PALMER 3

turntable

WIN

3 PAIRS OF MONITOR AURUM
RED LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM
WORTH £4,500 (UK ONLY)

DECEMBER 2010

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

ICON AUDIO MB845 MKII
Signature power amplifier

NAIM UNITIQUE
Network music system

WEISS DAC202
Firewire digital converter

10 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF IQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)
“...a significant breakthrough in high performance audio."  
The Absolute Sound, U.S.A.

“...performance that lifts them above the competition.“  
Hi-Fi News, U.K.

“...hits the sweet spot head on“  
Stereophile, U.S.A.

“Black Velvet...a big 5 stars“  
Sound & Vision, Greece

“...OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD GOOD."  
Tone audio, U.S.A

“FIRST CLASS..“  
Audio Review, Italy

“...from the first few notes, (you're) hooked. n“  
Hi-Fi+, U.K.

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

“A little champ of price/quality ratio: available at an affordable price, especially for atube amplifier of more-than-usual power..“  
Audio Review, Italy

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

“A refreshing change from the transistor competition with a captivating presentation. Excellent finish and build quality makes for a package strong on value.“  
Hi-Fi World, U.K.

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!
I was recently lucky enough to get Gigi, a rare chance to see studio legend Geoff Downs perform his 1979 Famous for the video that launched 'Star', the album is thirty five million years old Trevor's idea of a sci-fi future and a thirteen year old schoolboy's up visions of a brave new technology.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enjoy the new age of high fidelity.

David Price, editor

**Verdicts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Value</strong></th>
<th><strong>£</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outstanding</strong></td>
<td>simply the best</td>
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<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
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<td>worth auditioning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mediocre</strong></td>
<td>unremarkable</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>seriously flawed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value</strong></td>
<td>keenly priced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Electronic magazine**

Go to our website www.hi-fi-world.co.uk to buy an electronic version of this magazine, individual issues, back issues or a subscription.
Mount speaker supertest.

33 Arcam rCube.

80 Weiss DAC2021

86 Olde Worlde: Dynakit Stereo 70.

28 Naim UnitQiute.

70 Revolver Screen 3.
Tony Bolton gathers six of the best small standmounting loudspeakers together.

TANNOY MERCURY VI 18
KEF C3 19
WHARFEDALE 10.1 21
ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 V2 23
FOCAL 705V 24
MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 25

Noel Keywood enjoys these unusual slimline floorstanders.

ICON AUDIO MB845 MKII DSS 12
Noel Keywood is beguiled by this tubular belter!

David Price tries a fascinating new network music system from Salisbury.

WEISS DAC202 80
Rafael Todes tunes in to this great high end DAC.

David Price and Noel Keywood report from the 2010 National Audio Show.

Haden Boardman remembers the Dynaco Dynakit Stereo 70 tube amplifier.

David Price tries Russ Andrews ReVeel CD enhancer.

Paul Rigby has all that’s happening in the black plastic world.

David Price samples this interesting new turntable...

Tony Bolton is beguiled by this tree-based transducer!

David Price interviews one of Ireland’s leading folk/rock artistes.

Paul Rigby plugs in an interesting all in one phono stage, USB DAC and headphone amplifier...
The Peachtree Audio iDecco is a great purchase for those heavily into Digital Audio.

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

David Price, HiFi World, October 2010

Karat Series

Slim and perfectly formed

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

Our patented “wave” surround allows twice the driver excursion of a Standard half role design without Cone distortion.
PACIFIC STATE
The new £11,000 Pacific 3 SA is the first tower loudspeaker from Cabasse to feature the BC17 coaxial drive unit, originally developed for their Riga design. Complementing this are two 21cm (8") low-frequency units. The inverted honeycomb domes, manufactured from Nomex, are said to be ultra rigid but very light, and are developments of the 55cm (22") unit from the £108,000 flagship La Sphere. The drivers are actively driven by a 450 watt Cabasse designed amplifier, hence the SA (Semi-Active) appellation. This provides powerful, controlled and adjustable, low frequency output down to 37Hz, in a cabinet that is 20% less deep than would otherwise have been required in a passive speaker, the company says. Finished in a piano black or gloss pearl finish, the 1,290x290x490mm cabinet has a curved front baffle and fluted side panels to reduce standing waves inside. Initial impressions at the Paris launch were of an extremely well voiced large loudspeaker than should fit bigger British listening rooms very well. For more details, click on www.cabasse.com.

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

Q HERE!
KEF has announced the introduction of its eighth generation of Q Series loudspeakers, said to offer "a quantum leap in performance" due to the use of technology originally developed for the Concept Blade loudspeaker. At the heart of the all new model KEF Q Series is the latest Uni-Q driver array sporting a new, vented tweeter mounted at the acoustic centre of a new resonance damped, metal cone LF/MF Driver. The new Q Series bass driver uses a diecast aluminium chassis, and the large (50mm) voice coil ensures impressive power handling and output levels. The first two speakers to be released from the new range are two standmounts, the Q100 and Q300 at £380 and £450 per pair respectively. Finishes are Cherry, Black Oak and European Walnut. For more details, click on www.kef.com or call +44 (0)1622 672 261.

TURN IT ON AGAIN
Tom Fletcher, previously of Nottingham Analogue fame, has a new company called Fletcher Audio, and with it two new turntables designed by himself and made in Denmark. The Omega .3 and Omega .5 are said to "attain a new level in audiophile analogue replay, being advanced technologically and musically-involved designs that offer excellent value for money". Partnering the turntables there is the Zero Arm, an advanced design that can be matched with either model. In addition, a variety of armboards can be made to order for those wishing to use an existing or alternative arm option. Prices are £7,599 for the Omega .3 and £3,699 for the Omega .5; the Zero Arm is £1,999. Fletcher Audio is distributed in the UK by The Audio Boys, a new distribution company with strong links, past and present, to Tom Fletcher. See www.theaudioboys.co.uk.
**N JOY**

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

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

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

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

**ICONIC**

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

**HEADS UP**

Sennheiser has three new headphones, the HD 598, HD 558 and HD 518, featuring the company’s specially developed Ergonomic Acoustic Refinement technology; acoustic baffles inclined at a slight angle guide the audio signal directly to the ears. Powerful neodymium magnets and proven Duofol diaphragms are fitted, while low-vibration plastic materials prevent distortion. The HD 558 and HD598 (pictured) also feature a sound reflector that optimises the spatial sound effect. For more information click on www.sennheiser.com.

**NATURAL SOUNDS**

Yamaha has two new stereo amplifiers and an entry level CD player just out. The £329 A-S500 integrated is said to have “the look and feel of the A-S2000”, and there’s a built-in iPod dock. The £229 A-S300 is a lower specified variant, also available in black or silver. The £229 CD-S300 CD player sports features like Pure Direct, Intelligent Digital Servo, “high quality parts” and iPod and USB compatibility. For details see www.yamaha.com.
ADVANTAGE
AudioSmile's much respected Kensai mini-monitor has grown legs, in the shape of the new Advantage bass section, which together forms a fully three-way semi-active speaker. The company claims "improved level capability and dynamics, cleaner, more involving sound throughout the range" for the system, thanks to dual amplifiers delivering a total of 120W directly to the twin woofers, so your amplifier “can focus solely on the midrange up”. Interestingly, Advantage is a sealed design for tauter bass, but the company claims it can go "below 30Hz with a gentle roll-off". Price is £3,100 all in. For more information, click on www.audiosmile.co.uk.

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

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

THE MIGHTY ZOUCH
Zouch Audio’s Christmas Show is on Friday 10th December from noon till 8pm. They will be working with Henley Designs (Roksan, AudioVector and Olive), Kog Audio (Focal JM Labs, Black Ravioli and Storm Amplification) and Black Rhodium cables, with representatives from these companies running demonstrations throughout the day. All Hi-Fi World readers are welcome; for details contact Zouch Audio at The Old Coach House, Off South Street, Ashby de la Zouch LE65 1BQ. Phone +44(0) 1332 414128 or click on www.zouchaudio.co.uk.

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

**Q Series**

**All new Uni-Q array.**
Sweet, spacious and true, wherever you sit

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

**Advanced bass technologies.**
Deeper, tighter and more accurate bass

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

**Total system design.**
A holistic approach, with no compromises.

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

NAD's new C426 is described as "an energy saving audiophile FM tuner", offering ultra-low standby power, a new sleek design, and a host of convenient features. It uses a MOSFET RF front end with high quality components and a careful PCB layout, which gives excellent sensitivity with low intermodulation distortion to provide a musically satisfying performance, NAD says. The company has completely redesigned the power supply for improved efficiency and extremely low power consumption during standby while still allowing all remote activation and control interfaces. The C426 also has 30 available presets in any combination of AM and FM stations, nameable presets (up to eight characters) for AM and non-RDS stations; RDS PS (Program Service) that automatically displays the name of the radio station; RDS RT (Radio Text) that displays additional information broadcast by the radio station (such as the artist and/or song); Auto Search for optimised tuning, and a 'Blend' feature that narrows stereo separation and improves noise. The tuner is available now for £230, in graphite or titanium finish. See http://nadelectronics.com.

SACD REVIVAL

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

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

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

SPOTTED:

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

REVO-LUTION

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

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

Just two years after I reviewed Icon Audio's lovely MB845 valve power amplifier in our January 09 issue, there's a MkII version. In important areas the original design has been radically upgraded.

But the upgrade isn't just physical: where the original MB845 power amplifier was an audiophile bargain at £2,500 per pair (at the time) the new one has been 'repositioned' as a high-end power amplifier and priced accordingly; it now costs £4,999.95 in standard form.

Phew! That's some price increase. But we have run the original alongside a Musical Fidelity AMS50 transistor amplifier — price £8,900 — for a year and it often prevailed, as in a recent review of Tannoy's Definition DC10T loudspeaker for example.

The new version is a stunningly good amplifier, and easily able to justify its new price alongside the competition, but at the same time it moves out of reach for many potential buyers I suspect; this is a pity...

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

The MB845 MkII is a big chassis that provides an appropriate industrial backdrop for it. Together they are an impressive sight.

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

If all this looks very retro, a relic from the steam age with the same sort of puff, let me explain. It is retro, but brought up to date to exploit the relaxed, full bodied yet easy going sound of valves that were designed for audio use. Unlike transistors, designed for general industrial use, possessing inadequacies for audio amplification covered over with an electronic sticking plaster called feedback, the big 845s possess no intrinsic weaknesses as far as audio amplification is concerned. Their drawbacks are the obvious ones of size, weight and heat. An emerging 20th century radio industry soon demanded smaller size and power consumption so valves like this...
were quickly superseded, but sound quality didn’t benefit from miniaturisation. That’s why this amplifier also uses the early, large bulb 6SN7 and 6SL7 triodes. They sound better — smoother, more relaxed and fluid than later, smaller 1950s B7G and B9A based valves. And if you spotted that the two 6SL7s have charred black glass envelopes that make them look like burnt out seconds, they are in fact new, top quality ‘Treasure Series’ Shuguang from China. The black staining comes from improved gettering, a process that eliminates gas residues after evacuation of the bulb.

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

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

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

When we fitted Jensens to World Audio Design amplifiers back in the early 1990s they had a big impact on the sound and our WAD 300B uses them, so I know their sonic footprint. An amp fitted with Jensens isn’t going to sound like anything commercially available though and it’s useful to bear this in mind with regard to this amplifier’s sound quality. Whatever component you look at in an amplifier like this, it is radically different to most else on the market. Every component is optimised for audio use and much of what is used, especially the custom designed and built output transformers, are horribly expensive. So you’d expect it to sound different — and believe me it does! This is no cooking transistor amplifier.

The new amplifier is an altogether larger beast than the old one. Most noticeable is a new weight of 37kgs, up from 23kgs of the original. Where the old amplifier was an awkward lift, being close to the HSE recommended safe maximum of 25kgs, the new one is nearly impossible to lift and even difficult to move. It isn’t just weight and price that have gone up though, Icon Audio have knowingly increased power to the 100 Watt figure many listeners believe they need. To deliver this amount of power with valves you need a serious output transformer if it is to stay clean right up to maximum power and this is the main reason weight has increased so much. The new output transformer is a monster, but because of it the amplifier now delivers an easy 100 Watts of bass power without core saturation and the soggy bass that results. The old one, I noted, became unhappy much above 65 Watts at bass frequencies, so Icon Audio have not only rectified this weakness but upped the maximum power output as well. As a result the new MB845 is a really heavy hitter; it’s a muscle amplifier with a sound to match. It isn’t out of puff at 100 Watts, where the old one was struggling much past 65 Watts so there’s a big difference between them.

Higher power output from a single pair of 845 valves demands a more serious power supply so the mains transformer has grown substantially too. The H.T. is frightening 1250 Volts and uses diode rectification plus choke smoothing. Driving an 845 is no easy task; often a 300B valve is used but this is a ridiculously expensive solution. Designer David Shaw has instead used two 6SN7 double triodes, each strapped as a single, one per phase, each choke loaded for maximum voltage swing. The three chokes are now housed in their own screening cans on top of the chassis and you can see them as three smaller units sitting alongside the giant mains and output transformers. The front end paraphase splitter is a 6SL7 and it provides gain too. Running as recommended in low sensitivity mode, input sensitivity is a

“a modern variant of a classic valve amplifier, using materials neither affordable or even available when such valves first came into use 80 years ago…”
but end up changing their minds and preferring the more relaxed, organic flow apparent with feedback off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**SOUND QUALITY**

Initially I felt the new MB845 had drier bass than the outgoing model and this is the case, it is less rounded and fulsome, but it now goes deeper than before, carries stupendous weight and provides vivid dynamic swings that are quite extraordinary by everyday audio standards. Watching the cones of our Spendor 58es flap back and forth when playing CD showed deep subsonics were present — and I felt them too. The new MB845 MkII runs very, very deep and there's enormous weight to its delivery, something that brought real fright to the heavy synth work behind Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance'.

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

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

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

I used the Spendors because they areightly damped and the MB845 MkII gripped them strongly, even if it did not sound as dry as Musical Fidelity's transistor A45S0.

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

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

Nigel Kennedy’s violin was soft and smooth in Max Bruch’s Violin Concerto No1, but also richly detailed and again unusually forceful and expressive. Kennedy’s controlled bow work being made delightfully obvious by the fluency with which the amplifier could express dynamic changes. The new amp’s seeming softness of high treble gave violin a lovely silky sound. But Jensen paper-in-oils do produce dark inter-transient silences, plus a richly textured midband and no hardness or screech in upper treble. It’s all a little different from the norm and not run-of-the-mill. I don’t believe I have ever heard the copper foils (mine are aluminium, I recall) and somewhere this amplifier had a very dark, soft tonality. I was sold on Jensens when I first heard them but they do damp the sound down and ringing, stringing treble disappears – or so it seems. But not always; Jensens are sonically quite obvious and may not suit everyone. But the luxuriously rich midband and strong resolution of instrumental timbre, stretched dynamics and clean tempo changes all militate in their favour. Both Kennedy and the London Philharmonic accompanying him gained as much from Icon’s talents as other genres. Perhaps more so if hard, edgy and tonally barren violins tire you.

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

The MB845 MkII has a peculiar nature that lulls you into thinking there’s no power to treble – then it comes out and hits you! It is highly damped by the Jensens, but at the same time they seemingly stretch dynamic contrasts, causing sounds to leap out of a darkness free of hash and muddle. And all music is so affected. This is a characteristic of the amplifier that sets it apart.

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

CONCLUSION

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

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

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

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

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

Like its predecessor the MB845 MkII produces little distortion until high volumes are required. However, what it produces remains largely second harmonic, correlated with the music and this is subjectively benign. The
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Tony Bolton entertains six of the finest new budget standmounters

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

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

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

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

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**THE CONTENDERS**

- **TANNOY MERCURY VI** £150
- **KEF C3** £180
- **WHARFEDALE 10.1** £200
- **ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 v2** £225
- **FOCAL 705V** £300
- **MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2** £300
The Mercury VIs take over from the previous FI series, boasting slightly bigger cabinets than the previous models, new 13cm pulp fibre bass/mid cones and a 25mm soft dome tweeter. Inside the cabinets have extra bracing and silver-plated wiring. The capacitors in the high frequency part of the crossovers are damped with what is described as 'Differential Material Technology'. Two finishes are available, Dark Walnut or the Sugar Maple pictured. They're the smallest here, measuring 300x170x254.5mm (h x w x d) and weighing 4.5kg.

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

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

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

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

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

The Mercury has been carefully engineered to provide an even, smooth and accurate sound. Measurement shows a very balanced design. NK
The handsome C3 comes in two finishes, European walnut and the Black Ash of the review sample. Measuring 290x177x256mm the cabinets are armed with a 130mm bass driver and a 19mm aluminium tweeter with 'tangerine waveguide' attached, a segmented cover for the tweeter claimed to disperse output. Bass output is supplemented by a forward firing rectangular bass port mounted below the bass/mid driver.

**SOUND QUALITY**

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

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

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

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

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

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

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

Sensitivity was normal at 86.5dB and impedance quite high at 8 Ohms. The C3 will sound bright but quite fast. Colouration may be apparent.

**VERDICT**

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

**FOR**

- fast, vivid bass
- well defined imaging

**AGAINST**

- lively treble
- lacks finesse

KEF C3 £180

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**FOR**

- fast, vivid bass
- well defined imaging

**AGAINST**

- lively treble
- lacks finesse

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

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

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

‘Big Calm’ sounded just that; bass, although not the deepest to be heard within this group, was fast and shapely, guaranteed to get the feet moving, and provided a solid enough platform for the rest of the music. Midrange was well defined, vocals sitting centre stage surrounded by the other performers, with air and space around. I was impressed by the width of the soundstage, which extended well beyond the speaker boundaries, although of limited depth. I felt that I was listening from a better seat in the auditorium, with the added enjoyment that brings. Biwiring seemed to enhance these attributes and certainly made these speakers sing out in a more relaxed, but unrestrained manner.

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

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

Bass output extends down to 65Hz (-6dB), good for a small cabinet. The twin rear ports work across a broad area around 48Hz our red trace shows and damp the bass unit well. Sensitivity was mediocre at 85.5dB, impedance measuring 6 Ohms. The impedance curve is free of large peaks and fairly unreactive, making the 10.1 an easy enough load. Our 200mS decay spectrum (not shown) displayed no overhangs or undue colourations. Bass distortion was 7% from the bass unit and 9% from the port at 40Hz, a fair result for small cones.

The Diamond 10.1 will have a bright sound with some sharpness. Bass should be good. This sample was less accurate than an earlier one. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

VERDICT
Spacious and musical sounding budget box.

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FOR
- sophisticated styling
- engaging swing
- vocal presentation

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

**SOUND QUALITY**

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

The Mamas and the Papas proved an altogether more interesting experience. The smoother tonal balance allowed more detail through, and the recording seemed to acquire a more structured sound. Previously hidden aspects, such as Michelle’s vocals were revealed. Denny Doherty’s voice had more body, too. The only negative that I could find was a slight tendency to show a little too much forwardness at the extreme high frequencies around cymbals and tambourines.

“Big Calm” was an enjoyable listening experience, bass being quite sprightly, loping along through the track “Friction”, propelling the sounds in an unflustered but seemingly precise manner. Sky’s vocals had more of the sensation of a three dimensional human body behind them, subtle details in the sound being more openly displayed. So despite being only single wireable, the AE’s seemed to match anything that the other competitors so far could manage biwired, and retained an engaging musicality throughout the proceedings that I found most enjoyable.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

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

The loudspeaker’s port operates over a wide frequency range, the red trace shows. It applies broad damping to the bass unit around 55Hz. With port output +5dB above driver output at 80Hz it makes a strong contribution and bass quality should be good. Sensitivity was high at 87dB and impedance quite high at 7.5 Ohms, making the loudspeaker an easy load needing around 30 Watts or more to go loud.

The Neo One is a neatly engineered all rounder. It will sound smooth, clear and colour free, with a balance leaning toward speed and detail. NK

**VERDICT**

Civilised sounding speaker with fast and quite tuneful bass.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 V2

Acoustic Energy UK
C + (0) 1285 654432

www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

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

AGAINST
- nothing at the price
FOCAL 705V £300

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

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

This became more apparent playing the Mamas and the Papas, where the stereo placement of the performers was good. However, despite this I remained curiously disengaged from the music, which surprised me because this recording is very ‘human’. There was plenty of detail in the sound, but nothing that ‘got under my skin’ as it were, things sometimes sounding a tad detached despite the obvious quality of the loudspeakers.

Playing ‘Big Calm’, and the combination of the smooth and rich vocals and full bodied production of the instruments is, I usually find, the audio equivalent of settling down in front of a cosy log fire, yet the Focals didn’t seduce. Still, the general tonal balance was pleasing, with a satisfyingly gentle lower and high frequency emphasis. Timing was quite energetic and lively too, but oddly this speaker still didn’t quite get into the swing of things despite its good, strong bass.

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

MEASURED PERFORMANCE
The Focal 705V has a little lift at low frequencies and high frequencies, to add a little zing to the sound. Bass unit downward extension isn’t great, but the port is fairly broad tuned, extending output down to 30Hz. As port output was quite high, +4dB above the bass driver at 80Hz, it makes a strong contribution and bass quality looks good.

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

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

Sensitivity was fair at 86dB, overall impedance measuring 6.5 Ohms. Our 200mS decay spectrum (not shown) displayed a few small overhangs, or colourations.

The Focal 705V may have a lively sound with good bass and obvious treble. It is not the smoothest or colour free in this group however. NK
MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 £300

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

SOUND QUALITY

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

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

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

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

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

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

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

The Aviano 2 is super accurate, very clean and has well damped bass. It is a quality design. NK

VERDICT

Extremely classy sounding standmounter at the price.

MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2 £300
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- speed, detail
- better still biwired

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

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

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

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

Onto the winners’ rostrum, and in a creditable third place are the Wharfedale Diamond 10.1s. Particularly when biwired they seemed to offer very good performance for £200, having a certain zestfulness that suited the more pop based genres of music. They tried their best, and did quite well, with classical but ultimately were outclassed here by the silver medal winners, the Acoustic Energy Neo 1 V2s.

Here, spending £25 more seemed to produce even more sound per pound, with a level of delivery that took some beating. They were capable with classical music, and seemed unfussed by Beethoven getting a little worked up and passionate, yet retained a certain air of 'street cred' when playing the Morcheeba. They also managed a very creditable rendition of the Mamas and the Papas, being neither over emphasised or too restrained and mindful of its manners. It seemed to sit in a harmonious way on top of the sounds, connected to the rest of the frequencies below. They also displayed the most detailed soundstage of all the speakers here, creating a listening space that prompted me to listen to the music, rather than to the transducer describing it. A very creditable effort, but perhaps it should be considering their price.

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

“the Mordaunt Short Avianos had easily the most sophisticated and engaging presentation...”
As I remember, it wasn't so long ago that I had a Naim Nait I put out about 7W per channel, whereas the equally diminutive 2010 UnitiQute puts out 45W per side, and throws in DAB, FM, uPnP and USB sources, and sports a built-in DAC and analogue inputs for good measure. Yet the new UnitiQute is no technological marvel: these days there are plenty of affordable ways of playing music files off your computer into your hi-fi these days, not to mention USB memory sticks, DAB, internet radio and what have you...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, sort of. Whilst the UnitiQute surprises and delights...
"a great crossover design that should entice newcomers into the wonderful world of real hi-fi..."

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

**SOUND QUALITY**

The UnitiQute's sound is a tricky thing to triangulate. In the great scheme of things, it's much better than any other product of its type (not that there are many), yet it's still not quite as nice as perhaps you'd wish it to be in absolute terms. The paradox is that it's good enough to be treated as seriously expensive hi-fi, and to be assessed as such, when of course it simply shouldn't be subject to such rigour. This is akin to criticising a Golf GTi for not being as stable as a Ferrari over 120mph, and then thinking, "oh hang on, it's only a Volkswagen after all!"

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

Appropriately enough then, Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang' on LP (via the analogue in) was first off, and the size of the soundstage, the punch of the bass and the general speed and exuberance of the performance was breathtaking considering its modest price and status in life. Those classic analogue EDP Wasp synths buzzed all around and Q-Tip's staccato rap stabbed forth as the UnitiQute gave a gloriously propulsive and spirited rendition of this great little pop ditty. It's not the world's best recorded song this, but whilst the Naim was detailed enough to tell you this, it didn't perform a live autopsy as you listened, refusing to let the recording quality spoil the fun. Indeed, it seemed made for thumping pop such as this.

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

Whilst the UnitiQute wasn't the warmest of performers, it's certainly not hard or unpleasant. Felt's 'Primitive Painters' via the digital input (from CD) was very entertaining; here's a load of jangling eighties Rickenbackers topped off by
Definition is an outstanding new range of audiophile loudspeakers from Tannoy. Designed to get the very best from stereo music in the home, Definition distils and refines Tannoy's eight decades of loudspeaker expertise into a design of unrivalled performance value and stunning aesthetics.

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the beautiful but shrill tones of Liz Fraser (Cocteau Twins) and a densely layered production from Robin Guthrie (dito). This is something of an indie rock assault course, and the Naim passed with flying colours; the DAC isn’t quite up there with the very best but it does the job dutifully even better (which there should be). Still, there’s always Internet radio if digital fans can’t be doing with the latter’s paleolithic MPEG 2 codec (kind of like still running MS-DOS on your ‘IBM PC’); the Naim impressed with a variety of stations I’d never come across before. It’s a pretty good implementation too, as you can configure it to work with all sorts of obscure stations and preset them into its memory banks, after which time it will recall them without fuss. My only criticism is that a graphic representation of an analogue tuning dial would be nice: if a £60 Samsung MP3 player can do, why can’t Naim? Something for the software boys preset on a wet Wednesday afternoon in Salisbury, perhaps?

CONCLUSION

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

Everything works very well, there’s no sign of bugginess and the UnitiQute emerges sounding like a baby Naim, just as it should. Perhaps it could have been just a touch more euphonic on the ear given its likely partnering loudspeakers, but then again Naim owners would be clamouring for more grip and punch. So overall then, I think it’s a cracking little product, and a great crossover design that should entice newcomers into the wonderful world of real hi-fi.

Measured performance

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VHF Frequency response

24 bit Distortion

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<tr>
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PHILIPS DS9000 £400

It’s rare to find the name Philips in the pages of a hi-fi magazine these days which, given the company’s epic contribution to the hi-fi world in general, is a crying shame. The company that brought us two of the biggest music formats in history, Compact Cassette and Compact Disc, seems to have walked away from the audio market. Well not quite, because the DS9000 is a genuinely serious attempt on the company’s part to make the best iPod dock in the world. And the surprising thing is - given their recent history in consumer electronics and the stiffness of the competition from both B&W and now Arcam (see below) - it’s that they’ve nearly succeeded. The DS9000 is a superb product, one that’s worthy to wear the illustrious Philips name.

Rather than trying to be all things to all people, the 9000 is simply a lovely iPod speaker system. There are no built in CD players, wireless streaming or anything else; it offers pretty much the same functionality as the original (and best) B&W Zeppelin. The dock connector plays the digital music directly off the iPod, or a line input via a 3.5mm jack, and that’s your lot. Aside from an exquisite curved real wood case that wouldn’t disgrace a decent hi-fi speaker, that is, plus a natty control panel that lights up when you move your hand towards the unit, and dims when you walk away. The unit is also controllable by a free-to-download iPhone app, as well as the supplied remote control.

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

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

ARCAM RCUBE £500

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

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

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

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Letter of the Month

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

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

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

In a room 50% longer than mine and on the end of Naim amplification bass seemed a bit excessive and a touch woolly, although it improved with grill on and bungs in ports. I thought that what David described as the “dry and over precise” approach of the Cyrus equipment might tame this and so arranged a home demonstration. Audition at home confirmed the strengths noted before and added new ones. Bass was now well balanced and tuneful and imaging was excellent. A major strength is the ability to play soft and loud without losing the character of the music.

With my Monitor Audios there is an optimum volume for each recording (even for each track) - a narrow aperture between dull and in your face which is sometimes too loud. The Castles on the other hand are very even handed with source material and volume setting, and quite dynamic at all volumes, which my wife appreciates strongly as she prefers to listen at lower levels than I do. This might suggest a degree of loudness contouring but this does not seem to be the case. A frequency sweep test note from a hi-fi test record showed a very even perceived progression in my room. The only very minor drops in perceived volume were at precisely those points where speaker/ room resonances set in - certain high notes of the female voice and violin. Either this is extremely fortuitous or Peter Comeau is a genius.

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

Tannoy DC8. “I can confirm they are a lovely ‘speaker”, says John Hurley.
but not quite as fast. The upper midband and treble sweetens some voices and instruments a shade too much, Kate Westbrook’s voice lacking the underlying rasp I am familiar with from live performance. Brass too is very slightly softened with the merest hint of a quacky colouration. But a sweeter upper mid and treble is one of the things I was seeking so this is an acceptable compromise. The only serious casualty is harpsichord, which on one record sounds more like a child’s toy piano, missing the authentic clang which metal domes give. But this is at least in part recording related and mostly harpsichord is just a little less precise.

The Knights are not in the same league as the Tannoy 200s but given the price difference they would not be. I would not say they are better than my MAs but they are different in a way that suits my room and amplification better. The real wood veneer cabinet construction is almost as good as my MAs. At half the price I paid eight years ago for the MAs they are a bargain and I have bought them. I hope you find space to review them in a future edition because the Knight 2s offer a real alternative to the dominant sound of speakers.

Dr John Hurley

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

AN EAR FULL

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

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

In the meantime, I had found out that the pre section of the 8L6 is actually passive and consists only of the attenuator and the selector switch. Because the 8L6 has the advantage that pre and main section can be decoupled, turning it into a pure Class A push-pull valve power amplifier, I was willing to test run some preamps. It has to be said that I was rather sceptical, for I could not imagine that adding extra components in the signal path could bring me any sonic improvement. Very much like Noel claims in his column less is more in the same November 2009 issue. On the other hand, if this were true, why would Tim de Paravicini bother making separate active preamps anyway? Fortunately, besides a sceptic, I am also a scientist and so I am open to new insights.

My first idea was to try the EAR 868L, following Noel’s review. But as it happens, my good friend and high end guru, Edwin Maas (Edma) from the Netherlands, who builds, modifies and improves high end gear starting from, amongst others, Audio Note kits, had a preamp ready for testing and so we did somewhere last April. Edwin also brought along a modified Audio Note 2i Level C DAC, to compare it with my Music Hall DAC 2.2, which I thought was performing nicely.

The first thing Edwin got rid of, after hearing my setup, were my very expensive Nordost Frey interlinks and the evenly expensive Nordost Silver Shadow digital link. He replaced them with, equally expensive, self made solid core silver, silk insulated cable, featuring rhodium plated, Inakustik RCA plugs soldered with Audio Note Silver. It turned out that although the Nordost was fine with respect to sonic detail, the soundstage was somehow unnaturally split into left and right. Also the sound was a tad too airy, a bit like the air on top of the Mount Everest. The silver core cable brought back coherency and musicality without losing any detail, bien au contraire! Surely, this was the consequence of a poor impedance matching issue for which only my inexperience was to blame (surely not the Nordost company).

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

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

Rudy Deblieck’s neat looking system with EAR valve amplifier at top.
of my very revealing Phono-ars. With the digital hardness replaced by a sweet, well resolved midband, I could start hearing the small nuances in the timbre of different instruments.

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

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

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

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

Rudy Deblieck
Opblaasbeek
Belgium

Thanks for that Rudy – another interesting epistle. Rafael Tades just phoned me and we ended up talking about the sound of Danish Jensen capacitors and how good / beguiling they are. I see you are going the same way. In the end the science has to take a back seat to the experience. I’m glad you are enjoying it. NK

**LAND LINES**

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

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

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

The BBC was one of the first broadcasting organisations to employ digital encoding of the analogue signals originating from its studios. The first 13bit, 32 kHz digital links were installed between its FM transmitters in the late 1970s. The digital link was a one-way digital link, of course.

The BBC was one of the first broadcasting organisations to employ digital encoding of the analogue signals originating from its studios. The first 13bit, 32 kHz digital links were installed between its FM transmitters in the late 1970s. The BBC is a one-way digital link, of course.

The signal band width in FM is 16kHz. This explains why digital broadcasting, due to the much earlier digital might well broadcasting, due to the much earlier digital might well send over the digital signals, which may be a major advantage of Digital Audio. (D/A) is used.

The signal bandwidth in FM is 16kHz. This explains why digital broadcasting, due to the much earlier digital might well send over the digital signals, which may be a major advantage of Digital Audio. (D/A) is used.

**Sometimes I think it is best not to get too involved with the numbers and stand back a little. The fact that the BBC uses digital land lines is one of those hoary old “proof that digital is okay” examples. Well, quite obviously it is okay, but no better – and is that good enough? Hook up a good tuner and listen in and you hear back to source well enough. When this is a live talk from a studio what we hear is almost virgin, unprocessed basic audio and, having done a few radio talks in my time, I know fairly well what we hear is close enough to the damped sound of a studio, as well as the slightly embarrassing oral behaviour of the various souls at the microphones.

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

Back to figures. CD can be bandwidth limited to 16kHz (Wada, Chord Electronics DAC64, Denon Lambda processing and Pioneer Legato Link players) and VHF/FM tuners can have a frequency response that extends past 20kHz. That CD makes 21kHz as a mean statement, and is quite well the BBC uses digital land lines is one of those hoary old “proof that digital is okay” examples. Well, quite obvious...
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LIVE IN VIENNA

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

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

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

Since I play all formats on all kinds of equipment I dare to give a rating for listenable audio—how my ears and soul feel about it. I ranked from 1 to 200. Top 1 is live concert. Last place 200 is MP3 at 320 kbps.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thanks for all the help over the years. Your magazine transformed my system from a clinical Oracle Delphi and Krell system into a wonderful sounding tubed, vintage audio system with some modern sources. It is 5.1 surround with all channels direct into tubed power amps with source Oppo 83 SE from NuForce. My Thorens TD 124 has three tonearms for stereo played through Tannoy 700D speakers and mono and 78s played through a Tannoy center speaker combination. Back speakers are all Tannys.

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

regards,

Erwin Pani,
Vienna.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

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

At present I have a Denon DVD-2900, a Pioneer PL-550 direct drive turntable, Goldring 1042 cartridge, Pioneer CT-W202 double cassette deck and a Roberts WM-201 internet radio, all of which I play through my 1981 vintage Sansui AU-D9 stereo amplifier to Yamaha NS1000, or Richard Allen BBC LS3/5A plus Yamaha YST-SW45 subwoofer speakers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not withstanding your reply on
One material sums up our uncompromising quest for perfection in sound reproduction more than any other. Diamond. A unique combination of lightness and rigidity, it’s the ultimate tweeter dome material. So when we were designing our flagship 800 Series Diamond reference speakers, we knew that nothing else would do. Now, for the first time ever, you can experience the unparalleled clarity of diamond in every speaker in the range. True sound. Made for recording studios. And now available everywhere else.

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John Walker

Natural language text:

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

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

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

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

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

John Walker

Hi John. To date I have not run into any problems caused by HDCP. or High Bandwidth Digital Content Protection. The purpose of this system is to prevent copying of the digital stream, in particular to frustrate the sort of piracy that is emerging. Our measurements show that Samsung Blu-ray players consistently have very low jitter, lower than most CD players and Blu-ray players. Their digital stream does sound appreciably more pristine and composed than others too. as our recent Blu-ray player test reaffirmed in listening tests. You will get great sound quality from CD using this stream, although do be aware that your AVR-1610 isn’t the last word in quality. Once you start playing music in 24/96 from Blu-ray you will hear the improvement over CD and I suspect over the Denon DVD-2900 DVD player too.

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

ON SAFARI

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

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

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

regards

Richard Sowden

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

NK

BIG PLAYER

Following on from Vincent Hibberts letter (August 2010), could you please help with the following query: is there a sub-£500 USB media player that offers 24/192 FLAC playback via SPDIF, with internet radio a desirable option? Or do I simply wait for the Cambridge Audio NP30?

regards,

Dr Paul Harris

Whitehall

London

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

DP

HIBERNATING 1210

It’s a big thanks to Mr. Price (and that photo on Sound Hi-Fi’s website) that about 8 months ago I had my hibernating Technics SL-1210 turntable serviced and pimped a little: new rear speaker photos?

Should I get the new Cambridge Audio NP 30 asks Dr Paul Harris?
The Ayre QB-9 digital to analogue converter, in combination with your personal computer, will transform your audio collection into a new musical experience. Simply store CD's or high resolution downloads on your computer and enjoy the convenience of your entire music collection at your fingertips. You can even use your favourite music playback software to create personal play lists.

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The Ayre QB-9 brings you closer than ever to your favourite artists, changing the way you listen to music.
bar to take RCA, AT440ML cartridge, plus new Isolonoe feet and mat from Box to take RCA, AT440ML cartridge, plus new Isolonoe feet and mat from
Sound Hi-Fi.

The rest of my system is Naim 112/150, CD5, Stageline MM plus a look-out like Hi-cap thing (that works very well indeed) and Lumley Lampspro 100 speakers.

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

Overall, I like the Naim sound, though at times I do find it a little — how shall I say this without offending over the NACA5. and what a difference that has made

but I have recently taken delivery of

played a CD and have been buying

kit lives on a hefty Target stand and

though at times I do find it a little

some fantastic 60s/70s soul, funk and

Since the turntable refurb I've hardly

resides in an average size living room.

cloth ears (too many concerts and clubs,

money (managed to save about 1k),

for the last couple of years I admit

better. Having read your magazine

references to Icon Audio's phono stages

opinion, along with you all of course.

When I told Naim about this met a

and the outcome can be worthwhile.

amenable to a different front end

together. I was quite taken aback.

If it is any help, I once put a Croft

would work with my system. What would it do to the Naim sound? Would it take the edge off? Would it make it sweeter?

like to play my music loud (when I
can) and wonder if the Icon connected
directly to the 150 would work.

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

David Higgins

If it is any help, I once put a Croft preamp in front of a Naim NAP150 and the two worked brilliantly together. I was quite taken aback. Naim power amplifiers are quite amenable to a different front end and the outcome can be worthwhile.

When I told Naim about this I met a
deadly silence! NK

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

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

NOISY CHRISTMAS

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

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

Many thanks for your time.

Alasdair Mackenzie

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

UPGRADE

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

My turntable is an inexpensive Goldring GR2 complete with the standard 1012GX MM cartridge and a Goldring PH-1 phono stage. I used this set-up with my Cambridge system and didn't originally plan to upgrade it as I listen to vinyl relatively infrequently. Hearing the Goldring through the Cyrus pre/power amps however, provided an unexpectedly pleasing result. Although not able to match the CD8SE for detail retrieval, it's the sheer "ambience" of the sound provided by the turntable that impresses me (a quality that was not overly apparent when partnered with my Cambridge system).

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

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

Grant Hatcher
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Hi-Fi World - December 2008
A magic phono stage, the Icon Audio PS3 with valve power supply.

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

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

The Michell is a dramatic upgrade to the Rega and is effectively a stripped down superdeck that's upgradable to one of the best turntables around, in some respects, at any price. So it's a great launchpad to the high end vinyl world. Trouble is, you'd not be listening to your vinyl; you'd be listening to the Michell GyroDec SE, and that's not a problem.

The "problem" concerns the sound of violin music when played on my vinyl front end: solo violin sounds great, but massed strings sound so strident that I have to turn the volume down. This problem does not occur when playing violin music via CD. Since I do not want to repeat the mistake of buying stuff suspending that it might sound good in my system, only to find that it did not, I thought I had better get your advice. My present system consists of Naim NAC 202 / NAP 200 with Haopec + Hicap power supplies, Thorens TD124 in open slate plinth sitting on RDC spikes and ditto cups, Rega RB250 tonearm with upgraded counterweight and Incognito wiring (I think copper, but I'm not sure since I had this mod. ages ago), Goldring 1042 MM cartridge, Trichord Dino+ PSU with dedicated connecting lead, van den Hul M.C. D102II Hybrid Interconnects, Tannoy D500 "speakers", TEAC VRDS-T1 into Bel Canto DAC I, BTC KIMBER Special Edition Speaker Cable (hyper pure copper), all fed via a HMS Energia power distributor and purchasing a 2W Single-Ended! It's aimed at people who have a pair of Tannoy Westminster Royals in their bedroom, most of whom are to be found in Japan. This is where Tannoy sell most of their Prestige loudspeakers.

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

SOB STORY

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

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

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

thanks again,

Peter Inghels
The Hague
The Netherlands

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

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

NK

DEAD K9

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

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

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

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

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

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

yours sincerely

Keith Russell

A low-ish powered valve amplifier suits sensitive Tannoy.

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

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

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

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

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

Peter Inghels
The Hague
The Netherlands

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

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

If all is well here, ensure tracking force is 1.7gms or 1.8gms maximum. Use a stylus gauge; they are cheap.

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

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

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

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

...AND AGAIN

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

Still, I am wondering whether the Naim transistor pre amp and power amp paired with the high-sensitivity Tannoy (92 dB according to the manufacturer) makes for a happy marriage per se. I probably do not need all those watts in the first place with sensitive speakers like the Tannoy.
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Hi Keith - buy a Goldring G1042 moving magnet (£200) for your Linn LP12/Basilic Plus; it should make a fine combination. This cartridge is so far ahead of the K9 that you should ideally have one on both decks. Basically, put the K9 on your least favourite deck!

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

As for CD, well I'd go for a Musical Fidelity M1 DAC, an excellent affordable upsampling design at around £400; it should work a treat via Transparent Super RCAs.

Many thanks in advance,
Geoff Jennings

---

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

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

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

I'm no great fan of Lowthers, I have to admit. They're too ragged across the upper midband, where the cone breaks up. For tuned up valve amps a pair of big Tannoy are worth hearing and the DC10Ts I reviewed last month come to mind, but they would be a radical departure to Lowthers and perhaps too much of a
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The hi-fi industry refers to racks and other equipment supports as "isolation devices", going to great lengths to describe how these products protect electronic components from the outside world. Unfortunately, structure born mechanical energy is the least of your system's mechanical problems!

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

But not all cones are created equal...

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Get Your System Sorted!
Exposed!

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

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

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

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

ReVeel is the product of many years of work; back in the nineteen nineties Russ found a solution that removed MRA which was more effective than conventional alcohol-based wipes, but the Montreal discs. ReVeel can be used on CD, DVD, SACD and DVD-A discs.

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

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

ABOUT RUSS ANDREWS

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

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

Compact, all-in-one systems are all some people can accommodate, not least students confined to beer-bottle strewn bedsits. That's why there's a market for products such as Panasonic's SC-HC40DB [shown above] and Sony's CMT-MX55D [p57]. While similarly priced, both target a slightly different audience...

The Panasonic is a compact unit (500x201x102mm) with integrated cone speakers, a reported 35W of power and a wall mount option. Featuring a CD player, iPod/iPhone dock, FM/DAB radio and a USB port, the most interesting aspect of the Panasonic is its general design. As the CD player is mounted vertically the slim, wall-like, countenance gives you the impression that this is a space-saver of a chassis... and you'd be right. Everything about the Panasonic shouts "trim". A frontal door moves to the left to expose the CD player and then, uniquely, moves to the right to reveal an internally mounted iPod dock, then back again to hide both features. A fitted iPod is visible through an access window for monitoring. CD transport and other controls are mounted along with the top and, just to the rear, is a basic but neat little door. Behind which lies the vertically mounted USB slot. A plastic, but relatively large and fully featured remote control is included too.

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

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

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

SOUND QUALITY

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

VERDICT

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

PANASONIC SC-HC40DB £250

For
- design
- articulate midrange
- nearfield listening

Against
- negligible bass

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with piano being particular impressive for the price.

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

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

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

That stereo image and soundstage enhancement allowed John Foxx's synth output to paint a crutch of the MP3 sound, making it far more palatable and less offensive to the ears. WAV file playback enhanced the sound further, the better boost, when compared to the Panasonic, introducing a more balanced sound.

Moving to the USB port via a plug-in keydrive containing MP3 files was intriguing. In fact, if you must play MP3s via the Panasonic, this is how to do it. It's more direct playback for transparency and lack of bass – which can often act as a form of cushioning for the stripped bare data file – revealed the MP3 for what it is: a musical ghost, stripped of form and substance. The prickly presentation sounded nothing less than strangulated. WAV file playback, however, was more pleasant, adding that desperately needed level of integrity, without the MP3's listener fatigue.

Switching to the Sony's iPod dock, MP3s sounded far more approachable, the added bass acting as a crutch to the MP3 sound, making it far more palatable and less offensive to the ears. WAV file playback enhanced the sound further, the better boost, when compared to the Panasonic, introducing a more balanced sound.

VERDICT

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

Sony CMT-MX550i £220
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WORLD STANDARDS

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

**TURNTABLES**

**PRO-JECT GENIE 2** 2008 £175
A masterpiece of minimalism, this is well made for the money and includes a decent Ortofon OM3 moving magnet cartridge. Great sound per pound.

**REGA P2** 2008 £220
Some say the cheapest real hi-fi turntable money can buy - excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound.

**TECHNICS SL1200/11** 1973 £495
Sticky build makes it a respectable performer, although the cheapo arm limits it - fit a Rega RB1250 and it's suddenly a brilliant mid-price machine.

**REGA P3-24** 2008 £600
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, pacey and musical sound that’s one of the best at the price.

**MICHELL GYRODEC SE2005** £1,005
Design icon with superlative build and finish. Sound is beautifully smooth, effortless and exceptionally expansive. No longer peerless at the price, but still a brilliant platform.

**ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD** 2008 £1,350
Majoring on impact, punch and drive, this is an impactful mid-price turntable in sonoric 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.

**LIMN LP125E** 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 SME V 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. Fits up to three arms and enjoy, just don’t damage your back moving it...

**BRINKMANN BARDO** 2010 £4,495
Quartz locked Direct Drive makes for master-tape-like speed stability, plus wonderful clarity and pace. Upgradable and excellent build complete a formidable package.

**AVIS VOLVERE SEQUEL2007/4,600**
Stylish high end vinyl spinner with industrial strength build quality and a sound to match. Exceedingly natural yet powerful sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

**EAT FORTE** 2009 £12,500
Lavishly finished two box, two motor turntable with gorgeous looks. 407 tonearm bundled. Exceptionally stable and unflustered performer with a relaxed but highly enjoyable gait.

**TONARMS**

**REGA RB251** 2009 £1,136
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 last John Michell’s clever reworking of the Rega theme, using blazing, 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 £676
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 IV’s magic at just over half price. Exquisitely built and finished, and a design classic. Faces stiff competition these days, but lovely nevertheless.

**NAIM ARU** 1987 £1,425
Charmistic unicorn is poor at frequency extremes but sublime in the midband, truly emotive and insightful.

**HELIXS OMEGA** 2008 £1,595
Stylish and solid arm 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 aostound, although some don’t like its matter of factness!
LYRA DORIAN  2007 £595
Invasive 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 £850
Crisp, clean and detailed MC; particularly impressive at both ends of the frequency spectrum.

TRANSFIGURATION AXIA  2007 £890
Musically adept and highly resolving cartridge with impressive tracking abilities.

ORTOFON MC WINDFELDII  2008 £1,799
Ortofon’s new flagship MC is a sophisticated 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 ency that beguiles more than it impresses.

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

STELLA 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 ‘1’ 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 a real seat-of-the-pants musicality, this DAC justifies its premium price.

CYRUS CD8 SE  2008 £1,200
Bespoke Servo Evolution mechanism makes this the most musically engaging machine at the price, with super smooth tonality to boot. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

SIMAUDIPO 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.

ELECTROCOMPANIET EMC-I UP  2003 £4,450
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 quality is impeccable and the performance is stunningly musical.

ESOTERIC X-5  2010 £4,995
Superbly affordable high end CD transport, with an audio quality that’s beguilingly musical in nature, with dizzying incision and grip.

NAIM CDX2-XP52  2003 £4,950
A fine high end machine, but add an XP52 and it becomes one of the most characteristically engaging 16bit machines we’ve ever heard. Plays music with such passion!

NAIM CD53  2003 £7,050
The most polished Naim CD to date; tremendously capable and musical, but lacks the Rottweiler quality of the cheaper CDX2-XP52.

ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE 1 MKII/TURF DAC  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 chunky build detract from its brilliance!
STANDARDS

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 £6,600
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/SSPS 2006 £14,000
Very probably the best CD player yet made — certainly the most expensive; a digital tour de force.

RECORDERS

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

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

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250
Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for no-nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copes, 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 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.

TRICHRORD DIABLO + NCP5U 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 Wheat.

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 'f' 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 mighty accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

JUNGSON JA-6RD 2006 £899
Stunning value for money Class A monaural 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 S1 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.

ELECTROCOMPANIET PT-2 2008 £1,430
Excellent entry level design that raises the bar to listen to and look at — this is a truly impressive performer with fine sound-staging and build quality.

SUGDEN A21A S1 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.

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

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

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

COPLAND CSA3Y 2006 £1,998
Unusually swet, 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 LS50A 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 VSI60 2009 £3,298
Load of tube power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a gripping, 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-integrates.

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 integrated 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 2003 £90
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, going 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 as the twice the price adds transparency.

MODWRIGHT SWL9.05E £2,000
Captivating sound quality that will transform your system. Build quality is equally impressive and valuable top-notch. Highly recommenced.

NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200
Imaginative two box preamp with superb resolution and an engaging sound.

NUFORCE REFERENCE 95E V2 2006 £1,750
Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three dimensional sound.

ELECTROCOMPANIET NEMO BLACK 18.1 2009 £6,450 (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
Pace, 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 2009 £1,699
KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass heft.

QUAD II-40 2005 £3,330
Modern tubed monoblocks power amplifiers with plenty of power, liquid and open mid-bass 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 2010 2010 £140
Great little standmounters with a friendly fun yet surprisingly refined gait. Excellent value starter speakers.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 2007 £199
Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

B&W 886 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.

STANDARDS
a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is
and pulling you in to the music.
are way off the pace in respect of detail and

\[ \text{GURU QM-10P} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,595 \]

- brilliant!

\[ \text{Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeak-} \]

\[ \text{acoustic insight.} \]

\[ \text{One Thing Audio's modifications keep the} \]

\[ \text{exceptional build and finish.} \]

\[ \text{highly accomplished premium priced mains} \]

\[ \text{Headphones:} \]

\[ \text{ARS AURES MI} \quad 2006 \quad £ 5,995 \]

- Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful,

\[ \text{REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD} \quad 2010 \quad £ 14,995 \]

- Big banger with enormous scale and vast

\[ \text{ISOTEK AQUARIUS} \quad 2010 \quad £ 795 \]

Highly accomplished premium priced mains
conditioner that delivers the sonic goods,
unlike so many others.

\[ \text{TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM} \quad 2007 \quad £ 800 \]

Classy ribbon super tweeter with flexible
level settings and cool styling - you’ll be
amazed at the difference it makes, especially
with Quad electrostatics.

\[ \text{ISOPHON CASSIANO} \quad 2008 \quad £ 11,900 \]

Drive units featuring exotic materials allied
to superlative build quality result in an
immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy
load to drive, however.

\[ \text{REVOLVER CYGNIS} \quad 2006 \quad £ 3,595 \]

- This classy sounding, superbly presented big
floorstander will appeal to those seeking high
end sonics with subtle looks.

\[ \text{SPENDOR ST} \quad 2010 \quad £ 10,500 \]

- Clever high end moving coil design with
immense speed and dissecting clarity allied
to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly,
though...

\[ \text{B&O 801D} \quad 2006 \quad £ 10,500 \]

In many respects, the ultimate studio moni-
tor: dazzling clarity and speed with com-
mending scale and dynamics.

\[ \text{MONITOR AUDIO IDECIC 2006} \quad £ 200 \]

- Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly
soundstage éxito. A superb monitor that is
what they can do with this magnificent flag-
sign loudspeaker.

\[ \text{REVOLVER RW451} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,199 \]

- Very musical floorstander that’s clear, concise
and truthful, whilst being exceptionally ampli-
formance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity
ers with an absolutely captivating perfor-

\[ \text{ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEI CLASSIC £845} \]

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

\[ \text{SPENDOR S3/S5} \quad 2004 \quad £ 495 \]

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

\[ \text{RRR FS100} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,055 \]

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

\[ \text{MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM} \quad 2010 \quad £ 3,400 \]

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

\[ \text{REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD 2006} \quad £ 3,995 \]

- Great small standmounters for audiophiles
that offer detail and dynamics well beyond
their price and dimensions

\[ \text{WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3} \quad 2010 \quad £ 299 \]

- Disarming open and refined at the price,
these standmounters bring unexpected civili-

\[ \text{XTZ 99.25} \quad 2010 \quad £ 640 \]

- One Thing Audio’s modifications keep the
money. Big and sturdily built with serious
bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real
good bargain.

\[ \text{ONE THING AUDIO ESL57} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,450 \]

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

\[ \text{KIBRI NAIMA} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,550 \]

- Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers
are an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

\[ \text{GURU QM-10P} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,595 \]

- 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.

\[ \text{USHER BE-718} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,600 \]

- Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to
a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is
subtle, smooth and emotive.

\[ \text{MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE} \quad 2008 \quad £ 1,599 \]

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

\[ \text{MONITOR AUDIO G560} \quad 2008 \quad £ 2,000 \]

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

\[ \text{SPENDOR 58E} \quad £ 1,895 \]

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

\[ \text{ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEI 2006} \quad £ 2,300 \]

- Massive, transparent large floorstanders with
impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent
build and finish.

\[ \text{ISOPHON GALILEO} \quad 2007 \quad £ 2,100 \]

- Big standmounters that really grip the music
and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

\[ \text{YAMAHA SOAVO 1.1} \quad 2009 \quad £ 3,000 \]

- Musical, transparent large floorstanders with
impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent
build and finish.

\[ \text{ISOPHON CASSIANO} \quad 2008 \quad £ 1,599 \]

- Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful,
assured and even-handed musical perfor-
mance makes these an essential high end
audition.

\[ \text{QUAD ESL-2905} \quad 2006 \quad £ 5,995 \]

- 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.

\[ \text{SPENDOR ST} \quad 2010 \quad £ 5,995 \]

- This classy sounding, superbly presented big
floorstander will appeal to those seeking high
end sonics with subtle looks.

\[ \text{REVOLVER CYGNIS} \quad 2006 \quad £ 5,999 \]

- Revolver pull out all the stops and show
what they can do with this magnificent flag-
sign loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is
like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

\[ \text{USHER BE-10} \quad 2009 \quad £ 10,500 \]

- Clever high end moving coil design with
immense speed and dissecting clarity allied
to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly,
though...

\[ \text{B&O 801D} \quad 2006 \quad £ 10,500 \]

- In many respects, the ultimate studio moni-
tor: dazzling clarity and speed with com-
mending scale and dynamics.

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- Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly
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what they can do with this magnificent flag-
sign loudspeaker.

\[ \text{REVOLVER RW451} \quad 2006 \quad £ 1,199 \]

- Very musical floorstander that’s clear, concise
and truthful, whilst being exceptionally ampli-
ifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

\[ \text{ONE THING AUDIO ESL57} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,450 \]

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

\[ \text{KIBRI NAIMA} \quad 2007 \quad £ 1,550 \]

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- Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to
a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is
subtle, smooth and emotive.
**STANDARDS**

**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 superlatively 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/5RM-007T 2006 £2,800**
Simply the best headphones we've ever heard that shows just what a compact design can achieve. Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system.

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

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST 2004 £620/0.6M**
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.

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

**CHORD COMPANY**

**TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £229**
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.

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

**MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500**
Perfectly built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/MAM 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...

**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.

**SCHERBAHN DOLBY Digital 2007 £850**
Extremely good value; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

**ARIA 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.

**NAIN 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...

**SCONE 2007 £8,500**
This is the most complete music system you can buy. Superb performance across all formats and a powerful, expressive and stylish design.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T2005 £350**
Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

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

**CREEK CLASSIC TUNER 2006 £550**
No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

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

**MAGNUM DYNAAB 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.

**TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £229**
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.

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

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

**TUNERS**

**MISSING LINK CRY° 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, inasmuch as it's as good as some designs at three times the price.

**INTERCONNECTS**

**TELCOUNT 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-easing sound. superb value for money.

**CHORD COMPANY**

**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.

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

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**NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429**
Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.
David Price and Noel Keywood report from the National Audio Show 2010, held at Silverstone’s Whittlebury Hall in late September...

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

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

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

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

The Creek Wyndson programmable phono stage can be set to match any pickup cartridge, MC or MM. Just dial in the details and they are stored onboard. Price is £1,500. NK
In the Inspire room I spied these Fidelity Audio HPA100 headphone amplifiers; no prizes for style but the build quality sure looked good. DP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The new Kingsound Queen II hybrid electrostatic electrostatic loudspeaker, imported by Icon Audio, uses an electrostatic midrange/treble panel, coupled to a box bass unit. Should be good. NK
Whilst most hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts are happy to accept the influence that interconnects and speaker cable can have on the performance of a system, many people struggle to accept that a digital cable can be equally influential. The common reaction is that since the cable is only carrying a digital signal, the design and quality of materials used in the cable will have far less influence. Listening tests however, show this is not necessarily the case. Repeated listening tests using high quality digital to analogue converters and home cinema receivers have shown that digital cables can and do have an effect on the sound quality of the system in which they are used. Digital cables are capable of affecting levels of detail, dynamics, sound staging and the rhythmic and tonal characteristics of a system.

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

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

Fidelity
with SOUL

Chord Indigo Plus Digital

Chord Indigo Plus Digital

The Chord Company

Get advice on all aspects of hi-fi and home cinema from the Cable Doctor and sign-up for our newsletter, keeping you in touch with the latest product development news, exclusive competitions and technical tips
Tucked away in a room on its own we spotted the new Martin Logan Ethos electrostatic loudspeaker, driven by Audio Research valve amplifiers; it sounded divine, as Martin Logans usually do, displaying fabulous clarity and celestial imaging! NK

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here's an unusual idea. A flat panel loudspeaker that isn't a flat panel loudspeaker! It's actually a box loudspeaker squashed flat. Most panels are open backed, but Revolver's Screen 3 is not; it's a conventional loudspeaker with cone drive units and a sealed box enclosure, but the box has been squashed to a depth of just 10mm (4.3in) deep. The idea is that it mounts against a wall, or hangs from it, freeing up ever valuable floor space in the way wall mounting flat screen TVs kicked out bulky Cathode Ray Tube televisions. Placing a loudspeaker against a wall runs against the grain a little, but Revolver surprised me with this one. They have made a really good job of the Screen 3; it had a lovely sound.

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

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

Accompanying a really big 42in TV screen...
the really big Screen 3 will give an equally big sound and that, I think, is the point. You can forget your point source, bookshelf super monitors with their pinpoint focus; the Screen 3s paint it large, Hollywood style.

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

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

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

SOUND QUALITY

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

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

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

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

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

The Screen 3s held onto the heavy synths with the grip of a bulldog, spitting out seismic pulses many loudspeakers...
"THE ULTIMATE REAL WORLD TONEARM"
HI FI WORLD MAY 2009

"A new benchmark for musical communication"  STEREO TIMES
"One of the truly special products I've reviewed in the past 18 years"  STEREOPHILE
"The best tonearm I've heard"  HI FI WORLD
"So far ahead of the pack ... looks about to lap them"  STEREO TIMES

Multi-award winning ORIGIN LIVE TONEARMS make an enormous difference over other arms due to their market leading performance. Delighted owners report that the level of improvement is many times that of a cartridge upgrade - and lasts a lot longer.

These arms simply give an entirely new level of musical satisfaction according to many independent sources - Please see Origin Live web site for full reviews and information.

To eliminate any risk on your part, all arms are offered with a full money back refund should you not be anything other than delighted.

**Tonearm Models**
- Enterprise
- Conqueror
- Illustrious
- Encounter
- Silver

**World Awards**

ORIGIN LIVE

UNIVERSAL MOTOR UPGRADE
Upgrades & replaces motors & power supplies for ALL belt drive turntables

"The single most important upgrade you can ever make to any record deck concerns the motor drive...nothing can prepare you for the shock of going DC. In a word, gobsmacking."  COMMON GROUND MAGAZINE

"It's value is nothing short of tremendous."  LISTENER MAGAZINE

"The LP12 remains a classic ... but upgrade kits by Origin Live can bring a vast improvement to its performance"  HI FI NEWS

UNIVERSAL TURNTABLE MOTOR KIT - No one would blame you for being sceptical of an easy to fit, inexpensive dc motor upgrade. Especially one that improves on the best of other power supplies costing over 4 times as much or your money back. It is simply impossible to imagine the level of improvement attained by eliminating the motor vibration that your stylus amplifies over 8,000 times! Our DC motor kit offers massive improvements to all versions of Linn Lingo / Valhulla, Rega, Systemdeck, Roksan, Rock etc. The kits consist of a drop in replacement high grade DC motor and off-board 2 speed control box. Why not order now? - see web site or phone.

- Standard DC Motor Kit - £250
- Advanced DC Motor Kit - £339
- Ultra DC Motor Kit - £570
- Upgrade Transformer - £195
- Upgrade DC 240 motor - £129 with kit

ORIGIN LIVE
Tel/Fax: +44 02380 578877
E-mail: originlive@originlive.com
www.originlive.com
could not match. The big bass drive unit does a fine job and wouldn't shy away from producing some explosive screen sound tracks with awesome power. I did detect a bit of boxiness at times but this is to be expected with a cabinet wall so close behind the bass unit.

Lady Gaga's vocals were deliciously clear and alive in front of me, the excellent timbral resolution of the Screen 3s capturing her with beguiling ability. Wall positioning does limit apparent soundstage depth, but this isn't a great drawback. Fed a wide range of Rock, the Screen 3s sounded dynamic and exciting, ably propelled by our reference Musical Fidelity AM350 amplifier. The easy delivery and lovely timbral resolution of the Screen 3s painted a Steinway large and clear in front of me and nothing intruded to spoil my enjoyment of hearing Arcadi Volodos playing Liszt, punishing the keyboard in extraordinary fashion. A giant image with wonderful dynamic scaling and rich timbral resolution put the Steinway in our room in gloriously full bodied form. The Screen 3s did this so well I was a little shocked in some ways. Such an unlikely looking loudspeaker, but here they were delivering a wonderful performance. The complete absence of bass waffle made for a tidy and clean sound that had Volodos playing with a snappy precision unsullied by a hint of imprecision. Arcadi Volodos playing Liszt, punishing the keyboard in extraordinary fashion. The Screen 3s had me totally impressed. They may be large and expensive, but for sound quality Revolver's Screen 3s had me totally impressed. They were lovely — and you get your floor back.

The easy, smooth sound of these speakers delivered violins in the Emerson String Quartet with a silky richness that was an object lesson for cone loudspeakers; how I wish such a svelte delivery was more common. There was perhaps just the slightest hint of boxiness and a flattening of stage depth perspectives but to such a small degree it was trivial in the overall scheme of things. The effect was again a little noticeable in quieter moments of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing Mars, from The Planets. As the tempo grew I was impressed by the sheer scale of their presentation and the clear way in which instrumental strands were keep nicely apart. The richness and strength of the horns and thunderous rolls from kettle drum, all sharply timed with nary a hint of imprecision would bring a smile to the face of any classical listener, I believe.

CONCLUSION

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

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

| Sensitivity was high at 88dB |
| Sound pressure level into a measured overall impedance of 7.5 Ohms, although bass unit DCR was 4.5 Ohms and a response peak at 80Hz corresponds with an impedance dip to 4 Ohms our impedance trace shows, meaning there's strong current draw here. Otherwise, the Revolver is an easy load, unreactive and undemanding current wise. The Revolver panel measures well, but its frequency response is far from flat or even and this will likely be audible as a bright sound with restrained bass. NK |

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

| Green - driver output |
| Red - port output |

#### IMPEDANCE

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**VERDICT**

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

**REVOLVER SCREEN 3 £ 2,800**

- Acoustic Partnership
- +44 (0)1752 424777
- www.revolveraudio.co.uk

### FOR

- generous soundstage
- tight, tuneful bass
- smooth as silk

### AGAINST

- big
- heavy
- explicit high treble
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.

**DIGITAL**

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD1** 1986 £1500
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD45E** 1998 £200
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

**LINN KARIK III** 1995 £1775
The final Kariik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, gritty 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 Bravissimo 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** 1992 £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 1997 £3,000**
Sony's first two boxers was right first time. Tonal lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.

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

**TECHNICS SL-P1200** 1987 £800
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

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

**COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS**

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

**ESOTERIC PO** 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 DAC MAGIC** 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
Budgets Bravissimo performer with tweaks aplenty. Postron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.
**Classics**

**Ariston RD115 1972 £94**
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm. Scotland's original superdeck 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-S90 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-obsoleste ICs.

**Dual CS505 1982 £75**
Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Published, 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 301TD/124 rivals.

**Linn Axis 1987 £253**
Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with L/PX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

**Linn Sondek LP12 1973 £86**
For many, the Brit superdecks; 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 £599**
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 accorved 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**
Seminall Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10II 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 'beter' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagliing 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 spare parts 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.

**Tonearms**

**Aco Lustvre 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 AT1120 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.
**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS**

DELTEC 1987 £1900

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

ROGERS A75 1978 £220

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

EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 £625

Semital 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 sockets. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

VTL MINIMAL/SOW MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300

Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it showed. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra 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 A11 1985 £350

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.

NAIM NAIT 1984 £350

Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

NAD 3020 1979 £69

Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.

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.

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!

LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £N/A

A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hairshirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not bad for under £100.

NAIM MAC2.5 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.

LECON AC-1 1973 £N/A

Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.

ROSSI 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.

MYST TMA3 1983 £300

Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

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 £63

Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £N/A

Leak's biggest valve power amp oﬀers 35 Watts per channel and more low end welly than the smaller Stereo 20. Despite concerns over reliability their rarity means high prices are the order of the day.
LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £31
Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irresistibly musical and fluid.

LEICSON API 1973 £N/A
Mid-stop cylindrical styling alluded to its 'power 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.

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.

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 £25
Series 1 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.

CREEK CAS3140 1985 £199
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

NAD 4060 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.

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.

CREEK 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.

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

QUAD 303 1968 £55
Balde proof build, but woolly sound. Off the pace, but enduring nonetheless. Some pipe smoking slipper wearers swear by them!

RADFORD ST25 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.

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.

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NAD 4140 1995 £199
Brilliant affordable digital tuner has a smooth, detailed musical sound plus sensible real- world facilities.

ROGERS T7S 1977 £125
More of a semigene 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?

REVOX B760 1975 £520
More of a semigene 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?

YAMAHA CT7000 1977 £444
Reputedly the best of the classic Jap analo- /ogues, this combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.

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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 feature 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.

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.

SONY TC-377 1972 £1/A
A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards.

SONY MDS-JESSSES 2000 £900
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.

PIONEER PDR-SSRWR 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
AR185 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...

LOWTHER PM6A 1957 £18
This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

TANNOY WESTMINSTER 1985 £4500
Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in naughtiness 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 T72 / 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
Cedelion HF/3C000 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextreme mid-bass unit - and the result is a beautifully warm yet very focussed sound. A little bass boom necessities careful low-strand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

QUAD ESL57 1956 £45
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 superspeakers.
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 polypolypropylene
designs. Warm, smooth, clean and powerful
sound.

MISSION 752  
1995 £495
Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstand-
ers combined HIOA drive units and metal
dome tweeters with surprisingly warm
results. Benign load characteristics makes
them great for valves.

MEYBROOK HBI  
1982 £130
Peter Cowens-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 alu-
minium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass
unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties
loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding,
albeit coarse at high frequencies and limp in
the bass. Speakers would never be the same
again...

LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39
Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a
reasonably powerful amplifier sounds
quite satisfying.

MISSION X-SPACE  
1999 £499
The first mass production sub and sat system
using NKT panels is a sure-fire future clas-
ic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy
sound nevertheless!

QUAD ESL63  
1980 £1300
An update of the ESL57, with softer cabinets.
Until the 989, the best of the Quad electro-
stats.

YAMAHA NS1000  
1977 £532
High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter
domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive
sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning
translucence, speed and wallop allied to superb
transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!

CLASSIC CONTACTS

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cures, etc.

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CLASSICS

When a classic goes ' p000f' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Repairing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting it classic up and running again after it has suffered a small rip of seal on your ceiling!

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THE FALL
The Wonderful And Beggars Banquet
Fans of The Fall take note of this brilliant box set which features four CDs situated in a 140x190mm box. The CDs themselves are placed in colour card sleeves and include the original LP, which was released in 1984 and is presented here in a remastered form via the original master tapes. It was the band's eighth album and a career highlight. Mark E. Smith shared the songwriting duties with his then wife, Brix — complete with bitterness, cynicism and biting humour...

Next is a CD devoted to Singles/Rough Mixes which includes sixteen tracks, six of which have never been released before. Rather startling is the third CD, a BBC Sessions disc. These include the expected John Peel sessions (Peel adored The Fall and always termed them as 'The Mighty Fall') but there's also sessions from shows fronted by Janice Long, Kid Jensen and the Saturday Live show. Except for the Peel tracks (which can also be found on the old, six disc 'The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004' via Castle Music), all of the other session songs have never been released before. Finally, the fourth disc includes a ten track live gig recording: 'Live At Pandora's Music Box Festival' created by VPRO radio in Holland. Would you believe it, at 3:15am on a Sunday morning!

In addition to the music, the box includes an excellent 48-page book which includes plenty of images of memorabilia, posters, photos and artwork. It also includes a sort of diary of late 1983 and 1984, detailing events and including interviews within each diary entry. In addition to that lot, the band discuss the album, song by song. The book is finished off by single artwork and full production credit information for each single and album track. Phew!

APHRODITE'S CHILD
End Of The World./ It's Five O'Clock
Esoteric Recordings
A fascinating band featuring a bunch of blokes from Greece. They included Loukas Sideras plus sometime member Anargyros 'Silver' Koulouris. The other two might ring a bell with you, though. The first was Evangelos Odysseas Papathanassiou who we know better as Vangelis, yep the 'Chariots of Fire' composer plus the Greek with an Egyptian extraction, Artemios Voutouris Roussos, or Demis Roussos as he was known over here during a popular solo career he had with hits such as 'Forever and Ever'. Poor Demis also spent much of his time being ridiculed on UK TV comedy shows because of his rather stout proportions. Well, back in 1968, when he was part of the prog rock outfit, Aphrodite's Child, Demis was a rather svelte character. During 1968, the band released 'End Of The World', featuring the distinctive vocals of Roussos. At this stage, the musical output was more akin to psychedelia with the use of a Mellotron and decidedly hippie-like imagery. You know the sort of stuff, 'The grass is not green, the birds are singing' and so on. It includes late-Beatles type arrangements.

The sequel, 'It's Five O'Clock', moved the band's style on apace, pushing them forwards to their prog-related conclusion. This album still retains elements of their psyche background however, so there is a crossover element to the music. An exploratory album, the band sounds like they are prodding here, prodding there while trying a bit of this and that. Each track sounds like a sonic investigation as styles vary so much. The ultimate prog-like end would be the cult classic, '666' which was released in 1972 and gave the band a deserved underground following. Both of these new reissued albums provide a fascinating build up to that album.
A COMPLETE INTRODUCTION TO SUGAR HILL RECORDS

Universal

Part of a series of themed box sets covering a wide variety of labels and genres, this 'Introduction To...' looks at the US-based Sugar Hill label and does so over four discs. This was the rapping soundtrack of my teenage years with classic tracks such as The Sugarhill Gang's 'Rapper Delight' featuring Big Bank Hank's superman rap, Mike's rap on bad food and Master Gee's lines as his place as the youngest of the group. This set includes the long version of almost fifteen minutes. The group's '8th Wonder' also features the much sampled signature brass hook.

Like some Victorian gentleman finding the source of the Nile, disc two introduces what some term as the source of hip hop, with Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On the Wheels Of Steel'. Samples are scattered all over the place including Chic's 'Good Times', Queen's 'Another One Bites the Dust' and Debbie Harry's 'Rapture' plus many more. When that band's seminal, 'The Message' hits the spindle then you know that you're in the presence of greatness. 'It's like a jungle, sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.' And, 'Don't push me 'cos I'm close to the edge,' burn into the mind. And then there's the drug culture commentary, 'White Lines (Don't Do It)'. This list goes on...

Also look out for the 'A Complete Introduction To Chess', which also spans four CDs and includes a 36-page booklet secured within. Each CD is packed with classic music from Chuck Berry's 'Maybellene' and Howlin' Wolf's 'Evil' to Little Milton's 'We're Gonna Make It' and Elmore James' 'Something's Got a Hold On Me'. Covering the years 1948 to 1975, there are 100 tracks to feast upon in all.

35!!! YEARS
Bear Family Records

To celebrate the 35th anniversary of the birth of Germany's premier reissue record label, Bear Family has released a gloriously self-reverential box set that includes 3CDs and a 36-page booklet secured within. The music itself has been created by friends of the label. It's the hardback book that makes this box set so desirable. Spanning 208 pages, it is quite a production and is worth the entry price on its own, to be frank. After an introduction and some tributes to 'Lost Friends', colleagues who have passed away over the years, there is a 'fun' list section which asks a selection of notables; if your house was on fire, what Bear Family records would you rescue from it? Well, you can see my choice on page 39!

Next is a list of Top Billboard chart artists that feature on the label covering varying genres and then, the pièce de résistance, the Bear Family catalogue, covering firstly vinyl and then CDs. This section covers over 100 pages all on its own and features every single Bear Family release and an image of every single LP and CD cover too. For collectors, this portion of the book alone is almost priceless. Looking at those early vinyl days, the roster is fascinating: Bill Clifton, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Waylon Jennings, Ted Herold, Marty Robbins, The Carter Sisters... I'm sure many of these early releases will be new even to hardened Bear Family collectors. Quite a set for Bear Family fans, then. Oh, and don't forget the best bit... page 39!
Introduction around 1960 by David Hafler’s Dynaco Corporation of Philadelphia in the good old US of A, in pretty much unchanged form, you can still buy a version of this amplifier brand new today; rivalling the Klipschorn, Denon DL103s, Ortofon SPU and Beyer DT48 as one of the longest surviving hi-fi components of all time. It also has a reputation of being a major driver in the US marketplace, influencing and inspiring other audio designers along the way.

Although now in MkII guise, any variant of the amplifier is instantly recognisable with shiny chrome chassis and dark coloured chassis cage cover. Technically the differences between old and new are a change of driver valves from the hard to find 7199 to the easier 6GH8A (technically a TV valve, but one that sounds great in this set up – not interchangeable, it should be pointed out!) both dual triode pentode valves. There’s also solid state power supply rectification on the MkII with increased reservoir capacitor capacity, as opposed to the MkI using a valve GZ34 rectifier.

Both models operate the EL34 output valves in fixed negative grid bias, user adjustable. On the MkI a voltage meter has to be plugged into test points, on the MkII an inbuilt LED telltale does that job. The later MkII also has a more sophisticated bias power supply.

Over the years the name has passed through several hands, but delightfully the product and all the parts remain available. Initially available as both a factory wired item, and as a home constructed kit, for the last forty years the amplifier has been available only in do-it-yourself form.

The design is rock-solid, the chassis rigid enough to cope with the powerful and weighty transformers. It has a compact footprint of 13 inch wide by 9 1/2 inch deep (6 1/2” tall). The plating of the chassis is to a very high standard, shaming the vast majority of British counterparts. It is also pretty advanced for its day, using one of those new fangled printed circuit boards for all of the drive section circuitry, and most of the amplifiers passive components, with power supply and output valves neatly hard wired on the compact chassis.

Over the years across the pond there have been more modifications than you can shake a stick at. Most concentrate on replacing the original printed circuit board with a different drive circuit. The original board was tightly specified, not allowing huge scope for the tweaker wanting to upgrade coupling capacitors, and not everyone liking the pentode driver, and classic split load cathode follower circuit.

In Europe, the Philips/ Mullard 5-20 design was a much more popular use of the EL34 valve, as was the Radford STA15 and 25. The latter does get compared quite a lot to the Stereo 70. Both use fixed bias EL34 output pentode valves in an ‘Ultra Linear’ configuration (itself invented by Hafler), and both use triode pentode drive valves; but the drive circuits are much more apart. Radford using a more sophisticated Bailey modified Philips/ Mullard circuit, while the Stereo 70’s drive circuit can be traced back through the famous Williamson to Cocking’s original ‘Quality Amplifier’ circuits in Wireless World.

In comparison to most European amplifiers of the period, the Stereo 70 is a power house, producing 35 watts per channel from 1.3 volts of signal, a frequency response of 10Hz to 40kHz, and distortion of 1%. Despite the power, this is quite insensitive, and the Stereo 70 does need to be used with a preamplifier with gain, Dynaco offering the classic PAS2 and PAS3 valve preamps to match.

Common to all American vintage amps, the MkI uses fairly tight screw terminals for the 4, 8 and 16 ohm loudspeaker outputs, which are sensibly located on the rear of the chassis along with mains input fuse and power switch. The front contains the input sockets and test points. The input phone connectors are also very tight together, and are a bit of a pain, nee impossibility, with the vast...
Under the cover, PCBs hold small signal components, high power parts hard wired.

of generic types when rebuilding an amp. The original coupling capacitors replaced with new metallised polyester layer. The valves checked out on an AVO valve characteristic meter, the output stage rebaised, and the whole thing given a 48 hour soak test...

Returning to Jacques Lousier was a delight. The stereo image was much tighter, the whole sound more musical, more held together, and frankly more dynamic. There was still a touch of rose tint to the sound; but it was a genuine and worthwhile improvement. The vocals of both Dinah and Ella came forth; it was a fine performance, leaving most solid state amplifiers sounding cold and uninvolving, if not quite as lucid or as breathable as the Radford '25. On bass heavy material, it was again less plummy than original, with more depth complete with stronger perceived attack and punch, now beating the Radford in the bass department.

CONCLUSION

The Dynakit Stereo 70's biggest problem is lack of sensitivity, needing the use of a decent active preamp. Along with the British Quad II power amp, preamplifier choice is a deciding arbiter in the final sound. In addition, within a quiet room the ambient chassis noise of the unit may be a problem for some, along with the possible need for an autotransformer. But bulletproof build, and complete parts availability in addition to the fine overall quality make this amplifier a top vintage consideration.

The really good news is that second-hand you can buy a good working example for less than £500, and much less if you are prepared for Internet auction hassles and shipping one in from the States and giving it a good service. There are a lot more potential modifications and tweaks available, it is capable of driving modern real world speakers, and for its power, by valve amplifier standards, it's very compact. Pretty much dismissed and underrated; this massively influential amplifier is a sound second-hand buy, and new it is a real bargain.
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“we heroic soldiers of the secondhand and conquerors of the classic, lived to fight another day.”

david price

h, autumn, season of mists and mellow fruitfulness! But what the great John Keats forgot to include in his ode to one of the finer seasons of the British year, is hi-fi shows and audiojumbles. Well, far enough I suppose; if you’re an opiate fuelled romantic poet and thinking beautiful thoughts all the time, the prospect of trudging round a crowded hotel or a grubby town hall isn’t exactly foremost in the mind...

For this writer however, September and October have their own special attractions. The Whittlebury hi-fi show is turning into one of the highlights of the calendar; thanks in no small part to its pleasant ‘country house hotel’ location, where alongside the chirping of the late summer crickets you can hear the howling of superbikes and racing cars pounding around a nearby track known to the locals as Silverstone.

The show has to all intents and purposes replaced the late September show at Heathrow’s Park Inn. It’s the second year of the National Audio Show, as it has now been named, and it was well attended, with plenty of interesting manufacturers and punters alike. You can see Hi-Fi World’s highlights of the show on p66. Suffice to say that our report could have filled twice as many pages...

One high point for yours truly was interviewing Eleanor McEvoy; we recorded our chat with my WM-D6C, plus an excellent little stereo dynamic microphone and a Maxell metal C90. It was certainly the best sounding interview I’ve ever made and I was gutted that she didn’t burst into song; it could easily have been turned into one of the best recorded ‘unplugged’ sessions ever heard!

Speaking of cassette recorders, was it Tim Jarman I saw creeping out of the Tonbridge Audiojumble a couple of Sundays later, with an unfeasibly large mid-seventies Sony ‘pro’ cassette recorder hanging from an appropriately thick shoulder strap? I think it was! This twice yearly gathering is something of a pilgrimage for a certain type of hi-fi fan, and is a sort of cross between a car boot sale and a classic hi-fi boutique. There’s a lot of junk that should be at a ‘booster’ being offered for boutique prices, and there’s a lot of junk that’s offered for boot sale prices, but just occasionally you find a special piece that’s not commensurately priced...

As the previous audiojumble in the spring, I walked around fit as a flea but didn’t see anything I wanted, whereas this time I was still recovering from a bad cold but my luck was in, big time. Maybe it was that Paracetamol racing around my veins, but I happened upon an exceptionally tidy Rega Planet turntable circa 1975, sans pickup arm, being offered for a very nice price. Needless to say I quickly reached into my pocket, thanking the kind vendor between my sneezes! Now all I need is the matching original silver Rega R200 S-shaped arm; if you know of one then do let me know (by emailing editorial@hi-fiworld.co.uk); it would be good to get the ‘train set’ back together again! This said, I suppose an original Supex-sourced Rega R100 cartridge would be asking too much...

Then, just when I’d parted with my dough, something terrible happened! I spied a Sony PS-8750 turntable sitting in the corner and almost needed to sit down. Earlier, Adam Smith, who’s a regular audiojumber and who had a stall, said there had been one on sale for £150 earlier, which knocked me for six as soon as I’d arrived at around 10.30am. Sadly (and not unexpectedly) it had ‘gone’, but amazingly another had surfaced for £275! Well, given this was likely Sony’s most expensive integrated turntable ever, the first to sport quartz lock and also boasted a sublime carbon fibre tonearm with sapphire bearings and a build quality little short of a Continuum, I still thought it worth the wonga. Needless to say it has issues; a flickery strobe and a few bits missing, but that’s all part of the thrill of the classic hi-fi chase!

My bank balance visibly contorted with pain (I should have given it my last Paracetamol), I made for the audiojumble door, only to be cruelly confronted with an Aurex Microsystem. Partly not working, it was going for £35 and – as Oscar Wilde used to say – ‘I can resist anything except temptation’. A good friend has now restored it to its former glory, leaving me to do the finishing touches with Mr. Sheen, giving a £600 (in 1979) high end miniature hi-fi for less than the price of a decent mains plug.

As I cowered out, under the weight of my various purchases, I saw many other brave warriors emerging from the audiojumble, open reels or quadraphonic receivers clutching tightly under their arms. Like lions returning to their pride with freshly-caught prey, we heroic soldiers of the secondhand, ninjas of the not-wanted and conquerors of the classic, lived to fight another day. Albeit frugally until next pay day...
"The Runaways were part of that interesting American scene before punk broke in the UK..."

**Paul Rigby**

Never judge a CD by its cover. Put together by music maverick, Kim Fowley, in Los Angeles around 1975, The Runaways were a girl band featuring Joan Jett, Sandy West, Lita Ford, Cherie Currie and Jackie Fox. Given a somewhat sleazy image by Fowley, the band were often dismissed by many critics. This may be because the band were created and honed while still in the public eye. Hence, their early work can be termed raw and primitive but it would also be nearer the truth to say that most of the girls were still learning how to play their instruments during recording and gigging.

"I started Cherry Red in 1978," said Cherry Red Records chairman Iain McNay, explaining how he established links with the band. "I was a fan of the group and I first saw them supporting the Stranglers at the Roundhouse. They had done four albums and were on the brink of splitting. Cherie Currie, the singer, had already left and Joan Jett was doing the vocals. I then heard of an album that had come out in America that was not available in Europe. This was pre-Amazon so it wasn’t so easy to get American imports in those days. So I licensed the album from the management company, Toby Mamin and Peter Leeds (who also managed Blondie), which proved to be their final album called 'And Now... The Runaways'. When it came out we issued five different coloured vinyl editions and we got pretty good press. We even took a single off it called ‘Right Now’!

Cherry Red then released another album called ‘Flamin’ Schoolgirls’ which contained outtakes from previous sessions, licensed from Phonogram in Holland and released the following year. Time passed until six or seven years ago when Cherry Red managed to obtain the licenses for all of the band’s earlier albums, via Universal. "That wasn’t a door that opened very easily but, one thing we are at Cherry Red is persistent and we’re reputable; we always pay people on time. In the end we managed to get the albums we were after. It was the start of what is now an excellent relationship with Universal. Hence, The Runaways were special releases for us."

The Runaways were part of that interesting American scene before punk broke throughout the UK during that famous summer of 1976 when the Sex Pistols, The Clash, Siouxsie & the Banshees and rest played the 100 Club over a single weekend in Oxford Street. That’s when the UK variant of punk began to gather momentum. The Runaways had already been over here with their punk attitude. Not the greatest musicians, sure, but they created a magical sound and an energy that really worked. The Runaways, like their compatriots such as Johnny Thunders & the Heartbreakers and Television, were the inspiration for the UK version of punk.

All of the band’s CDs have now been reissued by Cherry Red off the back of a recently released film, called ‘The Runaways’, based on a memoir written by Currie, which has now been released as a DVD in the UK. The CDs - seven in all - include ‘The Runaways’, the 1976 debut; ‘Queens Of Noise’, the 1977 follow-up; ‘Wakin’ For The Night’ in which Joan Jett took over the lead vocals; ‘Live In Japan’ which was only originally available as an import; ‘And Now... The Runaways’; ‘Flamin’ Schoolgirls’, which was originally released on vinyl by Cherry Red in 1980, and has been released on CD for the first time plus ‘The Japanese Singles Collection’, featuring all of the band’s highly collectable Japanese picture cover single sleeves, lyrics, discography and sleeve notes. This CD features two bonus tracks, the UK single ‘Right Now’ and its B-side ‘Black Leather’, the band’s last single release.

And now you’re expecting me to say that the whole line of CDs has been remastered and sounds better than ever. Well, I’m not but they still sound good. And that’s the point. There is a growing fixation on remastering that is starting to dominate the CD market to such an extent that some music fans won’t touch a CD without it. It’s a sort of technological snobbery or, alternatively, a feeling that somehow, without the sticker proclaiming the fact, they’ve been short-changed. Yet, it doesn’t always follow that remastering should be imposed on every new reissue. Why? Because not every reissue actually requires it. These CDs, for example, were first remastered via the original masters and, so Cherry Red say, that’s good enough for them. That is, any further tinkering might not improve the sound quality. In fact, it might actually lessen it.

So I’ve dragged you down this column with a non-story! Well, if you’re not a Runaways fan then, yes I have. But with the best of intentions. This is the reason — and here I blow my own and Hi-Fi World’s trumpet — for the inclusion of our audiophile CD and vinyl review columns, this column and Classic Cuts. To not only separate the wheat from the chaff but to also give you an insight onto sound quality that other magazines may ignore.
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WIN 1 OF 3 PAIRS OF MONITOR AUDIO BX5 LOUDSPEAKERS,
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Here’s your chance to win one of three pairs of £500 Monitor Audio BX5 floorstanders, which Noel Keywood so liked in the November 2010 issue of Hi-Fi World. Here’s what he said...

“The narrow 166mm wide cabinet houses one 140mm (5.5in) bass driver, one similarly sized bass/midrange driver and a 25mm (1in) gold plated aluminium dome tweeter, fitted with protective grille. Both 140mm units use Monitor Audio’s C-CAM cone material where an aluminium/ magnesium alloy is heat treated then ceramic coated to improve stiffness. The tweeter also uses C-CAM formed into a dome and gold plated.

There are two bass loading chambers. The lower bass unit is front ported and the upper bass/midrange unit is rear ported. Foam bungs are supplied; you get just two and they are meant for the front ports. Monitor Audio quote a 30W-120W power requirement and a high 90dB sensitivity and we measured 89dB – very close.

Our measurements showed the BX5s were almost academically correct under measurement. In practice this results in a loudspeaker that’s less overtly dramatic, but an easier and convincing long term listen. Booming bass and zinging treble catch a listeners attention in the showroom, but it is the home experience that matters and in excess can get tiring.

Imaging is in the plane of the loudspeakers but the aura of the soundstage was large and stage depth convincing. Bass went deep, it was well controlled and about as fast as you could expect, making the BX5 a fun rocker. Reproducing the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing ‘Mars’ from ‘The Planets’, the BX5s managed to capture orchestral scale and power nicely, especially in the rumblings of the kettle drum. With a well cut album like the first from the Scissor Sisters, bass was firm and very musical, individual notes perfectly captured and well expressed. Bass guitar rolled down the scale with an even step all the way down in ‘Comfortably Numb’.

The BX5 is a fun budget floorstander. Graced with a big sound yet a strong sense of balance and control it works well as a high fidelity all rounder. With a wide range of ability, from its stereo imaging through to a great sense of scale and control with big performances it will appeal to all those who like their music strong and fast.”

If you’d like to win one pair of these superb speakers then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions.

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SEPTEMBER 2010 WINNER: CAMBRIDGE AUDIO BLU-RAY PLAYER
Ms Yaz H. of Sheffield, Yorkshire
After receiving positive feedback from the recent ‘XHQ’ (extra-high quality) Internet radio trial (which Noel wrote about in last month’s column), with over a thousand people providing feedback via an online questionnaire, the BBC has announced that it intends to launch the service on a permanent basis in December. The service will be called ‘HD Sound’, and it will initially consist of the same 320kbps AAC Internet stream carrying a live simulcast of Radio 3 that was used in the XHQ trial.

The BBC’s HD Sound format, to be used for HD Sound, is at a considerably higher bitrate than the 192kbps used for Radio 3 on DAB and the digital TV platforms, and just as importantly it uses the modern and efficient AAC audio codec as opposed to the ancient MP2 codec used elsewhere, so there’s no question that the HD Sound stream will provide significantly higher quality than the other digital platforms do.

The BBC’s use of the term ‘HD’ is controversial, though. I consider the term ‘HD audio’ to mean one of the high-resolution audio formats, such as Dolby TrueHD or DTS HD Master Audio that use 24bit resolution, and a high sampling frequency of 96-192kHz with the audio losslessly compressed.

The BBC’s HD Sound format fails to meet those exacting requirements in a number of ways; the resolution is limited to that of the source audio, which is invariably 16bit CDs for music radio, and although 320kbps may be a very high bitrate for perceptual audio codecs to use, AAC is still a lossy audio codec, so the resolution wouldn’t even be 16bits. And the sampling frequency is only the standard 44.1 or 48kHz.

Having said that, it must be remembered that this is radio we’re talking about, so people’s expectations of quality aren’t as high as they are for music they’ve purchased.

The public also clearly understands that the ‘HD’ tag signifies higher quality, which the HD Sound service does deliver. Furthermore, any step up in quality from 320kbps AAC would require a move to using lossless audio codecs, where a bitrate of the order of 1 Mbps would need to be used, so such a move is a long way off. To be quite honest, I’m undecided at the present time whether the BBC should use the term ‘HD’ for this service or not, because there are valid arguments both for and against.

Once it’s been launched, Radio 3’s HD Sound stream will initially be available on a web page that’s linked to from the Radio 3 home page. Then, after an initial period where the BBC will monitor usage and iron out any problems, the HD Sound stream will be made available via the BBC iPlayer, as well as via the forthcoming ‘UK Radioplayer’ — the latter is planned to launch in February, and it will consist of a common website/web application where listeners will be able to access around 400 UK radio stations that also broadcast on FM, AM or DAB. HD Sound streams will also be available for the BBC’s other national radio stations when special events are being broadcast — the first such planned event will be a Radio 2 stream relaying the Electric Proms on 28th to 30th October. As with the Radio 3 HD Sound stream, the intention is to eventually integrate live HD Sound streams for all of the BBC’s national stations into the BBC iPlayer and UK Radioplayer, and it is planned to extend HD Sound to the on-demand (listen again) streams on the iPlayer, too.

It’s certainly welcome to see the BBC delivering higher quality on digital radio where it is possible to do so, because they’ve badly let down listeners in this regard over the last decade due to their utter intransigence over the issue with DAB’s audio quality.

The launch of the HD Sound service also bears out a point that I’ve been making (banging on about might be a better description) for quite a while now, which is that the Internet is the platform that holds quite a lot of promise in terms of the audio quality that digital radio will be able to deliver — as Moore’s Law reduces the cost of Internet bandwidth exponentially over time, and that enables the broadcasters to deliver higher quality without increasing distribution costs. For example, the quality of the BBC’s national radio stations superseded the quality that DAB+ is ever be likely to deliver last year when the 128 and 192kbps AAC live radio streams were launched on the BBC iPlayer, and now, just 18 months further on, this HD Sound service is about to set the quality way beyond that which DAB+ will deliver, let alone the quality that will be available via DAB.

The BBC still has a lot of work to do in this area, though, as HD Sound needs to be rolled out to all radio stations, and to the on-demand streams, plus the BBC needs to make these higher quality streams available on Wi-Fi Internet radio devices (the only device that can receive them is the Squeezebox). But they do deserve credit for at least moving in the right direction.

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Hi Fi News (Feb 2010 edition)

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Wilson Benesch
Wireworld among others...
I'm intrigued and gratified that at last audio engineers are revisiting the transformer...

noel keywood

acting with two slabs of French country bread formulated to prevent the chicken salad between being eaten, at the same time I had to ask other hi-fi hacks attending the Paris show why they thought that an amplifier with Class D swively bits up front and a Class A output stage was likely to sound good. The conversation didn't get far!

The best hi-fi in my experience is no hi-fi. In other words, the simpler the signal chain the better it sounds. In this vein the cleverest idea floating around at present isn't the amplifier that my colleagues thought so good because of its complexity, but its exact opposite, a transformer based passive preamplifier like the Music First Classic that can provide gain, or should I say voltage step up. As most sources are low impedance and loads high impedance this can be done without matching problems and what you get is a preamp that amplifies without any amplifying devices inside, and with no need for a power supply. Magic!

I love ideas like this. They run a coach and horses through an industry standard view. Initially, a transformer based preamp sounds very whacky, or it did to me. But that just goes to show how ingrained ideas tend to assume a mantle of normality. To get gain we need transistors or ICs or, even better, some amazing Class D whizzy device that's only whizzy because it has a funny name. Back in the late 1970s Japan's big CE companies exploited this by using largely meaningless descriptive titles like 'super parametric Class A amplifier'. Listening to this stuff long ago, I became a deep sceptic. Most of it sounded prosaic, to say the least. We don't actually need overly complex technology. Jumbo jets do, space probes do, but hi-fi doesn't.

The drawback is there's nothing sexy about a few coils of wire in a box. Well, there is to me, but that's my problem! To the average music lover, categorically not intrigued by the art of transformer winding, the absence of lights, knobs and displays will be a huge disappointment, even a complete turn off. But the three dimensional, electro-mechanical art form that is a transformer is notionally a very pure approach to high fidelity and a transformer based preamp is a great idea. Better, as this idea gets developed the results seem to bear out my view that less is more in high fidelity.

It wasn't just my little argument in a Paris hotel bar that had me thinking this. In this issue you'll see another example of simplicity that you may like to argue isn't simple. But its designer, David Shaw, said, "I like to use as few stages as possible and that's why I used a paraphrase splitter up front". He was talking about designing the Icon Audio MB845 Mk11 amplifier I review in this issue. It too relies on transformers and circuit simplicity, employing as few amplifying devices as possible.

A paraphrase splitter was used up front because it has gain, David explained. This eliminated the need for another valve in the circuit. And more was squeezed from less by using choke loaded drivers to swing big volts into the 845 output valves. A choke is another coil of wire so the MB845 Mk11 is very much a transformer based amplifier and I find it interesting to find that yet again eliminating active devices and substituting coils of wire pays dividends in audio.

Could solid-state amplifiers be made this way? Yes, they could and Musical Fidelity tread down that path a little way, which is why their amplifiers are heavy and expensive! But generally to those who believe the 'black box' parameters of packaged solid-state devices are good enough to do the job, a transformer is a nightmare! Theirs is a completely different design philosophy that unsurprisingly gives a completely different sound as well. And the Icon Audio MB845 Mk11 amplifier was a startling example of how far apart the two different approaches to hi-fi amplification can sound.

Solid-state amplifiers could use small signal transformers to advantage I believe, and choke smoothed power supplies, with their ultra low noise. But so far I haven't mentioned cost. Parts wise a transistor amplifier is cheap to build, the biggest cost being its heatsinks, believe it or not, and the main transformer. All the other bits come in at pennies. You can't even mention audio transformers in this environment. They are bulky, heavy and expensive items from yesteryear that the transistor, plus a lot of design ingenuity, consigned to the dustbin of history long ago, alongside steam engines.

So I am intrigued and gratified that at last audio engineers around the world are revisiting the transformer and reinventing it. Korean Emilie are another company with great ability here and now even manufacturers of electrostatic loudspeakers are taking note that this ignored component is worth taking seriously.

What is complicated isn't necessarily clever. Elegant simplicity wins the day in audio – and it doesn't even have to cost much. The only exception to this is French country bread and its zealous defence of the Gallic chicken. Next time I'll pay for something less basic!
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**96 HI-FI WORLD DECEMBER 2010**
A couple of conversations that I had with people have come together in a rather interesting way this month, and unfortunately resulted in me spending more money on that famous auction website that everyone knows and loves! Well, I say 'loves' but as I was outbid on one of my dream turntables less than twenty four hours ago and am still sulking, I've dropped to being only 'fond' of it for the time being.

Anyway, the first of these conversations took place with a buyer of one of my turntables at the recent Tonbridge Audiojumble. I'll let you all recover from the shock of me actually selling a turntable before elucidating further...

The buyer and I were chatting about said item, a Sonab 65S, and it came out that he was buying it because he thought it looked interesting. This started me thinking, as this was the precise reason that I bought it as well; having spotted it in a Hi-Fi Year Book a number of years ago, I thought it seemed worthy of further research and, when one cropped up on that aforementioned auction website, I snapped it up.

This is not the first time I have done such a thing, and I am sure it won't be the last; it reminded me how easy the likes of eBay have made grabbing things that 'look interesting'. I cannot help but feel that it has widened the audio appreciation circle of many people other than myself and so, for that it should be applauded. Admittedly the response of partners and the regular depletion of funds go some way to limiting the joyousness of the whole experience, but on the whole I think it's a good one, and I shall continue to enjoy it until my good lady wife works out my Paypal password and closes my account [not long now - Ed.].

The second conversation I had was with a few fellow enthusiasts and the topic came round to, "what was your first record player?" Now, the one that sticks in my mind was my Amstrad (yes, I know...) RP10 with its BSR (yes, I know...) turntable but I suddenly realised with a jolt that I had a pride and joy before this. When my interest in records and music became apparent at an early age, my mother managed to acquire a very nice Bush SRP31 portable player from the loft of a friend of hers that had a lovely Garrard RC210 autochanger on it. Ironically, I would give my eye teeth to have that player now but at that time and at the tender age of four, I was scared of it! You see, whilst I now realise that said RC210 was an engineering marvel and its record size sensing and autochange facilities are to be appreciated, at the time it was loud, clunky, seemed to have an unnecessary amount of arms that flipped backwards and forwards too much, and I wanted nothing to do with it.

Fortunately, my grandfather and the Mettoy toy company came to the rescue as, back in the late 1970s, they introduced a whole range of record players for the discerning but youthful audiophile and one of these caught my eye in my mother's John Noble catalogue, no less. Not for me the basic Music Maker, or even the Music Maker with Radio that added an AM radio to the mix. I even skipped past the bright green Music Maker Stereo with its twin speakers to the object of my affection — the mighty FriscoDisco! This traded the sombre black colour scheme of the basic models for funky blue and red, added headphones and a microphone and depicted some cool and funky dude on the box spinning a hot tune or two, whilst clearly giving it his best popastic local radio DJ style intro!

Well, I was a good boy for the rest of the year; I did as my mummy told me; I went to bed on time without a murmur and was unfailingly polite and helpful. The result on Christmas morning was my very own FriscoDisco and I loved it! It mattered not one jot to me that it chomped its way through its six large torch batteries with alarming speed, or that the battery compartment showed a propensity for coming unclipped and depositing those batteries all over my floor. I was barely aware that its ceramic cartridge was probably tracking at about half a kilogram; I had sounds to be proud of! The unit was indeed my pride and joy for many a year until that dastardly Amstrad came along and replaced it in my affections, whereupon it fell into disuse and eventually went the way of many a child's toy into the charity shop.

You can all see what's coming now, can't you? Well, you're right — the memory stirred up something in me and I was mildly surprised to find that, within a week or two of starting the search, a boxed and unused FriscoDisco turned up on eBay and was mine for £15! Even worse, I also managed to find a Music Maker Stereo with Radio, so I now only have the Music Maker and a Music Maker with Radio, the set... or so I thought. You see, amidst my research I discovered that my FriscoDisco was not quite the 'daddy' after all; that honour goes to the Corgi Discosound Roadshow — basically two FriscoDiscos stuck together and with a basic mixer in between. I am almost ashamed to admit that, thirty something years on [? Ed], my heart leapt just like it did when I first turned the page in that John Noble catalogue years ago. Consequently, the search is on — wish me luck, just in case my wife, or indeed the men in white coats, get to me first!
A

h, yet another new turn-

table! This must be at
least the tenth new deck
of the year to come into
my purview, and I suspect
not the last. Right now, all
the world and his wife has apparently
always loved vinyl and they were
always fighting the good fight, even
in the darkest days when CD was at
its height!

Yes folks, it’s profoundly
fashionable to be a big fan of the
black stuff, a die-hard devotee of the
dark disc. Of course, whether this
has anything to do with the fact that
turntables are one of the few areas
of hi-fi separates where sales are
actually rising, well you might think
that but I couldn’t possibly say. Suffice
however, to point out that vinyl is
now officially cool again, and all’s well
in the analogue audiophile arena...

So is Jonathan Palmer just
another opportunist, setting out
to make a quick buck to cash in
on the analogue bandwagon with a
premium priced product? Well if he
was then he wouldn’t be the first,
but I’ve spoken to him at length and
I have to say I can’t see it myself.
Rather, he seems a very considered,
thoughtful type who has obviously
been so completely immersed in the
many-year-long design process of the
Palmer Three that he’s barely given
a thought to commercial consider-
ations. That’s a nice way to do it; I
have encountered a number of other
manufacturers who, shall we say, give
me the impression they decide how
much profit they want first and then
work backwards to arrive at the
finished product...

I was particularly intrigued that
the Palmer doesn’t have any standout
design features. Think back to how
the Japanese used to sell everything;
design a feature, give it an acronym,
think of a reason for it then slap it
into the product, complete with a
logo! The Palmer is the exact reverse
of this; simply an exceptionally well
built, handmade turntable that’s
devoid of carbon fibre this or quartz-
locked that. Jonathan describes it as
"a ground up design taking an holistic
approach to the design process", 
arguing that it’s necessary to view
the turntable as a whole, rather
than simply an assemblage of parts.
So on first inspection you might be

Three's Company

David Price joins the brand new Palmer 3 turntable for an extended interview period...
underwhelmed by the Palmer, in the same way that most nineteen seventies Mercedes Benz cars came with austere vinyl seats and wind-up windows but were better made than any other automobile on earth.

No trendy DC motor here; a low torque AC design spins the 10kg platter, hewn from a solid billet of aluminium alloy via a ‘loose touch’ peripheral rubber belt; you’ll need to spin the deck up to speed, or at least give a good shove from start off if it’s ever to reach thirty three and a third! “We do not treat the motor as the drive system,” Jonathan says, “instead we take the motor, pulley belt platter and bearing as the drive system as it is these components that fulfil the task of delivering the groove to the cartridge.”

Jon has chosen a “modified AC synchronous motor and thrust pad”, which he believes “is by far the best type”. He argues that, “DC motors need to be told what they are doing and are chasing their tails constantly correcting themselves. AC synchronous motors can only run at the synchronous speed, hence their use in other timing dependent devices such as clocks”. This motor sits on one 120x350mm sub-base unit, and is mounted in a stainless steel housing. Its large pulley is engineered from aluminium alloy for the utmost concentricity and its damping effect upon the motor; says Palmer.

This motor plinth sits next to the main 350x350mm plinth, which together (480x350x75mm) are designed to create long paths of dissipation between the main bearing and the tonearm mounting. This is done by fixing the bearing to a different element of the plinth to the arm. The unwanted vibration no longer has such a direct route and has to cross larger areas of mismatched surfaces. These are separated by bonding resins and layers of natural wood. The platter and spindle locate on precision machined conical surfaces ensuring complete concentricity, vital, as all the parts complete the drive system.

Much of the weight of the heavy platter is magnetically supported so it presents much less vertical mass to the bearing, whilst maintaining a fixed reference to it. This prevents any oscillation which can happen when magnetic support is used as it becomes a spring, Jonathan says. “All its mass is retained in its rotation which is exactly where we need it for a stable speed control”. The main bearing is a combination of brass and phosphor bronze custom matched bushings, while the spindle is supported by what Jon calls a “costly” tungsten carbide ball which has superior sphericity and tolerance.

There’s a separate offboard power supply with a matching wood fascia, and a matching wood topped stainless steel record clamp is also provided. The total weight of the turntable, including main and motor plinths and platter, is around 23kg. Currently, the Palmer 3 is available in real cherry wood finish but other finishes are available as bespoke options, such as walnut, birch and mahogany. Armboards are available for most common types such as SME, Rega, Linn, Hadcock and other mounts can be supplied on request.

SOUND QUALITY

One thing I love about turntables is how different they can sound. Whilst you can easily hear the difference between a £1,000 CD player and a £10,000 one, generally the sound between two different units of a similar price isn’t profound. One will be a bit better in one way, the other superior in another, perhaps. With turntables however, you can get night and day differences between two designs at similar price points, with respective strengths and weaknesses so pronounced it can have reviewers grimming! And so it proved with the new Palmer 3, and price rivals such as – for example – Avid’s Volvere Sequel. I spent a long period with the latter and still have its striking sound burned into my memory banks, and it proves an excellent counterpoint to the Palmer...

Put simply, the Palmer 3 has a lovely organic sound, which veers very gently into ‘warm’ territory – or perhaps it’s better described as ‘not cool’! It’s the sort of deck that takes the spirit of the vinyl LP and runs with it, rather than trying to turn it into a sort of higher resolution version of DVD-Audio or SACD, which is what both the aforementioned Avid does, and also the many high end direct drives that I seem to spend my time with these days. The Palmer is the Quad II valve amplifier to the Krell monoblock that is the Avid; it’s a sweet, subtle, beguiling, genteel performer that lets the romantic flavour of vinyl flood out, rather than its amazing technical prowess it is also capable of.

For example, cueing up ‘New Year’s Day’ by U2, and you’re immediately struck by the clarity of that classic early eights analogue recording, the rich texturing of the guitars and the immediacy that makes Bono’s voice sound quite endearing (this is not something I usually notice, I must say), I also found myself being amazed by the energetic cymbal work, and their metallic sheen, and the damped thump of the snares, and the fruity bass guitar. In short, the Palmer delivered an essay into the natural sound of the instruments in the studio, and went on to carry the way the band played together brilliantly. It wasn’t trying to tell me where the respective instruments were located with millimetric precision (although it was still excellent in this respect); instead of tying itself up with analysis it just got down into the groove and delivered a beautiful rendition of the song.

So it’s a very ‘human’ sounding deck, the Palmer, if it’s possible to anthropomorphise things which spin bits of plastic at constant speeds. This was underlined with a 12 inch of Mark Ronson’s ‘Bang Bang Bang’; Ronson is one of my favourite contemporary pop purveyors and is obsessed by retro keyboard sounds; his new album is like a greatest hits of late seventies/early eights synths. The Palmer caught the soft texture of the song’s crashing synth break, adding not the slightest edge to the proceedings and letting the full warmth of the instrument ooze forth. Vocals were taut and clean and rhythmic, while the drum machine sounded as fast as a machine gun. This is interesting; whilst the Palmer is fractionally warm and smooth, it’s in no way slow, suggesting it’s telling you what’s going..."
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on in the groove rather than editorialising on its own. Rhythmically the Palmer has an easy gait. Whilst it starts and stops very quickly, it doesn’t throw up a heightened sense of this. The Avid practically lives for the chance to tell you how fast and grippy it is, whereas the Palmer is less concerned about grandstanding to the audience and more self-effacing. In some ways it’s less thrilling to listen to, although this in no way means it’s less fun.

I'd liken its style to a unipivot tonearm that has less apparent grip than some conventional designs, yet still seems to deliver the rhythmic goods better. Subtle and self-effacing then, but no less fun with it.

Across the genres, the Palmer seemed to work very well, although I think its sweet, open, gentle nature suits jazz best of all. I put on a pressing of Herbie Mann’s ‘Summertime’ and was entranced. It has oodles of low level detail – the Audio Origami tonearm and Lyra Dorian moving coil being a particularly synergistic combination here – and duly set up a wonderful recorded acoustic that seemed to stretch back miles, whilst falling out of the Spendor’s like a tipsy rock star out of a London taxi cab.

I was presented with a wonderfully wide and expansive soundstage, with boldly located instruments which just oozed texture. The solo flute sounded lovely; it was supremely sweet and full yet had a certain raunchy steeliness too, telling me it was a real, living, breathing, woodwind instrument. Drums had a fantastic live quality, and double bass filled the room and flapped my flares.

Well recorded classical music was a treat; Autumn part I from a DG pressing of Vivaldi’s ‘Four Seasons’ proved both a musical joy and a veritable festival of the senses. This turntable’s naturally easy and unforced delivery made for an almost caressing rendition; rather than being assaulted by visceral power or speed, or being informed to the nth degree about the squeaking chair in the orchestra pit, I found myself enraptured by the tangible nature of the musical performance. At the same time I basked in the sound of massed strings, dripping with harmonics and sporting that most delicious woody timbre, positively lilting through my loudspeakers.

CONCLUSION
The new Palmer 3 is a welcome new entry into the vinyl revival fray, and one which I suspect will be around when many others have exited for more lucrative or apparently fashionable vistas. The deck is, as its designer suggests, very much ‘all of a piece’; it’s the amalgam of an awful lot of subtle, intricate design work allied to rigorous finessing and meticulous build.

There are no stand out features, bulleted unique selling points or eye catching contrivances. Rather, it’s like that superstar football striker who doesn’t have to run all over the pitch to chase the ball; he always happens to be in the right place at the right time to put it in the back of the net effortlessly. Give it Kraftwerk’s ‘Man Machine’ and the deck just flows, showing metronomic precision but also a sense of the song being written by humans for humans. It’s expensive at £3,750, but I feel it is good enough to justify the price; because the Palmer 3 is so backward in coming forward, it rather throws the spotlight on the other performers on stage, so to speak. As such, get a good dem and match carefully; this done vinyl fans won’t be disappointed. It’s expensive at £3,750, but I feel it is good enough to justify the price; it’s perfectly possible to spend a lot more and get far less from your music.

VERDICT •••••
Charismingly subtle and effortlessly musical performer which offers a lovely, lifting listening experience; a seriously impressive debut.

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Tony Bolton spruces up his record collection with Benz Micro’s superb Wood SL moving coil cartridge...

S

Sometimes, just the name of a country can evoke images of top quality, bespoke engineering. Mention Switzerland and watches in the same sentence and names like Patek Philippe and Jaeger LeCoultre spring to mind. In the audio world, this home of precision engineering has produced Benz Micro, manufacturers of hand made pickup cartridges. Designed by Albert Lukascheck, who personally tests each unit before it leaves the factory, the range of products runs from models costing a couple of hundred pounds up to those costing several thousand.

Situated approximately half way up the range are the wooden bodied S series. These come in three versions, high, medium and low output, and it is the latter that is under review here. Although the models have been around for a few years, recently the stylus profile has been changed from a Geiger S to a Micro-ridge design. This shape has several claimed advantages over other designs, including a very small contact area with the groove wall, a curvature of the tip (3 micron radius) ensuring that wear to the tip does not alter the profile, giving long life and minimal wear to both stylus and records.

As the name suggests, this series of cartridges comes clothed in a wooden body. The official description calls the material Bruyere, and a little research found the English name: Briar-root wood (Erica Arborea), better known for making the bowls of tobacco pipes. Encased inside is the generator, a crossed-coil design as found in other Benz Micro products. The solid Boron cantilever with ‘side-bonded’ stylus, grooved rear pole piece and countersunk O-ring damper are carried over from the previous version of this unit.

I initially installed the Benz on the Hadcock 242 Cryo arm attached to my Sondek, where it fed the Sutherland 20/20 phono stage that I reviewed a couple of months ago. First impressions were good, although the sound was a little tight and lacked a certain degree of flow in the rhythms being described. After about twenty hours playing it was sounding a lot looser, and the beat of the music seemed more natural. At this point it was relocated to the Clearaudio Carbon Satisfy tonearm on the Master Solution turntable, the signal being amplified by the Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage, running into the Tucana II and Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers. After about another twenty five hours playing, and a commensurate level of further loosening up and settling down to the sound, I started doing some serious listening.

SOUND QUALITY

The first LP was an old favourite, The Benny Goodman Trio playing a live concert in aid of the Fletcher Henderson Fund. (He was Goodman’s arranger and a band leader in his own right, who unfortunately died of a brain haemorrhage, so the band did a fundraiser which was recorded and transmitted on radio station WNEW in the ‘Make-Believe Ballroom’ series.)

This is a mid fifties mono LP in average condition, and usually plays (via the Ortofon Kontrapunkt a) with a subdued background of cracks and the occasional pop. My first reaction as the run-in groove played was disbelief. Most of the background noise seemed to have disappeared. As the tracks played through, and a couple of the usual ‘crunches’ failed to materialise, I became more and more impressed with the Benz’s tracking abilities. It seemed to follow the groove wall extremely accurately, digging into the groove to produce one of the best renditions that I have heard of this record.

The musicians seemed to be working together in a particularly cohesive manner, and the whole experience demonstrated the reason that Goodman was known as the ‘King of Swing’ for over twenty years. The timing was immaculate and the presentation vibrant without being forward or fussy. This was perfectly demonstrated on track four of the second side, ‘I Found A New Baby’. Towards the end, Gene Krupa executes a superb drum solo which gets the band so involved in listening that Krupa has to repeat a phrase, and can be heard calling out “that’s your cue”. As Goodman and Teddy Wilson (piano) rejoin the music, Krupa inverts his drum beat and plays the rhythm backwards through to the end of the track.

Over the years I have heard a lot of cartridges stumble at this, the beat seems to get a bit messy, and the whole thing can sound a little cacophonous. This time there was no such loss of definition, and the whole thing came smoothly to a close to shouts of appreciation from the audience, followed by enthusiastic applause.

Staying in the nineteen fifties, I moved into the world of stereo...
with the 1959 Renata Tibaldi/ Carlo Bergonzi recording of Verdi’s ‘Aida’ on Decca. The sleeve notes (by the respected producer John Culshaw) are interesting. Anxious to show off the spacial capabilities of the then new stereo medium, the engineers used multiple studios, each with a different acoustic, with Von Karajan’s direction of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra being relayed through closed circuit television. The results of these efforts are impressive. The Grand March seemed to take place outdoors in a large space, whilst the closing aria ‘O Terra Adio’, where Aida and her lover Radames die, walled up in a tomb, had a close intimacy. As the track draws to a close, there is the background chanting of the priests, and the lamentations of Amneris. She realises the full extent of the results of her jealousy.

It was magical. The two leads occupied the centre stage, whilst Giulietta Simionato’s heartbroken contralto seemed to hang in the air, high up to the right, with the priests’ chorus murmuring at a similar height, but from the left and centre. I can honestly say that this is the best I have heard this record since the demise of my Roksan Shiraz cartridge several years ago. Bear in mind that the current list price of a Shiraz is surprisingly modest. Not having had time before losing its composure, I put on my old Kontrapunkt b was particularly adept at this) but found instead the Benz Micro 1960s seven inch singles. Not having had time to put them through the cleaning machine, for once I broke my cardinal rule, and played them as found. I was expecting an ear crunching mess, but found instead the Benz naturally disentangling four and a half decades of dirt from the music, and playing these average condition discs with a degree of refinement and finesse that amazed. Yes, there was surface noise aplenty, but it was in the background, and only really obvious bits of groovewall damage intruded into the music. In the meantime I was more entranced by the levels of definition and energy in the sound, and the sheer amount of detail retrieval being displayed.

In case you haven’t guessed, I think I’m in love! I’ve never had a Benz cartridge to play with at home before, and I have been won over by its exemplary manners, unshakable tracking ability and sheer musicality. I have always considered the Ortofon Kontrapunkt range masters of the art of putting music before a description of the condition of the grooves (and my old Kontrapunkt b was particularly adept at this) but here I think there is a new claimant to the crown. The Benz Micro Wood SL seemed to be unperturbed by record condition or musical genre, and a master of playing the tunes encased in the grooves in a particularly enjoyable and engaging way. It seemed unfussed by aged recordings (or vinyl) and just rolled up its sleeves and got on with the job in hand - that of making highly enjoyable music.

**CONCLUSION**

With a price tag just the right side of £1,000 it isn’t cheap, but the Benz Micro Wood SL offered a performance that, I think, would cost considerably more to achieve elsewhere. The stylus profile has claims of longevity, so the cost should be ameliorated by a longer than usual usable lifespan. Overall, a truly impressive product, and one I recommend for audition without any hesitation. In fact I would say it was an essential listen if you are in the market for a fabulous piece of Swiss precision engineering.
MISSING LINK VINYL PASSION DUST BUSTER £15

Well, here's a thing. The last interesting and innovative stylus cleaner I tried was the infamous 'green sandpaper', back in the depths of the mid-nineteen eighties. Like many ideas from that heady time, it was great in principle but not in practice. Whilst we were assured that its fine-grade abrasive couldn't possibly wear down the hardest naturally occurring substance on earth (i.e diamond), over-zealous use of it on my part produced a coarse-sounding cartridge and (I'm sure) a slightly reprofiled stylus tip!

The Vinyl Passion Dust Buster comes at the same problem from a different angle; it's basically a little tub of sticky goo that sucks the grunge from your stylus. Okay, it's not goo, it's "a specially formulated polymer-gel-hybrid" that you simply place under the stylus — lowering it onto the gel and then lifting straight off for a full clean. The company assures me it hasn't broken a cantilever yet, and certainly during the test period none of my cartridges ever got stuck in the pot, or showed any sign of cantilever grief.

Sonically, the results are excellent; this is as good as a laborious full wet clean with isopropyl alcohol and a top quality stylus brush; records sounded clean and clear and smooth and open. The other bonus is of course that it's not alcohol based, so there's less risk of fluid ingressing up into your cartridge suspension. When the goo dries out you can apparently wash it under a tap to restore its magic properties, although mine didn't get dry enough to require this over the two week review period. An excellent and interesting tweak.

DP

[Contact: +44(0)1623 844478, www.the-missing-link.net]

SUTHERLAND TIMELINE £349

Over the years most audio enthusiasts will have used a strobe disc to assess the accuracy of their turntable's rotational speed. The advent of modern electronics has advanced this technology from being a cardboard disc with dots printed on it into some quite sophisticated devices. The latest incarnation of this is the Sutherland Timeline. This is a circular puck measuring 1.7 inches (4.2cm) in diameter and 1 3/4 inches (4.2cm) tall and weighing approximately 10 oz. (280g). The top part is made of machined aluminium, the lid being retained by nine recessed hex-head screws. On the top is a switch marked 33/45 and off.

Approximately half way down one side is a hole through which a laser flashes every 1.8 seconds at 33 1/3 rpm (on-time of 1.8 milliseconds) with a time base accuracy of two parts per million. The lower part is made of a material called Delrin, (first synthesised by Dupont in 1952, and since used for everything from guitar picks and the plucks on harpsichords, through to the 'Hot Wheels' on 1970s Matchbox cars)!

The Timeline is placed on the centre of the turntable and the laser is activated. As it rotates a red light flashes then the speed is correct. If it moves to the right then the speed is too high, and conversely low if it moves to the left. Adjustments to speed should be made with the record being played, since the drag of a stylus in the groove may affect the speed slightly.

Once the playing speed is correct the laser can be switched off and the Timeline then becomes a clamp, damping the vinyl and improving the coupling between the record and platter. I normally use the supplied Cleverclamp on my Clearaudio Master Solution. The Timeline seemed to give a little more depth and solidity to the sound, without losing the sense of space and air around the performers. The Sondek suspension required a little adjustment because of the extra weight, and displayed a similar sonic result. Costing £349, the Timeline is not cheap, but it is beautifully engineered, and can likely claim to be one of the most accurate speed testers on the market.

TB

[Contact: +44 (0)1992 573030, www.mdc-hifi.co.uk]
Heart Beat

David Price talks to the highly acclaimed Irish singer/songwriter Eleanor McEvoy about matters music, recording and life...

DP: Rumour has it that you’re a vinyl fan...?
EM: Oh yes, I love vinyl! I’ve just got the new album vinyl in my hands – it’s a bit of a thrill. We’ve done it from the fourth album onwards; we did ‘Yola’ on vinyl... and it’s fun to sign! Also when you get the album you get a code and you can download the album for free, digitally. I do love vinyl, but sadly you can’t go jogging with it!

I really like good sound, to the point where I now find it hard to listen to bad sound. My dad was into good speakers, so I think that’s where the rot set in. I am shocked that musicians go along with the bad quality that is MP3, it is horrible... perhaps it’s an element of not being exposed to good sound. You don’t know what you’re missing. I’m thrilled to have albums coming out on vinyl, because it does mean a lot to me.

DP: Are you familiar with the technical side of the recordings you make?
EM: For years I only used two inch analogue tape, but I had to disband it because trying to find studios that had two inch tape machines, and that actually maintained them, well you couldn’t get them! We went to Metropolis in London for mixing the last album, and we said “two inch” and they went “oh” and they asked around their tape ops and there was one guy who knows how to work a two inch machine there. And there were whizzes in Protools; these nineteen year olds, and they don’t know how to spool a reel of tape. And I asked the tape guy: “when did you last do a two inch session?”, and he said “the last time you were in!”

DP: How do you go about recording a song?
EM: I’ve always tried to do everything at the same time; where we have a band, we always try to play together. On ‘Yola’, we didn’t do any drop-ins at all. ‘Out There’, because I was doing it all myself, we had to. I’d never intended to make an album myself, I’d made demos to show what I was going to ask other people to do. This new album, I wanted to get a live feel across; I got a bass player and a drummer and then I went back in and layered things on top. The violin plays a very important part of this album, so I layered many tracks on top. You can hear it on ‘I’d Rather Go Blonde’, which has a huge string sound. There’s very little processing; I had a beautiful old antique ship’s bell on ‘Take You Home’ that was just a little off-pitch so we slowed it down to tune it to the track – apart from that there’s very little in the way of effects.

DP: How did you start off in the music business?
EM: Well, my aim was to write songs for somebody else to sing. The singing is a means to an end; not that I don’t love it because I do love it, but the writing is my thing. When I was a violinist in the RTE National Symphony Orchestra a very sad thing happened one day; there was a man in my section who was moved back. There’s a kind of hierarchy in violin sections; people at the top are the best and it goes down to the dregs down at the back. And he got moved back because his hands were going, as he got old. You look at these fantastic players and they get moved back the older they get. And so I thought, if I want to do the songwriting, now’s the time to do it; I thought I’m going to have to go for it so I quit my job! I was gigging at the same time I was in the orchestra, then things kicked off.

‘Only a Woman’s Heart’ came out the week I signed to Geffen. Geffen was the only company with the A&R guys at the top; they were in charge. Normally the sales guys are on top; they were the hippest, coolest label on the planet. The second album was very different to the first album; it comes to keeping your spirit alive. I think you have to follow your heart; in the second album I had a Telecaster electric, a Vox AC30 amplifier and a nose ring; I was so into that! I was touring with the Fugees on the Columbia roadshow and listening to how they told their stories using rhyme really had a big effect on me.

So on the third album I went off with Rupert Hine and we made ‘Snapshots’, which I loved – it’s one of my favourite albums. He was a fantastic guy to work with; with ‘Sophie’ another producer would have said put strings on it and make it a big production number, but he said “piano and voice”, and he was right! When we delivered that album, I think Columbia Records nearly died; they had had this Telecaster wearing woman in mind and they got sequences and loops, a very different direction. They released it and didn’t really do much with it. And that for me was the end of the major labels, I was broken hearted after that. In hindsight I have more sympathy for them now; they didn’t get me – an artist like me shouldn’t be on a major label.
DP: When you left the major label, did you start 'self publishing'?
EM: Yeah – the first one we set up on our own was Market Square. When ‘Yola’ got such a good reception, we started really going for it. So my partner set up Moscodisc and we got distribution worldwide. It was a slow, organic thing. The great thing about doing it this way is that I don’t have to think, “oh I can’t put this on an album”. We did a really contentious song about religion, the hierarchy of the Catholic church, I really am having a go at them. You’ll never get airplay with it, certainly not in Ireland, but at least you’re getting out there. I have another song where I’m having a go at the establishment in Ireland; the banks, the government, and I’m having a go at them. So there are no chains on an indie label!

DP: Given that there’s no one else to say no to you now, do you find yourself doing it?
EM: Yeah – you do have to be ruthless with yourself. For example one of the big challenges I set myself with this album was to keep the tracks really short. There’s one that comes in at two minutes ten seconds, which is very difficult to do. But you can do it!

DP: In the eighties, that’s one of the things I really loved about The Smiths; ‘This Charming Man’ was two minutes fifty five seconds...
EM: Oh yes… they were great. Fantastic! But I did still have some moments on this album when things began to get out of hand. Before we started this album I sat down with Ruadhri Cushnan and said on this song I wanted a church organ, and a mandolin, and then I said I want a banjo, and then I said I want a choir singing a Gregorian chant in Latin. And at that point he just burst out laughing, and said, “I really can’t see it working”. But we did it – without so much of the Gregorian chant!

DP: So where does your creative ‘essence’ come from?
EM: For me, the real gems come when you’re drifting off to sleep in the middle of the night. It’s caused a lot of disharmony in my relationship. Now I have a notebook next to the bed!

DP: Is it possible to be Irish and not write about the Catholic church?
EM: The amount of power that the Catholic Church had was very oppressive to me. They were bigger than the police. This is getting less personal to me now; one day I’d love to be ambivalent. But yeah, if you look at Irish people we’re all slightly obsessed by it. I have a go at lawyers a little bit on this album, and I also have a go at the fashion industry with a song called ‘Look Like Me’. I’m talking about people being dictated to what they should wear, being told that “ohh, brown is in this season”. I was at an awards ceremony in Dublin and all the women were all wearing the same type of high heels, the same colour of fake tan, the same blow dried hair; I thought they’ve all spent thousands of pounds trying to look like the same person next to them. I take great pleasure when people come up to me and say “I saw you in that dress in 1996”!

DP: With music there’s also the impetus to present your music in a way that’s fashionable too...
EM: I do make some quick references to what’s going on, but not so much that it’s going to date it. I always hope that I’m ahead of the game. I’m using pizzicato strings, which I think is going to be one of the things that people focus on. So in the next couple of years… you heard it here first! I do love pure pop acts, and the rap thing did – and still continues to – have a big influence. I still preserve quite a bit of my Irishness in my melody constructions, I think of a lot of my songs are intrinsically Irish. But yeah, I’m very influenced by what’s on the radio today. In terms of the last thirty years… Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Bruce Springsteen, Loudon Wainwright, Elton John here in Britain, his early stuff was absolutely incredible, in terms of bands, the Rolling Stones, the Byrds, The Smiths were great! Jimi Somerville’s voice was great, Alison Moyet had an interesting voice, Kate Bush as a voice and a songwriter. And I’d come home from the orchestra and put on Nirvana!

DP: Where do you think the future will take you?
EM: I’d love to write music for the theatre, and sound design. And writing with surround sound in mind. I’ve got a lot of dates coming up next year and while I’m on the road I’ll be writing the next album.

DP: Great. I’ll be listening out for banjos and Gregorian chants...
EM: [laughs] …and the pizzicato string thing might still be around!
**Cyrus**

Cyrus award-winning CD X5 SE and DAC X have been upgraded with a suffix. In a recent review, this combination, when used with the pre-amp, received the prestigious Editor's Choice award by Hi-Fi Choice magazine.

**Leema Acoustics**

The Stream III CD player is reviewed as having a leading transport controlled by Leema's own custom firmware providing secure handling and the barest hint of digital information. It is coupled with the new Leema Quad DAC. It is a refinement of Leema's highly successful MED Multi DAC, giving a shorter signal path and even better performance. The Stream III features a USB digital output enabling perfect digital archiving.

**Arcam FMJ**

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and sound quality far beyond the typical CD player.

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**Furutech is known for its excellent cable products and quirky accessories such as the Demag LP demagnetiser and Disc Flatten.**, both of which have been reviewed in this very journal. The company now released an equally quirky new product, but this time under the new brand name of Alpha Design Labs. Compact at just 150 x 115 x 57mm and weighing in at just 785g, the GT40 is positively schizophrenic in the facilities it has on offer.

Firstly, you get a USB DAC, which is ideal to connect to a computer or laptop up to a resolution of 24bit/96kHz via plug and play. Next is a headphone amp that features a single, full-sized 6.3mm jack. Finally, there's a phono amp which allows you to connect both MM or MC cartridges, as well as Line inputs. There's also a phono A-D converter that allows you to plug your turntable and your computer into the GT40 and then transfer your vinyl music to the hard disk.

The front fascia of the exceedingly well built chassis includes a beautifully machined volume knob for both playback and headphone volume, a headphone port, power button and source button selectors for phono or USB. On the rear, you have the phono/line inputs and outputs, phono ground and USB socket, 9V external power socket for the supplied integrated power supply/ plug unit and a tiny input selection switch to choose MM, MC or line.

Connecting the GT40 to my PC was simple. I connected the USB port to the GT40 and the computer and the drivers automatically installed themselves. You need to check volume levels, though. This involved entering the Control Panel utility on my PC and, on my Vista-powered operating system at least, selecting Sounds, then Audio Devices then making sure both of the correct devices are selected in the Playback and Recording tabs. You should also make sure that the levels are set to 100%. For some reason, mine was set to 24%.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Playing a range of ripped WAV files via my PC through a venerable set of hi-fi kit, viz. a Rega Mira integrated amplifier, Mission 70 speakers plus Chord Anthem 2 interconnect cabling, and the standard computer source offered a basic playback that struggled towards any sort of audiophile standard. Bass was decidedly wooden and one-dimensional while midrange sounded strangled and treble fizzy. Pushing a series of chart CDs through the system, all showing excessive peak limited compression, the vocals screeched with derision.

Switching to the GT40, I took an audible sigh of relief. Bass suddenly put on weight, the playback feeling a real heft in the lower frequency response which also offered more subtlety and integration within the overall presentation instead of the earlier 'tacked on' impression.

Midrange tones conveyed a detail and clarity that was severely lacking in the computer-generated replay. The GT40 not only broadened the soundstage but packed it with newly revealed information, while treble had a new found delicacy. With the chart CDs, the peak limited compression was successfully toned down to such a degree to make each CD listenable.

Moving to the headphone amp, via a pair of Sennheiser HD650s, I wouldn't exactly describe the GT40 as delicate but I was surprised at the depth of the bass response. The HD650s are inherently no slouch in this department but the GT40 really gives the headphones an extra sledgehammer whack. The GT40 also provides an admirable 3D soundstage.

I tried the phono stage within my reference system and, while it didn’t have the definition and transparency of the Icon PS3 (at around £1,400) it certainly wasn’t completely shamed either. Upper mids positively shimmered while bass retained a strength and structure to hold any piece of music together with gusto. I’d say this is pretty much the equal of anything below Trichord’s fine little Dino, which is no small feat, and considering the price of the ADL GT40, and all its other features, makes a strong case for it.

**CONCLUSION**

Packed with features and with a pleasing build quality, the Furutech-sourced ADL GT40 USB DAC is a winner on every level. The fact that the GT40 can offer so much within its price makes a strong case for it.

**VERDICT**

*For* - feature count

*Against* - nothing at the price

A jack of all trades, this little gadget will be one of the most handy boxes yet devised for some hi-fi addicts!

FURUTECH ADL GT40 £395

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LINN KEULIDH floorstanding speakers, rosewood with Kevlar Stone stands, very good condition £175. Gale centre plus rear speakers, as new, £75. 4 tier stands Unique equipment table mahogany + glass spiked £70. Tel: 0118 978 3410 after 4pm

SONY MXD-D3 recorder £100. Pioneer Laserdisc player CLD D515 £130. Sony surround sound processor D 98930 £130. Sony VCR SVL 7270 £35. Rotas Caspian CD player £200, items in good working order. 40 laserdiscs. Tel: 01270 619 387

HI-FI+ ISSUES, 21, 37, 41, 56 to 72. 19 copies, Hi-Fi Fi Choice issues 302 to 327, 26 copies. Hi-Fi News various dates, August 2008 to March 2010. £14. Buyer collects. Tel: 020 8590 8530

A R LEGEND turntable arm plinth cover £225. Marantz DR6000 CD recorder £125. Both very good condition. Buyer collects. Tel: 01925 824 307 (Warrington)

LINN AV5120 centre speaker £250. Armstrong 525 amplifier £30. Rotel RB940BX amplifier £65. Teac AN80 Dolby Processor £30. Skyline turntable support £40. Heybrook HBI speaker stands £50. Tel: 01708 457 691

WANTED: MUSICAL Fidelity X-PSU v3. Must be mint. Cash waiting, will pay post or collect. Tel: 01942 213 155

ARCAM 137 universal DVD/SACD/CD player. Mint condition, black colour, box and instructions, upscale to 1080 HDMI socket on back £300. 07891 161 2981 (mobile)

WANTED: TANNOY Saturn 8 loudspeaker, excellent condition, cash waiting. Tel: 020 7263 5072 after 7pm

SME 3009 improved arm complete with two spare SME leads, instructions, full test report, tracking guide. Superb condition, little used since new £195 plus postage. Tel: 01278 789 432


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- NAIM CDSX
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- MAGNUM TUBE DAC 180 IQACD PLAYER (LAST 2 £1350)
- MERIDIAN 200 TRANSPORT
- CHORD 1500 DAC/DIGITAL PRE AMP (£6000)
- THERA DATA UNIVERSEL CD/LO PLAYER (RARE!) EXCLT/BOXED
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- HARPER QUARTET (£4000)
- AURUM CANTUS VORM GLASS BLACK (£1700) EXCLT/BOXED £1485
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Hi-Fi WORLD
WANTED: PS Audio HCA2 power amplifier. Must be working. Also wanted, power supply for PCA2 pre-amplifier. All within reasonabl price. 07974 899 294

NAIM NAIT XS amplifier. Unwanted due to change in circumstances. Used once only. Needs good home. Accept £1100. Contact Paul on 07963 947 689 (Notts/Derby area)

FOSTEX FULL range drivers. FE166EN. Boxed, brand new, unwanted. Offers. Wanted: Small valve amplifier e.g Icon HPB or MP3 or similar. Tel: 07818 026 427

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 acrylic turntable, Nima arm, Ortofon MC10 Supreme, Trichord Dino phono amp, Eclipse TDA501-II amp with matching white TD508-II speakers. NAD C525BEE player, extra's. All £1000. Tel: 01834 813199 (Pembroke/shire)

WANTED: OWNERS manual or copy for Technics ST-S707 tuner. Will pay. Tel: 01903 260 310

MISSION 733 black, floorstanding, Thorens TD160 MkII, SME arm, Ortofon cartridge. Arcam Alpha 8 amplifier and Arcam CD73 CD player. Offers. Wife forces sale! Tel: 01978 357 215 or Email: jones1523@btinternet.com

ARCAM A38 integrated amplifier £850. (€1480 new), Arcam CD73 player £750 (€1350 new). Denon TU1800 FM/DAB tuner £150 (€300 new) Naim Uniti £1600 (€2100 new) All mint and boxed. Tel: 023 8073 8935

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp! Music Fidelity AX-1 Pre Amp. Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power AMP/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment stand Value £ 3700 Sell £1400 on account. Must be heard Contact Steven on 00353 873 6663

QUAD 303 / 33 amplifier and pre-amplifier £160. Telephone 01189 413708.

MERIDIAN 508.24 CD player, £400; Primare A30.1 100w amp, £400; Sonette DS595 iPhones, £50; Sony MD-S780 Minidisc, £50; Videologic DRX-601 E DAB tuner, £40. Cash only; buyer collects. (01428) 650902 (S.W. Surrey)

BRAND NEW Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC cartridge. Full warranty genuine product. £995 also Transfiguration AXIA MC approx 60 hours only £450 superb condition boxed call Dave 07554016461

GARRARD 401, restored and serviced £1000ono. Turntable power supply £300ono. John Linsley Hood Class A power supply £300ono. Arcam 99 9P power amp £250. Tel 0207 499 8729

NAIM AUDIO Hiline interconnect in immaculate condition, boxed. Superb upgrade, £395 Price to include postage Tel. Andy 07970078653 (Workshop, Notts)

MORSIANI MC-1, 9 inch, unipivot tonearm in mint conditions, with box and instructions. Fantastic review on TNT. Cost £1500, accept £700 ono. Tel: 07826 871573

REEL TO REEL tape recorder Sony TC399. Excellent condition with spare drive belts and 21 tapes. £110 ono. Tel. 01275 872777. North Somerset

ATC SCM50a active speakers, rosewood, vg, (£950) £2500 Stax 305 Mk2 headphones and stand, silver, immaculate (£850) £500 New vinyl at 40% of RRP. For list tel. Roy 01453 519700.

PAIR IAS Lyndhurst speakers. Original tweeters and bass unit. Mid range replaced. Pair Tannoy Lancaster corner cabinets Good condition No speakers. Offers 0151 727 0606 rplant@btinternet.com

LFD PAO SE power amplifier, black with grey speckled marble facia. 50w per channel mosfet design, silver solid-core internal wiring, custom-made toroidal transformer,boxed, mint condition. £525 ono. 01483 271669 (Surrey)

KEF IQ30 loudspeakers. Unused and boxed. £200 (£379). Tel David on 01530 833347. Leicester

REVOX B77 stereo open reel tape recorder. In superb condition and has just been fully serviced! Detailed photos available or can demonstrate. £495 ono. Tel. 07813 980156 E-mail ob.mm@virgin.net

AUDIOPHILE BASE hi fi support system with vibration control technology. 4 platforms (£200) (£800) janhud16@talktalk.net 01270624008 (Cheshire)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A 1000 for sale. Excellent condition, seviced and boxed. £450 ono. Also Arcam CD 82 for sale offers welcome. Call Andrew 07791529128, 0207 252 8122.

WANTED TDL Studio 3 or 4 in good condition email plaxconp@msn.com with pictures and info thanks.

WANTED:TOP quality Hi Fi seperates and complete systems. Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash Please call me on 0781 5892458


TURNTABLE: MARANTZ TT-1551 for sale: £600 Project phono box s-e turntable amp:£100 Monitor audio bronze br5 speakers:£200 Denon tu 180 dab tuner:£150 Fatman i tube valve £250 Fatman i tube docking station for apple i pod:£100. Optimum 5 shelf glass stand £50 For sale as seperates or if purchased complete £1150. Phone: 0141 332 1884 Email: drdcope@msn.com Location: Glasgow

MERIDIAN 588 CD player. Owned for last 6 years. Very good condition including original packaging, £660 ono. Tel Rob on 01384 396657 (West Midlands).

GRAHAM SLEE ERA Gold V, perfect condition (boxed), Nakamichi DR10 classic three head deck. serviced last year. little used, excellent. Quality of NOS 8" and 10" Goodmans TwinAxiom and Whitley Bros Stentorian full range drivers. Email: classicalcollector@gma il.com for more details.

QUAD ESL 989 speakers. Black cloth. Serviced by Quad in 2007. £1500. Tel: 020 8688 6397 (South London)

GARRARD 401 with Bastin plinth and modifications (upgraded bearing and lifted motor) cherrywood plinth with lid £950. Ortofon Samba MC with less than 30 hours use, bought while Koetsu was being retyped £110. Teac 2340R Reel to Reel £300 just serviced and in excellent working condition. 07940 507215

NAD T175 7.1 channel AV preamplifier for sale. £800 epistaxis@gmail.com

NAIM DVD 5 cd/dvd player;very limited usage, mint/ boxed £695. 112x pre-amplifier £229.150x power amplifier 2008 £479 both mint/boxed or £649 for the pair.Tel. 01984 640588.

MARANTZ CD17 KI Signature edition for sale, with hardwired Kimber Cable PK14 power cable. Otherwise unmolessted. Silver, with remote control, £440 no offers. For pictures and info email ben@bendesigns.co.uk

ROTEL MICHI RHB-10 excellent, RHT-10 boxed immaculate RHC-10 immaculate £1650 bargain may split. Equation Ones £395 (£4000) Equation Zero's £295 (£1500) very high quality attractive speakers panio black Tel 07500702061 noddfa@hotmail.com

METAXAS IKARUS Amplifier. High-end integrated Australian 45 watts p/channel. Latest price £2265.00. Was display model so as new - 50 hours max. Stainless steel case. £599.00 micklawley@darkbluemail.com 0121 7078083
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MONITOR AUDIO
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The diminutive RX1 is configured to offer an impressively natural, rhythmic sound in a beautifully compact and practical form.

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Please Note: Until the merger is complete, which will take a few months, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision and Audio T will remain separate legal entities. Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWA001 Advert valid until 11/11/2010, 6/00)

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision and Audio T are in the process of merging their respective businesses and will become one of the largest independent hi-fi and home cinema chains in the UK with over 50 stores nationwide

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO WWW.SSAV.COM/PEACHTREE

World Radio History

FOR SALE: Garrard 401 and PSU, Artcam 9P power amplifier, SEAS 25FWRX 10inch speakers, MAPLIN 50W amplifier boards, AudioTechnica AT111E cartridge, AvonMusic JHLM Classa PSU. Tel: 02079498729

CROFT APPARITION Elite Power Amplifier 15wpc Output Transformerless valve power amplifier, boxed. Output is provided by four 6AS7G valves. Black finish. £600 (ono) Tel 01625 612508, Macclesfield or mongobeaton@hotmail.com

GARRARD 301 rebuilt (inc bearing & motor mod) repainted black by Martin Bastin; Walnut plinth with lid £1450 01752 830037. Collection only 07709698137 For more information

ROGERS, 6A, loudspeakers £90. Systemtek, turntable cut, for, Rega, arm, £125 Rega, RB250, plus, VTA, adjuster, £120, Marantz, integrated, amplifier, PM 6002, 2x45wpc, MM input, £190 Carriage and insurance extra Tel 0208 591 2937

PAIR QUAD ESL57 speakers black grill mahogany surround. Serial nos. 49461 49481. One owner excellent condition. Offers over £500. Buyer collects. St. Helens Merseyside Tel: 01744605057

CYRUS CDB (serviced), Bamp, linkpower, remotes, cables, boxed £1100. Avid Diva turntable, SME M2-9 arm, boxed £850, plus postage. Email: mikeycasson@hotmail.com Tel: 07909 865333

NAIM NAT 200 Power Amp, current model, excellent condition, like new, can dem, original packaging, manual, etc £1625. Sell for cost of a NAP 150x - £875 Chris: 01384 346879. West Midlands.

WANTED A faulty or non working Quad 44 mk.2 pre-amp. Also required a Quad 44 C.D input module ( 500mv 50k ) Contact Mike 01758 613790.

WANTED FOR THE following Akai GXC 570D tape deck. Replies to joseph 00353786473336 or email to millmount1960@yahoo.co.uk

PROJECT RECORD deck + project phono amp/ Music Fidelity XA-1 Pre Amp/Arcam Alpha 9 CD Player/Arcam P60 Power Amp/Rogers Studio 5 Speakers/Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speak stands and equipment. Item Value £ 3700 Sell £1400 0no. Must be heard Contact Steven on: 00353 87 637 6623

MUSICAL FIDELITY E100 integrated Amp. Finish in Beautiful Piano Black. Excellent Condition. Digital and Phono Outputs £2500 Telephone Tony 02380 224003 Southampton

AURUM CANTUS Leisure 5 Speakers. Finish in Mint Condition, Piano Rosewood. Lovely open Sound and Excellent Base Response £495 Telephone Tony 02380 224003 Southampton

UNISON RESEARCH 56 Valve Integrated Amp. Mint Condition. Excellent Reviews. Beautiful Build, Quality and Lovely Sound £750 Telephone Tony 02380 224003 Southampton

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Audio Synthesis Passion 8m passive preamp. Excellent condition, boxed with manuals, remote control and transformers. p.s. £595 01626826085 Berkshire


Audio Synthesis Silver Blue SP. 1/2m Bal £100, 1 3/4m Bal £150, 1m Bal £125 Single ended lengths available Tel 01903 261931 brian.stanley-1@sky.com

Rotel RA01 amp. Rotel RCD02 CD Player. B&W DM601 speakers. speaker stands. cost £870.00. No remote control asking £300. For collection only North London. Phone 0208 458 8690

Audio Note AN-Vx 0.5m interconnects with AN-F RCA plugs. Possibly more than one set available. Approximately 8 years old. Very good condition. Superb sound. £140. 0208 8443950. brilliantrub.sub@gmail.com.


MOTH 30 pre & power, teak fascias, £65, Humax DV-1000t combined CD/DVD and digibox £35 Apollo Mezzo 2-shelf glass hifi table £75. 01541 414361 (Bristol) beedeel@yahoo.co.uk

SONY SCD 1 SACD/CD player. £2000 of Audiomac modifications including Ultraclock and associated power supply. As new with original packaging. £1850 (£5000). Contact Jim Roberts 01462 670786 (North Herts).

AudioNote OTO SE phono integrated valve amplifier. Remote preamp/turner/tape in/out, just recently serviced (new valves etc) boxed, manual, excellent, £1250 0no. 01483 271669 (Surrey)

Lehmann Black Cube SE Phono Amplifier with PWX power supply. Highly regarded, superb condition like new, very light use, boxed with manuals. £450 0no. Email hifiworld@smokingdrum.co.uk or call 01256 895438

Hi Fi MAGAZINE COLLECTION. 40+ back issues, mostly 2005-2007, in excellent condition, great winter reading. Cover price £100+ sell for just £15 0no. Chris: 01384 346879 West Mids.

OPPO 980H DVD/SACD player ex.con. as new £75 HDMI cable 5 metre £10 Tel: 020 8951 3178

Russ Andreas accessories, mains cables, mains filters, Kimber interconnect and digital cables. Genelec active studio monitors plus other items too many to list. Call for prices & info. All mint condition. Tel: 078139 53874

Synergistic Research a/c master coupler power cables, 2x 5ft, clean powerful sound, new £230 each. £85 each or two for £160. Tel: 01639 710113

Turntable cable, van den Hul, D502H TAC/RCA, 1.5m. Will fit Linn, Rock etc. Comes with original box etc. Offers. Tel: 01244 810 692 (Chester)

Quad 44 input modules, Disc 'B', 'Disc '4C'. CD/Aux. All with gold RCA + DIN and original packaging. Offers. Tel: 01244 810 696 (Chester)

For sale: Wilmslow Classicise speakers, walnut, Scanspeak tweeter, Volt bass. Superb sound, £560 0no. Buyer must collect. Weight 40kgs. Size: 910x H x 260W x 300D. Tel: Vic 01372 456 196 anytime

90W MELODY Valve mono-blocks, piano black, 240v, under guarantee, (8k) accept £2200. Graaf/WFB2 valve pre with MM/MC, £675, spare valves. Unico RDS valve tuner, remote, (£1275) £400. All pristine, boxed, o.v.n.o. CQ?. Tel: Shalom 07951 553 091

Apollo Hi Fi rack. Aria, double width, modular setup, various configurations, 10 toughened glass shelves, 2 storage drawers, black textured, excellent condition, cost £750, sell £350. Chris 01384 346879 West Mids.

Rel Storm Subwoofers, 200 watts, excellent condition, matt black, 5 Star reviews, long connecting cable, manual, can dem. orig.-£750, sell £350. Chris 01384 346879 West Mids.

NAD T175 7.1 channel AV preamplifier for sale. £800 epistaxis@gmail.com
Another year over, and a new one just begun! January 2011's Hi-Fi World kicks off with a bang, thanks to our special Awards 2010 feature, in which the team will be handing out gongs to the latest and greatest from the past year. We'll also have a wide range of brand new goodies for your perusal, from the gorgeous Martin Logan Ethos electrostatics [pictured] to Dartzeel's stunning CTH-8550 integrated amplifier, and much more! Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...

EMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT-16 LOUDSPEAKERS
AUDIOLAB 8200CDQ CD PLAYER/PREAMPLIFIER
DARTZEEL CTH-8550 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
DESIGN BUILD LISTEN PICOLO KIT AMPLIFIER
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MARTIN LOGAN ETHOS LOUDSPEAKERS
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JANUARY 2011 - 5TH NOVEMBER 2010
FEBRUARY 2011 - 3RD DECEMBER 2010
Despite the fact that they featured a band of temporary members, Dead Can Dance are basically Brendan Perry and Lisa Gerrard, a duo who found fame on the respected 4AD label for their music that touched on electronic ambience, folk and world music. The group has always had a certain cache as a slightly off-the-wall, leftfield outfit that have always made interesting music with intriguing and attractive constructions and arrangements.

To celebrate the fact, within the analogue domain, the specialist audiophile UK-based record label Vinyl 180 has released a suite of individual albums by the band. Now, the label has released a new box set featuring the debut self-titled album, the ‘Garden Of The Arcane Delights’ EP, the band’s second album ‘Spleen & Ideal’ and their first John Peel Session from 1983; the first time that this session has appeared on vinyl. Known as the ‘Black Box’, this release will be followed up by a second box set called, not unreasonably, the ‘White Box’, which should be out some time in Easter. The ‘Black Box’ will be available for a few pence short of £65 but, if you are a fan and you already have one or two of the albums, then you will be able to buy a Deluxe version of the box with just the EP and the Peel Sessions within for £35. Then, it’s up to you if you want to add the additional records to the box...

This is an admirable attitude for any record label to adopt, but isn’t typical that a vinyl-only label would actually implement it. How many times have we heard accusations of record labels ripping off the fans by ‘forcing’ them to re-buy music they already own? Not here – Vinyl 180 should be applauded for the fact. The Deluxe option will only be available from the label’s own shop outlet at: http://shop.ebay.co.uk/merchant/ heavyweightvinyl180.

Audiophiles may be a little concerned to hear that the vinyl has all been mastered via CD quality digital files. Shock, horror, eh? Well, the reality is not quite that bad. The first album was originally mastered onto analogue tape but was seen to include too many problems. Hence, a remix was supplied by the original engineer, John Rivers, who added corrections, producing a CD master that was used in the recent CD reissues. All of the music after that was originally recorded, in the studio, as a 16bit digital file. The reason? Because Dead Can Dance were a forward thinking band back in the eighties and they, like many others around them, thought that CD was audio nirvana and so committed to the format in a wholesale fashion and recorded their works, after that debut album, on a Sony 1630 professional CD recording system! So, do not be afraid – you are not being short-changed, on the contrary.

The only aspect of the master that was altered was some slight de-sessing to subtly minimise sibilance that enables even average turntables to play the records without a problem. Dent also took a view on how to play digital files back. “If you take a digital source,” said Dent, “there’s a number of ways that you can improve the quality of playback. So I use a high class digital clock and the right D/A converters, built by Manley, with valve outputs: very high quality.”

The result is the best sounding, commercially available source on these Dead Can Dance releases that is currently available on the market. Impressively, these vinyl editions also blow the Mobile Fidelity SACD editions (which were also sourced from CD digital files) right out of the water. Highly recommended. PR
Not all diamonds are forever.
This one is.

USHER Dancer Diamond Series. Featuring world's first Amorphous DLC (diamond-like carbon) diaphragm tweeter, which makes all current diamond tweeters on the market obsolete. To find out more, visit www.usheraudio.com, or your nearest USHER dealer.
The New Integrated Amplifier ECI-5 MK II

Our aim when designing the ECI-5 MK II was to make the sound more modern, enhancing the details and dynamics. Feedback from our listening team tell us that we have succeeded—"this amplifier sounds much larger than the size and the price tag"