

HI-FI
WORLD

WORLD

NO.34 JANUARY 1998

SUPPLEMENT



WE PICK THE
TOP HI-FI OF
1997

CHRISTMAS QUIZ
see page 21

MUSIC REVIEWS
see page 25



FREE CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT

World Radio History

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PRODUCT
PARAPHERNALIA

Christmas Contents

WORLD WINNERS

This year has seen many a new component pass through the hallowed portals of World Towers. Of these only a select few rank as true no-compromise performers. We pay homage to the hi-fi stars of 1997.

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CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Do you know your Watts from your Amps or your Rotweiler from your subwoofer? If you think so then take a crack at our brain-teasing Christmas Quiz.

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MUSIC

We round up the top music of the year and pick some Christmas tunes (guaranteed turkey-free) from across the genres.

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QUIZ ANSWERS

Find out if you should book yourself in to an HFAA (Hi-Fi Addicts Anonymous) clinic or if you're a sane, normally-balanced person with the answers to our fiendish quiz.

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SPARK

HOPE

软硬兼施再创辉煌 以过人

再创新天地

令普罗乐迷共享真善美

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 THD: ≤0.01% (100W, 1KHz, 8Ω)
 SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO: 95dB
 TONE ADJUSTMENT: TREBLE ±12dB
 BASS ±12dB
 DIMENSIONS: 430×100×290(L×H×W)mm
 NET WEIGHT: 11.0Kg

SPARK 765

TUBE INTEGRATED STEREO AMPLIFIER
 USING TUBE: 6550C×4(MADE IN SVETLANA)
 POWER OUTPUT: 2×50W (8Ω)
 FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 10Hz~50KHz±0.5dB
 INPUT IMPEDANCE: 100KΩ
 OUTPUT IMPEDANCE: 4Ω, 8Ω
 INPUT SENSITIVITY: 500mV
 THD: 1%
 SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO: 89dB
 DIMENSIONS: 320×190×400mm(LCH×W)
 NET WEIGHT: 25Kg

Contact Ms. Anna Gao
 CATIC (Zhuhai) Enterprise Group
 Zhuhai Spark Electronic Equipment Co. Ltd.
 No.1 Gang yi Road(Baishi), Qianshan, Zhuhai,
 Guangdong 519070, China
 TEL: 0086 756 8622042
 FAX: 0086 756 8626572
 E-Mail: /s=spark/o=szmail/p=szptt/a
 =chinamail/c=cr/@x400.sta.net.cn

MODELS AVAILABLE: TUBE AMPLIFIER

INTEGRATED AMP: SPARK

310 KT100×4 CLASS AB, 2×50W
 334 EL34×4 CLASS AB, 2×45W
 530 KT100×4 CLASS AB, 2×50W
 550 300B×4 CLASS A 2×25W
 550A 300B×4 CLASS A 2×25W
 600 EL34×4 CLASS AB, 2×40W

710 KT100×4 CLASS AB, 2×40W
 730D 300B×1 CLASS A 2×12W
 734 EL34×4 CLASS AB, 2×45W
 765 6550C×4 CLASS AB, 2×50W
 MONOBLOCK AMP: SPARK
 800 FU29×4 CLASS AB, 150W
 810 KT100×4 CLASS AB, 75W

850 300B×4 CLASS A 50W
 9021D 211×1 CLASS A 25W
 930 300B×2 CLASS A 25W
 9030D 300B×1 CLASS A 12W
 PREAMP: SC-1 6N11×4
 SC-2 6DJ8×4
TRANSISTOR AMPLIFIER

INTEGRATED AMP:

SPARK 200 2×100W
 210 2×85W
 210C 2×80W
 220C 2×100W
POWER AMP: SPARK
 208-1 200W (MONOBLOCK)
 220C 2×85W



WORLD WINNERS

Hi-Fi World 1997

QED DISCSAVER MM PHONO STAGE

If you want to get the most from your record collection but don't fancy declining your savings, then QED have the solution. A mere £35 buys you their



Discsaver. This is a small black plastic box (containing an NE5532 dual op-amp, 1% metal film resistors and polystyrene caps) that steps up and equalises the signal from your cartridge. And £35 really does buy proper fidelity.

Volume raised at the ready (the Discsaver doesn't have particularly high gain), I bounced through Bob Marley's Exodus album. The QED immediately made its character clear with a generally relaxed, mellow presentation. The lower registers weren't absolutely pin-sharp, but had a great deal more power and pungency than the price tag would lead you to expect.

With Georg Solti conducting the LSO in Mahler's Symphony No 1 it was Brownie points for the QED again in the areas of sound staging, image clarity and musicality.

Leaving the most permanent

impression in my mind was the QED's cohesive, easy musical flow. And while this isn't one of the most detailed or revealing phono stages I've ever heard, it is, without doubt, one of the most entertaining. For just £35, the Discsaver is a bargain.

QED Discsaver £34.99

QED Audio
Ridgeway House,
Ridgeway Close,
Lightwater,
Surrey GU18 5XU
Tel: 01276 451166

ROKSAN XERXES X TURNTABLE

Watching Rhodes on the telly and the shenanigans that went into creating the de Beers diamond cartel is probably the best argument for giving up vinyl you could come across. Dropping a diamond into a groove cut into plastic suddenly looks very non-PC. On the other hand, Roksan's new Xerxes X turntable is one of the best reasons for sticking with the old LP I've come across for a long time.

Like a stealth bomber on a radar screen, what's so good about this turntable is the fact that it doesn't appear to be there. What you hear is what's on the vinyl. The music sneaks under the radar screen and delivers straight into the command centres that control the foot-tapping and singing

along ganglia.

The Xerxes X must be one of the best three-dimensional turntables at the price. A quick spin of a classic EMI SXL, the Gwydion Brooke Mozart Bassoon Concerto, found a vividly laid-out orchestral image, with the bassoon perfectly placed and scaled within the semi-circle of strings and brass. Maybe the Michell Orbe has somewhat better depth, but the Xerxes was nonetheless very impressive in this aspect as well.

If you want seriously to reproduce



treasured LPs at their very best, the Xerxes X is a definite 'best buy' at the price.

Roksan Xerxes X (motor unit) £1295
DSU power supply £150
XPS 3.5 speed control (33 and 45) £170

Roksan
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 433777

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TECHNICS SU-C1000 PRE-AMP AND SE-A1000 POWER AMP

If you really want to get away from all the rubbish dirtying the National Grid's electricity, the only way to go is Battery. Technics have decided to travel down this road with the £350 SU-C1000 pre-amp.

The SE-A1000 power amplifier



certainly looks impressive too with its huge, illuminated power meters. Technics rate the SE-A1000 at 85watts per channel but our tests showed 100watts was available, with minimal distortion and good all-round figures.

Into the drawer of the 8000CDM/Da Capo digital duo slipped Time Out by the Dave Brubeck quartet. This CD does a particularly good job of revealing the ambience and acoustic of the quartet's performance, along with the complex and subtle musical flow that gets feet tapping.

Having been dropped in at the sonic deep end, the Technics managed to swim rather than sink. In fact, they did more than just swimming - they were pulling off 50m of butterfly at a heavyweight gala and barely even breaking into a sweat. There was that vital but near-intangible 'something' in the air - a mixture of tonal colour, detail, easy rhythmic flow and subtly revealed acoustic - without which no component stands a chance of lulling you into a sense of listening to a living, breathing performance.

Whether taken as stand-alone components or a pair designed to work together, the SU-C1000 and SE-A1000 pay their way without any excuses.

Technics SU-C1000 £349.95
Technics SE-A1000 £399.95

Technics
Willoughby Road,
Bracknell,
Berks. RG12 4PF
Tel: 01344 862444

DENON PMA-250SE INTEGRATED AMP

The PMA-250SE is the latest in a long line of well-regarded '250 amps but it has undergone a raft of both external and internal changes which have been overseen with a high level of UK input.

On test the Denon immediately struck me as possessing a lean and highly controlled sound that wasn't going to let anything get the better of it. Treble detail was excellent for a machine of this price, revealing subtle decay at higher frequencies and a feeling of spaciousness. Yet it managed to achieve this without resorting to undue brightness. While bass notes weren't especially deep they were well controlled and brilliantly sustained, even with current-hungry Celestion SL600s.

Miles Davis' 'Big Time' also allowed the baby Denon to flaunt its emotional yet controlled appeal. The bass was powerful for such a small amp and the sax soulful. It could perhaps have been a little sharper with transients but timing



was as good as it had been before. The intricate tambourine in the background was delicately revealed, and portrayed in a way many more expensive amps fail to manage. Without a doubt, Denon have usefully improved on an already fine amplifier. The PMA-250SE is controlled whilst still allowing colour and texture into the music, detailed whilst avoiding sterility.

At first I thought the Denon was a £200 amplifier and I was judging it on that standard. Then I discovered that the actual price of this little corker is just £160! At that price I don't think the Denon has such a thing as a rival!

Denon PMA-250SE £159.99

Hayden Laboratories
Chiltern Hill,
Chalfont St. Peter,
Bucks. SL9 9UG
Tel: 01753 888447

SONY MDS-JE500 MINIDISC RECORDER

If you've ever thought hi-fi recorders are fussy to use, then Sony's new £300 MDS-JE500 MiniDisc may change your mind. From the moment you pop in the disc and the machine says 'Welcome', you get the feeling it's been designed with people in mind.

Lurking inside the MDS-JE500 is Sony's latest 1-Bit Hybrid Pulse DAC



with a 20-Bit analogue-to-digital convertor and new fourth-generation ATRAC coding. All this high-tech trickery seems to have paid dividends.

I started listening with direct digital recordings from a Sony X77ES CD player via the optical cable supplied. The MDS-JE500 turned in a musical rendition of Steely Dan's 'Roco Darling' with powerful bass, strong image projection and a sweet, slightly softened treble.

Moving to analogue recordings made from my Michell Orbe turntable, the Sony did itself proud, conveying the full wallop of the bass sequences on ABC's 'King Without A Crown'. Midband was good, with just a hint of clouding and a slightly diminished airiness to the acoustic. So gentle was the effect though, you wouldn't know unless you'd heard the original on a capable system.

As I ran the gamut of my vinyl torture tracks, the Sony was hard to fault. Even compared to the best Nakamichi it offers 'good' sound, so for just £300 it's near remarkable. If I was forced to put my cards on the table and nominate cassette's rightful successor, then MiniDisc it is.

Sony MDS-JE500 £299.95

Sony
The Heights,
Brooklands,
Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 0XW
Tel: 01932 816000

CASTLE EDEN LOUDSPEAKERS

There's an old adage that runs: "There's nothing new under the sun." Nowhere is this more true than in the world of the sub-£1000 speaker, dominated as it is by the near-ubiquitous two-way reflex-loaded design. There are some small areas of innovation though, one



being cone material. And it is here that Castle have been flexing their loudspeaker muscle, first with the Avon and now with the Eden. Both of these use mid/bass drivers with cones of carbon fibre, a material which is not only light and stiff but also well damped.

The first artistes to get the Castle treatment were Dave Brubeck and his quartet, with the rhythmically-spirited *Time Out*, featuring 'Blue Rondo a la Turk', which heads the album. The Edens immediately revealed a clean, dynamic character. Cymbals were crisp, powerful and superbly detailed, the Castles displaying the tonal variations as the cymbal was struck at different points. There was also plenty of impact to Joe Morello's handwork, wherever he was heading in the percussion department.

At the end of the day, the bottom line with any piece of hi-fi is, "Does it make music?" Some do, some don't, and some prefer one genre to another. Castle's Edens join that select band of hi-fi components that simply make music regardless.

Castle Eden £449

Castle Acoustics
Shortbank Road,
Skipton,
N. Yorks. BD23 2TT
Tel: 01756 795333

GALE MINI MONITOR LOUDSPEAKERS

It looks like Gale have put together a well finished and constructed little loudspeaker for a shoestring £50. Two nice touches are the gold-plated binding posts (a single pair at this price) and the flared port that reflex loads the mid/bass driver.

The Gales found themselves in at the deep end from the first moment, facing up to Tori Amos' *Boys For Pele*. The way these speakers dealt with 'Hey Jupiter', a sparse piano and vocals track, had my eyebrows heading for my hairline in appreciation. I hadn't really been expecting as much clarity or transparency as the Minis manifested.

One of the penalties paid by diminutive loudspeakers is bass that doesn't go particularly low. But it sounds as though Gale have managed to squeeze some low octaves from the Minis' small cabinets.



Tori Amos' piano was surprisingly weighty and substantial, and had sufficient tonal resolution to endow the music with colour. One slight drawback was the cabinet occasionally booming along to vocals, but given the Gales' price, 'slight' is the operative word.

Where the Mini Monitors really impressed was their ability to capture the detail in and around images. This meant the Gales put together a sound stage with an appealing transparency that would have quite a few £150 loudspeakers looking worried. On top of this, vocals were smooth and expressive, benefiting from the Mini Monitors' delicacy and insight.

Gale Mini Monitor £59.95

Gale
Gallery Court,
Hankey Place,
London SE1 4BB
Tel: 0171 586 5977

KENWOOD DM-7090 MINIDISC RECORDER

Experiences of yore with pre-recorded MiniDiscs had me worried that I might be greeted by the slightly flat, artificial sound I had come across in the past. But powering up the DM-7090 with The Fugees' *The Score* found a serendipitous mix of clarity, insight, power and real rhythm.

Vocals, especially on the eerie 'Ready Or Not' imaged with crystal clarity and loads of detail (the kind you'd be hard-pressed to find from a pre-recorded on a cassette deck at any price). The drum machine possessed floor-flexing extension and impact, and pounded along with the synthesiser chords in the background to spine-chilling effect.

Thumbs up for replay then, so it was time to try out the DM-7090 as a recorder. Hooking it up to our DPA Renaissance CD player, I put the Kenwood through its paces making digital recordings. Tori Amos' *Boys For Pele* CD was impressively clean, clear and dynamic. The bassline of 'Caught A Lite Sneeze' had lost little of its power and depth. Harpsichord was crisp, its timing and precision undiluted by the ATRAC 4 compression process.

I have to say the DM-7090 does a better job as a recorder than 99.99% of all cassette decks, and without the hassle of tape tuning to boot. If the scrawny catalogue of pre-recorded titles could only be fleshed out to



proper proportions and brought down to sensible prices (not the £14-£16 charged at present), I suspect MiniDisc's future would be looking bright.

Kenwood DM-7090 £499.95

Kenwood
Dwight Road,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 8EB
Tel: 01923 816444



SONY ST-SA3ES TUNER

Mravinsky's Leningrad performance of Shostakovich from the RFFH in 1960 was, exactly as was said at the time, "A magnificently eloquent and perfectly controlled performance". So was the ST-SA3ES's for that matter. There's no mistaking the Leningrad's brass, grasped with great realism by this tuner, right down to the shading between each



section, or the sweet, rosy and vivid strings.

Equally magnificent was a thunderingly vivacious performance of Chabrier's Espana courtesy of John Eliot Gardiner and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, with its terrific percussion; just a trifle woolly, but no more than is expected from almost any tuner. Checking with a venerable Quad FM4 alongside, I discovered that there's just a spot of mild euphony brought to bear here, which made timpani and bass drums a touch deeper and the midrange a little broader and a little crisper than they should strictly be.

That touch of midrange and bass enhancement, not in the least overdone, was just the job for Rock stations. Certainly, the Sony had a driving beat and a rhythmic grip that puts it well in touch with any of the competition. Just enough, too, to add a mild dash of spice to Jazz FM's sometimes lazy 'Dinner Jazz' - a spot of curry powder to pep up the Cottage Pie.

Let's hope Radio 3 repeats that Mravinsky performance. The Sony helped so make it jaw-droppingly memorable. Just that alone would have been worth £250.

Sony ST-SA3ES

£249.99

Sony
The Heights,
Brooklands,
Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 0XW
Tel: 01932 816000

CELESTION A3 LOUDSPEAKERS

Over the past eight days I have indulged myself in the sheer pleasure of a system that reproduces music so well that I have been listening to entire symphonies and albums from beginning to end without interruption. It's addictive and enormous fun, especially with the A3s.

I found myself breaking out in a cold sweat after Puccini's *Nessun Dorma*, the atmospheric of the piece were delivered with such tremendous impact. Tenor voice was also reproduced faithfully, without the barest hint of break-up or strain. A superb recording of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* (not just the aftershave advert bit) was most enjoyable. The lightly struck timpani echoed around my living room, resonating so realistically that even the paintings on the wall vibrated in sympathy.



The Celestion A3 is a loudspeaker that does credit to a great British brand that has always supported the general music industry. They go loud, yes sir they do, but they are equally refined when being played sensibly. I'm sure the A3s will find a happy home with those who have the space to love their music.

Celestion A3

£2399

Celestion International
Foxhill Road,
Ipswich IP3 8JP
Tel: 01622 687442

TANNOY MERCURY M2 LOUDSPEAKERS

To find out how the Mercury m2s would acquit themselves, I perched them atop a pair of Haybrook's H5B1 stands and opened the proceedings with Kula Shaker's *K* CD.



While this album doesn't really rate as an audiophile production, it's laced with an infectious funkiness throughout, which the Tannoys picked up without difficulty. A blend of nimble upper bass and confidently controlled lower bass carried off rhythms with ease, while a clarity born of fine dynamic contrast helped prise Crispian Mills' non-stop vocals on 'Hey Dude' out of the rest of the mix and into intelligibility. Backing off the pace, it was time to pass the beanbags and caftans for the tablas and sitar of 'Govinda'. Again, the Tannoys' upper midrange sparkle helped bring some clarity to this track.

Taking a different musical approach, I plied the Tannoys with some choral music. *Magnificat*, directed by Philip Cave, is always a good test of tonal range and sound staging. Here, the m2s' dry bass was confirmed by an acoustic which lacked the space provided by the cues contained in the lowest octaves. Mind you, it takes a 'speaker' of at least £250 to even have a stab at this, so the Mercurys weren't disgracing themselves.

The simple fact is these Tannoys make music fun, and they do this with music of any genre you care to name. This is a rare quality indeed at £140.

Tannoy Mercury m2

£139.90

UK Sales: Marantz
575-583 Bath Road,
Longfield,
Middx. UB7 0EH
Tel: 01753 680868

The Caspian System by Roksan



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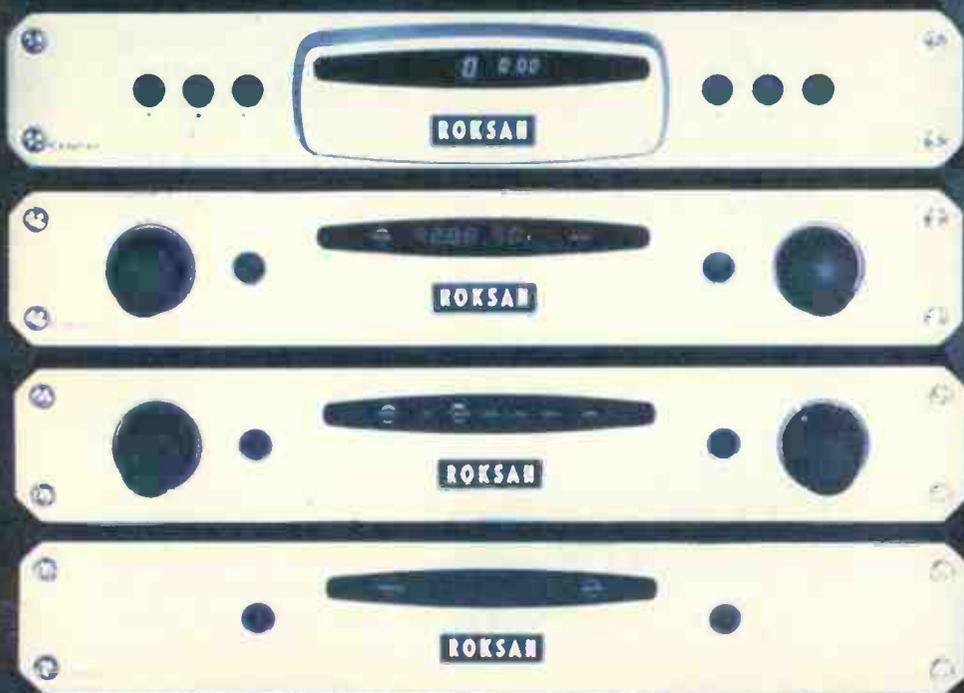
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SOUTHAMPTON (NEW) 01703 337770
TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543
WATFORD 01923 213533 (OPEN SUNDAY)
WORCESTER 01905 612929



JAMO CONCERT 8 LOUDSPEAKERS

Jamo, who years ago gave us dubious mass-market 'speakers, have got down to the serious art of real loudspeaker design. They have now proven their standing as a market leader: the Concert 8 is exceptional.

These Jamos are comfortable with large orchestral pieces and are capable of great depth of image and clarity. Mahler's 5th symphony in C sharp minor was eerily moving and majestically musical.

Bass is fast and powerful as demonstrated by Rush's 'Moving Pictures', with Geddy Lee's rattling Rickenbacker and superbly powerful attack on drums. Most remarkable is the distinct lack of cabinet resonance and coloration.

Pink Floyd's 'Division Bell' and 'Momentary Lapse' showed off the Concert 8's dynamic abilities. At all times the 'speakers remained completely in control, free of distortion and cone break-up. The result was an effortless and flawless performance.

The Concert 8 is one of the most advanced loudspeaker designs on the market today. An impressive lack of resonance and coloration shows off the excellent drive units, allowing the music to take first place and really shine. The '8s are a no-compromise, no-expense-spared credit to their designers. Jamo are now firmly in the super league and the competition had better beware!



Jamo Concert 8

£1500

Jamo
5 Faraday House,
Drayton Fields,
Daventry,
Northants, NN11 5RD
Tel: 01327 301300

KENWOOD DP-3080 CD PLAYER

Inside the Kenwood sits a Bitstream DAC with Kenwood's own D. R. I. V. E. filter system like the one fitted to the DM-7090 MD player reviewed in April. This, Kenwood say, reduces the quantisation errors that occur on low level signals. These produce a 'stepped' waveform instead of a smooth one. D. R. I. V. E. filters out the 'steps' to give a smoother waveform and, apparently, a more subtle, natural sound.

'Hear the Voice' by Mighty Truth certainly left a good first impression. Vocal presence was excellent, with the singer projected from the rest of the mix and free from sibilance. The bass wasn't quite as deep as that of some of its rivals but integration with the midrange was excellent.

The same proved to be the case with the treble performance. The Kenwood was true to the original, simply sounding natural without a hint



of brightness. The sheer smoothness displayed at higher frequencies is quite unusual in such a budget machine.

The Kenwood's balanced approach served it well with a variety of music. 'La Visite Est Terminee', from the Jam Nation CD showed a refinement which is atypical at this price. Control was excellent, with fine detail retrieval, and the '3080 wasn't inclined to 'throw' music at the listener. The sheer cohesion with which it deals with all types of music shows a maturity well beyond the norm at this level of the market. Kenwood have a real winner here.

Kenwood DP-3080

£169.95

Kenwood
Dwight Road,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 8EB
Tel: 01923 816444

TEAC P-30 TRANSPORT

The P-30 looks like it was hewn out of a single piece of aluminium and its weight is in keeping with its looks. Within the first five seconds of John Lee Hooker's Boom Boom it was blatantly obvious that the P-30 is a bit special, even at its less than bargain basement price.

Compared to our customary (and nearly half the price of the P-30) Audiolab 8000CDM there was an extra octave of bass. And this bass had some



of the best impact, focus and (unusually for digital) rhythm I've heard in a long time. In fact, the P-30 feeding a quality DAC like Pink Triangle's Da Capo would have some expensive turntables looking worried. Another benefit was a combination of complete control and an unforced, natural presentation.

It took a lot of will power to pull myself away from the adrenal overload provided by a range of funky Techno CDs to line the P-30 up with something more acoustic. Eric Bibb and Needed Time with their Good Stuff HDCD album then slipped smoothly into the Teac's copper-plated interior.

'Saucer and Cup', a solo voice/guitar number, showed how delicately revealing the Teac could be. It relayed impressive amounts of spatial information, producing a truly transparent acoustic. The tiny timing changes and inflections that make music involving were there in abundance too.

The P-30 mixed up a dangerously effective brew of CD's solidity and precision along with vinyl's natural, easy flow. Dangerous because music as listenable as this will have you permanently bolted to your hi-fi.

Teac P-30

£2499.95

Teac
5 Marlin House,
The Croxley Centre,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 8YA
Tel: 01923 819630



DNM ACIORE MC CARTRIDGE

Letting the stylus slip gently into the lead-in groove of Rosie Vela's seductive if rather processed Zazu album, I quickly found the Aciore has quite a punchy, up-beat sound. Throughout this album, drum machine basslines strode along purposefully with a dynamism that made CD sound flat and unexciting by comparison. Cymbal crashes provided incontrovertible proof of the Aciore's speed and clean top end; the ringing of every individual rivet clearly delineated.

Moving on to a Decca pressing of Mussorgsky/Ravel's Pictures At An Exhibition, I found the same focus and speed that had been obvious with Zazu. Here, it helped give crescendos real verve and impact, callos in particular sounding impressively substantial. There was also an attractive impression of space around individual instruments



which were themselves solidly located within the side-to-side and back-to-front spread of the orchestra. Helping instruments preserve their own identities rather than blurring together was a broad tonal spread.

Without a doubt, DNM's Aciore is one of the most engaging and dynamic cartridges I've come across in quite a while. And considering the fact that any cartridge, not just an MC, can be traded in on the DNM, reducing its standard price of £255 to £175, it looks like a bit of a bargain.

DNM Aciore

£255

Virtual Reality Audio Systems
PO Box 383,
Brentwood,
Essex CM14 4GB
Tel: 01277 227355

QUAD 707 POWER AMP

Using Quad's patented system of 'current dumping' the 707 fits two amplifiers in each channel. A high-quality, low-power amplifier controls the loudspeakers at all times and, when required, a second high-power amplifier provides the muscle. The low-power amp carries an error signal, so that



when the larger power transistors (the current dumpers) get within the target area of required output current, it will fill in the remainder accurately. The overall sound quality of the 707 is solely dependent on the low-power amplifier, which, by virtue of its low output, can be made of the highest quality. Quad claim crossover distortion and transistor matching problems disappear.

The Debussy Preludes and Chopin nocturnes were enthralling, deep and moving enough to make you sigh at the end of each piece or movement. Piano, which is one of the most difficult instruments to reproduce faithfully, really showed off the amplifier's finesse and quality. Harmonics, timbre, depth of tone and sheer dynamics made for a presentation that was faultless. The 707/ESL 63 combination is pure music, made for the gods.

It is clear that Quad are targeting the serious audiophile and pro user with the 707. In it, they have created a power amplifier that will breathe new life and dynamics into the ESL 63s, the great grandfather of loudspeakers, as well as less esoteric designs. Nice one, Quad!

Quad 707

£799.95

Quad Electroacoustics
St. Peters Road,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 7DB
Tel: 01480 52561

MARSTON SILHOUETTE DAC

The first CD into the Teac P-30 transport's tray was Chaka Demus and Pliers. My immediate impressions were of an extremely clean and clear sound. The dynamic duo's vocals were well focused and easy to follow, the rhythm section in full flow as my tapping feet demonstrated. There was a good dose of detail present as well, all the way from the powerful basslines up to the complex percussion.

The ever-present Dave Brubeck Quartet followed with their Time Out album. Here the Marston was equally impressive. Cymbals sounded suitably realistic, shimmering and decaying in a believable manner and sax was rich and smooth. The piano imaged forward out of the right-hand 'speaker' as it should and had a realistic timbre to boot.



Switching to the optional power supply made a significant difference, all of it for the better. Most notable was the improved weight to the sound, especially at the bass end. Stereo width broadened significantly although stage depth, which was already very good anyway, didn't benefit to the same extent. All in all, the Silhouette was sounding much more natural thanks to the loss of the clinical edge that the DAC possessed when used on its own.

Marston Audio Research's Silhouette DAC on its own is really rather good, only a few minor blemishes blotting its copy book. With its optional power supply the good bits get even better.

Marston Silhouette DAC/PSU

£650/895

Marston Audio Research
PO Box 89,
Kings Lynn,
Norfolk PE30 5SH
Tel: 01553 772875

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November 97

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OBH-12 UK Price: **£199**



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Friern Barnet, London N11 3ER, UK
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ROKSAN CASPIAN CD PLAYER

Sitting next to the laser inside the Caspian CD is a green light. Roksan say this shines onto the disc and helps the laser to focus on the disc, reducing data reading errors and improving laser tracking. Roksan were a bit vague as to exactly how this system works because there's still some patent work going on.



Suffice it to say, the green light and the fact that this player comes from the same stable as the Caspian integrated we use as a £700 reference what my ears' appetite.

The Dave Brubeck quartet showed what the Caspian was capable of in the treble, with great resolution of detail that wasn't due to an in-your-face forwardness, just an extremely revealing presentation. With cymbals on this album, almost all the delicate tonal gradations were obvious, where many players only manage a monotonal version of events. Similar focus and delicacy were obvious in the bottom end, as a lean but perfectly formed double-bass demonstrated.

Janis Joplin's Pearl album on a Master Sound Super Bit Mapping CD found the Caspian no slouch when it came to rhythm either.

The Caspian is a very smooth, even performer blessed with plenty of rhythmic drive. It looks like going green is a good idea sonically for the Caspian. I can see the competition following suit, although they'll be going green with envy.

Roksan Caspian CD £695

Roksan
St. Peters Road,
Huntingdon,
PE18 7DB
Tel: 01480 433777

MARANTZ CD-17 KI-S CD PLAYER

The moment you lift Marantz's CD-17 KI-Signature from the box you can appreciate its clean design and styling. The CD-17 KI-S is a no-compromise, heavyweight music machine that is dressed to kill - Mozart in Moschino, Berlioz in Boss and Jean-Michel Jarre in Jean-Paul Gaultier. A tribute to its creator, the CD-17 KI-S is the inimitable Ken Ishiwata personified.

Juluka, the fantastically powerful and rhythm infected African Trad/Rock band have put out some great AAD recordings. 'Scatterlings Of Africa' in particular delivered bass that was solid in attack and had a real resonance in the decay. Vocals were slightly recessed and less artificially forward than they usually are in this recording. The whole sound was lush and natural.



Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor demonstrated once more a bass powerful enough to fill an aircraft hangar without sounding bloated or fuzzy. Few CD players are capable of such an excellent job on organ music. This is one of the real tests of equipment performance, as the organ has the widest dynamic range of all instruments.

What really got me about this player is that it performs the basics so well that all you are left with is music. There are no snags, quirks or irregularities - Ken has succeeded in raising a fine CD player to the status of a superstar.

Marantz CD-17 KI-S £1299.90

Marantz Hi-Fi
Padbury Oaks,
575-583 Bath Road,
Longfield,
Middx. UB7 0EH
Tel: 01753 680868

YAMAHA KX-580 SE TAPE DECK

To find out how the KX-580 Special Edition would fare with pre-recorded cassettes, I dropped a copy of Heaven 17's Luxury Gap album into the Yamaha's drawer. The transport is obviously one of the better single capstan types around, because there was no hint of vocals or instruments wandering around in the sound stage as there is with transports that have poor speed stability. Bass had good weight and drive, midrange was clean and smooth and treble detailed.

All the other ingredients necessary for a hi-fi recipe were there too - bass that had weight and drive with good rhythm, clean, smooth midrange and detailed treble. With its decent front-to-back sound staging, low hiss levels and an innately involving sound the '580 SE won me over.

Feeding the Yamaha a higher quality recording - Vladimir Ashkenazy performing Chopin's Piano works Vol VIII - produced impressive results. Pitch was sure and steady, giving the overall sound a satisfyingly solid, tidy character which made for engaging listening. Tonal quality was good too, the only flaw a slight wiriness in the



upper registers, as is common to just about every tape deck ever built.

Yamaha's KX-580 SE is an impressive deck all round. It sounds good with pre-recordeds, whether they're dull or bright, thanks to its Play Trim, and it makes recordings with Dolby S that are very close to the original. You couldn't ask for more.

Yamaha KX-580SE £249.95

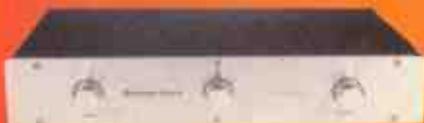
Yamaha
200 Rickmansworth Road,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 7JS
Tel: 01923 233166



**SONNETEER
ALABASTER
AMPLIFIER**

So alluring and seductive does the Alabaster sound that after Randy Crawford's 'You Might Need Somebody' had finished, I suddenly remembered I was supposed to be reviewing the amp rather than sitting there transfixed, marvelling at the power of her voice and the beauty of the arrangement. Here was a genuine musical event instead of a mere hi-fi reproduction, the Sonneteer relaying that uncanny spark between players that you so rarely hear outside a live gig.

Dynamically the Alabaster was spot on as well. It may have lacked the sheer wallop of my reference 100watt Sony Esprit V-FET power amp but it was easily better at those tiny little accents that bring music alive. Along with its excellent timing (the Alabaster can stop and go better than Eddie Irvine) this made for a very enjoyable rendition of REM's 'Near Wild Heaven'. Without sounding up-front or aggressive, it conveyed the power



and scale of the song along with all its intricacies (such as Peter Buck's masterly guitar picking) like a true pro. In fact, I've yet to hear a more emotive rendition of this lost REM gem on any other integrated.

The Alabaster is an extremely impressive device which has that elusive combination of a sweet, mellifluous, musical sound with sledgehammer 'speaker-driving' ability. It could be just what you've always wanted - I know I wasn't too happy to give it back.

**PINK TRIANGLE
TARANTELLA
TURNTABLE**

A 180gm audiophile pressing of Muddy Waters' Folk Singer from Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs with its glorious reverb had the Pink Triangle giving the impression that the back wall of the listening room had been knocked through into the building next door, such was the feeling of spaciousness it produced.

The Tarantella proved its dynamic worth by not compressing or



roughening up Muddy's vocals, which had quite frightening power at times. It's partly knowing that the Tarantella is free from these twin nasties that makes it such a joy to listen to - you're not counting down to the places in particular tracks where lesser decks run into problems.

Listening to Time Zone's 'World Destruction' 12in. was prefaced by the kind of manic grin that means a fair amount of low-frequency information is about to come my ears' way. As the music emerged from the Jamo Concert 8s that grin just spread wider. In spite of its delicate appearance the Tarantella can pack a real bass punch without blurring instrumental or vocal images together.

At £750 with the RB300, Pink Triangle's Tarantella is a truly exceptional piece of equipment. And not only does it sound superb it looks gorgeous too.

**DENON DCD-S10 CD
PLAYER**

If you want an atmospheric, slightly warm and engaging sound, then it's got to be the Denon for you. This, very likely, is down to the Alpha Processing filter Denon are so proud of because the mid-price DCD-1015 player has an element of this signature in its sound too. It produces in the DCD-S10 an impression of acoustic space which is quite remarkable.

Take Anne-Sofie von Otter's solo from Then Svenske Messan on Proprius. Heaven knows what St Gertrud's Church in Stockholm is really like inside but you couldn't mistake it for being anything else. Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five' swings along with deceptive ease but it's built upon a series of out-of-the-



ordinary time signatures. The Denon reproduced this with stop-watch accuracy, so much so you could sense Morello and Brubeck smiling quickly at each other as the tricky moment came off perfectly.

When it came down to The Fugees' version of 'No Woman No Cry' or Leftfield's 'A Final Hit' the DCD-S10 had floorboard rattling bass and a knack of leaving no sample or MIDI-trick unturned and tempted you to turn the volume well past eleven and compete with the Ministry of Sound or the neighbours. That's the neighbours across the other side of the street hanging out of a white car with an orange stripe. . . Oh-oh!

Sonneteer Alabaster £899.95

Pink Triangle Tarantella £575

Denon DCD-S10 £1299.99

Sonneteer,
PO Box 163c,
Esher,
KT10 0YH
Tel: 01372 468676

Pink Triangle
Camberwell Bus. Centre,
Camberwell,
London SE5 7RR
Tel: 0171 703 5498

Hayden Labs
Chiltern Hill,
Chalfont St. Peter,
Bucks. SL9 9UG
Tel: 01753 888447



ROKSAN ARTAXERXES X PHONO STAGE

Listening to Bob Marley's Natty Dread I found the Roksan strutting its transparency. Marley's vocals hung crystal clear between and in front of the 'speakers'. The same separation made itself felt with instruments, each occupying its own space in the overall acoustic. This kind of clarity allows you to listen right into the depths of a record's grooves and, with a phono



stage of the Artaxerxes X's ability, does so without sounding sterile.

If the sound of silence is music to your ears, then the Roksan will win you over in this area as well. It might not be the quietest phono stage we've ever measured but it still produces barely audible hiss with MCs and will do justice to a vinyl source that digs out more music than background noise. And where many alternatives can produce a travesty of treble and midrange with harsh, scratchy upper registers, the Artaxerxes X came clean on Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra on a Decca pressing with powerful cymbal crashes and massed violins free from hardness and spit.

Proof of the Roksan's neutrality was the way it transmitted the almost golden warmth of this recording in its entirety while it had seen Bob Marley through appropriately ganja tinted spectacles.

Roksan Artaxerxes X
with Atessa PSU £945

Roksan
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cams. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 431777

KIMBER POWERKORD MAINS CABLES

The first candidate to connect Roksan's Caspian CD player to the mains was a four-foot length of 4TCM. Even as I was walking over to our customary listening spot I could hear better bass definition and extension - there was now more rhythm coming through the Roksan Caspian CD and Audio Analogue Puccini SE amplifier than you could shake a very big stick at. Treble was also sweeter and smoother.

Now it was time to replace the 4TCM with five feet of 8TCM. Again, the benefits weren't small. I got more of everything - bass went lower and was faster, the sound stage opened up further and images became three dimensional where before they'd only managed two and a half. And if you wanted to shake a stick at the rhythm, it would be the size of a telegraph pole.

The costliest Kimber upgrade was the six-way 8TCM-wired mains distribution block at £200. Now whatever was playing through the Caspian and Puccini SE had a truly life-



like quality to it that made burning the midnight oil to my favourite recordings a strong possibility.

Kimber 4TCM PowerKord (4ft.) £73

Kimber 8TCM PowerKord (5ft.) £121

Kimber 8TCM 6-way block (3ft.) £200

Russ Andrews Turntable
Accessories
Edge Bank House,
Skelsmergh,
Kendal,
Cumbria LA8 9AS
Tel: 0800 373467

CREEK OBH-8SE AND OBH-9 PHONO STAGES

Where lesser phono stages appear fast by adding an artificial edge to the sound, the Creek OBH-8SE MM equaliser used good old-fashioned grip. The heavily modulated bass sequencing on Inner City's 'Good Life' proved it could stop-start far faster than rivals like Rotel's IC-based RQ-970BX, without sounding the least bit hard. Rather, the Creek was satisfyingly smooth from bottom to top. Sound staging was another high point, the Creek projecting lead vocals right out into the room while allowing backing tracks to hang well back in the recorded acoustic.

Moving to the OBH-9 MC stage with the OBH-2 PSU the opening piano and acoustic guitar parts of Fleetwood Mac's 'Sara' took on a delicacy and finesse that the Rotel just couldn't match: vocals were smoother and more powerful, and drumming had far more



pace and feel. But most impressive was that combination of smoothness and musicality, like the subtle interplay between cymbals, bass and snare drums which never descended into harshness or aggression.

I'd say these new Creeks are easily the best low-price phono stages on the market - you'll need to spend £300 on LFD's Mistral to truly better them. Use a decent budget deck like Systemdair's 2X2/RB300 and a cartridge like Goldring's 1042 MM for great results.

CREEK OBH-8SE/OBH-2 £160

CREEK OBH-9/OBH-1 £110

(OBH-2 PSU option £20 extra)

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London N11 3ES
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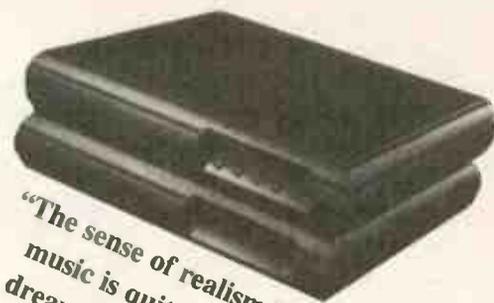
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Pink Triangle

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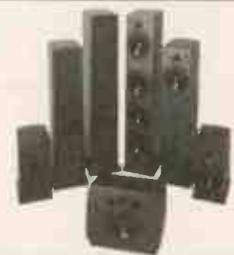
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Dominic Baker, Hi-Fi World



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MUSICAL FIDELITY X-DAC CONVERTOR

Fed with digits from Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* the X-DAC shone. Its presentation was articulate and airy with plenty of drive. Though the sound was a tad brighter than neutral this didn't undermine all the good things the X-DAC was doing. Paul Desmond's alto sax, for instance, flowed with a rare liquidity and had believable texture and tone. To the X-DAC's credit, this quality of reproduction extended to every single instrument in the recording.

'O Fortuna' from *Carmina Burana* followed. Here, in spite of a CD that has a rather rough edge to it, the X-DAC did full justice to this intense music. Helping out was the fact that the chanting was clear and intelligible, dynamics were crisp and bass, especially on timpani, was firm and extended.



Testing the HDCD performance with Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* showed off the advantages of this encoding system. Tonal colours were better, the spaciousness of the acoustic opened up and there was a solidity and warmth present that just wasn't there with many normal discs.

Musical Fidelity have done themselves proud with the X-DAC. For £300 you get an excellent sounding, well designed and interestingly styled DAC which is a match for anything anywhere near its price.

Musical Fidelity X-DAC £199.99

Musical Fidelity
15/16 Olympic Trading Estate,
Fulton Road,
Wembley,
Middx. HA9 0TF
Tel: 0181 900 2866

ROKSAN CASPIAN AMPLIFIER

Dropping the Caspian in at the deep end, I supplied it with the signal from the P-30 and Da Capo. Spinning inside the Teac was an HDCD recording of Eric Bibb and *Needed Time*, *Good Stuff*. This R 'n' B stormer swiftly showed that the Roksan was gifted in the rhythm stakes, assembling one of the most foot-tapping sonic experiences I've heard in quite a while.

On the Chemical Brothers' *'Setting Sun'* bass had great focus, depth and drive, retaining the extreme funkiness of this track where lesser amps lose it to blurred and sloppy bass. The Roksan's transparency was such that it even managed to reveal layering in the



congested mix, usually the province of good pre/power combos.

Mopping my fevered brow, I headed for a slightly mellower work-out with Wagner, Brahms and Schubert all going under the laser. Tone and inflection turned out to be another couple of skills the Roksan has got sorted. Violins, both solo and en masse, had a deliciously natural resonance completely devoid of the solid-state glassiness that so often spoils the picture.

Well, in the proverbial nutshell, it looks like Roksan have produced something rather special in the new Caspian. There's a combination of valve-like tonality and smoothness with transistor bottom-end grunt and control which it's hard not to be seduced by.

Roksan Caspian £695

Roksan
St. Peters Road,
Huntingdon
PE18 7DB
Tel: 01480 433777

TEAC V-6030S TAPE DECK

Dealing with Heaven 17's *The Luxury Gap* album, the Teac fulfilled its promise, particularly on tracks like 'Lady Ice And Mr Hex' with its heavy basslines which tend to come through budget



decks as a confused, distant rumble. Through the V-6030S they were powerful and punchy, adding to this track's rhythm rather than tripping it up.

The piano causes more problems for more cassette decks than any other instrument. Unsurprisingly, the V-6030S and its secure transport shrugged off the pitch-stability problems which can make some piano recordings sound like they were made under water. The real give-away was the solidity and impact of leading edges where they often sound loose and blurred.

Cassette's main *raison d'être* is its ability to record. I tried taping some well-recorded indie Rock in the form of Silkscreen's *Relief* album. With a tape like TDK MA and Dolby S, the V-6030S was capable of producing seriously good recordings. Even with the drummer going mental on his cymbals, they refused to become splashy or hard.

Teac's V-6030S uses capable electronics built around a tasty transport, and it shows. It has no weaknesses whether you want the best playback or recording. Alongside Pioneer's £430 CT-S740S, it's one of the standard bearers for the good old compact cassette.

Teac V-6030S £549.95

Teac UK
5 Marlin House,
The Croxley Centre,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 8YA
Tel: 01923 819630

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CADENCE ES MK1 £1750
MARK LEVINSON 31.5 + 30.5 £14000
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mas amination

David Price brings you this year's trivia-packed brain teasers.

1) Whose Pip never squeaked?

- A The Man from Delmonte's
- B Pink Triangle's
- C Dennis Healey's

2) What are Sonneteer's *Campion* and *Alabaster* integrated amplifiers named after?

- A Shades of Dulux paint
- B Sunday evening 'bodice-ripping' TV dramas
- C English poets



Sonneteer's *Alabaster* and *Campion* amps take their names from what source?

3) What do the initials 'LFD' stand for?

- A Linear Feedback Design
- B Low Fuzzy Distortion
- C Lovely Fee, Darling

4) Who designed the original *Systemdek* turntable?

- A Peter Dunlop
- B Malcolm Michelin
- C Slick Goodyear

5) Which of the following is not a *Castle* loudspeaker?

- A Avon
- B Tay
- C Silage

6) Which direct-drive turntable do the BBC rely on?

- A Technics SP-10 MkIII
- B Trio L-07D
- C JVC QL 10

7) What is the name of SME's proprietor?

- A Robert Louis Stevenson
- B Alastair Robertson-Aikman
- C Sir Bufton-Tufton

8) South coast hi-fi specialists *Cymbol* are descended from which company?

- A Ion
- B Onix
- C Ormele

9) What was Pink Triangle's controversial LP12 mod called?

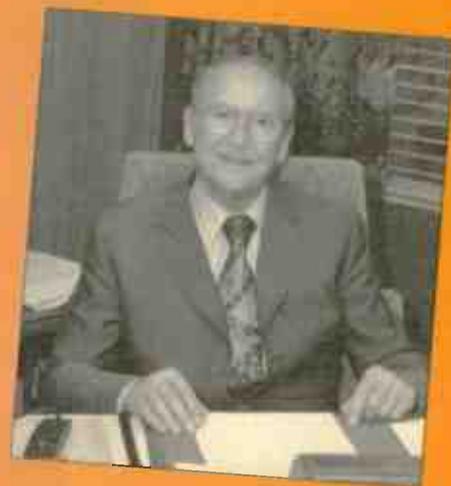
- A Pingo
- B Pink Faerie
- C Pink Link

10) What's Talk Electronics' £500 integrated amp called?

- A Squall
- B Storm
- C Diefuge

11) Which ZX is Noel's most treasured possession?

- A Sinclair ZX 81 computer



What is the name of SME's proprietor, pictured here?

- B Citroen ZX car
- C Nakamichi ZX9 cassette deck

12) What is DNM an abbreviation of?

- A Denis Morecroft
- B Don't Need Much
- C Dynamic Not Mushy

13) What do Mission and Roksan have in common?

- A Their company car parks are the same size
- B They've both named products after ancient Persians
- C They both serve humus in the canteen



One of Noel Keywood's most cherished possessions.

DAC Attack!

Following in the path of the original and extremely well received Assemblage DAC-1, the DAC-2 appears to be another big hit with customers and reviewers alike. The DAC-2 builds on the strengths of the original DAC-1, with its dual Burr-Brown PCM 1702 20 bit DACs, Crystal CS8412 input receiver, toroidal power transformer and Analog Devices based output stage, but adds HDCD capability with the PMD-100 digital filter chip, an extra co-ax digital input on a BNC jack, a phase invert switch, three more power supply regulation stages with greatly increased power supply capacitance, and improved parts quality in the analog output stage. The best news is that all these improvements come with a very small price, the DAC-2 digital processor kit is \$499.00 U.S.! Of course, the DAC-2 also comes with our 30 day satisfaction guarantee, two year limited warranty, AND our assembly guarantee (If you can't get it to work, we will!).

For those of you with the upgrade bug, we also have a parts upgrade kit available for the DAC-2. This kit includes Caddock resistors and MultiCap capacitors for the analog output stage, Kimber silver and Illuminati hook-up wire, EAR and Soundcoat isolation and damping materials, Linear Technology voltage regulators, and more parts that make a significant improvement in the performance of the stock DAC-2. The parts upgrade kit is available at a special package price of \$149.00 U.S., which makes it even more good news!

At today's exchange rates, the DAC-2 will cost approx. £329 including VAT and shipping (10-14 day delivery).

For more information on any of our products, please Call, Write, Fax or E-mail us and we will be happy to assist you.

A few of the positive comments from the press:

"...for the price of \$499.00, it produces remarkably excellent sound. This is a really good kit for the DA converter beginner."

Mitsuru Yoshioka, MJ Magazine (Japan) Dec. 1996

"Putting on Steven Stills' Manassas (Atlantic 82808-2) - a bona-fide, re-mastered-from-the-original-master-tapes, HDCD-badge-wearing, High Definition Compatible Disc was much better. The resemblance in quality to what I'd been hearing that day in the recording studio, listening directly to my own master tapes, was uncanny!"

"The DAC-2 is the best D/A I've ever had in my system, revealing musical details on familiar recordings that I was previously unaware of."

Muse Kastanovich, Stereophile, Vol. 20 No. 1, January 1997

"The DAC-2 is another well-engineered product from Sonic Frontiers. The unit had better bench performance than many more expensive processors. In particular, the DAC-2 had low crosstalk, very low noise, good linearity, and excellent reproduction of low-level signals"

Robert Harley, Stereophile, Vol. 20 No. 1, January 1997

"With the HDCD decoder now working for its living the sound became even clearer, crisper and more natural. Detail retrieval improved but most importantly, all the good things the DAC-2 was doing before were more obvious."

Ketan Baharadia, Hi-Fi World, Supplement No.29, June 1997

Subscription Info: Stereophile - (800) 334-8152,
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14) Who designed the classic Epos ES14 loudspeaker?

- A Robin Williams
- B Robin Hood
- C Robin Marshall

15) Which famous big guy is MD of Wharfedale?

- A Robbie Coltrane
- B Stan Curtis
- C Giant Haystacks

16) What is Linn's new phono stage called?

- A Logo
- B Lentil
- C Linto



Could this be the new Linn Lentil?

17) What's Orelle's high-end brand called?

- A XTC
- B C LEE
- C FAN-TC

18) What's the connection between a new Arcam and an old Meridian CD player?

- A Both are called the MCD
- B Both are top loaders
- C Both use Phillips transports

19) Who runs Creek Audio Limited?

- A Johnny Mathis
- B Ivor Creek
- C Mike Creek

20) Which multi-national company recently introduced CD-RW?

- A Sony
- B Philips
- C Loricraft

21) Harbeth comes from which two names?

- A HARRISON Ford and ELIZABETH Taylor
- B HARLEY Street and BETHnal Green
- C Dudley and ELIZABETH HAREwood

22) Which loudspeaker won a Design Council Award?

- A World Audio KLS5 Gold MkII
- B Quad ESL 63
- C Vidoutonw Minimas



The name might look familiar but it isn't a washing machine.

23) Which turntable and CD manufacturer could be easily confused with a washing machine maker?

- A Ariston
- B Whirlpool
- C Fons

24) Which band had new adventures in hi-fi?

- A Kids from Fame
- B REM
- C REO Speedwagon

25) What was Aurex?

- A An American tape manufacturer
- B The computer from the BBC's Blake's Seven sci-fi series
- C Toshiba's high-end brand name

26) Which of the following isn't a Michell component?

- A Argo
- B Iso
- C Cappuccino



Are coloured LPs like this made from sugar and spice?

27) What are LPs made from?

- A Recycled lorry tyres
- B Flour, water and a little oregano
- C Polyvinyl chloride polyvinyl acetate copolymer

28) What do the initials 'DVD' stand for?

- A Digital Versatile Disc
- B Despite Vigorous Debate
- C Disc Virtually Dead

29) How is information recorded on a CD?

- A In a wiggly groove cut into its surface
- B In a series of pits and humps
- C In a helix delicately hammered into its surface by Norwegian elves

30) How do electrical signals move through a conductor?

- A Via electrons
- B Via motons
- C Via bus



Who first invented transistors like this?

31) Which company invented the transistor?

- A Bell Telephone Laboratories
- B Microsoft
- C Tenco

32) The specifications for CD are laid down in which book?

- A The Yellow Pages
- B The Red Book
- C The Argos Catalogue

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AUDIOLAB M



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GUILDFORD 01483 536666
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NORWICH 01603 767605
OXFORD 01865 241773 (OPEN SUNDAY)
ROUGHOUGH 01733 897697

PRESTON (NEW) 01772 825777
READING 0118 959 7768
SHEFFIELD (NEW) 0114 255 5861
SOUTHAMPTON (NEW) 01703 337770
TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543
WATFORD 01923 213533 (OPEN SUNDAY)
WORCESTER 01905 612929

World Radios



Christmas Rock and Pop

Ho ho ho - it's that time of year again. Bloody marvellous! But you're thinking: "Goddarn - what am I going to buy Gramps and Aunt Flo?" Well, if they've got a sense of humour or you simply want to make a copy for your own collection, buy one of this tasty assortment - the year's best Rock and Pop releases - and they'll sure make a nice change from the Mantovani and Sinatra you got them last year.

Without any doubt the two best albums of the year were The Verve's *Urban Hymns* and Radiohead's *OK Computer*, with the nice 20-somethings from Oxford winning by a red nose.

OK Computer was an album to appeal to anyone with an interest in



taking music to its polar extremes. It was anything but conventional and steered so far clear of commerciality that on the first few listens it sounded too clever for its own good as if the boys had merrily gone up their own chimney spouts. Bringing the concept album very much back into fashion, Radiohead hit an emotional chord and produced the most creative album of the last few years.

The Verve, in complete contrast, came out with an Oasis album better than Oasis themselves. Taking the Mancunian band's vibes they took off from Wigan in the direction of the

Stone Roses. The Plum Pudding Award, methinks.

Largely about Rock 'n' Roll, dope, psychedelia and streetwise sensibilities, *Urban Hymns* was a delightful mix of the Stones, Beatles and more than a slice of those Likely Lads from Burnage. 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' and 'The Drugs Don't Work' were the flagship singles, but better by a mile were 'Lucky Man', 'Space And Time' and 'Come On'.

Following closely behind with the Fairy On Top Of The Christmas Tree Award was the off-beat offering from Tricky's much more normal cousin Finlay Quaye.

A happy-feely, summery album, *Maverick A Strike* should have come out in May or June but strangely was held back until the autumn. Shame - it was just right for the beach. Combining sweet Reggae rhythms with good-time Soul, the tracks 'Even After All' and 'I Need A Lover' jumped to the fore.

Award for Scaring Santa Back Up His Chimney goes to the Prodigy's *Fat Of The Land*. 'Smack My Birch Up', 'Breathe' and 'Firestarter' - need I say more!?

Not an entirely great LP, it nonetheless showcased the band's best works and any of the singles would have undoubtedly won them Single Of The Year. So British they make Paul Gascoigne look foreign. The Prodigy showed the world that our little Empire is still leading the world in the music field.

In a similar vein, winning the Snow Up Your Nose Award, were the wacky Dance-music partnership The Chemical Brothers with *Dig Your Own Hole*. Though they should have known better, both being university graduates, they nonetheless subverted travellers, ravers and kids during the spring and summer festival season with their blend of anarchic House.

Dig Your Own Hole was an aggressive, speed-fuelled album, guaranteed to get a party jumping and



especially impressed our State-side cousins.

The award for the album as Predictable As The Queen's Speech goes to Oasis for *Be Here Now*, a collection which, while being an enjoyable and all-round respectable release, lacked the sparkle of the previous few years' releases. It was an album full of great anthems, good production and a few laughs, but it will ultimately be forgotten by the middle of next year.

On the Soul front Erykah Badu was the find of the year with the highly-rared *Baduizm* album. Blur had a rousing and hard hitting comeback album and Nick Cave got the Bad Seeds together for the umpteenth time to record the moving and reflective *Boarman's Call*.

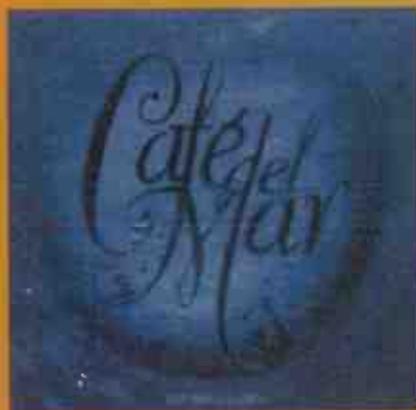
On the Hip-Hop front the Wu-Tang Clan managed a brilliant release in *Wu-Tang Forever*, while, if film compilations are your stocking-filler, they don't come much better than *Romeo And Juliet*.

Of course a quick mention should also go to Supergrass's *In It For The Money* LP, which was wacky, wild and will keep them up for the years to come.

Finally, the Too Many Sprouts So Don't Stand So Close Award goes to Bush, with some album I can't remember which no one with any musical scruples should get near (unless you're American of course) - a real turkey in other words ☹



Christmas Dance



CAFE DEL MAR
VOLUMEN CUATRO
MANIFESTO 533 907-2

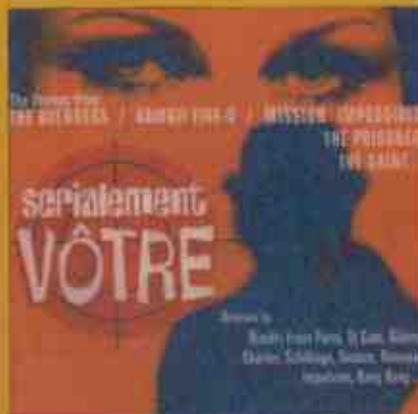
Got da winter blues? Feeling untanned and stressed out? Fear not, Cafe del Mar is here to magic you to San Antonio, beach-side, to feel the sun setting over the sea. Well, it may take a bit of imagination but with the aid of a sun lamp, margarita and loud system you could almost believe you were there.

Cafe del Mar follows in the hot little footsteps of Cafes 1-3 with an awe-inspiring collection of sun-drenched tunes straight off Dance-music guru Jose Padilla's hit list. The sound could perhaps be described as a cross between a traditional Spanish guitarist and Chris Rea jamming on a beautiful summer's evening in Ibiza - a sort of flamenco-down on the beach.

The glowy, dusky vibe is ever present, but like the other compilations in the range, Cafe 4 showcases a

diverse range of artists. Tracks such as Chicane's atmospheric classic 'OffShore' nestle alongside new offerings from up-and-comings like Karezi Ramirez and Wasis Diop.

For those whose knowledge of Ibiza landmarks is a little rusty, Cafe del Mar is a bar in San Antonio built by famous designer Lluís Guall. It's better known for its Dance culture history, specifically Padilla who's been resident in the legendary venue for yonks. Padilla's tunes inspired a whole generation of clubbers and, by the looks of Cafe 4, his tunes will now inspire another. The best selection of desert-island discs ever, and every one's a scorcher.



SÉRIELEMENT VÔTRE
DECONSTRUCTION LCR180

So a variety of French remixers and

DJs were asked to turn their talents to such cult TV tunes as 'Mission Impossible', 'Charlie's Angels' and 'Hawaii 5-0'. Big names such as DJ Cam, Dimitri from Paris and Implosion picked their favourites, added some bleepy bits and hey-presto, the ultimate compilation of superhero Techno themes was born.

Riding on something of a wave of recent French releases this novelty disc boasts enough retro-appeal to make it a great stocking filler for any member of the family.

But is it the type of record you'd want to buy for your dad's Christmas present just so you can 'borrow' it later? Possibly. But if your dad's still got his hearing, the chances are you won't be old enough to remember many of the themes on *Sérielement Vôtre*. 'The Prisoner' springs to mind, as does 'The Avengers', 'The New Avengers' and 'Mannix', which, incidentally, still sounds like it's right out of the Sixties - did someone forget to remix it?

Fortunately there are enough classic tunes to keep the album flowing; Stephanie Maica's 'James Bond' theme works really well, especially with those sexy vocal samples, and Aleem's 'Twin Peaks' offers a remix as good as Moby's. DJ Cam takes 'The Twilight Zone' to the extreme with a Breakbeat twist and a dosage of scratching, but none come close to the superb Wonder Woman theme à la Roussia.

OK, so I probably would have been just as happy with the originals, but who cares?



Christmas Classical



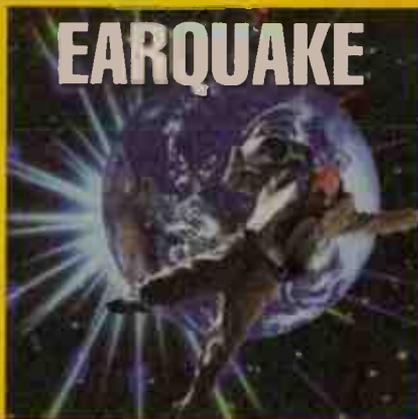
Weihnachtskantaten
Collegium Vocale; director,
Philippe Herreweghe
HARMONIA MUNDI 901594

On the French label Harmonia Mundi Philippe Herreweghe directs poised and thoughtful performances of three of Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas cantatas: *Das Neugeborne Kindelein* (The Newborn Little Child), BWV122; *Unser Mund Sei Voll Lachens* (Let Our Mouths Be Filled With Laughter), BWV110; and *Selig Ist Der Mann* (Blessed Is The Man), BWV57.

These last two are kindred works; both were first performed in Leipzig on Christmas Day, 1725, the former in the morning at the church of St Nicholas, the latter in the afternoon at Bach's own church, St Thomas's. Quite a treat for the city's music lovers.

With first-rate contributions from the choir and period-instrument orchestra of Herreweghe's Collegium Vocale, and an excellent quartet of soloists (Vasiljka Jezovsek, Sarah Connolly, Mark Padmore and Peter Kooy), this is music-making of the highest order, and a matchless introduction to three of the lesser-known gems from among Bach's vast

output of sacred cantatas. The recording is outstanding, especially in the joyful *Unser Mund Sei Voll Lachens*, its brilliant trumpets and drums and lively rhythms redolent of the much larger scale Christmas Oratorio.



THE EARQUAKE EXPERIENCE
Helsinki Philharmonic
Orchestra; conductor, Leif
Segerstam
ONDINE ODE 894-2

This being the season of goodwill, a fun way (fun for you, that is, not them) to rouse your friends and relations, or the whole neighbourhood for that matter, from their post-prandial stupor would be to select a track from *Earquake*, a release on the Finnish Ondine label which sets out to bring the listener the loudest Classical music ever written on a single CD.

More seriously, it is also an attempt to introduce the music of several little-known contemporary composers alongside that of more famous names such as Nielsen, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Respighi.

Despite its inclusion of a couple of

free earplugs in the CD packaging, *Earquake* is no gimmick; neither is it perfunctory compilation from existing recordings. Rather, following a successful concert performance of the programme, all but one of the tracks were specially recorded at the same sessions, with a first-rate orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic, conducted by Leif Segerstam. The surprisingly successful result blends music by sixteen very different composers into a continuous listening experience, one with no jarring juxtapositions of styles.

The music has been chosen well: it isn't all blaring brass and thundering percussion - there are even some quiet moments - and items such as the *Negro Dance* from Nielsen's *Aladdin* suite and the *Can-Can* from Shostakovich's ballet *The Age Of Gold* are by no means superficial sonic experiences. Other tracks supply showpieces for the skills of the Helsinki players: *Revueltas'* darkly atmospheric *Night Of The Mayas*, for example, and Erwin Schulhoff's brilliant *Weapon Dance*. Jacques Ibert's *Bacchanale* provides welcome relief after the pounding served up by William Bolcom's *Machine*, the fourth movement of his *Fifth Symphony*, and many will already be familiar with *Come Un Sogno* from *Angel Of Light*, its composer, Einojuhani Rautavaara, having acquired the cult status of the likes of Gorecki and Tavener.

This offers an appropriately serene prelude to the final and longest track, *Hekla (Volcano)* by the Icelandic composer Jon Leifs. Claimed to be the loudest single piece of music ever written, this evocation of a volcanic eruption deploys a 140-strong orchestra whose 22 percussionists deliver hammer blows to rocks, anvils and steel plates, rattle chains, set off sirens and fire several dozen cannon shots.



Christmas Jazz

It's that time of the year already, so with little in the way of, er, festive offerings coming from the areas I normally cover here, instead I've put together a round-up of the year's real must-haves from the worlds of contemporary jazz and improvised music.



CHRONOLOGIA

TZADIK TZ7502

John Zorn's hugely prolific Tzadik and Avant labels have inevitably been responsible for some of my favourite records this year, among them this gem. Peter Scherer was keyboard player and programmer with ambitious Lovers, the NYC Brazilian-Funk supergroup which he fronted with singer and guitar abuser Arto Lindsay.

Anyway, you wouldn't necessarily guess that background from this set. Chronologia brings together various pieces Scherer has composed over the last few years for sundry underground film-makers. The album largely features not his keyboard playing but heavily-treated guitar textures, occasionally batted by the percussion work of Nana Vasconcelos and Cyro Baptista. Dark, minimal stuff for sure, but somehow eerily beautiful.



VISTA

IMPULSE! AS9304

This summer saw some of the peachiest reissues I've ever come across with a host of Impulse! '60s and '70s titles appearing in strictly limited editions: 20-bit remastered discs in exact miniatures of the original sleeves. Of all these highly desirable reissues, I was most pleased to see the appearance of three titles by the sadly overlooked altoist and composer Marion Brown.

Of these three, Vista, while not perhaps as searching as its companions, was my personal favourite. Brown brings all the considerable baggage of his experimental background to a highly accessible set, which includes a sonorous cover of Stevie Wonder's finest ballad, 'Visions', and a gorgeous rendering of minimalist composer Harold Budd's 'Bismillahi' Rrahmani Rrahim'.



THE SIGN OF FOUR

KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KFW197

Easily the year's most unlikely pairing of talents, pitching Fusion superstar guitarist Pat Metheny against British Free Music godfather and guitarist Derek Bailey, in the company of two of Metheny's regular percussionists. A self-confessed Ornette Coleman obsessive, Metheny has dipped his toes into Free Jazz waters in the past, but this release really is something else altogether.

A triple CD, The Sign Of Four captures two live shows given at New York's New Music haven The Knitting Factory last December, plus studio pieces recorded around the same time. By turns an apocalypse of full-on noise and scattering, schizoid texture-improv, this is an experiment which works, and works throughout its three-hour duration. Superb ●



Christmas Quiz *Answers Page*

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1) B Pink Triangle's | 13) B They've both named products after ancient Persians | 23) A Ariston |
| 2) C English poets | 14) C Robin Marshall | 24) B REM |
| 3) B Low Fuzzy Distortion | 15) B Stan Curtis | 25) C Toshiba's high-end brand name |
| 4) A Peter Dunlop | 16) C Linto | 26) C Cappuccino |
| 5) C Silage | 17) A XTC | 27) C Polyvinyl chloride polyvinyl acetate copolymer |
| 6) A Technics SP-10MkIIP | 18) A Both are called the MCD | 28) A Digital Versatile Disc |
| 7) B Alastair Robertson-Aikman | 19) C Mike Creek | 29) B In a series of pits and bumps |
| 8) B Onix | 20) B Philips | 30) A Via electrons |
| 9) C Pink Linnk | 21) C Dudley and Elizabeth HARewood | 31) A Bell Telephone Laboratories |
| 10) B Storm | 22) B Quad ESL 63 | 32) B The Red Book |
| 11) C Nakamichi ZX-9 | | |

RATINGS

25-32

Don't worry, the ambulance is on its way.

10-14

Not quite a train spotter, but you know your locomotives.

20-24

A depressingly high score - seek medical help.

5-9

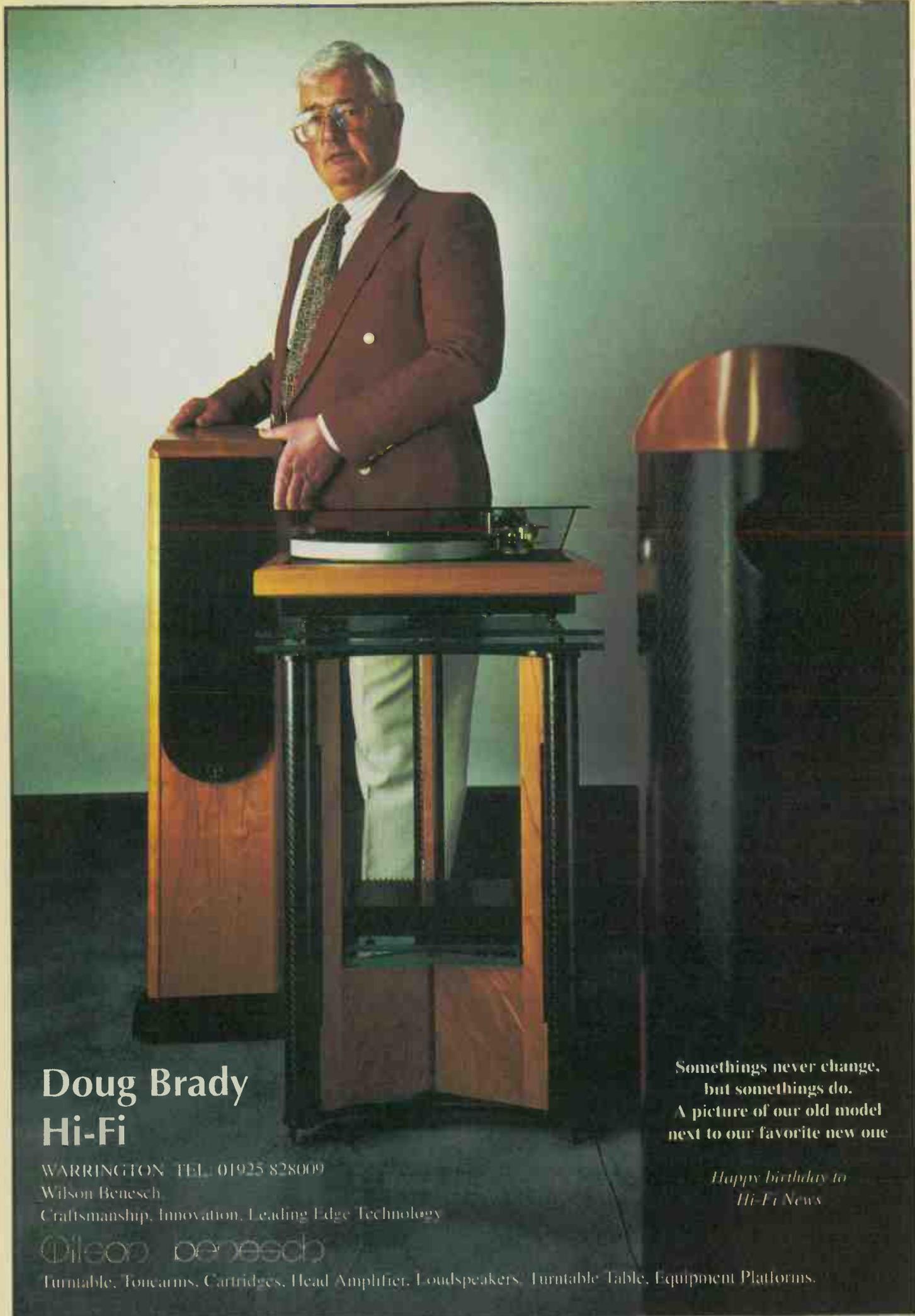
Well done - yours was a well-spent youth.

15-19

Try to spend more time out of doors away from your system.

0-4

Congratulations, you have a life outside of hi-fi.



Doug Brady Hi-Fi

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Craftsmanship, Innovation, Leading Edge Technology



Turntable, Tonearms, Cartridges, Head Amplifier, Loudspeakers, Turntable Table, Equipment Platforms.

Some things never change,
but some things do.
A picture of our old model
next to our favorite new one

*Happy birthday to
Hi-Fi News*

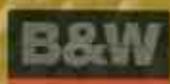


B&W CDW 1
"For a domestic loudspeaker our European Award is an honestly bestowed plaudit"
EUROPE EISA — Aug '95

'A loudspeaker that knows how to groove'

B&W's patented method of using Kevlar's unique woven fibres for loudspeaker cones has been a major factor in reducing unwanted standing waves.

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