

HI-FI WORLD

MARCH 2011

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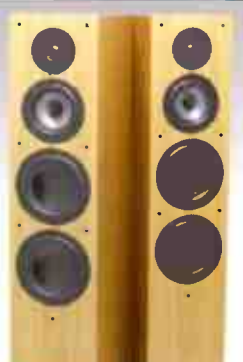
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SPENDOR A9 loudspeakers **EXCLUSIVE!**



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Hi-Fi News, U.K.

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Tone audio, U.S.A

"FIRST CLASS.."
Audio Review, Italy

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Hi-Fi+, U.K.

"...what I heard blew me away."
The Audiophile Voice, U.S.A.

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



Prologue1 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue2 40 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88



Prologue3 Dual Mono Valve Preamplifier



Prologue4 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue5 35 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue6 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue7 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with KT88



Prologue8 Valve CD Player



Dialogue1 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Dialogue2 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88

PrimaLuna

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

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

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



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verdicts

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



Any hobbyist who's experimented with making their own loudspeakers will tell you that getting the basics right is vital for superior sound. Keeping it simple with a couple of high quality drive units, rather than making a big box full of transducers with complex crossovers often yields the best results. In this sense, it's fair to say that 'less is more'...

That's why a small coaxial speaker with one drive unit close to the another for 'point source' imaging, set into a tiny, resonance-free cabinet, can work so well. Our review of Tannoy's Revolution DC4 [p69] shows how...

The same principle explains why valve amplifiers can sound more musical than solid-state. Using simple circuits with relatively few active electronic devices, they rely on quality transformers and wiring to give great sound. In contrast, transistor amps are more complex, with many more components and longer signal paths to sully the sound. Our classic Dynatron LS15 power amp review [p86] shows how keeping it simple is a timeless virtue.

One exception to this rule is Creek's new Destiny 2. This solid-state integrated amplifier sports a passive preamplifier stage that removes the need for extra circuitry in the signal path. This, plus other clever tricks, makes it one of the best solid-state integrateds we've heard. Read all about it on p50.

This issue's preamplifier supertest clearly shows how basic engineering directly affects performance. The MF Audio and Creek passive preamps tested are so good because they're so simple; the Icon Audio and PrimaLuna valve units add some valve warmth to the proceedings which some will love, while others will prefer the Cyrus and Electrocompaniet transistor designs that sound cleaner but less engaging. The action starts on p17.

In my view, the best maxim for hi-fi buyers is 'each to their own'; take a careful look at what you want from a product and buy accordingly. The great thing about hi-fi in 2011 is that there's so much to choose from; I hope *Hi-Fi World* helps you make sense of it all. Enjoy!

David Price, editor



testing

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

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

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

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



ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE
Go to our website www.hi-fiworld.co.uk to buy an electronic version of this magazine, individual issues, back issues or a subscription.

Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd 86 Newman Street London, W1T 3EX Tel: +44 (0) 20 7396 8000 Printed by St.Ives, Plymouth Tel: +44 (0) 1752 345 411
Our Agents in Malaysia Millennium Hi-Fi & AV Simon Chang Showroom & office, 500-1-3 First Floor Wisma Indah (Shen Court), Jalan Tun Razak 50400 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
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news

ABOUT TIME

Meridian Audio has two new products out, the DSP3200 Compact Digital Active Loudspeaker and the Audio Core 200 Stereo Audio Controller. The speakers are said to echo the lines of Meridian's flagship DSP8000, and are the most compact Meridian loudspeakers designed to date. They feature Meridian's Digital Signal Processing (DSP) technologies, said to deliver powerful, room-filling sound with the performance of a conventional system many times the size.

Meridian SpeakerLink connectivity makes connecting the DSP3200 to the Audio Core 200 easy, too. They feature a wide-range driver that allows the DSP crossover frequency to be outside the speech band, for "quality sound at high levels and for prolonged periods", the company says. It comes in high-gloss white and high-gloss black.

The Audio Core 200 Stereo Audio Controller is said to be perfect for bringing together all audio sources; it's a digital preamplifier with upsampling DAC. The Audio Core 200 connects easily to almost any audio source, including PC audio replay via USB. There is a Meridian SpeakerLink input for single-wire connection to a Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System. Fully compatible with Meridian's i80 Dock for iPod, the Audio Core 200 will play iPod/iPhone via Meridian DSP Loudspeakers while it charges, and control what you hear via the front panel or remote handset. Audio Core 200 is housed in a newly designed compact case and is finished as standard in high-gloss black or high-gloss white.

The Meridian Sooloos Media Core 200 is said to make the Meridian Sooloos experience even more accessible. It's said to be "an elegant, compact and virtually silent system that requires only the user's choice of controller to perform". It can be operated by any of the network-based control systems available, including the iPad or iPhone App, a computer running the Control PC or Control Mac application, or a Meridian Sooloos controller such as the Control 15 or Control 10. At the heart of the Media Source 200 is a 500GB hard drive, storing around 1,000 CD albums in lossless quality for graphical and touch-screen access. Prices are £3,750 for the DSP3200 loudspeakers, £1,500 for the Audio Core 200 Stereo Audio Controller and £2,000 for the Media Core 200.

For more details, click on www.meridian-audio.com.

Meridian MC200

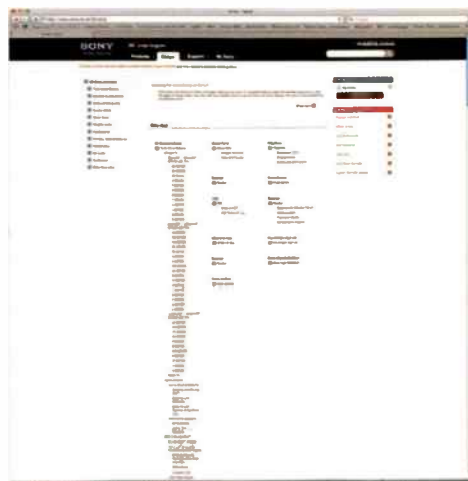


Meridian AC200/DSP3200



TUNING IN

Sony has launched a new streaming music subscription service which offers a different approach to digital music sales. 'Qriocity' is a cloud-based digital music service which uses streaming, rather than digital downloads. As such, the service is not available on portable devices, so users are limited to home computers currently. The service has launched in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and will launch in the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and New Zealand later in 2011. Music Unlimited lets users play music from a variety of Internet-connected Sony devices such as Bravia TVs, Blu-ray disc players, and the PlayStation 3 gaming console via a single ID log-in and wallet solution. For details, click on www.sony.co.uk/Qriocity.



NEW CONVERSION

The new (£1,250) PD 1 DAC from Electrocompaniet sports a PC/Mac USB input and remote control, making it ideal for the latest generation of computer sources, plus coaxial and TOSLink inputs for CD player,

Blu-ray and satellite compatibility. The remote control has the facility to select the source and adjust volume up and down, and start/stop your media player and jump to the next/previous song in your playlist. If you want to avoid cables or want to put your computer away from your stereo system you can add the optional Music Streamer. This box connects to the USB port of your computer and streams music to you PD 1 via radio link – no wireless network is needed, says Electrocompaniet. See www.electrocompaniet.no.



TWO PLUS TWO

The new Audience Clair Audient 2+2 is a new £3,950 standmounting loudspeaker that comes in a choice of Black Ash, Natural Teak and Wenge. It measures just 368mm high by 200mm wide by 260mm deep, and incorporates four proprietary Audience full-range A3-S drivers. Unique SSIT SweetSpace Imaging Technology means the drivers deliver exceptionally flat frequency response and eliminate the need for a separate woofer, tweeter, midrange driver and crossover network, the company says. The A3-S driver further features a large patented neodymium-magnet motor structure, voice coil and utilises a rigid lightweight anodised aluminium-magnesium alloy cone material. It is built using the company's custom-made mono crystal Auric internal wiring and highest-quality components. For more details, call +44 (0)1775 761880 or click on www.highendcable.co.uk.

NEW IMAGE

Klipsch's new entry-level S3 headphone is said to "bring Klipsch's signature sonic performance to an entirely new audience". The £39.99 phones come in a choice of graphite grey, red, pink and green finishes, have a standard 3.5mm headphone jack and a durable, tangle-resistant cable. The cable is also moulded into the plug for improved strain relief. These headphones have undergone extensive resistance and strength testing to ensure they stack up to virtually every real-world scenario, the company says. The package comes with three pairs of different-sized patented oval ear tips (med, large, small/med dual flange) and a carrying case. Unlike circular-shaped ear tips that put stress on the pressure points inside the ear, Klipsch's patented oval ear tips naturally fit the contours of your ear canals, providing comfortable long-term wear. These lightweight ear tips also offer superior noise isolation, blocking out almost all ambient noise and providing strong bass. For information, see www.klipsch.co.uk.



TENT-ATIVE APPROACH

HiFi Wigwam's Pie-Fi Show takes place on the 6th March, 2011, and is described as "quite simply an opportunity for visitors to listen to some of the best audio equipment ever assembled in the same place". From vintage valve classics to solid-state power-house setups, from vinyl to computer source, and from low-budget to no expense spared horns, bookshelf speakers and homemade electrostatics - just about every name from the world of hi-fi can be found in one of the sixty or so rooms. The event will be held at the spacious and luxurious Scalford Hall Hotel, Melton Rd, Scalford, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE14 4UB. Full details can be found at www.thehifishow.com.

ON THE MOVE

Avid HiFi Ltd has moved to new premises; their new address is Avid HiFi Ltd., Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE28 0LW. Their telephone number is +44(0)1480 869 900, email is www.avidhifi.co.uk.



THOUSANDS

Paradigm announce the MilleniaOne. Imported via Anthem AV Solutions, they can be used as left, right or centre speakers, and are said to "provide versatility in a compact form factor whilst maintaining a superb level of quality and performance", the company says. The MilleniaOne is designed in a compact (195x115x145mm) oval cabinet and ships with a small bookshelf stand, minimising its footprint; it comes in white or black gloss finishes. Paradigm's diecast aluminium enclosures provide superior rigidity while maintaining a thinner wall and acting as a heatsink for drivers and crossover components, it is claimed. The speaker uses an S-PAL tweeter dome with silver finish to match the cone and the tweeter motor employs neodymium magnets and extruded aluminium heatsinks. The speakers are sold either as a 2.0 left/right pair at £499, or as a MilleniaOne 5.0 system (including a horizontal centre speaker) for £1,249. Add-on the MilleniaSub subwoofer and you have a compact 5.1 home cinema system for less than £2,500. For more details, click on www.anthemavs.co.uk.

THE CONCEPT

Clearaudio have just introduced their new Concept MC cartridge, said to "provide the high level of performance for which Clearaudio moving coil cartridges are renowned, for the lowest ever cost". The £550 cartridge sports an aluminium magnesium alloy with ceramic surface layer, boron cantilever, OFC wound coils and a Micro Line Contact stylus. For details call Audio Reference UK Ltd. on +44(0) 1252 702705 or click on www.audioreference.co.uk.



ON AIR

Denon and Marantz have announced that, following the release of Apple iOS4.2, the AirPlay feature on some of their products is now active. This enables streaming of iTunes music libraries direct from a computer, as well as directly from an iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch, to multiple Marantz or Denon AirPlay-compatible products. These currently comprise the Melody Media (M-CR603) network mini system, the NA7004 network audio player/tuner, and the SR7005 A/V receiver and AV7005 A/V pre-amplifier. Denon are offering this as an optional upgrade to three existing Denon AV receivers = the AVR-4311, AVR-3311 and the company's 100th Anniversary Product Collection model AVR-A100 – through www.denon-upgrade.eu for €49. The new CEOL Network Music System will be supported henceforth. For more details, click on <http://airplay.marantz.eu/> or <http://airplay.denon-upgrade.eu/en/>.

JEZ'LL FIX IT

Jez Arkless, designer of the Alchemist Axiom and Maxim amplifiers, and co-conspirator on the 'The Alchemist' with Tim de Paravicini, now runs a comprehensive classic hi-fi service centre under the guise of Arkless Electronics. He does repairs, modifications and rebuilds "to classic hi-fi and some high end modern stuff", and can build one-off equipment too. He can be contacted on +44(0) 1670 530674, or click on www.arklesselectronics.com for details.

ACTIVE LIFE

The new £4,487 A215-M floorstanding active loudspeakers from Swiss-based PSI Audio are said to be the pro audio company's "first foray into the hi-fi market". They boast built-in Class G bi-amplification and are said to be "capable of providing a truly outstanding listening experience including a stunning bass response". They're available in a choice of Studio Red or black. This floorstanding monitor has been optimised for listening in a sitting or standing position and reproduces the sonic space with a remarkable precision. Claimed output power is 120W RMS, frequency response 36-23,000Hz (@ -6dB) and vital statistics are 1,660x1,110x250mm and 15.8kg. For more details, call +44 (0) 208 941 6547 or click on www.emerginguk.com.



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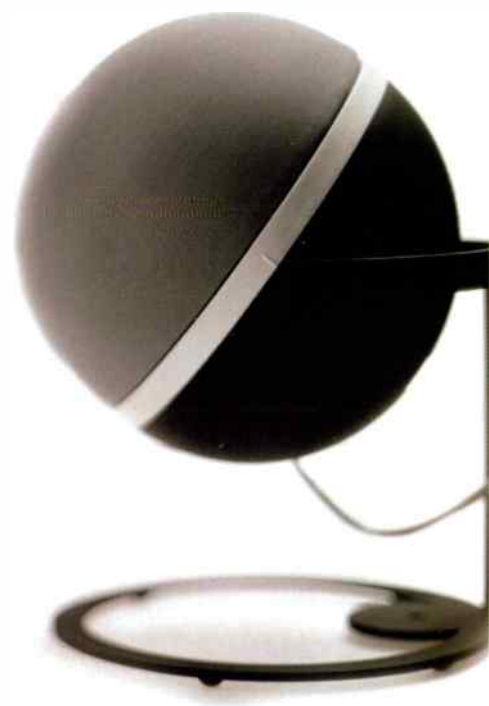
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TAKE OFF

Bowers & Wilkins has announced a significant upgrade to its highly successful Zeppelin; the new Air is described as "the ultimate AirPlay wireless audio system", and sports updated drive units, improved amplification and advanced Digital Signal Processing plus fully integrated AirPlay technology so users can easily stream music wirelessly from iTunes, iPhone, iPad or iPod touch. And "while Zeppelin's iconic shape has been retained, subtly updated styling helps modernise this design classic", says B&W. A fully active 2.1 design, the improved 4x25W plus 1x50W amplifiers power revised drive units, and the DACs have also been upgraded with 24bit/96kHz capability. AirPlay requires iTunes 10.1 or later and iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch with iOS 4.2 or later. Zeppelin Air is available from March 2011, and costs £499.99. For more details, click on www.bowers-wilkins.com.



SPEAK EASY

Launching at next month's Bristol hi-fi show, the new XTZ MH800 DSP is described as "an entirely new hi-fi concept", no less! A compact active digital speaker system, it uses patented Dirac HD Sound from Dirac Research which is in turn said to allow, "a totally new construction methodology". The digital signal processing is claimed to produce a frequency response of 40Hz to 20kHz within +/- 1dB. The speaker is a two way construction, equipped with advanced design drivers from Danish/American Tympany. The 3 inch aluminium driver is from Peerless, while there's a 5.25 inch is a long-throw down firing polypropylene woofer, vented through a slit port on the front of the speaker. The cabinet is a painted contemporary MDF design. The amplifier is enclosed in an aluminium cabinet and offers 2x40 Watts of Class D power. The Dirac Sound Processor software is specifically designed to run Dirac technology in real-time from a Windows or Mac computer, and does not require any additional hardware. It is said to work just like a sound card and is claimed to correct the sound image, increase vocal clarity and bass tightness, flatten the frequency response, optimise the impulse response and extend the frequency range. For more details, click on www.audiosanctum.co.uk.

FOUR ON THE FLOOR

Quadral's new Vulkan VIII is described as a three-way compression chamber, bass reflex, floorstanding loudspeaker which comprises a ribbon tweeter, plus Quadral's own patented 'ALTIMA' membrane midrange and woofer speakers of 170mm and 320mm respectively. These are housed in a pressure chamber for the delivery of contoured deep, clear and punchy bass, the company says. Inside, premium components are used, with 'Real Cable' for the inner wiring. Each speaker stands 1,260x290x500mm and comes in a choice of three natural wood finishes plus any one of 190 lacquered special colour finishes! For more details, call +44 (0)1785 748 446, or click on www.quadralgb-ie.co.uk.





Arc Light

Meridian's new G08.2 CD player brings serious style, sound and sonics for substantially less money than their acclaimed high end players, says David Price...

The MCD was Meridian's first ever Compact Disc player, audaciously launched as the world's first such specialist hi-fi machine back in 1984. I'm not sure if Philips and/or Marantz would agree, given that it was a lightly tuned CD100/CD63 (which was certainly no bad thing), but it nevertheless set the blueprint for CD player design during the eighties, and showed how careful attention to detail over a silver disc spinner's various subsystems (power supply, passive componentry, vibration damping, etc.) could yield real sonic rewards. Oh, and it looked great too...

It was, along with the subsequent MCD Pro, a compact and swish piece of kit with gently 'breathed on' styling from Meridian's Allen Boothroyd,

design director of Meridian and MD of Cambridge Product Design. He'd had a good few years, with everything from the bold Lecson range to the striking yet tiny 100 series of Meridian separates to the BBC Microcomputer, as arrows in his design bow. It was this striking industrial design, plus simple ergonomics and serious attention to sonics, that defined Meridian. And lo and behold, here we see it again, over a quarter of a century later with the G08.2...

By any standards, I think this is a beautiful product. Whereas I think Meridian rather lost their way for some of the last decade, with too much reliance on black plastic as a case material, here the company is back to its brilliant best. The 440x350x90mm 8.2 is hewn

largely from aluminium, smoothly but unfussily surfaced, with the company's trademark glass top. It's a solid piece of equipment, and weighs 8.5kg to prove it. The fascia is interesting, with a large multi-character dot-matrix vacuum fluorescent display. By today's standards – beautiful fine pitch OLED and all that – the Meridian's display looks a tad dated, but still it blends in nicely with the overall fascia design so it's not distractingly old hat; tech obsessed sixteen year old boys would doubtless call it 'old school' and believe it to be deliberately retro...

I like the way the control keys get their legends from the display *à la* F80, and also the soft blue backlighting behind the keys. I'm also a big fan of the slot loading drive, which is becoming increasingly



"with top-notch sonics, build and ergonomics, plus superlative styling, this machine seems a veritable bargain..."

popular of late; it's much nicer than having an (inevitably cheap) CD-ROM disc tray wobbling and grinding its way out to greet you. In use, the player as a whole feels slick and svelte, far more so than many similarly priced machines. As far as I'm concerned, the company is back at the front of the 'feel good' queue with the G08.2. Round the back it's also pretty slick, the Meridian is a veritable festival of socketry; optical and TOSLINK digital output, RCA phono and balanced XLR analogue outputs, an RS232 port (remember them, microcomputer fans?), Meridian Comms socketry and an IEC mains input.

Inside, the CD mechanism itself is securely mounted, and as per all ROM drives, is capable of spinning up to many times 'real time' speed to perform multiple high speed re-reads to ensure the best data capture; it's said to provide ten times the error correction of a conventional CD player. Then the onboard digital signal processor (said to work at up to 150 million instructions per second) upsamples the signal to 24bit, 176.4kHz for the onboard DACs and 88.2kHz for the digital outputs. The digital filter is a custom Meridian design with 'apodising-like'

qualities; this first appeared in the 808.2, the company says, and there's also a triple buffering system said to minimise jitter, plus a new design of high-stability clock. Multiple power supplies ensure that digital and analogue circuitry are kept apart and properly aspirated, and multi-layer boards are said to reduce system noise.

SOUND QUALITY

Every inch a modern, high quality CD player, the Meridian delivered a grand, spacious and poised performance with every disc it span. Central to its character is a very powerful bass, which doesn't sound overblown yet is not that far from it; there's absolutely no sensation that the Meridian is a thin, lightweight, weak-kneed contraption. Instead, it announces the G08.2's presence in the room and in the system in no uncertain terms. Fragile State's 'Every Day a Different Story' was a case in point, the washes and swirls of analogue synthesisers fluttering behind an extremely voluminous acoustic (as opposed to electronic) bass guitar which might as well have been a real instrument plugged into the auxiliary input of my amplifier, so strong was it! This underpinned a wide, capacious

soundstage that doesn't get much bigger via 16bit digital disc, and a busy upper mid and treble, bristling with detail. Happily, the Meridian managed to set all the various items in the mix neatly together with one another, all in their right places, in an utterly unforced way. It was this particular aspect of its sound – along with that vast bass – that really sets it apart from other similarly priced machines I've heard.

Staying with techno and moving to 4hero's 'Planetaria (Hefner Remix)', and it was again a chance to sample some beautiful bass, this time courtesy of real double bass, counterpointed by some deft snare drum work and cascading strings. The Meridian again showed itself as a major player, sounding suitably



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HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



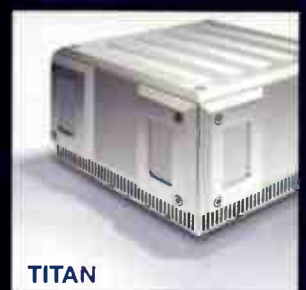
ORION



VISION



SIGMAS



TITAN

fulsome and confident, utterly in control and unfazed by the sinewy rhythm part. This, rather better recorded and less electronically processed track (with largely acoustic instruments, recorded back in 1997 on analogue tape) gave me a chance to get a handle on the GO8.2's tonality. I have to say I've found some Meridian electronics a little dry sounding at times, and it's certainly true that this machine doesn't give an overly rosy rendition of the recording, but if anything I'd say the 8.2 is slightly on the smooth side; without doubt it's not as clinical and thin as some Meridians we've heard in the previous decade. The superb detail rendition across the board means it's actually very good at capturing the unique tonal 'texture' of different instruments, going way beyond a perfunctory reading of what's on the disc. Again, this is the sort of thing that marks it out as a serious machine.

Stanley Clarke's '1,2, to the Bass' was a visceral delight; I heard this 2003 masterpiece in all its glory, the Meridian supplying a wonderful groove inside which the great man's low frequency histrionics were delivered with real authority. At the same time, Q-Tip's great vocal work was carried with excellent timing; all the things that people used to say about CD (and indeed still do) seemed to recede into irrelevance as this player let the music sing. Importantly, this isn't a player that itself sings; it doesn't euphonise, embellish or augment the original recording; rather I got the feeling of it very carefully, systematically and purposefully unlocking it; letting out for the wider world to hear. Thus the GO8.2 displays excellent timing, deep and brooding inter-transient silences and wonderful attack when the next snare hit is delivered. Dynamically too it was a complete success; unlike some higher end machines it doesn't assault you and try to take your head off, by emphasising rhythmic accents as if to make a point. Rather it just lets the proceedings flow, according things an appropriate volume in a calm and unforced yet musically expressive way.

Moving to some classic, slickly recorded late seventies rock music from Supertramp, and 'Take the Long Way Home' assuaged any doubts I had about the Meridian's top end. Earlier in the audition period I'd felt it just a tiny bit lively, shining slightly too bright a light on the proceedings. It turned out that running in and warming up was all it needed to smooth out; the mix on this album is quite topky (presumably mixed for

seventies Stateside FM radio) and yet the 8.2 wasn't falling over its feet. Rather, it remained smooth and clear, with vivid detailing to, and a pleasing atmosphere around, the soaring hi hat and harmonica work. I also enjoyed the richly resonant piano sound, dripping with harmonics (well, as much as it possible with 16bit) and coming over with real finesse.

Highly accomplished with electronic dance, jazz fusion and rock, I was intrigued to see how well the Meridian would perform with classical and it was here I got my biggest surprised. The superb Linn recording of Mozart's 'Symphony 29 in A major (Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Sir Charles Mackerras) showed how this player can really lock into what's going on deep down in the recording, and as such it responds brilliantly to this flawless production. The 8.2 was breathtaking here, providing an incredibly lifelike string tone, devoid of screech yet getting deep into the grain of the massed violins; you could hear the bows on the wires as easily as the players themselves, yet there was a massive, cavernous recorded acoustic inside which the vast physical presence of the orchestra was set. Superb in transcription terms, the Meridian didn't just stop there; it made the music flow with gusto, holding the listener a captive before them. Again, this combination of being terribly assured and calm yet passionate with it, proved a winning one, making well recorded classical music a pleasure.

CONCLUSION

An excellent all round performer, the Meridian GO8.2 is largely agnostic about the type of music you feed

it; it rejoices in pretty much every genre from techno to classical. It's very powerful and commanding by nature, yet incisive too, so listeners soon find how high it can fly with especially well recorded discs. Tonally it's excellent, with real finesse and delicacy, but it won't smother harsh recordings in a comfort blanket and isn't the machine you buy to calm a hard sounding system. Put it on the end of a well balanced set of mid or high price hi-fi separates though, and it's an unalloyed pleasure. So, with top-notch sonics, lovely build, fine ergonomics and superlative styling, this machine seems a veritable bargain even at its not inconsiderable price.



VERDICT ●●●●●
 Everyman's modern high end CD player; this stylish, well made Meridian has an extremely enjoyable yet refined and incisive sound.

MERIDIAN GO8.2 £2,400
 Meridian Audio Limited
 +44(0)1480 445678
 www.meridian-audio.co.uk

- FOR**
- commanding sound
 - midband clarity and ease
 - expansive soundstaging
 - design, ergonomics, build
- AGAINST**
- nothing at the price

REFERENCE SYSTEM:
 Marantz CD72 CD player
 dCS Debussy DAC
 Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier
 Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of this player was perfectly flat to 20.2kHz our convolved impulse response shows. This will give the Meridian absolutely accurate subjective tonal balance, but it will not soften out the sound of older CDs as some players do.

The balanced outputs give a high 5V output and the unbalanced phono sockets 2.5V, also quite high against the Philips standard of 2V. Distortion from both outputs was the same, measuring a low 0.018% at -60dB, a very low value. This resulted in a good EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 98dB.

Jitter was extremely low all round, with signal related jitter induced by a -60dB 1kHz tone measuring a miniscule 12pS, the random jitter noise floor just 5pS and low rate clock drift 25pS. These are all class leading figures.

The Meridian GO8.2 measured very well in every area and should give fine sound quality. NK

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Separation (1kHz) | 110dB |
| Noise (IEC A) | -114dB |
| Dynamic range | 98dB |
| Output | 5V / 2.5V |

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

DISTORTION

| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| THD 23456789 | Input RMS | Frequency |
| CH1 0.181299% | -60.01 dB | 1.00002 kHz |
| CH2 OFF | OFF | OFF |

Frequency response (-1dB)
 CD 2Hz - 20.2kHz

| | |
|------------|--------|
| Distortion | |
| 0dB | 0.001 |
| -6dB | 0.0007 |
| -60dB | 0.18 |
| -80dB | 2.8 |

AMPLIFICATION

Mark Levinson 380S pre-amp. Original packing, manual, remote, white gloves, unmarked. (£6795) Bargain at only £2795.

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

Unison Research Unico Primo. Months old, mint boxed. (£1167) £695.

Eastern Electric M520 mkII Integrated Amp. One owner, 8mths old, perfect. Original packing, manual, remote. Just won Hi-Fi News group test, and awarded Editors Choice. (£1995) only £995

Restek MPRE+ with MAMP monos. Ex-demo. Mint, boxed, 5yr warranty. Scored 85% in a very recent HiFi Choice review. (£3000) £1995

ASTIntrew AT2000 plus integrated. Black, stunning performance, originally supplied by us. Mint condition. (£1739) £1195

Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta Rev 2.0. Ex-display, mint, boxed with manual & metal remote. 5yr warranty. (£1449) bargain at £795

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

Bryston B4SST power amp. Excellent condition, in silver, one owner. (£3450) only £1650

Chord CPA 2200 Pre-amp. Boxed in silver, excellent condition. (£2917) £1150

McIntosh MA6500 Integrated amp. Boxed, excellent condition & reviews. (£4795) £2195

Boulder 865 integrated. Regarded as the best integrated amp you can buy. Costs new around £10000. Mint, one owner, original boxing. EPOA

Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp. 250 wpc. Black with wood side accents. Excellent condition, very recent service. Single ended, balanced inputs. Original packing. Rarely available used. (£3950) an opportunity at only £1395.

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

Deftec DPA50S power amp. With Deltech 500S 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, 5yr warranty. Stunning performance and reviews. (£2195) £1295.

DIGITAL

Audionet ART G2 CD player. One owner, 24mths old. Mint, boxed. (£3395) £1295

TEAC VRDS 10 SE. One owner, almost new. Original packing, full 12mth warranty. Rarer than a rare steak at the rare steakhouse £595

DCS Verdi Encore transport. DSD upsampling, excellent condition, warranty for new owner. Original packing and remote. (£10000) £2895

Benchmark DAC 1 HDR. One owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed. (£1821) a bargain at £1095.

Naim CDS with matching CDSPS. One owner, excellent condition, original boxes and packing. Stunning analogue performance. (£4500) £895

Bel Canto CD2. Mint, boxed, one owner. (£2700) £1495.

ASTIntrew AT3500 Plus CD player. Mint, black, supplied by us new. (£1525) £995

Densen B-410 CD player. Mint, Gizom remote (costs £175) one owner, black, great reviews. (£1295) £695

MBL 1621 CD Transport and 1611F D/A Converter. SOriginal flight cases, manuals and SFGB remote. Arguably the best combo available in the world today. Piano black & gold, some brassing and minor marks. (£35560) be quick at £12995.

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

Accustic Arts DAC 1 mkIV - 66 BIT 1536kHz d/a converter balanced output, stunning spec, mint, boxed, one owner. Great value. (£4500) £1795.

LOUDSPEAKERS

Penn Audio Charisma / Chara 2 box speakers. One owner, excellent condition. Stereophile most wanted award. (£7000) bargain at only £2495.

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QUALITY PRE-OWNED.

ART Stiletto Monitor speakers. One owner, cherry, excellent condition, original packing. (£1199) £495

Verity Rienzi speakers. Dark Makore, mint, ex-demo. (£8495) EPOA

Usher S-520 speakers. Birch, original packing, only 18mths old, as new. (£360) only £195.

Linn Klimax 320A speakers Cherry, v. rare, cost new £17000! One owner, excellent condition, matching Linn stands, original packing. Huge saving. £7495

ATC C4 Subwoofer. Active, one owner, months old, mint, boxed. (£2988) £1595.

Amphion Helium 520 speakers. Black, one owner, supplied by us. Excellent condition, few months old. (£1499) £795 be quick as these are virtually new.

Spendor S6e. Mint, cherry, one owner and only a few months old. (£1900rrp) £795

Klipsch Heresy III speakers. Walnut, one owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed, 99db efficient and a 5-globe HiFi World review! (£1798) £1195

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, customer upgraded, mint, original factory crates. (£10600 with stands) EPOA

Quad 11L2. High gloss cherry, ex-demo, mint condition. Boxed. (£376) £279.

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

Klipsch P-39f Palladium series. Ex-demo, one of best speakers you'll ever hear. (£14750) EPOA

ADAM Audio A.R.T. Pencil speakers. Cherry/dark silver, astonishing articulation, excellent condition, all original box and packing. (£3600) only £1795.

Audio Physic Virgo V. One owner, supplied by us, mint, 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 speakers. Maple, one owner, 6mths old, unmarked, original packing etc. (£2612) bargain at £1895.

ANALOGUE

Mitchell Iso MC Phono Stage. With Hera PSU, original packing, excellent. (£900) now only £295

LFD MCT Phonostage. Mint, one owner. Sensational performance only 18mths old, very low hours. £3400) so £2300 looks very tasty indeed!

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

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

MAINS CONDITIONING

Isotek Optimum 1.5m power lead. 2 available, excellent condition. (£275) £139

Isotek Substation. Excellent condition, 6 outlets, stunning performance. (£1100) £395

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

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

CABLES

Vertex Moncayo 4.1m speaker cable. Stunning, ex-demo, excellent condition. (£1560) EPOA

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

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

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

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.

Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links. Set of 4, 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module. Simply sensational. (£540) £395

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

ACCESSORIES

Sennheiser HD650 headphones. One owner, low hours, mint, has Russ Andrews Upgrade Jack cable. (£400 + £75 for cable) £195.

Grado GS1000i Statement Series Headphones. 13mths old, original packing & warranty card. As new. (£1100) be quick at £695.

MISC

Mission m7ds Surround VI speakers. Black, original packing and manual. Perfect condition, and absolutely fabulous bi-pole rear speakers with incredible dispersion. only £60

Pre Ordination

Tony Bolton tries a brace of the latest and greatest preamplifiers...

A modern preamplifier's task is simple; it should be a piece of wire, possibly with gain and hopefully with switching! In days gone by, preamps were often button festooned knob fests, with lots of circuitry between the input and the output, and usually a phono stage for good measure. How times have changed...

The sheer variety of approaches to designing preamps surveyed here is impressive, with four mains powered units, two of which being valve driven from PrimaLuna and Icon Audio, the other two being solid state, manufactured by Cyrus Audio and Electrocompaniet. There are two passive units. Of these, the Creek uses a potentiometer and the Music First, a stepped transformer to control the gain.

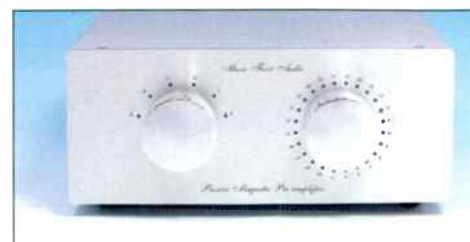
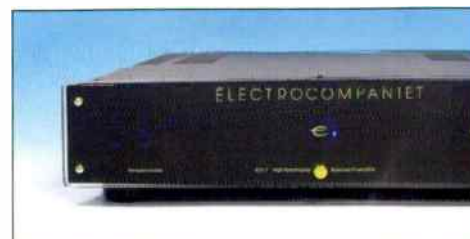
As well as a range of differing methodologies, these preamps also span vastly differing price points, with the cheapest being the Creek OBH-22 at £338, through to the Music First Audio Classic V2 Silver at £4,500 (including VAT at 20%). If a range such as this can't put the relative value for money of different designs into perspective, nothing can!

For the purposes of this test, each preamp was run in for fifty hours, then spent an evening being listened to on its own, before all of them were compared back to back using the same tracks. These included a 200 gram Classic Records re-pressing of 'Belafonte at Carnegie Hall', a 1958 Decca stereo recording of 'The Grand March' from Verdi's opera 'Aida', and the pulsating dance beats of Fats Waller and his Rhythm playing a cover of the track 'Dinah' in the mid thirties on an LP called 'The Vocal; Fats Waller'. Digital was represented by a CD called 'Arabesque' by Zouge 2. This is a fusion of Arabic influenced beats fused with laid back Western electronica.

Listening took place using a Clearaudio Master Solution/ Benz Micro Wood SL/ Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage combination, and the Leema Antilla CD player. Power amps included a pair of Icon Audio 845 valve monoblocks and a Leema Hydra II solid-stater, powering my Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers. Needless to say I also tried them all through my pair of Quad 303 solid-state power amps bi-amping my Kelly KT3s as well. Cabling for the latter was by Atlas Cables, and for the former system using my Philosophy Cables loom. Mains was fed through either an Isotek Titan or Isotek Sigmas.

THE CONTENDERS:

| MODEL | PRICE | RANK |
|----------------------------|--------|------|
| CREEK OBH-22 | £338 | 18 |
| ICON AUDIO LA4 | £799 | 19 |
| PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE 3 | £1,550 | 21 |
| CYRUS PRE-XP/PSX-R | £1,925 | 23 |
| ELECTROCOMPANIET EC4.7 | £1,950 | 24 |
| MF AUDIO CLASSIC V2 SILVER | £4,500 | 25 |





CREEK OBH-22 £338

The passive OBH-22 is relatively tiny, measuring a mere 150x100x66mm and weighing 610 grams. This polished alloy fronted, extruded aluminium box contains a 27mm Alps Blue Velvet motorised potentiometer alongside two gold plated relays for source switching and a muting relay that shorts the signal to ground when active. None of the relays are in the signal path. A micro controller decodes the infra-red signals from the SRC2 handset, and turns itself off after each operation to avoid any sonic degradation.

Power for this switchgear is provided by a plug in wall-transformer. Without it, volume can still be adjusted manually, but only the Line 1 input can be utilised. When power is present a green LED lights up over the appropriate input button. To the right of the volume control is the mute button. The back is packed with RCA phono sockets for the two line level inputs, the tape loop and the output, alongside the power input.

SOUND QUALITY

I started off with Zouge 2 and spent a pleasant seventy minutes immersed in an interesting mixture of sampled sounds and Middle Eastern wind and percussion instruments. The OBH-22 tackled the rhythms with zest and I found myself focusing on the complex patten of tabla and hand drum as they panned between the two speakers. The sonic image

was a reasonable size, although it didn't extend beyond the speaker boundaries. Neither did it extend forward very much, seeming to go backwards instead into a large and cavernous space.

This became more obvious when playing the 'Aida' piece. The stereo spread of the chorus seemed to extend away from me, with the orchestra in front but again I was aware of an open space between me and the front edge of the soundstage. The scale of the piece was portrayed, veering from the grandiloquence of the massed orchestra and choir, down to just the strings during the ballet sequence, but I felt that the

expected impact of the orchestra and chorus striking up again afterwards was a little muted.

I liked the Creek OBH-22. It offers practical facilities and remote control, allied to a detailed and easy flowing sound. Ultimately I felt that it erred on the side of good manners in its nature, sometimes leaving me wanting a little extra slam in the dynamic of the music. However, it offers great performance at the price in a practical package, and has set a high standard for the rest to match. There's very little that even comes close for the money, so if only minimal inputs are needed then many will surely choose this.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Testing revealed why we argue about this device and why opinions differ: it rolls off upper treble, heard as a slightly warm sound. At 20'clock of the volume control frequency response reaches just 15kHz (-1dB), quite a surprise. The reason is a high value potentiometer of 100k is used inside, allowing parallel capacitance to load the output at half volume, when output impedance is highest – a classic problem. At lower and higher volume settings the effect lessens.

Although high value resistors are noisy (Johnson noise) the OBH-22 produced a maximum of just 2.5uV (IEC A weighted) at half volume.

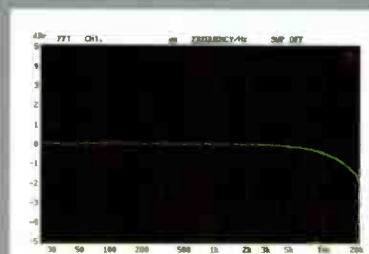
Separation was 80dB, distortion negligible (0.00007% but this is our Rohde & Schwarz analyser measuring itself) and overload does not exist. Gain was exactly x1, meaning no gain is available as is to be expected.

The OBH-22 has rolled down treble and this will give it a warm

sound, but the effect is volume control position dependent in degree. Our analysis shows the worst case result. NK

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Frequency response | 0Hz-15kHz |
| Separation | 80dB |
| Noise (e.i.n.) | 2.5µV |
| Distortion | 0.00007% |
| Gain | x1 (9dB) |
| Overload | none |

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT ●●●●●
Brilliant value entry level passive; a little flat and dry in absolute terms but amazingly capable at the price.

CREEK OBH-22 £338
Creek Audio Ltd.
+44(0) 1442 250146
www.creekaudio.com

FOR
- detailed, incisive sound
- fine rhythms
- size

AGAINST
- dynamically flat
- tonally dry



ICON AUDIO LA4 MKII £799

Leicester based Icon Audio have established a reputation for making affordable valve amplifiers for the past decade. The first LA4 introduced some five years ago was a solidly made all triode circuit design that includes valve rectification, using a Western Electric designed 274B, and the 6SN7 double triode for the amplification. This is the latest incarnation; housed in a robust 250x370x230mm alloy and steel chassis, it boasts an Alps Blue Pot motorised volume control, dual choke power supply, DC heater supply, what are described as 'audiophile' polypropylene audio capacitors (Jensens are available for another £200 over the £799 list price) and high quality 2W metal film and wire wound resistors.

The internal wiring is with silver Teflon coated cable, and the valve holders are ceramic. An optional acrylic valve cover is available for an extra £50. At the back, from left to right there are the gold plated RCA phono sockets for the line inputs, another pair for the tape loop and two pairs of outputs, to allow for bi-amping. The mains IEC input is on the far right.

SOUND QUALITY

I started again with the 'Arabesque' CD which, this time, felt a bit more lively and was driven along by some very deep and solid bass. It was not that the Creek was lacking in this department, but the LA4 delivered the same sound with considerably greater weight and

drive. The sound of the drums had a sensation of physical impact that was very convincing and that seemed to propel the music along with more energy than I'd heard previously...

Staying rhythmical I next played the Fats Waller LP. Waller was in all senses a larger than life character, and it shows through in the track 'Dinah', where he takes a fairly standard 1920s Foxtrot, swings it, and adds a rolling bass line on the piano to the already driving brass and drums. Through the LA4, the music romped along, capturing the effervescence of a performer who would party for three days, and then turn up at the RCA studios in New York, complete with retinue, and carry on the party whilst he cut records! The direct-to-disc nature of recordings of this

period seemed to carry through, with the sound seeming to be very immediate and accessible.

Staying live, but in a different sense, I next played the Belafonte LP. This is an example of just how good vinyl can actually be, with this preamp describing a spacious auditorium, pinpointing the singer centre stage, with the orchestra spread lower down to the sides and front. The audience response flowed across the room, adding to the feeling of involvement. Overall, the Icon Audio LA4 sounded excellent through all three of my power amps. It majored on musical flow, and attention to detail, creating a very convincing musical panorama. It's not the world's most detailed or transparent, but is great value considering what it can do.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The LA4 MkII has two gain settings: High gives x8 (18dB) gain and Low gives x4 (9dB). The latter is a common gain value for preamps, High being needed when a low output source like an external phono stage (there is no onboard phono stage) with low gain is used. With either gain setting distortion (2V in/1V out) was very low, measuring 0.0003% on Low and 0.004% on High, all second harmonic.

Like any good valve preamp the output swing was vast at 38V, making overload headroom enormous all round. Bandwidth was very wide too, the -1dB frequency response stretching from 2Hz - 200kHz, unaffected by volume control position. Input noise (A weighted) was 2.8µV at High and Low gain settings, or -91dB below a 100mV input signal - very low.

The LA4 MkII is nicely proportioned all round as a valve preamplifier.

It measures well and copes with most situations. NK

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Frequency response | 2Hz-200kHz |
| Separation | 77dB |
| Noise | -98dB |
| Distortion | 0.004% |
| Gain | x8(18dB) |
| Overload | 38V out |

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Well made, lucid sounding tube preamplifier offering great value for money.

ICON AUDIO LA4 £799

Icon Audio
+44(u) 1162 440593
www.iconaudio.co.uk

FOR

- open, musical sound.
- spacious soundstage
- deep bass

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

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PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE 3 £1,550

Established in 2003, Prima Luna are based in Holland and are the brain child of high-end distributor Herman van den Dungen. Along with designer Marcel Croese (previously with Goldmund) and Dominique Chenet (ex-Jadis), he has built up a range of amplifiers across two levels, of which the Prologue series are the less expensive. Despite this I could find no signs of poor quality in the finish or fit of components. The heavy gauge steel chassis was hand finished with five coats of a charcoal colour with odd metallic flecks in it. The front panel can be had in either this charcoal colour or in a silver finish. The casework measures 395x280x190mm and the complete unit weighs in at 12.7kg.

The circuit is a dual mono, non inverting design with no global feedback, fitted with 2x 12AX7s, 2x 12AU7s and 2x 5AR4 valves, the latter being the rectifiers. Volume is controlled by an Alps Blue Velvet Potentiometer. As with the LA4, ceramic valve sockets are specified, this time along with Nichicon, Solen and Swellong capacitors. The preamp is shipped ready to accept the optional onboard moving magnet, solid state, phono stage, which can be retrofitted at any time.

SOUND QUALITY

From the moment the needle hit the groove of 'Aida', I was aware that this was a very different beast to the Icon Audio. The sound had a darker

hue, being very richly textured and detailed. The performers seemed more rooted to the ground than they did with the LA4, accompanied by the powerful rumble and roar of the timpani which extended very low indeed. Whether there really was more bass output from this preamp than the LA4 I don't know, but the sensation, caused, I think by the darker and richer flavour of the sound, gave that impression.

Moving over to CD and the Prologue 3 disentangled the complex rhythms of 'Arabesque' and presented them for analysis. I felt that there was more colour in this sound than from the LA4, but less in the way of filigree detailing and shape. Turning to the Fats Waller LP and I came to the conclusion

that this preamp likes to show off recordings, and is prepared to flatter them a little. The energy in 'Dinah' was beautifully portrayed, but I felt that there was a little too much richness and perhaps a touch of voluptuousness in the sound, which, in a full bodied sounding system might prove too much.

Overall then the Prima Luna Prologue delivers a very good performance at its price, but will require a degree of careful auditioning and/or partnering: it's a warm sounding device for those who want precisely this. It's less neutral than the far cheaper Creek and Icon Audio preamps but doesn't comprehensively better them; rather it offers a different take on the music which some may prefer.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Prima Luna Prologue 3 measured flat across the audio band, an upper limit of 67kHz ensuring RF is not amplified. Gain was useful at x4 (12dB) maximum, but there is no phono stage and external stages will need to have quite high gain to work with this lowish maximum value, at least double the usual x100/x1000 values.

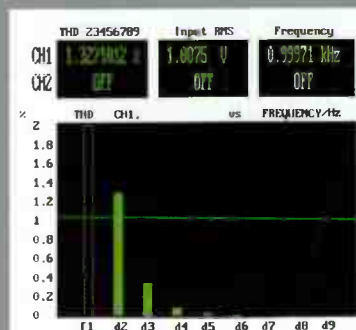
There was both input distortion (i.e. in the stages before the volume control) and output distortion (i.e. in the stages after the volume control), which leads to a complex distortion scenario, but with 2V in (e.g. from a CD player) and 1V out to a power amplifier, distortion measured a high 1.3% but comprised mainly second harmonic our analysis shows. This will not be obviously audible, as it takes a good 5% or more before timbre is lightened slightly, something that is very difficult to detect.

The Prologue 3 measured well

enough in all areas and should give a good sound. NK

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Frequency response | 2.5Hz-67kHz |
| Separation | 68dB |
| Noise | -98dB |
| Distortion | 1.3% |
| Gain | x4/12dB |
| Overload | 7V out |

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Dark and rich sounding valve preamplifier that's ideal for brighter power amplifiers and/or speakers.

PRIMA LUNA
PROLOGUE 3 £1,550
 Pistol Music
 +44(0) 20 8971 3909
 www.pistolmusic.co.uk

FOR

- smooth, solid sound
- large soundstage
- deep bass

AGAINST

- over full for some systems

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ADL

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CYRUS PRE-XP/PSX-R £1,925

The Pre-XP and PSX-R power supply are both housed in compact magnesium casework, diecast by Husquevana of Norway and measuring 73x215x360mm.

The preamp weighs 4kg and the PSX-R is 6kg. This power supply contains a 300VA toroidal transformer with 30,000 microfarad slotted foil reservoir capacitors. Plugged in via the attached chord, the PSX-R takes over supplying power to the audio circuits of the component that it's connected to. In this case, the twin transformers in the Pre then take on only switch-gear and display duties. The effect on the sound is very noticeable, with bass extending deeper and seeming faster, as well as the general levels of detail and separation improving.

The front panel of the Pre-XP features two buttons for scrolling up or down the input selection. There is also a button labelled Zone 2, and one marked Setup which accesses the menu to allow for equalising input levels, assigning names to inputs and adjusting the display. This covers information about source choice and volume setting. The Zone 2 setting operates a remote amplifier based in another room, but sharing the same source components.

SOUND QUALITY

Via the preamp's built-in DAC, with direct digital feeds from my MacBook, the results were very good and served to demonstrate the limitations of the DACs supplied in the

Mac. I also tried the Antilla CD player's DAC against the Cyrus's own, using the Antilla as a transport. The results were creditable but not up to the standard as the Leema – hardly surprising considering the price differential. However, if you are running an older or cheaper CD or DVD player this is a very sensible way of improving the sound without have to replace the player.

Moving to the analogue inputs and I settled down with a Harry Belafonte on LP. I particularly enjoy both the 'Jamaica Farewell' and his version of 'Danny Boy'. Both are slow, quiet numbers that focus on the vocals with minimal backing. Here they were taken apart and

displayed with superb levels of detail, but without some of the richness of emotion that the previous three preamps had managed. The sound was cooler, and less involving because of it; some may prefer this more dispassionate take on things, especially with over coloured ancillaries.

So here's a very well conceived, specified and made preamp, one that's designed for those with a multiplicity of sources, and quite complex systems. The Cyrus gives a very clean, straightforward sound that's polished and detailed but not the most romantic. If this blend of attributes is what you seek, this is an essential audition.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Cyrus is ultra wideband, its upper response limit extending past 200kHz. There is no band limiting, allowing RF breakthrough into the power amplifier. Gain was low at x2 (6dB), but each channel can be gain trimmed by +/-10dB (x3) giving a maximum gain of x6 (16dB).

Output overload was very low at 2.5V, just above the 1-2V needed by power amps for full output - barely satisfactory. Input noise was low at 4µV or -88dB below 100mV.

The preamp gave 2V output from its S/PDIF digital input, at full gain and from a full level input signal, enough to drive all power amps. Frequency response extended flat to 21.2kHz with a 44.1kHz (CD) input and distortion at -60dB was low at 0.2%, sinking to 0.08% with a 24bit input, so the digital converter is very linear.

The Cyrus measured well via analogue and digital inputs, so should give very good sound quality. NK

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Frequency response | 1Hz-200kHz |
| Separation | 89dB |
| Noise (e.i.n.) | 4µV |
| Distortion | 0.005% |
| Gain | x2/6dB (x6 max) |
| Overload | 2.5V out |
| Frequency response (-1dB) CD | 2Hz-21.2kHz |
| Distortion, 16bit (%) 0dB | 0.001 |
| -60dB | 0.2 |
| Noise (IEC A) | -99dB |
| Dynamic range | 97dB |

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●
Sleek and clean sounding compact preamp that's exceptionally versatile.

CYRUS PRE-XP/PSX-R £1,925
Cyrus Audio Ltd
+44 (0) 1480 435577
www.cyrus.co.uk

FOR
- detailed, pacey sound
- design, build, finish
- multiple inputs
- highly versatile

AGAINST
- too cerebral for some



ELECTROCOMPANIET EC4.7 £1,930

Established in Norway in 1973, Electrocompaniet make a wide range of premium electronics, and the EC4.7 preamp sits in the middle. It's a line level-only device offering six inputs, one of which can be in balanced XLR form. This is a big unit, measuring 483x410x115mm and weighing 8kg. The fascia is thick acrylic, into which are sunk four gold buttons controlling volume and source selection, the latter being displayed in a alphanumeric screen on the left. The volume position is noted by a blue light that travels in a circle around the gold E logo in the centre of the panel. These controls are also duplicated on the supplied remote control.

The back houses the array of phono sockets, plus a pair of balanced XLR inputs and outputs. Above the socketry there is a sliding switch to choose the required level of gain from the two settings. The pressed steel casework is finished in a crackle black paint that reminded me of the dashboard of an MGB sports car. It's neat enough but not as svelte as the Cyrus, for example. Internally there is a toroidal transformer and what is described as "a reservoir of capacitance far beyond necessary".

SOUND QUALITY

After the tonal richness of the Prima Luna and the rather cooler take on things from the Cyrus, I found yet another presentation of the music with the Electrocompaniet EC4.7, which I'd call lyrical and polished. Playing 'Aida' I found myself more occupied with the

melody and flow of the sound, rather than the high drama that the Prima Luna displayed. I would describe the sound as less impactful. There didn't seem to be quite as much bite on the crescendoes of music as the two valve amps managed, yet there was a sweetness to the sound that never let it be less than beguiling. It was never less than very nice to listen to.

Playing the Fats Waller track and I found myself noticing the detail of his fingering of the keys more than I had, but at the expense of a little of the perceived energy and power of the playing. Going over to CD and again I found it was the little bits of shape and detailing around the sounds that caught my ear, taking precedence again over the dynamic of the music. Little details such as the sound of hand bells being jingled, or the alteration of the shape of a drummer's hand as

it moved over the drum skin, were very clearly displayed. Such attention to detail meant that the stereo image was very well handled, with lots of shape displayed, yet still I'd have liked a little more solidity behind the sound, rather than the preamp seeming to focus just on delicate detailing. At times the performers felt a little too ethereal; not quite as substantial as I would have liked.

Overall this is a very capable conventionally sized preamplifier with a good range of inputs, and (for some) the all-important balanced operation; if the rest of your system can run balanced this is a real sonic benefit to have a balanced preamp. The Electrocompaniet is by nature a sweet sounding smoothie, just a little too soft, delicate and romantic for some perhaps, but a great many will love it all the same.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The EC 4.7 has two gain settings, 0dB or no gain, and +9dB or x2.8 gain. The latter is a fairly standard figure and will cope with most sources, being equivalent to a 357mV input sensitivity when feeding a 1V sensitive power amplifier. External phono stages will need healthy gain to match, around x200 for MM and ten times more for MC.

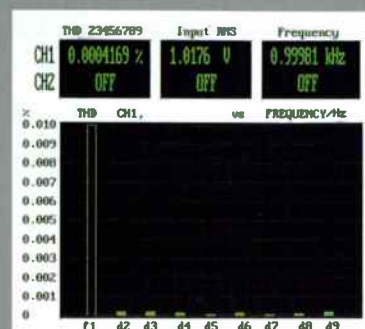
Input overload was higher than 10V and output swing 21V before overload, so there are no limitations here.

Frequency response was wide, stretching from 1.5Hz up to 90kHz within 1dB limits and distortion very low at 0.0005%. Input noise was 6µV (A weighted), or -84dB below a 100mV input signal.

The EC 4.7 measured well in every area and is likely to have fine sound quality. NK

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Frequency response | 1.5Hz-90kHz |
| Separation | 107dB |
| Noise (e.i.n.) | 6µV |
| Distortion | 0.0005% |
| Gain | x2.8 (9dB) |
| Overload | 21V out |

DISTORTION

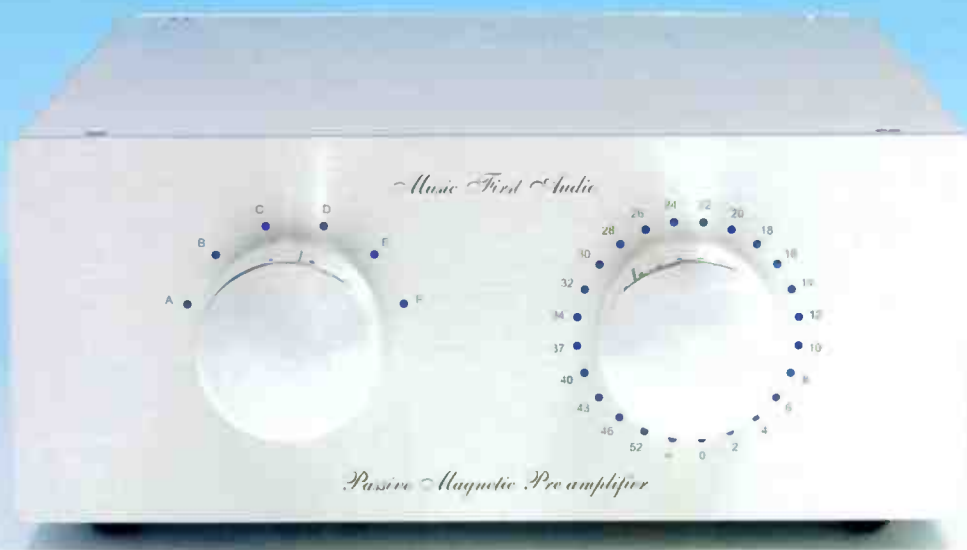


VERDICT ●●●●
 Versatile, fully balanced design with a very sophisticated and musical sound.

ELECTROCOMPANIET EC4.7
 £1,930
 Electrocompaniet
 +44(0) 20 8893 5835
 www.electrocompaniet.com

- FOR**
- highly detailed sound
 - polished presentation
 - musically involving
 - fine imaging
 - balanced operation

- AGAINST**
- prosaic finish



MF AUDIO CLASSIC v2 SILVER £4,500

First launched in 2003, the Classic preamplifier can be had in two forms. Either the copper wound variant for £2,200 plus VAT or the silver would version

here. The silver in question is in the windings of the transformer which is 99.99% pure; the V2 means this model is fitted with the newer, larger transformers. The casework is a handsome brushed aluminium case measuring 88x216x200mm.

On the front are two large rotary knobs, the left controls the volume via twenty four steps, and the right one, the source selection. At the back are four RCA unbalanced inputs and two XLR balanced ones; there is also a switch to change from 0 to +6dB of gain should you partner this with an insensitive power amplifier. The knobs use Swiss made Elma silver contact rotary switches, and more 99.99% pure silver cable with PTFE insulation is used for the internal wiring.

SOUND QUALITY

This time I started listening with the Belafonte LPs and the Music First seemed to live up to its name with the most gorgeously open and detailed soundstage of any of the units here. I felt that I was closer to the actual performance than I had been before, with singers and musicians firmly placed on the stage at the Carnegie Hall. The background was the quietest yet, with an inky blackness that still managed to create a perception of the size of the space lost in the darkness. Stage width was

impressive, although not quite the biggest that I have heard, that honour goes to the Modwright LS36.5 (with PS 36.5 power supply) that I reviewed in the May 2010 edition of this magazine.

Moving to 'Aida' and the level of detail that fell out of the speakers was impressive, as was the unforced way in which it was presented. Easy and effortless, the MF Audio just delivered music in a comprehensive manner that seemed just right; the sound was spacious, multilayered, with pinpoint precision in the placing of sounds in front of me, and had a tonal balance that was completely natural.

With 'Arabesque' via CD, I again found myself focusing on the inherent

rightness of the sound. Bells tinkled, drums thudded and pipes whistled and droned, each seemingly correct in its relationship with the sounds surrounding it. My listening notes got a little sketchy here, because I must confess that I got so involved in the music that I forgot the reason that I was listening in the first place. This is the biggest compliment that I could pay this machine; it is simply superb. Although very expensive, the Music First preamp takes sound reproduction to such a level of realism that the very high cost seems completely justified. Very expensive yes, but this preamplifier was added to the group to see what's possible when serious sums are invested.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Music First Audio preamp has a slight lift up in treble at high frequencies, peaking by a small +1dB at 35kHz, before rolling away to -3dB at 100kHz, when set to high gain. This flattened somewhat at half gain, but at all gains (or attenuations) response from 0.15Hz-20kHz was flat, except when feeding a load of less than 5k ohms, when treble started to roll down. As most inputs are 10k or more, this should be acceptable. Input impedances of 1kohms will be too low though.

Distortion was vanishingly low at all frequencies, right up to 10V output; the transformer is very linear, the worst case result being 10V in / 20V out at 40Hz, measuring 0.02%, second harmonic. But this is not a realistic situation.

Gain was exactly zero when set to 0dB and +6dB, x2, when set to +6dB. Noise was low enough at 22uV.

The Music First Audio preamp

measures very well in all areas. NK

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Frequency response | 0.15Hz-35kHz |
| Separation | 60dB |
| Noise (e.i.n.) | 22µV |
| Distortion | 0.0002% |
| Gain | x2/6dB |
| Overload | >10V out |

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Superb preamplifier that lets the rest of your system make hay. Clever transformer design gives balanced operation with gain. Expensive, but not over-priced for its performance.

MF AUDIO CLASSIC V2 SILVER £4,500
Music First Audio
(+44(0) 1424 858260
www.mfaudio.co.uk

FOR

- superbly clean and detailed
- excellent soundstaging
- shimmering treble
- balanced operation & gain

AGAINST

- price, sadly...

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September 8th, 2010
by Jason Kennedy
Source: HiFi+

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EVO

Happily, this group didn't have any nasty surprises; essentially we had a mixture of passive, active tube and active solid-state preamplifiers and they all justified their position in life. What they did to is to cater to quite different audiences, which I'll try to demonstrate as I run through each machine individually.

Given the wide variety of prices here, any order of merit has to be based both on sonics first and foremost, but with value a key consideration too. However, others might conclude differently if they place the emphasis more on size, build, upgradeability and flexibility; as ever it's ultimately down to each customer's individual requirements.

So, at number six in overall quality was the Creek OBH-22. This is not damning with faint praise, but rather a testament to the capabilities of this unassuming little box that it can stand comparison with preamps costing between twice and well over ten times as much. In terms of the sound per pound you get, this is the winner, as it gives an open, detailed and accessible sound without the muddle of so many cheap preamplifiers. For the price it is peerless, but in outright terms it is beaten by the other (more expensive) competitors...

Next up was the Electrocompaniet EC4.7. I enjoyed its delicacy and detailing; it's svelte, couth, subtle and musical in a way that few price rivals are and it has the benefit of balanced operation which brings a more solid and punchy sound. However, via RCA phonos I still wasn't entirely convinced about the substance of what I was listening to. If you generally play mellow melodic music then this will serve you well, but if you like a bit more passion and intensity in your sound you might do better to look to the fuller sounds of others here.

Coming from almost the opposite direction is the next runner up, the Cyrus Pre-XP and PSX-R combination. This is unbeatable in terms of facilities on offer and upgrades. I found the sound quite cool and even handed, but for my taste, a little too controlled. I like a bit of colour and fire in my sound, and whilst the Cyrus combination gave a very detailed and incisive rendition of whatever was played through it, I found that it didn't engage me emotionally as much as the next contender, which is....

The Prima Luna Prologue 3, which was all fire and intensity. Enjoyable but occasionally



MF Audio Silver Classic v2; capable of breathtaking sonics, and versatile too. Justifies its lofty price tag!

overpowering, the sound was deeply hued and very full bodied, but with a dark and slightly mysterious edge to it. If you imagine the voluptuousness of Nigella Lawson crossed with the gothic intensity of Morticia Adams and I think you have the sound of the Prologue 3! It was very enjoyable, with textures that you could run

This leaves the number one slot to go to the Music First Classic V2 Silver. In his review of this in the November 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World*, David Price felt that a purchaser would have to spend over £7,000 to better its performance, and I would totally agree with this. The sound of this passive transformer preamplifier

"huge sonic gains are possible by upgrading your preamp – think greater space, scale, depth, power and detail, plus more exuberant rhythms and dynamics..."

your fingers through, and sounds that had enough substance that you almost felt that you could eat them. However, I sensed that there was a slight tendency to over play things a little, and it seemed that a little honesty got lost in the process. This seemed a forgiving and somewhat flattering unit, which will make many friends, but proved just a little to full-bodied for my taste buds.

The second place winner is the Icon Audio LA4. Here I felt that the tonal balance was better maintained. Where there was colour on the sound, it was shown, but it wasn't as 'full-fat' as the Prima Luna had been, striking a more defined line between pace, shape and detail. Add in the fact that it is roughly half the price of the Prima Luna and it is something of an audiophile bargain. The substantial remote control is effective and the whole package is seemingly well put together and finished. Especially as it is the second cheapest unit under review here, it offers great sound, solid build and well thought out facilities.

was unerringly open, expansive, beautifully detailed and tight in its timing and imaging. Without going into the 'silly-money' price tags I can think of nothing around that can better it in overall performance. It's very expensive but in no way exorbitant, I feel.

There's a vast gulf between the high end MF Audio and the budget Creek (excellent as the former is at the price), showing that huge sonic gains are possible by upgrading your preamp if you're fortunate enough to have the funds. Think greater space, scale, depth, power, bass, midband and treble detail and atmosphere – plus more believable rhythms and dynamics. So each of these is very good in its own right and any potential purchaser should be pleased with their acquisition, but spending more money does buy better performance. It's down to you to decide how much better, and where this ties in with your desired tonal balance and the other things you're going to hook up to your preamplifier. **TB**

Ninth Wave

The brand new A9 is Spendor's latest high end speaker; Noel Keywood listens in...

Ah Spendor – Spencer and Dorothy! Long ago and far away from today's brutally commercial reality an ex-BBC engineer set out to produce a 'proper' loudspeaker, one that was pure and accurate. Spencer Hughes and his wife Dorothy put onto the market the BC1 and it got a great reception around the world. Today we choose to use Spendor S8e loudspeakers as our in-house 'benchmarks' against which other loudspeakers are judged – and they remain effective in this role after several long, hard years. So when Spendor's new A9s reached our offices recently I was eager to hear them.

Hailing from the BBC I don't think Spencer or Dorothy spent too much time listening to the Rolling Stones at that time; Spendor's were voiced for classical music and have had an easy demeanor ever since. Forget speedy bass, or that slight crack in the upper midband, Epos style, that gives an impression of speed. Searing treble? Not here please!

For these reasons people are commonly underwhelmed, even disappointed, by the sound of our S8es (we use them as 'benchmarks' not 'references'). And over the years it has become obvious that the S8es suit solid-state amplifiers with a high damping factor; they sound distinctly tubby with valves or Naims.

Conversely, they have proven to be a magic match for our in-house Musical Fidelity AMS50 amplifier; it holds their otherwise fulsome bass in an iron like grip whilst they act as a foil to the amplifiers dry, concise delivery, the final result being nothing other than impressive.

What I am identifying here is

the intrinsic sound of Spendor's ep38 polymer cone that is clean and well damped, adding not one jot to the sense of upper midband hardness that so many transistor amplifiers display. This is quite unlike metal cones, that can be unfortunate partners for some less svelte transistor amplifiers.

The A9 also uses the ep38 cone material, in the critical midrange unit, affecting vocals and string instruments in particular. The smaller A6 is in fact the successor to our S8es, similarly being a two way loudspeaker. The A9 is designed for better bass handling, having two 180mm Kevlar cone bass units compared to the single ep38 polymer 150mm cone of the bass/midrange unit in the A6. That's quite a lot of cone area and Philip Swift, MD of Spendor, explained to me that he had tried for a more controlled bass than that of earlier models (note: Philip founded Audiolab and designed the 8000A amplifier; read more in Wikipedia).

Cabinet size always helps when we're talking bass and the A9s are quite big, just nudging past the 1 metre height norm; they stand 1030mm high without spikes and 1050 with them. In keeping with their pedigree a range of elegant real wood cabinet veneers are offered and our samples came in a well patterned Light Oak. Construction quality and finish are good, if conventional.

Weighing 27kgs the A9s are movable without difficulty, although as usual spikes complicate the issue a bit and alternative rubber or PVC feet are not an option.

This is basically a reflex loudspeaker; a long slot port sits at the bottom of the cabinet's rear face, to load the bass units.





Connection is through sturdy WBT terminals that accept 4mm plugs, bare wires and spades connectors, but bi-wiring is not an option.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to the A9s quickly as delivered, and then after forty eight hours of running in with pink noise, showed they had settled and

smoothed nicely and needed little more. I gave them more all the same, another three nights in our listening room – being pummeled with Monitor Audio's surreal sounding De-Tox disc (gentle background noise with lots of plinks and plonks that vary in intensity over a long period – yes, I have listened to it all!).

The A9s remained stable in presentation over this second period and sounded right to me, unlike for example the B&W 804Ds I reviewed recently that sounded unhappy until run in for more than one hundred and twenty hours, whereupon they suddenly shone – the degree of difference being a shock!

This sort of experience complicates the review issue badly; when is a loudspeaker in a state that represents its final performance? I suspect modern synthetic materials need be worked long and hard to

on the 'Supernature' CD.

Spendor talk about the A9s sounding 'fast' – not a phrase Spencer or Dorothy would have used (merhinks! – and this they do). The easy clarity of the epJ8 polymer midrange unit gives vocals a naturalness that I love and strong treble seemingly lifts speed and incisiveness. Exactly where to draw the balance in this sort of trade off is an artistic decision made by the designer and Spendor's is heading into modernity, shall I say. Even within a gentle song like Eleanor McEvoy's 'Just for the Tourists' from 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' there was some obvious sibilance and in the opening of 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' the violin Eleanor plays so vigorously, as we saw and heard when she played live at the UK's 2010 Whittlebury Audio Show, had a shriek that was challenging – and unlike the real

"the A9 has a wonderful midband and some of the best bass you'll hear from a loudspeaker of this type..."

settle. Luckily, I know what Spendor's sound like, including the STs (April 2010 issue) and the A9s were working properly in the end I feel.

As always, the review was started with our Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A transistor amplifier, one of the few transistor amplifiers that sounds as if it is working properly. All the same, where the AMS50 was perfect with our S8es, offering redemption for their fulsome bass by holding it in a grip of steel, I did in the end drift away from the AMS50 to our Icon Audio MB845 MkII for good reason. Treble from the A9s could be a little astringent at times and the AMS50 did nothing to hide the fact. The MB845s, that with other loudspeakers I have described as "almost soft", helped lessen this effect. But even with the MB845 MkII's driving the A9s, damped ride cymbal hissed at me on Alison Goldfrapp's 'Fly Me Away'. This is an effect I remember from the ST and is Spendor's view of how treble should be balanced relative to all else – which for me is too obvious to result in total happiness. But Alison Goldfrapp's voice was clear as a bell, and even if a little sibilant at times, intensely detailed all the same. Raised treble sent forth waves of information and this gave the A9s a deeply insightful nature, synths rasping viciously in 'Koko' as Ms Goldfrapp went about her business

instrument. So treble quality wasn't this loudspeaker's particular area of excellence; I'd advise owners to use a nice, smooth, silky front end with the A9 for best results.

At this point it is time to talk about that rare property in modern loudspeakers – reproduction of timbre. It's here you have reason to 'think Spendor'. The midrange unit resolves timbre with a magnificence that did justice to the instrument in Nigel Kennedy's hands, giving it a lovely, full bodied character. When Nigel was not bowing the higher strings of his violin, the Spendor's sounded like few others, falling back to their roots with satisfying honesty. All in all, I found myself slowly drawn into Mr Kennedy's moving interpretation of Massenet's 'Meditation'. It would be churlish to say the A9s were anything other than excellent in the end, even if imperfect. But then, every loudspeaker is a whole host of compromises and whilst treble might be 'obvious', Spendor's midrange unit is nothing other than superb. Instruments in The Royal Philharmonic were convincingly differentiated by timbre in Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' for example, horns having a rich brassy, sound and a fruity rasp, violins having a nice, rich sound from the bodies, whilst timpany had weight and a good sense of dynamic contrast, placing a large and convincingly real orchestra

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in front of me.

The A9s have an almost dry quality, again much like the STs and unlike the S8es, and this worked well with classical. It also worked well elsewhere; they delivered vocals with a convincing sense of body and Jackie Leven's rich baritone delivery was nicely captured on 'Fairy Tales of Hard Men'. Every little vocal nuance was laid out in front of me on 'Desolation Blues', sudden vocal pushes from his tightly modulated delivery made obvious, bringing out the song's melancholia.

'Extremely Violent Man' entered with real bite to crashing guitar chords and whilst hand drums beat out a regular rhythmic pattern in the background Jackie's voice was clear and hard etched in the foreground, explaining "even my mother had to look away".

The sound stage was just a little in front of the loudspeakers and its boundaries just beyond them at either side, although this is to some extent a room function, affected by side wall reflections (ours are acoustically damped). With a gentle arc up and across between the loudspeakers the sound stage was seemingly open and expansive, locking Jackie's voice firmly at centre and quite high in front of me, always a nice effect since the singer hovers high, at what is a believable stage position.

Where Spendor have scored a

big hit with the A9 is bass quality. From a slightly smaller cabinet the A9s manage the same sort of expressiveness as Triangle's Antals I reviewed last month. They have obvious bass power and are as tight and controlled as anything on the market today. Interestingly, bass quality was identical with the high damping factor AMS50 transistor amplifier and the low damping factor MB845 valve amplifiers, suggesting they rely more on acoustic and magnetic damping within the loudspeaker itself than electrical damping presented by the amplifier. And that's good.

The A9s run low but keep the lows under good control so there's no waffle. This helped stabs of heavy synthesiser bass from 'Monster' push out firmly into our listening room, whilst Lady GaGa chimed out clearly centre stage. Always grippy, they beat out Led Zeppelin's 'Heartbreaker' with an insight I am unused to. It was breathtaking to hear those classic guitar riffs thrust out so clearly. Cymbal crashes were a little lively, but Bonham's drumming was perfectly captured.

It was with my usual bass test, the emphasised walking bass lines in Angelique Kidjo CDs, that the A9s were superb. They have no resonant lift, just an even delivery of bass notes across the scale from high right down to the lowest, with near perfect grip and power. The A9's bass is both powerful and fast. Lone strikes against a bass drum were strong, but not overly large, and the repeated low bass notes in 'Wombo Lombo' were handled with perfect control.

Spendor move up to the top of the league here; the A9s deliver bass that defines what is possible from a box of the size. I strongly suspect their bass drivers are very well proportioned for the task, because the lack of change in perceived bass quality between our amplifiers is unique to date and suggests better drive units than is common. Like the Antals, they had expressive bass, bass

that you could say had detail, rather than being a mellifluous outline description of what was being played. Also, bass was tight enough and in suitable proportion to all else to allow near-wall positioning in a room.

CONCLUSION

Spendor's new A9 is one impressive loudspeaker. It offers a more modern take on sound quality than Spencer or Dorothy would recognise, yet it still has a wonderful midband and some of the best bass you'll hear from a loudspeaker of the type. Spendor remain attuned to good engineering principles. Only the tweeter warrants remarking on, its lively nature meaning that buyers should make sure they've got a smooth front end and/or amplifier for best results. So the A9 is a very well developed loudspeaker with impressive ability, and proves well worth auditioning, whether you like Classical music like Spencer and Dorothy, or prefer Lady GaGa instead!

VERDICT

Highly accomplished large floorstander with a powerful, bracing sound. Use smooth sources for best results.

SPENDOR A9 £3,995

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FOR

- even sound balance
- tight, tuneful bass
- broad amplifier matching

AGAINST

- needs smooth front end

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our stepped sine frequency response analysis shows a smooth characteristic down to 300Hz, albeit with a lift around 10kHz sufficient to add brightness to the sound, when measuring between mid and tweeter. Measuring on the midrange axis, phase matching was insufficient to avoid a deep phase suckout appearing between mid and treble units.

A pink noise analysis carried out at various distances and heights showed the A9's bass extends down to subsonic frequencies, the port exciting a room mode at 24Hz for example. This is attributable to a peak in port output at 28Hz (see the red trace), the port providing bass below 70Hz, our red port trace shows. A pink noise analysis also suggested quite a light bass balance; this is not a bass heavy loudspeaker. But the subsonic peak will add 'heft'.

The impedance trace is impressively flat in basic trend, especially at low frequencies, meaning low reactance and even current draw from amplifiers, and this indicates good acoustic/magnetic damping and quite a tight or well controlled bass quality. There is no sign of under-damped boominess, or the lively bass quality this produces, and near wall placement may suit the A9. The 200mS decay spectrum was fairly clean, with some overhang at 280Hz and 80Hz.

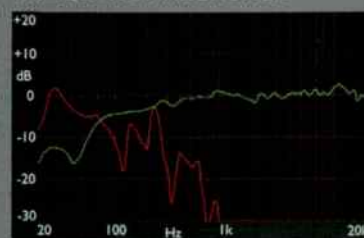
Sensitivity was reasonable at 87dB, if not as high as many modern floorstanders that reach 90dB. One reason is use of a 7 Ohm DCR bass unit, where most are 4 Ohms and draw more amplifier power. Overall impedance measured a high 8.6 Ohms as a result

and this is a true 8 Ohm loudspeaker, where most nowadays are 6 Ohms at most. Amplifiers of 40 Watts or more are needed.

Bass distortion below 80Hz was higher than usual from the drivers, rising to 7% at 40Hz, but unusually low from the port, around 1%, down to 25Hz; as the port does most work at low frequencies these results bode well. From 100Hz to 6kHz distortion hovered around 0.3%, a normal enough result.

The A9 has an even tonal balance it is likely to have an obvious subsonic kick, dry, well controlled and clean lower bass and an easy sounding midband, but some treble emphasis. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output

Red - port output

IMPEDANCE





On The Button

Teac's feature-festooned A-R650 amplifier promises a big bang for just a few bucks. Paul Rigby tries it for size.

Fans of true comedy will be familiar with one Anthony Aloysius St John Hancock, resident of 23 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam and the TV version of his highly successful radio series. Called simply, 'Hancock', it featured one of his best loved episodes called the 'Radio Ham' in which the lad was surrounded by boxes of complex amateur radio equipment, through which he would chat to fellow enthusiasts from around the world. The kit itself was full of switches and knobs, glowing dials and bits and bobs. If you look carefully, in scene two, when Hancock is in the middle of talking to a chap in Tokyo, just to the left of him on the desk, is a black box packed with dials. A busy, busy thing it is too; well, that's the Teac A-R650, that is...

Alright, it isn't. I was being facetious. But I ask you, take a look

at this new budget amp from the company and tell me what is the difference between it and one of Hancock's toys? This is so retro that when I connected it up to my reference system to allow it to run in over several days, I almost expected to hear Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky Mick & Tich warbling from my speakers...

Knob festooned it may be but it's also very well made, considering the low price. It has a fascia quality and finish that is typical of Japanese gear. As for that fascia, it comes with a gamut of facilities including a rotary source selector that, when turned, cycles through six sources including – despite what one popular hi-fi magazine declared during their review – a phono stage. Below the source selector is a brace of buttons to select one or two sets of attached speakers while, to the left, is a power and a standby button: a nice blend

of the eco-friendly and convenience. Especially, when many modern appliances only offer a standby button and most hi-fi equipment only provides a power button. Underneath that is a headphone socket.

To the right of the source selector is a Tape 2 button. Again, a nice addition that recognises us Luddite types who still use the little analogue treasures. What might cause a sprinkling of consternation among audiophiles is the inclusion of bass, treble, balance and loudness controls. Most are placed centrally, in full view, standing proudly. It's as if Teac has put them in that place as a dare to anyone to kick up a fuss about it. Okay, I'll bite; why are they there? They degrade the overall sound rather than add to it. As soon as you use the things they warp and malfom the sound that staggers its way to your ears and... yada, yada,



"a feisty, dynamic, forceful and spirited performer that's musical and fun to be around..."

yada. Well, I suppose the point is that it's a budget device and in the real world people whose lives aren't governed by audiophile considerations, will still find them useful. Fair enough, but I still don't like 'em! I'd advise future owners of this amplifier to ignore them. Then they might go away of their own accord.

Below the Four Knobs Of The Apocalypse is the punch line, Teac's elbow in the ribs, their way of shouting, "gotcha!" Because there, in a swathe of subtle irony, is a Source Direct button that, when depressed, ignores all of the fancy knobs and switches, including the bass/ treble/ balance and loudness, cutting through to the core of the amplifier itself and concentrating on sound only. So, that's all right then. Needless to say, during the listening tests, this button was depressed so that I wouldn't be.

Switching to the rear and we can see two banks of speaker connectors (popular in Europe, apparently) plus outputs for a turntable, tuner, CD player, a tape or a CD recorder bank plus a second tape loop. Remote control sockets are included if you wish to buy the matching Teac CD player and tuner. Weighing in at 9.2kg, the Teac spans a fairly compact (for a Japanese box) 435x142x355mm.

SOUND QUALITY

The best way of assessing any piece of hardware – high-end or budget – is first to feed it with the very best source possible, so it can show its true colours, untrammelled by boundaries. Hence, the jazz-infused 'It Could Happen To You' from Diana Krall's LP, 'From This Moment On' (Classic) was spun up on my reference Avid vinyl source. I initially tested the effectiveness of the Source Direct button. With it engaged, the Teac displayed more focus and detail around the vocal delivery while detail was more insightful and relaxed. The soundstage also magically transformed from two to three dimensions.

Generally however, the Teac did struggle to cope with the sheer amount of information that was being thrust upon it. My top end Avid turntable highlighted the Teac's slightly bright tonality, even via my valve-based phono preamplifier. Krall's vocal suffered from sibilance and, while bass was powerful and punchy, and upper mid frequencies were quite exciting via the extra bite applied to plucked strings, cymbals suffered from being too well lit.

Despite these initial problems, the Teac proved to be musical, lifting

the mood and adding 'swing', making you want to move and dance with the rhythm.

The decision was made, therefore, to 'downgrade' to a Project Essential turntable, priced at around £150. The Project's less detailed approach gave the Teac a way around those problem areas accentuated by the Avid deck. Vocal detail was reduced which eased the pressure on the wee amp to perform, while upper midrange information was less demanding, meaning that the Teac sounded less strained as it was asked to decrease its workload. So I'd recommend a competent budget turntable with the Teac, one which will still produce plenty of pleasure for analogue fans but not push this amp too hard. I'd also suggest running it into the amp's onboard phono stage.

As it transpired, my Icon Audio PS3 reference phono amp rather overwhelmed the Teac, causing it to sound strained. However, the Teac's own phono stage is quite perky and light on its feet for the price, keeping all areas of the soundstage in check and performing to an admirable standard. It's more than an afterthought, and suits the rest



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of the amp, and similarly priced ancillaries, well.

In keeping with the notion of the Teac cutting its cloth to suit its style I then dropped my Quad ESL-57s and, instead, hooked up a pair of Mordaunt-Short Aviano I speakers (£200). With these budget speakers installed, the Teac made more sense. Being better matched and more confident, the Teac seemed to relax. Yes, vinyl still had that Alka-Seltzer treble ('plink, plink, fizz') but the bass seemed more integrated with the mid frequencies, making their output more cohesive and coherent. Also, Krall's vocals benefitted from not being examined under such a strong Quad spotlight.

Moving to the digital domain, I played Jo Stafford's early fifties cut, 'Easy Come, Easy Go', via the JSP box set, 'Beyond the Stars'. The introduction of a lower resolution CD format helped the Teac immeasurably. The treble problems experienced in the vinyl chain were reduced. Yes, the upper mids were still well lit but the overall arrangement was far more civilised with no sibilance present. In fact, the lifted midrange actually helped to emphasise details in the mix, moving a finger here to point to that textured sax and there to the vocal grain on that vibrato.

Switching to rock and Kasabian's 'Shot The Runner' from the album, 'Empire' (Columbia) improved the response even more. Rock blended well with the Teac's penchant for revelry. In fact, with rock infused within its guts, the Teac was a very different machine indeed. Gone was the rather nervous, hesitant analogue transcriber, to be replaced by this confident, swaggering macho hulk. In the digital domain, rock freed the Teac, encouraging bass to bounce like a manic squash court player while midrange and treble – while hardly incisive – offered enough information to genuinely excite the ear. Treble sounded more comfortable, no tizzy fizzies were heard and the lifted mids sounded more natural.

Finally, the included headphone stage was tested,



sounding just as lively and happy as the Teac phono stage. Tested via a pair of Sennheiser HD650s, the headphone amp is well matched to the rest of the amp. Vinyl playback was relaxed and at ease with life while CD replay was lively, punchy and full of vigour.

CONCLUSION

The Teac A-R650 should not be viewed as a long term purchase for those looking to build a hi-fi with an ambitious upgrade path, as it's not happy when matched with higher-end equipment. In fact, it performs better with like minded elements in the same hi-fi price bracket. Given compatible equipment to work with however, the Teac is a feisty, dynamic, forceful and spirited performer that is musical and fun to be around. You can't say fairer than that; the

REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Avid Acutus turntable
 Pro-Ject Essential turntable
 SME IV tonearm
 Benz Glider cartridge
 Icon PS3 phono stage
 Mordaunt Short Aviano 1 loudspeakers
 Quad ESL-57 loudspeakers
 Cyrus CD8SE CD player

company has obviously voiced it to work well within its comfort zone, so when matched with good similarly priced ancillaries, it really impresses. It's only if you're looking for a budget priced high end wonder that you'll be disappointed. So I recommend careful auditioning to get the best out of it. When you do find those other boxes that 'click' with the Teac then break out the champers because you'll have a hell of a party.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The modestly sized A-R650 is massively powerful, producing 136 Watts into 8 Ohms and 210 Watts into 4 Ohms. Its heatsinks are fan cooled should this power be drawn, to prevent overheating because of their limited surface area. With a damping factor of 32, and a well extended low frequency response, bass should be strong.

Distortion levels were low after the heatsinks warmed up; thermal compensation seemed a little unsettled at times when cool. However, the circuits are well developed, as there was no high-order crossover distortion; from low to high power output at 10kHz the distortion pattern comprised second harmonic and a little third at high levels. As a result, the Teac should have a smooth, inoffensive treble quality. A maximum level of 0.08% (1W, 4 Ohms, 10kHz) is low.

The phono stage was accurately equalised and has mild subsonic filtering to suppress cone flap from disc warps. It introduced -10dB cut at 5Hz, but did not affect response above 20Hz - a nice compromise. With adequate sensitivity and overload, plus low noise results with MM cartridges will be good.

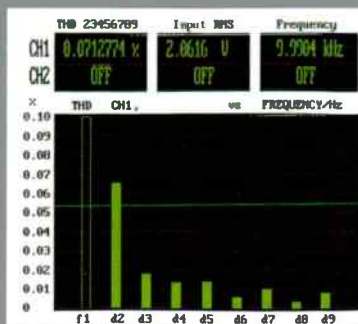
The tone controls were odd, the bass control possessing a massive

15dB of boost and cut, making its action very coarse. The treble control offered a more normal 10dB boost / cut at 10kHz. A bypass button removes these circuits from the signal path.

The A-R650 is powerful and measured well. Only the tone controls were a bit below par. NK

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Power | 136watts |
| CD/tuner/aux. | |
| Frequency response | 5Hz-45kHz |
| Separation | 76dB |
| Noise | -98dB |
| Distortion | 0.04% |
| Sensitivity | 290mV |
| Damping factor | 32 |

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●● £
 Inexpensive, versatile and well made budget amplifier that sports a punchy, engaging sound. Needs intelligent matching for smoothness, however.

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- FOR**
- build, facilities
 - feisty musicality
 - power
 - price
- AGAINST**
- dubious tone controls
 - needs careful matching



TEAC VRDS-10, a lovely, big sounding, 18bit behemoth.

401 in a very solid heavy plinth. This has a Jelco 250ST arm with a Grado cartridge. I also have a Trichord phono stage. The amplifier is Icon Audio Stereo 40 and 'speakers are Tannoy 15in Monitor Golds in Lancaster cabinets.

I also use a Leak Troughline 3 tuner. I have about 1500 LPs.

I have thought about changing my very cheap CD player and will buy secondhand. What would fit in with my system? I could pay up to £500 if it was worth it. I am not familiar with current CD players but I need one as I own about 300 CDs.

Please keep up the excellent articles on vintage hi-fi and I like to hear about other people's systems. regards

David Oxtoby

Hi David – well as ever you've so much choice if it's 'up to' £500! If it's 'very cheap', then look out for a good used Marantz CD52SE for around £70, which is a surprisingly smooth and open performer, albeit a little light in the bass. Moving up by £100 and the CD63 KI Signature is a great machine; still lovely after all these years. A big, smooth, open and unerringly musical sound. At this £150 pricepoint the Cambridge Audio CD4SE also appears; it's a John Westlake design and he tells me he's still surprised by how good it sounds. I bought one for my brother fifteen plus years ago and he still loves it. It's big hearted, bouncy and slick in the treble, considering it cost just £200 in the late nineties. Add another £100 or so and we're into TEAC VRDS-10 territory; lovely big sounding 18bit behemoths with the added bonus of still having user serviceable parts, at least the last time I checked! There's also the likes of Marantz's CD-72 at this price, which is another really well made machine with a wide, sweet sound. By the time you're getting up to £500-600 then look for modern machines now surplus to requirements; we'd suggest a three year old Astin Trew AT3500 is a really nice way to unload this sort of dosh. Hope this helps! **DP**

IMPEDANCE MATCHING

Today, I received the February 2011 edition of Hi-Fi World and as per usual, perused the Readers Classifieds, before proceeding to the Letters pages, which – as usual – were a mine of information and ideas, but which – again as usual – left me with more questions than answers as to my own system.

The first query regards impedance matching of my Quad 57 'speakers and WAD K5881 Mk2 power amp.

Since I acquired these items some years ago, the Quads have been connected to the WAD via the 8 Ohm connections, as that is how the amp was configured when I bought it. At various times since then I have read that the Quads needed to be connected to the 16 Ohm terminals; whereas, others say to the 8 Ohm terminals. Just recently, I have read that they should be connected to 4 Ohm terminals.

Naturally, this becomes confusing to those of us who don't have the electronic background, to fully understand these things.

Today, on Page 51 of Letters, under the item "Violins Etc. Part 3", Noel advises Peter Inghels of The Hague that he should connect his 6 Ohm Tannoys to the 4 Ohm terminals of a Quad valve amp, as they will cope with even the 1 Ohm of an electrostatic speaker.

Given that the 57s are regarded as a very difficult load to drive – apparently drawing anywhere between 2 and 32 Ohms – would it be appropriate for me to reconfigure my K5881 Mk2, connecting the output terminals to the 4 Ohm taps of the output transformers? If so, would this improve – or worsen – the upper or lower frequencies of the system? And how would it affect the volume, if at all? Getting the volume level right is a pain already, with about a 10 degree rotation from quiet – spoken word at same level as someone in the room – to too loud for my ancient ears.

Recently, I have been obliged – due to a fault in one of the 57s – to replace them with the KEF iQ30 speakers I won from Hi-Fi World in July 2009, for Letter of the Month. This has shown up the strengths and weaknesses of the Quads

– likewise, the KEFs – and has caused me much soul searching, as to my future system requirements.

Currently, I am planning on having the Quads completely rebuilt by One Thing Audio, having read various reviews in Hi-Fi World and other mags.

The reasoning behind this decision is that I live in a block of 50 year old Council Flats, with the resulting problems of lack of sound-proofing, due to the building regs in force post-WW2, so don't need the problems of excessive bass and the disturbance it causes my neighbours, especially if I am having a late-night session, i.e. Late Junction and World on 3, on Radio 3.

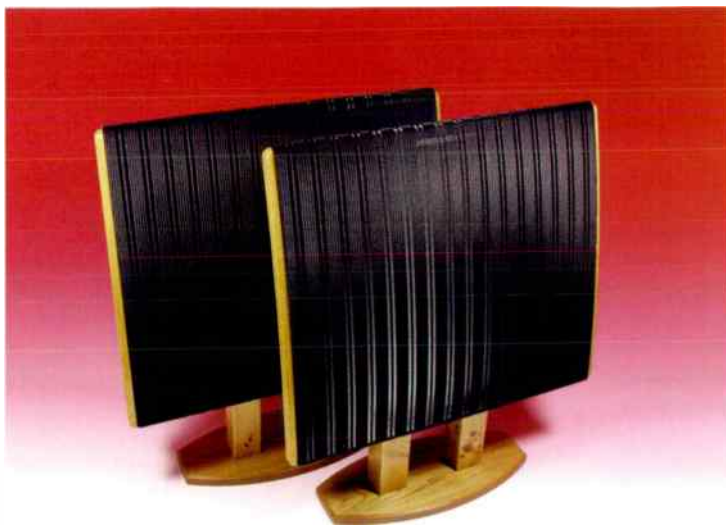
In addition, as a man of 62 years, I have become aware this past year, that I am loosing the top end of my hearing. This has been forcibly brought home to me by the use of the KEFs, as the bass frequencies somewhat dominate the music and I find myself having to turn up the volume, just to be able hear the treble frequencies, especially when listening to the Bach Brandenburg Concertos. Those Recordors just disappear into the mix. I'm considering bi-wiring them, just to see if it will improve matters.

As regards the front end of my system, my current turntable is a Thorens TD150, with a Rega RB300 arm and a new Goldring 1042 pickup. From what my ears tell me and from what I have read in Hi-Fi World, the Rega isn't a suitable arm for the Thorens, as it is clearly too heavy for the suspension. I haven't been able to get it to bounce properly, despite fitting – and removing again – Linn LP12 springs.

I also have a Denon DP 2000 Direct Drive turntable, which I was given two years ago, but which is still waiting to be used. In addition, I also have a Goldring GL75 – minus its arm – but the chassis has previously been butchered, by someone trying to fit another arm. Apart from a flat on the idler wheel, which induces wow, it appears to be in very good condition.

My problem is trying to decide whether to buy another arm for the Thorens – possibly a Jelco SA 750D, or Jelco 250ST, with a view to using a better cartridge – or building a chassis for the Denon DP2000 and sticking the Rega on that. I do know that the Denon runs absolutely spot-on, even with 180gm vinyl and the Rega 1042 in the groove.

Because my RB300 is now 16 years old, I have been trying to decide whether to have it overhauled and upgraded by Audio Origami, or to buy a Rega clone. Duo-Phonic are currently pushing the ISOKinetic ISO 700 and Rega ISOweight for 390 smackers. Obviously, I wouldn't consider putting it on the Thorens. Alternatively, the Michell Tecnoarm.



Send your ESL-57s to One Thing Audio to have them renovated/improved.

In your opinion, given the above decks, which would you choose – and if the Thorens, which of the Jelco arms, or can you think of a better arm for it?

Please note, that I am prepared to consider upgrading to a better turntable and arm, but not until I have had the Quads rebuilt, and as that isn't likely to be before Easter, the turntable upgrade will have to wait until much later in the year, due to my limited income – possibly even 2012. I retired seven years ago – on medical grounds – to care for my late father and am just about to start caring for my aged mother, so my finances are somewhat limited at this time.

Any thoughts you may have on the above will be very much appreciated.

Many thanks, once again, for your excellent magazine. Long may you prosper.

Cheers,

Russ Betts

Havant

Hants.

Hi Russ – firstly, I'm sure Noel will advise you on which taps are best to use for your ESL-57s. Let me say I think you're doing the right thing getting them 'One Thing'd'; the One Thing ESL-57s I lived with for several months were one of the best speakers I'd heard in a long time. Second, I'd be tempted to get the RB300 rebuilt; there's no point in buying another if you already have one. As you know I think Audio Origami do this superbly and so I'd send mine straight off. I'd also suggest the Denon as the better deck to use of your two, providing you're sure the Denon is perfectly healthy; some parts are no longer easily available, I am told. So, get the Denon re-plinthed and serviced (including a change of bearing oil, etc.), fit the AO RB300 and use a 'toppy' cartridge like an Audio Technica AT-OC9 moving

coil. This done you'll have a lovely front end with a lively balance that will suit your ears, and your speakers.

DP

As maximum power transfer is not an issue for you, technically at least using the 4 Ohm tap of the output transformer is best for a Quad, whose impedance drops to a few ohms at 20kHz. However, subjectively, you will not notice much of a change as this will only restore very high treble by a small amount. As a matter of course, when reviewing valve amps I listen to both 8 Ohm and 4 Ohm outputs and find there is surprisingly little difference between the two.

NK

VINYL TO CD

I have recently sold my beloved Linn LP12 turntable as I am shortly downsizing my property and wish to save on space taken up by my vinyl collection. I will be saying goodbye to the vinyl, but before I do so I would like to burn copies of the ones I have not bought on CD. My problem is that I am unsure of which way to go about this task as I would like decent sound but also ease of use, without breaking the bank. I have looked in a few shops and also seen ads for either Vinyl-usb, turntable-computer-

CD, Vinyl-turntable burn direct-CD, Vinyl-memory stick-computer-CD

I do not expect LPI2 quality as my budget would only be £250 maximum but I would appreciate your guidance on my best course of action. Thanks for a great mag.

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Smith
Sheffield**

You have two easy options open to you. One is to buy something like an M-Audio Mobile Pre USB (£110 approx), which will record a line level source into your computer, which you can then edit to your heart's content with the supplied software, or something like Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) which is freely downloadable from the internet. You can then burn this to CD on your computer's DVD-RW drive.

The other way of course is to buy a secondhand CD recorder. All of those late nineties models from Philips, Marantz and Pioneer gave very good sound quality (surprisingly so) in recording mode, but they're not ideal for playback; basically you'd need to record on them in 'real time' then play back the CD-R on a decent hi-fi CD player. This done, you'd get at least as good sonic results as if you'd gone by computer (probably better), but of course the editing/scratch removal possibilities are very limited compared to doing it on computer. **DP**

OPTIONS

I'm after some advice on upgrading my cartridge. I have, over the years, built up what I consider to be a very nice system. To me it sounds just the right combination of detail and tone and I enjoy listening to all formats.

My question is regarding cartridges. I have tried the Audio Technica OC9/III and this is just too bright for my tastes and I have also tried a Dynavector 10x4 which gives me a nice sound but is lacking in the detail I want to hear.

I am at present using a Goldring Eroica L cartridge which, to my ears,



The M-Audio Mobile Pre USB will record a line level source into your computer.



Audio Technica AT-33EV is an interesting mix of the AT-OC9's detail and incision, with a more benign tonality.

gives me the best sound from my VPI Scout and Trichord Diablo vinyl front end. The problem with this cartridge is that it makes my – shall we say – better quality vinyl sound good but makes my “getting on a bit” vinyl sound not it's best!

I do realise the old adage of garbage in/garbage out but I was wondering if you could suggest an alternative cartridge which would play my good vinyl well but not be too critical of my older vintage?

I have read your reviews of the Ortofon Rondo Bronze and the Benz Wood SL and both of these seem to fit the bill, but could you recommend any others? I would be quite happy with either MC or MM designs if they give me what I want.

Thanks for any help you can give me with this.

Andrew Burtchaell

I recommend the Ortofon Rondo Bronze for this, as it is mild mannered yet detailed. As you rightly observe, you need to steer clear of cartridges with a treble lift and this alone reduces your options. A Denon DL103 will also smooth things over and give a full bodied, easy sound that seems popular. Or there is even the new Ortofon Cadenza Mono, for an even smoother presentation, should your oldies be mono. **NK**

Hi Andrew – I think the Audio Technica AT-33EV (£450) is ideal for your purposes. It's an interesting mix of the AT-OC9's detail and incision, with a more benign and beguiling tonality and less upper treble lift. Whilst not exactly dull, it's certainly quite sweet, and suffers poor recordings far better than the forensic, unforgiving OC9. I believe there's been some positive discussion of them on the Timestep forum (www.time-step.net). **DP**

BETTER SPOTIFY

I'm looking to give my nephew a laptop, his first computer just for his own use, for a birthday present, in the

early part of next year. As he seems to be genuinely developing an interest in music of various sorts, I am reluctant to just hand this over with the built in speakers – and that's it. I know Spotify is useful and even an old codger like me can appreciate it (I guess) but having a competent sound is important. He knows about Spotify, and he also uses his father's old turntable a little to play his dad's old records, and he also has some CDs etc, etc, but he is also young and computers are really where he is going for sure.

I don't want to complicate this, but also I don't want to end up offering him a below par sound either.

I know nothing of computer music really, at the moment anyway, and while I don't want to spend a fortune, I am happy to spend what will make a serious difference, as I believe he will appreciate that. If he loses musical interest and takes up Quantum Mechanics instead, maybe his younger sister will inherit your words of wisdom.

Finally, simplicity must be the key. Over complication will probably not work for either of us.

Thanks guys,
Neil Porter

Hi Neil, well I'm not sure if you want me to recommend a computer as well as a computer sound system? I use an Apple MacBook Pro and find

that's a cut above the usual dire PC speakers. **DP**

BRENNAN

I came upon this web site <http://www.brennan.co.uk/> and saw this device that seems to be a good storage and easy functionality. I own a Quad 34 that seems to be compatible with this device. I would like to know your opinion about it and if it's really compatible with my Quad.

Thanks for your time,
Jos Carlos Elias

I've reviewed the Brennan for the Sunday Times, whilst Patrick Cleasby did it for this magazine, and we both agree that it's a decent bit of kit, but those used to specialist audio might find it wanting. It's certainly easy to use, and this is its real strength, but it's hampered by middling storage (by modern standards) and a limited number of playback formats; you're only really talking MP3 and WAV, so you can forget about FLAC and AAC, which I think are the two most important (and useful) formats around right now. Whilst fine in consumer audio terms, the Brennan isn't really hi-fi, and Quad owners will perhaps find it a little thin and two dimensional sounding, and a touch strident too. It's a decent little thing, but you'd probably outgrow it fast! **DP**



Brennan isn't quite up to Quad 34 standards of fidelity and does not handle AAC or FLAC, says David.

it brilliant for just about everything, including audio purposes, incidentally. Anyway, whatever computer you end up with, I take it you want a small compact active speaker system with serious sonics? If so, the B&W MM1 (£400) would be my recommendation. They're USB designs and have their own built in DAC, which means you're not at the mercy of the nasty one (that's likely to be) built into the computer. They have high quality two way drivers, and a decent amp, to give a fast, clean and delicate sound

CAN YOU HELP?

I am pretty sure all of my kit has received enthusiastic recommendations from you or your reviewers over the years, so I am hoping you can advise on where to go next. I have Spendor SP 9 speakers (with upgraded wiring), Tannoy Super Tweeters, Esoteric 01 D2 CD Player, Musical Fidelity KW 500, Nordost Red Dawn cabling throughout and IsoteK mains filter. Having built up the system carefully, I like all the kit and it all works very well on a Quadrespire stand in a solid room. However, while

clear and powerful it can all lack a bit of emotion and warmth. Any thoughts welcome on which component I might change to get more warmth and feeling into the sound.

I was wondering whether changing the KW 500 to something else might do the job or maybe I am just finding the limits of the CD format? Any suggestions that you have in a price range appropriate to the rest of the kit would be greatly appreciated.

Simon Hodgson
Bath
England

Whilst I like a lot of what Musical Fidelity does, I find the brand can be quite variable in its output. This is partly because Anthony Michaelson has a wide ranging, and somewhat eclectic set of proclivities; one minute he's trying to do sweet sounding things with tubes, the next it's massive transistor monoliths with more power than a JCB. With this in mind I never really warmed to the kW500. I was always impressed by it, sometimes even slightly scared by it (you don't want to play fast and loose with the volume control, lest your loudspeaker voice coils end up in your lap!), but I was never charmed by it. That's not something I can say about the Musical Fidelity AMS35i – which has a lot less power but a lot more life, and delicacy. The '35 won't turn your listening room into a live venue with sound pressure levels to match a PA, but it will still go plenty loud with your Spondors and offer so much more detail, atmosphere and general musicality. As such this would be my choice. **DP**

MY NEW SYSTEM

I've been dreaming for the past 25 years, dreaming about valves and something like a Linn LP12, so I decided it must be time now to have a really nice entry level system with the valve equipment coming from Icon Audio. I'm no expert in system building so I decided to speak to the editor from Hi-Fi world magazine where all my dreams began 25 years ago. David Price was on hand to help me but he did have concerns with the fact I was spending fifteen hundred on valves and only three-four hundred for something like a Pro-Ject turntable. His advice was to spend around a thousand on a turntable and the three-four hundred for an amplifier, but David understood I really wanted my dream valves and that I would probably upgrade to high end turntable some years down the line, therefore the advice was go for a Rega P 3-24 because it surpasses everything else in it's class, and fit an Audio Technica AT 95 cartridge to stay with

the entry level setup. I told David about my vast collection of CDs and what budget player should I look for, good advice again in the form of Cambridge Audio 650C.

So there you go folks, my new system is Rega P 3-24 turntable, Audio Technica AT 95 cartridge, Icon Audio PS 1 Mk II phono stage MM/MC with separate PSU, Icon Audio Stereo 25 Mk II KT88 integrated amplifier, Cambridge Audio 650C CD player, Royd Audio! Royd Eden loudspeakers.

Have you any advice on cables please?

Many thanks,
John Smee,
Pembrokeshire

Gosh John, I was expecting to hear that you didn't follow my advice and that in the end you bought an Amstrad music centre, and could I please suggest how to improve it! So many folk I advise seem to go off on a tangent but amazingly you haven't, so well done that man!

I do hope you upgrade your turntable fairly soon, but in the meantime you've got a fine front end and it's doubtless already making nice music. Add a pair of Black Rhodium Tango loudspeaker cables (£15/m), which will see you right for many future upgrades, and a pair of Rhythm interconnects (£50) which are a great match for your current good quality mid-price kit, and you'll be cooking on gas. **DP**

LOUDSPEAKER CONNECTORS

Please help my constant fiddling. Over the years I have gathered what I regard as some nice equipment which should be satisfying my ears, so I can just concentrate on listening to the music instead of amusing (I think!) my wife and my dog with my constant speaker placement and checking connections.

My system consists of LPI 2/Cirkus, latest Akito/Adikt, Lingo 1, Primaluna Prologue 2 (upgraded KT88s), Project Tubebox, Missions 752F (bi-wired), all connections are Van den Hul First Ultimate and 'speaker cable is VdH The Wind

I think my problem is with my speaker connections. When all connections are cleaned with Kontak the sound is beautiful, transparent and a joy to listen. But within a few days the sound goes off, so I start fiddling with speaker placement to re-gain that sweet

spot, as now the soundstage is all over the place. This is when listening to hi-fi gets most frustrating, and tiring. Eventually I re-clean the speaker connections and wipe the perspiration from my worried brow. I know that the speaker cables are terminated with very inexpensive plugs, care of Maplins, but they can sound fabulous...until they don't!

What would be a good compromise plug for the speaker terminations, and would these need



Add a pair of Black Rhodium Tango loudspeaker cables and you'll be cooking on gas, says David.

to be soldered professionally? After so many years would it be wise to replace the 'speaker posts on the Missions in case these are worn. If so, any thoughts with what?

I also read with great interest the replacement Tube review (Jan'10) and am considering the TJ Full Music 12AX7 as a suitable upgrade for the Primaluna. Would it also be a good investment to upgrade the 12AU7s from the same source, or other?

I want some stability in my hi-fi life, and just get back to the music, and to complete reading Hi-Fi World!

Many thanks,
Martin Trevers
Croxley Green



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|--|--|---|
| <p>WBT-Produkte</p> <p>Pole Terminals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » WBT-0705 Cu/Ag » WBT-0710 Cu/Ag » WBT-0710 Cu mC » WBT-0702 11 » WBT-0702 12 » WBT-0702 01 » WBT-0730 11 » WBT-0730 12 » WBT-0730 01 » WBT-0735 | <p>WBT-0702.12</p>  <p>Signature Pole Terminal Polished, platinum-plated</p> | <p>WBT-0702.12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Extremely high contact pressure thanks to fine thread and milled grooves » Pat. clamping mechanism for 4 mm banana plugs » Solder or crimp connection with Torx screw » Direct platinum plating (nickel-free) » Max. constant current 100 A » Twist-proof mounting » Puzzle plate system <p><small>Enlarge product view</small></p> |
|--|--|---|

A top quality source of connectors is WBT of Germany.

Hi Martin. That is a fascinating problem, one I have never heard before. However, I well remember one reviewer who insisted on using old 30A round pin plugs that he

polished with Kontak regularly, plus all other connectors and swore by the process. A top quality source of connectors is WBT of Germany and you can buy them from www.hificables.co.uk, to name but one source. You will have to resort to a bit of DIY butchery if you wish to replace the Mission's terminals. An alternative is to hard wire this connection, by either soldering direct to the terminal posts or to the crossover inside the cabinet.

Better yet again is to remove the crossover from the cabinet altogether and lead drive unit wires straight out to it. We tend to put the crossover in a plastic case, as there are strong magnetic fields around the bass inductors. You can then either solder cables to it direct or use high quality WBT connectors.

TJ Full Music valves have a good reputation, as do NOS of various manufacturers, especially Mullard and Philips. Also, cryogenically treated valves are interestingly purer in sound. **NK**

MB845 Mk2s AND BENZ WOOD CARTRIDGE

With reference to the MB845 Mk2s. I found that triple shielded interconnects like the Cambridge Audio 70 efforts are almost totally silent. I think it's the big expensive transformers. Like anything expensive (and big), they tend to be noisy, and these monsters are no exception. I tried all kinds of interconnects, mainly expensive, and came down to these Cambridge Audios.

Will you thank Tony Bolton for his review of the Benz Wood cartridge. I ordered one straight away on the review and it sounds fantastic: I don't like glopping around the countryside auditioning hi-fi when I don't know about the ancillary equipment such as noise limiting devices. I'd much rather stay home and let you geniuses figure it out.

Anyway, the cartridge turned up the following day, without payment, the cheque having crossed in the post. That man is really trusting. He rang me up the same day and asked me if I liked it. I was deeply touched – thanks for recommending them. have a great time
Best wishes,

James & Cath Gould

NORTHERN IRELAND HI-FI SHOW

Hello to all at Hi-Fi World. Just thought I would drop you an e-mail to say that the above event was great. It has been over ten years since the last hi-fi show in Northern Ireland and I think this one was better. There was 35 stalls over three rooms, including Krons, Lyric, Living Space and of course Paul and Matt

from Diverse Vinyl with plenty of vinyl to sell. On Saturday the 6th after 12 noon, Eleanor McEvoy popped in to sign copies of her new album 'I'd Rather Go Blonde'.

David, didn't you interview her for the December issue of Hi Fi World? I found her to be very charming, a real nice lady. I got my copy signed of course.

Anyway, back to the show. There was plenty of hi-end gear to drool over, some of which had never been shown in the UK before.

I was disappointed that you could not come over to give your backing to a great weekend. I came away £200 plus lighter but a very happy vinyl person. Anyway, I hope this event was a success and that it will not be another 10 years until the next one. It really was a great weekend.

All the best,
Andy

Hi Andy, yes I did interview Eleanor and found her as charming as you did. Thanks for an upbeat report of the Northern Ireland show; we'll try and make it over to the next one! **DP**

OLDE WORLDE V NEW ORDER

As a lover of hi-fi for many years I finally stopped changing gears due to fact that I completed a system which suits my musical tastes, sound and environment. It consists of Yamaha NS-690 II loudspeakers, Aragon 24k+ips AV preamp/2004 II power amp, Sony CDP-XA50es CD player moded, Thorens I 45 turntable VdH moded, various hi-end cables and accessories.

My question to you is can retro hi-fi be in real terms comparable with new one? So if I may suggest that you in your Olde Worlde column test similarly priced systems from £70 or £80 and some newer ones, so we will see are only design has been changed or we are



Benz Micro Wood "sounds fantastic", so thanks to Tony Bolton.

missing something?

Anyway your magazine stands out from crowd. Please keep going.

Best regards

Goran Obrad

Hi Goran – if you've read us over the years you'll know we've done a lot of classic reviews, and even sometimes slipped classic kit into modern group tests! You'll also know that we all use a combination new and classic kit in our reference systems; Noel the Garrard 401 turntable and me the Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers, for example. As for Tony Bolton's system, well I struggle to find anything modern in it at all sometimes! Of course, some classic hi-fi is superb, and absolutely up to par (or indeed better) than the best of what is available now. But it depends on what it is; for example, turntables have moved on apace in the past twenty five years but CD players have only improved significantly relatively recently, and still the difference is less pronounced.



Eleanor McEvoy – charming and talented, says David.

Cartridges are generally far better than of yore but most top modern loudspeakers aren't substantially better if at all; in fact they're just different. One thing's for sure, though. Budget hi-fi is far superior than the entry level stuff of yesteryear; there's never been a better time to buy your first system, I'd wager. **DP**

PRO AUDIO & HI-FI

The review of the Weiss DAC in your December issue prompted me to write to you. For many years I have enjoyed music using a whole range of hi-fi equipment. As I became better paid I took pleasure in assembling systems with loops of ever thicker cable in an effort to hear music as I thought I wanted to hear it.

Naturally, I have had some good pieces and some less convincing ones but I think my recent experience of pro-audio has made me question some of the apparent barriers in the two worlds. I carried out research online about pro-audio before becoming involved and in particular I was interested in studio monitors. I have always used stand mounted speakers, as to me they offer the best compromise of accuracy, size and clarity and avoid monoliths in the lounge.

Studio monitors come in all sizes but most are the same size as lounge friendly stand mounts. Some forums were describing studio monitors as rather cold, clinically detailed and fatiguing to listen to. I felt I needed to let my ears decide.

I am lucky to own two of Audio Aero's fabulous Capitole CD players; an earlier Mk 1 24/192 and a current Capitole Reference. Both have an excellent valve pre output although to use studio monitors all anyone would need is a pre-amp with XLR out.

I demonstrated the older Audio Aero with a number of studio monitors including Focal, PMC and Adam. The pro-audio centre was not used to seeing a hi-fi person arrive but they were interested, welcoming and served coffee just like in a hi-fi shop. What they did know about was music. They were in the business of creating, recording and mastering music and they know how it is meant to sound.

What I heard was a sound which was without the niceties of hi-fi. The monitors were open, detailed but not fatiguing (maybe the valve stage on the AA helps) with proper bass despite diminutive size. Prices are incredible. Focal do a monitor with beryllium tweeter for less than £1400 a pair and with magnesium tweeter for less than a grand. With built in matched power amps., that is incredible value and a tweeter's delight if they want to tune the monitors to their rooms. Why



Adam Audio make quality studio monitors and domestic hi-fi loudspeakers.

wouldn't you explore that?

What I bought were Adam Audio SIXs, a small monitor, £1500 a pair which, when teamed with the AA are just stunning and 2x7.5m Vovox matched pro XLR cables, at £340 a fraction of what similar high end hi-fi cables would cost but these are reference quality cables that are stunning. Less than 2k for top quality active studio monitors and pro cables.

Since I am unlikely to buy another CD player I see no reason to return to a stack of pre and power amps and esoteric cables to get high end sound. The worlds of pro and home audio need not be so far apart. Studio monitors offer a different active path to quality, high fidelity sound without the artifice of marketing, matched veneers and hype that sometimes afflicts the industry with another wonder product. It is refreshing to get back to the music and depart from the convention that exists in the different worlds. Manufacturers like Adam, Focal and Weiss seem to be prepared to straddle both and I think it is worth a listen. It is working for me. With regards,

Karl Podmore
North Yorkshire

There is no magic in Pro kit Karl. Often, the same components and design techniques apply, it's just there is a difference of outlook. Costs, however, where they vary, are due to various factors. Mass market pro gear is often cheaply made and just not up to scratch.

Pro loudspeakers commonly have midrange domes that, whilst in

theory have certain strong benefits (dispersion), also break up badly, giving a sharp piercing sound at high levels – and studios seem to like this. But then they listen at very high levels from giant loudspeakers just 2m or so away; it's quite frightening. Domestic hi-fi is, generally, better honed. **NK**

PURRING HUMMING AND BUZZING

As a long-term subscriber to Hi-Fi World who has been the happy recipient of useful advice in the past, I thought I would submit my most extreme problem to you for possible suggestions. The problem is basically the Mains and all the nasty noises it is transmitting to my hi-fi.

The context – France, major city centre, 230V nominal, the hi-fi is on a dedicated spur I had installed when we bought the 1980s flat. The kit LV-modded Canary Audio 601 Mk2, Avondale stereo power amp., Chord DAC64 Mk2, CEC T51 drive, SME20 turntable with SMEV arm and Dynavector DV20XL cartridge, Aesthetix Rhea phono stage, Proac Future .5 (cables are a bit of a mix, but I am slowly going Kondo).

Although the mains voltage is generally acceptable at a low 229 to a high 231, I have a huge amount of transformer buzz even in the kit which is already connected to a Moth 1kVA isolation transformer. Before spending more money on mains conditioning, I followed the advice of a dealer and used a Fluke-branded instrument to conduct a 24 hour measurement.



If your mains supply is as bad as Nigel's, try regeneration with a Pure Power supply.

Initial results indicated that there are "significant" amounts of 150Hz, 250Hz and 350Hz on the waveform; there seems to be a 45s-47s cyclical voltage variation of about one volt; there seems to be some voltage on neutral and some DC. There is also 15kHz-16kHz created by the frequency generator associated with the lift-braking system (this creates tones at that frequency in the video and computer equipment). DC seems to be present, but in quite "normal" amounts (and given the humming of transformers isolated by 1kVA 1:1 devices is perhaps not so obviously the root of my problems, if I have understood anything).

In concrete terms, the 1:1 isolation transformers hum, buzz and sometimes create a lot of noise, as do the transformers in the hi-fi downstream of them (the level does vary during the day but never seems to completely go away). Inverting the input-output of one of the transformers in order to have a moderate voltage reduction did not change the situation.

What is there to be done to improve the situation and eliminate the above problems?

All the best,

**Nigel Briggs
France**

Bonjour Nigel. Since your current mains conditioners have been overwhelmed by what sounds like a chaotic supply, the only solution left is mains regeneration. In this process the mains is converted to d.c. where battery storage can be introduced, then back into clean a.c. through what are effectively high current, high efficiency power amplifiers fed from a sine wave source. This not only blocks all rubbish, it also provides immunity to short term power loss. Go to the Pure Power site at www.purepoweraps.com for more information where you will find 230V models. I presume you will be able to buy in France or the UK. **NK**

SATORI IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland could hardly be described as the land of the midnight sun, more appropriately the land of

the midnight rain, sleet, snow, explosion. We have however just had our first audio show in 10 years which has prompted me to write and explain my 'sudden illumination', my Satori, in contradiction of the generally accepted industry philosophy which suggests that upgrades are only achieved by buying something better. As an enthusiast who for over 30 years has regularly swapped boxes in pursuit of hi-fi nirvana, much to my wife's chagrin and the groans of my bank account, I have arrived at my present system:

Vinyl – Gyro SE, SME IV with Furutech AG-12L arm cable, Ortofon 2m Black, HR Power Supply, Pure Sound phono stage connected via Chord Company Indigo Plus cables.

CD – Chord Electronics Blu Transport, DAC 64 with 2x Indigo Plus digital cables running balanced via Furutech Reference III XLR leads.

Amplification – DK Design (now LAS) VS.1 Signature Mk III hybrid integrated.

Speakers - Wilson Benesch Curves bi-wired using Furutech Reference III cables.

The system has a dedicated mains spur in a dedicated listening room 15ft x 14ft and is connected with Furutech Reference and Evolution power leads (more about these later).

My sudden illumination came about when I was introduced to products, loosely termed accessories, which have had a dramatic and beneficial effect on my system and thus my enjoyment. Firstly my friendly neighbourhood dealers and kindred spirits, those nice people David and Gary Campbell at Kronos Audio Visual (great coffee and conversation) suggested I try an Acoustic Solutions Resonator, a device which apparently improves bass response. As the eternal sceptic I was naturally doubtful that a block of wood with a bronze cup attached could have any audible effect, let alone improve the low end. Having installed said product I was astounded to discover that the bass had firmed up, become more tuneful and that paradoxically the top end was more focused with more air and space. A mere snip at the asking price.

Next I became acquainted with

a resonance damping device - Black Ravioli. I borrowed three pieces and initially wondered if they would be better served with Arabiatta or Putanesca sauce as opposed to their suggested placement under my phono stage. Once employed I was pleasantly surprised, nay shocked, to find that Rickie Lee had a more palpable presence, had taken a step forwards into the room and that the sound stage had become more three dimensional with better separation and added weight.

At this stage I began to wonder if Kronos' David Campbells predilection for Greek myths would be better changed to Arthurian legend as these products were more likely to be the unnatural offspring of Merlin than Zeus' father. I consequently used 6 more pieces of this black magic, employing 3 each under my CD transport and dac, yielding equally astonishing and beneficial improvements. CD now sounds more musical with a reduction in hardness without artificial warmth, Black Ravioli just allows the equipment to work to its full potential. An inexpensive upgrade.

I borrowed and subsequently bought high end power leads from Furutech, those previously referred to, these had similarly positive and dramatic effects resulting in increased openness, spatiality, detail and weight. Okay I know they are expensive but they are also a long term investment as getting the infrastructure correct can be of greater benefit than changing equipment.

My last tweak was to replace the valves in my Pure Sound phono stage and came about at the suggestion of Kronos and through meeting Guy Sargent at the N.I Audio Show. Guy kindly recommended gold pinned E88cc and ECC803S to replace the stock valves. Once installed the Pure Sound which punches above its weight was metamorphosed into an entirely different animal, bass arriving in my listening room coupled with a sweeter and more open top end that one would normally associate with extremely high end esoterico – and all for the princely sum of £45.

As each product employed gave vast and audible improvements to what was already an open and musically resolving system I can only conclude that finding a good dealer, trusting their suggestions and wringing the best from what you have, thus resisting the temptation to swap boxes for the latest all conquering panacea can not only be a more cost effective but a rewarding experience. Whilst some may consider that blocks of wood/bronze cups, black pasta and wires are more audiophile than audiophile my ears tell me to adopt the diametrically opposed view point and I would recommend exploring such products without reservation.

Sometimes you just have to accept that what appears to be alchemy and black magic may lead to illumination.

Gary Gardiner

On matters like this readers must judge for themselves. I have not been convinced by various balls, triangles and other mystic devices demonstrated to me at Shows, but then a Show atmosphere isn't the best to discern fine differences. Perhaps dealers can provide home trials. **NK**

THORENS TD125

I hope you may be able to help me in locating parts for the above turntable. I have owned a Thorens TD125 turntable since the 1970s and ran it alongside a Sony amplifier. Initially I had a pair of B&W P2h speakers and subsequently changed for a pair of B&W DM 16s. I had to put the equipment into storage and because of the suspension unit on the deck put the inner platter, outer platter, mat and what I would term the central pole (for the record to go on – sorry for the lack of technical jargon), with the amplifier in our loft. Unfortunately, as a result of some work being done to our plumbing in the loft it was not until some months later that I found that the above items had been stolen.

If you are unable to help directly with regards to the above parts, are you able to put me in touch with someone who may be able to help in order that I may know whether they are available and affordable?

Thank you,

Barry Gibbons



Thorens TD125 had its bits stolen and needs repair, says Barry.

If you are indeed looking for the inner platter, main platter and bearing/platter spindle for a Thorens TD125, then the first person to call is the owner of www.theanalogdept.com. If they can't help then the only alternative in my view would be to buy a faulty turntable from eBay for the parts. The TD125 was unusual

at its time as it used a Wein Bridge transistor sine wave oscillator and power amplifier to drive the motor, very advanced technology in those days! Let us know how you get on.

DAVE CAWLEY
SOUND HI FI

Hi Barry – another person to talk to is Haden Boardman (audioclassics@hotmail.com); I'm sure he'll have a solution for you. **DP**

ADVISE PLEASE

I wonder if you could provide some advice and guidance on the next step of my hi-fi journey please. My current system is as follows; Roksan Kandy LIII amp, Monitor Audio RS8 speakers, Cambridge Audio DacMagic connected to PC via USB. Panasonic Blu-ray player also connected through the DacMagic but only really used for movies. Project Xpression III record deck and Ortofon 2m Blue used as main source of music.

I have recently moved into a smaller flat and the system is now in a room approx 4 meters by 4 meters with a ceiling height of approx 2.4 meters filled with the usual sofas and coffee tables etc.

I am very happy with both the amp (bought 2nd hand only about 6 months ago) and speakers (though I do think that perhaps the speakers are too big for the room). However, since getting the DacMagic approximately 2 months ago I find that the PC side of things sounds a lot better than the turntable. More detail is apparent and it seems to have a bit more sparkle about it. Bass is also firmer and overall I just find it a more

exciting listen.

With that in mind, could you advise on my next step in improving the turntable side of things. Vinyl is really the only form of music I actually buy and it's the medium I love the most. I do not have massive funds available but could make £500 to £750 available for this upgrade.

I have seen a Roksan Radius turntable available 2nd hand for around the £550. Would this provide a significant upgrade over the Project?

I have also fallen in love with the looks of the Michell Tecnodec, though a new one (including a Rega RB250 arm) would be at the top end of my budget. If I was to go with a new Tecnodec would it be worth using my existing 2M Blue until further funds are available? If not, what cartridge should I be looking at? Also, what other turntables would you recommend looking at either new or 2nd hand?

Finally can you comment on the phono stage in the Kandy? Would it be worth upgrading this to a stand alone box before the turntable upgrade? If so what should I go for?

Finally I guess an idea of my listening trends might help? I like everything from heavy hard rock through to electronic dance music, pop and the occasional folk and jazz disks.

Thanks in advance,

Ben Sexton

Here is my two'pennyworth Ben. I am no fan of the lesser 2M cartridges from Ortofon, but the 2M Black transcends their limitations, quite dramatically so in my view; it is head and shoulders above the other models. It has the sparkle that you are looking for too. So either get an Ortofon 2M Black, or head toward the Goldring 1000 Series, like the 1024 GX or 1042. These are an easy listen, without being dull, and they have plenty of dynamic life to them as well, with good quality bass. Add in a very reasonable price and you are boogeying. I can't help feel that you may be well advised to improve your record deck also, but David will say more on this. **NK**

The Kandy phono stage is surprisingly good, actually, Ben. What's really wrong in your system is your turntable, which is a fine machine at its price point but is a little out of its depth in the context of the rest of your components. If you're buying new, then stretching the budget to a Michell TecnoDec would really bring big rewards; far more focus, grip and insight, plus a wider soundstage and a deeper bass than your Pro-ject. I also feel it would be better, if well set up, than the Roksan Radius but it's likely a close run thing. This said, you would have to mount the Michell carefully, preferably on a wall shelf, to get the best from it. Just sticking it on a chest of drawers will drop its performance down to Rega P3 levels. Use your 2M Blue until you can afford a 2M Black or, ideally, an Audio Technica AT33EV.

DP



Eastern Promise

Sporting 'the latest filter technology', HDCD playback and a vacuum tube in the analogue output stage, plus chunky build and fine finish, the Cayin CD-50T offers a lot for a mid-price CD player, says David Price...

The small but energetic Chinese hi-fi manufacturing industry has had a surprising degree of success here in the limited time it's been around, which is not very long at all. Being (almost) old enough to remember big Japanese brands attempting (and succeeding) to take over the UK audio market some forty years ago, I have to report that China has done things a little differently. Instead of doing it all themselves, Chinese mass market consumer electronics manufacturing is often conducted in cooperation with western multinationals such as Apple Computer for example, or small niche specialists such as the German company which is responsible for the design of this Cayin machine.

You've got to applaud the versatility of Chinese original

equipment manufacturers (OEMs) then, as they will make *anything* it seems, from mega selling computer hardware products to specialist CD players which are hardly flavour of the month anymore...

Still, I am not complaining; I think it's good that now Compact Disc is being banished to the fringes of the mass market, people are still investing time and money in the technology, which by absolute standards is of course antique now. Lest we forget, we're approaching CD's thirtieth birthday! Do you know any other thirty year-old-computer-based consumer electronics products still on sale? But now, as a new generation of music buyers emerges who simply don't equate albums with anything physical you can hold in your hand or place on your table, the venerable format has finally got

rather good. Lots of tricks have emerged to coax the goodness from it, such as high quality digital filters (and HDCD is usually synonymous with this), tube output stages, careful mechanical isolation and decent power supplies. And there you go, the Cayin has all this for under £900.

The Cayin eschews the stock Japanese 430mm width, coming in a compact case measuring 350x325x95mm and weighing in at 7.8kg. The front panel is a thick, extravagant even, slab of brushed aluminium, and sports a nice variation on this tried and tested theme because it's sculpted in the lower centre. It's certainly a little less generic looking and shows someone has actually bothered to think about its appearance, instead of doing just another 'me too' machine. The case is your usual pressed steel, but again



they've really tried hard with an excellent metallic graphite grey paint job and a serious bit of lacquering, plus satin finish screws.

The front transport controls are a bit fussy, with small fiddly buttons; the easiest to use one is the least used, namely the power switch. The display is standard issue Chinese blue fluorescent, dimmable, but has a tiny 'music calendar' reminiscent of late eighties Japanese machines, and – shock horror – some red detailing! It's quirky, and again they've made an effort, but it's not great. Round the back there are standard RCA outputs, an IEC mains in, and one optical TOSLINK and one coaxial digital out. Oh, and then there's a tiny 12AU7 tube poking its top out of a deep rear recess, just to remind you you're all valved up... The remote control is your usual Chinese fare; a metal faced job that's decent but nothing special; at least it's not nasty plastic.

Overall I was impressed with the Cayin's build at the price, it's certainly swish considering its lowly market position, and effort has clearly been made. That's not to say it doesn't face a hard fight with the likes of the Cyrus CD8 SE though, which is an even more lovely thing to behold in design, build and finish, and costs almost the same...

SOUND QUALITY

It's a fascinating conundrum, this CD player. Plugging it in, I could instantly hear a lot wrong with it, and yet there's also a lot right, and it's this good side of its character that

dramatically outshines any downsides. The result is quite an interesting and quirky mix, and one that's a lot of fun, but it simply can't beat the cool neutrality of rival British designs. The question then becomes, do you buy this knowing it is flawed in some ways, or do you go for the likes of a Cyrus CD8 SE knowing it's a far more accomplished all rounder, but in some respects less satisfying to listen to? The answer, dear reader, rests with you; let me elucidate...

Having done all the running in and warming up, the first track I kicked off with was Simple Minds' 'Somebody Up There Likes You', the CD layer of the brilliant sounding SACD. At highish volume, at first listen I was bowled over. I had to remind myself that this is eight hundred and something pounds. It was wonderfully warm and sumptuous, with a delightfully solid weight to bass drums, and a lovely timbre to analogue synths, letting them wash all around. 'Wow', I thought to myself, this is giving a thoroughly satisfying rendition of the song with an epic sense of scale and power. If anything, it rather reminded me of the Astin Trew AT3500 in this respect; it was a big, bold bruiser that was nevertheless soft around the edges; nothing here hurt my ears.

I then switched to a Cyrus CD8 SE, and was struck by the difference. Where the Cayin gives a cascade of sound – swirling, haunting and ethereal when playing the Simple Minds track – moving to the Cyrus was like touching the shutter button on a good camera at first pressure,

causing the autofocus to snap things into view. It gave a dramatically different window on the world, setting up a wider soundstage, making a slightly less strong centre image, giving a far better sense of front-to-back depth and tightening up everything in the mix, from the bass guitar to the hi-hat cymbals. Instead of being subsumed in a morass of sound, the song's guitar overdubs became more pronounced and explicit, whereas cymbals suddenly started timing better, sounding less sweet but ultimately more sonorous.

Switching back to the Cayin, I was struck by the fuller, bigger, fatter sound, and intrigued to hear an obviously looser (albeit fuller) bass line, with the player sitting on dynamic accents from both the bass drum and snares. It failed to eke out the counterplay between bass drum, bass guitar, snare and hi hat (which is what the track is all about), whereas the Cyrus completely nailed it. Bass was now sounding ever so slightly overblown; it was as if the bass guitarist was fractionally overdriving his amp, giving a bigger sound but with a slight compression effect. A fascinating comparison then; the Cayin was doing a lot wrong, with the Cyrus proving a model of clarity and grip, yet I still rather liked the fuller more visceral sound of the CD-50T, for all its failings.

Moving to Steely Dan's 'Babylon Sisters' and the Cayin supplied a beautifully sumptuous signal to my amplifier and loudspeakers. It gave the sense of everything being turned up to eleven, the soundstage

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bristling with detail, sparkling with hi hats and punching with a big fat Fender Rhodes electric piano sound. The brass stabs were clean and rich, Fagen's vocals crisp and clear. Moving to the Cyrus, I noticed a tighter framework to the music, with more rigid front to back imaging, a less fulsome centre image and wider left/right detailing from trumpet and hi hat. There was also more of a sense of being immersed in the organ playing, and greater definition and dynamics to the percussion work. The CD8 SE sounded great, but came a little closer to the rendition of this track I'm used to, via my high end direct drive turntable, which shows this recording to be just a little too bright and dry. The CD-50T however, was able to round off the recording's faults and give a more euphonic rendition, which actually sounded better.

I found the same phenomenon with Microdisney's 'Town to Town', namely a wide, powerful soundstage, strong bass and a very appealing overall balance. Here though the player couldn't conceal one of the less appetising aspects of CD, a slight grain on strings. Even via the original vinyl pressing, the backing strings are a bit lively, and they don't transfer to CD terribly well; the CD-50T grated a little here, with that tube buffer doing nothing to aid proceedings. Still, vocals proved full and commanding, underlining this player's strong central image placement; it rather reminds me of vinyl in this respect. Whilst it's not especially wide left-to-right, it sets up a very big sound in the middle, if you'll pardon my rather simplistic turn of phrase! Instruments in the mix inside this aren't that well defined but the whole recorded acoustic comes over as solid and imposing, making it ideal for stadium rock, I suspect! Happily I have no U2 recordings to prove this theory, but I'll bet my Microdisney retrospective that I'm right!

Once again, shifting to the Cyrus saw instruments coming over with superior definition, plus tighter image location, a silkier and more atmospheric hi hat sound, more explicitly timed rhythm guitar work. I heard snare drums tighter, and with a touch more bounce. Depth perspective was better too. Interestingly, whilst it would appear

'points win' to the Cyrus, I still came out rather liking the Cayin's own particular rendition of this track; it may have been less accomplished in absolute hi-fi terms but it certainly made up for it in the way it played music.

The situation reversed slightly with Fragile State's 'Every Day a Story (4hero remix)'. I heard a deliciously sumptuous acoustic bassline, with lean but clean sequenced analogue synth pads, and sweet but slightly generic sounding hi hats. Again the Cayin pushed out its big wall of sound, with upfront imaging forward of loudspeakers. It loped along merrily, showing a pleasant rhythmic gait, rather in the manner of a unipivot tonearm. Bass drums came over a little soft and overblown sounding, without an explicit attack-delay-sustain envelope. The CD-50T has a slightly generic tonality; this player seems to sprinkle its valve magic dust on everything, leaving everything sounding as if it's had magic dust sprinkled on it; so there's no dramatic difference between the sonic fingerprint of, say a Stax recording studio from the early seventies and REM in the mid-eighties.

Whereas the CD-50T produced a Phil Spector-like wall of sound, again the Cyrus was more open, ordered and accurate. Here, bass guitar sounded a tad lighter but far tighter, bass drums were beautifully taut, keyboard pads shimmered through the mix and treble was brighter and sharper, yet not painfully so. The sound didn't quite have the louche, clubbable feel of the Cayin, though; it was a touch more like hi-fi (albeit very good hi-fi); the CD-50T just played music instead.

CONCLUSION

This isn't the world's best CD player, or even the best under £1,000

in absolute terms, but still there's an awful lot to like. It's obviously well made and intelligently designed, and the sonic results are always fun. It's an ideal match for lean and slightly mean sounding budget or mid-price systems, and would really flatter the clinical sound of many modern loudspeakers. Put it in a super revealing system however, and you're into choppy waters; you can hear it 'editorialising' a little to much, presenting its larger than life character up ahead of the music, whereas some rivals simply fade into the distance and let the music flood out. As such, in the right system, with the right music, the Cayin CD-50T could be the answer to all your troubles, but in the wrong one it certainly won't be. So I'd suggest try before you buy; you may well be beguiled.

REFERENCE SYSTEM:
Cyrus CD8 SE CD player
MF Audio Silver Passive preamp
NuForce Ref 9SE power amplifiers
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

VERDICT ●●●●●
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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response has an unusual steady rise up toward high frequencies, our impulse analysis shows. We confirmed this with a sine wave tone test, it is so unusual, and the player does indeed have a rise of 1dB overall toward high frequencies, as shown. This will give it a bright balance, brighter than is common.

Distortion at peak level measured a high 0.26% but this was second harmonic only, so is inaudible. Distortion also rose at low levels, or so it seemed, the player measuring 1% against a common result of 0.22%, but this in fact was caused by noise, not distortion. Valve players need not be so noisy. The noise, measuring -88dB, also degraded our EIAJ Dynamic Range figure, which measured 84dB against a usual 98dB.

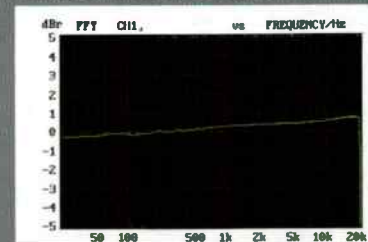
The internal clock measured 44,106Hz, instead of 44,100Hz and the error prevented phase lock against our analysers reference internal clock, so jitter was measured using a Variable clock mode, a high 300pS being recorded.

The Cayin CD-50T has an unusual performance, out of line with the norm, so it will have a distinctive sound. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)
4Hz-21.3kHz

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Distortion | 0.26 |
| 0dB | 0.13 |
| -6dB | 1 |
| -60dB | 6.5 |
| -80dB | |
| Separation (1kHz) | 90dB |
| Noise (IEC A) | -88dB |
| Dynamic range | 84dB |
| Output | 2.2V |

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION





Future Perfect

There's no denying that when Creek do a good transistor amplifier, they do a really good one – says Noel Keywood, having listened to the new Destiny 2...

Unpreprocessing is the word I'd pull out of my bag of adjectives for this one, the new Destiny 2 amplifier from Creek. It was always so, yet Creek have a reputation like few others – and rightly so. A Creek amplifier isn't just a piece of natty electronic design; it is a quality audio amplifying device, the two being subtly but importantly different. Designer Mike Creek long ago put circuits together that delivered the right figures, in the late 1970s to be precise. At the start of the 1980s he formed Creek the company, the first product being an amplifier – the 4040. The new Destiny 2 reviewed here is a distant successor, 40 Watts having grown to 120 Watts, for that is what the Destiny 2 produces.

Reviewing a Creek, just about any Creek in truth, is easy for me because I have been doing it since they started and know the house sound, as well as Mike Creek. Before talking to Mike, as you can at hi-fi shows where he is usually to be found in the Creek/Epos room,

you do need to brush up on your cascode devices and the number of poles in your feedback network, not to mention servo behaviour and output device failure modes. For Mike has been at it for a long time and is a man of deep experience, not a Johnny-come-lately with a freshly minted degree in electronics and dangerously little experience.

Grasp the Destiny 2 and lift it and you'll start to understand what this means. It is impressively solid, weighing a substantial 10kgs, beautifully built and slickly finished, yet there's no unnecessary visual embellishment. It is easy on the eye and lovely to use, with its powered Alps volume control and short throw push button selectors. Creek products have always been compact and the Destiny 2 will fit most racks, as it is a fraction under 17in (430mm) wide. Although depth is 355mm, or 14in, it will just sit on a 12in deep shelf if bare wires are used to avoid projecting banana plugs. Height is just 80mm. From this compact package you get no less than 200 Watts into a 4 Ohm loudspeaker and this is

more than enough to go very, very loud in just about any room. As I always point out in my loudspeaker reviews, I rarely manage to get more than 10V or so into a loudspeaker, which amounts to 25 Watts at most, so the Destiny 2 has huge reserves.

The Destiny 2 uses control logic and small signal relays for signal switching. Press an input selector and you are aware of this by the clicking sounds that issue forth. However, the amplifier does not use a digital volume control, like so many nowadays, but a high quality Alps potentiometer, motor driven to allow remote control. Mike likes to keep the signal path as simple and pure as possible, so avoids putting the signal through a volume control chip.

And unlike so many modern amplifiers the Destiny intentionally places no silicon chips in the signal path, when not used in optional Active mode, explaining why its topology may seem a little odd, but is in fact typical Creek style common sense. As I said earlier this is a proper hi-fi amplifier, not



a general purpose industrial design that thoughtlessly relies on all the clever doo-dahs companies like Texas Instruments churn out nowadays, such as voltage controlled gain chips, balanced line drivers, voltage regulators, etc. The Destiny has its own unique N-channel MOSFET output stage, driven by P-channel drivers, a circuit devised some time ago by Russian physicist Alex Nikitin (who now produces the ANT Audio phono stage and can be found at most audio shows, manning the Sound Hi-Fi stand).

The Destiny 2 uses a development of the original circuit found in the Destiny 1, Mike told me, where they managed to improve performance by using parallel cascode devices in line with the MOSFETs to share voltage swing, so obtaining very high power from a fundamentally linear output stage. It was quite obvious under measurement that the Destiny 2's output stage was deeply linear, as distortion at 10kHz continued to decrease below 1 Watt, where in so many transistor amplifiers it increases.

Also, Mike explained, the Destiny 2 has no preamplifier, unless it is switched to Active mode on the front panel. It simply places a high quality Alps volume control in front of the all-discrete power amplifier section, and in so doing minimises the number of active devices in the circuit (a man after my own heart!). The drawback is low sensitivity of 600mV, but this is enough for all silver disc players, CD, DVD and Blu-ray, as they all deliver 2V out.

All of which explains why, if you want more gain, then you must switch in a preamplifier, by pressing an Active button on the front panel. There are three gain options; 3dB, 6dB and 9dB, selected by a slide switch on the underside of the amplifier. The idea is that if you have a low output source like an old tuner connected to the Tuner input, you press Active, after selecting Tuner, to increase gain. When switching back to CD, with its higher output, Active is then switched off, eliminating the preamplifier and its amplifying devices from the circuit, optimising sound quality. It's purist, but then this is a proper hi-fi amplifier and I totally

fitted (our review sample lacked this option) the input becomes another line level input to which can be connected an external phono stage; Creek suggest one of theirs. Including this input, there are four line level inputs, plus Tape In/Out sockets. There is also a fixed gain AV/ power amp input and a Preamp output. Two sets of loudspeaker outputs are fitted, A and B, with relay switching to control them. Both can be switched off when headphones are used, plugged into a quarter-inch jack socket on the front panel. Also on the rear panel is a main power switch; the front panel carries a Standby 'off' switch.

"If valve amplifiers did not exist and I had to choose an amplifier I could carry, it would be this one..."

agree with the philosophy; as few active devices as possible should be used and all of those (and passive components) need to be audio grade quality, not the cheapest items in the component catalogue.

The downside is the amplifier looks a little less logical than many designs, especially those loaded up with digital volume controls and armfuls of volume logic to provide an 'intelligent' user experience, or programmable input gain, but it is sensible if you want the best sound possible.

The Destiny 2 has room onboard for a phono stage plug-in circuit board, available as an extra. If not

The Destiny 2 comes with a solid feeling remote control that switches all functions and can control other Creek products.

SOUND QUALITY

I mentioned earlier that Creek have a 'house sound' and it is easy enough to describe. Much of the hard, mechanical quality of transistor amplifiers is missing from Creeks, as well as what I identify as 'spitch', that upper midband glare that so many confuse with the projection of detail. It isn't – it's glare! Valve amplifiers do not have it, and nor do Creeks. But then, by using discrete electronic amplifying devices of suitable quality,

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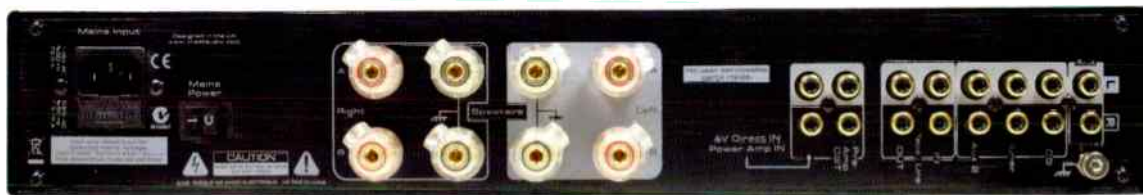


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and as few components – active and passive – as possible, Creek amplifiers follow valve amplifier design principles and guess what – there are similarities in their sound. Not only did the Destiny 2 have not one jot of glare or upper midband hardness, it also did not bleach the character out of orchestral wind and string instruments, as so many amplifiers still do.

Pull these colourations out of a transistor amplifier and all of a sudden it starts to sound 'warm'. It isn't of course, it is just that there is no upper midrange shout to artificially emphasise detail. That makes the Destiny 2 a remarkably relaxing listen; it is one of the easiest sounds you'll come across in a modern amplifier – the very epitome of silkiness and smoothness. A gentle but clear rendition of Toni Braxton singing 'Spanish Guitar', was embellished with deep insight into the studio behind her. There was nothing forced here, just an easy, liquid transparency, especially convincing with human voice; it had Toni Braxton singing powerfully, yet with an unforced ease. The bass line was strong and full, relaxed in its progress, but with plenty of strength to the delivery. Backing singers spread out across the sound stage in a wide arc, forming a backdrop that was as smooth as silk.

With Nigel Kennedy playing Max Bruch's enchanting Violin Concerto No.1, I heard an amplifier that I would say was deeply sympathetic to the both the music and instrument. His strings had a convincingly rich texture, made apparent by the absence of transistor edginess and glare that invariably blights violin. Small inflections and gentle emphases in Kennedy's playing were clearly described by the Creek; it's a deeply expressive amplifier, meaning of course it lets the artist's expression shine through. In this sense, and in a very real sense, the Destiny is hugely communicative – but it manages this with a gentle fluency that is almost unsettling. At least I found it so.

It was unsettlingly good for me because it approaches what valves do, albeit with a more even, less characterful stance. It also was at times frighteningly close to our

Musical Fidelity AMS50 run from a Music First Audio preamp that I used as a comparative benchmark during listening tests. This latter combination had finer treble, brimming with gentle filigree detail, where the Creek sounded a little darker and simpler in its rendition, yet the Destiny 2 had much of the easy clarity, lack of glare and general grip of the AMS50. It sounded a little more fluid, but less threatening. Orchestral strings were so utterly smooth through our Spondor S8es loudspeakers that the Destiny 2 was a near ideal choice for anyone wanting to steer clear of hot bottles.

With so much power in the closet, the Destiny 2 could let rip when asked to. Cranking volume right up with Lady Gaga singing 'Monster' the amplifier showed another face: steamroller drive that propelled deep synth stabs across the room with deceptive ease. They rolled over me like a tropical storm, and inside this I could hear how much insight the amplifier has. It laid out Lady Gaga's lyrics with an unforced insight, sudden changes of tempo captured perfectly, Gaga's interjections ringing out clearly. This is an amplifier that impresses with silent ability as it were. It is temporally tight and grippy, whilst setting out a rich canvas of sound. Creek amplifiers always have bass power and the Destiny 2 at times really let rip, putting more heft into the pounding beat of 'Dance In The Dark' than most rivals. It has thunderous lower bass I found, and does subsonics with alacrity.

CONCLUSION

To my ears this is a top quality transistor amplifier, one able to run the best in the business. In fact I feel it is better than most amplifiers in the

business, it's just that you need to spend time with an amplifier like this and drop preconceptions based on previous experience. Like any really good hi-fi product it is silent in itself, adding little if anything to the music. However, as most transistor amplifiers add far too much for my liking – which is why I choose to use valve amplifiers – the Destiny is a bit different and may be a little challenging to anyone expecting even sharper crashes, bangs and wallops. It has vast power, a generously large demeanour and thunderous subsonics, but delivered in a velvet glove. It is a lovely piece of work, crafted with skill and experience to give a fantastic sound. If valve amplifiers did not exist and I had to choose an amplifier I could carry, it would be this one! Creek rightly have a reputation like few others, because their products are better than most others, and the Destiny 2 shows this. A top amplifier.

VERDICT ●●●●●
Big, powerful, full bodied but as smooth as silk. A deeply expressive amplifier that is as good as it gets.

CREEK DESTINY 2 £1,600
Creek Audio Ltd.
+44 (0) 1442 260146
www.creekaudio.com

FOR
- powerful sound
- silky smooth midband
- totally free of colour

AGAINST
- few facilities
- phono stage an option

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Compact in size, but weighty, the Destiny 2 has a power supply able to allow 200 Watts into 4 Ohms, no less, so the Destiny 2 is rather bigger in ability than it looks. Power into 8 Ohms was 120 Watts, so there's plenty of heft even for higher impedance loudspeakers, like the Spondors A9s in this issue. However, most loudspeakers use 4 Ohm bass units nowadays so the Creek can deliver almost any volume level feasible. A damping factor of 26 is sufficient to keep bass well under control.

Creek amplifiers have traditionally been thermally stable and low distortion and the Destiny 2 was better than ever in both areas. It produces second harmonic distortion, even up at 10kHz, with no sign of crossover. It did this from cold to hot and at all signal levels from fractions of a Watt up to full output, with no sign of a change in transition from Class A to B working. It has a very benign distortion pattern and will sound smooth as a result, especially at low volumes where transistor amplifiers can distort quite significantly.

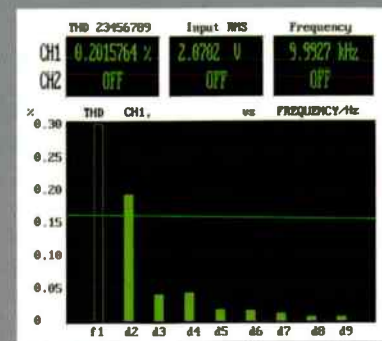
As standard input sensitivity is a low 600mV for full output, appropriate for CD and any other silver disc player, but inadequate for some tuners and low gain external phono stages. A three

switch slide switch gives 3dB, 6dB and 9dB gain increases and set at 9dB (x3) gives 200mV input sensitivity, barely enough for a low gain (x100) phono stage. However, an internal phono stage can be fitted to the amplifier.

The Destiny 2 is a well worked out design right up to today's standards. It provides an excellent measured performance. NK

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Power | 120 Watts |
| CD/tuner/aux. | |
| Frequency response | 1.5Hz-32kHz |
| Separation | 69dB |
| Noise | -107dB |
| Distortion | 0.2% |
| Sensitivity | 600mV |
| Damping factor | 26 |

DISTORTION



emillé
Just for your musical bliss

Ara



Stereo Integrated Amplifier
Remote control
Analog & digital inputs
Hand-wound output transformers

Distributed in the UK by Angelsound Audio
www.angelsoundaudio.co.uk
Tel: 01923 352479

www.emillelabs.com

Black Rhodium

Enjoy the musical detail, speed and airiness of Black Rhodium's first ever DCT++ interconnect cable



By applying our more advanced DCT++ process to the cable before assembly instead of our standard DCT process after, we have further improved the sound quality of our award winning 'Polar Illusion' cable. At the same time we have added a very effective double braided screen and given the cable a new high end appearance.

Phantom is made from two tightly twisted silver plated copper solid cores insulated in low loss PTFE, responsible for its fast detailed sound quality. DCT++ processing adds depth to the sound and enhances the timing of the music's rhythms. Termination using the highly acclaimed Eichmann Bullet plugs ensures the ultimate in musical detail shines through.

The Phantom is a very special interconnect for Black Rhodium and we have written a short account of its progressive development from cables that have won 5 stars in What HiFi? and 'Best Buy' in HiFi Choice to our new Phantom that we offer today. Hear this cable at your nearest Black Rhodium dealer and you will want to buy it!

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01332 342233 sales@blackrhodium.co.uk

Tellurium Qtm



www.TelluriumQ.com

HI-FI WORLD
VERDICT ●●●●●
August 2010

hi-fi+
Cables of
the year 2010



Hi Fi World
product of
the year 2010

The first cables designed primarily
to combat phase distortion

"something that I've never heard from any cable at this price point."
Paul Rigby, HiFi World August 2010

"Cavernous acoustic space.....palpable sense of reality...good sense of timing and pitch...the sound was controlled and didn't harden as the volume increased...even tonal balance."
Hi Fi News (Feb 2010 edition)

"Whatever you do, don't audition the Ultra Black. As I said before, once you do, there's no going back."
Steve Dickenson, Hi Fi Plus, Awards issue 2010

Find out why these new cables have won four awards in their first year including two separate product of the year

+44 (0) 1458 251997



Violins of The Chicago Symphony Orchestra jumped out at me from a well lit orchestral space, playing Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherazade'. The Reference 9.2s are not backward in coming forward as they say, but then that is the sort of presentation modern metal cones provide, when treated with exotic materials, frozen to absolute zero or covered in pixie dust, as whim dictates. But you get a surgically clean and wonderfully clear rendition and this is how orchestra was delivered by Canton's 9.2s. Oboe had sparkling presence, violins jumped into the fray with vigour and horns called out with a rich, brassy rasp. Vivacious is a term that describes their handling of an orchestra, instruments being lifted right up and out of the mix it seemed, dancing vigorously on the sound stage just in front of me.

The Cantons offer a front row listening perspective, and with stable, well wrought images the whole came over with a drama many loudspeakers lack. And all this without shrieking treble or any sense of sharpness.

Unsurprisingly, the Cantons toned down a bit when connected to our Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve amplifiers, a certain degree of relentlessness leaving them, replaced by a mellower, more considered presentation that allowed solo violin to dance in front of me, with nary a hint of sheen or artifice. Even with the MB845s though, the Cantons hardened up on orchestral crescendos and were obviously not plastic

coned loudspeakers, but for the most part I enjoyed a nice, simple sense of clarity, one I found really enjoyable.

One caveat I have to make is this; such a forward and revealing loudspeaker better handles modern, high quality recordings than the many older digital ones I possess that are a little iffy in themselves, meaning digitally distorted – all those old DDDs. This includes swathes of classical recordings where wide digital dynamic range was confused with good sound quality. Another peculiar example is Duffy's fairly recent 'Rockferry', from the album of the same name. Wondering why it sounded rough, one day perchance I spotted an interview with the recording engineer who admitted adding digital distortion for extra "graunch". This is very difficult to play and the Reference 9.2s did not flatter it, although the track was listenable.

CONCLUSION

So Canton's Reference 9.2 DC loudspeakers are thoroughly modern and revealing, brutally so at times. Yet

they are unusual for having what at times could be described as a warm balance, with – most of the time – easy sounding treble that never offended me. I took to this presentation and enjoyed it, even if at times it could be a little challenging. What sounded good when Steve Earle recorded 'The Hard Way' in 1990 doesn't compare to modern 24/96 from John Mayer or Carlos Santana, or 24/192 resolution digital from the 2L label of Norway, with Percy Grainger's playing of Grieg's Piano Concerto for example, that redefines digital. Early digital deficiencies are thrown at you by the Cantons, but later quality made apparent.

So Canton's Reference 9.2 DC loudspeakers are forthright, but truthful, and accurately balanced. I enjoyed their pace and vivacity: theirs is a sound full of life, accurately presented – and it was exciting. Loudspeakers are funny things but Canton have obviously tried to craft a product that provides accuracy with excitement and this is worth hearing.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

This loudspeaker is distinguished by its unusually flat frequency response characteristic. Not only is it flat in terms of trend away from the 0dB datum line, but it is fairly smooth too, suggesting well suppressed minor resonances and a colour-free sound. Only the tweeter breaks away from flatness – and then only above 8kHz where the effect will not be very apparent. This will add a hiss to high treble, at least when there is strong treble content in a recording.

Bass rolls away smoothly below 150Hz, indicating strong bass damping and this is borne out in the impedance curve; it is almost flat at low frequencies. Although there is little low bass from the main driver, the port peaks strongly at 50Hz, measurement showing it was +4dB above the driver at 80Hz. Low bass is provided by the port and it is a little peaky.

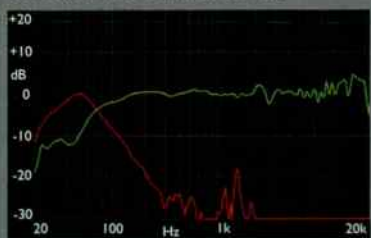
With a high-ish sensitivity of 88dB – good for a loudspeaker of its size – and with an unreactive 4 Ohm load characteristic at low frequencies (7 Ohms overall) where current is drawn by the bass driver, the Canton is an easy load, for both valve and transistor amplifiers. Peculiarly, the loudspeaker has a 35 Ohm DC resistance, suggesting a large value series input capacitor bypassed by a 35 Ohm resistor and indeed impedance rises below 20Hz, where it usually falls because the bass voice coil is becoming purely resistive. KEF used to modify bass behaviour with such an arrangement but Canton's is set very low; it may well be used to suppress subsonic cone flap from

warped LPs.

The 200mS decay spectrum was fairly clean, except for hot areas at 180Hz and 80Hz. Bass distortion was very low, measuring 1% at 40Hz from the drive unit and 6% from the port, with no steep rise at subsonic frequencies. Midband distortion hovered around 0.2%, a normal enough result.

The Canton Reference 9.2DC is an interesting design, offering a unusually even and accurate tonal balance, and good engineering all-round. It should sound very smooth and natural. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●●●
Brilliantly revealing yet accurate loudspeaker that's a scintillating listen. Match with a smooth source.

CANTON REF. 9.2 DC £2,300
Computers Unlimited
☎ +44 (0)20 8358 9593
www.unlimited.com

FOR
- tonally accurate
- ultra fast transients
- dynamically lively

AGAINST
- some midband emphasis
- fulsome bass

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 martape-like speed stability, plus wonderful clarity and pace. Upgradeability and excellent build complete a formidable package.

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

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

MCINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

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

EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

TONEARMS

REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

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

SME 309 1989 £767

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

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300

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

NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

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

LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700
Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Lacks the SME's slam, the OL's clarity or the ARO's emotion, but has a feisty musicality all of its own.

SME 312S 2010 £1,750
Twelve inch magnesium alloy armtube plus 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 soundstaging. Build quality up to SME standards, which is saying something...

TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600
Stunning build, exquisite design and surely the most naturally musical and lucid sound around makes this a remarkable pickup arm.

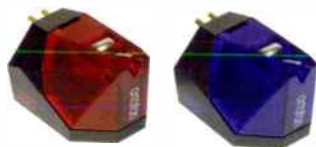
OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500
Few if any pivoted arms come close to this arm's combination of liquid musicality and forensic grip.

CARTRIDGES
AUDIO TECHNICA AT-95E
1984 £25

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

ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE
2007 £60/£120

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



GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135
One of the best MMs going, with sweet and extended treble and punchy, muscular bass.

DENON DL103R 2006 £200
Awkward to get working properly with a poor mounting arrangement, yet it rewards with a musical performance that makes similar priced cartridges sound cold.

DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250
Distant descendent of the classic Ultimo 10X, this has warmth and sweetness in spades, allied to a punchy bass. Beats G1042 comfortably.

ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350
Staggeringly good high-end MM that uses a stylus from the MC Jubilee and easily rivals similarly-priced MCs

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395
Deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go makes this a great value budget MC. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLIII
2010 £399
New stylus and cantilever breathe life into this feisty, punchy and detailed performer.

LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595
Incisive and musical, this baby Lyra is one of the most powerful and revealing MCs at its price point. Beware the sharp treble, though!

ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE 2005 £500
Excellent mid-price moving coil with real rhythmic alacrity and a decent deal of finesse.

ZYX R-100H 2005 £625
Exceptionally tight sounding and detailed cartridge with the musical skills to match, this is up with the very best at the price, with a presentation all of its own.

BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650
Crisp, clean and detailed MC; particularly impressive at both ends of the frequency spectrum

TRANSFIGURATION AXIA 2007 £890
Musically adept and highly resolute cartridge with impressive tracking abilities. Top end lift means careful matching required, however.

ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE 2009 £1,000
Musical, out of the box sound, allied to real finesse, makes this a great do-it-all high end moving coil.

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799
Ortofon's new flagship MC is a sophisticated and alluring performer that takes the vinyl experience to a new level.

KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE 2007 £2,399
The new K Signature adds a hefty dose of insight and finesse to the already impressive Red and the results are fabulous.

DIGITAL SOURCES
MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC £170
Clear, concise, low distortion sound belies giveaway price. Superlative value for money.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC £229
An innovative and flexible new DAC, this is a svelte, rhythmic and impressive performer.



STELLO DA100 SIGNATURE £675
Superbly finessed sounding DAC at the price, with strong driving bass and plenty of air and space.



CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800
Well built CD player with a silky, yet detailed sound and a whole host of useful facilities. Excellent value for money.

NAIM 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 unremittingly smooth and musically engaging.

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000
Bespoke architecture gives a truly uniquely musical sound that's beguilingly musical in nature, with dizzying incision and grip.

ELECTROCOMPANIE EMC-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 charismatically engaging 16bit machines we've ever heard. Plays music with such passion!

NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050
The most polished Naim CD to date; tremendously capable and musical, but lacks the Rottweiler quality of the cheaper CDX2-XPS2.

ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE | MK2/TUBE DAC 2 2007 £7,980
Superbly built high end CD transport and DAC combo that shows just what the format can be capable of. Very tangible, musical sound with wonderful dynamics and glistening harmonics. Only curious styling and clunky build detract from its brilliance!

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



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

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



RECORDERS

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

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

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

PHONO STAGES

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

AMPLIFIERS

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

ELECTROCOMPANET 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... ELECTROCOMPANIET NEMO

2009 £4,450 (EACH)

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

**DPA SA-1** 2010 £2,850

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

SILK GLOWMASTER KT88 2007 £1,699

KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass 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 AEI CLASSIC** £845

Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950

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

RRR FS100 2007 £1,055

Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM 2010 £3,400

Distinctive coaxial standmounters with wonderful soundstaging, bright lucid midband excellent musical insight.



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

ONE THING AUDIO ESL57 2007 £1,450

One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of the game.

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

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

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

MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE 2008 £1,599

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

MONITOR AUDIO GS60 2008 £2,000

Still a great rock loudspeaker after all these years, with a vivid, lithe and engaging sound.

SPENDOR S8E £1,895

Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

ACCESSORIES

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

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

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

HEADPHONES

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

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

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

**GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70**

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

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199

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

SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250

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

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000

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

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

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

INTERCONNECTS**TECHLINK WIRES XS 2007 £20**

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

WIREWORLD OASIS 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 TUNER2006 £550

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

MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800

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

MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-100T 2006 £1,895

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

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

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

TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329

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

NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429

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

ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650

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

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249

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

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250

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

MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500

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

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

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

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650

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

**NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995**

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

LINN CLASSIK MOVIE 2007 £2,250

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

MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1 2010 £6,990

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

MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000

The combination of SA-751 disc player, SC-752 preamp and MA-952 monoblocks delivers a truly jaw-dropping performance. Start saving now...





Power Ranger

Rafael Todes fires up Musical Fidelity's punchy mid-priced transistor integrated power amplifier, the M6 PRX...

In recent months Musical Fidelity have come up with some interesting products. I recently had the company of an AMS100, a one hundred Watt power amplifier for a month, it took two burly men a good five minutes to haul this 150kg crate up a single flight of stairs. This is a £14,000 monster, pure Class A, and 100W of vice-like control. Musically however it is a cool customer and I never saw it break sweat in the time I had it. Its smaller sibling, the AMS50 has been adopted by *Hi-Fi World* as a reference due to its neutrality, super bass qualities, and ability to present detail.

Personally speaking, I am a worshipper at the thermionic temple. I love the sound that valves bring to acoustic instruments, particularly strings and voice. Typically, you can expect a liquid midrange that is sweeter than a transistor amplifier, and a sound stage that is deeper, and more holographic. There can be an airiness to the sound which is incredibly lifelike, or perhaps even *Über-real!* After all when was the last time you heard that airiness in a real concert? The downside can come with valve amplifiers' control of bass frequencies. Often you will hear a soggy or bloated bass which lacks the same incision and accuracy of a

transistor amplifier. These days, this downside can be partially alleviated by the use of a beefy, well made transformer, and high quality valves.

Is this beauty of tone genuine or not? Anti-valvistas would claim that the beauty of sound comes from second-order harmonic distortion, which is not present in well-engineered transistor amplifiers. This age-old debate will run and run, and ultimately people tend to chose the family of sound they want, and stick to it!

The maintenance costs of running valve amplifiers should not be forgotten. A new set of valves can cost anything from a hundred quid to



"a big, no-nonsense, ballsy sound, extremely low levels of distortion, with plenty of grip..."

over a thousand for new old stock. They can last a couple of years with moderate to heavy usage, but when they go, they can take parts of the circuitboard with them, and this can be expensive to repair, thus valves are not for the faint-hearted. Transistor amplifiers are much more reliable and maintenance-free. It is not uncommon for a well-built transistor amplifier to last over twenty years without seeing a soldering iron.

Musical Fidelity's founder Anthony Michaelson started life as a Clarinetist, and a rather accomplished one at that, recording the Mozart Clarinet Concerto as well as the Mozart Clarinet Quintet. He starting building valve preamps as a hobby whilst still a student, and this cottage industry grew into what is now Musical Fidelity. It is interesting that Musical Fidelity operate on both sides of the great thermionic divide, with the Primo, the flagship preamplifier designed to accompany the Titan, being pure Class A triode. He is no stranger to the benefits of valves, and his use of this excellent

valve preamplifier with the AMS100 is clever, bringing the best of both worlds.

SOUND QUALITY

It struck me listening to Mozart's charming A major Symphony no 29 (Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields on Argo) comparing the M6PRX with my VAC Auricle Musicbloc valve power amplifiers, that the two were not a million miles apart. Sure, strings and woodwind were slightly more mellow with the valve amplifiers, but the differences weren't as large as I had expected, there is a smoothness to the M6PRX that is almost valve-like, it didn't ever shriek, and there was none of the hash or graininess from which lesser transistor amplifiers suffer. The soundstage was wide and multi-layered, and the wit and beauty of this magnificent symphony shone through like a ray of sunshine.

Listening to Bernstein's earlier (1959) CBS recording of Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, I was

immediately struck by the amplifier's command of this huge, brass-laden orchestra. When the big orchestral climaxes arrived, with forces blazing, I was impressed at the amplifier's ability to keep a cool head. It reminded me of the control I heard from its £14,000 cousin.

When the orchestra breaks into cross-rhythms against the piano, the boogie factor zoomed up and the amplifier really danced. The transients caused by the solo piano sounded really clean, no hint of any distortion, as did the big brass moments. Visceral power oozing from the speakers.

In Coleman Hawkins and Red Allen's 'High Standards' album, remarkably recorded in 1958, the track 'All of Me', shows a thunderous double bass line, tight and musical, while Coleman Hawkins jams on top. It is not the most flattering of sax sounds, it doesn't have the warm mellow sound of valve, it's cool and detached, but quite life-like.

On to Mahler's Sixth Symphony, and the last movement, which has a huge range of orchestral colours,

Definition



Definition DC10T



Definition DC10T



Definition DC8



Definition DC8T



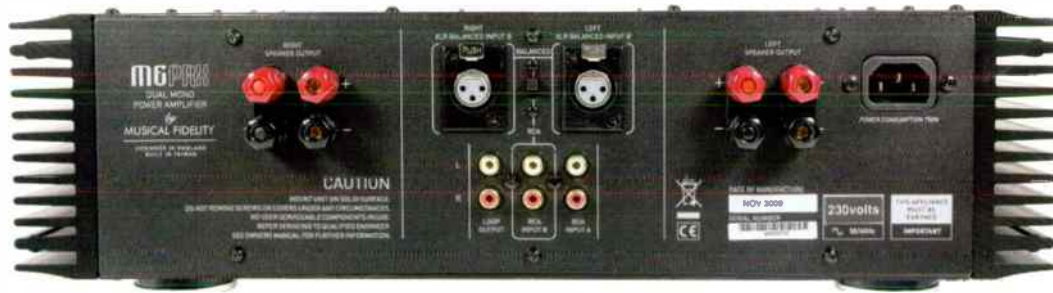
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flourishes, and textures. I had been so impressed at AMS100's ability to spotlight the individual instruments' miking, as well as making me feel that I was standing in the midst of the string or woodwind section during the relevant passages. I feel this quality much less with its cheaper cousin, the sound feels like you are in the fifth row of a concert hall. But at £11,500 less than its smarter relative, this criticism is totally unreasonable!

There is some controversy about the attribution of Bach's famous Toccata and Fugue in D minor, there is recently scholarship that suggests it was written after 1850, due to a number of kitsch musical touches that did not exist in Bach's time. In this excellent recording by Peter Hurford on the organ of the Ratzeburger Dom (Argo ZRG943) the huge range of the organ is a good indicator of the tonal evenness of an amplifier across different registers. The M6PRX passes this test with flying colours. Its neutrality can be heard across the different registers of the German organ, and both the earth-shattering bass and the clarity with which it portrays the massive hell-raising diminished chord, is extremely impressive. You can distinguish every note of the chord, a feat that is not always possible amongst lesser amplifiers, in fact I heard a passing note that I have never heard before! The amplifier here has both muscle combined with clarity.

Ray Gelato's 'The Full Flavour' is Linn Records' tribute to Louis Prima, brilliantly recorded by Callum Malcolm. On this CD through a Naim CD5X and Flatcap 2X, the amplifier seemed in its element. It made a stunning rendition of the vocals by Ray Gelato and guest star Claire Martin, silky smooth, natural, and highly realistic. The band was beautifully portrayed in space, punchy bass, real zing on the drums, and the amplifier had no problems deconstructing the playing to reveal layers I hadn't

M6PRX UNPLUGGED

The M6PRX uses the same basic circuit topology as the AMS family. It has twin amplifier sections, in mono configuration, with twin choke-regulated power supplies for optimum supply noise filtering, is rated at 260W and has the ability to drive a wide range of loudspeakers, due to the stability of the voltage source. Usefully, there are two sets of RCA inputs, balanced XLR inputs, as well as a loop which can feed line level to another amplifier, which could be useful in the case of bi-amping or home cinema use. The unit weighs a substantial 20kg and has dimensions of 44cm wide, 12.5cm high and 39cm deep. It has a custom made front panel extrusion and heat sink extrusions, which are in the form of slats on the sides of the amplifier. The badge is made of medical grade stainless steel. The amplifier is manufactured in Taiwan, whereas the AMS range is built in Europe. There is a M6PRE preamplifier which makes a good bedfellow for the M6PRX, in the same series which shares common values with the latter.

heard before. There seemed to be real synergy between the Naim and the M6PRX for this type of recording.

CONCLUSION

Anyone looking for a well-built power amplifier around the £3,000 mark shouldn't miss auditioning one of these. It has a big, no-nonsense, ballsy sound, extremely low levels of distortion, with plenty of grip down below. It really excelled on

CD playing studio-recorded jazz. It images well, and has many of the qualities of its more expensive relatives, at a price that represents fine value for money.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace turntable
- Cartridgesman Conductor tonearm
- Ortofon Kontrapunkt A cartridge
- Icon Audio PS3 Signature phono stage
- VAC Auricle power amplifier
- B&W802D loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

This M6 delivers 220 Watts into 8 Ohms and 380 Watts into 4 Ohms so it is massively powerful. It is also quite efficient, barely getting warm on the test bench even when delivering full power for one minute or so.

Like most Musical Fidelity amplifiers distortion was very low even at high frequencies, measuring just 0.024% at 10kHz, 1W into 4 Ohms. Our analysis shows this was second harmonic too, with no sign of crossover distortion visible on the analysers. The amplifier will have very clean treble as a result.

Bandwidth extended way past 100kHz, up to 150kHz -1dB. At the low frequency end, gain extended down to 4Hz before rolling away, so there is plenty of low end power, kept in control by a high damping factor of 36, so bass will be tight.

Both unbalanced RCA and balanced XLR inputs had a sensitivity of 1.35V for full output.

The M6 is a massively powerful

but clean amplifier that delivers current with considerable ease. NK

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Power | 220 Watts |
| CD/tuner/aux. | |
| Frequency response | 4Hz-150kHz |
| Separation | 96dB |
| Noise | -123dB |
| Distortion | 0.024% |
| Sensitivity | 1.35V |
| Damping factor | 36 |

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
Clean, detailed, precise and well ordered sound, but with lots of life and visceral punch to match. An excellent mid-price transistor power amplifier, well worth audition.

MUSICAL FIDELITY
M6PRX £2,995
Musical Fidelity
+44(0)20 8900 2866
www.musicalfidelity.com

FOR
- precise, focused sound
- airy, spacious treble
- articulate bass

AGAINST
- lacks a sense of romance!

Vinyl is black!



The award winning A.N.T. phono stage 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 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!

The new and much heavier 31Kg SME model 20/3 turntable is a breath of fresh air and music to our ears! This finely engineered precision turntable is built to exacting SME standards. The massive construction incorporating extensional damping of major surfaces, combined with a lack of vibration from moving parts ensures exceptional resolution and uncoloured performance. Driven by a three phase, brushless, eight pole DC motor, with hall effect sensors and closed loop speed control, gives truly excellent pitch stability.

SME - Shelter - AT/OC9 & Denon cartridges - Clearaudio - Jelco - Hadcock - SL-1200 mods - Funk Cassette & reel to reel tape - Marantz - Focal - Whest Audio - A.N.T - Puresound - 78rpm - Iso pods
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The Tannoy Revolution DC4s are small and perfectly formed bookshelf speakers. Paul Rigby puts a pair to the test...

Size Matters

When editor DP announced that my new mission in life was to review the Tannoy Revolution DC4 loudspeakers, I looked around and pondered the lack of space in my house, reflected on the vast amounts of kit already present, and wondered where the box might go when the couriers delivered them. But when the lorry turned up and a wee little package was handed over, I realised just how dinky these mini-monitors really are. They're so small that when I placed them upon my speaker stands, the little Tannoys were hardly able to span the four decoupling supports on the top!

Ranging over a restricted 270x152x162mm and weighing just 3.7kg, my first thoughts were to wave a tearful hanky at the retreating bass. I couldn't see much air being moved by these cuties. Driver-wise,

the speaker looks very simple indeed, until you look a little closer then you realise that Tannoy has utilised a Dual Concentric design. In fact, a compact, wide bandwidth version of the more recognisable units that you may have seen Noel waxing lyrical about a few issues back. Part of the driver mix is a paper cone, a titanium domed tweeter with a Tulip waveguide backed by a neodymium magnet accompanied by a simplified internal construction. The rear of the chassis provides enough terminals for bi-amping, if required.

Rather than being honed to perfection in some remote Caledonian anechoic chamber, the trapezoidal chassis looks like designer Dr Paul Mills arrived at the shape while whittling a piece of wood on a porch during a balmy summer in Alabama, in the company of a bunch of 'good ol' boys', while slurping hooch and chewing straw!

It looks positively anorexic, but then interestingly with loudspeakers, less can often be more. Smaller cabinets mean less wood to resonate, and less air inside to chuff around, messing up timing.

Why do the Revolution DC4 at all? Well, partly because he *could*. Mills' self-imposed challenge was to get a dual concentric design into as small a space as possible and, with speaker materials evolving and improving all the time, Mills decided to do just that.

The second reason? Using the dual concentric design meant that only one driver had to be fitted which allowed the speaker to shrink further. Tannoy is looking seriously at this 'small' market. According to its own research, newbuild houses are shrinking. Apparently, each year they reduce in size by nine square foot! Who can live in a matchbox with a pair of B&W 802Ds? Soon, people

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"... ELAC's use of their JET ribbon tweeter is the hi-fi equivalent of a turbocharger; it magically wipes away so many of the pitfalls of small speakers by using a transducer that wouldn't disgrace a speaker at several times the price"
HIFI-WORLD Magazin January 2011 Edition

BS 243



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will live in a pair B&W 802Ds!

So Tannoy sees the tiny speaker market as growing [yes, very good, Paul! Ed.]. Of course, those of us living in flats or bedsits will also be ideal potential customers too. Mills also wanted to juggle with materials and technology and to provide more value for money, which is why the DC4s have basically the same guts as a pair of Tannoy Autograph Minis, retailing at around £1,500, with a cheaper chassis.

Setting up the DC4s is a bit of a trial. The stereo image wavers around a bit so you will find yourself moving the speakers an inch to the left here, back a bit there. The best bass balance is not right up against the wall, somewhat surprisingly, but a little way from it - half a metre? I would recommend that you point the tweeters directly at your head too. Listening tests were undertaken with grilles removed.

SOUND QUALITY

I began by spinning vinyl and Kate Bush's 'Bertie' from the 'Aerial' (EMI) album. Surprisingly, I found the playback lacking in engagement. Not surprisingly, bass was largely absent but did resemble a hollow sculpture. That is, the bass was shaped and framed but without any low frequency substance while the vocals, normally rich and warm on wax, sounded rather cold and icy which removed much of the emotion of the performance. General midrange performance was excellent, though, with real organic clarity impressing over all instruments.

Moving to the jazz-infused krautrock of Embryo and various excerpts from the album 'Opal' (Wah Wah), there was less time for the music to become introspective because the presentation was more uptempo. I found myself carried away by the musicality and energy of the Tannoys. This music didn't dwell on the cool nature of the DC4s, I was able to enjoy the crisp projection of the guitar solos and the sax bursts.

What was going on? It's partly a problem of perception - at least from myself. I expected more warmth and depth from vinyl playback. Not getting it, I felt robbed. Perhaps the DC4s were getting a little overwhelmed by my bass-heavy, valve phono stage enriched turntable, and just ran out of puff?

Moving to more balanced CD sources was a pleasurable experience; the Tannoys simply adored the little silver disc. Suddenly the DC4s felt thoroughly at ease; this was synchronicity! Listening via the Icon CD player, I found myself relaxing

"It's so clean, so crafted and precise that an acoustic guitar solo is almost shocking in its presentation..."

for the first time and genuinely enjoying the listening experience. Okay, bass was still absent without leave, but even here there was fun to be had. Imagine sitting at a dinner, after a good meal and lots of wine and up stands an after-dinner speaker who tells you the most splendid stories about Groucho Marx. Now, of course, you'd rather have Groucho there, in front of you, giving you the stories first hand but the second-hand stories make you laugh, you have a really good time nevertheless. That's what bass is like via digital sources through the DC4s. It describes what bass *should* be like without actually giving it to you...

I've saved the best till, last, though. Playing Carol Kidd's 'It's Alright With Me' from 'Dreamsville' (Linn), the DC4s underwent an immediate transformation because, oddly, the authority of this speaker lies in the midrange. The mids are almost visceral. Power, beautifully sculptured - but from ice - emanates from the midrange. It's so clean, so crafted and precise that an acoustic guitar solo is almost shocking in its presentation. Each string is plucked with an almost devastating clarity. Each plucked string is delivered like a punch that, even when it's over, your ears dwell upon what you have heard. For that reason, you need to take care on system matching. A forward front-end will produce brightness from the DC4s, stabbing your ears with midrange icicles!

Attach a warming CD player, like the Icon, and you have an almost clinically transparent transducer but without a single element of harshness that you might normally associate with that epithet. Spinning a reissue of Phil Manzanera's debut solo work, 'Diamond Head' (Expression), the word that springs to mind is 'fresh'. Mids and treble had bags of space to

roam while the music fizzed with energy.

CONCLUSION

The Tannoy DC4s are a bit of a Curate's Egg. Bass had to be drawn on a page and described to my ears, yet still when the DC4s became involved with the music the recording became captivating. I was surprised by these speakers' apparent dislike of vinyl - or certainly my particular vinyl front end. It felt like the turntable was throwing too much bass into the speakers, which they then struggled with, and muddled the upper frequencies.

In my system, the Tannoys certainly gave of their best in the digital domain. Exhibiting super instrumental separation, they revelled in the sheer joy of the CD-based music. The musicality of the entire presentation just picked me up and carried me away. The exuberance of the midrange frequencies couldn't fail to put a smile all over my face. So do carefully audition these loudspeakers; they have a distinct and unmissable character of their very own.

VERDICT ●●●●
Striking midrange performance makes these brilliant in small spaces, but lack of bass is not for all.

TANNOY REVOLUTION
DC4 £349.90
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FOR
- spacious midband
- detail resolution
- diminutive size

AGAINST
- light low bass
- transistor amps only!
- tricky set-up

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Unlike most Tannoys the DC4 has raised output from its concentric horn tweeter, giving a lift in frequency response of +4dB above 5kHz, a property that will be clearly audible as prominent or 'bright' treble. A small amount of droop in the crossover region around 2.5kHz will soften the upper midband a trifle, ensuring there's no bite there, and below this frequency output is reasonably even all the way down to bass frequencies. Forward output from the bass unit reached no lower than 100Hz, a high value, but the port is tuned to 85Hz and will provide some bouncy sounding upper bass, down to 70Hz but no lower. So this little loudspeaker does not have deep bass.

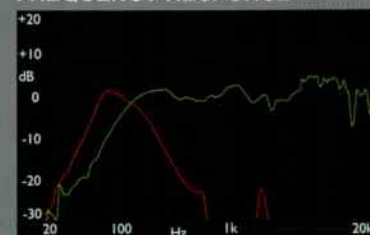
For such a small loudspeaker sensitivity was fair, measuring 86dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal watt of input (2.8V). With a highish measured overall impedance of 7.1 Ohms amplifiers of 50 Watts or more will be needed to go loud. Our graph of impedance shows the DC4 is very reactive and will induce a broader difference in sound quality from amplifiers than flatter impedance loudspeakers. It isn't ideal for valve amps as such large impedance changes produce small frequency response undulations.

The 200mS decay spectrum was

very clean, except for a bass overhang at 70Hz and some small output at 180Hz. Otherwise, the DC4 looks remarkably uncoloured.

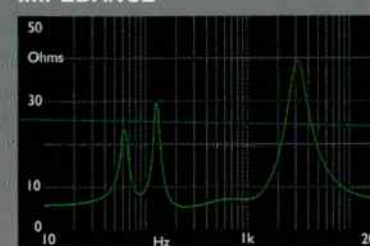
The Revolution DC4 will have light bass and accentuated treble; wall positioning will help lift bass. Colouration was very low and sensitivity fair, so it should sound clean and well balanced tonally. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE





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WIN A SUPERB BENZ MICRO WOOD SL MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE WORTH £950 IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT COMPETITION!



Here's what Tony Bolton said about this fabulous cartridge, in the December 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World* magazine...

"In the audio world, the Swiss home of precision engineering has produced Benz Micro, manufacturers of hand made pickup cartridges. Designed by Albert Lukascheck, who personally tests each unit before it leaves the factory, the Micro has been around for a few years, but recently the stylus profile has been changed from a Geiger S to a Micro-ridge design. This shape has several claimed advantages over other designs, including a very small contact area with the groove wall, promising good detail retrieval, and the curvature of the tip (3 micron radius) ensuring that wear to the tip does not alter the profile, giving long life and minimal wear to both stylus and records. This series of cartridges comes clothed in a wooden body. The official description calls the material Bruyere, and a little research found the English name, Briar-root wood (*Erica Arborea*), better known for making the bowls of tobacco pipes. Encased inside is the generator,

a crossed-coil design as found in other Benz Micro products. The solid Boron cantilever, with 'side-bonded' stylus, grooved rear pole piece and countersunk O-ring damper are carried over from the previous version of this unit.

Playing a mid fifties mono LP in average condition, my first reaction as the run-in groove played was disbelief. Most of the background noise seemed to have disappeared! As the tracks played through, and a couple of the usual 'crunches' failed to materialise, I became more and more impressed with the Benz's tracking abilities. It seemed to follow the groove wall extremely accurately, digging into the groove to produce one of the best renditions that I have heard of this record. Musicians seemed to be working together in a particularly cohesive manner, and the whole experience demonstrated the reason that Goodman was known as the 'King of Swing' for over twenty years. The timing was

immaculate and the presentation vibrant without being forward or fussy. In case you haven't guessed, I think I'm in love! I've never had a Benz cartridge to play with at home before, and I have been won over by its exemplary manners, virtually unshakable tracking ability and sheer musicality. It seemed unfussed by aged recordings (or vinyl) and just rolled up its sleeves and got on with the job in hand



– that of making highly enjoyable music".

For your chance to win this great moving coil cartridge, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 28th February 2011 to:

March 2011 Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4 Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.

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QUESTIONS

- [1] From which country does Benz come?
 [a] Sweden
 [b] Swaziland
 [c] Surinam
 [d] Switzerland
- [2] Albert Lukascheck does what?
 [a] makes the tea
 [b] calls the shots
 [c] fixes the roof
 [d] designs Benz cartridges
- [3] What type of stylus is used?
 [a] elliptical
 [b] spherical
 [c] Gyger
 [d] Micro ridge
- [4] Tony said he thought he was what?
 [a] "the egg man"
 [b] "all shook up"
 [c] "confused"
 [d] "in love"

March Competition
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entries will be accepted on a postcard only

DECEMBER 2010 WINNERS: MONITOR AUDIO BX5 LOUDSPEAKERS
 Mr. Ian Clemence of Lancashire
 Mr. S. Haria of London
 Mr. R. Jackman of Berkshire

WORLD CLASSICS

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

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

DIGITAL

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

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

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

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

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



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

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

DACs

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



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



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



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



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

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RD11S 1972 £94

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

ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300

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

PIONEER PL12D 1973 £36

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



PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600

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

DUAL CS505 1982 £75

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

GOLDRING Lenco GL75 1970 £15.65

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

LINN AXIS 1987 £253

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

LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86

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



MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £ N/A

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



MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599

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

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400

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

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79

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

GARRARD 301/401 1953 £19

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



ROKSAN XERXES 1984 £550

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

SONY PS-B80 1978 £800

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

THORENS TD124 1959 £ N/A

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



TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 £ N/A

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

TRIO LO-7D 1978 £600

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

TO NEARMS

ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46

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

AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120 1978 £75

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

ALPHASON HR100S 1981 £150

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



SME 3009 1959 £18

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

GRACE G707 1974 £58

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

REGA RB300 1983 £88

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



SME SERIES III 1979 £113

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

HADCOCK GH228 1976 £46

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



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253

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

NAIM ARO 1986 £875

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



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

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS

DELTEC 1987 £1900
Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80V per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

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

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



SUGDEN CS1/PS1 1976 £130
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

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

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



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

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



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

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

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



MUSICAL FIDELITY A11985 £350
Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.



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

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



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

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



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

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

PREAMPLIFIERS

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

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.

LECON 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 rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR

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



QUAD II 1952 £22

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



QUAD 405 1978 £115

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

QUAD 303 1968 £55

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

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 ARI8S 1978 £125

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

BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88

Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers AB1 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 HB1 1982 £130

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

CELESTION SL6 1984 £350

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

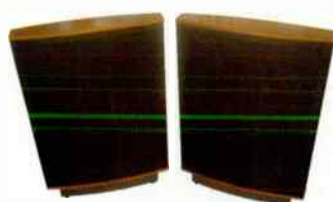
LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH

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



QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200

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



YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532

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



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499

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



CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

GT AUDIO

(Graham Tricker, Bucks)
Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.
Tel: 01895 833099
Mob: 07960 962579
www.gtaudio.com

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL

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CARTRIDGE MAN

(Len Gregory, London)
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Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net
www.thecartridgeman.com

AUDIO LABORATORIES (LEEDS)

(Phil Pimblott, Leeds) Renovation, repair and restoration. Specialist in valve hi-fi, radio transmitters, cinema amps, kit building.
Tel: 0113 244 0378
www.audiolabs.co.uk

QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS

(Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).
Tel: 0845 4580011
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

Dr MARTIN BASTIN

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(Northumberland)
Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.
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SOWTER TRANSFORMERS

(Brian Sowter, Ipswich)
Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services.
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Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

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(Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad IIs.
Email: one.thing@ntlworld.com
www.onethingaudio.com

LORICRAFT AUDIO

(Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)
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(London)
Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.
Tel: 020 8 864 8008
www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI

(Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex).
Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.
Tel: 01903 695695
Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk
www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING

(Bristol)
Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol.
Tel: 0117 925 6015
www.octave-aw.co.uk

REVOX

(Brian Reeves, Cheshire)
Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.
Tel: 0161 499 2349
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www.revox.freeuk.com

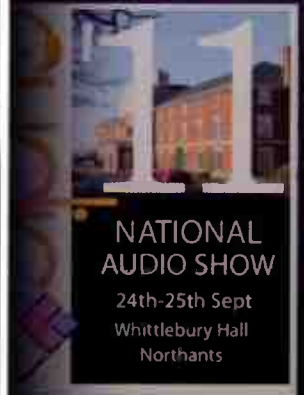
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RUSS ANDREWS SPEAKER FOCUS RINGS £10

These are simple creations but ones that work on a very basic principle. In essence, they aim to minimise the interaction of the high frequencies coming from your tweeter domes with the metal faceplate surrounding the tweeter, and the consequent

interference to the sound waves that can result. To this end, the rings are simply felt items with a self-adhesive backing that are stuck in place around the tweeter dome. They are not actually circular in shape, but are oval and therefore there is the possibility of experimentation of orientation, to obtain the best results.

The fitting guide on the Russ Andrews website suggests vertical orientation for loudspeakers with wider baffles but the rings can be loosely positioned and removed without leaving a sticky mess if you wish to try all possibilities.

I actually fitted the rings to several pairs of loudspeakers and found that they made a difference in every case. With some, such as a pair of Creek CLS10s made by Goodmans, which have a carefully shaped diffuser around the tweeter,

results were quite subtle, but on my own Ferrograph S1s, which have replacement tweeters that do not perfectly fit the cutout for the originals, the effects were quite ear-opening. Settling with the rings oriented horizontally, the speakers' entire top end seemed to snap into focus across the central plane of the soundstage, whilst high frequency effects that are tucked away in the back of the performance suddenly were able to draw much more attention to themselves. The soundstage itself seemed better locked into place and, even in direct sonic terms, there was a delicate hint of extra crispness to everything. So these seem something of a bargain at their current website price of £10.08. For a simple but non-permanent change that gave a surprisingly vivid effect, I would strongly recommend giving them a go. **AS**

[Contact: +44(0)845 345 1550,
www.russandrews.com]

soundbites

ISOTEK SYNCRO MAINS CABLE £875

Arguably one of the strangest looking (and most expensive) mains cables ever to appear on the market, the Syncro features a pre-filter device situated within an anti-resonant chassis. The point is to synchronise (hence the name) the mains supply to offer the attached component a symmetrical sine wave, realigning the waveform. This is claimed to give a reduction in mains-related noise. To test the new Syncro, I plugged it into a wall mains socket and hooked the other end to power up my Isotek Aquarius mains conditioner with a series of Isotek Elite and Isotek Optimum mains cables running from the Aquarius to my reference hi-fi system. For comparative purposes, I also tried an Isotek Extreme mains cable (£395 per metre) to power up the same Aquarius. The new Syncro is priced at more than twice the price of the Extreme, so is it worth the upgrade?

Sound tests were intriguing because the most obvious aspect

of the performance was a major reduction in hardness and 'mush' – an element which was not obviously present with the original Isotek Extreme mains cable but was noticeable by its very absence when the cable was replaced with the Syncro. The result was a beautifully smooth series of vocal performances which glided over the soundstage, lacking any sort of harsh delivery and making subtle vocal inflections and varying vocal power surges wholly more obvious. All organic instruments now exhibited sparkle and shimmer while the removal of the excessive distortion allowed all instruments, of whatever variety, time to breathe. Bass, meanwhile, was no longer trying to be understood. That is, there was now a complete lack of lower frequency strain. With the Extreme cable,

bass seemed to be almost artificial in nature, as if it was being propped up by scaffolding. With the Syncro, those same lower frequencies exhibited a shape and structure. A highly impressive piece of kit, to match its equally hefty price! **PR**

[Contact: +44 (0)1276 501392,
www.soundfoundations.co.uk]



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DAVID BOWIE
David Bowie
Deram

This album followed a series of stop-start single releases via Bowie during the early sixties, a time where the man had dabbled with a variety of musical collaborators and associated record labels to little effect. It was only when he joined Decca that a new album, via that company's imprint, Deram, was mooted. Decca, for its part, was eager to make up for its earlier mistake of rejecting The Beatles. It was now eager to find young, new talent and to exploit it to the full.

The first single off the new Bowie album, 'Rubber Band' (re-recorded on the album itself) with The London Boys (which was not featured on the album) was not well received, largely due to its quirky, nostalgic arrangement. The rest of the LP was received in the same manner as it failed to chart. The album, in fact, was a little odd. There were obvious influences from The Kinks' Ray Davies with Bowie directing his gaze at English society as well as English history and its character. Staggering along with Deram, unsuccessfully, until Decca dumped him, Bowie left to join Mercury and relate the story of Major Tom in 1969...



Now reissued in its obscure glory, Decca has packaged both of the original mono and stereo versions in a nicely presented double album gatefold and 180gm vinyl. The inner sleeves are very interesting. One LP provides a photocopy of both sides of an included single sheet biography, while the second LP provides an original copy of the sleeve art and rear sleeve liner notes. It might not be the best album that Bowie ever produced in his life (the man himself is not exactly enamoured of the work) but it's a vital element of the Bowie canon and essential for any Bowie fan.

ROGER BUNN
Piece Of Mind
Wah Wah

There's cult albums and then there's this piece from Roger Bunn, a man who never found fame but who mixed with many stars of his age. During the sixties he worked for British rockabilly star Joe Brown, later he teamed up with jazz greats such as Graham Bond and Zoot Money, then briefly rubbed shoulders with Jimi Hendrix and Marianne Faithfull, featured in a band called Djinn (which, at one time, included David Bowie) and became the original guitarist for Roxy Music... and

that lot is just the edited highlights. This, his one and only solo album, was made in 1969 but never received the general distribution that it deserved and Bunn didn't live long enough to see the LP enjoy a final general release in 2006 (he died the year before).

The album itself is a weird mixture of jazz, freak beat, folk and psychedelia in which Bunn sings, sometimes unrecognisably but within a cockney idiom, in such a cool mannered way that he always retains your interest. The track 'Fantasy In Fiction', for example, sounds like the man's had a few too many to drink but not enough for him to lose his grip on the performance. Backed by a full orchestral band, the track, like so many others on this album, makes the listener sound like a fly on the wall to a one-man private party. You feel that you're intruding on a great time. 'Crystal Tunnel', on the other hand, offers a cool jazz flow that demands small hip movements and subtle shoulder swings. As an arrangement, in fact, Donovan fans should take note as the LP's production reflects the balladeer.

Bunn would have been proud as this new reissue provides the full scope of Bunn's vision in all its eclectic glory.



FAUST
The Faust Tapes
ReR

This is an infamous album — partly for the content, yes, but mostly because of the marketing campaign that was laid upon it by the German, avant-garde group's UK label, Virgin. At the time of its release, Virgin decided to push the album, a collection of home recorded bits and pieces assembled by the group's fans, into UK retail for just 50p a pop. It worked. Around 50,000 albums were sold, a feat that would make any modern UK label or distributor faint!

The krautrock outfit was set apart from its contemporaries such as Embryo, Tangerine Dream, Can and Ash Ra Tempel. Formed by ex-music journalist, Uwe Nettelbeck, along with Hans Joachim Irmiler, Jean Hervé Peron, Werner "Zappi" Diermaier, Rudolf Sosna, Gunther Wusthoff, and Armulf Meifert, Faust pushed the very edges of music form and structure.

The album presents a cacophony of avant-garde noise, frantic jazz and manic rock pieces that are split up into, well I wouldn't call them songs, more like movements or soundtrack filaments; hence the twenty-six track listing with most of them entitled 'Unknown'. There are gentle oasis within this hectic *flambé* of experi-

mental music such as the track, 'Chere Chambre', which lays a male French speaking voice over a beautiful acoustic guitar track. Faust has a habit of doing this sort of thing, however, contrasting the controlled, the melodic and the serene either directly over or at least adjacent to the disorganised, chaotic, almost Fractal-like, primeval noise expurgations. The contradiction has always appealed to the band and reflects life itself in its disorganised, multi-faceted manner.

A LP that demands a bit of time to allow it to sink in and for the ear to adjust to the Faust philosophy, this album is solid quality. This issue is limited to just 1,000 copies.

EDDIE VEDDER
Into The Wild
Music On Vinyl

An intriguing album based on an intriguing film of an intriguing life that focused on the days of Christopher J. McCandless, a fit, intelligent young man who gave up an existence of potential affluence, savings of \$24,000 and, ultimately, his future. Despairing of society, McCandless turned his back upon it and headed for the wilds of Alaska, dumping all of his ID and paper money. He was destined never to return, dying of starvation at just twenty-four years of age. Sean Penn

starred in a film about his life in which themes of sorrow, redemption and loss are explored.

It was Penn who requested that Pearl Jam front man, Eddie Vedder, provide the soundtrack to the film. In return, Vedder reflected the wilderness of the story, giving his album, which was initially released on CD in 2007, a selection of roots-based tunes mixed with folk and some rock elements. It was a tough assignment for Vedder, who sometimes struggled to come to terms with the wrenching, emotional subject matter laid bare by the film. What happens is that Vedder sometimes drowns himself in a sea of passion and sentiment. Some might say that, faced with the assignment, Vedder should have seen this coming and politely refused Mr Penn.

That said, this album will still be of interest to Pearl Jam fans because it shows Vedder as a maturing songwriter. On this album, he is way out of his comfort zone, pushing his talent to the utmost and finding new material which he can develop and evolve over time to the benefit of forthcoming albums. Fans will view this album as an important piece in an evolutionary jigsaw, therefore. An excellent edition from MOV, it includes a 26-page, full colour booklet. **PR**

Elec-tron-ic



Family run Dynatron had an enviable reputation for quality radio and television products, says Haden Boardman, as he samples their upmarket LS15 and LS16 Stereo Valve Power Amplifiers...

Started back in 1927 by teenage brothers Ron and Arthur Hacker, from its very earliest days, the Dynatron company had a shrewd eye for high quality set design and manufacture. Very much at the top end of the market, some incredibly ambitious radio sets had been designed and manufactured, in both cabinets and circuitry. Because of the age of the two 'boys', the company was actually founded in their fathers' name, H. Hacker.

By 1936, the company was trading successfully as Dynatron Radio Ltd. from Maidenhead, Berkshire. Post World War Two trading could be difficult; a surprising amount of consolidation within the Radio trade occurred, and this small top end company needed larger corporate support to survive. In 1955 the company became fully owned by the Southend on Sea based E.K. Cole (EKCO), Radio & Television manufacturing company, famous pre-WWII for the innovative use of Bakelite cabinets and top industrial designers.

Both brothers stayed on the board until EKCO ended up in serious financial difficulties, and a bail out from Pye of Cambridge. At this point the Hacker Brothers went their own way, setting up the fabulous Hacker Radio Company, famed for table radio models such as the

Mayflower (featuring FM performance to rival a Troughline, and a push pull ECL86 amp with similar guts to a Cadet III) and the much more famous transistor portable 'Sovereign'. Hacker ceased trading in 1977, and through the Philips acquisition of Pye, the Dynatron name was passed on to the family run business of Roberts Radio in 1981. It could be said that this amplifier set was the last of the true Dynatron lineage: In terms of high fidelity amplifiers, these two little models made up in the EKCO era to about 1960, were about the last.

Under EKCO/Pye the company specialised more in high quality cabinets based around the better stock models and chassis from the EKCO/Pye radio and television range... The first ever Hi-Fi Year book lists just one Dynatron amplifier combo; the TC10 (preamp) and LF10 power amplifier (using 7 pin OSRAM output valves), selling for £25 complete. This was slightly less expensive than a Leak TL10 combo (£28-10s) at the time. By 1959 the line up had expanded to two mono preamps; TC15CS, TC20CS and TC16CS Stereo pre, and all together four power amplifiers; LF11 (EL84s) LF20 (EL34s) and these two, the LF15CS and LF16CS. Although two different model numbers, the two are designed to go together as a stereo-phonics 'set'. The '15 has a larger

mains transformer and a whole set of connections to power the matching preamplifier and tuner set. Output transformers are identical, as is the audio circuit. The '16 can plug in to the '15 for mains power. There were a couple of matching tuners, including a fixed preset model (remember there was only three stations on FM back in the 'Fifties; Home, Third, and Light from the BBC!) and a range of loudspeaker cabinets based around Goodmans loudspeaker chassis.

Technically the circuit is basic and honest. And the Hacker Brothers did not follow the late 1950s form by building a stock Philips/Mullard 5-10 design, although there is nothing wrong with that circuit! A compact 7 1/2 x 12 x 5 1/2" chassis, painted in a green Hammerite-type finish, each mono block is fitted with a single ECC83 dual triode valve which is arranged as voltage gain amplifier and split load phase splitter. This drives the two EL84 pentode output valves in a classic ultra linear push pull configuration, with bias provided by cathode resistors. Overall negative feedback was applied across the entire circuit (stated as 20 dB) and a very decent set of output transformers fitted. Output is provided for 3.75 or 15 ohms (use the lower setting for 4-8 ohm modern speakers), frequency response quoted as 15-30,000Hz and

a full one volt sensitivity available for full 10 Watts output. Input connections are via a RF coax plug (easy to change for a modern phono socket!), and the layout of the whole thing is very well thought out and very well screwed together. The power supply on each amp is based around an EZ81 rectifier valve.

Service-wise there are no real issues or problems with these amps. The High Tension is set quite low (still lethal remember!) and the amp's biased well under the maximum seventeen Watts rating of each of the EL84s, ensuring a pretty long valve life. Clearly anything with a damaged transformer should be avoided, but all passive parts are pretty easy to source, with EL84s and ECC83 still in

breakup with fellow band member. The little Dynatrons played this track with passion; although not managing to completely do the track justice, all the complex layers were in evidence. Still, the vocals sounded a tad grey and flat, lacking real guts.

A complete change of mood, and Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side Of The Moon' underlined this very slight softening of the sound. Everything was present, but could have been more dynamic and more involving.

Staying in the nineteen seventies with 'Jazz At The Pawn Shop' (I have sadly rediscovered this album's delights!) suited the little amplifier much better. This really had boogie factor and had plenty of weight, with perhaps just a touch off softness

"they're rare; I've had hundreds of Leak TL12+s and Stereo 20s through my hands, but only ever three or four Dynatrons..."

manufacture.

Modifications or improvements are not really on the cards here. A complete front end rebuild swapping out the ECC83 for a circuit using an ECC88 might make use of a little more gain. But that would be fairly drastic action on a fairly rare amplifier, and in my opinion a tad unfair on the little Dynatrons. It may be necessary to change most of the passive component with time.

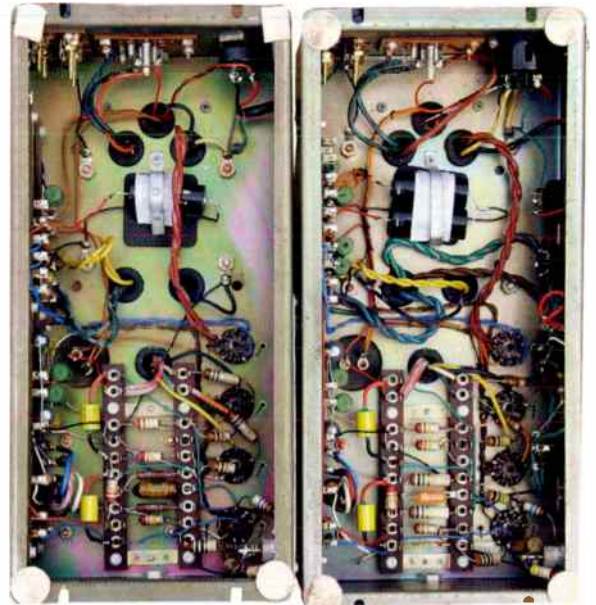
The low IV sensitivity dictates the use of a preamp, and so for auditioning purposes, I used a new Croft Micro 25. Our set of power amplifiers had been serviced at some point with some of the original coupling capacitors changed, but for an amp pushing fifty years old, this set was in amazingly original and good condition. The turntable used was also a totally original Thorens TD150 (Mark I) with a Pickering XV15/625E cartridge; digital replay came via a homemade Burr Brown PCM63K based DAC via computer and CD transport sources. Loudspeakers were a set of early Rogers LS3/5a, with all cables from The Chord Company.

SOUND QUALITY

I began with ABBA's remastered 'The Visitors' CD, and my favourite track 'The Day Before You Came'. This can be quite a challenge for most systems; the better the system, the more you get a sense of Agnetha's choked up vocals singing about her

to the overall sound. Jimmy Smith and the 'Organ Grinders Swing', did just that, snappy and fast! Switching to solo piano, and the famous 'Dick Hyman Plays Fats Waller' (Direct to Disk on Reference Recordings) showed up some shortcomings in the bass, the poor old Bosendorfer grand sounded a little truncated, somewhat missing its extra lower octave...

Vinyl replay suited the amp much better. Similar tracks played on the record player revealed a solid, three dimensional presentation missing from the digital replay. Fun was had trawling through a bargain charity shop selection of immaculate Decca Phase Four and EMI Studio Two mid Sixties stereo recording; these suited the set well. These 'panoramic' recordings (I am being kind, some may say 'ping pong') were a real hit on the little Dynatron amps. Flipping through a few 1980s seven inch singles was great fun on this set up. Again, I felt the amplifiers a little soft, and in direct comparison to a set of rebuilt Leak TL12+ monoblocks, I felt the Leaks won out by quite a reasonable margin. Noise wise, in stock form the Dynatrons were much quieter than the 'standard' Leaks, but also much less sensitive (standard Leak TL12+; 0.1V for same output) making a true direct comparison an impossibility. Tonally the Leak seemed to have the better balance; it was an interesting comparison.



CONCLUSION

These little Dynatrons are very rare. I must have had well over a hundred Leak TL12+ power amps through my hands, and even more Stereo 20s, but I have only ever had three or four Dynatron models, and this the only set of this unusual little stereo combination I have seen. As such prices are higher for these than that of the much more common Leak TL12+ or Stereo 20. From a pure audio point of view, buy the Leaks. In stock and standard form, the Dynatrons are a lovely thing, but frankly not that amazing, and despite the superb build, and the petite looks they are certainly not worth paying a heavy premium for. I feel this is one for Dynatron collectors, unless a set turns up for less than the same money as a set of Leaks, the latter is a more sound buy in today's market.

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"the vinyl LP is an amazing format, long may it run..."



David Price

As a child, there wasn't much I liked about *Blue Peter*. Even before I'd grown a single rebellious bone in my body, the prospect of John Noakes, Peter Purvis and Valerie Singleton showing the five year old me how to make pottery from garden waste or finding yet another application for wood-effect, sticky-back plastic hardly filled me with awe...

Yet, forbidden by my mother to retune to the apparently unwholesome show that was *Magpie*, I dutifully sat through *Blue Peter* three times a week for the entirety of the nineteen seventies, comfortably numb. It had its moments (elephant poop on the studio floor was a key one), but mostly it was unalloyed tedium. "And here's another report from a mudhut in Africa", said Lesley Judd. "Great", I'd say sarcastically; a worrying attitude for a recent graduate of playschool.

Yet there was *one* thing on *Blue Peter* that set my imagination running free; the 'time capsule'. Buried at the back of the *Blue Peter* garden, I yearned to see it being opened in "the twenty first century". I made my own, with copious lists about what should go inside (a Caramac bar, an Action Man, a deflated Spacehopper and *Whizzer and Chips* comic) and even attempted to excavate my parents' back garden as part of the project, until my father rather ungenerously intervened.

Recently though, I've discovered my very own 'hi-fi time capsule', unearthing a cache of old DAT tapes which powered me through my younger life in Japan. Thousands of miles away from my beloved record collection, I decided that the only way I could survive the Orient was to record (most of) it on to Digital Audio Tape. Sony's first DAT Walkman had recently launched, and I just *had* to have one...

So, upon my return to Blighty one Christmas, I set about an epic recording session. My Linn LP12 turntable, Ittok LVII tonearm and Supex SD900V moving coil provided the music via the preamp section of an NVA AP30 amplifier, which fed the wee Sony DATman. I disappeared with ten DAT 120s, and didn't see my family for weeks...

It worked brilliantly. Back in Japan, I listened with relish to my 'digital LP12' as I walked the mean streets of Shimokitazawa; like Cliff Richard I was well and truly wired for sound!

I did the same thing at regular intervals throughout the nineties. By about 2000 I had a Michell Orbe, Origin Live RB300 and Ortofon MC30 Super as my front end, and the DAT tapes faithfully signposted the different sounds of the respective sources; I didn't record over my original tapes, so I could make instant A-B comparisons, as if ten years of upgrading had taken mere seconds.

On moving house recently, I found this long-lost stash of DATs again. Suddenly my only aim in life became to get them going, through a very high quality dCS Debussy DAC. I also made fresh recordings via the old NVA amp so I could hear how my current Marantz TT-1000/OL Enterprise and Ortofon Winfield compared against my 1992 LP12 and 2000 Orbe.

The differences proved fascinating; the old Linn sounds a bit soft and woolly, with a rather narrow left-to-right soundstage, but is very propulsive and seductive to listen to. Tonally, it sounds 'woody' and coloured, but it has lovely sweet treble and makes some pretty unlistenable recordings highly enjoyable. I once thought my LP12 was the best turntable I'd heard, then I thought it was rather below par; now I realise it is neither – just a very, very good deck.

The Orbe front end proved

a big improvement on the Linn in some ways, having a vastly wider soundstage and a gorgeous tonality; you can really hear the instruments; recording studios sound dramatically different. It has a firm, thumping, insistent bass, and stability that gives a mastertape feel to the proceedings. Even with a modest arm and middling cartridge, the Orbe was a sublime vinyl source.

My current Marantz TT-1000 (a recently reconditioned 1979 high end direct drive) sounds just as different again. It's so much more incisive; it feels like you can hear not just right to the back of studio wall but behind. Transients are absolutely striking, the listener feels like they're being sliced and diced by hi hats or guitar strings, such is their amazing speed. Pianos have a glorious solidity, as if they're cemented to the rock beneath the studio's very foundations. It's an intensely visceral experience, showing vinyl as the supreme 'hi res' source.

Of the three, the Marantz is ultimately the most capable, but that's not to say I wouldn't be happy with either the Linn or the Michell. Indeed, I still think the Linn is a lovely thing to listen to, albeit not terribly accurate. Later LP12s of course have got far less romantic and far more accurate. The Michell amazes me; it has much of what's good about both the Linn and the Marantz plus special charms of its very own; you're never going to hear a soundstage like that again! It remains a brilliant design that deserves all the acclaim that the LP12 ever garnered.

Unearthing my audiophile 'time capsule' and doing careful comparisons shows me that top turntables through the ages can be quite different in their core competencies, yet just as lovely to listen to. It also reminds me that vinyl is a brilliant music carrier; it's still an amazing format, long may it run. I'm looking forward to vinyl, 2021-style. ●

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
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"when spinning records on your shiny hi-fi, take time to consider music away from your usual haunts..."



paul rigby

If you look at general music magazines, check out fan websites and gaze at music retail lists, the majority of music on offer tends to originate from either the UK or America.

Okay, you'll see some world music, now and again, with a smattering of esoteric releases thrown into the mix but, considering we're supposed to be attached to the European mainland – by politics and trade if not physically – then it's surprising that markets that sit, in geographical terms, around the corner, are not more fully represented. Which leads to you conclude that cultural differences and similarities play more of a part in music appreciation than distance.

However, if you made the effort to reach out to our European and even Asiatic neighbours and took the time and trouble to investigate just what they are capable of then I bet you'd be pleasantly surprised, at least, with a good chance of being completely bowled over.

Anyone looking to dabble in such esoterica would be advised to check out the Ace record label catalogue because it has a wealth of interesting yet obscure material, lovingly sourced and remastered. Selected from the archives of musical history, the individual CDs cover music from the territories of France, Japan, Iceland and Australia. They provide an ideal entry point into a world that can be termed as strange, rather lovely, intriguing, weird and very different.

Mick Patrick co-compiler of the, 'C'est Chic: French Girl Singers Of The 1960s' collection and who provided assistance to the 'Nippon Girls' CD compilation (subtitled the 'Japanese Pop, Beat and Bossa Nova 1966-70') commented, "As you can imagine, the 'Nippon Girls' compilation was very difficult to complete because all of the material

had to be licensed from Japan and we were all working in a foreign language. The Japanese, though, are very meticulous about their masters and sources". Patrick believed that this was why the sources for the 'Nippon Girls' were so well preserved and well catalogued.

Patrick's love for French girl singers derived from a wish not to restrict himself to UK or American music. "There's plenty of great music coming from other countries. French music has its own identity. In the same way that you can admire British music for its Britishness, you can admire French music for the same related reason."

Patrick, like many other French music fans of the sixties in fortunate geographical locations around the southern areas of England, used to be able to tune into French radio stations to hear and become familiar with many French pop songs of the period. Not many of those records were ever released over here, thus their foreign nature and their rarity value adds to their appeal. Patrick also admitted to their other-worldly strangeness and their contrast to the British norm. "French girl singers have their own particular style. Many of them don't really sing that well but it doesn't matter too much. They don't care either, they're a bit nonchalant. They're a bit blank too – and I find that quite appealing."

The Australian CDs definitely have their own identity too. They are loud and crude – sincere about their feelings, honest and raw in nature. "They are not cheesy pop records, they're beat group, surf and garage songs and it really works in the Australian style."

Surprisingly for such rare releases, many of the tracks within these CDs are sourced via original master tapes. Patrick confirmed that, for example, his 'C'est Chic'

disc is, with one exception, entirely derived from master tapes which is impressive. "Only one track is dubbed direct from record," Patrick confirmed. "Although, because we have our own, in-house, studio who are expert in modern remastering techniques, you'd be hard pressed to tell which of the tracks was taken from disc."

Most of the masters were stored in France and only one of the tracks on this compilation has ever been released in the UK. Yet, there were some licensing problems which means that fans expecting to find music via their favourite artist may be out of luck and the reason is intriguing. "Some artists have clauses in their contracts which means that you can't use their music on various artists compilations. They tend to be the larger, more famous artists. Sylvia Vartan was one example."

One of the great things about French records, and this holds true for some other European releases, is that the format of their released music was different to ours. During the sixties, many singles arrived on four-track EPs with beautiful sleeve artwork. "They were like mini-albums," said Patrick, "with stiff, glossy covers. You'll find many of them pictured in the included CD booklet, making them attractive to record collectors. They're also worth a lot of money."

Other compilations that may be released via Ace in the near future which might include a CD themed on Italian music and possibly a general European collection.

When spinning records on your shiny, hi-fi system, take time to consider music away from your usual haunts. There's plenty of gems out there. These Ace compilations represent just one time period. Check 'em out, you might just surprise yourself! ●

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"overall, it's fair to say that the progress of Digital Audio Broadcasting is once again stagnating..."



steven green

Until around a year ago, DAB+ appeared to have built up enough momentum to become the common European digital radio system that so many companies and organisations crave. Since then however, DAB+'s progress has faltered, as a number of countries that had been bullish about launching the technology chose not to go ahead with their plans. Part of the blame for this can be attributed to the global recession hitting, but I've no doubt that the sheer enormity of the task of switching a country's population from analogue to digital radio, and in particular the time and costs involved in doing so, would also have acted as a major deterrent to organisations considering such a move.

The situations in France and Germany sum up the fortunes of DAB+'s progress over the last couple of years. In Germany, the broadcasters had originally announced plans for a "big bang" relaunch of digital radio using the DAB+ standard to take place in 2010, but the commercial broadcasters then backed out, leaving the relaunch plans in tatters. France was also set to launch digital radio last year, only using the DMB standard rather than DAB+. DMB is the same as DAB+ apart from the fact that DMB can carry video whereas DAB+ cannot – the French broadcasters wanted to deliver low bit rate video streams alongside the radio stations' audio. Once again, however, as the time to launch digital radio neared, broadcasters withdrew their support for the launch, and the plans were cancelled...

As things currently stand, the only countries with a large population to have launched digital radio using the 'DAB family' (DAB/DAB+/DMB) of standards are the UK (population of 62 million) and Australia (population of 23 million), which commercially launched digital radio using DAB+ last

year. Overall then, it's fair to say that the progress of DAB is once again stagnating.

This situation is clearly bad news for the British DAB chipset manufacturing company Frontier-Silicon; so in order to give DAB+ a boost, Frontier-Silicon has agreed to purchase an unspecified amount of advertising airtime from five German commercial radio stations for the next four years. In exchange for this investment, the stations must launch on a German national DAB+ multiplex, which is due to launch in autumn this year, and which will also carry stations from the public service broadcaster, Deutschlandradio. In other words, Frontier-Silicon has agreed to subsidise the launch of the five commercial radio stations on DAB+.

Although the launch of this national multiplex is obviously a boost for DAB's supporters, the future of DAB+ in Germany is still anything but secure, as the vast majority of commercial radio stations in Germany are still opposed to the launch of DAB+. The VPRT, which is the organisation that represents commercial radio stations in Germany, was responsible for the proposed "big bang" relaunch being abandoned last year after the VPRT condemned the proposals, and the stations withdrew their support. And the VPRT has reiterated its stance towards digital radio following the developments with the national multiplex. "As we know, DAB failed in the market. Against this background, plans for the closure of FM – originally scheduled for as early as 2015, but now postponed – are absurd from an economic and social perspective and are therefore unacceptable."

And you certainly cannot blame the German commercial radio stations for being sceptical about launching their stations on DAB+.

Almost a decade on from DAB being relaunched in the UK, there still isn't a single digital-only station in the UK making a profit, and according to UK commercial radio's trade body, the RadioCentre, 5% of the entire industry's revenues are being sunk into DAB just to keep it afloat. Furthermore, despite the dishonest claims made by the BBC-funded organisation Digital Radio UK about when switchover could take place, the reality is that it's still another ten to fifteen years away. Why, you might ask, would any company want to try and emulate that?

As Frontier-Silicon has had to subsidise the launch of commercial radio stations in Germany, it is clear that the main drawback is still the high transmission costs involved in launching stations on digital radio – unsurprising considering that FM and DAB+ might have to be broadcast simultaneously for up to twenty five years! I suggested in 2007 that WorldDMB, the organisation in charge of the DAB family of standards, should develop a new standard that isn't constrained by the need to be backwards-compatible with the original 1980s version of DAB, as this would allow a far more efficient system to be designed, which would in turn reduce the transmission costs for stations. But WorldDMB has predictably done nothing, whereas the forward thinking DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting) organisation has designed and released the highly efficient DVB-T2 system, which could be used to deliver digital radio, and it would allow the transmission costs for radio stations to be reduced to just a third of the cost of transmitting on DAB+, and to a tenth of the cost on DAB! Whether WorldDMB will ever wake up to the requirements of radio stations before the DAB/DAB+/DMB standards fail completely remains to be seen. ●

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"there is something very strange about transformers; they harbour, in their lumpy iron cores, magic and mystery..."



noel keyword

Slowly, as the years go by, I find myself becoming almost religious about something that's little more than a block of rusty old iron, or so it appears to the average unappreciative eye. This block, this weight, this industrial lump, one that has almost broken my back in the past when forced to unload a couple of tons of them from a lorry, is the transformer. And not only is it a dirty, heavy object of great underlying beauty, just like those rocks Naomi Campbell was allegedly given by Charles Taylor, but I have been listening to one – or another one should I say – that is so good I swear it is surrounded by magic. It is the Music First Audio transformer preamp, reviewed in this issue by Tony Bolton.

Our esteemed editor David Price, who has a fine ear, has consistently rated this preamp as one of the best, yet it has eluded me. These things happen; moving coil cartridges of high quality elude David and everyone else when I am around because a good MC is a little bit of magic too, magic I like to sequester before anyone else can even get close! But in this case a Music First Audio 'magnetic preamp' has been floating around eluding me regularly, until recently. When I finally heard it I was almost perplexed by its subtle beauty. It has a sound, but barely a sound, that is so utterly and persuasively correct, and beautiful like a sweet spring breeze, that I was instantly won over. I cannot quite imagine how it could get better.

And what is a Music First Audio preamp? A transformer. Yep, another lump of old iron. In case this all sounds bafflingly obscure, let me explain that this preamp, like any preamp, makes the music louder. However, it needs no power; no batteries, no mains connection, no

solar cell, not even a hamster in a wheel. It uses a transformer, one of the world's least sexy objects, to 'step up' the signal to double what it was. I think you could triple the signal, but then the impedance matching problems may intrude in some set ups; there is a practical limit, if not a theoretical one.

Absence of a running hamster isn't the reason to get excited about this item though. Sad as it may be, I get excited because the rightness of this preamp seems to be forged elsewhere, in a place where simple perfection reigns. It is minimalist; it relies on Zen like perfection – and that always pays off in audio – and it uses a magical process: electromagnetic induction.

Our letters pages this month carry some intriguing observations what lies behind this unattractive yet magic device and – yes – I think I can justifiably use that great Sixties description – it's cosmic!

I saw a giant power transformer on the back of a low loader some months ago and it was hardly a pretty sight. And then there are the lumps of iron with tangles of wire sticking out that grace my work room at home. Transformers are such ugly, anonymous objects I always want to heave them out, but I know that if I do I will regret it. I don't yet admit to having transformers under my bed, but they're everywhere else and spreading slowly it seems, like something from *The Quatermass Experiment*.

The reason for this is my love of valve amplifiers of course. Each one needs at least two output transformers and one mains transformer, and the one I choose to use at home has seven transformers on it, if you include the chokes. And interestingly, the more of these things you use, the fewer electronic components are needed, meaning in

principle at least, quality improves. So this infatuation, obsession or belief system isn't entirely irrational. Not at all, and as the years roll by it's getting worse, not better!

Even though the transformer is a thing of metaphysical magic and mystery, because it passes current through nothing and directly you look into how it can do this you bump up against the end stops of our knowledge of the behaviour of the light, electromagnetism, wave/particle duality and a postulated mechanism for energy transmission, the photon, I admit to never having wound one. Having worked with an expert in audio transformers though, Andy Grove, who designed all World Audio Design transformers – the ones I sometimes helped unload from lorries – I have never quite wanted to step over that threshold. Easy in principle, good audio transformers are hideously difficult to build in practice; complex layering and sectioning are essential. Few transformer manufacturers can handle this and when they can it is usually the work of one dextrous individual, invariably a woman, to build the things. If she decides there are more exciting things to do in life, like start a family (this is a true tale), then your amplifier business is doomed...

So you can see now, we have moved from lump of old iron, to magical preamplifier, to the heart of every valve amplifier, to cosmic principle to – er – having a family! The more I consider transformers the more I become convinced that there is something very strange about them and they harbour, within their lumpy iron cores, magic and mystery. Is it the case that a transformer preamp, by its very nature, had to be better than anything else? Done properly, I believe so. ●

vinyl section

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Adam Smith is beguiled by this high end American vinyl spinner.

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Haden Boardman reports on Martin Bastin's Garrard idler wheel upgrade, while Paul Rigby samples LP Revirginizer.

KISEKI BLUE NOS 106

Neville Roberts tells the story of this enigmatic classic moving coil cartridge.

PRO-JECT ESSENTIAL 109

Tony Bolton takes a fine new budget turntable for a spin.

SPEAKERS CORNER

A couple of jazz issues from German-based reissue record label (www.speakerscorner.de) focus on two of the legends of the genre. 'Bill Evans At The Town Hall... Volume One' (1966) is a quality live recording with notable highlights that include 'Who Can I Turn To' and the remarkable 'Solo - In Memory of His Father', a sonic exploration. Also look out for Illinois Jacquet's 'Swing's the Thing', a collection of two dates from 1956 and 1958 (originally issued as 'The Cool Rage', both originally released as a 10" LPs). A vital and critical study of the man's art...



news

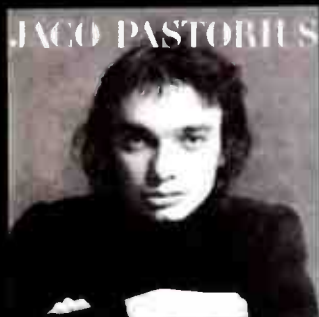
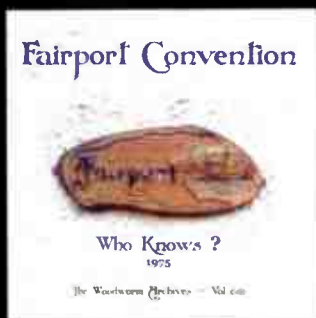
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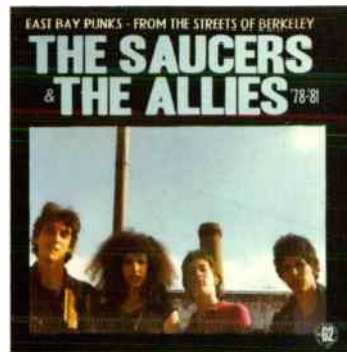
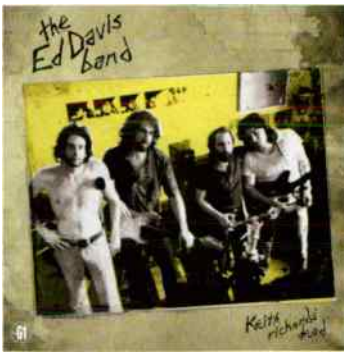
Keep an eye on Music On Vinyl (www.musiconvinyl.com). This Dutch-based reissue company, with a very active UK office, has well over 100 releases under its belt in its short life and, significantly for this independent company, has achieved 'Preferred Status' with Sony Music so that MOV has first pick on many archival and the vinyl versions of contemporary releases. Is the Preferred Status cooperative showing the way forward for the vinyl industry?

While you contemplate that, look out for MOV's new releases including Fairport Convention's 'Who Knows? 1975: The Woodworm Archives - Vol One' a rare live recording of largely unknown location but quality performances nevertheless. Next is Cheap Trick's 'At Budokan' (1979), limited to 500 copies in yellow vinyl plus a 12 page booklet. Leonard Cohen's 'Songs From The Road', is a recently released double album taking

from Cohen's 2008-2009 world tour including London and Manchester.

The Jaco Pastorius, self-titled debut album, a superb release from 1976, showcased Pastorius's brilliant bass technique. A jazz *tour de force*. Also look out for Golden Earring's 'To the Hilt' (1975), storming hard rock with a prog feel plus Modest Mouse's 'The Moon & Antarctica' is an excellent contemplative indie rock release from 2000.





DIODES



TIME/DAMAGE LIVE 1978

PUNK [SPIT!]

Three punk reissues from the Italian outfit, Rave Up (www.petrqsh.it/raveup) include The Ed Davis Band's 'Keith Richards' Dead'. The band played in the Cincinnati area of USA. This release includes their 'Keith Richards' Dead' single plus 4-track demos and live cuts. The 'Saucers & The Allies '78-'81' is subtitled 'East Bay Punks - From the Streets Of Berkeley' which says it all, really apart from the fact that the Saucers were later renamed as The Allies. Live cuts and demos are transcribed from both. Also look out for the Diodes' 'Time/Damage Live 1978', a punk band who had plenty of European success. This album features a live Toronto, Canada gig.

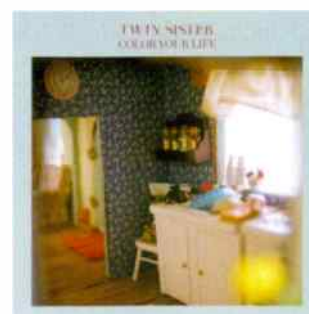
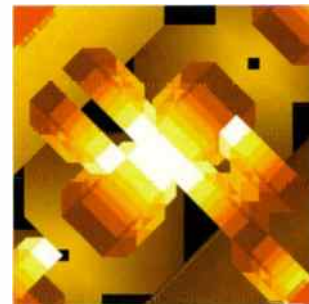
...AND FINALLY

From Munster (www.munster-records.com) comes ex-Baracudas man and now alt.country maestro, Jeremy Gluck with the help of Rowland S Howard, Nikki Sudden, Epic Soundtracks, Jeffrey Lee Pierce and more. 'I Knew Buffalo Bill', recorded in 1986 and 1988, is a centre of glorious weirdness. Sometime Caboladies man, Carl Calm, has issued ambient, meditative mini-symphonies of relaxation with 'Dayglo Port' via Dekorder (www.dekorder.com) that's full of interesting textures. Rob Mazurek's Exploding Star Orchestra (Delmark; www.delmark.com) is a modern, exploratory jazz outfit whose new album, 'Stars Have Shapes' has always been constructed like a vinyl A/B-side, even in its CD incarnation, offering a cinematic jazz flow. Fabienne Delsol's 'On My Mind' (Damaged Goods; www.damagedgoods.co.uk) is her third solo project. Anyone who enjoys a French, sixties flavoured female vocal to trigger spine tingles should apply forthwith!

The new album by Stereolab, 'Not Music' (Duophonic; www.duophonic.com) is apparently derived from the same group of 2009 sessions that created 'Chemical Chords'. Typically innovative, it provides sixties flourishes and electronic invention.

Presented on 180gm vinyl with a CD, Caro Emerald's debut, 'Deleted Scenes From The Cutting Room Floor' (Dramatico; www.dramatico.com), presents a classic jazz vocal style but adds elements of samba, mambo and more. Emerald offers undiluted energy and romance in her delivery.

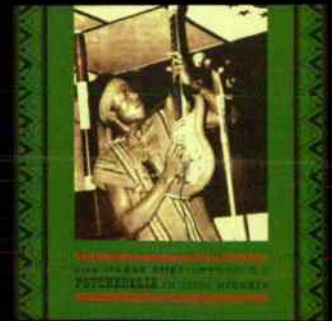
Finally, look out for Twin Sister's 'Vampires With Dreaming Kids'/'Colour Your Life' (Double Six; www.dominorecordco.com) whose album is basically the melding of both of the band's earlier EPs. Mixing an indie pop bounce with a 4AD-like ambience, the band obviously enjoy sonic explorations...



DIP INTO THE WORLD

The amount of musical discoveries sourced via world music artists has been brought to the public's attention by a small band of dedicated labels. Soundway is one of those whose archival passion has resulted in a range of significant finds. 'The World Ends: Afro Rock & Psychedelia In 1970s Nigeria Part 1' is a triple album compilation. Featuring plenty of rare photographs, record sleeves and labels, this gatefold edition includes output from The Funkees, The Wings and The Identicals.

Also look out for Vampi Soul's (www.vampisoul.com) double album compilation of Bola Johnson's works. Mixing humour with a self-deprecating take on life and his relationships with women, Johnson provides a high energy Afrobeat, funky, groovy and roots-like content that keeps the party jumping.



Groove Thing

Adam Smith gets all in a spin with the mighty Spiral Groove SG2 turntable...



A new name to many I suspect, Immediasound are a US-based company, founded by a gentleman called Allen Perkins, who manufacture and distribute an impressive range of high end audio equipment. The name actually derives from the words 'media' and 'immediate' in order to convey Allen's attentiveness and desire to fulfil customers' requirements in a timely and efficient manner. An ex-designer of both SOTA and RPM turntables, Allen formed Spiral Groove in 2005 in partnership with Lisa Thomas, a lady of many talents including film and music producing as well as being CEO of Clif Bar – a company manufacturing a range of all-organic energy and nutrition foods! The story goes that the two met when Lisa came into Allen's shop to buy a hi-fi system; the two struck up a rapport, a deal was done and Spiral Groove was the result.

With manufacturing facilities in California, the Spiral Groove range currently consists of two turntables and an arm, but there is the promise of a forthcoming DAC/preamp and a Class A power amplifier. Whilst the SG1 is the range-topper, the SG2 is most certainly no poor relation, as might be suspected by its not inconsiderable £14,000 price tag including the Centroid tonearm. It merely has a few subtle differences that set it apart from its bigger brother but without compromising

the design goal of being "simple, elegant, reliable, and faithful to the source".

Weighing in at a noticeable 23kg, the SG2 turntable is a belt drive unit based around a five layer plinth, consisting of aluminium top, centre and bottom sections decoupled by elastomer sections. The motor, bearing and tonearm mount are all mounted on different layers in order to aid decoupling and the platter is belt driven around its periphery by an AC motor which is in turn powered by its own offboard sine wave generator. The platter also consists of differing layers – above the aluminium drive ring is a layer of vinyl, and on top of that a layer of graphite which provides the interface to the record, helped by the screw-down clamp. Interestingly, the spindle is decoupled from the bearing and completely separate; moreover the aluminium ring that carries the belt groove is only fixed to the outer part of the main platter – all of this adds up to a requirement for some seriously impressive tolerancing in order to maintain concentricity!

The Centroid arm is a unipivot design that, on the SG1, uses a novel bayonet style mount to offer speedy arm changes, but the SG2 makes do with a simpler system of six bolts. Incorporating what Spiral Groove call 'Balanced Force Design', the arm is designed using CAD to simulate the forces that act upon it as the cartridge tracks the record, allowing

for them to be mechanically compensated so that the arm can offer a stable platform on which the cartridge can work most effectively. The counterbalance is large and wraps around the arm pillar to keep the centre of mass close to the pivot point and the carbon-covered aluminium arm tube promises low mass but good rigidity.

Build and finish of both deck and arm are superb, as one would hope from the price tag, and setup is not a difficult procedure, the clear and concise arm instruction manual helping greatly here.

The deck itself is switched on and off and has speed selection performed by two buttons on its top surface, with appropriate illumination. Of the arm, I have only one minor criticism; namely that there is no damping at all to the cueing mechanism – unlike Noel and David I do not hand cue, and I greatly appreciate a nicely damped mechanism that drifts the stylus gently down to the vinyl, which the Centroid most emphatically does *not* do. Still, at least the manual does provide a warning to this effect!

SOUND QUALITY

So, with cartridge loaded, deck warmed up and the stylus (carefully!) lowered onto the record, I sat back



"the SG2 simply cast aside my loudspeakers as if they were a nuisance and left me with this massive swathe of sheer insight right across my room..."

anxiously awaiting that high end hi-fi moment of fear when I would find out whether the promises made by the SG2's design and price would be delivered. As the music started, I realised that the phrase 'Oh yes' didn't quite do the result justice! What was that in my right hand speaker as Sara K's 'The Painter' from her 'Water Falls' LP slipped under the stylus? I'm used to hearing a cello, but this was like I have never heard it before through the Spiral Groove combo – every fibre of the wood

used make up the instrument seemed to be sat by my right knee, vibrating in tune as the bow was drawn across the strings.

Once the lady herself started to sing, I knew I was going to enjoy myself, as the scale, depth and sheer immediacy of her performance was laid out right before me, to each side of me and I'm pretty sure somewhere behind me too. The SG2 and Centroid arm simply cast aside my loudspeakers as if they were a nuisance and left me with this

massive, all-encompassing swathe of sheer insight right across my room. Frankly, it was all so superb I played the track through three times in a row just to make sure I wasn't kidding myself!

Rifling through some more records in my collection made me realise that this was no accident. It appears that Spiral Groove's attention to detail and careful design have resulted in a turntable that majors on insight, fluidity and a comprehensively vivid ability to pick you up and

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place you right into the heart of the performance. With a smooth, almost velvety midband that pulls singers to the fore with ease, the SG2 has no difficulty in projecting a lifelike 3D image into the listening space, aided by a top end that captures every single nuance, no matter whether it is right in the heart of the action, or subtly tucked away in the background; all topped off with the sort of smoothness that would only normally be found atop a proper Irish pint of Guinness.

Dylan LeBlanc's 'If Time Was For Wasting' from his 'Pauper's Field' album was next onto the platter and was another cause for settling back with a sigh of pleasure. Once again, the Spiral Groove seemed to take great delight in highlighting something that I had not noticed properly before, and this time it was the pedal steel guitar, with notes starting and stopping on a sixpence and floating out of the performance in a most enticing manner. 'Floating' also seemed to be the most appropriate epithet to append to Hope Sandoval's stunning performance from Mazzy Star's 'Into Dust' on their 'So Tonight That I Might See' album – it takes a truly awful turntable to really mess this track up, but hearing it on the SG2 merely served to confirm that it is one immensely capable spatial organiser. Those silky vocals pouring into my listening room were a joy to behold.

In order to check that the SG2

was not all just sweetness and fluidity, however, I next kicked things up a notch with Plan B's 'The Defamation of Strickland Banks' album, and the SG2 proved more than equal to the task. Whilst not exactly a recording to challenge exacting audiophile standards, the deck spruced it up very well indeed to leave me enjoying the sheer verve and passion of the performance. Other similarly rocking music showed the Spiral Groove to be a more than capable rhythm machine, with a bass that was tuneful, very well detailed and surprisingly deep, as evinced by the surprising impact of the subsonic rumbles featured in the Eagles 'Long Road out of Eden'. A little more speed and tightness would have been nice when things really turned hard and fast, but I suspect that unless you are a regular hardcore drum and bass listener, you are unlikely to notice.

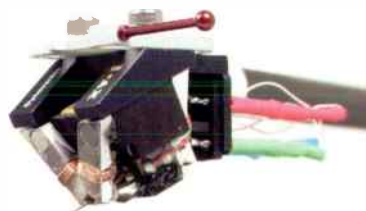
CONCLUSION

One of the joys, for me, of a high end vinyl spinner is the sheer sophistication that it

can offer. A good affordable turntable is, in some ways like a revvy sports car which puts a smile on your face as you thrash it but soon leaves you with a sore back and ringing ears! The Spiral Groove SG2 is more of a

REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Ortofon Kontrapunkt b cartridge
 Dynavector XV-1 cartridge
 Anatek MC1 phono stage
 Naim Supernait amplifier
 Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers (modified)

Mercedes Maybach in which you can lay back and feel the music wash over you in the sort of way that leaves you never wanting to switch it off. Expensive it most certainly is but, I somehow suspect that if you were to find the necessary funds, you would be extremely unlikely to feel short-changed by this highly capable record player.



VERDICT ●●●●●
 A real high end treat for vinyl lovers, the Spiral Groove SG2 is an effortlessly fluid and captivating performer.

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- exceptional finish
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 - velvety midrange
 - sophisticated nature
- AGAINST**
- no cue damping
 - price

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Spiral Groove SG2 turntable ran a slight -0.25% slow as delivered, an insignificant error pitch wise, but it can be adjusted if desired. Unweighted Wow & Flutter was low, hovering around 0.12%. The IEC weighted Wow and Flutter value measured 0.0625% our Rohde & Schwarz analyser said, as seen in the analysis here, as low as it gets.

The wrapped aluminium unipivot arm was well damped our vibration analysis shows, the main bending mode at 150Hz being well damped. The common third order bending mode at 450Hz has a little more amplitude but the peak is narrow and does not encompass much energy, and in relative terms this performance compared well with the best arms available. Also encouraging is a total lack of high frequency vibration in the headshell and along the tube, quite a rare strength. All in all, this arm should have a very smooth and character free sound, and also strong dynamics.

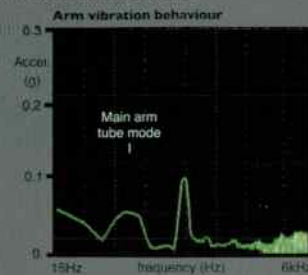
The Dynavector XV-1t moving coil cartridge was flat in frequency response, exhibiting a small -1dB droop across the midband but almost no treble peak, a negligible +1dB lift at 15kHz so will sound warm as MCs go. Tracking was very good, 63µm being cleared confidently, but there was slight mistracking at 90µm. Distortion was very low on both lateral (0.7%) and vertical modulation (0.6%), the latter

figure being exceptional and indicative of correct Vertical Tracking Angle of 22 degrees. This is a super quality MC cartridge.

The SG2 measured well in every area and is likely to offer an unusually smooth, almost warm sound with good dynamics and channel imaging/separation, due to the good arm structure and rigid headshell, aided by the cartridge fitted in our sample. NK

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Speed accuracy | -0.25% |
| Wow & flutter | 0.12% |
| Wow & flutter (IEC weighted) | 0.06% |

ARM VIBRATION



WOW & FLUTTER, weighted





"If you want to make someone feel emotion, you have to make them let go. Listening to something is an act of surrender."

Brian Eno

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BASTIN GARRARD IDLER £120

Martin Bastin has long been my source of Garrard parts; he's spent a lot of time researching the consistent parts of 301s and 401s, down

to almost molecular levels. He started with the main bearing, developed the Maxplank plinth and in more recent times has been seeing what

can be done to improve the idler drive wheel. On a Garrard this little rubberised wheel is the link between the inside of the platter rim and the motor pulley. Martin has long made noises about the original ones being "okay, but improvable". So after many years in the shed, Martin has



developed special rubbers, a decent casting and much better bearings than the original Garrard item. There is a special procedure to ensure perfect finish to the edge, and

to make sure the thing is truly round in shape. The new idler wheels are supplied complete with a tube of suitable grease.

Total cost is £120, which

I do not think bad considering the amount of work that has gone in to development and manufacture.

Fitting the idler is of course a doddle. If on a standard Garrard 301/401 main bearing, raise the edge of the platter with your fingers, and strike the bearing with the wooden end of a small hammer. The original

idler is then removed with one screw. Put a small amount of grease on the idler's bearings, and replace everything back as normal. It was clear the new idler fit much tighter in the bearings...

Sound wise I was quite staggered to find it did indeed make the deck quieter. A familiar recording of Jimmy Smith's 'Organ Grinder's Swing' lost noise that I had put down to a faulty pressing, a kind of worn groove 'shush' in the back drop disappeared. Similar on a charity shop special Decca Phase Four Stereo Sampler there was just an extra edge of detail, due to this marginal lowering of the noise floor. The more dynamic recordings didn't seem to benefit much, but there was no demerit either. A win-win situation then. Strongly recommended, it's a real improvement on the original Garrard item. **HB**

[Contact: +44 (0)15584 823446]

soundbites

RECORD REVIRGINIZER £29.95

Record cleaning machines, gadgets and fluids sit, cheek by jowl, within a crowded accessories arena. The feeling is that it would take something pretty unusual to make a splash and get noticed – and that's what the Record Revirginizer, all the way from Australia, does.

A manual method of cleaning your records, this system is in the current market, unique and intriguing. It arrives within a 500ml bottle containing a viscous liquid; this light blue coloured, anti-static polymer is simple to use but does require patience. You pour a quantity of the liquid directly onto your vinyl. Judging the right amount will be down to time and experience but I would recommend a little at a time. The Revirginizer is viscous but non-toxic and, once you've poured a quantity onto your record (avoiding the record label), you carefully spread it over the vinyl and then leave to dry for a few hours (which is where the patience comes in). The company recommends that you lay a small piece of paper or card on the edge of the record so that, when the

liquid dries, the card can be used as a handle or tab to help pull off the rest of the film. Once dry, you simply peel the now skin-like material off the record and discard. What you have left is a clean record!

I tested the liquid on an old, original issue, Peggy Lee LP that had more than its fair share of 'Rice Crispy' noises on playback. Listening to the treated LP, I noticed significant noise reduction, of around eighty percent I'd guesstimate. It may seem obvious, but it's worth stating that the reduction in noise allows more sonic details to be heard, especially the more subtle, nuanced information which was being blanketed by the noise. My LP may have benefitted from a second application but I believe that a fair amount of the remaining noise was basic wear and tear.

As with good quality record cleaning machines, LP cleaning like this does more than remove the more obvious pieces of muck and grime from clogged grooves, it also removes the release agent. Hence, an unexpected benefit of the treatment was general sonic improvement. The

overall presentation sounded more focused, with a new and unexpected transparency that revealed a welcome clarity. This is an effective cleaning system. **PR**

[Contact: www.recordrevirginizer.com,



Small Wonder



Neville Roberts tells the strange story of the enigmatic Kiseki Blue NOS moving coil cartridge, and tries a brand new limited edition...

Back in 1979, it is said a certain Japanese gentleman, Mr Goro Fokadu, formed a company called Audiophile Products in the Netherlands. The story goes that he had been experimenting with a wide range of audio products, one of which was the silver wired moving-coil transformer MCT-1 for low-impedance moving-coil cartridges. He used a winding machine that he invented for this purpose and then later developed it for winding coils for moving-coil cartridges...

Unfortunately for a number of interested manufacturers, Mr Fokadu decided not to sell this winding lathe to them as he preferred to manufacture his own cartridges, which had the brand names of Kiseki (which means 'Little Miracle') for the elite range and Milltek for a more affordable range of high-output cartridges. The Kiseki Blue was the first moving coil cartridge made by Mr Fokadu and was a low output, low-impedance design, which soon joined the ranks of the elite, being considered a reference cartridge by audiophiles worldwide. It subsequently underwent a number of improvements over the years to become the Blue Silverspot and later the Blue Goldspot. In addition to the unique winding lathe, high quality oxygen-free copper was employed for the coils and a special fluid was used on the coils to minimise the effect of room-temperature changes. The magnets were charged after the yokes had been connected, to maximise the strength of the field.

This is the stuff of which legends are made – quite literally – as it never happened! In truth, Mr

Fokadu did not exist at all and was actually invented by a Dutch audio entrepreneur who decided to launch his own brand of cartridges to his own design that he had custom-made by Dynavector! The Kiseki cartridge is in truth the brainchild of Herman van den Dungen, the man behind the Ah!, PrimaLuna and Mystere range of audio products.

Back in the last century, a company called Audiophile Products was formed by Herman in Holland which, as Durob Audio, was the European distributor for Koetsu cartridges. Audiophile Products still exists today as the holding company for DÉ HifiWinkel in Beek-Ubbergen and Durob Audio in Vlijmen. However, following supply and quality control problems with the Koetsu cartridges, Herman decided to produce his own high quality cartridges to compete with Koetsu. He prepared hand drawings for the body of a cartridge and some of his associates prototyped six aluminium bodies. These bodies were then sent to three cartridge manufacturers in Japan to make six prototype cartridges for him to assess. Of these, one was chosen and the first of his new cartridges was born.

In choosing a name for the new cartridge, he asked one of his Japanese friends to translate into Japanese, "I make a new start". The answer was 'Ata ra shii ka do de', which was a bit of a mouthful as a brand name, to say the least. He then tried "little miracle" and that came out as 'ki se ki' and hence a new brand was launched and the rest is history!

What about Goro Fokadu? Well, he was actually Mr Goro Fukada,

Herman's cartridge maker at that time, but Herman decided to modify his name to preserve Mr Fukada's anonymity and to enable Herman himself to effectively own the name! Curiously, Herman's business partner at the time who knew about Mr Fokadu/ Fukada thought that the name 'Kiseki' (which he pronounced as 'qui sait qui') meant 'who knows who'!

Anyway, the good news for the hi-fi industry is that Herman has now decided to resurrect the brand, starting with the launch of a 'signature edition' of the Kiseki Blue in the form of a limited run of 100 Kiseki Blue NOS (New Old Style) cartridges. This new cartridge has been manufactured using a few of the original components that comprised the top of the range Kisekis of the nineties (and because no better parts are available now) plus some other components where new technology offered significant improvements. According to Herman, the resultant cartridge has 'all the 'romance' of the original cartridges, but will be the last of its type as many of the original components are no longer available, hence the limited run of 100 cartridges. One of the original components is the lovely turned wooden presentation box. However, it has a hand-written serial number on the box, with a matching number on the cartridge – in my case, No. 026.

Once in my hot little hands, out came the tools and the Lyra Clavis DC cartridge in my ISO1000 (an OEM Rega RB1000) arm was swiftly replaced by the Kiseki Blue. The next job was the not-so-swift calibration and alignment of the cartridge in

SPECIFICATIONS:

Body: aluminium alloy
Cantilever: solid boron rod
Stylus: nude line contact
Tip radius: 5 x 120 µm
VTA: 20 degrees
Coil: pure iron cross coil
Weight: 11g
Output: 0.4mV, 3.54cm/sec
Impedance: 12ohms
Compliance: 15 µm/mN
Tracking force: 1.8gm
Load: 100 – 47,000ohms
Tonearm mass: medium

its new home! I carefully set up the cartridge in the tonearm using an alignment protractor and set the VTA approximately correct by having the tonearm parallel to the record, then finely tuned it by ear [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE].

SOUND QUALITY

The first recording I played was Louis Fremaux and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra performing 'Saint Saens Organ Symphony No. 3' on the HMV Greensleeve label (ESD 7038 – stereo/quadrasonic). A really fabulous sounding disc, in particular, the second movement has some amazing 16Hz organ notes which are a great test of the bass response of a system. So this was the first record to grace my turntable with the new cartridge fitted. The Blue NOS certainly had the wow factor; the sustained organ note was clearly reproduced and was felt more than heard. At the same time, the strings of the orchestra were crystal clear and there was no sense that the cartridge was focusing on the bass frequencies at the expense of everything else.

Moving onto some jazz, a direct-to-disc live recording from the 1970s of 'Lincoln Mayorga and Distinguished Colleagues Volume III' (Sheffield Labs LAB-1 SL5/SL6) the Kiseki gave a sparkling performance with crisp percussion and a deep and throaty saxophone that was exceptionally convincing. One small criticism was that the image placement was not as precise as I am used to with this recording and the positioning of Lincoln Mayorga's piano was a little far back. I put this down to a slightly constrained midrange which was the result of the cartridge not being fully run in, and can confirm that things certainly seemed to open up after just a few hours of playing.

At this point, I just had to try it with Side B of the first disc of the three LP set of Laurent Garnier's 'Tales of a Kleptomaniac' (Pias Recordings PIASR 160 TLP). As I have mentioned in a previous article, this recording has an astounding techno bass line with some acoustic saxophone, trumpet, trombone and guitar, topped off with a triangle for good measure. This is a real test for any record deck, arm and cartridge combination as it has incredible power and complexity in the music. Even though the bass line hit me in the stomach as though I'd been winded with a bowling ball, it was incredibly well controlled, tight and punchy. As with the Saint Saens, there was no tendency for the bass to swamp everything else and the

triangle had no trouble making itself heard through it all – no mean feat!

Calming things down somewhat, I tried the Kiseki out on a solo instrument – in this case, a harpsichord. 'J S Bach Partita No 1' by Trevor Pinnock (from an Archiv 2-LP set 415 493-1) demonstrated a lot more detail and clarity than I have experienced with other cartridges, but in no way was this at the expense of smoothness and polish to the performance. A full baroque orchestra was equally revealing – with an excellent recording of the Vivaldi Concerto in D for violin and strings (Telefunken Das Alte Werk 6.42355 AW), the cartridge gave a fast and lively performance that was crisp but not in any way harsh.

To round off proceedings, I finished off with the infamous Telarc 1979 digital Soundstream recording of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra playing Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture (Telarc DG-10041) with live cannons that very few cartridges can track. Indeed, this record has been gathering dust recently as the only cartridges I have owned in the past that could track it successfully were the Shure V15 MM and a Dynavector Ruby Karat MC. Impressively, the Kiseki had little problem staying in the groove during the live cannon cracks. The thud of the cannons did not mask the cacophony of all the bells in the conclusion and, as with the Laurent Garnier, you felt the power of the propellant as very much a force to be reckoned with. It's a clear, crisp, precise and poised performer the Kiseki, one which belies its real world (for a moving coil, at least) price.

Indeed, it's very hard to criticise from a sonic point of view; the cartridge worked consummately well in my reference system. One niggle was that the stylus is a little difficult to see underneath the cartridge if you prefer to do all your cueing manually, and I suppose it wins no prizes for good looks – but that's being picky.

CONCLUSION

This Kiseki Blue NOS is a fascinating postscript to a long running story in hi-fi, one that's become the

stuff of legend. Certainly, audiophiles of a certain age will know the brand and feel it has real kudos; the Lamborghini of moving coils to the Ferrari that is Koetsu? So the chance to hear a refreshed but still genetically fairly 'pure' Kiseki was hard to resist.

The result was a characterful cartridge with superb tracking ability, an extended and well-controlled bass that packs a punch when required, and a startlingly clear treble and upper mid, but without any tendency to become harsh, even when pushed during loud passages of music. As such, it's highly recommended.

The trouble is that prospective purchasers won't have the chance to buy one for long, due to the limited nature of the production run, so the promise for this coming year is an all-new cartridge called the Kiseki Blue NS (New Style) which will have a smaller body and be constructed from only fresh components. The Kiseki Blue NOS will be a hard act to follow and if the NS is as good as the limited edition NOS, then it will be a winner. In the meantime, I can wholeheartedly recommend snapping up an NOS while you can.



VERDICT

An enigmatic classic moving coil reborn. The result is a powerful, punchy yet precise performer with character to spare.

KISEKI BLUE NOS 1,450 Euro

Durob Audio

☎ +31 73 511 2555

www.durob.nl/

FOR

- excellent clarity and detail
- lack of harshness
- extended, punchy bass
- superb tracking ability

AGAINST

- difficult to see stylus for manual cueing

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

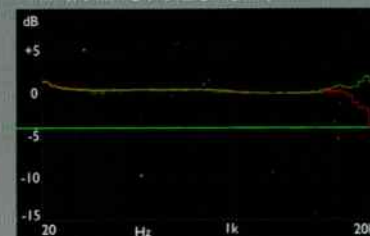
Frequency response of the Blue was remarkably flat on outer grooves our analysis shows. The MC generator has no loss in the upper midband and there's little sign of a peak caused by stylus tip mass resonance, probably because of good damping control. The small +1dB lift above 9kHz will be enough to ensure treble is well stated, but the Kiseki will sound smooth and well balanced tonally, with no treble spit. Stylus tracing loss on inner grooves was a little higher than some of the best geometries, but with output flat to 14kHz this will be little apparent. At 2.2gms downforce tracking was very good, if not quite up with the best, with 60µm peak amplitude cleared at 300Hz and 23cms/sec velocity cleared at 1kHz. The Kiseki didn't like the top torture tracks of 90µm and 25cms/sec. Output was low at 0.5mV at 5cms/sec rms so a preamplifier with plenty of gain is needed. Channel separation was high, although generator alignment wasn't perfect, with a 12dB difference in crosstalk levels between channels. Distortion levels were very low all round just 0.6% on lateral modulation and a very low 1.3% on vertical modulation, due to Vertical

Tracking Angle perfectly set at exactly 22degrees, measurement showed.

The Kiseki Blue is a very precise cartridge and is up with the best, giving good results in nearly every areas. NK

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Tracking force | 1.6gms-2.2gms |
| Weight | 11gms |
| Vertical tracking angle | 22degrees |
| Frequency response | 20Hz - 20kHz |
| Channel separation | 32dB |
| Tracking ability (300Hz) | |
| lateral | 60µm |
| vertical | 45µm |
| lateral (1kHz) | 23cms/sec. |
| Distortion (45µm) | |
| lateral | 0.6% |
| vertical | 1.3% |
| Output (5cms/sec rms) | 0.5mV |

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



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Essential Listening

Tony Bolton samples Pro-Ject's latest entry level turntable, the Essential.

Following on the success of the both the Debut and Genie series of turntables, Czech Republic based manufacturers Pro-ject have introduced a new entry level turntable, the Essential. Costing £155 for the black model (the matt red and matt white editions are £170) this new deck sports a new unipivot tonearm.

This new all undamped aluminium design is Pro-Ject's first non-gimble bearing arm. The unipivot itself is made from a hardened steel point which rests against a hardened and polished steel pad. This is all housed out of sight under a big curved housing, which must be gently lifted when setting up the deck to remove the transport lock. Care is needed to avoid damage to the delicate signal leads which also share the housing. Behind this, on a low slung stub, is the counterweight.

This has an eccentrically positioned hole so that the centre of gravity of the weight is low, helping the arm to track warps more easily. The anti-skate weight is attached to a rod sprouting from the centre of the top of the bearing housing and dangles from a piece of wire. At the front of the arm is the pre-fitted Ortofon OMB 3E moving magnet cartridge.

Power is provided from the motor mounted in the rear left hand corner and propels the 300mm MDF platter via a silicone drive belt resting against the rim. A thin felt mat sits on top of this. The plinth measures 415x112x335mm with the clear acrylic lid closed, and is made of particle board. The whole unit rests on three rubber feet which provide only rudimentary isolation.

Setting up was easy, requiring three transport clips removing from the arm, the belt attaching and the counterweight and anti-skate weight

fitting. Getting the arm correctly balanced was the longest job, with only minuscule movements of the counterweight sending my digital scales a little too far either side of the recommended 1.75g downforce. Once the correct setting was achieved the counterweight was secured using the supplied Allen key. The one thing that the otherwise helpful manual didn't point out is that being a unipivot design, the arm can tilt to the left or right so the counterweight needs to be centred to make sure that the arm is level and that the Vertical Tracking Angle is correct. The cartridge alignment is set at the factory, although a cardboard, two point alignment gauge is supplied.

SOUND QUALITY

I did most of my listening with the Essential mounted on a Target wall shelf. A bit of care in the choice of location is a must, I found. This done,

RETRO

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QUALITY HIGH FIDELITY & VINTAGE

| | | | |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|
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| Ayre K-5 XE Evolution pre amplifier with remote control and balanced facilities | £1195 | Creek OBH 9 moving coil pre amp | £345 |
| Conrad Johnson Premier Eleven 6550 valves (re-valved with 6550 valves boxed) | £1395 | Cyrus EQ7 phono stage | £795 |
| Croft integrated valve amp EL34 with valve phono stage | £495 | EAR 834P mm/mc with volume | £2295 |
| Croft mono25 valve pre amplifier with phono stage 6mths old | £345 | EAR 324 phono stage | £1195 |
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I was impressed with the rhythmic drive of the music. A jazz compilation based around the various bands that Coleman Hawkins worked with through the thirties, called 'Ridin' In Rhythm', went on first. I was impressed with the way such a modest cartridge handled the potential raucousness of a saxophone played in anger, but it stayed on the right side of good manners whilst capturing the raw energy of a hot Swing band in action, recorded directly to disc.

Moving later on to somewhat calmer waters, and Ernest Ansermet conducting L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande playing Debussy's 'La Mer' and 'Clair De Lune' showed how the Essential again focused on the drive and energy in the music. The rise and fall of the full orchestra as the wind and the sea have their 'Dialogue' in the third movement, was quite persuasive in its presentation.

Imaging was reasonable, with the sonic picture drawn with quite broad strokes of the brush. There was certainly more depth and body to the soundstage than most equivalently priced CD players, and there is potential to improve this, along with several other aspects of performance with the optional electronic speed control, the Pro-Ject Speedbox 2 (£105). Having an earlier model to hand, I plugged it in and found that the whole presentation took a substantial step up in detailing and smoothness. The bass, which was already surprisingly substantial and quite agile, became tighter and better focused, the midband gained in shape and definition, and the treble seemed to relax and expand, smoothing away some of the forwardness that sometimes occurred with violins and brass.

I also noticed that the already minimal motor noise seemed lowered, so I experimented by removing the drive belt and placing the needle on a stationary record with the motor revolving. With the direct mains power, and the volume

"for the price of a week's shop, here's a well thought out package that's easy to use and which makes the sonic grade...

turned up very very high, there was an audible hum of motor noise through the loudspeakers. With the power supply fitted this became virtually inaudible. In use, a noticeable effect of this should be a drop in perceived surface noise on a record.

Having put the belt back on, the following evening was spent wandering through some old Soul and Motown favourites from the sixties, and via a circuitous route ending up with Shpongle's third LP 'Nothing Lasts, But Nothing Is Lost'. Running back on direct mains via the supplied wall wart, I found myself enjoying the simple and unpretentiously direct presentation of the music. The songs ranged from the heartbroken wails of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles asking 'What's So Good About Goodbye', to the stereo trickery of the drums in Shpongle's 'Schmaltz Herring' at the end of side one. All were replayed with a bouncy enthusiasm that encouraged further listening.

The Motown LPs were mostly originals, and varied in condition from mint to average. The deck coped quite well, the better condition records being shown off, and the poorer ones being played with a surprisingly low intrusion of the inevitable pops and crackles. The presentation of the sound focused on the music first and foremost, and the groove wall condition seemed a secondary consideration. Something that a lot of budget decks seem to get the other way round...

CONCLUSION

This turntable is well named. It transmits the essentials of music in a straightforward and enjoyable manner. It is an entry level deck and although in ultimate terms the performance is limited, this can be improved upon, as already mentioned

with the Speedbox, and the cartridge can be upgraded with various stylis from the OM range. Apart from the coloured options there is also a version which comes fitted with a phonostage with USB connectivity. It retails at £230, which is the same price as the basic Debut 3. For shellac heads like myself, there is even a 78 option, which requires the fitting of an alternative pulley and the appropriate sized needle.

But it is within its sphere of the market that the Essential excels. £155 nowadays buys a shopping trolley full of food and a few gallons of petrol. For the same outlay the Pro-Ject Essential offers a well thought out package of a simple to set up, and easy to use turntable, that also makes the sonic grade. It demonstrates the benefits of listening to music on vinyl – the more natural flow of sound, and the greater emotional depth perceived in the music – whilst avoiding most of budget deck failings. As such it is an excellent first deck for a vinyl newcomer, or for someone who wants to rediscover the joys of their old LPs without stretching the household finances too far. Recommended.

VERDICT

Basic but effective entry level turntable with decent build and real attention to detail shown in its design. A fine first deck, or perfect for born again vinyl fans.

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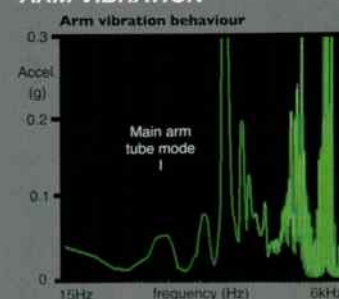
The Project Essential turntable ran +0.5% fast, an acceptable error. Unweighted Wow & Flutter varies a bit, hovering around 0.22% due to wow from 2Hz-5Hz our analysis shows. As a result, this fell into the IEC weighted Wow value, but even then at 0.092% as shown in our analysis the Essential was reasonably speed stable as budget decks go. This is quite a good result. There was little basic speed drift.

The simple tubular arm was inevitably lively, with a 0.45g third order bending mode at 690Hz obvious in our vibration analysis. However, the main arm tube mode at 230Hz is well damped so the arm is stiff, if a little ringy. This suggests firm bass, good dynamics and stable lower midband imaging, if a little but of liveliness in the sound, often a subtle zing. The headshell was lively, shown in the peaks at right, but this is not uncommon.

The Project Essential measures respectably well considering its price. It does not disgrace itself in any area and the arm, although simple, is better than it may appear. NK

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| Wow & flutter | 0.207% |
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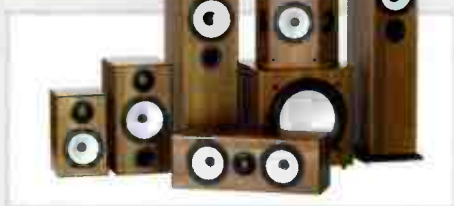
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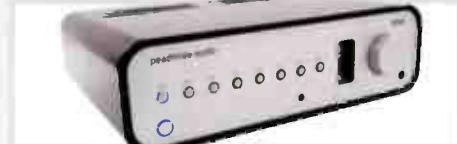
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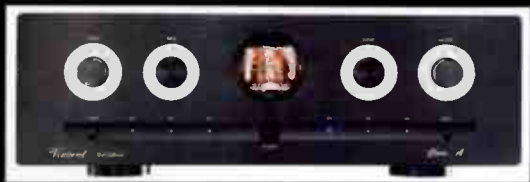


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PURE OASIS FLOW £160

There are plenty of DAB radios on sale these days, and Pure have

played more of part in this than most companies. But there are few that do 'ruggedised' portables, things which Sony used to do under the name of 'Sports', back in the eighties, for example. Most modern radios are either plasticky and flimsy or luxurious and lavish – but certainly not tough, so when Pure came out with the original Oasis back in 2007, it found an appreciative audience. With a tough aluminium frame, rubberised in the right places to protect it, rubber covered socketry to prevent the ingress of water and special controls, it proved ideal for bathroom or outside use; you couldn't exactly throw it in a lake and expect it to work, but it didn't give up the ghost at the first sign of a drop of rain. The new Oasis Flow is basically this same radio, but with internet radio/music streaming capability, and a better, fine pitch backlit OLED. Sadly though, the direct input preset buttons have gone, meaning a slightly less direct user

experience.

It's very easy to set up - five minutes or less has all the DAB stations in, plus your Wi-Fi network's particulars. The built-in ChargePAK battery will take an hour or so to charge, after which it gives around fourteen hours of use on FM, less via DAB or Wi-Fi. There's also a 3.5mm input for your iPod, should you need it. The display is excellent, navigation easy and the radio has its predecessor's excellent sound quality (considering its mono design); it's loud, punchy and robust sounding, although don't expect a particularly extended treble from its single full-range speaker. The Oasis Flow has all the frills of the latest generation of Wi-Fi radios, works well as a portable – outside and/or away from the mains – and is big enough to fill your back garden with music, should your neighbours tolerate it. It has a premium price, but certainly does the job it's designed to with little fuss.

DP

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soundbites

PHILIPS FIDELIO DS8550 £250

Hot on the heels of the superb DS9000 iPod speaker system reviewed last autumn comes this, more compact version with wireless Bluetooth capability. Its 562x216x214mm cabinet follows its bigger brother's styling, being curved to minimise sound diffraction, with the rear curved to stamp on internal standing waves. Two 3" full range drivers are reflex loaded, and fed by a 30W RMS amplifier; this is fed by an onboard DAC; the DS8550 takes a direct digital output from the docking connector of an iPhone, iPod or iPad, and will recharge them at the same time. DSP is used to optimise the speakers to the cabinet. The unit can also connect to iPads via Bluetooth, so it doesn't have to be physically attached to its source. This feature, plus the built in rechargeable battery (which gives about five hours) and built in carrying handle, makes the Philips truly

portable, although it must be noted that it's not really robust enough for the great outdoors; it's certainly not splashproof! As per the DS9000, it has a proximity sensor which lights up the controls when your hand gets close, which is a nice touch albeit not strictly necessary. There's also a supplied remote control.

The DS8550 sounds surprisingly good considering its modest price, with a decently clean and open sound; it certainly doesn't give the impression of being just another piece of consumer electronics to which no attention has been paid in the performance department. Fed via an iPod Classic running Apple Lossless, the Fidelio sounded big, confident and musical, with a nice rhythmic gait and nothing nasty as far as the sound balance was concerned. They haven't over-egged the bass port loading, so there's no sense of a dirge like boomy bass, and there's a decent degree of nice open treble too, although the pricier DS9000



is wholly superior as you'd expect. Overall, a fine, versatile and well built iPod dock that's good value even at £250. **DP**

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Overall, very impressive. Robert Townsend -- Stereophile Jan 08

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April's Hi-Fi World ushers spring in with a smile, showering you with fresh new products! We've a wonderfully eclectic mix, from the latest lavish Luxman D-05 CD spinner [pictured below] to the high end Quadral Vulcan VIII loudspeakers; from Ortofon's budget Vivo moving coils and KEF's Q100 loudspeaker (left) to Bricasti's pro audio studio DAC – and so much more. Here's some of what we hope to bring you:

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FELA KUTI

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF FELA ANIKULAPO KUTI

2010

Published by Wrasse Records (www.wrasserecords.com), this significant box set tracks the career of the Nigerian singing superstar, Fela Kuti, the man who invented Afrobeat, over twenty-seven discs, including one DVD. Kuti, the subject of a new stage show, 'Fela!', currently underway in London, was politically active, singing inflammatory lyrics and suffering for his cause by taking numerous physical beatings while his family and property were regularly attacked by governmental agencies.

Jo Ashbridge, co-owner of Wrasse and creator of the box set, is in no doubt as to the man's worth and significance, "Fela Kuti was an absolute genius. No-one else has really replicated his music, mainly because he had a unique edge. Fela fought for what he believed in, he was passionate. His music was politically driven and he wanted to change Africa, how the average Nigerian lived, where the country's riches in terms of its natural oil and the money generated from it was going and the, unfortunate, accompanying widespread corruption.

In response, he was beaten regularly, because of his outspoken words, by the militaristic government. Fela also objected to the associated behaviour — that corruption becomes so much the norm, passed down generations, that it becomes accepted. Fela thought that such corruption just made his country and the people in it slaves when, in fact, they should have had control of their lives and the oil money that was being produced."

"the music is superlative, full of energy, pride and confrontation..."

In addition to the complete box set, Wrasse has decided to publish an additional series of three box sets in which the same albums have been divided up into three portions, nine discs in each, for those who find the complete box set rather too costly to buy in a single lump.

"The discs within the three smaller box sets are apportioned in a completely random manner but there is a reason for that," said Ashbridge. "A few years ago, we published a Fela Kuti anthology which was intended to span three volumes and would do so in strict chronological order. The first anthology was fantastic, it had all the early musical years featured, Fela's core music. The second anthology was good but the included music was not quite as vital. Anthology three, which never appeared, would have featured that material from the end of his career but which lacked a certain edge and, thus, we think, would not have been as popular in terms of sales."

To prevent the same quality problem occurring in the new, three-set, series, Ashbridge decided to mix and match albums from all of Fela's eras, equally, among each of the three box sets. "I thought that there was no point in putting all of the good stuff in the first set because that volume would be the only one which was going to sell," said Ashbridge.

The original batch of 26 albums (covering 46 original vinyl albums) were once available in France via Universal but the lesser titles that

didn't sell as quickly or moved through the system were dropped over time and haven't been available for some time. Hence, this box set provides a great service for Fela fans.

Why France? World music and Fela in particular are very popular in France and world music sells well there. "Germany is also massive on world music with the Netherlands in third and then we come in after that. This box set is selling well over here, however. We created three booklets for the discs that we spread over the mini-box sets. All three are included within the complete box with text written by Chris May, who knew Fela personally."

The only problem with the main box set is that the booklets and CD sleeves give you no guide as to the chronological dates of each album, which may trouble some listeners who want to listen to each portion of music in date order. Speaking to Wrasse about this point, however, and stating that *Hi-Fi World* readers would appreciate some chronological assistance, the label did declare that it would place that information on their website.

The music however, is superlative. Full of energy, pride and confrontation, it brings a party to the ears of those who care only for the music but a sense of purpose, drive and zeal to others who see and hear it as a rallying call. Fela Kuti's music remains relevant. Check out this little box of magic and prepare to be dazzled.

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