz Micro Ace). This will bring a far tighter and more focused sound with tremendous life and grip. Add a Timestep PSU (www.timestep-distribution.co.uk) for extra smoothness and musicality, and a SDS Isoplatmat for a deeper bass and silkier treble.

DP

QUEL AGE EST-IL?

I am a regular reader of *Hi-Fi World* from France, a magazine that I well appreciate since the disappearing of the French one 'La Nouvelle Revue du Son'. I own a pair of pristine Wharfedale 400 CR3/2 crossovers that a very old audiophile offered to me. Can anyone among your contributors tell me the age of these items, and in what system were they used?

**E. Brousseau
France**

This crossover is similar to that published in Briggs 'Loudspeakers' book in the crossover section, labeled N.W.9 except that the low frequency crossover is at 400Hz, not 800Hz as published (Briggs lowered the crossover frequency as he found it gave better results when speakers were used for stereo). Wharfedale produced such crossovers for the home constructor and the level controls on the midrange and treble outputs allow the user to balance the performance for their own choice of drive units.

For example, in the same book Briggs describes a 3-way corner reflex system using a 12 inch or 15 inch bass unit, an 8 inch or 10 inch midrange and a 3 inch cone treble unit. Similarly the Wharfedale W4 speaker described in 'More About Loudspeakers' used a 12 inch bass unit, two 5 inch midrange units and a 3 inch treble unit with crossover frequencies of 400Hz and 5kHz.

Best wishes,

**Peter Comeau
Director of Acoustic Design
IAG Group Ltd, China**

CONSULTING THE ORACLE

Dear David – I have been looking for some alternative speakers to my Quad ESL63s for a while now, since, as much as I love them, they won't really rock 'n

roll, will they?

Recently, I was offered some Yamaha NS1000Ms by a friend of mine who used them for a couple of years and then put them in dry storage for the following 30. They're in absolutely mint condition and still have the swing tags on the back of the cabinets describing what they're made of! I was able to listen to them in my system before buying, so it was a no-brainer. I just plonked them down on some sturdy boxes (since I didn't have any low stands), next to the Quads, hooked them up with some wire which came with them (Sony Speaker Cord - Made in Japan!) and sat back.

Now I finally understand what you've been banging on about all these years! With zero tweaking, and virtually ad hoc placement they sounded really very good, but since all the info out there on the blogs is entirely contradictory (amp has to be monster solid state – no! – valve. Free-space siting – no! – wall siting, etc. and ad infinitum), and since you're the only journalist to have actually owned and used them as a reference, I thought I'd come to the Oracle, so to speak, with a few questions of my own.

Do you use them in free-space (I seem to recall a photo of them like that on tall stands in your listening room that *World* published some time back, or am I going mad?)? Have you tried them against a "hard wall", as recommended in the manual?

Have you replaced the spring clips on the back with proper binding posts, and if so, which? Would it affect resale values? If not, what unterminated cable would you recommend (ideally, I would prefer to fit post so that I can keep with the Van den Hul Revelation that's currently on the Quads, or some Kimber 8TC that I have, both terminated with

banana plugs)? Of all the amps that you've tested with them, do you have favourites (valve and solid state) that had particular synergy?

Have you upgraded the crossovers or the internal wiring as some bloggers seem to have done? If so, what did you use, as the capacitors seem to have been specially made for them? Is it as difficult as some suggest? Apart from putting them on proper stands, are there any other tweaks or advice?

Noel, you'll be pleased to know that I won't be retiring the Quads (restored by Quad, with 'pro' grilles, One Thing mains cables and Widgets, on dedicated stands), which sound fabulous on the end of my Chord 1200B. I intend using the Yam's as an alternative, unless I can tweak them to a point where they're unequivocally better, which I think might just be possible with a bit of work. Largely, I suspect, due to the naff thirty-year-old cabling (which, out of interest, I also tried on the 63s, and all the magic I get with the Van den Huls disappeared) and maybe room position, they're not currently as fast as the Quads, especially on bass transients (where they have more level but less extension in my 21'x23' room), and do not "groove" as much (a real surprise, that one!), with less tonal discrimination between different stringed instruments.

Even as things stand, however, they're almost as transparent, image



Wharfedale crossover from the days of its founder, Gilbert Briggs.

even tighter with better depth perspective, and are 'lustier' in general, which is just what I was looking for. After all, they're going to be playing Led Zeppelin, not Bert Jansch!

All advice gratefully received, and thanks for a great mag, with the best Letters Section in the business.

Ross

You want to get rid of your ESL-63s? Oh, I feel faint – pass the smelling salts James!

And replace them with something from Japan fitted with

spring clip connectors. Do you see men in white coats walking up your garden path?

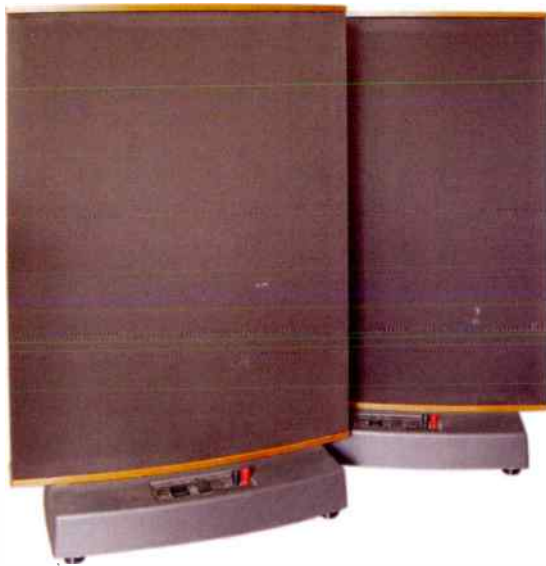
Well, truth is they're not perfect; I soon started surgery on mine and in the end there was little left. The cloth 'sock' then the louvered outer metal grill were removed first. I did not remove the dust covers, but some do. The protection circuits had to be upgraded of course, getting rid of the 'compressor' that just muddled the sound. Then I designed a crossover to match them into a Celestion SL6000 dipole subwoofer, ending up with

differences, then go back to the box you will immediately hear the box. It's influence will be rudely obvious, well for about 30 minutes or so. After that you will likely re-adjust back to its own peculiar character.

All the same good box loudspeakers are great fun and perhaps we must leave it at that. A Martin Logan X-Stat electrostatic panel atop a Tannoy Westminster Royal SE handling bass duties may be the way to go.

I will leave David to talk about your spring clip adorned wonder!

NK



Quad ESL-63 electrostatic loudspeaker - great but flawed all the same.

one of the world's biggest and most awesome dipole loudspeakers, the Celestions reaching right down to 5Hz the spectrum analyser showed. Few amps could drive them properly though, one problem, and a reviewer's life demands constant changing of equipment, which was a little impractical with ESL-63s atop SL6000s. I could hardly lift the latter.

In the end this set up had to go, but I regret losing it. Box loudspeakers will forever sound like box loudspeakers, for that's the nature of the beast. When designing big WAD loudspeakers, like KLS3 and KLS9 I would put my head into the bass unit cutout and shout "hello" or make noises into the box (the men in white coats gave up on me long ago!). What returned was a vivid lesson in the true sound of a box loudspeaker – i.e. what we are really listening to with these things – and I have never taken them seriously since. There is no cabinet that will not return sound at you, this sound exits via the cone, in most cases adding that nice, big warm thrum. That's why, when you listen to an open panel for a while, long enough to acclimatise to its

Hi Ross, glad to see you now know what I've been rabbiting on about all these years! The short answer is

Radiospares catalogue are suddenly better crossover designers than the entire audio engineering personnel of Yamaha (a company famous for its exquisite musical instruments, lest we forget; their logo is of course a tuning fork), plus the collected best brains of Tokyo University (who did a lot of the drive unit development, reputedly), is beyond me...

I am sure it is possible to do better than Yamaha on the crossovers, it's just I think you'd need someone who seriously knows what they're doing and has access to the very best, possibly custom made, passive componentry, plus a lot of time. Even then, the results may simply be different, rather than better. Either way, I don't think the "oh, I'll just solder this fancy cap in and see what happens" approach is likely to succeed. Think of it like this; I am sure someone could set up a Porsche 911 better than the factory spec, but it's not going to be someone with no test track and just a Halfords Advantage Card for good luck, is it? For this reason, I don't want to hack around my rear terminals either; personally if I was you I wouldn't be thinking about resale values (why would you want to sell them?), but you don't want to start playing around with the cabinets. Why not use bare wire? In all instances, bare wire is better than banana plugs; there's one less thing in the way of the signal, after all!

What you really need to concern yourself about is placement. My stands are made by Custom Design; I am sure they can supply the exact



The Yamaha NS1000M loudspeaker - a brilliant design from Japan. It needs careful matching, says David.

that I am keeping my NS1000Ms as original as possible, thank you very much. Quite why a few blokes on forums with a soldering iron and the

same stands (to the dimensions I specified to them); the right stands make a massive difference. I run mine 20cm from the rear wall; you're right,

they do sound better against solid walls. The other thing to do is to periodically tighten the drive unit's screws up on the baffles, as these can work loose over time and they begin to smear the sound slightly.

I've tried umpteen amps and the best non-silly money solid-state for them to my ears is the Musical Fidelity AMS35i. I also know the Icon Audio 845s to be a superb partner, and funnily enough there was a real synergy with the humble Icon Audio Stereo 300B integrated which sounds sweet and fulsome. My own valve amp is the World Audio Design K5881 (modded), which sounds sublime, although this runs out of puff in my new larger listening room. I use the really rather modest Black Rhodium Tango cables; these are smooth and open and stable.

Keep experimenting, is what I'd counsel with the NS1000Ms; they're like a finely tuned racing car which rewards careful set up (although I'll pass on tampering with the engine)! What I love about them is that they can sound so dramatically different; put a smooth, sumptuous front end on them and they're all rich and fruity; put a thin, searing one on and they're precisely this. It's the mark of a true monitor loudspeaker, and why they were incredibly popular in recording studios in the seventies and eighties. **DP**

TALK RADIO

I have a view to offer on DAB and a tricky question about my system.

I was listening to R4 this morning (on LW - so there!) and yet another carefully managed 'discussion' about the replacement of FM with the DAB system. I am sick of hearing the rehearsed P.R. line presented in this way - aunty Beeb patiently patronising licence fee payers with explanations as to why we should do as we are told and be grateful for the cost, the awful reception, poor sound and general contempt in which we are held.

That's the thing that gets me - being lied to and cheated by unelected, unaccountable and seemingly incompetent members of the executive. Perhaps others have noticed how, since Thatcher, most of the actions of governments have involved redirecting public money into private pockets and DAB is just another way of doing this. Licence fee payers are being told to accept a huge reduction in BBC broadcast quality and to bear all the costs of providing infrastructure meant primarily for private radio stations.

The BBC Trust would have us believe this is all to do with choice, but by subsidising competitors by the back door it is undermining the Beeb's own

radio service, no doubt with a view to eventual privatisation and fat cats feasting at our expense. I often wonder what the Advertising Standards view of claims like 'CD - quality sound' would have been, if promoted by a commercial organisation?

Now my hi-fi predicament. For years my system has been based around a classic (in some ways) combination; Thorens TD160S (Akito/1042), JVC JAS11 and Wharfedale E70s/ or my own standmounts (D2905/ Peerless CSC176, 90dB and very nice indeed). Cambridge CD4 transport, Dacmagic 3 and a Sony MDS JE500 recorder. Currently lacking FM (!), but I have that covered.

I was in audio heaven with all this - not high end, but in some ways surprisingly close (synergy), but then the amp's input selector finally collapsed. No music - hell!

I couldn't bear it, so I drove to Richer Sounds and got a Topaz AM10 as a slot-in stop gap. The JVC was an amazing little amp - Hi-Fi Answers best budget buy for years and actually way better than that suggests. Okay, the phono stage was a bit clanky with poorly mixed records (not on good ones) but that came with life like tonality, projective imaging, firecracker dynamics and amazing grip and drive. That's why I chose it over the A60 I auditioned it against and kept it after trying a NAD 3020 in my system (yes the NAD's phono stage is better).

In fact, a significant upgrade was always going to be expensive so it never happened. I have neighbours and the JVC sounded lovely whispering into the (95dB!) E70s at normal volumes, but would get all feisty and muscular at a certain point on the volume knob. The Topaz can't do any of that, obviously, and so what to do?

My question is this: given that, apart from the phono stage, there are no active components before the JVC's 250K volume pot and the main board has a handy 'main in' (L, R and common) could I use it as a power amp

(I can do the wiring) and drive it with an OBH-22?

The deck deserves a decent equaliser. I am thinking of a second hand XLPs. Cash is in short supply, but I can't put up with Kate Bush sounding like Minnie Mouse! I need your advice.

Mark

Hi Mark. Yes, in principle you can use it as a power amp in the way you suggest and this makes a lot of sense in your case. The OBH-22 can be used to input select and



A wild loudspeaker that worked - Wharfedale's E70, still used by Mark. Paper drive units with massive sensitivity made it Rock.

adjust volume. Just butcher a phono interconnect and patch it onto the board or - better - connect the board up to one of the now unused phono input socket pairs. Remember to disconnect the JVC volume control or it will load your input stages unnecessarily. You can of course then get a Creek phono stage for playing LP. **NK**

TIME FOR A CHANGE

After reading the latest issue from Hi-Fi World Towers, I thought a thought provoking letter might just help change the current format of the mag. As a renewed subscriber now for two and a half years it's all beginning to look the same every month: turntable reviews - best of batch of (amps/preamps/etc) reviews all given 4/5 globes/stars, even though there are some comments that would definitely remove them from my list of suspects.

There are new technologies out there. I am of course talking about music streaming and storage of CDs/ Downloads/ LPs on HDs (yes, I know Noel they do fail, but nowadays they

are pretty reliable, more so than many esoteric amps/preamps (I have owned them all)! In any case, you can easily back the HD up onto a QNAP in raid 5 mode for example. Now just in case you think I am a computer (audio) nerd (and I may be)! I am nearly seventy years old, design and build valve amps (211/845/50/2A3/45), etc. And hearing and sight are still better than the average teenager (although that may not be saying much).

This new technology is the way forward, so embrace it. Why is it the way forward? Because it allows something that other approaches do not: instant retrieval of sorted albums. Instant playing and storing of downloads (e.g. Wolfgang's Vault), a la iPod/mp3/4 etc. I haven't bought a CD in two years and judging by the falling rate of CD purchases nor have the public at large.

There is a vast new subject here. Please add it to your reviews and talk points. Coverage to date in all mags has been spotty to say the least. We (wife and self) are musicians and go to many concerts so comparison between live and recorded music is frequent (many times I prefer recorded). I have a couple of (good) systems (Kondo inspired 211 monoblocks/ Martin Logan 'speakers/ NAS Hyperdeck/ SME VI Helikon) and an all-Leema set up (the only solid-state equipment I have been able to more than live with), comprising Pyxis/Agental Altair IVs/Xanda 11s/RipNAS/Mac mini/QNAP/Sim Moon/Accoustic Arts. If set up correctly it's difficult to hear the differences between a download/CD/ripped CD/ and Vinyl. Yes, I know in some houses this may seem like blasphemy, but your mag could help define this newish source by being an early adopter and leader. Please think about varying the mag's content and its time to drop the globes/stars rating: they are meaningless.

Ian

We do cover this topic and we intend to do more as it grows in popularity. Digital storage and downloading is much about compatibilities and menus, less about sound quality, as you have found, although I don't know how you can find vinyl to sound like downloads; they are radically different in behaviour and sound quality.

And Raid Array storage strategy is hardly a hi-fi topic Ian; it may interest you but I doubt it will appeal to Hi-Fi World readers.

The issue of Globe ratings is contentious, so let me explain. There is far more equipment available for review than we have space for in the magazine. Paper is expensive and its price only increases. As a result we actively select products of at-least

reasonable ability for review, not wanting to waste paper and space with negative coverage. We could easily include more dubious product and spice things up a bit, but that would then deny space and coverage to items worthy of mention – and there are many out there. It is our job to find them.

Most difficult to cope with at our end is the amount of product we reject either because it is faulty, or for poor performance. For example we had a beautifully built and finished panel wall loudspeakers in for review recently, price a lofty £1,200. When measured frequency response was absurd, so they were sent back. Then a pair of active loudspeakers started issuing smoke – the first time I have ever seen smoke from loudspeakers under review! Three tuners were tested before one worked (their lab generator had gone wonky), three amplifiers blew up (bad board batch from Taiwan) and three DACs from Korea failed to work (they had to withdraw them).

I could not tell you how many speakers we reject as unreviewable because they sound and measure badly; it is quite shocking and is a gruesome waste of time for us. At least three products per month are rejected, after considerable test work. Magazines that don't test don't suffer this turmoil of course. It gets worse when an argument starts with a manufacturer who insists their product works well, as some attempt to do – then the waste of time spins

verdict then becomes personal. The Pearl Evo Ballerina 401s are a good example in this issue; their domes are unusual and provide quite a dramatic presentation, but I have heard smoother loudspeakers. Some would love 'em, others hate 'em I suspect. They're certainly worth reviewing though.

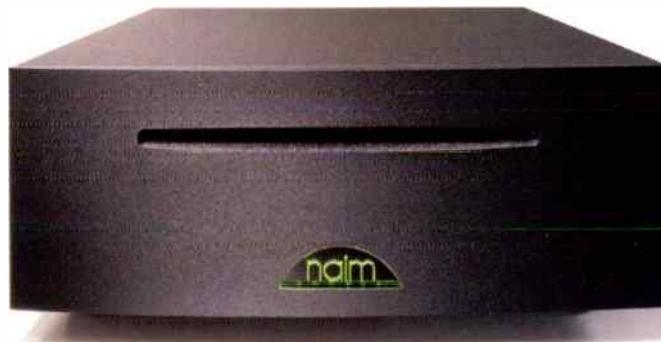
We try and provide readers with an honest and well researched basic view. This contrasts, for example, with most of today's audio websites where there is no measurement and just one person's opinion – often a eulogy – of a product that commonly reads like it is closely linked to the manufacturer (we have been offered 'independent reviews' like this but do not use them).

Borderline products, like the good and bad LFT-16 loudspeakers I am reviewing at this very minute, will probably go on our website in future. It was recently revised for this purpose, as well as to support the magazine. Go to www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/loudspeakers/reviews. It consumes less paper! **NK**

MAGIC DUST

"This player [the CD 50T] seems to sprinkle its valve magic dust on everything, leaving everything sounding as if it's had magic dust sprinkled on it" (page 49, March 2011).

This is from the magazine that claims "to ensure the upmost accuracy" (well, you mean utmost, but never mind) because of test equipment that is "amongst the most advanced in the



Naim Unitiserve music server will be reviewed by us soon, as well as the QAT MS-5.

out of control. We would rather deal with competent manufacturers who produce decent products and bring these to your attention, than get involved with the deluded end of the industry, which seems to be growing. That, broadly speaking, is why we do not have many low Globe ratings ...

On "comments that would definitely remove them (review product) from my list of suspects", we quite often find questionable characteristics, but these have to be balanced against strengths. The final

world", so that "you can depend on Hi-Fi World reviews". Perhaps you'd provide a technical explanation for "magic dust".

Tony Williams

Hi Tony. Our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser said "the primary spectral content was determined by the time domain Hanning windowing function imposed on the Fast Fourier Transform" (in German) so we've decided to use the term Magic Dust instead as this means just as much. Hope this helps! **NK**

Eco Warrior

David Price is struck by the latest and greatest incarnation of Leema's popular Antila CD player, the IIS ECO...



It's always nice to spot new talent. We came across Leema Acoustics some seven years ago, hearing an early pair of loudspeakers and being impressed. No surprise really, as founders Lee Taylor and Mallory Nicholls (Leema, *geddit?*) are both ex-BBC engineers who went on to build studio monitoring electronics. The company was founded in 1998 and has steadily evolved since then; indeed evolution is very much a central theme for Leema. We've seen their range of electronics grow to encompass CD players and amplifiers, and all have enjoyed substantial development. As the Antila IIS ECO reviewed here shows, the guys just can't leave the design alone, sporting a long list of tweaks over its four year lifetime; this machine represents the culmination of all the work and among several other things adds a full 'eco' standby mode, hence its new appellation.

The Antila is the company's top integrated silver disc spinner, and is built in Wales with most components sourced from the EU. It's built in a way that befits its £2,995 price tag; it's a weighty beast at 12kg, if not quite of Japanese 'battleship' mass. It's fairly large too, measuring 440x110x310mm. I wouldn't say it's the swiftest looking or feeling of things; rather it has the feel of something handmade to high standards from good quality materials (which I suspect is pretty much what it is). Alloy front and top plates punctuate cooling fins either side; these are more about form than function as no CD spinner is ever going to produce enough heat!

The alloy plates are chunky, but more importantly are beautifully surfaced, nicer it must be said than many aluminium clad hi-fi separates I have seen from China. The Leema logo is drilled into the top plate, and the fascia is quite unusually laid out; illuminated buttons provide transport controls and a large backlit inverted LC display displays track and time. While I'd still say a high end Marantz or Denon feels a more exotic proposition, congratulations to Leema for actually having put thought into the look and feel of the machine, and a fair whack of cash too.

Inside is of course where it really counts and here in the very latest incarnation of the Antila we see Leema's new Quattro Infinity Multi-DAC (as it's called), which employs no less than eight 24bit/192kHz Crystal CS454x multibit delta-sigma converters, said to be selected for their audio quality, fed from a fully balanced digital datastream. This latest machine gets a new audio motherboard with separated left and right channel areas, Wolfson digital receiver and the aforementioned DAC. The power supply driving this sports nine regulated power rails.

The new digital convertor section uses eight DACs, (four stereo DAC chips), but only actually feeds a signal to four of these, half of each stereo DAC, two for left and two for right. Each pair is then potted in its own screening vessel, the resulting output doesn't need to go through an analogue 'summing' stage which the previous twenty DAC model used, so there's one less stage in the analogue signal path, Leema says. The whole circuitboard is also said to be "much

better laid out" with separated sections for each channel. Leema haven't yet worked out upgrade prices for the IIS ECO but it will be "very costly" as the new board requires a new chassis so that's audio motherboard, chassis, power supply, etc. It's possible then that this mod won't be completely retrofittable. In this instance, Leema would advise buying a new machine.

As with previous machines, the Antila IIS ECO has Leema's Intelligent Protocol System which hooks up to other Leema components, allowing a press of the play button to power up the amplifier(s) from standby and select the CD input, for example. If used in a totally purist, single-source system with the Hydra II power amplifier, the Antila IIS ECO will even control the amplifier's volume via LIPS commands, the company says. Round the back, there are TOSLINK and coaxial optical digital outputs, RCA line level phono outputs and balanced XLRs (used for this review).

SOUND QUALITY

Not having heard the Antila in reference conditions for a good few years, it was fascinating to set ears upon this very distinctive British CD player. I've spent a lot of time recently with Japanese high end stuff and enjoyed it, but listening to the Leema I'm reminded how different the 'house sound' of Brit machines is, and why they're so liked in Japan! Put simply, the Leema has a more organic sound than you'd get from a serious Nipponese machine, yet doesn't give away even so much as a ha'ppeny in its resolution. Indeed, the Antila IIS ECO struck me as



offering the rare and desirable combination of incredible insight and yet consummate smoothness. It's almost as if you can hear right inside the mix, seemingly beyond the ones and noughts, to a world that's unconcerned with all the failings and compromises of Red Book CD; what the Antila does heroically well is fool you into thinking you're not listening to digital, coming over with much of the smoothness, authority and effortless detail of high end open reel tape.

For example, Sueno Latino's 'Sueno Latino' came over as something of a three dimensional odyssey of sound, rather than the muddle it normally is. Even the opening words sounded far more tactile, more accurately placed in space and intricate than they normally do, and when the looped rhythms kicked in the song came over with scale and clarity. Small percussive effects, like those warbling electronic birds and whistles blowing right at the rear of the mix were clear as day, despite those thunderous bass sequences. Piano stabs sparkled out of the mix, rich with harmonics, and the Roland TR909 hi hats rang out like bells in the night. Interestingly, this track sounds good on lo-fi portables but generally bad on hi-fi; it's only the very top source components that seem to be able to unlock all of the strands of the mix and frame them

coherently, without falling over their feet.

It was this sense of order and composure which made the likes of the Luxman D-05 sound rather showy and eager to please, yet rough around the edges. The Lux I liked a lot, but it just isn't in the same league; the Electrocompaniet is far closer to the Leema in overall ability, but I fear it too cannot quite match the Antila's forensic detail recovery allied to the seemingly hewn from granite sense of

Leema didn't boom the bass guitar out at me; it doesn't over-egg the pudding, yet nor did it sound in any way lacking in weight. On 'King', the bassist is right down at the bottom of the scale, yet I could hear his playing with absolute accuracy, fingers frantically running up and down the bottom E string (circa 80Hz) with speed and dexterity, yet no boom or muddle. No less impressive was how well it syncopated with the rhythm guitar and drum section.

"the Leema managed to excavate vast tracts of information while stringing it together as a cohesive musical whole..."

authority and stability it has. Cueing up UB40's 'Tyler' showed this all too clearly; I was struck by the beautiful sax sound the Leema summoned up; its metallic quality was carried with uncanny accuracy, and yet it had a lovely smoothness to it too, almost as if delivered to my speakers via a classic early eighties Koetsu moving coil cartridge. Well, maybe it wasn't quite as romantic as that, but it certainly wasn't your average digital disc spinner doing brass.

At the same time, I was taken with the bass, which was highly tuneful, wonderfully supple and absolutely right in its level; the

The Fun Lovin' Criminals' 'Up on the Hill' showed a beguiling combination of rhythmic flow and the ability to pick through a dense mix, unpeeling it like onion skin, to reveal what's inside. Whereas the Luxman D-05 was able to scythe through this song like the proverbial hot implement through Lurpak, it didn't do it in anywhere near as effortless a way. Fascinatingly the Lux simply threw lots of miscellaneous detail at you, as if to say, "there you go, have a bit, and have another bit, and another"; the result was lots of detail alright, but where did the music go? The Leema showed

Ever wondered just what good really is?



**Introducing the New BDP93
NuForce Edition with 3D
capabilities**

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where, managing to excavate vast tracts of information while stringing it together as a cohesive musical whole. Suddenly I heard previously lost backing vocals, Fender Rhodes overdubs, triangles supplying minor percussive detailing and backing saxophones and sitars, all perfectly slotted into the right place in the mix; where so many other CD spinners simply blurred them into a hazy background. This sort of revelatory listening experience reminds me of the moment I upgraded my old Rega moving magnet cartridge to a Supex moving coil; things were the same yet somehow magically different!

Switching to baroque classical in the shape of Linn's new (and immaculately recorded) disc of Telemann's 'Concerto in G major', and I heard a shimmering rendition of a very special recording in front of my very ears. Recorders, traditionally a difficult instrument for CD players of any kind, sounded eerily lifelike and devoid of distortion. Harpsichords had an authentic metallic quality, the harmonic structures of every note carried adroitly. Violins were a revelation, quite superb by Red Book CD standards, again richly resonant and uncannily lifelike. All individual instruments were located with precision; there was no sense of listening to 'dual mono' as with some even quite expensive silver disc spinners; and all were set into the recorded acoustic in such a way as to convey the great sense of the scale of the concert hall. Dynamic accenting was as clear as the imaging was pin-point; this is an incredibly precise sounding device.

CONCLUSION

You'll probably have gathered by now that I've come away rather enamoured with this new silver disc player. But superb as it is, how does it compare with other similarly exalted products that I've reviewed over the past year or two? Well, firstly it reminds me of the SimAudio Moon CD3.3 inasmuch as it has a similarly velvety tonality and a musical nature. True enough, but while it's only £500 more expensive, I'd say it's considerably more capable, building

on the former's strengths to give a far more insightful presentation. Ditto the Meridian GO8.2, which to my ears it betters through superior fine detailing and rhythmic flow; the difference isn't so profound, and it lacks the Meridian's visual design flair (in my humble opinion), but it's worth the extra outlay. The closest machine I've heard to the Leema is the Electrocompaniet EMP-1/S, which has a slightly fruitier and more spirited sound, but again lacks the subtle detailing and polish; considering the Antila IIS ECO is over fifteen hundred pounds cheaper, that's quite an achievement...

Fundamental to this player's sound is its exactly forensic detail retrieval, which is utterly exceptional at or near the price, plus the relaxed yet musical way it strings it all together. It delivers a very 'undigital' sort of sound which will appeal to analogue addicts and silver disc upgraders alike. This machine doesn't have a hugely obvious character of its own, which makes it all the better

to let the contents of the original recording shine. As such, right now I'd say it's one of the best CD players under £5,000.

2009 ANTILA II (£495 TO UPGRADE FROM MK 1)
 New output filters using audiophile grade 1% film capacitors instead of surface-mount parts, new audio board for filters and revised grounding.

2010 ANTILA IIS (£995 FROM MK 1, £595 TO UPGRADE FROM MK II)
 New metal tray loading drive to replace original Philips, new servo and interface board, new control firmware developed by Leema.

2011 ANTILA IIS ECO (UPGRADE PRICES T.B.C.)
 New Quattro Infinity DACs, full Eco standby mode, new audio motherboard, new firmware, Wolfson digital receiver chip in place of Burr Brown.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

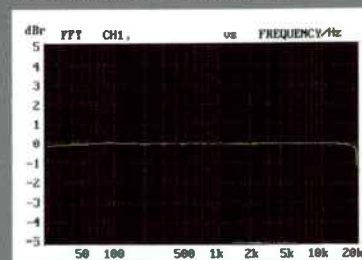
Frequency response of the Antila shows an even characteristic with no peaking or fall off, measuring -1dB at 21.6kHz; a normal enough result for 44.1kHz sample rate CD.	-6dB	0.002
	-60dB	0.24
	-80dB	3.1
Distortion levels were low throughout the entire dynamic range, measuring 0.001% at 0dB or full level, down to 0.21% at -60dB, good if not exceptional figures. Consequently EIAJ Dynamic Range was a fair 97.5dB figure, a little below the best at 100dB. Output was the same through line out and XLR out, both measuring 2.37V; commonly XLR offers double line, although with unbalanced to balanced line driver chips there is no fixed relationship between the two.	Separation (1kHz)	124dB
	Noise (IEC A)	-104dB
	Dynamic range	97.5dB
	Output	2.37V

Jitter from the digital output was very low, random jitter measuring 5pS across the audio band, with no signal related peak at 1kHz from a -60dB 1kHz test tone - an unusually good result. There was a little low rate clock drift but at 40pS this was also lower than usual (300pS is common).

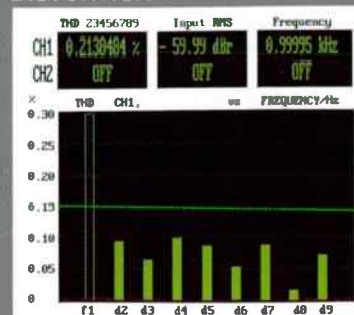
The Antila is a well engineered player that produces good and consistent results under test. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)
 CD 2Hz-21.6kHz
 Distortion
 0dB 0.001

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
 Stable and smooth yet detailed and musically engaging, it's currently class of the affordable high end CD player field.

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FOR

- forensic detail
- beguiling rhythms
- pronounced dynamics
- build and engineering
- metal disc tray

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

HP8 MkII



All Triode Headphone Amplifier

Stereo 60 MkIII



KT88/KT120 65W Integrated Amplifier

Stereo 25 MkII

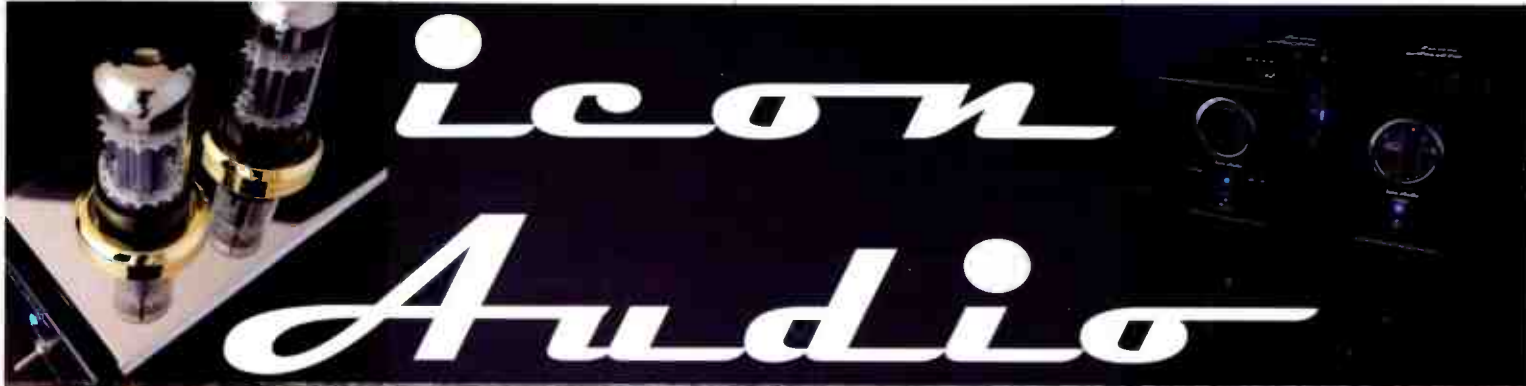


Entry level 25W Integrated Amplifier

MB90 MkII Mono Amplifier



115W KT88/KT90/KT120



MB845 MkII 110W Triode Mono Amplifiers
Power Amplifier of the year 2010 - HiFi World

MFV2



Bookshelf Loudspeaker

PS 1



All valve phono stage

Stereo 40MkIII



40W EL84/KT88 Integrated Amplifier

CD X 1



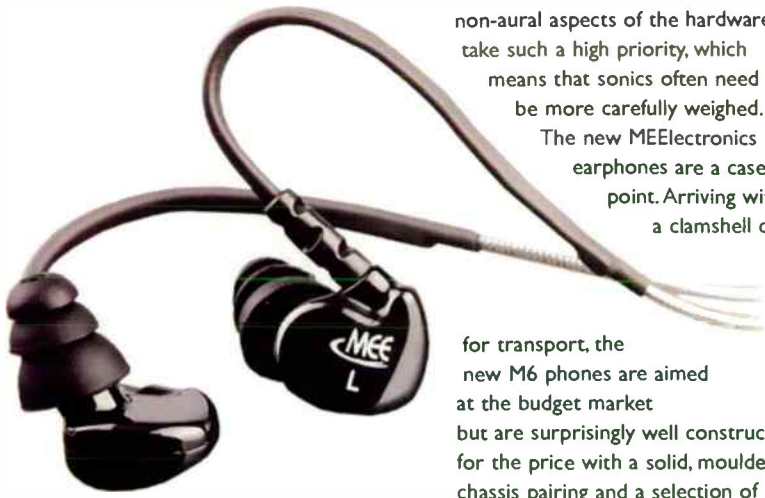
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non-aural aspects of the hardware take such a high priority, which means that sonics often need to be more carefully weighed. The new MEElectronics M6 earphones are a case in point. Arriving with a clamshell case

for transport, the new M6 phones are aimed at the budget market but are surprisingly well constructed for the price with a solid, moulded chassis pairing and a selection of removable earpieces design to fit a variety of ear types.

Compared to my reference Sennheiser CX95s, priced at around £60, the M6s show a welcome degree of specialisation. So, whereas the CX95s offer a very short lead length of 650mm, the M6s show their flexibility by extending that to

1022mm – ideal for use in the gym, road running or if you have your MP3 player in a bag, situated lower on the body, rather than a chest pocket. In addition, the M6 phones incorporate a semi-rigid wire-frame that extends for about 70mm from the earpiece before the soft wire extension kicks in. This is used to wrap over the ear, keeping the bud in place; again, ideal for exercise. Sonically the CX95s are generally superior to the M6s, but considering the price difference, that's not surprising. That said, the M6s don't fall over in a faint, offering a lively bass response which is both musical and foot-tappingly rhythmic while the mid and upper frequency regions offer enough detail to draw you into the performance. Better than I'd expected at the price, these are recommended for the energetic and the vigorous! **PR**

[Contact: www.advancedmp3players.co.uk]

MEELECTRONICS M6 £20

Headphone design is one of compromise and specialisation – more so, in fact, than any other piece of hi-fi equipment because they're applied bodily. In fact, there is no other piece of hi-fi around in which

soundbites

ONE THING QUAD ESL-57 BINDING POST UPGRADE £100

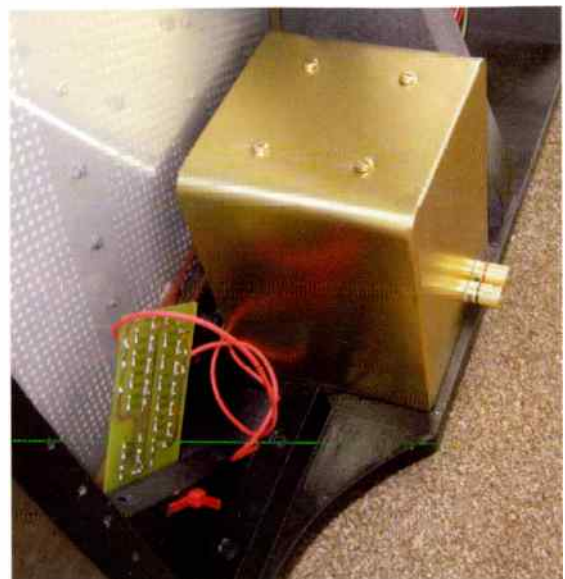
One of the greatest loudspeakers ever made, Quad's ESL-57 is a truly inspiring product. Which is why, if you have a pair, you should look after them! Mine have even been modified by One Thing, who installed its upgraded treble panels within to add new sonic possibilities to the units. One Thing now offers '57 owners a new upgrade that you should seriously consider; improved speaker connections. When you take a look at the originals, instead of seeing bulky, solid, gold-plated nuggets that can take banana plugs, spades or bare wire, the original Quad speaker connections are underwhelming, offering two phono-only connection holes highlighted by the sort of tiny plastic colour rings that you might push onto an electric toothbrush. More importantly, the structure of the speaker connector is braced within the chassis of the '57 speaker itself, which is invisible to the naked eye, meaning the strength of the connection is unknown.

I have been using Avid SCT speaker leads of late: big, thick cables with substantial connectors at the end. Constant reviewing has meant I have had to disconnect and reconnect several flavours of cables over a long period of time. Now, granted that my situation is not normal for any sane audiophile out there but what I can present to you is a time compressed version of what will ultimately happen to your Quad speaker connections – they will snap off. Mine sheared only to expose, once One Thing had the backs off, the realisation that the other connections were hanging on by a thread. A good reason for a pre-emptive change is that a lot of the speaker connection gubbins inside is encased within a heavy wax substance. If your connections shear at the wrong place, the large block of stinking wax might have to be heated and melted down first to get at the broken connector within. A lengthy and relatively expensive business.

The upgrade itself comprises a sturdy gold-plated, heavy-duty

connector braced on both sides of the chassis and will handle any sort of cable. Tests proved them faultless and the upgrade is well worth it, maintaining sound quality and offering peace of mind. **PR**

[Contact: +44 (0)24 7627 4573, www.onethingaudio.net]



Omni Present

Clever production engineering changes mean that German Physiks now have a sub £8,000 loudspeaker in the UK, making them significantly more affordable to high end buyers. David Price tries the Limited 11...

A couple of years back I tried an unusual new omnidirectional from German Physiks, in the shape of the HRS120. I really liked it, but two things ultimately limited my enthusiasm. First, a trivial point admittedly, was the finely hewn but unflattering wood finish. Second was the price; at £16,000 I feared it would be off the radar of most high end speaker buyers in this country. Now though, here we are with a slightly downsized speaker that's £8,000 less. That's a big chunk of change for something that I was to find gave about ninety percent of the performance for about fifty percent of the price.

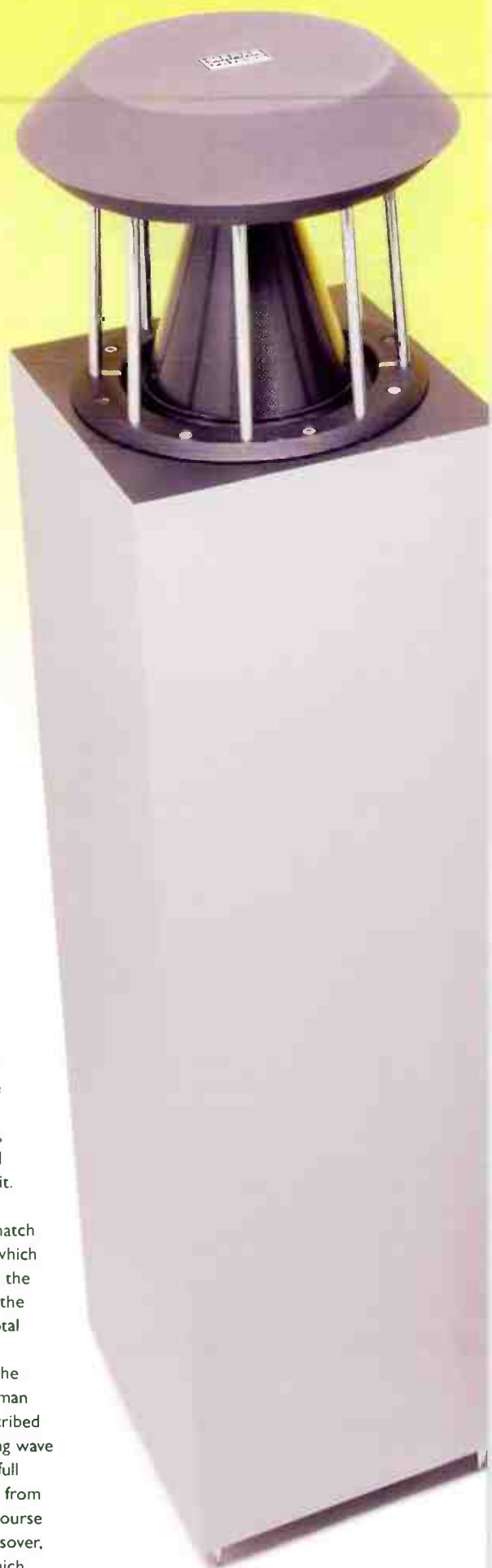
So the new Limited 11 is not your average common-or-garden box speaker. It's an omnidirectional with a very clever midrange and treble driver (more of which later). Omnis don't generally come cheap; the iconic one for me is the £50,000 MBL Radialstrahler; it's not the sort of thing you'll find in the sale section of the Superfi website! The object for German Physiks was to make their omni design as cheap as they could; to wit it is (currently) direct sale-only from Germany, and has a rather industrial 'acoustic linoleum' finish.

Personally, I did not take to this, but there are many listening rooms in which it would suit perfectly. And a little bird tells me at some stage other finishes will be available, including white, which would look stunning and flatter these loudspeakers' distinct looks in a way which wood or grey lino doesn't. The basic profile of the speakers is quite arresting but attractive in a

'high tech' sort of way, and the quality of finish is excellent; there's no denying they're an impressive sight in a slightly retro, 'space age' sort of way. If you want the light grey finish at £7,800 you'll have to hurry as only one hundred pairs are being made before dark grey and white finishes join the colour palette and the price goes up to £9,999.

The Limited 11 uses a single carbon fibre Dicks Dipole Driver (DDD) and a downward firing 200mm woofer. The 1,050x240x240mm cabinet sports no logos and the normally shiny surface of the DDD diaphragm has been given a matt finish. The HRS120 was a good deal bigger at 1145x320x320mm, but I don't think the Limited 11 looks any the worse for it. Titanium finish loudspeaker terminals are fitted, which match the overall colour scheme, which interestingly cost more than the standard gold type fitted to the more expensive speakers. Total weight is 28.9kg apiece.

The DDD is of course the 'standout' feature of all German Physiks speakers, and is described by the company as a "bending wave convertor". Amazingly, it's a full range device, claimed to run from 200 to 24,000Hz, which of course obviates the need for a crossover, especially in the midband which is precisely where you *don't* want it. Remember that conventional



loudspeakers crossing over cause all kinds of nasties, from peaky response to phase errors: it's the sonic equivalent of letting people park on roundabouts; just about the worse thing you could do to your road system! Then of course there's the omni directional dispersion pattern, which can only be a good thing; done properly a full range omni answers a vast range of questions asked by multiple moving coil cone drivers, and also electrostatics too. Overall, the company claims a frequency response of 32-24,000Hz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE].

It's named after its 'father', Peter Dicks, who created his first design concept in 1978. It was Mainhattan Acustik, run by IT expert Holger Mueller, who licensed the design in the early nineties, which duly led to the birth of the German Physiks company. The driver has since been refined many times, and partnered to a down-firing bass driver (a 200mm diameter unit) in the same cabinet; this forms the blueprint for all the company's speakers. The cabinets have extensive Hawaphon and felt damping materials applied inside and are constructed from heavy panels of MDF, with internal reinforcements fitted at critical points. Minimum life expectancy is said to be twenty five years, with corrosion resistant V4 grade stainless steel for the DDD driver support pillars, terminal mounting plates and all the screws; a five year warranty is offered.

SOUND QUALITY

As with all speakers that land in my listening room, I manoeuvred the Limited IIs into a place that I 'guesstimated' would be best. Not as with all speakers however, right from the second the volume was switched on, the German Physiks omnis sounded at home. It was at this point that I congratulated myself on my brilliant choice of positions for them, but the company's representative Robert Kelly dryly pointed

out that they work well pretty much anywhere in a room, anyway. Hmmm! Anyway, I did do a bit of minor remodelling, but soon I'd got them singing, about 3m from each other and about 50cm from the back of my long rear wall. The thing to bear in mind here is that they can deceive you into thinking you've got 'em working perfectly, so amenable they are to rooms, compared to certain other high end speakers which are horridly fussy; don't give up after your first reposition, they do reward careful placement even though they flatter bad rooms and positions.

Not having heard another German Physiks loudspeaker since the HRS120 was cruelly snatched from my listening room a couple of years ago, it was fascinating to suddenly 'snap back' to their distinctive sound. I don't mean distinctive as in coloured; indeed it's quite the opposite. Here you hear a loudspeaker with so little apparently going on, save a few bass issues right at the bottom end. This latter point is as much about speaker/room interaction and setup, as it is about the speaker itself, incidentally. Imagine if you would, a clean sweep from 200Hz upwards; as the frequency rises, the speaker continues to sound the same. There are no 'hot spots', no periods of strange vibrations or any other type of misbehaviour; instead things just sound uniform and even and true. That, in a nutshell is what you get from the Limited IIs.

The recent Heathrow hi-fi show saw Noel and I answering questions from an audience, and one which stuck in my mind was that of how can we (i.e. reviewers) make our mind up about the sound of a speaker without listening to 'real' (i.e. acoustic, orchestral) music? Well, dropping the stylus on the A side of Kraftwerk's 'Computerwelt' reminded me that electronic music, which of course has no natural acoustic signature, can be just as honest a test of a transducer. The Limited IIs immediately sounded dextrous, subtle and detailed; the bassline was bouncy yet tight; midband was breathtakingly expansive yet precise and treble was crisp and sonorous. This track's metronomic beat showed the fleet footedness of the DDD driver; it can stop and start with agility, giving very little 'hangover' from the last excursion it's asked to make. It's not quite up there with electrostatics or ribbons, but not far off and certainly sounds far closer to these than ye olde moving coil driver. The result is a





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Shuttle Bus service improved again from Milton Keynes direct to the Venue, and let's face it with the price of petrol this is going to be even more popular. Increased Parking again for 2011 and special visitor packages for the Sunday.

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Exhibitor bookings are already well ahead of 2010, and with the show now extended to all day Monday this is the biggest show in the UK as befitting of a National event. Reassuringly most exhibitors from 2010 have re-booked and we have many new names and enquiries to follow up. Overall space has again been increased and as you can see above we are now targeting mainstream brands as well.

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suppleness and fluidity across the mid which is lovely, allied to a delicacy coming from the (obviously very light) carbon fibre structure.

In tandem with this is a bass response that's very coherent, following the events further up the frequency range with alacrity. There's less of a sense of two drive units than with a mid-price Martin Logan, for example; things integrate well. The lovely bass synth cadences of 'Computerwelt' came through very nicely timed; indeed in my room they worked better than the larger HRS120, which as I alluded to earlier tended to 'over drive' the room a tad. The Limited 11 sounds tighter and drier than its bigger brother then, which suits the main DDD driver a treat, as this is precisely what it is. On paper, it goes down a few Hertz less, but I can't say it's noticeable, even on the subsonics imprinted into the groove of 'Computerwelt'. The baby GP speakers sounded crisp and firm and all of a piece with events further up top.

Moving to Herbie Hancock's 'The Prisoner', a lovely piece of late sixties acoustic jazz, and these speakers showed themselves to have tonal purity that's unexpected even in products of this price. B&W802s, for example, are many fine things but when I listen I still hear their Kevlar cones across the upper mid; by contrast the Limited 11s seemed to have less in the way of innate 'tone' with piano and double bass. There was a satisfyingly sense of 'being there' to the performance. I wouldn't claim that they're as transparent as a Martin Logan panel in this respect, but again they came close without the attendant mid/bass integration issues. Better still, this superb Blue Note recording came over with cavernous size; maybe not the Grand Canyon, but the GPs certainly did a passable impersonation of the Avon Gorge. Once you've got them close enough in the room, or turned the volume up sufficiently, instruments lock into place in the soundstage and you're there. It's the ease of soundstaging and general effortlessness which impresses; funnily enough though you get used to it and it's only when you go back

to conventional speakers that the imaging and phase sounds so out of sorts.

Acoustic Triangle's 'Placet Futile', startlingly well recorded on SACD, showcased the tonal purity and unbridled evenness of these loudspeakers. The Limited 11s thrived, with sparkling harmonics from the piano, a wonderfully tangible clarinet and a profound sense of air and space. They let the recording's flavour pour out into my listening room, as if the studio barrier had been breached and the music was overflowing. The location of the respective instruments, and indeed the microphones capturing them, was laid before me with forensic accuracy. The overall effect was mesmerising, the only concession to it being a recording rather than a moody live jazz space was the bass. Yes, of course you can hear the two drive units gently brushing up alongside one another, but this is so deep down that it's no worry. In my listening room, there was no sense of lumpiness or boom, or blur or slur; only the slightest 'hint of box' was heard. This is nothing to be ashamed of, as I've never heard a box loudspeaker doesn't allude to the way it's constructed. The Rondo from Mozart's 'Wind Serenades' (Chamber Soloists of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra) again proved the Limited 11's mettle; a deliciously accurate tone to brass and woodwind, plus acres of air and everything held in perfect proportion.

The only music type I tried which in any way raised questions with these speakers was rock; they actually sounded very pleasing replaying America's 'Ventura Highway', but they lacked the drama of my Yamaha NS1000Ms (which I am ashamed to say had been made to sound rather ordinary with jazz and classical). They may be £8,000 speakers but they lack the sheer physical presence of some rivals; Usher's £10,500 Be-10 have more heft, more punch, more power, more of a tiger in their tank. The German Physiks, by contrast,

sound more petite, precise and poised, but ultimately weaker and less impactful; at very high levels there's the sense that they don't quite have the sheer horse power. German Physiks would surely retort, 'so get the HRS120', but that's another £8,000 spongs you need to find!

CONCLUSION

In many ways I liked the German Physiks Limited 11 more than the larger and pricier HRS120 I reviewed way back when. As a package they're brilliant, giving 'essence of German Physiks' to a far wider market, and in some ways giving away little or no performance to boot. If you want a spacious, even, clean and precise sounding loudspeaker for a medium to large-ish room – and listen to most types of music – then they're truly first rate contenders. Only headbanging rock fiends wanting big bore bass will find them wanting. As such, I'd wholeheartedly recommend them – providing of course your decor suits the light grey lino; if not wait for the unlimited ones and get the white!

REFERENCE SYSTEM:
Marantz TT-1000 turntable
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
NuForce P9 preamp
NuForce Ref. 9SE power
M. Fidelity AMS35i amp
Yamaha NS1000M speakers

VERDICT

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FOR

- sublime soundstaging
- speed, musicality, dynamics
- delicate tonality

AGAINST

- slightly limited bass
- grey finish!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response from an omnidirectional loudspeaker like this one looks far more ragged than a forward firing design, due to the amount of return energy from room surfaces, even with our gated, sine wave burst measurements designed to minimise this problem. However, fast 'chirp' tests and pink noise both showed the Limited 11 has a good pressure level balance in any direction, and our pink noise analysis, published here, clearly shows this. There are no significant tonal imbalances and even though subsonic output is limited by an internal series capacitor the Limited 11 still managed to energise our 28ft measuring room's mode at 24Hz, so it will have low bass.

Overall, the Limited 11 looks very balanced, but in truth there is much more treble energy being put into the room from an omnidirectional unit and this means that subjectively the balance will sound bright or light, due to reflected energy from walls, ceiling etc.

Sensitivity was on the low side at 83dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input. A high impedance of 8 Ohms was one reason for this, although the bass unit is still 4 Ohms our impedance graph shows. Current draw at low frequencies will be very even as there are no bass peaks, so something different is happening here. Bass damping is good according

to the impedance and response plots, so the Limited 11 will likely have well controlled bass, but this is not a bass heavy design by any means; it will likely sound a little light low down.

Colouration was reasonably well controlled, but the cabinet looks a little lively at low frequencies.

The Limited 11 is obviously a well developed design likely to give a good sound. It will almost certainly have a light balance though. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



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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
MAINS: Vertex AQ. **SUPPORTS:** ARCICI, HI FI RACKS, STANDS UNIQUE, VERTEX AQ

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CONRAN AUDIO SPEAKER DOCK £249

The tidal wave of small iPod based speaker systems continues, and these days they're getting increasingly diverse. This one is a creation of Studio Conran, a respected design centre set up, of course, by designer Sir Terence. Using this dock, there's

certainly the sense that real thought has gone into its ergonomics, which is unusual to say the least. It's a pretty looking thing alright, and comes in a choice of white or black finishes, although the plastics used for the 283x120x233mm case – whilst high quality – aren't quite as nice as some rivals which use more aluminium or chrome. Still, the control interface is brilliant and novel, and the iPod docking cradle itself swivels, making it ideal for iPhones or iPod Touches in horizontal widescreen mode. One lovely touch is the fact that the remote control slots into the side of the case, for neat storage when not in use.

The electronics engineering has been done with Q Acoustics, with speaker guru Karl Heinz Fink having an input; this bodes well! It plays out iPods via its inbuilt dock, has an aux input and also will stream music via 'apt-X' Bluetooth Stereo; so you can wirelessly stream music from your iPhone, iPod touch, iPad or MacBook as well as other Bluetooth compatible devices providing you

either have it built in or use a dongle. The 'apt-X' protocol transmits CD-quality full-bandwidth stereo, and works in a stable way. A choice of EQ presets are offered but I preferred it 'flat'; there are twin 75mm mid/bass drivers with matching 25mm tweeters, output power is a claimed 15W music power with a frequency response of 75Hz-20kHz. Listening to it, I'd say this is tad optimistic, but there's certainly the sense that the Conran sounds far clearer and cleaner than you'd expect from a product of this type. For example, it's close to B&W's Zeppelin Mini Compact, which is at least £50 more expensive. The unit proved smooth and even and composed at all times, and all volumes. It goes loud without any strain and fills the room with decent sound in a fuss-free way. Its midband is particularly good, with a delicacy that lets you get right into the music. Those looking for a 'boom-tizz' machine should look elsewhere though; it's no party blaster. **DP**

[Contact: www.conranaudio.com]

soundbites

RINGMAT AFRICAN JUMBO FEET £138.50

Although visually similar to the original Ringmat Feet introduced in 1999, the current versions have benefitted from refinements to both the materials and the design. There are now five versions available, choice being dependent upon the weight and footprint of the item to be supported. The African Jumbo Feet and the Mammoth Feet reviewed here are intended to support equipment with a foot diameter of over 45mm and a weight of 21.5 to 39kg and 39 to 60kg respectively. They are made from two plastic discs separated by a cork ring and a Poron spiral spring. (Poron is a rapid recovery material used in the aerospace industry.) Under the lower disc are two foam rings, and a cork ring on top that flexes the plastic disc between the foam rings. Centrally placed on the top plastic disc is a plastic covered steel plate that flexes that disc against the cork below. This flexing action is claimed to disperse any

vibrational or resonant energy being produced by the equipment that they are supporting. The number of rings, spirals and Poron springs varies depending upon which model is selected. One foot in a set has a stiffer response than the others to prevent any oscillating movement. This should be placed under the least weight bearing foot.

I tried the African Jumbo Feet under a very hefty (23.5kg) Onkyo M-30000R power amplifier. There was an immediate alteration of the sound, which gained a level of smoothness and definition that wasn't as big as a component change would be, but was still noticeable. The soundstage seemed bigger in all directions and all the elements of the music effortlessly expanded to fill the extra space. I also tried placing the Mammoth Feet under the same company's Spike Shoes (*HFW* May 2009) and again found improvements in the size, shape and texture of the sound. Although not at all cheap at £138.00 for four African Jumbo

Feet, or £148.50 for the Mammoth variety, they do work, and contribute a sense of decorum and musicality to a system. They're expensive, but many will judge the improvement to be worth it all the same. **TB**

[Contact: www.ringmat.com, +44 (0)1729 823873]



WORLD STANDARDS

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

TURNTABLES

PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

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

REGA P2 2008 £220

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

TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £495

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



REGA P3-24 2008 £400

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

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

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

ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2010 £1,399

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

FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

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



MARANTZ TT-15S1 2005 £999

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

MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,005

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

ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD

2008 £1,350

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

REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

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

MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

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



LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

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

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £4,495

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

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

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

McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

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

EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

TO NEARMS

REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

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

SME 309 1989 £767

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

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

AUDIO ORIGAMI PU3 2007 £1,300

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

NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

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

LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700

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

SME 312S 2010 £1,750

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

GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495

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

TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600

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

OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500

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

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

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

ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE**2007 £60/£120**

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

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

DENON DL103R 2006 £200

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

DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250

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

ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350

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

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395

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

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

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

LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595

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

ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE 2005 £500

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

ZYX R-100H 2005 £625

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

BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650

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

TRANSFIGURATION AXIA 2007 £890

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

ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE 2009 £1,000

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

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799

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

KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE 2007 £2,399

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

DIGITAL SOURCES MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC £170

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

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC £229

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

**STELLO DA100 SIGNATURE £675**

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

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

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

NAIM CD5I 2008 £895

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

ROKSAN KANDY K2 CD 2010 £900

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

BENCHMARK DAC-1S 2009 £930

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

CYRUS CD8 SE 2008 £1,200

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

SIMAUDIO MOON 300D 2010 £1,290

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

**NAIM DAC £1,995**

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

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000

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

ELECTROCOMPANIET EMC-IUP 2003 £3,450

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

**ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2 2007 £3,985**

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

ESOTERIC X-05 2010 £4,495

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

NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950

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

NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050

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

ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE I MK2/TURF DAC 2 2007 £7,980

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

DCS PAGANINI DAC 2007 £9,599
Digital rarely sounds better; dCS's bespoke Ring DAC makes for power, punch and insight on an epic scale. Add clock and upsampler for an even more profound experience. Justifiably expensive.



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

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



RECORDERS

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

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

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250
Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

PHONO STAGES

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

AMPLIFIERS

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOON i-3RS 2008 £1,890
Grippy and clean performer with fine soundstaging and build quality.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

£390

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY**X-CAN V8** 2008 £350

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

SUGDEN HEADMASTER

2003 £600

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

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

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

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1,500

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

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

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

NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200

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

**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

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

MELODY PURE**BLACK 101D** 2007 £3,295

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

MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU

2010 £5,995

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO

2009 £7,900

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

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

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

QUAD 909

2001 £900

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

NAIM NAP150

2002 £795

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

SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER

2003 £1,300

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

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2**

2006 £1,750

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

**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

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

CHANNEL ISLANDS**AUDIO D100** 2005 £1,595

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

ICON AUDIO MB845 2009 £2,499

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

GRAAF GM20 OTL 2003 £3,300

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

ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO

2009 £4,450 (EACH)

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

**DPA SA-1**

2010 £2,850

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

SILK GLOWMASTER KT88

2007 £1,699

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

**QUAD II-40**

2005 £3,230

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

QUAD II-80

2005 £6,000

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50

2010 £7,000

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

LOUDSPEAKERS**Q ACOUSTICS 2020** 2010 £140

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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I

2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

B&W 686

2007 £279

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

KEF iQ30

2009 £330

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

YAMAHA SOAVO I.1 2009 £3,000
Musical, transparent large floorstanders with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent build and finish.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

ACCESSORIES

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

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

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

HEADPHONES

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

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

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

**GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70**

Excellent build and fine sound makes these budget cans superlative value for money.

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199

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

SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250

A super all round reference design with crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000

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

**STAX SR-007T OMEGA****II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890**

Simply the best headphones we've ever heard at any price, these sweetly translucent electrostatic earspeakers are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...

INTERCONNECTS**TECHLINK WIRES XS 2007 £20**

Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

WIREWORLD OASIS 5 2003 £99/M

Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

CHORD COMPANY**CHAMELEON 2 £90/M**

One of our favourites, these are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

**DNM RESON 2002 £40/M**

Neutral and transparent - a steal!

VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST**2004 £260/0.6M**

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

**TCI CONSTRICTOR 13A-6 BLOCK****2003 £120**

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

MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE**2008 £375**

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

TUNERS**DENON TU-1500AE 2006 £120**

Excellent entry level analogue tuner; slick sonics and fine feature count makes it a bargain.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T2005 £250**

Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550

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

CREEK CLASSIC TUNER 2006 £550

No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800

Truly sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

MAGNUM DYNALAB**MD-100T 2006 £1,895**

One of the best ways to hear FM that we know; superbly open and musical sound in a quirky but characterful package.

**SYSTEMS****YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200**

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

TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329

Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!

NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429

Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650

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

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249

Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250

Neat update of the original and best one-box stereo system; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500

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

**AURA NOTE MUSIC CENTRE****2007 £1,500**

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

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650

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

**NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995**

Uniquely versatile one box music system with excellent ergonomics and sonics to match. A landmark product for Naim.

LINN CLASSIK**MOVIE 2007 £2,250**

Superbly built all-in-one that offers excellent sound across all formats and is surprisingly easy to use.

MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1**2010 £6,990**

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

MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000

The combination of SA-7S1 disc player, SC-7S2 preamp and MA-9S2 monoblocks delivers a truly jaw-dropping performance. Start saving now...





Designed by Peter Comeau, Mission's new MX-2 bookshelf loudspeakers may just have dragged this venerable brand name back into the spotlight, says Paul Rigby...

Punch Time

Twenty years ago, Mission loudspeakers used to be top of every budget hi-fi buyer's audition list. In fact, I have a pair of ageing Mission 70s that I still use as part of my own PC computer sound set-up. After falling on relatively hard times, the brand is now enjoying a resurgence under its new parent, International Audio Group. Somewhat circuitously, the company has now regained its former Director of Acoustic Design, the talented Peter Comeau, formerly of Heybrook and World Designs, amongst others...

This new design, the two-way MX-2, has a rearward firing bass reflex port, spans a healthy 340x206x310mm and weighs in at a 'lift-and-grunt'-prompting 7.7 kg. The cabinet is built using high density MDF which is heavily braced

internally with an interlocking structure designed to reduce panel vibration while the crossover is based around the use of Linkwitz Riley slope filters.

As for the drivers that surround it? "All Mission drivers are manufactured in-house," said designer Peter Comeau. "We have our own plant which produces cones using a combination of pulp and Aramid fibres (a strong and heat resistant synthetic that is also used by the military) that are formulated to provide a natural sounding midrange. The cone itself is a combination cone/inverted dome design that provides greater rigidity to improve bass performance too. The treble units are based around Mission's silk dome technology. For the MX series, we utilised the advanced Klippel measurement system to help linearise

our drive units for low distortion across their working range and maximum dynamic headroom."

I had to take Peter's word for it because I couldn't remove the frontal grilles to see for myself; they proved tough to budge. Tentative enquires resulted in one response: the company didn't recommend it, for sonic reasons. The bottom line? Leave the grilles alone.

According to Peter, the trims under the grille have been profiled to smooth the acoustic output of the drive units on to the baffle. But it's more than that. The treble unit itself is actually fitted with a waveguide integral to the grille to improve its power performance in-room and better integrate its midrange to the bass unit, he says. "This provides a more seamless crossover, both on and off-axis, than you would normally

expect," said Comeau, smiling benevolently. "Without the grille, the response is lumpy and slightly colored through the presence region. The grille and integral waveguide produce a more coherent output from the drive units to enable them to behave as one apparent source. This is a speaker where removing the grille actually makes the sound worse!"

In an odd way, setting up the MX-2 was a bit like setting up an Apple Mac or chucking a TV dinner in the microwave – it's very modern day, as the MX-2s are almost plug and play. The grille is one example, the fact that the speaker has been designed to be used close to the wall with

in sonic terms, bass became unruly and too excited so the bungs were inserted to calm the lower frequencies. Mids then became more dominant while bass fell pleasingly into line, showing the Missions to be surprisingly refined when thus configured.

They're not dull and boring though; playing Mixmaster Morris's classic 'Global Chillage' CD album I was impressed by the MX-2's timing and how they, for their low price, managed to isolate even tonally complex musical sequences, breaking down the mix to individually identifiable strands and presenting each's unique personality. This was done in an efficient, crisp manner that allowed

the heart of the music, that you cannot fail but be entranced. All that for £200 quid? The MX-2 speakers already have my 'No-Brainer' Award for 2011.



"each note started and stopped with precision, without a smidgeon of blur..."

very little toe-in is another (because of the decent 'off axis' performance', so you don't have to point the treble unit at your ears). In effect, you just plonk the speaker next to the wall, give it a toe-in nudge with your boot and you're done. "This type of design fits well with most room acoustics and enables the listener to easily adjust the bass performance by moving the speakers backwards and forwards a little to personal taste," said Comeau. "In addition, we include a foam bung for the port in extreme cases where the full bass extension is not required, such as if the speakers are to be used near a corner." So there's relatively little fiddling about with positioning.

SOUND QUALITY

Pulling open the new Adam Faith six CD box set 'Complete Faith: His HMV, Top Rank & Parlophone Recordings' (EMI) and running '(Got A) Heartsick Feeling', I tested the MX-2s on low volume. Comeau praised the speaker's performance in this configuration and, I must, say, I have to join him. My first impression was 'cultured'. The MX-2s displayed a strong stereo image with an almost sweet output balanced by admirable midrange detail and bass output (with the bass reflex bung out). These speakers are ideal for small rooms and for late night listening when you have to consider the children sleeping upstairs. Impressive was a lack of boom-tizz, which it has to be said was something of a trademark of many budget Mission speakers of yore; indeed the MX-2 sounded impressively couch.

For more audiophile volume levels, at an optimal room position

each note to start and stop with precision and without a smidgeon of blur that ultimately enhanced both clarity and detail.

Switching to vinyl and The Fall's 'The Classical' from the 'Hex Enduction Hour' (Kamera) LP plus selections from Kraftwerk's early outing, '2' (Vertigo), sounded tame and stilted until I removed the bass reflex bung. This gave the music a much needed kick up the backside, injecting pizzazz into the music. The soundstage was now more self-assured while the broad spectrum of frequencies had far more drive, force and vigour. In fact, like DIY expanding foam, the bass filled the gaps in the mix, adding structure and confidence to the midrange and, despite missing the last zing of treble, providing an impressive overall, dynamic performance.

CONCLUSION

Mission's new MX-2s offer a real sense of exactitude in how they deliver music. On its own, this forte might appear rather clinical or lacking in organic flow, yet the MX-2s do this with such panache and style, combined with a layer of warmth that draws you into

REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Avid Acutus turntable
 SME IV tonearm
 Benz Glider cartridge
 Icon PS3 phono stage
 Icon Audio CD-X1 CD player
 Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
 Icon MB845 power amplifiers

VERDICT ●●●●●
 Sophisticated sound alloyed with real musical insight makes these super value for money.

MISSION MX-2 £200
IAG UK
 ☎ +44 (0)1480 447700
 www.mission.co.uk

FOR
 - punchy, fulsome sound
 - clarity & detail
 - design, build

AGAINST
 - nothing at the price

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MX2 has an unusual raised lower midrange output, enough to audibly add body to the sound. In conjunction with strong port output spread across a reasonable broad frequency range the MX2 is likely to have a weightier sound than most rivals, with plenty of body to voices and instruments. A smooth midhand and complete absence of high frequency peaking will heighten this apparent balance.

Drive unit integration was excellent and off-axis response varied little from on-axis, so the MX2 will also be consistent across a wide range of listening positions.

The impedance curve was much like that of most two way, port loaded loudspeakers, with twin residual peaks and a large midband peak due rising inductive reactance in the crossover. Overall impedance measured 7 Ohms but a 4 Ohm bass unit is used as is common nowadays, to improve voltage sensitivity. The MX2 produced 87.5dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input, a good result for its size, and it will need 40 Watts or so to go loud.

The 200mS decay graph has some small overhangs around 800Hz and 1800Hz but whether these will be audible can only be determined by listening tests; their amplitude was low.

Bass distortion was relatively low, below 2% above 25Hz from the bass

drive unit and 7% from the port at 40Hz, falling steadily up to 100Hz. Levels were variable across the midband, from 0.1% to 0.5%, but normal enough all the same.

The MX2 will sound smooth, full bodied and have strong bass. It will also have smooth, unintrusive treble, measurement shows. It should give very nice results in use. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
 Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



Pro-Ject

A U D I O S Y S T E M S

Xperience, gained...



V Pack, now including:
Ortofon Vivo Blue cartridge
Pro-ject Evolution tone arm
Pro-ject Xperience turntable
Price tag - £1,000



Paul Rigby wonders whether the striking looking Olive 4HD will lead the way in the current music server offensive...

Service Station

When I think of a music server, I think of music generated in a lifestyle environment. That's partly because the home automation market was the first arena to really embrace the technology for use in multi-room audio via the likes of Linn, Living Control, Nuvo and Opus, where one server could set up different zones featuring different musical moods.

Now though, the hi-fi industry is becoming increasingly interested in this technology too, yet these new server packages still cross market boundaries into lifestyle sectors. We're not talking about changing valves, we're not talking about filling speaker cabinets with sand and we're not talking about tiny adjustments to a turntable suspension. What we are talking about is connecting a server to a TV, allowing it to talk to a smartphone and introducing it to a home network. The hi-fi-based musical server might aspire to hi-fi

audiophile glory, but its feet firmly straddle many boundaries.

On the face of it, the Olive 4HD is eminently capable of succeeding in this cross-market environment. And that's even before you turn it on. Its unusual shape, with a sloping front that could, I'm sure, break through the sound barrier if thrown hard enough, is almost otherworldly, as if the chassis was made in a small shed in Roswell. With its wordy etchings covering the upper surface of the chassis exclaiming musical genres such as: 'jazz', 'classical' and the slightly speculative 'symphonic', I wonder if I may have seen the chassis tumbling through space in the film '2001: A Space Odyssey'?

On a more prosaic level, the front of the chassis holds a CD transport slot for the playing, burning and ripping of music, standard transport buttons plus a power standby while, to the left, are five navigation buttons that control the 110mm touchscreen. To the rear, next to the power connector and

on/off switch are pairs of analogue and digital outs, a digital input, three Wi-Fi connectors, Ethernet, HDMI to connect to a TV which displays the touchscreen output, data back-up/restore USB and an IR input. Inside, the Olive includes a TEAC CD-R/W mechanism, Burr Brown PCM1792A DAC with support for WAV, FLAC, AAC and MP3 up to 24bits. Finally, for storage, you receive a generous 2TB hard disk, cushioned with padding to reduce noise. Spanning 440x66x311mm and weighing in at 6kg, the Olive allows you stream music to smaller Olive streaming devices, Tversity modules (PC) or Twonky media (Mac).

SET-UP

After switch on, a friendly, *Hitchhikers' Guide To The Galaxy*-type message appeared in the touchscreen; "Olive," it said Encnured to tap the touch screen with my finger to access the main menu, I was immediately disappointed. Maybe it's because I'm so used to the light and responsive

Vinyl is black!



The award winning A.N.T. phonostage is the preferred choice of many professionals. Featuring breathtaking realism and stunning dynamics, vinyl has never sounded so good! This no-compromise design is available in moving coil or moving magnet versions and features, Class A, no overall feedback, passive equalisation and no transistors or op-amps. Hi Fi World said "Cue up your favourite LP and sit back in awe as the music issues from the groove. It's an exceptionally musical device, bristling with energy" Now available for 35% less directly from the factory on the phone number below!

The Evo ! What an evocative name and rightly so too! The SL-1200 evolved from a Hi Fi turntable into a DJ deck and now we turn it back into a Hi Fi turntable again! Fitted with the legendary SME 309 tonearm and the Audio Technica AT33EV your emotions will run wild. The AT33EV is itself an evolutionary cartridge hence its EV suffix and matches the SME 309 so well. We have worked with direct drive turntables and moving coil cartridges for over 30 years now and the EVO has evolved into a mature product that is quite simply a world beater. We can supply completely new units with 5 year guarantees or we can convert your own, even if you bought it used.

SME - AT/OC9 - Benz & Denon cartridges - Clearaudio - Hadcock - SL-1200 mods

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"gave a sense of ease to the musical proceedings in general and invested the high treble notes with a pleasing shimmer." HiFi World.

For more information on this truly exciting new product and many other high end audio upgrading accessories, including rhodium plated connectors and high purity silver and copper cables, please visit www.oyaide.com or contact your nearest Oyaide dealer on:

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capacitive touch screen of my iPhone 4 but using the Olive was, in comparison, slow and clunky. Fingers had to be pressed hard and slowly with not even a resistive reaction. Even the promised remote control iPhone app didn't help because I couldn't find it in the App Store. It would have acted as an alternative to the brick-like remote which resembles a novelty pencil case.

The first job was to connect the Olive to my computer network. Choosing the wireless route (a wired connection is an option) I entered the set-up screen. After a quick scan, the Olive offered a shortlist of possible networks. Finding my own, I was asked to input my password... which was rejected! After a moment's panic, I realised that the Olive had defaulted to 'caps on' mode. Turning that off, I tried again and all was well. This was followed by the display of my IP address which I later found out I needed to write down somewhere for later. Once an Internet connection is achieved, before you do anything else, I recommend moving back up the menu tree to search for the internal software update option. This could be very important to introduce new features and fix possible bugs.

I then attempted to wirelessly link the Olive to my PC's bank of MP3 and WAV music. To connect the two, I ran downstairs to my PC, opened up the little used and archaic 'Run' command box, typed in the Olive's IP address (carefully written down from earlier), waited for the connection and then watched as a network address appeared on the PC labelled, not 'Olive' as expected but as the IP address in question. My job was to then drag and drop music from different areas of my PC into this 'Import' folder which would then shift it up to the Olive server to be processed there. Then, I ran back upstairs to the Olive to check that everything had been processed correctly.

I wonder if you are as irritated by reading the above as I was in actually having to live through it? Can you *honestly* imagine having to go through that process if the box had the world 'Apple' stuck on the front? Touchscreen aside, the Olive installation reminded me of the bad old days of MS-DOS input on my ancient 8086 PC. Have we come no further than this? When I have to write my IP address down on a piece of paper, take it to my PC and then type it in



to generate a folder which has no idea what music is currently present on my PC?

What do I want? After switch on, I want the Olive to automatically check for updates and automatically install them without my knowledge, then automatically scan for networks. I want it to find my network, ask for the password, ask permission to scan the network for music, automatically upload it and then allow me to interface with the server via a tablet-sized interface. Is that so difficult?

The Olive interface is based on an old and clunky menu tree of the sort I was reviewing on music servers five years ago, which is hard to navigate and irritating to use. There is no hand-holding and there is little in the way of guidance. Even playing an album stored on the internal hard disk is clunky. Accessing music via the attractive 'Cover Flow'-like interface, you press on an album cover to start, via the touch screen, which is good, but then, if you want to access track two you cannot continue with the touchscreen interface – why? In fact, you have to leave the screen, to look for physical buttons (you don't have to if you use the text-only 'track list' option but why complicate matters in the first place?). This is poor interface design and shows no understanding of human psychology.

The Internet radio option is straightforward and, once you get used to the long-winded menu tree, works well and produced a decent sound quality, even at low data rates, but the music selection is not as wide as I hoped. Searching for 'prog', for example, I found eight or nine choices on the iPhone app, TuneIn Radio, but just one or two here.

SOUND QUALITY

In comparison to my current reference Icon Audio CD player, it is immediately apparent why a specialist digital CD player, and one so well designed as the CD-X1 (£1,350), will always sound better than a music server. But then, that's not the point of the server which is made to target sound quality in part but also convenience and flexibility. That said, the Olive still performed well, offering a fine sense of musicality during playback. On the Carol Kidd album, 'Dreamsville' and 'Can't We Be Friends', the presentation may have lacked the depth of presence of the Icon but the Olive proved tonally

correct with a jaunty acoustic guitar accompaniment. Yes, the Icon pushes the upper frequency limit higher but the upper mids and treble were foot tappingly musical on the Olive and, while the Icon caught the emotion and nuance of the Kidd vocal, the Olive did enter into the party spirit with a swinging sense of fun.

Playing a selection of tracks from The Damned's 'Stiff Singles 1976-1977', the Icon may have dominated with its incisive nature and the effusive manner in which it delivers detail but the Olive does provide a meaty, crisp lower frequency range, centred around a rock solid stereo image and a relatively impressive spatial soundstage with the right support components. There is also an impressive clarity which enabled the music to emerge from a deep well of blackness. So the Olive's onboard DAC is a decent, get-you-going proposition, but don't think it's going to find head-to-head with a class leading separate CD player in the sonic stakes. If sound is your priority, you're going to have to pipe it through an external DAC; we'd recommend anything from the Musical Fidelity M1 DAC (£399) to the Electrocompaniet PD-1 (£1,250). The former gives a lovely, clean smooth, silky sound; the latter adds bite and punch and energy to the equation.

CONCLUSION

The Olive performed well in spite of itself. Music servers are mentally connected with ease-of-use lifestyle technologies which means that they tend to suffer from expectations that would never be placed upon another piece of hi-fi. The Olive is hampered by an overly complex and less than friendly interface, but its essential sound quality remains open, clean and gutsy when required. Offering a wide range of flexible options and facilities, the Olive is an aural Swiss Army Knife of sonic possibilities. I liked it, but still feel it needs more work to its ergonomics to entice folk spoiled on the effortless functionality of Apple gadgets.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Icon Audio CD-X1 CD player
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
Icon MB845 monoblocks
One Thing Quad ESL-57 speakers

VERDICT

Although its user interface isn't quite right yet, the Olive still looks the business, is packed with features and sounds very respectable.

OLIVE 4HD £2,250
Henley Designs
+44 (0) 1235 511166
www.henleydesigns.co.uk

FOR

- flexibility
- feature count
- hard disc capacity

AGAINST

- user interface



Nippon Excess?

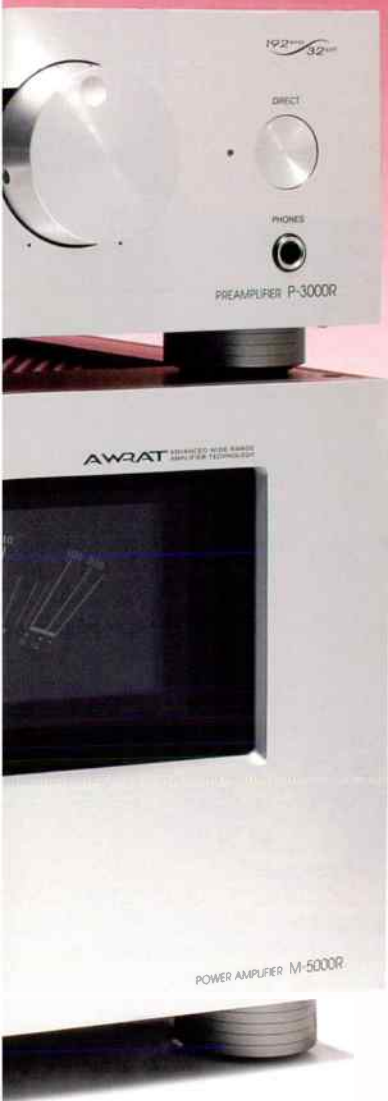
Tony Bolton tries a huge 'old school' Japanese pre-power amplifier combination from Onkyo, the P-3000R/M-5000R...

Although probably better known in the UK for manufacturing high quality A/V receivers and a very good range of mini hi-fi separates, Osaka based Onkyo have not forgotten their roots in conventional high fidelity equipment. Their flagship Reference range consists of a £1,500 CD player (the

C-7000R), the P-3000R preamplifier and the M-5000R power amp, the latter two under examination here. They're classic specimens of Japanese mid-to-high end hi-fi; if ever any younger readers wanted to know what life was like in the nineteen seventies, look no further! Large, well built, impressive looking and studded with features (some useful, some not

so), they could only have hailed from the Land of the Rising Sun...

The preamplifier comes in handsome 435x99x333mm aluminium casework and, like the partnering power amp and CD player, is available in either silver or black. The front panel is dominated by two big knobs, the left controls source selection and the right hand one, the volume. To



the right of this is a Source Direct button which bypasses the tone controls, which, in turn are accessed through the Mode button situated under the display and to the right of the Source Selector. Repeatedly pressing the Mode button scrolls through options for Treble, Bass, Balance, Biamp, HPLLevel (Headphone Level) Lineout or Record Out, ASb (Auto Standby) and 1.2 Out (setting Line 1 or 2 output to be adjusted by another component with an onboard volume control.

Below the right hand side of the display are two buttons, the left, labelled SRC, controls the sampling rate convertor and the other turns the digital input source display on or off. A headphone socket is on the bottom right, and at the extreme left are a power on/off button and above it a Standby button. The display contains information for selected source, sampling rate in use and a PCM indicator which lights when a digital signal is detected. All of these controls are also accessible from the supplied remote control, which can also operate the C-7000R CD

player and the Onkyo Dock, available separately.

The back sports the usual collection of RCA phono sockets for the inbuilt moving magnet phono stage, the three line level inputs and the Tape Loop. Alongside this are two pairs of pre out sockets, to allow bi-amping should you so choose. There is also a 12 Volt trigger socket to connect to the power amp. Above this is a socket labelled RI Remote Control Jack which allows the Onkyo Dock to be controlled from the preamp's remote handset. There are also a selection of digital inputs including a balanced AES/EBU in, two coaxial inputs, two optical inputs and one optical output. Finally there is a USB input to allow a Windows operated computer (XP, Vista and 7

feature separate aluminium panels for the top, sides and front to reduce vibration being transmitted to the electronics inside.

SOUND QUALITY

I initially set the amps up on the downstairs system being fed by the recently reviewed Benz Micro Ace cartridge on the Clearaudio Master Solution and Leema Agena phono stage. Digital sources included the Leema Antila CD player, our DVD player and the digibox. The power amp was driving my Chario Urso Major loudspeakers.

Being in the front room, the amplifier found itself on A/V duty a lot of the time and the improvement in sound quality from the digibox was enormous. Its high quality upsampling

"the Onkyos were reaching for detail in the music that I'd previously not been aware of..."

operating systems are supported) to connect to the amp through the onboard DACs, although Macs are sadly not catered for by Onkyo.

The power amp is a simpler beast. Housed in a fairly massive 435x187.5x432.5mm aluminium case, it weighs a not insubstantial 23.5kg (the preamp tips the scales at 11kg). The front is ornamented by a large pair of power output meters, that can be set by a button on the front to read on a x1 scale or a x10 setting, or switched off altogether should you wish. In the middle are power on and standby buttons. At the back are very substantial speaker binding posts, the 12 Volt trigger connections, XLR and RCA input sockets (with switches to select the appropriate one) and an Auto Standby switch which, when engaged, switches the power amp off if no signal has been detected for three hours. A veritable festival of facilities, then!

The internals are equally well specified, with the preamp boasting separate Burr-Brown 192kHz/32bit DACs (PCM1795) for each channel, a low vibration circuit board, separate transformers for digital and analogue circuits (toroidal for the analogue side), a discrete phono equalisation circuit and independent headphone amplifier. The power amp is equipped with two toroidal transformers and four 27,000 microFarad capacitors. If the XLR input is used then the power amp output can be bridged to produce a claimed output of 300W into 8 Ohms. Both units

DACs added a sense of realism and refinement that was entirely absent when using the digibox's internal convertor. Rather than the sound being a two dimensional sideways spread, there seemed to be a sense of depth and dimension that related to the positioning of the action on the screen. Combined with the clear, smoothly detailed sound coming out of the speakers it made TV a far more involving experience. Films played on DVD also benefitted.

Turning the TV off and settling down to some music found me enjoying Beethoven's 'Egmont Overture' performed by the Concertgebouw Orchestra, with Eugen Jochum at the helm. This is a piece that I like to play quite loudly and the Onkyo rose to the challenge effortlessly. The claimed 150W into the 4 Ohm load of the Charios seemed quite realistic. I had the volume control at the 1 o'clock position and it was more than loud enough for me (and the neighbours) but retained a smoothly detailed cleanliness to the sound that allowed me to choose where I focused my listening. Each instrumental grouping was displayed in a balanced and harmonious manner, and their interplay was a delight to listen to.

I was impressed by the tonality and textural detail as well. There were no uncouth shrieks or rasps to ignore, rather, the effortless analysis that separates real high end products from pretenders to the name. There was slam when required, and a



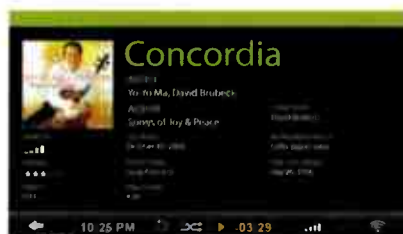
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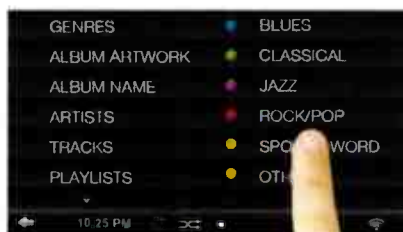


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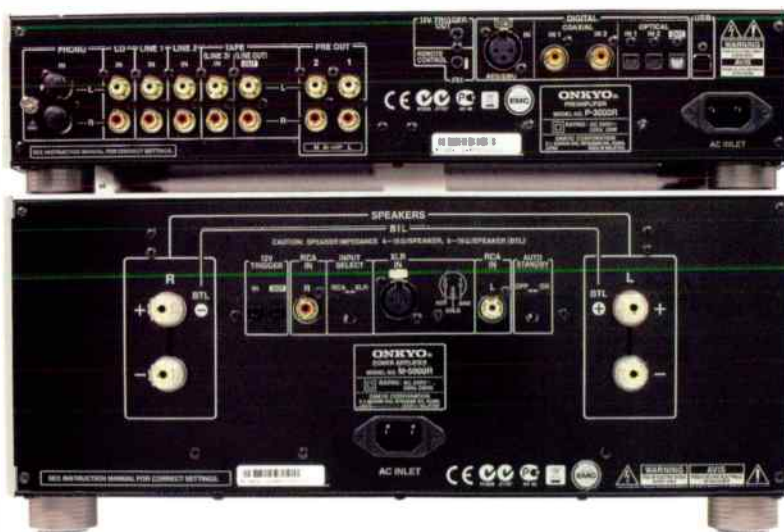
delicate touch when needed.

A couple of days later I moved the Onkyos upstairs to drive the Kelly KT 3s and be fed by the MusicMaker III moving Iron cartridge on the Sondek, directly into the MM phono input of the preamp. Initial results were adequate, but about fifteen hours of usage opened the sound up and smoothed the rough edges. If this phono stage were a free standing item I would expect it to cost around £250; the sound was detailed and musically engaging, if at times a little unemotional.

Francoise Hardy's first LP (which features her hit single 'Tous Les Garçons et les Filles') released in the UK by Pye in 1964, was handled well. The monophonic sound was centrally placed and filled about 2/3rds of the area between the speakers. Although it was relayed in stereo (there is no mono switch) the little surface noise on this good condition record was virtually unnoticeable. The gentle flow of 'Tous Les Garçons...' was engaging but I felt that the vocals sounded rather matter of fact. Hardy had a richly textured voice which I felt wasn't fully recognised by the amps. The sound was enjoyable but the track 'Ton Meilleur Ami', which questions the apparent absence of love in a relationship, lacked the emotional input that I have heard through other amps. It felt a bit like a dispassionate enquiry, rather than a heart rendering questioning of emotional integrity.

The following day I was in jazz mode and found myself getting quite involved in Lew Stone and His Orchestra foxtrotting their way through a 1941 recording of W. C. Handy's 'Aunt Hagar's Blues'. The Stone orchestra was one of the hottest British dance bands of the nineteen thirties and forties, and the Onkyos dived into the rhythm with gusto. The presentation was quite full bodied and the detail that was extracted from the grooves of this late sixties Decca LP release (transferred from the original 78) was a compliment both to the recording engineer and the amplifier's designer.

Coming fairly up to date I explored the amps' reaction to Hux Flux's second CD called 'Division By Zero'. This is an unusual blend of psychedelic and Goa trance by Swedes Dennis Tapper and Henric Fietz, with the compulsory driving bass and drums, but with some



most interesting and entertaining sounds and effects swooping in and out of the mix. The upsampling Onkyos seemed to love it, reaching for detailing in the sound that I had previously not been so aware of. With electronic music, they really shined.

CONCLUSION

Overall a fine performance from these amplifiers, although I felt that they maintained a somewhat stiff upper lip when it came to the emotional detail of some types of music. However fed with anything that had a beat and they absolutely

came alive, so it's fair to say they're quite music dependent; one they've got the chance to demonstrate their grip and power things really begin to rock and roll. It's also important to add that the sheer variety of connections that can be made make these units very flexible, and the onboard DACs make a strong job of displaying the capabilities of upsampled higher resolution digital, be it from digital disc or live transmission. Combined with a good built-in phono stage these amps offer a one stop fix that will cover many people's audio needs; only seekers of romance need look elsewhere!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The M-5000R power amplifier produces 98 Watts into 8 Ohms under measurement, and 182 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it has plenty of grunt. With a damping factor of 56 there's plenty of control over loudspeakers too; the amplifier will have quite tight bass. Distortion was very low at all frequencies and output powers, measuring just 0.003% at 10kHz, 1W. There was no sign of crossover distortion so treble should sound clean and natural, lacking coarseness. Input sensitivity was high at 760mV, helping lift overall gain of the pre/power combo. As the preamp has a gain of x4 this gives an input sensitivity of 190mV, high enough for all sources, even old tuners and cassette decks, and also modern low gain phono stages. However, the preamp has an onboard phono stage with accurate RIAA equalisation our measurements showed, plus an effective gain of x74 for MM cartridges - quite low. This suggests the phono stage is not purposed for high quality cartridges.

The Onkyo M-5000R/P-3000R combination possess a good all-round measured performance, as is to be expected from Onkyo. They will have a smooth and powerful sound. NK

Power	98 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-58kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	-102dB
Distortion	0.003%
Sensitivity	760mV
Pre	
Frequency response	1Hz-100kHz
Separation	95dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.0002%
Gain	x4
Overload	5.7V out

DISTORTION

VERDICT ●●●●

Well equipped and built pre/power combo from Japan with strong sound and excellent connectivity.

ONKYO P-3000R £1,700
ONKYO M-5000R £2,500

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FOR

- clean open sound
- onboard phono stage
- fine upsampling DAC
- power meters!

AGAINST

- can sound clinical
- USB input Windows only

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 CD1 1986 £1500
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

TECHNICS SL-P1200 1987 £800
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

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

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

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



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

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

DACS

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



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



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



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



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

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RD15 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 PL12D was off the pace compared to rivals



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

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

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

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

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



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



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

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400
Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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.

ALPHA50N HRI1005 1981 £150
First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.



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

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

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



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

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



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253
Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

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



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

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS
DELTEC 1987 £1900
 Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

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

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



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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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-fi!

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

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 ALECTO 1997 £1989

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

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 £28

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



MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR

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



QUAD II 1952 £22

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



QUAD 405 1978 £115

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

QUAD 303 1968 £55

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

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



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

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



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

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

LOUDSPEAKERS ACOUSTIC RESEARCH

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

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

LOWTHER PM6A 1957 £18 EACH
This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

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.

TANNOY WESTMINSTER 1985 £4500
Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in tautness but can drive large rooms and image like few others.

JR 149 1977 £120
Infamous cylindrical speaker that was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEF T27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



SPENDOR BCI 1976 £240
Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit - and the result is a beautifully warm yet well focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH

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



KEF R105 1977 £785
Three way Bextrene-based floorstander (complete with castors!) gave a truly wide-band listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace. The quintessential nineteen seventies loudspeaker.

IMF TLS80 1976 £550
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800
Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 £375

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

**MISSION 752** 1995 £495

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

HEYBROOK HBI 1982 £130

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

CELESTION SL6 1984 £350

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

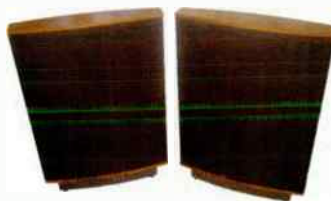
LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39

EACH

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

**QUAD ESL63** 1980 £1200

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

**YAMAHA NS1000** 1977 £532

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

**MISSION X-SPACE** 1999 £499

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



CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

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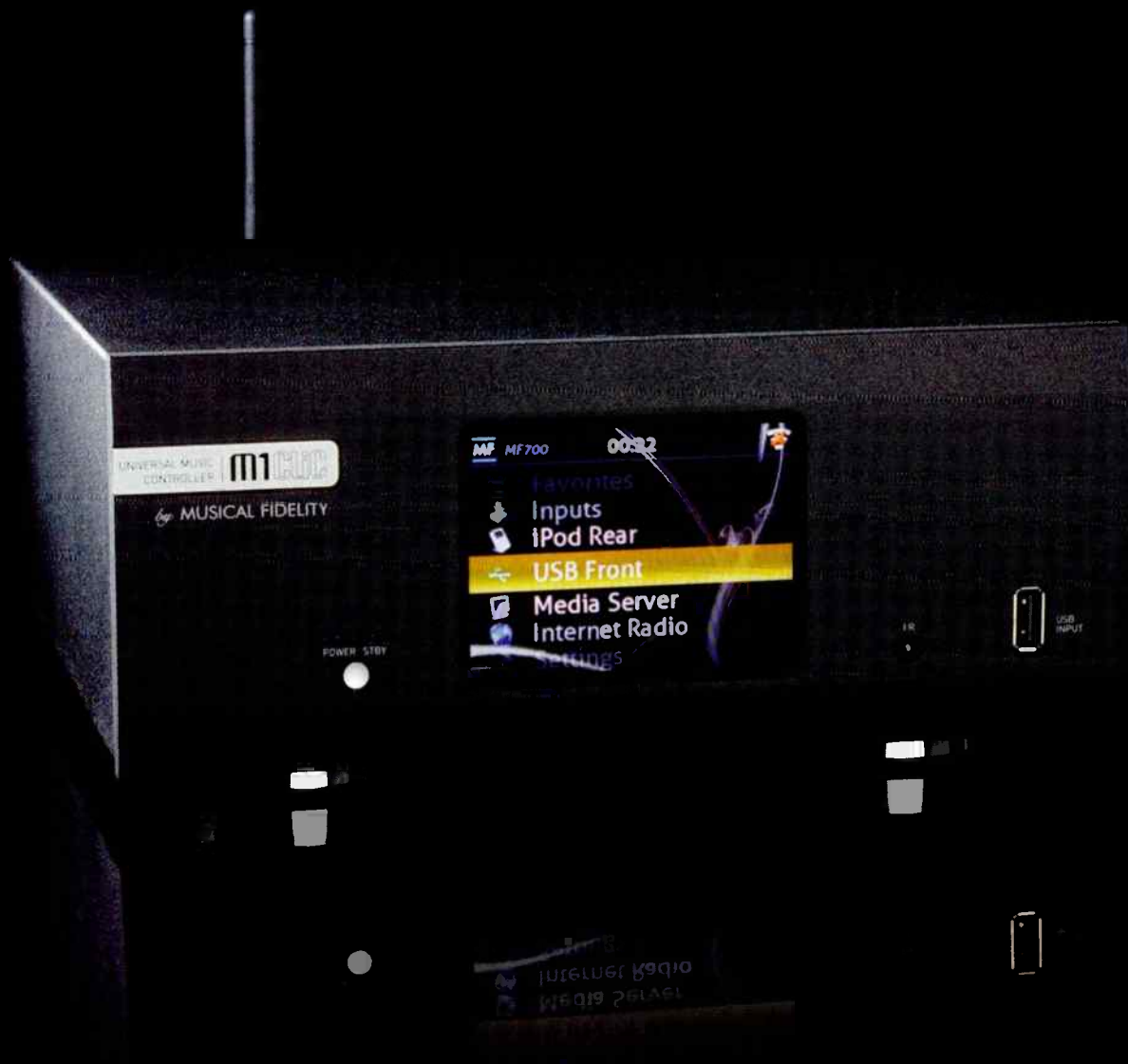
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WIN A FANTASTIC PAIR OF MY AUDIO DESIGN MY1920 MINI MONITORS WORTH £999 IN THIS MONTH'S COMPETITION!

Here's your chance to win one of *Hi-Fi World's* favourite small loudspeakers, as reviewed by David Price in the May 2011 edition! Here's what he wrote...

"My Audio Design is run by Timothy Jung, who has come up with a fascinating range of speakers, a product of his close collaboration with loudspeaker drive unit designers; he gets drivers made and makes bespoke cabinets for them. The My1920 is his smallest, attempting to give a largish, room-filling sound from a cabinet similar in size to a BBC LS3/5a, no less. It's emphatically not an LS3/5a clone; it's engineered completely differently; only the size is similar. The new Wavacor 22m neodymium super tweeter is said to be capable of 40kHz, but goes all the way down to 2kHz, where it crosses over with the Wavacor

145mm mid/bass driver, claimed to give a total frequency response of 58Hz-40kHz. The mid/bass unit uses a special treated paper cone with a field-stabilising ring inside the magnet assembly. The voice coil bobbin is made with special formulated fibreglass and the crossover is point to point wired with silver solder and 99.99997% copper cable, with a bespoke ESA Diamond Silver capacitor, audiophile-grade air/iron core inductors, and 99.997% Diamond Silver internal wiring for the tweeter. The 280x190x230mm cabinet combines layers of materials in different densities to reduce and control unwanted resonance at various frequencies.

Tonally this speaker is rich and full for something so small, and, rather than firing the soundstage out at you, the My1920 sounds so deep that it's almost recessed; you're able to 'listen in' to the mix in a way that's

completely unknown in box speaker circles at this price. There's a decent degree of body to the whole lower frequency arena, and yet it doesn't boof or boom. The 1920 almost had the effortlessness of a bigger box, allowing the bass to do its thing without constipating the midband. Speaking of which, the intermediate frequencies came over in a smooth and relaxed way, yet were bristling with details. The tweeter is an excellent unit, which seems uncannily transparent and atmospheric; it goes seemingly sky-high making for a very atmospheric, spacious sound. This speaker sounds mature and sophisticated way beyond its size and cost, and brings sweetness, space and smoothness to every recording it plays. They're exceptionally smooth, spacious and refined mini monitors that beguile and excite in equal measure".

For a chance to win these superb loudspeakers, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 31st May 2011 to:

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QUESTIONS

[1] Who runs My Audio Design?

- [a] Timothy Jung
- [b] Jimmy Young
- [c] Jimmy Carr
- [d] Cameron Diaz

[2] The My1920 is a similar size to which speaker?

- [a] BBC LS3/5a
- [b] Wharfedale E70
- [c] IMF TLS80
- [d] KEF Reference 4

[3] Who makes the tweeter?

- [a] Wavacor
- [b] News Corp
- [c] Rotax
- [d] Ricardo

[4] The My1920 had the effortlessness of what?

- [a] "a bigger box"
- [b] "an antelope outrunning a snail"
- [c] "a trotting gazelle"
- [d] "a cat on a hot tin roof"

June Competition
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Sandwich Box

Adam Smith remembers one of the most dramatic nineteen seventies loudspeakers, the Leak 2075...

The first loudspeaker from H.J Leak and Co. to see the light of day in 1960 caused quite a stir, and not just because of the way in which its new technology was demonstrated. This was, of course, the construction method of the cone that gave the 'Sandwich' loudspeaker its name. In the days when paper ruled the roost, Dr. Donald Barlow published a paper in 1958 suggesting the use of aluminium foil in loudspeakers and, engaged by Harold Leak to develop a loudspeaker along these principles, he went on to design a cone that had a layer of polystyrene sandwiched between two layers of aluminium. Allied to a cloth surround in a 13 inch bass driver and mated to a 3 inch cone tweeter, the Sandwich was born and, to demonstrate its effectiveness, Harold Leak used to lay a piece of glass across the top of a cone and stand on it at press conferences!

found itself mounted in its own 125 litre cabinet, feeding a transmission line. In a separate 31 litre rotatable cabinet on top, the three remaining drive units comprised a 6.5 inch lower midrange unit, also of Sandwich construction, plus the 3 inch upper midrange and 1 inch Mylar tweeter carried over from the 2060, to make the 2075 a genuine four way design. A fairly complex circuit gave crossover frequencies of 450Hz, 2kHz and 5kHz, the bass end of which featured another Dr. Barlow innovation in the form of a bass inductor made from a long coil of flat copper around half an inch wide rather than the usual wire; the result of which was very low series DC resistance and accurate inductance. Said crossover was mounted in the lower cabinet, which connected to the upper using a four way umbilical cable. Finish was Teak, naturally, with each channel weighing in at an impressive 51kg and a pair relieving your wallet of £132 in 1975!

Organisation and Leak in particular were feeling the pinch from the Far East. Loudspeaker production ceased, causing the nation's floorboards to breathe a sigh of relief, but sales still fell and, despite a last ditch attempt at recovery by introducing new ranges of electronics and a turntable that were nothing more than rebadged Japanese items, albeit ones of good quality, by the early 1980s the Leak name was no more.

BUYING

Despite the relatively high price when new, it seems that the 2075 actually sold quite well and examples are not as uncommon as you might think (unlike the 3090s). The drive units are sturdy beasts generally; open circuit voice coils are not uncommon on the bass driver but this is usually down to a joint failing where the lead-out wires come through the cone or solder to the tag panel and so repairs are not difficult. Sandwich cones generally can 'sag' over the years as the suspensions weaken and a quick fix is to pop the drive units out, rotate them through 180 degrees and refit. Of course, a rebuild by the likes of DK Loudspeaker services is a far better idea, but with four Sandwich drivers per pair of 2075s, the costs soon mount up.

The upper midrange driver is fairly reliable and is common throughout many other Leak and Wharfedale models of the 1970s so replacements are not difficult to find, even though you might have to buy a complete pair of speakers to get your hands on them. Again, the tweeters

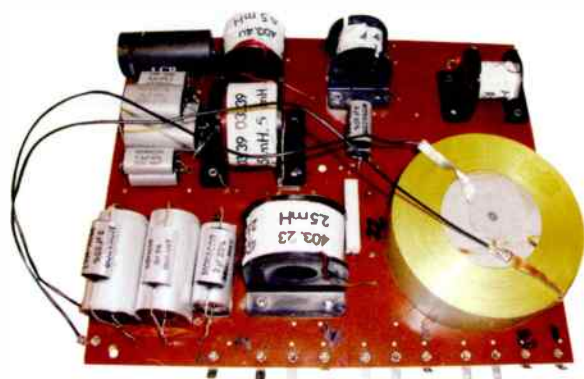
"Harold Leak used to lay a piece of glass across the top of a drive unit cone and stand on it at press conferences!"

The Sandwich was a great success and development continued throughout the decade and into the 1970s, when a completely new lineup was announced in 1974. Starting with a modest two way system in the 2020, this rose through the 2030 to the 2060, the latter of which was probably the spiritual successor to the original Sandwich, with its 12 inch Sandwich bass driver, a brand new 3 inch midrange unit, designed by Alex Garner and featuring a carefully perforated cone to dissipate standing waves, plus a Mylar dome tweeter in a decently sized floorstanding sealed enclosure. However, Leak weren't finished and quite a few eyebrows were raised when the new flagship was announced – the mighty 2075!

For this behemoth, the Sandwich bass driver grew to 15 inches, gained a long-throw rubber surround and

When 1977 came along, the whole range was redesigned and replaced by the 3000 series, the lower models of which featured time-aligned stepped baffles and smaller drive units based around simpler polystyrene-only cones. However, the 2075 underwent a fairly moderate makeover to become the 3090, adding level controls for lower mid, upper mid and treble and replacing the dome tweeter with an Isodynamic ribbon unit. Sadly that bass inductor fell prey to the bean-counters and was replaced by an item altogether more conventional but much less remarkable.

By the end of the 1970s, the Rank





seem robust, although can again be prone to lead-out wire fractures where the voice coil connects to the tag strip. A steady hand, patience and some heat shunt tweezers will usually have a silent unit singing once more.

The Achilles heels of the 2075s, however, are to be found internally. Whilst the crossover bass inductor, as mentioned, is a thing of beauty, the rest of the components mounted on the impressively large PCB in the top of the bass enclosure are distinctly underwhelming. The capacitors are cheap ceramic film types and Leak even sneaked a polarised electrolytic into the midrange! If you want to hear the speakers at their best, then replacing all of these is a must. There are quite a few and a good number are paralleled up across each other and the drive units, so there is no need to spend a fortune on these. However, those that are directly in series with the tweeter and upper mid should be replaced by high quality items if you really want to hear what these speakers can do. Incidentally, don't be surprised if your pair has one or two differing crossover components to each other – final tuning was done by ear at the factory so this is not uncommon!

The real disaster area of the 2075s though, is the wiring. This is cheap rubbish that looks more like dental floss and which actually

removes part of the bass frequency spectrum! Add in evil push-on tags that invariably fall off as you remove the drive units and this is most definitely the first thing that needs to go. Think good quality copper cabling and soldered joints and you won't go far wrong – it's the only way to release the potential of these monsters! In price terms a couple of hundred pounds should secure you a tatty pair with 'issues', up to £5-600 for a smart and tidy pair with a full brace of healthy drive units. Budget a minimum of £70-£100 for the crossover and wiring upgrades mentioned above.

SOUND QUALITY

As standard, the 2075s can be summed up as 'fun'. They're big, brawny and slightly brash but if you can't listen to a pair and smile then you've got no soul! Sort those crossovers and wiring out though, and suddenly the iron fist develops a quite surprising velvet glove. The tweeter which has always been thought of as rather challenging responds beautifully to some high quality capacitors and suddenly starts to offer real detail and insight whilst reigning back its exuberant nature very neatly indeed – I have personally heard more than one modern metal dome sound far worse!

The midband and imagery

of these loudspeakers is truly exceptional. Naturally they have that large loudspeaker effortlessness in spades, but the warmth, detail and insight that they impart on everything from Mahler to Metallica is really quite impressive, speaking volumes for the high quality design of Alex Garner's midrange driver. Their imaging is nothing short of astonishing and they offer a hugely stable, focused and wide window onto music.

Bass-wise, the 2075s are intriguing. On first listen you might actually be convinced they are a little bass-shy, but the transmission line woodwork in the lower half of the bass enclosure means that they are surprisingly free of resonance and do not boom at the bottom end. The 2075s do not offer any artificial boost or rumble which, from a 1970s speaker, is quite a surprise – pick up a cheap pair for pure headbanging duties and you might be disappointed by their surprising level of bass control and couthness! In fact the only area in which they fall down slightly is due to the lack of bracing in the upper half of the bass enclosure, adding a hint of woody colouration and smearing upper bass detail ever so slightly. This is an effect you really have to listen for, however, and generally the 2075s are surprisingly well balanced and even-handed performers.

CONCLUSION

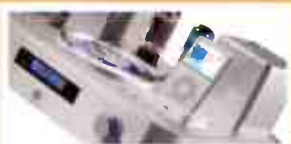
So there we have it. Not all of those big, ugly loudspeakers from the 1970s deserve dismissal and the Leak 2075s remain as one of my absolute favourites. Yes, they need a little work to release their full potential and you're never going to disguise their bulk with a cunningly placed pot plant, but if you have the room to house them, soldering skills to fettle them and amplification to really grip their rather insensitive 4 Ohm load then you are really missing out on a treat if you don't give them a try.

** see Noel Keywood's column on p95 for his reminiscences of these monsters.*



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"we don't use blind listening tests because we don't think they're any more reliable, just different..."



David Price

I recently received an interesting letter from reader Chris Mitchell on the subject of blind listening tests versus conventional individual subjective reviewing; such philosophical issues fascinate me. As you may know, we don't do blind listening tests at *Hi-Fi World* as we simply don't think they're any better than our conventional way of reviewing, and indeed in some ways worse. Chris argued against our position, saying that, "the fact remains that blind testing still represents by far the most reliable way of determining whether differences in equipment exist or if one item is repeatedly judged as superior by a majority of listeners". Chris also tagged his own little conspiracy theory to the end of his point. "There are two main reasons why reviewers don't employ these tests. One, they are time consuming and difficult to organise, and two, the results would shatter the reviewers reputation"...

I replied by stating that I've never seen any empirical research data to show that blind listening tests are somehow better or more reliable, and even if there is, then it would be questionable in its methodology. What we're talking about here is subjective; it's very hard to move something from the realm of human subjectivity to some kind of empirically demonstrable pattern. The reason we don't use blind listening tests is that we don't think they're any more reliable, just different.

In blind tests, which are often held with several people, you get 'group dynamics' coming into play; there's always someone who's absolutely outspoken about what they think they're hearing, and this can sway the others who sometimes are less clear. Then there's the music being played, which may or may not be unfamiliar, and the fact that most people on the panel won't be familiar with the

system or room acoustics either. Conversely, your critical faculties are most finely honed when you're at home, on familiar ground. Slotting review units into my own reference system tells me exactly, and almost instantaneously, what they're doing (relative to my reference components, which remain constant over long periods of time).

We also give products a good airing in the *Hi-Fi World* reference system in the office, which has dramatically different acoustics and ancillary components, and of course it gets measured too. This means that the amount of listening time we give products far exceeds that possible in a blind test, that's often held in one afternoon; I'd say on average each product gets about three weeks from me; in the case of big ticket items (like B&W 801 loudspeakers) this can be up to three months...

Chris wasn't having any of this! "Oh come on David! I think you know in your heart of hearts that if you were regularly on a well conducted blind listening panel you would likely be embarrassed by the results, as would I. I find the casual and random nature of the reviews to be of limited value when considering a purchase. There is rarely any point of reference and comparisons are usually based on the reviewer's vague recollection of a similar product reviewed in the dim and distant past. Not as reliable as blind testing", he replied.

I said that I didn't know any such thing in my heart of hearts! He then continued, "having read thousands of hi-fi magazines over the years it seems strange to me that many products fall into a neat pecking order based on price. I'm afraid we'll have to agree to disagree over blind tests as with hi-fi prices going off the scale I consider them essential if we are to restore any sanity to this hobby. Unfortunately,

I think hi-fi journalism is largely responsible for the crazy prices we now see by giving everything an automatic recommendation regardless of price".

An interesting theory this, that there's a "neat pecking order based on price". Generally yes, more expensive kit sounds better than the cheaper stuff, but there's usually a reason for that – which is that the best things use the most expensive materials. For example, a £150 Rega PI turntable is basically a bit of fibreboard sitting on three rubber feet. The Acoustic Solid Storm however [tested on p100] uses mostly aluminium, which is more rigid and less resonant so surely it's unsurprising that it sounds superior. Is it sinister for us hi-fi hacks to point this out, thus maintaining this evil pecking order?

Chris continued, "I don't think reviewers risk their reputation at all by listening on their own at home. No one can question their findings as that is what they say they hear. If however they were subjected to blind tests which revealed that they either couldn't tell the difference between one product and another or they preferred a product which cost 1/100th of another then their reputation would really suffer. This is why magazines have no interest in pursuing this testing method."

Well, I think this is Chris trying to find an argument to fit his conspiracy theory. Certainly this magazine isn't afraid of saying so when we find classic or cheap products which upset the audio apple cart; don't forget we pretty much put Garrard 401s and Technics SL1200s on the hi-fi map, plus countless other oddities. It's fascinating to talk about respective systems for reviewing kit, but I'm not sure it's so enlightening when people try to load creaky conspiracy theories on top. But Chris, nice chatting with you all the same! ●



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"Dirter's first recording has to be the most unique debut of any record label in the world..."



paul rigby

Dirter. Now there's a name to conjure with. In this case, it is the name of a record label, one that promotes leftfield music but whose roster has become a home for household names. Well, if you happened to be familiar with the genre, at any rate. Like the quote from the famous Hollywood film studio, MGM; "More stars than there are in heaven", the Dirter roster of Nurse with Wound, Faust, Andrew Liles, Current 93, John Cage, Merzbow, Cosey Fanni Tutti and Acid Mothers Temple give notice to a star-studded *avant-garde* conglomeration.

That name, according to label boss Steve Pittis, was almost accidental. "It was a non-word, that was made up for a joke but when I came to release a recording by a band called Playground, they declared their love for the name and encouraged me to keep it."

Dirter's first recording has to be the most unique debut of any record label in the world. It was, in fact, the rantings of a bloke who sold newspapers. "I worked in Harlequin Records, which later turned into Our Price, in Bishopsgate in London, and this newspaper guy used to sell newspapers outside the shop. He was there when we initially moved into the premises. It was freezing cold, in the winter, we'd just opened this gleaming new shop. This guy was about three foot tall, hunched up, something hanging off his nose and he looked really pissed off. I was about nineteen and was an assistant manager at the time. My manageress said, 'Go and ask that poor old boy

if he wants a cup of tea.' So I walked out to him and said, "Scuse me, as you probably know, we've just moved in and..." and he interrupted with a "Yea, bleedin' racket!" So I paused and said, "Yea... er, so can we offer you a cup of tea, you look really cold?" And he shouted back, 'F**k off out of it! I ain't got time for a cup of tea. Do you think I've got time to stand here drinking f**king tea all day?!" So I walked back in and said to my manager, 'Lou, I don't think he wants one'...

About twenty minutes later, obviously calmed down from his hissy fit, Mac (for it was he) came in and said, 'Er, if you don't mind, I'd be very obliged to have that cup of tea.' From then on, he was the star of the show and every time Mac came in I used to prime this very early recording Walkman that I used to bootleg gigs on, ready and waiting, with a BASF C60 in it. Every time that Mac came in, we'd press play and record. He'd just sit there and give forth with his anecdotes. Some of which were incredibly offensive. We put his words together as a cassette and we flogged these to mates of ours who knew him and I had this bonkers idea, many years later, of putting it on vinyl. And that's how Dirter started."

As Pittis freely admits, some people hate the record. They say that it's just a bad recording of a bloke ranting. "That's exactly what it is!" exclaimed Pittis, rather proudly. Lots of other people have loved it, though. Taken in a broader context, however, it is also as powerful a cultural statement as a field recording of a lost blues singer in the Mississippi

Delta or a folk singer in the Blue Mountains in the USA. It's a snapshot of a generation, their views on life, this country and the people in it. It represents a time and a place.

Sadly, when Harlequin eventually left the site and Pittis moved onto other things, the site was replaced by the music retailer Our Price, who, "... bullied him into some sort of legal agreement so that he couldn't pitch outside the shop, which completely messed up his livelihood. Mac came to see us with tears streaming down his face. He said, 'Well, looks like I'm off.' I was choked. From 'F**k off out of it!' which is how the album begins to him becoming a really good mate. I think he spent most of his last years in the betting shop." Yet, through Dirter, he lives on and you can still buy this album from the label via www.dirter.co.uk.

Inspired by Faust's debut album release, as a fourteen year old and, much later, Throbbing Gristle, Pittis realised that there was more to music than the heavily marketed, major label fare which ultimately lead to his releasing Pessary's noisy electronic 'Inward Collapse' and then the experimental rock noises of Playground.

"I initially wanted to be all things to all men with Dirter but then realised that I had to follow my heart and stick to this sort of music. I only handle stuff that I like."

Which you have to applaud. A record label boss only producing stuff he likes? It's a bit like a friend inviting you around to listen to his record collection. What better reason do you need to investigate a label like Dirter? ●

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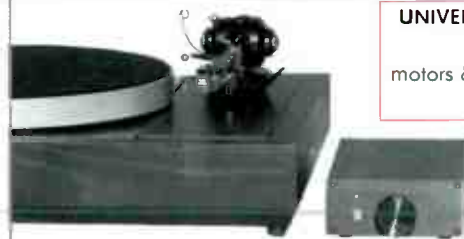
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BASICALLY SOUND

"the usual low audio quality stance of the broadcasters has marred the introduction of Radioplayer..."



steven green

The BBC and commercial radio groups have finally launched the Radioplayer, which is an online player application that makes all of the BBC's and most commercial stations that broadcast on FM and DAB available from one place on the internet. It can be launched from www.radioplayer.co.uk or via some of the stations' websites. It's expected that all radio stations that broadcast on FM or DAB will be available on the Radioplayer within the next year or two.

I've criticised the radio industry on a number of occasions for being biased towards DAB and biased against Internet radio. Some might think that the launch of the Radioplayer contradicts my stance, but in my opinion, the manner in which they've implemented it supports my view. The industry first announced plans to launch the Radioplayer almost exactly two years ago, which I would say is an incredibly long time for what is a relatively straightforward web design software project. And the broadcasters only employed a single member of staff to run the entire project – albeit that a lot of the work will have been carried out by staff from the broadcasters. In comparison though, you could form a small army from the number of staff the broadcasters employ to work on DAB.

Furthermore, whereas the BBC has broadcast no less than twenty three high-impact TV advertising campaigns for DAB, which would have cost in the region of £170 million if they had been shown on commercial TV (which works out to be approximately £14 in advertising costs per DAB radio sold-to-date), I'm unaware of the BBC drawing any attention to the launch of the Radioplayer, let

alone broadcasting a TV advertising campaign for it.

Global Radio, the UK's largest commercial radio group, has also taken the opportunity to reduce the audio quality of the streams available via the Radioplayer compared to the quality of the streams it makes available to Wi-Fi Internet radio devices – its stations on the Radioplayer are using 48kbps AAC+, which may be better than the quality on DAB, but it falls well short of the quality provided by the 128kbps WMA streams that Global Radio delivers to Wi-Fi Internet radios.

Global Radio's default Internet radio streams have been using 128kbps WMA for over four years now. So considering that Internet bandwidth costs fall in-line with Moore's Law – in other words, the cost per Mbps of Internet bandwidth halves approximately every 18 months – the cost of each 128kbps stream to Global has fallen by a factor of over six since they were first launched, so there was clearly no need from a cost perspective to reduce the bit rates from 128 to 48kbps. Unfortunately, it doesn't surprise me that they've done this, though. Nick Piggott, the person in charge of digital radio at Global Radio, has been one of the fiercest opponents of delivering good audio quality on digital radio ever since DAB was relaunched in 2002. For example, he's suggested that people who would like to hear music on the radio at good quality should go out and buy the CD instead, as well as making disparaging comments about audiophiles in general. He's also admitted that he hates delivering streams online to listeners who could listen via DAB.

As mentioned above however, there are still 128kbps WMA streams available for all of Global Radio's

stations – which include Classic FM, Heart and Capital Radio – on Wi-Fi Internet radios, and if you're listening via a computer you can find direct links to these WMA streams on www.radiofeeds.co.uk, which provides comprehensive and up-to-date links to Internet streams for all UK radio stations that are also broadcast on FM or DAB. There are no problems with the quality of the BBC's Internet streams, as they use the same AAC streams that are available via the iPlayer, although it wasn't possible to access Radio 3's 320kbps AAC 'HD Sound' stream via the Radioplayer, which is still only available via the Radio 3 website.

Turning to the user-interface side of the Radioplayer, it has to be said that it is very easy to use. It has a search box that allows you to search by station, presenter or the show's name, which worked well enough. It's also claimed that you can search by location, although when I did so it only found stations whose name included the place I was searching for. It's easy to save your favourite stations as presets, and the presets are available the next time you open the Radioplayer. On-demand programmes, such as those available on the iPlayer, as well as on-demand programming from some of the commercial stations, are also easily accessible. Similar to how the iPlayer has developed, there are plans to bring the Radioplayer to Apple products, mobile phones and games consoles. It's also been said that Internet-only stations will be allowed to join the Radioplayer in future for a small fee, although I won't be holding my breath for that to happen.

Such a shame, then, that the usual pro-low audio quality stance of the broadcasters has marred the introduction of what is otherwise an attractive proposition. ●

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"the Leaks were stars; they made music fun and they dwarf modern loudspeakers in so many ways..."



noel keywood

So, it was 1974 when the Leak 2075 loudspeaker was launched, Adam tells us in his *Olde Worlde* feature on p86 of this issue. I don't remember the details, but I do remember attending the press conference at the time, in Bradford. Leak launched a broad range of loudspeakers and the 2060 was the one I lived with and championed most strongly in print at the time. It was room friendly but delivered lovely sound quality, courtesy of its white, plastic coned, perforated midrange unit. However, the show stopper at the conference was the massive 2075, which I stared at in awe. Who would live with that, I wondered?

Well, the answer was – me! Yep, I was duly enrolled/ persuaded/ intimidated into reviewing it, even though I could think of no easy way of getting said devices up the stairs to my first floor lounge. But arrive they did, in one of the longest pantechnicons ever to negotiate my quiet residential street. When it drove off little did I realise it would return, not to collect the 2075s, but to drop off a pair of 3090s a few years later! You see, Leak had worked out it cost more to collect these loudspeakers than it did to build them, and of course once unpacked and given a good reviewer's belting they were secondhand in any case and worth little.

Leak's new midrange distinguished both the 2060 and 2075. Leak had come up with a lovely white plastic able to form a stiff, light cone and engineer Alex Garner, who later joined Tannoy, came up with the idea of using punched holes to control standing waves. He likened their effect to that of a groin on a beach. The groin juts out into the sea and, although its *modus operandi* isn't obvious at all, it works.

Interestingly, when designing World Audio Design loudspeakers I revisited this idea using thin rolled out strips of Blu-tack as acoustic 'groins' and it worked brilliantly; I was taken aback at how it smooths out frequency response and suppresses resonances at breakup. So the holes, in conjunction with a coat of soft damping painted onto the cone's rear face, do work; they're no sales gimmick. As a result the 2060 and the 2075 both had an excellent midband, one that was clear, detailed and uncoloured, the 2060 the more so of the two in truth.

But the 2075 had Leak's massive 13in Sandwich bass driver housed in the most stupendous cabinet, fitted with grab handles and castors on the rear face so it could be wheeled along no less! And I ended up with a pair, whether I liked it or not, a pair that Leak were unwilling to collect. Not a great fit into my modest 17ft x 14ft lounge, they loomed large like a pair of lighthouses. The big 2075s were nevertheless a good listen and great fun. They are handed into Left and Right, the tweeter going on the inside as always. This helped imaging which was very good. Their low frequency output overdrove my room, but copious room corner damping and foam filled settees helped control this.

At that time it was customary to use high damping factor Godzilla amps from the likes of Crown and Bryston to provide grunt and I did so in the course of my reviewing duties, although Cambridge and Quad amplifiers were more subtle, if less able to supply enough grunt for the 2075s.

I loved 'my' 2075s, but no one gave them much credence at the time – and prejudice was rife then; a loudspeaker like this "couldn't sound good". Faced with this view and their

size, they never set the world alight.

I did not take mine apart, because I did not own them, so I am fascinated to learn that they can be improved easily. It's very 1970s to find a product with great underlying technology, flawed by lack of attention to detail. Back then resistor, capacitor and wire quality were not an issue; rubbish components often resulted in a compromised sound, as Quad ruefully admitted to me after their demise.

My lovely 2075s were, in the end, destroyed by a giant power amplifier that gave up the ghost whilst trying to push their 13in cones. Some time later I was ready and willing to say hello to another pantechnicon, and 3090s!

The 3090s were an altogether more sophisticated experience. Entering their drive unit line up was Leak's new Isodynamic tweeter. It was silky smooth and quite unlike the Mylar dome it replaced. With a full set of drive unit level controls now on the rear, the 3090 was a refined and svelte monster, making the 2075 seem like a hoodlum. I was very impressed by the 3090, for in some areas there was little to touch it. Imaging and sound staging were lovely, treble quality unmatched then, and likely even now. Although the big bass inductor had gone, I do not remember bass quality being appreciably worse. Oh – and the horrible foam grille of the 2075, that sagged and collected dust, was replaced.

Both these Leaks were stars. What a pity most homes cannot house them. As Adam says, they made music fun and they dwarf modern loudspeakers in so many ways. Both are forgotten wonders, likely to stay that way because of their size, rarity and the fact that sound quality isn't pin sharp modern, unless tweaked. ●

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"it was a humble nineteen seventies Philips cassette deck which really had my jaw hitting the floor..."



adam smith

Many of you, like me, may be fans of the television show 'Mythbusters'. But for those of you who are not familiar with it, the show takes a light-hearted but factual look at theories, rumours, myths, movie scenes, urban legends and the like. It then applies scientific theory to see whether there is any truth in them – rating them 'Confirmed', 'Plausible' or 'Busted' accordingly. As examples, I have learned that you can fool an ultrasonic motion sensor by moving very slowly, however a car cannot survive a jump of significant distance from a ramp without sustaining terminal damage. I took the latter particularly hard having grown up watching the *Dukes of Hazzard*, but science is science!

I have often felt that a whole episode, if not an entire series, could be spent on matters relating to audio and hi-fi, and these thoughts came to me recently as I spent an evening in the company of Tim Jarman, to deliver my apparently unwell Technics RS-9900 cassette deck for investigation, as well as gird my back muscles and take along my Leak 2075 loudspeakers, as he'd never heard a pair. The evening was a success, and we also succeeded in inadvertently busting a few commonly held audio myths along the way...

The first was regarding those very Leak loudspeakers. Settling down to listen to some Vivaldi through a source component I shall return to later, and Tim's immaculately restored Bang & Olufsen Beolab 5000 amplifier, he became very concerned that something was wrong. You see, he had read the commonly held theory that the treble from the 2075s is something like living with a Rottweiler – impressive most of the time but you're never quite sure

when it's going to turn round and rip your head off. Consequently he was intrigued to enjoy the sweet sounds emanating from the 2075s and pushing the volume control higher and higher served to make things much louder and far more intense but with no sense of strain.

Having got to know the inside of these loudspeakers very well in the last few months, I can confirm that the cabling and new capacitors work wonders on that tweeter and turn it into a remarkably civil performer. Okay, it's not going to challenge a good ribbon or electrostatic but I have heard many dome tweeters, both metal and cloth, that have sounded less nice. Myth number 1, that Leak 2075 tweeters are nasty – *busted!*

Going back to that source component I mentioned earlier, it was my turn to be surprised. You see, it was a humble mid nineteen seventies Philips N2521 cassette deck which really had my jaw hitting the floor. The soundstage was vast, bass was solid, the timing and pitch were spot on, and most insanelly of all, even at the ridiculous levels at which we were listening, there was an almost complete absence of tape hiss. Apparently the line amplification section of the Philips is almost peculiarly over-designed for what was a fairly middle of the road cassette deck; add in a well designed transport and the results were staggering. Myth number two that cassettes always hiss – *busted!*

The third and final myth, or should it be misunderstanding, of the evening also related to cassette and concerned my misbehaving Technics RS-9900, featured in a recent *Olde Worlde* and mentioned in my last column. After a good twenty minutes or so of prodding, poking, tweaking, recording and replaying, we found that there was nothing wrong with

it. I must confess to being a little baffled at this point as I had brought along the horribly distorted tape that I recorded two nights before the Scalford Hall show and the results were definitely not pleasant. It turned out that it was operator error, however – oops!

You see, back in my younger days, I was never really a cassette fan. Yes I made recordings for use on my Walkman and later, in the car, but I have never bought a pre-recorded cassette in my life; whilst my school friends were buying their albums on cassette and merrily swapping them, I was stocking up on vinyl and refusing to lend it out in case my precious grooves were 'midi systemed'. Consequently I knew the basics about tapes and recording and was always well aware of the 'fact' that Chrome cassettes meant you could push recording levels much higher with less chance of distortion – this was always the case on my Yamaha KX-250 anyway.

However, it turns out that my beloved Technics has Ferrite heads – harder wearing and more reliable but less inclined to deliver the necessary record current on the good old CrO₂ setting. Couple this with a Dolby reference level that Technics unusually set at -2dB rather than the usual 0 to +2dB range and it transpired that I had simply cranked up the record level too high. Popping a 'normal' tape in meant that I could happily wind the level up to have the meters wrapped around their end stops without any issues, but much above that -2dB level on chrome set distortion in again.

So there we have it, Leak 2075 tweeters aren't evil, cassettes don't always hiss badly and chrome tapes don't always allow recording levels as high as you'd think; three audio theories well and truly 'busted'. As for me, I'm off to look for some decent Ferric tapes...●

Storm Chaser

Acoustic Signature's new Storm is gunning for top seat at the table of the ultra-competitive £4,000 turntable market. Rafael Todes gives it shelter...



Having sold my Linn Sondek LP12 and Ittok just over ten years ago, I was rather taken with an Acoustic Signature Challenger that had just received a favourable review in a *Hi-Fi World* group test. It was the cheaper brother of The Storm, but shares a number of its characteristics. I lived with this deck for a few years, and greatly appreciated this foray into the higher end. It was tonally quite neutral, and represented superb value for money. Acoustic Signature make a wide range of decks, ranging from the Manfred at £1,699 to the newly released Ascona for a whopping £16,500; as for the Grande Reference (weighing in at a massive 200kg), if you need to ask the price then you can't afford it! Seventy five per cent of the company's decks are for export outside Germany and are particularly popular in the Netherlands and Asia.

Weighing in at a mighty 28kg, this new version of The Storm has a 50mm platter, built from aluminium; into this are inserted eight brass

silencers, not unlike the Feichert Woodpecker. They have a couple of rubber rings around them, and there is no metal-to-metal contact with the rest of the platter. Tapping the platter yields a very dead sound, thus they seem to be doing their job well. The main bearing is made with hardened and polished steel, with a hard tungsten carbide ball at its base. The housing of the bearing uses sintered bronze inserts, which do not require any oil. The other contact point of the bearing uses a specially developed material called Tidorfolon. This is used in high-pressure pumps in the food industry, where oil contamination is not a possibility. It is very hard, and above all, self-lubricating.

The motor is a substantial unit, and is controlled by a so-called S-Alpha unit, which takes the DC supply from a wall wart, and regenerates a sine wave at 12VAC. A thin belt drives the circumference of the platter. The base of the deck is 45mm of aluminium, and has room for three different arms if so required. The arm base is attached to the chassis with an Allen screw on

a track. Thus the arm board can be pulled out to accommodate 12 inch arms, as well as 9 inch arms.

The three aluminium legs are adjustable, although the mass of the deck makes adjustment a bit uncomfortable, as the mass of the deck rests on your other hand whilst performing the operation of raising or lowering the leg. A felt mat is included, and annoyingly seems to attach itself to outgoing records. The deck looks like a shiny spacecraft in miniature and is very solidly constructed, as befitting a high end product from Germany.

Visually, the deck gives off an über-solid sense to it. It is almost totally constructed out of aluminium, and is visually a stark contrast to the Fletcher Point 5 (which combines two different materials, namely aluminium alloy for the platter and wood for the chassis).

The chassis below the platter slopes down, leading to three feet, around three inches in diameter. They have a touch of the elephantine about them; is this an aesthetic statement, or does it serve an engineering



"perhaps the soubriquet 'Storm' is a bit of a misnomer. There's very little that's stormy about it, maybe it should have been called 'The Sunshine' instead!"

purpose? Apparently, there were great sonic differences between the more basic decks in the range and those which had substantial feet, not within the footprint of the deck. The size of them is required to make a substantial bond with the subchassis of the deck; I wouldn't call it beautiful, it's more a case of function over form.

Tapping the shelf on which the deck sits, yields more of a thud than a Technics SL 1200 for example, and indeed many decks I have reviewed. So I feel the deck will hugely benefit from both an absorbing platform and careful location.

For the purposes of the review, the distributor (Air Audio Ltd.) supplied an SME IV arm and cable, and I used a Cadenza Bronze on both the deck, and a Timestep Technics

1210 Mk II with an SME V, and Sound Dead Steel mat, and a Fletcher Audio Omega Point 5 with a Conductor Air-Bearing Tonearm, with the Cadenza Bronze cartridge.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to Frank Sinatra's 1961 recording of 'That Old Black Magic', the Acoustic Signature Storm really throws up the presence of Frank Sinatra high in the room. It projects the nuances of his voice, with a smoothness and naturalness that is highly impressive. It is a particularly well recorded track, richly orchestrated, and the deck does a fine job of separating the brass/percussion textures, particularly the xylophone, which you can hear in its own glorious bubble. There is a feeling that the musicians are enjoying themselves

as the music smiles.

Colin Davis' 1970's recording of Handel's 'Messiah' is a little dated in terms of performance practice by today's standards, but makes for an interesting listen on this deck. In the large chorus 'The Glory of the Lord', the deck makes a detailed and rounded sound of the choir's output in a way that so many other decks don't manage half so well. A section of sopranos can sometimes shriek, and hurt the ears when not adequately reproduced, and this deck really excels here. There is a good sense of the weight of sound of the choir as well.

Mendelssohn's incidental music to the 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' has a huge dynamic range, with barely audible fairies dancing to full-blooded orchestral fortissimos. On

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Diva IISP Mich el Fr mer, *Stereophile*, January 2011

Photo shows base model Diva II



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Pulsare Phono Stage

this Philips recording conducted by Sir Colin Davis again, the Storm takes the bull by the horns in terms of dynamics, but never loses control of the performance. The violins sound precise when quiet, particularly in their staccato off the string passages, and there is a lovely sparkly but rich string timbre, ably assisted by the Ortofon Cadenza Bronze, which shines sunlight on the texture.

Turning to my own field of Chamber Music, and specifically the Mozart Eb Quintet played by the Amadeus Quartet with Cecil Aronowitz as second viola on DG, I noticed that compared with my



Fletcher Audio Omega Point 5, there is less attack at the beginnings of notes – the Storm seems to tone down the shock of the articulation; not in an unpleasant way, just it homogenises and even pasteurises the sound. I also notice that Martin Lovett's cello sounds a tad less full with the Storm, as compared to the Fletcher Audio. The sound is underpinned by skillful bass reproduction, full but not bloated. This is a substantial improvement on the way I remember the cheaper model (The Acoustic Signature Challenger) sounding, where the bass was never this controlled.

Listening to Mozart's glorious 29th Symphony conducted by Sir Neville Marriner, I am immediately struck by the fact that the deck is producing a smooth, vivacious sound. It isn't the last word in audio realism, the imaging is generally very good, but not quite holographic, the sound of the strings is flexible and bouncy, dare I say 'liche' [if you must! Ed.]?

Benjamin Britten's 'Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge', and in particular the 'Aria Italiana', where

the violins buzz all over the top string whilst the cellos and basses strum like a banjo, provides a great turntable test piece. I am struck by the largesse of the violins; it's a huge sound oozing with depth and punch. Sometimes this can sound on lesser decks like a solitary few violins, but here there is the gravitas of a substantial section. You can even feel the air generated by the cellos strumming away maniacally. I suspect the SME IV is doing a fabulous job keeping control of the proceedings and is exceptional in this respect.

Listening to the famous Tchaikovsky 'Piano Concerto No.1', superbly played by Vladimir Ashkenazi on a vintage Decca recording, the beginning starts with a brass call, and the soloist answering by sweeping the keyboard with bombastic chords. Ashkenazi plays this now cliché-ridden classic in a quietly understated, and highly musical way, finding the musical line ahead of the mindless bravura that sometimes finds its way into this piece. It strikes me that this deck has something in common with this approach. It isn't trying to impress you with its prowess, or show you its ability to spotlight details, it just gives an accurate, well-staged exposition of the musical line, with some genuinely beautiful sounds and textures. It's like going to a party and meeting someone, who afterwards you discover has achieved something remarkable, and you had no inkling of this when talking to them!

By contrast, with the Timestep Technics SL1200 reference, I really feel the showiness of the piece; the deck is making me aware of every accent in the score, the rise and fall of every phrase close up. It is a very different approach to the Storm, which tends to smooth out the attack at the front of notes, producing a really mellow sound and is a matter of personal taste. If there is a line which represents the 'transient speed' of a turntable, the rapidity that the note speaks, the Technics would be at one end of the line, the Storm would be at the other, and the Fletcher Audio would be between the two, but far closer to the Storm than the Technics.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Fletcher Audio 0.5/Cartridge Man Conductor turntable
Technics SL1210Mk2/SME Series V turntable
Ortofon Cadenza Bronze cartridge
Audio Research SP9 mk2 preamplifier
Icon Audio PS3 signature phono stage
VAC Auricle Musicblocs power amplifiers
B&W 802D loudspeakers

CONCLUSION

This is a highly capable deck, which sits at the price point comfortably and against stiff competition; it is sonically pleasing and at times beguiling to listen to, its temperament is even-keeled and rational, but perhaps the soubriquet 'Storm' is a bit of a misnomer. There seems to be very little that is stormy about it, maybe it should have been called 'The Sunshine' instead! It is excellent value for money and I personally would be happy to live with it for its innate musical abilities, and mellow sound. It does however require careful location and a suitable platform on which to sit.



VERDICT

Another excellent high end turntable joins the fray, with a smooth, solid, open and lyrical sound guaranteed to please.

ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE

STORM £3,612

Air Audio Ltd.

☎ +44 (0) 1491 629629

www.airaudio.co.uk

FOR

- stable, expansive sound
- easy musicality
- fulsome tonality

AGAINST

- lacks ultimate transient speed

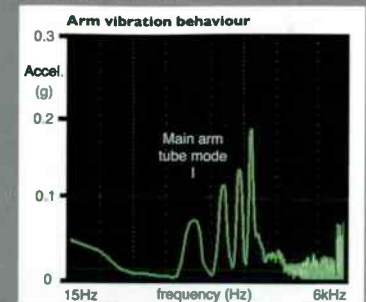
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The SME IV arm fitted has a first bending mode at 360Hz, the first peak at left in our vibration analysis, and the common related third order mode at 1080Hz, the highest peak at right in the cluster. This makes the arm stiff, and quite well damped, as expected from a tapered tube. However, the four peak cluster is surprisingly more than an SME V produces, even though it is physically similar. The IV is more lively than a Rega RB301 in this area, although it is better damped in the midband and at higher frequencies, and this likely accounts for the uncoloured midband nature of SMEs. There is very little high frequency excitation in the structure.

Speed error of the Acoustic Signature turntable was negligible at +0.2%, so it is very accurate. Speed stability (wow and flutter) unweighted measured a very low 0.094% unweighted and 0.043% IEC weighted, extremely low values, making the turntable very speed stable. NK

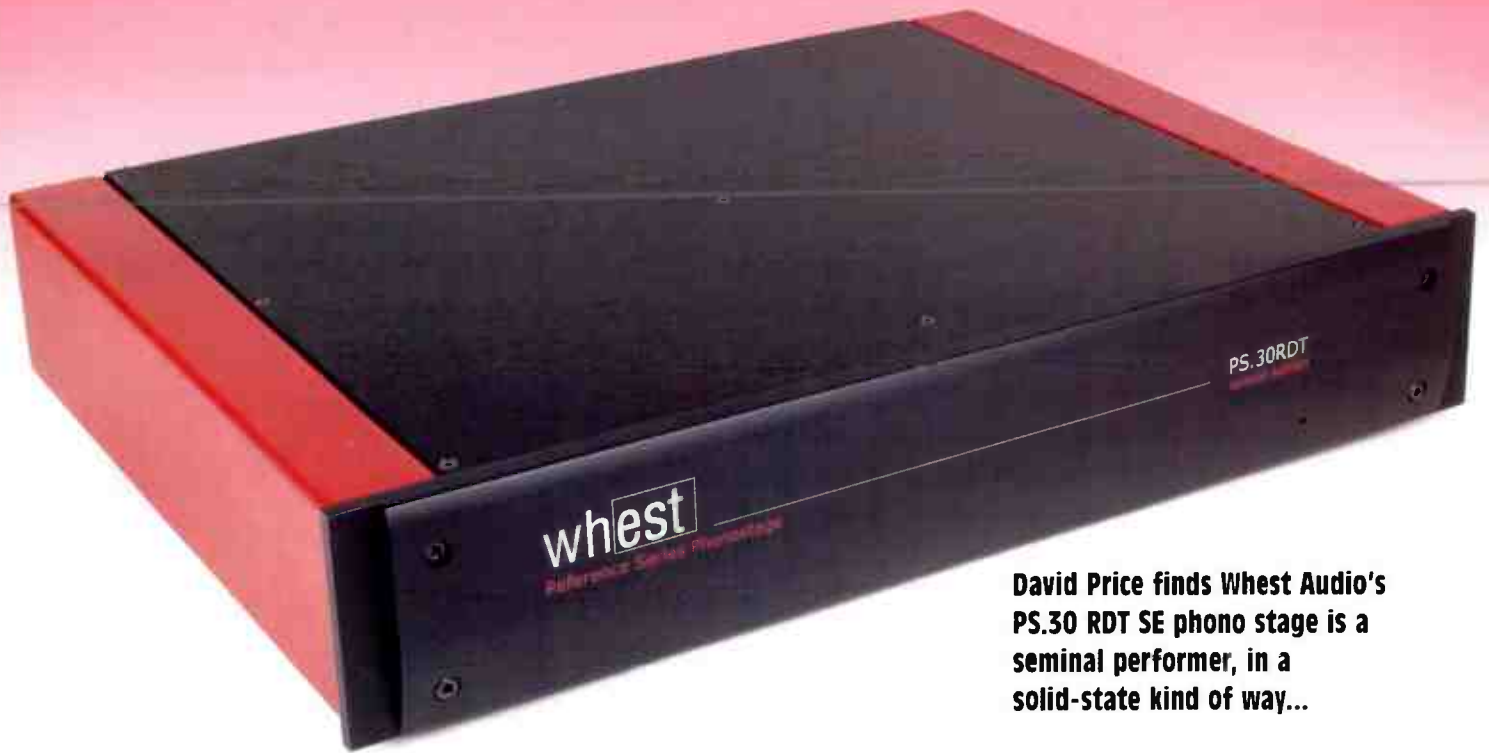
Speed accuracy	+0.2%
Wow & flutter	0.094%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.043%

ARM VIBRATION



WOW & FLUTTER





David Price finds Whest Audio's PS.30 RDT SE phono stage is a seminal performer, in a solid-state kind of way...

Master Blaster

Top of the pops in the new romantic category of phono stages is of course the Icon Audio PS3, which is warm and sweet and expansive in a way that vinyl simply isn't.

It doesn't just flatter the source, it embellishes it. If you like this effect but want still more, then consider Emille's Allure, which is about as close to the edge of reality you can get without checking out completely; it's an amazing listen but coloured and euphonic to a fault.

In the other corner of the phono stage boxing ring, we have solid-state stages from Whest; this company pretty much epitomises the high resolution, 'matter of fact'

transistor sound that the likes of Michell's ISO pioneered. And the higher you go up the Whest range, the more you get of this; it's like shining a thousand Watt light onto your desktop, so you can see every speck

of dust in sharp relief, and this isn't always a pretty sight.

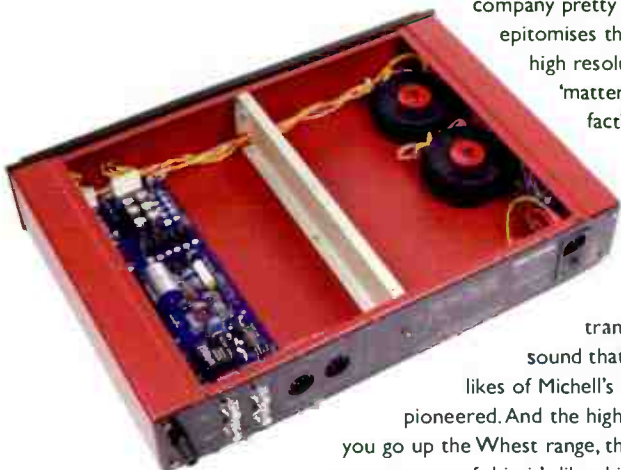
So in the PS.30 RDT SE, do understand that you're not being introduced to a black box that's going to gently caress your shell-likes, as you sip (in hi-fi terms) a Malibu and coconut cocktail on a tropical island beach. Whest's new SE is aiming to be an aural experience more akin to standing three rows back from the stage down in the stalls, getting beer bottles and fast food packaging thrown over your head, plus blasts of dry ice and anything else a live rock gig throws at you!

The price for this is a princely £4,500 (another £200 if you want a red cased version), making it one of the most expensive phono stages I've ever reviewed. It's special for Whest because, unlike their lesser designs, it has a discrete transistor front end said to be one and a half years in development. It's described by proprietor James Henriot as "pretty much as quiet if not quieter than the best ultra low noise monolithic op-amp available today", no less. The advantage of going discrete, James adds, is that I am able to run the front end at a higher voltage and higher current. This is an interesting point, as I find op-amp based phono stages often have a super clean and composed sound, but sometimes

discrete transistor ones (such as the A.N.T. Audio Kora series) are more musical in some respects. The PS.30SE obviously attempts the best of both worlds...

The high frequency sections of the RIAA filter are all passive and driving passive filters 'properly' require higher voltage and current. The new discrete stage makes it a very simple task, the company says. The filter impedances are lower "which is also nicer". The input stage runs in Class-A throughout and then it's off to the discrete Class-A output stage which is identical to the company's ultra high end MC REFV MK4 design. The output stage here is said to be 'faster' and uses new devices to take advantage of the increased performance of the incoming signal. What distinguishes it from its bigger MC REFV MK4 brother are the forty discrete regulators present in the MC REFV and the hybrid discrete 'instrumentation amp' front end design. "The Special Edition does things its own way to achieve the resolution it achieves but does borrow from its big brother", James told me.

Despite the fact that the only thing the Special Edition shares with the other products in the 30 series is the casework, the 30 series nomenclature has been retained.



Whest could have marked it out as a PS.40, which would emphasize its closeness to the company's top phono stages, but they also feel it's important to let PS.30 owners (both the R and RDT versions) upgrade to SE spec, so they've kept the 30 name. The upgrades can be done "in two or three steps over a period of time", and apparently over two hundred Rs and one hundred and fifty RDTs have now been upgraded to SE status.

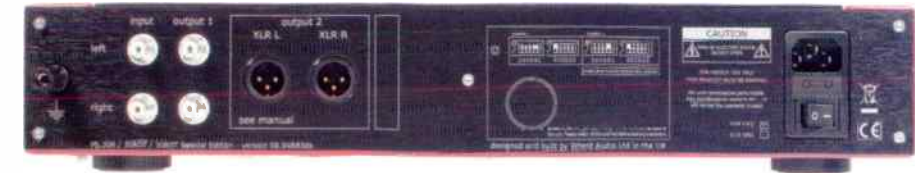
SOUND QUALITY

Think of a Whest PS.30RDT, only more so! Actually, this is a little unfair, because whilst the new Special Edition has a strong family sound (you certainly wouldn't confuse it with an Icon Audio PS3, for example), it actually tilts things a little away from the stark, icy perfection of the RDT and instead gets a little more up close and personal. The new phono stage retains everything that makes the 30 series great then, but adds intimacy, delicacy and a more organic feel...

For example, Boz Scagg's 'Lido Shuffle' came over with a brilliant sense of focus, making my sumptuous vdH Frog cartridge sound more like a Lyra Titan than it ever has. I was struck by the precision and definition of the soundstage, the way everything was put in its rightful place with an unerring sense of purpose and propriety. The lead vocal was also carried with incredible definition and yet it wasn't in any way hard or forward in its articulation. Instead the Whest strung everything together tightly, keeping everything on a short leash so to speak, but still seemed able to let the music breathe in a way that lesser stages were never quite able to do. It was an enticing combination, offering the architectural correctness of op-amp based Whests with more ease.

Moving the pace down a notch or two and Kate Bush's 'The Sensual World' was also rendered with great skill. It's not the world's best recording, but there's something about it that when played back on the very best sources, it suddenly comes alive and starts sounding far more natural and less processed. I was again struck by the clarity and immediacy of the lead vocal, giving a very tactile feel that communicated the song's mood with great effectiveness.

Whilst lesser transistor phono stages have left me cold, the PS.30 RDT SE didn't; it's not exactly tonally warm, but there's



definitely a slight move to a warmer sound that others lower down in the range lack. In my system it actually sounded very neutral.

Moving to some eighties power pop from Spandau Ballet, and 'I'll Fly for You' really suited the Whest's nature. To be honest, it prefers immaculately well recorded songs, which give it space to showcase its dizzying amounts of low level detail. I was enthralled by the delicacy of the guitar sound, the power and articulation of the piano, and the grain of the singer's voice. The SE really pulls ahead of lesser 30 series designs by removing a layer of very subtle 'mush', a kind of semi-translucent grey veil, from the sound. The result is that you can really get into the texture of various instruments in the mix; this is something that good tube phono stages do brilliantly, but op-amp based transistor ones do less well. What solid-state stages (can) do brilliantly is provided a superbly tight stereo image, as if individual musicians are set in stone, locked solid into a particular part of your listening room. The Whest was great at this particular trick, fully conveying the recording's scale.

Dropping the needle on the lead-in groove of Kraftwerk's 'Computerwelt' showed the Whest's percussive prowess; it locked into the beat like the autofocus snapping things into view on a good

camera. It produced a captivating performance, showing sizzling fast attack transients and great dynamic articulation; it offers up everything with a superlative sense of scale, both spatially and dynamically. My only remark is that despite being to all intents and purposes slower, my reference tube-aspirated Icon Audio PS3 still captured the really gentle nuances of the music in a more organic and believable way. The Whest can never be all things to all men, then, but is in its element with high powered, complex percussive music such as this.

CONCLUSION

Expensive yes, but Whest's PS.30 RDT SE is an excellent phono stage that offers the insight and low level detailing that only a good transistor design can, yet is more fluid and organic sounding than it has a right to be, considering its non-thermionic status. Properly matched up to a top quality cartridge this is one of the best phono stages you'll find, if neutrality and a lack of the tendency to editorialise concerns you. It unlocks the music in your record grooves in a genuinely special way, one which keeps you coming back for more.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Marantz TT-1000 turntable
Origin Live Enterprise arm
vdH The Frog cartridge
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
MF AMS35i amplifier
Yamaha NS1000M speakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Whest measured flat, as our analysis shows, right across the audio band, with little sign of the usual lift at high frequencies common to other stages, that adds to analysis but can also unfortunately emphasise peaky treble from a cartridge. There is no warp filtering, full gain being maintained right down to 1Hz, so cone flap will be likely with warped records.

Gain levels measured a bit higher than quoted, probably because we use true p.d. input voltage, but this isn't a problem. Plenty of gain range is available, 76dB being enough to cope with really low output cartridges, as 0.1mV into the Whest will give 643mV out, comfortably above the 200-400mV required by most amplifier line inputs. Overload was as usual set by output swing, in this case a healthy 9.8V.

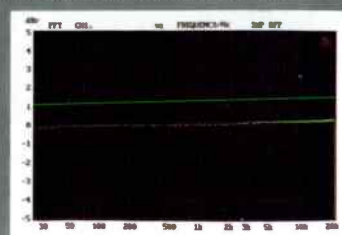
Noise (equivalent input noise, IEC A weighted) was low at 0.1µV, if not

as low as the best at 0.08µV, a figure common when an input transformer is used.

The PS.30 RDT measured well all round and should give excellent sound quality. NK

Frequency response	1Hz-62kHz
Separation	69dB
Noise	0.1µV
Distortion	0.0002%
Gain	x170 – x6434
Overload	9.8V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT

Powerful, dramatic and forensically detailed phono stage that's never less than a gripping listen.

WHEST AUDIO

PS.30 SE £4,500

Whest Audio

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www.whestaudio.co.uk

FOR

- transient speed
- dynamic articulation
- superlative detail
- input flexibility

AGAINST

- price



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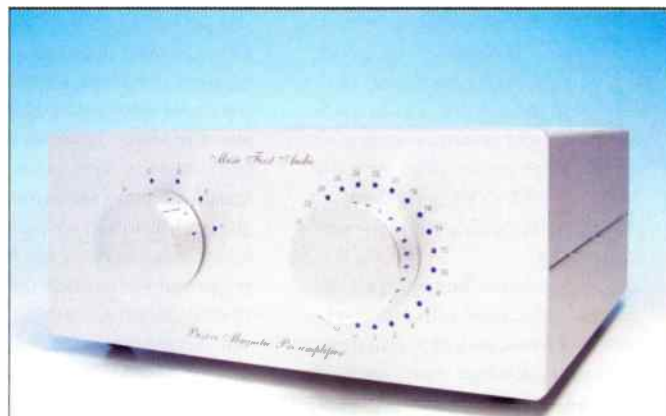


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Kind Of Blue

Tony Bolton is rather touched by Ortofon's new budget moving coil cartridge, the Vivo Blue...

Seemingly producing cartridges since the dawn of recorded time, Danish manufacturer Ortofon recently introduced two new budget moving coil cartridges. Priced at £225 for the Vivo Red, and £275 for the Blue model being looked at here, these new units go straight into one of the most hotly contested areas of the market. Not only are there MCs from nearly every other manufacturer, the market at this point has no shortage of very able moving magnets; not least Ortofon's own which are particularly strong at this price point and rather overshadowed their previous budget moving coils!

These new Vivos are made from a polycarbonate based resin called Lexan DMX, which is claimed to be scratch resistant. It is made by GE Plastics and is used for keypads, housings and other parts of mobile phones, computers and digital cameras. It is also used for soft keys, infra red lenses, bezels and screens. In the audio environment it has been chosen because of its rigidity and damping properties; important since the body of this cartridge serves as the base for the generator unit inside.

The generator unit is wound with 99.9999999% pure copper wire manufactured in Japan. Attached is an aluminium cantilever with a nude elliptical diamond with a tip radius of r/R 8/18 micro m. The cheaper Red model uses the same body and wiring but substitutes a conventional elliptical stylus for the nude one.

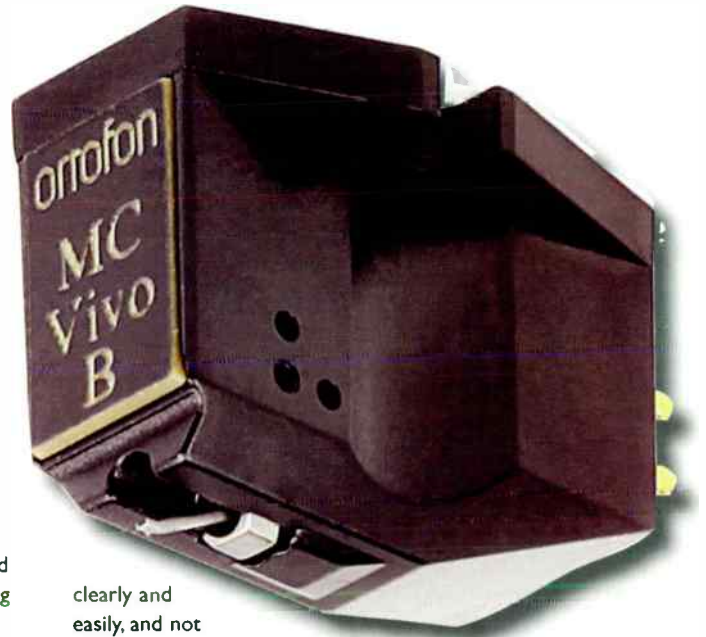
I attached the Blue to the Hadcock 242 Cryo arm that resides on the Sondek, where it fed the Luxman E200 phono stage and the Leema Acoustics Tucana II amplifier, driving my Kelly KT 3 loudspeakers. Set up was easy, the shape of the body and the visibility of the cantilever making alignment a very quick job. I started off trying the

tracking weight at the maximum of 2 grams, but soon settled on the recommended setting of 1.8 grams. The heavier tracking force produced a very deep and solid bass sound, but midrange and the treble were more compressed, a sonic feature that gradually disappeared as I adjusted the counterweight until everything sounded more balanced. Going beyond the recommended setting resulted in an over emphasised treble and a somewhat thin sound. In short, the Vivo seems particularly responsive (or susceptible!) to VTF. Running in was accomplished quickly, with the cartridge sounding good after about fifteen hours; no epic, Shakespearian saga here!

SOUND QUALITY

Over the next few evenings the Vivo Blue found itself running the gamut of my record collection. I started off relatively gently with the Dave Brubeck Quartet's LP 'Countdown Time In Outer Space'. With cover art by Franz Kline, this 1962 recording was dedicated to astronaut John Glenn, and followed up the success of the previous two 'Time' LPs, 'Time Out' (1959) and 'Time Further Out: Miro Reflections' (1961), and featured more unusual time signatures, including 7/4 and 11/4. One of the tracks was a cover – a 'Brubecked' version of the waltz 'Someday My Prince Will Come'. This polyrhythmic track had the drums in 4 time, the bass in 3 and the piano and alto sax free to move between them.

The Vivo Blue seemed to revel in this complex rhythmic structure, displaying the various time signatures



clearly and easily, and not getting flustered by their interaction. The production of Brubeck recordings is always superb, and relayed through this cartridge the results were excellent. The performers were securely placed on the soundstage, each having his own position which was defined by the blackness surrounding them. I have heard deeper soundstages when playing this recording, but usually through more expensive cartridges.

Recorded in the same year, but under very different circumstances, 'Joan Baez In Concert' is a compilation of recordings made during her various tours of the United States. Originally released in the US on the Vanguard label, this British pressing on Fontana has survived the years well. It is a mono pressing, and I deliberately left the Luxman phono stage in stereo mode to see how well the Vivo coped with the surface noise that can sometimes be present under such circumstances. I was very impressed. As I have said, the record is in good condition, but I was expecting a few pops and crackles around the edges of the soundstage, and I certainly didn't

"I forgot I was listening to a forty nine year old piece of vinyl and got lost in the beautifully gentle rendition of 'Lady Mary'..."

expect the inky black silence that surrounded Baez's voice and guitar. I forgot that I was listening to a forty

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nine year old piece of vinyl and got lost in the beautifully gentle rendition of 'Lady Mary'.

This is a traditional song, probably dating back to the Elizabethan era, that speaks of the one sided love the singer has for a nobleman who appears in her life, seems to love her, but turns out to be there for just one thing. Most nineteen sixties folkies covered this track, but the Baez version is particularly appealing, with the purity of her voice being very suited to the naivety and regret portrayed in the lyrics. The Vivo played it well, keeping the focus and simplicity of the song intact but at the same time producing a well balanced description of the timbre of her voice and its relationship with her guitar. I felt as though I was a few rows back in the audience, level with the stage, looking at a life sized performance. The only thing that let the side down was the applause at the end of the song, where a slight phasing effect was noticeable. I usually find that the sound of clapping is something that a lot of cartridges struggle to get right, regardless of price, so I wasn't unduly surprised at the Vivo tripping up a little here; it's only £275 after all.

Curious to try more complex fare, I put on a 1974 Decca recording of the Handel Opera Society Chorus and Orchestra performing the 'Coronation Anthem' from 'Zadok the Priest'. The opening stringed theme had a good flow and gradually built until the full massed voices of the chorus came in. The effect was impactful and impressive, as it was meant to be, but there were the first signs of the complexity of the sound beginning to push the tolerance limits of this cartridge. The definition of the vocals lost a little focus as voices and orchestra swelled, and the violins had a slight forwardness that was acceptable but not entirely accurate.

A later excursion into some heavyweight Wagner confirmed my thought that the Vivo was happy with simpler classical music, but the requirements of a full orchestra and mixed chorus was a little outside its comfort zone. It was still very pleasant to listen to but not as satisfying as I would have liked it to be. Having said that, most cartridges at this price, whether MM or MC tend to struggle a little with complex classical music. The Vivo did better than most here. Tonally I think it did a generally good job, although the some of the trumpets, along with the violins, had a slight sharpness that more expensive designs negotiate more smoothly.

Interestingly, the synthesised

complexities of The Orb's 1991 LP 'Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld' held no terrors for the Vivo. The deep bass and obscure sound effects that litter this recording were negotiated easily and with a sophistication that belied the £275 asked for this cartridge. Sounds that were meant to float across the front of the soundstage did just that, whilst more impactful noises seemed to have a realistic slam behind them. The immersive sound staging of The Orb was well displayed, with the sound portraying a curious but inviting glimpse of a surreal space where familiar instruments, such as electric guitars, rubbed shoulders with some of the more outlandish creations of electronic keyboards. It was very enjoyable.

CONCLUSION

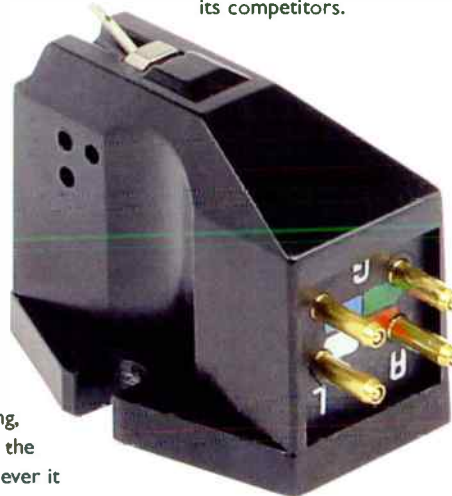
That is how I would sum up the Ortofon Vivo Blue - very enjoyable. Although I criticise it for losing a little grip with complex classical music, and falling into the trap of creating a confused ripple when dealing with the sound of an audience applauding, it maintained its grip on the musical essence of whatever it was playing.

I was impressed with the way it tracked older records, missing the surface noise potential in favour of focusing on the music in the grooves, which is something that a lot of cartridges at twice the price get wrong. Within its price point it handled all musical genres well, although if I played nothing but classical music I would consider spending a little more and buying further up the Ortofon range. However, as the second from the bottom of Ortofon's MC range, I felt that it offered very good performance and manners.

It is in direct competition with the *Hi-Fi World* favourite, the Goldring 1042 (which has risen in price from £99 in the late nineties to a cool £265 now). The Goldring offers

deeper and more seismic bass, but a less detailed and insightful midrange. The 1042 has the advantage of being an MM so being more phono stage tolerant, whereas the Vivo, being a low output MC will need a quiet, high gain phono stage to release its potential.

Other moving coils at this price point often seem to have an unfortunate tendency to try to show off with overly emphasised treble that I find wearing to listen to for any length of time. Here the Vivo scored. I found the sound refreshingly easy to listen to, with no fatigue inducing shrieks or shouting. It's a very creditable product that has the Ortofon family good manners and performs that bit better than most of its competitors.



VERDICT

Super new budget moving coil cartridge from respected Danish manufacturer; a real step up from previous efforts.

ORTOFON VIVO BLUE £275

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FOR

- smooth sound
- excellent timing
- detailed stereo image

AGAINST

- a little overawed by heavy choral and orchestral work

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The new Vivo has a relatively flat frequency response for a budget MC, a small lift above 10kHz of a few dB being just enough to ensure the balance isn't a dull one. As budget MCs go though the Vivo Blue will sound smooth and well balanced – and usefully free of the peaky treble that commonly afflicts this end of the market. Tracing loss on inner grooves was typical of good cartridges, amounting to -4dB at 20kHz (red trace). This will not make the sound dull but usefully reduces end of side distortion a little.

Tracking was good, if unexceptional. The Vivo cleared 60µm peak amplitude but wouldn't track the top level torture track of 90µm at 300Hz. The picture was the same in the midband, at 1kHz, where 16cms/sec velocity was just cleared, where others manage 20cms/sec and the best 25cms/sec. I used 2gms tracking force, the recommended maximum.

Distortion was low at 1% on lateral modulation and 3% on vertical modulation, mostly second harmonic. The latter figure reflects a measured vertical tracking angle of 26 degrees, just a little above optimum of 22 degrees.

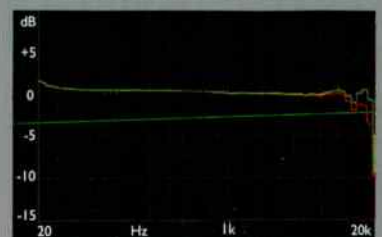
Output was a little low at 375µV at 3.54cms/sec or 524µV at 5cms/sec

rms. This is not so low as to be a problem with a reasonably quiet phono stage.

The Vivo measures tidily all round. As budget MCs go it will sound less bright than most; it needs a quiet phono stage. NK

Tracking force	1.6-2gms; 1.8gm optimum
Weight	9.2gms
Vertical tracking angle	26degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 20kHz
Channel separation	28dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	60µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	16cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	1%
vertical	3%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.5mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



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AMR 77 integrated amp titanium finish lightcased x dem	£395
Anakex monoblocks £2400 new	£3395
Ayre K-1 XE pre amplifier	£1195
Ayre K-5 XE Evolution pre amplifier with remote control and balanced facilities	£1195
American vintage power amp used in Abbey Road studio	£445
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Leak TL12+ rare hammered paint finish 1961	EPOA
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Naim MAC 145	£145
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Naim HiCap olive case work	£395
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Roksan Kandy 3 integrated amp black boxed as new	£395
Rotel RB850 power amp	£175
Rotel RC850 pre amp	£95
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Sugden Audion - P power amp	£295
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SPEAKERS

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ATC SCM Active 10 bookshelf speaker with stands	£1195
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KEF Coolest 3	£95
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Martin Logan Vantage latest spec with active bass unit mnt boxed rrp £5195	£2595
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Mission 775 boxed large floorstander with Aerogel drive units	£295
Mono Pulse 32A 8 months old ex dem	£495
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EAR 324 phono stage ex dem boxed	£2395
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SME 10 with tonearm with V	£3295
SME 3009 tonearm series II improved with phonoamps boxed	£225
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System Deck II biscuit tin model (SME mount)	£245
Technics SL1200 MKII	£245
Thorens TD166 MKII	£95
Thorens 125 MKII Turntable	£195
Trichord Dino phono stage 6mths old	£295

CD PLAYERS, OACS

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Show Time

Audio 11 at Heathrow's Park Inn hotel had around thirty exhibitors and attracted around 1,200 people over the weekend of 26th & 27th March 2011. It proved a lively event that threw up some interesting new products; here's just some of what Noel Keywood, David Price and Adam Smith saw...

Spotted in the Air Audio room was this breathtaking silver disc spinner. The Loit Passieri looks extremely promising with its superlative build and tube analogue output stage. It shared a stage with the Acoustic Signature Storm [reviewed on p100] and a range of Astin Trew electronics, sounding better than I've heard in previous shows. DP



A high end hard disk music server to compete with the likes of Naim and Linn, the QAT MS5 proved an intriguing looking product; we'll find out soon as one is winging its way to Hi-Fi World towers for an exclusive review! DP



Racing down a corridor at the end of the show, late on Sunday, I saw a blue luminescent glow radiating from a rank of turntables. Drawn in in puzzlement I was faced by large and complex acrylic and steel sculptures aimed at playing LPs, fitted with Rega and SME arms. This was Analogue Alchemy (www.analoguealchemy.com/index.html) based in Harrow, North London. And everyone was speaking Russian! Director Mark Proskourine was quick to explain that he had lived in London for twenty years and the turntables were entirely UK made, using top subcontractors involved in automotive and aero engineering industries. Audio 11 was the company's first show; with eye catching products and a novel pedigree Analogue Alchemy have a lot in front of them. NK



Media and music servers are popping up everywhere and UK based Bitperfect (www.bitperfect.co.uk/) were displaying a beautifully built unit designed in the UK and some interesting amps and DACs from Calyx Audio of South Korea (www.calyxaudio.com). As Calyx are OEM suppliers of digital processing chips there's potential here. NK

Howse Audio were using a lovely Revox B-710 dual-capstan cassette deck as a music source, and Music First Audio were using a large Akai open reel recorder in one room and this beautiful original unrestored Revox A-77 in the other. We've noticed a trend in the past few years, with a number of exhibitors resurrecting the joys of analogue tape. NK



UKD were showing two products that really caught my eye; first was the Pathos Endorphin, which is surely one of the most beautiful silver disc spinners ever made. Sadly I didn't get the chance to hear it but on looks alone it was a show stopper. Second was the reappearance of the long, lost Onix brand; it's not the very same company responsible for a range of great eighties black box electronics, but it's nice to see the name living on. DP



Music First Audio like to bake an audio-themed show cake – and this year it was to commemorate winning a World Award in 2010 for their magnetic preamplifier. Harry is holding the gastronomic delight here! We told Louise she was to hand it out to show visitors. That wiped the smile from her face! NK



A surprise new exhibitor to the show was JoSound, showing the JO 45/1 and the larger JO 45/3. Both loudspeakers feature Jordan Watts metal drive units and stunning cabinets fashioned from Chinese bamboo, in Swindon! The quality of the build was sublime, the looks striking and the sound interesting; watch out for a review here very soon. DP



Is this the ultimate Rega modded arm? It was spotted sitting in a wooden case in the Angelsound room and hails from Audiomods. Very little of the Rega RB250 upon which it is based is left it appears; the arm tube is perforated with holes to suppress high frequency standing waves, the arm pillar has been rebuilt and the bearing carrier looks new. Finish was superb. NK





Audio Note were showing items from the more affordable end of their model spectrum, with an analogue front end comprising the TT-Two turntable plus the ARM Two/II tonearm, which is the middle model in the new range. CDs were handled by the CD2.1x/II CD player through the fabulous Oto integrated amplifier and into the AZ-Two loudspeakers. As is nearly always the case with Audio Note demonstrations, the sound was dynamic, rhythmical and detailed over a huge range of music from soft classical to pounding dance. AS

Here's an amplifier I like – the Japanese Almarro 318b. It is Single Ended and uses the novel 6C33C Russian trawler valve, comprising parallel strapped triodes in one envelope. A Cold War device once used in transmitters, these days it sounds sweet and looks good in S.E. amplifiers, of which the Almarro is a great example. This was another gem in the Angelsound room. NK



It took Lou Hinkley of Daedalus Audio twenty hours to get to Heathrow from Ferndale WA (Washington State), just south of the USA's Canadian border. "I live between the Pacific ocean and the Cascades", a mountain park, he told me (and I was envious). Daedalus sell direct only and Lou had flown in to demo the DA-RMa, seen here. NK

No sooner had the ink dried on their Linn LP12 Vivid review, than we discovered the Inspire Hi-Fi Quest; a full blown Rega Planar 3 mods package. You can see for yourself the result; we hope to bring you a full review soon. Also, shown fitted to the deck was X100 tonearm, which is a complete suite of mods to the RB251 including a new carbon fibre arm tube. DP



Deco Audio put together a very interesting system and mated some most unexpected components together to superb effect. CDs were handled by a CEC transport through Audio Note DAC and into a Germán Silvercore Preamp One and Audion Black Shadow 845 power amps. Speakers were Audio Note AN-E HE Specials on Something Solid stands. Vinyl was handled by a Nottingham Analogue Dais turntable sporting the new Audio Note ARM one/II and I01 cartridge. The arm is a brand new design from Audio Note and comes in three variants with different wiring configurations. It is machined from a single block of aluminium and sounded superb. AS



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News

COMING SOON

▶ Audiolab are introducing a new tuner as part of its highly acclaimed 8200 series this Spring. Available in either silver or black finishes, it features both DAB and DAB+ along with FM and AM and is a perfect partner for the award-winning 8200 CD player and 8200 amplifier.

▶ Sendor adds two models to its range. The ultra-compact A3 floorstanding loudspeaker features advanced drive unit technology and cabinet engineering from the SA1 and A5 models. The two-way infinite baffle S3/SR2 is a standmount design and is said to deliver significant improvements over the original S3/S. Both models incorporate insulated gold plated terminals along with high linearity audio grade capacitors.



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MUSICAL FIDELITY V-LINK £99

The computer audio world reminds me of the microcomputer boom of the early eighties; for a while people used everyday consumer durables like portable televisions and cassette recorders to interface with their shiny new micros, to keep costs down. It's the same with hi-fi now; people are using their computers to do the job because buying bespoke devices (not that there are many available) is too expensive or inconvenient. The result is that large amounts of music has ended up on people's laptops or desktops, in varying formats, and is played out to the wider world in all sorts of nefarious ways!

The obvious point to make is that playing your computer music files via its built-in 3.5mm minijack audio or headphone output is absolutely the worst way of doing it; even your iPod will sound better. For this reason people are piping it out either via built-in digital outputs (such as those built in to the latest generation of Macs) or USB ports, to external DACs. This is a far better way to do it, and will sound 'hi-fi' at least.

But it doesn't stop there. First, using your computer's optical connection (if it's got one) should be better than standard USB, because lots of high frequency noise gets thrown out down the USB cable's electrical wires from your computer to your DAC. However, just to make life complex, there's now the option of Asynchronous USB on a few DACs, which lets the DAC control

the clocking of the data, which makes for a largely jitter-free connection. It still has the disadvantage of residual electrical noise, but unlike the optical connection you're no longer at the mercy of your computer's audio clock (which is bound to be poor, in audiophile terms)...

So which should audiophiles go for? The Musical Fidelity V-Link removes your dilemma; it connects to your computer via USB, controls the music data transfer asynchronously, and then outputs the datastream optically. In effect you can have your cake and eat it! There's also an electrical coaxial output, but why?

Well, sadly optical TOSLINK doesn't go up to 24/96 resolution, whereas electrical does. So you've got the choice; the V-Link will play your CD-quality music files (i.e. 16/44.1) asynchronously out from your computer, using its own high precision clock, and port out this very low jitter digital signal via noise-free optical. But if you're playing hi res 24/96 files (such as those downloadable from a number of music label websites, such as www.linnrecords.com) then you'll use the coax out. Either way, you're getting the music sent to the V-Link in a very stable way.

The device works superbly. There's a clear sonic improvement compared to porting the signal out via USB to a non-asynchronous Musical Fidelity V-DAC. Via my MacBook Pro, the V-Link feeding the V-DAC made for a smoother sound, with things in better focus, and a superior sense of ease and flow. It's not amazingly dramatic, but you'd take it every time.

Of course it's an extra box; you plug the V-Link into the computer (via USB) and the DAC into the V-Link, whereas before you could hook the V-DAC directly to the computer (via USB), but the additional £99 is easily justified. Obviously, for CD-quality files it's better to use the TOSLINK optical out from the V-Link, as it gives a slightly smoother and cleaner sound than coaxial, but hi res files sounded great via the coaxial.

The new V-Link joins the well established £180 V-DAC in Musical Fidelity's range; it's a complementary product along with the £120 V-PSU. The latter has three 12V DC outputs giving cleaner power to other V-series components, making for a noticeably clearer and smoother sound.

Overall, the new V-Link is a fine little tweaky product for computer audiophiles. Rather like using domestic cassette recorders and televisions for running your microcomputer, I suspect that in ten years when we're all massively networked up around the house products such as the V-Link will look as unnecessary as MiniDisc does today; it's very much a product of its time, designed to solve a particular problem for customers of today. It does precisely this, unlocking a very high quality digital music feed from your PC or Mac in an efficient and fuss-free way. It costs a mere £99; not so long ago, products with asynchronous USB functionality cost one hundred times that. Makes you think, doesn't it? **DP**

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Heed Audio DACtilus DAC BNIB	370	269	PenAudio Charm Sub modules x-demo	2175	1499
living Control Music Box 3 BNIB	2887	1499	PenAudio Serenade x-demo	7250	4999
living Control Room Box4 BNIB	1712	999	ProAc D18 Cherry Xdemo	2195	1850
Primare CD30.2 CD player S/H	1500	699	Sonus faber Cremona Elipsa Maple x-demo	12980	7999
Analogue					
Heed Audio Quasar MM/MC 2 box Phono stage x-demo	740	499	Apollo 80cm single column Stands S/H	149	99
Heed Audio Questar MM Phono stage BNIB	300	219	Cardas Cables Golden Cross 3m speaker cables	1999	999
Kuzma Stabi S/ Stogi S double arm version Xdemo	2795	1750	Electrocompaniet ECS1 M6 feet x4 BNIB	189	49
Kuzma Stogi Tonearm x-demo	1390	799	Jadis KT90 Valves x 4 BNIB	600	300
Mark Levinson No320s Phono Module x-demo	995	649	JPS Ultra Dual bi wire 2x8 Spades to banana S/H	549	279
Roksan TMS/Atremiz/DS5 Turntable S/H	N/A	2250	MIT Terminator II Biwire 2x10ft S/H	599	249
Preamplifiers					
Audio research LS16 MKII S/H	3189	1599	Nordost Heimdall 2x3.5m Speaker cable S/H	1500	899
Audolici AP01 preamplifier S/H	2100	999	Spectral MI-350 20ft interconnect S/H	2100	899
Conrad Johnson Classic Phono x-demo	2400	1750	Stereovox 2x2.5m HDXV speaker cable S/H	350	169
ECS Finestra Preamplifier Phono S/H	N/A	379	Stereovox HDVX 0.5M digital S/H	199	75
Krell KAV250p preamplifier S/H	2398	995	Synergistic Research AC master Coupler 5ft IEC-UK S/H	499	149
Quad 66 Preamplifier S/H	N/A	349	Transparent Balanced Reference 2x30ft x-demo	6345	3299
Amplifiers					
47 lab 50 Humpty PSU x-demo	1999	1199	Transparent Reference SC 2x10ft x-demo	6192	3199
47 lab 50 w Gain card x-demo	1999	1199	Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies		
Audio Technica AT-MA50 Mixing Amplifier S/H	399	149	Cyrus DAB 8.0 Tuner Silver S/H	600	379
Bel Canto eVo4 Poweramplifier S/H	3400	1649	Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	395	199
Chord Electronics SPM1400 B mono Integra S/H	12000	4299	Quad 66 Tuner S/H	N/A	229
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McCormack DNA125 power amplifier S/H	1999	995			
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Living Voice Avatar II Cherry S/H	3000	1499			
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SYSTEM 931S speakers £150. Tel: 01344 776 445 (Berks)

WANTED: SUGDEN Masterclass headphone amplifier HA4. Also Clearer Audio Silverline Optimus Reference XLR interconnect 0.75m or 1m. Tel: 01753 773 369

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SYSTEM 931S speakers £150. Tel: 01344 776 445 (Berks)

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1. Not everyone is honest - Buyer Beware!
2. Don't send cash!
3. Accept no verbal guarantees.
4. Have you heard the item or something similar? If not, why do you want it?
5. Don't pretend to have knowledge - it's your fingers that will get burnt!
6. Is it working? If not, why not? Can it be repaired and if so is it worth it?
7. Has it been modified and, if so, have notes been kept?
8. Was it any good in the first place?
9. Don't send cash!
10. If you are in the slightest doubt, arrange an audition (see point 5) If it's too far, wait for another time.
11. Either buy it or don't: vendors are excusably impatient with 'consultation' exercises.
12. Don't send cash!

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1. Not everyone is honest - Seller Beware!
2. Make no verbal guarantees.
3. Even 'nearly new' is still second-hand. If the manufacturer's guarantee is no longer in force, your price should reflect this.
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NEXT MONTH

Whilst you shouldn't bank on July's weather being hot, you can be sure that the next issue of Hi-Fi World will be a sizzler! From the brand new QAT digital music server [pictured] to Advanced Acoustics' retro-styled MAA402/MPP202 pre-power combination and Quad's fine little 11L Classic loudspeakers, we've got a whole lot of kit lined up to amuse you through the summer. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you:

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HAWKWIND SPACE RITUAL PART I & II BACK ON BLACK/EMI

"Hawkwind represented the very essence of the counterculture, and this album is an aural statement to that attitude..."

Back On Black (www.backonblack.com) has just released a whole host of vinyl from classic space rock outfit Hawkwind, from their early seventies EMI period. Issued on coloured vinyl, the complete reissue list includes 'Hawkwind' (the band's first album, issued in 1970 and reissued on blue vinyl); 'In Search Of Space', issued in 1971 and seen here on red vinyl; 'Doremi Fasol Latido', released in 1972 and produced here on grey vinyl; 'Space Ritual I' (a live piece that was released in 1973 and is seen here on blue vinyl; 'Space Ritual II' (continuing the live recording and also released originally in 1973 but also re-released on yellow vinyl plus 'Hall Of The Mountain Grill', which was released in 1974 and is seen here on yellow vinyl. You also have the option of purchasing the 'Masters Of The Universe' compilation which was issued in 1977 clear vinyl.

Hawkwind were – and still are – a phenomenon. Their sound is an amalgam. Taking heavy metal rock, combining that with psychedelia, prog and art rock, the band, which seemed to undergo line-up changes at the blink of an eye, and just as frequently, were just as much a visual feast as an aural one. Mixing synthesisers along with science fiction lyrics inspired by the legendary British novelist Michael Moorcock, the band took us to outer space in their songs as often as they took themselves there under a drug-fuelled haze. They looked strange, they dressed strangely and they even had a big breasted Amazonian vixen named Stacia who would dance

naked – except for daubed body paint – around the stage during the performance! Hawkwind were the sort of band that would have Agent Scully scratching his chin. They were also anti-establishment and wanted to stay clear of the record industry. For example, during the Isle Of Wight music festival in 1970, they famously entertained the crowds just outside the festival fences for five straight days...

As founder, guitarist and singer, Dave Brock declared to the NME in 1971, "If we had a little more money, I would like to turn the whole act into a kind of circus with a complete light show where we could give things away, papers and food, etc. Originally we just wanted to freak people out – now we're just interested in sound... We try to create an environment where people can lose their inhibitions. We also want to keep clear of the music business as much as possible – just play for the people. It's like a ship that has to steer around rocks, we have to steer round the industry. But I'd like us to go on 'Top Of The Pops'. It's so ridiculous – we could simply turn it into a party."

So imagine the album, 'Space Ritual' appearing amongst this fog of otherness. Especially as the album was recorded live during 1972 and released in 1973. People talked about the counterculture during the sixties but, for us Brits, Hawkwind represented the very essence of that philosophy and this album is an

aural statement to that attitude. A multimedia daydream, complete with poetry, the album is a space rock fantasy but tightly played by one of the most hardworking groups in the country at that time.

Well mastered and excellently presented, the record has been aurally cuddled and split into two parts via Back On Black's vinyl reissue to maintain sound quality. The engineer, Tim Turan, has not changed what's on the record, he's enhanced it, giving the music that's already present, a polish to modern audiophile expectations and standards.

The aural excellence of this Back On Black reissue is highlighted by the first thing you notice before you even get to the wax, the packaging. "The cover art was scanned and then redrawn," said Back On Black boss Steve Beatty. This has resulted in a cover that is even better than the original. "Well, we now have the technology to produce a much higher resolution cover than the original printers. We also decided to produce a cover with a matt look. I hate to see reissued LP covers with a gloss sheen, it gets covered in fingerprints in seconds." Which gives you an idea of how the label considers every aspect of the project before it's released.

This album promises a drug-less high, an inner space journey and it, along with the other Hawkwind reissues, should be offered to NASA as a Space Shuttle replacement. **PR**

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