

# hi-fi news

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI

& Record Review **156p ISSUE**

## SUPER MODEL

**The Estelon XB - hi-fi's sensuous floorstander**



**NEW SERIES**

**"Classic kit is in great demand"**

**How to buy Vintage, p130**



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This year's very best in hi-fi and home theatre

**Group test: CD players**  
Six of the best from £350-£2100

**Red hot vinyl**  
vdH's 'Crimson' MC pick-up



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Gato Audio's  
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**Fostex TH-900**  
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• **HIGH-RES DOWNLOADS** Five new releases tested • **READERS' CLASSIFIEDS** Hi-fi bargains galore

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# MUSICAL FIDELITY

## V90-DAC | DIGITAL ANALOGUE CONVERTER

“The V90-DAC is an upsampling DAC of outstanding quality”



## High-end performance from real world sources

The V90-DAC is the perfect way to upgrade the performance of a wide range of equipment. Housed in a solid yet discreet case, it unites sleek design and technical excellence to offer unrivalled musical enjoyment.

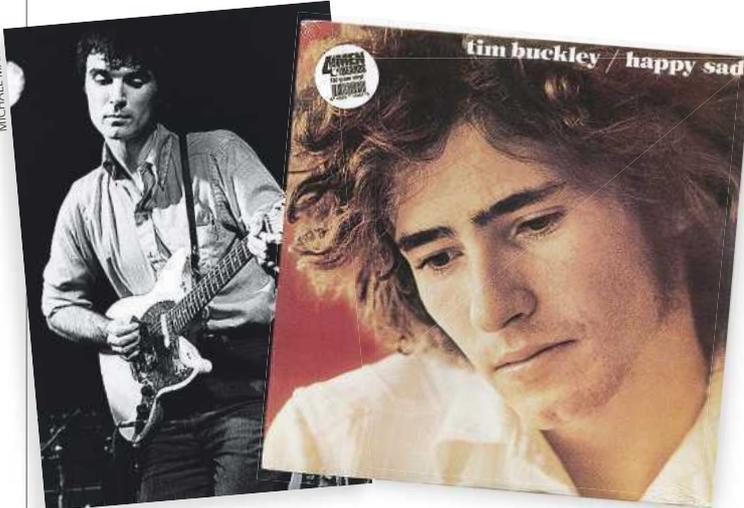


**RIGHT:** Not quite 'Blood On The Tracks' but vdH's The Crimson MC is an exquisite-sounding pick-up, see p74



**ABOVE:** A new Bryston integrated with DNA from its pre/power amps, p66

MICHAEL MARKOS



**VINYL:** Talking Heads' *Remain In Light* is this month's Vinyl Icon (p86) while Steve Sutherland applauds a 'leap into the creative unknown' as Tim Buckley's *Happy Sad* is reissued on 180g LP (p84)

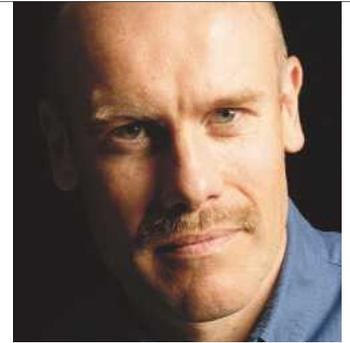
**RIGHT:** *Hi-Fi News & RR* is the exclusive UK representative of EISA's Audio and Home Theatre panels. Paul Miller is EISA's Audio and HT Panel Manager



If you've been reading *Hi-Fi News* for years, even decades, then you are part of a very special and encouragingly large family. I have been working in the audio industry for over 30 years and many of our contributors for longer than that, and yet we regularly get letters from stalwart readers who open their account with 'I have been reading *Hi-Fi News* since the '70s...' Of course, as the longest-standing hi-fi magazine in the world (we were launched in June 1956), *Hi-Fi News* was one of very few reputable equipment digests in the 1970s and the only one still flying the flag for all that's great and good in high-end audio some 40 years later.

Which got us thinking. With all those decades of knowledge and passion for music and hi-fi kept alive by our readers across the UK and worldwide, why not let them bear witness to a lifetime's hobby? So the idea for our 'HFN Writing Competition' was born.

The deadline for entries has now passed but in a few short months I have been amazed at the breadth, depth and sheer volume of our readers putting pen to paper. In fact, if we published a few of your episodes each month, most complete with great pictures, it would take years for us to process all these fabulous reminiscences.



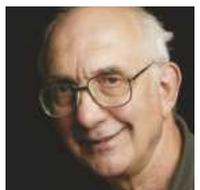
So thank you all who entered, even if we're unable to reply to everyone immediately. We've heard from valve, vinyl, hi-res digital and headphone aficionados. We've had submissions from as far afield as Norway, the US and even Australia and one whose address looks to be a few hundred yards down the road from the office...

**'The sheer volume of readers putting pen to paper is amazing'**

We'll be publishing our favourite submissions in the coming months but the best will also be available to read at our forthcoming Hi-Fi Show, in Windsor on the 25-26th October. You can read more about the exciting presentations and exclusive premieres being planned by our exhibitors in our show update on p19. If you've ever wanted to experience the thrill of high-end audio first hand, then snap up a ticket today!

**PAUL MILLER EDITOR**

**HI-FI NEWS' EXPERT LINE UP: THE FINEST MINDS IN AUDIO JOURNALISM BRING THEIR EXPERIENCE TO BEAR ON ALL AREAS OF HI-FI & MUSIC**



**BARRY FOX**  
Investigative journalist supreme, Barry is the first with news of the latest developments in hi-fi and music technologies



**JOHN BAMFORD**  
JB brings huge industry experience, a penchant for massive speakers and a love of hi-res audio in all its diverse guises



**KEN KESSLER**  
is currently our Senior Contributing Editor and almost singularly responsible for the renaissance in valves and 'vintage hi-fi'



**KEITH HOWARD**  
has written about hi-fi for 30 years, and edited *Hi-Fi Answers* for nine. KH performs our speaker and headphone lab tests



**STEVE HARRIS**  
Former Editor of this very title from 1986 through to 2005. A lifetime in audio and a love of jazz makes Steve a goldmine



**JOHN HOWES**  
Foremost collector and archivist of vintage hi-fi, famous for the UK's bi-annual Audio Jumble, John shares his experience with *HFN*



**STEVE SUTHERLAND**  
Worked on *Melody Maker* and then edited *NME* from 1992-2000, the Britpop years. Steve brings a unique slant to our Vinyl Release pages



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“Absolute Dream USB is well-named.”

- Paul Miller, *Hifi News*, June 2013



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# Really... Just One's and Zero's?

**USB, FireWire®, Ethernet, eSATA join HDMI on the Digital frontier!**

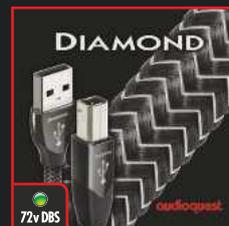
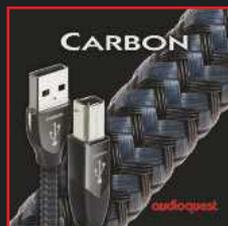
Ever since the first CD players in 1983, the credibility debate in audio has been over whether "bits are bits," and there's no more to it. Ever since 1983, differences in digital audio performance have been clear to all who would listen, and differences between digital cables have ranged from minor to jaw-dropping amazing.

Now, the audio world is going through an evolution maybe even more profound than the transition to CDs: Digital audio files, whether on a spinning disc, streaming from the internet, or resident on a hard drive or a flash drive, are offering wonderful new opportunity for convenience ... and for fantastic performance.

AudioQuest brings the same sensitivity, insight, and technology to today's new digital transfer modes as we've brought to Digital Coax, AES/EBU balanced digital, Toslink and ST fiber optic cables for the last 28 years.

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Whether you use buds with an iPod, a 3.5mm-plug analog cable from a computer, or USB cable into a DAC (Digital Audio Converter), whether playing 128K files, lossless 44.1 (CD quality), or 24/96, it's a bright and wonderful day in audio!



# REFERENCE SERIES



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Home Cinema Choice, March 2009

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# ROCK STEADY...



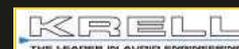
**K**rell, creator of so many firsts, can be credited with the concept of the true high-end integrated amp. Its KAV-300i revolutionised the way audiophiles treated a single-chassis solution to their amplification needs. The secret? Incorporating all of Krell's expertise in a no-compromise, yet compact enclosure.

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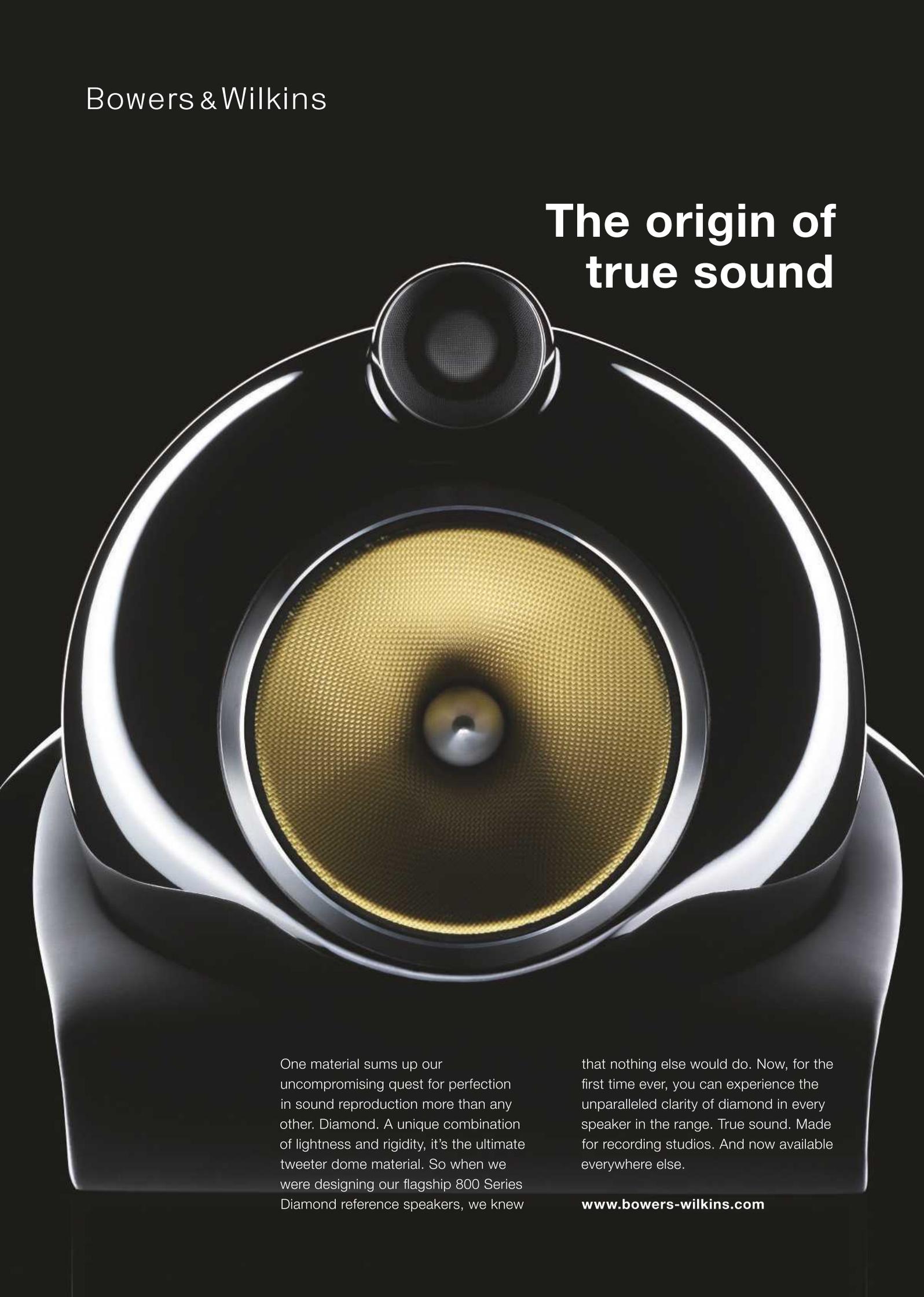
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The very best audio and home theatre products, as voted for by the editors of 50 specialist European magazines, are revealed exclusively in the UK by *Hi-Fi News* across no fewer than 17 pages



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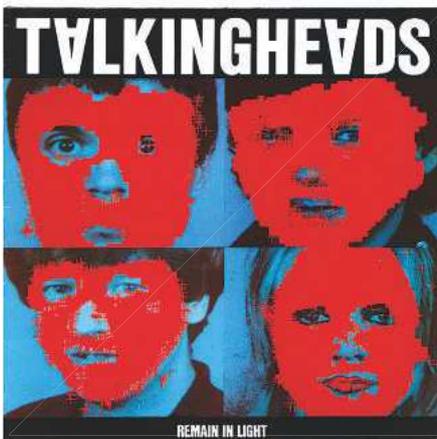
Steve Sutherland continues his tour of the world's iconic rock venues with the history of Hyde Park

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ABOVE: For our Group Test of £350-£2100 CD players, turn to p55

SUBSCRIBE!  
**hi-finews**

Free £95 interconnect cable  
See page 96

# Yamaha's retro flagships

YAMAHA RETURNS TO HIGH-END TWO-CHANNEL WITH MASSIVE 3000-SERIES SEPARATES



Five years have elapsed since Yamaha launched its last flagship CD/SACD player and amplifier [*HFN* Mar '08] but now these 2000-series components have themselves been topped by the new £3500 CD-S3000 player and partnering £4000 A-S3000 amplifier. True heavyweights in every sense of the word, these separates combine an elegant retro-styling with a smooth, continuous, screw-free chassis design.

The CD-S3000 is based around a custom CD/SACD transport, manually tuned at the point of manufacture for minimum vibration. Inside, the digital board (including a custom asynchronous USB input utilising ASIO 2.0 Yamaha Steinberg drivers) and digital PSU are placed on the left, the ESS ES9018 DAC and fully balanced analogue output stages and analogue supply to the right. The partnering A-S3000 amplifier is also a fully floating/balanced design, its two-part frame featuring a secondary copper-plated chassis supporting a massive power supply.

Yamaha rates its A-S3000 at a conservative 2x100W/8ohm with a dynamic output of 2x120W/8ohm. You can read the first full technical review of Yamaha's 3000-series in next month's *Hi-Fi News*.

**Yamaha Music Europe GmbH (UK),**  
0844 811 1116; <http://uk.yamaha.com>

## NAD's 40th

ICONIC AMPLIFIER RESURRECTED 'DIGITALLY'

As part of its up-coming 40th-anniversary celebrations, NAD has announced three new 'D-series' components. Of particular interest are the £799 D7050 Direct Digital Network amplifier and £399 D3020 DAC/amplifier. The former utilises the digital Class D technology pioneered in its Master Series M2 amp but adds plug 'n play wireless music system streaming convenience with Apple's AirPlay and Bluetooth aptX. The amplifier with



the iconic name, the D3020, shares the 30W rating of the original 3020 integrated from the late '70s but is brought bang up to date with analogue Class D Hypex power modules.

**NAD/Lenbrook;**  
[www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com)

## HI-FI NEWS' NUGGETS

### DIGITAL CHORD

In a recent interview, Chord Electronics' founder John Franks has discussed the prospect of a new breed of digital Class D amplifier. Inspired by the high-speed switching technology used in high-end radar applications, the new Class D modules are currently being developed by Chord's design consultant Robert Watts. A commercial version of the amplifier is still some way off, however. [www.chordelectronics.co.uk](http://www.chordelectronics.co.uk)

### IAG MOVES

International Audio Group – parent company of Audiolab, Castle, Mission, Quad and Wharfedale – has moved its UK operations to an all-new, purpose-built complex. [www.internationalaudiogroup.com](http://www.internationalaudiogroup.com)

## Crowning Venere

VENERE 3.0 COMPLETES RANGE

Echoing the lyra-inspired form of its supreme £80k Aida floorstander [*HFN* Apr '12], and embellished with a tempered glass bass and angled top-plate, Sonus faber's Venere 3.0 is nonetheless significantly more affordable at £2898 (£3198 in walnut).

The design of the 'double-curved' cabinet, the moulded, low diffraction baffle and that of the 29mm silk-dome tweeter, the 150mm mid driver and two ultra-light bass units is pure Italian Sonus faber. Significant cost savings are enjoyed, however, by having the Venere manufactured by a partner company in China. Sensitivity is rated at 90dB/2.83V/1m with a nominal 6ohm impedance.

**Sonus faber, 0208 971 3909;**  
[www.sonusfaber.com](http://www.sonusfaber.com),  
[www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)



## NuWave music

PS AUDIO LAUNCHES AN ADC WITH A DSD TWIST



Not to be confused with PS Audio's NuWave DAC [HFN Apr '13], the £1799 NuWave Phono is an ADC (Analogue-to-Digital Converter) that accepts analogue audio at line level and from MM/MC vinyl front-ends. The NuWave Phono includes

RIAA correction and offers (balanced) analogue and digital outputs. The latter include 24-bit/192kHz LPCM and 64X/128X DSD delivered via DoP (USB). I2S and S/PDIF outs are included. **PS Audio Inc, 07738 007776; www.signaturesystems.co.uk**

## New tube on the block

ICON AUDIO RELEASES THE FIRST KT150-BASED AMPLIFIERS

First there was the KT88, stalwart of tube amps for decades, then the KT120 and now, hot on its heels, the bigger KT150 also manufactured by Tung Sol. Icon Audio is upgrading its Stereo 60 MkIIIm (pictured), MB30SE, MB90 MkIIIm and MB150 amplifiers with this new tube. Prices are £2600 and £2100, £2900 and £3700 (all per pair). **Icon Audio, 0116 244 0593; www.iconaudio.com**



## Phono stage exposed

NEW ADDITION TO EXPOSURE'S 3010S2 SERIES

With a fully-discrete RIAA network derived from its flagship MCX series, the new £900 3010S2 phono stage from Exposure Electronics also looks very flexible. Separate

MM and MC boards offer two gain settings and numerous loading options.

**Exposure Electronics Ltd, 01273 423877; www.exposurehifi.com**



## System 'hub' from Mac

HEAVYWEIGHT AMP INCLUDES PHONO AND DAC INPUTS

Unmistakably 'McIntosh' with its iconic 1950s styling, the new £4995 MA5200 is nonetheless a very modern integrated amp catering for both MM phono systems and the latest high-res digital media. Rated at 2x100W/8ohm and weighing a substantial 17kg, the MA5200 incorporates the 'McIntosh Digital Engine' with its three assignable digital inputs (coaxial and optical S/PDIF plus asynchronous USB 2.0). Five line-level inputs are included (one balanced on XLRs) while Mac's new 'High Drive' headphone preamp promises to handle cans of all denominations.

**McIntosh Laboratory, 01202 911886;**

**www.mcintoshlabs.com; www.jordanacoustics.co.uk**



## HI-FI NEWS? JUST ASK...

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form, hand it in at your local store and they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. **Just ask!**

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## Upcoming Events

IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR HI-FI DIARY

- 06-11 SEP** IFA Consumer Electronics Unlimited, Messe-Berlin, Germany; <http://b2b.ifa-berlin.com/en/>
- 28-29 SEP** Salon Hi-Fi/Home Cinema, Hôtel Novotel Paris Tour Eiffel, France; [www.salonhifi.com](http://www.salonhifi.com)
- 06 OCT** Audio Jumble 2013, The Angel Leisure Centre, Tonbridge, Kent; [www.audiojumble.co.uk](http://www.audiojumble.co.uk)
- 25-26 OCT** The Hi-Fi Show 2013, Beaumont Estate, Windsor; [www.hifinews.co.uk/show](http://www.hifinews.co.uk/show)



an award winning range of CD players, preamplifiers & amplifiers

## Introducing the NEW JAZZ Valve Pre-amplifier from NAGRA

Breaking with a tradition that has always seen its machines designated by a combination of three letters, Nagra presents its new preamplifier, which carries the evocative name 'JAZZ' and is destined to be a successor to the highly reputed Nagra PL-P and PL-L. It's a way of paying homage to the legendary Montreux Jazz Festival where Nagra has been an important partner for many years.

The Nagra JAZZ offers exceptional transparency. It also creates a sound image, which is deep, natural, highly defined and extremely rich in detail.

The first of an exciting new range, the Nagra JAZZ preamplifier is due to be followed by several new models designed by Audio Technology Switzerland. Watch this space!



Nagra ACPS II  
High performance power supply



Nagra JAZZ  
High performance valve pre-amplifier



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# Hi-Fi Show preview



THE 'WHO'S WHO' OF HIGH-END AUDIO SET TO EXHIBIT AT THE UK'S INAUGURAL HI-FI SHOW



The waiting is now over as tickets go on sale for the UK's premier high-end audio event – The Hi-Fi Show at the Beaumont Estate, Old Windsor on Friday 25th and Saturday 26th October 2013. We have a fixed visitor allocation for this event and, once fully booked, sadly, no tickets will be available on the day. Tickets cost £20, or £15 for subscribers. Please call 02476 322234 now to avoid disappointment and see [www.hifinews.co.uk/show](http://www.hifinews.co.uk/show) for more details.

The UK's only high-end audio show is gathering momentum with the 'who's who' of international hi-fi planning a series of exclusive presentations, listening demonstrations and Q&As.

The 13 Windsor and Wessex suites will be given over to these exciting closed-door

demonstrations with individual opening times staggered throughout the day so that visitors can plan their own schedule of experiences. The biggest decision will be knowing where to begin!

The Sandringham suites will play host to open-door demos where you can get to grips with

the latest in computer-based audio, take part in a special comparative cable listening session and enjoy the very best in private listening within our 'Headphone Haven', organised by the HighEndWorkshop.

Naturally, your favourite *Hi-Fi News* contributors will also be on hand to complete the day.

## UK Firsts

### EXCLUSIVE SHOW AUDITIONS

A host of UK-firsts will be debuted at the Show. Absolute Sounds in its first appearance at a UK event in several years will be unveiling the Constellation Performance range with Magico loudspeakers, the Tech DAS Air Force One turntable, D'Agostino Momentum pre and power amps plus the new Devialet ADH amplifier range.

TAD will be showing its Evolution One, Reference One and CR-1 loudspeakers with C2000 DAC, C600 preamp and M600 monoblocks. Kog Audio will present the stylish Estelon loudspeakers together with a new Vitus CD player/DAC and amplifiers, while Symmetry will feature no fewer than five new products from Ayre, the revised Brinkmann Balance turntable and the new Etna MC from Lyra.

Naim Audio will partner with Focal loudspeakers to create a system of 'breath-taking' dynamics while Chord is set to unveil its new CodeX streamer. Our website has more teasers!

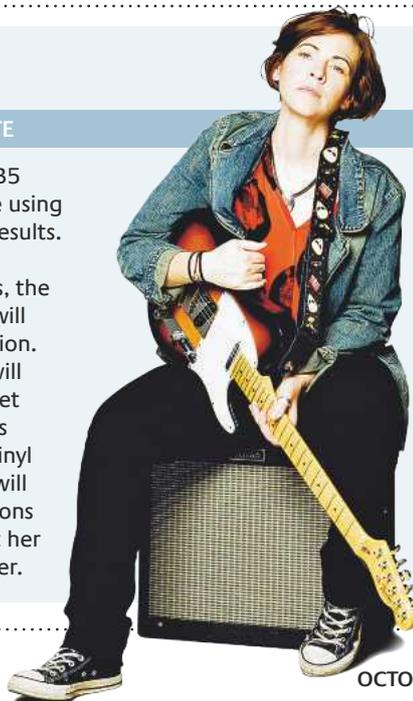
## Eleanor McEvoy Live!

TWO DAILY CONCERTS AT THE HI-FI SHOW IN THE PMC SUITE

Demonstrating PMC's close links with the music industry, two professionals who choose to use PMC for recording and personal listening will be appearing at the Show. In the morning, world-renowned mastering engineer Crispin Murray will provide a vinyl cutting and mastering seminar. Murray recently oversaw the half-speed cutting of two tracks by renowned Irish singer/songwriter Eleanor McEvoy at Metropolis Studios

in London using PMC's BB5 XBD-A system and will be using the BB5SE to demo the results.

Appearing during the mornings and afternoons, the second of PMC's guests will be performing a live session. Eleanor McEvoy herself will be playing a 30-minute set including the same tracks used for the half-speed vinyl demonstration. Eleanor will also be answering questions from the audience about her extensive recording career.



# The Best of the Best



EISA is the unique association of 50 special interest magazines in audio, home theater, in-car electronics, mobile electronics, photo and video, from 20 European countries.

Every year the EISA jury of experts rewards the best products available in Europe with the EISA Award. All EISA winners may use the official EISA logo - it's your assurance of outstanding quality.



Your assurance of quality  
Tested by the Experts



[www.eisa.eu](http://www.eisa.eu)

# EISA

EUROPEAN IMAGING AND  
SOUND ASSOCIATION

# EUROPEAN AUDIO AND HOME THEATRE PRODUCTS OF THE YEAR 2013-2014

*Hi-Fi News* is the  
exclusive UK  
representative for the  
Audio & Home Theatre  
Panel within EISA

The best sound, most advanced technology and desirable features, the ultimate expression of design and, of course, the greatest value for money. Every year the EISA Awards applaud those products that stand above the rest. So read on...

**W**elcome to the EISA Awards for 2013-2014. The European Imaging and Sound Association is the world's largest independent awards panel and one that reflects the collective opinion of the 50 most respected specialist magazines centred on, but not exclusively based within, the European community [see p112].

While faultlines within the Euro Zone continue to dominate headlines in the UK, the collaboration of EISA's member magazines has continued apace and

with renewed purpose as the aspirations of our fellow audio and video enthusiasts rise above the political turmoil of the day. From the EISA Convention held in May to the final General Meeting in June [see pictures, below], member magazines pool their combined experience to arrive at a consensus of the very best in sound and vision products available across the wider European continent.

With every magazine having reviewed a broad swathe of specialist products, these Awards are typically agreed upon

with amicable efficiency. The process is undoubtedly assisted by the increasingly fluid movement of equipment across the continent, blurring national stereotypes. Enthusiasts, it seems, are only interested in achieving the very best sound and picture quality, regardless of nationality.

Every issue of *Hi-Fi News* reflects the 'borderless' reality of our hobby with truly state-of-the-art products now available in the UK from both established and new specialists across Europe. This year, EISA Award-winning products including those from Marantz, T+A, AudioQuest and Oppo, have all been premiered within the pages of *Hi-Fi News*.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The EISA 'family' of magazine editors captured on a break from this year's GM; from the Convention, Mike Gough (Senior Product Manager) wields B&W's Panorama 2 soundbar; the AudioQuest team (Rob Hay, Steve Silberman, CEO Bill Low and Thijs Helwegen) pose next to a large DragonFly DAC; Eric Kingdon (Sony's UK Technical Marketing Manager) with its flagship STR-DA5800ES AV receiver



THE EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

**European Loudspeaker 2013-2014**  
**Sonus faber Venere 2.5**

Inspired by its high-end Aida loudspeaker, the Venere 2.5 is the more affordable of two floorstanding models in Sonus faber's new range. The sweeping aesthetic of the Venere 2.5 with its tilted apex topped in glass and double curve of its cabinet walls combines beauty with great strength, controlling any unwanted vibrations from its two bass/mid units. Treble is handled by a 29mm fabric-dome tweeter, helping to deliver music that's vivid and colourful but also refined and undemanding over long listening sessions. The Venere 2.5 is available in stunning piano black or white finishes in addition to polished wood veneers. This is a loudspeaker that succeeds in pleasing both the eye and the ear.



**European High-End Audio 2013-2014**  
**T+A MP 3000 HV/PA 3000 HV**

EISA's High-End Audio award can only be earned by products that combine the very best in hi-fi engineering with superlative sound quality and this year, T+A's astonishing HV (High Voltage) series is the stand-out winner. Built into massive, but immaculately finished aluminium chassis, the pair consists of the MP 3000 HV digital media player and PA 3000 HV integrated amplifier. The player has a high-end DAC at its core, includes a plethora of digital inputs, a built-in CD drive, UPnP network client for computer-sourced music streaming, internet radio functionality and an FM tuner for good measure. The partnering amplifier is rated at a substantial 300W but is no less sophisticated as the entire system can be controlled via T+A's splendid two-way FD100 handset, complete with display. The HV series is the embodiment of high-end style and substance!




**EISA**  
AWARD

**Best Product**  
2013-2014

HIGH-END AUDIO  
T+A MP 3000 HV/PA 3000 HV

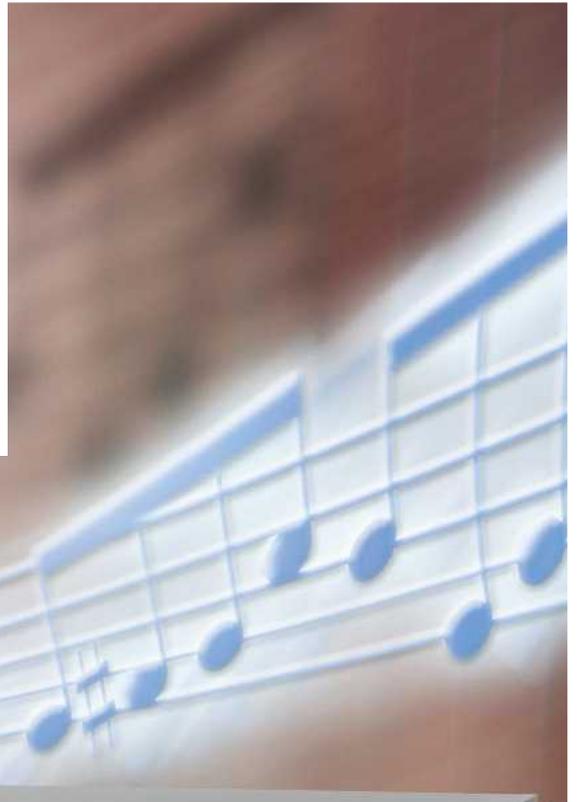


## EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER

### European Digital Audio Player 2013-2014 Marantz NA-11S1

If networked audio systems have typically been designed for convenience rather than ultimate sound quality then this new digital audio player from Marantz marks a turning point in the evolution of home hi-fi. In addition to offering USB Type A and B sockets – for iDevices, memory sticks and connection to a PC or Mac – the NA-11S1 includes an Ethernet port for access to a NAS drive or to become part of your wired home network. The new DSD-over-USB protocol is also supported. Naturally, AirPlay and DLNA connectivity is included, so you can wirelessly stream music from your computer or mobile device. The player is immaculately finished while its subtle, smooth and intricately detailed sound is always musical, setting an enviable standard. Without doubt, the NA-11S1 is a supreme streamer.



	<b>Best Product</b>
	2013-2014
DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER	
Marantz NA-11S1	

## European USB DAC 2013-2014 **Meridian Explorer**

Computers are ideal for storing your favourite music but they are not designed with hi-fi in mind. Meridian's portable Explorer DAC bridges this gap by accessing audio files up to 24-bit/192kHz via the computer's USB output and converting them into glorious stereo music. The Explorer is powered directly from the USB hub, so there's no need for batteries or external supplies, includes three LEDs that provide an indication of audio file sample rate and offers two 3.5mm outputs. One combines a fixed-level analogue with an optical digital output, while the other is purpose-designed to drive headphones via its integral analogue volume control. The very natural and transparent sound of the Explorer is as sophisticated as its all-aluminium case is stylish, bringing a taste of the high life to your notebook.



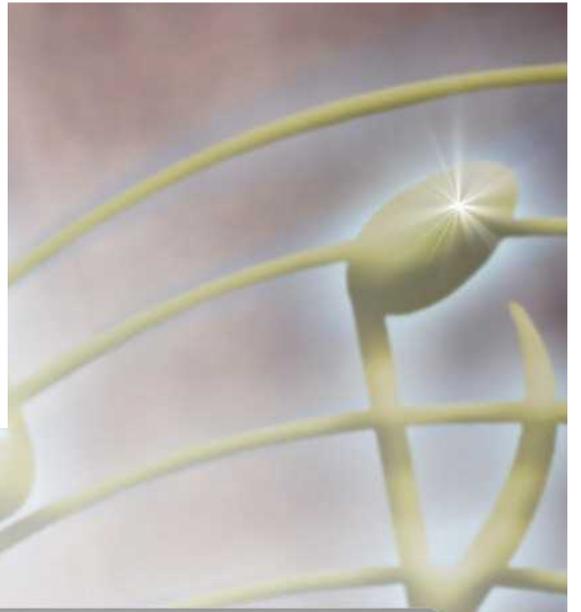


# EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

STEREO SYSTEM

## European Stereo System 2013-2014 Pioneer PD-50/A-70

Stereo separates are not only becoming more popular again, they are also becoming much more flexible and Pioneer's PD-50 disc player and partnering A-70 amplifier show us how. The PD-50 spins CD and audiophile SACD discs while also including a front-mounted USB port for playing music off a memory stick. Around the back, there are digital inputs to boost the performance of external digital devices. Meanwhile, the A-70 not only boasts a full 90W power output but its Class D amplification ensures this is achieved as efficiently as possible with a robust and rhythmic sound. The fact that Pioneer's A-70 also includes conventional digital and asynchronous USB audio connections confirms its status as an impressive hi-fi hub.



**EISA AWARD**  
**Best Product**  
2013-2014

STEREO SYSTEM  
Pioneer PD-50/A-70

**European Wireless Hi-Fi Headphone 2013-2014**  
**AKG K935**

If you want to enjoy the sound of your hi-fi system privately, but without being tethered to a headphone socket, then AKG's K935 wireless 'phone is the perfect solution. The base unit, which can be wall-mounted, includes hidden magnets that hold the headphone in place while they charge, allowing for up to eight hours of remote listening enjoyment over a high quality 2.4GHz wireless connection. RCA and 3.5mm analogue inputs are fitted along with a sensitivity switch to accommodate a wide variety of music sources. Not only does the K935 develop a very detailed, spacious and sympathetic sound, but its soft and compliant velvet ear pads and light weight ensure the headphone is equally comfortable to wear.





## EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

### European Wireless Speaker System 2013-2014 **DALI KUBIK FREE**

With its new Kubik Free series of miniature two-way loudspeakers, Dali is putting the fun back into functionality. The self-powered Kubik Free loudspeaker connects wirelessly to any Bluetooth music streaming device, its onboard amplifiers delivering a deliciously sweet sound from Dali's proprietary wood-fibre bass/mid driver and soft-dome tweeter. Of course, the Kubik Free also includes wired USB and optical inputs – perfect for partnering with your TV – and stereo connections for all legacy audio devices. A multi-pin connection allows your Kubik Free to power a second, passive version of the speaker called the Kubik Free Xtra while a subwoofer output is included to service a full 2.1 channel audio system. Finally, with a choice of wrap-around grille colours, the Kubik will blend seamlessly into any modern living space.



**EISA**  
AWARD  
Best  
Product  
2013-2014  
WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM  
DALI KUBIK FREE

**European Hi-Fi Accessory 2013-2014**  
**AudioQuest Carbon USB cable**

Every seasoned enthusiast knows that different interconnect and loudspeaker cables will impact on the sound of a hi-fi system, but the same is also true of digital cables. The rise in popularity of USB DACs has been met by a similar cloudburst of proprietary USB cables, and AudioQuest is right at the forefront of this new technology. Carbon USB, named after the woven carbon fibre-like jacket that clothes this fashionable cable, lies midway through its five-strong range. It employs superior silver-plated solid copper conductors and adheres exactly to the USB specification, offering excellent compatibility and helping to deliver a pristine sound with all good-quality USB DACs. If you want to hear your system at its best, then trade-up from your 'giveaway' USB cable.





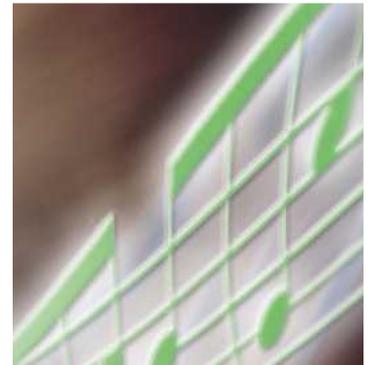
**European Compact Hi-Fi System**  
**Panasonic SC-PMX9**

Proving that the ultimate in wireless connectivity need not mean unnecessary complexity, Panasonic's SC-PMX9 manages to offer full compatibility with your DLNA home network while supporting music media streamed via Bluetooth or AirPlay. Panasonic's Music Streaming app, available for Android and iOS devices, puts you in full control of your listening pleasure but as the SC-PMX9 is also a comprehensive hi-fi system you also have the choice of playback via CD, digital radio and USB stick in addition to the fully integrated iPod/iPhone dock. The partnering three-way loudspeakers deliver a wonderfully rich sound thanks, in part, to the proprietary Class D amplifier tucked inside the SC-PMX9 that leverages off Panasonic's proven MASH noise-shaping technology. Whether your preference is for wireless or wired sound sources, Panasonic's SC-PMX9 is a thoroughly modern solution.



**European Micro Audio System**  
**LG CM3430**

There's a lot more audio technology packed into LG's compact, wireless audio system than first meets the eye. A full 2.1 channel loudspeaker system with two sub-bass drivers is incorporated into the body of the CM3430, purposefully driven via a 40W Class D amplifier. Its super slim casework comes in a variety of colours and plays host to a slot-loading CD player, FM radio and a USB port that supports playback of uncompressed music files. Depending on territory, DAB radio versions are also available. For even greater flexibility, you can stream music via Bluetooth or AirPlay. Whatever your choice of source, the versatile CM3430 punches well above its weight with a surprisingly grand and engaging sound that belies its discreet appearance.





**European HT Loudspeaker 2013-2014**  
**KEF E305**

KEF's revamped 'egg' 5.1 package is ideal for a discreet home theatre system. Its secret weapon is the brand's proprietary Uni-Q driver, which combines a 115mm woofer and 19mm aluminium dome tweeter in a coaxial design to create a precise sound image from its five small satellite speakers. Adding realistic, deep bass is the partnering 250W active subwoofer with its long-throw 200mm driver and whose design merges seamlessly with the surround enclosures. The E305 is neatly conceived, easy to install, simple to use and provides an impressively broad but still accurate performance with film soundtracks. It's also a natural performer with music material, making it a great all-round solution.



**EISA**  
AWARD  
Best  
Product  
2013-2014  
HT LOUDSPEAKER  
KEF E305



# EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

HT HIGH-END

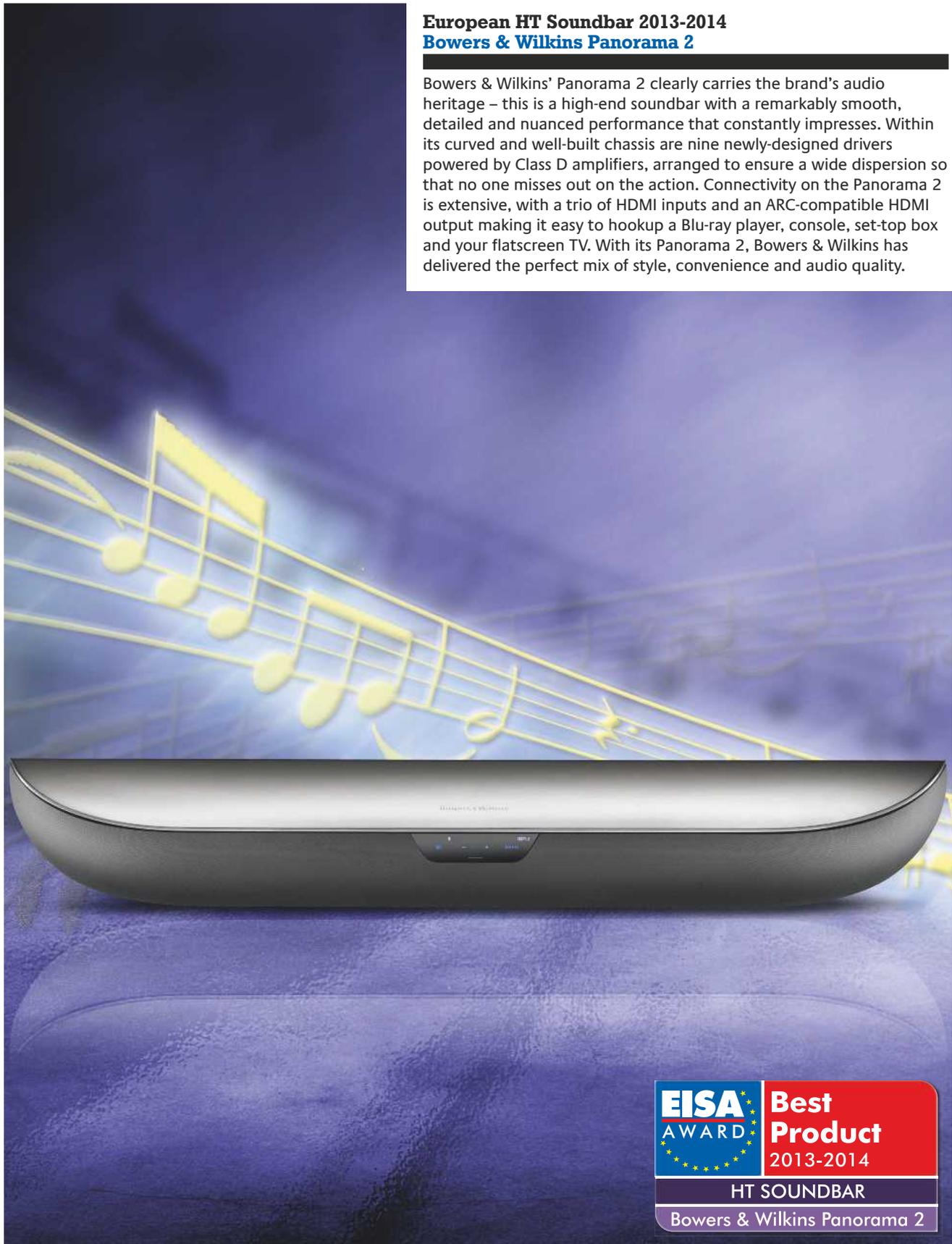
## European HT High-End 2013-2014 Krell Foundation

A 7.1-channel processor/preamp with state-of-the-art digital processing and features, the Krell Foundation is aimed at home theatre enthusiasts for whom only the very best will suffice. A total of ten HDMI inputs and two outputs provide setup flexibility, including instantaneous source switching, while the brand's proprietary ARES room EQ system tailors sound performance to the listening environment. Owners of compatible amplifiers can make use of its balanced outputs. As expected from a high-end product, design and build quality is faultless, and the slim form factor means it can be accommodated easily. In action the Foundation delivers multichannel audio with amazing clarity and precision and passes video signals with unerring accuracy.



**European HT Soundbar 2013-2014**  
**Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2**

Bowers & Wilkins' Panorama 2 clearly carries the brand's audio heritage – this is a high-end soundbar with a remarkably smooth, detailed and nuanced performance that constantly impresses. Within its curved and well-built chassis are nine newly-designed drivers powered by Class D amplifiers, arranged to ensure a wide dispersion so that no one misses out on the action. Connectivity on the Panorama 2 is extensive, with a trio of HDMI inputs and an ARC-compatible HDMI output making it easy to hookup a Blu-ray player, console, set-top box and your flatscreen TV. With its Panorama 2, Bowers & Wilkins has delivered the perfect mix of style, convenience and audio quality.





# EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

HT RECEIVER

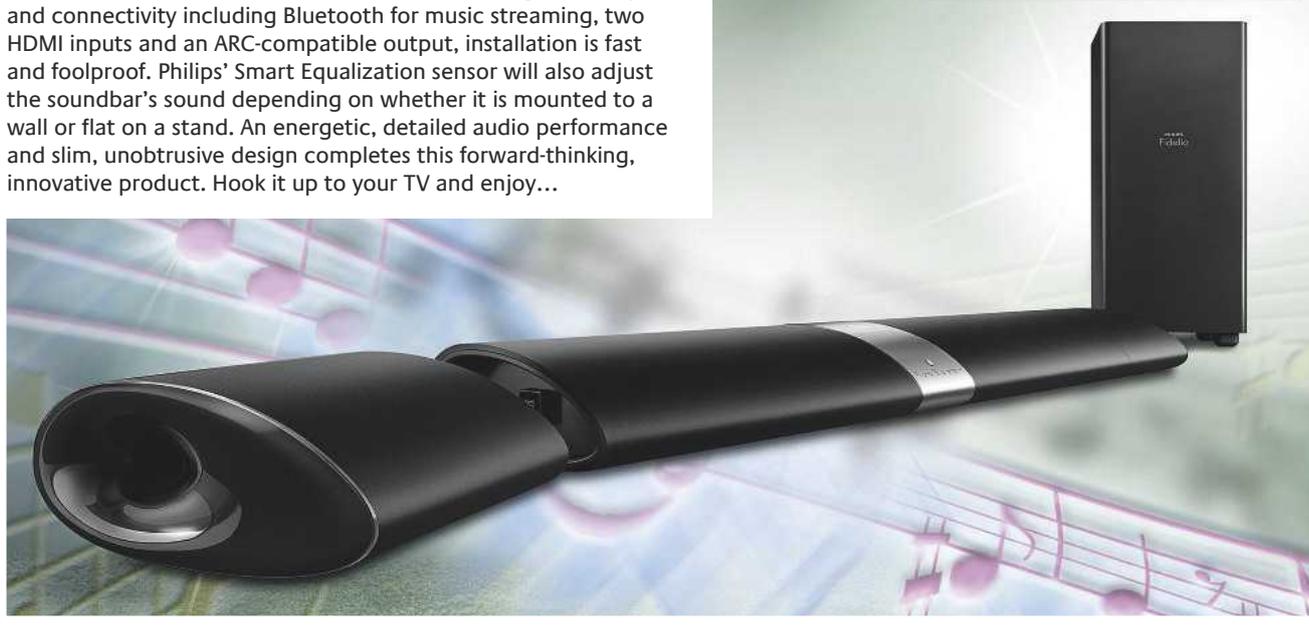
## European HT Receiver 2013-2014 Sony STR-DA5800ES

Sony's flagship receiver sports a heavyweight design and build but brings finesse to its multichannel performance ensuring that movie soundtracks and music alike are delivered with vivid detail and bags of energy. The 9.2-channel STR-DA5800ES is also feature-packed, offering nine HDMI inputs and three outputs, an asynchronous USB input, built-in network switching and, uniquely for an AVR, video-on-demand courtesy of the Sony Entertainment Network. Powerful on-board audio processing enables centre channel Lift Up and Virtual Height functionality to ease installation, while media playback includes support for 192kHz/24-bit FLAC and WAV files. Add in the gorgeous and intuitive graphic user interface and effective auto-calibration regime and the result is an inspired new addition to Sony's home cinema line-up.



## European HT Innovation 2013-2014 Philips Fidelio HTL9100

The Philips HTL9100 is no ordinary soundbar. If needed, the detachable, battery-powered side speakers can be put anywhere in the room where they will receive rear-channel sound wirelessly, providing true 'Surround On Demand' via the onboard Dolby and DTS 5.1 decoders. With the subwoofer also working wirelessly, and connectivity including Bluetooth for music streaming, two HDMI inputs and an ARC-compatible output, installation is fast and foolproof. Philips' Smart Equalization sensor will also adjust the soundbar's sound depending on whether it is mounted to a wall or flat on a stand. An energetic, detailed audio performance and slim, unobtrusive design completes this forward-thinking, innovative product. Hook it up to your TV and enjoy...



HT INNOVATION

**European HT Universal Player 2013-2014  
OPPO BDP-103EU**

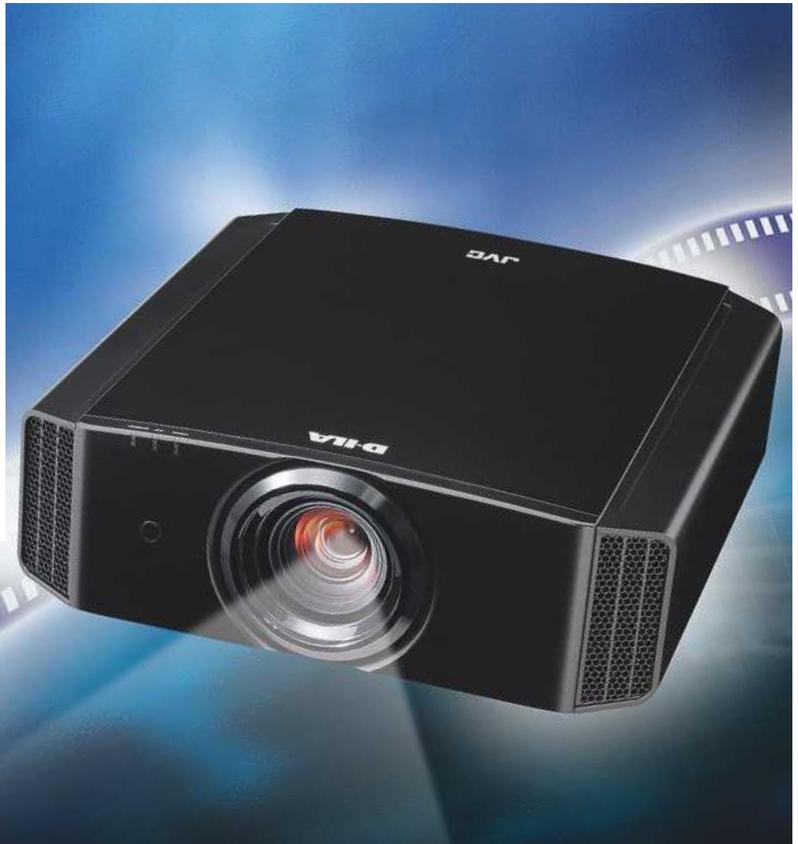
OPPO's BDP-103EU is a state-of-the-art Blu-ray player, matching a luxurious, heavyweight build quality with an astonishing range of features. In addition to two HDMI outputs, external sources can take advantage of the player's high-grade processing via its twin HDMI inputs, while USB, Ethernet and Wi-Fi capability make it easy to play back your own media files. As a universal deck, the OPPO will happily spin Super Audio CDs and DVD-Audio discs as well as Blu-rays – its performance, aided by extensive user adjustments, is sublime. 4K upscaling and HDMI passthrough mean it can be combined with the latest high-end displays at the heart of a home cinema.




**EISA**  
AWARD  
Best  
Product  
2013-2014  
HT UNIVERSAL PLAYER  
OPPO BDP-103EU

**European Projector 2013-2014**  
**JVC DLA-X55R**

Designed for home theatre enthusiasts, the DLA-X55R offers an unprecedented picture quality for its price point. Light output and native contrast are highly impressive, while the colour reproduction is nuanced and natural. Sharpness is another strength, with JVC's second-generation 'e-Shift2' detail enhancement technology displaying Full HD content with an astonishing level of detail that comes close to an Ultra HD sensation. Installation of the DLA-X55R is helped by its comprehensive setup features, including motorised horizontal and vertical lens shift, a 2x zoom and Lens Memory function, plus extensive calibration options and a range of excellent preset viewing modes.



**European HT Solution 2013-2014**  
**Loewe Individual 55 Slim Frame/3D Orchestra 5.1 IS**

Loewe always strives to provide home entertainment systems that mix premium design and ease of use with a quality audio-visual experience, and this combination is no different. The new Individual 55 Slim Frame TV offers Active 3D playback, an integrated PVR and Smart TV features, plus personalised style options to tailor it for any living room. The 3D Orchestra 5.1 IS, meanwhile, uses an array of wireless speakers with omnidirectional dispersion, ensuring an immersive surround sound performance, with a tight bass delivery from the dedicated 200W subwoofer. With no need for an external processor, as decoding is handled by the Loewe TV, this is an appealing fuss-free solution.



**European Green TV 2013-2014**  
**Philips 50PFL5008**

In a market of ever-increasing screen sizes, Philips continues to maintain its standing as an environmentally friendly brand. The Philips 50PFL5008 carries on this ethos, outperforming the competition with reduced energy consumption and efficient use of environmentally relevant materials in its printed circuit boards. The Philips brand extends its winning streak by earning the EISA Green Award again this year.



**European Green Phone 2013-2014**  
**Samsung GALAXY S4**

With its GALAXY S4, Samsung has shown that it's possible to produce a large-screen smartphone with minimal environmental burden. The S4 outperforms the competition through its limited use of precious metals and toxic materials. Samsung's flagship has particularly low power consumption, which is not only positive for the environment but is also convenient for the user. EISA's Green Jury is pleased to see that the S4 has a removable battery – going against the recent trend of using embedded batteries.





## EISA AWARDS 2013-2014

VIDEO/PHOTO/IN-CAR/MOBILE

### VIDEO PANEL

EUROPEAN TV 2013-2014	Sony BRAVIA KDL-55W905A
EUROPEAN HOME CINEMA TV 2013-2014	Panasonic VIERA TX-P60ZT65
EUROPEAN SMART TV 2013-2014	Samsung UE55F8000
EUROPEAN ULTRA HD TV 2013-2014	Philips 65PFL9708
EUROPEAN DESIGN TV 2013-2014	LG 55EA980W
EUROPEAN CAMCORDER 2013-2014	JVC GC-PX100

### COMBINED AWARDS WITH PHOTO/VIDEO PANEL

EUROPEAN PHOTO-VIDEO CAMERA 2013-2014	Panasonic LUMIX DMC-GH3
EUROPEAN PHOTO-VIDEO ACCESSORY 2013-2014	Manfrotto MVH500AH
EUROPEAN ACTION CAM 2013-2014	GoPro HERO3 Black Edition

### PHOTO PANEL

EUROPEAN CAMERA 2013-2014	Nikon D7100
EUROPEAN ADVANCED CAMERA 2013-2014	Sony Alpha SLT-A99
EUROPEAN SLR CAMERA 2013-2014	Canon EOS 100D
EUROPEAN ADVANCED SLR CAMERA 2013-2014	Canon EOS 6D
EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2013-2014	Samsung NX300
EUROPEAN ADVANCED COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2013-2014	Olympus PEN E-P5
EUROPEAN COMPACT CAMERA 2013-2014	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50/HX50V
EUROPEAN ADVANCED COMPACT CAMERA 2013-2014	Fujifilm X100S
EUROPEAN TRAVEL CAMERA 2013-2014	Olympus TOUGH TG-2
EUROPEAN LENS 2013-2014	Tamron SP 90mm F2.8 Di VC USD Macro 1:1
EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL LENS 2013-2014	Canon EF 200-400mm F4L IS USM Extender 1.4x
EUROPEAN ZOOM LENS 2013-2014	Tamron SP 70-200mm F2.8 Di VC USD
EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM LENS 2013-2014	ZEISS Touit 2.8/12
EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM ZOOM LENS 2013-2014	Panasonic LUMIX G Vario 14-140mm F3.5-5.6
EUROPEAN PHOTO INNOVATION 2013-2014	Samsung GALAXY NX
EUROPEAN PHOTO SOFTWARE 2013-2014	DxO Optics Pro 8

### IN-CAR ELECTRONICS PANEL

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HEAD UNIT 2013-2014	Kenwood DNN9230DAB
EUROPEAN IN-CAR NAVI-MEDIA SYSTEM 2013-2014	Parrot ASTEROID Tablet
EUROPEAN IN-CAR AMPLIFIER 2013-2014	Hertz HCP 5D
EUROPEAN IN-CAR SPEAKER SYSTEM 2013-2014	Focal PS 165FX
EUROPEAN IN-CAR SUBWOOFER 2013-2014	GLADEN ZERO 12 PRO
EUROPEAN IN-CAR STREAMING SOLUTION 2013-2014	MOSCONI DSP_AMAS
EUROPEAN IN-CAR INTEGRATION 2013-2014	Focal DSA 500RT
EUROPEAN IN-CAR HIGH-END COMPONENT 2013-2014	Ground Zero GZPA Reference 2T

### MOBILE PANEL

EUROPEAN MOBILE HEADPHONE 2013-2014	JVC HA-FXZ200
EUROPEAN MOBILE AUDIO SYSTEM 2013-2014	Harman Kardon Onyx
EUROPEAN TABLET 2013-2014	Sony Xperia Tablet Z
EUROPEAN ADVANCED SMARTPHONE 2013-2014	HTC One
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# Estelon XB

Tired of ugly boxes? Estelon's narrow-waisted cylinders marry form and function for a new take on floorstanders  
 Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Keith Howard**

'**W**ho'd have thought that Estonia had a 25-year-old high-end audio business?' mused The Editor. We both felt a little bit foolish, maybe even politically incorrect for underestimating Estonia, as we've been photographing Estelon's flagship XAs or XA Diamond speakers at hi-fi shows since the late-Noughties, just because they're so pretty.

Although we live in an era when it seems as if there are no restrictions on cabinet shape – think of Vivid, KEF's Blade, most Wilsons – the Estelons deftly bridge the gap between radically bizarre and domestically acceptable. The enclosure shape and construction are the main contributions the XA, XA Diamond, XB and XC have made to speaker evolution, as the drivers are made for Estelon by an outside supplier. And while I'm not saying this is the first speaker with a narrow waist, it is one of the sexiest manifestations of the form. Simply put, they look wonderful.

Estelon calls the shape E-Ion, the XB reviewed here being 110mm smaller at 1260mm than the 1370mm XA and XA Diamond, recommended for a room size of 20-50m<sup>2</sup>. (The shape is truncated for the standmounted XC.) Common to the three floorstanders are a main woofer at the bottom of the enclosure, then a driverless span of cabinet until you reach the upper section, with the tweeter placed directly below the midbass unit.

Designer Alfred Vassilkov developed the shape over a five-year period, addressing a number of disciplines. He experimented with assorted materials and both traditional and novel construction techniques, settling on a special casting process and the use of a proprietary marble-based composite.

As we all learned in 'Speaker Design 101', the absence of parallel sides breaks up resonance modes, so the E-Ion combines an internal acoustic chamber of

non-parallel sidewalls and extensive use of structural stiffening to create a dead enclosure. And whatever else one may or may not hear when they audition the XB, one thing they will not experience is box-type coloration.

## SEEKING HARMONY

Alfred describes his motivation more like a top oenologist or spiritual healer than a speaker designer, but it fits with both the speaker's delivery and its physical presence.

'Every single detail is carefully considered, selected and tested in all stages of the production process. Each decision from engineering to design is made with the synergy and perfect resonance of the speakers as a whole in mind. The process is comparable to building an exquisite musical instrument.

'Nature is also an inspiration, particularly the harmony of the way in which every part of nature works perfectly in unison. This can be observed visually through the changing of seasons or

by listening to the sounds when you take a walk through a forest. This harmony is what I strive for in my work.'

No, don't waste an e-mail on sending this to 'Pseud's Corner' because I've heard similar from other designers, and Alfred certainly looks like he could mingle with Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin and they'd never guess he came from audio. And it does go a long way to explaining the general 'vibe' of the Estelon: it simply does not smack of normal high-end practice, though I can't quite say why.

But when you look at the ingredients, it certainly ticks all the right boxes. Its three drive units are cutting-edge,

**RIGHT:** Cabinets have acutely chamfered baffles to minimise diffraction effects and you should listen with the grilles in situ. Metal 'punch nets' protect the ceramic cones of the Accuton drivers from accidental damage

"It is comparable to building an exquisite musical instrument"



## FULL RANGE

Estelon's web site says very little about the design philosophy of company founder and designer Alfred Vassilkov. But our measurements [p45] suggest that he has an interesting and unusual design approach, in which the midrange driver is tasked with reproducing as much of the frequency range as is possible, probably to achieve the prized seamlessness of the best full-range drivers without the worst of their compromises. Although our measurements don't specifically identify crossover frequencies, the XB's 6¼in 'midrange' unit operates from around 100Hz up to crossover to the tweeter. Compromise is inevitable though – at crossover to the tweeter there may be directivity issues, and at low frequencies the driver may run out of excursion capability when pushed hard. And when this does happen, of course, the resulting nonlinearity will affect a large part of the audible frequency range. KH

German-made Accuton drivers using the kind of materials familiar to supercar and high-end watch manufacturers. As examples, the 220mm bass unit employs an ultra-rigid ceramic sandwich dome, the 160mm mid-bass unit features a titanium voice coil former and the 25mm tweeter has an ultra-hard ceramic dome.

### SUPERLATIVE FINISH

Accuton's drivers, however, were not selected for the materials alone. The mid-bass driver's surrounding air space was defined to provide maximum freedom from dynamic compression – it enjoys its own acoustic enclosure. All moving elements of the driver are ventilated for a resonance-free response. The high frequency driver eschews ferrofluid filling, the designers preferring instead to fit a double neodymium magnet for low energy storage and for superior heat transfer.

Other internal details include a specific type of Kubala-Sosna-made cabling and a minimalist second-order crossover design fitted with 'Mii Teflon-Hybrid' capacitors and air core inductors, the network encased in a separate chamber. Estelon emphasises that all its components were selected 'through extensive listening tests based on subjective musicality'.

Another welcomed practice is that each drive unit is burned in for several hours, the drivers then mated as matched pairs for each speaker pair.

They are then burned in *again* as matching pairs, before being fitted into the finished cabinet for individual tuning.

Then there's the exquisite finishing. After the proprietary

marble-based composite is cast, it is aged prior to the application of a multi-layer resonance-damping compound. After that stage, the cabinet surface is prepared, with hand-sanding and sealing, for a build-up of layers. Lastly, multiple coats of the chosen lacquer finish are applied, and hand-sanded between coats. Final polishing is done by hand. The Estelon XB standard finishes include black or white gloss, or matt black for £22,000 per pair. The review pair was finished in 'Red Rocket Liquid Gloss' for an extra £3000; the same level of finish is also offered in gloss silver or matt silver. A third level, with a £2000 premium, provides matt white, 'Blue Cobalt' or 'Deep Purple'.

Estelon also goes the extra mile for packaging and set-up. The instruction booklet includes copious details with cute drawings for a fool-proof procedure for unpacking and installing the speakers. It shows you how to tip the box, replace the fitted castors with spikes and finally position them for ideal placement. The XBs benefit from a lot of air around them, so they can do a terrific 'disappearing act'.

### SO WHAT'S MISSING?

With power courtesy of Devialet, I fed the Estelons a barrage of tracks that, inadvertently, complemented their mien... unless it got too heavy. Kodo's *Warabe* [Sony SRCL 467 1] was brutally unkind, the massive, over-the-top drumming, pregnant with bottom octave energy, simply losing the sheer force I know it to possess. It was curious, because everything else was just so in terms of speed, impact and especially in its imaging.

As this was the initial exposure, albeit a crash course in what to expect, I chose a track at the other extreme, Eleanor McEvoy's piano/vocal-only rendition of 'God Only Knows' on *If You Leave...* [Mosco MOSCD4010]. This time, the careful placement with toe-in as prescribed by the manual proving its merit, the Estelon



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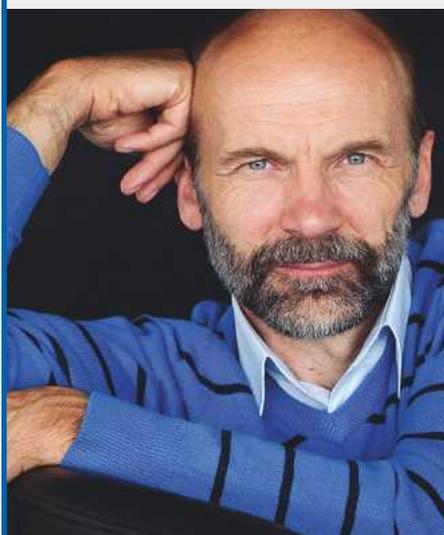
**TechDAS**

## ALFRED VASSILKOV

As Estelon is a product of Alfred & Partners, a design studio and think-tank over 25 years old, and as this series of speakers only emerged in the mid-to-late 2000s, one suspects that designer Alfred Vassilkov prefers not to be rushed. The main source of inspiration for his work comes from a lifetime of experimenting with speaker design. If Alfred has a priority, it is the desire to 'achieve a strong emotional impact with the listener through the symphony of beautiful soundscapes. This can only occur when everything works in unison and as one body, when it feels right, it sounds pure and it looks beautiful.'

As a primary technical design goal, however, Alfred's desire for Estelon is 'to produce speakers that are bigger than the sum of their parts. Using design to enhance every aspect of the user experience, from stirring emotions through beautiful, rich sound to pulling on heart strings with striking and meaningful aesthetics.' Which goes some way to explaining why the look of the Estelon is so particular.

Estelon is, however, no mere dream factory, but a proper commercial venture. It must be fiscally solid because it has earned EU support, not something normally connected to high-end audio businesses, but what you'd associate with, say, environmental concerns. The EU Regional Development Fund helps innovative Estonian companies, and Estelon is one that received a grant to register patents.



XB did something wonderful: it matched its physical form to the music, an effect I'd only experience before with certain Sonus fabers. You're probably tiring of my continued adoration of Ms McEvoy, but suffice it to say, the Estelon could have been made for female vocals. Every nuance in her masterly display of subtlety was recreated with such lifelike intensity that I was reminded of the first time I heard Quad ESL63s in the SME Music Room. It must be stressed that this is the antithesis of Kodo, but perhaps I had stumbled upon the Estelon's forte?

### MADE FOR FINESSE

If a speaker's physical presence embodies either the heart of the designer or the way it presents music, then Alfred Vassilkov must be a true aesthete or the Estelon XB was designed for finesse above all other concerns. I fiddled with the piano next to my desk to remind me of the sound of the real instrument, to double-check that those tones and tinkles were as 'real' as I believed – rich, rounded, mellifluous.

We do not, however, live on a musical diet of voice-and-piano-only performances, so I chose something in-between McEvoy and Kodo: Albert King's 'The Very Thought Of You' from the remastered *Born Under A Bad Sign* [Stax 0888072343344] with backing by no less than Booker T and the MGs. Piano and subtle drums far right, Mr King strumming guitar and singing in the middle, the Memphis Horns stage left.

A true *non-sequitur*, the album's closing track is a masterpiece composed by English big band leader Ray Noble, a super-smooth display of class that shows how blues singers can deliver popular standards with as much grace as a Sinatra or a Bennett. Why the Estelon and this track so loved each other is down to a synergy that occurs often enough to make us love and appreciate high-end audio.

It was a case of a sound system shouting, 'This is what it's all about!' The Estelons positioned the eight musicians across the stage in a natural manner, completely avoiding the old 'Viewmaster' approach to 3D. (For those too young to remember when 3D was utterly unconvincing, that means lots of 2D images in a 3D space.) There were no gaps in the soundstage between the players that suggested an exaggeration of spatial effects. It simply filled the imaginary canvas with sound. Especially appreciated was the snap to the drums, even though impact



**ABOVE:** Side view of the 8in Accuton bass driver with its ultra-stiff ceramic/sandwich cone, thin fabric spider, underhung motor and 38mm titanium voice coil former

was not a prerequisite in such a romantic number. But moving to 'The Hunter', as sinister a blues song as has ever been issued, the Estelon XB conveyed the dark menace of the song despite a seeming truncation of the lower bass. Actually, 'truncation' implies a lack of extension. So perhaps, 'reduction' is a more accurate descriptive word.

While this didn't detract from the experience, knowledge of the listening material as heard through other systems

points out a minor demerit. The caveat is obvious: if you're a hardcore bass junkie, look for another solution.

Back to the finer sounds, though, the Estelon's suavity reappeared with Lou

'It was a case of a system shouting, "This is what it's all about!"'

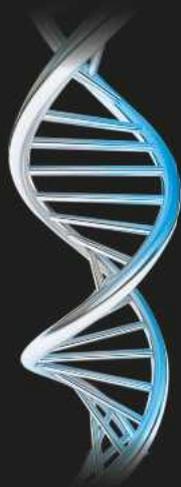
Rawls' *At Last* [Blue Note CDP 7 91937 2], with adroit balancing of two utterly contrasting voices on the title track. Rawls' rasp and Dianne Reeves' hyper-clarity force a system to display its prowess with texture or the lack thereof. The interplay was perfectly complementary, leading me to the recently-released *These Hoodlum Friends: The Coasters In Stereo* [History of R&B Records R002].

Like all of the doo-wop and Motown greats, the Coasters – having been around long enough to be part of the male vocal group template – featured five distinct voices. As many of their numbers were ➔

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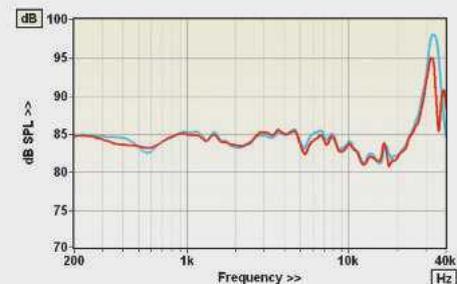
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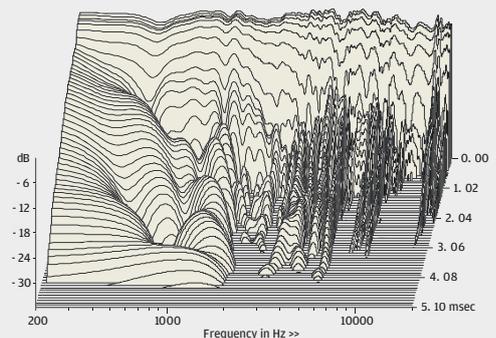
## ESTELON XB

Estelon claims 87dB sensitivity for the XB but our pink noise figure of 84.1dB indicates that this is optimistic. So too is the 6ohm nominal impedance, which suggests a minimum modulus of 4.4ohm. Estelon claims a 3.5ohm minimum but we recorded a dip to 2.9ohm. Impedance phase angles are quite high, so the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) falls to a low figure, the minimum of 1.4ohm at 60Hz suggesting that the XB is quite a difficult load to drive. The on-axis frequency response [Graph 1, below] shows a declining trend above 8kHz despite which, because of the smoothness of the traces, any errors were limited to a mere  $\pm 2.4$ dB and  $\pm 2.1$ dB respectively – excellent figures. Pair matching error of  $\pm 1.3$ dB is less outstanding but the largest disparities occurred above 15kHz, below which the matching was a fine  $\pm 0.8$ dB.

Bass extension could not be measured because the metal grilles of the Accuton ceramic drivers prevent correct placement of the microphone, but near-field measurements were made anyway and revealed that the XB is, in effect, a two-way speaker with a subwoofer. In fact the output of the bass 'driver' is so narrow-band that it appears to be an ABR, with the midrange driver operating to below 100Hz. Estelon's design aim appears to be to have a single driver cover as much of the frequency range as possible, the inevitable compromises being in output capability and directivity control at tweeter crossover. As in the Avalon Compás [HFN Aug '13], the tweeter's ultrasonic resonance occurs at around 32.7kHz and the cumulative spectral decay waterfall [Graph 2] reveals the presence of breakup resonances in the upper midrange and treble. KH



ABOVE: The forward response is very smooth but declining above 8kHz. Note the tweeter resonance



ABOVE: Cabinet resonances are reasonably controlled but there are driver resonances in the mid and treble

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	83.4dB/84.1dB/84.4dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	2.9ohm @ 53Hz 20.7ohm @ 1.2kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-54° @ 2.2kHz 60° @ 78Hz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 1.3$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	See text / >40kHz/>40kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.5% / 0.3% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD)	1260x420x590mm

**LEFT:** Beautifully-made, multi-way WBT connectors ensure secure cable attachment. As the sockets are placed near to floor this prevents heavy cables from damaging the binding posts

Curiously, the set also included the Coasters' covering of a classic from the 'Great American Songbook', Duke Ellington's 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore'. I won't say it's a performance to worry BB King, Nat 'King' Cole or even Paul McCartney, but it was far better than merely listenable, thanks to some chillingly convincing strings and a gloriously tinkly piano worthy of any Blue Note album of the period. 'Satin Doll', on the other hand, swings so joyously that it raised an eyebrow. The Estelon understands 'hip'. Pure bliss.

### PERFECT COALESCENCE

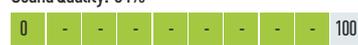
Two standouts, though, ensure that the XB is worthy of your attention. Joe Brown's heart-warming 'I'll See You In My Dreams' from the astounding *The Ukulele Album* [Joe Brown Records UGCD 008] was rich, glowing, scintillating. All I could think of was Burl Ives in the old Disney lump-in-the-throat-former, *Summer Magic*. It was warm 'n' fuzzy in the nicest way.

And then there was Keb' Mo'. If a speaker can 'like' a recording, *Peace... Back By Popular Demand* [Okeh/Epic EK92687] struck the right note. Everything coalesced perfectly, my concerns about the odd behaviour at the lowest registers simply not mattering at all. This is a mighty fine speaker ... that just happens to have Sophia Loren's curves. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

KH succinctly describes the Estelon XB as 'two-way with subwoofer'. While it is capable of exceptional detail and finesse, a slight disconnect between the mid and lower bass creates a lightness to the sound when mass is required. That odd artefact aside, the Estelon XB is a smooth, silky, sexy performer that adores female vocals – quite appropriate as it's one of the most 'feminine-looking' speakers around.

Sound Quality: 84%



comedic, one of those was a *basso profundo*. This collection, in addition to demonstrating how good were the stereo recordings made by Atlantic in the 1950s, features the sax work of no less than King Curtis on many tracks. It is a time machine of the finest sort: an object lesson in how little has been achieved in the recording arts in the ensuing years.

These tracks rock, and the Estelon was able to swing along with their R&B groove, capturing the sax's honk with perfect attack and detail – that 'I can hear mouth-on-reed' authenticity – with the thoroughness and 'convincingness' that many audiophiles rightly prize over all else.

# Gato Audio CDD-1/AMP-150

Striking design marks this compact combination of electronics from one of Denmark's most innovative specialist brands. Can the sound match those exciting visuals?

Review: **Steve Harris** Lab: **Paul Miller**

It's said, facetiously, that Scandinavians are so good at design because 'What else are they going to do through the long winters?' But one of the other things they can do is listen to music, so perhaps it's not surprising that we almost expect to find Nordic hi-fi sounding as good as it looks.

New to the UK although established in other markets, the CDD-1 and AMP-150 are Gato's flagship products, the visual design being the work of Kristen Dinesen. They are both so compact that you might even think that the 150W-plus per channel AMP-150 integrated must be a Class D amplifier.

It isn't, though. In fact, it builds on a concept pioneered in Denmark long ago with the first big GamuT power amp, designed by Ole Lund Christensen and originally marketed as Sirius. Like that amplifier, the AMP-150 integrated uses a single-MOSFET output stage (actually one pair for each channel) rather than the usual array of two or more devices in parallel.

## CONCEPT OF WHOLENESS

Gato's Frederik Johansen had worked at GamuT in the mid-2000s [see boxout, p49]. He explains: 'When I came into that company, basically, there was the D200, and that was a very good amplifier. The problem with it was that it was very expensive to make. We had to redesign a whole lot of things.'

Johansen left GamuT to form Gato in 2007, and continued with the single-MOSFET idea. 'That concept seems to work very well. So we stuck with that and we tried to improve on it and make it work better with less. If you took a D200, you couldn't fit it into a small box!'

'There are some problems when you have a very powerful MOSFET: it's difficult to control it. On the other hand, you get a very close relation between your speaker and your power supply. Because the

only thing there is this MOSFET, and if you can control it in the right way, you can have something good.

'It's a question of optimising everything to fit as a whole. I cannot take the honour of figuring out how to do all this, because obviously GamuT, over 30 years, optimised these things. We were inspired by that and worked on it.'

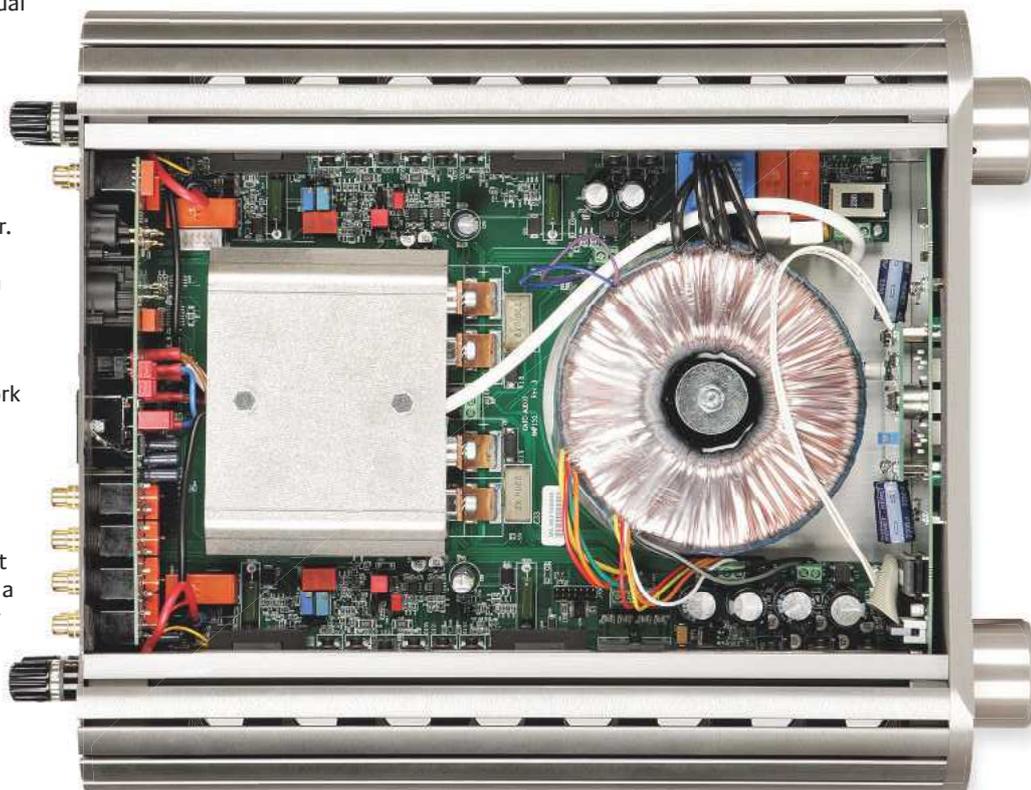
Gato has approached CD player design with the same idea of 'wholeness.' The CDD-1 uses a Philips CD-Pro 2 mechanism and balanced dual-differential Burr-Brown D/A converters and, says Johansen, 'If we go with the upsampling as we do, we can have less harsh filters on the output stage, which gives us a more natural, relaxed, less grainy sound.'

It's a sign of the times that Gato's website now headlines the CDD-1 as a 'High-end DAC with a drive', although the instruction manual still calls it a 'CD player/DAC', and its USB input accepts sample rates up to 192kHz. But this is a dashing-style CD player anyway.

To load a disc, you must lift off the impressively-machined cover, but this is well designed and doesn't seem fiddly even on first acquaintance. With a CD in place, you can replace the cover without taking

too much special care to align it, because the magnetic clamp that's held loosely in its centre will find the transport hub and attach itself. A felt facing underneath allows the cover to sit down pleasantly on the small feet below.

*'It's headlined on Gato's website as a "High-end DAC with a drive"'*



**RIGHT:** All Gato's key semiconductors – the PSU regulation, preamp stage and single pair of MOSFET output devices (per channel) – are mounted onto single-piece L/R heatsinks



We're used to seeing analogue meters on the front of amplifiers, but not on CD players. If the AMP-150's big dial is like a conventional speedo, the matching one on the CDD-1 is a kind of wacky rev counter. As well as finding uses for the analogue pointer, Gato has crammed in all the other necessary display indications, including an LED digital readout, source icons for standard and USB digital inputs and the usual arrow symbols for the CD transport. Both CD player and amp have a small screw adjuster on the back panel to dim the meter backlight and indicator lights.

Once a CD starts, the CDD-1's pointer needle will move steadily to indicate

progress through the track, or you can have it creep round slowly to show progress through the whole disc, on an uncalibrated scale of 0 to 80 minutes. The Time button toggles between these two modes. This is all very neat, but not so useful if you want to know the length of a track or go to a certain point in the music. Track numbers are indicated conventionally by the two-digit red numeric display near the top of the dial.

When running as a DAC, the analogue meter has a different function, with scale markers for all the standard sample rates from 32kHz up to 192kHz, while the digital display shows the incoming signal's

**ABOVE:** Focal point for both of Gato's matching fascias is a large analogue meter. Both share the same stylishly slatted curved side-cheeks, those on the amplifier also providing ventilation

bit-depth. During his lab tests, though, PM noted that the needle didn't always flip round to the correct marker for 48kHz, 96kHz, or 176.4kHz, etc, as he repeatedly changed the input sample rate.

#### PRE-HEAT AMP FEATURE

It would do Gato an injustice to describe the AMP-150 as more conventional-looking than the player, but it has a classic simplicity. Its central 'power meter' again includes icons that light for input selection, but seems – dare I say it – less contrived than the display on the CDD-1.

Rotating endlessly as does the volume control, the AMP-150's input selector cycles through one balanced line input and four unbalanced line-level inputs, identified as CD, LP, Radio and Tape. But what you see on first switch-on is a flame-like icon to indicate that the amp is warming up.

Instead of 'standby,' the front-panel button that activates the amplifier is labelled Heat. This denotes a pre-heating feature, which gets the amplifier to its optimum working temperature in ten to 15 minutes, rather than a couple of hours. ↪

### DENMARK'S HIGH END

This year, the High End show in Munich hosted a total of 363 exhibitors from 35 countries. Along with the ever-growing German contingent, there were exhibitors from almost every European country, even one each from little Estonia and tiny Lichtenstein. There were a few from Sweden, a couple from Norway and Finland. But there were a dozen exhibitors from Denmark, plus many more brands represented only by their local distributor. And we shouldn't forget B&O, which wasn't at that show but must be easily Denmark's biggest audio exporter. All this wouldn't be so surprising if it weren't for the fact that Denmark's population is only around 5.6 million. Historically, it seems that Danish high-end draws on a strong heritage of furniture design and manufacture. Its strength seems to lie in a willingness to pursue design ideals even to the point of eccentricity while remaining deadly serious about sound quality.

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**ABOVE:** This top-loader is easy to use, its lift-off cover retaining a magnetic puck. Unusually, its cutaway design lets you to touch the disc while spinning. Unusually, too, when run as a DAC, the CDD-1 uses its analogue meter needle to indicate incoming digital sample rates

There is also an active low-noise cooling system; however, I never became aware of its operation.

A special feature of the system-remote handset is the rotary volume control, which can be comfortably nudged round with the thumb. The remaining key controls operate normally, but some aspects may throw you at first if you haven't read the manual. To play a CD, you might go for the button with a small single-arrow icon, but this turns out to be the CD/DAC source selector. 'Play/Pause' is actually the button in the centre of the volume control, so it falls conveniently under thumb. Amplifier source selection is via the up/down arrow keys below. The remote [see p51] also adds the secondary functions that don't appear on the CDD-1's front panel, giving you direct track selection using its numeric keypad, along with track and whole-disc repeat.

### A TRANSPARENT WINDOW

I listened first to the Gato CDD-1 as a CD player, using my Classé CAP-2100 amplifier. It sounded cleanly articulate, with a clear-sounding mid and treble that was crisp without ever becoming wispy or edgy. In the Mozart oboe quartet that opens *The Art Of Janet Craxton* [BBC Records BBC CD 635], the Gato conveyed the beauty as well as the precision of Craxton's playing, and presented the four instrumental parts in a way that allowed you to focus effortlessly on any one of them.

Perhaps the Gato didn't give the impression of being unusually forceful or

driving, but it was certainly sprightly. On many recordings, I was impressed by its rhythmic agility. On *Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section* [Contemporary/Original Jazz Classics S7532], I found myself grooving along to the endless subtleties of Paul Chambers' bass lines, and smiling at the flights of Philly Joe. As before, the soundstaging was very good, in this case giving a clear picture of the rhythm trio on the right while the saxophonist soloed from the left, realistically sized and not just trapped in the speaker.

The player could be equally convincing on rousing pop and rock, without adding any edge of its own. When The Kooks got fast and furious on *Inside In/Inside Out* [Virgin 0094635072426], it conveyed the energy and talent of the Brighton youngsters, while on Luke Pritchard's

endearing opener, 'Seaside', you really felt the pleading urgency of his vocal.

Whatever music you threw at it, the Gato CD player could give an appealingly transparent window into what was going on. Playing Ry Cooder's *Bop Til You Drop* [Warner Bros 7599-27398-2], the complex mix of guitars and vocals in 'Little Sister' was well resolved, the instruments spread out in width and layered in depth too, the backing vocals well delineated and tuneful.

Listening to the CDD-1 as a DAC confirmed the virtues that I'd begun to appreciate when using its built-in drive. With other transports connected via S/PDIF, it still delivered a thoroughly believable soundstage, often strikingly three-dimensional. Listening to higher-res ⇨

'You could hear each piano string vibrate as the hammer struck it'

## FREDERIK JOHANSEN

Today Frederik Johansen is managing director of Gato, but he got his first job in audio, in the mid-1990s, at Holfi. It was there that he first worked with the designer Kresten Dinesen, who would later become a co-founder of Gato.

After a few years Johansen was headhunted by Thule. 'My official title at both places was production manager,' he says, 'But being in a small company, you were kind of involved in everything from development to sales.'

In 2004, when distributor Poul Rossing had bought the ailing GamuT company, he hired Johansen to take care of production and to manage R&D. But in 2007, when GamuT was sold again, Johansen left, teaming up with Dinesen to form Gato.

'We saw in other small companies that there was mainly one guy, the owner, who did everything,' says Johansen. 'But we have a good strong network of freelance developers, experts in their own fields. We can combine their specialities in the same product.'

'To me it is much like cars. You buy a Mercedes, you get comfort, you get a good engine, you get a package of qualities. You buy a BMW, it will be a different package.'

'And if you buy a Gato amp, CD or speaker, you get a package of qualities uniquely ours. I don't want to say that we are the only ones telling the truth. I just want to make some products that sound the way we think they should sound!'



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## GATO AUDIO CDD-1/AMP-150

Both these components perform as slickly as they look. The CDD-1 offers a superb performance with CD while the (PC) USB drivers ensure there's no diminution in A-wtd S/N ratio (114.6dB re. 0dBFS), low-level resolution ( $\pm 0.1$ dB over a full 100dB dynamic range) or distortion (0.0003% at  $-30$ dBFS) compared with the traditional S/PDIF input. All CD, USB and S/PDIF inputs offer fantastically flat responses via the balanced XLR output, achieving  $\pm 0.01$ dB from 20Hz-20kHz with CD and 48kHz media,  $\pm 0.02$ dB up to 40kHz with 96kHz media and  $+0.08$ dB/88kHz with 192kHz media. Jitter is vanishingly low at 10-15psec (all digital inputs, all sample rates) but the CDD-1 is not free of 'analogue' artifact. Distortion increases gently over the top 25dB of its dynamic range [see Graph 1], peaking at 0.002% at its maximum 4.35V output.

Gato Audio's partnering amp is arguably more characterful for while it beats its 150W/250W spec. at  $2 \times 170$ W/280W into 8/4ohm – with 210W, 400W and 740W into 8, 4 and 2ohm under dynamic conditions [see Graph 2] – there's a marked increase in distortion through mid and treble frequencies. Versus power, the AMP-150 manages a very consistent 0.02% distortion (1-150W) but versus frequency it increases from 0.007%/20Hz to 0.025%/1kHz to 0.35%/20kHz. The A-wtd S/N is also influenced by a gentle infusion of white noise at 83.5dB (re. 0dBW) – often a positive factor in listening tests – while the response shows a gentle subsonic bass roll-off ( $-0.4$ dB/20kHz). Readers may view comprehensive QC Suite test reports for the Gato Audio CDD-1 and AMP-150 by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'download' button. PM



**ABOVE:** There are balanced inputs to be found on the rear of the AMP-150 to match the balanced outputs on the CDD-1, which also provides high-resolution DAC-only operation with S/PDIF and USB digital inputs

material via USB, the sound could take on another degree of palpable solidity, just as if there was now a removal of some below-threshold veiling effect that had been there before, but not consciously noticed. It seemed extremely transparent.

### WIDE OPEN SPACES

Next I tried the Gato AMP-150 with my existing sources. On first switching over from my Classé CAP-2100, there was a momentary (and actually misleading) impression that it was slightly recessed or dulled by comparison. In reality, I think it would be true to say that the Gato amplifier was tidier. Returning to Ry Cooder's 'Little Sister', it seemed that every instrument had its stable location, and space around it. The Gato clearly revealed the dry, padded studio sound of Jim Keltner's drums, with Tim Drummond's rock-solid bass line tightly locked in.

With more intimate acoustic material, the Gato amplifier could give singers and instruments a presence that was sometimes stunningly life-like, without being artificially larger-than-life. With *Get On Board* [Telarc CD-83675], and 'Pockets', Eric Bibb appeared between the speakers with tangible, almost fleshy weight, complete in every breathy detail. The Gato amp also impressed with its clean and unexaggerated handling of the mega bass-drum on 'God's Kingdom' and the subterranean 'Step By Step'.

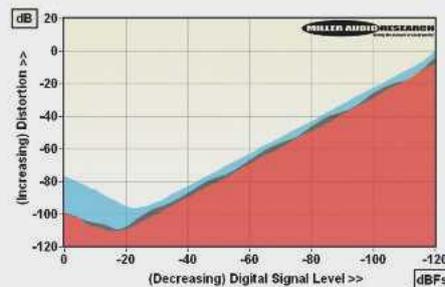
Connecting the CDD-1 and AMP-150 as a system, I found that in terms of timbral naturalness and stereo imaging, the two products worked together in a way that really did make the whole seem greater than the sum of the parts, perhaps reflecting that 'wholeness' which Gato seeks in voicing its products.

On Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks* [Columbia 512350 6], the stereo stage became a vast panorama seeming to stretch well beyond the speakers. But it wasn't just about wide-open spaces. On *Jasmine* [ECM 273 3485] the combination put you right up close to Keith Jarrett's piano, hearing every string vibrate as the hammer struck it. Similarly, you felt the big, chesty resonance of Charlie Haden's bass. Above all, you could appreciate the rapport between the two of them, and the two lifetimes of music that had gone into this poignant reunion. ☺

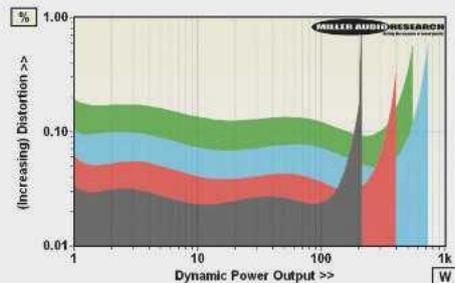
### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Although the attention-grabbing design is a big part of the package, these luxurious products offer a harmonious listening experience too, especially together. They sound relaxed, presenting instruments and voices with realistic textures, rather than edging them with 'hi-fi' super-detailing. The user interface may not suit everyone but the sound quality is excellent and is highly commended.

Sound Quality: 85%



**ABOVE:** THD vs. decreasing 24-bit digital level via S/PDIF (1kHz, red) and USB (1kHz, black; 20kHz, blue)



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) loudspeaker loads

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	170W / 280W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	210W / 400W / 740W / 550W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz, DAC/Amp)	97ohm / 0.010-0.028ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz, DAC/Amp)	+0.0 to -0.01dB / -0.40 to -0.04dB
A-wtd S/N ratio (DAC/Amp)	114.6dB (0dBFS) / 83.5dB (0dBW)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, DAC/Amp)	0.0020-0.009% / 0.0065-0.35%
Digital jitter (CD/USB/ S/PDIF)	118psec / 15psec / 10psec
Power consumption (DAC/Amp)	29W/455W (54W idle)
Dimensions (WHD, DAC/Amp)	325x110x375mm/325x110x430mm



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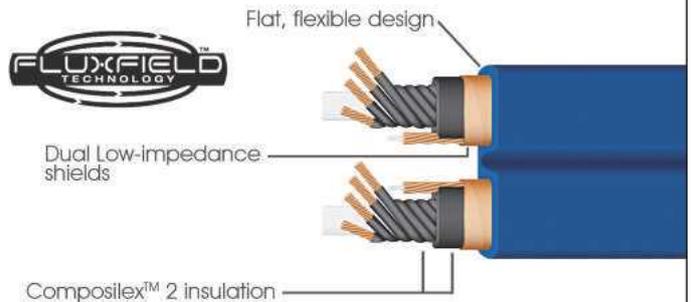
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# hi-finews GROUP TEST

High-res downloads might be making the headlines but with a huge existing catalogue of music on CD, a standalone player still makes sense. We test six from £350 to £2100

## CD PLAYERS £350-£2100

### TESTED THIS MONTH

PIONEER PD-30	£350
REGA APOLLO-R	£598
CYRUS CD 6 SE2	£750
SIMAUDIO MOON 230D	£1220
TEAC CD-3000	£1500
MUSICAL FIDELITY M6CD	£2100



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With the ongoing excitement over high-resolution downloads, it is easy to forget that these still represent only a tiny proportion of the music sold in the UK and out in the wider world. Although the promise is there, limits to availability, ambitious pricing and limited choice are still problems that high-res retailers have yet to resolve completely. By comparison, CD might not be the format of the moment, but disc pricing is as low as it has ever been and availability massively wider than high-res.

So a standalone CD player still makes a great deal of sense and the choice of candidates is considerable. The six players here include some new releases from big names, and although three of the contenders are 'straight' CD players, the other three all bring a little added value in the form of SACD replay or by having digital inputs – both, in one case.

Of course, the CD player/DAC can play your existing collection of discs together with any new arrivals, while at the same time helping the newcomer to dabble in computer-stored downloads.

It isn't too much of a surprise to find that the CD player/DACs are the two most expensive contestants in the group: TEAC's CD-3000 at £1500 (which also offers SACD capability) and the Musical Fidelity M6CD at £2100 which features both conventional digital inputs and USB. Interestingly, the other SACD player is the least expensive model in the test: the £350 Pioneer PD-30. Between these two Super Audio spinners are the three conventional players: Rega's compact Apollo-R at £598, the classical half-width £750 Cyrus CD6SE<sub>2</sub> and the rather larger Simaudio Moon 230D, freshly reduced to £1220, which completes this month's sextet.

### METHOD AND MUSIC

All six players were plugged in and left playing on repeat for 48 hours prior to any listening. For the purposes of the test, they were connected to a Naim Supernait integrated amplifier and Neat Momentum 4 speakers via TCI Constrictor cables.

Listening was initially carried out without exact level matching but for the main phase of critical listening,

the players were levelled off with a 1kHz test tone supplied for the purpose and the output measured by multimeter at the speaker terminals for the most accurate replay assessments.

The test mainly focused on CD replay, the format common to all six players, but the SACD functionality was tested on the Pioneer and TEAC via Goldfrapp's *Supernature* [Mute 3378472]. The digital inputs of the two CD player/DACs were given a brief test by using Mark Knopfler's *Privateering* [Mercury Records UNI061] as a 24-bit/96kHz FLAC, via coaxial S/PDIF digital from a Naim ND5XS player and USB via a Lenovo T530 ThinkPad running foobar2000.

The discs which were selected for level-matched listening on the players were Love's *Forever Changes* [Elektra 8122-73537-2], Peter Gabriel's *So* [Virgin 0777 7 86366 2 5], Martha Tilston's *Machines Of Love And Grace* [Squiggly SQRCDO7] and Phantom Limb's *The Pines* [naimcd166] – all of which were standard CDs. ↻

REVIEWS BY ED SELLEY  
LAB TESTS BY PAUL MILLER

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# Pioneer PD-30

The Pioneer might be the least expensive player in the test but it doesn't give much away in build or appearance to the competition. The styling isn't exactly ground-breaking but it looks clean and elegant, and everything seems well bolted together. It is also worth noting that the remote is (by a comfortable margin) the nicest of the six in the test to use. The player is also flexible in terms of format handling. As well as the SACD-capable mechanism, the USB socket can read thumb-drives of compressed content. Only the slow loading and slightly noisy transport spoils the effect: the Pioneer is the slowest player to go from pressing 'close' to hearing music. The display could also have been a little brighter for viewing from a distance.

The PD-30 has an unbalanced RCA output for analogue as well as coaxial and optical digital connections. There's also a front USB and a pair of IR triggers for system integration. Internally, the Pioneer makes use of an AKM4480 '32-bit' DAC for decoding which also allows for SACDs to be handled in their native DSD format. Also present is Pioneer's 'Sound Retriever', which is intended to improve the quality of compressed audio replayed via the front USB socket.

## CONFIDENT SOUNDS

Sonically, there is much to like about the way the Pioneer makes music. The PD-30 has a confident and relatively powerful sound that benefits from having bass which is both deep and reasonably detailed. Love's 'Alone Again Or' had sufficient impact to be felt as much as heard, and the more lavishly endowed



ABOVE: Clean modern styling, reasonable build and logical controls help the Pioneer look quite expensive

'Stag's Bellow' from Martha Tilston had genuine depth to it. The player handled the stopping and starting of notes with aplomb and had a good sense of clarity.

At the other end of the register, treble is equally detailed and defined, but the more primitive recording of the Love album did reveal a slightly brittle nature to the trumpet; and even with more sophisticated recordings it never truly lost the hard edge to some notes and vocals. Careful system matching would probably correct this but the PD-30 also has a slightly recessed midrange that would be harder to adjust via partnering equipment. As a result, the simple arrangement of Phantom Limb's 'Angel Of Death' sounded a little thin and constrained, without the relatively powerful bass to augment it. Goldfrapp's 'Time Out From The World' on SACD was open and airy, though with slightly smoother treble than the PD-30 managed with CD.

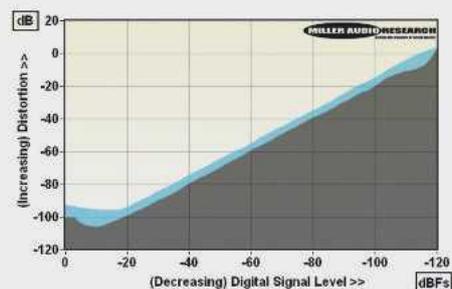
Sound Quality: 78%



## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

In common with Pioneer's flagship PD-50 player/DAC, this more affordable PD-30 preserves much of SACD's 100kHz+ bandwidth by not downsampling to 88.2kHz LPCM. In practice, its SACD response stretches out to -1.7dB/40kHz, -7.6dB/60kHz down to -20dB/80kHz while its CD response is flat to +0.02/-0.09dB from 20Hz-20kHz. Both CD and SACD enjoy a usefully wide 107dB A-wtd S/N ratio from single-ended outputs and from a moderate 440ohm source impedance. All these features, including the ~190psec jitter, are shared with the PD-50 which is evidently based around the same DAC and broadly similar analogue stage. Where the PD-50 scores is with its inclusion of a digital input.

The DAC's digital filter trades a freedom from pre-ringing and acausal distortions for extra post-ringing and some slight HF phase distortion, a trade-off many find worthwhile. Other specifications including its 2.03V maximum output, better-than-100dB stereo separation and low distortion [0.001% through bass and midrange, rising only slightly to 0.002% at 20kHz - see Graph, below] are all very good at this keen price. PM



ABOVE: Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (black) and 20kHz (blue) over a 120dB range



ABOVE: Single-ended (RCA) outputs for analogue and a pair of digital outputs (coax/optical) are grouped at one end, with the IEC mains socket at the other

Maximum output level/Impedance	2.03Vrms / 440ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD / SACD)	106.6dB / 106.6dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0012-0.0037%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0021-0.0027%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.02dB to -0.09dB
Digital jitter (CD / SACD)	195psec / 185psec
Resolution @ -100dB (CD / SACD)	±0.8dB / ±0.1dB
Power consumption	12W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD)	435x128x329mm

# Rega Apollo-R



**D**esigned as part of Rega's new, smaller line of entry level electronics, the Apollo-R is not quite as narrow as the Cyrus but still presents a fairly compact form. Nonetheless it feels impressively solid and heavy and the general construction is among the best in the group. As the only top-loader in this test, the Apollo-R is slightly less accommodating in terms of placement. (Presumably Rega would also like to sell you a turntable too, which also would benefit from the top shelf of your equipment rack!)

Although the business of loading a disc is slightly more involved than with some of the other machines here, the Rega did load CDs quickly and proved almost completely silent in use. The remote is very directional and somewhat insubstantial, and the display could be clearer from a distance, but otherwise this is an easy player to live with.

Like the other machines under £1000, connections are limited to RCA phonos for analogue plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. Decoding comes courtesy of a single Wolfson WM8742 DAC in a layout that benefits from experience gained from the Rega DAC design, although the Apollo-R does without the adjustable filters.

### EVEN-HANDED REPLAY

In use, the Rega initially didn't show much in the way of defining characteristics. The longer the Apollo-R played, however, the more this showed to be a positive rather than a negative trait. The Rega is extremely even from top to bottom and so none of the sample tracks provoked any unpleasant behaviour,

**RIGHT:** The only top-loading player in the test. The Rega Apollo-R's controls are simplicity itself



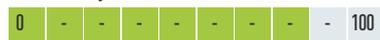
or revealed too much by way of unwanted artefacts.

There is a very slight warmth to the midrange and treble that helped the occasionally edgy Love album to be reproduced free of any harshness or aggression, and with a rather lovely, very believable richness and life to instruments and vocals.

Crucially, this warmth never became overpowering. The newer Phantom Limb and Martha Tilston recordings were presented with impressive detail and no sense of bloat or bloom to the lower registers. The Rega lacks a little detail at the very low end and the soundstage doesn't feel quite so expansive when compared to the best in the test, but the overall performance was rarely less than convincing and the relationship between musical elements was generally easy to follow.

There is also sufficient low end extension to ensure that the Rega presented the more upbeat 'Sledgehammer' with a keenness and drive that points to it being able to handle more uptempo material without issues.

Sound Quality: 80%



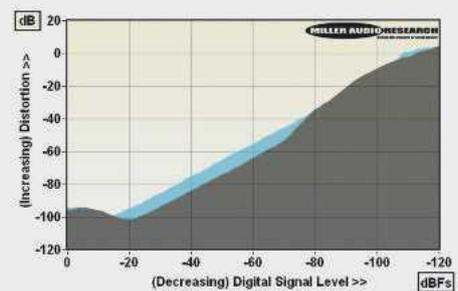
**RIGHT:** Connections are slightly cramped together, but the basics are all provided and build quality is solid



### HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Benefiting from knowledge and technology trickled-down from Rega's flagship Isis CD player and DAC, the Apollo-R is a far tidier player than its original Apollo. There's a reduction in power supply-related jitter from 700psec to just 240psec in this new 'R' version, unaffected by the moderately high +235ppm clock error (crystal clock accuracy is often mistakenly correlated with jitter). The output level of the Apollo-R is unchanged at 2.15V but the A-wtd S/N ratio has widened from 102.9dB in the original model to 106.5dB here – a reflection of the superior Wolfson DACs and analogue output stage fitted to the 'R'.

Distortion is a little lower too, from 0.007% at peak output through midrange frequencies (Apollo) to a mere 0.0006% here. This is a fine result, although at lower digital signal levels there's precious little difference in distortion between the old and new models. The Apollo-R has the very mildest bass roll-off of -0.2dB/20Hz and a similar -0.25dB shaving at 20kHz but these are less likely to exert a subjective impact than its moderate 550-600 output impedance. Avoid long or fancy interconnects. PM



ABOVE: Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (black) and 20kHz (blue) over a 120dB range

Maximum output level/Impedance	2.15Vrms / 55-600ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio	106.5dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0006-0.0041%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0018-0.0057%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.17dB to -0.24dB
Digital jitter	240psec
Resolution @ -100dB	±0.3dB
Power consumption	10W
Dimensions (WHD)	220x90x315mm

# Platinum series



QUAD's reputation as a manufacturer of hi-fi products that deliver musical accuracy through technical prowess is legendary and is nowhere more evident than in the Platinum series of components. Platinum is the pinnacle of QUAD design, a series of CD/DAC Pre and Power amplifiers that provides everything you need, bar the loudspeakers, to replay music recordings as they were meant to be heard – naturally. Platinum is the flagship of the QUAD range, a new set of electronics from a brand that has been famous for quality amplification since 1936. Like all QUAD designs, Platinum's purpose is the 'closest approach to the original sound' – in Platinum's case closer than ever before.

# Cyrus CD 6 SE<sub>2</sub>

Cyrus has been using the same casework for over a decade now, which tends to hide the evolution that its designs have undergone on the inside. The SE models were the first CD players fitted with the 'Servo Evolution' slot-loading transport, and the SE<sub>2</sub> model seen here has further updates to this mechanism and servo, as well as other detail improvements. The casework might have been around for a while but it feels extremely solid, and the overall standard of finish and the paintwork remains excellent. The remote is rather less attractive though, and I was irritated by button legends that didn't really match their functions.

The slot mechanism does at least cure the problem suffered by older Cyrus CD players where the tray would obscure the buttons; and the front panel is well laid out. The Cyrus differs slightly from all the other players here, in that it has two identical RCA outputs instead of the usual one; but conversely, there's no coaxial digital output.

Internally, the Cyrus makes use of a 24-bit/192kHz-capable DAC which is mated to the transport via bespoke software. Bespoke or not, the Cyrus was the only player to show a mild hiccup with one of the test discs in the form of some slight skipping and loading times were not especially fast.

### A SENSE OF LIFE

In use, the Cyrus is a player of two halves which leaves it feeling slightly inconsistent. The low-end response through to the lower midrange is perfectly acceptable, if not obviously superior to the less expensive players in the test. The Cyrus has plenty of detail retrieval – the kick-drum in 'Stags Bellow' was

**RIGHT:** The Cyrus is logically laid out and easy to use, although the display could be easier to read at a distance. Build quality is excellent however

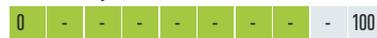


reproduced with exceptional clarity with a proper sense of decay to the sound. But the actual bass depth that the Cyrus can achieve is not that great. Certain notes that were felt with some of the other players had rather less weight to them, and the Cyrus could sound a little soft by comparison. The percussion in Gabriel's 'That Voice Again' was robbed of some of the energy that the piece really needs to shine.

From the midrange to the upper registers, however, the CD6SE<sub>2</sub> is a much more assured performer and in some regards puts itself right up in the top section of the group. The handling of the multiple vocalists in Phantom Limb's 'Angel Of Death' was extremely impressive. The four singers were easily distinguishable from one another but at the same time presented as a cohesive whole.

Detail retrieval was extremely good, while the Cyrus managed to avoid tipping over into harshness or brightness – even with the less than perfect Love recording. Instruments also had a texture and realism to them that gives the Cyrus an appealing sense of 'life'. This is further aided by a relatively spacious and open soundstage.

Sound Quality: 72%



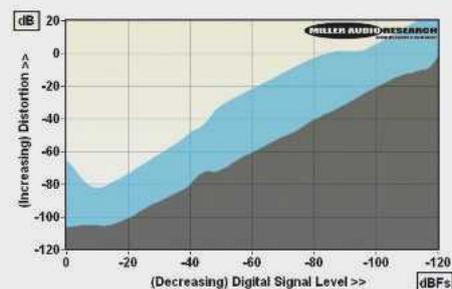
**RIGHT:** Twin audio outputs are a slightly unusual feature, but the layout is logical. MC Bus adds Cyrus system functionality



## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Looking back over my test data for Cyrus's original CD6SE [see *HFN* Oct '09], this latest 'SE<sub>2</sub>' variant would appear to be based on the same DAC and analogue building blocks and offers a near-identical performance – with one very important difference. While the CD6SE was struck by a debilitating 2970psec jitter, the CD6SE<sub>2</sub> has this reduced to 260psec even though a deal of uncorrelated, noise-like jitter remains. Otherwise the '6SE<sub>2</sub>' offers the same 2.14V maximum output from the same low 46ohm source impedance with the same 108dB A-wtd S/N ratio.

The pattern of distortion is unchanged too, from a low 0.0004% through bass and midrange frequencies to a significantly higher 0.05% at 20kHz dominated by a 3rd harmonic [see Graph, below]. At lower signal levels there's also a swell of ultrasonic (requantisation) noise up to 62kHz and –96dB below full output – another hallmark of the CD6 and CD8 series of CD players. Finally, I did encounter some problems with Cyrus's proprietary disc mechanism/software when it came to reading CDs containing 40 or more tracks. PM



ABOVE: Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (black) and 20kHz (blue) over a 120dB range

Maximum output level/Impedance	2.15Vrms / 47ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio	108.4dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/–30dBFS)	0.00035-0.0038%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/–30dBFS)	0.054-0.035%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.00dB to –0.33dB
Digital jitter	260psec
Resolution @ –100dB	±0.4dB
Power consumption	8W
Dimensions (WHD)	215x73x360mm

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# Simaudio Moon 230D

The full-width Simaudio takes up a fair bit more room than the Rega and Cyrus, but the Canadian player is roughly the same size as the Pioneer. Thanks to the relatively restrained but handsome styling it also manages to look fairly discreet. Build quality is excellent and the large display is by far the easiest in the group to read at any distance. The 230D is also a racehorse in a field of show ponies in terms of operation. The transport is by some margin, the fastest to load discs and respond to track changes. The remote is no beauty but is similarly effective in use.

Although the price of the 230D has recently been reduced to assist its journey to 'legacy product', the Moon is priced at a level where it will be going head to head with some CD player/DAC models and the relatively sparse connectivity is thus limited by comparison. The 230D makes do with RCA analogue outputs and a single coaxial digital output. There is less of a point of contention with the internals, thanks to Simaudio Moon's proprietary transport, upsampling software and filtering arrangements.

## ENGAGING CHARACTER

The minimalism of the 230D does seem to pay dividends in terms of audio performance, and the Moon produced consistently excellent results across the full range of our test material. In some ways, the 230D's performance is similar to the Rega's, in that very little 'leaps out at you'. This is down to its excellent sense of cohesion throughout the audio spectrum with no single area seeming to dominate.

The Moon is slightly brighter than some of the other designs here but manages to carry this off



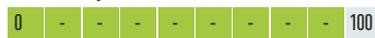
**ABOVE:** A study in simplicity, the Moon has logical controls and a large, easy to read display. Build quality is excellent

without revealing the limitations of the relatively elderly Love recording. The top end is in fact impressively smooth and controlled, and with the more modern material, the 230D exhibited an almost liquid quality with voices and instruments that was extremely appealing. All the way through the midrange, this natural and even-handed performance is present and works to good effect.

This well-judged top end is partnered with an equally detailed, deep and controlled bass response that gave the Moon total control over the bassline of 'Stag's Bellow' and imparted a liveliness and sense of agility to 'Sledgehammer' that was engaging without dominating the overall performance.

The impact of low notes was also impressive and lent further authority to replay. The Moon managed to sound accurate and commendably real but never lost the sense of liveliness and engagement that more upbeat pieces of music played should convey. All in all, this is a very accomplished performer.

Sound Quality: 85%

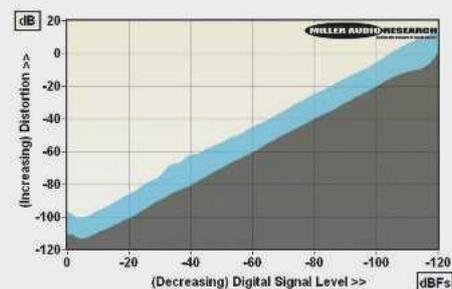


**ABOVE:** Limited connectivity (analogue and digital out) reflects the Moon's focus as a dedicated CD player but leaves it looking a little restricted next to CD player/DACs

## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Although listed as a 'legacy' product on Simaudio's website, sufficient stocks of the 230D CD player exist to support demand into 2014. And a good job too because the combination of Burr-Brown's PCM1793 DAC with Simaudio's proprietary mechanism, re-clocking system and 2nd-order analogue output/filter stage looks very compelling indeed. Distortion is low at 0.0005% through bass and midrange frequencies, increasing to 0.0014% at 20kHz [see Graph below], but even here the complement is mainly 2nd and 4th harmonic with little of the extended odd-order components common with digital players. Jitter is very nearly as low as we can measure with a 16-bit pattern – just 120psec and free of any noise-like jitter that might impact on the crispness or focus of stereo images.

The frequency response rolls-away inaudibly to -0.25dB/20kHz while crosstalk is the lowest of the single-ended players here at <-105dB (20Hz-20kHz). Its 1.95V output is on the standard and the 105dB A-wtd S/N ratio also par for the course while stopband rejection (determined by the DAC) is >79dB. PM



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (black) and 20kHz (blue) over a 120dB range

Maximum output level/Impedance	1.95Vrms / 95ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio	105.0dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0005-0.0036%
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0014-0.0035%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.00dB to -0.25dB
Digital jitter	121psec
Resolution @ -100dB	±0.3dB
Power consumption	4W
Dimensions (WHD)	429x89x333mm

# TEAC CD-3000

The CD-3000 is the flagship player in a range of two-channel components intended to allow TEAC to compete at price points lower than those of its Esoteric models. There is more than a whiff of Esoteric about the styling of the CD-3000 too, with smoothed-off leading edges on the front panel and general construction that looks bomb-proof. The partnering IR remote is well laid out and easy to use (although arguably still not as nice as the Pioneer's) and the fitment of buttons and connections is very good too.

This is just as well, since the CD-3000 has a fair few of both. It offers SACD playback over balanced and unbalanced outputs, and is then additionally fitted as a DAC with a single USB and coaxial input, which can be selected from the front panel. These will accept sampling rates up to 24-bit/192kHz and, generous to a fault, TEAC even supplies a USB cable in the box.

The CD-3000 is the only player in the test group with twin DACs: in this case with the unusual fitment of switchable sample-rate conversion which we switched on for critical listening. For an SACD player, the TEAC is commendably quick to operate but still a little slower than the straight CD players.

## GOOD ON DETAIL

The CD-3000 managed the unusual achievement of doing nothing seriously wrong at any stage of the listening programme, but at the same time never truly demonstrating why it should be chosen above the competition.

The overall sonic balance is smooth and controlled and



ABOVE: Extra buttons hint at considerable functionality. Construction and finish are uniformly excellent

frequently possessed of truly realistic colour – the handling of the tricky trumpet in Love's 'Alone Again Or' was extremely accomplished. The TEAC was also effective with vocals and the detail retrieval that the CD-3000 managed was also extremely impressive. Bass response is commendably deep and potent although there wasn't the same definition to some low notes that the Moon was able to manage.

These general performance characteristics do not change a great deal when playback is switched to SACD. The TEAC retains an impressive ability with voices and the performance is spacious, but there is still a faint muddiness to the bass response that robs the player of some clarity.

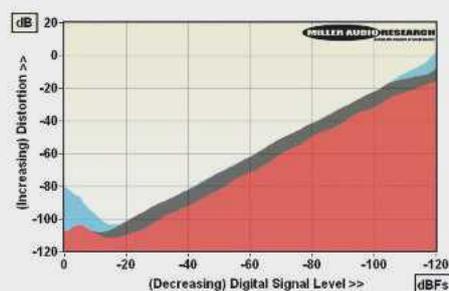
Replay via the digital inputs was not significantly different although it is worth noting that the performance across USB and coaxial was more consistent than the other CD player/DACs in the test.

Sound Quality: 75%



## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Teac's flagship 'Distinction' SACD player/DAC offers a very high 4.6V output from its 100ohm balanced connections – more than enough to compromise a non-level-matched listening comparison – while its A-wtd S/N ratio is only fractionally behind MF's at 112.5dB. Distortion is vanishingly low at ~0.0002% through bass and midrange over the top 30dB of the player's dynamic range with 24-bit digital inputs, increasing to 0.0035% over this same range with 16-bit CD [red vs. black traces, Graph below]. There's an increase to 0.01% at 20kHz at peak outputs [blue trace, below] regardless of disc or input type – an increase in 3rd harmonic distortion caused by stress in the shared analogue output stage. These are not high figures, of course, and do nothing to disturb the ultra-flat ±0.02dB frequency response with CD or 48kHz digital inputs (out to -10dB/90kHz with 192kHz inputs). Unlike with Pioneer's PD-30, the SACD response is truncated beyond 40kHz where it's already -8dB down, courtesy of Teac's sample rate conversion (or downsampling in this instance). SACD jitter remains a low 90psec, however. PM



ABOVE: Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (red, S/PDIF in; black, CD) and 20kHz (blue, CD) over a 120dB range



ABOVE: Balanced XLR output sockets are available in addition to RCA phonos. Two digital inputs are featured and one digital out. All of these feel extremely substantial

Maximum output level/Impedance	4.56Vrms / 97ohm (balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD / S/PDIF)	112.5dB / 112.3dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0002-0.00024% (S/PDIF)
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0094-0.0004% (S/PDIF)
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.02dB to -0.02dB
Digital jitter (CD / SACD / S/PDIF)	128psec / 90psec / 55psec
Resolution @ -100dB (SACD / S/PDIF)	±0.1dB / ±0.2dB
Power consumption	9W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	435x116x371mm / 10.3kg

# Musical Fidelity M6CD



The most expensive player in this test is also, by quite a margin, the largest. Musical Fidelity's current casework is fairly substantial but the use of contrasting colour buttons and the small lip to the front panel prevents the M6CD from looking like a monolith. With so much front panel space on offer, it's a shame that the display is as small as it is – and the remote isn't exactly a masterpiece of clarity either, although it works well. The build quality is extremely good though, so the M6CD feels as substantial as it looks.

The functionality is impressive too. The Musical Fidelity lacks the SACD replay of the TEAC but adds an additional optical input to the DAC section by way of compensation. The digital inputs are 24-bit/192kHz capable (the USB is driverless and is limited to 96kHz) although the M6CD relies on a single DAC to carry out decoding rather than the pair used in the TEAC. The Burr Brown DAC here has been used by Musical Fidelity for some time and seems to be its preferred option. Transport loading times aren't especially fast and skipping tracks takes a curiously long time.

### ASSURED PLAYER

The delay getting up and running is worth persevering with, as the M6CD put in a very assured performance with our range of test material. As with the other strong performers in the group, there is a sense of a presentation that doesn't favour any particular part of the frequency response. The balance of the M6CD is in some ways similar to the Rega's with a very slight warmth that keeps the music civilised but



**ABOVE:** The biggest player in the test is reassuringly solid although some buttons are obscured when the tray is open

equally avoids excessive bloom or softness from creeping in. Indeed the Musical Fidelity's handling of the Peter Gabriel track was a hugely enjoyable combination of potent bass, that provided plenty of impact and detail, with a controlled and exceptionally refined mid and upper performance that eloquently demonstrated that 'civilised' need not be synonymous with 'dull'.

This controlled but entertaining character is maintained with the digital inputs, and while the M6CD has to concede some ground to the TEAC in terms of USB implementation they are a welcome addition. The performance with the high-res FLAC of Knopfler's 'Privateering' had a genuinely lovely richness and realism to it that was an improvement over the already strong musicality offered by the CD mechanism. Thus the M6CD seems well able to handle any movement you might make into high-res audio while still delivering as a CD player.

Sound Quality: 83%

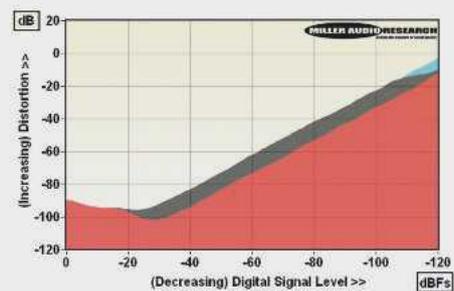


**ABOVE:** Logically laid out inputs and outputs allow for good connectivity and opportunities to use the M6CD as a comprehensive digital hub in your system

## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

While the technical performance of the M6CD bears more than a passing similarity to Musical Fidelity's outboard M6DAC [HFN Mar '13], it's not identical. Both share broadly the same balanced output and filter stage, though the M6DAC has two DSD 1796 DACs giving it about a 2dB advantage in A-wtd S/N over the 113.5dB achieved by the M6CD with its single DSD 1796 chip. The player also has slightly higher levels of (higher-order) distortion amounting to 0.002% at -10dBfs versus 0.0006% from the M6DAC though this is hardly 'high' and the trends versus frequency are impressively uniform [see Graph, below].

Output level is a high 4.3V from a (balanced) 50ohm source impedance, regardless of CD or digital input, though there are necessarily some advantages in distortion and linearity at lower digital levels via 24-bit S/PDIF (0.0005% vs 0.004% at 1kHz/-30dBfs). Jitter is very low too, at the 16-bit limit for CD (116psec) but falling still further to a state-of-the-art 10psec with 24-bit digital inputs. Response is linked to sample rate, -0.3dB/20kHz for CD and -1dB/40kHz for 24-bit/96kHz media. PM



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (red, S/PDIF in; black, CD) and 20kHz (blue, CD) over a 120dB range

Maximum output level/Impedance	4.33Vrms / 50ohm (balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD / S/PDIF)	113.5dB / 113.5dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBfs/-30dBfs)	0.0033-0.00042% (S/PDIF)
Dist. & Noise (20kHz, 0dBfs/-30dBfs)	0.0027-0.00056% (S/PDIF)
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.01dB to -0.28dB
Digital jitter (CD / S/PDIF)	116psec / 10psec
Resolution @ -100dB (CD / S/PDIF)	±0.2dB / ±0.1dB
Power consumption	9W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	440x125x385mm / 11.2kg

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# GROUP TEST VERDICT

• AMPLIFIERS • TURNTABLES • CARTRIDGES • AM/FM TUNERS • CD PLAYERS • HEADPHONES • SPEAKERS •

None of the six players in our test was without an endearing quality or two, and the levels of performance available even at relatively modest price points is a demonstration that behind the doom-laden headlines, CD still has a huge amount to offer as a format. Nevertheless, this group also demonstrated that sound quality does not necessarily ascend linearly with price.

In some respects, the Cyrus CD6SE<sub>2</sub> deserves to be higher up the rankings. The midrange and treble performance of this diminutive player is absolutely superb and it is beautifully built. The problem is that anyone seeking an equally accomplished performance at the bottom end is likely to find the Cyrus doesn't deliver the extension that the wonderfully open and detailed upper registers so richly deserve. Viewed as a whole, it doesn't justify the extra price over some of the less expensive models.

## A SOLID PROPOSITION

The Pioneer PD-30 is a much more solid proposition value-wise. This is a powerful and lively player that delivers a performance with SACD that makes it a bit of a bargain if you have a sizeable back-catalogue of DSD material. The build and styling are also more than acceptable, even compared to more expensive offerings. The slightly brittle top end and the slow and noisy transport count against it in this test but judged as a £350 player, there is an awful lot to like.

The TEAC CD-3000 is the most complete player here in terms of features – indeed there aren't many players on the market that offer more functionality. The build is extremely solid, and while it did very little 'wrong' during the listening tests neither did it truly manage to

engage the heart with the same efficiency that it did the head. The slightly matter-of-fact presentation and the fractional softness of its bass rob it of a degree of excitement that some of the other players here produced. If you are looking for an SACD player that doubles as a USB DAC though, TEAC's implementation is fully loaded.

Rega's Apollo-R is an altogether simpler player but in performance terms it is none the worse for that.

This is a machine that displays a very even-handed and open character and generates a degree of musical satisfaction that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The parts themselves are nothing to sniff at though: the build is solid, the aesthetics are good and this is one of the most accomplished players under £1000.

The top two spots are slightly more contentious and come down in part to your requirements. It is very hard to argue with the way that the Musical Fidelity M6CD performs. It

combines a control and smoothness that allows it to handle poorer recordings with aplomb but without glossing over or losing the finer details of superior discs. As well as being a talented CD player, the trio of digital inputs gives it functionality that would stand anyone looking to move away from CD in good stead.

## OVER THE MOON

For all this though, it is the Moon 230D that is the best CD player

here. The functionality is much more limited but it delivers a performance with CD that is a superb balance of control and

*'Its functionality is limited, but the 230D is the best player here'*

excitement; and there is very little it cannot do justice to. If you have one eye on the future, at least to 96kHz via USB, then MF's M6CD certainly cannot be ignored. But if you are simply looking for a great CD player to perform that task alone, you will need to seek out a 230D. Simaudio might be leaving the CD category but it is going out on a high! ☺



**ABOVE:** The Musical Fidelity M6CD is an engaging and flexible performer but it is the more focused Moon 230D that offers the best performance with silver disc

• AMPLIFIERS • TURNTABLES • CARTRIDGES • AM/FM TUNERS • CD PLAYERS • HEADPHONES • SPEAKERS •

# Bryston B135 SST<sup>2</sup>

Bryston's update to the B135 integrated amplifier allows you to tailor it to modern needs – is this the ideal marriage of analogue and digital in one main unit?

Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

**B**ryston's longevity and professional affinities make it a default purchase for a certain type of audiophile: one who eschews the fashion and politics which so infect audio. Bryston chugs along, having celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and it behaves with a controlled conservatism such as denotes the character of McIntosh and Quad. But that is not to say it ignores progress.

To give this its full name, the B135 SST<sup>2</sup> C-Series Integrated Amplifier shows Bryston's mettle for embracing the modern world beyond two-channel, purist, analogue pursuits. While the unit reviewed here is two-channel, purist and analogue, it can be fitted with a DAC module for £1575 that adds two coaxial and two Toslink inputs (the ingress and egress hardware is already fitted whether you purchase the module or not).

Other options (not provided with the review sample) include a £500 universal remote and an MM-only phono stage for £650. It is curious that Bryston chose to forgo an MC facility, while I am staggered that anyone can leave out USB circa 2013 – the only omission about which I am forgiving is streaming options and the like.

## AMPLE FACILITIES

Since Bryston rates the B135 at 135W/ch into 8ohm [see Lab Report, p69], I had no qualms using it with the Wilson Sophia 3s, while also feeding it to LS3/5As and even the ridiculously good \$129-per-pair Pioneer SP-BS22-LR bookshelf speakers. Nothing challenged the B135, and I was delighted to find that its rotary volume control provides a long, gradual level climb up to the 12 o'clock point, allowing for a precise setting with every speaker, before kicking in with real wallop. Balance (via buttons) works in 1dB steps, too, for fine-tuning.

Even without any options, the B135 is so comprehensively equipped that it will

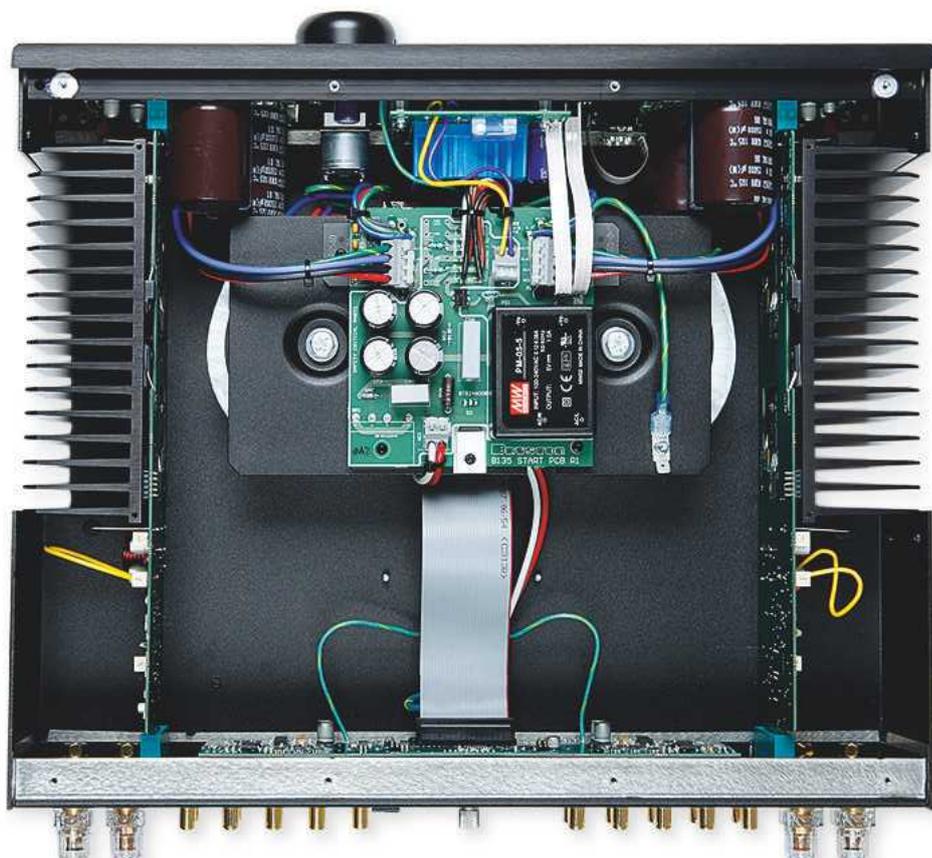
challenge you to find omissions. Minus the digital option, you still have a half-dozen line inputs at the back, a tape loop and pre-out facility. The latter reminds you that this is a single-box alternative to the BP6 or, more likely, the BP17 preamp and 2.5B stereo power amp whose rating is shared by the B135 and falls somewhere between the older 2B and 3B models. The five-way, gilded speaker terminals are among the nicest I've seen, multi-way, robust and able to accept fat cables with aplomb.

Because Bryston supports home integration and home cinema – two worlds that I accept have never collided meaningfully with my own – the unit is adaptable for all manner of automation. Maybe it remains a North American pursuit of some note. Regardless, this unit also features a pass-through facility, an RS232

port for control and software upgrades plus two 12V output triggers, one of which is programmable.

One of the first details you notice when removing the unit from its box – which is sensibly designed for easy unpacking – are the nicely integrated heatsinks in the side sections, the edges well protected and unlikely to catch you unawares. Across the fascia, the company has shown further restraint by providing a dual-purpose row of buttons to access the sources, sensing when digital inputs are in use. LEDs light up to indicate the source chosen, while the two balance buttons also have their functions indicated by green and red LEDs, the latter indicating that one channel is full on and the other silenced.

Next to the IR sensor – irrelevant if one is minus the optional remote – is a



**RIGHT:** An integrated combination of the BP17 pre and 2.5B SST<sup>2</sup> power amp, the dual mono B135 has output 'cards' with edge connectors directly attached to its 4mm binding posts



welcome sight: a ¼in headphone socket. I tried it with Grados, Sennheisers and other sets of cans and found it to be another area where Bryston has its ear to the ground: new-wave devotees of cans usage will nod with deep respect as the headphone amp is superbly controlled, quiet and detailed. Insertion of the jack automatically mutes the speaker outputs.

Lastly, a cluster of buttons and lights in the upper right-hand quadrant deals with power on, mute and clipping indication. Once switched in, the B135 takes a few seconds to stabilise. You then take it out of mute, exactly like the switch-on procedure employed by Audio Research and others who enable their users to avoid nasty switch-on thumps.

Features mean little if the underlying engineering is lacklustre, and Bryston ensures that it is anything but. Its B135 amplifier enjoys over 30,000µF of filter capacitance per channel, part of a power supply that contains three ultra-low-noise transformers: two for the analogue section and the third for the digital, with separate ground paths for both sections. You can see these in our inside shot, adjacent.

Ordinarily, one aspect of Bryston ownership would elicit a sarcastic, 'Yeah, right', but given that the brand has been

here for a half-century, I must praise the company's legendary 20-year guarantee. At a time when everything seems disposable, this is as confidence-inspiring a feature as any product can offer.

### TRUE TO SCALE

Listening via the Sophia 3s, the immediate reaction was to succumb to a silky smoothness. I am loath to call it 'valve-like', and some might prefer a sharper sound, but the lack of aggression was doubly appreciated with music comprised of forceful brass sections, like the backing for Nancy Wilson's *Son Of A Preacher Man/Hurt So Bad* [SoulMusic Records SMCR25 100].

Dating from 1969, the album's title track was uncharacteristic of Wilson, having become a signature song for Dusty Springfield. Wilson's approach is completely divorced from Springfield's swampy southern soul/funk, the former choosing instead to reinterpret it as a swinging Vegas nightclub dazzler. It enjoys a different kind of rhythm from that offered by the familiar version courtesy of Dusty, but the Bryston grabs the whole

**ABOVE:** One row of dual-purpose buttons chooses analogue or digital sources; LEDs indicate choice. Note refreshingly retro rotary volume control and ¼in headphone socket

of the track and balances a multitude of textures, keeping the bass tight and fast. It underscores the slickest of horn sections, like of a sonic version of Fowler's Dictionary: a lesson in punctuation and usage. Best of all, Wilson's honeyed voice, notorious for its complex tapestry of tones, comes through unhindered.

It's heard to better effect on 'By The Time I Get To Phoenix', slowed down to the gait of a Peggy Lee ballad. Ordinarily, when jazz, pop or opera greats venture outside of their comfort zones, trying to 'get down with the kids', the

"This amplifier is so smooth it should be called "The Nigel Havers"'"

results embarrass. Even the astounding Mel Tormé, Dame Kiri and – repeatedly – Frank Sinatra fell into this humiliating trap. Not so Wilson, who remains one of the most versatile of all the singers who perfected their craft away from rock and soul.

Because of the lush strings, the Bryston was able to reveal another facet of its abilities: scaling. The vocals are further forward, as if she's singing into your shoulder (*sigh...*). The strings are handled with subtlety, to prevent them from schmaltzy intrusion. They're almost laid-back, and the guitar and percussion provide an intimate, clubby feel. It's a deft trick, convincing the listener that the music consists of a close group, when it's actually an orchestra.

Tim Buckley [see p84] had a distinctive, love-it-or-hate-it nasal voice that marked his eponymous 1966 debut as a release of note. Part of a bargain box set, *Tim Buckley – Original Album Series* [Elektra 8 122797538] is a terrific showcase for a small rock band of the non-raucous, ↻

## TWO PROS IN A POD

In 1993, PMC founders Peter Thomas and Adrian Loader learned of Canadian manufacturer Bryston when an audiophile demonstrated a 3B amplifier. They immediately felt it would be the ideal choice for both the professional and home hi-fi sectors, noting, according to Peter, 'its transparency, honesty and ability to drive all loads.' It seemed like the perfect fit, as the design philosophies of both companies were so similar. Like PMC, Bryston had no automated production, no robotics, no moving assembly lines and all products were hand-crafted. And like many speaker makers who would rather not indulge in amp design themselves, they became distributors for the UK and Eire, and are now celebrating a 20-year association. PMC's large active studio loudspeakers include electronics developed through the on-going collaboration between the two manufacturers. PMC/Bryston combinations are used in the recording industry by the BBC, Stevie Wonder, Prince, Brian May and numerous other high profile clients.

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## INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



**ABOVE:** A full complement of analogue inputs and home integration connections, digital inputs pre-fitted awaiting the optional DAC module. But no USB provision

coffeehouse variety. It's all stage right/stage left as far as the positioning of the instruments goes, but surprisingly revealing of a system's way with details. Indeed, tracks like 'She Is' turn out to be quite messy, when a hyperactive drummer swamps the other instruments to the left, while a lone guitar enjoys the speaker on the right channel.

Consistent, though, from track to track, was that hard-to-define voice – like Neil Young's only with tunefulness and minus the added tint of helium. The Bryston kept all the textures as they should be, and even made the extreme left/right spacing seem unobtrusive.

### SO-OO SMOOTH

Buckley's antithesis is the astounding Tom Jones, and 'Delilah' – from a dirt-cheap 3CD collection *True Sixties Love* [Spectrum 984 272-7] – is almost laughable in its intensity. What a barrage of wonderful clichés! Tinkling bells, mariachi horns, Broadway-style backing vocals, country-style redneck bass... Never does the Bryston lose the plot. Admittedly, Jones was able to command the best of Decca's producers, musicians and engineers, so nothing he released once stardom was achieved was ever less than of audiophile-grade, but this is spectacular.

At the other end of the scale, from the same box set, is the consummately irritating 'Cinderella Rockefeller' by Esther and Abi Ofarim, with as odd an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach as 'Delilah', nonetheless enjoyable for its mix of ragtime piano, banjo, tuba and other 'comical' instruments, with a vaudeville feel provided by the vocals. Again, the Bryston kept the balls in the air, excelling for the attack and the tone of both the melodic and abrasive instruments. It was a piece of unparalleled kitsch

from this delightful box of guilty pleasures, however, that both taught me a lesson about musical snobbery and late 1950s recording genius. No, I am not about to start a campaign for the reassessment of Pat Boone, but damn, could he sing.

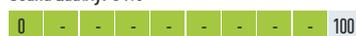
As my dotage ramps up my lachrymosity to daily tear-fests of nostalgia, I find schmaltz more appetising than I should, and his version of 'I'll See You In My Dreams' is a strings-drenched epic of blubbering excess... saccharine strings, 1950s Bar Mitzvah band rhythm guitar, a one-beat drummer and a gorgeously rich voice. The trumpet solo will make you think of Guy Lombardo or Lawrence Welk, even if you've never heard of them. This amp is so smooth, it should be called 'The Nigel Havers'.

While I did indulge in rock, and wallowed in the technoid, percussive bliss of Wang Chung's 'Dance Hall Days' on *Tazer Up!* [Digitally Sound Records 1055], the B135 invites a more considered listening session: it errs toward the genteel. Still, I was sucked right into Wang Chung's scarily futuristic, hard-edged soundscape, despite it being a remake of a song first heard in 1984. The Bryston loved it. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Though trying this in basic mode, free of all options, I am truly impressed by the experience. Competition is fierce, however, with every high-end maker offering a circa-£5k integrated; Perreux and Krell in particular raised the bar to loftier heights grunt-wise. But the B135 has sonic finesse, clever ergonomics and a form that lets you buy only what you need. That may be enough to simplify your choice.

Sound Quality: 84%

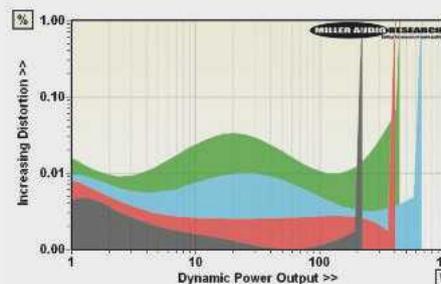


### BRYSTON B135 SST<sup>2</sup>

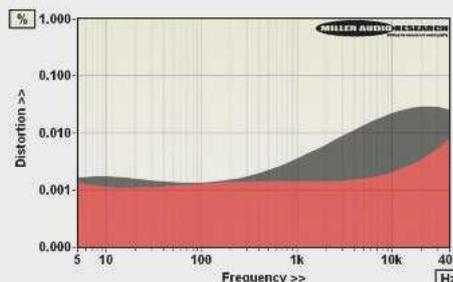
With its power amp stage based around Bryston's 2.5B SST<sup>2</sup>, this integrated version remains a very capable amplifier indeed. Rated at a nominal 135W/8ohm, it delivers rather closer to 2x170W/8ohm and 2x275W/4ohm (<1% THD) while its big power supply has the headroom to accommodate peaks of 220W, 410W and 665W into 8, 4 and low 2ohm loads under dynamic, music-like conditions [see Graph 1, below]. Bryston has evidently put a ceiling on the B135's maximum current of 21.1A (or 445W/1ohm), but the amp remains very tolerant of difficult loudspeakers.

Distortion is low and impressively independent of power output, hovering between 0.001-0.002% from 1-135W through midrange frequencies. There's an inevitable increase in THD at higher frequencies, but more so on the left than right channel in our sample [0.028% versus 0.0035% L/R at 20kHz – see Graph 2]. The left and right channels are otherwise very well matched, offering the same 0.023-0.095ohm output impedance (20Hz-20kHz), a low 0.0007% intermodulation distortion (19/20kHz, 10W/8ohm) and extended response from 1Hz-20kHz (±0.1dB), rolling off thereafter to -4.1dB/100kHz.

While this general performance is typical of previous Bryston amps, the lower-than-expected 77dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is 10-20dB 'noisier' than the brand average. As this is a white noise, and not hum which is <-85dBV, the subjective impact will likely be to encourage a smoother sound rather than the brighter, in-your-face presentation the marque has been criticised for in the past. Readers may view an in-depth QC Suite report for Bryston's B135 SST<sup>2</sup> amplifier by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'download' button. PM



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (cyan) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Maximum current is 21A



**ABOVE:** Distortion vs. frequency from 5Hz-40kHz at 10W/8ohm (left = black; right = red)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	170W / 275W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	220W / 410W / 665W / 445W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.023-0.095ohm
Frequency response (20Hz-100kHz)	+0.04dB to -4.05dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/135W)	25mV / 292mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/135W)	76.8dB / 98.1dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz re. 10W/8ohm)	0.0012-0.003% (0.028%, left)
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	61W/497W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	433x116x353mm / 13.6kg

# Tannoy Definition DC10A

Dual Concentric specialist, Tannoy, takes the tech to a new level with its flagship Definition floorstander  
Review: **John Bamford** Lab: **Keith Howard**

For the legions of audio enthusiasts who seek the vibrant clarity provided by a nominally ideal point-source transducer, Tannoy's Dual Concentric (DC) drivers have few peers. The company's first coaxial DC design – in which the tweeter was positioned in the centre of the mid/woofer cone – pre-dates KEF's Uni-Q by some four decades.

Needless to say, Tannoy's DC drivers have evolved considerably since the 1940s, the strikingly handsome DC10A employing a 250mm (10in) driver derived from the company's classic designs seen in its long-running Prestige series models. Indeed, Tannoy proclaims it to be its most refined and accomplished 10in DC driver to date, benefiting from a raft of design enhancements trickled down from the development of the imposing £38,000 Kingdom Royal flagship loudspeaker.

The £11,500 DC10A sits at the top of Tannoy's four-model Definition range. Tall enough, at nearly 1.2m, to create almost life-sized images in all but barn-like listening rooms, and with its solitary DC driver residing in an elaborately-constructed and immaculately-finished 103-litre enclosure, it represents the epitome of a purist (and minimalist) design approach.

Inside the parabolic curved cabinet are multiple chambers that provide extensive bracing, the enclosure formed of fine grade birch wood sourced from cooler, slower-growing regions which the company says improves the cabinet's natural acoustic properties.

HF is handled by the latest iteration of Tannoy's aluminium alloy tweeter: a 51mm (2in) compression unit that's horn loaded via a flare which comes out of the middle of the woofer cone. The tweeter fires through a phase-compensating 'Pepperpot' waveguide – so called

due to the pattern of small holes at its centre. Frequencies below 1.1kHz are reproduced by a multi-fibre treated cone which has a twin roll fabric surround, the driver's motor comprising an edge-wound voice coil system and Alcomax 3 Alnico magnet assembly.

Says Tannoy: 'This configuration delivers the greatest magnetic flux density across the poles, employing to full effect the smoothness and musicality of the Alnico magnet system.'

Alnico (an alloy of aluminium, nickel and cobalt) has long been favoured as a magnet material for use in cost-no-object drivers. Tannoy cites Alnico's exceptional field strength and electrical conductivity, saying: 'This minimises non-linear voice coil inductive effects and reduces micro-distortions from eddy currents, leading to a sweet, natural and inherently coherent sound.'

## ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Energy-absorbing compounds are used to isolate the driver and crossover circuitry from the cabinet – to restrict woofer-generated cabinet resonance from affecting the tweeter, and reduce microphony in the network. Tannoy calls this Differential Material Technology (DMT). The second-order crossover is hard-wired using a 'simple, straight' design philosophy designed to provide a clean signal path. It uses laminated core inductors and polypropylene capacitors that are damped using this DMT compound; metal film resistors feature in the HF feed; and once fully assembled the entire crossover is subjected to deep cryogenic treatment. This is claimed

**RIGHT:** The DC10A's 250mm Dual Concentric driver employs a multi-fibre cone with 51mm aluminium dome tweeter in a 'Pepperpot' waveguide at its centre





## DUAL CONCENTRIC

First developed by Tannoy's chief engineer Ronnie H Rackham and patented in 1947, the 15in Monitor Black was the world's first full bandwidth coaxial transducer trademarked 'Dual Concentric'. Proclaimed the most accurate loudspeaker available, it was used initially as a calibration instrument for microphones. It soon found favour with countless recording and broadcast studios. Passing decades have seen Tannoy develop and refine the DC concept, implementing new materials and manufacturing processes. Enhancements include the Tulip and Pepperpot waveguides for the tweeters, Tannoy aficionados constantly arguing about which they prefer. Tannoy has gone from strength to strength since becoming part of the TC Group, a holding company that includes several manufacturers such as TC Electronic of Denmark, Canadian fab-less semiconductor company TC Applied Technologies, and Swedish Lab.gruppen that acquired Lake Technology from Dolby in 2009.

to permanently reduce internal stresses in the microstructure of the crossover's components, joints and conductors and to improve signal transfer and resolution of fine detail.

Internal wiring is Oyaide 'six nines' purity PCOCC cable – as are the supplied jumper leads for bridging across the speaker's WBT Nextgen bi-wire/amp terminals. As with many Tannoy designs, the terminal panel sports a white coloured fifth connector that acts as a ground point for the driver chassis should you use a shielded speaker cable or run a separate wire to the earth terminal of your amplifier.

The idea is to reduce potential RF interference in the audio system and, with some amplifiers, further improve dynamic range and enhance fine textural detailing of the sound – although I must confess I could hear no improvement in my set-up.

Two thick aluminium plates, which are bolted to the front and back of the speaker's base, form a rigid plinth for substantial spikes that can be adjusted from above for easy levelling. Removing a small panel on the understand of the enclosure reveals a sealed 5-litre chamber – a mass loading cavity – that can be fully or part-filled with kiln-dried sand or lead shot should you wish to experiment with tuning the sound's bass character.

Dr Paul Mills, Tannoy's Director of Research and Engineering, says he likes the DC10A best when its cavity

is three-quarters full of sand or with about two litres of lead shot – but the choice will be room dependent.

### A CRITICAL FOCUS

What the DC10A's design offers listeners is a sharply-focused and ultra-explicit sound, coupled with satisfyingly deep bass. The speaker sounds fast and vivid – sometimes at the expense of civility since it is ultra-revealing of poor recordings. With audiophile fare it's a thrilling ride as it delivers explosive dynamics and holographic images, but with dynamically squashed and brittle recordings it can harden and become uncouth.

For the bulk of the listening I used

*'It proved adept at cutting through the morass of multiple layers'*

my Mark Levinson No.383 amplifier and T+A DAC 8 digital-to-analogue converter fed by a Mac mini source using JRiver Media Center playback software running under Windows 8. The sonic character of the amplifier proved a lovely synergistic match for the Definition DC10A, its sweet high frequencies taming the speaker's tendency to 'shout' when fed hard or grainy source recordings.

I was playing 'Awaken' from Yes's *Going For The One* [Atlantic 7567-81510-2], a late '70s rock recording that displays excessive multitrack complexity and over-engineering in its production. The DC10A all too readily exposed the album's compressed dynamics and splashy high frequencies, nevertheless it proved adept at cutting through

## Burmester 101 Integrated Amplifier & 102 CD Player News from the Classic Line

The 101 Integrated Amplifier is the latest integrated amplifier in the Burmester product range and a supreme example for the perfect combination of efficient class D power sections and an analogue power supply. With its power reserves thus made available the 101 easily achieves in a compact design the warm and well-balanced sound which is known to be a trademark of the Burmester tone. The switchable „Smooth“ function produces a rounded and detailed sound image even with low volume levels. Within the Burmester sound world the 101 integrated amplifier commends itself as a perfect game partner for the 102 CD player.

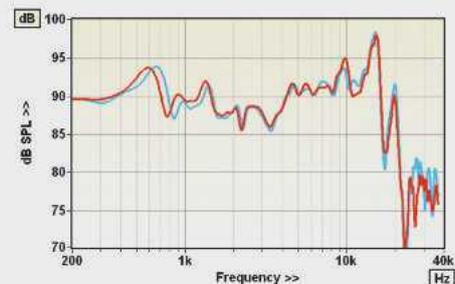


*Burmester* Audiosysteme GmbH  
Wilhelm-Kabus Strasse 47 · 10829 Berlin · Phone +49-30-7879680 · [www.burmester.de](http://www.burmester.de)  
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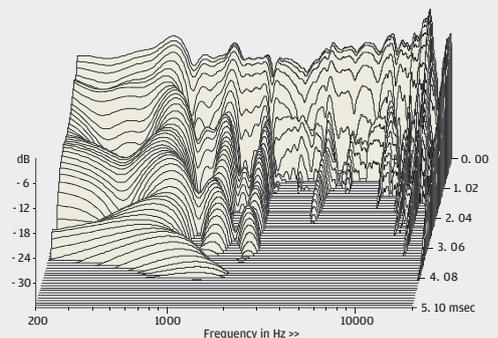
## TANNOY DEFINITION DC10A

Tannoy claims a high 93dB sensitivity for the DC10A but our measured pink noise figure of 90.8dB suggests that 91dB would be more realistic. A minimum impedance modulus of 5.2ohm indicates that a 6ohm nominal is more appropriate than the specified 8ohm but, quibbling aside, the DC10A is an easy load to drive. Impedance phase angles are quite high at low frequencies but the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) never falls below an amplifier-friendly 2.9ohm. The on-axis frequency response [Graph 1, below] is neither flat nor even, the prominent switchback in the octave above 10kHz giving rise to large response error figures of  $\pm 7.7$ dB and  $\pm 9.0$ dB respectively. Pair matching was poor too at  $\pm 3.4$ dB, with the largest disparity at a less remote 740Hz, albeit narrowband.

Near-field measurement of the bass resulted in an odd response trace with a slow initial decline in output followed by a peak below 35Hz, resulting in an initial fall to 53Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) and then a second at 25Hz. Similarly, at the opposite end of the spectrum the aforementioned response switchback causes the first drop to occur within the audio band at 17.4kHz (-6dB re. 10kHz). Even if we ignore this, output falls off immediately above 20kHz. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [Graph 2] shows a fast initial decay over much of the band but prominent resonances associated with the response peaks at about 650Hz and 1.4kHz and the notch at 2.3kHz, and a series of strong resonances in the high treble. A kink in the impedance modulus versus frequency curve and the near-field response curve also indicate a resonance – probably the length mode of the enclosed air – at around 130Hz. KH



ABOVE: The DC10A's forward response is neither flat or even. Note switches in output above 10kHz



ABOVE: Obvious resonance modes seen here correlate with peaks in the forward response [see Graph 1]

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	92.0dB/90.8dB/90.1dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	5.2ohm @ 169Hz 34.2ohm @ 63Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-51° @ 74Hz 51° @ 1.2kHz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 3.4$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	53Hz / 17.4kHz/17.4kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.2% / 0.1% / 0.2%
Dimensions (HWD)	1135x345x438mm

**LEFT:** DC10A has dual rear ports, with foam bungs provided if the speaker is sited close to a rear wall. The bi-wire terminal block has a fifth connector for grounding the driver chassis

warm tonal balance and silky-smooth treble, the Tannoy appears 'stark' and is strikingly graphic.

### PUNGENCY IN THE BASS

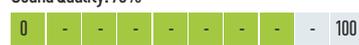
'Julsang' from the Proprius label's *Cantate Domino* [PRCD 7762] exposed the DC10A's less-than-flat frequency response and it became a little strident and 'peaky' when pushed to a high SPL. But at modest volume the recording's transient attack and shimmering decay was exquisitely lifelike. Imaging was first-class too, as expected of coaxial drive units designed for controlled directivity and even dispersion over a relatively large listening area. The Tannoy's crisp and fresh treble quality helped to clearly resolve the acoustics of the venue.

At the other end of the spectrum, low frequencies were pungent and powerful, with impressive extension that allowed me to *feel* the bass as the DC10A loaded the listening room seemingly with little effort. The organ bass pedals on Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D, performed by Michael Murray [Telarc CD-80088], had a good combination of weight and definition. And the slightly overcooked double-bass in the recording of Alison Krauss and Robert Plant's *Raising Sand* [Rouner 11661-9075-2] was reproduced without a hint of strain, the DC10A scoring highly in its ability to captivate and thrill in equal measure. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Although critical listeners – especially classical music aficionados – might be distracted by the DC10A's uneven frequency response, its forthright character makes it a hugely entertaining loudspeaker for enjoying contemporary music recordings. Partner it with a sweet-sounding amplifier to tame its exuberance and it sounds vivid and exciting, with lightning-fast dynamics and a pungent, punchy bass delivery.

Sound Quality: 76%



the morass of the recording's multiple layers. Chris Squire's Rickenbacker bass was served up with its characteristically chunky 'wallops' that would bring a smile to Yes fans, while Steve Howe's frantically choppy guitar licks rang out with uncommon clarity.

Winding the clock forward 35 years I listened to several tracks from Squakett's *A Life Within A Day* [Esoteric Antenna EANTCD 21002]. It's another over-engineered prog-rock fest that requires a system capable of forensic scrutiny to reveal the instrumentation and harmony vocals buried within. The Definition DC10A proved just the job, its candid and open sound revealing myriad subtle shades of instrumental finesse, and the sound of Squire's bass guitar was fast and resolute.

A year ago I played host to Dali's similarly priced Epicon 8 floorstander [HFN Sept '12]. Talk about chalk and cheese! Where the Dali flatters recordings, with a

# Van den Hul The Crimson

Anyone spending thousands on a moving-coil cartridge will expect something with nigh-on transcendental performance. Well, here it is...

Review: **Nick Tate** Lab: **Paul Miller**



One of the joys of our hobby is that there are so many manufacturers out there with wildly differing ways of doing things. And, unlike the auto industry, for instance, there still remains a space in the hi-fi world for good old-fashioned handmade goods which are the product of one man's (often fevered) imagination!

Van den Hul is one such example, its range of moving-coil cartridges hand built by AJ vdH himself at his workbench. His latest pick-up is called The Crimson and comes in a choice of natural light and dark wood finishes as well as a coloured (also wooden bodied) version. And should you have a passion for plastics, there's a polycarbonate option for your pleasure...

Although nudity is currently the trend for modern moving-coils, with generators exposed for all the world to see, The Crimson doesn't quite go all the way and chooses to cover at least a little of its modesty. Still, most internals are visible – and breakable, if you're ham-fisted. The stick-on 'v.d.Hul' label isn't quite what you'd hope for, cosmetically, on a cartridge of this price, and another disappointment is the stock vdH wooden box, which looks like something that would house a small set of tin soldiers back in the 1950s. Some might think this quaint for a £4000 product, others will not.

The Crimson gives a claimed 0.65mV output [see Lab Report], which should be enough for all but the most anaemic of



**RIGHT:** With DNA from the vdH Canary and Condor, the Crimson features a wooden body with four threaded inserts

MC phono stages, and uses gold coils, a samarium-cobalt magnet and a 'VDH 1S' stylus fitted to a boron cantilever. It comes with a free 200hr service check-up (for the original owner), should you want one, and the lead time is three weeks to build. I found it fiddly to install, quickly learning not to torque it into the headshell too tightly, thanks to a propensity of the metal thread cartridge body inserts to detach themselves. (Getting them back in is a faff that will likely prove a low point in your ownership experience.)

Another hurdle is the contemplation of the price of this product and the damage

that one wobble of the hand could cause – best perhaps to tell yourself that you're fitting a £15 Audio-Technica moving magnet!

## RED ALL OVER

With it nicely aligned in the headshell, riding the grooves at around 1.5g and fully run in, the trials and tribulations of getting The Crimson fitted soon melted away. Suddenly you're transported to a world which simply isn't obvious from the somewhat Heath Robinson packaging, and which turns out to be one of the most exquisite auditory experiences this side of live music itself.

One of the things that never fails to amaze me about the best high-end MCs is that they're so good, yet so different [see boxout]. They take you into their own distinctive world and seduce you into thinking that somehow their version of reality is the *only* one. And so it was with this van den Hul – within seconds of the needle touching down I was enraptured.

The Crimson pulls off the apparently impossible trick of being saccharine-sweet, yet as sharp and fast as razor blades flying through the air. It's really quite disconcerting, as experience teaches us to expect one or the other, but not both – yet this vdH MC offers dizzying speed,

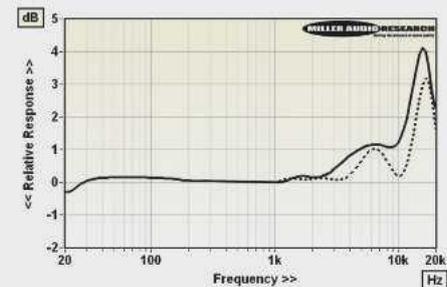
## A DIFFERENT APPROACH

The fascinating thing about high-end moving-coils is that two prime examples can be so good yet so *different*. Take, for instance, Linn's new £2960 Kandid MC [HFN Sept '13]: it sounds superb, as does the vdH, but they're night and day in their respective characters. The Crimson has a vast soundstage, and a sort of 'super-natural' approach to making music. Everything is larger than life – yet dreamier, sweeter and silkier too. The Linn by comparison, is altogether more measured: instead of being up in the gods of the concert hall, it's in the stalls getting down and dirty with the visceral power of the proceedings. Less showy and exuberant, the Linn focuses on the basic building-blocks of the music rather than projecting the overall pomp and grandiosity of the music. All of this means that if you're in the market for a serious MC, you should audition both!

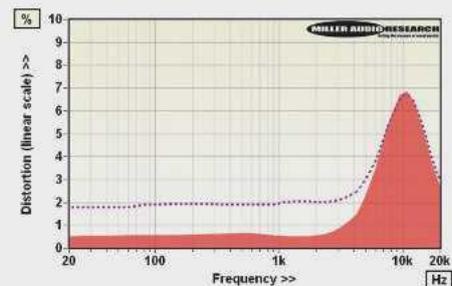
## VAN DEN HUL THE CRIMSON

This is no fussy low output moving coil, for the generator enconced within vdH's softwood body is capable of delivering a full 0.8mV into a standard 100ohm load. While this is nearly 2dB higher than specification, the channel balance is rather poorer at 1.1dB – audible in some systems and higher than the <0.3dB suggested in its literature. VdH also suggests The Crimson is best suited to medium/high mass tonearms (10-16g) and the 14cu vertical/21cu lateral compliance certainly supports this. Tracking at the recommended 1.6g downforce, hardly excessive for a relatively 'stiff' moving-coil, is very good indeed. The Crimson very nearly surmounted the maximum 80µm groove modulation with distortion at 0.5% at +15dB (300Hz, re. 5cm/sec) before just 'letting go' at 1.5% THD through the full +18dB track.

The VDH 1S diamond is beautifully polished and mounted free of excess adhesive, although the VTA is rather high at 28 degrees with the armtube parallel to the record surface. This may, in part, contribute to the slightly 'hot' presence and upper treble response of The Crimson [see Graph 1, below] which will bring some added pizzaz to its sound. Importantly, there's excellent symmetry between the lateral and vertical responses which augurs well for a broad, deep and coherent stereo soundstage. There's a similar symmetry in its lateral/vertical distortion [see Graph 2] which peaks at ~7% (many MCs are in double figures) but sits <1% from 20Hz-3.5kHz (-8dB, re. 5cm/sec). Readers may view a comprehensive QC Suite test report for vdH's The Crimson MC pick-up by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM



ABOVE: Frequency response curves (-8dB re. 5cm/sec) lateral (L+R, solid) versus vertical (L-R, dashed)



ABOVE: Lateral (L+R, solid) and vertical (L-R, dashed) tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harmonics) vs. frequency from 20Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec)

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving coil / 8.7g
Recommended tracking force	1.4-1.6mN (1.6mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	825µV / 1.1dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	14cu / 21cu
Vertical tracking angle	28 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	75µm / 80µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.80-9.5% / 0.49-6.8%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	-1.1 to +4.1dB / -0.6 to +5.2dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	35dB / 18dB

**RIGHT:** The 'gold' coils are visible here mounted in the field of a samarium-cobalt magnet. The fine, line contact stylus is specified as having a 3x85µm VDH 1S profile



lightning attack transients and effortless dynamics, while it's also tonally a real smoothie. At the same time, it artfully avoids turning into one of those 'forensic' sounding pick-ups: The Crimson doesn't lay out the recording on a grid for you, with everything in its right place for your calm, considered perusal. Rather, it assaults you with the most exuberant, emotionally arresting of listening experiences. It's almost 'Alice In Wonderland' in its ability to wake everything up that's in the groove and make it sing in the most luxurious and beguiling way.

Put on the most modest of recordings, in hi-fi terms, such as Burt Bacharach's 'Reach Out For Me' [A&M AMLS908],

and The Crimson goes wild. The soundstage is vast – almost too big – and elements in the mix such as percussion fire out at you with dizzying speed. The lead clarinet assumes a creaminess that's simply not there with lesser pick-ups; pianos sparkle with harmonics, cymbals glisten, congas beat with a menacing pulse – and the music sounds magical.

Change the record, if you can steal yourself, and The Crimson does the same trick all over again. Classic rock in the shape of Be Bop Deluxe's *Modern Music* [Harvest SHSP 4058], which is a roller-coaster of power and passion even with the worst of cartridges, is suddenly ablaze. Bill Nelson's voice towers between the speakers – again gossamer-smooth yet direct like he's right in front of you – while Simon Fox's firecracker drum work awes you with its punch and speed. Everything syncopates so beautifully, and the cartridge has you entranced. The soundstage is so

huge, yet it feels as if you can hear all four studio walls.

### REAL CHARACTER

But it's classical music where it shines most, showing a blissfully natural flow to Stravinsky conducting his *Rite of Spring* [Columbia MS 6319]. All the while this cartridge's innate speed and dynamics are brought to bear on the recording and the result is startling. Instrumental timbre is sublime: strings drip with harmonics yet never screech; brass rasps but

doesn't grate; cellos bow darkly and menacingly. The Crimson seems able to peel off layer after layer of 'wrapping', and get right to

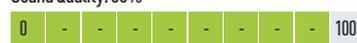
the music, yet it all sounds so easy and organic.

My only criticism is that some may find it just a little *too* 'larger than life', and yearn for something more taciturn. It could be called 'a character cartridge', and some won't like such licentiousness! ☹

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

One of the best MCs I have heard, van den Hul's The Crimson offers a uniquely beguiling combination of speed and sweetness. It is a dazzling performer no matter what music you play, but isn't a cartridge for 'deconstructing' records, rather it celebrates them and makes you want more. For all this, you can forgive it the price, fiddly setup and packaging – such foibles are fast forgotten when the needle hits the groove!

Sound Quality: 86%



'Everything syncopates so beautifully, it has you entranced'

# Fostex TH-900

Better known for manufacturing pro audio gear and some unusual loudspeaker drive units, Japan's Fostex now attempts a daring raid on the premium headphone market  
 Review & Lab: **Keith Howard**

Until now, Fostex and I have occupied parallel universes. I knew of the company, of course, but its name has always conjured up images for me of pro audio components and full-range drivers with whizzer cones. Not my bag, and so, barring a brief exposure to the Beahorn B2 Rhapsody, Fostex and I continued on our Euclidean paths, destined only to meet at infinity.

That we have collided sooner is all down to Fostex now having a line of consumer equipment comprising headphone amplifiers and headphones, both over-head and insert. The TH-900 reviewed here is the brand's flagship model, with a suggested selling price of £1279 (recently reduced from £1499). It's an apparently conventional closed-back design but with some novel features which are both technical and cosmetic.

## EARPADS ARE NO YOLK

To take the latter first, the cherry birch capsule covers are finished in traditional Japanese Urushi lacquer, using the sap of the Chinese lacquer tree. To judge by the photos on the Fostex website, it is a time-consuming, labour-intensive process to apply the lacquer, one which leaves the finished capsules a glowing claret colour appropriately named Bordeaux. The Fostex logo is applied as platinum foil, while the earpads will at least partly please vegans, I imagine, by not being made of leather but of 'protein leather' synthesised from

eggshell membranes. Cherry birch, by the way, is chosen for its 'dense texture' and the beneficial effect this has on the capsule closures' resonance behaviour.

On the technical side, Fostex makes particular play of its Biodyna bio-cellulose diaphragm in the 50mm diameter drive units, the use of 7N OFC copper in the connecting lead and a neodymium (NdFeB) magnetic circuit that achieves the high flux density of 1.5tesla in the magnet gap. The last is claimed to endow wider dynamic range, but it's notable that the TH-900, taking into account its lower than typical nominal impedance of 25ohm, is not notably sensitive (114.9dB at 1kHz for 1V input according to our measurements). In fact if you account for the difference in impedance, the recently reviewed Beyerdynamic T1 [*HFN* Aug '13] – another headphone designed for maximum gap flux – is better at converting voice coil current into sound pressure by a factor of four [see boxout].

First impressions of a headphone always revolve around comfort. The TH-900 is quite heavy at just over half a kilogram,



but the modest head clamping force, soft, large diameter earpads and padded headband

make it easy to wear for long periods. The 3.1m cable is adequately long for most hi-fi installations but is terminated in a fixed ¼in jack plug rather than a mini-jack with sleeve adapter, so you may need an adapter cable (none supplied with the review sample).

## WARM BATH EFFECT

Here, alas is yet another modern headphone in which excessive bass output not only colours the sound but drains it of life and interest. The diffuse-field corrected response in the Lab Report tells the story: too much bass and lower-mid, and not enough presence band.

At a recent concert in our local church by the young Mousai Singers the first half included an intriguing mix of 20th century choral pieces unfamiliar to me including Arnold Bax's motet *This World's Joie*. Next

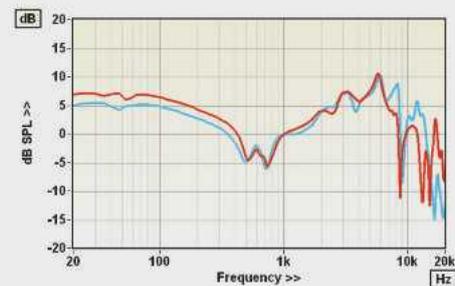
## COMPARING SENSITIVITIES

We use voltage sensitivity as a measure of how loud headphones or speakers will play at a given volume setting because the amplifiers we use are usually voltage sources which aim to deliver constant signal voltage regardless of load impedance. But as it is voice coil current that determines the force acting on the diaphragm, hence its acceleration and the sound pressure level it generates, it is to current sensitivity that we must look to compare the inherent sensitivity of speakers or headphones with different impedances. In the case of the TH-900, its 1kHz voltage sensitivity of 114.9dB for 1Vrms and impedance at that frequency of 24.9ohm equates to a current sensitivity of 114.9dB for 40.2mA or 102.8dB for 10mA. The same calculation for the Beyerdynamic T1 (99.6dB, 626ohm) reveals a current sensitivity of 115.5dB for 10mA, an improvement of 4.3x.

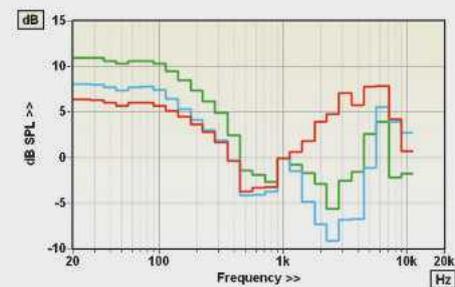
## FOSTEX TH-900

Fostex claims a sensitivity of 100dB per milliwatt for the TH-900, equivalent to 116dB for 1Vrms, which corresponds pretty well with our measured 1kHz sensitivity of 114.9dB, averaged for the two capsules. As mentioned in the main text, this high but not exceptional figure is obtained in part by resort to a lower than typical impedance. Whereas many modern over-head 'phones have a nominal impedance of around 40ohm, the TH-900's nominal impedance is 25ohm, equivalent to a 4dB sensitivity advantage if other parameters remain the same. The risk of using a lower impedance is not that it will cause difficulty to a proper headphone amplifier but that variations in the impedance will result in larger frequency response modification due to the finite source impedance of the aforementioned amp.

Over the audible frequency range the TH-900's impedance ranged between a minimum of 24.4ohm and a maximum of 30.7ohm, equivalent to 0.53dB total error with a 10ohm source impedance or 1.0dB with 30ohm. Given that the TH-900's corrected frequency response is anything but flat to begin with, these errors are negligible. As the uncorrected and corrected frequency responses show [see Graph 1, below], the TH-900 has impressive bass extension but in the context of output that firstly dips below 1kHz, then rises towards LF. Although there's increasing evidence that the diffuse-field corrected response does not quite represent the perceived tonal balance, it is clear that in addition to this excessive bass output and the octave-wide 'hole' below 1kHz there is also a shortfall in the presence band [see Graph 2]. All this suggests that the TH-900 will have a bass-skewed tonal balance, with thickened textures and a lack of sparkle. Capsule matching is actually good over much of the frequency range, the  $\pm 9.2$ dB figure representing narrow-band disparities at HF. KH



ABOVE: The TH-900 has a strong bass output, relative to an 'octave-wide hole' centred around 600Hz, that is likely to thicken instrumental textures



ABOVE: Third-octave freq. resp. (red = uncorrected; cyan = FF corrected; green = DF corrected)

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL at 1kHz for 1Vrms input)	114.9dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	24.4ohm @ 5kHz 30.7ohm @ 37Hz
Capsule matching (40Hz-10kHz)	$\pm 9.2$ dB
LF extension (-6dB ref. 200Hz)	<20Hz
Distortion 100Hz/1kHz (for 90dB SPL)	<0.1% / <0.1%
Weight (inc cable and 0.25in connector)	505g

**RIGHT:** Capsule closures are finished in claret Urushi lacquer; earpads use 'protein leather' derived from egg



morning I found a well-reviewed recording by the Finzi Singers on Chandos, and bought the 24/44.1 download from The Classical Shop.

It's not that this affecting piece sounded unpleasant but the TH-900's rose-tinted view of the world – that capsule colour is appropriate – robbed the choir of luminosity in the upper registers and suppressed the sense of 'air' and venue acoustic. The sound was warm and cosy but rather in the manner of radiograms from the '50s and '60s credited with 'a nice tone'.

A very different challenge was posed by Ulla Meineke's *Die Tänzerin (The Dancer)*, ripped from a collection of tracks assembled on a CD by German speaker manufacturer Heco, an old reviewing and musical favourite of mine principally because it evinces a quality so many modern rock/pop artists either don't understand or have stolen from them by loudness-obsessed mastering engineers: dynamic range. Without it, this track's characteristic use of slow-decay artificial reverb – decay time of a few seconds – would be impossible to realise.

Again the TH-900 produced a full, relaxed sound here but it was already becoming apparent that it applies this signature to everything played through it. It was like a warm bath when what this track really needs is something more akin to a cold shower if the dynamics are to

have full impact, and that reverb is to exert its full mesmeric effect.

So the trend was established, and maintained as listening continued. Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* [from Classic Records DAD 1004]

had an obvious hole in the middle of the frequency range, the basses were too weighty and the background LF grumble in this recording

not background any more. In Kate Bush's 'Snowflake' [24/96 download] the piano sound was denuded of attack and became dominated by the left hand. Likewise the acoustic guitar in the opening to Yes's 'Roundabout' [24/96 rip] had too much body sound, and bassist Chris Squire was afforded star billing in the remainder of the track. ☹

## HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Criticising the TH-900 feels like blaming the portly family dog for not sprinting like a whippet. Fostex seemingly hasn't created this headphone to convey whipcrack dynamics or microscopic resolution but to present music in a relaxed and inoffensive manner. Which is fine if you think 'relaxed' and 'inoffensive' are appropriate epithets for music of all genres – but it's not real high fidelity.

Sound Quality: 70%





## VTL S-200 Signature Stereo Power Amplifier

*It's been worth waiting for!*

The S-200 bears a similar sonic signature to its bigger brother, the MB-450 Series III Signature monoblocks. The mid bass authority and control is excellent while the midrange and top end reflect natural timbres and instrument colors effortlessly. The amplifier's agility and speed, its very low noise floor, and its ability to drive a wide range of speakers are distinct features that few other tube amplifiers in this price category can offer.

This 200 watts/channel stereo amplifier is packed with technology VTL has spent years developing. A fully balanced differential input stage drives a differential phase splitter and a lower impedance push-pull output stage with a custom made, fully balanced, interleaved and coupled output transformer. Like its stable mates, the amplifier incorporates VTL's SmartTube technology with automatic bias adjustment and fault sensing, making this amplifier especially welcome to music lovers who value ease of use. With the S-200, there's no need to guess when or if a tube may need to be replaced.

To keep the output tube operating point constant and stabilize the critical power supplies, even under AC and main power supply fluctuations, the S-200 deploys adjustable precision-regulated bias and screen supplies, yielding tonal stability and sonic integrity especially during complex, dynamic signal conditions.

The S-200 also features a user adjustable Damping Factor feedback control that allows the user to adjust the amplifier's output impedance by varying the amount of negative feedback. Impedance can now be precisely set to suit the listener's taste, and to improve control of the loudspeaker loads to deliver best performance.

Pair the S-200 with VTL's TL5.5 Series II preamplifier for one of the most compelling and seductive sounds available anywhere.



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# Crystal Cable Absolute Dream

Its interconnect and USB cables have already earned a place in the *HFN* hall of fame. But what of the 'Absolute' speaker cable? Review: **Paul Miller**



It is an unfortunate truth that many of the finest-sounding cables utilise noble metals. Unfortunate because these elements are typically expensive and when used in the volume required for a substantial, low resistance speaker cable, very expensive indeed. Crystal Cable's Absolute Dream speaker cable certainly falls into the latter category, using a beefed-up version of the materials and geometry first witnessed in its spectacular Absolute Dream interconnects [*HFN* Jun '12].

Once again these are true 'solid-core' cables, each conductor comprising a single, 'monocrystal' silver strand sheathed in two layers of Kapton and clamped within a PEEK (Polyether ether ketone) dielectric. This, in turn, is surrounded by two peripheral braids composed of silver-plated monocrystal copper and gold-plated monocrystal silver. Each cable employs four of these cores, tightly wound and held in place by a decorative chromed block at each end.

There's an additional noble metal employed here with Crystal Cable specifying a bespoke version of Furutech's rhodium-plated Alpha-OCC 4mm plugs. The expandable split-pin connector is fashioned from a mix of carbon fibre and a non-magnetic 'eutectic copper alloy' which, says Crystal, 'comes very close to there being no connector at all.'

With no formal lab report planned, I ran the numbers anyway to confirm that our 3m set offered a 500pF parallel capacitance, 0.6µH inductance and very



low 22mohm loop resistance. And, as expected, the supreme quality of the Kapton dielectric has kept any leakage beyond our measurable 300Mohm limit.

**BREATHTAKING DETAIL**  
 Regardless of the configuration of your system, a speaker cable of this value should not only help it sing like an angel, but it should also pour you a drink and give a foot massage at the same time. The latter I cannot guarantee but, as to the former, these are truly exquisite-sounding cables that, in my system, emphasised the new-found smoothness, the ultra-black background and microscopic detailing offered by the

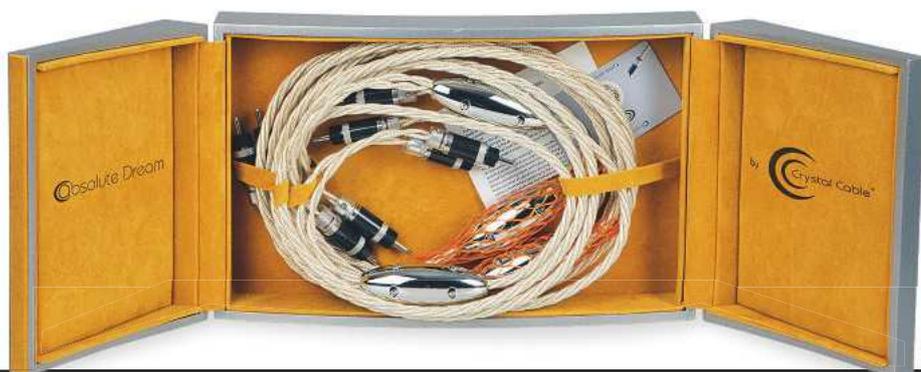
**ABOVE & BELOW:** A heavyweight twist of gold, silver and copper with rhodium-plated 4mm plugs, every serial-numbered set comes in its own luxurious presentation case

new Devialet 170 [*HFN* Sep '13]. The 24-bit render of The Beatles' *Abbey Road* album had never sounded so vital, alive and contemporary just as the soundtrack from *The Day After Tomorrow* [Varèse Sarabande 066572] filled the room with a palpable presence. Angelic? Absolutely! ⚡

## HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

If we thought the prices of Crystal's Absolute Dream interconnects and USB cable were scary then at £23,220 for a 2m set (plus £3890 per single metre), these speaker cable derivatives fall directly into the 'hair-raising' category. Nevertheless, where cost really is no object at all, these precious conductors seem capable of lifting the performance of even the most esoteric of hi-fi systems. For those who are only ever satisfied with 'the best', then here it is.

Sound Quality: 88%





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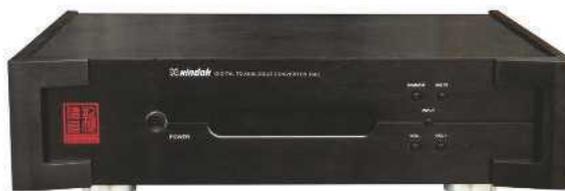
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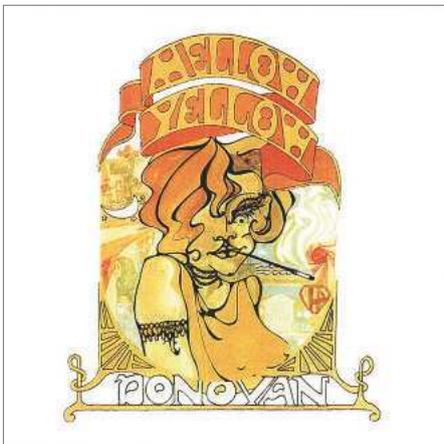
# Vinyl Frontier

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

Hummable tunes from 10cc, a slew of Sundazed albums, two unsettling Scots brothers and 1970s landmark funk-protest tracks: **Chris Heard** takes it all in his stride

In the mid-1970s, there was prog, there was rock, there was pop... and there was a curiously engaging hybrid of them all known as 10cc. Part art-school posturing and part chart-savvy commercialism, the group was unique in its ability to marry eminently hummable tunes with oblique cultural references and muso credibility. *How Dare You!* [Music On Vinyl, 180g], the band's fourth studio album from 1976 – and for me, their best – was the last to feature the original line-up of Eric Stewart, Graham Gouldman, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, before Godley and Creme went off to pursue a consciously more arch musical direction, leaving Stewart and Gouldman to hone the pop-perfectionism that would define their next record, *Deceptive Bends*.

*How Dare You!* is born of the classic rock era of relative excess that spawned *Hotel California* and *Rumours*, albeit in a far more modestly British style, with its busy Hipgnosis-designed gatefold sleeve providing a feast of lavish visual imagery at the height of vinyl LP's power to stimulate the senses. It might be the sound of a band falling apart, but *How Dare You!* succinctly captures the tension between Stewart and Gouldman's melodic major-chord sensibilities and their soon-to-be rivals' fondness for doodling around in the studio. 'I'm Mandy, Fly Me' marries a gorgeously languid dreamlike quality with rhythmic jumps and cut-and-paste effects, while 'Art For Art's Sake' encapsulates the group's central themes of radio-friendly musicianship, high-end production and



➔ **Donovan's *Mellow Yellow*: highlight in another Sundazed series**

lyrical punnery. The band's fondness for pastiche emerges on the 1920s jazz-flavoured 'Iceberg', while the melancholic album-closer 'Don't Hang Up' is effectively Godley and Creme's swansong before they fled an increasingly claustrophobic nest in pursuit of an edgier path (they would also go on to polish their invention of a guitarist's gadget, and become key players in the development of music videos).

As the set *Tenology* showed, 10cc were in their own way every bit as inventive as the pioneers of hip-hop sampling culture – albeit, some ten years earlier and in the less frenetic non-urban setting of Stockport – and their legacy as founding fathers of thoughtful, funny, singalong British pop-rock is assured. Just don't try to dance to it.

## JUST THE MANN

Manfred Mann may not have been at the very top of the pile of suited-and-booted 1960s beat groups, but outside of The Beatles and The Kinks their 45s archive is among the most consistent and durable of the era. In just two years, from 1964-66, the band scored nine Top 20 UK hits with the pretty-boy of the blues boom Paul Jones at the helm, while here and in the US the group's happy, uptempo songs found their way onto a series of moderately listenable long-players which are now reissued on 180g vinyl by Sundazed. The US titles – *The Manfred Mann Album*, *The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann*, *Mann Made*, *My Little Red Book Of Winners* and *Pretty Flamingo* – enjoy alternative cover-art to

## CHRIS HEARD

Chris Heard is a music journalist and a vinyl fanatic. He runs an online record store, Classic LPs, specialising in vinyl reissues and new releases, and a physical shop, Carnival Records, purveying 10,000-plus records amid the splendour of the Malvern Hills. Visit [www.classiclps.co.uk](http://www.classiclps.co.uk) and [www.carnivalrecords.co.uk](http://www.carnivalrecords.co.uk).



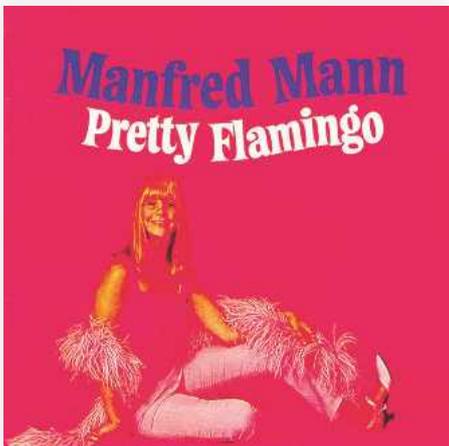
some of their UK counterparts, and their very presence marks a significant element of the British invasion (even though Mann himself was of South African extraction).

Tracklistings also varied between US issues and UK EPs/LPs, but here you can find some of the most joyously upbeat R'n'B ever unleashed: '5-4-3-2-1', 'Pretty Flamingo', 'Do Wah Diddy Diddy', 'Sha La La', 'Oh No Not My Baby' and 'Come Tomorrow', as well as arguably definitive takes of Dylan's 'If You Gotta Go Go Now' and 'Just Like A Woman'. Alongside peers such as The Tremeloes, The Troggs, The Move, The Herd, Spencer Davis and The Marmalade, Manfred Mann represented a particular kind of publisher-driven pop, but few carried it with such aplomb, even when the group fractured in 1966 with Jones being replaced on vocals by Mike d'Abo. The Manfreds went on to further success with some marvellous psych-tinged pop and more Dylan covers but the earthy brilliance of these earlier records represents the sound of British pop in the mid-1960s as well as anything on record.

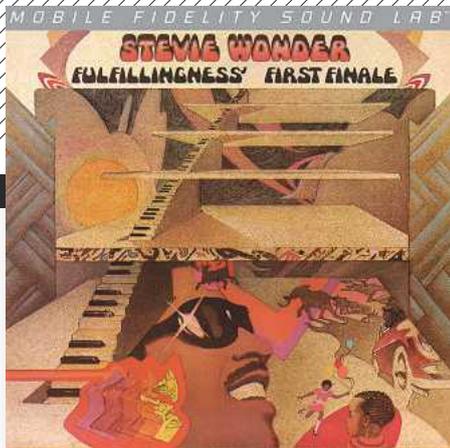
## MELLOW MONO

If you've ever read or heard of Donovan describing his role in the history of rock music, you might be forgiven for thinking he singlehandedly spearheaded the '60s British folk-revival. Modesty is not one of his strong suits. But significant though his influence was, Donovan Leitch was, in essence, a great *pop singer*. I briefly met Donovan at the funeral of his one-time mentor-producer Mickie Most, a man with the rare ability to galvanise raw talent and turn it into pop perfection (look no further than The Animals' recording of 'The House Of The Rising Sun'). Under his stewardship, Donovan made the switch from the slightly fey Dylan impersonator of 'Colours' and 'Catch The Wind' to the dizzying vibrancy of tracks such as 'Mellow Yellow', 'Jennifer Juniper' and 'The Hurdy Gurdy Man'.

This golden period covering his transition from introverted songwriter to flamboyant proto-hippy is recalled in



➔ **A series of Manfred Mann LPs is reissued on Sundazed at 180gram**



➔ Stevie Wonder's 1974 album is re-released on Mobile Fidelity

a series of new mono-mix 180g LPs on Sundazed, which has reissued *Mellow Yellow* and *The Hurdy Gurdy Man*, as well as *Wear Your Love Like Heaven*. *Mellow Yellow* from 1967 is perhaps the highlight, containing expansive tracks such as 'Museum', 'Young Girl Blues' and 'House Of Jansch', and featuring arrangements from future Led Zep bassist John Paul Jones.

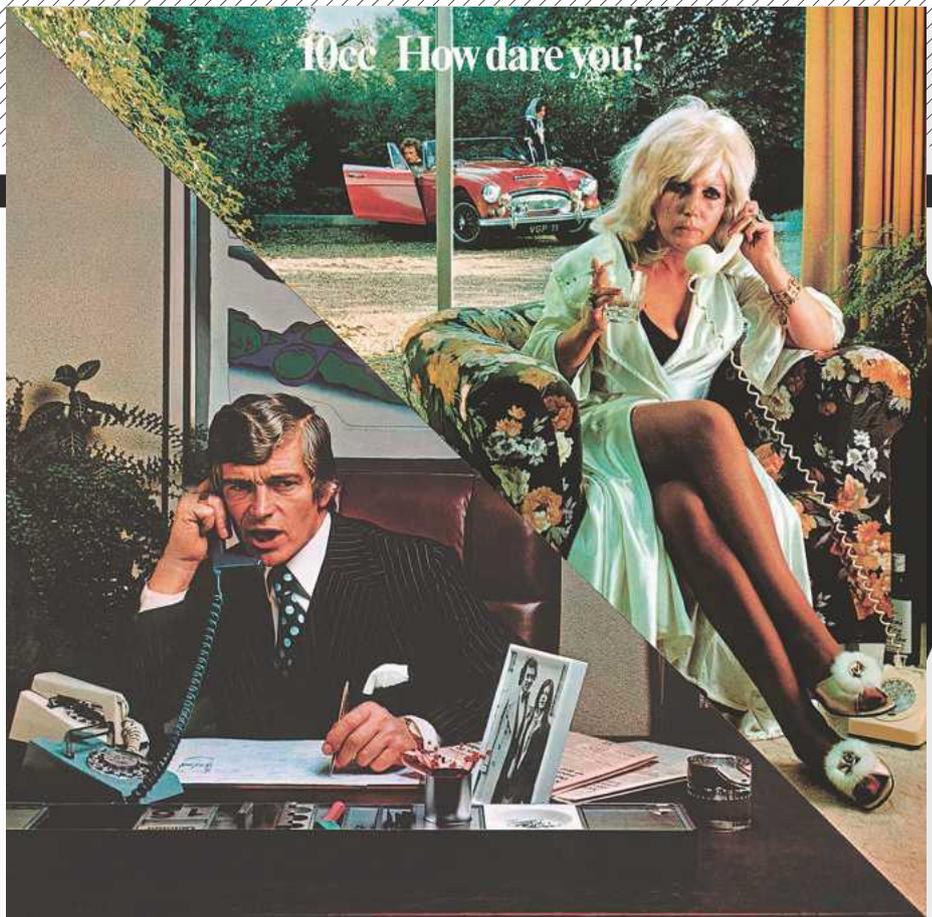
The emerging eastern influences manifest in the sitar of Shawn Phillips would reach their zenith a year or so later as Donovan joined The Beatles and the Maharishi in India, pretty much writing the guitar part for *The White Album*'s 'Dear Prudence' in the process. He was a man at the top of his game – just ask him!

### IT'S WINTER IN AMERICA

Charly Records has given a new lease of life to Gil Scott-Heron's landmark mid-1970s funk-protest album *Winter In America*, a collaboration with US musician Brian Jackson which contains Scott-Heron's timeless ghetto-blues anthem 'The Bottle'. First released on the US jazz label Strata-East Records in May 1974, the record was notable for Jackson's blues and jazz-rooted work at the Fender Rhodes electric piano, not to mention his mellifluous turn as flautist on 'The Bottle'. Elsewhere, Scott-Heron is on dynamic form as a poet and polemicist, raging with quiet dignity and



➔ Boards Of Canada's 'unsettling' *Tomorrow's Harvest* (Warp Records)



controlled fury against the injustice and oppression faced by his African-American brothers in 1970s urban US life. So it is that the 'Winter' of the album title acts as a metaphor for this troubled era, with Scott-Heron promising 'love and light' in a 'spring around the corner'. A beautiful and touching reminder of a restless, radical spirit in his artistic prime.

### CLASSIC STEVIE WONDER

Stevie Wonder, too, famously embraced black power on gritty masterpieces such as 'Superstition' and 'Living For The City' from his albums *Talking Book* (1972) and *Innervisions* (1973). These exquisitely-realised expressions of pain and longing were a hard act to follow, but Stevie was in broadly more reflective mood by the time he recorded *Fulfillingness' First Finale* in 1974. Now reissued by Mobile Fidelity, *Fulfillingness'* may lack the overall clout of its two predecessors, but it is still regarded as representing Wonder's classic period, with standout tracks such as 'Boogie On Reggae Woman' and the introspective 'They Won't Go When I Go' (a song later covered by George Michael).

### A MYSTERIOUS HARVEST

The outstanding *Tomorrow's Harvest* by Boards Of Canada [Warp Records], the work of Scots brothers Michael Sandison and Marcus Eoin, is their first album for

➔ Is 10cc's *How Dare You!* 'the sound of a band falling apart'? Whatever, the re-release confirms their inventiveness

eight years: a fluent and absorbing piece in which a series of atmospheric, ambient sound-sketches have been created using analogue electronic equipment, in the way that Brian Eno or Tangerine Dream may have done 35 years ago. Like the best of the duo's work (try to track down rare Warp LPs such as *Music Has The Right To Children* and *Geogaddi*), the record is rooted in the idea of nostalgia – by no means in a comfortable or sentimental way, but more concerned with the perceived idea of childhood memory and emotions – brought to life, made flesh somehow, by the use of eerie-sounding, pitch-shifting machine-made music.

'Donovan was at the top of his game: you'd only have to ask him!'

It's an incredible trick to pull off, and has proved influential on a slew of cutting-edge artists, from Radiohead to fellow Warp act Bibio. Boards Of Canada cite influences as broad as fellow countrymen The Incredible String Band and post-punk noise-tunesmiths My Bloody Valentine, but nothing sounds quite like this. At its most potent, Boards Of Canada's music has an unnerving ability to make the listener feel unsettled in the pit of one's stomach, like a helpless seven-year-old. Uncomfortable? Yes. Moving, mysterious and powerful? Most certainly. ☺

# Vinyl Release

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

## Tim Buckley: *Happy Sad*

It was the singer's third LP, but seldom has an artist made a more free-spirited leap into the creative unknown.

**Steve Sutherland** on the 180g reissue of *Happy Sad*

**Y**ou know that it would be untrue. You know that I would be a liar if I was to say to you that the fellow with the curly hair and the voice like burnt molasses was the reason me and my sixth-form pals are splayed out on the grass about 200 yards from this massive stage in the grounds of Knebworth House in Hertfordshire.

No, the reason we've borrowed my mate Lenny's dad's car and motored up to what the posters are calling the Bucolic Frolic is mainly because this is our first chance to get a youthful squint at The Allman Brothers Band who have bravely put the recent death of bro' Duane behind them and have just issued a prime slice of sunny-side-up Southern boogie called *Brothers And Sisters*. Also on the bill are more long-haired, shaggy-bearded, counter-cultural stoner superheroes in the shape of The Doobie Brothers with the

extravagantly moustachioed Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter in tow; we are getting a double dose of dual guitar good vibes.

So I would be a liar twice over if I now pretended that the aforementioned bloke, clad in fashionable denim and fronting a four-piece band of what, it later transpires, are top-notch session musos, was the absolute highlight of our day. In fact, in many ways, his performance was the most underwhelming. The Allmans and Doobies duly delivered, Van Morrison did his Van The Man bit – a mite too perfunctory and jazzy to my mind, but hey – the Mahavishnu Orchestra were, well... like modern art really. We pretended to understand them, even appreciate them so as not to appear unhip, but enjoyable?

### STEVE SUTHERLAND

Steve edited NME from 1992-2000, the Britpop years, launching NME.com and reviving the NME Awards. Previously he was Assistant Editor on Melody Maker. Among his many adventures he has been physically threatened by Axl Rose, hung out awhile with Jerry Garcia and had a drink or two with Keith Richards...



Not really. And then there was Alex Harvey and his band of scary, painted clowns, bringing a bit of thug glamour to the otherwise pretty cerebral proceedings. Stood out like a sore thumb with his Vambo Rool hooligan theatrics.

All of these acts made a big impression but the bloke who opened the bill, as I recall, played groovy and tight, didn't seem to know quite whether he was a folkie balladeer or a blue-eyed soul man and occasionally decided to scat sing, largely, it seems, for his own entertainment as the crowd wasn't really listening.

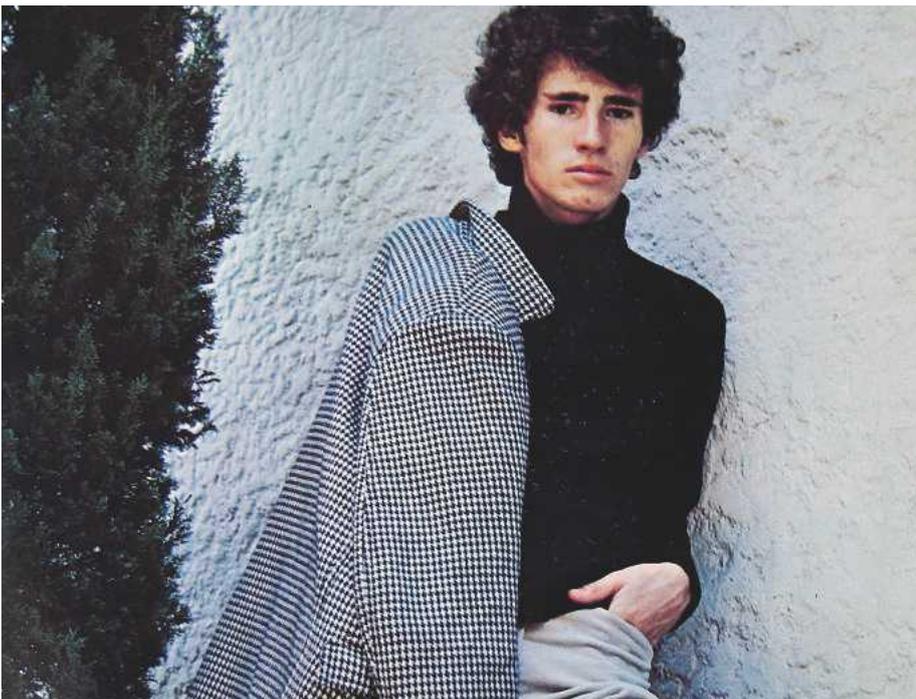
So there, I've 'fessed up. I'm one of the very few people I know who can actually claim to have seen the late, and, as we now know, great Tim Buckley in the flesh. And, well, I didn't quite get it. Heck, I was only a kid. What did I know? Subsequently, of course, like a great many others, I've come to appreciate Tim Buckley for the thwarted pioneer he undoubtedly was. And *Happy Sad*, the album we're here to appreciate, is the one that did it for me.

### STRETCHING OUT

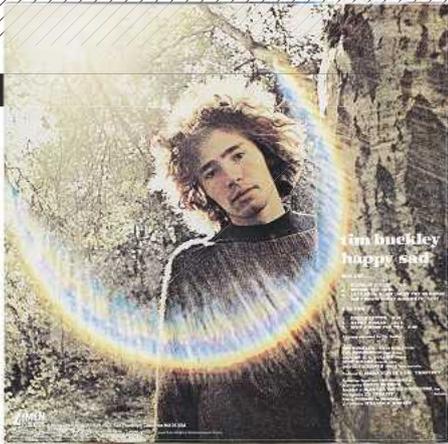
Buckley's eponymous first offering in 1966 was pretty standard folkie fare. *Goodbye And Hello*, which came out a year later, found him stretching out and testing his boundaries. But 1969's *Happy Sad* was a true revelation. Firstly it was indefinable. While maintaining the instrumental infrastructure of West Coast folk, its heart beat to the cool jazz of Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk and, most especially, Miles Davis, whose 'All Blues' from the superlative *Kind Of Blue* album, Buckley remodelled into *Happy Sad*'s opening track, 'Strange Feelin'".

Setting the tone for what's about to come, the twin stars of this track are the vibraphone played by David Friedman and Buckley's voice, which has just embarked

'Let this album ooze through your pores and soundscape your dreams'



➔ Tim Buckley as pictured on his eponymously titled debut LP released in October 1966. He was born in Washington DC on St Valentine's Day 1947, dying aged just 28 in 1975



➔ Priced £19.99, the 180g re-release of *Happy Sad* on 4 Men With Beards is available online from [www.classicps.co.uk](http://www.classicps.co.uk)

on a voyage which will carry it from lyric messenger to untethered expression.

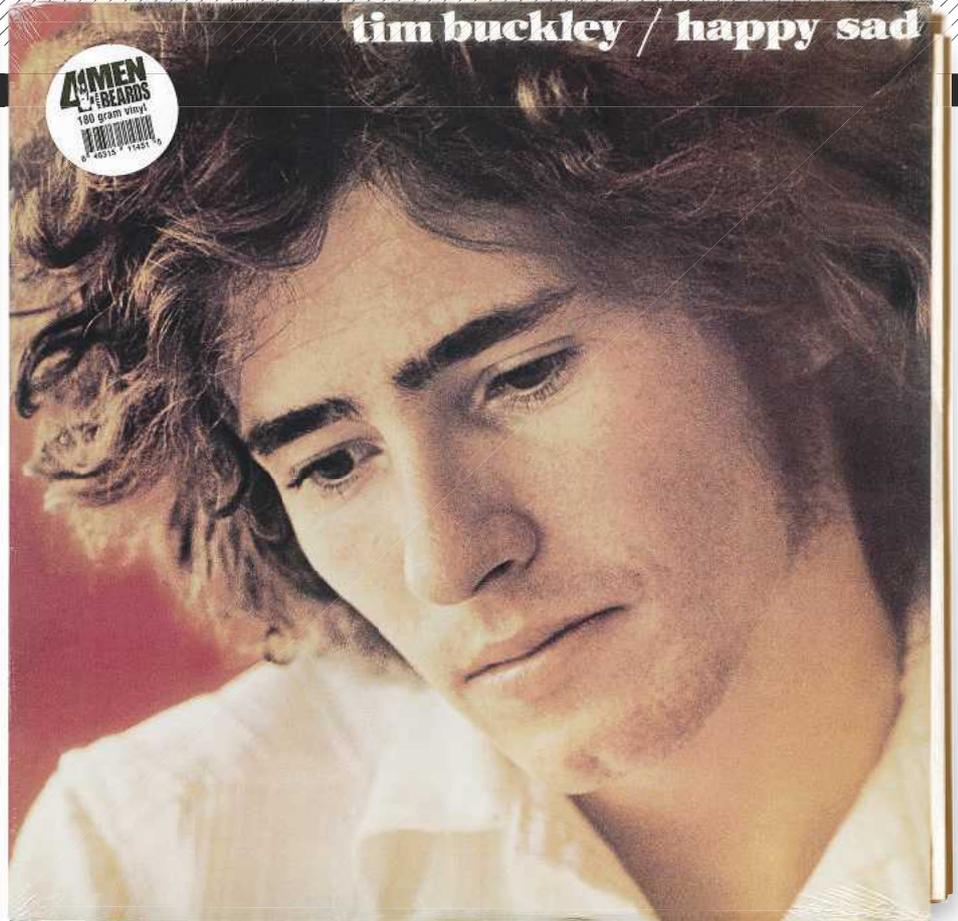
Later, on much-lauded works like 1970's experimental *Starsailor*, it's a voice that is given total free rein – an overbearing self-indulgence that makes for a testing listening experience, easily ridiculed. Here, though, the songs, despite becoming untethered from the usual thrall of verse-chorus-verse, are still rooted in a tuneful discipline and only on the 12 minute-plus 'Gypsy Woman' does Buckley threaten to overwhelm us with vocal pyrotechnics.

### PASSION SMOULDERS

All else is cool, very cool. The passion smoulders. This is deeply sexy stuff, troubled too. As suggested by the album title, Buckley could seldom see the sun without the shadow. He had fathered a son, Jeff (who, of course, would follow his own star to fame and tragedy), but had walked out on him and the boy's mother, Mary Guibert for a troubadour life – a decision which haunted him endlessly. 'Dream Letter' grapples with the guilt.

Then there's the exquisite 'Buzzin' Fly' where Buckley offsets his low moaning lothario honeyman persona by comparing himself to a rank pest always bothering his 'mama', as dudes in the '70s used to call their 'old ladies'.

Recorded in Los Angeles in December 1968, there are only six tracks on *Happy Sad* but only one lasts less than five minutes. The rest take us on a journey through the emotions, unfolding organically, not quite improvisational jam sessions, more loose musings around basic structures. The strangest is 'Love From Room 109 At The Islander (On Pacific Coast Highway)' which is really a suite of individual songs rolled together over nearly 11 minutes while the ocean laps in the background. The ebb and flow of the waves, which suits the mood perfectly, was not predetermined. An example of



Buckley embracing the chaos, a studio accident left tape hiss on the track and rather than re-recording, the sea was taped and spliced on to disguise the hiss. The fact that it works so well, feels so central to the atmosphere of the piece, is just reward for such an adventurous approach.

There is a theory that the way we make and enjoy our music has a lot to do with the way we live. Little wonder then that, in this time-poor iTunes age of the iPod shuffle, the individual number has become appreciated at the expense of the collection of songs we used to refer to as the LP. There is even the notion that, in this age of sampling, we only really connect with tiny bits of individual songs – a guitar riff, a drum beat, the rest of the song just fat around the bone. In such an era as this it is highly unlikely that an album such as *Happy Sad* would be financed. It takes up too much time and you have to listen to it as whole, let it ooze through your pores and soundscape your dreams.

### UNDER APPRECIATED

Not that there were too many similar records released during Tim Buckley's brief lifetime (he died aged just 28 in 1975 of a heroin overdose). Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* with its geographically-linked song cycle maybe, John Martyn's *Inside Out* (a jazz and vocal odyssey surely influenced by Buckley). Certainly he shucked off more

effectively than most the 'new Dylan' tag that every budding singer-songwriter in his day was saddled with.

The only really comparable works to *Happy Sad* are Buckley's own *Lorca* and *Blue Afternoon* that immediately followed. None sold well – *Happy Sad* was his biggest chart success. It got to number 81 in the Billboard charts. So Tim Buckley really is that rare example a largely undiscovered, criminally under-appreciated artist of utterly unique qualities. In other words, some kind of genius. And yup, (smug grin), did I ever tell you that I saw him once? ☺

### RE-RELEASE VERDICT

Released on the San Francisco-based 4 Men With Beards label, this 180g reissue comes sealed in a sleeve printed with the original artwork. With such sparse arrangements the acoustic guitars, vibes and marimba sparkle while the vocal breaks free of the speakers to hang, centre-stage, in the room. Packed with songs of beauty and substance, this is a set that cannot fail to engage. And as a 'demonstration disc' for those times you want to hear your high-end vinyl system truly sing, look no further. HFN

Sound Quality: 89%





# Talking Heads *Remain In Light*

At first dismissed by producer Eno as creating 'music to do your housework by', the band were to suspend their edgy guitar-based art-punk in favour of African polyrhythms and electronic samples for their fourth studio LP. The result was a watershed in '80s music...

Words: **Chris Heard**

One of the most influential albums of the past 35 years, 1980's *Remain In Light* was Talking Heads' major experimental art-rock statement – and its impact still sends ripples across the music scene today. Combining West African polyrhythms with Arabic music, disco-funk and 'found' voices, the LP was heavily inspired by producer Brian Eno's admiration for the Afrobeat sound of Nigerian bandleader Fela Kuti.

Its instrumental tracks were recorded as a series of samples and loops – a rare phenomenon at a time when such technologies were in their infancy in the music world.

The result was a groundbreaking collision of sounds, marrying rhythmic, funky textures with elements of early hip-hop and Byrne's mildly unsettling preacher-style narratives – to explosive effect.

Or, as the tightly-formatted world of US radio would have it: 'Too black for white radio and too white for black radio.'

### BRAVE INTENTIONS

Despite poor sales the LP was hailed by the critics, with the *NME* praising its 'brave intentions and haunting textures'. It was later positioned No 4 in *Rolling Stone's* choice of the greatest albums of the 1980s.

The sound was bold and expansive, opening new doors for rock production throughout the 1980s, with Eno – fresh from a five-year stint in Germany exploring the seminal electronic soundscapes of Krautrock – instrumental in its vision.

The band had worked with Eno on their two previous albums (*More Songs About Buildings And Food* and *Fear Of Music*), and convened at studios in the Bahamas, recording as



➔ The band (l-r) Jerry Harrison, David Byrne, Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz



➔ Harrison and Byrne on stage in Toronto and (far right) Tina Weymouth at Jay's Longhorn Bar, Minneapolis in 1978



➔ The first single from the LP was 'Once In A Lifetime'. It failed to chart in the US

they wrote. Yet things did not get off to the best of starts, Eno apparently reluctant to throw himself into the project after he had fallen out with Byrne during the pair's collaboration on the experimental album *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* (recorded prior to *Remain In Light* but released in its wake).

Within a week, engineer Rhett Davies had quit in frustration at the fast pace of Eno's working methods, while Byrne and bassist Tina Weymouth had fallen out over the LP's African-derived musical direction.

Eno had introduced the group to the 1973 album *Afrodisiac* by Fela Kuti, an archetypal Fela/Afrobeat set featuring a large multi-instrumental band, jazzy horns and an 'endless' layered groove that slowly builds to a rousing climax.

It became the template for *Remain In Light*, with Eno stating: 'I was very excited about this music at the time and they were pretty excited too, which was thrilling,

because no one in England appeared to be at all interested.'

The quartet of Byrne, Weymouth, guitarist Jerry Harrison and drummer Chris Frantz was augmented by horns, extra percussion and voices, while they moved away from traditional songwriting by improvising in the studio.

'The barriers between musician and producer were being broken down as we were writing the songs in the studio,' said Frantz.

Eno's input was crucial. He took a more active part than on previous Talking Heads albums,

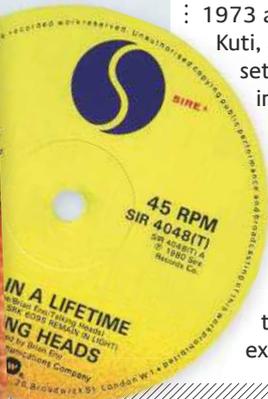
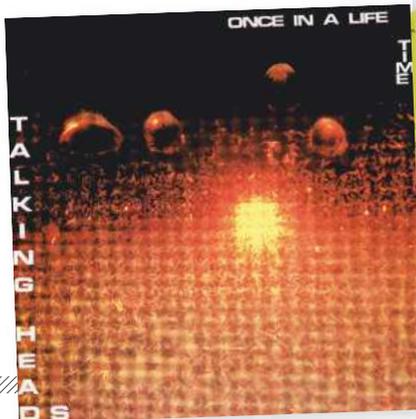
shaping the sound in terms of vocal harmonies, layered ambient sounds, lyrics and rhythmic devices.

### PREACHER MAN

In experimenting with the communal African way of making music, the band dived into the complexities of African polyrhythms in which the individual parts 'mesh' to make a cohesive whole.

The basic tracks focused on the rhythms and were performed using

'Within a week, engineer Rhett Davies had quit in frustration at Eno'



## VINYL ICONS

### PRODUCTION NOTES

Tensions were in the air as the band descended on Compass Point Studios in Nassau in July 1980. Eno and Byrne had fallen out during an earlier collaboration, while there was a lack of clarity about the direction the album would take.

Byrne, who had been immersing himself in academic literature on Africa, was adamant: 'We were really intrigued and excited by the formal aspects of African music.'

However, according to bassist Tina Weymouth: 'No-one discussed with us the fact that we were going to be playing in an African style.'

Weymouth and her husband, the group's drummer Chris Frantz, had considered quitting because of what Weymouth saw as Byrne's overbearing grip on the band.

Frantz vetoed the idea, though, and the couple ended up on holiday in the Bahamas, buying an apartment above Compass Point (where the band had recorded their second album). Along with guitarist Jerry Harrison, Byrne joined the couple in Nassau in spring 1980 with the aim of 'sacrificing our egos for mutual co-operation'.

Eno's role was pivotal to the project, but complaints about the fast pace of his work led to one engineer quitting and his replacement feeling the pressure.

Doubts began to emerge over whether the album would be completed at all, but the introduction of guitarist Adrian Belew using a Roland guitar synthesiser seemed to lift the sessions.

With backing vocals added by Nona Hendryx and brass parts from trumpet player and composer Jon Hassell, mixing was finally completed in New York and Los Angeles in August 1980.



PHOTO: ©DANNY CLINCH 2008



← The band as pictured on the sleeve of their sixth LP, *Little Creatures*, released in 1985. The group released eight studio albums in total, the last being *Naked*, in 2008

← Eno and Byrne pictured in 2008 while promoting the release of the second album they had made together, *Everything That Happens Will Happen Today*

↓ A Sire records promo shot of the group from the late '70s. They formed in New York in 1975 after Frantz encouraged Weymouth to learn to play bass by listening to Suzi Quatro records

a single chord, with each section being recorded as a long loop.

The record's opener, 'Born Under Punches (The Heat Goes On)', was inspired by Byrne's fascination with 'preaching, shouting and ranting', while 'Crosseyed And Painless' is built on the early rapping style of Kurtis Blow's hit single 'The Breaks'. Meanwhile the album's life-affirming centrepiece, the irresistibly funky

'Once In A Lifetime', returns to familiar themes of the preacher's pulpit.

'We're largely unconscious,' said Byrne explaining the

song. 'You know, we operate half awake or on autopilot and end up, whatever, with a house and a family and job and everything else, and we haven't really stopped to ask ourselves, "how did I get here?"'

### URBAN PARANOIA

For Byrne, *Remain In Light* represented an escape from his own demons following the band's emergence on the Manhattan punk/avant-garde scene in the mid-to-late 1970s. Recognisable for his songs of jittery, urban paranoia like 'Psycho Killer', Byrne was now amending his approach as he tried to move into fresh sonic territory.

'I think the music was important in that,' he said. 'The anxiety of my lyrics and singing didn't seem appropriate to this kind of music. This music is more positive, although mysterious at the same time.'

Analysing *Remain In Light*, Byrne said: 'Our weird take on it was a

long way round to rediscovering American folk, but coming at it from a fresh angle and in a more herky-jerky way that suits us.

### PERSONAL TORMENT

'That way of making music, with those rhythms and big ensemble of musicians that make up an Afro-funk band, was a way out of the psychological paranoia and personal

torment of the stuff I'd been writing and feeling. The paranoia of New York in the '70s, my age, my personal stuff, fitting in and not

fitting in. I felt I had that pretty bad for a while.'

Byrne was thrilled with the results of what he called a 'spiritual' album, saying that there was 'less Africanism in *Remain In Light* than we implied... but the African ideas were far more important to get across than specific rhythms'.

For their part, Talking Heads had been fans of Eno's work from the start. In an interview in *Punk* magazine in 1975, the band spoke ↷

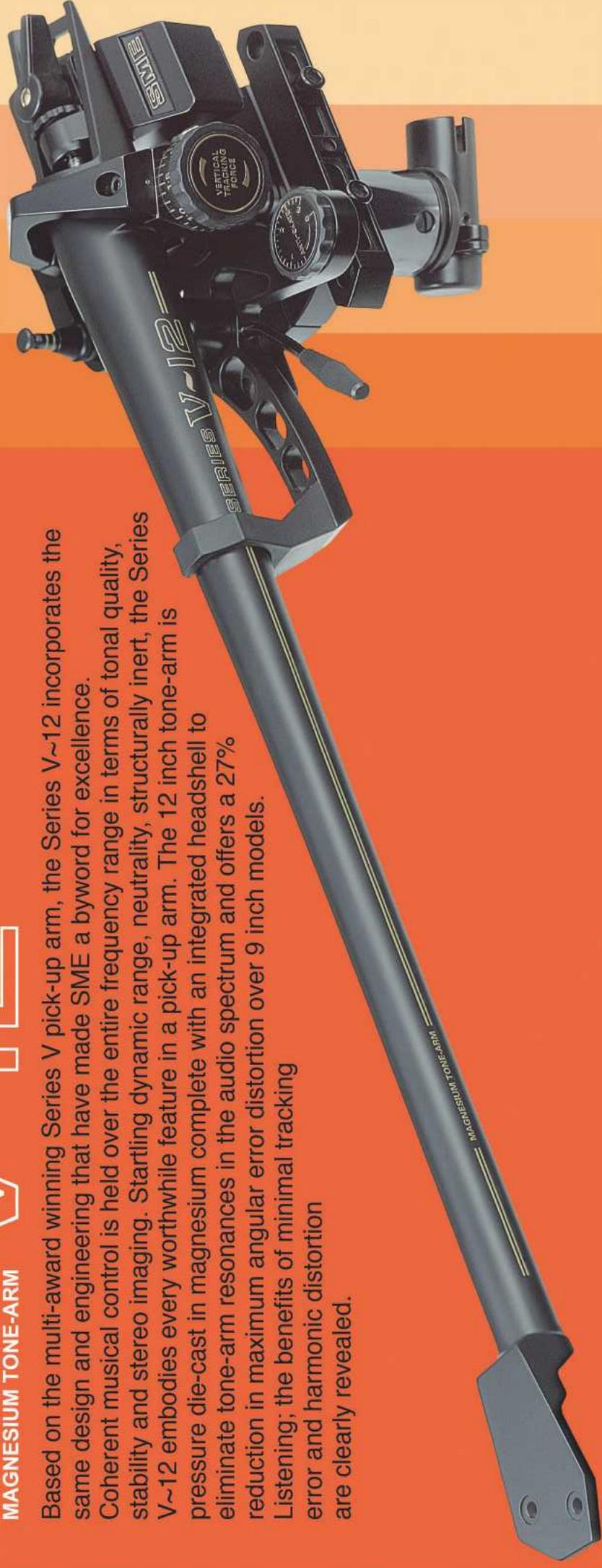
'Byrne was thrilled with the results of what he called a "spiritual" album'



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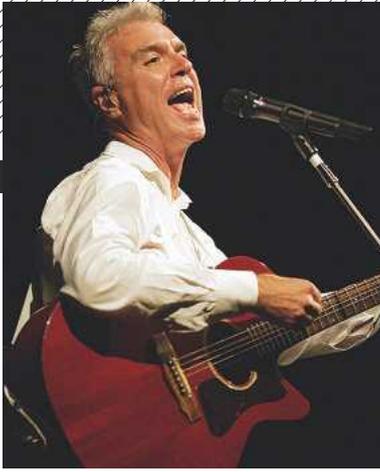


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# Alternate Format Discography



FERENC SZELEPCSENYI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

➔ Byrne plays acoustic guitar on stage in Budapest in 2009

of their love for Roxy Music and its enigmatic keyboard player.

'I remember "Love Is The Drug" playing and we were all saying how great it was,' said Mary Harron, a filmmaker who interviewed them. Bassist Tina Weymouth had been listening to Eno's solo album *Another Green World*, and soon he was called in to produce the band.

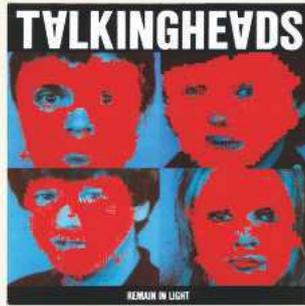
Initially Eno was disdainful of Talking Heads, dismissing them as 'music to do your housework by', but he later acknowledged the similarities with Roxy's art-rock posturing. '[Roxy Music had] imported a whole lot of ideas that hadn't been in pop music before and changed the form to fit us,' said Eno. 'That's what Talking Heads were doing, too. They took American light funk and married it with downtown New York punk or new wave. Now, everybody does it. But at the time it was a very new idea.'

## DEBUT PERFORMANCE

Eno felt that the album's contents were too dense for the four-piece to perform live, so they recruited a further five musicians to go on tour; among them guitarist Adrian Belew and Funkadelic's keyboard player Bernie Worrell.

The expanded nine-strong group made their debut performance on August the 23rd, 1980 in front of 70,000 people at the Heatwave Festival in Canada, with *Los Angeles Times* critic Robert Hilburn describing the new style as a 'rock-funk sound with dramatic, near show-stopping force'. The basis of the touring band that would later be immortalised in the concert film *Stop Making Sense* was established.

*Remain In Light* shifted no more than 50,000 copies on release, but has gone on to achieve more than a million sales. Not bad for a record that nearly wasn't made at all. ☺



## ORIGINAL LP

Talking Heads' fourth album came out in the UK and US on October the 8th, 1980 on Sire Records [SRK 6095], a US label co-founded by Seymour Stein in the mid-1960s which went on to sign a host of punk and new-wave acts during the late 1970s. Among these were The Ramones, Richard Hell and The Voidoids, The Undertones and The Rezillos. Stein, a music mogul who cut his teeth as a clerk at *Billboard* magazine in the late 1950s, scored a huge success in the early '80s by taking a risk on an unknown young New York-based singer called Madonna.

The brilliantly named Seymour Stein – subject of a song title by Belle And Sebastian – was in the right place at the time during the burgeoning mid-1970s US punk scene centred around the Manhattan club CBGB, and put out club regulars Talking Heads' first album, *Talking Heads:77*, in 1977, naturally enough.

Although sales were not hugely impressive at the time, *Remain In Light* was to become one of Stein's and the band's most talked-about releases. It went top 30 in six countries, peaking at number six in Canada and eight in New Zealand. In the UK and US it hovered around the top 20, but in the intervening three-and-a-bit decades there is no doubting the enhanced status it has acquired in being considered the group's pivotal work.

## ALBUM ARTWORK

The well-known sleeve featuring computer-generated, partly obscured portraits of band members Byrne, Harrison, Weymouth and Frantz was created using computer equipment at Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT]. Apart from the eyes, noses and mouths of the four

players, the faces were doctored with red colour blocks, the effect being likened by one psychoanalyst to a 'dismaying image', which mirrors the record's themes of 'identity disturbance'.

Weymouth and Frantz worked with MIT researcher Walter Bender and his media lab team, including Scott Fisher, who oversaw the laborious technical process (the technology being relatively primitive at the turn of the 1980s).

On the reverse of the sleeve, a similar effect is applied to four warplanes flying in formation above the Himalayas [see below right], an image based on American Grumman Avenger fighter jets which had been familiar to Weymouth's father during his stint as an admiral in the US Navy.

The plane collage had originally been destined for the front cover as the band considered a working title of 'Melody Attack' for the record,



but it was relegated to the reverse after the name change. The images were not abandoned, because the band felt they resonated in the context of the then ongoing Iranian hostage crisis.

## DIGITAL ISSUES

The first analogue-to-digital CD arrived in 1984, made in the former West Germany and featuring the catalogue number 6095-2 on the CD spine and the number 256867 on the disc itself. It underwent a reprint in the US in 1990, but it was not until 2006, a full 26 years after its release, that Sire's parent company Warner Bros got around to delivering a proper makeover. And what a job it did!

In conjunction with US catalogue specialist Rhino, item 8122 73300 2, released in Europe, amounted to an enhanced, remastered CD and DVD doublepack, including more than

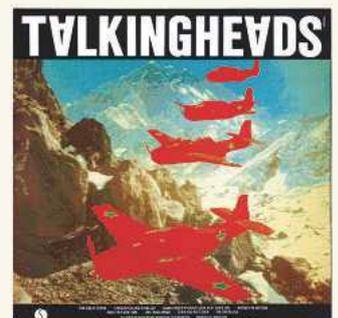
20 minutes of previously unreleased bonus tracks of unfinished outtakes and a DVD of the original album in 5.1 surround sound and Dolby stereo. Among the visual extras were a photo gallery and two videos from the German TV show *Rockpop* in 1980 – 'Crossedey And Painless' and 'Once In A Lifetime'.

At the same time, US consumers were treated to effectively the same product [R2 76452]: a hybrid dual-disc album, remastered in advanced resolution multichannel stereo at 96kHz/24-bit. Following a remastered 2009 Warner Music Japan issue, the earthy futurism of *Remain In Light* finally met contemporary cutting-edge technology in 2011 as a US download appeared in the form of eight FLAC files at 96kHz/24-bit. [HD603497940936].

## AUDIOPHILE LPS

As early as 1997, Warners was hailing a 'vinyl revival', putting out a limited edition 180g pressing of the LP [7599 26095 1] on a single record inside a machine-numbered, laminated cover with a facsimile of the original inner sleeve and a separate lyric sheet. Copies can be identified by incorrect track numbering on the back cover.

Rhino did an excellent engineering job on a remastered version made at RTI in 2006 [R1 70802] – still, perhaps, the definitive audiophile pressing – while this year a European LP mastered at AcousTech [8122708021] found its way on to the market. Earlier in 2013, more historical Talking Heads material was given the once-over by Warners vinyl engineers – including 1983's spirited collection *Speaking In Tongues* – but nothing in the band's canon matches the groundbreaking *Remain In Light*.



# Hyde Park, *London*

From Henry VIII to long-haired hippies, free gigs, Live 8 and the night they pulled the plugs on Bruce Springsteen... the history of live music events in London's Hyde Park is as rich as the story of popular music itself. **Steve Sutherland** looks back over the decades

**I**t was all going swimmingly until they found him at midnight, drowned in his pool. Typical bloody Brian. He'd been getting too messed up to play for years and now they'd finally found the balls to sack him, and were two days off debuting a new guitarist at a massive free gig to celebrate the group's bright new dawn, he'd gone and stolen their thunder. The show, far from a brand new start, was gonna have to be his wake.

And so it was that, on the 5th of July 1969, Mick Jagger addressed a crowd estimated between 250,000 and half a million in London's Hyde Park with a couple of stanzas of *Adonais*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetical reflection of the death of his fellow romantic poet, John Keats. Mick was dressed pretty poncey in a flouncey white dress designed by the Mr Fish boutique for Sammy Davis Jr and, when he'd finished reciting, several hundred overheated and wilting cabbage white butterflies were released from boxes to die on the stage.

## BACK ON THE MAP

Not perhaps the most auspicious start and not, by all accounts, The Stones' best ever gig – they were nervous, under-rehearsed after two years away, and badly out of tune. But no matter now – the gig served to put the band back on the map, got new guitarist Mick Taylor, lately of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, kind of bedded in and introduced the world to a brand new Stones-ian swagger in the shape of a fab new single, 'Honky Tonk Women'.

Other highlights were a lurching 'Midnight Rambler', 'Satisfaction', 'Street Fighting Man' and a brooding 'Sympathy For The Devil' with African tribal drummers. Granada TV filmed it and picked up the tab for the whole shebang which also featured Third Ear Band, Family and exciting new scenesters King Crimson.



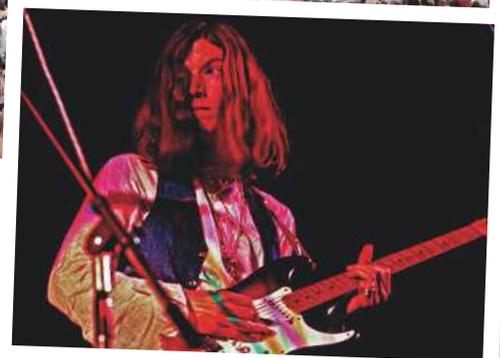
➔ The crowd at the three-day Hard Rock Calling event in 2009, which was headlined by The Killers, Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young

➔ On July the 28th 1968 Stevie Winwood and Traffic played what was to be a series of events run by Blackhill Enterprises

➔ Family's Roger Chapman returned in '74 with Streetwalkers

The Stones' show, although by far the most famous, was by no means the first to grace London's premier park. That honour went to Pink Floyd who, encouraged by a successful pot smoke-in held at Speakers' Corner in May 1968, decided to do a free gig on the 29th of June that year. In an eerie foreshadowing of the Brian Jones saga, the Floyd had sacked their founder and principal guitarist Syd Barrett six months previously. Syd had gone bonkers on too much LSD and the Floyd were simultaneously bedding in newbie Dave Gilmour and nervously debuting their new LP, *A Saucer Full Of Secrets* – the first recorded without Syd's wayward guiding hand.

The whole to-do, entitled The Midsummer High Weekend, went off rather well by all accounts, legendary DJ John Peel declaring it the very best festival he'd ever attended, as he lay on his back on a boat in the Serpentine



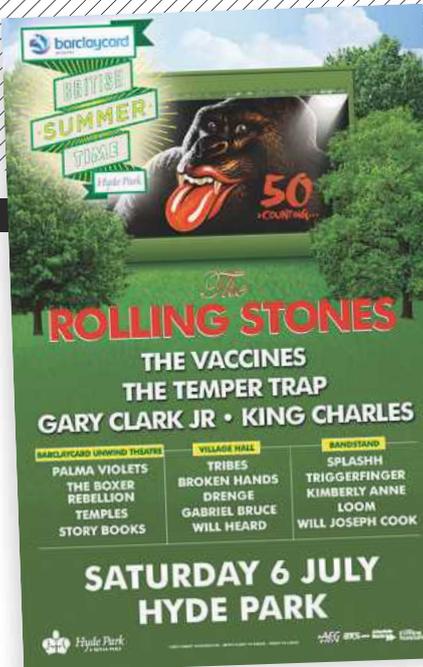
HEINRICH KLAFES

which ambled through the Park's 350 bucolic acres, grooving gently to a bill that boasted hippie faves Tyrannosaurus Rex, hardy perennial Roy Harper and upcoming Brit-blues whippersnappers Jethro Tull.

## A FEW MORE...

The gathering was such a success that Blackhill Enterprises, the organisation run by Peter Jenner and Andrew King who bossed London's infamous underground haunt, the UFO Club, decided to stage a few more. There was some opposition – the park, after all, was a national treasure, acquired by Henry VIII in 1536 as a private hunting ground and opened to the public 100 years later by Charles I.





Hardly the sort of place one would like to see gatherings of filthy, pot-smoking hippies, but the Blackhill boys were persistent in their pursuit of support from a few open-minded MPs and July the 28th saw Stevie Winwood's fab new outfit Traffic wow a sun-baked crowd who were also treated to much flamboyance from The Nice, featuring Keith Emerson on keyboards, The Pretty Things and The Action. A month later, on the 24th of August, an expanded and extremely eclectic bill boasted Family, Roy Harper again, Fairport Convention, Ten Years After and Fleetwood Mac featuring a guitar god also slowly losing his marbles in the form of Peter Green.

Four weeks on and the first season ended with Roy 'Get a proper job' Harper joining a smaller mustering which included The Action (once again), The Move and The Strawbs.

The first Park show of '69 was a real doozie showcasing what turned out to be a somewhat hesitant debut by Eric Clapton's first post-Cream experience, Blind Faith. Aided and abetted by Cream drummer and principal nutter Ginger Baker, Stevie Winwood, who'd temporarily

↗ **The Rolling Stones, who celebrated their 50th anniversary this year with two sell-out shows at Hyde Park (poster top left) over 40 years since their famous free festival in 1969**

↗ **Canned Heat headlined in 1970, just days after the death of guitarist Al 'Blind Owl' Wilson**

↙ **Gong at Hyde Park in 1974**

shelved Traffic, and Ric Grech from Family, Clapton performed a laid-back set which left many who'd come to witness his previous fretboard pyrotechnics a fair bit underwhelmed. Nonetheless some 120,000 enjoyed a day which also offered Richie Havens, fresh from his triumph at Woodstock, our own dear Donovan and feisty agit-proggers the Edgar Broughton Band. Post Stones, the Broughtons were back on a 20th of September bill headlined by jazzrockers Soft Machine.

#### FLOYD RETURN

The Seventies dawned musically in the Park on the 18th of July when Pink Floyd returned to debut their latest creation, *Atom Heart Mother*, complete with choir, orchestra and brass band before 120,000 appreciative fans.

Harper and the Broughtons were there again and so was ex-Soft Machiner Kevin Ayers whose Whole World Band featured the Machine's Robert Wyatt on drums and a very youthful Mike Oldfield on bass.

The Hyde Park guitarist curse struck again in September when America's finest boogie-merchants Canned Heat headlined nine days after their leader and awesome

axeman Al 'Blind Owl' Wilson was found dead from a barbiturate overdose. The band did their best, the rain came down in buckets and ex-Animal Eric Burdon showed off his new band War while John Sebastian, freshly solo from The Lovin' Spoonful, and ace folkie Michael Chapman attempted to keep the spirits up.

Seventy-One's biggie came in the shape of the much-maligned

but nonetheless monstrously successful Michigan heavy rockers Grand Funk Railroad who headlined on the 3rd of July over Steve Marriott

**'DJ John Peel declared it the best festival he'd ever attended'**

and Peter Frampton's gutbucket groovers Humble Pie, Jack Bruce (ex-Cream) closing out the season on September the 4th, supported by King Crimson.

The next Park show of note rocked up on the 29th of June 1974 in the shape of the returning Kevin Ayers, supported by ex-Velvet Underground chanteuse Nico who ploughed through 'The End', and ↻



TIM DUNCAN

HENRICH KLATES

## CLASSIC VENUES



THE ADMIRALTY/FLICKR

the hippy trippy Gong featuring a fresh-faced new guitar wizard in Steve Hillage.

Ex-Byrd Roger McGuinn did a hit-laden stint at the end of August, Roy Harper dropping in again to jam with some famous mates – Pink Floyd's Dave Gilmour and John Paul Jones from Led Zep.

Then it was brief chart sensation Don McLean doing his 'Vincent' and 'American Pie' in May '75, that summer's season rounded off with a whopper in the shape of Queen who attracted an audience of over 200,000 as they romped through future classics 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and 'Killer Queen'.

### LIVE AID ANNIVERSARY

Then, strangely, it all went quiet until the people's music returned

to Hyde Park on the 2nd of July 2005 when the English leg of the 20th anniversary of Live Aid was staged to coincide with the G8 summit, the much-vaunted catchphrase being 'Make Poverty History'. Headliners were a regrouped Pink Floyd, the cantankerous Roger Waters rejoining his Floydian cohorts for the first time in 24 years. Other notables on the bill were The Who, Madonna (who characteristically upstaged just about everyone by bringing to the stage Birhan Woldu, the starving child on the news report which prompted the original Live Aid) and U2 who played 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' with Paul

'Guitarist Steve Van Zandt declared Britain a "police state"'

McCartney. Weirdest of all, celebrity no-mark Pete Doherty of The Libertines staggered on to help Elton John slaughter T. Rex's 'Children Of The Revolution'.

Impressed by the Park's capacity to accommodate a lucrative crowd in central London, promoters Live Nation took the opportunity to team up with the Hard Rock Café to launch Hard Rock Calling in the Summer of 2006, kick-starting a six-year franchise with a couple of shows starring Roger Waters, The Who and Primal Scream, and followed up in subsequent summer weekends by Peter Gabriel and Aerosmith (June 2007), Eric Clapton and The Police (2008).

Expanding to three days in 2009, headliners were The Killers, Bruce Springsteen & his E Street Band

and Neil Young who was joined onstage for an encore of The Beatles' 'A Day In The Life' by surprise guest Paul McCartney. Macca returned

in 2010 for another three-dayer featuring performances from Pearl Jam, Stevie Wonder and Crosby, Stills & Nash with The Killers, Bon Jovi, Rod Stewart (with ex-Faces buddy Ronnie Wood guesting) and Stevie Nicks doing 2011.

The Hard Rock enterprise hit the buffers in 2012 when there was a right kerfuffle over Live Nation pulling the plugs on Bruce Springsteen when the boss bust the curfew jamming with Macca on 'I Saw Her Standing There' and

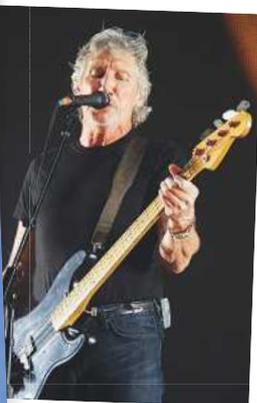
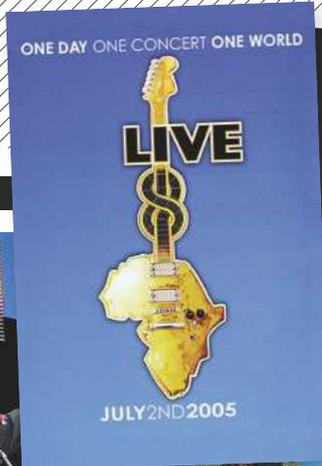
'Twist & Shout' – an act deemed cultural vandalism by the papers and drawing condemnation from London's publicity-alert mayor Boris Johnson. The E Street Band's guitarist Steve Van Zandt went one better and declared Britain a 'police state' via his Twitter account.

The other issue that brought the deal to an end was that such was the volume of local residents' complaints about the noise that when Blur closed the London Olympics on the 12th of August with a great British show co-starring The Specials and New Order, the crowd could hardly hear the bands due to the reduced amplification.

### BRITISH SUMMERTIME

So Live Nation took its Hard Rock deal and moved to the Olympic Park in Stratford, opening the way for rival promoters AEG to step in with this season's historic Barclaycard British Summertime with events featuring Bon Jovi, Lionel Richie and Jennifer Lopez, The Kinks' Ray Davies (which became a freebie when headliner Elton John had to pull out with a dodgy appendix) and, of course, over two gloriously sweltering July weekends, the triumphant return of The Rolling Stones celebrating their 50th year in the business.

Not a freebie this time though. The cheapest tickets were 95 quid. My, how times have changed! ☹



↖ In 2005 music returned to Hyde Park after a 30 year hiatus with the 20th Anniversary of Live Aid. A regrouped Pink Floyd saw Roger Waters on bass for the first time in 24 years

↖ The Live 8 event also saw U2 join Paul McCartney (far left) for a rendition of 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'

↓ Poster for Blur's closing Olympics show held at Hyde Park in 2012. Local residents ensured the PA volume was lowered. Audience members said they couldn't hear the bands



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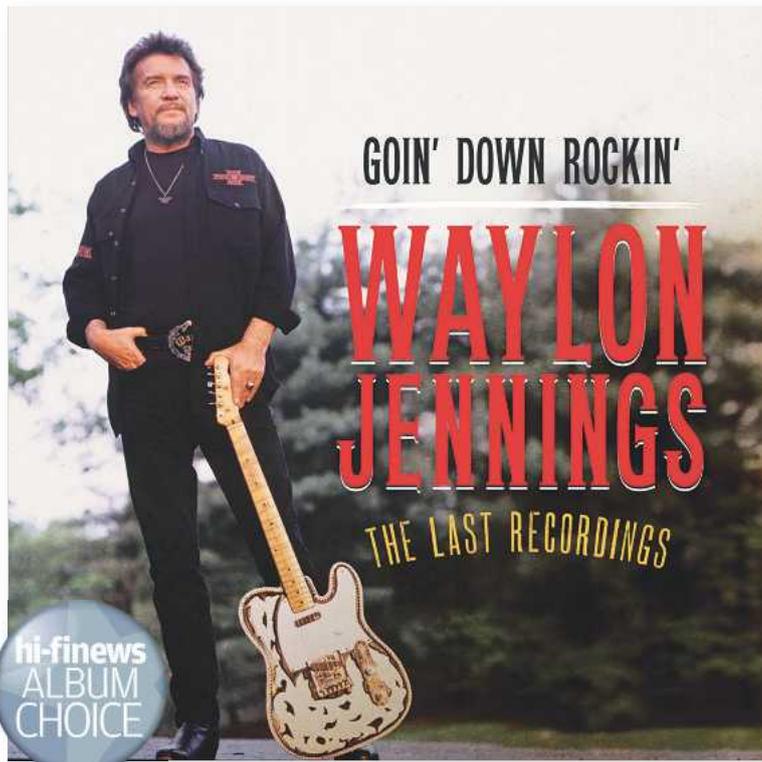
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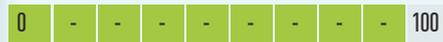
WAYLON JENNINGS

Goin' Down Rockin'

Sundazed LP5457 (180g vinyl)

It's not often we get country material in an audiophile context beyond Johnny Cash or Willie Nelson, so this farewell from Waylon Jennings is welcomed, indeed. Subtitled 'The Last Recordings', this is the cap to a 40-years-plus career that started with Buddy Holly's help. The magic is that Sundazed has released these final recordings absolutely free of overdubs, truly unplugged and intimate: acoustic guitar-only, nine originals and three co-compositions, all with the power of Cash's 'American' recordings. Knowing fans and newcomers alike will love the aptly-named autobiographical songs that book-end the set: the title track and 'Wrong Road To Nashville'. *KK*

Sound Quality: 90%



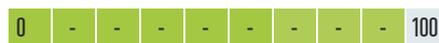
BOB DYLAN

Another Side Of Bob Dylan

Mobile Fidelity MFSL 2-379 (two 45rpm discs)

Dylan's fourth LP, from 1964, scored a mighty 91% in SACD form in July. A masterpiece so gravid with power, insight and intensity, it's still hard to believe it was created by a 23-year-old – such is its wisdom. Unless you're genuinely oblivious to the work of one of the most important and influential artists of the past 50 years – and to deny that he is such would be merely idiotic and/or recalcitrant for the sake of it – you will appreciate the worth of a set that includes 'All I Really Want to Do', 'My Back Pages', 'It Ain't Me Babe' and eight others any songwriter would kill to have composed. In this 45rpm vinyl form, it's even more visceral and 'real'. *KK*

Sound Quality: 83%



VANGELIS

Blade Runner Original Soundtrack

Audio Fidelity AFZLP154 180g (red vinyl)

Soundtracks are tricky to be objective about if divorced from the film, or if you love the movie in question. When the music is primarily synthesized, you might write it off as electronic wallpaper. Further compounding this OST is the controversy that resulted in the original 1982 LP being recorded by the New American Orchestra due to a dispute between Vangelis and the film studio. As a result, at least five versions exist, this limited-edition LP containing Vangelis' 1994 release of 12 tracks – ideal for purists, though various multi-CD sets offers more material. Irrespective of the content, an important release from any OST collector's viewpoint. *KK*

Sound Quality: 89%



NANCY WILSON

This Mother's Daughter

Pure Pleasure PPAN ST11518 (180g vinyl)

Anyone who adores vocalists of the Ella/Sarah/Dinah calibre knows that Wilson ranks with the best of them. Where she differs is that she has never confined herself to the restrictions of the pop/jazz vocalist genre, as demonstrated here, a 1976 release that could easily be filed under 'Soul'. Amidst the 40 or so LPs she cut for Capitol, this stands out, the title track calling to mind soul singers who can sing standards rather than standards singers flirting with soul – more like Dionne or Aretha, as it were. With a performer of this calibre, the backing band is stellar, too, among them Chuck Rainey, Hugh McCracken, Steve Gadd, Dave Grusin and George Duke. *KK*

Sound Quality: 89%





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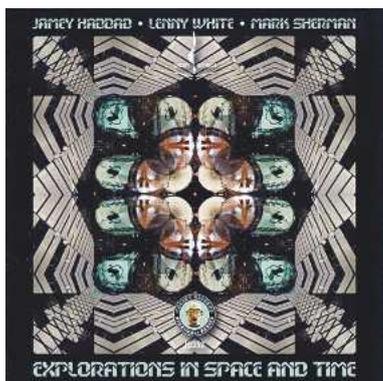
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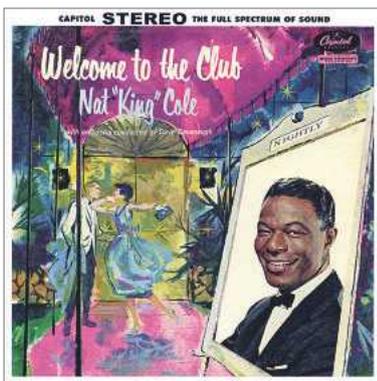
### JAMEY HADDAD/LENNY WHITE/ MARK SHERMAN

Explorations In Space And Time

Chesky JD352 (binaural CD)

Unrepentant hi-fi enthusiasts who remember fondly the sonic spectaculars of the 1970s-90s must be quivering with joy at the recent spate of retro-tinged 'audiophile demo discs' from the likes of STS. Chesky Records is currently enjoying a binaural kick, a canny move at a time when headphones are enjoying such previously unknown prominence. Chesky's latest ups the ante with a throwback to another audiophile staple: the percussion album. Unlike Kodo drumming, which is a proper genre, this is more like an early stereo sound effects disc. Give it a whirl with your fave cans: you'll be rendered speechless. *KK*

Sound Quality: 88%



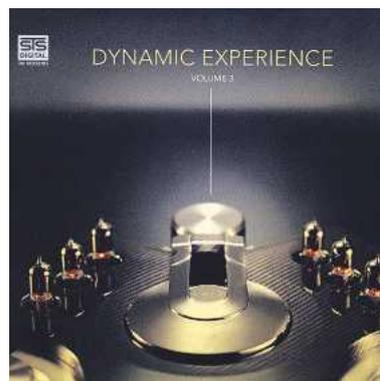
### NAT 'KING' COLE

Welcome To The Club

Audio Fidelity AFZ153 (stereo SACD)

While most NKC fans default to his work with Nelson Riddle, Gordon Jenkins or Ralph Carmichael, he delivered sensational albums with other arrangers. For this 1959 treasure, Cole's arranger was Dave Cavanaugh, backed by the Count Basie Orchestra (though for contractual reasons, Basie was not present). One of Cole's skills was keeping bombastic orchestras in check, his subtle delivery contrasting with the big band sound that lingered from the previous decade. This set swings as one would expect, and his 'Mood Indigo' must have had Duke Ellington swelling with pride, but the kicker is the revelation that Cole could have been a peerless blues singer. *KK*

Sound Quality: 90%



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

Dynamic Experience Volume 3

STS Digital STS611126 (audiophile CD)

Another perfectly-assembled, various artists' various genres, 'old school' audiophile compilation, STS's latest is produced with assistance from Blumenhofer Acoustics, Siltech, Octave and other high-end audio brands, to ensure that the sound is sublime. But the material, too, means that you can visit a retailer or a hi-fi show for a demo with one CD instead of a stack. Present on this set are Tom Jones, Paul Simon, Laurie Anderson, Tony Joe White, Lou Reed and John Cale, Rickie Lee Jones and other major performers, but STS knows its audience: the last cut, complete with warning not to play it too loudly the first time you test it, is a heavy percussion track. *KK*

Sound Quality: 90%



### PATSY CLINE

Patsy Cline's Greatest Hits

Analogue Productions CAPP 74854SA (stereo SACD)

A double-whammy month, then, if country is your music genre of choice. Cline, of course, created both the template for the heartbroken, angst-ridden C&W warbler, reaching its apotheosis with Tammy Wynette, and for the upbeat, joyous retort that would give us Dolly Parton. This perfect package contains a dozen of her hits, milestones from a career tragically cut short when she died at the age of 30 in a plane crash, 50 years ago this March. 'Walking After Midnight', 'I Fall To Pieces', 'Crazy', 'She's Got You', 'Sweet Dreams' – her output of only three LPs in her lifetime remains a textbook study of the genre, every performance faultless, the production sublime, every C&W cliché present in all their honky-tonk glory. *KK*

Sound Quality: 93%



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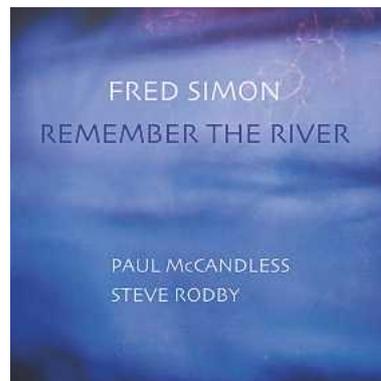
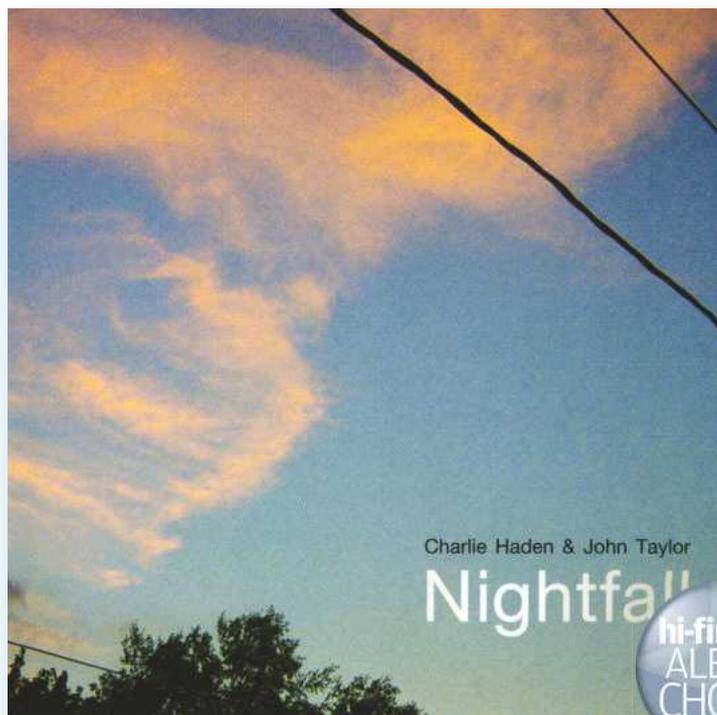
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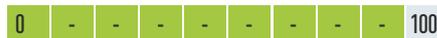
### FRED SIMON

Remember The River (192kHz/24-bit; FLAC/WAV)

[www.naimlabel.com; naimcd081](http://www.naimlabel.com; naimcd081)

This Naim 'True Stereo' recording from 2004 captures a tight trio rather than solo Simon, who authors and arranges here, also filling much of the stage with his softly-recorded piano, supported by bass from co-producer Steve Rodby (Pat Metheny Group), while Paul McCandless's reed array of oboe, soprano sax, bass clarinet and pennywhistle cuts through from the sidelines. Fully-prepped pieces include two Methenian compositions in the rising progression of 'Revolver' and the triplet jumps of 'WWJTD'. Others grow more organically – the Jarretty dynamic lift of 'Double Dream', the abstract 'Listen To The Colour Of Your Dreams, Pt 1', perhaps a rare moment where Paul Wertigo might have popped by to provide profitable percussion. That omission makes this a journey that flows by as softly as its title suggests, and well worth the remastering. *JF*

Sound Quality: 85%



### CHARLIE HADEN & JOHN TAYLOR

Nightfall (192kHz/24-bit; FLAC/ALAC/WAV)

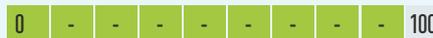
[www.naimlabel.com; naimcd077](http://www.naimlabel.com; naimcd077)

The second of three Haden duo recordings with Naim, joined in 2003 by John Taylor (Azimuth, Kenny Wheeler) for an intensely relaxing set subtitled 'The CalArts Sessions'. Haden clearly relishes the space of a two-piece, his instrument richly and boldly presented here, his solos spot-lit centre-stage.

They interact delightfully at baton handover points; in 'My Love And I' Haden switches seamlessly from support to lead after the introduction, delivers a sensitive

solo of octave-shifted melodies over Taylor's rootless voicings, then effects an equally dexterous hand-off back to Taylor. He even rosins up his bow for a six-minute 'Song For The Whale', initially warming your woofers with deep didgeridooness but then testing your patience with several minutes of frankly scary Charlie whaley noises. Humpback love song or rusty gate? You decide. *JF*

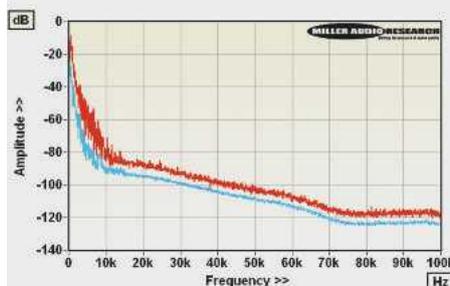
Sound Quality: 90%



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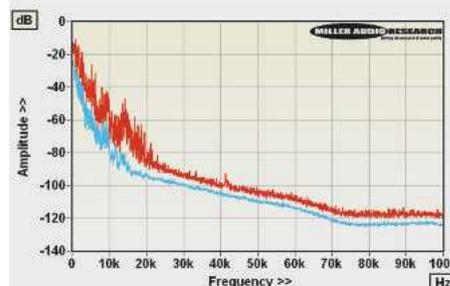
Following our Investigation feature [*HFN*, Jun '11] where we examined the claimed quality of high-resolution downloads, *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* is now measuring the true sample rate and bit-depth of the HD music downloads reviewed on these pages. These unique reviews will be a regular source of information for those seeking new and re-mastered recordings offered at high sample rates and with the promise of delivering the very best sound quality. (Note: asterisk in headings denotes technical reservation explained below.) *PM*

### LAB REPORT



Although this is a 192kHz rendering from analogue tape, the background noise of the analogue system can be seen gently tailing off at 70kHz. The piano extends to about 15kHz, as it should without distortion from compressors, etc. *PM*

### LAB REPORT



Sampled from 1/4in (Nagra) analogue tape at 192kHz. While the piano barely hits 8kHz it's the alto sax that produces the 20kHz+ harmonics seen here. System noise fades to an ultrasonic 70kHz. Lower sample rate versions are available. *PM*



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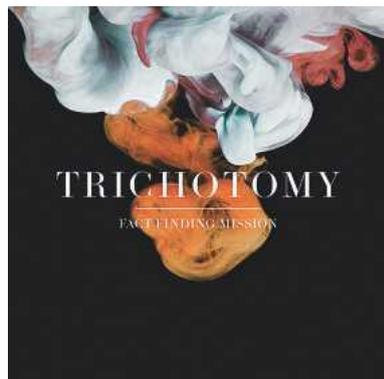
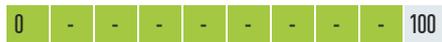
## NOUVEAU MONDE, BAROQUE ARIAS

Patricia Petibon, La Cetra (96kHz/24-bit; FLAC)

[www.hiresaudio.com](http://www.hiresaudio.com); DG 479 0079

This is the French coloratura soprano's fifth album for DG: this time with the Basel baroque orchestra, La Cetra, founded in 1999 by its musical director Andreas Marcon. Its theme is the 'New World' conquest, with songs and arias from Handel, Rameau, Purcell, *et al*, sung variously in Spanish, early French and English: *eg*, the familiar 'Greensleeves' and 'Dido's Lament'. Petibon has a wide palette of vocal colours to match the moods, which range from vengeful to lamenting; and the old instruments – baroque guitar, harp, lute, theorbo and percussion – might remind you of those Gregorio Paniagua audiophile LPs from 1980/82. The recordings took place in a chilly Basel church in Feb '12. Soft plucked strings then castanets opening track 7 serve to set a replay level such that vocal climaxes are not too stressful – too low and the accompaniments will recede. *CB*

Sound Quality: 85%



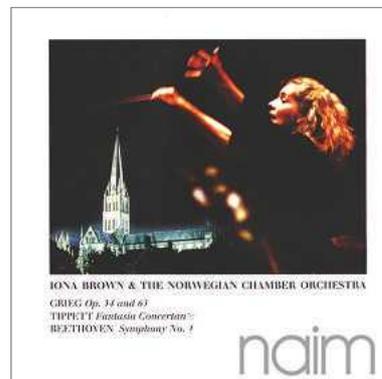
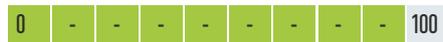
## TRICHOTOMY

Fact Finding Mission (48kHz/24-bit; ALAC/FLAC/WAV)

[www.naimlabel.com](http://www.naimlabel.com); naimcd186

The title track is not typical of the album but may be a landmark for this Australian trio – a Zorn-like collage noir, jazz-rock parts woven jaggedly around speech clips, with regular breakdowns to a piano motif that may have slipped onto the recording from Dire Straits' 'Telegraph Road'. Around this great adventure lie more conventional arrangements, often opening mildly – the new-age innocence of 'Song For EV', the finger-tripping Penguin Cafe intro of 'The Blank Canvas Pt 1' (where they are joined by guitarist James Muller). But these gentle landscapes always open out into wilder territory of improvisation and interplay, at which Foran, Parker and Marchisella grow more adept and organic with every recording (the guest spots here are less single-minded). It's a beautiful and balanced recording, too (from Sydney, Australia), opening wide their performance. *JF*

Sound Quality: 85%



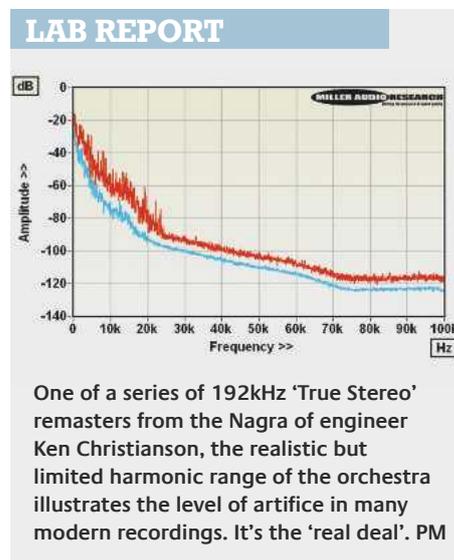
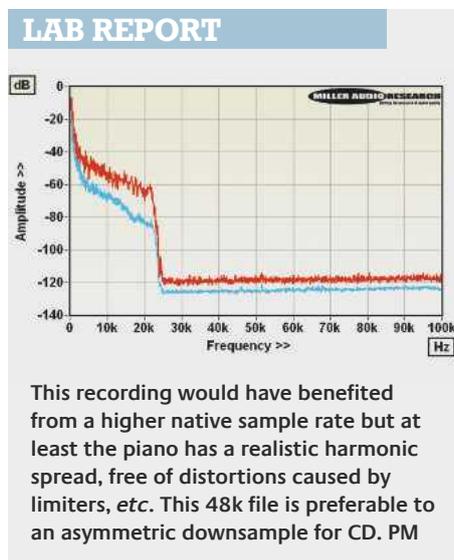
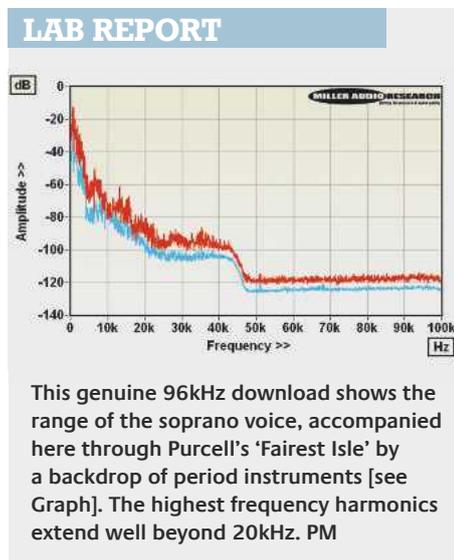
## GRIEG/TIPPETT/BEETHOVEN

Two Elegiac and Two Norwegian Melodies/Corelli Fantasia Concertante/Symphony 1; Norwegian CO/ Iona Brown (192kHz/24-bit; ALAC/FLAC/WAV)

[www.naimlabel.com](http://www.naimlabel.com); naimcd009

A familiar item in the Naim Label catalogue, this is a concert recording made in Salisbury Cathedral in August 1994. However, for this 'Super Hi Definition' download, engineer Ken Christianson has gone back to his finely balanced analogue master. Sadly, the booklet has not been updated to note that Iona Brown, appointed as the chamber orchestra's artistic director in 1981 (after sterling work with the Academy of St Martin's) fell victim to cancer and died in 2004. Here, she's one of the soloists in the Tippett – whose *Fantasia* suits the cathedral reverb – and conducts the lithe, aptly scaled early Beethoven performance and the two Grieg works for strings. These are touchingly done by the Norwegian CO – on true home ground, just as this event found Iona Brown returned to Salisbury! *CB*

Sound Quality: 85%





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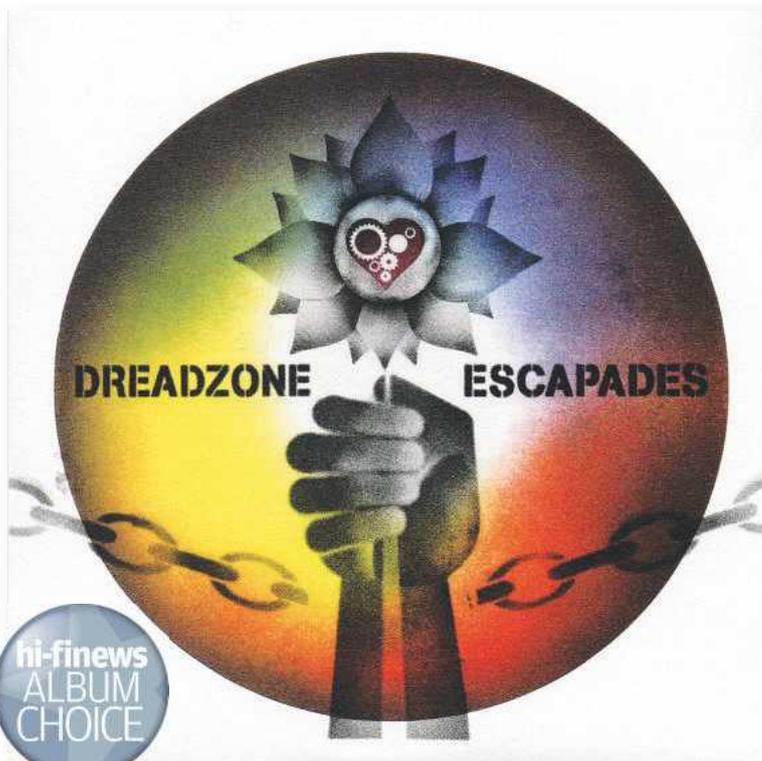
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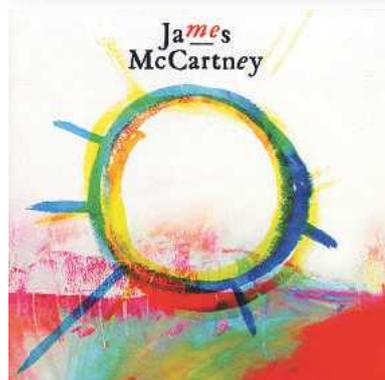
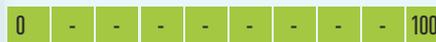
### DREADZONE

Escapades

Dubwise Records DUB005

Musically, on their seventh album, Dreadzone deliver up a gorgeous-sounding piece of work, a bona-fide sonic bath enriched by light-as-air melodies, subtle use of dub techniques and irresistibly hooky synth lines. One highlight amongst the ten tracks is the oppressive, introspective, painfully honest 'I Love You Goodbye', and another is the rock-leaning 'Too Late', with former Clash/Big Audio Dynamite man Mick Jones on vocals. If I had to complain, I'd say that although their socially-conscious lyrics are well-intentioned, they're often also clichés. The grooves and chilled-out reggaefied vocals, however, are so magical that the words hardly matter, and that's something which I rarely say. *JBk*

Sound Quality: 95%



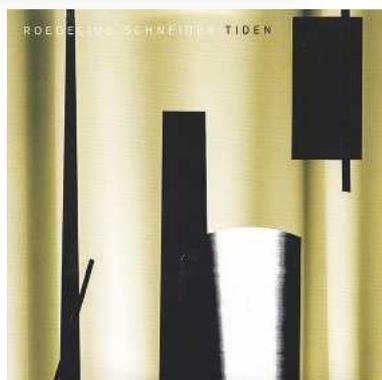
### JAMES McCARTNEY

Me

ECR Music Group ECR1305000

Rarely is a debut album burdened with so much expectation but, when you're Paul McCartney's lad, you presumably expect to be compared to dad. What stops this perfectly pleasant album from being great is its restraint. Young Jim sounds horribly in control even on the few tracks that rock out a bit. Mostly, though, tempos are mid-paced to slow, lyrics verge on banal and his performances lack conviction, so it's hard not to fall back on the odious comparisons. So let's. 'Butterfly' features remarkably Beatlish vocal harmonies, 'Thinking About Rock & Roll' could pass for one of his dad's and, weirdly, several cuts sound more like John and George than like Macca. *JBk*

Sound Quality: 83%



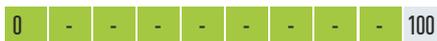
### ROEDELIUS/SCHNEIDER

Tiden

Bureau B Records BB132LP

In over thirty years of listening to German keyboardist Hans Joachim Roedelius I've rarely been less than totally captivated, so it's a particular delight to report that his latest collaborative work, with Stefan Schneider, of experimental ambient band To Rococo Rot, is one of his loveliest releases to date. The thirteen pieces are mostly improvised on piano and electronics, but the pair's talents mesh so well that the music sounds composed. Their ability to find unlikely textures and curious rhythms is matched only by their gift for making such unusual sounds seem inexplicably familiar, comforting and even soothing. Ambient album of the year, if you ask me. *JBk*

Sound Quality: 90%



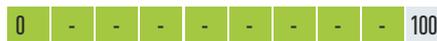
### SCUD MOUNTAIN BOYS

Do You Love The Sun?

One Little Indian tlp1210cd

It's been a while since the last Scud Mountain Boys album: 17 years to be precise. The band's mainman, Joe Pernice, is better known in his later incarnation as the founder of The Pernice Brothers, so his alt-country credentials are impeccable and this album, rich in wailing steel guitars and lazy acoustic strums, should delight his devotees. More than anything, it reminds me of Teenage Fanclub's 1997 album *Songs From Northern Britain*, which ploughed a relentlessly downbeat Gram Parsons furrow in which all the songs sounded much like all of the others. Pernice and the Fanclub's Norman Blake are now working together, so more of this is in the offing. *JBk*

Sound Quality: 90%



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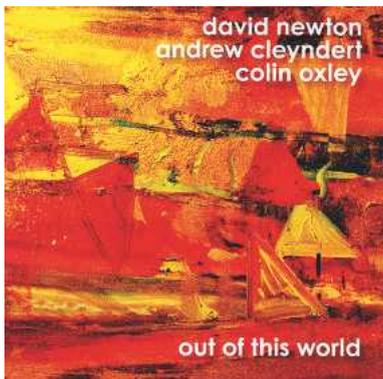
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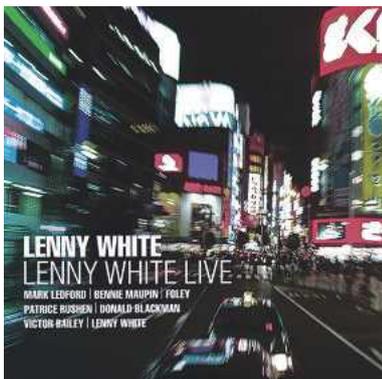


### DAVID NEWTON/ANDREW CLEYNDERT/ COLIN OXLEY Out Of This World

Trio Records tr590

Surely one of the greatest bass players around, Andrew Cleynert is the anchor here, and more besides, in a cohesive drum-less trio. Pianist David Newton has recorded many albums with his own trio, and notably with saxophonist Alan Barnes too. But he's also worked very happily as duo with guitarist Colin Oxley, which helps explain the tight, effortless rapport they show here, whether plunging into intricate unison lines or trading solos. Starting with the Harold Arlen number that's the title tune here, they embellish a neat selection of well-known and less-known standards, plus some Newton originals. *SH*

Sound Quality: 80%



### LENNY WHITE Lenny White Live

Challenge Records/BFM CR73373

You don't have to be a fusion freak to enjoy this recording from 1997 when drummer White led an all-star band on tour in Japan, playing material from his *Present Tense* and *Renderers Of Spirit* albums. It's a heavyweight ensemble but not top-heavy, with Victor Bailey joined on bass by Foley, who plays guitar-like 'lead' as he'd done with Miles in the late 1980s, while Patrice Rushen's fine piano solos contrast with the late Donald Blackman's wild and ethereal electronic keyboards. On trumpet is the late Mark Ledford, and there's plenty of great sax from Bennie Maupin. Tracks are long and the sound sometimes gets harsh, but sheer live excitement wins the day. *SH*

Sound Quality: 85%



### JOE LOCKE Lay Down My Heart

Motema 233725

'There is no highbrow concept here,' writes the master vibes player, explaining that this quartet album is meant 'to provide respite for folks who work hard every day and need an opportunity to slow down...' And it works, from the solidly-grounded, invigorating 'Ain't No Sunshine' through to a lighthearted 'Makin' Whoopee' and a sweet and soulful 'Dedicated To You,' and not forgetting a couple of tuneful Locke originals too. With great contributions from pianist Ryan Cohan, drummer Jaimeo Brown and bassist and co-producer David Finck, *Lay Down My Heart* is proving a well-deserved success for Locke. Look out for the follow-up, *Blues & Ballads Vol 2. SH*

Sound Quality: 85%



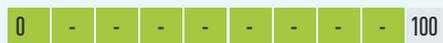
### GREGORY PORTER

Liquid Spirit

Blue Note 0602537410538

This 'major label debut' for the acclaimed singer and songwriter follows two award-nominated albums on the independent New York jazz label Motema. But there's no real discontinuity here. Pianist and arranger Chip Crawford, bassist Aaron James, drummer Emanuel Harrold and alto sax player Yosuke Sato all appeared on both the previous albums, while tenor saxophonist Tivon Pennicott was heard on *Water* though not on *Be Good*. But apart from that beautiful honey-toned voice, what's important here is Porter's writing, which just goes from strength to strength. He captivates us with arresting images, phrases with a twist that make you think, deep concerns sweetened by humanity and hope. *SH*

Sound Quality: 90%



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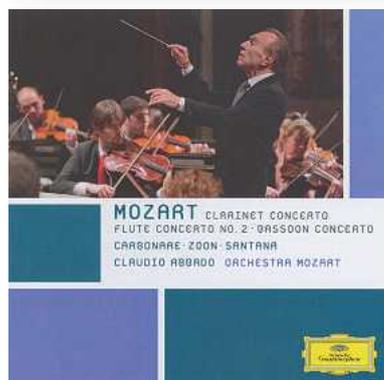
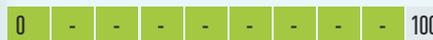
### SIBELIUS

Pohjola's Daughter; The Oceanides; Symphony 2  
Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder

Hallé CD HLL 7516

Sibelius's music has always been well served by British conductors: Beecham, Boult, Collins, Barbirolli, Davis. Now a Hallé cycle under Sir Mark Elder is under way. Their second CD (Symphonies 1 and 3 are on CD HLL 7514) starts with a gripping *Pohjola's Daughter* which brings out a cruel kinship with Dvorak's grisly symphonic poems. Sibelius's attempt at sea evocation is less persuasive – Boult's pre-war BBC SO *Oceanides* [Dutton] was the benchmark recording – but Elder's account is beautifully prepared. The *Symphony* (live, with applause) is refreshingly straight, with no romantic indulgence or exaggeration. An illuminating cleaning up of an over-familiar canvas. **CB**

Sound Quality: 90%



**MOZART** CLARINET CONCERTO  
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CARBONARE · ZOON · SANTANA  
CLAUDIO ABBADO ORCHESTRA MOZART

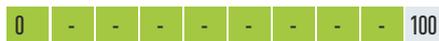
### MOZART

Concertos for Clarinet, Flute (K314) and Bassoon  
Orchestra Mozart/Claudio Abbado

DG 477 9331

Recently we had a perfectly enjoyable Clarinet Concerto in a re-recording by Michael Collins for Chandos. But Abbado's goes deeper and the sounds produced by Alessandro Carbonare are to be savoured – a top recommendation. The second work is the adaptation of Mozart's Oboe Concerto; here Jacques Zoon provides a delightful '*Peter and the Wolf*-like' cadenza in (i). The Bassoon Concerto is an earlier work, less often heard. Some will not like the timbre of Guillaume Santana's instrument (or some key clicks) but it's as well played as its companions. Crisp accompaniments in Abbado's disciplined Mozart style. **CB**

Sound Quality: 90%



Schubert Symphony No. 6  
Rosamunde incidental music  
Swedish Chamber Orchestra  
Thomas Dausgaard

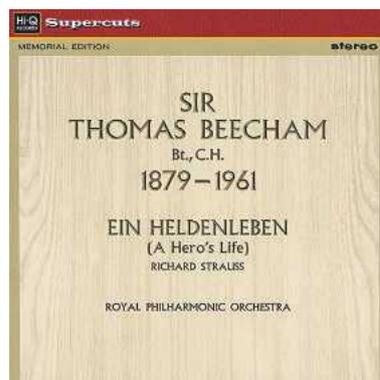
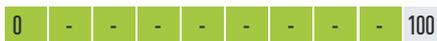
### SCHUBERT

Symphony 6; Rosamunde – excerpts  
Swedish CO/Thomas Dausgaard

BIS BIS-1987 (SACD hybrid); downloads up to 24-bit/96kHz

No-one familiar with Dausgaard's historically informed Beethoven cycle on Simax will be surprised by his similarly unsentimental Schubert, with a wide range of dynamics (some very fine *pp* string playing) and dramatic timing. The 'Little' C major is an odd work with its *Presto Scherzo* – reminiscent perhaps of that in Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 – and the seemingly easy-going finale, *Allegro moderato*, punctuated with sudden quicker militaristic sections. Like the five *Rosamunde* entr'actes and ballet movements, it's all beautifully balanced by BIS in the Örebro concert-hall. **CB**

Sound Quality: 85%



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1879–1961

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(A Hero's Life)  
RICHARD STRAUSS

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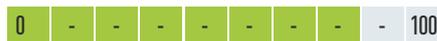
### R STRAUSS

Ein Heldenleben  
RPO/Sir Thomas Beecham

HI-Q HIQLP020

Beecham enjoyed a cordial relationship with Strauss although he recorded few of the orchestral scores – Tortelier's first *Don Quixote* a notable exception, while he also did *Ein Heldenleben* in 1947 [Testament SBT 1147]. Issued as a 'memorial edition', this 1958 Kingsway Hall re-recording (with leader Steven Stryk) was produced by Victor Olof, whose lengthy descriptive note is on the sleeve. EMI's last SXLP transfer (matrices -8/-7) sounded rather strained but here the quality is cleaner, smoother, albeit at the expense of depth-focus. Overall timing 43m 07s – Strauss's own (1941) was 39m 28s, Karajan's (1959) 45m 39s! **CB**

Sound Quality: 75%



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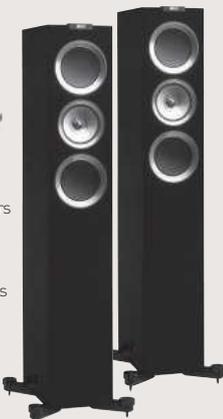
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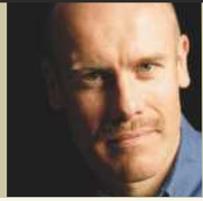
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# SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION



## Paul Miller Editor

Technician and writer on all things audio for some 30 years, Paul Miller took over the editor's chair in 2006. He invented the QC Suite, used across the audio industry

# A rare case of European unity

The world's largest independent Awards association takes some organising, but every year its strength in depth ensures the best kit is recognised says **Paul Miller**, EISA's Audio Panel Manager

Switch on the TV or open a newspaper and it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that Europe is coming apart at the seams. There's certainly no place for politics in *HFN* but with Europe re-emerging as a political battleground in the UK, I thought it important to draw a distinction between the opportunistic nihilism at Westminster and the collegiate cooperation that exists within our own European affiliation that is EISA.

The 'European Imaging and Sound Association' is a slightly clunky name for what is a surprisingly elegant organisation. It sprang into being over 30 years ago when a small group of photographic magazines clubbed together to deliver an Award for the year's best camera. Not only did this single Award evolve and expand to include cameras, lenses and now digital media, but specialist audio and video magazines joined to add the best in sound to the best in vision. *Hi-Fi News* was inducted in 2002 and yours truly was elected as one of the five current Panel Managers (Audio and Home Theatre) in 2012.

### STRENGTH IN DEPTH

Now the world's largest and most comprehensive Awards organisation, EISA currently combines the talents of some 50 different magazines from as far west as the UK, through the European continent and Scandinavian countries to the vastness of Russia and its one-time republics in the east. The Association currently comprises five broad judging Panels, covering audio and home theatre, video, photography, in-car and mobile electronics, with one magazine from each of the 19 member countries invited to participate per Panel.



ABOVE: EISA members and worthy winners assemble for the Awards Gala in Berlin

'Europe's audio community is strengthened by its shared passion'

*Hi-Fi News* is proud to represent the Audio and Home Theatre Panel for the UK alongside our sister title *Home Cinema Choice* on the Video Panel and *Amateur Photographer* on the Photo Panel. Some audiophiles are likely to be familiar with the best, test-based magazines that are our fellow members.

These include *Stereo* from Germany, *Audio* from Poland, *Stereo Prestige* from France, *Hifimailma* from Finland and *Audio Review* from Italy, to name but a few.

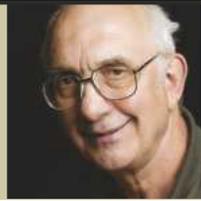
### AUDIO COMMUNITY

There's no escaping the strife currently ravaging the southern European economies and yet, surprisingly perhaps, one of EISA's most stalwart members is *Sound Vision (Hxos Eikova)* from Greece while a new high-end audio magazine from Spain, *AV Premium*, was inducted into the Association at this year's GM, alongside *Watt* from Norway. All these magazines, and more, will be available for visitors to The Hi-Fi Show to browse inbetween presentations of the very best high-end gear [see p19 for details].

Our relationship with many of these magazines runs deep, driven by our shared passion for the best in hi-fi. For example, our Show Blog from Moscow last month was filed by Mikhail Borzenkov, the Editor of Russia's *Stereo & Video* while July's report from Stockholm was penned by our colleague Jonas Bryngelsson from Sweden's *Hifi & Musik*. Similarly, it's not unusual to see *Hi-Fi News*' lab reports translated to accompany EISA-members' reviews of high-end audio equipment.

Stereotypical notions of a German, French, Italian, etc, 'sound' dividing our hobby are apocryphal. In reality, our fellow enthusiasts may be separated by language but they are having exactly the same conversations about vinyl versus hi-res digital, and solid-state versus tubes as we are in the UK.

The fact we are one audio community, joined by our shared passion for music and great hi-fi, is illustrated monthly in *Hi-Fi News*. This issue we've equipment from as far afield as Canada, Estonia, Denmark, Holland and Scotland. Bearing in mind that many overseas products receive their world launch in *HFN*, if you're a regular, then you're always at the footlights of hi-fi's world stage. ☺



## Barry Fox Technology journalist

Barry Fox trained in electronics with the RAF and worked as a patent agent, but he gave that up to enter journalism. He is one of the world's top technology writers

# Singing the Blues

From the early days of Blu-ray, the hi-fi world saw the chance of using BD's huge capacity for audio only, but SACD and DVD-Audio flopped. Will it be third time lucky, wonders **Barry Fox**

Universal is pitching audio-only BD under the Pure Audio label. The 'new ultra high quality audio for Blu-ray format' has been on test market sale in France through high street retailer Fnac since June. Sales and turnover are already outstripping those of SACD, says Olivier Robert Murphy, Global Head of New Business at Universal Music Group.

Pure Audio discs go on sale in the UK, Germany, Japan and the USA this autumn. The new format has one big thing going for it. It's not a new format. The discs are standard Blu-rays that play on any BD player or PS3 console. The big question now is, will the music industry manage to screw it up?

### OFFICIAL LAUNCH

Pure Audio was officially launched at Dolby's HQ in London, at a gathering of music and audio industry executives. Said Olivier Robert Murphy, who is Chairman of the newly formed High Fidelity Pure Audio Industry Group:

'You wouldn't drink champagne from a mug, run a Ferrari on diesel or watch HD movies on a black and white TV. Why settle for poor quality audio?'

There are said to be 36 titles in the first wave, and Murphy promises 150 from UMG 'by the end of the year'. He expects a total of 300 as other record companies join in, claiming 'interest from Sony and Warner' with David Bowie's latest album and a Led Zeppelin reissue slated for Japan.

'The more voices we have together, the louder we can speak,' said Jim Bottoms, previously with analysts Futuresource and now organising co-operation between MESA Europe (Media and Entertainment Services Alliance),

the Blu-ray Disc Association and the High Fidelity Pure Audio Industry Group. Members will pay £5000 a year and meet monthly in Paris, London and Berlin.

'We need to get the message out,' he said. 'If the consumer doesn't know about Pure Audio, they won't buy it'.

However, because Dolby's room was small, only two members of the audio press were present; and apparently no music press. So very little has been written about the launch. This may prove to be a good thing, because the Pure Audio Group needs to sort some important issues before too many discs escape.

Pure Audio BDs, says PAG, are mastered in stereo or surround (depending on the source master) with a minimum quality of 24-bit/96kHz. They are also encoded in three lossless formats – uncompressed PCM, DTS HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD. But there are inconsistencies between discs already available.

Although all are identically labelled 'High Fidelity Pure Audio', only two (Carlos Kleiber's Beethoven Symphonies and Stevie

Wonder's *Songs In The Key Of Life*) have all three coding options. The Limited Edition version of *Les Miserables* produced by UMG for B&O has only PCM and DTS, and the Demonstration

sampler given away at the launch uses only PCM and Dolby TrueHD.

The discs are audio-only but need a screen to navigate. They don't allow direct track access by number entered on a BD remote control. Track selection and audio format selection vary inconsistently between Left/Right and Up/Down cursor control menus. This matters because hi-fi purists hate screens and the sight-impaired and automobile drivers cannot use them.

MSM Studios in Munich has developed an alternative mastering system which lets



ABOVE (l-r): Laurent Villaume, Olivier Robert Murphy, Jonathan Jowitt and Jim Bottoms

a BD player remote control mimic a CD or TV remote, with direct entry of track numbers by numerical keys and codec selection by colour keys.

'We started out doing it the way UMG is doing it,' MSM MD Stefan Bock told me, 'but we gave up after a month and developed our own system. We hope the industry adopts it.'

We went all through this with DVD-Audio, I reminded the Pure Audio Group.

'Absolutely agree,' said Jim Bottoms. 'The navigation issue is one of our top priorities and we are getting a number of compatibility tests run in addition to awaiting input from a number of industry participants.' Said Richard O'Brien, UMG's spokesman: 'Pure Audio is a new product and so we are still fine-tuning issues like navigation functionality as part of the normal development process.'

### NERD APPEAL

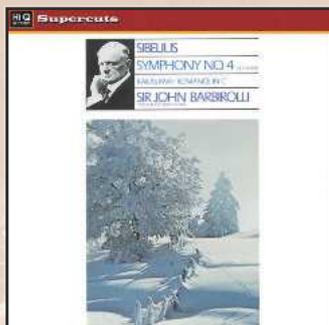
Everything points to the fact that UMG did not talk to the hi-fi industry ahead of mastering the first wave of discs. Didn't Dolby Labs, which is clearly heavily involved, flag the navigation issue? The record companies can usually and justifiably say 'Oh it's just hi-fi nerds nit-picking and niggling' when the audio press complains about technical issues. But Pure Audio needs to appeal to the hi-fi nerds out there. ☹

'The big question is, will the music industry manage to screw it up?'

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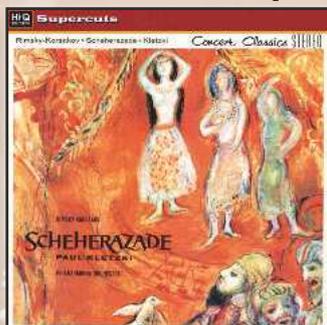
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## Barry Willis

Journalist for top American audio-video publications

While his main interest is high-end audio, Barry Willis also writes about the culinary industry, visual art and theatre for a huge variety of US newspapers and magazines

# Timelessly tubular

Early '70s band The Tubes were the first act to bring big-budget theatre to the live rock arena.

**Barry Willis** reckons it was a time when creativity could flourish without concerns over the cost

San Francisco has launched a daunting number of truly gifted and astoundingly original musical acts – none more original or unique than shock-rock troupe The Tubes, who emerged seemingly from nowhere in the early 1970s to take the Bay Area club scene by storm.

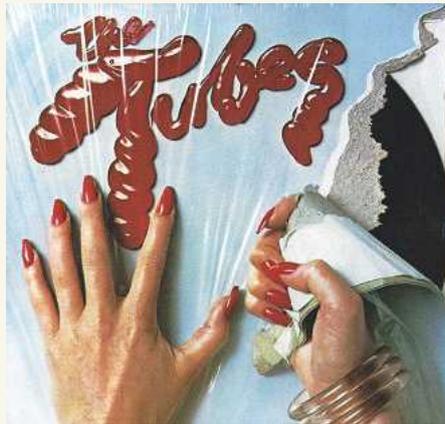
Country rock was then in its ascendancy. It was a time when bedraggled and conversationally impaired musicians staggered onstage to spend 20 minutes tuning their instruments in a stupor, then drifted into protracted aimless improvisations that bathed audiences in warm hazy eddies without a drop of substance.

### WHIP-SMART

Into this enervating void burst The Tubes. Transplants from the desert city of Phoenix, Arizona, The Tubes were everything that other acts were not – sarcastic, whip-smart, incisive, dynamic, hilarious. Ace musicians all, The Tubes poked good-natured fun at every conceivable musical genre and pop trend, simultaneously celebrating and satirising every aspect of crass commercial culture.

Long before Pink Floyd imagined *The Wall* or Madonna repurposed

the corset as a symbol of female empowerment, long before Pink and Lady Gaga were even gleams in their daddies' eyes, The Tubes ushered in a revolutionary theatricality never before seen in any rock arena. They dazzled with lavish, aggressive productions festooned with dancers and acrobats, ridiculously oversized props, film and video projections, and more throwaway bits of musical, visual, and topical humour than anyone could hope to follow.



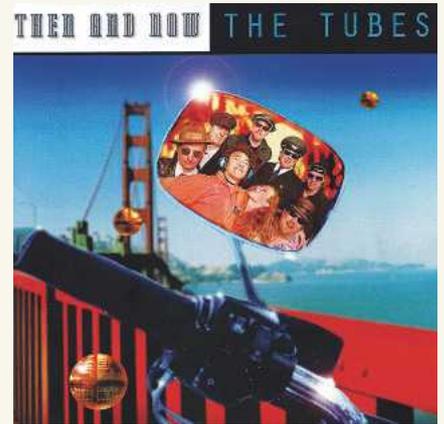
ABOVE: The Tubes' eponymously titled debut LP from 1974 (left) and *Then And Now* from 2004

They went where no-one had gone before. Guided by the band's synth wizard Michael Cotton and choreographer Kenny Ortega (who later worked with Cher and Michael Jackson), and driven by frontman Fee Waybill, who combined the athletic prowess of a professional stuntman with the charismatic conviction of a TV evangelist, they made possible the rock spectacles that are commonplace today.

'The Tubes made possible the rock spectacles that are commonplace today'

Even their earliest small-club shows were rehearsed to the point of perfection, but never to the point of fatigue. Their productions were like big-budget Broadway musicals, and almost as expensive to produce, at a time when the typical concert ticket cost the equivalent of a modest hourly wage – unlike today, when music fans toil the better part of a week to afford a ticket to anything. Tubes shows were art for art's sake, costs be damned.

Music was the foundation and backbone of their gigs but was only a fraction of the totality, a fact that baffled mainstream audiences and caused recurring problems for record label marketing executives.



Outside of a few key cities – San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, London – audiences couldn't begin to grasp what they saw onstage. Records contained the musical essence of their live shows, but for the first decade of the band's existence – its most fecund – there was no popular video format for fans to enjoy at home. The Tubes were excruciatingly ahead of their time.

### FINANCIAL PRESSURES

The cutting edge of art had a way of lacerating itself, too. Financial pressures forced reductions in the scale of Tubes productions, and other problems including inevitable personnel conflicts put an end to the spectacles.

Today the band continue to tour, vibrant as ever, if a bit thicker about the waists, playing several shows per month throughout the States. Their website, which can be found at [www.thetubes.com](http://www.thetubes.com), isn't as replete as it might be. A fire years ago in their rehearsal space destroyed much of their archives, said former Tubes dancer Cindi Garvie in a chance encounter in a theatre lobby.

The 'foolproof plan and airtight alibi' promised in the song 'What Do You Want From Life?' have yet to be revealed, but the essentials are all there. ☺



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## Jim Lesurf Science Journalist

Jim Lesurf has spent a lifetime in audio, both as an engineer at UK hi-fi company Armstrong and reader in Physics and Electronics at St Andrew's University

# The music bug...

The Preener, the Parastat, the Humid Mop... all were devices from audio pioneer Cecil E Watts that promised to help keep your vinyl clean. **Jim Lesurf** still uses one, but wonders if he's now alone...

Since the 1960s I've been playing my vinyl discs – 45s, EPs and LPs – with a Dust Bug attached to the plinth of my turntable. Its purpose is to sweep away any dust or fluff that might fall onto the disc as it is being enjoyed. To my mind the Dust Bug is part of the furniture associated with vinyl replay and one that I take for granted. But am I out of step, for it suddenly occurred to me that no-one appears to talk of the humble Dust Bug these days? Is it that people simply don't use one, or don't talk of it because they do not even know what it's for?

The device comprises a felt pad in the form of a roller and a tiny brush. These sit on the surface of the disc being played, sweeping up unwanted debris before it can reach the stylus. The Bug does have its drawbacks, however. The obvious one is that the bristles tend to be vibrated by the grooves and the sound this makes can be heard if you sit close to the turntable. And under some conditions a Dust Bug can add static to the disc rather than help it discharge.

### BRISTLE STOP

The decision as to whether or not to employ the Bug may depend on the kind of music being played. Recordings that are fairly loud give a higher amount of bristle noise, but this may not be so noticeable due to the sheer volume of the music. With music having long quiet passages the bristle noise is likely to be low, but you'll know it when you hear it!



ABOVE: The Bug on the author's turntable



ABOVE: Side view of the Dust Bug at work – see [www.smartdevicesinc.com/Watts.pdf](http://www.smartdevicesinc.com/Watts.pdf) for more

Overall I prefer to use a Dust Bug. That said, I do tend to use it with the brush removed. Most of my discs are sufficiently clean that there is no need for it. And using the felt pad roller without the brush reduces 'needle talk' noise dramatically.

The original, and in my view the best, Dust Bug was the design developed and sold by C E Watts, who was a pioneer in the audio world. I know that other brands were sold. But am I the only one who still considers them an indispensable tool?

While confessing to such personal indulgences – perhaps strange to modern ears – I should perhaps also confess that I keep a small bottle of alcohol near my turntable. No, not a single malt; a selection of those are to be found in another room. I keep some pure alcohol and a small brush which I use to clean the stylus of my Shure V15s cartridge occasionally.

I know that some people believe alcohol to be the devil when it comes to stylus cleaning. There may be a worry that it can dissolve any 'glue' used to fix the diamond tip to the cantilever. But I've never had any problems in this respect after decades

of using alcohol to maintain the V15. I found by experience that it is fine used with these designs, many years before someone whispered to me that alcohol might cause problems. I can't vouch for other makes of cartridge though, so check with the manufacturer to be safe.

### DUST TOO SMALL

However, as with the Dust Bug, I'm now wondering if I am also in a minority when it comes to cleaning styluses this way. Watts said he developed the Dust Bug as a result of examining LPs under a microscope. He noticed that photos taken using one revealed dust

too small to be seen with the naked eye. Keen on achieving the best possible replay quality from vinyl he decided something should be done, despite the fact that in his day LPs were mainly mono and most styluses would 'plough the road' clear of dust – and sometimes even of music!

So, what do others do? Are you bugging your LPs, or dabbling with the demon drink? Or maybe both? ☺

'The original and best Dust Bug was developed and sold by C E Watts'

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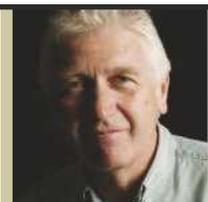
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## Steve Harris Contributing Editor

Steve Harris edited *Hi-Fi News* between 1986 and 2005. He loves jazz, blues music, vinyl and vintage hi-fi and anything that makes good music come to life

# Surprise in store

Among cushions, clothing and art prints featuring images of famous musicians can be found some of the finest hi-fi components available. **Steve Harris** tastes a new form of audio retailing

In a world where even the street ad hoardings are animated, do we still need still pictures? YouTube gives us endless music-video footage to explore, from old favourites to acts you never dreamed had been captured on film. I thought about this as I wandered home after a launch event at the Audio Lounge, the new high-end retailer in London's Wigmore Street, W1 [see 'Off the Leash', p154].

There as a special guest to open the store was none other than Guy Barker, the UK's most celebrated jazz trumpeter, composer and bandleader. But the party centred on the work of David Redfern, the pre-eminent music photographer.

### FINE ART

Whenever you see a mood-catching image of a jazz or rock musician, it's almost odds-on that you're looking at his work. Like some of the British stars he'd photographed in the 1960s, Redfern conquered America. In 1980 he was Sinatra's official tour photographer and, when the US Post Office issued stamps showing jazz musicians in 1995, three of the ten images were Redfern's.

In 2008, Redfern sold his vast picture library to Getty Images, but retained his favourite 1000 images, to market as fine art prints and for his partner Suzy Reed to use in her fashion textile business. Now, at the Audio Lounge, you can buy Redfern prints and colourful Suzy Reed



**ABOVE (l-r): MD Ruth Phipers, photographer David Redfern and jazz trumpeter Guy Barker**

**RIGHT: The listening room at the Audio Lounge with Giya G3 speakers in front of a Clearaudio Ovation turntable plus racked Audio Research and Siltech electronics. See [www.audiolounge.co.uk](http://www.audiolounge.co.uk) for more**



cushions that portray Miles Davis, John Lee Hooker and many others.

Audio Lounge is backed by Ajay Shirke, a lifelong enthusiast, whose involvement in audio began at home in Pune, India, when he started building Cadence electrostatic speakers and tube amps back in 1995. In the 2000s, Ajay acquired majority holdings in Spendor and Siltech/Crystal to form an international audio group.

He's partnered now by Ruth Phipers, Audio Lounge's managing director, who has worked in design, technology and brand communications and is a feng shui consultant. And, she says, 'By catering to the needs of a less technical audio purchaser who does not feel inclined to read electronics

reviews, Audio Lounge brings a refreshing solution to an industry which lost its way within the retail environment years ago.'

Audio Lounge has indeed created a welcoming, comfortable space. Along with Spendor, Siltech and Crystal, the brands stocked are Audio Research, Bel Canto, Clearaudio, Dan D'Agostino, Devialet, Nagra, Pathos, Sennheiser, Stax, Unison Research, Vivid and Wilson Benesch.

In the excellent listening room downstairs, I was treated to a fine-sounding vinyl system of Clearaudio Ovation front-end, Unison Research S9 amp and Spendor SP100R2 speakers. I was also impressed by the new Vivid Giya G3 speakers, vastly more expensive than the Spendors of course.

### SWEPT AWAY

Back upstairs there were the big Redfern prints priced at £1500 each, while Suzy

Reed was joyfully modelling a dress printed with the classic Redfern shot of Jimi Hendrix at Albert Hall in 1969.

It's impossible not to be swept away by the sheer

"Audio Lounge is a refreshing solution to an industry which lost its way years ago"

scope of David Redfern's work over the decades, awesome images that join the dots of musical history. But when I got home, I'm afraid I found myself once again frittering away time with YouTube. No still image, however exquisite, could beat a grainy movie of Hendrix playing 'Johnny B Goode'. And after that refreshment I just turned off the computer and put on some records. ☺

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## YOUR VIEWS

# Sound Off!

Correspondents express their own opinions, not those of *Hi-Fi News*. We reserve the right to edit letters for publication. Correspondents using e-mail are asked to give their full postal address (which won't be published). Letters seeking advice will be answered in print on our Sound Off pages, but due to time constraints we regret we're unable to answer questions on buying items of hi-fi or any other hi-fi queries by telephone, post or via e-mail.

## PLAYING DOWNLOADS WHICH METHOD WILL GIVE THE BEST SOUND?

I was wondering if you had any advice for ways in which to store music downloaded from the internet. I have read that it's better to transfer files to high-speed USB sticks and then connect these to ancilliary hardware using regular speed connections as this results in the lowest levels of jitter. Or are external hard disk drives with eSata connections, the way to go?

In short, is there an ultimate way to store and play downloads? I am sure there are many other readers who would find the definitive answer (if there is one) useful.

*Martin Swain, via email*

Keith Howard replies: Any USB flash drive capable of a sustained read speed of 10Mbits per second (1.3MB per second) should be able to deliver 24-bit/192kHz stereo (data rate 9.216Mbits/s) without problem. Fast flash drives capable of, say, 15MB/s are clearly overkill on this basis but given that so many unexpected factors make a difference to the sound quality of computer audio, they may still pay dividends – it's not something I have experimented with.

My experience of comparing replay of the same music files from flash drive or HDD is that the USB source

is typically superior but clearly it's impractical to keep an entire record collection on flash drives. I use a large (32GB) flash drive and copy files over from HDD prior to playing but I appreciate that not everyone can be bothered with such faff.

Other storage options such as an internal solid state drive (SSD) or network attached storage (NAS) I've not played with either but I can quite believe, as reputable sources have told me, that they not only give different results but those results depend on the exact device used.

In other words, you shouldn't assume that a NAS from manufacturer A will sound the same as a similarly specified device from manufacturer B. At least experimenting with different USB flash drives is quite cheap, whereas SSDs and NAS drives are not.

Paul Miller replies: Fortunately the read time of most USB flash drives is quicker than their write time, the fastest USB 2.0 devices offering a 30MB/s transfer – an order of magnitude faster than the USB 1.1 devices discussed by Keith in his opening sentence. USB 2.0 flash drives do not currently offer the full 60MB/s data rate.

For higher storage volumes use a plug-in USB stick with an SD card interface or, preferably, use an SSD drive. Many of the latter now come with SATA-to-USB kits (the Samsung SSD 840 Pro is my choice). Yes, I have measured differences in performance between the myriad USB sticks that clutter the corners of my lab bench and I'll be discussing this in a future Opinion page. You can do a lot to help yourself, however, by simple housekeeping. Don't just overwrite old files with new hi-res media. Instead make sure you re-format the stick before adding new content. It takes seconds and may improve sound quality.



**ABOVE:** Do 'high speed' USB sticks like the LaCie Whizkey mean less jitter?

Send in your views to:  
Sound Off, Hi-Fi News, AVTech Media Ltd,  
PO Box 718, Orpington, BR6 1AP or  
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please use 'Sound Off' in your subject field

## A more Faithfull mix of Marianne

ORIGINAL RECORDING RELEASED THIS YEAR ON BLUE VINYL

It was good to see the Back To Black reissue of Marianne Faithfull's *Broken English* album feature in both the Vinyl Release and Vinyl Frontier pages of the August issue. The review and feature painted an explicit picture of the circumstances surrounding the creation of what is, at times, a very explicit album in itself.

However, there is also an alternative vinyl edition, which was released for Record Store Day in April. Again this is a Back To Black edition, or in this case one that perhaps might better be described as a 'Back To Blue' release as it's a fine-sounding pressing on blue vinyl. It comes in a different colour sleeve to the LP released



**ABOVE:** The limited edition Record Store Day release of *Broken English* on blue vinyl costs £21.99 from Universal

on Island Records back in 1979 and features an alternative, less '80s-sounding mix of the set, with some tracks running longer.

This mix, which is the original one and until recently was believed to be lost, is said to be preferred by Marianne Faithfull. It can still be purchased from Universal's website at <http://store.universal-music.co.uk>.

By the way, the recent Deluxe CD edition of the album, also on Universal, contains both original and new mixes.

*Ross Hunter, via email*

Chris Heard replies: Ross makes a good point about the different mixes of this fantastic LP, which Universal issued in very limited numbers for Record Store Day this year, ahead of the standard black vinyl release a couple of weeks later. It must have made sense to manufacture these relatively slight variations while the presses were running!

## Lanes On Your Entertainment Superhighway

# Headphones old and new

PLEASE FOR A REGULAR HEADPHONE SECTION AND FOR VINTAGE MODELS TO BE REVISITED

It is always a pleasure to read Keith Howard's headphone reviews, not only for their inherent interest and quality but also because they indicate that *Hi-Fi News* is beginning to take the biggest growth area in hi-fi seriously. However, his recent review of the Beyerdynamic T1 is rather late at the table. This model first appeared more than three years ago and has, in my view, been overtaken by a number of high-end 'phones including models by HiFiMAN, Ultrason and Fostex.

Personally I have always felt the Sennheiser HD800 to have more life than the T1 while the HiFiMAN HE-6 has a more natural sound in the treble. More remarkable still is the Ultrason Edition 8, which reveals detail other 'phones miss without the edginess of the equally revealing Grados. Of course, this is all very subjective as are all headphone reviews, including Keith's.

However, it would be great if Keith could produce another comparative review of headphones costing around £1000 and include the Ultrasones, Sennheisers and T1s, while they are still fresh in his auditory memory.

Could *HFN* not have a regular headphone section? If you include in-ear monitors and portable amps/DACs there's certainly enough gear out there to keep it going.

*Roger Ellis, via email*

Interest in headphones certainly appears to have grown over the past couple of years though prices seem to be rising out of all proportion. My particular interest is in electrostatic/electret models, which historically



ABOVE: The Ultrason Edition 8, reader Roger Ellis's headphone recommendation

have been more costly than dynamic models and about which there seems to be very little written.

I listen daily to one of two 'vintage' electrostatics: the Stax SR5 Gold earspeaker with SRD7/SB energiser, and my Audio-Technica ATH 70 electret headphones. The latter I bought new while the Stax were a recent eBay purchase, replacing an even older SR5/SRD6SB set-up that had become unreliable.

I would be interested to know what other electrostatics are out there, and how they measure up to other dynamic types. I am familiar with the vintage Jecklin Float and have seen some AKG K340s, but I've seen new electrostatics advertised like the King Sound, and there are any number of adapters/energisers for Stax earspeakers. I would have thought this was a subject of interest to audiophiles old and new and a rich vein to be tapped for a piece in *HFN*.

*Andy Aldridge, via email*

Keith Howard replies: In recent years I don't think we've been anything but serious about reviewing headphones but, yes, headphone and related reviews are now a regular rather than an occasional element of *HFN*'s content. This reflects both burgeoning headphone sales and increased activity from manufacturers, and in some instances will involve catching up with models that slipped through the net when introduced.

Personally, I'd relish the opportunity to catch up with some classic headphones in the Vintage Review pages, mostly because I didn't hear them when they were current. As ever with the vintage items we revisit, though, the challenge lies in sourcing examples that are still representative of their youth.

Paul Miller replies: You'll all be pleased to learn that my plan to include at least one headphone review in every issue of *Hi-Fi News* started a few months back! Next month we will feature the Stax SRS-4170 Signature System – an exciting prospect, I'm sure you'll agree. Inevitably we'll be looking at some mature models still on the market (like the T1s), but these will still be the first *complete* reviews, combining Keith's listening and lab expertise.



RJ/E Forest



RJ/E Cinnamon



RJ/E Vodka



RJ/E Diamond



Cat 600 Pearl



Cat 700 Pearl



Cat 700 Forest



Cat 700 Carbon

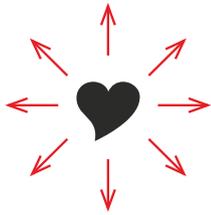
Since its origins in the early 1980's, Ethernet, and the Local Area Network (LAN) systems it enables, has become the copper plumbing of the digital age. Originally deployed only over coaxial cable, the Ethernet protocols (IEEE 802.3) now also apply to fibre-optic and "Category" (Cat 5, 5e, 6, 6e, 7) cables. These 8-conductor (4 twisted pairs) Cat cables are the 8 lanes which stream or transport your digital entertainment to equipment a foot away or several rooms away.

AudioQuest refers to its pre-terminated leading-edge Cat 7 cables as the RJ/E Series ... RJ for the RJ45 connector standard to the application, and E for Ethernet. For AudioQuest, the highest Cat 7 standard (with all 4 pairs using correctly differentiated twist rates and individually shielded) is only the solid foundation to which AQ then adds better materials and unique-to-AQ additional technologies.

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## The lack of classical hi-res

ARE THE MAJOR COMPANIES STILL INDIFFERENT TO HIGH-RESOLUTION FORMATS?

I am one of those strange animals who listens solely to classical music. As such, please read the following in the knowledge that it comes from someone totally ignorant of rock, heavy metal and reggae.

Having been given much encouragement by *Hi-Fi News* (which I have been taking as compulsory reading for at least 50 years; John Crabbe and his underfloor horns, *etc!*), I have taken to modern technology in the form of downloading music and playing it via a memory stick connected to my beautiful Naim SuperUniti. Even though my hearing suffers due to old age, I can tell the significant difference between the sounds of hi-res downloads and CDs, even though the latter sound hugely improved from when they were played on my pre-Naim kit.

But there is a flaw: much of the back catalogue of the big companies is not available digitally, least of all in hi-res form. Linn does a very good job indeed, but mostly with recordings from smaller companies. But where is the immense EMI catalogue? Linn has a few Decca items, which is a very good place to start, but where are RCA, Deutsche Grammophon and the other labels?

At one point the late Passionato did have some EMI recordings (Haydn symphonies conducted by Jeffrey Tate, for example) but they were still in 16-bit format. I read that Sony has now teamed up with Warner Classics. Does this mean that soon we will be

getting classical music in top quality for downloading? The company has not answered my query on this point. Surely it won't be restricting itself to MP3, will it? And if Apple is now introducing ALAC freely, will that be supported by a hi-res store?

Also, what about the reported flight from physical media? Personally I enjoy looking at my shelf and deciding which discs to play that night, but it seems others do not, if the reports are true. Yet buying discs has the great advantage in that they are packaged neatly and offer much more 'meta data' for easy reading while the music is playing. We classical people often find that useful and informative, adding to the pleasure of listening.

Cannot the industry get together, as they did for CDs all those years ago, and agree to make those hi-res downloads available on discs? I am sure there is a strong demand out there. One or two admirable small companies are doing just that, but it needs the big ones to come on board.

*James Bruxner, via email*

Christopher Breunig replies: As you say, and as I found when researching for a couple of Investigation pieces [see *HFN* Dec '11/Mar '13], companies like EMI and Sony seem indifferent to higher-resolution formats – more EMI SACDs have appeared in Japan recently, for instance, whereas we only had one initial small batch. DG recordings at 24/96 are gradually appearing at *highresaudio.com* and Linn with other Universal classical transfers – although we don't see 'midprice' counterparts to their CDs and rarely are there accompanying booklets. (At the very least it's nice to know who produced the recordings, not to mention where and when.)

Your last comment chimes with something former *HFN* colleague Nalen Anthoni is always telling me: 'HMV wouldn't have gone bust if they'd had a high-resolution disc transfer service'. Special back-catalogue orders would, of course, have needed support from the companies! First Hand Records is one label intermittently digging fruitfully into the past: Boult, Harry Blech, Cherkassky, Thomas Schippers, *et al*, but these are only CD transfers.

## WIRELESS FRONTIER?



Not only are wires still very much the lowest-distortion highest-performance way to send both analog and digital audio information, but when it comes to sending power, "wireless" is just a nifty science project, not part of a home entertainment rig.

The challenge of not adding distortion as AC power goes from the wall to the electronics, and the challenge of not adding distortion as audio power is sent to a loudspeaker, are almost the same. The amount of energy transferred through these cables, and the size of the associated magnetic fields, puts them in a different class from all other audio and video cables.

Speaker cables need to maintain perfect integrity across the audio band and then some, while AC cables only have to try to be perfect in a narrower band. AC cable design is therefore a subset of speaker cable design because AC cables are subject to almost all the same distortion mechanisms, and benefit from almost all the same damage minimizing techniques.

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ABOVE: *HFN* investigates hi-res classical downloads in the Dec '11/Mar '13 issues

## Recording radio the easier way...

READERS SHARE TIPS AND TRICKS ON HOW THEY USE HARD-DISK VIDEO RECORDERS AND FREEVIEW TUNERS

With reference to the problems Barry Fox described in the August issue with respect to recording radio programmes, the method I've used over the years has changed as technology has evolved. To my mind, recording onto DAT tape was probably the best method, but I've now abandoned this as there is now no support for consumer hardware.

These days the simplest method, and the one that gives the highest quality, is to use one or more Freeview tuners hooked up to a hard-disk video recorder that can burn recordings to DVD-RW discs. To obtain a CD version of the programme I use Roxio Toast for Mac (there is a PC equivalent). Toast has a conversion feature that allows the sound element of the files on the DVD-RW disc to be converted to AIFF form. These files can then be dropped into a CD burning window to create a CD-R.

I've now actually stopped creating CD-Rs. Instead, if I wish to keep the material, I store the files as ALAC in my iTunes library on hard disk after editing out applause, coughs and other distractions. For this I use Peak Pro software from BIAS.

*David Lovell, via email*

While I agree with Barry Fox that in the UK we do have some very good radio programmes that are worthy of recording, the process of using the Roberts Radio mentioned in his piece to record the DAB broadcast in MP2 and then use a PC with Nero to create a WAV

file is over-complicating matters and may not produce the best quality.

As a shift worker I find it necessary to time-shift a wide variety of radio programmes. In my case I use a Virgin Media Tivo Box (STB). Using the Electronic Programme Guide it's very easy to setup the STB either to record programmes as a 'one off' or a series link. This way you have bypassed the MP2 process, and I guess the quality is as good as the received sources. Perhaps Jim Lesurf can find out the data rates used for radio broadcasts on Virgin/Sky/Freeview and Freesat?

To replay the music through a hi-fi system you have the choice of analogue via phono/RCA, SCART or digital optical. I use the optical output, feeding it through an optical splitter into a Musical Fidelity V-DAC. I take the other output from the optical splitter into a CD recorder and burn a standard CD which I can then play on my daily commute to work by car. You can also do a degree of editing on the fly by pausing the CDR and using the STB remote to pause/fast forward to remove unwanted items.

*Alan Ralph, via email*

Barry Fox replies: Thanks to our readers for suggesting more ways of recording radio. I will certainly be trying the idea of splitting the optical output from a Sky, Freeview or Virgin box and sending it to a CD-R recorder. But it's crazy that we have to jump through these hoops to make a portable copy of a radio recording, eg, to play in a car.

Jim Lesurf replies: To answer Alan's question I took some measurements for our local Terrestrial TV transmissions and the data rates I extracted from the transmissions were as follows: BBC Radios 1, 2, 3, 4 = 200kbps; Radio 6 and 4 Extra = 167kbps; Radio Scotland and Asian Network = 135kbps; and the World Service = 100kbps.

Note these are the 'raw data packet' values so the actual audio content is typically about 5 to 10% smaller. So expect the '135' probably to correspond to an actual MPEG content rate of more like 128kbps.

If you think these rates are modest, note that on a commercial TV multiplex they tend to be lower. Some typical figures from my local TV broadcasts are: 4music, Magic, Kiss = 135kbps; Hits Radio, Kerrang!, Heat = 94kbps; Smooth Radio = 70 kbps. I'll leave you to guess the effect on (or lack of!) sound quality for those stations.

I also checked DAB and got 128kbps for Radios 1, 2, 4, Radio Scotland, and Classic FM. Meanwhile, Radio 3 was using 160kbps and Radio 4 Extra was 80kbps. Asian Network and the World Service came bottom in terms of data rates at just 64 kbps.

I gave up on DAB and FM some years ago, so ceased trying to record from either except for testing purposes. These days my serious radio listening is mainly via the iPlayer. For that I use an external solid-state recorder to grab the output digital stream. I do still use a DVD Video recorder but I also now use a computer USB dongle with software that enables me to record the 'raw' transport stream for radio and TV. This means I can capture the transmitted data with no added format-conversion stages.

I've written my own software to do this. It can be downloaded for free from my website at [www.audiomisc.co.uk/software/index.html](http://www.audiomisc.co.uk/software/index.html). However, I am happy enough writing simple computer programs and use Linux, which tends to make this easier because of the openly available software which I can freely modify. So I'm probably more of a computer geek than most audiophiles!

Like Barry Fox, I also think it crazy that the lack of convenient consumer kit makes good quality radio recording harder than it need be. You can do what is required using a computer. But to avoid hidden quality-sapping data processes, and to avoid costs, you end up having to fiddle about to set things up. Personally, I find that interesting in itself. But I know many people simply haven't the time or inclination!



ABOVE: Virgin Media Tivo, which allows radio to be sent to a CD recorder via its optical output

# Next time, MiND the DAC!

QUALITY OF PARTNERING DACS CRUCIAL IN GROUP TESTS OF NETWORK MEDIA PLAYERS

I read with interest the group test of network media players in the August 2013 issue, following the first in August 2012. All ten players had an associated DAC so the conclusions on performance, particularly their relative sound quality, are almost certainly dominated by the performance of these various DACs rather than the quality of conversion from Ethernet packets of music to S/PDIF digital output.

Among the players reviewed there was only one, the Simaudio Moon 180MiND, that provides this functionality alone. The comparative review of the Moon player focused on the partnering 100D DAC. A quick web search showed that the 180MiND streamer costs £949 of the £1500 quoted, so I'd guess it is a high quality unit. While there were no comments on the sound quality of the 180MiND streamer alone, the separate review of the Moon 380D and 330A in the same issue had a very favourable comment on the sound quality of the digital output from the 180MiND streamer when compared with that from USB.

For some time I've been searching for a device with the functionality of the Moon 180MiND streamer to feed S/PDIF digital to my Bel Canto DAC3 with VBS. One option would be to buy an inexpensive, fully-featured network player like the Pioneer N-30 and use its S/PDIF output. But I'd be surprised if better sound quality could not be achieved if more resources were expended on the Ethernet-to-S/PDIF function (for example, the Moon 180MiND streamer).

Can I suggest that when considering network media players in future you undertake a comparative

review of Ethernet-to-S/PDIF devices feeding the same high-quality DAC? In addition to the players you've tested, a quick survey shows that Naim and Linn also have products with this functionality. If you can do such a comparative review it would be important to include an assessment of the associated software (the player app). I suggest that as a performance baseline you include Apple TV and/or AirPort Express. While this hardware has its limitations the associated software (AirPlay, Remote app and iTunes) is very good, particularly for handling large libraries of music.

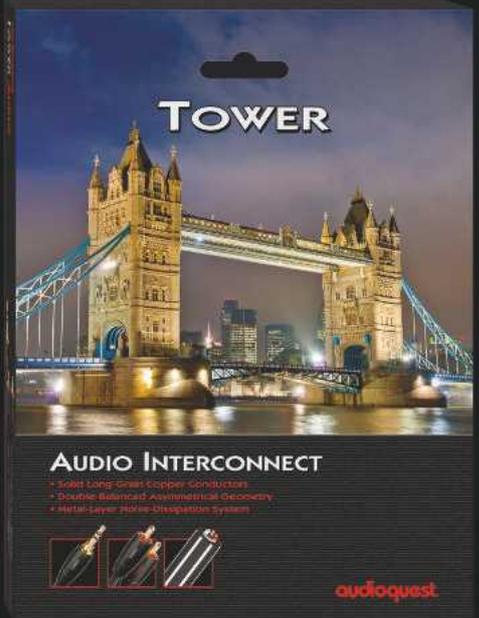
*David Lovell, via email*

Paul Miller replies: Thank you for your suggestions, David, although we should remember that when reviewing any integrated digital player (network/USB, CD or SACD player), the sound quality will inevitably be linked as much to the built-in DAC and analogue output stages as the digital front-end. Apart from the Simaudio Moon 180MiND and the Cyrus Stream X<sub>2</sub> [HFN May '13], all of the network players we've encountered have been fully integrated solutions – as are the Linn and Naim products you mention.

I was disappointed that the superb M1 CLiC network player/preamp from Musical Fidelity was never equipped with an S/PDIF or AES/EBU output because I suspect this may have made an excellent, low-jitter transport. The Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 is arguably a better option than the Pioneer N-30 as a digital transport but at least both of these allow you to access content over the network via the player's own display and IR remote, unlike the 180MiND which requires a third-party app device. As a transport, however, its performance is first-rate.



ABOVE: Simaudio's Moon 180MiND network player and 100D DAC from HFN Aug '13



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NEW SERIES

# Vintage turntables

Interest in classic kit from decades past is growing fast, but how do you secure the best buys? **Tim Jarman** kicks off a new series with a look at the used turntable market

Once a minority activity among audiophiles, the buying, collecting and appreciation of vintage hi-fi is now a major and growing part of the audio scene. One only needs to look at the queues of people at audio jumbles and the high prices sometimes paid for older equipment considered worthless not so long ago to see the evidence for this.

But purchasing older equipment is not as simple as buying a brand new system. Most equipment is traded between private individuals rather than through dealers meaning you have little protection should things go wrong or are not as they should be. The would-be buyer is advised to tread carefully, especially now that vintage kit is commanding larger sums of money.

## DECKS THAT IMPRESS

Turntables naturally spring to mind when you think vintage. During the 1990s when interest in vinyl replay waned, a used machine was often the only choice since there were so few turntables available new. This situation has now improved, yet despite the multitude of new models now on the market there is little in the way of choice should you want something other than a belt-drive deck having a rigid chassis and manual tonearm. You may also want to listen to a



**ABOVE:** Looking good and ready to run, this complete Garrard 401 set-up would make a top vintage buy

**RIGHT:** A Garrard 301, the predecessor to the 401. The internals of both are similar

**BELOW:** Sales literature for the Garrard 401 emphasising the refreshed styling and its pro capabilities

favourite old album using equipment from the time it was released, enjoy the best of 20th century design or simply finally take ownership of something that you lusted after when you were young (and penniless!).

All these desires are fuelling the vintage movement at present. To meet these needs, the ideal vintage buy must not only be a component that is complete and functional but one that is authentic too. This means it's vital to know its original specification if you want to be able to spot the best examples easily.

Take the Garrard 401 for example. This is a large motor unit aimed at professional users that supplanted the earlier (but technically very similar) 301 during

the mid-1960s. These are now a very popular model in vintage circles and availability is good. Yet finding a really fine sample isn't as easy as you'd think. The units were often console mounted, either in a broadcast studio or at home in a larger piece of furniture, so there is no standard plinth as such.

Similarly, although Garrard did produce the TPA 10 and TPA 12 arms to accompany these models, they were seldom specified once

The Garrard 401 offers superbly at high speed speeds (33, 45 and 78 rpm) in accordance with the highest technical specifications to ensure the most accurate reproduction of each and every record. It is designed for high fidelity reproduction.

Special for one of Britain's leading designers a precision engineering appearance in materials of choice with elegant style. The Garrard 401 is available in a distinctive, space saving console approximately 18" (45cm) deep, 14" (35cm) wide and 10" (25cm) high. The console is finished in a high quality dark wood. This is a cabinet finished in an elegant, modern style. The speed selector is a rotary control. The speed selector is a rotary control. The speed selector is a rotary control.

The high- and low-range (170 to 1500 and 200 to 2500) motor speed reduction ratios, arranged in a heavy motor housing to provide full magnetic protection, is located from the base plate in the motor unit. This provides an effective vibration-free drive to the motor at the end of the arm. The speed is maintained from a high level of torque which is also maintained.

A double pole switch is used for the power supply to the motor and a fully automatic stop and start mechanism.

Each unit is equipped with the most accurate and reliable components available to the Garrard design team and is completely self-contained.

Size: 13 1/2" (343mm) wide by 14 1/2" (371mm) high by 10" (254mm) deep. The motor unit is 17 1/2" (443mm) wide by 14 1/2" (371mm) high by 10" (254mm) deep. The motor unit is 17 1/2" (443mm) wide by 14 1/2" (371mm) high by 10" (254mm) deep.

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companies like SME began to make their presence felt in the aftermarket tonearm arena. Thus, the definitive specification for a complete 301 or a 401 system is difficult to establish.

One can be reasonably confident choosing one mounted in a period Howland West or SME system-plinth however, and one equipped with an appropriate SME arm is nothing to worry about either. Sadly, few come to market in this state, so before considering the niceties of sound quality do check that the plinth adequately protects the electrical connections to the motor and that both the deck and arm are suitably earthed with respect to electrical safety and signal integrity.

Luckily, the decks themselves are very durable and the few parts that do give trouble (control knobs on the 301, idler wheels on both models) are now available again as reproduction items.

Other problems are likely to be the result of little more than dried-up or hardened lubricants, which are a frequent cause of problems in turntables of all ages.

### CLASSIC LINN

Another turntable which can be found in a range of specifications is the Linn Sondek LP12, the classic super-deck of the LP's 'golden years'. The strengths of this model were, with hindsight, perhaps a little overplayed, but it is still a fine instrument and one that will complement a wide variety of vintage (and modern) systems.

When released in 1973, the Sondek was available with or without a plinth and with or without an arm, the supplied arm being

**ABOVE: A late model Linn Sondek LP12, for many still the turntable of choice of any era. To the right, assembly of the Valhalla variant (note the electronic motor control) takes place in the company's Glasgow factory in the 1980s**

**BELOW: An early suspended sub-chassis deck, the unpretentious Thorens TD 150 remains a bargain at current prices. They are simple and reliable**

either a Grace G-707 or SME 3009 as required. Almost immediately after release modifications from the factory came thick and fast, but by 1980 the classic combination of Sondek motor unit, Ittok arm and Asak cartridge was well established.

This is a nice specification to aim for if you can find an Ittok whose bearings still run smoothly and with minimal play (test the arm gently in your hands to assess this) as the design at this stage was still simple and durable.

The 'Nirvana' modifications of 1981 brought improved mechanical performance and some examples have been updated retrospectively. This is a worthwhile upgrade if you can confirm that it has been done properly on the deck you are looking to buy.

The greatest change to the basic LP12 formula was the introduction of electronic motor control, firstly

with the Valhalla in 1982 and then with the externally housed Lingo of 1990. Both variants offer improved performance, along with a convenient way to play 45rpm discs. But they also add considerable electronics to what was previously a fairly simple mechanical device.

### SPEED CHECK

When inspecting either version it is wise to use a strobe ring to ensure that both speeds are accurate and

that they do not drift excessively as the deck warms up. Linn is still very much in business, so support is available for LP12 owners –

at a price. Do avoid anything with non-factory modifications however, unless these are easily reversible.

Can't afford a Sondek? Never mind, a Thorens TD 150 is nearly as much fun in its own way and still very affordable. Some were even made by EMT in Germany – Kudos!

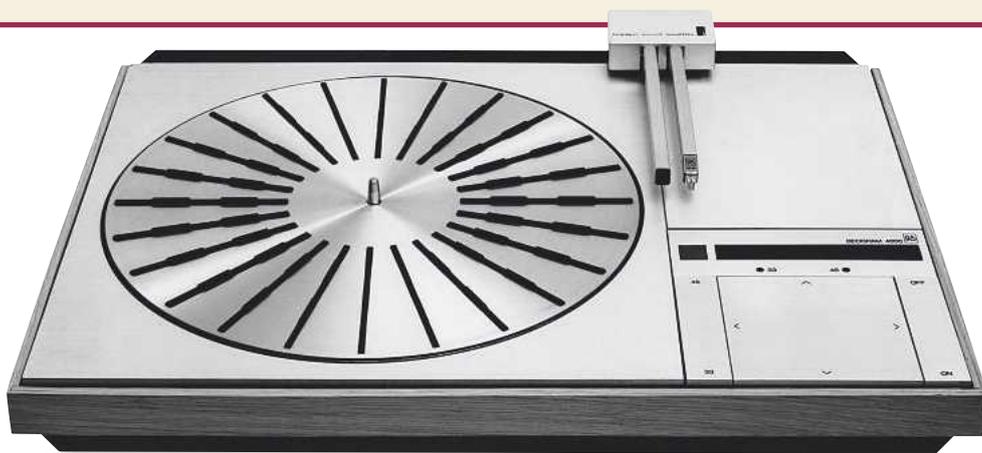
Although the majority of 'proper' hi-fi turntables are manually operated, a few designs attempted to combine high quality playback, sophisticated drive systems and the convenience of fully automatic operation. Perhaps the best known model in this genre is Bang & Olufsen's Beogram 4000, with its electronically controlled tangential tonearm and motor.

For a deck that appeared in 1972 the 4000 was a remarkable piece of work and one that introduced many new techniques, which weren't only used in turntables. For example, ↻

*'To spot the best buys it's vital to know original specifications'*



## BUYING VINTAGE



it was one of the first consumer products to use digital logic ICs. Nevertheless, the complexity of the Beogram 4000 is fearsome.

All manner of faults can occur and should, say, one of the many wiring connections between the plinth and the sprung sub-chassis break then tracking down the problem is not for the faint-hearted.

Equally, problems with the disc detector can allow the delicate integrated cartridge/stylus assembly to collide with the ribs of the platter if the machine is accidentally activated without a record in place or an attempt is made to play a 7in single.

### SLACK BELT

When inspecting one of these models it is wise to test the detector by starting the mechanism without a record on the platter while supporting the arm near its base with a finger, ready to catch it if it drops accidentally. Sometimes the cause of problems can be a slack belt, meaning that the platter takes too long to get up to speed, but often the reasons are more involved. A seized cueing mechanism can result in the solenoid coil burning out, so check this too.

Only B&O's own moving-iron cartridges (which suit most MM phono stages) can be used in any of its turntables, but luckily it is now possible to have them re-built to a very high standard.

Vintage Japanese equipment tends to be pleasingly reliable with none more so than Matsushita's Technics brand. Its SL-110 was

one of the first direct-drive decks to gain mass appeal, and represents an excellent buy, with little to worry about providing that both speed controls still work smoothly and have not developed 'dead spots'.

Technics did offer a variant fitted with its own EPA-110 arm, but in the UK it was more common to specify an SME 3009 and Shure V15

cartridge. This is a very desirable combination and well worth seeking out, although obviously it is necessary to inspect the arm

carefully for damage and wear. Packages such as this one were highly affordable not so very long ago, but values are now firming up.

If you would like to sample a decent direct-drive Technics deck at a more economical price then the SL-150 is an ideal choice. This model features a replaceable wooden arm board so many types can be made to fit. An SL-150 and a basic Rega arm

**ABOVE: B&O's Beogram 4000, the Danish deck that boasted a raft of innovations. Sleek styling hides electronics and mechanics of considerable complexity so restoration is not for the beginner. This is a style icon as well as a great performer**

**BELOW: Technics SL-110 (left) and SL-150 Mk2 (right) direct drives. Both turntables give excellent results when partnered with the right arms. Once derided, big Japanese direct drive decks of this era are now back in demand**

**'A turntable does not have to have been expensive to be covetable'**

### BEFORE YOU BUY...

When buying a vintage turntable always inspect it first-hand. Don't trust a seller's description over the telephone or by email, even if the seller provides pictures of the deck. After all, sending turntables through the post normally ends in tears due to their delicate nature, so you will need to travel to collect the deck in person anyway.

Make sure that a system is available for an audition. If not then take with you a small amplifier, a set of headphones, appropriate cables and, of course, a few records.

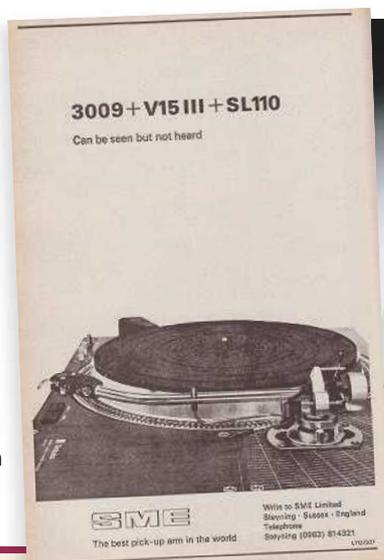
Check carefully that everything works as it should and that the turntable is also safe electrically.

is a very hard combination to beat in terms of sound per pound.

With both Technics models, bear in mind that the quality of the original components is very high, so resist the temptation to change handfuls of parts in an attempt to improve a deck's performance. If working correctly, Technics motors are best left alone.

### HANDLE WITH CARE

Even Japanese products sometimes go wrong, so don't buy with your eyes closed. Take as an example Sony's PS-X70, essentially a PS-B80 Biotracer fitted with a more conventional arm. Many Sony





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## Cable Lift



Nordost introduced its new Valhalla 2 Reference Cable Range at the High End Show, M.O.C. in Munich, Germany on May 9, 2013. The latest range consists of analog, digital, and tonearm interconnects, as well as loudspeaker and power cables. The new Valhalla 2 range uses upgraded Dual Mono-Filament technology, along with an innovative proprietary connector called the HOLO:PLUG™. The HOLO:PLUG™ is a patent pending connector, designed to be the best possible interface between the cable and the component. Perfect signal integrity can be measured throughout the system. Designed to transfer every last nuance of detail, and they claim the HOLO:PLUG™ is a miracle of mechanical and electrical integrity. If you have an original Valhalla cable and wish to upgrade to the new Valhalla 2 please give us a call as we have an upgrade path.



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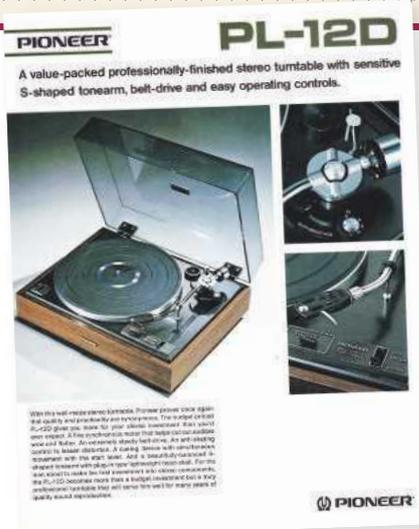
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## BUYING VINTAGE



direct-drive decks of this period, even the miniature Sony PS-Q7, use a sensing technology known as Magnadisc to sense the speed of the platter in order that the servo can quickly lock onto the correct speed. Magnadisc uses magnetic 'paint' that is applied to the inner rim of the platter during manufacture before it's 'printed' with a magnetic pattern. This is read by a device akin to a tape head as the motor runs.

Although the head does not touch the magnetic surface the paint can flake or lift away in places over the years, resulting in cyclic speed jerks and poor pitch stability. There is little that can be done to remedy this fault, so always ensure that any deck which uses this technique runs correctly before committing to purchase. Also, remember to handle the platter with extreme care and keep anything magnetic (tools, cartridges) well away from its rough brown surface.

Many Sony decks from this period are constructed from SBMC (Sony Bulk Moulding Compound), a material well suited to the purpose but which can also be fragile around the mounting bosses for screws and



other fixings. View missing screws and loose items with suspicion. Such damage suggests a hard life or a careless overhaul in the unit's past.

### CHEAPER CHOICES

A turntable does not have to have been an expensive, top-of-the-range model to be covetable or useful. The likes of the Pioneer PL-12D and the Dual CS-505 series sold by the thousand when new and both still have a lot to offer now.

The Pioneer has a hole beneath its platter to oil the motor bearing, but this only addresses one end of the shaft. A strip-down, which is a fairly easy task, is usually required if the motor is slow or noisy.

Often one finds significant play in the radial bearing of the arm too, but this can normally be corrected by careful adjustment of the bearing cones beneath. Don't overdo it though, or the ground surface of the races will be ruined.

The Dual too is fairly easy to deal with. Any reluctance for it to change speed can usually be fixed with a new belt and if the pitch control doesn't work, look no further than the little toothed belt that links the knob to the regulator.

Clouds of smoke from the underside may seem alarming, but normally just point to failed capacitors in the switch unit, especially if the machine has been stored somewhere damp for any length of time. Again replacement should cause no real problems.

Bought wisely, vintage gear does not depreciate in the same way new equipment does, so you can explore a whole world of listening for a modest outlay. ☺

**ABOVE:** BSR and Garrard fans look away! It's the all-conquering Pioneer PL-12D – a fine vintage buy that won't break the bank

**LEFT:** Another budget classic is the Dual CS 505. Still cheap, still great and with still plenty of used samples in good to excellent condition to be found on the secondhand market

### ALSO CONSIDER...

**1 Rega Planar 2:** Can have issues with speed stability and sound quality depends very much on which arm is fitted. It may well be worth saving up and buying the current version.

**2 Roksan Xerxes:** This one-time LP12 challenger can suffer from top-plate warping. It's a great deck, but check it carefully before buying.

**3 Logic DM101:** Another LP12 alternative that didn't quite make it. A decent piece of kit, but the electronic motor control unit fitted to later models can be a source of problems.

**4 Thorens TD 124:** A Garrard 301 alternative [pictured below] with a strong following. The two machines are similar, although parts availability favours the Garrard.



**5 Connoisseur BD1/BD2:** Basic models of no great value but a reasonable low-risk entry point for beginners. The motor mounting is one weak point, now being remanufactured.

**6 BSR/ADC Accutrac 4000:** Clever track-search function and striking styling but not a great performer sonically. Most faults tend to be mechanical in nature, but the electronics seem surprisingly trouble free.

**7 Lenco GL75:** Idler drive heavyweight that offers good value at current prices. Not state-of-the-art by any means, but a nice piece of engineering which can give pleasing results if the arm pivot blocks aren't too worn.

**8 Denon DP2500:** Essentially Denon's excellent DP2000 motor unit mounted in a factory plinth and fitted with a tonearm. The deck's mechanical performance is outstanding.

# max

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# Rogers Junior Mk III amplifier

Something of a rarity on the secondhand vintage market, is this all-British '60s valve amplifier actually worth seeking out? We find out how it measures up today...

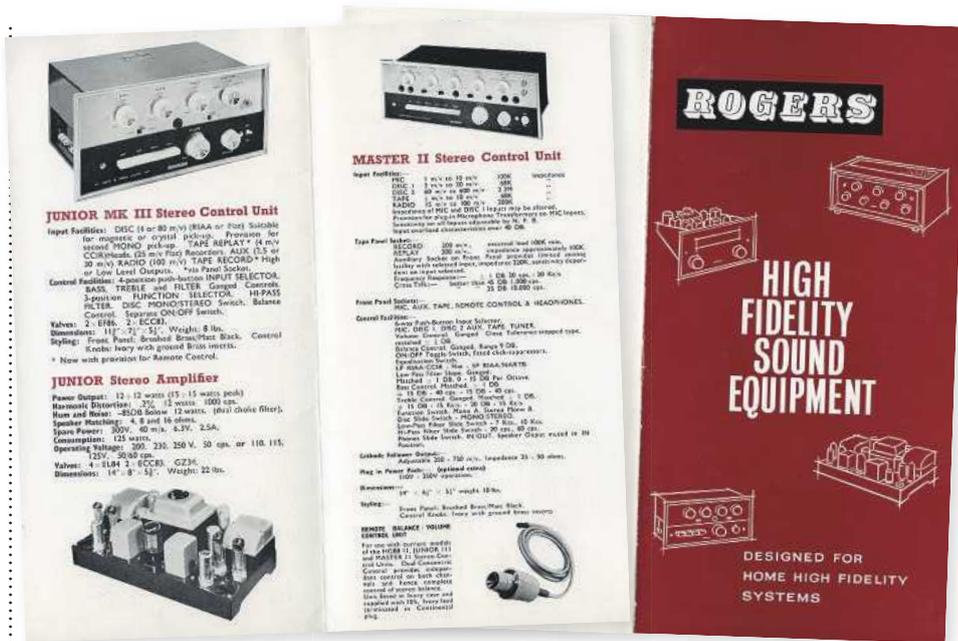
Review: **Tim Jarman** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Rogers Developments is probably best remembered for its Cadet series of amplifiers, of which the Cadet II and Cadet III stereo models were by far the most popular. Some readers may also remember the Ravensbrook and Ravensbourne transistor units which, like the Cadets, were not only very widely distributed but enjoyed a good reputation among hi-fi buffs.

Decent performance for the money was always the attraction with Rogers equipment, but that did not mean the company made only low-powered budget models like the Cadet. Its range was comprehensive and offered at one time or another something to suit most tastes – and pockets! Indeed, during the valve era, Rogers was a prolific producer of amps and associated equipment, but its range can be difficult to understand, not least because of the company's habit of recycling model names and applying them to ranges which otherwise had very little in common.

## OPEN CHASSIS

The 'Junior' system under discussion here is based around the Junior Stereo Amplifier, an open-chassis model rated by Rogers at 12W per channel and current from 1960 to 1964. This unit could be paired with a range of Rogers control units, in contrast with the Cadet series which could be used only with the control unit supplied. The units suitable for the Junior Stereo Amplifier



ABOVE: A Rogers catalogue of the early 1960s, showing the Junior Stereo amplifier and Mk III control unit. Also shown is the Master Mk II control unit and rare remote volume/balance control

were the Junior Stereo Mk II, the Junior Stereo Mk III, the Master and the Master Mk II. The latter two models were more sophisticated alternatives than to their number of extra controls and functions compared with the Junior units.

The original Junior Stereo control unit was not compatible. Its intended purpose was to allow two mono amplifiers from the

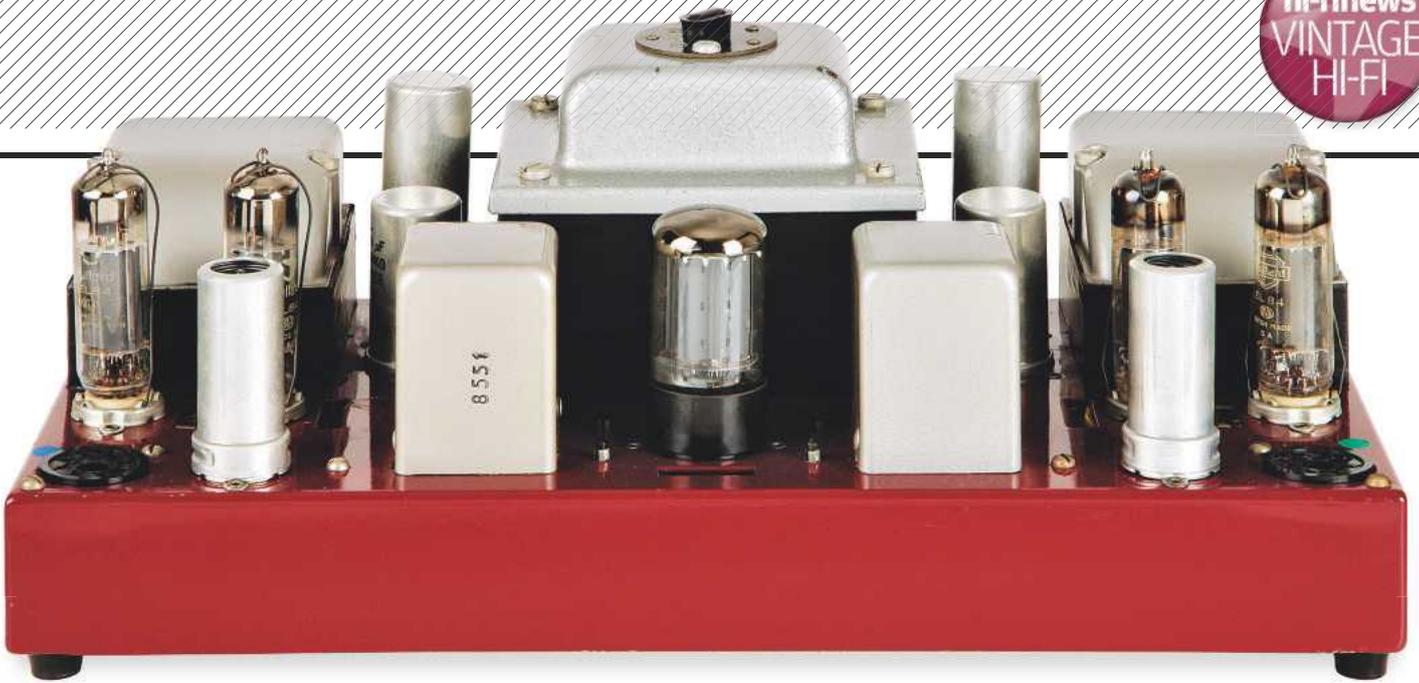
earlier Cadet, Junior and Senior series to be used in a stereo set-up.

## NOT SO JUNIOR

Despite its name, the Junior Stereo was in fact the largest amplifier in the Rogers range for at least part of its production run. The Senior series of mono amplifiers, which used EL34 valves and could produce a claimed 20W in Mk II form, was dropped in 1961 and the replacement Master, which was also EL34 based but good for a claimed 35W, did not arrive until 1966. Only the HG88 Mk II integrated model

LEFT: The Mk III Junior control unit, whose gold-coloured fascia matches that of the more commonly seen Cadet II. The two thick cables go to the main amp





could match the Junior's 12W rated output, but since it used ECL86 output valves instead of the EL84s of the Junior it is still regarded as a lesser amplifier.

The HG88 Mk II was introduced a year after the Junior Stereo and was dropped at the same point, when the range was revised and re-styled after the fashion of the Cadet Mk III. The 15W HG88 Mk III of 1965 could beat the Junior Stereo on power, but the Junior line was not continued into this new era so the comparison is not a relevant one.

### MORE SOPHISTICATED

In simple terms the Junior Stereo is a larger, more sophisticated version of the regularly encountered Cadet Mk II. By using EL84 output valves instead of the ECL86s

found in the Cadet the rated output power could safely be raised to 12W, double the Cadet Mk II's figure. The ultra-linear configuration, where the output valves are operated in a compromise between triode

and pentode modes by driving their screen grids from a tapping on the output transformer primary winding, was used to improve the performance and flexibility. This was clearly considered to be

a 'big amplifier' feature which the Cadet evidently did not merit.

The driver and phase splitter functions were handled by an ECC83 double triode in each channel and to supply the power a GZ34 rectifier was used. One still sees this valve (and similar types) used as a rectifier in valve amplifiers manufactured today, but it tends to be largely decorative and

**ABOVE:** The Rogers Junior stereo main amplifier, with a GZ34 rectifier in the centre flanked by a pair of EL84s and an ECC83 (which is hidden by a screening cover) on each side

powers a section of the preamplifier only, as conventional silicon rectifiers hidden under the chassis do the real work. This is not the case with the Junior Stereo, where the GZ34 powers the whole lot, including the valves in the control unit and ones in the switched FM Tuner should the owner have decided to add this to the system.

### EXTRA GAIN

The Junior Mk II Control Unit was a development of the one provided with the Cadet II, the main difference being that the magnetic cartridge adapter unit, which used two EF86 pentodes and had to be added externally to the Cadet, was now an integral part of the amplifier.

This made the valve complement two EF86s and two ECC83s, exactly the same as a 'fully expanded' Cadet set-up. The extra gain meant that a tape head (CCIR EQ) could also be connected directly, in addition to a radio tuner and a non-equalised auxiliary source.

The main change for the Junior Mk III control unit was that a wired remote volume control could be used. This was a rather cumbersome affair that offered two concentric controls in order that balance as well as volume could be adjusted.

Opting for one of the Master control units added extra knobs and buttons for additional filters and inputs rather than achieving any concrete improvement in sound quality. One refinement of real value was the use of a close-tolerance switched

**'Richness in the lower registers worked in the Rogers' favour'**

MAY 1962

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**Jim Rogers 1917-2002**

Any hi-fi enthusiast of 1950/60 vintage asked to name a few amplifier manufacturers would probably have started with Leak, Thelma and the

journey from a high-grade gramophone to dabbings with sundry radios and their loudspeakers, and on to the

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but ancient audio gear, all impeccably renovated, which I suspect provided a sort of nostalgic finale in a life of someone whose hobby brought him in contact with similar items spanning the whole history of domestic sound reproduction.

He was also the kindest of men, who would turn up with a bottle of wine and warm greetings on hearing that one was unwell. And on one memorable occasion he arranged for my children to tour the Catford factory, proving their first-ever glimpse of mass-production and enabling them to see how the gear that Dad was always testing and writing about was actually made.

I'm deeply grateful to have known such a thoroughly nice man.

**John Crabbe**

**LEFT:** Specifications and price lists from 1962 and 1963 with a *Hi-Fi News* tribute by ex-editor John Crabbe [far right] to company founder Jim Rogers following his passing in 2002

## VINTAGE HI-FI

**RIGHT:** A view of the underside of the main amplifier showing the point-to-point wiring. Not all the components are original, as is common with valve amplifiers of this period

attenuator as the volume control, the provision for this in other Rogers amplifiers being rather more basic.

### TIM LISTENS

Setting up the amplifier for listening involved running the usual gauntlet of early style RCA connectors into which bulky modern plugs won't fit, non-standard screw-type loudspeaker connectors not marked for correct phasing and a lethal unlabelled mains outlet into which a stray cable or tool could easily be pushed.

Then there's the fact that while the control unit has an 'aux' input that appears ideal for plugging a CD player into, its sensitivity is excessive for this purpose. The result if tried? Uncontrollable volume and gross distortion. The 'radio' input is the best to use when hooking up modern sources, but at 100mV it's still a bit on the sensitive side. This is one occasion where external in-line attenuators would be really useful.

Once the connector problems were overcome, the loudspeaker side of things proved much easier to deal with, thanks to impedance options of 4, 8 and 16ohm – sensible values that suit most frequently encountered loudspeakers.

After a bit of a tussle, my Cyrus CD8 SE CD player and Monitor Audio loudspeakers were ready to put the Junior Stereo set-up through its paces. Compared to the company's Cadet III amplifier [see *HFN* May '13], the Junior does not give the impression of being significantly more powerful, even though the claimed ratings

'The midrange clarity more than made up for a flat treble'

are roughly a third higher. Therefore, the available power is adequate and no more, restricting your choice of loudspeakers to the more sensitive models available.

What *has* improved is the bass control, which regular readers may recall was largely absent from the Cadet III to the extent that the amp's 60Hz 'rumble' filter had to be used to obtain consistent results. The Junior, on the other hand, can be used 'flat' in this respect, where just a little bass plumpness shows it not to be a modern DC-coupled solid-state design. A variable filter is included whose centre position indicates a top cut at 12kHz. This needs to be fully retarded in order to obtain the 20kHz operating point, which is appropriate for modern

sources and recordings. Even so, the top end is soft and muted meaning sparkling high notes such as those on 'Wade Into The Water' performed by Ramsey Lewis (from the Global compilation RADCD87) are hardly this design's forte.

### MIDRANGE CLARITY

Nevertheless, listening to the amp was a lively affair, with midrange clarity more than making up for the somewhat flat treble. Richness in the lower registers made its presence felt too and certainly worked in the Rogers' favour with discs having sparse instrumentation.

With more heavily processed material such as 'Giorgio By Moroder' from the current Daft Punk album *Random Access Memories* [Columbia 88883716862] the bass was just that bit too thick, causing muddle at the bottom end that at times veiled other sounds in the mix during the later and more energetic parts of the track.

This aside, the performance was pleasingly fluid with plenty of midrange texture. Only the bland top-end gave away the fact that the amplifier is as old as it is.

The presence of hum was difficult to judge as the input level was considerably higher than the designer had intended. However, muting the source and turning the volume control to maximum revealed more hiss than hum at the listening position, so clearly the former will be more of an issue than the latter if sources with lower-level outputs are used.

### HIT AND MISS

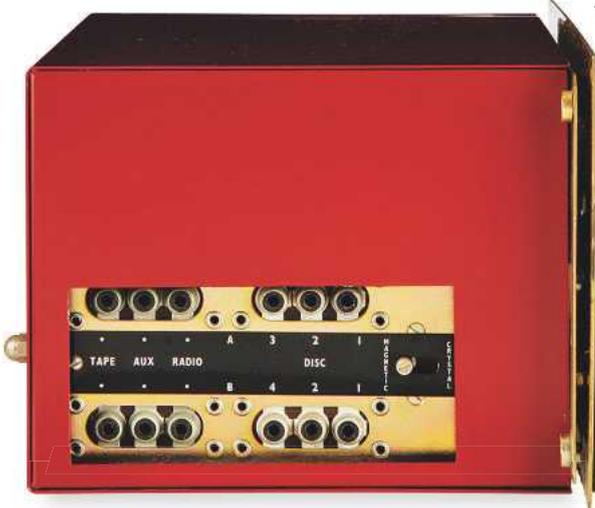
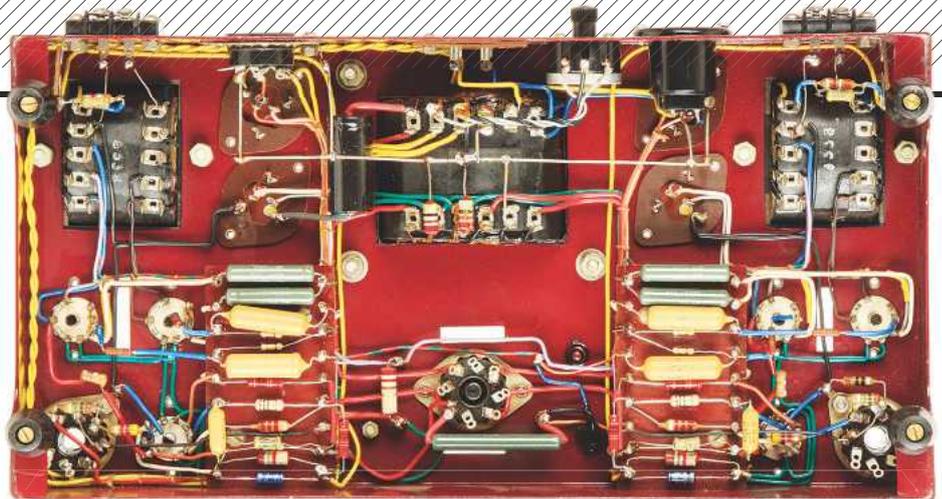
Just for fun I tried the magnetic cartridge input too. The arrangements for this are not as sophisticated as those found in the Rogers Cadet III and with no plug-in matching units, finding a cartridge that works properly is a hit and miss affair.

My reference Ortofon 2M Bronze proved not to be ideal. The level was adequate but the sound was thin and sharp, giving the impression that either the equalisation or the loading was some way distant from optimal. Using the tone controls and the filter went some way to correcting this and with a bit of patience it was possible to make the sound quite pleasing, if not strictly accurate.

The characteristics of the 2M series are representative of many modern MM cartridges so these problems are likely to be universal unless you can identify the correct 'vintage' type. The phono input also exhibits a high level of background hum, so if you want to listen to records an external phono stage is highly recommended. Even a basic model should improve upon the original Rogers circuit.

If you want a Rogers Junior, the first problem you will face is finding one. These amplifiers are considerably more difficult to source than those in the Cadet series, ⇨

**LEFT:** Plenty of inputs, but bulky modern plugs won't necessarily fit into the small, closely spaced sockets. Note the selector for magnetic and ceramic cartridges on the extreme right



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# VINTAGE HI-FI

# LAB REPORT

## ROGERS JUNIOR MK III (Vintage)



**ABOVE:** Rear view of the amplifier. The red dots that show loudspeaker phasing are a later addition, the original offering no clues. Beware the mains outlet (centre)

but they *are* out there, so in the end persistence should pay off.

The patterns of failure are more difficult to determine from such a small sample but one piece of good news is that the output transformers do seem to be sturdier than those used on the Cadet, meaning that failure should be less of an issue. It is still worth making some basic checks though. At the simplest level this need only be a meter test to ensure that the anode and the screen grid of each EL84 are returned to the HT supply via the resistance of the winding. This is best done with the amplifier switched off and disconnected for safety reasons.

### REPLACEMENT VALVES

All the valves used are standard types and replacements are easily found if they are needed. Contrast this with the Cadet Mk III, where the ECC807s in the control unit are almost unobtainable.

The EL84s used in the output stage are a more reliable valve than

the ECL86s used in the smaller Rogers models but they do work hard in this circuit and don't last forever. Keep an eye on them and have them tested if you think that they are suspect.

The GZ34 is also a hard working valve; check for sparks inside (which will produce a strong crackle on the sound) and replace the valve promptly if they occur.

The Junior Stereo Amplifier was designed for cabinet mounting and so a baseboard and a cover will be needed in the interests of safety if it is to be used 'in the open'.

Finally, note that the Octal-type plugs from the control unit can be interchanged mechanically but that the amplifier won't work if they are connected wrongly. This is a good thing to check if you set up the system and find that it doesn't work.

As with many 1960s stereo valve amplifiers, prices are reasonably firm but a Rogers Junior should work out cheaper than the more established EL84-based alternatives like the Leak Point One TL/12 Plus and the Point One Stereo 20. ⚡



**ABOVE:** Into the stereo age – ad from March 1960 for the latest Junior variant

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

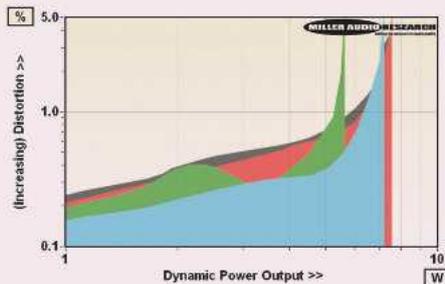
A considerable improvement over the Cadet series, The Junior Stereo shows once again the ability of Rogers to construct pleasing-sounding amplifiers. With limited power and a characteristically 'vintage' sound in the form of a muted top-end this is one for the collector rather than the everyday user. Restoration is not hindered by rare parts but should not be attempted by the uninitiated.

Sound Quality: 70%

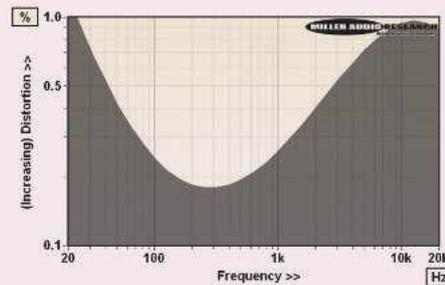


This rare amplifier, from John Howes' vintage collection, presented a similar variation from its maker's specification as the Cadet III [*HFN* May '13] and so comparisons are very instructive indeed. Rogers' original specification has the Junior Stereo III offering a maximum 2x12W (some 2W more than the Cadet III) while distortion is rated at 0.2% up to 12W into 8ohm at 1kHz. Once again, on the lab bench, this performance was barely suggested by the 8ohm tap into a nominal 8ohm load where some 2x6W was achieved at 1% THD. This is nearly double that managed by the Cadet III but the full 'clipping' power output was almost identical at 7.3W/8ohm and 7.5W into 4ohm. There's little improvement under dynamic conditions although the Junior Stereo does have an unusual trick up its sleeve: distortion actually *falls* into 8 then 4 and then 2ohm load impedances [see Graph 1, below]. So it's subjective performance with real world speakers might well be preferable to that of the Cadet III.

Into 8ohm, distortion reaches a minimum of 0.18% around 200-400Hz at 1W, increasing to 1.2% at 20Hz and 0.95% all the way up to 20kHz. Once again this is superior to the Cadet III even though the A-wtd S/N ratio is about a dB or so shy at 63.6dB (re. 0dBW). This is about 20dB off what might be achieved with a modern tube amp, however. The overall gain of the Cadet and Junior III is also consistent at 31-32dB but the Junior has the lower output impedance at <1ohm from 20Hz-8kHz. Readers may view a full QC Suite test report for the Rogers Junior III Control and Junior Stereo amplifier by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power output vs. distortion (8ohm tap) into 8ohm up to 5% (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus frequency from 20Hz-20kHz at 1W/8ohm (8ohm tap)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<3% THD, 8/4ohm)	7W / 7W
Dynamic power (<3% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	7.2W / 7.5W / 7.2W / 5.7W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.88-1.63ohm
Frequency resp. (20Hz-100kHz, 0dBW)	-3.7dB to -47dB (12k filter)
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/7W)	80mV / 295mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/7W)	63.6dB / 72.1dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8ohm)	0.17-1.2%
Power consumption (Idle/rated output)	109W/113W
Dimensions (WHD, Control/Main)	298x184x140/356x203x137mm

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“You’re contemplating full-range monitors, she’s contemplating divorce !”

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The situation came to a head when I employed an interior designer to recommend colours and fabrics for my renovated house. She entered my lounge, took one look at my speakers and said “Well, those will have to go for starters!” I had to admit that she was right.

The problem was I must have my music and I love deep bass, so Mini monitors were out of the question. How about building a full-range speaker into the cavity walls of the house?

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I studied all available literature on loudspeaker design but there was nothing on building high-end loudspeakers into walls. Undaunted, I went ahead with state-of-the-art componentry.

Finally finished, with serious misgivings about the concept, I switched on, telling myself the sound quality was certain to be inferior to my transmission lines but sacrifices had to be made for the fairer sex. I have never been more wrong.

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Alan Sircom, *HiFi+* Jul-Aug 2012



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Noel Keywood, *Hi Fi World*, June 2013

Rated – five globes



ARIAND FV34B, 40w per channel.  
Pictured is the 2013 MK IV model with remote. FV34B Mk III model review *HFN* Feb 2011 issue. Ken Kessler said –  
*"Both the editor and I had this pegged as a far costlier unit – at least a grand in the light of its build and performance"*



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*As a company run by Hi Fi enthusiasts we regularly evaluate our amplifiers to ensure they are the best of their kind. Whilst we do not make changes for change sake, if we can make a significant improvement to the sound quality and reliability we will do so. The new MK III version of the Stereo 60 now comes with several improvements in sound and performance, and build quality. This is our biggest integrated amplifier. It is ideal for someone wanting a very dynamic fast sound. It has a big power supply, big output transformers, and uses the excellent new KT120/KT150, and comes with many features. An excellent alternative to a transistor amplifier, the ST60III m will deliver the finest detail of modern recordings in a more vivid way and present jazz and rock music without harshness.*

**Two Amplifiers in One. The importance of Triode** The triode sound is preferred by many hi fi fans, although the power is lower in the ST60 is still ample for all but the most demanding levels. Ignored or neglected in the past we gave equal priority to the triode function so the full quality is maintained. With our UL/Triode switch you can change from 80 watts to 40 watts of pure triode sound at the flick of a switch.

**Now with "Easy Bias" Meter** We think of our amplifiers as musical instruments. Like a piano needs occasional tuning, big amplifiers need the bias checking. This way you can be sure of 100% performance all of the time. Simple with our "easy bias" meter. If the pointer is in the "black" it's correct! Also useful to check if your valves are worn or faulty. Long term performance is important to us and this useful aid will take the guesswork out of maintaining your amplifier.

**Attractive Valve cover** Most valve amplifier covers look as though they were done as a cost saving after thought, and don't exactly enhance the look of the amplifier. They are rarely seen in advertisements. We think that something you will use every day should look attractive. That's why we use 18 pieces of laser cut Perspex assembled with a further 20 precision components. See picture on our website.

*Our new series of "Low Distortion Tertiary" output transformers are the best we have ever made, enabling us to reduce global feedback by about 40%. All our amplifiers are designed and finished in Leicester. Warranty and service is done by the engineers that designed them so you can be sure of long term performance. We incorporate a "standby" switch in order to protect those precious cathodes from damage until they have warmed up. All of our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It allows for very easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume included for fine tuning your listening. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SCR capacitors audiophile resistors. A choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone cannot do. Recording loop included. In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities traditional of traditional design and performance. Bespoke upgrades available including silver/copper capacitors, valves and design. (\*Excluding EL34)*

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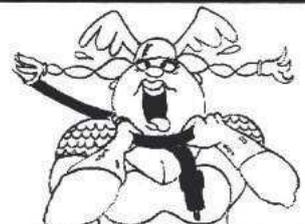
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# OFF THE LEASH!

KEN KESSLER TELLS IT LIKE IT IS...

The selling of high-end audio alongside other coveted goods is the way to go, says **Ken Kessler**



Those who have followed my scribbles over the years know that I value my cynicism above all other possible threads in my psychological fabric. Aside from trust issues that I have with just about everyone bar my immediate family, I have been showered with so much hype on a professional level for so long that I now require a second opinion when asking the day of the week.

Thus, if the opening of a second high-end audio salon in London, hot on the heels of KJ West One's herculean effort [see *HFN* Sept '12], does not find me attempting cartwheels, that's only because my glass is always half-empty. No, make that half-empty, cracked and leaking. Like the much-vaunted LP revival – not even a storm in a teacup so much as a light drizzle in a teaspoon – I do not want the arrival of the Audio Lounge to render me hopeful for the high-end's future.

## MAGNIFICENT PRESENCE

By all reports [see p119], it is a simply magnificent presence. Located on Wigmore Street, it means that the jaunt from the haunts of the filthy rich – Bond Street, Mount Street, *et al* – is so short they might even leave their limos parked near Scott's or The Square or Nobu and walk the few streets. Not likely, but you get my drift.

Where the Audio Lounge seems to have gone the extra step is in making the concept of high quality home audio equipment part of a larger experience. This is anathema to hard-core audiophiles, so please stop reading here if you're a hair-shirt type who thinks we have to suffer for our love of music.

By offering a range of furniture – both audio-oriented and non-specific – as well as such niceties as ultra-high-quality prints with a musical theme, objets d'art and other items that would never be found in a conventional hi-fi emporium, the Audio Lounge is addressing the 99.9% of the market that has no idea what hi-fi even is,

while also addressing the 0.1% who can actually afford that over which we lust.

If you think I'm overstating the case, a wonderful example of how far removed from reality we are appeared

in the recently-broadcast *Phil Spector*, a brilliant, big-budget 'imagining' of the murder trial of the legendary producer. The timeframe is the 2000s, so we are talking 'recent history'.

Early in the film, Helen Mirren, playing Spector's legal counsel, shows a 45rpm insert to a young legal aide and asks him to identify it. He has no idea what it is. She then pulls a 7in single from her handbag, slips in the adapter and asks him again. He replies, something from an early computer?

There has never been a bigger disconnect between hi-fi and the real world than there is today. Mind you, it has been a rarefied pursuit: I would imagine there were 10,000 all-in-one 'record players' sold for every separate turntable, and probably 100,000 table-top radios for every separate tuner. And that is merely my take on the era before iPods, gaming, home cinema, Kindles and other forms of home entertainment became competition.

## FIRST SEPARATES

My generation – those who came of age in the 1960s – is the first (at least, in the USA, maybe a bit later here) where people other than doctors and lawyers owned separates systems. By the time I reached high school, I had earned enough from part-time jobs to buy a Dual turntable, Pickering cartridge, Scott FM receiver and Scott speakers.

When I reached university in 1970, there wasn't a single room in any dormitory I ever entered without a hi-fi in it. And I went to a university not known for the financial comfort of its student body. Not having a sound system back then would be like not having a mobile phone today.

If you move on from the students of the 1960s/1970s who made hi-fi populist and on to the greater population, you find ignorance of hi-fi almost total, then as now. Numbers prove this: Ferrari sells 5000 cars a year, Rolex close to a million watches. Tell me of a hi-fi manufacturer selling a million of *anything*. And I don't mean RCA plugs.

In June, I went to an event called 'Masterpiece London' at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. Over 150 exhibitors were enticing the well-heeled to part with their dosh for art works, fine pens, furniture, sculpture, porcelain, pianos, watches, antiques of every sort, carpets, clocks. One exhibitor showed customised motorcycles, another motorboats. Not one exhibitor had anything to do with high-end audio, in an exhibition where I overheard one dowager asking about a piece of jewellery with a tag of £1.5m. Her husband didn't blink.

But I bet they went home to Bose or B&O. So shame on all hi-fi makers and vendors. Except maybe KJ West One and the Audio Lounge. ☺

'Tell me of a hi-fi manufacturer who is selling a million of anything'

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