SONY BDP-S480 Blu-ray disc player
TANNOY DC6T loudspeakers
REGA RP3 turntable

SONY BDP-S480

TANNOY DC6T

REGA RP3

SUPERTEST
integrated amplifiers

Icon Audio Stereo 20PP
Onkyo TX-NR709
Pioneer A-A9Mk2-K
Onix A55
Creek Evolution 2

COMPETITION
WIN AN AUDIOLAB 8200CDQ CD PLAYER/PREAMP WORTH £950!

12 PAGE VINYL SECTION SEE PAGE 98

FREE READER CLASSIFIED ADS IN THIS ISSUE!

NOVEMBER 2011

11 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST KEF Q1000 LOUDSPEAKER

NOVEMBER 2011
Furutech (Alpha) OCC Pure Transmission conductors terminated with beautifully-engineered high performance rhodium-plated connectors. The substantially-built extremely nonresonant connector bodies are finished in layered carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel providing improved mechanical damping for greater resolution, clarity, and powerful dynamics.

Introducing Alpha Design Labs

Furutech is justifiably proud of its reputation for engineering, build quality and performance, and has won the loyal support of audio enthusiasts worldwide for their finely made and beautiful sounding cables and audio accessories. Now Furutech greatly expands its reach with a new entry-level line called ADL (Alpha Design Labs). ADL was created by Furutech to imbue its Pure Transmission Technology into carefully engineered innovative designs that everyone can afford. ADL components and cables are made with the same dedication to total resonance control and refinement as all of Furutech’s many cables and accessories.

ADL GT40 USB DAC with Phono stage!

The GT40 records vinyl and other analog sources at 16/44.1 or 24/96 using its bidirectional USB connection and switchable Line, Phono MM/MC analog inputs, plus it features L/R analog outputs, a separate headphone amplifier, gold-plated Teflon-insulated RCA jacks in a high-quality aluminum chassis with a beautifully machined volume knob. CD Redbook 16/44.1 and especially 24/96 files reveal a vivid, captivating sound unheard of at this price.
One of the great things about doing this job is the chance to rediscover classic hi-fi components — and the opportunity to hear a well-fettled and/or restored golden oldie must never be missed!

And this month we feature two classic turntables, both subtly modified and carefully rebuilt. The Tiger Paw Khan modification package for the Linn LP12 [p106] is genuinely one of the most important reinterpretations of that magic Sondek formula. Its cast aluminium top plate is built with the precision you'd normally only expect from Linn themselves, and reduces resonances to effect a dramatic clean-up of the sound.

Then we have the Northwest Analogue Slate 401 [p111], which is a huge slate plinth and stand for the classic Garrard 401 Just as the Sondek is held back by its stock plinth, so is the Garrard — only more so as the massive motor in these decks throws noise and vibration into the system, which is why it's essential to have a massive structure such as this to filter out the nasties. This design works brilliantly well, and lets people hear their classic deck in a way that was never possible when new.

Elsewhere in this issue, we go back to the future with Tannoy's excellent DC6T floorstanding loudspeaker on p12. The brand has an mighty historical pedigree, and this features traditional Tannoy design cues (Dual Concentric drivers, wideband tweeter) in a modern setting. The result is a fast, clean, expansive performer for under £1,000. Our new integrated amplifier supertest has seven models of differing prices up to £1,200, including a tube amp and an AV receiver. There are some surprises — read on from p17.

Digital disc fans will like our review of the new Sony BDP-S480, which is entry level Blu-ray par excellence [p44] and its cousin from some thirteen years back, the DVP-S725. One of the first DVD players, it still gives great pictures but works as super CD spinner too, all for pennies secondhand; read our Olde Worlde on p86. But for me this month's nicest surprise is the Bladelius Freja III [p50] — a great sub-£3,000 SACD player that reminds us what a super format Super Audio Compact Disc still is. Enjoy this issue!

David Price, editor

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**Verdicts**

**Outstanding**

**Excellent**

**Good**

**Mediocre**

**Poor**

**Value**

**Electronic Magazine**

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Seven mid-price integrateds compared, including this Onix A55.

**Sony BDP-S480**
Blu-ray disc player.

**Tiger Paw Khan Linn LP12 modification package.**

**Deltec PDM3/DeltaTran DAC/sync lock system.**

**ALR Jordan Classic 2 loudspeakers.**

**Rega RP3 turntable.**
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"The whole auditioning process took about 30 seconds. Play a piece of music on GII Mini Sub. Play it again on Aquarius and wonder why you were so attached to the GII Mini Sub." "Very highly recommended"
Hi-Fi Plus. Issue 68,
WIN A FANTASTIC AUDIOLAB 8200CDO CD PLAYER/PREAMP WORTH £950 IN THIS MONTH’S GREAT GIVEAWAY!

Here’s your chance to win one of our favourite mid-price CD players, in the shape of Audiolab’s 8200CDO – and it’s an excellent preamplifier too! Here’s what David Price said about it in the August issue of Hi-Fi World...

“A CD player, digital preamp and analogue preamp rolled into one, this is basically an Audiolab 8200CD on steroids. It has a choice of two preamplifier modes; digital or analogue. In digital mode you can switch between two optical (24/96), two coaxial (24/192) and one USB (24/96) inputs (or of course the inbuilt CD player) and control the volume digitally via the 32bit Sabre DAC. In analogue mode there are an additional three line-level analogue inputs. The preamp section is fully balanced, helping to reduce noise. There’s also a direct-coupled, discrete Class A headphone amplifier; and the 8200CDO uses the American ESS Technology Sabre DAC, a device with 256 individual DACs per channel inside the chip, to increase conversion resolution, while also reducing static conversion errors. As per Naim’s DAC, the CDQ operates either in integer Oversampling or Upsampling mode, depending on the input sample rate. It also features Audiolab-developed user selectable digital filters for optimal listening and measurement modes. Along with being especially proud of the filtering, designer John Westlake has taken a lot of trouble over jitter reduction, and careful attention has been paid to the analogue output stage; the CDQ has true balanced analogue XLR outputs, connected directly to a pair of proprietary Audiolab FET based Class A stage buffers per channel.

Having spent more than a little time with the £2,500 Meridian G08.2 and the £2,995 Leema Antilla IIS Eco CD players of late, the £950 Audiolab appeared relaxed in such exalted company. Indeed it was quite spookily close to the latter in its general character, giving a relaxed yet compelling sound; a little soft, ever so slightly on the warm side of neutral, wonderfully expansive with a cathedral-like soundstage, and musical in a way that simply isn’t associated with digital.

The Audiolab 8200CDQ is a very accomplished machine in every respect, but for me its standout talent is to make music flow onwards and upwards, relentlessly yet caressingly, in a way that normally only good vinyl can. As a standalone CD player, this is one of the most impressive new products I’ve come across in a long while — especially at its amazing price of under £1,000. A superbly musical yet amazingly transparent sound allied to excellent versatility makes this a brilliant value package.”

For a chance to win this great prize, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 31st October 2011 to:
November 2011 Comp.,
Hi-Fi World magazine,
Unit G4, Argo House,
The Park Business Centre,
Kilburn Park Road,
London NW6 5LF.

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- THE EDITOR’S DECISION IS FINAL
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QUESTIONS

[1] What’s the Sabre’s resolution?
(a) 8bit
(b) 16bit
(c) 24bit
(d) 32bit

[2] How many DACs per channel inside the Sabre?
(a) 32
(b) 64
(c) 128
(d) 256

[3] What type of headphone amp is used?
(a) Class AB
(b) Class D
(c) Class S
(d) Class A

[4] What kind of package is it, according to DP?
(a) "quite tasty"
(b) "rather good"
(c) "pretty spiffing"
(d) "brilliant value"

November Competition
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entries will be accepted on a postcard only

AUGUST 2011 TRiANGLE COMETE LE LOUDSPEAKERS WINNER:
Dr Chris Corrigan of Grays, Essex

World Radio History
hiworld.co.uk

NOVEMBER 2011 HI-FI WORLD
JET FIGHTER
AX Horn Loudspeakers' new AXJet is a heavily reworked horn speaker designed "for reintroduction to the high-end hi-fi and studio monitor market". Finished in gloss polyester (black is standard although most colours are available), it is said to use AX Wavefront Engineering techniques "to maintain as near to possible a pure hemispheric wavefront, very efficiently and smoothly transforming high pressure energy to an even and fast sound distribution at the listener". The phase aligned compound horn design "allows a remarkable lack of intermodulation distortion and the single Voigt Lowther full-range driver covers the entire audio spectrum with no crossover, giving stunning transient response", the company says.

The AX Afterburner is said to give pressure equalisation to both sides of the driver, allowing higher sound pressure levels without the driver moving into distortion. Deltec Precision Audio have developed a purpose made amplifier with Kelvin Sensing (feedback control) direct to the driver. The company recommends the solid aluminium machined DPA-SA2 (Kelvin Sensing) stereo power amplifier complete with cables as a partner. For more details, click on www.axloudspeakers.com or see it as the National Audio Show 2011 in room 154.

HUNTINGDON TRANSPORT
Cyrus Audio has updated its CD transports with Servo Evolution 2 software; the new SE 2 code is said to deliver "state-of-the-art CD data extraction and a highly polished revision of the original code". The original SE code was written to extract 'precise' optical data from a CD with the smallest number of bit errors, but occasionally this meant rejection of imperfect discs, says Cyrus, but the new code can better accommodate less than perfect CDs such as those with copy protection, or hybrid SACD layers. The new SE 2 servo code can play non-standard CDs, yet can output data with the same low bit error rate, it's claimed. All Cyrus slot loading CD players can be upgraded to SE 2 spec through a factory upgrade for £99, which includes latest production components such as the load bezel and a new two year warranty.

Along with this comes news of an affordable new CD transport product, simply called Cyrus CD Transport [picture]. Priced at £750 it benefits from the latest SE 2 servo code and the company’s low resonance, monolithic, non magnetic, alloy diecast chassis. It is fully upgradeable to the ultimate CD XT SE 2 flagship CD transport from the premium X series range at a cost of £799. The company is also doing a special promotion on their DAC-equipped 6 series amplifier, comprising the new CD transport and a Cyrus 6 XP d amplifier for £1,699. This represents a saving of £300, or the equivalent of a free DAC upgrade from 6 XP to XP d (usually £1,250). The Cyrus 6 XP d sports 11 inputs, six of them digital, including a USB input, allowing connection to a computer whereby the DAC card receives a digital stream from the connected computer. The 6 XP can be upgraded to the higher power 8 XP model, matching power amps can be added or the CD transport can be upgraded to full XT SE2 specification. For more details, click on www.cyrusaudio.com.

HEAD LINES
Ministry of Sound has a new headphone range that "delivers their signature sound directly to your ears", they claim. Designed to suit Ministry of Sound consumers old and new, the range boasts "fantastic sound and 'on trend' colours to classic over-ear designs", plus curled cable sections to prevent tangles. It includes the MOS006, priced at £39.99, which sports high-grade anodised aluminium cups with 50mm drivers, plus a soft foam-coated split headband and classic sliding loop adjustment system. It's available in four colours (black, silver/black gunmetal/black, gunmetal/orange). For more details, click on www.ministryofsound.com.
NAIM CHANGE

News comes that Naim Audio and Focal are merging "to create a new European leader in the audio industry". The management company Focal & Co will own and manage Focal and Naim as independent brands, retaining their unique philosophies and product ranges, it is said. Focal & Co, owned by Jacques Mahul (Founder and Chairman), CM-CIC (long-term shareholder in Focal) and the management teams of Focal and Naim, will employ 325 people at its facilities in Saint-Etienne, France and Salisbury, UK and have a combined turnover in excess of £48 million. The Research & Development teams of Focal and Naim are central to the success of both brands, and these will be brought together to "create an industry leading R&D capability to propel the Naim and Focal brands to the next level of innovative, high quality sound classics in the dynamic new world of hi-fi technology". Paul Stephenson, MD of Naim Audio Ltd and now member of the Board of Focal & Co said, "it is a merger of European minds. In Focal, we have found a partner which shares our passion for music and will help us take Naim to the next level. We can achieve far more together than would have been possible alone, yet at the same time we are able to retain everything that is unique about Naim and everything that our customers love us for."

STRONG STUFF

Atlas Cables has announced two new interconnect cables, handmade at their factory in Scotland, which are said to "bring a new level of high quality performance to the mid-priced interconnect category".

The Hyper MK II Asymmetrical is an unbalanced cable that consists of a central conductor made up of 95 individual stands of OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting) copper wire with 99.9997% purity insulated by low-loss foamed polyethylene dielectric, the return conductor is a two-layer braid made from a total of 192 strands of Ultra-Pure OFC (Oxygen Free Copper). This is wrapped over a PVC foil to provide 100% rejection of RFI (Radio Frequency Interference). The conductors are bedded into copper yarns and covered by a soft gloss black PVC sleeve.

The new Atlas Hyper Symmetrical is a balanced cable design using a pair of OCC copper conductors with an extremely high purity 99.9997% that are twisted together for noise interference reduction. Each conductor is constructed using a single 0.4 mm core which is then shrouded by 72 individual strands. Insulated by dielectrics that are made of extremely low-loss foamed polyethylene, the conductors are shielded by a two-layer braid consisting of 192 strands of Ultra Pure OFC copper. This double layer of tightly woven wire mesh is wrapped over a PVC foil for RFI rejection, and as with the Hyper MK II, the conductors are bedded into copper yarns and covered by a soft gloss black PVC sleeve. Atlas Symmetrical can also be fitted with XLR plugs for truly balanced analogue applications. Prices range from £160 for 1 metre pair for Asymmetrical RCA to £375 for the Hyper Symmetrical XLR. For details, call +44 (0) 1563 572666 or click on www.atlascables.com.

GREAT MOMENTS IN MUSIC

This charming website showcases the work of Sheffield artist Pete McKee, who has done work with Oasis amongst many others. Click on www.greatmomentsinmusic.co.uk and see also www.therealpicket.co.uk.
SUPER SONIC!

Naim's new SuperUniti is a £3,250 design said to “extend the Uniti range and the possibilities for UnitiSystem into the high end, and extends its suitability for large rooms and those who like to play their music just that little bit louder”. It can be considered to be a combination of Naim's SuperNait integrated amplifier and the multi-source UnitiQute and a Naim DAC. It sports Naim's latest generation streaming board, including Naim's latest know-how in digital, plus a six-layer circuit board design with power to stream 24bit/192kHz sources, plus there's a “high performance” digitally controlled analogue volume control.

See www.naimaudio.com

THE LOOK

Acoustic Imagery has a brand new preamplifier and Class D monoblock power amplifiers, along with a phono stage, on sale. Launched at the National Audio Show, more details can be found on the website at www.acousticimagery.com.

STAR QUALITY

The New Zodiac USB DAC ($1,895) is said to bring professional level audio to the living room. It uses Antelope's 64bit clocking technology and Jitter Management. Along with a sampling rate of up to 192kHz and a claimed 129dB dynamic range, the DAC sports twin S/PDIF and twin optical inputs, plus balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs and high-speed USB 2.0 connectivity through a custom USB chip, working with native drivers. In addition, users can download a free desktop app (http://antelopeaudio.com/en/control_panel.html) for OS X, Windows and Linux which allows remote control of the device and a one-click firmware update. For more details, click on www.antelopeaudio.com.

POLE POSITION

Formula One driver Bruno Senna has installed a pair of PMC AML2 active monitors in his Monaco-based project studio, where he carries out remixes and production work of house and trance music. The Brazilian recently visited the PMC factory to collect his AML2s, whilst on route to Silverstone for the British Grand Prix. The driver for the Lotus Renault GP Formula One team has had a project studio at his Monaco home for several years. Senna is impressed with his new acquisition, saying, “how do you get a big monitor sound like that from such small speakers? These are the best nearfield monitors I’ve heard”. For details, click on www.pmc-speakers.com.

COCKTAIL BAR

The new Cocktail X10 includes CD Storage, Music Streaming and Internet radio. You can load your CD collection onto its hard disk (3.5inch SATA) via its high speed front loading CD, and there’s a 3.5” full colour TFT LCD sporting a “well designed high quality user interface”. The unit has a 60W amplifier inside which can deliver “high quality sound” despite its compact 180x147x98mm casing. It lets you encode your rips in MP3, FLAC, OGG or WAV, and these can be streamed via Ethernet or optional Wi-Fi. The X10 comes in 4 size options, without HDD to add your own, 500MB HDD, 1TB HDD or 2TB HDD. Prices for the Cocktail Audio X10 starts at £279 without a HDD up to £429 for the 2TB version. See www.audiosonctum.co.uk.
LINN DEPENDENT!
Linn have new Klimax Solo and Twin power amplifiers with specially designed new Dynamik Power Supplies, and a new Klimax DS with a new audio board. To celebrate the improvements Linn is offering existing customers an unprecedented upgrade opportunity, they say. The Renew DS upgrade package reuses the existing audio board in a new custom-built enclosure resulting in a second DS player for use in another room of the home, making use of the new Songcast feature to enable perfectly synchronised multroom playback. So existing customers can not only enjoy their music at a better quality than before, but also more of the music they love in different areas of the home.

Linn also has an all new £3,500 Majik Isobarik loudspeaker, "combining the latest playback developments to offer deep bass and clean highs". It sports a 2K driver array and an 8" ported isobaric bass system, with a claimed reduction in distortion at bass frequencies. The mounting of two bass drive units face-to-face gives a more linear response to the input current, and there's a new crossover design. Majik Isobarik loudspeakers come finished in a choice of real-wood veneer cabinets, plus high gloss options and colours.

Linn has also launched a new Kinsky App, allowing users to wirelessly control their Linn DS system within the home. The new App joins the recently launch KinskyDesktop for Mac, a Mac-based control solution for Linn DS which includes complete iTunes support. The App is available as a free download from the App store whilst KinskyDesktop is available for free from the Linn website (www.linn.co.uk/kinskydesktop). The software offers direct control of your Linn DS from your Mac, iPhone, iPad Touch or iPAd, and allows immediate access to all of your music from Studio Master to MP3 files along with all Apple file formats, including AAC and 24bit ALAC support. iTunes library support also allows easy access and high quality playback of existing playlists stored there, with album artwork automatically shared and updated. Information on the full range of Linn products can be found at www.linn.co.uk or by calling Linn Customer Support on 0500 888 909.

HEAD FIRST
AmpCity have announced what they call "the UK and Europe's first headphone recabling service, a hassle-free way to get the maximum performance from any pair of headphones". Customers simply mail in their headphones, then they're disassembled, the stock cable removed and 'Fidelis' ultra-high purity silver headphone cable soldered directly to the driver using Cardas silver solder. The whole process is completed, fully insured and tracked. The Fidelis cable is described as "a sonically transparent cable which reveals the true beauty of every song, exactly how it was recorded". The cable geometry has been designed for maximum interference reduction, as well ensuring perfect signal transmission. It can be used with any headphone with a detachable cable, with models supported including the Sennheiser HD800/HD650/HD600, HiFiMAN HE-500/HE-5LE/HE-6, Audeze LCD-2 and the AKG K702. The Fortis is a lightweight and portable version of the Fidelis cable, designed specifically for use with earphones and custom monitors. Models supported include all JH Audio and Unique Melody custom IEMs, Shure SE530/SE535, VVestone UM2/UM3X and the Ultimate Ears Triple.fi 10 Pro. The Headphone Recabling Service, 'Fidelis' and 'Fortis' range will be available to UK, European and worldwide customers. Prices start from £225, £180 and £140 respectively. See www.amocny.co.uk or call +44 (0)20 3384 6392.

MOBILE PIONEER
Pioneer GB introduces the first model of a new line-up of 3D Blu-ray Disc players - the £169 BDP-I 40. It is said to combine 3D playback capabilities with advanced networking features and exceptional sonic performance. An HDMI output offers high definition connectivity, and there's connectivity to a local network and the internet, opening up a host of new content and networking opportunities. In addition to an Ethernet port for regular wired integration, the players can each connect easily to a wireless home network via an optional Pioneer AS-WL300 wireless LAN converter. Support for a whole range of formats including MKV, DivX Plus HD.WMV and MP3 playback, plus a JPEG viewer for photo slideshows makes each of the Pioneer BD players flexible content companions, regardless of the source medium – be it CD, DVD, USB or LAN. The latest high-definition audio formats like Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio are supported, which it can either output as native bitstream or decode internally and output as uncompressed multichannel LPCM on HDMI to give Blu-ray Disc movies a compelling soundtrack. There's also support for SACD, whereby the output over HDMI can either be the DSD 1bit signal or hi-res PCM 88.2kHz/24bit or 176.4kHz/24bit. See www.pioneer.co.uk.

CORRECTION:
In our review of the Raidho X Monitor II in the September 2014 issue, the description of the mid/bass units was incorrect; the review suggested the magnet arrangement was that of the C Series with 20 neodymium, whereas the X series in fact uses a neodymium ring magnet driver. More information about Raidho loudspeakers can be found at www.raidho.dk.
Alvin Gold stands up to Tannoy's Revolution Signature DC6T loudspeakers...

There are many mainstream producers of loudspeakers, of which there is a handful - perhaps no more than half a dozen or so - who set the standards, not necessarily for excellence but simply as yardsticks that others judge themselves by. For a long time Tannoy has been one of those yardstick performers. For example, they make enormous wardrobe scale horn loaded loudspeakers that are highly prized (and highly priced) especially in Japan, which you could almost live inside and which have a very special kind of cachet and desirability.

The company has long championed the use of wideband (up to 50kHz in some cases) tweeter technologies, before most others latched onto the idea. Indeed the very word Tannoy has become an adjective for many, a word that defines what a loudspeaker does and not just what it is called. Tannoy was also one of the prime movers in the shift to coincident driver technologies, which mimics the idea of a single point in space that radiates all audio frequencies. By placing the tweeter at the focus of the bass driver, this should mean firmer and more consistently focused stereo imagery. The technology is known as Dual Concentric, which is a key component of the DC6T design and many other Tannoy models over the years.

Restricting our interest to the nuts and bolts of the review DC6T, it comes across initially as a neat but relatively simple design, which appears to boast two medium size 150mm pulp cone drive units. But for the reasons already given, appearances are deceptive. One of the units is indeed a 150mm passive ABR pulp cone bass driver with a rubber surround, pure and simple. The other is a compound unit, with a similar size bass driver diaphragm and a similar surround, but which has a titanium dome tweeter mounted at its central focus, behind a central waveguide.
"this speaker is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making..."
softness that may come as a surprise. This helps deliver a large scale, relaxed performance, which worked well with Mozart piano concertos, for example a recently remastered disc of K337 No 26 and K488 No 23 from Friedrich Gulda/Harnoncourt and the Concertgebouw on Teldec (reissued by Esoteric on an SACD hybrid). But it worked surprisingly well with a much spikier recording of Bartok, to give just one example from many.

The Tannoy also does a great job with full orchestral material. The characteristic low frequency richness already described, and the attendant musculature work well for this type of kind of music, be it a Beethoven symphony, or something sonically more sonically challenging from Mahler, Britten (say, the always astonishing 'War Requiem') or Schoenberg whose almost Strauss-like juvenile tone poem 'Pelléas und Melisande', has more layers than an onion and more depth than a coal mine, and which demands something like juvenile tone poem 'Pelléas und Melisande', has more layers than an onion and more depth than a coal mine, and which demands something very special to work properly.

I also had great success with quite different styles of musical poison – Marc Cohn's driving eponymous album for one, and Hugh Laurie's 'Let Them Talk', not forgetting chamber music generally, for example Schubert's 'Trout quintet' Amadeus, or another particularly fine quintet, the Brahms's Clarinet Quintet (Fitzwilliam String quartet) sounded fresh as a daisy.

Overall the Tannoy is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making. It is powerful and lucid. It doesn't overtly favour one type of music over another, and although most of the examples quoted are classical, this does nothing more than reflect my own musical passions. I do however believe that there is something about classical music generally that is more demanding and ultimate revealing of the equipment used for its reproduction. There are only so many times I can listen to Marc Cohn without the music becoming seriously irritating, but I am well aware that this is not something that many readers will agree with. CONCLUSION

Tannoy's DC6T is an excellent loudspeaker, one that lives up to the promise on the page. It has its limitations; it's not for example the most refined even at its relatively modest price, but it does a great job of reproducing the scale and power of a musical performance. It has strength and agility, and makes a more than fair passing stab at playing the silences between the notes (to coin a cliche), and to separate out a complex sound picture so that individual instruments can be followed clearly, its depth and weight also stand it in particularly good stead. Stereo imagery is also handled well, but take heed of NK's advice to listen from slightly off axis with the speaker pointing down the length of the room. In short, this is a loudspeaker that shows every sign of having been designed by someone who knows his musical onions.

The Tannoy is adept at injecting a strong sense of presence and gravitas into its music making. It is powerful and lucid. It doesn't overtly favour one type of music over another, and although most of the examples quoted are classical, this does nothing more than reflect my own musical passions. I do however believe that there is something about classical music generally that is more demanding and ultimate revealing of the equipment used for its reproduction. There are only so many times I can listen to Marc Cohn without the music becoming seriously irritating, but I am well aware that this is not something that many readers will agree with. CONCLUSION

Tannoy's DC6T is an excellent loudspeaker, one that lives up to the promise on the page. It has its limitations; it's not for example the most refined even at its relatively modest price, but it does a great job of reproducing the scale and power of a musical performance. It has strength and agility, and makes a more than fair passing stab at playing the silences between the notes (to coin a cliché), and to separate out a complex sound picture so that individual instruments can be followed clearly, its depth and weight also stand it in particularly good stead. Stereo imagery is also handled well, but take heed of NK’s advice to listen from slightly off axis with the speaker pointing down the length of the room. In short, this is a loudspeaker that shows every sign of having been designed by someone who knows his musical onions.

CONCLUSION

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The DC6T measures almost perfectly flat in its frequency response, our third-octave pink noise analysis shows, but this is with the measuring microphone off-axis. On-axis it is a little lumper in the treble and brighter, so for best results it should be pointed straight down the room, not directly at listeners. By today's standards it is then an unusually accurate loudspeaker, free from the accentuated treble that is so period, especially with bright CDs. There is just however, a small emphasis that will ensure the speaker does not sound warm or dull. Bass output lifts slightly and reaches down to 55Hz, the port peeking up below this value to add heft to basses. It also exerts very good acoustic damping upon the bass unit our impedance curve shows, resulting in a relatively smooth impedance curve at low frequencies. Hovering around 4 Ohms however, the DC6T does draw current from an amplifier, meaning it utilises their output capabilities well. The benefit comes in a massively high measured sensitivity value of 90dB from a modestly sized floorstander, so high power amplifiers are definitely not needed. 40 Watts will be more than enough in most situations and 20 Watts will do. meaning the DC6T is fine for low power valve amps as well as transistor amps. Our decay spectrum showed low levels of colouration, although bass is a little hot around 80Hz, suggesting lively bass.

This Tannoy is an accurately balanced loudspeaker with a wide raft of strengths measurement shows. In use it should give good sound quality, although less forward, bright, emphasised or shouty than is common. NK.

VÉRITÉ

Clean, detailed and expansive sounding like few others at the price, this is an excellent floorstanding loudspeaker.

TANNAY SIGNATURE DC6T

Tannoy UK
(+44 (0)1236 420199
www.tannoy.com

FOR
- wide soundstaging
- midband detailing
- fast bass
- fine build and finish

AGAINST
- nothing at the price
Jo 45/1

"their spirit makes music joyful rather than merely pleasant – in this respect they’re sublime..."

David Price
September 2011

Nature’s Beauty in Sight & Sound

Web: www.josound.net  E-Mail: info@josound.net
Can affordable integrated amplifiers really give anything approaching serious hi-fi sound?
Paul Rigby auditions seven of the best mid-price models to find out...

It's not an easy life being a mid-priced integrated amplifier. At this level, there's no leeway for the designer in terms of specifying fancy components; everything is accounted for on a very strict budget. For this reason, the circuit design has to be spot on for the amp to sound good, and be reliable with the sort of use it's going to receive. At the same time, the unit has got to have a fair sprinkling of facilities and look good too. Whilst £5,000 amplifiers can easily be jacks of all trades and masters of some, doing it on one tenth of the budget is nigh on impossible.

So please be upstanding for the manufacturers with models in this group test – they've been brave enough to mix it in a hotly contested market sector which has little room for also rans or even runners up. There's a fair smattering of Japanese names in the group (something you didn't see a few years ago, when they were all obsessed with home cinema), some renowned British specialists (including a budget valve design), and we've even got an AV receiver, to see how they fare in a stereo world (the manufacturer reckons it's good enough to compete with standard stereo amps). Read on to find out what's hot and what's not...

All In One?

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</table>

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Avid Acutus/SME IV/Benz Glider turntable
Icon CD-X1 CD player
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
Icon MB845 monoblock power amplifiers
Quad ESL-57 (One Thing) loudspeakers
Avid Isorak shelves
Atacama HMS 1 stands
Jools Holland has always loved music of every kind and during his illustrious musical career he’s bought and collected 100s and 100s of CDs and albums many of which he continues to play on his weekly radio show. Trouble was, the space they took up, keeping them in some sort of order, the need to find a certain album and then a particular track was always hugely time consuming.

Then Jools was introduced to the Brennan JB7. Now his whole collection is stored on something no bigger than a hardback book. Titles of his CDs, albums, even the tracks are automatically recognized and finding them again using the remote control takes just seconds.

“I can honestly say I’ve rediscovered lots of my music purely because the Brennan has made it so accessible. Just to be able to find what I want instantly rather than have to wade through CD after CD is a joy!”

Jools Holland pianist, bandleader, composer, singer and television host. He was a founder of Squeeze and the multi-million selling Rhythm and Blues Orchestra. He has collaborated with many artists including Sting, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, B.B. King, David Gilmour, Amy Winehouse and Bono. He tours regularly with his Rhythm & Blues Band and currently hosts ‘Later...with Jools Holland’ on BBC2.

“Music has been my life and now I can fit it all and more on my brilliant Brennan

“If you’ve got 100s or even 1000s of CDs like me, you’ll just love it!”

The Brennan JB7 is a revolutionary CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs

Key features

- Browse albums by spinning the volume knob - push to play
- Display track names as they play
- Delete tracks you don’t like
- Seven rainbow colour coded playlists
- Segue function blends one track into the next
- One touch record from vinyl, cassette or radio
- One button plays the entire music collection at random
- Plays MP3 downloads - future proof
- Clock with alarm
- 60 Watt, 4.8 x 16 x 22 cm steel and aluminium construction
- Backup music to external USB hard disk for safe keeping
- You can use it with your existing hi-fi or on its own

Money back guarantee

If you’re not suitably impressed with your Brennan JB7 we’ll collect it free of charge and refund you in full.

ONLY AVAILABLE DIRECT. To order visit www.brennan.co.uk
ICON AUDIO STEREO 2OPP £500

S

panning 200x310x270mm, this new amp is based upon the classic Leak Stereo 20 design; utilising EL84 and ECC83 valves, this 15W unit also includes a built-in headphone amp. Well made and solid, the Stereo 2OPP feels like a piece of engineering. Good first impressions, then...

SOUND QUALITY
Driving my reference Quad ESL-57 electrostatics proved a difficult task — the Icon sounded like it was pushing a large boulder up a steep hill. So I scaled down the load with AE Radiance One standmounters, a much easier load to handle...

Offering a fine sense of transparency without a hint of forwardness, the Icon first tackled some badly recorded pop CDs. Here, its smooth midrange took the more offensive frequencies off the table. Dynamic CD rock tracks like Skunk Anansie’s ‘Hedonism’ may lack a guttural low frequency punch on the Icon but the amp responded to this well recorded disc by glorifying in its melodic, rhythmic musicality; displaying a well integrated midrange.

On vinyl, the jazzy Ella Fitzgerald rendition of ‘I Love Paris’ was a revelation. The Icon focused on the vocal, lifting delicate tonal details off the disc, providing not only nuance and shade to the upper mid but a well balanced presentation. With the Yes track ‘Going For The One’, the warming aspect of vinyl helped to enhance what little LF was available, while the Icon’s upper mid performance allowed the amp to give a toe tapping, high energy performance. With smaller speakers in a compact room, you can enjoy its peerless midrange abilities which make for a sophisticated and involving listen, but it’s ultimately limited in power and punch.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE
Rated at 15 Watts per channel the 2OPP managed 12W at a generous 3% distortion limit, working into 8 Ohms. It manages slightly less, just 10 Watts into 4 Ohms, so the optimal load would appear to be between these values (i.e. 6 Ohms as claimed) and into 6 Ohms it may just make 15 Watts. Overload is relatively soft though, making the precise overload point academic; this is a low power amplifier. With sensitive loudspeakers like the Tannoy DC6Ts reviewed this month it will still go loud. Bear in mind the EL84 output tubes are inexpensive and known to sound sweet. Brute power is not what the 2OPP is really about.

Damping factor was low at 6 so fairly well damped loudspeakers are the best match, here Triangle Antals would be better than the Tannoy DC6Ts. Input sensitivity was high, noise low and bandwidth just wide enough, bearing in mind little feedback is used. Distortion levels were low all round and the amplifier had a very stable distortion pattern where second harmonic dominated up to high output levels, whereupon third harmonic from the output transformers appeared. Bass distortion was low up to full output (0.33%) though, a very good result.

The 2OPP is a nicely proportioned low power valve amplifier that is simple, cheap to run and will have a lovely sound, if not powerhouse dynamics. NK

VERDICT
Small form factor valve amp with refined midrange performance and great value for money.

ICON AUDIO
STEREO 2OPP £500
Icon Audio UK
+44(0)1132 440593
www.iconaudio.co.uk

FOR
- midrange subtlety
- clarity
- value

AGAINST
- light bass
- runs hot
- needs careful matching
next looking design, the standard sized (30x372x91mm) Onix has a sleek piano black finish. Shame then about the large, silver volume knob, which is rather clunky in operation. Quoted at 55W RMS per channel, the Onix weighs in at a respectable 8.7kg. All good at the price, but nothing remarkable, so far...

SOUND QUALITY
Kicking off with Yes on vinyl, and the Onix presented a fulsome sound with a plummy bass that sounded a tad too much at times. Detail was nicely presented, but things seemed slightly veiled and indistinct, with apparently rolled off high treble. Jazz on vinyl was more appealing, as it showed the amplifier’s nicely lyrical quality. Ella Fitzgerald singing ‘I Love Paris’ was impressive, grabbing my attention as the Onix’s low frequency power gave a commanding sound. As time moved on however, the legendary vocalist began to battle against her own orchestral backing, as if in a show of strength, as the lower midrange elements of the vocal were boosted too much, slowing the pace slightly.

Moving to compression-heavy, chart-based CDs and this smooth sounding amp calmed the bright mix, making these albums a real pleasure to listen to. For the first time, I could relax and enjoy the music. Bass was suddenly magnificent, whereas it had sounded a little over the top with the bass-heavy vinyl source (and tube phono stage), via CD it was just right, giving a satisfyingly firm foundation for the music without overdoing it. Low frequencies were not only deep and grippy but the Onix struck each bass note like it was toting a sledgehammer, even via my Quad ESL-57s. The ol’ radiators seemed to find bass tones in their darkest, deepest corners that shocked these rather cultured electrostatically-tuned ears! The Onix brimmed over with musicality along with an incredible bass slam. Not ideal for sumptuous vinyl sources then, but give the Onix A55 a decent digital signal and this friendly giant turns into a rampaging beast.

Advertising the Onix presented a fulsome show of strength, as the lower midrange elements of the vocal were boosted too much, slowing the pace slightly.

Playing Skunk Anansie’s ‘Hedonism’ rock ballad, the Onix displayed a solid stereo image, sitting within a broad based stage that, while not quite as deep as the Pioneer, extended beyond the edges of the speakers, stretching the space occupied by the instruments which, in turn allowed them extra room to breathe and to perform. This gave a rich, dynamic sheen to the strummed acoustic guitar and cymbals.

Overall then, a commendably smooth sounding design that flatters poor sounding source material and/or average ancillaries, and one that’s never unrequited to listen to.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE
The Onix A55 produces a useful 72 Watts into 8 Ohms and 110 Watts into 4 Ohms. This is more than enough to drive modern loudspeakers up to very loud, as the real life power output will be somewhere between these values, depending upon the impedance of the loudspeaker. Damping factor was high at 54 so bass will sound quite tight.

The amplifier’s distortion pattern remained reasonably stable right up to 10kHz, even at 10kHz, up to around 12 Watts, above which higher harmonics appeared. Judging the transfer characteristic closely in its harmonic structure and its visual time-domain residual, the Onix looks good, if not quite as stable as the best.

Input sensitivity was very low at 50mV. This suits silver disc players, all of which give 2V output, but it does not suit low gain external phono stages; volume would have to be wound right up. Noise was low simply because of low gain.

The A55 gives a tidy set of measured results. It works well in every area, ignoring low input sensitivity, but it is not distinguished in any way. NK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>72 Watts</th>
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<tr>
<td>CD/tuner/aux. Frequency response</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>504mV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damping factor</td>
<td>54</td>
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### VERDICT

Fulsome tonality and a big bass punch makes the A55 an easy listen, although some will crave greater transparency.

**ONIX A55 £700
UKD C 44(0)1753 652669 www.ukd.co.uk**

**FOR**
- warm sound
- big, slamming bass
- cultured midband

**AGAINST**
- oversmooth for vinyl
That said, the Pioneer wasn't as frequency area over the Icon. invovling; the Icon has the ability What the Pioneer did offer frequency exuberance of the improvement in the lower however, was an immense same guttural power and kick. Onix, nor did it exhibit that — unlike the Onix — it Pioneer lacked the low upper midband, which means definitely some brightness to its of transparency but there's throwing luminance onto the which unlocks murky mixes, among other things. This gives a sense of transparency but there's definitely some brightness to its upper midband, which means that — unlike the Onix — it doesn't suffer poor mixes badly. At times, this gives it a clinical personality.

Spinning the well recorded Skunk Anansie track, the Pioneer lacked the low frequency exuberance of the Onix, nor did it exhibit that same guttural power and kick. What the Pioneer did offer however, was an immense improvement in the lower frequency area over the Icon. That said, the Pioneer wasn't as involving; the Icon has the ability to drag the listener into the centre of the music while the Pioneer likes to remain on the outside looking in.

Jazz on vinyl sounded clean, the rolled off nature of the plastic itself calming the clinical feel and enhancing the clarity. Ella Fitzgerald's vocal had a simple, classic delivery. Yes, there was a slightly forward edge to the Pioneer's presentation but strings exuded a textured approach while the soundstage was particularly impressive, as it offered a three dimensional structure and admirable instrumental separation. Rock on vinyl highlighted the Pioneer's ability to portray midrange frequencies well. Despite the lack of control and grip in the bass, detail on guitars was commendable and expressive while the vocals blended well with the ensemble. Offering a magnificent, broad soundstage, the Pioneer showed itself to be a controlling, organising influence, albeit with brightly lit upper frequencies. A great value amplifier, but not for all systems and tastes.

**PIONEER A-A9Mk2 £700**

At 11.5kg, this amplifier is a slice of Japanese heavy metal if there ever was one! Offering gigantic speaker binding posts at the rear and built like a tank, you can't say Pioneer have skimped on construction. Finish is very good too, with an expensive look and feel and classy subdued lighting on its read-out. It's a largish (420x113x369mm), nicely presented and modern feeling machine that confers a sense of wellbeing on its purchaser.

**SOUND QUALITY**

First impressions were of a big, meaty and powerful sounding performer, with tremendous grip. The Pioneer was unflappable and resolute, while I was especially impressed by the soundstage, which was noticeably grander than the Icon yet more expansive than the Onix. It's a well lit design which unlocks murky mixes, throwing luminance onto the proceedings. This gives a sense of transparency but there's definitely some brightness to its upper midband, which means that — unlike the Onix — it doesn't suffer poor mixes badly. At times, this gives it a clinical personality.

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**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Pioneer remains no great powerhouse, producing 60 Watts into 8 Ohms and now in Mk2 form 90 Watts into 4 Ohms. All the same, this is more than enough for systems in which modern, sensitive loudspeakers are used in small to medium sized rooms. Measuring 52, Damping Factor was usefully high so the Pioneer will have a good sense of bass control.

The amplifier's distortion pattern was consistent at all power levels, with low order second and third harmonics dominant, both in the midband and at high frequencies, the pattern being a steady one, unmodulated by signal conditions. Our analysis of a 1 Watt, 10kHz signal into a 4 Ohm load shows this pattern. With distortion measuring 0.003% in the midband and 0.024% at 10kHz, into a 4 Ohm load, the Pioneer remains clean and relatively distortion free, so there will be no undue harshness.

The phono stage measured well but full gain exists down to 5Hz on MM so record warps will induce strong cone flap. Curiously, this does not happen on MC where gain falls below 20Hz to suppress warps. Otherwise, equalisation was accurate and noise low.

The Pioneer A-A9Mk2 produces a good set of results, but it is a little inconsistent. NK

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**DISTORTION**

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**VERDICT**

Superbly built, nicely laid out and possessed of a punchy, expansive and incisive sound, the Pioneer is impressive at the price.

PIONEER A-A9Mk2 £700
Pioneer GB Ltd. C: +44(0)870 600 1539

FOR
- transparency
- expansive soundstage
- classy build and finish

AGAINST
- clinical presentation
- forward midrange
Arguably the most svelte looking in this group, there’s something about the Creek’s compactness that sits nicely and unobtrusively on your shelf. In use, the Creek feels both solid and secure but it cannot be accused of being demure, unlike some of the Japanese-sourced amplifiers on this test – it’s a chunky amplifier with a positive feel; change a source and electrical relays clunks and click into operation.

SOUND QUALITY
Via my chart pop CDs, the Creek presented itself as by far the most balanced amplifier in pure sonic terms so far. Whereas the Pioneer had been a little upset by the bright, hard mixes of these discs, the Creek was unfazed; their inherently hard balance still remained recognisable during playback but it was noticeable that the effects were toned down appreciably and the Creek did a great job of digging into the vocal aspects of the performance and lifting more detail from these areas than the Pioneer and Onix. Only the Icon proved to be superior in this respect. While the Creek might not have provided the same delicate mids as the Icon, the Creek was capable of conveying glorious synth sweeps with a broad brushstroke that gave this little amp a grandeur all of its own. It wasn’t quite as expansive as the Pioneer in this respect, but was impressive all the same.

The better quality Skunk Anansie recording allowed the Creek to properly express itself, while the Onix had the dramatic edge, the Creek offered a better blend of dynamic bass and midrange detail.

The Creek may not have been as fulsome as the Onix in the bass, but it still offered a tight, solid bottom end that blended easily and naturally with an equally impressive upper mid and treble performance. The latter showed a particularly light touch, successfully giving the Creek a broad sonic contrast during the Yes track. It’s this sort of balanced approach which induced a sense of well being, especially during analogue play. You felt you were not going to be overly surprised and that, instead of waiting on tenterhooks for your hi-fi to give you a nasty surprise, you could concentrate upon the music instead.

Which is what we’re all here for, isn’t it?

Playing the Ella Fitzgerald track, the Creek was able to follow her famed enunciation with ease with added atmosphere to her delivery. Brass was also textured and vibrant. With none of the bass bloom of the Onix or the forward nature of the Pioneer, the Creek’s overall performance was one of equilibrium with both analogue and digital sources. On either format, cymbals had a lovely metallic sheen, electric guitars offered a metallic ring to their strings and drums proved richly resonant. Couch and smooth but wonderfully revealing and musically satisfying all the same, this should be at the top of your shopping list.
A n AV amp in a two channel stereo group test? Yes, and deliberately so; Onkyo boast that this is more than capable of mixing it with the others here, so we thought we’d see for ourselves! Of course, being a full size AV receiver (435x174x379mm), it has a chunky (12.2kg) chassis featuring a large fascia packed with many features that most two-channel users will find redundant. In operation, the Onkyo looks confident and feels nice and slick.

SOUND QUALITY
Playing my harsh chart CDs, the Onkyo becalmed the coarse, compressed upper mids; I felt I was actually hearing more musical information from the Onkyo than the Pioneer for example, because the latter emphasised the compression which forged a blocking effect on the ear. What it does not have though is the Creek's super-insightful midrange. The Creek can focus your ears towards individual instruments, giving each a distinct personality, but the Onkyo found these skills difficult to emulate. On 'Hedonism', the Onkyo didn't track the lower frequencies with the precision of the Creek but was capable of tremendous power and plenty of fun to go with it.

Via vinyl, Ella Fitzgerald sounded pleasingly balanced, the Onkyo successfully integrating all of the elements of the orchestra in a concise whole. It may not reach into the mix in the same way as the Icon but the Onkyo still conveyed Fitzgerald's ability to interpret this song with both romantic and rhythmic ease. Playing Yes via vinyl, and it fell short compared to the Pioneer's ability to examine each instrument individually, but it made for a nicely rounded presentation that was competent in soundstaging all the same. Tonally too, it didn’t offend, and treble was decently crisp even if it wasn’t the last word in silkiness.

So the Onkyo, which Hi-Fi World already recognises as a fine AV amplifier, performed surprisingly well as a basic two-channel amp too. It's hard to characterise it in terms of what it does especially well, as it's more notable for a relative lack of character that just gets on with playing music in a straightforwardly enjoyable way, underwritten by a serious dollop of power. In a world where the audiophile and the AV enthusiast occupy different camps and where the attendant technologies prioritise different targets, the performance of the Onkyo is a bonus for audiophiles who are looking for a second choice system connected to an AV set-up.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE
The Onkyo produced a massive 144 Watts into 8 Ohms and 225 Watts into 4 Ohms, which over seven channels amounts to 1.5kW! AV receivers do go effortlessly loud, mainly because the power is distributed to so many loudspeakers they run unstrained. Damping factor was satisfactory at 28 so bass will sound much like that of ordinary hi-fi amps, although Onkyos have quite 'big' bass subjectively.

The TX NR709 produced little distortion at all power levels and frequencies and although it runs quite warm, this is due to biasing into Class A. As it warmed up distortion went down, below the figures we quote. Levels were low, measuring 0.013% at 1 Watt into 4 Ohms, and less than 0.01% when hot, very good results.

Input sensitivity was high at 180mV with Pure Direct selected and frequency response stretched from 1Hz up to 120kHz. Via the input ADCs the limit was 22kHz, imposed by anti-alias filtering, and noise jumped from -100dB in Pure Direct to -77dB, so Pure Direct should always be selected for hi-fi use.

The Onkyo TX-NR709 amplifiers measured well. They produce little distortion and Onkyo run them warm to hot to ensure this is so. NK

Power 144watts
CD/tuner/aux 1Hz-120kHz
Frequency response 83dB
Separation -100dB
Noise
Distortion 0.013%
Sensitivity 180mV
Damping factor 28

VERDICT 💫💫💫💫💫 £800
Surprisingly good for an AV design, the Onkyo can be wholly recommended for two channel use too – with a smooth and easy musicality.

ONKYO TX-NR709 £800
Onkyo UK Ltd.
C +44(0)1628 473350
www.eu.onkyo.com

FOR
- smooth tonality
- all round competence
- flexibility and connectivity

AGAINST
- size!
YAMAHA A-S1000 £900

What's with the monster (435x137x465) Yamaha's 22kg weight? It's the behemoth of the group, with a distinctly retro, late seventies look and feel. The clunky switchgear feels very solid and precise; purchasers will feel they've got their money's worth before they even plug it in! Just don't drop it on your toes...

SOUND QUALITY

The Yamaha glided across the brightly lit pop chart CDs, smoothing out much of the excesses of their production. Highlights included backing synths which generated a smooth sweep along with an attendant widescreen aspect. In fact, the Yamaha was able to provide music with landscape views that competed effectively with the Pioneer. The Yamaha's large soundstage provided ample room to display the sound to its best advantage.

Spinning the rock ballad 'Hedonism', and the song was supported by a mighty bass wallop that reverberated across the entire soundstage. This was a performance of grand gestures with everything magnified to huge proportions. Bass slammed, the midrange rocked its socks off and the treble lashed to tsunami levels.

Moving to the smoother jazzy tones of Ella Fitzgerald, and this ballad couldn't fail to be 'driven' by the Yamaha, such was its sheer brute strength. But still it just couldn't infect the listener with the rhythmic magic of the music; things sounded big and bold but lacked the subtlety of the Creek, for example. Switching to Yes on vinyl, the Yamaha didn't have as much focus as the Creek, lacking the delicacy to really convey what was going on - even if it had vast swathes of power to push the beat along. Listening to the Yamaha was the audio equivalent of a fun fair, all surprise and delight but with little room for reflection and relaxation.

On a visceral level it was very satisfying, and as such would make a great choice for a dance or rock music fan, but classical fans may wish to look elsewhere, as should those without someone to carry it home for them!

THE MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The A-S1000 produced 98 Watts into 8 Ohms and this figure rose to 170 Watts into 4 Ohms, more than enough power for all situations and loudspeakers. With a massive damping factor figure of 80 the amplifier also exerts a lot of speaker control and will sound tight and possibly dry in its bass. This really depends upon the acoustic damping within the loudspeaker however.

Distortion was primarily third harmonic caused by crossover. However, the characteristic remained stable from low to high levels and it would be unlikely to affect the sound greatly.

Input sensitivity was very high at 150mV, Yamaha following a trend toward higher gain to improve matching to external devices, notably low gain/output phono stages. However, the A-S1000 has a switchable MM/MC phono stage onboard and it measured very well. Input sensitivity was again high so low output MM and MC cartridges can be used, but overload values are just high enough to avoid any issues here. Equalisation was accurate too (MM and MC) and both have the same warp filter that usefully reduces gain at 5Hz by around -10dB whilst not affecting audible bass, right down to 20Hz. Yamaha have carefully engineered the phono input stages.

Tone controls provide small amounts of lift and cut at spectrum extremes if moved just a little. Action was coarse though and maximum lift too high at +10dB. A bypass is needed too.

The A-S1000 is powerful and works well; it has an especially good phono stage for MM and MC cartridges.

VERDICT

A fun-filled, action-packed, big-hearted, happy-go-lucky amplifier, but subtlety seekers should look elsewhere.

YAMAHA A-S1000 £900
Yamaha Electronics UK Ltd.
C: +44(0)1923 233166
www.yamaha-uk.com

FOR
- wide soundstage
- bouncy, powerful sound
- confidence and authority

AGAINST
- likes musical insight
- style not to all tastes
following the familiar Cyrus blueprint, the compact, half width (215x75x365mm) 6 integrated is beautifully finished from cast alloy and weighs in at a modest 4kg. It's simplicity itself to use, aside from the non-standard speaker terminals which apparently all EU-sold amplifiers should use, but very few actually do! The 'D' suffix refers to the fact that this model came supplied with an optional built-in digital convertor card, making the amp far more flexible than the others here.

**SOUND QUALITY**

It took just seconds to realise that this amp stood apart from the crowd, even when faced with the spitting hardness of some modern pop CDs. It didn't mask their uncouthness, but tamed them just enough to make listening pleasant, if not a joy. Lower down, its bass was deep, firm and well integrated into the mix while the upper mids and treble showed a heightened sense of clarity which gave great insight into the music. This was all the more evident when the Skunk Anansie track hit the CD tray. For the first time, the tambourine, which had been muscled to death by the likes of the Onix and the Yamaha, showed itself with its attendant delicacy - along with a tight, forceful and dynamic bassline.

Playing Yes on vinyl was a testament to the Cyrus's good nature, as it successfully gave a structured and controlled presentation with admirable detailing. For example, during intricate guitar sequences I could hear the artist dragging his fingers across the metal strings of the guitar, with a palpable sensation of each string being a separate entity. A critical comparison, while playing Ella Fitzgerald's 'I Love Paris', was how the Cyrus would stack up against the Creek because this track offered a range of subtle music transitions, finely nuanced orchestral playing and multi-toned vocal manoeuvres. The most noticeable feature was a warming, sweeter effect from the Cyrus amp which contrasted against the relative chill from the cheaper Creek - a facet that only now reared its head. The Creek, when compared directly, could sound a little formal and impersonal when played alongside the more natural and humanistic sounding Cyrus.

Fitzgerald sounded expansive and flowing while being controlled by the Cyrus, with plenty of tonal texturing to the vocals and a romantic sweep to the strings. There's a richness about playback over all frequencies, a sense of bonhomie, as if the amp isn't really trying. So if you're looking for a new mid-price integrated, there's a good chance that the Cyrus 6 will fit into your system, no matter what kit you may already have.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1Hz-43kHz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damping factor</td>
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### VERDICT

**Excellent musical performer with superb build and a pleasing form factor.**

**FOR**
- clarity and detail
- midband insight
- size, build, finish
- flexibility

**AGAINST**
- speaker connections
Musical Artistry

By Wharfedale

Britain's most famous loudspeakers

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

Jade 5 - Oct 2011

IAG House Sovereign Court Ermine Business Park Huntingdon Cambs PE29 6XU Tel: 01480 447700 Fax: 01480 431767
www.wharfedale.co.uk
When you gather together a group of amplifiers priced around or below £1,000, differences will be marked. To that extent, those differences may even be more significant than if you were faced with a series of amplifiers priced around the £5,000 mark.

The reason is budget. Faced with limitations, different manufacturers tackle the problem in different ways. Some will play the balanced card, trying to please everyone, but that means a jack of all trades and master of none. Others will concentrate upon one particular facet of the sound which will mean that their product will perform stupendously well in just one or maybe two respects, but will crash and burn at others.

Consequently, these amplifiers can be recommended for certain jobs but should be avoided for others. There are some designs that take a quirky route and stand alone in a crowd, while others may fall at the last hurdle. It's only the select few that will take their limited design budget and get serious across-the-board results. We've neglected to include the total failure case study in this group test, but we have examples of all the rest...

First up is the Pioneer A-A9Mk2, which fits neatly into the 'coloured sound' group. It's one of those amps that decided to concentrate upon certain facets such as an excellent chassis design and build quality. In sonic terms, the Pioneer can be highly incisive, bringing a raft of detail that many other designs miss altogether, bubbling to the surface. It's how it achieves this result that draws the Pioneer into disrepute on occasion which means that its clinical sound requires careful component matching and thought. If you can successfully slot it into your chain, then you will have quite a successful amplifier in its way. One of the best here with a clean CD source, but that it might end up rubbing your audiophile sensibilities the wrong way. If you want a fun time however, consider the Yamaha above many others.

The Onkyo TX-NR709 is next. Now this is a sensible design that provides a heap of AV facilities but also gives you a balanced overview of two-channel sound — and it does so in a very reasonable manner. It's not the best at anything but neither is it the worst. It does everything well and, for an AV amp placed in an audiophile group test for stereo sound, that's nothing short of miraculous. Respect due!

The Onix A55 is an excellent amplifier in its way. One of the best of all the rest...

"offering the best sound in the test with some ease, the Cyrus 6XPd is a comfortable winner..."
Alloy coned mid/bass drivers make ALR Jordan’s Classic 2 loudspeakers one of the most divine small boxes David Price has heard recently...

What’s the best way to design a small loudspeaker? Well, come on, that’s a trick question, isn’t it? Anyone who answers this quickly with a rigid prescription put most firmly and forcibly probably doesn’t know one jot about the subject – as there’s no textbook answer to this. But in the same way that there’s no one single best way to lose weight (exercise, diet, sleeping habits – and any combination thereof), so there is no one right way to do small loudspeakers. You’ve got so much constraining you that the answer becomes the most artful compromise of cabinet design, drive unit quality and crossover characteristics. Essentially then, speaker design is where science meets art – a clever software package and an ‘A Level’ physics book is only half the solution...

This pretty much describes loudspeaker designer extraordinaire Karl Heinz Fink. Based in Essen, Germany, he has his own consultancy with a good number of staff and some very tasty computer modelling software. But this is only the start for KHF; it’s his personal magic dust that achieves the finished result, and it’s highly distinct. He develops or designs a wide range of loudspeakers for a large number of manufacturers across Europe, from Q Acoustics to Naim Audio, and all have his
design DNA visible (or audible) in the finished product, and it's a very palatable sonic footprint. Think 'clean', 'warm', 'sweet', 'expansive' and 'musical' as your starter for ten; you'll never hear an ear-splitting, cranial laser etching Karl Heinz Fink speaker. And it is he who's been involved for a long time with ALR Jordan — the Classic 2s tested here have his dabs all over them!

A two way bass reflex design, they have a claimed frequency response of 45-30,000Hz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE], with a 6 Ohm impedance and 80W continuous power handling. ALR Jordan recommend amplifiers between 25 and 150W, giving decent sound pressure levels from its quoted 88dB/W sensitivity. High frequencies are courtesy of a 25mm textile dome tweeter, married via a phase optimised Linkwitz Riley crossover network to a 140mm Ted Jordan metal coned mid/bass driver. They're nicely built and finished small speakers, available in a choice of three real wood veneers. They feel solid at 5.3kg apiece and measure 170x300x260mm, making them an excellent size for small rooms. The rear panel sports a bass port and two pairs of loudspeakers sockets for biwiring. My only criticisms would be styling; the Classic 2s look so old fashioned that I predict they'll probably be back into fashion fairly soon! Oh, and the detachable grilles are decently enough made (even if their styling is straight out of the nineteen seventies, along with turtlenecks and Space Hoppers), but they do seem to take the treble level down a little — I'm sure Karl Heinz would recommend you take them off before serious listening.

SOUND QUALITY
I do listen to lots of expensive speakers, and going back to budget ones can be a bit of shocker. All the more surprising then that the ALR Jordan Classic 2s didn't offend in the least; indeed quite the reverse; they were entertaining and charming in equal measure. It's quite rare to hear a pair of small speakers that don't have some screaming bass or treble peak — I've heard a good few that practically take off into a low earth orbit when asked to reproduce that deep synth cadence leading into the bridge of Scritti Politti's 'Absolute' for example, their bass ports going positively bonkers. Not so these, which proved a study in even-handedness and intelligent sensibility. Indeed, they're about as far from a loudspeaker that's engineered for the showroom as I've heard anywhere near their price; clean, open, delicate, subtle and smooth from top to bottom, it proved hard to fault them at their price.

Propaganda's 'Dr Mabuse' on SACD was testament to their superlative balance; if there's an eighties digital synth-laden electro torture track that's going to set them off crashing and grating then this is it, but instead I was surprised to hear them handle this song with aplomb, at searchingly high volumes too. Most
“Hart, We Love Sound!”

The Hart EVO1 Dual Monitor Modular Loudspeaker

“Hart has delivered a true high sensitivity speaker without the difficulties inherent with horn systems. No wonder the Quad amp sounded so sweet”

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

See the full review, gallery and prices at www.hartaudio.com or telephone +44 (0)1983 612 924
Give ‘em a google too!
arresting is their midband, which handled Claudia Brücken's voice brilliantly, making her icy, teutonic tones come across surprisingly smooth and with great depth; she hung high above, and behind the loudspeakers in a wonderfully ethereal way. The opening crashing electronic noises can sometimes grate, but not this time; instead the Classic 2s shuffled into the groove and pushed the song, refusing to sound harsh whilst pushing out – gently and in due proportion – the mix's innermost secrets. Bass wasn't in any way overwhelming, but had just enough body to give weight to proceedings, and sounded decently snappy without perhaps being the tightest or tautest around. Treble was unerringly smooth and nicely detailed, even if in my particular system it didn't quite have the atmosphere and extension I'd have liked – too much time spent with ribbon tweeters or the NS1000M's beryllium units, methinks!

Moving to some good old unconstructed prog rock music, and Egg's 'Seven is a Jolly Good Time' was no less enjoyable; that electric organ which dominates the song can grate on lesser speakers, as can the slightly nasal vocal tones, but not so with these little boxes. They sounded light, breezy, gently musical and endearing, and I was impressed with their rendition of the bass guitar, which was delightfully supple and tuneful. In absolute terms they were a little dynamically constrained at higher volumes, but this was never enough of an issue to limit their very obvious innate musicality, which was pure pleasure. They had a remarkable ability for making mistakes (as all loudspeakers conspicuously do, especially at under £1,000), yet hiding their tracks so gracefully and genteelly that you'd never notice. Even their tweeters, which I'd first worried were a little uncouth and veiled, seemed to blossom after they'd got some 'miles' underneath their belt, beginning to sound really rather smooth and crisp and delicate in an almost-ribbon-like way.

Driven by a boiling hot Musical Fidelity AMS351, almost too hot to touch on top, and having been whisked with serious amounts of power for hours on end, I found them really settling into their skins. Speakers with metal drive units always take time to get going (it's rather like waiting for your car to get off choke). Speakers that had, in their first hour of so, sounded just a little uptight and clinical, suddenly got into the groove like they'd been smoking jazz cigarettes instead of the regular variety available from a news agent near you. A Blue Note CD imprint of Lou Donaldson's 'Aliiator Bogaloo' had the ALR Jordans partying like it was 1999, so to speak, with a wonderfully wide range of texture, dropping back a few feet more than when they'd first been teased into action, and an infectious groove. You'd never say these were out and out rockers, but suddenly their easy musicality began to win the day. The great thing about them, I mused, was how they connected you right to the musical event but didn't distract you with tedious details of the recording and mastering, as many high end speakers do. They take you to the party, so to speak, without having to do the washing up afterwards!

**CONCLUSION**

At £800 the ALR Jordan Classic 2s are almost in a gang of one – there are precious few standmounting loudspeakers at this price that present such an open and musical sound without getting anywhere near harshness. They come in, do the job brilliantly and yet leave no blood on the carpet. With no nasty bass or treble peaks, high quality drive units intelligently married up and cabinets that don't really draw attention to themselves, it's hard to fault what they offer at the price. Maybe in absolute terms, I'd ask for a tauter and deeper bass, a tad more midband insight and a slightly more searching treble, but as I stated earlier, the Classic 2s know how to quit when they're ahead. Their genius lies in their ability to do what you're good at then quietly move on without drawing attention to their failings. That, surely, is the mark of a great speaker designer – and indeed a superb loudspeaker.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Classic 2 measured almost flat across the audio band, our pink noise analysis shows. The tweeter exhibits a small plateau lift of 1dB so this loudspeaker will not sound dull, but as there is no sign of peaking in high frequency output, neither will it sound sharp or coloured. In fact, the absence of perturbations in the frequency response indicates an unusual absence of local resonances in the speaker and a resultant lack of colouration. Our decay analysis confirmed this view on the midband, although the tweeter does have some overhang at 4kHz and the bass/midrange also has a little delayed output below 400Hz. However, the bass unit is well damped and the cabinet is not at all 'hot', so there is no bass boominess and the Classic 2 should have very good bass quality. With a part tuned to 50Hz and a part tuned to 50Hz and of broad output +6dB above the drive unit at 50Hz, the port reaches down to 3Hz and will give the loudspeaker a good feeling of bass weight. What has to be borne in mind with the Classic 2 is that its flat frequency response will translate to an accurate delivery but this, by definition, will sound more sober than the embellishment of many designs (or perhaps their designers)! Sensitivity was good at 86dB Sound

**VERDICT**

A balanced, even-handed and well-behaved standmounting loudspeaker, yet unerringly musical too. Don't let the run-of-the-mill looks fool you, this is a grand design. **£799**

**ALR JORDAN CLASSIC 2**

**PhonoSophie**

[www.uberphon.co.uk](http://www.uberphon.co.uk)

**FOR**

- smooth, refined nature
- even tonal balance
- open soundstaging
- satisfying musicality

**AGAINST**

- pedestrian looks
- slight bass looseness
20th anniversary edition amplifier of the Mei Xing Electronics Factory

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- Valves: 6SN7(Special) x2, 2A3(Special) x4
- Frequency range: 5Hz - 150KHz +0dB - 1dB
- Signal to Noise Ratio: 92dB
- Distortion Factor: <0.3%
- Unbalanced input: 4 groups
- Balanced input: 1 group
- Outputs: 2 groups

MC300845-AB Flagship monoblock amplifier
- Maximum Output: 100W
- Valves: 6SN7(Special) x2, 300B(Special) x2, 45(Special) x2

The Mei Xing Electronics Factory was built in 1991 and specializes in valve audio amplifiers. We have our own CNC machining center with numerically controlled lathes and a professional technical team with many years of experience. Our products have won many prizes, including CHINA FAMOUS BRAND, INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS BRAND and are of course fully CE, CCC and ROHS certified. Our products are very popular amongst our customers and have been sold to more than 40 countries.

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Adam Smith - Hi-Fi World

Hi-Fi World Verdict
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For:
- Intelligent engineering
- Treble purity
- Midrange accuracy
- Rhythmic coherence

Against:
- Nothing at the price

Price: £699

www.inspirehifi.co.uk
**Letter of the Month**

**IT'S MORE FUN TO COMPUTE**

I would just like to pass on my experience of getting decent sound quality from a Mac and refer to some of the points raised by Alex Cohen in July letters.

My main (serious listening) system is still (mainly) analogue based and will remain so. Like Alex, my primary reason for changing my second hi-fi over to a purely digital server based system about three years ago was convenience. It's in the living room and so is used more than the other systems. However, unlike Alex, I was not completely blown away by the resulting sound quality: Mac Mini with 1TB USB hard disk, Stello DA100 Signature connected to the Mac via an optical lead, Creek OBH-22 passive feeding an active crossover, then out to bi-amped (much modified) Spendor Preludes (soon to be replaced with some Celestion 5000s).

Initially, I used iTunes AAC at 320 kbps but soon realised that for classical and jazz recordings especially, there was just something not quite right. I can only describe it as a slight 'ringing' (especially on piano), or touch of shrillness or coloration. This was puzzling since I was also aware of a slight lack of space around the instruments and the fact that the extreme treble just wasn't as smooth as it ought to be. True, the sound quality was better than a budget CD player but that isn't saying much! I had expected a better sound from the Stello, but could the reviews all have been wrong?

So began a search for possible improvements. First of all came a valve amp for the treble and then later on a separate valve amp for the mid-range/bass (both pre-owned World Audio units). Quite an improvement, particularly in the treble. The shrillness was reduced considerably. But there remained a niggling dissatisfaction with the system. There was still a lack of ultimate detail. Piano recordings in particular showed up the shortcomings of the system and so I tried doing a few WAV rips using EAC (Exact Audio Copy). Immediate improvement!

I also tried Apple Lossless but totally agree with David Price's findings that it sounds as if a veil has been drawn over the recording, flattening the sound stage and depriving the music and instruments of any emotional content. I'm guessing that the decoding process just strips out those high frequency clues that make listening to music a truly emotional experience. In my opinion, it isn't even as good as AAC at 320 kbps.

A brief dalliance with Fluke enabled me to play FLAC files in iTunes and frankly I cannot tell the difference between them and WAV files, they both sound very good. However, I have now replaced Fluke with Pure Vinyl software which integrates perfectly with iTunes and enables me now to play FLAC files without any problems.

So why am I writing to you? Well, for a long time I have suspected that whatever the synonyms applied (ringing, coloration, jitter, etc.) that basically what I could hear that left me dissatisfied was distortion. So, after your review of the Musical Fidelity V-Link, I ordered one. Connected it up via USB from the Mac then optical lead to the Stello.

---

Audirvana – superb sounding computer audio software for Macs, says editor David Price.
Gave it 24 hours to run in and listened. Now I was completely blown away. I just cannot believe the difference this little unit has made to the whole system. The colouration has completely disappeared and everything is now reproduced with such effortless ease that it even makes 16/44.1 recordings sound better than I've ever heard them. Even AAC at 320 kbps sounds acceptable! I'm now listening to the most analogue sounding digital system I've ever heard and that shiver down the spine factor is back. All the emotional involvement has returned, all due to a small, very low-priced box and everything is now reproduced with such effortless ease that it even makes 16/44.1 recordings sound better than I've ever heard them. Even AAC at 320 kbps sounds acceptable! I'm now listening to the most analogue sounding digital system I've ever heard and that shiver down the spine factor is back. All the emotional involvement has returned, all due to a small, very low-priced box.

SPEAK EASY

The October issue has just arrived at the newsstands in Portugal and I got mine immediately before lunch. I'm writing to you because I was deeply shocked by Mr. Joe Cohen's letter which I read in your replies make it so that it wouldn't be overlooked by the readers.

People are free to speak their minds, but nobody should feel free to insult other people or institutions. One thing is to make an accusation, based on facts and supported by documents, extracting conclusions that may or may not be fair and verifiable. A totally different thing is to jump into conclusions and without the most basic respect for the ethical principles that should guide free speech, based on hearsay, without a consistent source of information, to produce statements that lay a blanket of suspicion upon others. That is what I call an insult. However, people who do that deserve our respect as human beings but they also deserve to be harshly criticised for their irresponsible actions. If such people learn from their mistakes they should be given new opportunities. If not, they should be prosecuted. That is what I think. In such circumstances, libel actions have more possibilities than to repeat the arguments therein which are final and based on facts which may be verified by anyone more curious than the surface and aren't socially punished for the lies they spread.

I think it is fair to point one's finger to the media as they are highly responsible for such a generalised behaviour as they usually give an example about how irresponsible, regardless of the consequences, some of the published material may be.

I tend to agree with "Good Old Winnie" when he said: "there is no such thing as public opinion, there is only published opinion!

Truth is so rare and so fragile from launching a blanket of suspicion over Hi-Fi World's whole team of professionals and specifically over its Editor and one of the reviewers in particular, Mr. Adam Smith.

The unfairness of the accusation is unacceptable, as your replies make absolutely clear, thus it would be useless to repeat the arguments therein which are final and based on facts which may be verified by anyone more curious than I am. I trust your word and don't need anything else.

Along a period of twenty years Hi-Fi World has conquered the trust of its readers and did it for being faithful to the Truth, in every circumstance. Your readers may disagree with some of your reviews; I may prefer a different pair of speakers or a different phono stage to the ones you recommend. Sometimes I would prefer the runner up to one of your yearly awards' winner but your reader's letters show that they always trust your opinion as an independent and highly professional one.

There is a culture of conspiracy in this world we live in. People remain on the surface and aren't socially punished for the lies they spread.

I think it is fair to point one's finger to the media as they are highly responsible for such a generalised behaviour as they usually give an example about how irresponsible, regardless of the consequences, some of the published material may be.

I tend to agree with "Good Old Winnie" when he said: "there is no such thing as public opinion, there is only published opinion!

Truth is so rare and so fragile
Thanks for that Mario. It's heartening that you see it differently. People put pen to paper without a great deal of concern or consideration, yet at the same time we also have to accept that in our position we have an obligation to answer criticism in a clear and honest way. As they say, "if you put your head above the parapet, it will get shot at". The difficult bit is catching the bullets between your teeth! NK

I think that as soon as you say something in the public domain, you're fair game for being contradicted and challenged - and quite right too, as they say, "sunlight is the best disinfectant".

The problem is that along with this come people who simply cast aspersions upon peoples' motives, for whatever reasons they may personally have, yet offer no substantive evidence. Alleging that you get a rave review in return for advertising in a magazine is seductive if you're of a conspiratorial mindset (and many are), but it just doesn't logically stack up with us. As I said last month, that would mean that [a] all reviews of advertisers' products were rave reviews (they're not), and [b] non advertisers wouldn't get reviews (they do) and [c] we'd only rave about the products of companies that were advertising (we don't). I trust that our regular readers know all this, and they can make their minds up in their customary intelligent and open minded way. DP

TUBE TALK

In a frenzy of risk taking and charting unknown territories (acquired qualities - I am a boring German by birth) I purchased last year the Ming Da MC300 PRE preamp and would agree with your balanced published assessment of it, in particular the microphonic aspect of the sound reproduction. However, the use of Russian Military 6SN7 tubes reduced this short coming, improved positioning in the sound stage and resulted in more clarity in sound production. Combined with Jf 300b tubes it is a very robust setup. Another point I would like to add - the 274b tube is charged by an insane 100uF cap – WE suggested only 4uF max for this tube. Negotiations with the producer (Suena) generated an alternative: two 4uF caps parallel instead of the 100uF with the effect that the 274b stopped sparking.

Olaf Handrick

Hi Olaf. Thanks for your letter: it is very timely. The bass peak, caused by incorrect feedback time constants, has been dealt with by Ming Da, and microphony in the valves supplied was obvious and curable too, your experiences show. The point being that with these issues seen to, the MC-300 PRE then becomes a wonderful sounding preamp at a great price.

All the same, the owner was not a happy bunny at the Guangzhou Show I have just attended, and he gave me some dark looks when our representative Anna Chang spoke to him (in Chinese). Criticism in a review is less acceptable in China than the West; it is taken as an insult I am told, even though it can have a positive outcome, as in this case.

To be frank though, a disappointingly large number of Western manufacturer's products are 'perfect' and anyone who does not think so is wrong. This is, of course, is logically absurd, apparent when the model is later replaced by one that is better. If it was perfect it would not need replacement.

I mention all this because some readers have ragled us with the fact that we do not criticise enough products and award too many Five Globe reviews. I accept this to an extent, but there is a reason. Poor products are winnowed out before review to avoid filling the mag with substandard product, to save paper and also to make space available for good products of interest to readers.

We tend to get involved in engineering issues with some items too, as a result of measurement. The MC300 PRE is a good example. It has a lot going for it, having a quite unique sound, as you might expect from its construction and parts, but the subsonic peak revealed by our spectrum analyser had to go.

And finally, Suena is not the producer. She is the person at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk
Icon Audio PS2 phono stage was liked by reviewer Paul Rigby — see our August 2011 issue.

be a little less romantic in its presentation?

As for a cartridge, I have read good reports of the Ortofon 2M Black, Benz Micro Ace and the Goldring 1042. Any other suggestions? I have not heard any of them and I don't know how on earth I will be able to compare. This is where your expert opinion will be so valuable.

I have just read the review by Paul Rigby of the Icon Audio PS2. That could be just the job once I have sorted out the arm and cartridge. Although I could be tempted by something like the Graaf WFB2 for the same money.

My system comprises a pair of Klipschorn corner horns (original 1972 models). I am thinking of purchasing a pair of Trachorns from ALK Engineering (www.alkeng.com/klip) when funds permit. The 401, an early Craft Super Micro pre (the weakest link?), and a pair of CR Developments Amphion single ended power amps with the "spectacular" (your words) 6C33C output valves. They sound lovely.

My tuner is a Leak Troughline with decoder; I love it! also an old Pioneer PD9700 CD player. My room is approx 26' x 14' with a curved long wall and 8' 3" ceiling. I have no option but to have my speakers on the short wall which is not ideal I know.

I very much look forward to your reply so that I can move forward and enjoy my music again (after all, I am precious to me)!

Terry Mason

Hi Terry.
The 3009 and V15 are well past their sell by date. Both have merit and the Shure tended to disguise the 3009's lively structure, but times move on. All the arms you list are very, very good and the PU7 and FXR are especially strong, although the Inspire pips them all for value in my view. Goldring's 1042 is great fun to listen to, and basically very accurate. Its stylus also resolves high frequencies well, and it is a fine tracker — all at a reasonable price.

As for moving coil cartridges are getting very good and becoming popular, and the Benz Micro Ace is one fine example. Just bear in mind you will need a suitable preamplifier, making this a costlier solution.

Personally, I don't much see the point of buying a good MC and then pairing it with a cheap transistor phono stage; it strikes me as contradictory.

Musical Fidelity A100 — not bad as a fixer upper for free!

Second Chance

Recently I was given a Musical Fidelity A100 as a worker, but with intermittent faults. Apparently, it had been back to the dealer for repair on several occasions over a number of years and the customer had just lost faith in the product. As an electronics engineer, I took this on as a challenge (especially as it was free of charge). After some remedial work which included unblocking/cleaning the cooling fans, replacing the emitter resistors and resoldering a few suspect joints I then made it to the August magazine, and all is explained on your new website. I first heard these speakers about a year ago and was very impressed, and was almost ready to buy, but I did have a couple of concerns. In the UK a got the impression that these were being distributed by a one man team, so I was concerned about continuing support, although there is a three year warranty.

Styling and look were quite basic. However, given the sound of these speakers, I think that is not so important, as any other type of electrostatic/ribbon type speaker will either be too big for the room, or could never be placed in an optimum position. I also noticed that on the Eminent website there is a very good user guide for the LFT-16s which details the design theory, measured performance and component values. I also notice that there is another downloadable document, which describes how to adjust the film tension, using the adjustment cams. Although the LFT-16s are not specifically mentioned, I wonder if you could enquire when you revisit the review if any adjustments are required during the life of the product. We know that companies like Quad and other
Hi Alan. You are a brave man methinks, but the LFT-16 is arguably one of the best £1k loudspeakers going and our runs others sonically by a big margin I feel. As we are finding though, U.S. production seems a little — erm — variable. We await more news of the fix for depressed tweeter level.

In the meantime, another manufacturer tells me they are to revive their ‘Isodynamic’ treble unit from the 1980s and we might hopefully see a midrange unit too. Magnetic planar drive units have potential, the LFT-16s show. NK

Hi Alan - yes, there’s a lot to be said for buying second-hand, and contrary to what many manufacturers seem to think, it doesn’t actually preclude people going on to buy new. Speaking personally, my first Michell GyroDec was a previously (well) owned example, from someone selling up to move to South Africa, I bought it, with GyroPower PSU, for £425, fitted a Rega R200 arm and Linn K9 cartridge to it (both lying around in my hi-fi spares box) and was amazed that it sounded better than my finely fettled, very expensive, bought-new, Linn LP12/Itok/at-33E. I duly sold my Linn, and my second-hand (and slightly battered) Gyro and bought a brand new Michell Orbe. So there you go — used hi-fi can be a great stepping stone to new hi-fi. It’s also a great way to get lots of bang for your buck (metaphorically speaking; that wasn’t a reference to your A100’s unreliability)! DP

Hi Alan - yes, there’s a lot to be said for buying second-hand, and contrary to what many manufacturers seem to think, it doesn’t actually preclude people going on to buy new. Speaking personally, my first Michell GyroDec was a previously (well) owned example, from someone selling up to move to South Africa, I bought it, with GyroPower PSU, for £425, fitted a Rega R200 arm and Linn K9 cartridge to it (both lying around in my hi-fi spares box) and was amazed that it sounded better than my finely fettled, very expensive, bought-new, Linn LP12/Itok/at-33E. I duly sold my Linn, and my second-hand (and slightly battered) Gyro and bought a brand new Michell Orbe. So there you go — used hi-fi can be a great stepping stone to new hi-fi. It’s also a great way to get lots of bang for your buck (metaphorically speaking; that wasn’t a reference to your A100’s unreliability)! DP

TOP NOTCH
I am happy to say I received my pair of Eminent Technology LFT-16 loudspeakers on the same day you got the new review pair. They were delivered by Darren Hatcher of A&D Audio. The fit and finish does leave something to be desired. There were loose screws in both treble units, one that had no wood behind to fix to. Some glue or other material is evident on the midrange units and the wood has a small crack above one unit. Having said this the boxes are heavy and feel solid. They certainly pass the knuckle wrap test. Initially I was underwhelmed by the sound, it was a little muddled and veiled. The speakers were initially on low heavy spiked bases tilted backwards and angled inwards. The system they are in consists of a Benchmark DAC 1 pre amp, Channel Audio D200 power amp and an Xtreamer digital source and Michell GyroDec with Hodcock 242 arm Benz M2 cartridge and Benz Micro PP1 phonograph. All connected with a mix of Van Den Hul The First interconnect and Odyssey 2 speaker cable.

The speakers were run in with a burn-in CD from a rival magazine for 48 hours (source: an X Box). After running in the sound opened up a little, sounding more transparent with good front-to-back depth. They did however still seem a little dull to me. I experimented by putting the treble on the high (0 dB) setting. This was not successful and made them sound a little phasey on some material.

Hearing spoken to Darren he suggested the speakers be raised so the treble unit was at ear level. The speakers now reside on Atacama SL400 stands, These are sound filled, very rigid and not prone to ringing.

I have liked the bass on the LFT-16 from the beginning. It is very tuneful and fast, no doubt due to the sealed box. However, on the stands it takes another leap forward and integrates with midrange seamlessly. The speakers are far from being dull as I first thought and are very well balanced. They don’t shout the midrange or treble, but there is no lack of detail or insight. Tonally, I have never heard instruments more convincing. As for the sound stage there is space and air around each instrument and a real sense of height. I am genuinely hearing aspects of recordings I have not before, such as dubbed instruments and room acoustics.

The speakers are understated but dynamic, it is this ability to reproduce dynamics that gives the realism to the music. Records I have previously found difficult to listen to, such as the Sundazed reissue of MC5’s ‘High Time’ (Sundazed make the best of a poor original recording) now have more body and atmosphere that allow you to concentrate on the music for what it is. It is enough to say I usually combine listening with reading a hi-fi magazine or two, but since I have had these speakers I just find myself putting it down to listen. Thanks for a great magazine. Kevin Foster

Hi Kevin - that was a timely and interesting e-mail. I have only measured our second pair and even with the tweeter at ‘high’ the ‘speaker barely makes 10kHz – see our graph. Moreover, this was the best it could do over a narrow forward angle, so there is little treble energy going into the room and it will sound dull, exactly as you say. The speaker must be pointed at listeners for strongest treble. As you note though, the loudspeaker still offers fabulous results, quite different from cone loudspeakers and much better. I wondered whether the originals were the best loudspeaker I had ever heard at the price. NK

Kevin replies - I am so glad that you agree with my ears. I did not realise that much treble was missing, but cymbals and high hats, etc., do sound recessed. Despite this they are solid and lifelike. I have lived with Monitor Audio GS 100 for some months and a speaker based on the Loki dual concentric drive unit, both of which are more brightly lit and forward, but neither have the presence or realism of the LFT-16. Darren had told me the speakers were delayed because a crossover component was not available. Could a wrong value item in the crossover be the problem? Or perhaps it is a different $i^2$
tweeter unit? I do think the bass is very tuneful and well integrated. At ear level and pointed at me, the speakers now seem well balanced but a little dull, I shall try the high treble setting again. Presumably we shall get some feedback from the manufacturer; he seems an approachable man. I do hope that a solution to the treble fall off is available as these are great speakers that are getting better each listen. Once again many thanks for replying. I may see you at Whittlebury Hall if you are there, Darren promised me a couple of tickets!

Kevin Foster

UPGRADE DOWN UNDER

I am in need of some guidance regarding the common problem of an upgrade path. This has never been a problem, given I've always known what I wanted but now able to take another step and am confused which way to go. My system consists of the Usher CD1 and Northstar design CD players, Goldpoint SA1 passive pre and a pair of Usher R1.5 power amps in bridged configuration. My cable loom is made up of the Atlas Titan Al Cu interconnects and Ichor speaker cables. Power leads are Russ Andrews Sig and Oyaide Black Mamba on the CDP and Oyaide Tsunami gpxr on the power amps.

The problem I face is that my taste in music, as in how I listen to music, is changing. I don't listen to it as loud as I use to and my music is a touch more laid back than energising. I like everything that my current system does but am needing that bit extra to really grab my attention. My room is 8m x 6.5m; it's softly furnished with hard floors and heavy drapes. As for upgrades, whatever is recommended will be looked at in depth. Price wise or budget would be relative to the rest of the system. As I am in Australia hopefully it's available nearby!

Renee Barker

Hi Renee, JBL TL260 loudspeakers are not the subtlest of performers yet the Usher power amplifiers are good and will drive just about anything you choose. I suggest you try and listen to the latest Castle Knight range of loudspeakers, which I know are distributed into Australia and New Zealand. They are deliberately engineered to offer a more sober and more truthful approach to reproducing music than is common. I also rather like the Kingsound electrostatic range of loudspeakers. Manufactured in Hong Kong they are likely to be available in Oz.

NK

BIG SMILE

In your last edition you gave the Audiolab 8200DCQ a great review, but no mention of the ancillaries it was tested with; what power amp was used? What amp was used when used as a CD transport? You are usually very good at this sort of stuff so I was a tad disappointed, as at that price and with those facilities, a great sounding system could be had for a relatively small outlay, do you not think? Also, I have seen pics of the Audiosmile advantage active speakers that augment the Kensais, but still no review! I think I saw it mentioned around the end of last year in the "next month we have section", but still no joy?!

Also, I found the mod projects available for the Rega (Inspire Hi-Fi) and the SL1200 (from Sound Hi-Fi) both very interesting. The Timestep Evo looks amazing and also sounds well worth investigating.

I would love to see a review of the Audiomods take on upgrading the Rega tonearms, ideally on both of the above; would the Inspire mods not warrant such an arm, bearing in mind the price of each item?!

As I said before, thanks for a great mag. I look forward to hearing your views on the above. Keep up the good work!!

David

Hi David - sometimes we have to miss out our 'Reference System' panel on the grounds of space; the pages get too crowded and it becomes impossible to fit it in! Basically though, we all run fairly consistent reference systems from month to month, so if in doubt look up the name of the reviewer and find another review of his with the
Due to my domestic situation, specifically with regards to bookshelf loudspeakers, I hope you can give me some advice of all these modded arms to get you very soon, along with a supertest they’re certainly superb value. We’re more interesting than the almost the case that the modding Technics, Linn, Rega and Garrard 401

My Audio Design My1920 – a great ‘speaker solution for those lacking space...

‘Reference System’ panel shown; that’s about 95% accurate! If there’s something special or unusual about the systems/ancillaries being used, then we’ll always mention it in the text, anyway. As far as the Audiolab 3200CDQ was concerned, I ran it in several systems, but primarily with a Musical Fidelity AMS15i integrated amplifier (using the CDQ as a CD player, via its balanced outputs, as I remember) and of course my Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers. I also tried its preamp capabilities into a World Audio Design KS881 power amplifier.

Regarding our ‘Next Month’ page, I have to periodically remind readers that I say “here’s what we hope to bring you”. Note use of “hope”, for hoping is all a poor editor can do when promised lots of tasty new kit that’s “just a few weeks away” by the manufacturer or PR, and then it never materialises for any number of reasons – often beyond the control of even the manufacturer! So please take this almost as a “wish list”; what yours would truly like to see the Santa Claus of the Hi-Fi World to deliver down the World Towers chimney before the next issue is done...

We’ve been amazed by the range of mods packages for, variously, the Technics, Linn, Rega and Garrard 401 (and indeed this issue has two more superb variations on the theme); it’s almost the case that the modding world is more interesting than the new turntable releases right now, and they’re certainly superb value. We’re lining up an Audiomods review for you very soon, along with a superetest of all these modded arms to get some sort of perspective. Watch this space...

ON THE SHELF

I hope you can give me some advice with regards to bookshelf loudspeakers. Due to my domestic situation, specifically a young child running around, I am having to trade in my current Sugden Masterclass integrated amplifier and Focal Electra 1007BE speakers as the hi-fi will be relegated from dedicated rack to a closed cabinet and the speakers from their stands to the top of the cabinet. The rest of my kit consists of a Cyrus CD XT and DAC XP. I also have a Linn Majik power amplifier, which I am considering bringing back into service as it runs cool and should therefore be happy in a cabinet. I have a large music collection across a range of genres and primarily listen to Americana, Indie and Rock. I’m not sure of the trade in value of the Sugden and Focals but hope to have up to £2,000 available to buy a new pair of bookshelf speakers and possibly a new power amp. I would prefer a sound that is tonally coloured and am happy with my current kit’s presentation which I find very smooth, but also clear and detailed.

I recently read your review of the MAD My1920 speakers and think they could be a good fit and suit my taste. How do you think they would pair with the Cyrus kit and Linn Power Amp? Also, do you think they would be suitable sighted on top of a cabinet and close to a rear wall. The lounge itself is long and thin, I listen around the room and am around 10ft from the speakers, which measured 592W, as I recall!), which is plenty enough for the MADs – it will tickle them nicely and allow them to punch hard into your room. The clever thing here is that the Rotel uses B&O’s IcePower Class D chips, so the amp runs totally cool even at full whack - a Musical

Rotel RB1092 Class D power amplifier, produces massive power and stays cool.
Paul Geoghegan uses a Magnum Dynalab tuner to receive quality VHF/FM in the Emerald Isle (Ireland).

Fidelity A100 it is not (I refer the honourable gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago; see SECOND CHANCE)! This should fit into your cabinet nicely...The Rotel is a touch on the dry side, tonally speaking, but should complement the My Audio Design speakers which are, if anything, just a tad warm. I'd recommend Black Rhodium's Tango speaker cable (£15/m), which is nicely smooth and silky too, for this application. DP

RADIO GAGA

Steve Green has had a running commentary on radio reception from the BBC with some occasional comments for other areas of Europe, including Lyric FM in the Emerald Isle. Last Monday, 15th August I heard a live streaming broadcast from BBC Radio 3 of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake on my very recently acquired music server from Cambridge Audio [NP 30]. Thanks for the review that influenced my leap in that direction. Most of the stations I visited were coming through at 128kbps WMA. However, the BBC Radio 3 broadcast that night was coming through at 478kbps AAC. I had a feeling we were in for a good night's listen.

To say it was good was an understatement; my wife and myself were spellbound. I have never heard live radio like this, it was stunning. I should mention that I do like FM and have heard some good broadcasts, admittedly not BBC Radio 3 on FM as it is beyond my range. It shows what can be done.

A visit to various websites indicate that the BBC are running test broadcasts. Well, I think they have cracked it, absolute perfection or as close as can be reasonably expected. The following day, Tuesday 16th, the quality dropped slightly to 466kbps and then to 307kbps for Wednesday 17th. These bit rate figures are still good and make for great listening.

Very sadly, the local state radio station here in Ireland for classical music, Lyric FM, broadcasts at 32kbps. I think they believe Microsoft's statement that 32kbps is audio quality when everyone else realises that this is not the case. Programme content is great but broadcast quality really sucks. FM is no better with clicks, pops and clacks with volume drops. My FM tuner is a Magnum Dynalab FM 90 which is very good at pulling in a quality programme, when it's there. Incidentally, the clicks and pops are also audible on my car radio some distance from the house which removes housebound issues as being the problem.

It seems to me that if you want to listen to digital radio in your car, or generally as background music in your house, then best buy a table top DAB radio. If you want to listen to digital radio more seriously, then invest in a music server streamer that can pull in live streaming broadcasts worldwide. I hope BBC Radio 3 maintain this streaming quality for its a real achievement. Keep up the good work in the magazine. I enjoy my monthly read.

Paul Geoghegan

Hi Paul - yes, one of the 'side effects' of me spending so much time with network music players of late has been me almost accidentally listening to a lot of internet radio. You're right, the quality is variable, but it can be very good indeed - a particular fave of mine is Radio Paradise (www.radioparadise.com), which plays fine rock music at a decent bitrate. The great thing about internet radio (as opposed to DAB) is of course that it's extensible, which is to say the bitrate can be instantly and invisibly upgraded; it's just a case of the broadcasters being bothered. It's great when the Beeb does bother - it saddens me that over the past decade it's been on a race to the bottom in terms of both content and technical quality. A few less home improvement shows on BBC1 and dire sitcoms on BBC3, and a few more serious bits of music broadcasting such as what you've outlined, would be welcomed by us all. If anyone at the BBC is reading this (and I'm aware that some do), then I'm sure I can speak for all the readers when I say we like you when you remember who you are (i.e. the BBC) and don't try to compete with commercial stations for ratings. That's why we pay our licence fees, much as many of us resent it these days. Okay, I'm off my soapbox now - time for a glass of water and a calming half hour of Radio 4! DP

DOWN AND DIRTY

I am currently listening to 2LS the Nordic Sound sampler 2 disc SACD / Blu-ray disc. Some wonderful music. I am currently playing the 2ch 192/24bit layer on my Sony BDP-S370 connected to my Rego DAC via a QED co-axial cable. When I hit the DISPLAY button on the Sony's remote it confirms that I am playing the 2ch 192/24 layer. However, the Frequency LED lit on the Rego indicates the incoming sample rate is 44.1/48kHz. Will it be impossible to get the 192/24 layer unmolested to the DAC via this type of connection? I am assuming the Sony is downsampling the coaxial output to 16/44.1kHz despite what it says via the display, or could the Rego be telling porkies?

Derek James

The digital audio (SPDIF) output on your Sony is most likely streaming 16/44.1 to your DAC as you suspect, because this interface cannot support more than 96kHz sample rate in stereo. Downconverting to CD standard is the safe thing to do, allowing the player to interface with any external device to give sound. What manufacturers try and avoid these days is a 'no sound' scenario that leaves users confused and dissatisfied. So you get the lowest common denominator option; anything that works! You could look at the player's audio menus; on access you can set the maximum output sample rate to 96kHz but I do not recall this option on the Sony. You must use
Cambridge Audio Azur 751BD Blu-ray player has selectable analogue output filters, but it is expensive.

the HDMI output to enjoy 24/192 high resolution digital audio and at present only A/V receivers, or A/V preamplifiers (e.g. Onkyo) can accept and make sense of an HDMI input.

NK

THE BLUES

I very much enjoy reading your Hi-Fi World editorials. Earlier in the year I read a review you wrote of the Pioneer BDP-LX53 and Cambridge Audio 650BD. I have been researching both of these players to replace my current universal DVD Pioneer player, but my limited technical knowledge of digital to analogue converter chips has left me in a bit of a quandary.

I was hoping I could ask for your advice in this regard? I realise that at this point these companies have new players (Oppo BDP-95 and Cambridge Azure 751BD), so I'm wondering if I should choose from the new players instead? Or is the audio performance between the new players and the older players negligible? Is the performance of the Cambridge Azure 751BD worth twice the price of the 650BD?

Either way, my main question is regarding the difference in audio performance between the Dual ES9018 SABRE 32-bit Reference DACs in the Oppo BDP-95 and the five Wolfson WM8740 24/192kHz DACs in the Cambridge 751BD. I see that one is a 32bit versus a 24bit. Not knowing enough about the technical difference it seems that the Oppo DAC would be superior to the Cambridge DAC. Is that reasonable to assume or is that misleading? I prefer the design of the Cambridge players, but I want to buy the player that will create the best audio playback from SACD, Audio-DVD and Blu-ray. I will be using the analogue 7.1-channel surround outputs to connect to my Rotel processor. My priority is audio performance over video. I hope this is not too trivial of a question for you, as I'm at a loss trying to decide which player to choose given the different DACs employed.

Alberto Trujillo

Hi Alberto. I am sorry to disappoint you but I have not heard the analogue output of the Oppo BDP-95 so cannot comment upon its analogue performance. I have measured and carefully listened to the Cambridge 751BD and whilst it is a good analogue player, it isn't the best by any means. That is because Blu-ray players are intended to work with A/V receivers via HDMI; their analogue outputs are not a priority. You would be better advised to buy a modern Onkyo receiver like the TX-NR609 (see our review) and use HDMI connection. If you want the very best from SACD then get a more expensive Onkyo or Marantz receiver, preferably with proper DSD convertors. I compared the 751BD with the 650BD in our September 2011 issue. I hope this helps you. NK

We have an Oppo BDP-95 on order - review coming soon. DP

COMPUTER BUILD

I wonder if you could help me. I am about to have a new computer build and would like to be able to download music and burn high definition discs to play on my hi-fi system. My current, elderly PC is not connected to my system and the few CDs I have burned from downloads sound rather dull and lo-res, though the music sounded well through the PC speakers. Can you advise as to the required hardware/software needed to burn high fidelity discs; does burn speed affect quality? The dearth of record shops these days means the only way to buy music is online; gone are the days of Rare Records, Forsythe, Virgin and dozens of other record stores. I hope you can help me. I will be specifying a PC based around an Intel i5 processor, the rest is dependent on what you suggest. Thank you for reading my request.

Fred Davies

Hi Fred - what a subject! There's enough to discuss here to fill the entire magazine. The answer to your question depends on how seriously you want to take the subject of computer audio, and what your budget is. If you're really serious, then I suggest to you get an off-the-shelf audio computer from Item Audio, for example (see www.itemaudio.co.uk). There's a choice of platforms (Mac or PC) and you can specify just about everything you want; the key is zero noise fanless operation, internal electromagnetic shielding, a rigid low vibration chassis and with high quality components. Solid-state SSD hard drives are pretty much essential, as are good quality internal cables. If you don't go

For an audiophile PC go to Item Audio says our editor, David Price.
for the Item Audio solution then aim for all the aforementioned in your build choices. As far as burning is concerned, you need to run the best quality optical media at the lowest possible burning speeds, while the computer itself is not doing any other tasks. DP

LOUDSPEAKER UPGRADE

My last letter to you, written in the summer of 2007 listed a wide range of kit which worked okay but failed to deliver truly enjoyable listening. In between times I culled much of the equipment in an attempt to simplify things. One mistake was to buy the Pioneer A-A6 integrated amp on the basis of a glowing review; how bitterly disappointing this proved to be and I could not dispose of it fast enough (thanks eBay)! Then a colleague loaned me a Naim CDS5 NAC121 NAP150 just to see what I thought. Running this through Naim NAC5 cable to my Acoustic Energy Evo3 floorstanders was an utter revelation — absolutely stunning sound. At last, decent solid punchy bass, lovely vocals and imaging like we have never heard before. A deal was swiftly done and my remaining old components headed for eBay too. I have since indulged in a Naim tuner and Flatcap PSU which does make a difference...

Maybe a single brand system won’t give the last degree of perfection but I have lost the urge to change boxes in search of better sound; it all just works so well. However, I do think that the speakers are now outclassed by the electronics. I have yet to audition the speakers, at wildly differing price bands and I have for a Naim system, headed for eBay too. I have since indulged in a Naim tuner and Flatcap PSU which does make a difference...

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What do you think? Musical tastes vary from lighter classical to a bit of rock (ACDC, Led Zeppelin), to soul and dance (70s disco), to soul and dance (70s disco), to soul and dance (70s disco), to soul and dance (70s disco). This might explain why you don’t necessarily see the same musical tastes in others. It all just works so well. However, I do think that the speakers are now outclassed by the electronics. I have yet to audition the speakers, at wildly differing price bands. However, it was a bit disappointed to your reply to John Watson in the July issue regarding Hadcocks and cartridges. Noel clearly isn’t keen and the respected Alvin Gold’s contribution was akin to a Yemeni saying “I was very hungry, so I thought about fish and chips, then I was considering tagliatelle and then I saw a picture of lemon cheesecake and felt strangely drawn to it — what do you think I should eat?” My point is that you’ve read on a list of wildly different speakers, at wildly differing price points, and asked me what I think? What I think is that I don’t really know what you want because there’s no pattern to follow, so it becomes a tricky diagnostic process.

If it’s light rock and soul you’re into, and you have a Naim system, and you want floorstanders, and your budget doesn’t seem to be constrained than I’d consider the Eminent Technology LFT-Bb. These use superb 'isodynamic' drive units for a sweet, transparent, spacious sound that would really suit your musical tastes, and offer moderate but effective bass; your Naim drivers should drive them no problem. They’re pretty affordable too, as exotic floorstanders go! DP

HO HUM

I love the Letters section, I really do! Then again I can see with all the pressures of the 'day' job, you can be a little distracted. If you have a set of Tannoy Westminsters sitting in your hall and a letter describing the mythical powers of a 1960s cartridge that sounds superb in a 1970s Laskys special and is clearly better than any other cartridge (ever!), I can sympathise. However, I was a bit disappointed to your reply to John Watson in the July issue regarding Hadcocks and cartridges. Noel clearly isn’t keen and the respected Alvin Gold’s contribution was akin to a dinner party guest who’d reached the port stage.

I have an interest as I’m using a Hadcock 242 with a Goldring idler drive and am currently using a Musicmaker cartridge. I read Raphael Todes recent review and agree that pairing the Hadcock with an idler drive creates a unique synergy. I bought the arm about seven years ago to replace a warn bearing Akito on my Linn. After the initial excitement about it being better I discovered it wasn’t. It didn’t have the lovely micro rhythms of the Linn pairing and wasn’t a great success on my rock/prog collection. I compounded the problem with the Musicmaker which tonally was superior to my Denon DL304 but that was about it.

I persuaded myself that an Ortofon Rondo Bronze was the way to go but really it’s too heavy for a Hadcock and is a bit like racing a bus around Silverstone. At this stage my wife bought me a Pioneer PL12D and when that seemed more enjoyable than the Linn, I knew it was time for revision. The Lenco came with a Mission 774 SM (the Itok rival) and after happy times with this I put the arm on the Linn with the Ortofon and finally understood about system synergy.

Now back to John Watson’s question. The Musicmaker works superbly with the Hadcock but the Lenco motor is causing the cartridge to hum. I understand this is a longstanding problem with Grado based cartridges. Would the Audio Technica AT33E provide an answer? You’ve a long list of contributors who’ve listened extensively to the types of setups both John and I have so there must be an answer somewhere. I play the turntables through Creti pre/ VTL ST85 power and Monitor Audio Studio 20s.

Steven Slawther

Yes, even in their heyday in the nineteen seventies, Grados did have hum issues, as I recall, and of course the MusicMaker shares a lot of DNA with them. None of our long list of contributors have heard this exact combination, I am afraid, so we can’t
DIRECT LINE

Fascinating to read about your new turntable measuring regime, and I thought you might like to hear about my experiences with two decks I recently acquired. They are a Dual 505.1 and a Yamaha P-520 direct-drive, bought at the same time in a British Heart Foundation furniture and electrical store for £1.5 each! Both were obviously low hours, particularly the Dual. They are, coincidentally, peers both in era (early 1980s) and their price at that time. I have a Townshend Rock part-way through a complete rebuild, which hopefully will soon be up and running with a Garratt Decca C4E, but I needed to do some transfers of LPs for a friend, and the two decks were an opportune find.

Despite its near-mint condition, I assumed the Dual would have ‘dried out’ (which proved to be the case), so it is less likely to give hum problems on comparison. There are two things about the Yamaha I wouldn’t have noticed were it not for the A/Bing I was able to do with the Dual.

1 - the ‘timing’ of the Yamaha is what I would describe as slightly ‘constipated’ compared to Dual; the latter has a ‘fluidity’ that the former simply lacks...

2 - The Dual has a (really quite surprising) purity and clarity with voices and instruments which the Yamaha also lacks. This was evident on most discs (not all - but I suspect it was less so on those from less than perfectly played master-tapes which had inherent wow/flutter issues), not least the first two AC/DC's ‘Highway To Hell’ (180g re-release) and ‘In A Blue Mood’ by Kay Starr (1985 re-release of a c. 1955 LP). (BTW I pretty much ignored AC/DC in my formative years, despite having a life-long penchant for hard rock (I’m 52) and now I can’t fathom why - this superb mastering of a superb album has given me (and many others) an immense amount of pleasure in recent months.)

Take the chiming, bell-like power-chords that Angus Young is so brilliant in producing - they have just that on the Dual, a bell-like quality which is not present with the Yamaha. Ditto Kay Starr’s voice, along with the muted brass and other orchestral instruments on the latter album.

Then the timing - ‘Highway To Hell’ just damn(sic)-well boogies on the Dual (feet can’t keep still), not so the Yamaha. Despite the fact that the Dual is distinctly light in the bass in producing - they have just that on the Dual, a bell-like quality which is not present with the Yamaha. Ditto Kay Starr’s voice, along with the muted brass and other orchestral instruments on the latter album.

Then the timing - ‘Highway To Hell’ just damn(sic)-well boogies on the Dual (feet can’t keep still), not so the Yamaha. Despite the fact that the Dual is distinctly light in the bass, the kick-drums and bass-lines are still unmistakably there and making their intrinsic part in the music known. Both decks have strobes which tell me they are both very speed-stable in terms of drift and very-low rate wow, but sometimes I think I might perceive a little variation with the Dual. But then again I could be looking too hard and imaging it (I find using peripheral vision is the best way to do this).

I have to assume that the direct drive ‘cogging’ you’ve been discussing is the root of these singular differences in sound, but it’s surprising that artefacts down in single and double-digit Hertz could be responsible for such a profound difference in them. My friend also has the Kay Starr album as a set of three 45’s, which I also transferred. Interestingly, although they actually have a slightly ‘better’ sound in terms of dynamics and even detail, they lack the purity of tone on the LP and thus I believe the tapes were not as well set up as they were for the LPs. In fact I think this is actually visible as less rock-solid peaks in spectrograms as they are played, viewed on my PC.

Rainer Scott

Hmmm. Thanks for that Rainer. Forensic measurement has revealed only small cogging effects; I have yet to measure anything large. Unfortunately, the presence of cogging was much amplified and speculated upon by the UK press when Direct Drive first appeared and I am not at all certain that an explanation of the sound of DD is anywhere near as simple as this. Even the mechanical construction of a DD may introduce sonic problems. In your case too I must note you are listening to different cartridges as well.

MAD ABOUT THE GUIDE!

I am so pleased to see your old Buying Guide back up and running on the Internet. I was using it on a very regular basis up until it’s disappearance from the Net and quite frankly (as daft as it may sound), when it went I was lost without it! Thing is, all the stuff that I wanted in the mid 1990s but couldn’t afford is now available 2nd hand as good prices (e.g. eBay and cash converters) and this guide is absolutely ideal for helping out with research on this older (but golder) stuff (for example turntable cartridges and mid end CD players as upgrades). Apart from product reviews, I find it very useful for checking this 1990s stuff’s price when new, to give a good feel for where the item sits in the pecking order and welcome help with likely component matches. Today’s Buying Guides are pretty useless to me. I’m a lot happier now I’ve got the use of yours again.

Richard Franks

Thanks for writing in Richard. We resurrected this guide in response to your request and those of so many others who wrote in from around the world. Now we understand the value, I hope we can improve this listing slowly.

NK
People I speak to often "wonder whether I should get a Blu-ray". Sony have more interest than most in persuading them to do so, because they were one of its original developers. The BDP-S480 is an instrument in the process of persuasion, otherwise known as marketing: it's as cheap as chips but it does a great job at a price of just £140 or so. I can't see why anyone wouldn't want a player like this, it does so much but costs so little. But I am a Blu-ray fan. It is still early days for Blu-ray and people remain ambivalent toward it.

The BDP S-480 plays more varieties of silver disc than all except the best players, like the Cambridge 650BD I use. In fact it plays all silver discs, including SACD high resolution music discs, but not the high resolution PCM on DVD-As (DVD audio only discs, now obsolete). It does of course play DVD video discs, as do all Blu-ray players, and it upsamples the video to high definition specification. This process cannot in theory improve picture quality other than to make it smoother through interpolation, but in practice DVDs do look better through a Blu-ray player, I have found.

It plays CD of course, and last but not least it plays Blu-ray discs, including high definition audio discs. I'll point out quickly here this means audio discs of appreciably better sound quality than CD. In effect, Blu-ray players were to replace CD players, except as usual the industry blew this opportunity by betting the future lay in surround-sound from a silver disc, when it turned out to be tunes from thin air. What concerns many readers wondering whether to get a Blu-ray is whether it will connect into their stereo: well, all of them do this. The Sony has stereo sockets on the rear. What it does not have is a 5.1 analogue output set of sockets, for connection to an old analogue-only receiver. If you have one of these, it is time to bin it. AV receivers have improved a lot over the last few years and Onkyo and Marantz offer great receivers at bargain prices. They all have an HDMI digital input and this is what you need to use to fully utilise and appreciate any Blu-ray player, especially if you intend to spin SACD music discs.

Providing you set it to PCM in its audio menu, the BDP-S480 will output SACD sound from its analogue stereo sockets. Setting to PCM introduces onboard DSD-to-PCM transcoding so the digital signal can be sent through the onboard PCM DACs, because dedicated DSD converters are too expensive to use. Surround-sound is internally mixed down to stereo.

This might sound like no way to treat super high quality SACD and it isn't ideal, but our measurements confirmed that DSD code does not get mashed in the process; distortion was lower than CD and bandwidth wider and more analogue like, so via its analogue outputs the humble BDP-S480 manages well for the price when used as a simple CD/SACD player. Even its jitter was very low!

Connected up to an AV receiver able to process the DSD code from SACD the BDP-S480 can be internally set to output raw DSD over the HDMI line, allowing SACD to be heard in full surround-sound (or stereo) through the receiver. For receivers unable to process DSD it can be set to output PCM.
If you have a DVD-A collection then the Sony will play them, but only the Dolby (AC-3) surround-sound track, not the high resolution (24/96) PCM track. This isn't always so bad though; for example Carlos Santana's 'Supernatural' DVD-A sounded better in AC-3 on the Sony than the stereo mixdown on the CD, which for some reason is very ropey, possibly attributable to low quality mix down studio processing.

To enjoy high definition video from Blu-ray you need an HDTV, connected by an HDMI cable that carries both video and audio in high resolution digital form. All Blu-ray players are currently backwards compatible to older equipment though, including this one, and you can connect up an old TV using its Composite or Component signals. The player does not have a SCART output though, nor S-Video (European version). The Component output is restricted in quality, according to Sony's specs. This points to a limitation of the BDP-S480: it is not especially strong in backwards compatibility. Not only is component quality limited but the player's digital audio output is electrical only; there is no optical TOSLINK SPDIF output, common on other players, nor are there analogue surround-sound outs as I mentioned earlier.

All video formats are catered for, including 1080p progressive video. Both Sony and Panasonic camcorders now offer HD video running at 50/60 progressive frames a second and the BDP-S480 did indeed play a 1080p Blu-ray disc of video from my Panasonic HDC-TM900 camcorder, providing it was set to 1080p. Set to Auto, it converted it to 50i, which wasn't very nice, producing shimmering effects on verticals (lamp posts) as the camera panned horizontally. But with 50p the player indicated a 23Mbps data rate when the Display button was pressed, much below the 28Mbps expected. Picture quality was far better from my Cambridge 650BD which also plays 50p, but it ran the same sequence at an indicated data rate of 28-32Mbps - much higher and a high rate by any standard. This gives video approaching good quality broadcast TV, at least when the sun is out (and the wind in the right direction). The Sony fell behind the Cambridge here, but then it is a lot cheaper and the need to reproduce 50p to perfection is hardly mainstream.

As you would expect the player can be set to decode lossless Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio, sending PCM out to a receiver unable to process these formats. I checked these functions at 24/192 resolution with the 2L 'Divertimenti' music Blu-ray, and with a Dolby test disc, as well as with ordinary programme discs and all worked well.

The player identified my PC on the home network and was able to start the Windows Media player to access both photographs and music, whereas this normally has to be initiated at the computer. It also has a web browser, can access YouTube (great for music videos) and much, much more – because Sony have really strengthened up this aspect of the player compared to the BDP-S370 I reviewed in our October 2010 issue. For more detail on the player's web related connectivity it's useful to read the handbook, available on Sony's UK website, under the Support section. It is a downloadable PDF.

I do not much like the player's T-bar on-screen navigation scheme, where the player defaults to player menus rather than a disc's top menu. Also, it repeatedly blocked my actions with a Gracenote look up warning; generally the control logic was a bit messy because Sony try to get all functions up on screen, instead of delineating them. This was OK when there were few, but now it looks messy - and trivial obstructive messages are a real no-no, as that deprecation of software gone mad, Vista, once showed us.

You can control the player with an iPhone, but I did not try this. Load times were similar to the earlier BDP-S370 I reviewed in our October 2010 issue, 22 seconds for the Java menu of John Meyer's 'Where the Light Is' which is fast as it normally takes 30 seconds, and just 10 seconds for a CD. Curiously, our standard
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BDMV test BD-R took 17 seconds to load, compared to 14 seconds before, and it should load in 10 seconds or so, meaning the Sony can be a tad slow with some discs, but not all. Loading was lengthened by 10 seconds if Auto was not selected in the Video menu. The software was updated from M07.R.0213 to M07.R.0427 upon arrival, prior to review.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Sound quality from the analogue output was good, as measurement suggested, making this a half decent stereo CD player for those so interested. It isn't an audiophile player, as some readers hopefully ask about budget Blu-ray players, but it does an honest and decent basic job, where earlier Sony players did not. Sony have stopped trying to stuff sub-standard audio electronics into such products hoping no one would notice. Many buyers want decent analogue stereo and as Samsung can give it to them, Sony were never in a position to decide not to. Connected to my Marantz SR8002 receiver and spinning standard Rock, the Eagles CD 'Long Road out of Eden', showed the usual dry, firm if one dimensional sound, a tad less generous and atmospheric than the Cambridge. There was still plenty of punch in the drumming though; the S480 was not anaemic and nor was it coarse or edgy as some budget players can be due to cheap DACs.

With SACD, violins of the Marinsky Theatre orchestra were well separated, one from another, behind Lang Lang playing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2, their strings having the smooth analogue quality that SACD is known for; in this respect the BDP-S480 performs unusually well by preserving the strengths of the format through its analogue outputs. Bear in mind our measurements show 24bit equivalent distortion levels (i.e. very low) from the analogue outputs when playing SACDs and the benefit is discernible, if not as obvious as in higher resolution players.

The analogue output was similar in balance and dynamics to the electrical digital output A/B comparison showed, but as is often the case the digital link was a trifle more specific in its images, and suffered less subliminal muddle. The sound stage was wider too, partly because full left and right images were more firmly established. Lack of jitter on the S/PDIF link gave the sound a pristine quality that could only be matched on HDMI by switching off the video content at the receiver by selecting Pure DSD. The player itself has no Video Off feature, unlike the Cambridge, but then it is basic, not an audiophile machine.

Spinning the close miked harp of Yolanda Kondonassis playing 'Malgueña' (beautifully) on SACD underscored how clean the S/PDIF output of this machine is, now appreciably tidier and more pristine than analogue. Note that this player processes the high resolution DSD layer of SACDs our measurements confirm, where most Blu-rays just play the CD quality layer, that is the difference. One consequence of this is that the analogue and S/PDIF outputs fall silent when DSD is selected (because there is no conversion to PCM); the CD layer of an SACD cannot be directed through them.

Switching the player to DSD output via HDMI gave full SACD surround-sound from the receiver of course, as the Marantz can process DSD. Spinning music concert Blu-rays like John Meyer's 'Where the Lights Is' gave fine sound quality, native or PCM output. Our many 2L 24/192 Blu-rays and SACDs all played perfectly, sound quality being determined by the receiver of course.

Picture quality was very good and a tad above other similarly priced players, our HQV and Spears & Munsil test discs showed. Our own test sequence on 1080 50i of an idling Tiger Moth at Duxford airfield looked very good, with plenty of detail in grass and trees, the slowly idling prop having a smooth blur. Silky colours suggested low noise. The John Meyer concert (VC-I HD video at 60p) also came across well, with an indicated data rate of no less than 40Mpps. Replay video quality reached a high standard, the solid quality is lightweight and the front controls unpleasant, but the remote control is handy enough. A Display button puts up a lot of tech info on what is playing too.

**CONCLUSION**

With mountains of ability and no major weaknesses Sony's BDP-S480 is a great way to enter the world of Blu-ray and high definition audio and video. This applies to audiophiles as much as those who want decent pictures, especially audiophiles who'd like to enjoy SACDs as well as other silver discs. Great value then, and a fine audio player too.

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**TABLE OF MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

| Frequency response from CD through the analogue outputs was flat to 21.6kHz, our analysis shows. Frequency response with 96kHz sample rate digital reached 40kHz and with DSD code from SACD a high 65kHz, these results being identical to the outgoing BDP-S370. Distortion levels were low with CD (i.e. 16bit), measuring 0.22% at -60dB, resulting in an EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 95dB. As usual distortion dropped with 24bit, the player returning a low 0.1% at -60dB and 0.1% from DSD code. This is a relatively good performance for a budget player, showing Sony has put some effort into the analogue performance. PCM must be selected to get DSD from the analogue outputs. Jitter levels from S/PDIF were good, a 1kHz-60dB tone producing 50pS of signal related jitter, whilst random jitter hovered around 10pS across the audio band, and low rate clock drift was just 150pS. Output was a normal 2.05V.

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**VERDICT**

Excellent entry level BD player with fine picture and decent sound, plus useful internet functionality.

**FOR**

- excellent picture quality
- decent sound for the price
- SACD playback
- internet functionality

**AGAINST**

- slightly fiddly navigation
- slowish disc access
**Hi-Fi World**

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"Absolutely fantastic" CHROMIUM STYLE 5.1

"Tuneful bass Tweeter scintillates... Impressively built and finished off for the price" - ORKAN VIII

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"Sweet and smooth" - 4.5/5 - ALTAN VIII

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SOUNDBITES

AVID ISORAK
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The Avid Isorak is a simple to build, modular isolation shelving system. Constructed from either 30mm black or 26mm oak veneered MDF, the shelves can be supplied on three or four legs (black or silver) of varying lengths, providing a bespoke unit. The secure-slot design simplifies stacking; you just rest one shelf upon another. Each set of legs rests on the legs below, separated by a large ball bearing providing isolation. Finally, each shelf provides heat dissipation slots plus a 'tidy' hole for cabling.

LISTENING TO THE AVID ISORAK

Listening began with my Icon CD-X1 CD player, perched upon a simple MDF table. Spinning the King Crimson-esque tones of Polyphony’s ‘Without Introduction’ (Gear Fab), it was no surprise to hear a forward, sometimes bright series of upper frequencies. In fact, treble flailed about like a tree in a storm, losing direction and precision while bass sounded like a hillside full of sheep – woolly. More, the lack of structure allowed it to bleed into other frequency areas robbing the lead guitar of much of its impact.

Placing the CD-X1 on the Isorak, for an 'ending' fee. This is where each cable wire end is coated with tin (at 450°C). You can also request banana plugs to end each cable (which costs another £30 on top of the ending fee) but Origin Live doesn’t recommend it, stating that the tin ending is a superior conductor.

To test the Linear Flow 2s, I compared them with a set of Chord Epic Twins (£37 per metre). In comparison to the OLs, the Epic Twins sounded slower. Playing a range of vinyl-based female vocal jazz, the Epics showed a good upper midrange performance but the treble lacked life and pace was slower. The Linear Flow 2s on the other hand, displayed more energy and verve. Bass showed greater punch while the upper mids provided more attack during, for example an acoustic guitar strum while treble-based cymbal work had an altogether lighter and more metallic ring. Listening to the Linear Flow 2s for an extended period across varying additional musical genres, these cables showed more clarity with added depth to vocals. Offering excellent sound quality for a very reasonable price, the Origin Live Linear Flow 2s will provide the basis for a top drawer hi-fi system.

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Super Star

It’s not every day you find bespoke SACD players, but Bladelius’s Freja III is precisely this. David Price dusts down his Super Audio Compact Disc collection and enjoys hi res, millennium-style...

As I write this, television is awash with the 9/11 commemorations, with nostalgic looks back at how the world was on that awful day. Tony Blair was at the height of his political powers, the charts were still owned by Oasis and the England cricket team was a national disgrace – what a different world it was! In hi-fi too, things certainly weren’t the same as now; MP3 players were crude in the extreme, a new generation of music fans were learning that they didn’t need to pay thanks to Napster, and SACD and DVD-Audio were squaring up for a format war that never was...

Back then every week I’d get emails telling me of countless new hi res disc releases, whereas now there are precious few new SACDs; DVD-Audio has well and truly died. There are some rays of light, with several websites offering hi res downloads (B&W’s Society of Sound being one example), but it’s fair to say that optical disc-based hi res never really came to much, much to my chagrin. And so why, pray tell, would anyone want a bespoke, non-universal two-channel SACD player such as the Bladelius Freja Mk.III?

Well, I still like Super Audio Compact Disc. Indeed, as optical disc formats go it remains my favourite by a long way, and I do have a number of discs. Linn Records are releasing stunning classical music on this format on an almost weekly basis, and there’s still a fair range of discs available. Amazon UK lists classic rock albums from Pink Floyd, Sting, Dire Straits, Steely Dan, The Who, Elton John, Depeche Mode, etc. for around £10, and Nick Drake’s ‘A Treasury’ compilation is a mere £2.97! So it’s not quite game over for the ageing format – SACD is not going to take over the world in the way that it once promised, but like punk it’s still not quite dead!

The Bladelius hails from Sweden, recognisably so. It’s an object lesson in clean modern design, with beautifully brushed aluminium casework, radiuses at the edges to great effect, and a fascia that’s an essay in minimalism; just a power, open, stop and play button (all else is on the remote control). The greenish blue alphanumeric fluorescent display is wonderfully retro in...
"SACD is not going to take over the world in the way that it once promised, but like punk it's still not quite dead!"

appearance, sporting zeros that have a diagonal bar going through them from bottom left to top right, just like you'd see from a computer in a nineteen seventies science fiction adventure! The disc tray isn't the slickest but is decent enough, and as per all SACD players track access is a little pedestrian, but the overall effect is of a nice machine to use. At 125x440x445mm, the unit is unusually large, but much of this is air (doubtless the purer Scandinavian variety) as it weighs a middling 10kg.

Inside, the company have done a fully balanced design, which sports (I presume) a Sony SACD/CD mechanism (with CD Text), "super high performance", Burr Brown digital converters (two per channel), which upsample to 192kHz on CD. For low jitter, the clock is mounted right up close to the DACs. There's also a generous toroidal transformer with separate power supplies for the digital and analogue sections. Round the back, there's a choice of RCA phono or balanced outputs (I used the latter), plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. Overall standards of finish are excellent and the Freja is very nice to live with, if you don't mind its bulk taking over your equipment rack, that is!

SOUND QUALITY

Pricewise, the Bladelius inhabits a strange world between 'affordable' silver disc spinners and the true high end designs, so for it to justify its price it had to give more than a taste of the latter. I'm pleased to say it did, on both CD and SACD (which of course substantially outperformed the stock Compact Disc variant). The essence of this machine is its cleanliness. It's not an exceptionally forceful sounding design, with massive crashing bass or searing treble that imposes itself on the listener just because it can (a la certain Japanese machines I can think of). Instead
it simply gets on with giving an unsullied rendition of what's on the disc in a controlled yet engaging way.

Kicking off with Simple Minds' "Someone, Somewhere In Summertime," and the Freja showed a cool muscularity with the thundering pop rhythms of this classic early eighties stormer. I was struck by the tautness of the kick drum, and the way it played off against the snare, which was carried with dizzying impact and speed; meanwhile the hi hats glistened away behind in the mix, with silkiness that you'd never get from a CD player at any price. The Bladelius showcased the wonderful shimmering clarity of SACD, making short work of a mix that can sound murky via cooking Compact Disc, and indeed a number of lesser SACD players. It was exceptionally clear alright, but not bright — there was, if anything, a sense of things sounding a little less upfront than via Red Book CD.

Moving to Steely Dan's 'Babylon Sisters' on SACD, and the Bladelius was again something close to majestic. It set up a massively powerful groove, with punching bass drum, thumping snares and dramatic vocal peaks, all underpinned by warm washes of keyboard accompaniment. The track was bubbling with subtle detailing, but this didn't detract one jot from the natural quality flow freely. It's not convincing either! On both scores, you should have no fears about the Bladelius Freja III — I have found it extremely capable all round. My only worry was it might turn out to be good, but not good enough for its price point, and again there was no cause for concern, as I'm struggling to think of any stock CD player that sounds obviously better at the price. What you get is a very controlled, composed and cool customer that doesn't editorialise or lose the plot, neither is it in any way dry, cerebral or analytical. Instead it ekes its way smoothly, and as much charm as an object such as this can posses, and it comes highly recommended...

"factor in striking styling, fine build and as much charm as an object such as this can posses, and it comes highly recommended..."
TALKIN' ABOUT THE RESOLUTION: THE GREAT SACD - DVD-A DEBATE

The phrase "pure, perfect sound, forever" still resonates around the audio industry. This is how Philips - co-developer of Compact Disc - described its brand new sixteen bit digital music format back in 1982. This view didn't last however, and the race was on to find a new digital coding system that could offer a wider window on the music. Super Audio Compact Disc (SACD) was announced in 2000, a bespoke audio format that used the (then) new DVD platform but was not compatible with DVDs. Confusingly though, it used a completely different digital coding system to that found in both DVD-A and CD. Rather than the Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) system, where 16, 20 or 24bit samples are taken at high speed, the new Direct Stream Digital (DSD) approach took far smaller 1bit samples at a far higher speed of 2.8224MHz. This gives a frequency range of up to 100kHz (better than DVD-A) and a dynamic range of 120dB (not quite as good).

Whilst DVD-Audio's Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) coding system gave a very wide bandwidth and excellent resolution and dynamic range, it generated massive amounts of noise at its sampling frequency (44.1kHz in the case of CD, 192kHz for DVD-A). Were this not eliminated from the audio signal, it could play havoc with a hi-fi's electronics, so a heavy 'brick wall filter' is applied, which simply crops off all the signal above half the sampling frequency. In the case of CD, this is 22kHz (i.e. 44.1kHz/2), and with DVD-A at maximum resolution it's 96kHz. This is a bit like using a hammer to crack a nut, as the filtering just loses off the top of the audio signal. Because it's above the limit of human hearing, it was initially assumed to be inaudible, but it actually creates phase and noise problems inside the audio band. This is obvious with CD (it has a 'brightly lit' upper mid, even with the best of players), but even 24bit, 96kHz DSD-Audio shows a slight metallic ting in the treble and loss of atmosphere. 192kHz is obviously smoother still, but some experts have ventured that to truly get around PCM's inherent high band noise, a sampling frequency of at least 384kHz is needed.

SACD uses Direct Stream Digital however, which works in a way that doesn't require it to chop off all the music's extended high frequencies. By taking tiny 1bit samples at dramatically higher sampling rates, it gets round the need for brick wall filtering. This means it can offer an incredibly wide range without the intrusive effects of filtering, giving a more natural high end performance - in theory, at least. Digital experts like Professor Malcolm Hawksford of Essex University have said that the system simply doesn't work at high enough sampling frequencies to give decent resolution. He says this is particularly obvious in the treble range, which is - of course - where the ear is most sensitive. While DSD achieves better than 20bit PCM performance at low frequencies, further up the range the resolution effectively goes right down. Indeed it's said that most of DSD's 2.8 million pulses per second are needed just to reach 16bit standard, let alone better it...

So neither PCM or DSD are ideal, both are flawed. DSD was designed expressly to bypass PCM's weaknesses, and succeeds in this, but it then introduces other compromises such as lower effective resolution at high frequencies. The result is that neither DVD-Audio (and its more modern descendants) or SACD give perfect sound, but instead sound differently imperfect - and the question is which sort of imperfection sounds better to you! Personally, I think SACD gains more on the savings from DVD-A than it loses on the roundabouts; I prefer its slightly warmer, smoother, more romantic feel which echoes the ultra crisp, delicate and detailed sound of the very best moving coil phono cartridges. DVD-A (and its spiritual heir, 24/96 PCM downloads) by contrast, sounds more like 'Compact Disc on steroids': more of everything except the music. DP

**DIGITAL DISC COMPARISONS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>SACD</th>
<th>CD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>17GB</td>
<td>7.9GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single sided dual</td>
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<td>7.9GB</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Dual layer</td>
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<td>4.7GB</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**VERDICT**

Quirky, characterful design with an insightful musical nature allied to detail and polish; fine CD spinner but showcases SACD to great effect.

**BLADELIUS FREYA III £2,800**

15 Audio

0-44 (0)8448 221115

www.15audio.co.uk

**FOR**

- superb SACD performance
- detailed, polished sound
- highly musically engaging
- great styling, fine build
- balanced operation

**AGAINST**

- slow disc loading
- plasticky remote control
- cheap printed handbook

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of the Bladelius measured flat to 21kHz with CD. With SACD this extended to 32kHz with a steep fall off above this frequency, our analysis showed. Although SACD is able to reach 100kHz these few players get much further than the Bladelius, possibly to limit supersonic noise that is a result of DSD processing. SACD gave remarkably low distortion on this player though, up with the best in measured terms and nearly ten times lower than that from CD, the result at -80dB being 0.03% against 0.26% from CD. It is this and the ability to resolve a -100dB signal with low distortion of 2.8% that gives SACD its remarkable performance and contributes to its smooth sound. EIAJ Dynamic range with CD was 98dB, a common result.

Output from the phonos sockets (unbalanced) was a normal 1.8V but from the XLR sockets (balanced) a very high 6V. Otherwise results were similar between these outputs.

Random jitter measured 60pS across most of the audio band, a result above most players. This may slightly degrade purity.

The Bladelius measured well all round, but was undistinguished with CD. With SACD it was very linear, if not wideband. NK

Frequency response (1dB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>2Hz-21kHz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>SACD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2Hz-32kHz</td>
<td>2Hz-32kHz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rafael Todes expounds on Deltec's new PDM3 digital to analogue convertor, and its custom Deltran sync-locking CD transport modification...

Deltec Precision Audio is highly respected as a purveyor of serious, specialist digital products. It was founded by Adrian Walker and Rob Watts in the nineteen eighties, while they were still students at Cardiff University. Around 1990 Adrian left the company, whilst Rob Watts continued, changing the company name to DPA Digital, to reflect its new emphasis. They continued until 1998, when under-capitalisation caused it to cease trading. During these early years, they produced a string of 'cult' products, which lovers of classic hi-fi can still experience, although not inexpensively — the Deltec 1 amplifier, for example, may still be found in the annals of eBay, fetching not insubstantial sums!

Cut to 2008, when Deltec customer and fan Dave Clarke met up with Adrian Walker, and they decided to reform the company. The first products of this company were amplifiers and mains filters (editor DP was highly impressed by the CA1/SA-1 pre-power in the March 2010 issue of Hi-Fi World), and now we have a new digital convertor in the shape of the £2,649 PDM3 you see here. The latest product of this new venture, the DAC can either work as a standalone unit connecting to its source by USB (44.1 and 48kHz, 16bit), S/PDIF or TOSLINK — as well as via the special Deltran module in the DAC, communicating by optical link to a specially modified CD player...

The Deltran facility generates the clock within the D to A convertor using a 'high-spec temperature controlled crystal oscillator', and feeds this back to the CD transport. Indeed Deltec were one of the first companies to use this sync-locking technique way back in 1989 — and it became a new fashion which got people really excited. Similar sync-locking was also employed by Arcam, in the Blackbox 50, by Linn in their Kariik/Numerik and by Wadia.

Our PDM3 review sample was supplied with a Deltran-enabled Cambridge Audio Azur 650C CD player, because it's a good inexpensive machine, but DPA can of course fit the sync-lock to virtually any CD player for around £250, making it a very high quality bespoke digital transport for the Deltec DAC. In accordance with DPA's philosophy — which is somewhat unconventional these days — the digital path is as simple as possible, so there is absolutely no upsampling going on!

For the PDM3, DPA use internal thick-film hybrid voltage amplifiers, circuit designed on a ceramic substrate. It has printed ink resistors that are laser-trimmed giving well-matched circuits. The case is 3mm aluminium, with the front panel 25mm thick. The width is a shade over 23cm, with standard depth. Height is 10cm. Overall the unit feels a quality product, although it's very much Deltec's version of the above rather than an aluminium-clad, chrome festooned Japanese battleship of course. The DAC has a single green LED on the front panel to show power is on, but disappointingly there's no further information to show resolution or bitrate. Still, it locked on to its target effectively, and the one time I had a problem, it was easily remedied by restarting, Microsoft Windows-style!

The matching Cambridge Audio Azur 650C is a bargain at £350, but I was curious as to how DPA were going to transform this great-value budget CD player into a high-end object. After all, the transport mechanism is a computer-style plastic drawer — not the sort of thing you'd see on something with high-end pretensions! Physically on its rear, it has been modified with a circular piece of plastic, the size of a two pence piece, with an optical slot in the centre of it. The optical cable goes into the PDM3, along with a second cable, either optical or S/PDIF. For the purposes of this review, I used a Chord Indigo Plus for the S/PDIF, and the supplied DPA optical cable.

SOUND QUALITY

Kicking off with a Linn recording of a former ensemble of mine, the Schidlof Quartet playing Shostakovich quartets with the Piano Quintet, I was aware of the commendably mellow nature of the DAC. It has a rich, warm, almost valve-like sound which complimented the string sound of four Stradivari instruments beautifully (if Stradivarius had designed amplifiers, I'm sure they would have been valued!). There's a passage in the first movement where I have to pluck violently, simultaneously with my colleague's bowed note. It should sound shocking,
violent and disturbing. It receives a bit of pasteurisation with this combination, as the front of the attack is damped down a bit, but the upside it that the Deltec will make poorer, less accurate recordings more palatable.

The Piano Quintet with Ian Brown on piano presents other difficulties for a DAC. Recorded with a concert Steinway, the piano had as I remembered it, a slightly brittle sound; what I hear now has smoothed over some of the more jagged edges that gave the performance its seat-of-the-pants quality, and that I am accustomed to hearing on my (far more expensive) Bel Canto CD2/Weiss DAC202 reference. There also seemed to be more of a contraction of the dynamics of the performance, but there was also an impressive lack of post ringing to the piano sound which I also get with my current reference.

On to some Wagner, and the 'Tagesgrauen' from 'Gotterdammerung' (Barenboim conducting the Bayreuther Festspeile Orchestra). This Dawn chorus is like the world waking up, as a single motive is woven together on different instruments to provide a heroic climax with the brass triumphing. It's a study in orchestral colour, and a gripping paragraph of music. The PDM3/Deltran Cambridge combination had a credible crack at this. The woodwind colours were on the mellow, understated side — certainly not varnished in appearance, they glow rather than sparkle. It's a lovely smooth sound, not oozing with detail, but it had a musicality to it that make the passage highly engaging to listen to.

Listening to the same passage on the reference Weiss DAC202 with a Bel Canto CD2 transport, and there was more of a sense of doom to the music, as the basses paint the picture of depression and desolation so realistically. There was more detail to the woodwind sound, and because there are more micro dynamics, you are swept along with the waves of sound more convincingly. There is more gloss to the sound as well as more underlying texture. However, this combination, the Weiss is £4,600, the Bel Canto CD2 is £2,700 plus.
The Model M2-12R precision pick-up arm is an extension of our popular Series M2 range offering optimum cartridge choice with minimal tracking error and harmonic distortion associated with a 12 inch arm.

Providing classic looks and meticulous build quality, this arm offers all the most important features; traditional 'J' shaped tone-arm, detachable S2-R aluminium headshell with azimuth adjustment, two stage tungsten counterbalance system, superb quality ball race bearings and a level of rigidity to suit all types of cartridge.

"The best pick-up arm in the world"

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power supply LNS (£400) comes to £7700, as compared to the Cambridge Azur plus modifications (£700) plus the PDM3 (£2,649) comes to £3,400. At less than half the price, you would expect a considerable difference, so under the circumstances the PDM3 does remarkably well.

A fairer comparison was the Bel Canto CD2 as a standalone player with power supply which is the same ballpark. Listening to Solo’s recording on Decca of Ravel’s ‘Tombeau de Couperin’ grittily played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Deltec dug nicely into the string texture of this piece. The orchestra had a fine spatiality to it, and the Minuet really danced beautifully; it has a lovely swing with its Sicilian rhythm which comes across very well. Listening to the Bel Canto, the separation of the various instruments wasn’t quite as good, although there was slightly more depth to the string sound and tighter bass pizzicato. Again however, the sense of timing of the Minuet wasn’t as convincing, its dance is more reticent; there wasn’t that much in it though.

With the DPA I was using a Chord digital cable for around £1,000; changing to DPA’s own proprietary digital cable (£170) is good value for what it is, but doesn’t yield quite the same stage depth as the Chord costing five times as much, or the same incision to the sound. So I would take the Bel Canto over the DPA with their own cable, and would reverse this with the Deltec and the Chord Indigo. I guess this shows the importance of a good digital cable in the grand scheme of things!

Listening to Martin Taylor’s ‘Years Apart’, spirit of Django on Linn Records, it proved fascinating to listen with and without the Deltran connected. Without, the Deltec DAC sounds very good at its price but still unremarkable, the soundstage being closed in with some lack of definition to where the performers are in space, in absolute terms. With it connected, you’re suddenly into a very different world where you can almost see the musicians in thin air; there’s a crystalline clarity of sound, and the whole thing has a toe-tapping rhythmic drive. The saxophone had a raspingly real quality to it, and the guitar’s timbre hit the spot; perhaps the leading edge of notes was on the softer, more gentle side, lacking a touch of bite, but the overall effect is highly engaging and a delight to hear. Not bad for a turbo-charged budget CD player. Obviously then, prospective purchasers of the PDM3 are strongly advised to get their players Deltran’d!

CONCLUSION
Deltec’s PDM3 DAC is an interesting and successful product, as befits their fine reputation in specialist high end digital. Via its Deltran sync lock, it has a gentle, almost analogue-like sound, which invites long listening sessions, and has a laid-back musicality to it which is very appealing.

The DAC isn’t capable of doing high-res from a computer via its USB input, which may put some off, but this can be remedied by the simple expedient of a Musical Fidelity V-link, enabling 96kHz 24bit USB reproduction of course – so no worries there.

The key point is its unusually smooth and gentle but compellingly musical nature, which is precisely what so many digital sources lack. It’s highly recommended then, for those seeking an alternative to typical boom-tizz digital sound, especially with the highly worthwhile Deltran mod to the matching CD player.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

| Frequency response shows a lift at high frequencies our analysis shows, measuring +0.4dB at 20kHz. This is quite unusual and may make the DPA PDM3 a bit brighter than usual in a just-perceptible manner. Distortion levels were very low throughout most of the dynamic range with a CD 16bit signal, measuring 0.019% at -6dB through to 0.11% at -60dB, a very low value. Switching our digital generator to 24bit saw the tell-tale -60dB figure drop to 0.04%, very close to the best possible, so the DAC is inherently very linear. EIAJ Dynamic Range measured a high 100dB, partly because of this. Output was a normal 2V and noise low at -100dB. The PDM3 is a very linear DAC, up with the best in this area. The small lift in its frequency response suggests it may have a bright-ish sound balance. |

REFERENCE SYSTEM
Bel Canto CD2 CD player Weiss DAC202 digital converter VAC Aurelie Musicloco power amplifiers B&W 802D loudspeakers Townshend Seismic speaker cradles Chord Indigo Plus cable Coherent Systems $10 digital cable Chord Epic Twin speaker cables

VERDICT
Distinctively smooth and natural sounding new DAC with excellent Deltran sync lock functionality.

DPA-PDM3 £2,649
Deltec Precision Audio Ltd. C: +44(0) 1793 238 085
www.deltecprecisionaudio.com

FOR
- smooth, delicate sound
- clarity and detail
- flies with Deltran sync lock
- build and finish

AGAINST
- unusual styling
- no hi-res via USB
Your guide to the best products we’ve heard that are currently on sale in the UK...

**TURNTABLES**

**REGA RP1 2010 £225**
Pleasing sound, fine build and ease of set-up and use make this a great first 'real' hi-fi turntable.

**REGA P2 2008 £300**
Excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound.

**REGA P3-24 2008 £405**
Seminal affordable audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and really sings with optional £150 outboard power supply.

**REGA P3-24 2008 £405**
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 mean it's still the class of the mid-price field.

**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 SE 2005 £1,138**
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.

**MARANTZ TT-1551 2005 £1,299**
Cracking all in one deck/arm/cartridge combination, this must surely be the best sounding plug and play package at this price point.

**ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2011 £1,450**
Although getting expensive, the latest Radius is a highly grown up package with a flowing yet engaging nature; a fine package.

**LINN LP12SE 2010 £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. Expensive, though.

**MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,138**
Elegant deck with great low frequency solidity, coherent soundstaging and a precise midband.

**AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600**
Stylish high end vinyl spinner with industrial strength build quality and a sound to match. Exceedingly neutral yet powerful sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

**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.

**ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,556**
Exquisitely engineered deck and SME V tonearm combo that's an extremely accomplished performer with classical music.

**ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE STORM 2011 £6,612**
An excellent high end design with a smooth, open and lyrical sound and razor sharp styling and build.

**FLETCHER AUDIO OMEGA 5 2010 £3,099**
Charming high end turntable that's a fitting testament to the late Tom Fletcher.

**ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE EAT FORTE EVO 12 2010 £4,750**
Excellent premium price turntable with power, precision and passion aplenty, but relaxed and easy going by nature too. Great value package with the Pro-ject Evo 12" arm option.

**ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,556**
Innovative engineering gives a nimble, pacey and musical sound that's one of the best at the price.

**BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £5,045**
Unique high end direct drive turntable with amazing grip and focus, albeit not the most romantic of natures.

**McINTOSH MTIO 2008 £5,995**
Big, expensive, controversially styled and glows more than some might consider necessary, but an astonishingly good performer.

**BRAHMS TONEARMS**

**REGA RB250 2009 £136**
Capable way past its price point, the new 3-point mount version of the classic RB250 serves up a taut and detailed sound. A little lean for some tastes, but responds well to rewiring and counterweight modification.

**MICHELL TECNOARM A 2003 £442**
The late John Michell's clever reworking of the Rega theme, using blasting, drilling and reworking! Surely the best overall performer under £500.
ORIGIN LIVE
SILVER 3C  2010 £599
Excellent mid-price tonearm with a clean and open yet lyrical sound.

HADCOCK GH-242
EXPORT  2010 £770
Conspicuously musical, lyrical sounding tonearm, but needs the right turntable. Excellent value.

SME 309  1989 £767
Mid-price 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.

FUNK FIRM FXR II  2010 £1,175
Clever reworking of the ubiquitous Rega platform, the FXR II gives a wonderfully musical, almost unipivot like performance.

AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7  2007 £1,300
The classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

NAIM ARO  1987 £1,425
Charismatic unipivot is poor at frequency extremes but sublime in the midband; truly emotive and insightful.

HELIUS OMEGA  2008 £1,595
Stylish and solid lump of arm with fabulous build quality, that turns in a dynamic and weighty performance.

SME SERIES IV  1988 £1,620
Offers nine tenths of the SMEV's magic at just over half price. Exquisitely built and finished, and a design classic. Faces stiff competition these days, but lovely nevertheless.

SME 3125  2010 £1,750
Twelve inch magnesium alloy armtube plus SMEV bearings makes an impressive transcription tool with an insightful yet communicative performance.

GOLDRING G1042  1994 £239
One of the best MM's going, with sweet and extended treble and punchy, muscular bass.

ORTOFON VIVO BLUE  2011 £275
Super new budget moving coil cartridge from respected Danish manufacturers; a real step up from previous efforts.

DENON DL103R  2006 £295
Awkward to get working properly with a pivot arm, but needs the right turntable. Excellent value.

ORTOFON B HORN  2008 £25
A crisp, clean and detailed MC; particularly impressive at both ends of the frequency spectrum

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

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

LYRA DORIAN  2007 £649
Incisive and musical, this baby Lyra is one of the most powerful and revealing MCs at its price point. Beware the sharp treble, though!

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

ZYX R-100H  2005 £799
Exceptionally tight sounding and detailed cartridge with the musical skills to match, this is up with the best at the price, with a presentation all of its own.

ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE  2005 £770
Highly finessed Swiss moving coil that plays music with riflebolt precision.

ORTOFON CADENZA BLACK  2010 £1,650
Ultra incisive, transparent and dimensional moving coil with grip and punch aplenty.

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD  2008 £2,250
Ortofon's new flagship MC is a sophisticated and alluring performer that takes the vinyl experience to a new level.

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

DIGITAL SOURCES

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

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 2010 £330
A flexible new DAC, this is an impressively rhythmic and detailed performer.

ARCAM rDAC 2010 £200
Cracking budget DAC, sporting a fulsome and musical sound with gorgeous build and styling.

MUSICAL FIDELITY M1 DAC 2010 £400
Surprisingly sophisticated upsampling DAC with oodles of detail and air, but bass isn't quite as powerful as it could be.

STELLO DA 100 SIGNATURE £750
Superbly finessed sounding DAC at the price, with strong driving bass and plenty of air and space.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P 2009 £1,250
Excellent mid-price machine with slick slot loading and an open and inviting sound.

SIMAUDI MOON 300D 2010 £1,290
Lovely fluid sounding DAC with a deep, dark, velvety sonality.

CYPRESS CD8 SE 2008 £1,350
Bespoke Servo Evolution mech makes this the most musically engaging machine at the price, with super smooth tonality to boot. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

DENON DCD2010A E 2010 £1,790
Powerful, open sound allied to a rich tonality and satisfying subtlety make this an excellent mid-price buy.

NAIM DAC 2010 £1,995
Superb high end digital converter with a probing, punchy and forensically detailed sound.

MERIDIAN G08.2 2011 £2,400
Everyman's modern high end CD player, the stylistic, well made Meridian has an extremely enjoyable yet refined and accurate sound.

MARANTZ SA-KI PEARL CD 2010 £2,500
Finely honed affordable high end silver disc spinner, this has a musical lucidity that's unexpected at this price.

LEMA ANTILLA IIS ECO 2011 £2,995
Stable and smooth yet superbly detailed and musically engaging, this is class of the £3,000 CD player field.

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000
Bespoke architecture gives a uniquely musical sound that's beguiling yet proffers dizzying incision and grip.

ELECTROCOMPAHIEM EMP-I /S 2011 £4,650
Epic in scale, lavish in tone and exuberant in its musicality, this is a memorable SACD spinner. Quirky in operation and modest in finish, though.

Q增加了1个新的DAC,这是一款非常具有节奏感和细节度的表演者。

ELECTROCOMPAHIEM EC-1UP 2009 £3,450
Quirky yet extremely capable high end upsampling CD spinner, with a musical flu-ency that beguiles more than it impresses.

ACUSTIC ARTS CDPLAYER £90 2008 £1,350
Excellent valve phono stage with good range and balanced outputs.

ICON AUDIO PSI.2 2007 £599
Excellent entry level design that raises the bar for budget phono stages. Crisp, smooth yet brighty lit sound on both MM and MC sources, at up to 24/16 resolution from hard disk/NAS. EXPensive, but you can hear why...

PHONO STAGES

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P 2009
Excellent entry level design that raises the bar for budget phono stages. Crisp, smooth yet brighty lit sound on both MM and MC sources, at up to 24/16 resolution from hard disk/NAS. EXPensive, but you can hear why...

LINN KLIMAX DS 2007 £9,600
Landmark network music player, offering brilliant sonics at up to 24/16 resolution from hard disk/NAS. Expensive, but you can hear why...

GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V
Excellent valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.

ICON AUDIO PS1.2 2007 £599
Excellent valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.
Well presented mid price designed with detailed sound and USB input for archiving.

Expansive, detailed, powerful sound makes this a leading sub-£1,000 contender.

Exceptionally musical and natural sounding all discrete transistor phono stage, with highly lucid, valve-like presentation.

Powerful, propulsive, expansive sound puts this right at the top of the £1,000 phono stage tree.

Superbly built, well specified phono stage with a charm of its own.

Just as the name suggests, this is a lovely way to play LP with an exceptionally open and lucid sound.

This superbly built, well specified phono stage combines impressive functionality and connectivity at a lowly yet refined and open sound.

Excellent starter tube integrated, with plenty of detail and an expansively musical sound.

The clarity and openness of valves plus firm grip and fine detail make this a preamplifier with a subtle, supple sound.

Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

Brilliant value budget passive, with remote control, mute and input switching, plus an easy, a neutral sound.

Great little headphone amplifier with a lively, musical presentation.

Excellent solid-state preamp with a meticulous, proficient sound.

One of the best preamps we've heard at any price, this transformer coupled marvel does very little wrong; its powerful, clean, open yet delicate sound is unmatched at or near the price.

One of the very best super-integrateds.

To turn in a mightily accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

Integrated tour de force from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with superb sound.

A quality integrated that suits all genres of music providing insight and clarity in a compact but flexible package.

One of the best phono stages we've heard at any price, this transformer coupled marvel does very little wrong; its powerful, clean, open yet delicate sound is unmatched at or near the price.

The clarity and openness of valves plus firm grip and fine detail make this a preamplifier with a subtle, supple sound.

This superbly built, well specified phono stage combines impressive functionality and connectivity at a lowly yet refined and open sound.

Excellent starter tube integrated, with plenty of detail and an expansively musical sound.

Thoroughly modern music maker with classic style and great pedigree, this amp sings with gentle music but is no headbanger!

One of the best high end integrads we've come across, this combines hear-through transparency with musical get-up-and-go.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

Dynamic performer that can be used on its own as a complete phono-level preamp.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

This superbly built, well specified phono stage combines impressive functionality and connectivity at a lowly yet refined and open sound.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.

Sounding and unusual in engineering and fluidity.
STANDARDS

POWER AMPLIFIERS

XTZ AP-100 2010 £520
Decently smooth yet usefully muscular, this power amp punches way beyond its price point in sonic and value terms.

QUAD 909 2001 £900
The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallops to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but expansive character with enough wallop to make small standmounters super value for money.

MISSION MX2 2011 £200
Sophisticated sound alloyed with real musical insight makes these small standmounters a steal.

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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I v2 2010 £225
Great small standmounters for audiophiles who take full advantage of a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive soundstaging at the price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50 2010 £7,000
Mighty, assured high end full Class A integrals that project clarity allied to real musicality. Lacks the lucidity of the best tube amps but redeems with power and punch.

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO 2009 £7,900
Seriously expensive, but one listen explains why. Wonderfully exuberant sound that can only come from a top quality tube design.

QUAD 11-80 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.

QUAD 11-40 2005 £3,230
Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three-dimensional sound.

MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU
2010 £5,995
Exceptionally open and expansive, yet muscularly expressive sounding high end preamplifier.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC 2006 £845
Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.

LOUDSPEAKERS

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO 2009 £7,900
The Norwegian power station is as cool as a glacier tonally, yet impresses with its sheer physicality and fleeciness of tone. 600W per channel makes for a massive bang per buck.

ICON AUDIO MB845 MkII 2010 £5,500
With 120W from big 845 valves right down to low frequencies, this power amplifier has massive dynamics and bass swing, yet is easy on the ear.

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950
More transparent and spacious than they’ve got to be at this price, these refined mid-price standmounters represent top value.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC 2006 £845
A natural successor to the BBC LS3/5a, whose impressive neutrality, imaging and evenhandedness makes this a superior, if less charismatic, loudspeaker.

MISSION MX2 2011 £200
Sophisticated sound alloyed with real musical insight makes these small standmounters a steal.

MY AUDIO DESIGN MY1920 2011 £1350
Exceptionally smooth, spacious and refined mini monitors that beguile and excite in equal measure.

ELAC BS243 2010 £1,000
More transparent and spacious than they’ve got to be at this price, these refined mid-price standmounters represent top value.

RDR FS100 2007 £655
Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

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

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

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

SPENDOR S8E 2008 £1,895
Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent allrounder.

EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LT8BB 2010 £2,300
Brilliant entry level electrostatics, giving a taste of loudspeaker esoterica for the price of most moving coil boxes. Tremendous clarity, evenness and delicacy, although not the world’s most powerful sound.

SPENDOR S5 2006 £350
Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions.

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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NE I v2 2010 £225
Great small standmounters for audiophiles who take full advantage of a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive soundstaging at the price.

MISSION MX2 2011 £200
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XTZ 99.25 2010 £640
Disarmingly open and refined at the price, these standmounters bring unexpected civility, refinement and insight to the price point. Exceptional value for money.
end sonics with subtle looks.

Distinctive co-axial standmounters with wonderful soundstaging, bright lucid midband and true musical insight.

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

Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

Wonderfully wide and open, super fast and amazingly engaging to listen to.

Wonderfully build and finish allied to an insightful, superlative build quality result in an immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...

Simple build and finish allied to an insightful, superlative build quality result in an immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...

Wonderful little budget over-ear portable phones with a clean, smooth sound to beat the best of the rest at the price.

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

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

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.

Simply the best headphones we’ve ever heard at any price, these swiftly translucent electrostatic earphones are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...
NEW MB845 Mono Blocks
Fabulous huge 845 Single Ended mono blocks. NEW improved version of the original, Now with 'Low Distortion Tertiary' transformers 90+90w, 5 Globes Hi Fi world
From £3499.95

NEW ST20pp 15+15w Amp
15+15 watts of Pure Valve Heaven. Mullard's amazing EL34 makes this amplifier perform way beyond its modest size. Now with headphone socket. Not sure about valves? Try this with our money back guarantee.

NEW Stereo 60 MK III 85+85w
Total redesign with new KT120. New Tertiary transformers. New power supply, very low distortion. High power in a box. "High power, good timing" Hi Fi Choice RECOMMENDED
Only £1999.95

EWMB805 SE Mono Blocks
45+45 Watts of Single Ended Heaven
From £4999.95 (upgradable)

NEW Stereo 25 MK II
NEW high quality headphone socket for private listening. NEW 6SN7/6SL7 valves for better definition. Upgraded output transformers for better bandwidth. 35+35w, Alcap out, 4/8Ω outputs, Supplied transparent cover
FREE EL34 UPGRADE WORTH £100 (limited offer)

NEW PS2 All Valve Phono Stage
Pure valve to get the best from vinyl. All triode. No feedback. Passive RIAA. High output. "One box" design. Redo your vinyl collection! From only £449.95

NEW PS3 All Valve Phono Stage
"Our Fave Affordable High End Phono Stage" N.K. Hi Fi World. Awarded 5 "Globes" "Outstanding Product" Hi Fi News
All triode. Passive RIAA. Custom British MC TX option. Very quiet, high output. With the best possible Power supply. Valve rectified & regulated for definition and smoothness, 14kg. From only £1599.95 (inc MC TX)

LA4 MK II Line Preamp
"...Majored on musical flow and attention to detail. Distortion very low 0.0003%. Enormous headroom, bandwidth very wide, very low noise..." Hi Fi World, awarded 5 Globes
From only £899.95 (upgradable)

Silver Teflon audio cable. Steel & alloy plate construction. Soft start. Comprehensive manual inc DIY valve change info. Plexiglas valve cover included. "Proper" valve amplifiers are heavy because good transformers need lots of iron.

See our other models at www.iconaudio.com Buy direct from us, or through your dealer. Export no problem! (EU £30 per box) Want to know more?
Or ring us on +44 (0)116 2440593 email sales@iconaudio.com

Whilst stocks last, Conditions apply ask for details Prices correct with 20% UK VAT at time of going to press but subject to change 09.2011 E & O E UK Visa MasterCard AMEX and debit cards accepted
**INTERCONNECTS**

**TECHLINK WIRES XS**  2007 £20
Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

**WIREFORLD OASIS 5**  2003 £99/M
Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

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

**DNM RESON**  2002 £40/M
Neutral and transparent — a steal!

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST**  2004 £260/0.4M
Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tonal bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**TCI CONSTRUCTOR 13A-6 BLOCK**  2003 £120
Top quality ‘affordable’ mains outlet block, with fine build and good sonic. Well worth the extra over standard high street specials, which sound coarse and two-dimensional by comparison.

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE**  2008 £275
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.

**TUNERS**

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

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T**  2005 £250
Sweet sounding digital/anologue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.
Show Time

Noel Keywood visits China’s popular Guangzhou AV Fair 2011...

In Britain, hi-fi show organisers hope people turn up; in China they hope they don't – that's the difference! When 12 million people live in a city – China's third largest – if they all turn up at once it's hard to fit them into the hotel. Well, you get my drift. A Chinese hi-fi show is attended by lots of people, to the point where I often found it difficult to get a picture of a product, there were so many folks in front, wandering around, peering underneath and generally coming between camera and item. I was told the Guangzhou AV Fair in China was a busy show worth attending, and now I know just what that means...

Is a Chinese hi-fi show any different to a Western one? In many ways, no. This one reminded me of the UK's Bristol Show, only on a larger scale. Bearing in mind the Dussun R20 monoblock power amplifier, delivering 200W.

White Swan hotel at which this show is held has a miniature lake in its centre, fed by a waterfall topped by a small Chinese temple, there is obviously a difference of scale. But then, everything in China is large. The Pearl river outside the hotel is ornate Chinese inlaid furniture and embroidered wall hangings. Lovely but expensive, up to £9,000 for the bigger items.
A nice traditional touch: girls in Cheongsams line up to greet visitors at opening time on the first day.

A massive Fountek Grandmaster 598 amplifier using five parallel push-pull pairs of KT88s per channel (www.fountek.net), good for 200W.

an inland waterway, 100 miles from the sea, yet still over one quarter of a mile wide. At the show, spread over five floors, and with additional suites, there were hundreds of exhibitors, but the rooms and corridors were little different in size to those at Bristol's Marriott hotel. They were far busier, and as the temperature outside was a hot 35 degrees Celsius, it wasn't so cool inside.

But (hallelujah!) China worships at the altar of the valve ('tube' over there) and valve amps were everywhere. This was a notable difference to UK shows, although the gap is narrowing as Brits get the message. A valve amplifier is an altogether more visually engaging and expressive device than any transistor amp can hope to be, and this seems to go down well in China. Whilst I saw many transistor muscle amps lurking on floors, adorned by big power meters waving their needles to gain attention, nothing could match the splendour of China's valve amplifiers, some of which are works of art. Entire rooms were dedicated to them. Prices were not so different to the UK; China isn't cheap. But it is consistent. Valve amps sell in the £1,000-£3,000 range, with few trying to ask more. Forget Communism and poverty, China's cities are thriving Meccas of wealth and consumption, with Ferrari's and Range Rovers in the car parks. And the cities are vast. I'm told, however, that in contrast the countryside is desperately poor, and that a permit is needed to live in a city.

China has a large number of manufacturers not known in the West, like Lai Dengni and Line Magnetic (both pictured here), many a little known like Fountek and Dussun, and a few better known had their own suites, making for around 250 exhibitors in all (pardon the detective work but the Show Guide is written in Chinese!). There were up to 100 brands unknown in the West. I would guess, many manufactured around Guangzhou in the southern Guangdong province, population 80 million. We can show only a small selection here.

KEF were demonstrating their new Blade loudspeaker to a capacity audience.

Like Ming Da and Beijing-based QAT. The show occupied five floors of the hotel, and with 40 rooms per floor occupied, no fewer than 200 brands were exhibiting. Larger manufacturers like KEF, owned by Hong Kong based Gold Peak, Hi-Vi (drive units) and International Audio Group (IAG) like Ming Da and Beijing-based QAT. The show occupied five floors of the hotel, and with 40 rooms per floor occupied, no fewer than 200 brands were exhibiting. Larger manufacturers like KEF, owned by Hong Kong based Gold Peak, Hi-Vi (drive units) and International Audio Group (IAG) like Ming Da and Beijing-based QAT. The show occupied five floors of the hotel, and with 40 rooms per floor occupied, no fewer than 200 brands were exhibiting. Larger manufacturers like KEF, owned by Hong Kong based Gold Peak, Hi-Vi (drive units) and International Audio Group (IAG) had their own suites, making for around 250 exhibitors in all (pardon the detective work but the Show Guide is written in Chinese!). There were up to 100 brands unknown in the West. I would guess, many manufactured around Guangzhou in the southern Guangdong province, population 80 million. We can show only a small selection here.

A Lai Dengni amplifier TW-02A with top cap equipped 807 output tubes giving a quoted power of 26W (www.laidengni.com).
This is a Line Magnetic LM-219 amplifier (31,800 RMB). It was on open display in the foyer — and the young lady is a guard with fight training, we were told!

Western brands were everywhere, because everyone wants to get into the Chinese market. Consequently, there were plenty of visiting Western exhibitors, like XTZ we spoke to, and China is a friendly and welcoming place to be. Guangzhou (also known as Canton) may be largely unknown outside China, but not only is it vast, double the population of London.

A Red Woman Army LP, spotted in an annexe selling music. It’s a high quality Direct Metal Master pressing.

it is just a two hour train journey from Hong Kong, making it easy to reach. The biggest presence at the show was that of IAG, and here I had to get my head around a curious reality: Wharfedale is China’s largest distributor of audio!

Yes - that old British stalwart of a brand name now has an entirely new and even bigger life in China. Regular readers will know loudspeaker designer Peter Comeau for his design articles in Hi-Fi World and the products of World Designs. Made an offer he could not refuse, Peter is now head of acoustic design at IAG (Shenzhen) and responsible for designing Wharfedale loudspeakers (amongst others). So I found myself at a huge distributor gathering where Peter had to explain the technologies being used in Wharfedale loudspeakers to Wharfedale dealers throughout China, of which there are hundreds!

That's the story behind our picture of Peter on stage as a senior figure at IAG, thanking distributors for their time, interest and efforts. Behind him you can see SWT, short for Sino Wharfedale Trading, set up by IAG to handle distribution through the vast country that is China. The IAG room made much of Wharfedale history, with large black-and-white pictures of founder Gilbert Briggs, his books, factory, products, etc., including a Wharfedale advert for their well known E Series with the slogan “Blow up your amplifier with an E Series”!

I mention all this to illustrate that China isn’t quite what it is.

Wharfedale history in the IAG room, with picture of founder Gilbert Briggs.

Peter Comeau, Chief Acoustics Engineer at IAG Group (centre, wearing a tie) congratulating Chinese distributors at a SWT (www.swt5s.com) conference. SWT is short for Sino Wharfedale Trading and is very big in China.

The compact and smart Ming Da MC34-A valve amplifier (www.mei-xing.com).

Giant Hi-Vi loudspeakers (www.swanspeaker.com).

A Raphaelite 211 SE amplifier (www.raphaelite.com.cn) and, in the background, a Linn Sondek that was in use for demo purposes.

A monster triode on display alongside 845s and 211s in the Foshan City Nanhai Guiguang tube factory room (www.ggtube.net).

The White Swan hotel has a waterfall feeding a mini-lake at its centre, full of Koi carp. A bridge across the pond was popular with children.

The hotel's terrace overlooked the Pearl river, at this point 500m wide.

I did not see any radical new Chinese products or technologies. However, Kings Audio Ltd, manufacturers of Kingsound electrostatic loudspeakers, were there, Hi-Vi make advanced drive units and many of the valve amplifier manufacturers boast of winding their own transformers in order to maximise performance (not always so successfully our measurements suggest). LPs were on sale and are bought in quantity from Western markets; Chinese LPs are pressed in Germany. There were few turntables on display and where they were being used, such as the Linn Sondek in the Raphaelite room (see the picture) the interest was enormous; I struggled to get pictures. CD players and servers, like those from QAT, are the most popular sources it would seem. Radio tuners were curiously absent.

Whilst Guangzhou might seem a long way from the UK it many ways it was very close. The hotel setting was familiar enough, the products not unfamiliar. Happily, not everyone turned up at once, but it was packed for all three days and I was a happy participant in throng of eager audiophiles!
V Pack, now including:
Ortofon Vivo Blue cartridge
Pro-ject Evolution tone arm
Pro-ject Xperience turntable
Price tag - £1,000.

Distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.
www.henleydesigns.co.uk, info@henleydesigns.co.uk, 01235 511166
With products like the Logitech Squeezebox Touch taking networked music to the masses, you could say we’re enjoying a new golden age of wireless. This time though, of course, it’s not about vast transmitters beaming radio waves hundreds of miles, but small scale, local home transmissions via Wi-Fi routers. With all the hype around this, it’s easy to forget that actually there are other wireless possibilities, and it’s not a case of Wi-Fi or the highway!

The Audio Pro WF100 is a package of two wireless ‘dongles’, one being the TX100 transmitter and the other the RX100 receiver. The former plugs by USB into your PC or Mac, and pipes out your music digitally, whereby it’s transmitted by a dedicated, protected protocol which is in the 2.4 GHz-band “for best possible sound quality”, say Audio Pro. With a bandwidth of 1.6Mb per channel, the transmission is said to be “in full CD quality”, and is compatible with lossless compacted file formats like FLAC and Apple Lossless. There’s a built-in ‘sniffer’ that looks for any other wireless channels which may cause interference, whereupon the system hops onto a different channel to avoid it — all done invisibly and behind the scenes, of course. This means the system can coexist with other wireless systems in the house. The music is transmitted in real time, with a 20ms buffer.

The RX100 receiver plugs into the mains and has a USB output, or analogue line outs, and uses a “specialised Burr-Brown DAC” which runs at up to 48kHz sampling rates. The range of the system is fifty metres via the internal antennas. No installation files are required which means setup is a quick process, and there’s no cumbersome pairing. There’s a ‘housecode’ switch which lets you select between one of three different AP100-equipped wireless sound sources, and there’s no limit to the number of receivers, so you can achieve true multiroom if desired, although extra transmitters or receivers cost £85 apiece.

The system worked very well within the confines of my house, giving a strong sound that — whilst not the equal of a high end Wi-Fi streaming solution — was more than adequate for casual music and internet radio listening. Via the RX100 going into my reference system, there was a good deal of detail, a nice smoothness and things sounded pleasingly musical in the way that a good entry-level CD player of yesteryear would. It worked in a glitch-free way, with no nasty noises or network drop outs. All in all, a handy and capable alternative to those not wishing to commit to Wi-Fi music streaming, for whatever reason! DP

[Contact: www.sav-distribution.co.uk, 0843 289 7195]

soundbites

PURE ONE MINI £50
If Digital Radios had been this good — and this cheap — ten years ago, then DAB would surely have made a greater impression on the British listening public. In short, you get a DAB/DAB+ and FM-capable small table radio, available in black or white, for under fifty quid. There’s an optional ChargePAK for £28 which offers easy rechargeable battery operation, and it has a 3.5mm input to let it play out your iPod or Walkman. Sixteen presets, a headphone output and a USB socket for future updates complete the picture. As radios of this type go it has relatively low power consumption (although analogue portables are still much better) and it sports an excellent, but small, backlit display. Sound is decent and the radio is surprisingly sensitive (by the rather modest standards of DAB); it certainly seems superior to designs of a few years back. Overall then, this is a very agreeable and unassuming little package that’s genuinely affordable in a way DAB radios haven’t been until now. If you need Digital Radio, then try this. DP

[Contact: www.pure.com, 0845 1489001]
If the number of bass units in a loudspeaker were a guide to quality, then Hart's new D&W Sonix would walk away with all prizes. It boasts eighteen a side, or thirty six in all! The rear panel of each module carries no fewer than nine; it is smothered in them. They are small 4in drivers all working in parallel. The idea is to get a lot of well controlled cone area, plus a lot of motor to push them. In effect the rear of each module is one big bass unit, making four big bass units in all. And if you are wondering whether these Harts produce bass, the answer is a big yes!

The one big 12in driver you do see is a Tannoy Dual Concentric, its voice coils rewound by Hart. For those not acquainted with big Tannoys, what you have is a midrange horn sitting at the centre of a large bass unit. This close physical arrangement eliminates phase errors at crossover, giving smooth off-axis coverage. It makes for a stable stereo image that sounds more focused than usual. Tannoys are known for this property, as well as clean bass and massive dynamics from their big twelve inch cones. Put this little lot together as an idea and you have a loudspeaker that will sound focused across its stereo sound stage, as well as very punchy and extended in its bass. It may seem a little left-field compared to the herd and it is certainly different, but loudspeakers...
are an art form as well as a science and for anyone who dreams of having their room moved physically, in this case by a loudspeaker that isn’t so large, here is an unusual but interesting solution.

The bottom module is a passive bass bin housing nine rearward firing drivers. In earlier models Hart made the bins movable so they could fire inward or outward, as well as backward. With the D&W Sonix however, styling prompts the bins to be aligned with the bass units all firing rearward. The heavy bass/midrange module sits on top and is connected with sturdy jumper leads. Connection to the amplifier is through chunky screw terminals that accept 4mm plugs, as well as spades and bare wires.

This loudspeaker is entirely passive, unlike earlier models, so a mains connection is not needed. I will note straight away though that it draws amplifier current and needs a reasonably sturdy amplifier, although it does not need a powerful amplifier. Producing massive volume from a few Watts it is ideal for valve amplifiers with a 4 Ohm tap, or any good modern transistor amplifier, all of which can these days cope with 4 Ohm loudspeakers.

Each module is 43cm wide, 45cm deep and 89cm high overall. Hart now use a lustrous Macassar wood veneer with a lacquered deep gloss finish that looks classy, but there is no grille to cover the big Tannoy driver.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Spinning Adele's latest album '21' and ‘Rolling in the Deep’ had all thirty-six bass units in a state of frenzy as they pounded out the beat, and it was interesting to hear a peculiarly non-resonant quality to the bass: it sounded powerful, ran deep but was very even in its spectral spread. There was no 'boing' in the sound, no bounce nor spring, but there was firmness and power. Despite their solid bass power the Duo Soniks were not bass-heavy: the balance was excellent in our 28ft square listening room, which is well damped and not obviously modal in spite of its squareness (because a large air volume is well damped). They may well over excite smaller rooms, but as there is so much cone area, coupling into the room load will always be good and bass quality likely good too. The '21' CD lacks high treble and in conjunction with the loudspeaker’s own roll off the sound balance was obviously warm, Spinning a succession of better balanced CDs than '21' showed the treble roll off to be obvious most of the time and a bit more high treble would not go amiss to avoid a pervasive sense of warmth. The converse of this is that the D&W Sonix is very easy on the ear, mellow in fact. Rising impedance at high frequencies correlates with falling output, as is common, suggesting more treble is available.

The midband was projective as it usually is from a Tannoy midrange horn, violins of the London Philharmonic sounding clear and well differentiated from each other and the rest of the orchestra. Nigel Kennedy’s playing was well lit and explicit, although the absence of upper harmonics lessened airiness in the sound. David Hart told me he rolled down treble to soften the characteristic hard character of Tannoy’s horn.

With thunderous rock of the Lady GaGa variety, the D&W Sonix drove the room in startling fashion, bass synth in ‘Monster’ laying a carpet of subsonics into the room that felt threatening. That the cabinets are home to so many drive units does make their existence a trifle obvious in the form of cabinet warmth, and a hint of roughness in the sound. Skunk Anansie’s ‘Just Because You Feel Good’ had bass guitar sounding full bodied and powerful, drums had a visceral punch and Skin sang with conviction from centre stage, projected out at me in typical Tannoy fashion so I was aware of every little vocal inflexion. These are big hearted loudspeakers; they send out a massive performance, one with heart and soul.

The soundstage stretched linearly between the loudspeakers, images on it outlined with dependable precision, even when moving around the room. There may have been more air and space had higher frequencies bounced from our walls and ceiling, but off axis treble falls more heavily than our on-axis graphs show. As it was, the stage was dense and intense. The speakers can be spaced quite wide apart however, without a ‘hole in the centre’ appearing.

**CONCLUSION**

The Hart Audio D&W Sonix are hardly mainstream. But when manufacturers around the world turn out loudspeakers to a widely accepted pattern that draws complaint about lack of innovation, we should take them for what they are, an interesting and diverting alternative. Effectively a Tannoy Dual Concentric in a reasonably sized cabinet with massively enhanced bass, they come out of the corner with a head start. More upper treble would not go amiss to my ear, but this apart they are focused, massively dynamic and a fun listen, all from a few Watts. There really isn’t much like them!

**VERDICT**

Massively powerful and startlingly dynamic loudspeaker with great bass and an easy demeanour.

**HART D&W SONIX** £9,500

**HART AUDIO**
(C+ 44 (0)1983 612 924
WWW.HARTAUDIO.COM

**FOR**
- formidable bass
- tonal warmth
- strong dynamics
- high sensitivity

**AGAINST**
- need high current amp
- subdued treble

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response shows the Hart has extended bass and is reasonably smooth across the lower midrange, with a gentle bump in the response peaking at 800Hz – an unusual effect that gave vocals some prominence, pushing them forward a little on the soundstage. The dip around 2kHz will soften detailing but also make for easier listening, while the roll off above 6kHz will ensure there’s no sting in the treble. However, the degree of roll off is sufficient to be audible also as a slight warmth or even dullness to upper treble. The roll off will not pass unnoticed and it gets steeper off-axis so the speakers must be pointed at the listeners.

Helped by massive low bass output, right down to subsonic regions, and a very low measured overall impedance of 3.7 Ohms (it is a 4 Ohm loudspeaker) that results in high current (and power) draw, way higher than other loudspeakers, the D&W Sonix produced a massive 94dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) so it will be much louder than any other loudspeaker at a specific volume and not obviously modal in spite of its existence a trifle obvious in the form of cabinet warmth, and a hint of roughness in the sound. Skunk Anansie’s ‘Just Because You Feel Good’ had bass guitar sounding full bodied and powerful, drums had a visceral punch and Skin sang with conviction from centre stage, projected out at me in typical Tannoy above 800Hz but there were some hot spots below this frequency that suggest a bit of cabinet colour may be apparent. The D&W Sonix will certainly have its own sound; this is a very characterful loudspeaker. However, it will be smooth and full bodied, as well as dynamic and strong at low frequencies. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**

Green - driver output
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**

WWW.HI-FIWORLD.CO.UK  NOVEMBER 2011 HI-FI WORLD
Here is our list of the great and good from audio's glorious past, products that have earned their place in hi-fi history. You’ll also see some oddities which aren’t classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price.

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

### Digital

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

**Cambridge Audio CD4SE** 1998 £200
- A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

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

**Marantz CD73** 1983 £700
- A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 16x4 DAC - super musical.

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

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

**Musical Fidelity Trivista** 2002 £4000
- When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSF 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. 16x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.

**Naim CD5** 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** 1987 £3,000
- Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.

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

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

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

### DACs

**Cambridge Audio DACMagic**
- Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.

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

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

**DACs**

**Cambridge Audio DACMagic**
- Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.

**DCS Elgar** 1997 £8500
- Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.

**DPA Little Bit 3** 1996 £299
- Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!

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

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

### Compact Disc Transports

**Technics SL-P1200**
- Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.
TUNETABLES

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

PIONEER PL12D 1973 £36
The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this bought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals.

PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600
Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

DUAL CS50S 1982 £75
Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound.

GOLDRING LENCO G7L7 1970 £15.65
Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TDI24 rivals.

LINN AXIS 1987 £253
Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with UVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86
For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price.

MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £N/A
Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.

MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599
Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

TECHNICS SP10 1973 £400
Somnial 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 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

SONY PS-B80 1978 £800
First outing for Sony's impressive 'Bioracer' electronc tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

THORENS TD124 1959 £N/A
The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck'; this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass.

TOWNSEND 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

ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46
The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120 1978 £75
Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

ALPHASON HR100S 1981 £150
First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.

SME 3009 1959 £18
Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

GRACE SL707 1974 £58
This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound, imported by Linn, fitted to early LP1/2s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

REGA RB300 1983 £88
Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.

SME SERIES III 1979 £113
Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

HADCOCK GH22B 1976 £46
Evergreen unipivot, with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.

LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253
Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

NAIM ARO 1986 £875
 Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.
CLASSICS

TECHNICS EPA-S01 1979 £N/A
Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS

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

ROGERS A75 1978 £230
The prototypical Audiolab 8000A—lots of sensible facilities, a goody power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonic and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

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

SUGDEN CS1/PS1 1976 £130
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN sockery. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300
Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent general purpose tool.

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.

NAIM NAC32.5 1978 f N/A
Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier for anacrophiles only.

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.

ROGERS CADET III 1985 £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
Madaeighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

ROTAL-RS206X 1983 £139
Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

CREEK CAS4040 1983 £150
More musical than any budget amp before it, CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

ROTEL RA-206X 1983 £139
Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

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

LUCENT H-7 1984 £300
Spacious, smooth and open to listen to. Not a production success, but a real gem and one of the rarest.

DELTEC 1988 £190
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.

SUGDEN A21 1969 £N/A
Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

MISSION CYRUS 3 1984 £299
Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.

SP-8 1982 £1,400
Beautifully designed and built monaural tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in in-cision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £N/A
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EBF6, pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest fit.

NAIM MAC32.5 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.

LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £25
The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks—cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 £N/A
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EBF6, pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest fit.

ROGERS A75 1978 £220
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.

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The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks—cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.
LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £N/A
Leak's biggest valve power amp offers 35 Watts per channel and more low end welly than the smaller Stereo 20. Despite concerns over reliability their rarity means high prices are the order of the day.

LECSON API 1973 £N/A
Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'power of power' pretensions, but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

MARANTZ MODEL 9 1957 £8000
Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

LEAK STEREO 60 1958 £N/A
Gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 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 60 1958 £N/A
Another of the serious classic solid-staters. Boasts the usual high end Jap package of fine sound, brilliant sensitivity and superb build.

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 £25
Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiple socket. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.

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

QUAD FM4 1983 £240
Supreme ergonomics and styling allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.

SONY ST-5950 1977 £222
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, it boasted a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.

SEQUERRA MODEL 1 1973 £1300
Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.
CLASSICS

TECHNICS ST-8080 1976 £180
National Panasonic's specialist hi-fi brand was a big hitter back then, and this is no exception. Superb FM stage makes for a very clean and smooth listen with lots of detail and depth.

ANALOGUE RECORDERS

YAMAHA TC-880GL 1977 £179
Early classic, with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!

AIWA XD-809 1989 £600
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn’t half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 £800
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.

PIONEER CTF-950 1978 £400
Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.

SONY WM-D6C 1985 £290
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single record/replay head better than most Naks. Result sublime.

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

AIWA XD-809

NAKAMICHI CR-7E

PIONEER CTF-950

SONY WM-D6C

SONY TC-377

DIGITAL RECORDERS

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

IMF IBM PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audophile sound and HDCD compatibility.

KENWOOD DM-9990 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...

BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects – articulation, stage depth, clarity – and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers AB1 subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!

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

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

SONY MDS-JESSIES

KENWOOD DM-9990

BBC LS3/5A

LOWTHER PM6A

HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS
Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs, warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.

Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstanders combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics.

High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brashy 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!

The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxed sound nevertheless!

When a classic goes ‘poof’ your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!
Hi-Fi World tests all products before they are reviewed. Many fail this first hurdle, rejected for a variety of faults. Pre-testing is crucial but only Hi-Fi World does it. For those products that pass, our measurements give our reviewers invaluable information about behaviour. Hi-Fi World is the only magazine, worldwide, sufficiently well equipped to be able to apply comprehensive tests in all product categories. Here's how we do it...

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

Loudspeakers are tested with the industry standard Clio measurement system from Audiomatica of Italy, giving results understood and accepted by manufacturers worldwide. Measuring microphones are a Brüel & Kjær mic. capsule on a B&K SPL meter and an Audiomatica microphone. Our tests include decay plots and coloured contour maps, as well as unique distortion measurement that provides valuable insight into bass behaviour. See our website www.hi-fiworld/loudspeakers/tests for more detail.

**PICKUP ARMS**

Our unique arm vibration tests are made using a special miniature Brüel & Kjær accelerometer attached to the arm's headshell, at the cartridge mounting position, as our picture shows. This reveals arm tube bending modes and high frequency vibrations in the headshell, that degrade sound.
AMPLIFIERS
Amplifiers are connected to large resistive loads, 8 ohms and 4 ohms, and all parameters including power and distortion are measured by a Rohde & Schwarz UPL, the world’s most advanced audio analyser. The loads are custom built to our specification, able to absorb 200 Watts without generating high frequency distortion due to magnetic hysteresis caused by iron content in the wire. This allows us to measure crossover distortion at 10kHz accurately and understand its influence upon sound.

DIGITAL CONVERTORS
DACs are connected to the digital signal generator of our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser and their analogue output sent to the analyser for analysis. We can measure all parameters and even pre-jitter the signal to test effectiveness of reclocking, allowing us to uniquely determine impact on sound quality.

PICKUP CARTRIDGES
To measure pickup cartridges you need an accurate test disc – and there is only one, JVC TRS-1007. We have two of them. It was cut at half speed and needs special equalisation, but is super accurate. That is why our cartridge measurements are of unparalleled accuracy, matching those of Ortofon for example, who also use TRS-1007.

VHF/FM TUNERS
Top quality VHF/FM tuners demand the use of a reference standard RF signal generator and for this we use a Leader 3412 Standard Signal Generator. An external MPX filter and post-equalisation network complete the picture, giving super accurate data for analysis in our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser.

TURNTABLES
Analysing turntable speed stability is thorny. We have just bought a Kenwood 180FL Wow & Flutter meter to get a high resolution analysis from its frequency demodulated speed stability output, important to see what Direct Drives are really doing.

CD, DVD AND BLU-RAY PLAYERS
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OLDE WORLDE

Living By Numbers

Tim Jarman goes back to the nineties to remember the first DVD players, with the help of Sony's DVP-S725D...

It may seem strange to see a DVD player in 'Olde Worlde', but the format has been with us now since the late nineteen nineties and in that time the equipment has changed a lot. DVD seemed under threat from Blu-Ray a couple of years ago, but just as with CD and SACD it may well be that the earlier, more basic format ends up prevailing, such are the quirks of the audio-visual market...

Not so long ago the supermarkets and discount electrical retailers got themselves into a pricing war with the cost of a basic DVD player dropping to under £10. An effect of this race-to-the-bottom was that people soon forgot that DVD players had in very recent times been high-price luxury items, and serious money at the time and because it doesn't record you still really needed to buy a video cassette recorder as well, a perfect situation for a manufacturer!

Sony first started talking about DVD players for the UK market in 1997 but did not show any actual models until 1998. The initial offerings were the DVP-S715 and the DVP-S315, the former being a full function machine and the latter being slightly more basic. Both used a complex optical assembly with two lasers and two sets of lenses arranged on a common carriage, something that was necessary so that the machine could play both CD and DVD discs. A similar pickup was used in 1999's DVP-S700, the next top model which came finished in champagne when compared to the supermarket cheapies, early DVD players were extravagantly engineered and solidly built, as befitted their high asking price. The Sony DVP-S725D shown here for example cost around £500, gold to match Sony's range of high-end AV amplifiers. 1999 also saw the launch of the DVP-S725D, the first of the second generation players on the UK market whose key difference was the use of a single laser unit that could read all types of discs.

At a glance, the DVP-S725D isn't greatly different from a modern player. Perhaps the only thing that one would really notice is that it is rather larger and heavier than those which are in the shops now. It comes with a comprehensive remote control whose keys glow in the dark, useful for 'high fidelity' viewing which is of course best done in near darkness. Around the back there are all the usual sockets and connectors, some of which are gold plated as is par for the course for expensive Japanese gear (yes, they still made them in Japan in those days!). Plenty of other tricks have been used to ensure top performance, the underside of the cabinet is carefully pressed and shaped to ensure minimum resonance and the feet are fitted with their screws off centre to further damp any vibrations. Damping material is also attached inside the top cover and rear panel, tinny it ain't!

"few modern CD players are constructed with such care and attention to detail..."

Of course we now know that the Digital Versatile Disc format became a huge global success, but back in those days of 'Cool Britannia' that certainly wasn't a foregone conclusion. The public traditionally
did not buy non-recordable video disc formats and had already rejected Telefunken's TelDec system, RCA's CED (Capacitive Electronic Disc, very similar in appearance to a vinyl LP), JVC's VHD, Philips LaserVision, Pioneer Laserdisc and Philips CDi (with its much-delayed full motion video adapter) to name but six, so it is clear that against a backdrop of unexplained failure the odds were stacked against DVD.

There was little that Sony could do about this but they did do one thing to cushion the blow should DVD fail, they made the DVP-S725D a very accomplished CD player as well. There was more to this than a couple of gold phono sockets and a handful of copper-plated screws. Instead, the audio circuits were isolated from the power, servo and digital sections of the machine and fed from their own 'R Core' transformer and linear regulated power supply. Top quality audio-specific components were used throughout these stages and extra special attention was paid to component selection in the L/R stereo output amplifier with special capacitors and instrument-grade op-amp chips from US firm Analog Devices. Few modern dedicated CD players are constructed with such care and attention to detail.

Assume then that DVD bombed and all that you were left with was an expensive CD player; how good is it? Trying it in my system the first thing that struck me was how tidy the sound is; it's all there but there is absolutely nothing wayward no matter what sort of music you play. Bass is tight without being dry, treble is clean without being harsh and that upper midrange glare that spoils some modern designs just isn't an issue. This is the natural outcome from something designed by people who knew exactly what they were doing operating on sensible budgets for the task at hand. You don't expect rough edges - and sure enough there aren't any. Okay, so it lacks the mellifluous midband and treble sweetness of the best classic European machines but that's something the Sony shares with just about every other CD player ever to come out of Japan, it's a difference in taste - not ability. In the final analysis the rendering of vocal texture can sometimes be considered slightly uninviting, but overall the DVP-S725D is practically the equal of £500 CD players available new today.

Of course DVD didn't fail, they're everywhere and so a player remains a useful asset. We are lucky in Europe that our version of the DVP-S725D is fitted with SCART connectors so there is almost direct access to the red, green and blue outputs of the video DAC. As with audio the best quality is often obtained by minimal signal processing so delving into the menus and switching the AV output from CVBS (PAL) to RGB in an absolute must, then the signal need only go up the cable, through a few wideband amplifiers and then straight into the three electron guns of the monitor's picture tube. That's right, for maximum viewing pleasure forget low-end consumer flat screens and find yourself a pensioned-off professional TV monitor instead. A good one will give a simply stunning picture and they are built to be tough enough to run for decades!

Most were mega-money new but with the TV stations re-equipping for HD there are plenty of bargains out there. For the beginner the Sony Trinitron PVM-2130QM (21") or PVM-2730QM (27") are a good choice as there are loads about, you don't need to make up special cables and they don't look too industrial in a domestic setting. On my PVM the DVP-S725D really shows it talents with smooth movement and solid blocks of stable, vivid colour. DVD's limited resolution and colour palette is occasionally evidenced by a jagged diagonal line or a certain lack of subtlety in the rendering of skin tones but that's the format talking, not the player. The Sony's menus allow you to adjust the video filtering to smooth such things over but as is often the case the cure is worse than the disease; make sure they are all switched off before you start that box-set viewing marathon.

All this talk of CRT monitors and SCART cables may seem rather quaint in a world of upscaling players, HDMI and oversize LCD TV sets but just as with LP records, valve amplifiers and loudspeakers in massive wooden boxes the newest way isn't automatically the best way to do something. Why bother with an early DVD player? Well, along with the very decent CD playback, lavish build and surprising video performance, they're irredeemably cheap! This particular box changed hands for £10 and even on a bad day on eBay, you'll likely pay no more than £30. That's a good deal for a fine sounding mid-price CD player, let alone one that also does video too. The Sony DVP-S725 isn't the most romantic olde worlde you'll have seen in these pages, but it's still a testament to a just passed age that will one day seem as quaintly nostalgic as Britpop, the Rover 75 and the idea that "things can only get better" by voting in a landslide government.

REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

There is usually a repair and maintenance aspect to used hi-fi but unless you are very skilled and well equipped such things are mostly off the menu with the likes of the DVP-S725D. Luckily they are not that old so general decay has not yet set in, but watch out for worn-out laser pickups, indicated by a reluctance to read the disc. New lasers are still available but the cost is sobering; it's easier to find another complete machine. Even with a working example it is worth taking the time to clean the lens and the 'turntable', the latter item seems to get far grubbier in DVD players than with CD ones (possibly due to the discs sharing table space with too many TV dinners!) and this can sometimes give the impression that the laser is on the way out.

The DVP-S725D has no proper 'off' switch, and although the linear audio supply is switched off in standby mode, parts of the main switch mode one that runs the digital circuits keep going all the time. For this reason, tired electrolytic capacitors and cracked soldering in this area are a good possibility in a well-used example; replacement is straightforward for anyone with an electronics background. The remote control uses a conductive silicone rubber membrane for its keys and switches and with use this exudes a sticky mess over the circuit board inside, stopping certain functions from working. Once dismantled warm soapy water will clean it up however.
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World Favourites are listed, as are 2010 World Awards. We will be adding an Olde Worlde listing soon. There is so much to come from our vast archives, including our definitive picture library.
"it was terrible to be limited to Red Book 16/44 digital audio for the best part of twenty years..."

david price

I can smile about it now, but at the time it was terrible." As a certain Stephen Patrick Morrissey observed in one of The Smiths' great mid-eighties singles ('Shakespeare’s Sister'), there are certain things in life which seem gravely important to you for long periods of your life, but then get relegated to the status of a wry smile when you look back nostalgically many years later...

I can personally think of many such examples, from Arsenal losing to Ipswich Town in the 1978 FA Cup final and that first series of Dallas ending in a cliffhanger over "who shot JR?", to the lowly 'C' grade I got in '0' Level Music and my managing to fall off my shiny new Honda MTX125R motorbike at 2mph, twisting the front forks, aged 18! We all have our crosses to bear. I’ve had a few hi-fi moments too — spending many hundreds of pounds buying a new CD player in 1985 (a Yamaha CD-X2), only to find it so bright as to be unlistenable — springs to mind.

Indeed, this was to become something of a seminal moment in my life. Back in the mid eighties, I liked LP but was still perfectly happy to commit to the shiny new silver disc as my future format. But it was CD’s terrible sound that ruined it, and I then had to suffer — as a keen purchaser of hi-fi magazines — reading how wonderful and perfect the CD was "perfect" having to explain what I desperately wanted was for people to admit that CD was not perfect (which at the time was akin to proclaiming the earth was really flat after all), and for a new digital format to come along and prove it...

Well, it did. Despite only raising the sampling frequency to 48kHz (from CD’s 44.1kHz), Digital Audio Tape sounded surprisingly superior. But still this wasn’t quite what I’d had in mind; I craved a new ‘Super CD’, and wondered if we’d ever get one. But there didn’t seem to be any light in mind; I craved a new ‘Super CD’, and wondered if we’d ever get one. But there didn’t seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. Even in the letters pages of early nineties What Hi-Fi, people were still saying things like, "If CD is perfect then why does my system sound so shrill!", only to get replies telling readers that it was what the music really sounded like. For me, these were hi-fi’s Dark Ages.

Then, in the mid-nineties, just when I thought Compact Disc could not be stopped, and that it was ‘game over’ for audiophiles, came the announcement; Sony and Philips were working on a replacement! I couldn’t believe it. Oh my god, the inventors of the Devil’s own disc had admitted the error of their ways and repented!

As it happened, DVD-A bombed fairly quickly, while SACD never achieved the momentum it needed to become a mass market format, although it has been modestly successful. You can still buy new SACDs from a range of sources, Linn Records being a key player; their classical releases are sublime. There are a few on Amazon and failing that eBay, secondhand. Serious SACD-ers however, look to the market where the formats really got a foothold (and still has) — Japan. At the time of writing CD Japan (www.cdjapan.co.jp) has 1,100 new titles. DVD-Audio of course has since been reborn; stripped of its physical carrier, it’s now the de facto high end download format (in its 24/96 incarnation, often compacted via FLAC).

And so hi res digital continues; it’s had an unspectacular first ten years, but at least it didn’t go the way of Elcaset, for example, to be resurrected in the ‘where are they now’ category. In my view it really was terrible to be limited to Red Book 16/44 digital audio for the best part of twenty years, before SACD (and then hi res downloads) appeared, and vinyl made its rightful resurgence. The bad days are over, it seems.
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"It's amazing what vinyl does to a person – or a record label, for that matter..."

Paul Rigby

It's amazing what vinyl does to a person – or a record label, for that matter. It changes that person's or company's perspective. It alters how they do things, how they think about music and the way it should be presented.

Take World Circuit (www.worldcircuit.co.uk), one of the premier world music labels. It has just released four albums on vinyl, the first time it has issued anything on black wax since the late-eighties. They include the live Carnegie Hall performance of the 'Buena Vista Social Club', the Ry Cooder-produced project featuring a host of legendary Cuban musicians; 'AfroCubism', the original project that spawned the idea for the Buena Vista LP but this time featuring the likes of Toumani Diabate and Bladés Ochoa; Tony Allen's 'Secret Agent' and Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabate's self-titled LP.

Nick Gold, owner of World Circuit explained why it has taken so long to address the black wax. "We understand now that we can produce it and sell it without losing money and that there is a market for it. I've always been told that you shouldn't produce vinyl because it will lose money – not now. A magic line has been crossed that's now made it possible. It was probably our German distributors who began pushing us for vinyl, initially. They produced our first recent vinyl release under license, the live Buena Vista sessions at Carnegie Hall, that went well and we began to do it ourselves. Sales of the recent releases seem to be holding up quite well. The numbers aren't massive but they're doing well."

On a personal level, this vinyl rediscovery prompted Gold to dig out his treasured Rega Planar 3 turntable. This, in turn, has tweaked the interest of his fifteen year old son et al., "...and there's no nostalgia excuse with him and his mates. They love the records and the 'thing' that it goes on. This strange machine we call a turntable. Some kids have never seen one. Watching it working is fascinating for them. At a gig, he'll always buy vinyl now. Even if he doesn't play it he'll put it on the wall or prop it on the mantelpiece."

You see how the vinyl ripples enter into Gold's personal life too! In addition, it shows you the affinity even someone of fifteen years of age can have with the beloved plastic. The same age group which the general media wrongly believe are download fixated to the exclusion of everything else. But back to World Circuit!

"This release of four LPs is partly a toe in the water," said Gold, "but we do intend to release more, especially those releases that have never been released on vinyl before. It was all originally created on analogue anyway. There is the onereplacement to produce really nice vinyl at World Circuit, especially from the half-inch tapes in our possession, which are all in excellent condition. Later this year, we are looking to have a reissued 'Buena Vista Social Club' vinyl, mastered by Bernie Grundman (long term mastering engineer of choice when Classic Records were still with us)."

He won't be doing them all, though. "We've decided to approach the original mastering engineers for each of our releases. Whoever did the album the first time round will be approached to do the reissue because they will know the recording intimately if that's not possible then we'll talk to the original mix-down engineer. It's horses for courses."

Another reason for this selective approach to mastering engineers is a bad experience Gold had with a remastered LP in the past. "I wasn't happy with it so we approached a second engineer. The difference between the two engineers can be huge and was in this particular case. To the extent of sounding like a completely new mix. One might provide a mix with a softer, deeper bass that's not so brittle, another might sound harder with a much wider soundstage. All from the same tapes."

Of the forthcoming releases, in addition to the original 'Buena Vista Social Club', expect to see Ry Cooder and Ali Farka Touré's album, 'Talking Timbuktu'. For both LPs, Ry Cooder has taken an intimate and very hands-on interest. Also, on these albums, Gold has found extra tracks but he's not sure how they will be presented on vinyl; possibly via an extra 12" disc or even a bonus 7" single.

"There's some good stuff on there," affirmed Gold. "Nearly every tape has extra tunes. Some of it is pretty obvious why it wasn't released but there are interesting pieces too. A lot of these sessions that we did were also recorded to DATs, so we have much to choose from."

So why have they suddenly thought of extra tracks and rarities? According to Gold, a natural train of thought, "Vinyl, analogue, 1/2" tapes, music on the tapes, what other music is there on those tapes? Simple really." But that's vinyl for you. A simple idea that keeps on being brilliant. PR
The Evo! What an evocative name and rightly so too! The SL-1200 evolved from a Hi-Fi turntable into a DJ deck and now we turn it back into a Hi-Fi turntable again! Fitted with the legendary SME 309 tonearm and the Audio Technica AT33EV your emotions will run wild. The AT33EV is itself an evolutionary cartridge hence its EV suffix and matches the SME 309 so well. We have worked with direct drive turntables and moving coil cartridges for over 30 years now and the EVO has evolved into a mature product that is quite simply a world beater. We can supply completely new units with 5 year guarantees or we can convert your own, even if you bought it used.

The SME 309 tonearm is a delight to use, to look at and more importantly to listen with! Featuring the very same tapered magnesium armtube as the SME V you might wonder why this tonearm has such a low price tag. SME have a very long history and pedigree of making as they say “The best tonearms in the world” and we agree with them. This might be the last tonearm you buy, and in the long term has to be the very best value for anyone. We fit more 309s than all other arms added together, we simply love them to bits!

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"it's amazing what a couple of hours of fiddling and fettling can do for the look and the sound of your system..."

**tony boltton**

For me, one of hi-fi's greatest hassles is dust. My system seems to attract it, both to itself and the area immediately surrounding it. This was brought home to me when I was preparing for the visit by Mark and Derek from Tiger-Paw, as recounted on p106 of this issue.

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I avoid using proprietary polishing sprays since the chemicals in them can sometimes have a destructive effect on the finishes of some units. Many years ago I was somewhat distressed to find that Mr. Sheen and the paint on Quad 33 preamps was not a good mixture - some of the paint coming away from the light on the front and a slight speckling appearing on the bodywork itself! I clean acrylic, such as the lid on the Sondek, with spray glass cleaner, which gives a good finish and seems to be reasonably dust repellent, followed again by a quick 'Zero-zap'.

When it comes to the electrical connections I generally use Russ Andrews' DeoxIT Gold (www.russandrews.com) for the plated finishes on most hi-fi cables and mains leads. I have found it seems to keep things shiny over long periods and has a small but beneficial effect upon the sound. If this isn’t handy then a wipe over with either Isopropyl Alcohol or Methylated Spirits does an effective job.

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"Blu-ray players and AV systems can do much more than what they were designed for..."

noel keywood

Shooting video can be both difficult and frustrating - even to those who enjoy it. It's an art that requires patience, skill and a bit of luck. But it's also incredibly rewarding.

I needed a directional microphone of course; the mics on the Canon HV30 I was using at the time were picking up sound from all around, which might be what's needed for, say, a wedding reception video, but not for much else. The mics should gather sound from the direction the camera is facing, but they're too sensitive to pick up sound from other directions.

A useful device here is the M-S microphone where the Side channel can be matrixed in to produce stereo. And sound quality? This is where AV gets very interesting, because you can use your AV system to give an immersive, palpably real experience. Suddenly, the hi-fi has a new role, to reproduce the sound of a live event.

Video sound quality is a world of its own and one that isn't so easy to cope with. I started shooting video ten years ago and soon learnt that what you see and what you hear can be two entirely different things. The shots I have of a Tiger Moth aircraft idling on the grass at Duxford airfield, happen to be a useful test piece for judging picture quality, but it's a test that can't be repeated at home. I got a great piece of video of my son at nine years old flying off into the blue, but instead of the gentle purr of aircraft's engine on the soundtrack, I got was "waaah - I wanna ice cream". But the final result can make it all worthwhile - and it is the audio that brings it to life. This is where AV gets very interesting, because you put the sound of an event through your hi-fi and sit in the middle of what was happening afterward. Still pictures bring back memories; video takes you back to the event.

I mention all this because I bought myself a new toy the other day, one that slots into AV in an impressive way. It's a camcorder, one that shoots video at 50 progressive frames a second to give picture quality that approaches that from professional cameras. Each frame is so good it can be used as a still shot, and when running, video quality is startling. Transferred to Blu-ray disc it plays through a Blu-ray player, with the audio directed through the AV hi-fi system to give an immersive, palpably real experience. Suddenly the hi-fi has a new role, to reproduce the sound of a live event.

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When it goes right. I have some great footage of growling Rolls Royce Merlins at air shows, on Spitfires and Mustangs as they taxi past the camera, a noise that thankfully drowns out all others - including all requests for ice cream!

The new toy is a Panasonic HDC TM900, bought on the basis of good reviews, notably from www.camcorderinfo.com (I really wanted Canon's new HF G10 but the extra cost and complexity ruled it out). Using the Panasonic's standard modes was disappointing, providing a picture little better than the outgoing tape based Canon HV30 I have been using. Grass and trees faded off into a gentle blur.

Selecting 'turbo' mode, recording in HD at 50 progressive frames a second, changed everything. Suddenly, I had video! This mode greatly increases data rate, required storage capacity, and the computer processing power to cope with it when editing. It is also a non-standard format based on MPEG4. But so far there has been no problem scoring, editing and burning it to Blu-ray, using TMPGEnc Authoring Works 4. It's a camcorder, one that slots into AV in an impressive way. It's a camcorder, one that shoots video direct to onboard memory are especially good at, unlike old tape based machines.

And sound quality? This is another difficult area because a microphone of good sound quality also picks up low frequency disturbances, but it doesn't relate to the picture onscreen. Extended high frequency response and noise, including whistling wind noise over the mike.

Trying to get a sound track that both relates to the subject being shot and one that is free from annoying noises, children shouting for ice creams, jets screaming overhead and what have you is hideously difficult, but fascinating and very rewarding.
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it's with a heavy heart, dear reader, that I have to announce the end of a long and wonderful era in the Smith household, and I have chosen you as the ideal conduit to channel my anguish, as I feel sure that you'll understand what I am going through...

You see, ever since I discovered car boot sales in my early teens, I have taken endless delight in the discovery of worthy audio and hi-fi equipment from all sorts of places. The aforementioned car booter was a very fruitful source but my local dumps, free advertising papers, second-hand shops, audiojumbles and even the odd skip parked in a road all have proven to be surprisingly fruitful sources of, at times, impressively worthy equipment. Yes, a great deal of it was merely average that simply suited a particular need for spare parts, or the occasional friend who would request me to find him "a cheap one of those old record players" so that he could enjoy the discovery of worthy audio and hi-fi equipment from all sorts of places. However, a few gems have cropped up, like a mint, boxed Bang & Olufsens Beogram 4000 from the car boot sale, a pair of original 1960s Goodmans Maxims at the dump and, on one startling occasion, a twelve inch professional Audio Technica arm from the bottom of a box at John Howes' Audiojumble that everyone else missed! However, it looks like the days of my collecting equipment are now at an end. "What on earth has happened?" I hear you cry. Has my long-suffering wife finally put her foot down and declared "No more"? Has my trusty Range Rover finally dragged in the mother of all repair bills — probably!

Equally however, a few gems have been purchased under a table in a car boot sale field, lobbed unceremoniously into a dusty skip or sat out in the rain at a dump, a good cleanup is absolutely mandatory. When just a young lad, I started off with a bit of washing up liquid on a damp cloth but then came the day when I bought something that was just that little grubbier. My mother was consulted, a bottle of Cif (as it was then known) was pulled from the cupboard and the item in question (a Yamaha CR-820 receiver, I seem to recall) soon sparkled...

Obviously, standard Cif became a staple part of my hi-fi clean-up kit, along with assorted cloths, toothbrushes, cotton buds and the like, and I even switched to the occasional lemon variety when it came along, just to add that little extra frisson of freshness to my items. And then that fateful day struck — I was given a magnificent, huge JVC amplifier that drove my Leak 2075s a treat and unfortunately had resided in the lounge of a heavy smoker for most of its life. Fortunately it had been in a rack with only small gaps around it, so the smoke had not permeated inside too badly (if the circuit board soaks it up, trust me — you'll never get rid of the smell) but the allegedly silver front panel was brown and it absolutely stank. My Cif (as it was now renamed) did its best but couldn't quite cut through the grime.

Off I went to my local supermarket to peruse the alternatives — and there it was — Cif with Bleach. A bottle was purchased, I raced home and in no time that amplifier's front panel was gleaming and smelling surprisingly sweet! I never looked back and this became my staple cleaner for many years, both for hi-fi and home. There were one or two hiccups however, like discovering that it was remarkably effective at removing the lettering from the front panel of 1980s cottage industry units like my Quantum Electronics 102 preamplifier. One or two visitors were perplexed by its 'lum' and 'lanç' controls where one would normally expect to find Volume and Balance. Still, I worked around these issues and was delighted with it until recently when I noticed it disappearing from the shelves. My father found a bulk three litre bottle at a local cash and carry, which lasted quite a while and the last bottle I bought was from a supermarket in Italy when my wife and I were on holiday there. In retrospect I'm not too sure how I'd have explained that to the Customs officers, had they chosen to search our bags.

"dumpster diving" will continue but unfortunately has now vanished however, and a nice person from Unilever has indeed personally confirmed to me that it is no longer made due to "low levels of demand". I am sure that I'll find something else to do the job and that my favourite hobbies of bargain hunting and "dumpster diving" will continue but I really am disappointed that they have chosen to cease production of such a useful product. Unless I can find something as effective yet gentle, I may well have to decline any smoke damaged-items in future. More importantly, I'm sure our bath tub will never be as shiny again!
REGA RP3 100
Adam Smith auditions this new mid-price vinyl spinner.

VINCENT PHO-111VP 105
David Price enjoys this carefully tweaked budget phono stage.

TIGER PAW LNN LP12 106
Tony Bolton tries a superb new Sondek modifications package.

NORTHWEST ANALOGUE 401 111
Adam Smith reviews a new slate Garrard plinth system.

JUST JAZZ
We haven't had a great deal of jazz in the last couple of issues so let's right that wrong. Via Pure Pleasure (www.purepleasurerecords.com) is Jamie Cullum's debut commercial LP: 'Pointless Nostalgic' (2002), proving that this little man had the gall to claim his position as the British Sinatra but also mixing jazz with contemporary and self-penned ditties. Stacey Kent has a deliciously naughty voice that manages to interpret a song with...
PRINCE TRIO
Witnessing the rise of a superstar that finishes just before the phenomenon that was Prince’s ‘Purple Rain’ (1984), Warners has released ‘Dirty Mind’ (1980), Prince’s first carefully crafted work, packed with superb funk-pop music plus lots and lots of sex. Right after that we have ‘Controversy’ (1981), featured here with a limited edition poster, that pushed back the musical boundaries and began to introduce social commentary until his second masterpiece, ‘1999’ was released in 1982, computer funk in extremis with maturing writing skills and enough raw talent on display to scare the life out of every other singer-songwriter of the time.

surgical exactitude blended with often heart-breaking emotional generosity. ‘The Boy Next Door’ (2003) is a celebration of favourite songs from favourite man such as Bennett, Sinatra, Como and Ellington. Featuring Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Hank Mobley and Don Byrd (a rising star at the time) with Doug Watkins, The Jazz Messengers (1956) features classic tracks with some Asian-influenced innovation.

From Germany’s Speakers Corner (www.speakerscorner.de) is Oscar Peterson & Nelson Riddle’s self-titled album that performs a perfect tension of breakous exuberance from pianist Peterson and the smooth Riddle arrangements. The result is warm and rich; music to bathe in. Also look out for Baden Powell’s ‘Sultane On Guitar’ (1971) which features the gifted Latin instrumentalist bossa nova co-founder; Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong’s ‘Ella And Louis Again’ (1957) follows the 2CD version, packing in two LPs while ‘The Soul Of Ben Webster’ sees the great tenor sax man entering a purple patch late-on in his career.

EXPLORING THE LEFTFIELD...
Kicking off the world of the weird and strange is a quintet of new, related albums emanating from the Spectrum Spools label (editionsmego.com/spectrum-spoons). Consisting of Temporal Marauder’s ‘Makes You Feel’, Bee Mask’s ‘Canzonidal Laboratorio del Silenzio’ and ‘Elegy For Beach Friday’, Fabric’s ‘A Sort Of Radiance’ and Forma’s self-titled piece, they all utilise a nostalgic electronica framework of often sweeping rhythms and synth-based loops to provide sometimes magnificent, lush and rich soundscapes that transport you to a rollercoaster ride of emotional turbulence.

Reinhold Friedl’s ‘Inside Piano’ (Hronir: www.hronir.de) is a new didactic piece that provides a guided tour around the instrument, utilising an avant-garde approach of tones, effects and noise. This vinyl edition, limited to 470 copies, features three pieces not found on the CD version.

Finally, Phurpa’s ‘Trowo Phumag Ceremony’ (Editions Mego; editionsmego.com) utilises a range of traditional Tibetan instruments along with extraordinary bass-infused chants, whose reverberation is both invigorating and disturbing.

...AND FINALLY
The Three Seasons’ ‘Life’s Road’ (Transubstans; www.transubstans.com) is a new two disc release fronted by ex-Siena Root vocalist Sartez, who comes across all Glenn Hughes on this rock release, infused with hard blues. Dave Deeper’s ‘The Ram Project’ (Jackpot; www.jackpotrecords.com) is a ‘reimagined’ take on the Paul McCartney, 1971 release, ‘Ram’. A fun project more like, it’s interesting to see a tweaked viewpoint on this classic release. Tropical soul and beat are next from the Brazilian outfit Garotas Suecas and their new LR ‘Escaldante Banda’ (Vampi Soul; www.vampisoul.com) which provides a partybeat backed with a circus tent full of instruments which keeps the energy high and the vibe swinging. Finally, check out the heavy blues rock Of The Raver’s ‘Bad, Bad World’ (Wah Wah). Fans of The Edgar Broughton Band will lap it up.
Third Degree Turn

After several years of market dominance, Rega’s P3 turntable has suddenly been pensioned off for this, the new RP3. Adam Smith takes it for a spin...

I don’t know if it’s something in the water, but interesting things are definitely happening down in Southend-on-Sea and the fruits of this can be seen in the outpourings of exciting new goodies from Rega. Historically the company has been known for its very sedate rate of new products and existing product updates but, in the past few years, things have definitely ramped up in a noticeable manner.

First there were the flagship Osiris and Isis amplifier and CD player, then the entire loudspeaker range received a tasteful restyle and recently we have welcomed the arrival of the Rega DAC and the decidedly stylish new Brio-R amplifier.

However, back in between these events, another significant happening occurred, namely the replacement of the PI entry-level turntable with the RP1. This occurred a year or so after the publication of an interesting photo on various internet forums which may or may not have been a prototype of a new flagship ‘P10’ turntable, or a development mule for future models lower down in the range. Rega is still remaining tight lipped about that flagship possibility but one item in that mysterious photo has finally stumbled into the spotlight, courtesy of the brand new RP3 — a replacement for the highly capable P3-24.

The item in question was a phenolic resin brace which is fitted between arm mounting and main bearing housing. Giving the deck the apparent appearance of a suspended subchassis type but without the suspension, Rega claims that it “forms a structurally sound ‘stressed beam’ assembly specifically where increased rigidity is required”. This therefore prevents energy absorption and unwanted resonances from causing distortion in the music. Of course, the company has always followed the path of low mass in its plinths, which is why the RP3 still had a traditional Rega lightweight plinth with a small brace – the company claim that making the whole plinth skin from the brace’s phenolic material would cause counter-productive issues in terms of mass absorption resulting in unwanted energy transmission.

Sitting atop the RP3 is yet another new item in the form of the RB303 tonearm. A further development of the P3-24’s RB301 item, which in turn was an evolution of the original, classic RB300, the RB303 advances Rega’s tonearm technology further still. New for the latest model are a new arm tube with claimed increased rigidity between it and the bearing housing, plus an alteration to the mass distribution within the arm which Rega claim “ensures the arm will exhibit fewer points of possible resonance”. The counterweight is also now a satin black finished item that matches the armtube – Rega claims no sonic wonders as a result of this but it certainly looks nice!

The RP3 comes in three finishes, namely White, Grey and Titanium which does seem to suggest that you’ll have to be content with the older P3-24 if you still want something more vivacious like Red, Blue, Green or Pink. Still at least you can still jazz the deck up with a red, blue, yellow or purple mat should you so desire. Retail price of the RP3 is £475, although it is available as a package with Rega’s Elys 2 cartridge for £549. As the motor used in the RP3 is the same as that of the P3-24, the TT-PSU upgrade would also appear to be an option, but the review sample was supplied without.

SOUND QUALITY

Going back to the P3-24 that I reviewed in the July 2009 issue of Hi-Fi World, I personally felt that this finally marked the incarnation of the deck that offered the sort of sound quality that many people stated that it had offered for years, but by which I had never been quite convinced. Consequently, I was intrigued to hear whether the RP3 was simply a swift polishing exercise to keep the deck competitive in the marketplace but I quickly realised as I started listening that such cynicism was misplaced. Frankly, being well aware of Rega’s abilities I should have known better!

With the Elys2 nicely warmed up, the RP3 immediately announces itself as a sophisticated and intensely poised customer. Traditionally the Planar/P3 has always expertly bridged the gap between boisterous budget belter and suave mid-priced smoothie but has been gradually moving closer and closer to the latter. The RP3 however, truly completes the jump across that gap; such is its silky...
"the tonally grey sterility of Rega's past decks that has often troubled me seemed nothing but a distant memory..."

The other thing that struck me as I continued listening was the incredible lack of surface noise and background mush coming from the loudspeakers during quiet interludes. That new brace seems to be doing its job very effectively indeed as the silences between tracks were positively cavernous. When the music restarted however, the RP3 instantly filled the soundstage, offering a better sense of focus and accuracy than its P3-24 predecessor. This meant that instruments were vivid and stood out in superb clarity within the soundscape, ensuring that all the action was easy to follow. Once again however, I couldn't help feeling a lack of focus to the treble at times, which experience suggested was down to the Elys 2 cartridge; it's a pleasant enough performer but its rolled-off top end means that it is simply rather too veiled and over-smooth for me at times.

Consequently, out came the Smith vinyl toolkit and in went my Ortofon 2M Black. A spot of protractor-wielding followed by weight and bias tweaks saw the stylus back in the groove and everything deliciously crisp and shiny once again.
"The Truth, nothing more, nothing less..."

"This is one of the great turntables in the world..." - March 2009 David Price, HiFi World

"Acutus Reference is one of the most musical-sounding record players you can buy" - March 2007 The Absolute Sound

"Fabulous detail retrieval and focused sound, the Acutus Reference SP delivers a captivating performance."
- September 2010 John Bamford, HiFi News

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Now cymbals were delivered with a superbly crisp leading edge and almost military precision, the sharpness and impact, but I was aware, that it never seems rattled or distantly emotionless, but equally the TD500 in its sense of fluid insight — no bad thing when one considers that the TD500 is one of the finest turntables I have heard, and retails at well over ten times the price of the RP3.

CONCLUSION
There is a regular procession of turntables of all shapes, sizes and budgets through the Smith listening room, yet it's a rare thing to hear a deck that offers such sophistication and poise whilst bearing such a modest price tag. Rega have successfully upped their game once more with the RP3, and although I feel it needs the TT-PSU to really perform at its best, it is pretty much the class leader at the price and more than good enough to worry decks brandishing bigger price tags as well. Even more tantalisingly, the box it came in was a dual-purpose carton that was also labelled with 'RP3' markings, which suggests that there is much more to come from Essex yet. Personally, I'm looking forward to it immensely.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE
The Rega's new RB303 tapered cast arm in the P3 is rigid, having a first bending mode at a high 300Hz our analysis shows. There are two higher peaks, at 575Hz and 1150Hz but they are narrow and encompass little energy (area under the curve). However, this RB303 still exhibits quite a lot of modal energy around 1kHz and this is possibly the source of the arm's characteristic tonality. In all though the RB303 on the P3 reafirms its place as an advanced design with little resonant energy and a good general rigidity. The P3 turntable varied speed stability issues

WOW & FLUTTER
The Rega remains mediocre in terms of speed stability and it is unlikely to have the rock solid pitch of a direct drive or better belt drives; better is possible. It is however a good enough result for a budget deck and the RB303 arm remains a strong design of deserved reputation. NK

CONCLUSION
The deck has a sense of grace and smoothly effortless commanding musicality which means that it never seems rattled or distantly emotionless, but equally it never becomes over-boisterous and trips itself up. In many ways it reminded me of the mighty Thorens TD550 in its sense of fluid insight — no bad thing when one considers that the TD500 is one of the finest turntables I have heard, and retails at well over ten times the price of the RP3.

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Michell Hydraulic Reference, SME 3009, new lid
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Passion Play

David Price tries the Missing Link tweaked Vincent PHO-111 Vinyl Passion phono stage...

In a world of phono stages where it's possible to get no change from £4,000, here's something for £119 that's been specially tweaked by the capable hand of Mark Sears from Missing Link. The 'Vinyl Passion' edition of the Vincent PHO-111 phono stage, itself a German designed, Chinese built box of chips, has been subtly but usefully breathed on.

The PHO-111 itself is a cheap and cheerful op-amp based phono stage in a box. It offers two switchable input sensitivities (4mV MM and 0.45mV MC) and three loading options (47kOhm/100pF, MM 11: 47kOhm/300pF, MC: 100 Ohm/100pF), with cheap gold plated RCA input and output sockets. The 145x55x125mm box is a very inexpensive pressed steel affair, and comes with a 16VAC/200mA 'wall wart' switched mode power supply, that comes with an enigmatically 'upgraded' Missing Link sticker outside! That, as far as I can discern, is the extent of the mods...

SOUND QUALITY

This modest phono stage sounded surprisingly smooth with a nice, fulsome bass and absolutely no upper midrange nasties. Kicking off with Nu Era's 'Some Think Electronic' EP, and 'A 3rd of the Third' was most enjoyable, its sins being those of omission, musically speaking. Bass was quite warm and soft and tuneful, the bass guitar line being picked out well and counterpointed nicely to the banging electronic percussion. The snare sound, which can be quite hard and grating, wasn't anything of the sort; although there was a slightly diffuse nature to it in absolute terms; ditto the hi hats which were ever so slightly blunted, yet never harsh. Behind this, thick swirls of synthesiser sound gave an expansive and immersive effect, making the track relaxing get involving to listen to – and certainly far, far better than expected.

Daryl Hall and John Oates' 'Can't Go For That' showed the Vinyl Passion as a little dynamically constrained and loose at frequency extremes, with a subtle tendency to cloud fine detail, but then again it never sounded anything other than enjoyable. Indeed, I found it quite relaxing and beguiling in its way: it didn't ask much from the listener, letting its sound wash around in a comforting way and giving as much as it needed to in terms of detail, without falling over itself to sound overly forensic. This contrasts with other cheaper designs which throw everything at you in a forced and harsh way, trying to give the illusion of ability they don't have.

The only real downside was the hiss, which was audible on MM and almost intrusive on MC; via the latter it was almost like listening to analogue tape without Dolby! This apart, it wasn't a bad performer at the price, with an unusually smooth and warm tonality, and a general musicality only normally heard from grown up phono stages – the Vincent PHO-111 Vinyl Passion just gets on the job of making music fun.

VERDICT

Warm, smooth and enjoyably musical considering its modest price, although hiss can intrude via moving coil.

MISSING LINK VINCENT
PHO-111VP £119
Missing Link
C: +44(0) 1623 844478
www.the-missing-link.net

FOR
- musically enjoyable
- smooth and warmish
- MM and MC inputs

AGAINST
- hissy on MM and MC
- rudimentary build!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our analysis shows flat frequency response, a result of accurate equalisation. However, gain does not reduce below 20Hz on MM or MC, being maintained right down to 1Hz in other words there is no warp filtering and warps at 5Hz will get strongly amplified, causing loudspeaker cone flap.

MM gain is close to unusably low at x48 (33dB), a common gain being x100. MC was x10 higher (correct ratio) but again too low in absolute terms: it should be x1000 minimum.

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And finally hiss was 20dB higher than usual in MC, and 6dB higher than usual in MM mode, since both were a high 0.7μV equivalent input noise (IEC A weighted).

No differences existed between MMI and MMII in all the above measurements.

This phono stage did not measure well. Lower noise ICs are commonly available nowadays and more gain is needed. NK

Disc
Frequency response 1Hz-35kHz
Separation 65dB
Noise (e.i.n.) 0.7μV
Distortion 0.003%
Gain x48(33dB) - x 490(54dB)
Overload 9V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
Here's one of the most interesting upgrade packages in recent years, for the ubiquitous Linn Sondek turntable. Tony Bolton gets his claws into the Tiger-Paw Khan Linn LP12...

Like most of you I'm sure, I am very protective of my hi-fi equipment. I am quite happy to try 'hot-rod当地' things as long as whatever is done can be undone without leaving a mark if it doesn't work. 

So when editor DP approached me to do this review, which involved the stripping down, replacement of the top plate studs and crossbrace, and reassembly of my Linn Sondek, I must admit that I approached it with some degree of trepidation...

Regular readers will be aware that my Sondek is not standard, in that I use a Hadcock 242 Cryo unipivot tonearm on it, and it is powered by an Origin Live Ultra DC motor. Both of these changes, I feel, have been extremely beneficial to the sound, and have the advantage for me of enabling the deck to spin at higher speeds than just 33 and 45. The interchangeability of the Hadcock arms allows me to have three: one for LP, one for 78 and the other for visiting cartridges, also making it a convenient tool for this job.

Having been reassured that the Khan modifications could be undone if required, I duly got the kettle brewing and awaited the visit from Mark Digman and Derek Jenkins, two of the three partners that make up the rather abstractly named company, Tiger-Paw. Based in Coulsdon in Surrey and formed in the early part of this year, they offer a range of modifications to the LP 12 ranging from replacement hinges through to the Khan mod under review here.

Whilst various companies have focused their attention on the LP12's subchassis, armboards and power supplies over the years, very few have looked at the effects of the stainless steel top plate upon the sound. After experimenting with several versions, this final design is a piece of bead-blasted and anodised aluminium which is cut from a solid billet. The top has a curved design on it, whilst the underside has a straight pattern cut in, along with tappings for the studs. These shapes are claimed to dissipate resonances making for a more inert mounting for the subchassis and motor.

The original top plate is slightly curved to make it a stressed fit into the plinth. This one weighs about...
the same amount but is machined to close tolerances to allow it to just drop into place. The bolts which go right through the original top plate are replaced with high quality bespoke steel studs. Completing the ensemble is a replacement crossbrace, again in aluminium with more 'standing wave reduction grooving' which replaces the original pressed steel example. This is where the electronics for the Valhalla board or Lingo control board live, so any improvement in the mounting should benefit the sound.

After their arrival, and suitable time being allowed for tea drinking and a listen through a selection of my records ranging from Shpongle to a 1933 copy of Lew Stone's 'White Jazz', the Sondek was carried from the front room into the kitchen and placed on a Linn jig, ready for surgery. The Linn jig is a stand which holds the deck both steady and level while allowing complete access to all parts of it. Over the next hour Derek, who has over thirty years of experience in working on Sondeks, removed the original bits until there was just a plinth sitting there. Then the new top plate was installed, followed by replacement springs and mounting grommets onto which was put the original subchassis. The bearing was thoroughly examined and pronounced to be in excellent health (pleasing news considering that this player was built on the 19th April 1982, and in my hands for the last eight years, has covered quite a high mileage) before being reassembled. Next was the crossbrace, armboard and motor unit...

YEARS AGO A GOOD FRIEND WHO used to work for Linn introduced me to the black art of setting up Sondek suspension, and I have, on occasion, lost whole evenings tweaking the bounce of both LP12s and various Thorens decks, so I was very impressed to watch Derek get it bouncing perfectly in under five minutes. After final checks for arm and cartridge alignment, and balance, the Sondek went back to the wall rack in the front room and was fired up.

SOUND QUALITY
This is one of those rare occasions when it took a matter seconds of listening before I turned to Derek and Mark, commenting on the hugely increased scale and detail of the soundstage. They laughed and informed me that I was conforming to what they had begun to call the "three second rule"!

Staring with Shpongle's 'Are You Shpongled?', we worked our way back through the same selection of records and I sat there mesmerised by the transformation of the sound. I have mentioned the scale differences — the music seemed to be coming from a far bigger area in front of me, with increases to all dimensions of the sound, without it acquiring a grandiose, overblown manner. The other thing that was obvious with the Shpongle pieces was the increase in detail and depth to the bass. It seemed to gain a better shape and a more defined position within the music, but lost a certain euphonic colouration that, to my ears, slows and clouds the sound somewhat.

Moving onto Lew Stone's 'White Jazz' was an ear opener. This cover of the Casa Loma Orchestra’s hit is well recorded with the band on top form, and this copy is in good condition; I now found the surface noise had taken a big step further into the background, and the beat of this rather crackingly paced foxtrot had more snap and precision. The trumpet pyrotechnics of Nat Gonella stood out with a sharper attack to the notes and the decay being better described. It was hot jazz that had just had the temperature turned up.

After Mark and Derek had left for the long drive back to the Southeast, I settled down for a very late evening of record playing. After a lot more 78s I moved back to microgroove recordings and played Acker Bilk’s second LP, revelling in the latinesque beat of ‘Creole Jazz’...
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with Bilk’s wailing clarinet almost sending tingles up my spine. I usually reach for the mono switch with this record. It bears a few minor scars from its fifty years of existence, but I now found it playing in an acceptable manner with the phono stage still in stereo mode. The background crackles were sufficiently muted so as not to be intrusive.

The same applied to a 1964 Roy Orbison LP that had obviously attended a few parties in its youth. Played on the rejuvenated Sondek, the final track on side one, a cover of Jerry Lee Lewis’s ‘Mean Woman Blues’, played with minimal disturbance but displayed a more incisive guitar sound than I am used to hearing from it.

While I was putting together my notes for this article I played through Kalman’s operetta ‘Grafin Mariza’. First performed in 1924 it is typical of the period with swinging Viennese waltzes and lush sounding choruses, complimenting rather sprightly two steps such as ‘Komm mit nach Varasdin’ sung by the two leads. This recording, originally done by Electrola (HMV) in Germany in 1972, has most of the spoken bits in between the songs so comes with performers walking into and out of the stage area, along with some basic sound effects such as doors opening and differing acoustics for indoor and outdoor scenes.

I felt that the level of detail retrieval had vastly improved since last playing these discs and even though I know them well, I kept hearing odd little things in both the music and effects that I hadn’t previously been conscious of. It was musically coherent, and thoroughly delightful to listen to.

As I write this I’ve been trying to think of any drawbacks to this modification to the LP 12. and the only one that I can come up with is that if you have been relying on the bass colouration of a standard Sondek to richen up the sound of your system then you may find this a little different. There is plenty of bass there, but it seemed to be more evenly weighted across the frequencies and possessed of greater agility. If the bass sound was human then I would say that it had lost a couple of stone of flab and gained a leaner and more toned musculature!

CONCLUSION
For the performance improvement on offer I feel that £795 for the Tiger Paw Khan mods package is exceptionally good value for money. The quality of the components, the enthusiasm for music and the technical knowledge of both Mark and Derek was second to none. I think that the Khan works very well, but should it not be to your taste, it can be removed as easily as it went in, of course. Based on my experience, you won’t want to though, unless it was the obvious coloration (and other flaws) the stock LP12 exhibits that first attracted you to it. As such, I think this is a positive step forward sonically, which retains the positive characteristics of the turntable, while eliminating some areas of sonic confusion, and I totally and unequivocally recommend it.

VERDICT
•••••
A beautifully crafted modifications package for the evergreen Linn LP12, bringing very substantial sonic improvements.

TIGER PAW KHAN £795
Tiger-Paw
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www.tiger-paw.com

FOR
- noticeably lower noise floor
- more expansive soundstage
- improved timing precision
- retains LP12’s charm!

AGAINST
- nothing
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Remarkably, it is now nearly sixty years since the Garrard 301 was born. Although a risky proposition for a company more famed for their more affordable turntables and record changers, it immediately became the reference turntable for the serious home user to have, as well as becoming an almost essential fixture in recording and radio studios. Garrard hit on to a winning streak that continued eleven years later with the unveiling of the 401 — crisper, more modern styling and a few tweaks under the bonnet kept the Swindon company at the top of its game, until financial dire straits, cost-cutting, poor quality control and intense Japanese competition finally killed off the 401 in 1977, and the entire company a few years later.

Fortunately, though, Garrard rose again under the guiding hands of men such as Loricraft’s Terry O’Sullivan, and the mighty 301 and 401 motor units are once again at the top of their game. Able to take on the finest of modern designs, these decks show just how simple but intelligent engineering works, although they do need a bit of help along the way. A good service, proper setup and a seriously solid plinth are essential in hearing just what they can do and, fortunately, there’s a new name on the block that can do the whole lot for you...

Dominic Harper turned his hobby into a business after realising that he was spending more time than was strictly necessary repairing and rebuilding turntables, and Northwest Analogue was born. Specialising in Garrard 301s and 401s, plus Thorens TD124s and assorted Goldring Lencos, the company aims to
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"Provide a wide range of services for your turntable, from basic servicing (starting at around £60) to complete overhaul". However, my eye was caught by the rather swanky plinths on their website, especially as they are made of slate, and I have still yet to hear a better Garrard setup than that in a plinth from the now-defunct Slatedeck. Combine this with the recent unearthing of my own, rather sorry-looking 401 from its resting place in the loft (or "gateway to the skip" as it is sometimes known) and this was clearly an opportunity too good to miss.

Contact was made and Dominic mentioned that he might like to take a look at my 401 before it went into one of his plinths; just to be sure it was operating at maximum potential. I sheepishly confessed to its rather less than LP-ready condition and ended up sending it off to him for a full fettle. All I can say is that Dominic's mother clearly raised him well as, after unboxing and examining it, his response was an effortlessly polite, "It has seen better days"! The rebuilt, relubed and repainted vision that returned to me looked like new however, so I can heartily recommend Northwest's restoration services, which extend to nearly any turntable you like, and even to cartridge rebuilds.

Following further discussion, we settled on a review plinth made from finest Burlington Blue slate and fitted with rotating armboard with an SME mount that would cater for 9-10 inch arms, bringing the cost in at £1,150. Dominic also supplied two tiers of his slate racking system to support the deck, priced at £350 each with legs of any length up to 230mm and an Exact Audio cork mat to supplant my 401's rather unwell original item. This £30 mat damps the platter very effectively and sits neatly inside the 401's raised edges. All plinths are made to order, starting at around £900, and customers can specify their own requirements for each one. Of course, arms up to 12" in length and with any mounting pattern can be accommodated and Dominic is happy to make plinths that will take up to four arms if the owner so desires.

Other options include extra armboards for £175 each, slate SME arm base spacers for £80 and a rather natty slate record puck, also £80. The plinth itself is superbly finished and, unlike the old Slatedeck type, comes in a single, easy to manoeuvre layer (well, "easy" given the confines of its considerable weight, naturally – setup and positioning definitely requires four hands). It also has a thicker outer edge to hide wooden support, what will you hear? The first thing, naturally, will be the rock-steady, sledgehammer bass for which the deck is rightly known. This means that rhythm is king and the deck's astounding sense of timing will ensure that nothing is allowed to slip, slur or fall behind. This stability means that midrange detail is very good and treble smooth, if somewhat less crisp compared to the best of the rest. Equally, imaging is spacious and well defined, if somewhat lacking in the ultimate depth and width offered by some of the opposition.

Swap the deck to the Northwest Analogue slate plinth and support however, and something remarkable happens. Whilst that magnificent, tight and oh-so-deep bass is still very much present, suddenly the deck no longer appears to be attempting to continually thump you out of your chair. Not an ounce of depth or weight is lost but suddenly the low end takes on real form, snaps into incredible focus and simply leaves you sat there, jaw somewhat slack at "Its sheer even-handedness and neutrality means that it lets the music shine through, keeping me listening into the early hours, night after night..."
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In 1989 I first encountered the Northwest Analogue slate plinth. As the only company, apart from Nakamichi, making a moulded slate plinth for the Garrard 301, it was, I have to say, a major piece of kit for me. But, on closer inspection, it seemed to be a bit of a mistake. A deck on such a plinth almost seemed to be fighting a losing battle from the start. As a result of its efforts, it would be on its best performance, yet still look like a deck overcompensating to get a decent sound. It was not until the Vibration Dampening System was introduced that the true potential of the deck was heard. I was then captivated by the way in which the deck would clear the air of any trace of vibration, and create a sense of serenity and space for the music.

Now, I know that if you are not a bass freak, you might be wondering what all the fuss is about. But trust me, everyone is catered for. Across the midrange, the slate plinth opens up the soundstage noticeably - admittedly the likes of the Michell GyroDec still has the edge in terms of sheer expansiveness of soundstage, but the modifications and support around my old 401 suddenly had it sounding cavernous compared to its previous incarnation.

CONCLUSION

It’s good to have another company making beautiful slate plinths for Garrard 301s, 401s and other classic turntables once more. The vibration given off by that massive motor, even when it is running at its very best, needs to go somewhere, and a Northwest Analogue slate plinth does the job of taming it brilliantly, with the slate racking system providing the icing on the cake in both sonic and visual terms. Add in the company’s capabilities in terms of the restoration services that they offer to ensure that the item the plinth is housing is in tip-top condition, plus their impressive range of accessories and add-ons, and you have an excellent one-stop shop for all your vintage turntable needs.

Of course, it must be remembered that there are some excellently crafted, highly capable and superbly styled plinth units made from all sorts of materials out there that also perform very well and will lighten your pocket somewhat less than the Northwest Analogue unit but, to me, it just seems that a massive chunk of finest slate has a regal sense of authority, control and purposeful musicality that no other design can quite match up to. Rather like one of those old Garrards, in fact.
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<td>Hifidac DAC II DAC BNIB</td>
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<td>Krell 505 Evolution SACD player x-demo</td>
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Amplifiers

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Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies

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<td>Yamaha RX V795RDS AV receiver S/H</td>
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Luxury Rap

David Price talks to Heaven 17's Glenn Gregory and Martyn Ware about life, the universe and everything analogue...

Along with Glenn Gregory and Ian Craig Marsh, Martyn Ware co-wrote and co-produced some of the most memorable hits of the nineteen eighties: 'The Luxury Gap', Heaven 17's second studio album, which spawned 'Temptation', 'Let Me Go', 'Come Live With Me' and 'Crushed by the Wheels of Industry'. The album spawned hits like 'Temptation', 'Let Me Go', 'Come Live With Me' and 'Crushed by the Wheels of Industry', and is now being 'toured' live, performed entirely in three dimensional surround sound at the London Roundhouse on Friday October 14th. The next day, his side project, British Electric Foundation's 'Music of Quality and Distinction' is being performed live, with a range of guest vocalists including La Roux's Elly Jackson, Sandie Shaw, Glenn Gregory, Scritti Politti's Green Gartside, Boy George, Midge Ure, Polly Scattergood, the Noisettes' Shingai Shoniwa, plus Kate Jackson.

I got the chance to speak to Martyn Ware and Glenn Gregory in London's Primrose Hill. Both from Sheffield, the guys haven't lost their northern friendliness and remain resolutely down to earth. Charming and approachable, at times they still sounded like awe-struck sixteen year olds in awe of the wonder of great music, seminal recording artists (many of whom they've now worked with) and the technology in general. We kicked off with Martyn explaining to me about BEF night; he was still at the planning stage...

MW: We've got so many guests! From a logistical point of view, the BEF show is a problem, because you're relying on the goodwill of the artists, and you're dealing with a certain number of egos. Hopefully none of them are going to be divas, although Boy George is on - although he's a mate, and we've always got on really well with him! Sandy Shaw can be edgy, but she's a fantastic woman and a great singer. I'm thinking it's going to be quite an emotional night, it's the joining of generations, hoping to expose the provenance of great pop music. The whole BEF project is about trying to prove that electronic music can be emotional and affecting.

DP: It was a heck of a project, the original BEF 'Music of Quality and Distinction', an inclusive thing bringing together so many different artists but with a new sound...

MW: Yeah - we were so in love with technology at the time, there was a lot of things we used. We used to order a lot of kit in. It was about that time that Ian bought the Fairlight. Forty grand he paid. Forty thousand quid!

OP: It must have cost a bob or two!

MW: He just turned up and said, 'I've bought a Fairlight'! It wasn't very user friendly and the sound quality was appalling, but it looked great. Being the world's first sampler was amazing, being able to see the 3D waveform was really cool. It was like great, hi hat, kkkkkk! It was that bad that we rang up Synclavier in Australia and said there's something wrong with this machine, I think we need a replacement motherboard. And they said, 'that will be the aliasing noise, mate'! But it doesn't sound anything like a hi hat! And they said, 'that's because it's only eight bit sampling'.

GG: Did it really work?

MW: When the EMU 2 came out it was a hundred times more usable, and £ 3,000. Ian was sick as a dog.

GG: He ended up using his Fairlight as a keyboard stand. Then he sold it; I think someone in New Order bought it...

DP: But it was part of the birth of sampling. And the analogue synths of the day sounded so nice back then.

MW: Still do. Sadly I sold 'em all throughout the course of the eighties. We got rid of all sorts, Jupiter 4s, Jupiter 8s, and bought horrible clanking digital synths in an effort to keep up with times. Then it got to 1992 and I met Vince Clarke for the first time. He was always a fan of the early Human League, and claims that 'Being Boiled' got him into electronics, because before that he was a sort of 'happy clapper' Christian folk singer. And then one Christmas this stuff arrived, it was a bunch of boxes. And he'd found me an original boxed Roland System 100, and he'd bought it for me in an effort to get me to go back to make records like, back in the day.

GG: And, coming full circle, you have started using them again - and there's a lot of that on the new BEF album.

DP: When the synth generation came it was two fingers up to the Eagles, wasn't it?

GG: That's exactly what we were doing, wasn't it? Even before the Human League, when punk had smashed open the door for us, we realised we don't have to play guitar, we can do it with these synths...

MW: It wasn't as important to have...
a traditional musical skill, as it was to have a good ear and a sense of what sounds were appropriate for different sources.

**GG:** We were writing demos, and I remember it was a lovely day, and lan was sat on the windowsill of his flat. And he said, 'I've had an idea — I'm going to write a song about the Lord’s Prayer. He was going on about a chord structure that never seemed to stop building, like sexual tension. And both me and Martyn went, 'are you all right?'

**MW:** But the man had got it right! We were writing a lot using this Akai keyboard, that had a stepping chord facility. There was something about the appeal of this sort of random way of writing, it was really about multiple choice. And actually the funny thing is we wrote the entire 'Luxury Gap' album using this technique, and our publisher brought out the sheet music. And when you look at it, it was incredibly complex - some of those tracks are in the most bizarre keys, they were weird inversions, seven flats, you know. Finnally enough making the first BEF album, 'Music of Quality and Distinction Vol. 1.' It was like a crash university study course in brilliant song structures; they were great songs but we didn't quite understand why we liked them so much. When you start deconstructing songs like 'It's Over', 'Anyone Who Had a Heart'; you know Jimmy Webb, Bacharach and David, it was like a crash course in how to keep people interested in a song. And often what appeared to be incredibly complex were very simple chord sequences, because some of the greatest songwriters were not very good keyboard players. Like a swan floating on the lake but underneath was something different going on entirely, that really appealed to us.

**DP:** What are your favourite Heaven 17 tracks - 'Temptation'? **MW:** We've played that for what must be a couple of hundred of times, and everybody gets it, always. But for us, the song that we're most proud of is 'Let Me Go'.

**DP:** And 'Come Live With Me' has a certain Bacharach quality.

**GG:** Yeah, totally!

**MW:** That's part of the excitement of doing 'Luxury Gap' live for the first time ever, it has to sound right, it has to sound epic, it has to sound like the best thing we ever did. And that's the reason we're doing in three dimensional sound... it's gonna sound great.

**GG:** I tell you, 'The Luxury Gap', when it was at Air Studios which was in Oxford Circus, we had to order in extra air conditioning to keep the machines cool, because we'd got so many tape machines in the room. We were running three 24 track tape machines in sync, which took about 15 seconds to sync up, plus a couple of half inch machines, plus quarter inch machines with multiple loops going round the outside of the studio, choral loops which we mixed down to 128 tracks!

**DP:** So if you dropped your fag on the floor the whole of London would have gone up...

**MW:** It was technological insanity; we had towers of outboard gear, going up to the ceiling. We had every Dolby SR unit in London! I think it cost £300,000 at that - like way over a million quid in today's terms. We really were highly motivated. We had that work ethic, maybe it's the Sheffield thing, but we weren't lounging around with a bunch of professionals...

**GG:** Totally.

**DP:** Did you get the sense that it was a special time in music?

**GG:** Oh yeah. Greg Walsh the co-producer/engineer on that album was pushing the envelope constantly...

**MW:** He was trained by Geoff Emerick, a famous engineer who worked with the Beatles at Abbey Road, and with Rod Temperton, who wrote some of Michael Jackson's hits — all of those vocal harmonies he brought to us.

**GG:** We were doing 128 track backing vocals for 'Let Me Go'. We really went for it on that album.

**MW:** When it was finally mastered, we so proud of that album. 'Penthouse and Pavement' was more like an experimental album, energy-led, but with 'Luxury Gap', we were attempting to make a timeless album. And a lot of credit has to go to Virgin Records, because there was literally no agreed budget for that album. When we started working on 'Temptation' in the studio, and we thought it would be great to have a big orchestra, and we rang up the record company, the answer was, 'when do you want it?', not 'how much does it cost?' It's a different world now...

**DP:** It was just at the time when you could do that...

**MW:** Oh yeah, it was a particular window of opportunity that you could exploit — and we did!

**GG:** To be honest, there was an awful lot of 'we're gonna show everybody out there that we're better than you' - and can write better songs that are more melodic and more beautiful. It's not like that anymore, but at the time, yes.

I sense that for Glenn and Martyn, feelings run deep; they're immensely proud of the 'Luxury Gap', and justifiably so. But the album itself wasn't the beginning and the end of the Heaven 17 project. They were really trying to do something new at the time, which was to bring soul music to electronics (or vice versa). Whereas the likes of Kraftwerk and Phil Oakey's Human League (one of the biggest bands in the world, momentarily) were following a cleaner, colder and more clinical groove. Heaven 17 were working hard to fuse the warmth of soul with the clinical precision of electronics. I put it to them that it defined their sound...

**GG:** Oh yeah - we were listening to a lot of black dance music and northern soul.

**MW:** It was a burgeoning time, I mean come on, the Michael Jackson albums, Quincy Jones, Earth-Wind and Fire, I mean, it was an incredible time! Even a lot of Norman Whitfield Productions, it all had an influence on us, as well as disco. Giorgio Moroder...

**GG:** And the important thing about the Heaven 17 take on that, we also were equally in love with Bowie and Roxy (Music), and lyrically I guess we were more on the Bowie side, and musically on the funk side, so it was a lovely hybrid.

**DP:** That's something I love about your albums...

**MW:** Yeah - on 'Luxury Gap' we were doing a lot of composing on the Roland MC8, and it's very mathematical — it was beautiful. And you know the nature of Linn Drums is that they were super-accurate timing wise, much better than any modern computer-based system. That's what you get from a Linn drum, and why 'Penthouse and Pavement' sounds pin-sharp.

**DP:** It's very difficult to hear that album sounding right — you've got to have good hi-fi equipment, a really good stable turntable, and then it suddenly snaps into focus, otherwise it sounds mushy...

**GG:** Do you know, even a good CD player can make a difference to that album!

And that's why I can't wait to hear the classic 'Luxury Gap' album performed live; it is bound to sound superb, with painstaking attention to detail not just to the music itself but the sonics from the guys. Indeed, either of the two nights are going to be very special indeed.

**CONTACT:**
Box Office: 0844 492 8008
Day Tickets: £23.50
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www.heaven17.com
NEXT MONTH

With its wide range of great new products from all around the world, December’s Hi-Fi World magazine keeps the winter chill away — and maybe even help your hi-fi sound better too! For example, on the speaker front, we’ve got the Piega Premium 1 mini monitors, toting superb ribbon tweeters and built with Swiss precision. Vinylistas will love the Design Build Listen RWand tonearm, a striking new design from New Zealand. The brand new British designed, Chinese made Audiolab 8200A integrated amplifier promises much, as does the Danish Densen Beat 110. And it’s back home to Huntingdon, England for the latest Cyrus CD transport, likely a corker. Here’s just some of what we hope to bring you...

FIDELITY AUDIO PRE-120 PASSIVE PREAMPLIFIER
NOLA MICRO GRAND REFERENCE LOUDSPEAKER
MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC II DIGITAL CONVERTER
ITEM AUDIO STEALTH MINI MUSIC COMPUTER
PHILIPS GOGEAR MUSE 3 DIGITAL PORTABLE
AUDIO RESEARCH VS115 POWER AMPLIFIER
DENSEN BEAT 110 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
AUDIOLAB 8200A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
DESIGN BUILD LISTEN RWAND TONEARM
ORIGIN LIVE LINN LP12 POWER SUPPLY
AYON SPARK III INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
CLEARAUDIO SMART MATRIX PRO RCI
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One of the most important and, above all, revolutionary jazz albums of all time, 'Bitches Brew' was a jazz-rock fusion piece that was created via tape spliced jams and various takes, featuring great musicians such as Joe Zawinul, Wayne Shorter, Airto Moreira, John McLaughlin, Chick Corea, Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland, Don Alias, Bennie Maupin, Larry Young and Lenny White. The album sounds as fresh today as it sounded like an alien landing in the middle of the High St back then. The record itself was a zeitgeist influence of varied musical styles. In fact, the first recording was made just a day after Hendrix had played at Woodstock — his influence is in there too (on 'Miles Runs the Voodoo Down')...

Drummer Lenny White remembered the sessions. "My role was to play in between the cracks. I wanted it to sound like one drummer with eight hands. You know, some critics say Jack played by himself on 'Sanctuary' but it's not true, yet I consider that a compliment in a way. I played subtly and it sounds like it's just one guy. The entire group was built around a double rhythm section—two drummers, two percussionists, two bassists, two—sometimes three—keyboards and guitar! We were all positioned in a semi-circle with Miles and Wayne in the middle. Miles would start a take by pointing at someone, like John or Jack, we'd all play and then he'd stop us with a wave of his hand."

The feeling that something significant was being created was there at the very beginning. And what better way to celebrate the album than this box set released by Sony! Frankly, it's a bit of a corkscrew. It includes three CDs featuring the original ninety four-plus minutes of music that appeared on the LP. In addition to that you receive six bonus recordings including alternative takes and single edits of 'Spanish Key', 'John McLaughlin', 'Miles Runs The Voodoo Down', 'Great Expectations' and 'Little Blue Frog'. In addition to those you also get a previously unissued performance at Copenhagen November 1969 with Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Dave Holland and DeJohnette.

But that's not all. You also receive two 180gm vinyl LPs housed in a replica gatefold picture sleeve. That little lot is contained in a 12" slipcase box set complete with a full-size 52-page book featuring rare, unpublished photographs and record label memos and a memorabilia envelope containing a reproduction of the Davis' Rolling Stone cover story from December 1969. There is previously unseen correspondence from producer Teo Maceros' archives, reproductions of three Fillmore West concert tickets from April 1970, high quality photograph prints and a foldout poster of Miles Davis.

For anyone looking to delve into the 'Bitches Brew' experience, there is something for everyone here, no matter what price point you can afford. PR
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.
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