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REVIEWED

DALI OBERON 9

Giant-slaying sound!

REVIEWED

ADCOM GFA-585se

A blast from the past...



REVIEWED

MAGIC DAC

Bargain-priced perfection



FUTURE



ISSUE 521 SEPT/OCT 2021 A\$9.99

PLUS SWEET VINYL SUGARCUBE: YOU NEED ONE!

05



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

OBERON SERIES

DALI OBERON is a breakthrough: it's the first entry-level loudspeaker to incorporate DALI's patented SMC technology, drastically reducing non-linear magnetic distortion – so you can hear your favourite music like you've never heard it before.

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WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU: MUSIC OR LYRICS?

This question came up on a TV show recently (a Spicks and Specs repeat) and it's had me wondering ever since, and thinking about the songs I love and why I love them.

According to songwriter, singer and producer Karl Martin Sandberg (stage name Max Martin), who's written almost as many of the number-one singles on Billboard's Hot 100s chart as Paul McCartney and John Lennon (they're the top three writers on that chart), melodies are the most important. They're so important that he uses a 'melodic maths' formula to create his tunes. He used it to create

hit songs for Britney Spears, Backstreet Boys, Taylor Swift, NSYNC, Maroon 5, The Weeknd, Katy Perry and others.

Music being the more important of the two makes sense if you think about Sigur Ros, many of whose songs have lyrics that are sung in a made-up language the band describes as "a form of gibberish vocals that fits to the music." And what about the famous "Nah, nah nah nahnahnah nah, nahnahnah nah, na-ah nah" lyric from *Hey Jude*? Or the chorus from the Spice Girls' hit song *Wannabe*: "I'll tell you what I want/what I really really want/So tell me what you want/what you really really want/I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna really really really wanna zigzag ha."


So far, it would seem that the argument for the music being the more important of the two is winning out — or at least it does until you consider the lyric to Paul Simon's song *The Dangling Conversation*. "It's a still life watercolour/of a now late afternoon/as the sun shines through the curtain lace and shadows wash the room/and we sit and drink our coffee/couched in our indifference/like shells upon the shore/you can hear the ocean roar/in the dangling conversation/and the superficial sighs/the borders of our lives." That's pure poetry. (Indeed it's so poetic that the lyric to that song has been

published in several poetry anthologies.)

And how about another of my favourite tunes, Don McLean's *American Pie*? It has both a beautiful melody and an absolutely gorgeous lyric. Amongst my favourite lines from it are: "And the three men I admire most/the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost/they caught the last train for the coast/the day the music died" — but I'd be the first to agree that these lines work best when accompanied by the music.

The same would be true of the lyric "Stuck around St. Petersburg/when I saw it was a time for a change/killed the Tsar and his ministers/Anastasia screamed in vain." For my money, *Sympathy for the Devil* is the one of the best two songs Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (*vale* Charlie Watts) ever wrote, the other being *You Can't Always Get What You Want*.

Yet despite the brilliance of the music for *Sympathy For The Devil* and the fabulous lyric, I think one of the song's best touches is the addition of the nonsensical words 'Boop Boop' in the background.

So in the end, it's probably a personal call as to which is most important — the music or the lyrics. For me, the teller is that although I often forget the words to songs, I always remember the melodies. How about you? 

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EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

18 SWEETVINYL SUGARCUBE SC-2 MINI

Here's a component you've probably never heard of, and never realised you needed. Until now. And possibly its best application is one for which it was not designed. For vinyl-head reviewer Jez Ford, it was the answer to all his prayers. And if you're into vinyl, it'll be the answer to all yours as well.

22 ADCOM GFA-585SE STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

If you believe the old adage 'they don't build them like they did in the old days' you won't believe the new Adcom GFA-585se, because it looks like it just arrived on a time machine straight from the 1980s. It's a high-powered, low-noise, low-distortion 'muscle' amplifier that's available at a remarkably low price.

80 DALI OBERON 9 LOUDSPEAKERS

What's in a name? Quite a lot when it comes to DALI and its new Oberon Series. This very large, very loud, floor-standing loudspeaker design leverages DALI's home-grown drivers and technologies to best effect, and their best is very good indeed...

88 CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 200M DAC

Cambridge Audio's DACs have been winning awards ever since this British company popularised the concept of using stand-alone DACs with its original DacMagic back in the early '90s. This latest iteration is the best yet, yet its price tag still sports only three digits. Winner!

94 RME ADI-2 DAC FS DAC

Unless you're into professional audio, you likely won't have heard of German manufacturer RME, and although the ADI-2 is intended for consumer use, the company seems to assume a level of knowledge on a par with professional sound engineers. So you'll need to do a lot of homework to get it working at its best.





76 SOUND TRAVELS

Being able to travel the world (when that was possible!) meant being able to be exposed to the best audio equipment in the world in its country of origin. This month, Tom Waters interviews an audiophile who made the most of the possibilities on offer.

80 HIGH END REVIEW

The High End. Does it start at a particular price? Or is it about a certain minimum quality of sound? Or maybe it's just a state of mind. So what is it when a pair of very modestly priced speakers deliver high-end performance at a price that's not generally regarded as being at the 'high end' of audio?

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OUR FRONT COVER

DALI's Oberon 9s may not look impressive, but they sound impressive, as you'll discover if you listen to a pair yourself. But don't forget to read our full review and test on page 80 first!

FEATURES

06 SOUND BITES

Rega Kyte, Transparent Audio Gen 6, Paradigm Founder Series, Denon AVC-X8500HA, Glanz tonearms, Wilson Audio Acoustic Diode, Elac Solano Series, Loewe Klangers, JBL L52 Classics, Yamaha price reductions, Nordost Odin Gold, Sony HT-A9, NAD M10-V2, and Audio Technica's new M50xBT2. All this news and more ...

32 EISA AWARD WINNERS

The world's foremost panels of experts, skilled in audio, video, car sound and photography, have finalised the judging of the EISA Awards 2021-2022 and in this issue we announce the winners across all the categories, plus give you the Judge's Citations in full for the winners in the audio categories.

43 LEN WALLIS AUDIO NEWSLETTER

More than just an advertising feature, Len Wallis Audio's regular newsletter is a window into what's happening on the showroom floor, and in the home installation sphere. Covid-19 might have slowed sales, but the store voted one of the top five in the world just keeps on giving back to its customers.

98 THE SPENDOR INTERVIEW

Philip Swift, the owner of iconic British loudspeaker manufacturer Spendor, was a fan of the brand long before he bought the company. His first purchase was a pair of Spendor BC1s, and his second was the very first pair of Spendor BC3s off the production line. So why did he leave AudioLab, the company he founded to run Spendor? Find out here!

03 EDITOR'S LEAD-IN

Which is more important to you: music or lyrics? Or is sound quality more important than either? No, just joking. Without music, the best sound quality in the world is a waste of time. Which doesn't really answer the question posed this issue by editor Greg Borrowman.



101 CLASSIC ROCK

Could it get more classic than Chrissie Hynde singing a paean to Bob Dylan? Well it could really, because this issue we also review John Hiatt's new album Leftover Feelings, which has the 68-year-old back in old digs. But the prizes for best releases go to new outfit Lovebreaker and the not-quite-so-new Emily Wolfe.

102 RE-ISSUES

Re-issues are often a great way to pick up back-catalogue at bargain prices (Joni Mitchell Studio Albums 68-79 come to mind here!) but that's not the case with Rod Stewart's wallet-damaging five-LP box set. Luckily, you'll be able to console yourself with The Complete Sorrows, a 4CD set that proves the band deserves to be more than just a footnote in pop history.

104 TOP PICKS

Billie Eilish, Mackenzie Scott and Courtney Barnett could all have afforded to spend more time polishing the lyrics of various of the songs in their latest releases, but there's still enough magic in the music to make them Top Picks. But the toppest pick of all is undoubtedly Turnstile's 'Glow On' which is a Master Class in heavy music.

114 ROCK ON

Two of Australia's greatest musicians have joined forces and the result is an album that's bigger than both of them. And Amends has done the same without changing its line-up: their new album is jaw-droppingly good.



Rega says the sensitivity of the new Kyte is 89dB SPL (presumably for a one-watt input, but this is not stated) and the impedance is 'nominally 6Ω'. Rega says that using injection-moulded phenolic resin to construct the cabinet has many advantages. "The natural stiffness of phenolic resin is a big advantage which has been further enhanced with ceramic plates and a complex internal cross brace structure, and Rega achieved this unique cabinet construction at one third of the price of other British-made quality loudspeakers," said **Philip Sawyer** of Synergy AV, which distributes Rega in Australia. "And the money that most loudspeaker companies

would spend on marketing Rega has instead invested into researching and developing this unique cabinet, along with its own ZRR tweeter and its own hand-made bass/midrange driver."

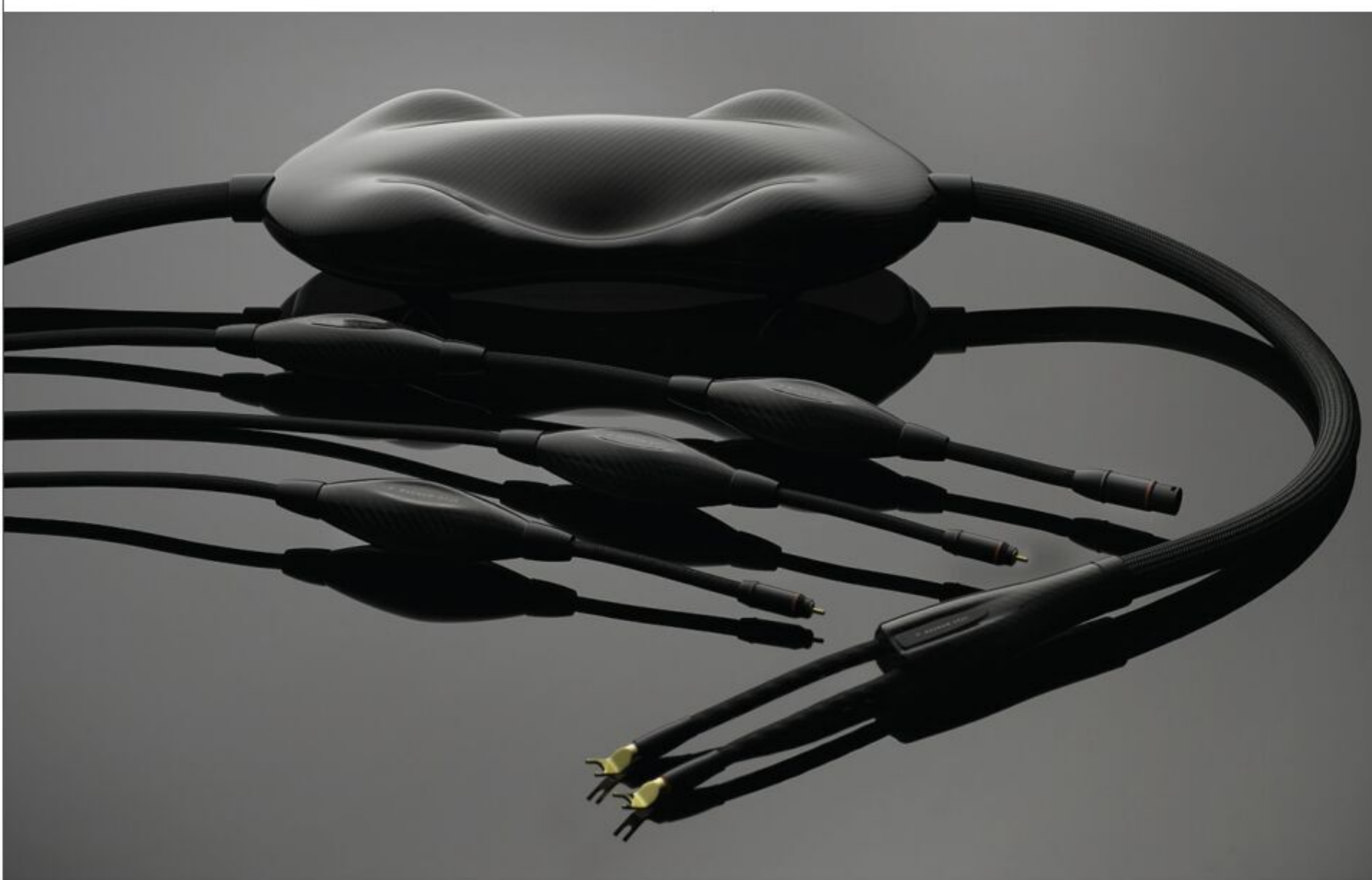
Available now, exclusively and only in that black phenolic finish, the Rega Kyte speakers sell for \$1,099 per pair (RRP).

For more information, contact Synergy AV on (03) 9459 7474 or www.synergyaudio.com

REGA KYTE LOUDSPEAKERS

Rega has released a new desktop/bookshelf two-way loudspeaker that uses a thermoset phenolic resin cabinet. Designed and manufactured in the UK, the new Rega Kyte marries a 125mm diameter bass/midrange driver with Rega's 'ZRR' dome tweeter, a design so-called because Rega says it has 'zero rear reflections' whose 19mm-diameter dome is surmounted by a triangular phase correction bridge.

The bass-reflex cabinet's port is at the rear, above a set of vertically-mounted speaker terminals. Despite its small size (the cabinet measures 188×325×232mm WHD) the cabinet is internally damped and braced with a '+ shaped' structure the ends of which are fixed to ceramic plates that are anchored to the phenolic resin.



TRANSPARENT AUDIO GEN 6

Transparent Audio has released its Transparent Generation 6 'Connoisseur Collection' range of cables and interconnects.

"Generation 6 represents a higher level of refinement and precision for the Transparent Audio Cable design model," says **Nigel Ng**, of Advance Audio Australia, which distributes Transparent in Australia. "It debuts a new and more comprehensive approach to using different types of advanced materials

and more mass to eradicate resonant frequencies from within and without network enclosures. In addition to a more solid foundation for music's lowest frequencies, the listening result of removing vibration and resonance is a quieter soundfield with low-level information retrieval capable of revealing previously hidden musical details."

Transparent's top-line Magnum Opus speaker cable has a newly configured, stiffer, heavier, more stable, polymethyl methacrylate plinth with a 4.78mm carbon-fibre plate embedded in a cavity filled with IFER to deliver a stiff platform married solidly to its epoxy-loaded, carbon-fibre carapace. A 2.4-metre-long pair sells for \$112,050.

If you own a previous generation Transparent cable or interconnect, Transparent says it will reward you by offering access to its upgrade program. "With Generation 6, Transparent customers get a chance to trade-in and trade-up while retaining most of the value of their original Transparent investment," says Transparent CEO **Karen Sumner**.

For more information, contact Advance Audio Australia on (02) 9561 0799 or at www.advanceaudio.com.au



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DENON AVC-X8500HA

Denon says that its latest flagship AV receiver, the 13-channel AVC-X8500HA, offers “the ultimate home theatre experience” but in a first for the company, it’s making a budget-priced “A-Spec” upgrade circuit available to owners of its previous flagship model, the AVC-X8500H. The ‘A’ version (and the A-Spec upgrade) includes many circuit updates, including 8K/60Hz upscaling and pass-through, 4K/120Hz pass-through, HDR10+, Dynamic HDR, HDCP 2.3, as well as other HDMI 2.1 technologies supporting 40Gbps transmission.

In addition to offering 13-channels, each one rated by Denon with a power output of 120-watts, the new AVC-X8500HA (and the A-Spec upgrade board) have all the latest 3D audio formats built in, including Dolby Atmos, DTS:X, DTS:X Pro, IMAX Enhanced and Auro 3D. “This new model will gradually replace all existing Denon AVC-X8500H

units, but current owners of the Denon AVC-X8500H will have the opportunity to upgrade the HDMI/Digital board within their AV amplifiers to obtain the same features as the “A” components,” said **Paul Astbury** of QualiFi, which distributes Denon in Australia. “The upgrade can be booked by contacting any Denon dealer, who will advise scheduling and pricing.”

The 8K HDMI input enables 8K/60Hz and 4K/120Hz video pass-through. The new HDR format support includes HDR10+ and Dynamic HDR, and a new HDMI feature called Quick Media Switching (QMS) allows a source to instantly switch frame rate to eliminate screen blackout. For exceptional colour, clarity and contrast the AVC-X8500HA still supports HDR10, HLG (Hybrid Log Gamma) and Dolby Vision, as well as 4:4:4 Pure Colour subsampling and BT.2020 pass-through.

New features that will be most appreciated by gamers include razor-sharp motion clarity with 4K/120Hz pass-through, and Variable Refresh Rate (VRR) to reduce frame tearing and improve overall precision.

The new Auto Low Latency Mode (ALLM) and Quick Frame Transport (QFT), are designed to reduce lag. The AVC-X8500HA can also upscale existing HD and 4K content to 8K and supports eARC (Enhanced Audio Return Channel), to allow lossless and object-based audio transmission such as DTS:X and Dolby Atmos from TV apps or connected devices using a single HDMI cable.

The inclusion of DTS:X Pro in the AVC-X8500HA means users can enjoy up to 13 channels of DTS:X decoding with speaker configurations such as 7.2.6 or 9.2.4 as well as the latest IMAX-Enhanced films in 7.2.6 or 9.2.4 speaker configurations. In addition to DTS:X Pro, the Denon AVC-X8500HA features several other 3D audio formats, including Dolby Atmos, Dolby Atmos Height Virtualization Technology, DTS:X, DTS Virtual:X, IMAX Enhanced and Auro-3D. The latest height virtualisation technologies provide immersive audio without height channels, creating virtual height effects in 7.1, 5.1 or 2.1 speaker arrangements.

The main differences between the H and the HA versions are that the HA has 8K/60AB, 4K/120AB eARC (the H had only 4K/60P eARC); the HA has HDR10+/Dynamic HDR (the H didn’t); the HA has 8K60AB, 4K120AB Pass-through Capability up to 40Gbps (not available on the H); the HA version has 1080P and 4K to 8K Upscaling on all inputs (not available at all on the H); and the HA has HDCP Version 2.3 (the H had Version 2.2).

Available now, the Denon AVC-X8500HA sells for \$6,490 (RRP).

For more information, call QualiFi on (03) 8542 1111 or visit www.qualifi.com.au

GLANZ IS BACK!

Glanz tonearms are once more available in Australia, this time through Melbourne-based distributor Absolute Hi-End. The brand is now under new ownership, but it’s really new old ownership as the new owner is none other than **Masataka Hamada**, the engineer who, many decades ago, was responsible for designing some of Glanz’s original tonearms. The range currently comprises the entry-level B-series, the mid-priced S-series, and the top-line Reference SD. Some models are available in all three standard effective lengths (229, 254 and 309mm or, if you prefer, 9, 10 and 12 inches) and all are manufactured in Shizuoka, Japan.

Whereas the more expensive Glanz arms have stainless steel arm tubes and string-and-weight anti-skating systems, the entry-level MH-9B (229mm) and MH-10B (254mm) tonearms’ arm tubes are made from

chrome-plated brass and have spring-applied anti-skating. Other parts of the tonearm post are made from stainless steel. In Australia, the MH-9B and MH-10B tonearms each sell for \$3,250 (RRP).

The Glanz S-Series tonearms (MH-94S, MH-104S, and MH-124S) are said by many to be the best available. The design is unusual because point-style bearings are not used. Instead the various moving parts are connected across the surfaces, and the lower bearing in the direction of the vertical axis uses a high-precision thrust bearing deployed via

a strut structure that allows heavy arms to move with high sensitivity. The design is also unusual because the anti-skating mechanism is detachable to accommodate those audiophiles who do not believe it is necessary.

Reviewer **Nick Tate** wrote of the Glanz MH-124S in the UK’s Hi-Fi News magazine that: “It is an absolutely top-tier modern tonearm whose sound quality leaves nothing to be desired ... it is lovingly built, beautifully finished and a joy to use — making it extremely good value for money, even at its not-inconsiderable price.”

For more information, contact Absolute HiEnd on (04) 8877 7999 www.absolutehiend.com



WILSON AUDIO ACOUSTIC DIODE

During the creation of the recently-released Alexx V loudspeakers Wilson Audio created a unique spiked foot to prevent energy from the Alexx V's cabinet from travelling through the feet to the floor, and vibration from the floor travelling up into the cabinet.

The new foot, which they named the Wilson Audio Acoustic Diode, or AD Spike, is made from Wilson Audio's 'V-Material' which it describes as a "constrained layer damping composite unsurpassed in vibration absorption and resonance control."

"Energy from the enclosure migrates into the V-Material where it is faced with the effective damping properties of this efficient material," said **Nigel Ng**, of Advance Audio, which distributes Wilson Audio in Australia. "The mass of the loudspeaker concentrated onto the very small ends of the spike tips results in significant levels of localised high pressure that prevent detrimental vibrations from travelling upward into the footer. Those vibrations that do travel up the spike are absorbed by the mass of the Acoustic Diode and then have to travel through the V-Material to have a chance of influencing the enclosure."



Wilson Audio says that a key part of the design is that the spike and the threaded post are kept separate to prevent a direct path for vibrations to travel, or interplay, and are therefore dissipated and absorbed in either the V-Material or the footer housing. "This distinctive design, combined with advanced vibration-mitigating materials, provides the best of both worlds; a solid base from which the drivers can launch as well as preventing the transmission of energy from the floor to the loudspeakers," says Ng.

Originally available only with the Alexx V, the Wilson Audio Acoustic Diodes are now available for separate purchase, and are recommended as a retro-fit for all Wilson Audio loudspeakers. Available now, they sell for \$4,995 (RRP) for a set of eight, sufficient to support a pair of loudspeakers.

For more information, contact Advance Audio Australia on (02) 9561 0799 or visit www.advanceaudio.com.au

WE. BY LOEWE WINS EISA MOBILE AWARD

It may be rather oddly named, but the portable We. by Loewe We. HEAR 2 speaker designed by famous German manufacturer Loewe has been named 'Best Mobile Speaker 2021-2022' by the Expert Imaging and Sound Association, a community of 60 technology magazines, websites and social media commentators from 29 countries.

In the written citation explaining the reasons the We. HEAR 2 won a prestigious EISA award, the judges commented: "The portable We. HEAR 2 speaker is tastefully designed and looks gorgeous. It's available in four different colours, so you can pick the one that fits your interior — or exterior, since the speaker is IPX6-rated to be water/dust-proof. Controls for volume and Bluetooth pairing are cleverly housed behind its anti-roll-stand, and its sound performance is clean, detailed and punchy, with ample volume to get your party started. Charging via USB-C fully replenishes the We. HEAR 2's 15-hour-rated battery in around 4-5 hours. The robust cylindrical chassis is designed to be positioned either horizontally or upright, or attached to the included adjustable belt for music on the move."



"Loewe only relatively recently launched its new brand We. by Loewe," said **Paul Riachi**, of Indi Imports, which distributes Loewe in Australia. "The concept is that products bearing the We. By Loewe brand will be designed specifically to address the precise requirements and functionality sought by today's youth. The EISA award for the HEAR 2 paves the way for a successful future for younger generation products in the pioneering Loewe technology ranges, particularly since it comes on the back of this model also

winning an iF Design Award earlier this year."

Riachi says that Indi Imports will be selling the We. By Loewe HEAR 2 in all its colour variants — Aqua Blue, Coral Red, Cool Grey and Storm Grey — and that the company will announce pricing closer to when the new model arrives in Australia early in 2022. In Europe, the model currently retails for €169.

For more information, contact Indi Imports on (03) 9416 7037 or at www.indiimports.com



ELAC SOLANO SERIES

Elac has released a 'Solano' series of loudspeakers. It comprises a floor-standing model, the FS 278 floorstander (\$5,495), a bookshelf/standmount model, the BS 283 (\$2,999), and a centre-channel speaker, the CC 281 (\$2,295). All models use exactly the same bass/midrange driver, a 150mm dynamic cone model, and all use exactly the same tweeter, a JET 5 air-motion design that's made by Elac itself in its factory in Kiel, Germany. The use of identical drivers means that although the FS 278 and BS 283 can be used as stereo speakers in a two-channel hi-fi system,

they can also be used as the front left/right and surround speakers in a multi-channel audio system.

The FS 278 marries two 150mm bass/midrange drivers with the JET tweeter in a 2½ way design that sees both 150mm drivers operating in tandem up to 450Hz, after which the upper-most of the two on the front baffle takes things up to 2.4kHz before crossing over to the JET tweeter. Elac claims a frequency range of 30Hz to 50kHz and a sensitivity of 87dB SPL (2.83V/m) for the FS 278. The Elac Solano BS 283 has a somewhat lower sensitivity (85dB SPL) and a less extended low-frequency response (41Hz to 50kHz). Both models have nominal impedances of 4Ω, but the Elac FS 278 has a

minimum impedance of 3.5Ω compared to the Elac BS 283's minimum of 3.2Ω. All three models are available with either white or black high-gloss painted finishes. "Compact, attractive, and high in performance, each model is hand-crafted in Keil, Germany, and comes with a ten year warranty," said **Philip Sawyer**, of Synergy AV, which distributes Elac in Australia. "These new Solano models mark a new reference in loudspeaker design, performance and value, offering astonishing performance and a gateway to high-end German audio engineering."

For more information contact Synergy AV on (03) 9459 7474 or at www.synergyaudio.com

LOEWE KLANGERS

Famous German brand Loewe has introduced two new radios that can not only receive free-to-air FM and DAB/DAB+ radio broadcasts but also connect to the internet to allow you to listen to internet radio from thousands of radio stations around the world and stream from music services such as Amazon Music, Deezer and Spotify Connect. Both models can also play back files stored on a USB stick or streamed wirelessly from your phone via Bluetooth.

The two new models are the Klang s1 and Klang s3. Loewe rates the Klang s1 with a power output of 80-watts, and the output of the larger Klang s3 at 120-watts. Both models have two 75mm diameter wide-range drivers whose bass is enhanced by a reflex port, and their treble by two additional tweeters. In addition to being higher-powered, the larger Klang s3 model also features a CD slot.

"These two new models have an understated beauty, are wonderfully easy to use thanks to the illuminated controls

and extra-large displays and deliver crystal clear sound with excellent bass," said **Paul Riachi**, Director of Indi Imports, which distributes Loewe in Australia. "There is no other streaming device which has the solid aluminium build quality or sound quality as the new S1 and S3, and which also have all the features of any multi room device, as well as FM, DAB+, and Bluetooth playback."

"With the German know-how and engineering, there is simply nothing better at these price points," added Riachi.

Available now, the Loewe Klang s1 retails for \$799 and the Loewe Klang s3 for \$1,199.

For more information, contact Indi Imports on (03) 9416 7037 or at www.indiimports.com



PARADIGM

PARADIGM FOUNDER SERIES

Paradigm's new 'Founder Series' is so-named because it's the first completely new speaker line the company has released following its sale two years ago to **Scott Bagby**, who together with **Jerry Van der Marel**, originally founded Paradigm in 1972.

The six speakers in the new line-up, all designed and manufactured at Paradigm's own factory in Toronto, Canada, comprise three floorstanders (120F, 100F, 80F), a bookshelf/standmount (40B), an LCR (70LCR) and a centre-channel (90C). All models are available in four finishes — walnut, black walnut wood veneer, midnight cherry and high-gloss piano black.

All models in the Founder Series are passive designs except for the top-of-the-line 120F, whose three 215mm bass drivers are powered by an on-board Class-D amplifier rated at 1,000 watts. These three drivers cross to a passive 152mm midrange driver at 300Hz which takes things up to 2.4kHz before handing over to a passive 25mm dome tweeter.

The tweeter used in all models in the Founder Series is Paradigm's own design, which uses a 25mm ceramic dome that's fitted with two devices the company has trademarked, an 'Oblate Spheroid Waveguide' (OPW) and

a 'Perforated Phase-Aligning' (PPA) tweeter lens, both of which act to smooth frequency response and control dispersion.

The midrange driver used in the 120F is also used in the 100F, 90C and 70LCR. It has an aluminium/magnesium 152mm cone driven by a 50mm diameter high-temperature multi-layer voice coil wound on an Apical former and is fronted by Paradigm's unique perforated phase-aligning lens. Essentially, this PPA lens minimises deleterious sound-wave interactions while at the same time maximising the useful interactions. The driver is also isolated from the front baffle using a 'Shockmount' isolation mounting system. A similar driver is used in the 80F and 40B models, but it has a smaller voice-coil, one that's only 38mm diameter.

The three 215mm-diameter bass drivers in the 120F have cones made from mineral-infused carbon-fibre and polymer in a formulation Paradigm calls 'Carbon-X'. They're driven by a Class-D amplifier with DSP whose performance is able to be calibrated to suit the listening room via the ARC Genesis Room Correction app. Available now, the Paradigm 120F speakers sell for \$13,999 per pair (RRP).

For more information, call Audio Active on (03) 9699 8900 or visit the website at <https://brands.audioactive.com.au/>

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JBL L52 CLASSIC BOOKSHELF

JBL has released the smallest model in its Classic Series, the JBL L52, a two-way bass reflex model with a front-panel high-frequency attenuator. The speakers are available in your choice of grille colour — black, blue or orange — to complement the walnut wood veneered enclosure and/or your room's decor.

"Although it's the smallest member of the iconic JBL Classic Series, the L52 Classic delivers big sound that must be heard to be believed," said **Martin Ireland**, of Convoy International, which distributes JBL in Australia. "The bass is powerful, the sound is dynamic, and the soundstage presentation is exceptionally large, which allows the loudspeakers to disappear into the room. The unique attenuator enables owners to tailor the sound to suit their specific room."

The JBL L52 Classics' compact size allows them to work in a variety of applications from stand-mount, to bookshelf, to tabletop, to wall-mount. To facilitate wall-mounting, the JBL L52 comes with threaded inserts on the rear panel for use with third-party wall-mount brackets.

Essentially the L52 is a scaled-down version of JBL's award-winning L82 Classic, being a two-way design using a 19mm titanium dome tweeter fitted with an acoustic lens waveguide and a 133mm bass/midrange driver operating from a bass-reflex enclosure with a front-firing port. The bass driver has a premium white pulp cone and a cast chassis.

"The L52 Classic is such a compelling proposition with its big sound, small size, and attractive pricing", said JBL's **Jim Garrett**. "You get a phenomenal-sounding loudspeaker with a premium design and the legacy of 75 years of JBL history as the guarantee of high-performance and quality for years of listening pleasure." When they go on-sale in November, the JBL L52 Classics will retail for \$1,899 per pair.

For more information, contact Convoy International on (02) 9974 9900 or visit www.convoy.com.au



YAMAHA DROPS PRICES!

Yamaha Music Australia has reduced the prices of all Yamaha soundbars except the flagship YSP-5600BMk2, which remains at \$2,499 (RRP). The model whose price has been reduced the most dramatically is one of

the company's most popular, the YSP-2700, which features Yamaha's YSP (Yamaha Sound Projector) technology. Previously priced at \$1,549, that model now has a recommended retail price of \$1,099.

"Our price reposition acknowledges the growing sales trend in this category" said **Dale Moore**, the Marketing Manager for Yamaha's AV Division.

"Yamaha has a long history of building the best-sounding products in this category. Our YSP circuitry has long been regarded as the best audio technology on any sound bar, producing 5.1 discrete channels of sound as opposed to the virtual surround sound from most other models. We're excited that this technology is now available at such a highly-attractive price point." The other Yamaha soundbars that have had their price reduced are the entry-level SR-C20A at \$279 (previously \$299), the SR-B20A at \$299 (previously \$329), the YAS-109 at \$349 (previously \$399), and the ATS-1090 at \$349 (previously \$399). Yamaha has also dropped the prices of its soundbars that come with a wireless subwoofer included, such as the the YAS-209 and ATS-2090 which are now available for \$499 after previously having shared an RRP of \$649. The other model whose price has been reduced dramatically is the MusicCast BAR 400 which now has an RRP of \$799, down from \$999.

"We're proud to have been a pioneer of this category in Australia with the launch of the YSP-1 back in 2004", said **Boyd Gill**, Product Manager at Yamaha Music Australia. "Our newly revised pricing reflects our on-going commitment to enable all Australians to experience true sound from Yamaha."

For more information, contact Yamaha Music Australia on 1800 805 413 or visit <https://au.yamaha.com>

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NORDOST ODIN GOLD

Nordost has released a new Supreme Reference line of cables and interconnects — Odin Gold. “Odin Gold achieves the unthinkable, eclipsing Odin 2,” says **Nigel Ng**, of Advance Audio, which distributes Nordost in Australia. “While Odin 2 will continue to remain available as a beacon of audio prowess, Odin Gold is now taking its place at the apex of Nordost’s offerings, as the new flagship line.”

Nordost says its cables use a patented ‘dual-mono-filament’ technology that creates “a virtual air dielectric between the extruded FEP insulation and each individual conductor” and that “gold-plated TSC technology is then carried throughout the cable and into its purpose-built purpose-built, 100 per cent shielded, gold-plated Holo plug connectors.”

Odin Gold loudspeaker cables are constructed with 28 gold-plated, solid-core 20AWG 99.999999% oxygen-free copper conductors, with each conductor using dual-mono-filament technology. “In contrast to Nordost’s previous loudspeaker cables, Odin Gold loudspeaker cables use an innovative tiered-termination process which eases the transition from cable to connector over several stages,” says Ng. “This process minimises the conversion points of conductors, using eight gold-plated, 14 AWG 99.999999% OFC conductors at either end of the cable. By decreasing the number of conductors without decreasing the overall gauge, Nordost eliminates overcrowding and creates orderly and precise connection points, while decreasing the impedance introduced which occurs in standard termination practices.”

Odin Gold Loudspeaker Cables are terminated using Nordost’s gold-plated Holo plug spade and Z-plug banana connectors. The retail price is \$86,995 for a 1.5 metre length; additional half metre stereo increments are \$9,000.00. Prices for other cables and interconnects in the Nordost Odin Gold range start at \$54,995 (power cable, 1.25-metre length), \$61,995 (interconnect, per metre), and \$34,995 (tonearm cable).

For more information, contact Advance Audio Australia on (02) 9561 0799 or visit www.advanceaudio.com.au



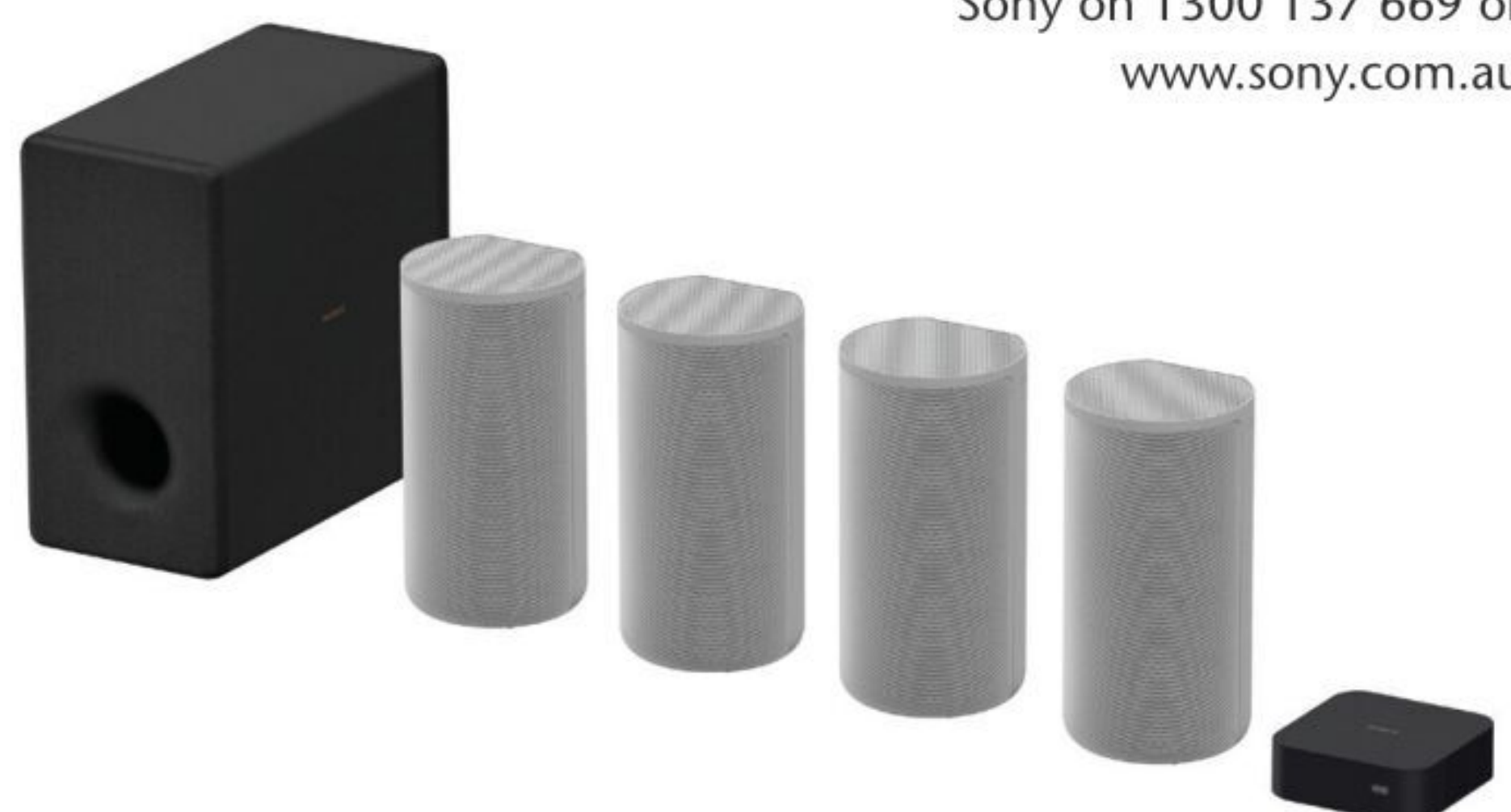
SONY HT-A9 + SSMT

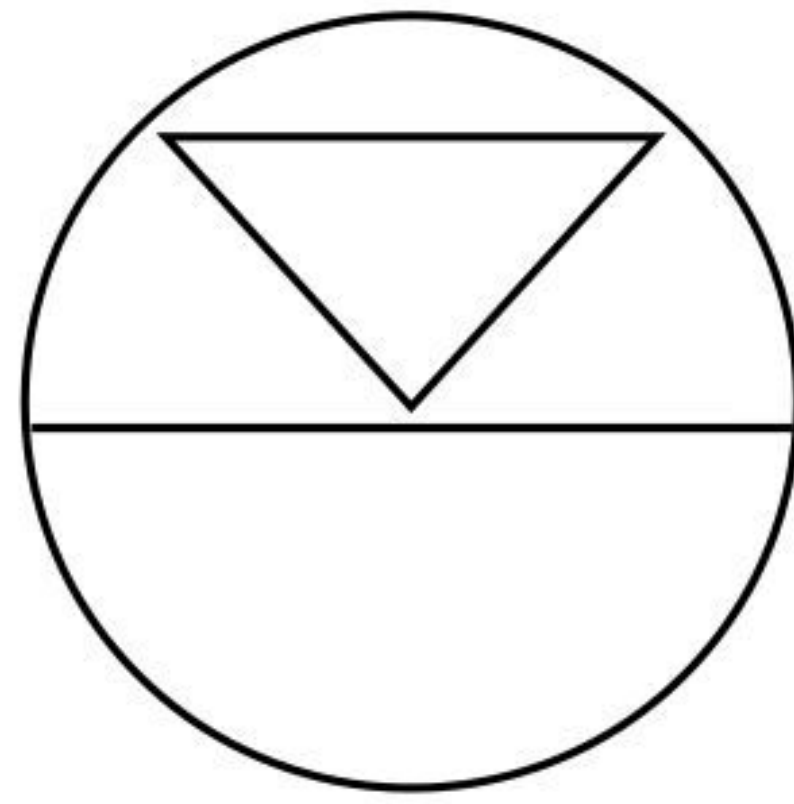
Sony has released its HT-A9 home theatre system, which integrates with its SA-SW5 and SA-SW3 wireless subwoofers and uses Sony’s 360 Spatial Sound Field Optimisation technology to create an immersive three-dimensional sound field at the listening position no matter where the speakers are positioned in your room.

Sony’s unique 360 Spatial Sound Mapping Technology places two microphones in every one of the HT-A9’s speakers and uses these to measure their relative height and position in the room, after which the circuit creates up to twelve phantom speakers by synthesising sound waves. “This means there’s no need to re-arrange furniture or precisely position the speakers, because the phantom speakers will ensure that everyone gets the same sonic experience, wherever they are in the room,” says Sony. “Also, there’s no need for connecting cables because the four speakers connect wirelessly to the control box, which links to your TV via HDMI.

In addition to two microphones, each HT-A9 speaker has a front-firing bass/midrange driver and tweeter and an upwards-firing midrange driver. The two optional subwoofers available to improve the low bass response of the HT-A9 are the SA-SW5 wireless subwoofer (\$999) which has a 180mm driver and an amplifier rated at 300-watts and the SA-SW3 wireless subwoofer (\$599) which has a 160mm driver and a 200-watt amplifier. Available now, the Sony HT-A9 Home Theatre system sells for \$2,299 (RRP).

For more information, contact Sony on 1300 137 669 or www.sony.com.au





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NAD UPDATES M10 TO M10V2

NAD has released a new and improved version of its Masters M10 BluOS Streaming Amplifier. The new V2 version has the same award-winning 100-watts per channel amplifier and BluOS streaming capabilities, but adds the capability to expand with Dolby Digital Surround decoding and a dedicated infra-red remote control.

“The original M10 caught the industry off-guard and made audiophiles and non-audiophiles re-imagine what hi-fi can and should be,” said **Cas Oostvogel**, Product Manager for NAD Electronics. “The M10 V2 continues where the M10 left off but now adds even more versatility as a two-channel or, potentially, a wireless home theatre system.”

The Dolby Digital upgrade means that M10 V2 owners can now easily build a complete Dolby Digital surround sound wireless 4.0, 4.1 or 4.2 immersive home theatre system simply by adding BluOS surround-enabled speakers and a subwoofer.

Although the M10 V2 can be controlled both by its front-panel touch screen and the BluOS app, NAD now includes an infra-red remote to enable quick and easy access to basic audio controls and presets. Streaming music is still controlled through the BluOS app and the M10 V2 supports AirPlay 2, Bluetooth aptX HD, is Roon Ready, and can be used with popular voice control assistants.

“Bringing everything but the speakers to the hi-fi experience, the M10 V2 features audiophile-grade amplification and DAC, with built in sources and pre-amp capabilities,

upgraded 7” IPS colour touch-screen and renowned nCore amplification technology,” said **Martin Ireland**, of Convoy International, which distributes NAD in Australia. “Its highly acclaimed ESS Sabre DAC effortlessly handles BluOS audio streams, which processes up to 24-bit/192kHz, and supports MQA and other lossless and high-resolution audio formats from streaming services such as Amazon Music Ultra HD, Deezer, Qobuz, and Tidal.”

The M10 V2 features Dirac Live room correction, so that owners can use the supplied microphone to measure their room’s acoustic anomalies and correct for any peaks and dips caused by the room’s acoustics up to 500Hz (a full-bandwidth version is optionally available).

The M10 V2 includes RCA analogue, optical and coaxial digital, HDMI eARC, and USB Type A inputs to connect compact disc players, game consoles, external drives, media adaptors, flat-panel displays, and other components, plus there’s two-way aptX HD Bluetooth and you can integrate with a multi-room set-up of up to 63 other BluOS wireless players. “The NAD Masters M10 V2 BluOS Streaming amplifier is a complete modern system for the modern listener,” says Ireland. “All you have to do is add loudspeakers.” Available now, the NAD M10V2 is priced at \$3,999 (RRP).

For more information, contact Convoy International on (02) 9774 9900 or visit www.convoy.com.au

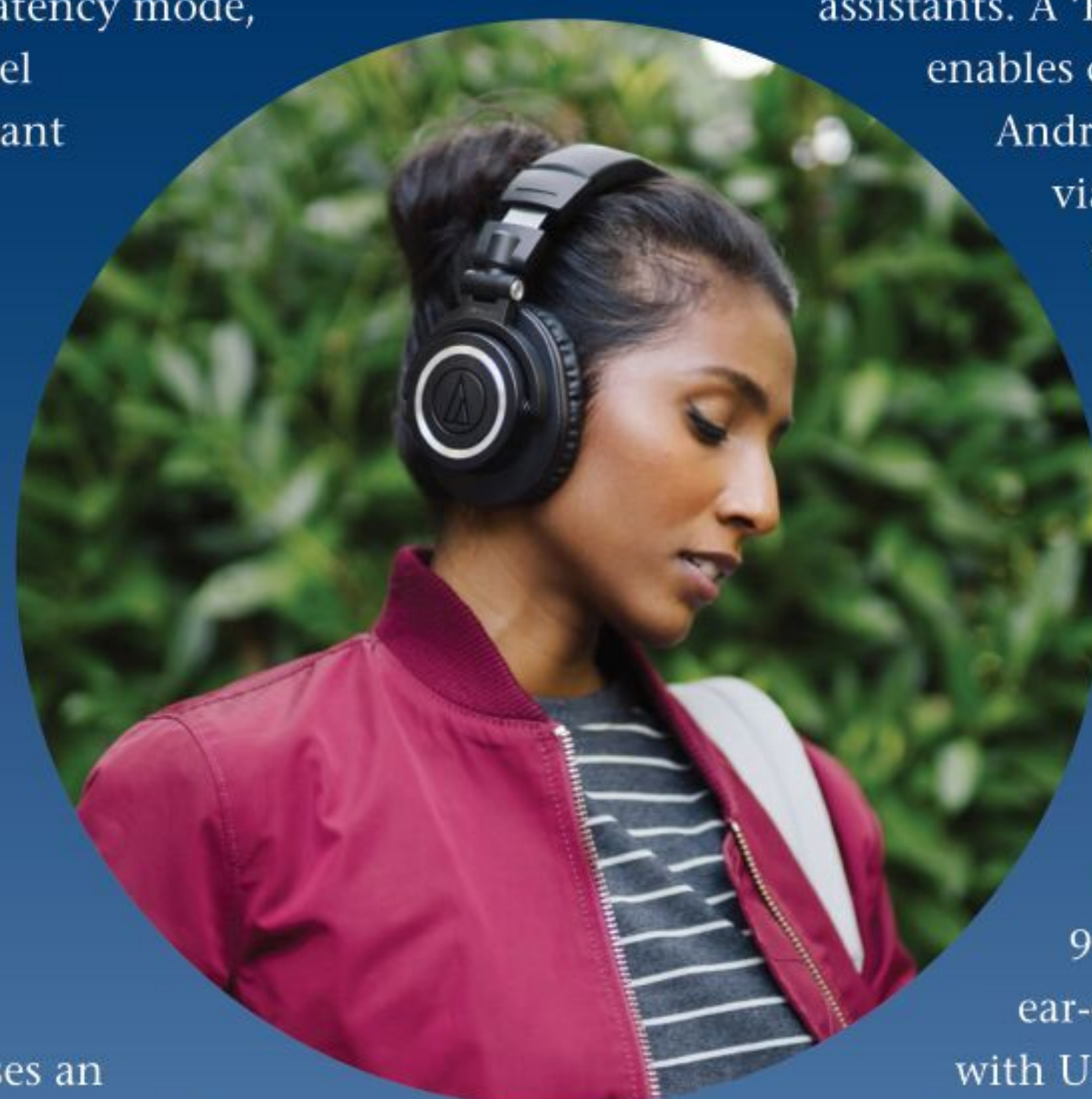
AT UPDATES BEST SELLER

Audio Technica has updated its best-selling Bluetooth headphones by incorporating beam-forming technology with two new microphones and updating the Bluetooth profile, along with other improvements.

“Audio Technica’s new M50xBT2 studio monitoring headphones deliver the same exhilarating wireless listening experience as their predecessor, offering exceptional clarity and deep, accurate bass response,” said **Alena Striebel**, of Technical Audio Group (TAG), which distributes Audio Technica in Australia. “In addition to the hardware improvements, Bluetooth connectivity has also been improved with the addition of multi-point pairing to let users connect wirelessly to two Bluetooth devices at once; a low-latency mode to improve synchronicity between audio and video for smoother streaming and for gaming; and increased compatibility thanks to the multiple audio codecs on-board — SBC, AAC and LDAC.”

Audio Technica has also added additional features to its A-T Connect app, allowing control of the low latency mode, equalisation, channel balance, voice assistant choice, misplaced headphone location and codec. Users can also now adjust the headphones’ equalisation settings by making the changes in the A-T Connect app and saving those settings on the headphones themselves.

The M50xBT2 uses an AKM AK4331ECB device, which is a 32-bit high-quality stereo audio DAC that has a built-in headphone amplifier. It also has sidetone circuitry to allow users to hear their voice in the headphones when making calls on most smartphones.



Controls on the left ear-cup access volume, mute, music, and calls, and voice assistants. A ‘Fast Pair’ feature enables quick pairing with Android OS smartphones via a single tap. Battery life is quoted at 50 hours on a full charge, with a further 3 hours possible following a 10-minute quick-charge. The M50xBT2 has 45-mm diameter drivers, a fold-flat design with 90-degree swivelling ear-cups, and comes with USB charging cable, and a detachable 1.2m cable for wired operation. It sells for \$349 (RRP).

For more information call Technical Audio Group on (02) 9519 0900 or visit www.audiotechnica.com.au

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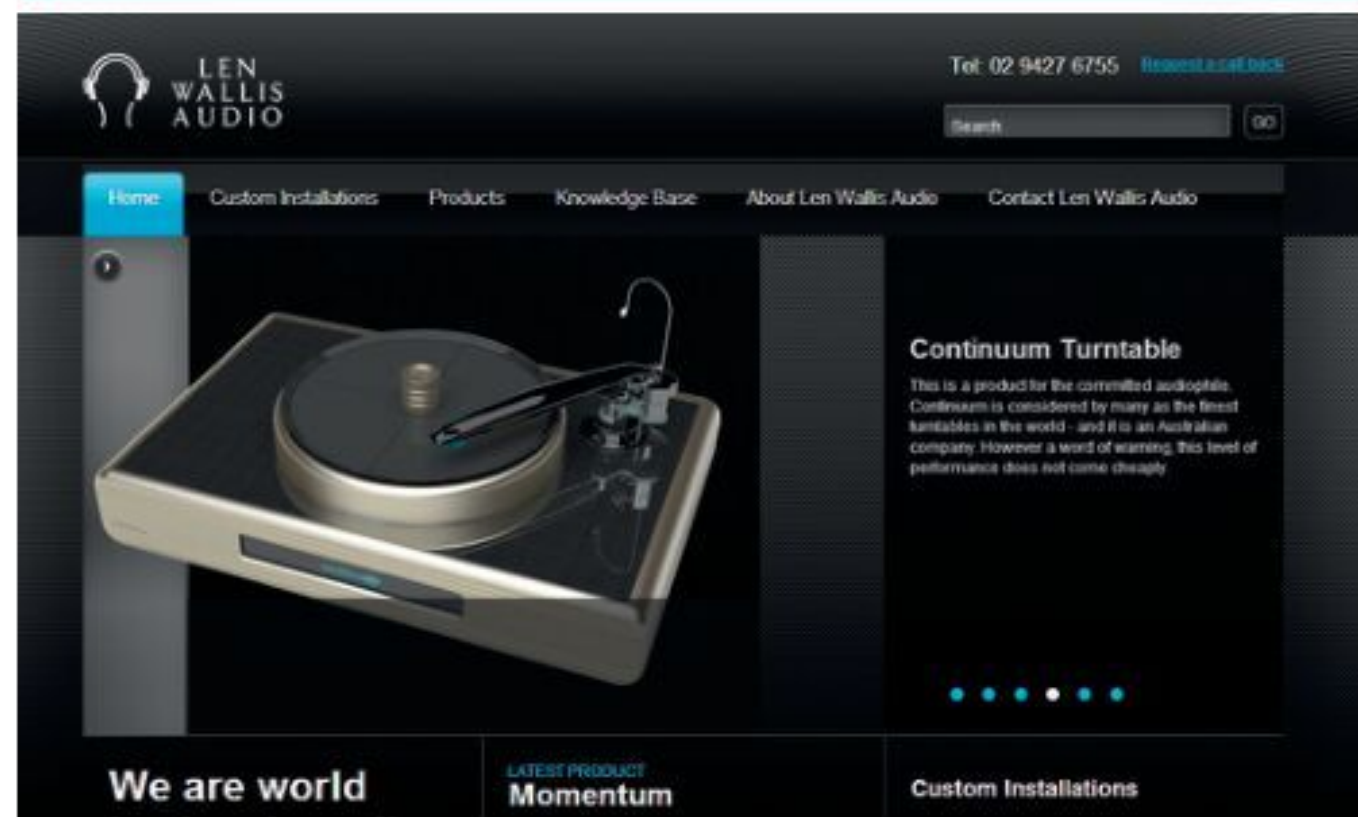
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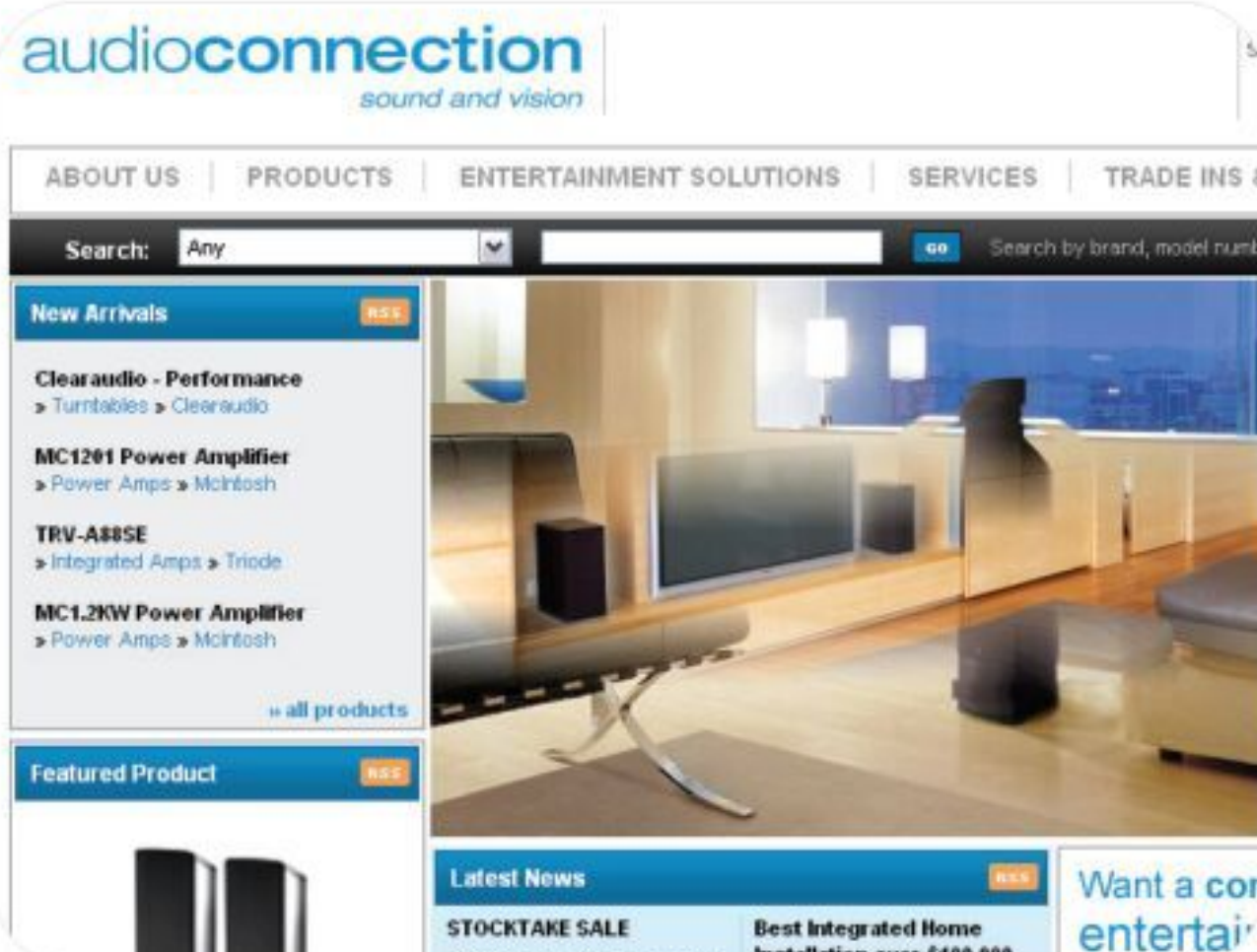
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SWEETVINYL SUGARCUBE SC-2 MINI

VINYL RECORDING SYSTEM WITH CLICK REMOVAL

Remember when we used to record stuff? Put vinyl records on, make mixtapes on cassette, play them in the car, give them nervously to prospective girlfriends with a carefully hand-written case insert, wondering if that track near the end isn't a bit much for that stage of the relationship?

Where has it all gone? These days you'll be lucky if your hi-fi amp even has a 'record out' around the back. It almost makes me chuckle when I review something which still has an input labelled 'tape'.

It was compact discs which did for recording, of course, because once you could copy digitally and burn your own CDs (though heaven forbid I should suggest you so much as think of copying digital music in any way because we will get rude letters from lawyers forbidding any mention of such fun if do), the whole mixtape game was up. File sharing just made it even more quaint, while for our tastes sharing a Spotify playlist seems rather lacking in romance by comparison.

But now we are enjoying the revival of vinyl, and to a lesser and faintly ridiculous extent also of cassette, which must have tickled or perhaps utterly baffled the Dutch

inventor of the compact cassette, Lou Ottens, before he died earlier this year, aged 94. So perhaps the time has come again for some recording fun. The makers of the Sugarcube clearly think so. Not only will they help you record your vinyl, they'll even make it sound better in the process. (And thankfully, no cassettes are involved.)

EQUIPMENT

The Sugarcube range hails from SweetVinyl in Mountain View, California, which funds product development via the Indiegogo platform, most recently with the SC-2 models updating a legacy range. There are other variants, including the SC-2 Mini/Phono, which adds a phono stage to the model reviewed here, but Australian distributor Decibel Hi-Fi says availability for that one is currently 'constrained'. So the only key prerequisite for this SC-2 Mini is that you'll require a phono stage, either standalone prior to the SC-2 Mini's inputs, or within an amplifier which offers a tape loop.

Around the back of the SC-2 Mini in addition to its inputs are analogue outputs for connection to your playback system or tape loop, USB slots allowing an external DAC to be used, a USB slot for the provided Wi-Fi adaptor, and an Ethernet socket if you're

able to present the unit with a hard-wired network connection.

On the front is another USB slot to which storage can be attached to transfer recordings, along with a knob and buttons to control how much cleaning-up the SC-2 will do to your recordings.

It's a solid little unit; I couldn't criticise the engineering-like construction other than at its feet, where sorbothane-like rings in a bottom groove no doubt provide useful isolation against vibration, but had a tendency to fall out whenever I moved it. With my turntable and preamp connected to the Sugarcube's input, I powered up the unit.

CONNECTION AND CONTROL

The front panel display is a bit alarming at first. A couple of company ident screens flash up very quickly, then there's nothing but 'snow'. This won't alarm those who have fully perused the manual in advance, as did I, of course, being a responsible reviewer, though in this case the required information appears only in the digital manual supplied on a stick, and not in the fold-out 'welcome' sheet. In there, on page 12 of 54, it tells you not to be alarmed by the snow on the display: *"When you power up your SugarCube, it will take about two minutes to complete its startup procedures. During this time, the LCD display will show snow (our humorous tip of the hat to the old days of analog TV). There is nothing wrong with your unit. We apologize for the wait but we have some seriously sophisticated software loading and it simply takes additional time. When you hear the results of our efforts, you will agree that it was worth the wait."*

I don't encounter many jokes in product manuals, let alone baked into the software, so *kudos* for that, and I braced myself for any further amusement at my expense further down the line. In fact it can't have taken longer than 30 seconds before the snow was replaced by a far more reassuring screen with the SugarCube logo, and I was able to progress to networking and using the app.

I had given the SugarCube unit an Ethernet cable connection, thereby avoiding use of the supplied Wi-Fi dongle. But the app didn't automatically 'see' the unit on my network, as the manual suggested it would when using Ethernet. It offered the options of Wi-Fi set-up, which I didn't want, or 'Enter IP address'. The unit usefully shows its IP address if you hold down the 'Bypass' button. I entered it into the app. Success!

Just to be thorough, I removed the Ethernet cable and inserted the Wi-Fi dongle to try set-up that way. Wi-Fi set-up involves pressing the big front button for more than seven seconds (say the app's instructions) or five seconds (says the manual) then letting go, until after a worrying pause the screen displays 'Wi-Fi Set-up'. You can then connect your device, in my case a current iPad Pro, to the SugarCube's own Wi-Fi network, then return to the app. Whereupon, says the manual, the SugarCube will be found. Oddly the iPad Pro failed, but a 2016 iPhone SE worked, though the tiny screen didn't do the app any favours.

There is one more way to control the SweetVinyl SugarCube, which is via a Chrome browser. I unplugged the Wi-Fi dongle and returned the SugarCube to Ethernet. Then, as described in the manual, I typed in the IP address followed by :5123 (its port number) for external control. Instant success here, and the first thing that I did, under the 'Support' menu, was to accept a software update. And I'm glad I ended up with this method of control, because the bigger the screen, the clearer were the editing functions once I started recording.

RECORDING

I began by pressing the unit's 'Bypass' button to check that the sound of my vinyl was flowing freely. Then on the app I went to the 'Recording' section; dropped the needle and pressed 'New recording'. A light on the unit flashed red, and the app indicated things were under way. Well, that could hardly be easier.

The app immediately offered to search for the album's metadata if I cared to enter the artist or catalogue number. It managed no match for Alex The Astronaut, but this was not unexpected, as I was playing a

non-mainstream piece of vinyl — a disc combining her first two digital EPs on one LP. But I found the catalogue number on the back of the album, which was ATA003, and was quite astonished to find that the app immediately returned the correct artwork and album details (see overleaf). It even popped the artwork up on the front-panel display. Then I sat back to enjoy the album.

The Sugarcube SC-2 Mini is a great recorder, helpful at splitting tracks and IDing LP metadata. But vinyl fans may well find they love it even more for day-to-day playback

If you're more keen to wander off and leave it running, you can limit the recording length (e.g. to 20 minutes), which is a nice user-friendly touch.

As noted, the app was fairly cramped for operation on a smallish phone, but big, bold and easy to handle on the Chrome browser — noting also that the Sugarcube seemed happy for me to use both control systems at the same time. If not particularly swish in terms of font use and design, it's perfectly clear what you need to do.

I had already, via the web interface, set recording quality to 24-bit/192k FLAC, and this particular LP being fresh and new, I had the cleaning circuit set to '4 Low'.

I stopped the recording at the end, and investigated how I might break the album into individual tracks. You don't have to do this — you may be happy with complete sides of digitised vinyl, but once I got the hang of the track splitting, I found the process to be quick and accurate, sliding start and stop markers around to the required positions (see image overleaf), with a subsequent 'trim tracks' option allowing finer adjustments. This is best done by listening as you move the markers — though the audio comes from your browser or tablet, not out of the SC-2. If you face any confusion, there's a full recording guide on a USB stick which comes in the box — it might be useful if SweetVinyl would put these guides online, so that you can find them if you mislay the stick, as well as benefit from any revisions.

Once recorded and split, you can export the files to a USB stick or drive plugged into the front of the unit. It took about three minutes to transfer my five split songs, and there they were, not only neatly foldered by artist and album, but with the artwork in the folder too, and the full unbroken album side too (you can prevent this last bonus by using the 'Side Format' options). I am not sure how much internal storage resides inside the Sugarcube itself, but clearly exporting is the method to be used; it's not designed to be used as a hard-drive music server; indeed there's no apparent way to play back recordings out of the Sugarcube's own sockets.

As I became accustomed to its ways I realised the best way to start a recording is just to punch the Record button on the front panel as soon as the stylus drops.

I also switched from FLAC to the more Mac-Friendly WAV or Apple Lossless, and tried the option to save recordings direct to the controlling device rather than to USB.



The Sugarcube SC-2 Mini is a new type of hi-fi component you've never realised you needed!

This allowed me to drop the files straight into my Mac's download folder as a zip file, which is neater, though the network transfer was far slower than via USB, despite the SC-2's gigabit Ethernet.

I was soon recording records almost as fast as I could change LPs, the only delay being the few minutes after recording that

the unit takes to generate the audio preview required for editing. Use that time to put the LP away and make your next selection, then you can be recording the next side as you edit the previous one. Warning — this is highly addictive!

There are some obvious questions here. Do you need a unit costing nearly \$4,000 to record your vinyl? You could use any computer with a simple audio interface and free software such as Audacity. Click and pop removal can be done with fairly cheap software like ClickRepair, which operates effectively up to 96kHz. Why pay more?

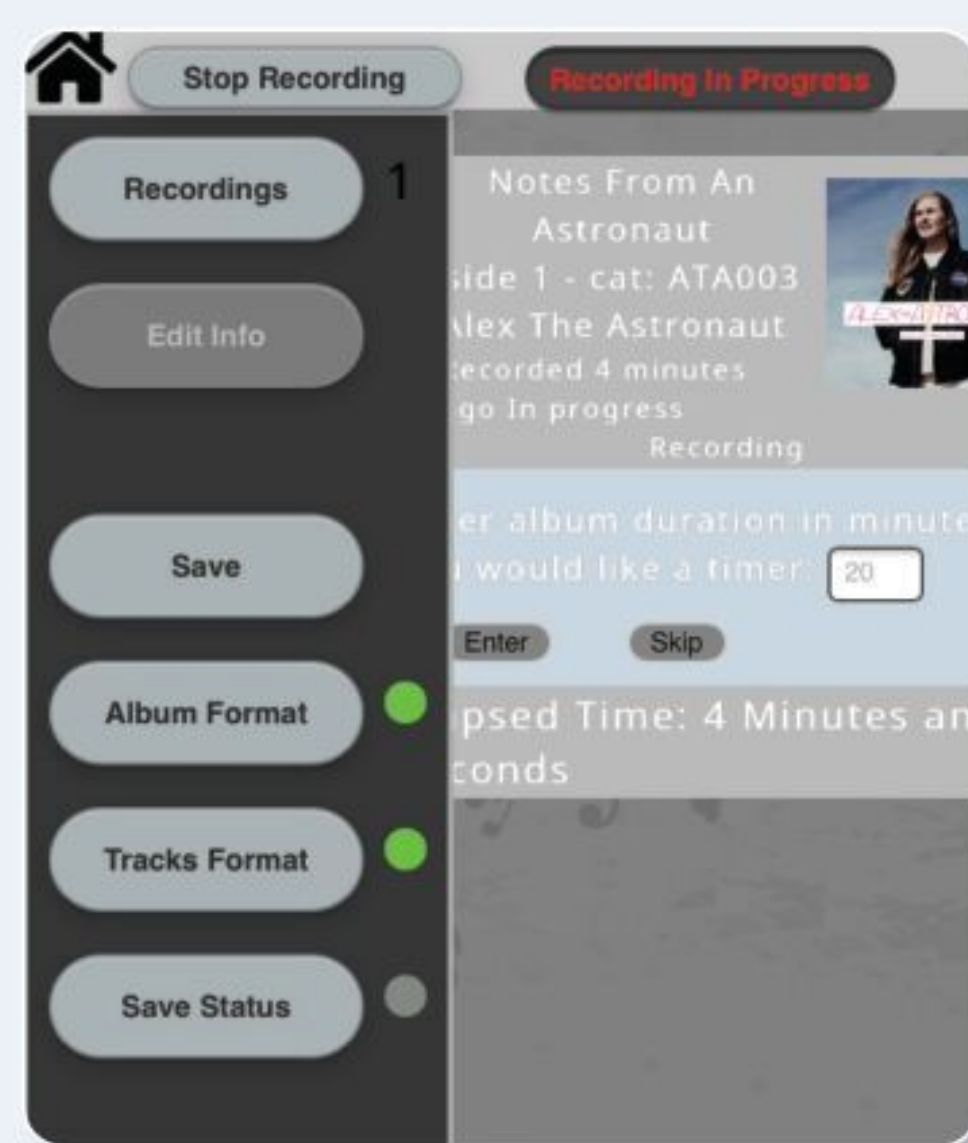
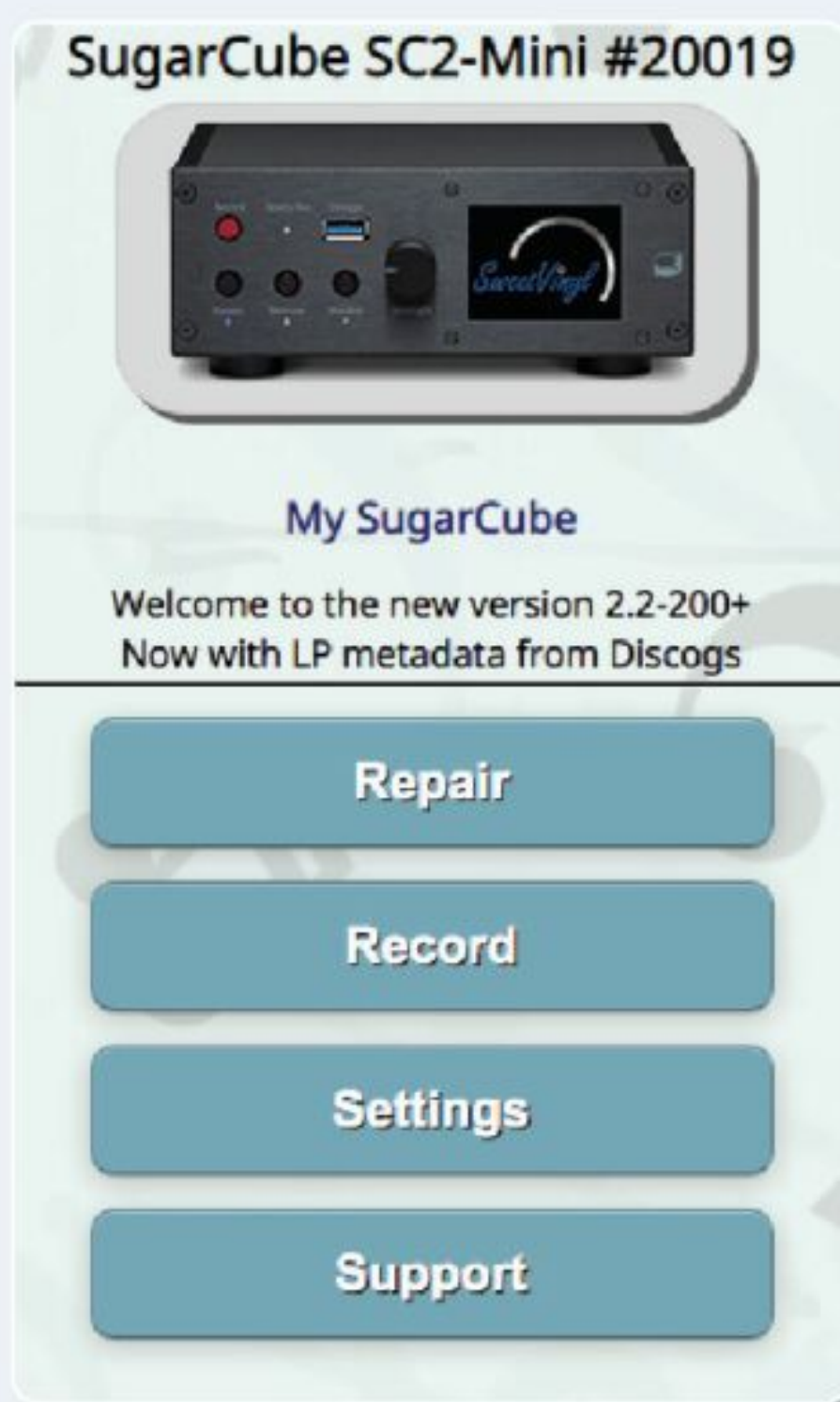
I can see several good reasons. Firstly, a simple audio interface will have a basic analogue-to-digital converter in it, whereas Sugarcube's ADC (from AKM) is of such quality that I couldn't easily pick processed sound from the sound with 'bypass' selected, even with click removal up high.

Second, the Sugarcube can sit permanently looped into your system, on bypass when not in use, immediately available to start recording whenever you feel the whim.

REAL-TIME LISTENING

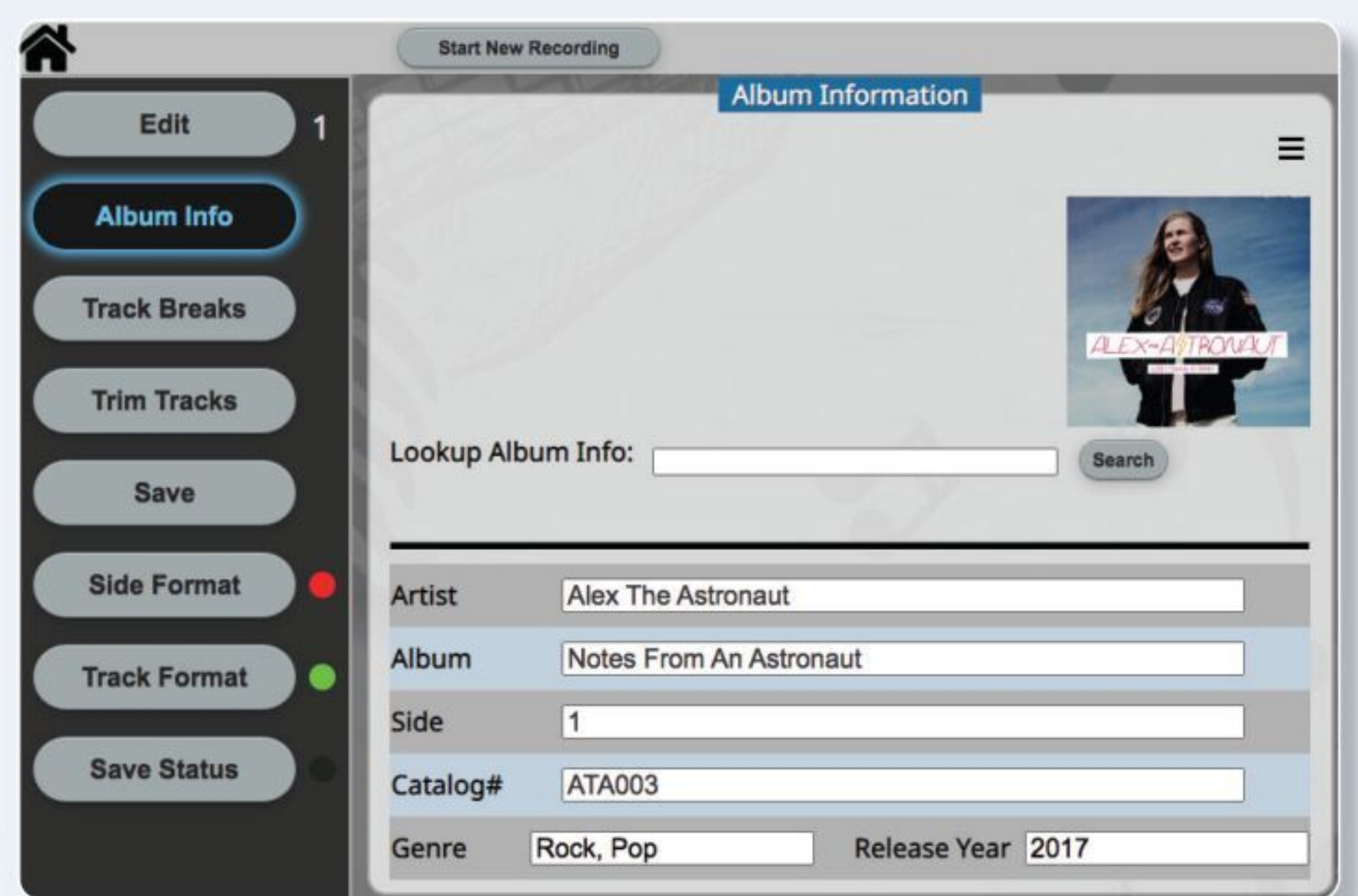
And thirdly I was mightily impressed by the ability of the Sugarcube not only to make its recordings of click-reduced vinyl, but to undertake this process in real-time, whether you're recording or not. This makes the unit useful even if you never want to record anything, though I suppose the live vinyl cleaning does come with the caveat that you are listening through a system that digitises the input (though that is now happening with the phono inputs of many smart amplifiers anyway, e.g. Linn, NAD's M33 etc.).

Real-time click removal is quite the thing. I have a pretty clean copy of The

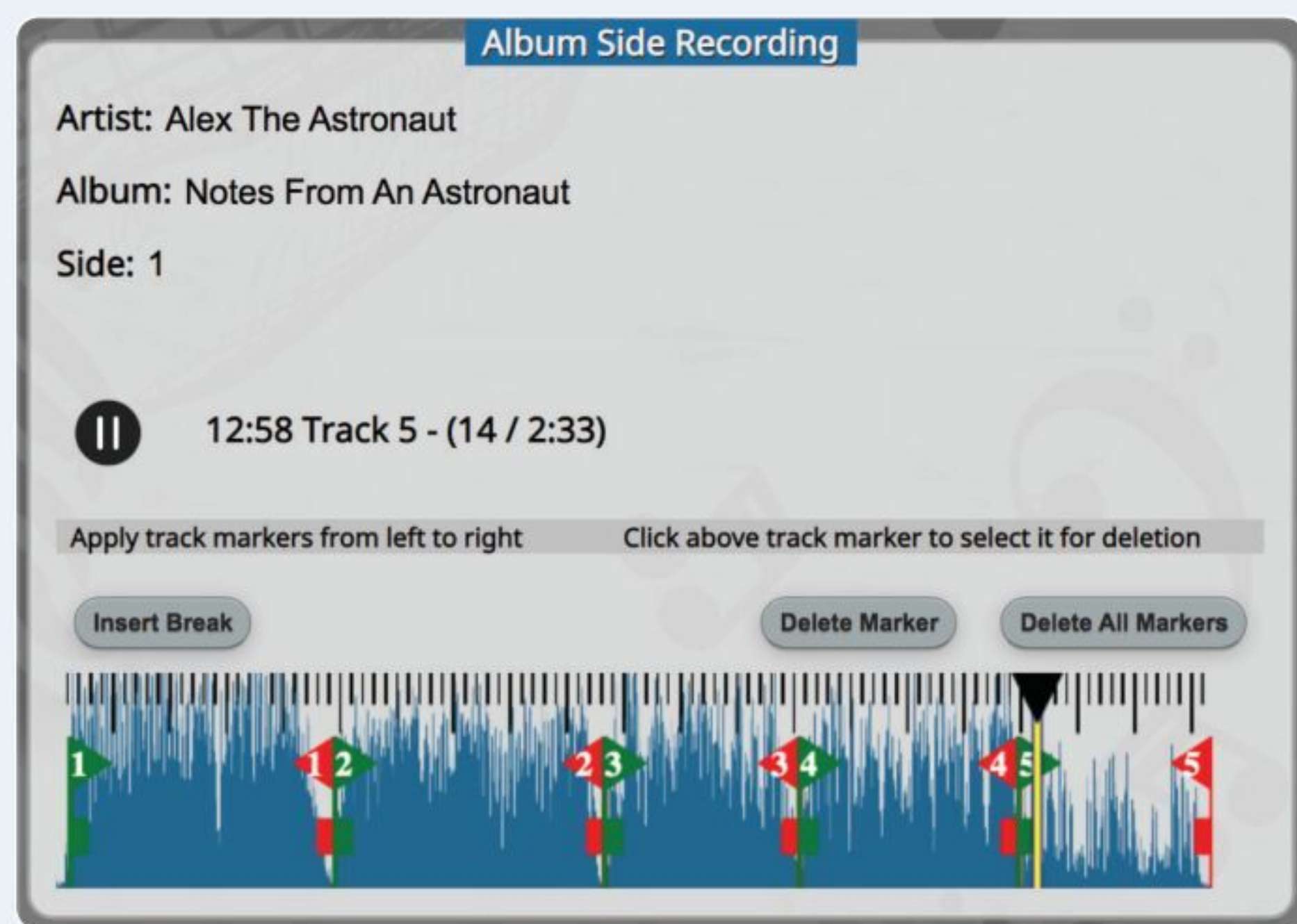


▲ Controlling the Sugarcube on an iPhone was possible, but cramped, especially on a dinky little iPhone SE.

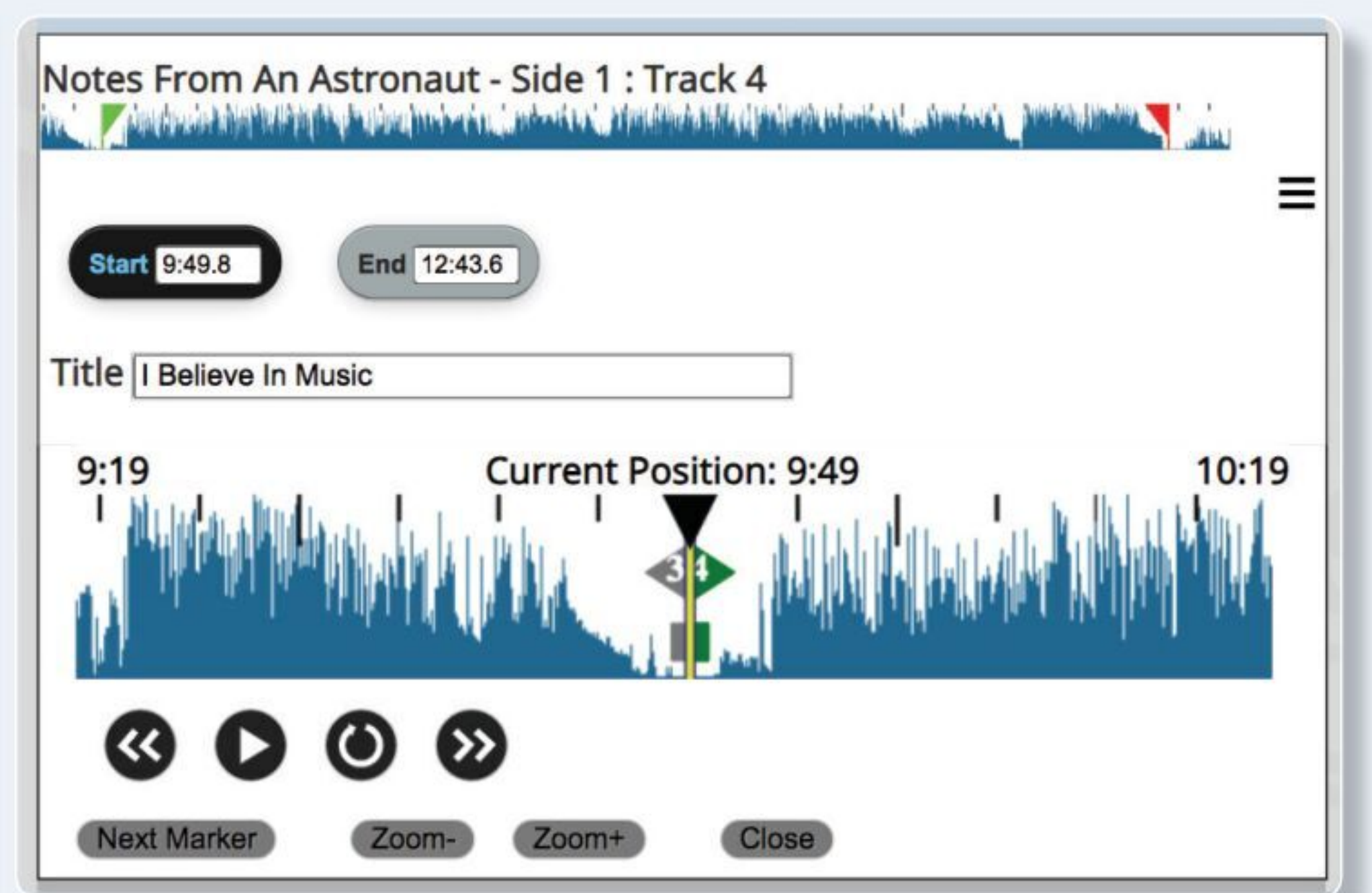
◀ Home screen, connected and ready.



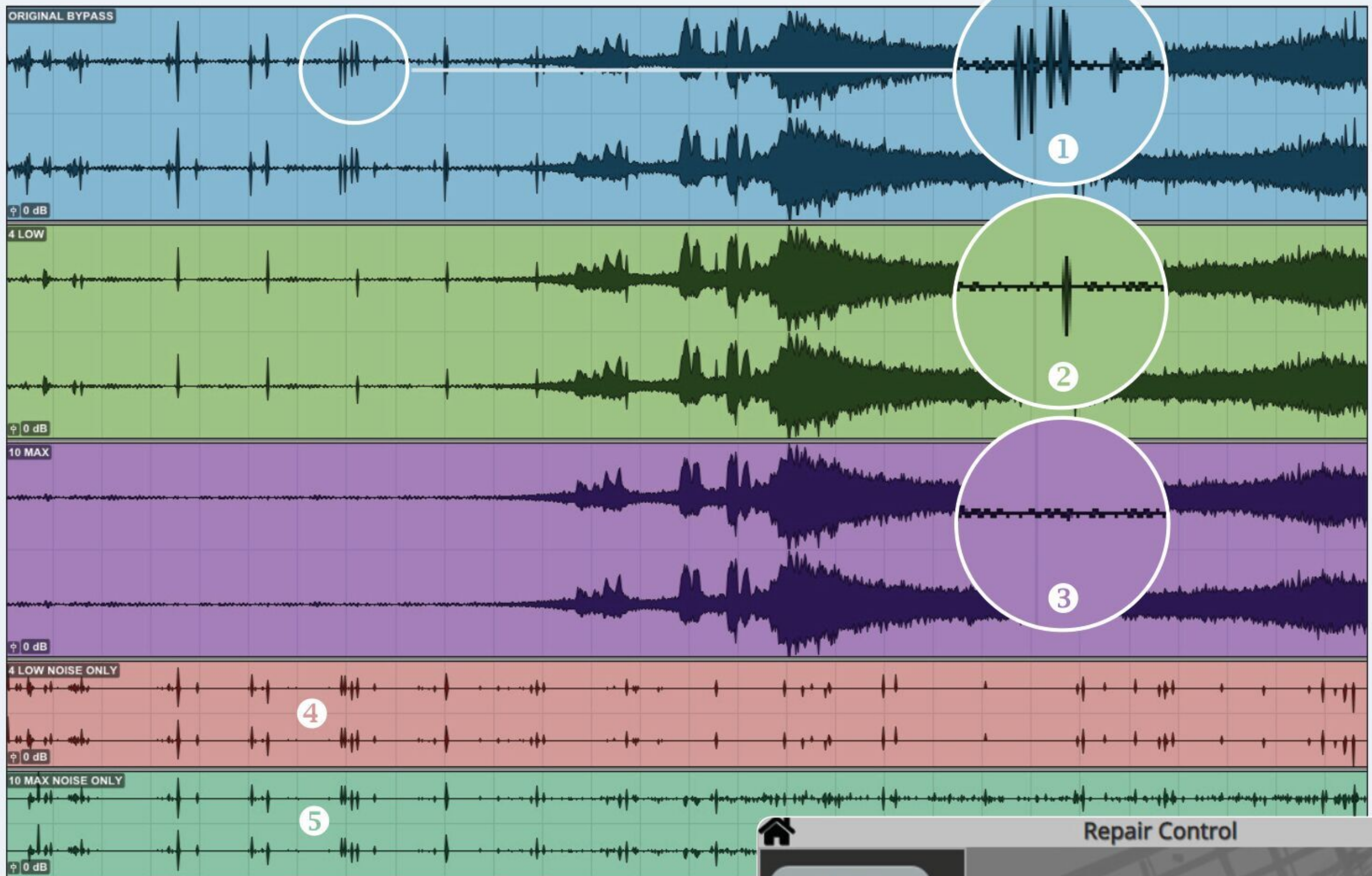
▲ While recording, if you enter the catalogue number the Sugarcube goes online to find album and track metadata. The image also appears on the front-panel display.



▲ With the whole side of the album recorded, you can view the waveform via iPad or Chrome browser and manually mark the start and end of each track. The music plays as you edit, and you needn't be 100% accurate at this stage.



▲ You can then view each track in turn, and adjust the end of that track and the beginning of the next. By moving the two markers slightly apart, you can trim away any unwanted gaps. Again the music will play while making your edits.



▲ **REAL-TIME LISTENING:** These waveforms were digitally recorded from the SugarCube's output while playing the noisy copy of Simon & Garfunkel's 'Concert in Central Park'.

- ❶ Set to 'Bypass', the SugarCube just plays the input straight through, crackles and all.
- ❷ A setting of '4 (Low)' was enough for most vinyl, but here one big glitch was still audible.
- ❸ Cranking it to '10 (Max)' removed even this huge glitch and flattened the waveform.
- ❹ Switching to 'Monitor Clicks' you hear only what's being removed. This is for '4 (Low)'.
- ❺ This waveform shows what was being removed when the SugarCube was on '10 (Max)'.

Alan Parsons Project's 'Eye in the Sky' which nevertheless has a loud crack in the left channel at the fade of track one. I repeated this section with a '4 (Low)' level of repair in circuit — the click entirely vanished. Using the web interface I could A-B quickly from bypassed sound to repaired sound, and again besides the slight delay in processing, I couldn't pick a difference. Perhaps the smallest smidgeon of upper-echelon openness was curtailed, I thought, but then I tried just banging the button and trying to pick blind which was bypassed and which processed and couldn't do so reliably. So vinyl cleaned, instantly! I can see some vinyl-lovers thinking it's worth four grand for that alone.

There's an interesting option to listen not to the cleaned vinyl, but only to what has been removed — just the clicks. This makes it very clear the work that's being done by the SC-2 (see ❹ and ❺ above).

Not that any of this means you shouldn't clean your vinyl properly — and Decibel Hi-Fi is the distributor of several excellent LP cleaning machines and kits. But I was

constantly impressed by the SugarCube. One torture test to which I subjected the SweetVinyl SugarCube SC-2 was a dreadfully damaged copy of Simon & Garfunkel's 'Concert in Central Park', where the opening groove and fade is laden with all manner of noise. Here Level '4 (Low)' wasn't enough — a full-on scratch still cracked through on every revolution. But up on '10 (Max)', even the sound of this severe scratch was reduced to a barely audible bump, and I could enjoy the sound of near-silence.

CONCLUSION

The SugarCube SC-2 Mini is a great recorder of vinyl, very helpful at splitting tracks and excellent at ID-ing LPs. But vinyl fans may well love it even more for day-to-day playback. You can leave it on bypass with new and clean pressings, or easily dial up a preferred level of click removal for anything that's in less than pristine condition. In this mode SweetVinyl's SugarCube SC-2 Mini is a new type of hi-fi component you have never realised you needed.

Until now! — Jez Ford

CONTACT DETAILS

Brand: SweetVinyl
Model: SugarCube SC-2 Mini
RRP: \$3,950
Inputs: RCA line-level analogue, 4 x USB-A 2.0, 1 x USB-A 3.0 (front)
 Ethernet, Wi-Fi dongle provided
Outputs: RCA line-level analogue
Control: iOS/Android app, Chrome browser
Dimensions (whd): 203 x 89 x 203mm
Weight: 2.7kg
Contact: Decibel Hi-Fi
Telephone: (04) 8602 2877
Web: www.decibelhifi.com.au



- Easy high-quality recording
- Live click removal when listening to vinyl
- Browser and app control



- Phono stage not included

ON TEST

ADCOM GFA-585se

STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER



You've heard of that saying "They don't make 'em like they did in the old days". These days that certainly applies to amplifiers, with even the glitziest of the uber-hi-end amplifier manufacturers succumbing to the temptation of buying 'off-the-shelf' ready-made Class-D modules from Denmark or Holland and putting them inside their amplifiers.

Well I can use these pages to tell you that, at least when it comes to Adcom, they "do make 'em like they did in the old days" because the Adcom GFA-585se looks like it just arrived on a time machine straight from the 1980s. Same circuitry, same build quality, same construction techniques, even the same look.

It's a high-powered, Class-A/B 'muscle' amplifier of the type that once shared shelf space in hi-fi emporiums with the likes of other famous 'muscle' amps of the day — Sumo, S.A.E., Crown, Great American Sound Company, Krell and others.

Adcom is no longer manufactured in the USA (see breakout box titled Adcom History) but the new owner owns all the original schematics and, with the GFA-585se at least, seems to be following them to the letter.

THE EQUIPMENT

Like Everest, photographs of the Adcom GFA-585se cannot prepare you for the sheer size of this amplifier. And they certainly can't prepare you for the amplifier's weight. So far as size is concerned, your rack (or, more likely, your floor) is going to have to accommodate dimensions of 275 × 482 × 502mm, so it's around half a metre wide, and half a metre deep and so high you could use it as a foot-stool.

Photographs also don't do the Adcom GFA-585se's front panel justice, because it's nigh-on impossible to convey the "shine" and the depth of black of all that lovely fluting. So if you think the Adcom GFA-585se looks good in photographs, just wait until you see it in the flesh!

I guess that in one way it's lucky the front panel looks so good, because there's so much of it on display!

There certainly isn't much to see on the front panel by way of controls but I wouldn't expect many on a power amplifier. I was pleased that the mains power switch is on the front panel, where it's easy to access, but in fact you probably won't need to use it all that much because you can configure the circuitry so that the amplifier will go into stand-by automatically, in which mode it will draw less than one watt.

It does this via an auto-sensing circuit that switches the amplifier on automatically when it senses an audio signal at its input, and off when it has not detected a signal for a period of time. The amplifier can also be switched on and off via an external trigger voltage. If you're not a fan of auto-sensing circuits or trigger voltages, you can also set the amplifier for totally manual operation, in which case the front-panel location of the power switch will prove to be very handy.

It's pretty hard to miss the two LEDs to the right of the power-on LED, because they have the longest identification name I think I've ever seen on the front panel of any amplifier... ever. You'll probably be able to see it in the photographs accompanying this review, but if you can't, the writing says "advanced power amplifier instantaneous distortion alert."

I think I would have labelled these LEDs with something a whole lot shorter and simpler, such as 'Headroom Alert' or 'Peak Power Indicator'. I am pretty sure that the underlying circuit is a fairly straightforward clipping detector, but Adcom says of it: "The instantaneous distortion alert circuit is a unique ADCOM distortion-detection system which reads all forms of non-linear distortion such as THD, IM, slew-induced, 'clipping', etc. The instantaneous distortion alert LEDs will light when distortion reaches 1% regardless of the impedance or the phase angle of the current voltage and the reactance of the loudspeakers which the amplifier is driving. Sometimes, when the amplifier is in use, the LEDs may occasionally flicker under high-volume listening, particularly if you are driving low impedances. This flickering is no cause for concern. The LEDs are simply warning you that the amplifier is approaching its maximum power output into the specific loudspeakers

The Adcom GFA-585se looks like it just arrived on a time machine straight from the 1980s

which you are using. If, however, the instantaneous distortion alert LEDs glow brightly or are on most of the time during playback, you are overdriving the amplifier and should lower the volume control to reduce the listening-level demands, or you may blow the AC rail fuses, cause the thermal protection to be activated or, in extreme cases, damage your loudspeakers."

As you can see from this description, the Adcom has a thermal protection circuit, which it says will "shut down the amplifier if the temperature of either heat sink reaches 70°C." If this happens, the LED labelled 'thermal' will illuminate and the output stage will be disabled until the temperature of the heat sinks drops below 70°C, after which the amplifier will automatically re-connect the output stage and playback will resume.

To the right of the 'thermal' LED is an LED labelled 'limit'. You'll see this turn on for around ten seconds whenever you switch the amplifier on while the circuitry stabilises after which you'll hear a pair of relays click and the amplifier will be ready for use.

Adcom's 'Owner's Manual' says that the "the GFA-585se is provided with an overload protection circuit to protect amplifier when speaker short circuit (sic) or DC voltage is





happened (sic) on the amplifier output stage... it means the output relay will open immediately to prevent the output transistor or other parts from failing."

The issue I have with this statement is that I doubt any relay could operate quickly enough to provide this type of protection, and relying on a fast fuse would also be unwise with such a high-powered amplifier. Indeed the local Australian distributor, NGP Distribution, says that users should never make any changes to input or output connections while the amplifier is turned on and under no circumstances should the speaker terminals be short-circuited or either of the terminal(s) be connected to ground.

You should note that 'switching off' the amplifier is not quite as simple as pressing the front panel switch, or even turning off the amplifier at the mains, because the storage capacitors inside the GFA-585se are so large that the amplifier will continue to be 'powered-up' for many minutes after you've done either operation.

Indeed Adcom provides a very large warning (highlighted in bold type) right at the start of its Owner's Manual which says: "**WARNING. The GFA-585se is a very powerful**

amplifier capable of delivering very large peaks into low impedances, exceeding 50 amperes per channel. Therefore, be certain to exercise extreme caution when making connections to and from the amplifier. Always make certain that the amplifier is disconnected from the AC outlet, and its large filter capacitors are discharged. Please note that the power supply capacitors can take more than 12 minutes to discharge. Failure to observe this precaution may result in damage to the loudspeakers and/or blowing of the amplifier's a.c. rail fuses, conditions which are NOT covered by the warranty."

The rear panel reveals both unbalanced (via gold-plated RCA terminals) and balanced (via gold-plated XLR terminals) inputs, with two micro-switches (one for each channel) to select the pair you are using. There's also a micro-switch with positions for 'bridged' and 'stereo', revealing that it's possible to operate the Adcom GFA-585se as a bridged mono amplifier, in which case its rated output increases to 1,000-watts into 8Ω. As noted earlier, none of these switches should be used while the amplifier is powered-up. (If used as a mono amplifier, the GFA-585se should only be used with passive loudspeakers).

At the left of the rear panel are a slider switch to select turn-on mode (Manual, Auto-On, Trigger) and two 12V d.c. trigger terminals (in/out). The speaker terminals are large, well-made, insulated multi-way types, with the channels oriented correctly so your speaker cables will not cross. Below the terminals are advisories about the minimum speaker load that can be accommodated (4Ω when the amplifier is in stereo mode and 8Ω when it's in mono mode).

There are two large handles on the rear panel to facilitate moving it, but the 34kg dead-weight of the GFA-585se and the fact that the huge toroidal power transformer is positioned off-centre, behind the front panel, make moving it a job for at least two strong people.

LISTENING SESSIONS

You obviously need to exercise some caution when installing the GFA-585se by making sure there is no common ground between the input and output, following the warnings in the instructions never to make any change of input or output connections while the amplifier is turned on, and avoiding short-circuits of any kind, but these precautions are no more than you should do when installing any hi-fi amplifier at all. But I have to mention it because we've all become so used to super-sophisticated computerised modern protection circuits — which you won't find anywhere inside the GFA-585se — that we can let our guard down sometimes and get careless.

I thought I'd start my listening sessions with a biggie, and one with which I'm more than familiar, Handel's mighty *Messiah*, which here in Australia we tend to perform around Easter (when it was intended to be performed), whereas in the rest of the world it's more often performed around Christmas. I consider it one of the miracles of high fidelity that I can listen to it any time I like. It's very long (the score runs around 300 pages!) and when following using the score (which I often do) I am continually amazed that Handel composed it in just 24 days.

To give you an idea of how fast Handel would have had to have been putting pen to paper in order to do this, Miles Hoffman, Professor of Chamber Music at the Schwob School of Music, once estimated that if Handel had been writing 10 hours a day, he would have had to put down 15 notes every minute to do it in this time! (Though I am not sure if Hoffman took into account that some of the *Messiah* is recycled from works Handel wrote earlier.)

Listening to a performance recorded at the Sydney Opera House just a few years ago

(in December, for a change), I didn't need to listen for long to hear that the Adcom GFA-585se was doing a superb job in 'telling it like it is', because it sounded exactly as I recalled when I was in the audience the night it was recorded. When the massed choir (600 strong) comes in singing 'and the glory, the glory of the Lord' I thrilled as the shivers went down my spine, particularly at the gloriously beautiful sound of the sopranos.

The Sydney Opera House acoustic is

particularly kind to sopranos, which I heard immediately when Celeste Lazarenko took her first solo with *Shepherds*, where I could hear not only her voice direct, but also the faint echo from the rings above the stage and also the louder echo from the hall itself — at least I could when listening to the Adcom GFA-585se. It's not always this evident. I admired, too, the accuracy with which the Adcom rendered the sound of the harpsichord (which is given a rightful prominence

in this recording that it's not often given).

The Adcom also delivered the famous *Hallelujah* chorus with aplomb and was equally superb at delivering the triumphant sound of the *Amen*, the sound of which I confess I prefer over the *Hallelujah*.

Sydney's Opera House is not only one of the most beautiful in the world, it also houses the world's largest mechanical action pipe organ, with 10,244 pipes, 201 pipe ranks, 131 speaking stops and five manuals.

ABOUT ADCOM

In L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy famously says, "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." So maybe it should not come as a surprise for you to learn that Adcom is no longer headquartered at 11 Elkins Road, East Brunswick, New Jersey and has not been there for nigh-on half a century. Since it was first established back in the 70s in the USA, the company has shifted through different states of America, and though several completely different owners, who between them had varying degrees of success marketing it.

The company was founded by Newt Chenin, who was the Southern Californian sales representative for one of the most famous amplifier companies in America at the time, SAE (Scientific Audio Electronics), founded in 1967, in Los Angeles, by Morris Kessler and Ted and Beth Winchester. The SAE amplifier circuits were designed by Kessler himself, as well as by Ed Miller (who would later found Sherwood) and James Bongiorno (whose designs were used by Marantz, Dynaco, Sumo, Great American Sound, Harman-Kardon and Spread Spectrum Technologies, amongst others).

Legend has it that Kessler had over-estimated demand on one of his SAE power amplifiers and had a warehouse full of them that he couldn't shift, so he offered them to Chenin who in addition to being a sales rep, was selling his own line of phono cartridges, under the name Adcom. The brand-name was apparently code for 'Added Compensation' because Chenin was making additional income by selling the cartridges to hi-fi dealers he was already being paid to visit.

Chenin and Kessler came to an agreement, and the amplifiers were quickly re-badged with the Adcom brand and with the model number GFA-1 and released in December 1979. Chenin used the same sense of humour he'd used to create his

company name to create the model number for the first amplifier to wear an Adcom badge, because GFA stood for 'Great F*cking Amplifier'. He later followed it up with the GFA-1A and GFA-2 power amplifiers, the GFP-1 preamplifier, and the GFT-1 tuner.

All these models were built by Amplifier Technologies Inc. (ATI), a company owned by Kessler which had a 50,000-square-foot plant in southern California, and built models not only for SAE and Adcom, but also for B&K, BGW, CAT (California Audio Technology), Outlaw Audio, Theta Digital, and a number of others. Kessler sold SAE to Drew A. Kaplan (DAK) in 1988, but kept ATI.

Rated at 200-watts per channel, the Adcom GFA-1 was one of the first 'high-current' amplifiers available. It was quickly followed by the GFA-1A power amp and then the GFA-2 power amplifier, establishing a pattern that would become a tradition at Adcom: releasing a specific model, then very shortly afterwards releasing a revised, updated version of that model. All these Adcom models were also designed either by Morris Kessler, Ed Miller or James Bongiorno.

The success of these Adcom models caused Chenin to hire industry veteran Rob Ain as Vice President. When Chenin retired, his son Alec took over the running of the company, and he and Ain brought in Nelson Pass to design the Adcom GFA-555. (After having worked at Adcom since 1981, Ain moved to Polk in 1988, but came back to Adcom as Executive Vice President in 1991, before moving over to Boston Acoustics in 2003.)

The Pass-designed Adcom GFA-555 power amplifier, released in March 1985, quickly became the company's most famous model. Indeed it could fairly be said that it was phenomenally successful for the company, with *Stereophile* magazine reviewer Anthony Cordesman writing of it at the time: "It is so clearly superior to past amplifiers in the low-to-midpriced range — not to mention most amplifiers costing two to three times its price — that I can unhesitatingly recom-

mend it for even the most demanding high end system."

True to form, Adcom released a GFA-555II fairly soon after. Although this amplifier incorporated various circuit improvements, not the least of which was re-instating the original driver transistors specified by Pass (his original design specified Motorola MJE15030/31s, but when Adcom built the 555, they used 2SA1011/2SC2344 drivers only to find these failed if the speaker protection fuses failed. They then went with 2SB633/2SD613 pairs — which also proved problematical — before reverting to Motorola MJE15030/31s), but the main difference was in the exterior.

The original GFA-555 had a very dated front-panel design, with a flat piece of alloy fitted with rudimentary handles. The MkII version eliminated the handles, added fluting and in general informed the front panel cosmetics that Adcom now uses. As for the GFA-585se, although it bears a similar model number to the GFA-555, Nelson Pass says that he "doesn't recognise the GFA-585se as being related to my original design."

As for the current owner of Adcom, the brand name is now owned by the Everest World Company Ltd., a company based in Bangkok, Thailand, which purchased the rights not only to the Adcom name but also the rights to Adcom's intellectual property, including its circuit designs.

Everest subcontracts the manufacture of the Adcom GFA-585se—along with several other of its amplifiers—to Resonance Electronics, a company established in 2009 in New Taipei, in Taiwan, that — according to its Facebook page — "specialises in the development and production of power amplifiers, stereo preamplifiers, digital-to-analog converters, and stereo integrated amplifiers for high-end hi-fi audio systems."

However, although some Adcom amplifiers are built in Taiwan, it would appear that others are not. The Adcom GFA-5500, for example, is built for Everest by China-based company Quality Technology Electronics.#

I heard its sound being authentically reproduced during the *Messiah*, but I heard it much better when I switched to playing a fabulous recording made by Move Records back in 1969 shortly after the Sydney Opera House was opened.

Appropriately titled 'Sydney Opera House Concert Hall Grand Organ' it features Douglas Lawrence, Robert Ampt, Christa Rumsey and Donald Hollier demonstrating the organ's versatility playing works that you really wouldn't expect, such as *Grand Chœur* from *12 Pièces* (Théodore Dubois), a *Lamento* and a *Litany* (Jehan Alain), *Preludes for Christmas Time: Op. 76, No. 6* (Schiedermayer) as well as some you might, written by Lizst, Hayden and Schumann. What? No Bach? No, but there is Lizst's absolutely stunning tribute to him — *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H* — which on this disc is magisterially rendered by Hollier.

The Adcom delivered the awesome sound of the organ's larger and longer pipes tremendously well, while also accurately voicing the multitude of stops used to showcase the instrument's versatility. You can hear that the Adcom doesn't have any inherent circuit noise, either, because when Move's engineers let the sound of the organ fade away at the conclusion of the various works, you can hear the acoustic of the Sydney Opera House itself.

Curiosities on this album are several of Haydn's *Pieces for Mechanical Clock*, played by Robert Ampt. When I first heard this album I had no idea that there were once clocks that, instead of ringing to indicate the hour (or parts of it) instead were connected to small (tiny!) mechanically-operated pipe organs, and played them instead. Various composers were commissioned to write pieces that these clocks could play and many, including Haydn, obliged.

So did Beethoven. Mozart did too, but he wasn't happy about it, telling Constanze in a letter "*If it were on a large clock-work with a sound like an organ, I'd be glad to do it; but it is a thing made up of tiny pipes only, which sound too shrill and childish for me.*" Needless to say, Hayden's pieces, as rendered by the Sydney Opera House organ, are neither shrill nor childish. And they sound wonderful.

I'd been turning up the volume quite a bit, and finding the Adcom GFA-585se was easily and effortlessly delivering the power levels I required, but my home isn't really suited to massed choirs and pipe organs, so I thought I'd turn the wick to max playing back an instrument my home is suited to, in the shape of a piano. And if you want to hear a piano hammered mercilessly, I can't think of a better track than Muse's *Apocalypse Now*, the opener to 2003's 'Absolution'.

The power available on tap from the Adcom GFA-585se is more than impressive — it's awe-inspiring. And it's audible not just with the piano sound, but with the swirling synthesisers, the frantic drumming and the urgent bass on this track. Part of the lyric of this song is "Declare this an emergency/ come on and spread a sense of urgency... this is the end/the end of the world." And in this case the lyric would be right. Turn up the volume on this one with the power levels the Adcom GFA-585se can deliver and it really will sound like the end of the world!

But the Adcom GFA-585se can also be soft, silky and delicate, as I proved to my satisfaction by listening to Karen Carpenter sing Burt Bacharat's (*They Long to Be*) *Close to You*. She was a great drummer, but it's her voice that always amazes me, because it's just so, so pure yet has a tonal depth the like of which I don't think I've heard since.


In some ways it's a pity that the Carpenters' hit songs *Close to You* and *We've Only*

Just Begun and *I'll Never Fall in Love Again* are so bubble-gummy, because it means that fewer listeners might take the time to listen to their excellent Beatles covers, their great version of Leon Russell's *A Song For You*, or to Karen's version of *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* which, although it's not perfect for her register, beautifully demonstrates the perfection of her phrasing and breath control. Although this was one of four hits from the album 'Passage', my favourite on this album is their cover of Klaatu's *Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft*.

CONCLUSION

My alternate idea for the lead paragraph to start this review was to introduce the Adcom GFA-585se as 'a blast from the past' because in terms of its electronic design, its build quality, its sound quality and even its appearance, it's like a time-traveller from the 80s. Which is good news because to my mind, the power amplifiers from that period represent the 'golden age' of high-end audio. But that's just the good news.

There's even-better news, which is that it would appear that the recommended retail price of the GFA-585se has also travelled through time to 2021.

You are not going to be able to buy any modern hi-fi stereo power amplifier with the same high power, low noise and distortion and extended frequency response — or its superb sound quality — for anything even close to what Adcom is asking for its GFA-585se.  *greg borrowman*

Full laboratory test report, see page 28

CONTACT DETAILS

Brand: Adcom
Model: GFA-585se
RRP: \$5,799
Warranty: Two Years
Distributor: NGP Distribution
Address: U31/32 Carabella Street
 Kirribilli
 NSW 2061
T: (04) 0345 6154
E: sales@ngpdistribution.com.au
W: www.ngpdistribution.com.au



- Very high power
- Great sound
- Low noise



- Protection circuitry



**Flexible,
Smart, Bild i.**

LOEWE.

Made in Germany since 1923.

The new Loewe bild i TV sets impress with their outstanding design, fine details and soft shapes as well as a fabric-covered rear panel. But it's not just the exterior that has an all-new look, the values inside also have something new to offer. Available in 65, 55 and 48 inch sizes, the Smart TV from Loewe is a small revolution and differs from its previous models. In a modern interpretation, bild i shows how smart television works. The SL7 chassis in combination with os7 transforms the TV into a new generation of smart OLED TVs. The new Loewe OLED televisions in the bild i series are characterized by their soft design language and exclusive material. This is Loewe's way of combining quality and the latest technology in a fresh, modern, interior-style look.

Even when it comes to sound, Loewe remains flexible: be it with invisibly integrated "Loewe invisible sound" speakers via the bild i or with the attached soundbar in the bild i S to offer an extra level of audio enjoyment, or Dolby Atmos multi-channel home cinema by adding the klang sub5 - everything is possible in modular form.

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 W indimports.com f/Indi Imports @indimports



reddot winner 2021



Readers interested in a full technical appraisal of the performance of the Adcom GFA-585se Stereo Power Amplifier should continue on and read the LABORATORY TEST REPORT published on the following pages. Readers should note that the results mentioned in the report, tabulated in performance charts and/or displayed using graphs and/or photographs should be construed as applying only to the specific sample tested.

LABORATORY TEST REPORT

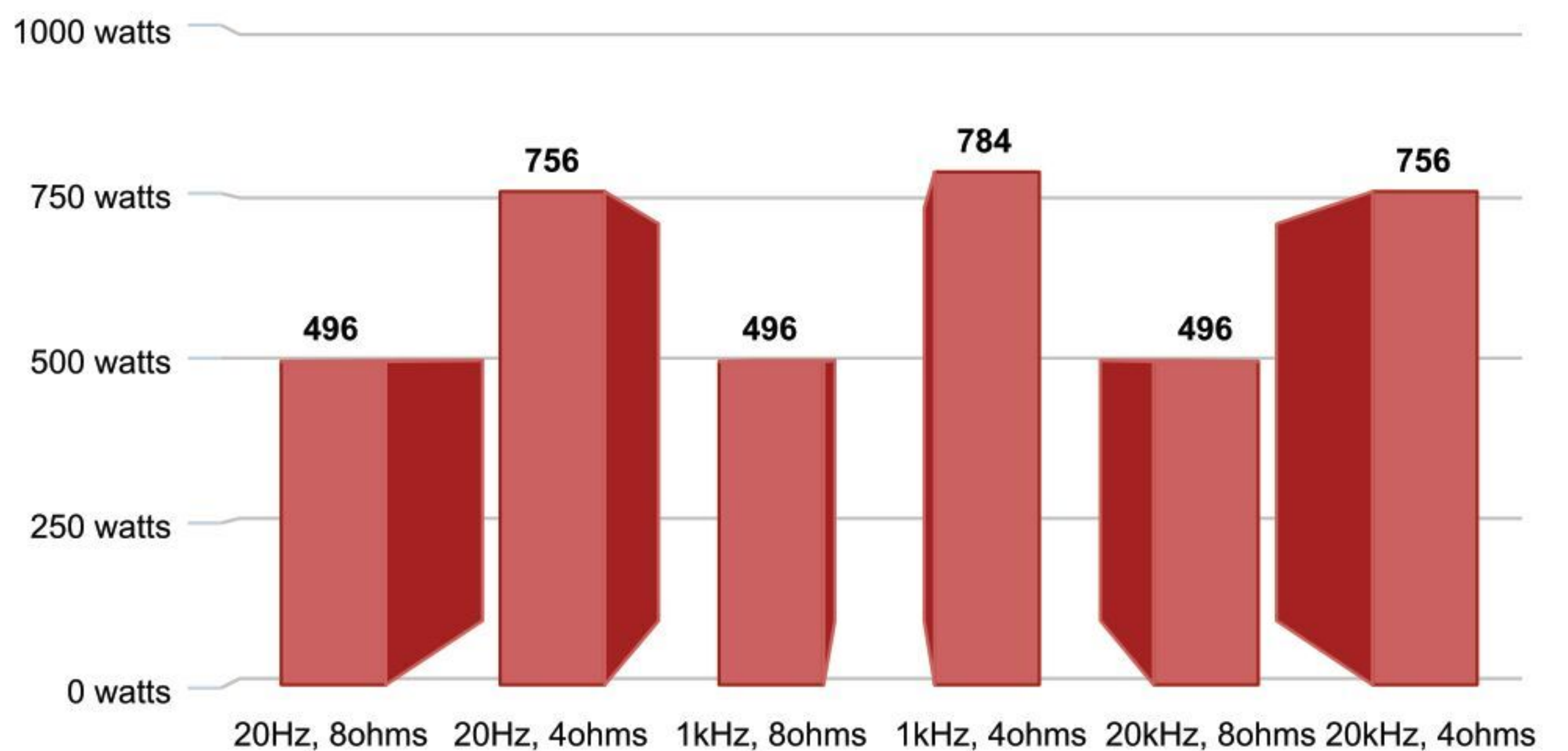
Newport Test Labs measured the both-channels-driven into 8Ω power output of the Adcom GFA-585se as a just a few watts shy of 500-watts per channel (496-watts), which is above specification. Importantly, it is able to deliver this power at any frequency across the audio spectrum, from 20Hz to 20kHz, as you can see from the tabulated figures and from the adjacent bar graphs.

When only a single channel was driven into the same load, the GFA-585se's output power increased to 530-watts per channel at the frequency extremes, and to 545-watts per channel at 1kHz.

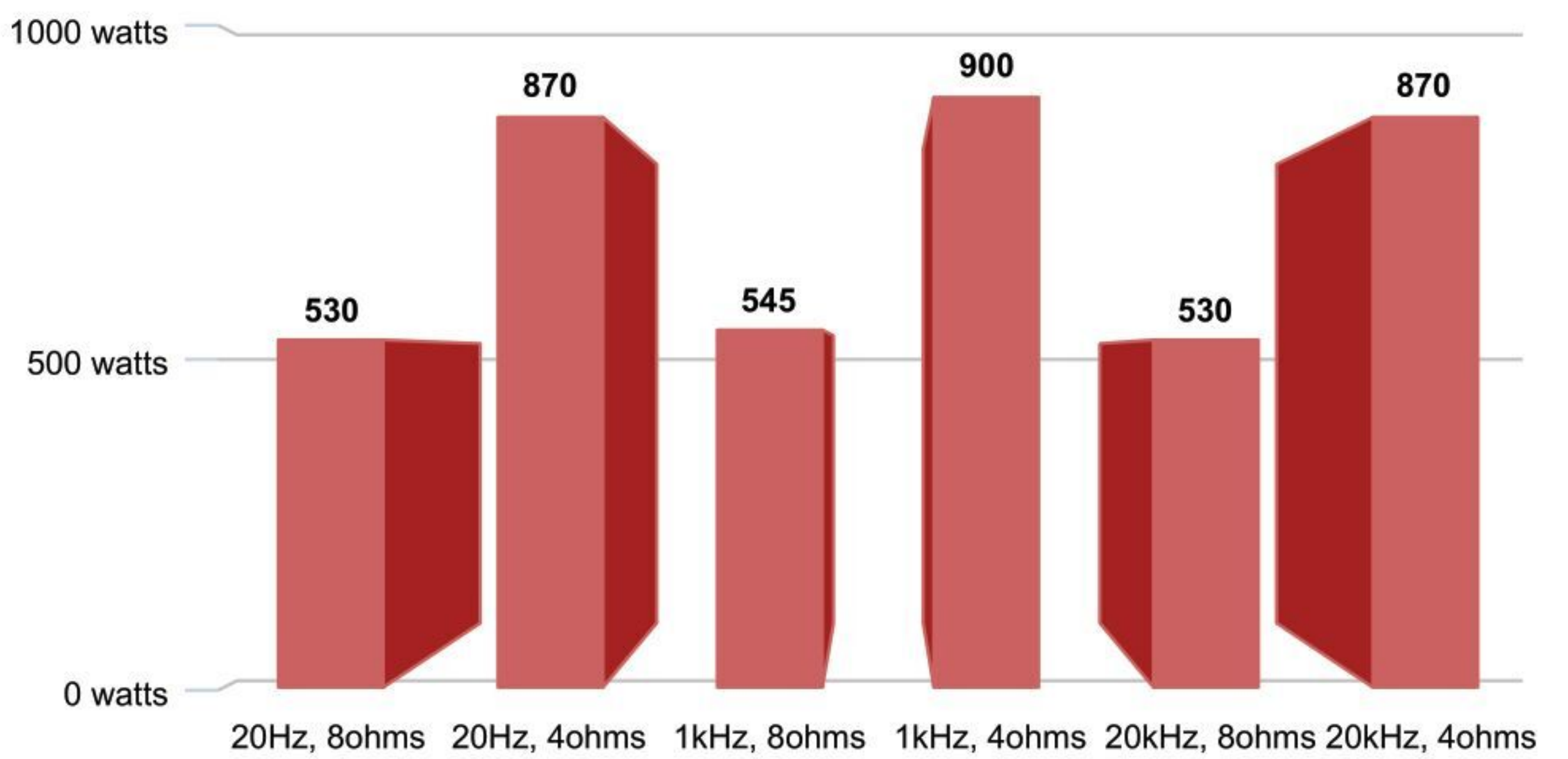
Driven into 4Ω loads, Newport Test Labs measured power output at 784-watts per channel, both channels driven, using a 1kHz test signal, and 756-watts per channel, both channels driven, at the ends of the audio spectrum — 20Hz and 20kHz. Again, these figures are higher than Adcom's specification of 600-watts per channel.

When just a single channel was driven into 4Ω, Newport Test Labs measured power

Adcom GFA-585se Power Amplifier (Both Channels Driven)



Adcom GFA-585se Power Amplifier (Single Channel Driven)



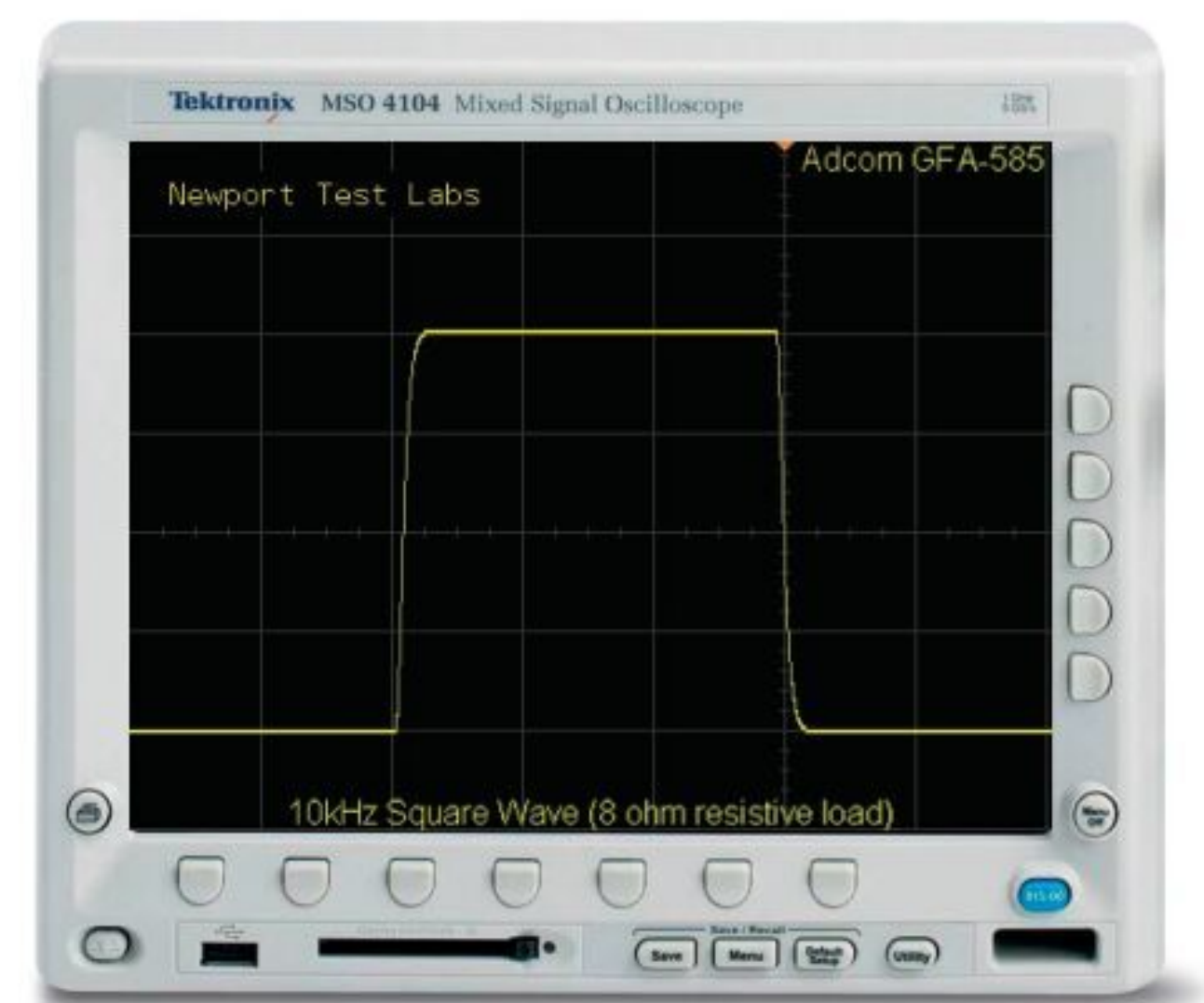
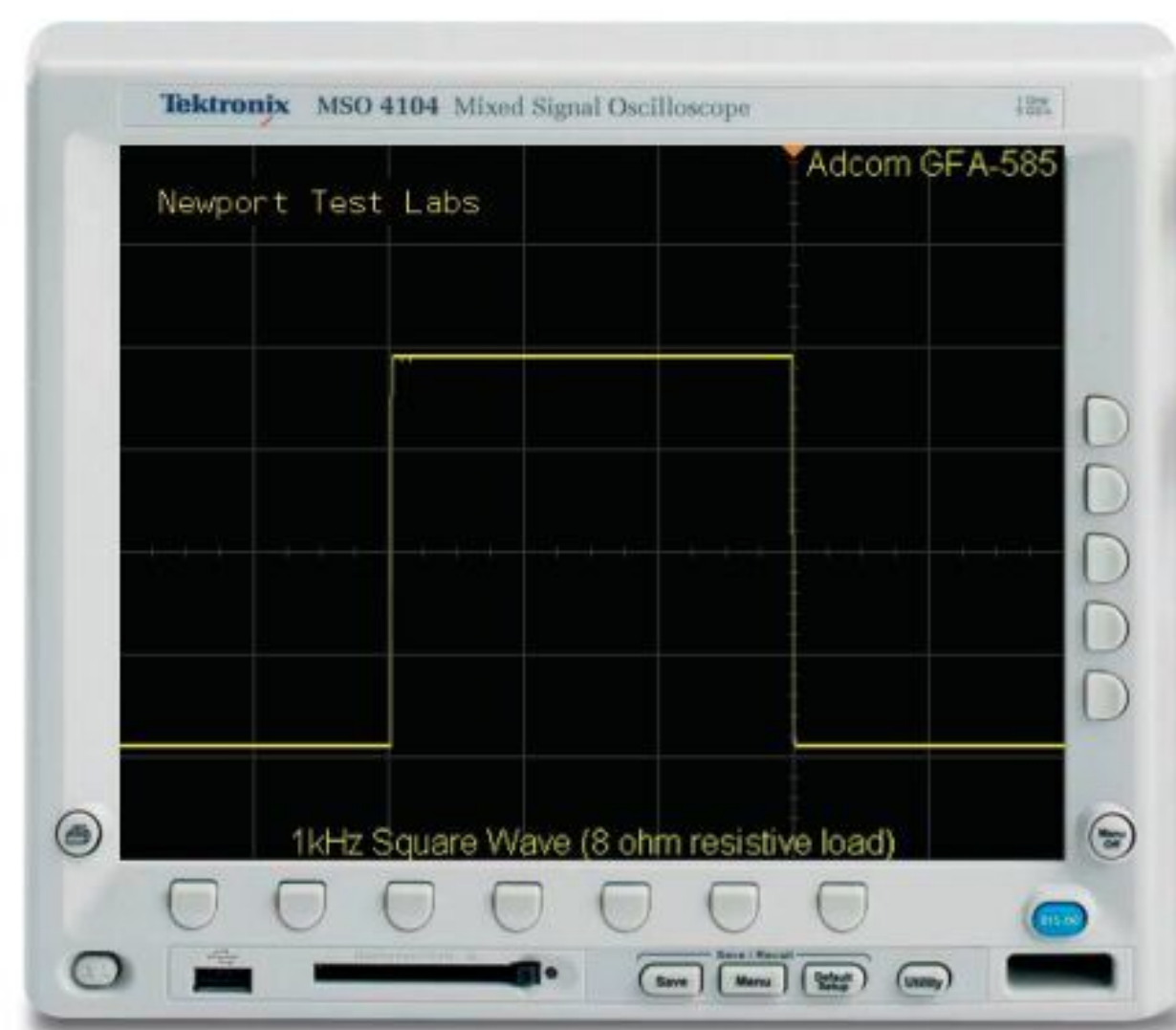
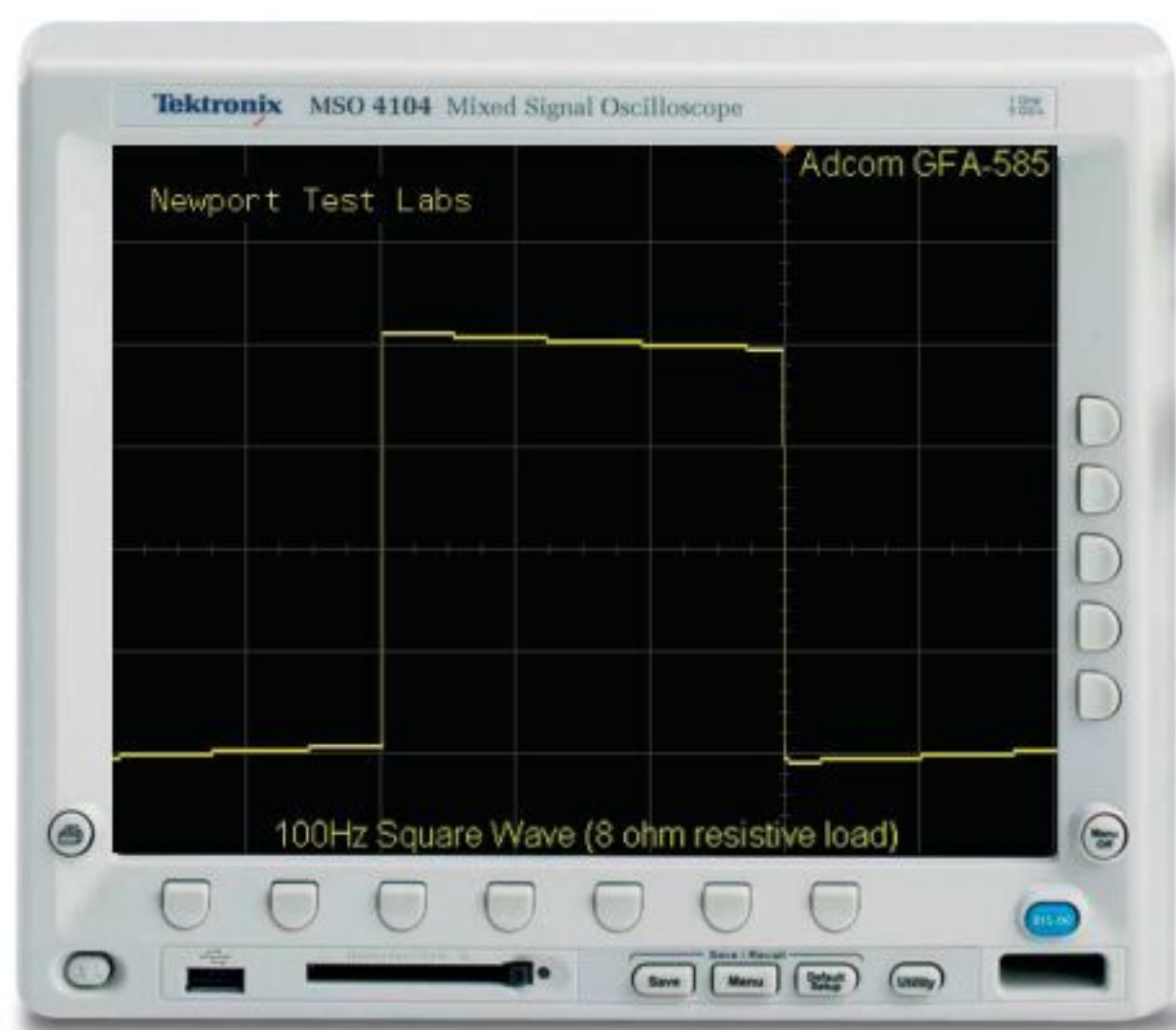
output at 1kHz as 900-watts per channel, and at 20Hz and 20kHz as 870-watts per channel.

Channel separation was not particularly high, with Newport Test Labs measuring it as 68dB at 20Hz, 69dB at 1kHz and 59dB at 20kHz. While not high, this degree of separation is more than you'll need to deliver perfect channel separation and stereo imaging. Channel balance was outstandingly good, with just a 0.009dB difference in gain between the two channels, which will also help ensure perfect stereo imaging.

Graph 1 shows the output spectrum of the Adcom GFA-585se when driven by a

1kHz test signal at an output of one watt into an 8Ω load. The test signal is the peak referenced to 0dB at the left of the graph. You can see that there's a second harmonic distortion component to its right at -97dB (0.00141%), a third harmonic at -103dB (0.0007%), a fourth at -107dB (0.00044%), a fifth at -118dB (0.00012%) and a sixth harmonic at -115dB (0.00017%). All these distortion components are too low to be audible.

You can see that there are some signals to the left of the test signal which are noise from the mains power supply at 50Hz, along with some harmonics of that noise.



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THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S
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2022

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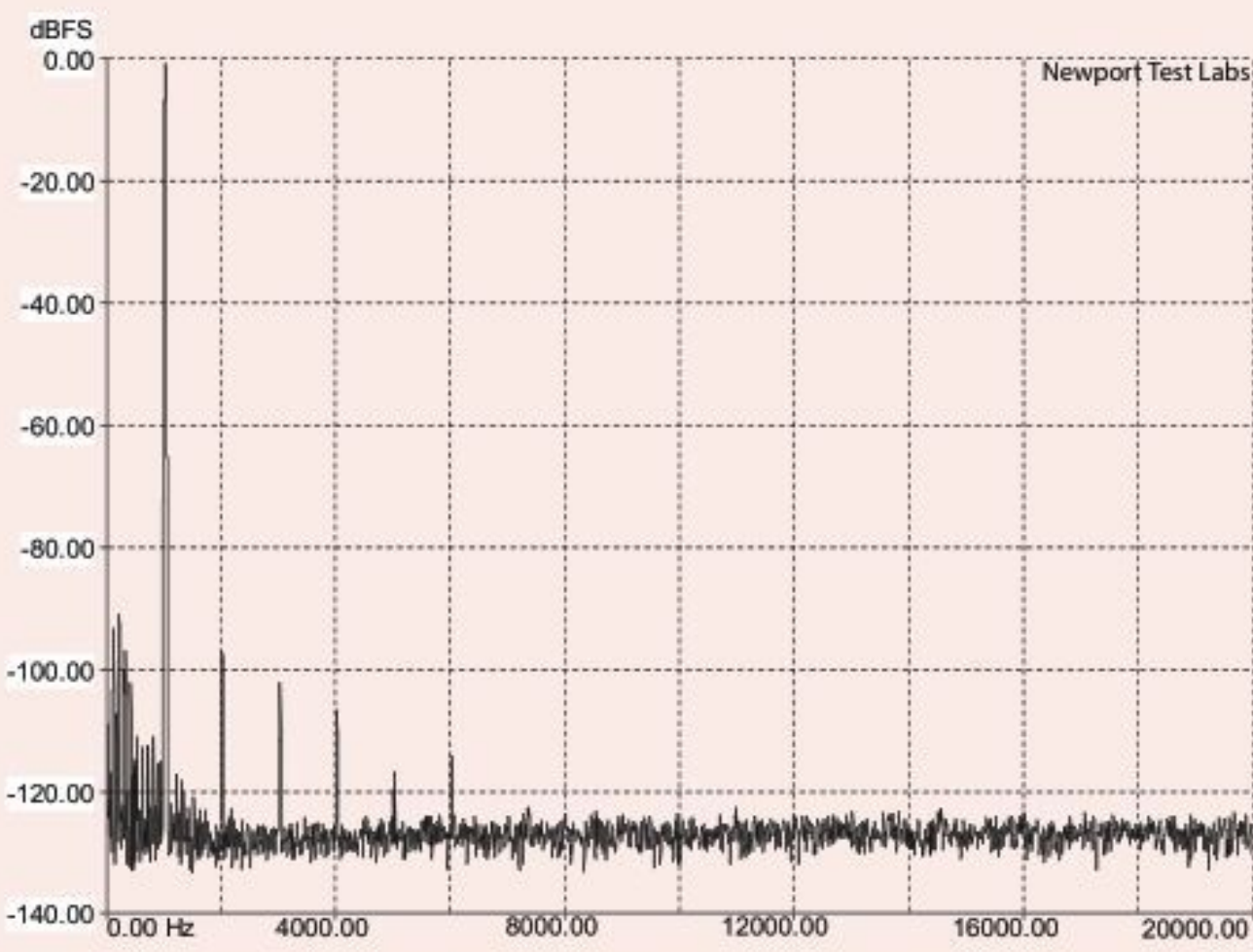


BREAST CANCER TRIALS

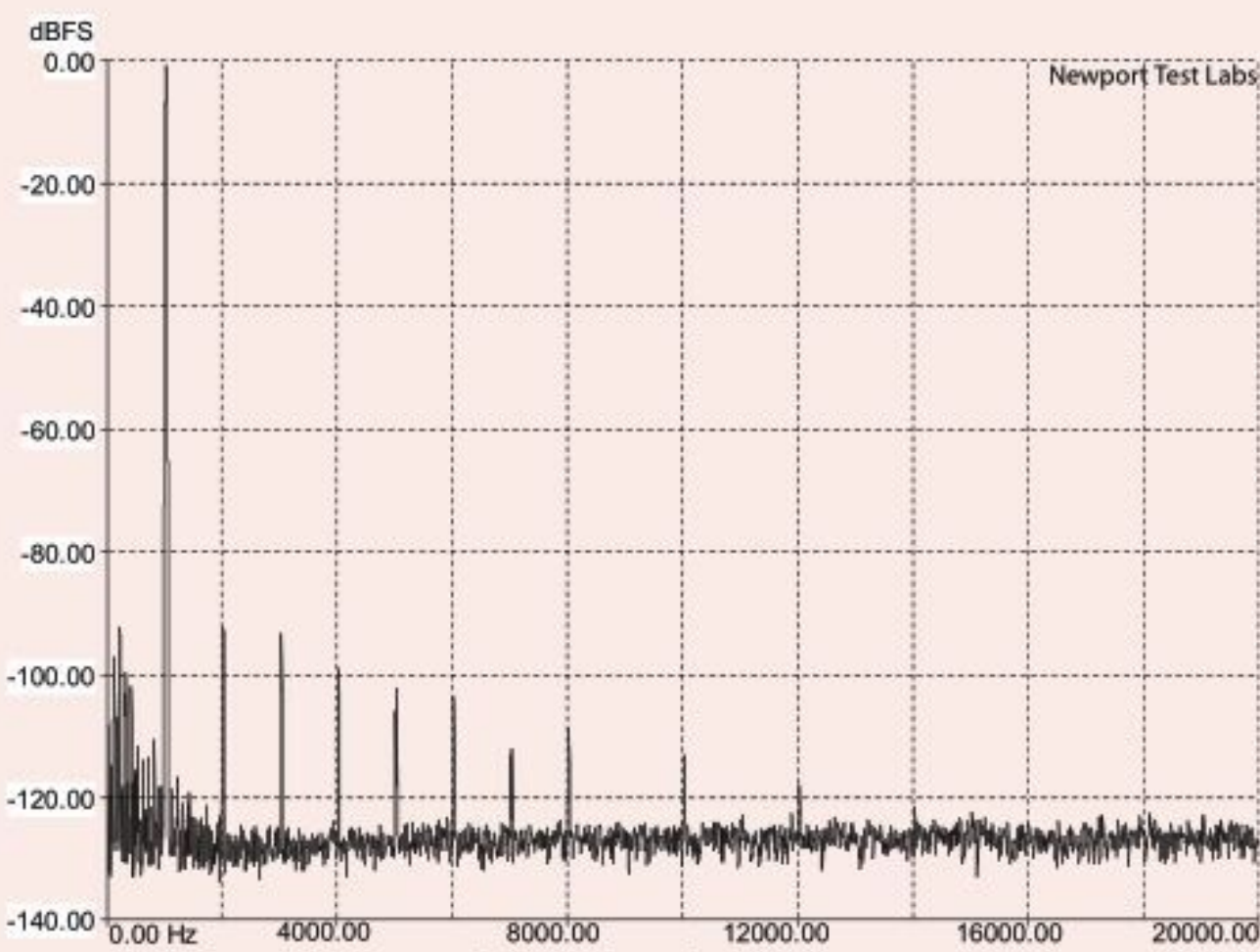
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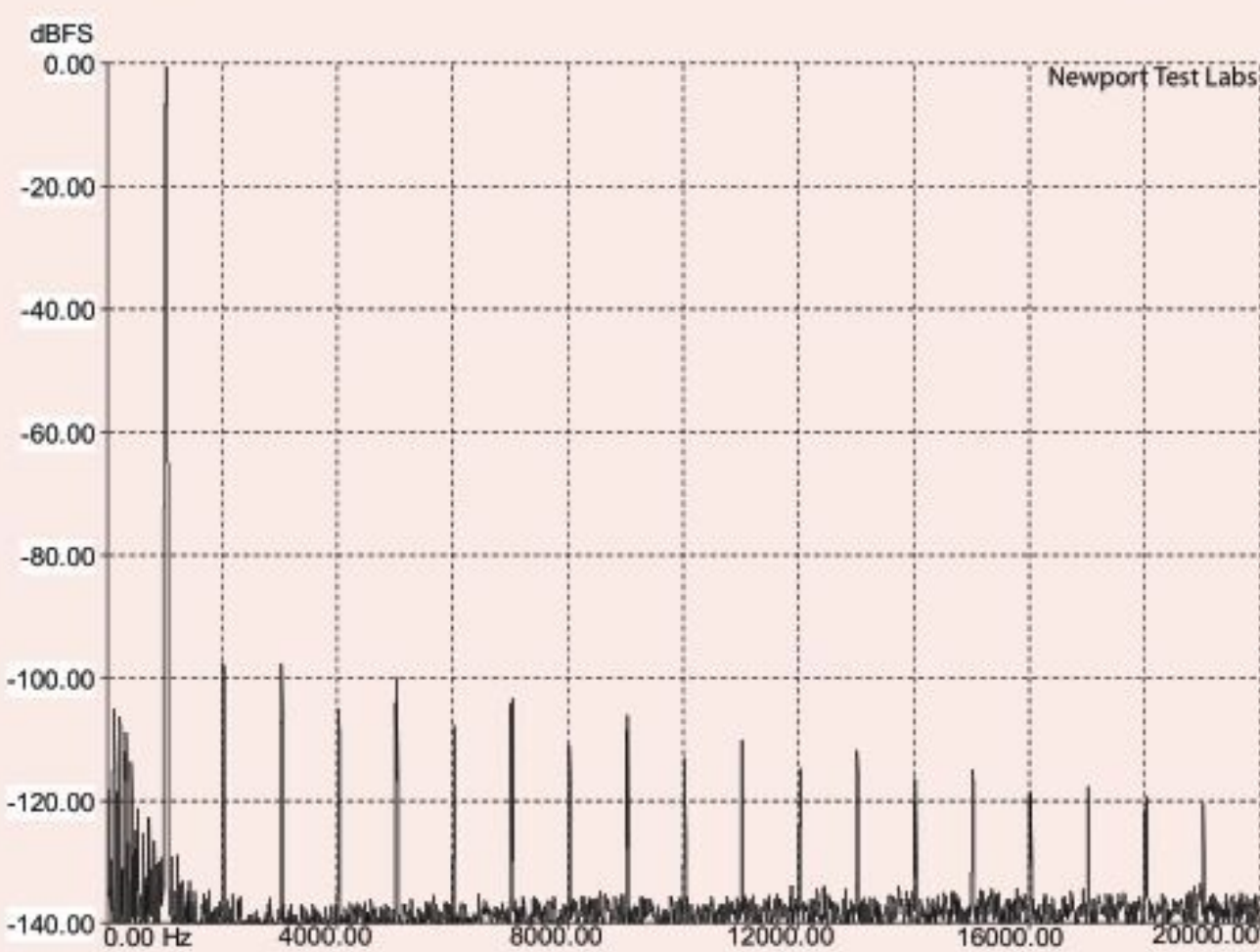
LAB REPORT



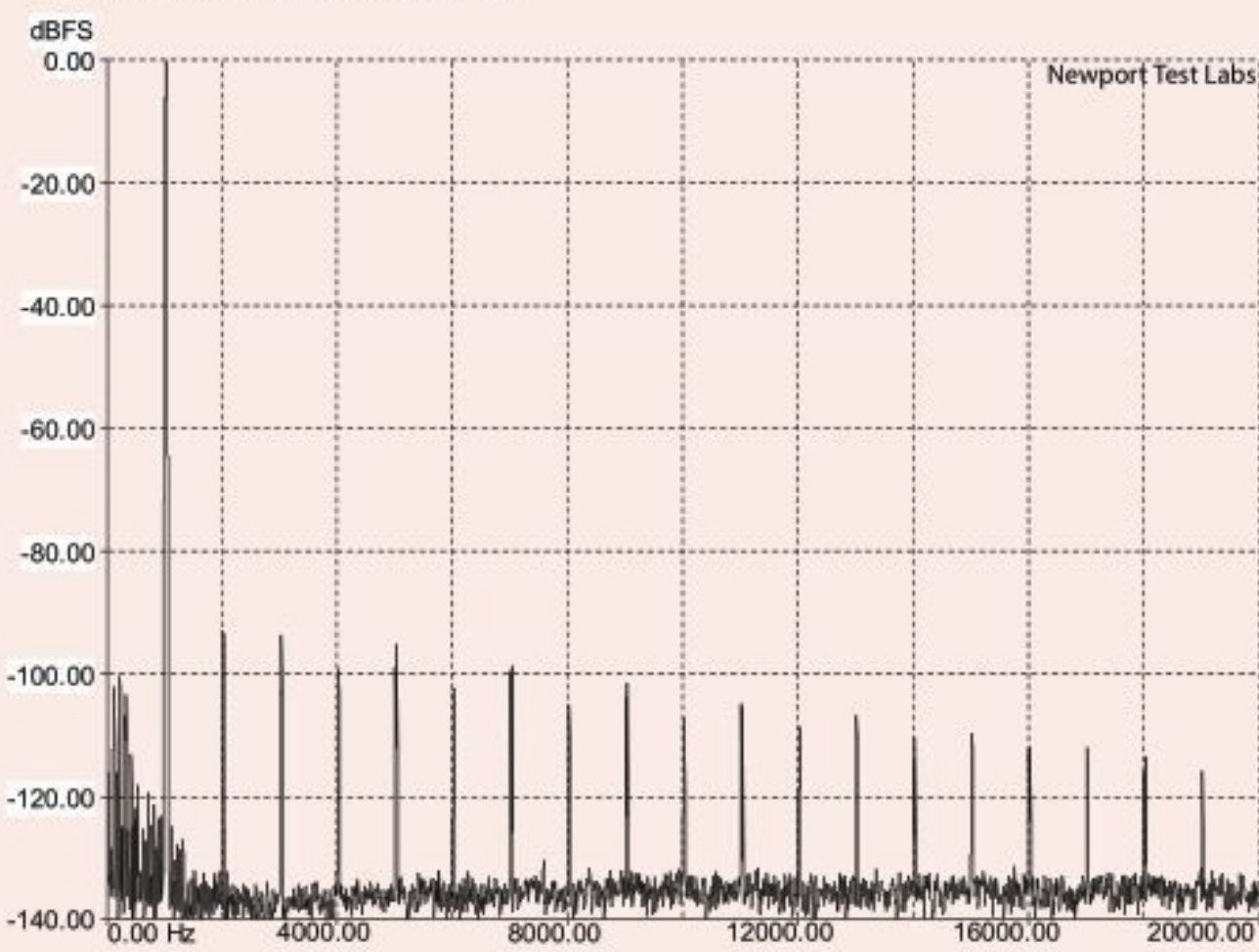
Graph 1: THD at 1-watt into an 8 ohm non-inductive load.



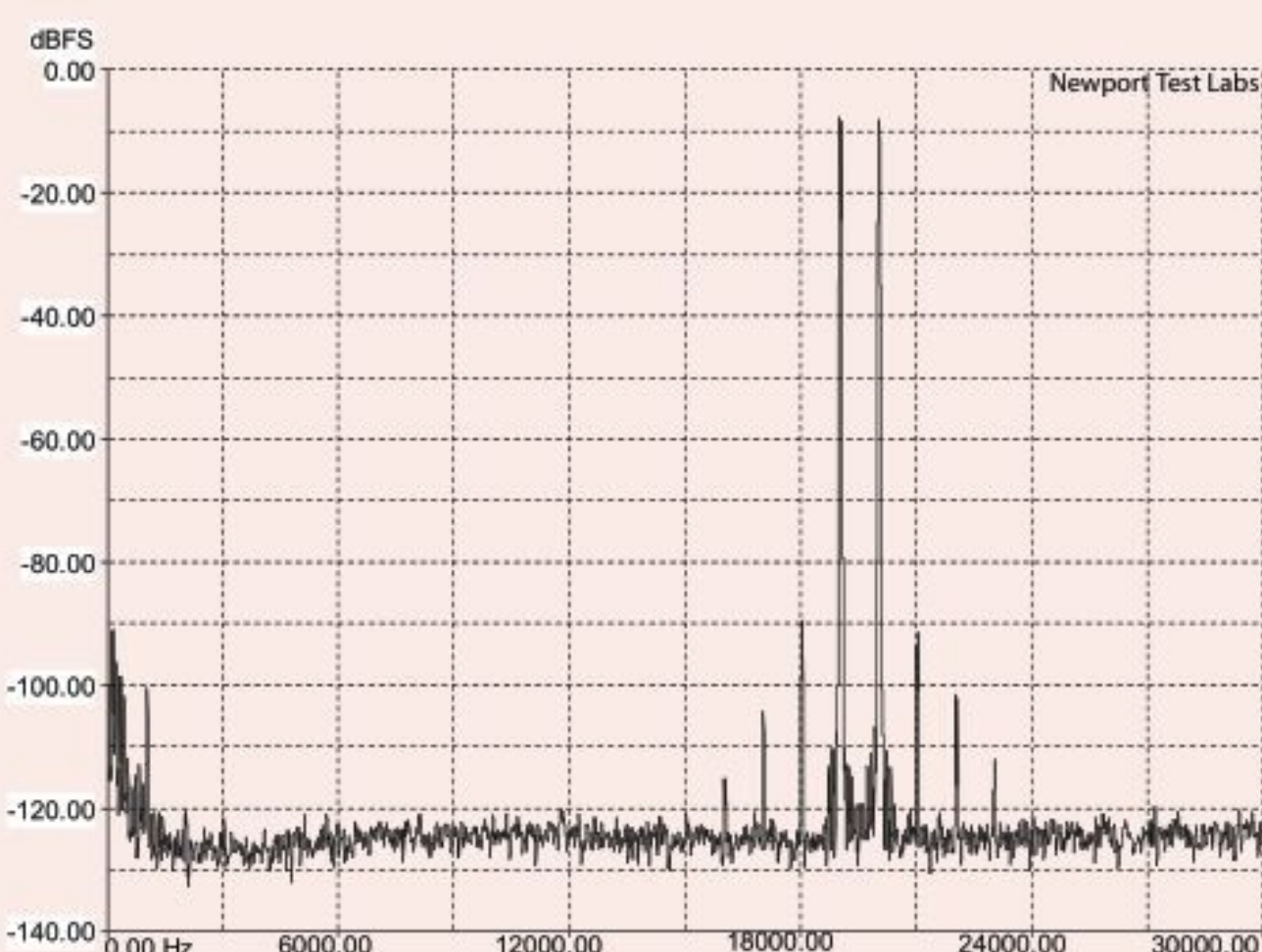
Graph 2: THD at 1-watt into a 4 ohm non-inductive load.



Graph 3: THD at 20-watts into an 8 ohm non-inductive load.



Graph 4: THD at 20-watts into a 4 ohm non-inductive load.



Graph 5: IMD (CCIF) at 1-watt into an 8 ohm non-inductive load.

All these noise components are more than 90dB down. You can see that the overall noise floor across the audio spectrum is otherwise uniform, and close to 130dB down, which is excellent.

Graph 2 shows performance with a 1kHz test signal at one watt output, but this time into a 4Ω load. You can see that there are now more distortion components visible, and that they're a little higher in level, but all are so low in level that they would not be audible. The second and third harmonics are both around -94dB (0.00199%), the fourth is down at -100dB (0.001%), and the fifth and sixth harmonics are both around -103dB down (0.0007%). The remaining four distortion components are all more than 110dB down (0.00031%).

Graph 4 shows performance with a 1kHz test signal and an 8Ω load, but at an output of 20-watts. As you'd expect with the higher output power, distortion has increased again, both in the number of distortion components and level. However, all distortion components except the second and third harmonics, which are both at around -98dB (0.00125%) are more than 100dB down (0.00031%). So once again, these levels would not be audible.

Note that the noise floor has dropped down close to -140dB across the audio spectrum and that the mains noise at the extreme left is lower in relation to the level of the test signal, which although at 20-watts has now been re-referenced to 0dB.

Distortion into a 4Ω load at an output of 20-watts is shown in Graph 4 and you can see that although it's slightly higher than it was into the 8Ω load at the same power output, it's essentially the same signature, which is an excellent trait.

Intermodulation distortion is shown in Graph 5 for an output power of 1-watt into 8Ω. The two test signals (at 19kHz and 20kHz) have upper and lower sidebands at

18kHz and 21kHz both of which are around 90dB down (0.00316%). There are two more sideband pairs, with the higher in level of the two coming in at more than 100dB down (0.001%) and the lower in level at more than 110dB down (0.00031%).

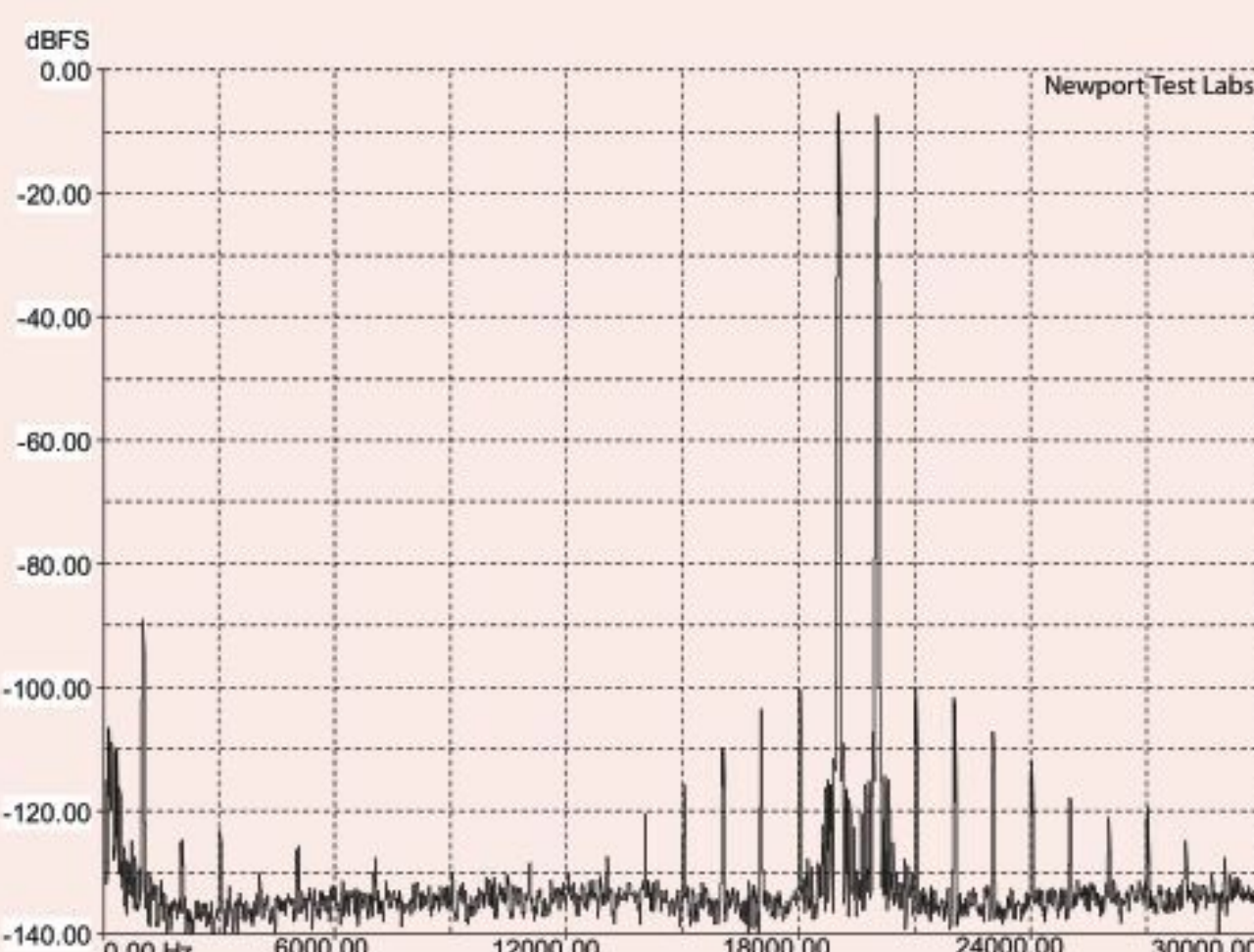
On this graph you can see mains noise at the extreme left of the graph while at 1kHz there's a regenerated signal that is the difference of the two test signals. It's sitting at around -102dB, so would not be audible.

CCIF intermodulation at an output of 20-watts is shown in Graph 6. This time all the higher sidebands are more than 100dB down, but the 1kHz difference signal has increased a little in level, to -98dB (0.00125%). You can see that the noise floor has dropped down close to -140dB. There are some low-order distortion components associated with the difference signal, but all are more than 125dB down (0.00005%).

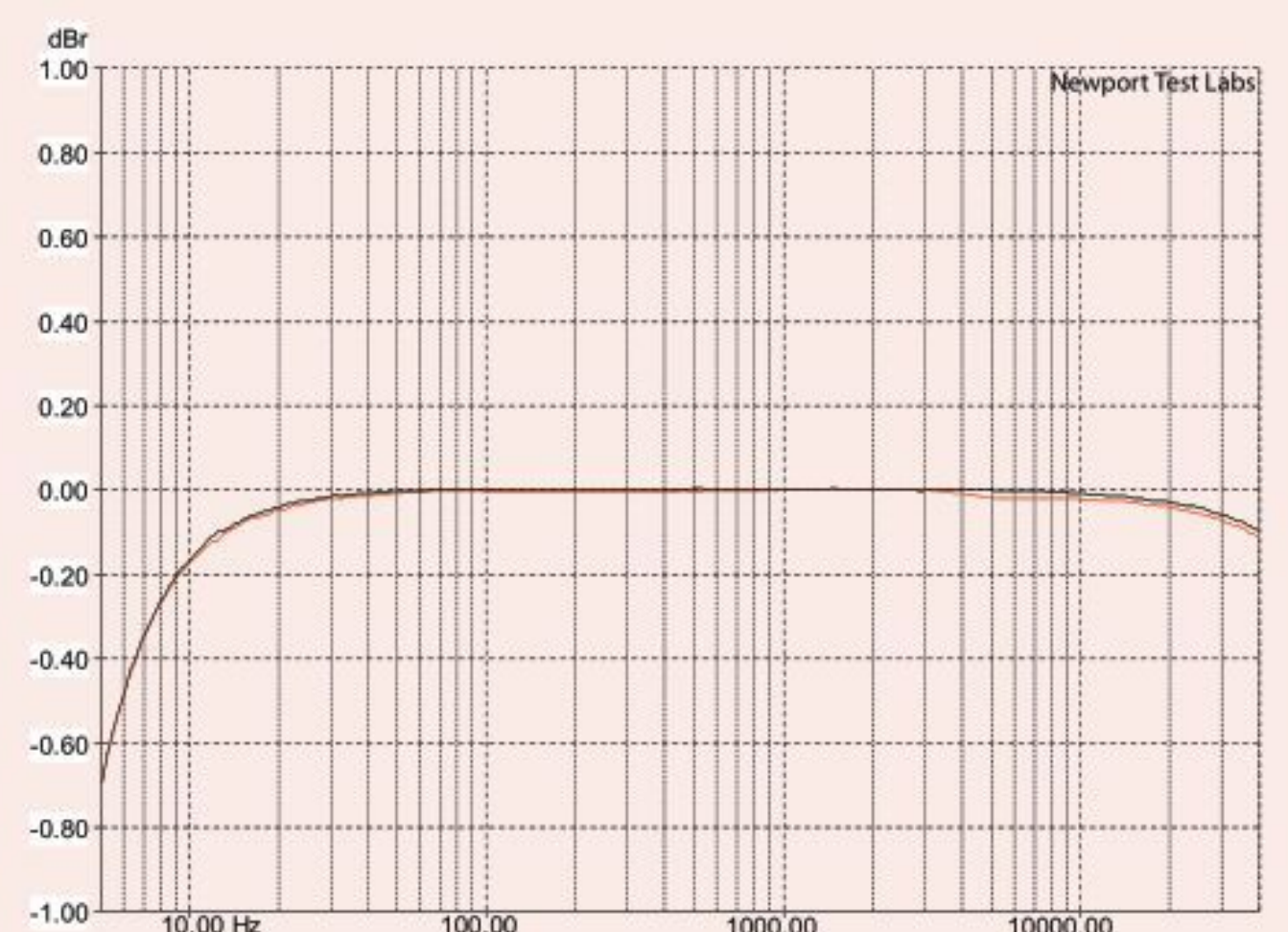
Graph 7 shows the frequency response of the Adcom GFA-585se between 5Hz and 40kHz, using a highly magnified vertical scale, so the top of the graph represents +1dB and the bottom -1dB. There are two traces on the graph. The black trace shows the Adcom's response when it's driving an 8Ω non-inductive resistor.

The red trace on the graph shows the Adcom's frequency response when the amplifier's output is loaded by a circuit that simulates that which would be presented by a two-way, bass-reflex loudspeaker. It's the same load used by *Stereophile* magazine, which is an Atkinson-modified version of an amplifier test load originally developed by Ken Kantor.

You can see that at low frequencies, the traces are virtually overlaid and are 0.65dB down at 5Hz and about 0.05dB down at 20Hz. The traces diverge very slightly above 2kHz, but the differences are really only visible because of the graph scaling. You can see that both responses are about 0.1dB down at 40kHz.



Graph 6: IMD (CCIF) at 20-watts into an 8 ohm non-inductive load.



Graph 7: Frequency response at 1-watt into an 8 ohm load (black trace) and into a sim. spkr (red trace).

This puts the normalised response across the audio band at 20Hz to 20kHz $\pm 0.002\text{dB}$, which is extraordinarily flat. When *Newport Test Labs* looked further at the frequency response, it measured the 1dB down-points of the Adcom GFA-585se's frequency response as 3Hz and 125kHz, and the 3dB down-points at 1.5Hz and 216kHz. All these results are far better than specification and prove that the Adcom has both a flat frequency response and a very extended one.

These characteristics are reflected in the square wave responses measured by *Newport Test Labs*. The 100Hz square wave shows some tilt, which reflects the frequency response being 3dB down at 1.5Hz, but there is no bending that would indicate a phase error. (The 'stepping' in the oscillogram is due to the digital oscilloscope itself and should be ignored.) The 1kHz square wave is an almost-perfect representation of the signal from the square wave generator itself.

You can see a completely vertical leading edge (the glitch near the top is an artefact of the digital oscilloscope) and a perfectly flat top on the waveform. Perfect!


The 10kHz square wave shows the vertical leading edge starting to move away from the vertical as it rises, which shows that the high-frequency response starts rolling off at 125kHz and is 3dB down at 216kHz. It's an excellent result.

Newport Test Labs would normally show an oscillogram of an amplifier's response when it's driven by a 1kHz square wave and the speaker terminals connected to an 8Ω resistor in parallel with a 2μF capacitor, which is a very extreme, highly capacitive load. The Adcom GFA-585se proved to be unstable into this load, so this test was discontinued. As a result I would not recommend the amplifier for use with electrostatic speakers. It will be stable into conventional dynamic speakers, as evidenced by its excellent performance into exactly such a load in Graph 7 (the red trace).

The Adcom GFA-585se's signal-to-noise ratios were good, as you'd expect from the noise floors returned in the THD and IMD tests, with *Newport Test Labs* measuring 76dB unweighted and 84dB A-weighted referred to an output of 1-watt, and 102dB unweighted and 111dB A-weighted referred to rated output. The differences between the weighted and unweighted figure suggested to me that there was some noise being introduced by the test set-up, but the 84dB A-weighted result shows that noise will not be audible even at low listening levels.

The tabulated result chart shows that *Newport Test Labs* measured the output impedance of the Adcom GFA-585se at 0.008Ω which is an outstandingly good but not unexpected result, given the similarity in the frequency responses when driving a resistive load vs. a reactive one. It results in an extremely high damping factor of 1,000, and means the amplifier will exert maximal control over loudspeaker cones to prevent unwanted inertial movement.

Power consumption was a little higher than one-watt in standby mode, increasing to 105-watts when the amplifier is switched on but with no audio signal present. Once an audio signal is present, the GFA-585se will draw around 150–300 watts when played at normal listening levels, increasing to over 1,500-watts if you were playing it at its maximum output level.

Overall, the Adcom GFA-585se returned outstandingly good performance in all the tests conducted by *Newport Test Labs*. 

Steve Holding



Adcom GFA-585se Power Amplifier – Test Results – Power Output

Channel	Load (Ω)	20Hz (watts)	20Hz (dBW)	1kHz (watts)	1kHz (dBW)	20kHz (watts)	20kHz (dBW)
1	8 Ω	530	27.2	545	27.4	530	27.2
2	8 Ω	496	26.9	496	26.9	496	26.9
1	4 Ω	870	29.4	900	29.5	870	29.4
2	4 Ω	756	28.8	784	28.9	756	28.8

Note: Figures in the dBW column represent output level in decibels referred to one watt output.

Adcom GFA-585se Power Amplifier – Laboratory Test Results

Test	Measured Result	Units/Comment
Frequency Response @ 1 watt o/p	3Hz – 125kHz	-1dB
Frequency Response @ 1 watt o/p	1.5Hz – 216kHz	-3dB
Channel Separation (dB)	68dB / 69dB / 59dB	(20Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz)
Channel Balance	0.009	dB @ 1kHz
Interchannel Phase (Direct)	0.14 / 0.05 / 1.04	degrees (20Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz)
THD+N	0.009%	@ 1-watt
Signal-to-Noise (unwghted/wghted)	76dB / 84dB	dB referred to 1-watt output
Signal-to-Noise (unwghted/wghted)	102dB / 111dB	dB referred to rated output
Input Sensitivity	59mV / 1.35V	(1-watt / rated output)
Output Impedance	0.008Ω	at 1kHz
Damping Factor	1,000	@1kHz
Power Consumption	1.21 / 105	watts (Standby / On)
Power Consumption	150 / 1,535	watts at 1-watt / at rated output
Mains Voltage Variation during Test	238 – 250	Minimum – Maximum



EISA AWARDS

2021-2022

Australian Hi-Fi Magazine is proud to be a member of the world-wide Expert Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) which each year gathers together expert reviewers from more than 60 technology magazines and websites specialising in hi-fi, home theatre, in-car electronics, mobile electronics, photo and video from around the world to judge the best product of the year in each class and reward the manufacturer with a coveted EISA Award. This year, as always, Australian Hi-Fi Magazine voted on the awards given in all

the Hi-Fi categories in a complex process that involved nominations, short-lists, listening sessions, extensive laboratory testing and an exhaustive final voting session, all of which were complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic which meant that all collaboration had to be by electronic means. On the following pages you'll find all the products that won a 'Best Product' prize in the 2021-2022 EISA Award Hi-Fi category individually showcased, along with the Judges' Citation for each product. A full list of the 2021-2022 EISA Award winners in other categories can be found on page 40.



EISA FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022

Monitor Audio Silver 500 7G

The seventh generation of Monitor Audio's Silver Series incorporates a wide range of acoustic innovations, all on show in the magnificent floorstanding flagship of the range, the Silver 500 7G. The C-CAM metal/ceramic tweeter has a new motor and housing, for cleaner, sweeter treble, while the RST II midrange and bass drivers are fashioned from an improved ceramic-coated alloy for greater stiffness. Add in a refined crossover and a beautifully-finished enclosure, into which the drivers are fixed with bolt-through mountings, and you have a speaker as adept with the finest detail as it is developing a massive, powerful view of the music.



EISA STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022

KEF LS50 Meta

The original, EISA Award-winning LS50 loudspeaker was widely acclaimed, but KEF's engineers have taken it to a new level with numerous detail revisions including the use of Metamaterial Absorption Technology to further control unwanted driver resonances. That may seem like a small internal upgrade, but the result is a magnificent compact speaker capable of a huge soundstage, generous bass and terrific imaging. It's an already impressive speaker now transformed into something truly special and, at the price, is the very best of its genre. If space is tight – or even if it isn't – these remarkable speakers are the ones to have, and their strikingly attractive looks further enhance their user-appeal.



EISA STREAMING AMPLIFIER 2021-2022

Cambridge Audio EVO 150

Compact, clever and capable of driving even demanding speakers to deliver a room-filling sound – whether from your phone, your computer or streaming services – the EVO 150 is all the system many users will ever want or need. It has style on its side, and amazing flexibility including balanced inputs and a phono stage, but the most outstanding feature here is how simple it makes set-up and operation for breathtaking performance. The Cambridge Audio engineers have considered everything, from the way the EVO 150 leads you through installation to the superb StreamMagic app control, making this a system all the family can enjoy, with class-leading sound.



EISA WIRELESS FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022

System Audio Legend 40.2 Silverback

System Audio's elegant active speaker is not only slender, but it's packed with technology to allow users to achieve the optimum sound and then tweak it to their own tastes. Use it with the optional wireless Stereo Hub and you get a choice of automated and manual equalisation to adapt the speaker to your room. System Audio offers a generous pick 'n' mix approach to DSP, including downloadable 'RAM Tweaks' to further reconfigure the sonic balance. However, most impressive of all is this wireless speaker's compelling sound, which majors on resolution, bass power and a fine grasp of rhythm.



EISA WIRELESS STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022

KEF LS50 Wireless II

Developed from the original LS50W design, using the same Metamaterial Absorption Technology found in the LS50 Meta model, this is much more than just a pair of speakers. In fact, it's a complete wireless hi-fi system, able to play music from portable devices, local network storage and streaming services, all under the control of a cleverly-designed app. Set-up and configuration is simple, meaning you'll have music playing in minutes, while the combination of KEF's Uni-Q driver and plenty of internal amplifier power delivers a focused, involving sound 'way beyond expectations for speakers so small. They can handle hi-res music or just Bluetooth from your phone, look fabulous whether on shelves or their dedicated stands – and of course have that 'hi-fi without all the boxes' appeal.



EISA HI-FI SUBWOOFER 2021-2022

KEF KC62

On rare occasions it's hard to associate the equipment before you with the sound you're hearing. Take as an example the amazing KEF KC62 subwoofer – it's tiny at just 25cm per side, with a pair of drivers just 16.5cm in diameter, and yet this seemingly miraculous speaker delivers massive, fast and tautly controlled bass down to subterranean depths. The KC62 is so small you can hide it away almost anywhere, but the performance is all down to clever design – the opposed drivers use Uni-Core force cancelling, each powered by a 500W amplifier, all under the control of digital signal processing. Want even more fun? Try using two of them!



EISA HIGH-END LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022

Wilson Audio SabrinaX

Wilson Audio's Sabrina was long-established as a remarkable compact high-end speaker, but for this X model the company has made some major changes to further enhance performance. These start with those beautiful cabinets, now made from the inert X-material from which the speaker takes its name, finished in a choice of WilsonGloss paint colours. The tweeter is derived from the company's flagship models, for better detail and 'air', and while the midrange is retained from the original Sabrina, a new woofer delivers tighter, faster bass. The result? An expanded soundstage and extended bass, delivering massive scale with free-breathing atmosphere and ambience – whatever you play.



EISA POWER AMPLIFIER 2021-2022

NAD C 298

NAD started its story making amplifiers, and has been researching and developing the technology for almost half a century. All that shows in the unassuming-looking C 298 power amplifier, designed for use in everything from conventional hi-fi and home cinema systems to hideaway custom installations. It has single-ended and balanced inputs for flexibility, and switchable signal-sensing for remote operation, while its energy-efficient Purifi Eigentakt amplification technology gives it the ability to drive just about any speaker with impunity. The sound is spectacular, and upgradable too – switch it into bridged mode, and you have a 600W+ monobloc!



EISA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER 2021-2022

Rotel Michi X3

This may be the more affordable of two integrated amplifiers in Rotel's revived Michi lineup, but it's undoubtedly the sweet spot of the range, combining 'drive anything' confidence with speed, warmth and the ability to switch from pile-driver to a gossamer touch when required. There's no shortage of power here, but the Michi X3 carries its massive output lightly, being fast, detailed and beautifully controlled, and is all the more rewarding as a result. Add in its flexibility, build quality and sheer style, and you have an amp able to take on all the super-integrated amplifiers now available and show most of them a clean pair of heels.



EISA PHONO STAGE 2021-2022

Hegel V10

Hegel has taken its time adding a dedicated phono stage to its acclaimed series of amplifiers, but it's been worth the wait. The V10 is designed to service a wide range of moving-coil and moving-magnet cartridges, aided by its highly flexible gain, loading and infrasonic filter settings that are selected via a matrix of DIP switches underneath the black case. Indeed, the elegant but functional Norwegian styling belies the scope of this vinyl-loving preamp. So it's worth taking the time to dial-up the optimum settings and realise a sound that's both smooth and gloriously insightful, and clearly 'voiced' to partner Hegel's other electronics.



EISA HIGH-END MUSIC PLAYER 2021-2022

HiFi Rose RS150

It's hard not to form initial impressions of the RS150 based on the way it looks, from its build quality to that graphic-filled full-width touchscreen display, but it soon becomes clear there's more to it than meets the eye. This is an accomplished – and extremely flexible – player/DAC that will play everything from Bluetooth streams to hi-res content, and you can even install SSD storage to make it a complete library and player in one unit. The sound is striking, too, majoring on richness and detail that contributes to a very mature presentation. This is a decidedly impressive debut for the Korean brand.



EISA DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER 2021-2022

Bluesound NODE

Bluesound's multiroom wireless system was revolutionary when it first appeared, its BluOS platform having been designed to play music all the way up to hi-res, with a process of refinement and development ever since. This latest version of its NODE music player is a simple way to bring multiroom to your system, with Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Apple AirPlay 2, aptX HD Bluetooth and USB-A to access audio content from streaming services, Internet radio and your own music library. And the new NODE now also has HDMI ARC, for audio from TVs and gaming systems – all controlled using the intuitive BluOS Controller app or via the popular voice assistants.



EISA DAC 2021-2022

Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M

Cambridge Audio has been making DACs since 1994, and it all shows in the latest addition to its DacMagic line, the 200M. It lives up to the precedent of its illustrious forebears with an attractive combination of solid build, ease of use and performance, plus wide-ranging file-format compatibility, all the way up to 768kHz/24-bit and DSD512 (at least via its USB input). Easy to use, it's not only an excellent 'desktop audio' device that'll drive headphones to good effect, but it will also serve up a storm in a main audio system with its crisp, rewarding and expressively-detailed sound.



EISA STEREO SYSTEM 2021-2022

Marantz Model 30/SACD 30n

Marantz's 30 series has a new style influenced by the design of classic models from the company's past, combined with up-to-date capability within.

The Model 30 amplifier and its matching SACD 30n player are a triumph: the amplifier plays it simple, concentrating on the purest possible sound from its all-analogue design, while the SACD/CD/Network player brings a whole world of musical opportunity to the party, from discs to streaming and more. 'Modern Musical Luxury' is how Marantz describes this combination, and with its blend of rich, powerful sound, features and gorgeous build quality, this stereo system delivers on that promise.



EISA BEST VALUE TURNTABLE 2021-2022

Pro-Ject Debut PRO

Launched to celebrate the company's 30th anniversary, this very refined version of Pro-Ject's entry-level turntable comes with a raft of improvements, not the least of which is a new one-piece alloy/carbon-fibre tonearm. The platter is now more heavily damped and non-magnetic, the suspension of both arm and motor have been enhanced, and a new Pick it Pro cartridge comes pre-fitted for near instant set-up and use. Described as 'the ultimate expression of the Debut concept', it sounds assured and involving – it's an absolute knock-out, and a new champion for the entry level.



EISA HIGH-END TURNTABLE 2021-2022

Thorens TD 124 DD

It may have ceased production more than half a century ago, but the Thorens TD 124 turntable retains legendary status, and is still much sought-after. While the latest version may look much like the original, the 'DD' on the model number shows this is now a direct-drive design, complete with a new and very adjustable tonearm to complete the retro looks, especially when fitted with the SPU 124 phono cartridge. There's even a pop-up adaptor for 'jukebox' singles, but whatever you play on the TD 124 DD it delights with its speed, slam and sheer weight. It may look vintage, but the sound is compellingly up to date.



EISA PHONO CARTRIDGE 2021-2022

Ortofon 2M Black LVB 250

The latest variation on Ortofon's long-running 2M moving-magnet cartridge design pays tribute to Beethoven 250 years after his birth, complete with a picture of the composer on the side of its body. It fits the bill with a silky, sophisticated presentation especially well-suited to classical, jazz and acoustic music. Refined and composed, it uses a version of the stylus and cantilever found in the company's Cadenza Black moving-coil cartridge. This, along with a new suspension, all contributes to a sound that boasts rock-solid imaging, great stereo focus and depth along with a smooth, lush view of strings and other acoustic instruments.



EISA HEADPHONES 2021-2022

Focal Clear Mg

Focal's Clear headphones were already a superb performer, but with the arrival of the Mg version the company has raised the bar even higher. Changes include a new, pure magnesium driver (hence the name), improvements to resonance control within the open-back housings, and in the alignment of those drivers relative to the user's ear. The result is a headphone sound that retains all the openness of the original, but now offers better speed, clarity and precision. It reveals even more detail in the music and creates a palpably realistic sense of an acoustic spread before you, not enclosed within your head.



EISA HIGH-END HEADPHONES 2021-2022

T+A Solitaire P-SE

T+A made an ambitious entry into the headphone arena, aiming straight for the top with its Solitaire P model and a matching HA200 headphone amplifier. The P-SE is a little more affordable than the original design, thanks to some simplification of the planar magnetic drivers and their motor system, but this is still an unapologetically high-end design, able to deliver a wide-open view of the music while still presenting it with weight, richness and impact. Above all, they impress with the way everything hangs together, from the weight of a double bass to the finest detail in the high treble, making for an entirely thrilling listen.





EISA BEST VALUE HEADPHONES 2021-2022

Sennheiser HD 560 S

Sennheiser has long had an enviable position in the audio market, from its excellent headphones to its role as a supplier of microphones for everything from recording to live performances. And in the HD 560 S Sennheiser brings together all that knowledge in a design able to deliver a wide-open sound with exceptional detail and fast clean bass, plus a realistic impression of soundstage. The new drivers use a polymer blend for linear response and an airy treble, while the angled drivers combine with the open-backed design to create a real sense of presence.



EISA HEADPHONE SOLUTION 2021-2022

Naim Uniti Atom Headphone Edition

With an eye to the seemingly unstoppable rise of headphone listening, Naim created this version of its entry-level Uniti Atom, dedicated to headphone use. With amplifier technology trickled down from the company's flagship Statement product, the Uniti Atom Headphone Edition combines wide-ranging network and streaming audio capability with both balanced and single-ended headphone outputs, and it can also be used as a streaming preamp into a power amplifier or active speakers. Whichever you choose, it plays music with authority and immense impact, and will really make the most of partnering equipment.



EISA HI-FI ACCESSORY 2021-2022

Ferrum Hypsos

Power is everything – that's the thinking behind the Hypsos, a hugely flexible DC power supply from Polish brand Ferrum, designed to replace all those plug-top supplies with which so many hi-fi components are now provided. It can deliver clean d.c. power over a range of 5V to 30V, and comes complete with pre-loaded settings for more than 100 popular products. Or you can set up your own output parameters, complete with fine adjustment to find the power setting 'sweet spot'. It represents a potent upgrade for a wide range of devices, not least USB DAC/headphone amplifiers, typically encouraging a sound with greater ease and smoothness – and, yes, power!



EISA AWARDS 2021-2022 FULL LISTING

HI-FI EXPERT GROUP

EISA FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022
MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 500 7G

EISA STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022
KEF LS50 META

EISA WIRELESS FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022
SYSTEM AUDIO LEGEND 40.2 SILVERBACK

EISA WIRELESS STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022
KEF LS50 WIRELESS II

EISA HIGH-END LOUDSPEAKERS 2021-2022
WILSON AUDIO SABRINAX

EISA HI-FI SUBWOOFER 2021-2022
KEF KC62

EISA STREAMING AMPLIFIER 2021-2022
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO EVO 150

EISA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER 2021-2022
ROTEL MICHI X3

EISA POWER AMPLIFIER 2021-2022
NAD C 298

EISA PHONO STAGE 2021-2022
HEGEL V10

EISA DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER 2021-2022
BLUESOUND NODE

EISA HIGH-END MUSIC PLAYER 2021-2022
HIFI ROSE RS150

EISA DAC 2021-2022
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 200M

EISA BEST VALUE TURNTABLE 2021-2022
PRO-JECT DEBUT PRO

EISA HIGH-END TURNTABLE 2021-2022
THORENS TD 124 DD

EISA PHONO CARTRIDGE 2021-2022
ORTOFON 2M BLACK LVB 250

EISA STEREO SYSTEM 2021-2022
MARANTZ MODEL 30/SACD 30N

EISA HEADPHONE SOLUTION 2021-2022
NAIM UNITI ATOM HEADPHONE EDITION

EISA HEADPHONES 2021-2022
FOCAL CLEAR MG

EISA HIGH-END HEADPHONES 2021-2022
T+A SOLITAIRE P-SE

EISA BEST VALUE HEADPHONES 2021-2022
SENNHEISER HD 560 S

EISA HI-FI ACCESSORY 2021-2022
FERRUM HYPPOS

COMBINED AWARD WITH HOME THEATRE AUDIO EXPERT GROUP

EISA COMPACT SUBWOOFER 2021-2022
SVS 3000 MICRO

COMBINED AWARD WITH MOBILE DEVICES EXPERT GROUP

EISA WIRELESS HEADPHONES 2021-2022
PHILIPS FIDELIO L3

EISA IN-EAR HEADPHONES 2021-2022
LG TONE FREE FP8 (DFP8, UFP8, DFP8W, FP8W, UFP8W, FP8E, TFP8E)

HOME THEATRE AUDIO EXPERT GROUP

EISA SMART SOUNDBAR 2021-2022
DENON HOME SOUND BAR 550

EISA SOUNDBAR INNOVATION 2021-2022
LG ECLAIR QP5 (DQP5, DQP5W, QP5W)

EISA COMPACT SOUNDBAR 2021-2022
JBL BAR 5.0 MULTIBEAM

EISA BEST BUY SOUNDBAR 2021-2022
TCL TS8132

EISA HOME THEATRE SOUNDBAR 2021-2022
PHILIPS FIDELIO B97

EISA BEST BUY HOME THEATRE SUBWOOFER 2021-2022
SVS SB-1000 PRO

EISA COMPACT SUBWOOFER 2021-2022
SVS 3000 MICRO

EISA HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM 2021-2022
POLK AUDIO RESERVE

EISA HOME THEATRE RECEIVER 2021-2022
YAMAHA RX-V6A

COMBINED AWARD WITH HOME THEATRE VIDEO EXPERT GROUP

EISA UHD PLAYER 2021-2022
REAVON UBR-X200

HOME THEATRE VIDEO & DISPLAY EXPERT GROUP

EISA 8K TV 2021-2022
LG 75QNED99

EISA BEST PREMIUM OLED TV 2021-2022
LG OLED65G1

EISA BEST GAMING TV 2021-2022
LG OLED48C1

EISA FAMILY TV 2021-2022
HISENSE 65U8GQ

EISA BEST BUY LCD TV 2021-2022
TCL 55C728 (55C727 & 55C729)

EISA PREMIUM LCD TV 2021-2022
TCL 65C825 (65C821 & 65C822)

EISA BEST HOME THEATRE TV 2021-2022
PHILIPS 65OLED936

EISA BEST BUY OLED TV 2021-2022

EISA AWARDS: 2021-2022

PHILIPS 55OLED806

EISA PREMIUM UST PROJECTOR 2021-2022
SAMSUNG THE PREMIERE LSP9T

EISA HOME THEATRE PROJECTOR 2021-2022
SONY VPL-VW590ES

EISA BEST BUY PROJECTOR 2021-2022
XGIMI HORIZON PRO

EISA LASER TV PROJECTION SYSTEM 2021-2022
BENQ V7000I/V7050I & ALRS01

PHOTOGRAPHY EXPERT GROUP

EISA CAMERA OF THE YEAR 2021-2022
SONY ALPHA 1

EISA BEST BUY CAMERA (APS-C) 2021-2022
FUJI X-S10

EISA BEST BUY CAMERA (FULL-FRAME) 2021-2022
NIKON Z 5

EISA ADVANCED CAMERA 2021-2022
NIKON Z 6II

EISA PREMIUM CAMERA 2021-2022
CANON EOS R5

EISA PROFESSIONAL CAMERA 2021-2022
FUJIFILM GFX 100S

EISA PHOTO/VIDEO CAMERA 2021-2022
SONY ALPHA 7S III

EISA LENS OF THE YEAR 2021-2022
TAMRON 17-70MM F/2.8 DI III-A VC RXD

EISA WIDEANGLE LENS 2021-2022
SONY FE 14MM F1.8 GM

EISA WIDEANGLE ZOOM LENS (APS-C) 2021-2022
TAMRON 11-20MM F/2.8 DI III-A RXD

EISA WIDEANGLE ZOOM LENS (FULL-FRAME) 2021-2022
SONY FE 12-24MM F2.8 GM

EISA STANDARD LENS 2021-2022
SONY FE 50MM F1.2 GM

EISA TELEPHOTO ZOOM LENS 2021-2022
TAMRON 150-500MM F/5-6.7 DI III VC VXD

EISA PROFESSIONAL TELEPHOTO ZOOM LENS 2021-2022
NIKON NIKKOR Z 70-200MM F/2.8 VR S

EISA PORTRAIT LENS 2021-2022
SIGMA 85MM F1.4 DG DN ART

EISA MANUAL LENS 2021-2022
LAOWA ARGUS 33MM F/0.95 CF APO

EISA MACRO LENS 2021-2022
NIKON NIKKOR Z MC 50MM F/2.8

EISA SPECIAL PURPOSE LENS 2021-2022
LAOWA 15MM F/4.5 ZERO-D SHIFT

EISA LENS INNOVATION 2021-2022
CANON RF 100MM F 2.8L MACRO IS USM

EISA PHOTO SOFTWARE 2021-2022
ZONER PHOTO STUDIO X

EISA ADVANCED PHOTO SOFTWARE 2021-2022

DXO PURERAW

EISA PHOTO SERVICE 2021-2022
CEWE PHOTOWORLD

EISA PHOTO PRINTER 2021-2022
EPSON SURECOLOR SC-P700

COMBINED AWARD WITH MOBILE DEVICES EXPERT GROUP

EISA MULTIMEDIA SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
SONY XPERIA 1 III

EISA ADVANCED SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
OPPO FIND X3 PRO

MOBILE DEVICES EXPERT GROUP

EISA MULTIMEDIA SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
SONY XPERIA 1 III

EISA ADVANCED SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
OPPO FIND X3 PRO

EISA BEST SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
APPLE IPHONE 12 PRO MAX

EISA FOLDABLE SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
HUAWEI MATE X2

EISA BEST BUY SMARTPHONE 2021-2022
TCL 20 PRO 5G

EISA WIRELESS HEADPHONES 2021-2022
PHILIPS FIDELIO L3

EISA IN-EAR HEADPHONES 2021-2022
LG TONE FREE FP8 (DFP8, UFP8, DFP8W, FP8W, UFP8W, FP8E, TFP8E)

EISA MOBILE SPEAKER 2021-2022
WE. BY LOEWE WE. HEAR 2

EISA SMARTWATCH 2021-2022
HUAWEI WATCH 3 PRO

IN-CAR ELECTRONICS EXPERT GROUP

EISA IN-CAR HEAD UNIT 2021-2022
KENWOOD DMX8020DABS

EISA IN-CAR INNOVATION 2021-2022
AUDIOTEC FISCHER CONDUCTOR

EISA IN-CAR SPEAKER SERIES 2021-2022
GROUND ZERO URANIUM SQ SERIES

EISA IN-CAR SOUND PROCESSOR 2021-2022
ESX D68SP

EISA IN-CAR SPEAKER SYSTEM 2021-2022
ETON ONYX 16, ONYX 80, ONYX 28

EISA IN-CAR DSP AMPLIFIER 2021-2022
MATCH UP 10DSP

EISA IN-CAR CAMPER VAN COMPONENT 2021-2022
ALPINE ADVENTURE AUDIO

EISA IN-CAR COMPACT SUBWOOFER 2021-2022
PIONEER TS-WX010A

EISA IN-CAR INTEGRATION 2021-2022
ZENEC Z-E2055

EISA IN-CAR OEM PREMIUM AUDIO SYSTEM 2021-2022
MASERATI MC20 WITH SONUS FABER

CELEBRATING THE YEAR'S RED HOT PRODUCTS



GLOBAL AWARDS 2021-22

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EISA is the unique collaboration of 60 member magazines and websites from 29 countries, specialising in all aspects of consumer electronics from mobile devices, home theatre display and audio products, photography, hi-fi and in-car entertainment. This truly international association includes expert members in Australia, India, Canada, the Far East, USA and the wider European community, ensuring the EISA Awards and official logo are your guide to the best in global consumer technology!



HEADLINES

The Newsletter of Len Wallis Audio



Spring 2021

BOWERS & WILKINS' BEST YET?

800 D4 Diamond series touches down



VIVE LA REAVON
NEW 4K BLU-RAY PLAYERS



TECHNICS SL-1000R
PURE REFERENCE CLASS

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VIC Carlton: Carlton Audio Visual (03) 9639 2737

Hawthorn: Melbourne Hi-Fi (03) 9230 2000

South Melbourne: Clef Hi-Fi (03) 9645 0342

WA Cannington: West Coast Hi-Fi (08) 9356 2177

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Lismore: Living Entertainment North Coast (07) 5499 3788

Mascot: Audio Solutions (02) 9317 3330

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VIC Camberwell: Sight & Sound Galleria (03) 9882 0035

Cheltenham: Audio Experts (03) 9545 5152

Fitzroy: Vinyl Revival (03) 9419 5070

Notting Hill: Class A Audio (03) 8555 0735

WA Joondalup: West Coast Hi Fi (08) 9300 0601

O'Connor: West Coast Hi-Fi (08) 9331 4711

*Cash back amount varies per model purchased. SACD player: Model SACD30N: \$250; model SA12SE \$350; model SA10: \$500. Matching Stereo Amplifier: Model 30: \$250; model PM12SE: \$350; model PM10: \$500. For full terms and conditions and to claim your free SACD disc set and cash back go to www.marantz-rewards.com with your purchase receipt and bank account details.

4 From the Desk of Len

We're Covid-safe and still open for business, via a range of delivery and pick-up options. But if you want something special before Christmas, Len has some sage advice for you.

6 B&W 800 D4 Series

This world-famous British company has significantly upgraded its 800 Diamond Series speakers to Gen 4 and added unique patented Biometric Suspension to its midrange drivers.

9 MEZE Elite

Despite its eye-watering price, this small, boutique Romanian company's latest high-end headphone, the MEZE Elite, is actually a bargain!

10 New Models from Technics

One of the most renowned manufacturers in Japan has added new amplifiers, disc players, powered speakers and turntables to its range.

12 PS Audio Promotion

The United States' most-loved audio manufacturer is continuing to deeply discount its Power Plant mains power supplies, but it can't last!

13 Serhan Swift mu2 MkII

This Australian-designed and manufactured loudspeaker is one of the best available in its class and offers a level of performance that is far beyond its price.

14 BlueSound Updates Nodes

The welcome addition of HDMI eARC to the Node and the increased power output of the PowerNode has been achieved with no increase in price.

15 Reavon Universal Disc Players

French manufacturer Reavon has taken up where Oppo left off by announcing



two optical disc players that not only play any format you can think of, but can also play files from USB and DLNA.

16 Custom Installation Feature

Len Wallis Audio was privileged to be able to outfit a stunning beachside home with an even-more stunning array of electronics and speakers. Maybe this one will win us a Sound & Image Gold Award!

22 Sonos Roam & Beam(Gen2)

The hot multi-room music streaming brand at the moment is Sonos – with good reason. Their interface is excellent and the product is reliable and well-priced. These two new products will cement their place at the top.

24 Audiophile Vinyl

The USA's Mobile Fidelity (MoFi), the UK's Chasing the Dragon and Germany's Inakustik are three of the world's leading producers of audiophile vinyl, and we have excellent selections from all three.

25 Triangle Borea BR-A1

If you want to add Atmos-capable speakers to your home theatre system, but can't mount speakers in the ceiling, Triangle's new Borea BR-A1s are just what you need...

26 New LG OLED TVs

OLED technology is far, far superior to either LED or LCD and LG not only developed it, but is also the sole

manufacturer of OLED screens. Its 83-inch screen is simply a stunner!

27 Yamaha Old and New

We can finally offer the long-awaited new AV receivers from Yamaha, plus we're reducing the prices on two of the outgoing AV receiver models.

28 B&O Beolab 28 Speakers

From a Danish manufacturer renowned for its décor-friendly styling comes a new active wireless speaker system that sounds every bit as good as it looks.

29 Inakustik Micro Air

This German cable specialist's offerings are beyond most budgets, but their new Reference Micro Air speaker cables use trickle-down technology to change the game at a lower price-point.

30 Musical Fidelity Re-Prices

One of the UK's most value-oriented high-end brands has repositioned the prices of all their models downwards by a considerable margin, plus introduced a new budget phono stage and a Nuvista Valve set that could be an investment.

31 Marantz PM6007 Amplifier

One of Marantz's most popular integrated amplifiers has been superseded. Its replacement, the PM6007, is better by far and only \$50 more. As for the PM6006, grab one at our hot price while they last!





FROM THE DESK OF LEN WALLIS

This is written during lockdown — something that I hope will have passed, or at least close to it, by the time you read it. We spoke in the last newsletter of some of the ramifications that the pandemic has had on us all, but there are some additional long-term consequences that are being played out at the moment.

One of the obvious effects of a world-wide pandemic is that factories the world over closed for a period, or if they didn't, they reduced their output.

This has been further exacerbated by a global shortage of chipsets (due to both the pandemic-induced slowdowns and a couple of major fires). As a result, shipments of stock are being severely hampered — with some companies already informing us that any orders placed now will not be supplied this side of Christmas.

The second problem is that we are also witnessing price rises. The cost of manufacturing has risen for most companies due to factory slowdowns

and the increased cost of parts and raw materials (for example the price of aluminium has risen by over 30% this year). Compounding this, the price of shipping has skyrocketed in recent times. Many companies have already implemented price rises or have announced their intention to do so.

We are suggesting to our clientele that if they are looking to invest in new equipment prior to Christmas that they should not leave this until the last moment.

PURCHASING FROM LEN WALLIS AUDIO DURING NSW LOCKDOWN

As the NSW lockdown continues the Len Wallis Audio retail division will be temporarily closed to the public until further notice. To continue taking care of your needs, we have a number of ways in which you can still safely shop with us, including:

- Purchase on-line or by phone and have your purchase delivered
- Free delivery on any order

- Contactless Collection from our loading dock at the rear of the store

If you need help and advice with a purchase we encourage you to call us on
(02) 9427 6755

You can also email us at:
sales@lenwallisaudio.com.au

With the relaxing of rules surrounding the construction industry our Custom Installation Division continues operations, albeit in a limited capacity and with strict conditions imposed. Please give us a call if you have any questions regarding this sector of our business.

For the latest developments visit our dedicated webpage at **lenwallisaudio.com/about-us/covid-19/**



Reavon UBR-X100 & UBR-X200

UNIVERSAL 4K ULTRA-HD BLU-RAY PLAYERS

THE ULTIMATE DISC AND FILE-BASED ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

The Reavon UBR-X100 is fully digital, and the perfect movie source. Playing 4K Blu-rays including Dolby Vision HDR compatibility, plus standard Blu-rays, 3D Blu-rays, DVDs, DVD-Audio and CDs, the UBR-X100 is elaborately engineered for disc playback, with ultra-rigid construction using a 1.6mm-thick chassis base reinforced with a 3mm-thick steel plate under-base. The result is significantly low noise and even more rigid and stable chassis structure.

In addition to disc playback via dual HDMI

output terminals, the UBR-X100 can play audio and video content from an external drive via USB or DLNA, supporting MKV and M2TS video, FLAC, AIFF, DFF and DSF music, even JPG and TIFF photos. Audio is output via the second HDMI output, or from optical and coaxial digital outputs.

And it's geek heaven, with its information screen showing not only the usual disc detail, but mastering information such as MaxFALL and MaxCLL HDR settings, bit-rates and more.

The Reavon UBR-X200 includes everything on offer from the UBR-X100, but adds analogue outputs, backed by Burr-Brown Audio PCM1690 Series DACs, and a low-noise low-EM military-class toroidal transformer. This flagship player offers RCA unbalanced and XLR balanced audio outputs, plus individual 7.1-channel surround outputs for movie and music surround sound, including decoding of Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, in addition to lesser formats.

This is the EISA-winning flagship UHD disc player that everyone is talking about – and given the demand for previous players of this quality, we suggest you contact your nearest Reavon dealer without delay!

REAVON



BOWERS & WILKINS 800 D4 SERIES

Bowers & Wilkins have just released the fourth generation of their high-end loudspeaker range with the 800 Series Diamond, and this latest iteration of this world-famous series has seen some significant re-engineering.

Technically available from September 1, (we will start to see the model range arriving over September and October)

the 800 D4 Series is the result of almost six years of research and development, delivering innovations and proprietary technologies that B&W says elevates the range to a new level of audio performance and design.

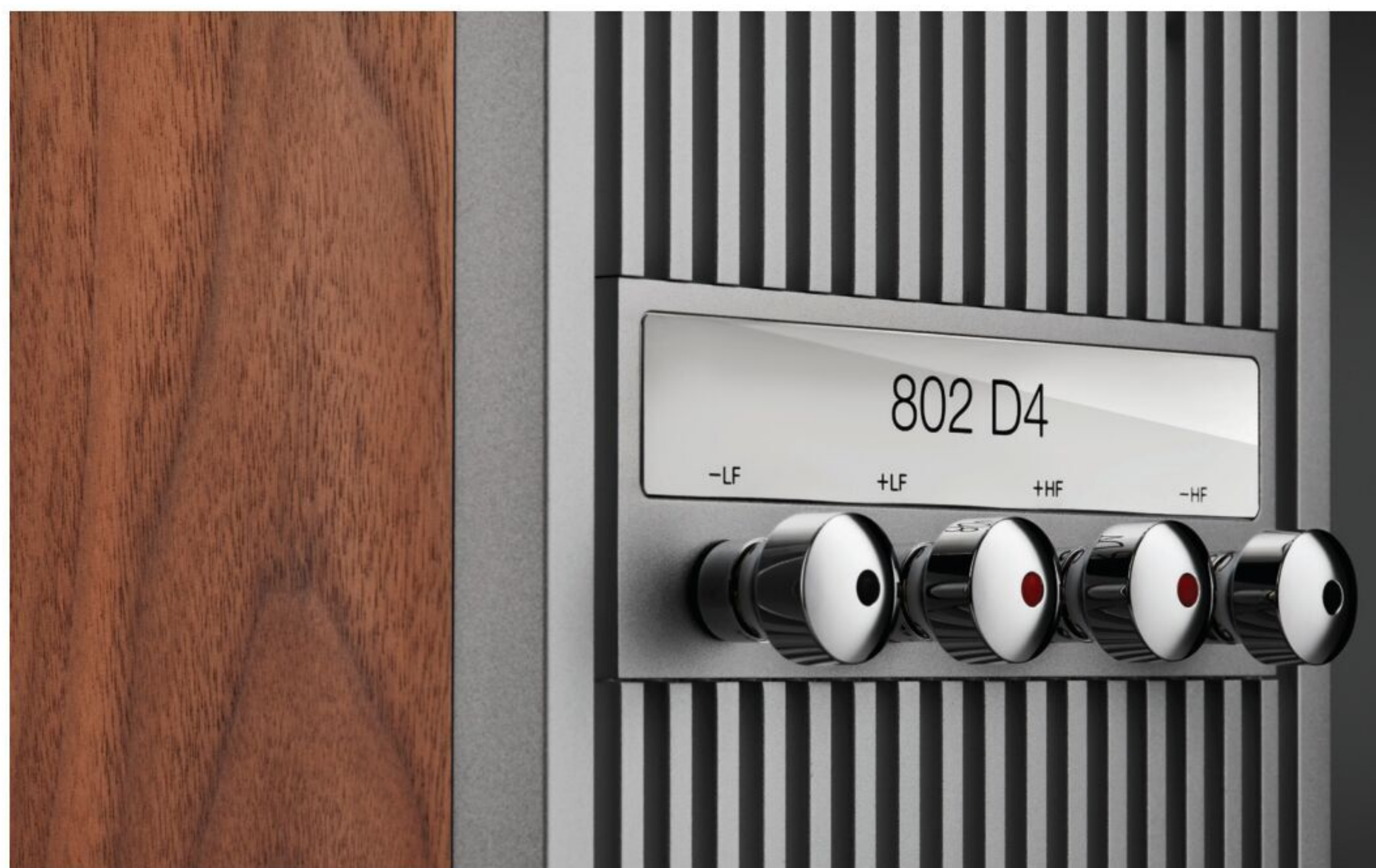
This fourth series has much to live up to; the current D3 range was widely regarded as one of the best in the world.

In fact the 800 Series has had a long and distinguished history spanning some 40 years. Used by some of the world's leading recording studios, including Abbey Road and Skywalker Sound, music producers and filmmakers have often preferred the B&W 800s as their definitive reference monitors and have used them to mix some of the most iconic albums and movie soundtracks of the modern era.

So the brand's engineering legacy and the reputation that has made Bowers & Wilkins an audio authority for more than 55 years was effectively on the table with the launch of this new series.

No pressure, then.

Whilst at the time of writing we are yet to have listened to the final product, there have been significant advancements in acoustic excellence being reported and purposeful refreshes across the range to the stunning industrial design of the D3 Series, which has somehow, to our eyes, turned the elegance factor up to 11.





For example, Bowers & Wilkins have developed an all-new drive unit suspension system — Biomimetic Suspension — which reduces unwanted noise created by the conventional fabric suspension, which has been used in loudspeakers for decades. The result is said to be an even more transparent and natural sound than ever before.

Every model now sees the adoption of the revised Solid Body Tweeter-on-Top

housing with an elongated tube-loading system to produce an even more open sound — whilst the acclaimed diamond dome tweeter, one of Bowers & Wilkins most iconic technologies — is retained.

The new range of loudspeakers now includes a Satin Walnut finish to join the established finishes of Gloss Black, Gloss White and Satin Rosenuit.

Geoff Edwards, Brand President, Bowers & Wilkins, says, “Our flagship

800 Series Diamond loudspeakers perfectly encapsulate everything that Bowers & Wilkins stands for; outstanding audio performance, engineering and design excellence plus British quality manufacturing.” He continued: “With the new 800 Series Diamond range, we have built upon its revered status as the world’s finest loudspeakers and taken a leap forward in both audio performance and design.”



The 800 D4 Series Diamond range includes (from left to right) The flagship model 801 D4 (\$52,900), and three additional floor-standing models: 802 D4 (\$38,900), 803 D4 (\$29,900) and 804 D4 (\$18,900). The small stand-mount/bookshelf speaker is the 805 D4 (\$11,900). For home theatre use, B&W has two new centre-channel speakers: HTM81 D4 (\$11,900) and HTM82 D4 (\$8,500).

MEZE ELITE HEADPHONES



Meze have released a new high-end headphone, and true to Meze tradition this is an exceptional headphone for the money. Meze produce a very limited range of 'phones and each one represents the best in its class.

The Meze Elite is targeting the top end of the market, and sell for \$6,500. Considering the development that has gone into this product and the

technologies used in its creation, this is actually a bargain.

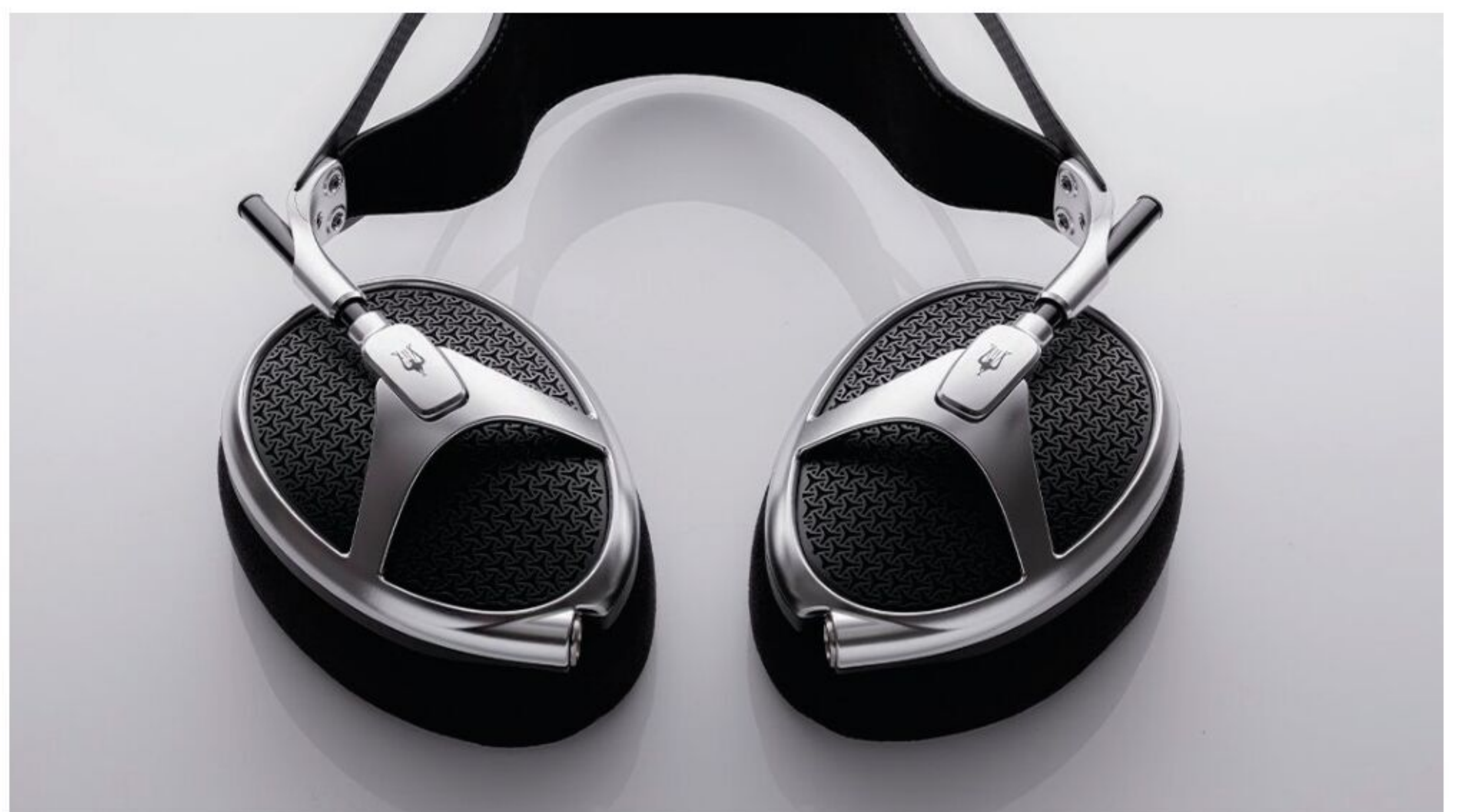
The drivers used in the Meze Elite were developed over a three-year period by Rinaro Isodynamics and are based on the Isodynamic Hybrid Array Driver technology utilised in their Empyrean headphones that uses the company's exclusive Parus low-mass acoustic diaphragm constructed on an ultrathin biaxially-oriented semi-crystalline film.

An integral part of the unique design of these drivers is the use of dual coil arrays, allowing for better frequency targeting of different areas of the ear, which improves acoustical perception in the upper frequency range as well as enabling high sensitivity of 101dB SPL so they can be driven by almost any source without the need for additional amplification.

A carbon-fibre headband with patent-pending suspension wings and a real leather headrest ensure an ultra-light feel, maximum durability and a luxurious fit, while the Meze Elite headphones also come with two pairs of ear-pads which, while offering different levels of fit and comfort, also have their own unique impact on performance.

Owners are able to choose between different connecting cables, and these cables can also be upgraded with an array of optional alternatives manufactured by Japanese cable specialist Furukawa.

Every part of the Meze Elite is meticulously crafted — right down to the aluminium suitcase that they come in. It is easy to recommend the Meze Elite solely on the basis of this craftsmanship, but the real secret is the performance that is the result of the combination of advanced innovative and unique technologies and this craftsmanship. If you have the opportunity, have a listen — you will be impressed!





New models from Technics

The recent re-introduction of the superb turntable line-up from Technics has been a very welcome addition to our range of turntable offerings. Technics have not succumbed to the temptation to capitalise on their past reputation and reduce the quality of manufacture to hit price points — the construction quality of their current offering is as good as their iconic offerings of yesteryear. Surprisingly they have also managed to remain price competitive.

They are now taking this same attitude to a wider variety of products.

Technics SU-C700 Integrated Amplifier: \$2,749

The fashion at the moment is front panel meters — and Technics have embraced this trend with gusto. Despite the fact that this amplifier is narrower than is usual (it measures 335mm wide) the front panel is all power meters.

Despite this obvious homage to days of old this is a very modern amplifier,

featuring a variety of both digital and analogue inputs — including a phono input. It is rated at 45 watts per channel, and yet it can drive relatively inefficient speakers with ease.

It features several Technics exclusive technologies, including:

JENO Engine (Jitter Elimination and Noise-shaping Optimisation)

LADC (Load Adaptive Phase Calibration) — this is a speaker impedance optimisation algorithm which can be selected from the remote control.

High-Speed Silent Linear Power Supply (to ensure that the amplifier can deliver ample voltage and current at all times, even when very dynamic music demands both simultaneously).

SL-G700 Multi-Digital Player: \$4,949

If you are looking for a high-end player that covers most of your digital requirements this may be what you are looking for. Firstly, and most obviously, the SL-G700 is a high performance CD/SACD player. It can also be used as a digital-to-analogue converter.

Technics' SL-G700 is also a streamer supporting a wide variety of music sources and connectivity — including TIDAL, MQA, Spotify, Deezer, Apple Air Play, Bluetooth and Chromecast.





Build quality is typical Technics, down to its Four-Section construction ensuring isolation of the different digital, analogue and power supply platforms.

SB-C700a Speakers: \$2,995/pair

When reviewing these speakers Herb Reichert of Stereophile magazine concluded by writing: "I dare you to audition these beautiful, well-engineered speakers. Technics' new Premium Class SB-C700s are not only accurate, transparent and neutral, but also excellent value.

Highly recommended."

This is a speaker designed for anyone looking for something stylish, compact, and dynamic with excellent imaging — and that is casting a pretty wide net. The driver, developed by Technics specifically for this model, is a flat two-way coaxial design — that is, both the mid-bass driver and the tweeter are part of the same structure. Because the tweeter is at the centre of the mid-bass driver it acts as a point-sound source providing coherent sound across the frequency range and

delivering excellent soundstage focus. This is by no means a new or unique technology, it has been used for eons in one form or another by numerous manufacturers — the most obvious current example being the speaker that the SB-C700a will invariably be compared to, and that is the KEF LS50. It is a technology that can be hard to get right, but when it is the results are very rewarding.

Technics SL-1000R Direct-Drive Turntable: \$32,999

We have not received this yet, but it is on order, so keep an eye on our social media — and we will be sending an EDM to announce its arrival the moment it hits our shelves. (Not on our email list? — please go to our website to correct this).

The Technics SL-1000R is the result of allowing some of the best turntable designers in the world to run riot. This turntable features a double-coil coreless direct-drive motor, a super-heavy platter, a separate control unit and a high-quality base-mounted tonearm all on an extremely stable, rigid cabinet. We can hardly wait to hear it!





PS AUDIO POWER PLANT PROMOTION EXTENDED

PS Audio has announced that they are extending the 20% price reduction on their Power Plant products for a further limited time. PS Audio have been recognised as the leader in this field for some time, and with the current offer they represent even better value than usual.

DirectStream Power Plant P20:

RRP: \$16,995. Limited offer \$13,596

DirectStream Power Plant P15:

RRP: \$12,995. Limited offer \$10,396

DirectStream Power Plant P12:

RRP: \$8,395. Limited offer \$6,716

Stellar Power Plant 3:

RRP: \$3,895. Limited offer \$3,116

Why might you need to use a PS Audio Power Plant? All hi-fi equipment powered by the 240-volt a.c. mains power supply depends on that power being correct in order for it to deliver its

optimum performance, yet the mains power supplied to your home is rarely ever exactly 240-volts and rather than being an optimal 50Hz sine wave, the mains waveform is often distorted.

PS Audio's Power Plants correct for the problems that typically affect Australia's mains power supply. They take your incoming a.c. mains power, convert it to d.c. and then regenerate it to produce a new a.c. voltage of exactly 240-volts, at exactly 50Hz, with a perfect, undistorted sinusoidal waveform. This clean, undistorted signal can then be used to power all your hi-fi components.

Clean a.c. mains power not only ensures increased component longevity, but also improves sound quality. Using a PS Audio Power Plant, you can expect far better micro and macro dynamics, as well as lower background noise. It is one of the most important pieces of equipment you can own because it establishes a firm and reliable foundation for your system that will serve you for years to come. And compared to a passive power conditioner, a PS Audio Power Plant will give you greatly improved performance and safety, together with better dynamics, improved bass and a much bigger, more open soundstage.





SERHAN SWIFT MU2 MK11

Our respect for the Serhan Swift mu2 bookshelf speakers is well known. We hold this Australian-designed and manufactured bookshelf speaker to be one of the best available in class, certainly offering a level of performance that is far beyond its price.

Did Serhan Swift do themselves a disservice by calling this new version of this fabulous speaker the mu2 MkII? Could it have been called the mu3? We think so, given the number of changes that have been made to it. About the only thing consistent with the previous model is the size. The finish is different (a much more attractive low sheen), and importantly the cabinets are now manufactured entirely in Australia.

Both the woofer and the tweeter have been improved with an even-flatter frequency response, smoother roll-offs at both ends of the audio spectrum, and lower distortion across the range. The crossover has also been tweaked. Upgraded bracing and multiple layers of carefully selected materials reduce cabinet colouration even further, clearly audible as increased resolution and detail. Constrained layer damping, custom-manufactured by Les Davis of 3D Damping Disc fame, provides additional vibration control (pioneered in the original mu2).

These are excellent speakers, and if you are in the market for a pair of speakers in this price bracket (or even close to this price bracket) you would be doing yourself a disservice if you did not include them on your audition list.

Priced from \$7,500 per pair



New BlueSound Models

We have long sung the praises of BlueSound as a multi-room streaming platform, and they have recently updated two of the core products in their range, the Node2i streamer and PowerNode2i streaming amplifier.

Functionally these two models (now simply called Node and PowerNode) remain the same as the previous versions, except for the addition of an HDMI eARC input on the Node (the PowerNode already featured this input), allowing for the unit to be seamlessly connected to your TV and entertainment system.

The touch glass interface on top has also been upgraded, including the addition of a precise volume slider.

Most of the important changes have been made underneath the hood — with both the processor and the DAC having been upgraded. The new DAC supports all digital formats up to 24-bit/192kHz including MQA.

The power output of the PowerNode has also been increased from 60 watts per channel up to 80 watts per channel. As before, both units allow you to stream music from your own digital music library, from your computer, from the internet or from your own portable device via Apple AirPlay 2, Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, plus there are both wired digital and wired analogue inputs for maximum user convenience. Everything is controlled by Canadian manufacturer BlueSound's award-winning BluOS controller app or, if you prefer, by the voice assistant of your choice: Siri, Alexa or Google Voice. Despite these improvements to what were already excellent products both units have been released at the same prices as their predecessors.



 BlueSound Node **\$999**

 BlueSound PowerNode **\$1,499**



Reavon Universal Disc Players

We don't see many new brands coming onto the market, so launching a new brand with a new range of disc players — particularly in this era of streaming — is unusual indeed.

Reavon is a French company and is an offshoot of the consumer electronics company Groupe Archisoft.

Archisoft established Reavon with one over-arching goal: to build the best multi-purpose disc players available for use by discerning audiophiles and home theatre enthusiasts. No doubt the French company was aware of the pent-up demand for universal (multi-format) optical disc players following the departure of Oppo from this category.

Reavon currently has two Universal Disc Player models available:

Reavon UBR-X100 - \$1,390

Theoretically this is Reavon's budget model, but it is 'budget' in relative terms only. This is an extremely capable, well-built piece of equipment. It plays Ultra HD Blu-ray, Blu-ray 3D, DVD, DVD-Audio, CDs and will play optical discs containing music and video files in a wide variety of popular formats, including FLAC, AIFF, DFF, DSF, JPG, TIFF, MKV and M2TS. It will also act as a streamer that is able to play external files via USB or DLNA.

Reavon UBR-X200 - \$2,900

Taking the technology to another level with improved componentry, including upgraded DACs and an upgraded power supply, along with the addition of SACD playback, plus balanced and multi-channel outputs, the UBR-X200 is currently Reavon's flagship model.





Coast with the most

Nine audio zones, five 4K video zones, full Savant control of the whole home — and not a bad view outside. Welcome to intelligent smart living, made rather comfy.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Peter Tsui at Studio Kai

SCREEN SURF IMAGES: Terry Trathen, Fabrizio Pasetti & Jacopo Benedetti on Scpio

If you were fortunate enough to have a home in a stunning ocean-side location such as this, wouldn't you want the best in home entertainment to supplement the natural environment around you?

This home's owner had recently purchased the three-bedroom property when they contacted Len Wallis Audio's custom installation team to gain their input on a major planned renovation. High-end architectural fittings and finishes in the interiors were to be handled by a renowned local design firm, complementing spectacular uninterrupted views of the local surf beach. So while the client wanted high-performance audio available throughout the home, space was going to be relatively limited. He preferred the entertainment to be 'hidden', rather than detract from the stunning location and design.

While large displays were requested for every video zone, these were required to blend as harmoniously as possible with the architecture; to this end each of the internal TV screens would be given a custom-made timber or aluminium surround. A media room had also been allocated in the renovation plans, with the particular request that its design and surround system should cater well for the presentation of sports events on the big screen.

An integrated home

But the planning and installation involvement of the Len Wallis Audio team went far beyond the audio and AV of the home here, into the wider realm of the integrated smart home. Here their brief included lighting control, data networking, phones, intercoms and security, climate control, even pool monitoring, all to be

integrated under a single automation system which, at the request of the client, would need to be very simple to control, as he was a self-professed technophobe.

So one of the team's first tasks was to convince the client that although a smart home may be complex 'under the hood', the whole point of a good integrated solution is that under a single control system the multiple systems in the home can be made far more intuitive and straightforward to use — and, via the use of automation, potentially far more efficient as well.

This done, the chosen solution had all the various sub-systems simply controlled using the Savant automation platform, including the Savant Pro Host controller (see overleaf), which the team describes as having plenty of processing power for a system of this size, while the control system could be refined to remove any unnecessary controls for a client not interested in tweaking settings.

"It's a tried and true recipe of equipment that we have used in many past projects," said the LWA installation team. "No shortcuts were taken here, and only premium brands have been used throughout."

Power first

The level of quality here begins right at the fundamentals — the provision of power to the home.

OUTDOOR LIVING: The poolside outdoor kitchen is one of five video zones receiving distributed 4K entertainment plus audio. The Savant control system includes an 'Entertain' scene which starts a Tidal playlist through multiple areas, also setting lighting to predetermined states throughout the home.





To keep this architectural home as clear as possible of equipment, the majority of it is centralised in a plant room, with a rack containing amplifiers, the audio matrix switcher and the AV processor, as well as networking, NAS drives and other switching equipment. Indeed one of the first tasks faced by the Len Wallis team was to have the plant room relocated from the area originally designated by the architect.

“It just wasn’t suitable — it was in an area penetrated by salt air,” says the team. “We had to convince the client to lose a bit of cinema space to create a dedicated plant room which could be properly managed using a dedicated air-conditioning system to ensure the best operational environment for all the equipment under a constant room temperature.”

This was eventually agreed, and high quality power provision was planned.

The rack in the new plant room is fed by a dedicated 15-amp circuit, surge protected at the electrical board and connected via an Eaton UPS (uninterruptible power supply) which provides dual-online power filtration. From there, an Eaton Enclosure Power Distribution Unit is used to connect each device in the rack, this allowing remote power management and cycling of each device individually. The team notes how beneficial this has proven as a service tool on many projects, as they can then not only manage the system through a secure VPN, but are also able to schedule power cycles from devices which need it.

“So for example we have scheduled the Foxtel and Apple TV devices here to power cycle weekly,” the team tells us. “These devices can be problematic when it comes to locking up, and this simple scheduling reduces service calls substantially.”

All other local devices in the home are connected with Thor premium surge

protected power boards, with antenna, satellite and network feeds also separately surge-protected to prevent surges entering the home through these other lines.

Lighting and networking

Electronic dimming was quickly deemed essential for lighting control, and Lutron’s HomeWorks QS system was used, which integrates fully under the Savant control system using the DALI (Digital Addressable Lighting Interface) protocol for all light fittings within the property. When turning on and off, all the lights have been given an extended ramp rate — “to give a luxurious feel to the control”, says the LWA team — and every light circuit turns on at a reduced output when the corresponding keypad button is pressed once, or at full output if the button is double-tapped.

The Lutron system also controls motorised shades, underfloor heating



▲ **SPACE SAVER:** With limited space available for high-quality speakers, the Len Wallis Audio team created a frame around this 85-inch TV into which they could mount Meridian DSP520 digital active speakers. The result: style, with real sonic substance.

MERIDIAN & SAVANT

Meridian appears in this home both in the main plant room, where its rack-mounted 200 Series Digital Theatre Controller and Eight Channel Amplifier (pictured below) are situated, and throughout the home in sound-critical areas where Meridian's digital active speakers (right) are used. These allow high-resolution digital audio signals to be maintained right up to the

speaker, simplifying audio distribution by minimising long analogue cable runs.

The entire home runs under Savant home automation, bringing together everything from lighting and entertainment to security

cameras and climate control. Savant also has switching and system devices which allow 4K video and high-res audio distribution.

Such over-arching 'umbrella' control of multiple systems allows the programming of 'scenes' which can combine multiple system changes under a single command — activating certain lights, playing music in certain areas, and far more besides. These scenes

can then be automated to occur at certain times without user interaction, or can be triggered from dedicated panel switches, or selected using the Savant Pro app (pictured above), which can run on pretty much any mobile or tablet device.

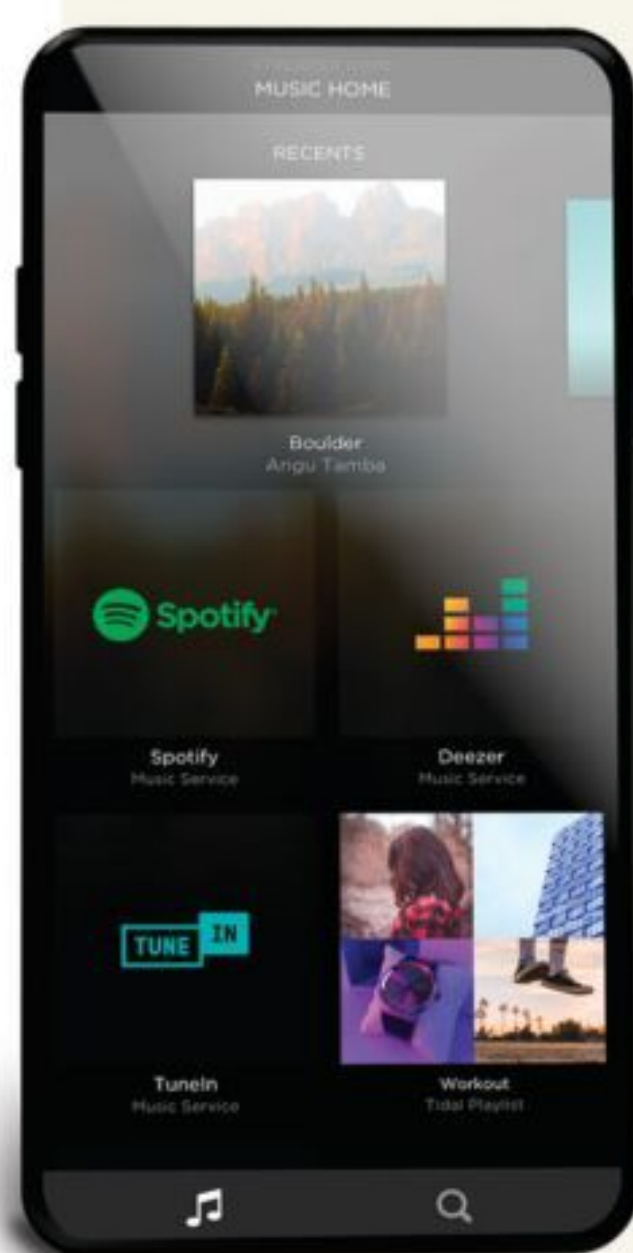
It will even run in Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Portuguese, Russian or Swedish!

and exhaust fans, and is completely integrated with the Savant system to provide various 'scenes' which combine lighting with other systems in the home. There are 24 Lutron 'Palladiom' keypads around the home, in a mixture of polymer and metal finishes, each keypad custom engraved and able to control scene-based programming for each area.

A scene button by the front door, for example, initiates a 'Welcome' macro which turns on lights throughout, activates the TV and audio, as well as starting the HVAC in key locations.

A simpler scene in the Master Ensuite just starts and stops the internet radio in that area. It's the ability to customise such scenes and then clearly label the keypads that are the key technologies to providing the simplicity of operation requested by the client.

There are also automated processes which require no user intervention at all.





Twenty minutes before sunset, the lights in common areas will turn on to preset levels in a Savant-triggered scene which occurs every evening, the correct time identified by the astronomical time clock. Lighting on the street frontage turns on at sunset each night, and turns off at sunrise. A 'Wake Up' scene slowly ramps up light levels in the bedrooms from 0–90 per cent over 30 minutes every weekday at 6:00 a.m. after which the motorised blinds open at 6:40 a.m. — all designed to wake the occupants gently.

Data networking was no minor task in this home; the owner had the requirement of enterprise-grade networking so he could work 100 per cent reliably from home even before the idea of lockdown arrived to raise that priority still further. The system uses a dual-WAN connection, with a fibre-optic connection for the home's main internet feed and a dedicated 4G modem as a secondary connection.

Networking devices are hardwired for reliability wherever possible, with reserved IP addresses, and the Wi-Fi is delivered by five Ruckus wireless access points. For maximum security no port-forwarding has been enabled, so that remote access is solely by encrypted IPsec VPN secure network protocols which authenticate and encrypt every command.

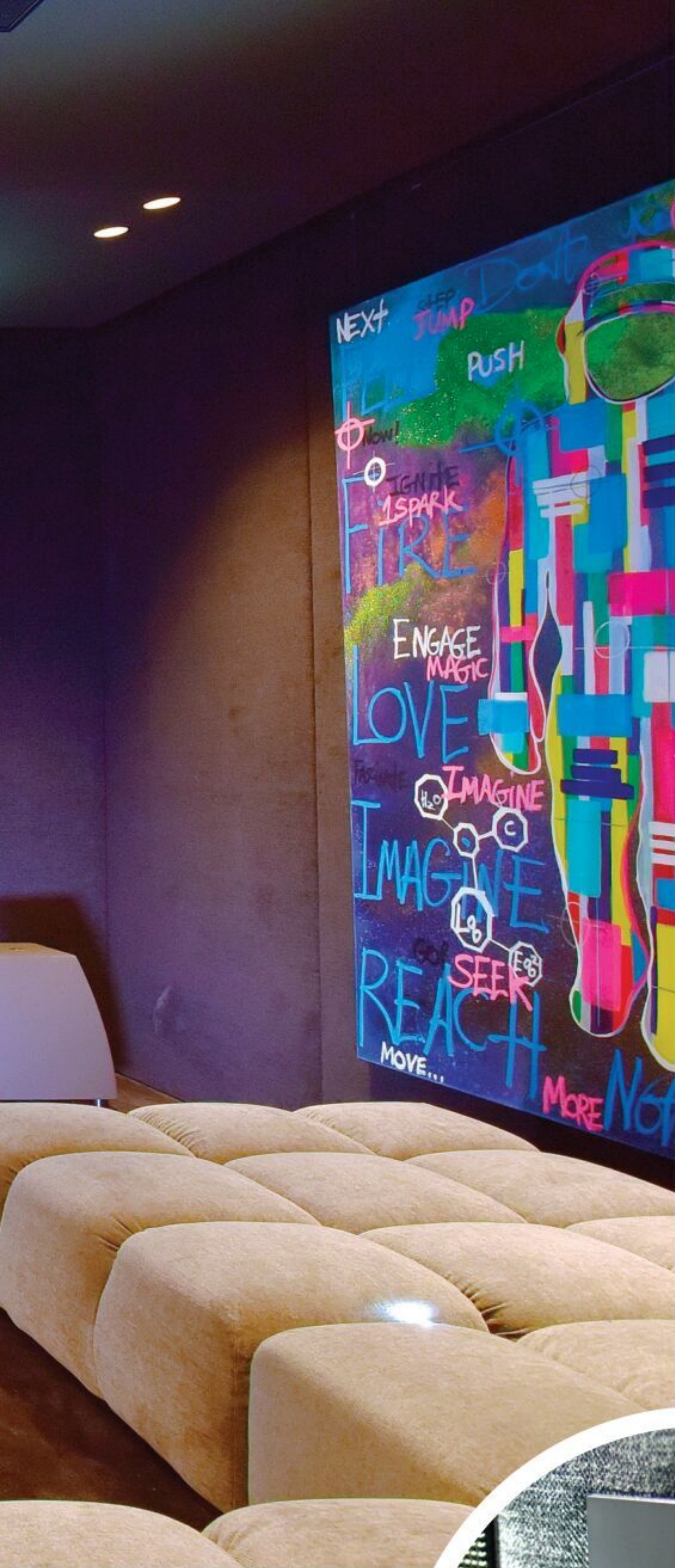
Distributed music & movies

The home has a total of nine defined audio zones, five of which also receive 4K distributed video. The music distribution uses a Savant 32x20 digital audio switch which has 16 analogue and 16 digital inputs available, providing 20 outputs and the ability to pass Dolby and DTS surround signals via its digital outputs. All the sources used here were digital, including two Tidal HIFI-level streams, making 24-bit/96kHz streaming music available to any or all of the nine audio zones.

Other audio sources include AirPlay, Tune-In internet radio, AppleTV and Foxtel audio, while each of the TVs also allows audio from any device to be played in any zone.

Given the space limitations in the home, architectural-style speakers were used throughout, with Meridian's high-quality digital active speakers used in all of the critical listening areas. These allowed the signal to be kept digital all the way to these speakers.

In external areas, however, such active speakers would be unsuited to the harsh marine environment — this home is so close to the beach that it gets salt spray from the surf, says LWA team. So rugged passive speakers were used for these exposed external areas. Each zone has completely independent source selection and volume control, with DSP applied to tailor the audio to the individual spaces, and a small amount of delay was applied



both music and video in the Living Room. But even here the wall cavities were limited in depth and the client didn't want in-room speakers — and Len Wallis Audio didn't want to settle for a soundbar solution.

"Instead we designed an aluminium surround to house a pair of Meridian DSP520 speakers flanking the 85-inch 4K display," says the LWA team. "It's a bold yet minimal statement which conceals a very capable stereo system."

When only music playback is required, the owners can activate a 'Living Music' scene from either a Lutron keypad or the Savant app, which starts randomised Tidal favourites playing at a set level in multichannel stereo. Or an 'Entertain' scene starts an 'Entertain' playlist from Tidal playing through the Living, Family and Terrace areas, all at set volumes, while also setting lighting throughout the home to predetermined dimmed states.

Finally there's that media/cinema room (left). Here there's a 135-inch

Severtson woven screen, together with a Sony 4K projector for superb UHD imaging.

A Marantz AV processor provides digital signals for three Meridian DSP640 active speakers concealed behind the screen, a further pair of DSP520 speakers providing the rear fill, and DSP320 speakers

in the ceiling for Atmos height immersion. The bass is supplemented by a pair of Meridian DSW 12-inch subwoofers, finished in custom matte finish to complement the décor. It's a completely digital active 5.2.2 system.

The cinema space was not without design issues, however — the interior designers wanted all the walls finished in a lightly padded fabric, which the Len Wallis Audio team knew could lead to over-absorption. And a large feature glass-and-steel sliding door had been planned at the back of the room — which might

have rattled due to the high volume levels the home theatre system is able to create — was modified based on improvements suggested by the LWA team to ensure it wouldn't vibrate. The team also added a motorised heavy curtain to conceal it. The team also convinced the client to retain some reflection in the room by not adding a planned star-ceiling. "The result was even better than we expected," says the team. "Bass sweeps through the room without creating any audible vibration, and overall this is a near-reference immersive cinema space. Indeed the quality of audio throughout this home is exceptional — it's a stand-out feature of the home."

Ready for more

There's far more to the integration of this home, with intercom points, nine zones of HVAC and climate control, smoke detection, automated control over the pool's cleaning system, pumps and temperature, perimeter security sensors and cameras with NAS drive recording, monitored alarm systems... the list goes on.

And all these systems received the same attention to detail as the audio and AV — for example the standard alarm speakers have been replaced by Speakercraft speakers to achieve a cleaner appearance in the ceiling. The client can monitor all security cameras and review recorded footage through the Savant app.

The LWA team also allowed for a large amount of provisional cabling, so they would be able to deliver further changes to the system after practical completion. They tell us these provisions have already been beneficial for the addition of extra sensors, cameras, lighting loads and control panels — for example, once the home was completed the owner asked for a further four security cameras to be added.

Various future upgrades are also thereby possible, including for 8K video, and to enhance audio, with most zones pre-wired for the addition of active subwoofers.

So it's ready for more — but we wonder, as we ponder those spectacular ocean beach views, who on earth could possibly ask for more?

to certain zones to avoid any 'echo' effect when playing music housewide through both digital and analogue zones.

Savant IP video distribution allows 4K video to be shared with all the screens, from two Foxtel 4K satellite TV boxes and two AppleTV 4Ks. Each display uses a Savant VoIP receiver connected to a Netgear 10G managed fibre switch, enabling a system capable of full 4K with minimal compression, and video tiling too. Thanks to the extended bandwidth of the fibre, the system will be firmware upgradable to handle any 8K screens in the future.

Main video zones

Full range performance was requested for



Sonos Roam

The hot multi-room music streaming brand at the moment is Sonos — and with good reason.

Their interface is excellent, the product is reliable, and the brand is well-priced (plus they have a larger marketing budget than anyone else).

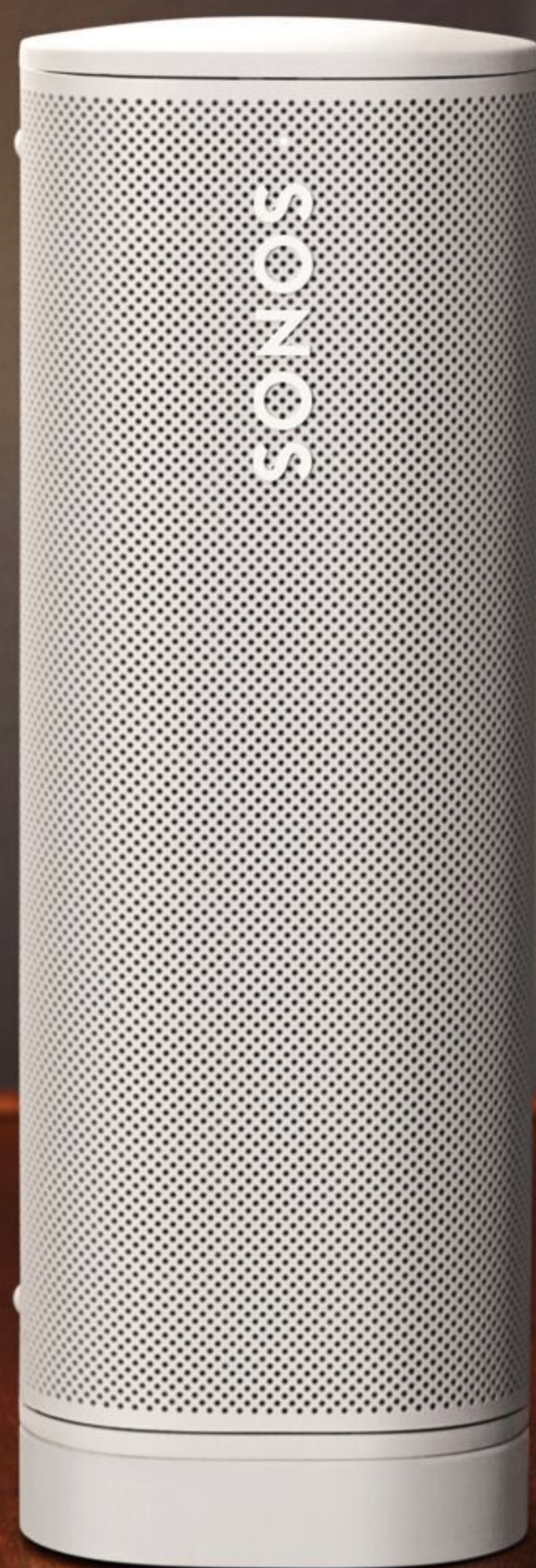
The most recent product to be added to their stable is their budget portable speaker — aptly called Roam. It is compact, waterproof, voice-controlled, has a long battery life and, given its size and price, delivers a surprisingly high level of performance.

Its in-built battery gives up to 10-hours of play time and can be charged with the supplied cable, or wirelessly, via any Qi-certified charger. Roam automatically connects to your home Wi-Fi

network for playback, plus you can also use Bluetooth or Apple AirPlay2 to stream to it directly from your smartphone or tablet.

The Roam's waterproof (IP67-rated) exterior is drop-resistant and it can be operated vertically or horizontally so that its Class-H powered racetrack bass/midrange driver and soft dome tweeter will deliver the clarity, depth, and fullness of sound that you'd usually only expect from a much larger speaker.

What's more, it is able to adjust its sound quality to compensate for where it's located. By using automatic Sonos 'Trueplay' tuning, Roam can increase bass response when you're using it outdoors, and reduce it when you're in a very small room, to ensure the sound is always perfectly balanced. **\$279**





Next Generation Sonos Beam

Sonos has upgraded its popular Beam smart Soundbar, which has been so popular that we've been sold out for a while now. The new Sonos Beam (Gen 2) delivers an upgraded, more immersive sound experience with greater depth and clarity than the original Beam, and now also includes support for Dolby Atmos, enabled through the use of increased processing power and newly-developed phased speaker arrays that enable the Beam (Gen2) to steer and localise sound around the room for a more life-like listening experience.

The new Beam (Gen2) soundbar is also now compatible with HDMI eARC on your TV, so you can experience your favourite

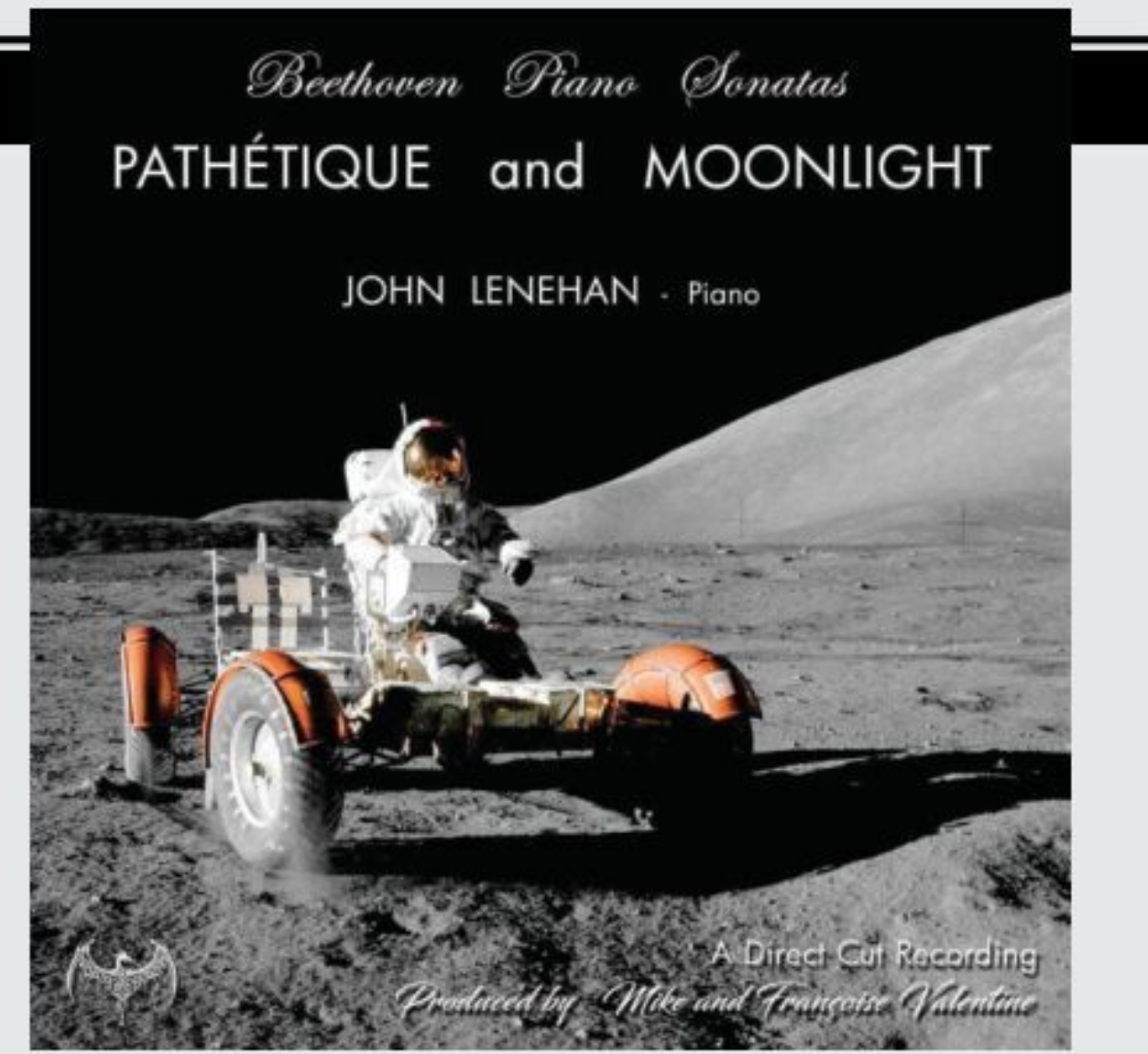
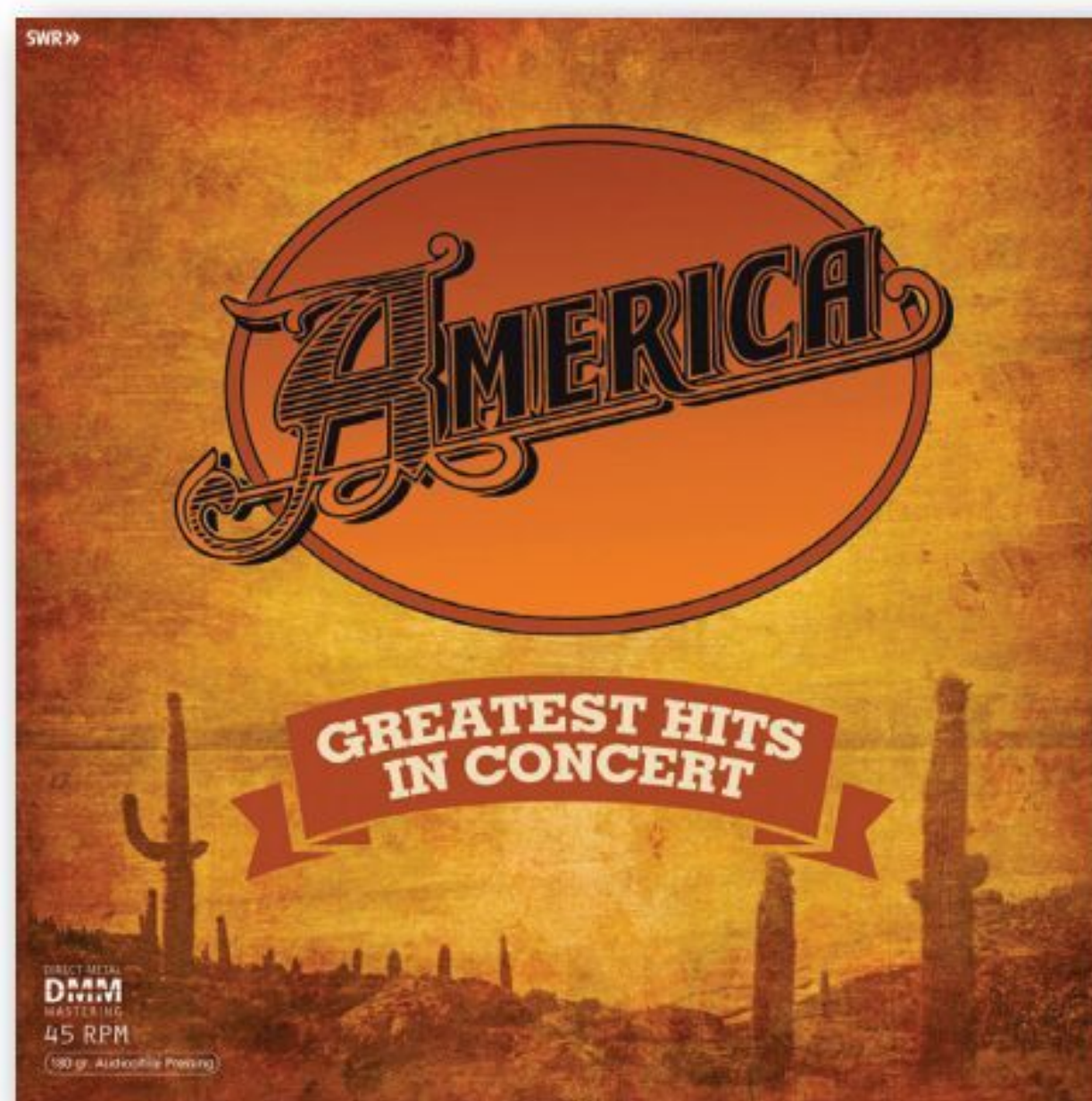
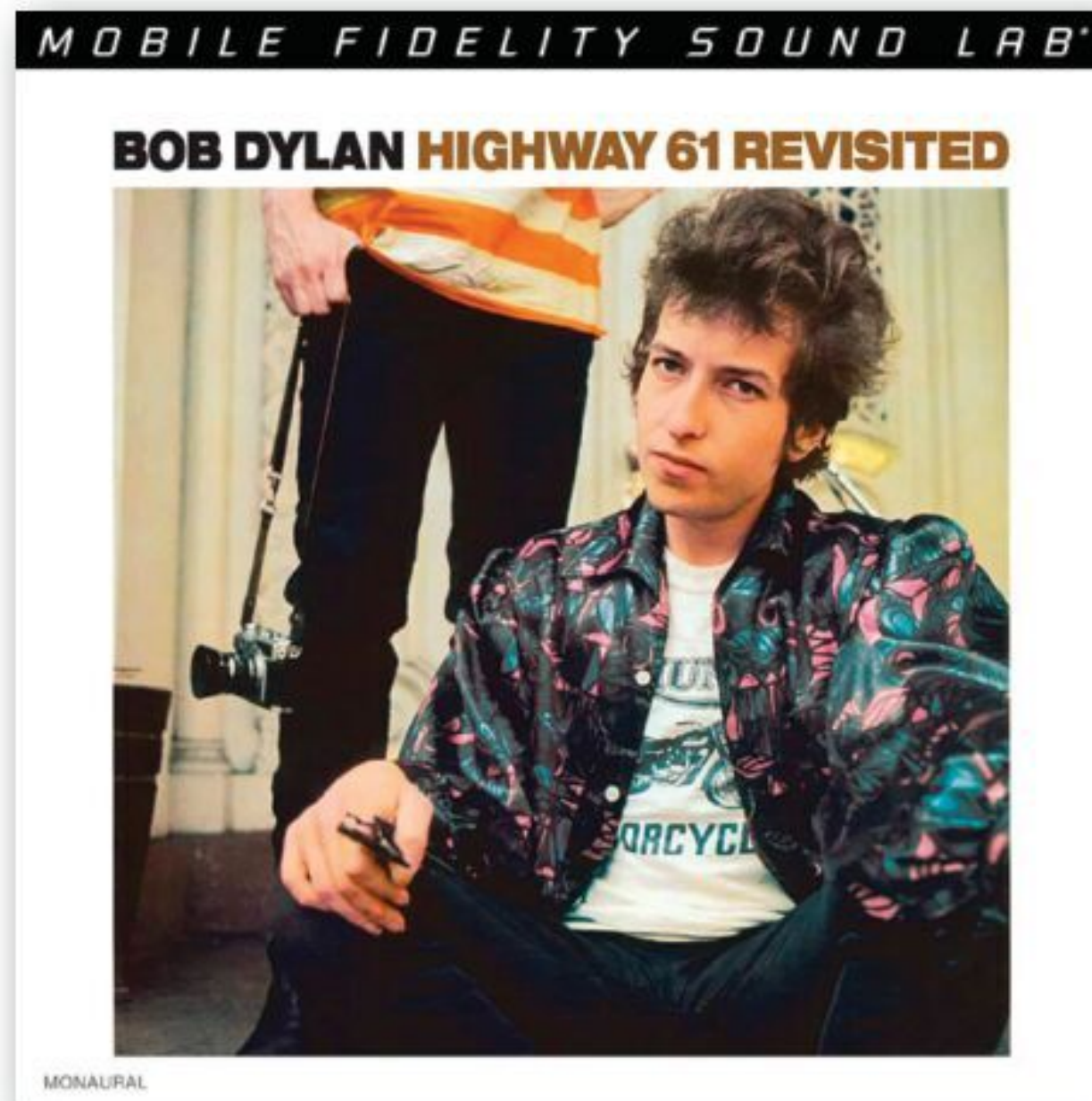
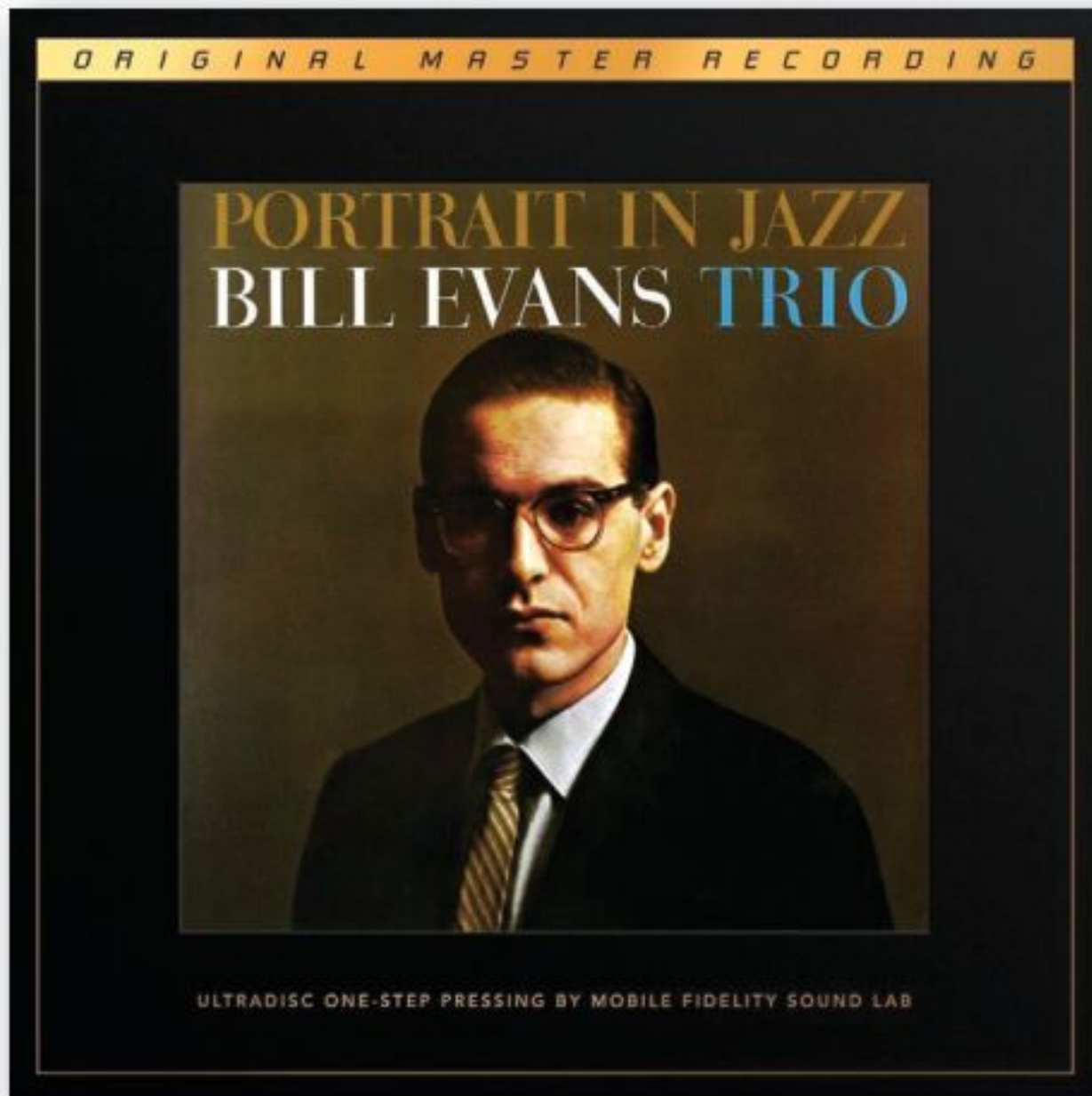
movies and games in even higher-definition sound with added support for new audio formats. Customers should note that although the Beam (Gen2) supports Amazon Music HD, Amazon has indicated to us that it has no plans to offer this high-res music format here in Australia.

However the Beam (Gen2) is fully compatible with more than 100 streaming services available via the Sonos app.

"Beam (Gen 2) sets the standard for compact soundbars with a richer, more immersive listening experience," said Patrick Spence, Sonos CEO. "We often talk about 'Hollywood at Home' being a real catalyst for our business, and Beam

has played a huge part in this as one of the top-selling soundbars in its category. Taking what we've learned over the years about great listening and home theatre, we've found a way to bring new features and significantly better sound to Beam, all in the same compact size that has proven extremely popular with customers."

Although it's the same size as the original Beam, the Beam (Gen2) has a sleeker exterior, a new perforated polycarbonate grille and easier, more secure set-up, with just two cables and new NFC capabilities. We expect stock to arrive on October 6, just in time for the footy finals and the New Year movie releases. **\$699**



Chasing the Dragon

This UK-based label is owned by producer/recording engineer Mike Valentine and offers a range of audiophile LPs including a number of Direct Cut LPs. This label includes classical, jazz and folk genres. If you need a recommendation for a good place to start listening to the quality of the performances recorded by Mike Valentine, and the superior sound quality, we would recommend you listen to the John Lenehan recording of two of Beethoven's best-loved piano sonatas: the 'Pathétique' (No. 8 in C minor, Op.13) and the 'Moonlight' (No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 27). Superb! **Priced from \$95**

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

Len Wallis Audio carries a range of audiophile vinyl sourced from three manufacturers. We try to keep our selection up-to-date on our website, but if there is something special that you are interested in that isn't there, it would pay to call us.

Mobile Fidelity

Priced from \$69 to \$299 depending on the technology deployed.

The undisputed leader in audiophile recordings, Mobile Fidelity has been producing audiophile vinyl since 1977. The label concentrates on re-releases of classic albums from the past and also specialises in releasing their albums in a variety of different versions.

Firstly, Mobile Fidelity (MoFi) only use first-generation original master recordings as source material for their releases. These master tapes are played back at half-speed and the lacquers are cut with a proprietary cutting system

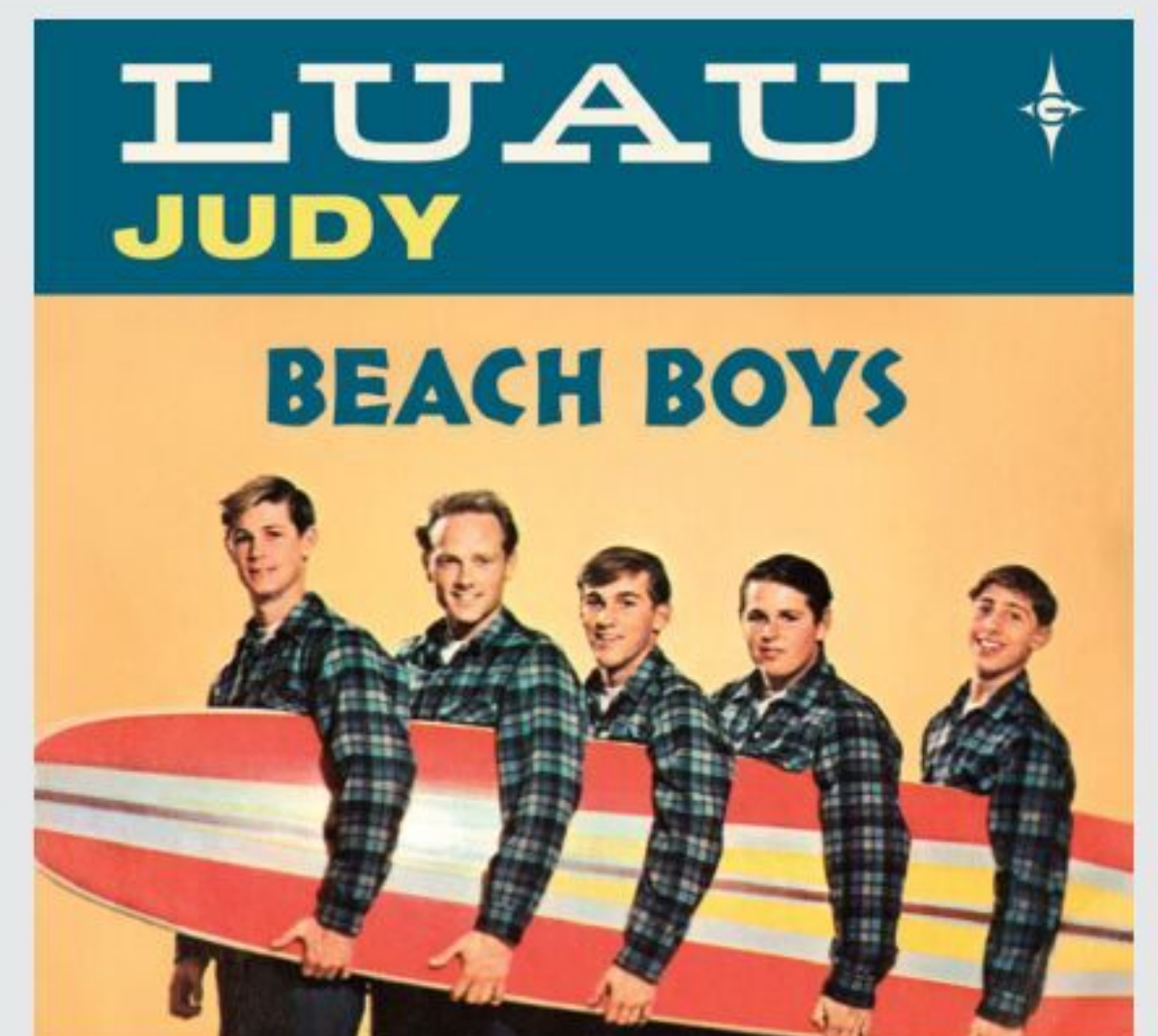
called GAIN2 Ultra Analogue.

Many MoFi recordings are pressed not on ordinary vinyl, but on 'SuperVinyl', a proprietary compound the company developed to address two specific areas of improvement, noise floor reduction and enhanced groove definition. Irrespective of the particular vinyl compound used, all recordings are released on 180g weight vinyl.

Depending on the release, MoFi recordings can either be traditional 33.33 rpm pressings or 45 rpm pressings. In the latter case, this means that one album would be spread over two 45 rpm LPs. The highest (and most expensive) technology employed by Mofi is called Ultradisc One Step, a process which eliminates two stages of the manufacturing process.

All Mobile Fidelity LPs are limited runs, and each one comes with its own special 'Limited Edition' number.

This is as good as vinyl gets!



Inakustik

This German manufacturer of quality cables also has a large collection of excellent vinyl in their catalogue. In fact they are so adept at producing high-quality recordings that many manufacturers of high-end audio components, such as Elac, Thorens and Burmester, commission Inakustik to put together reference recordings for them.

Inakustik's catalogue is vast and covers all genres, and we carry what we consider to be a highlights pack.



Triangle BR-A1

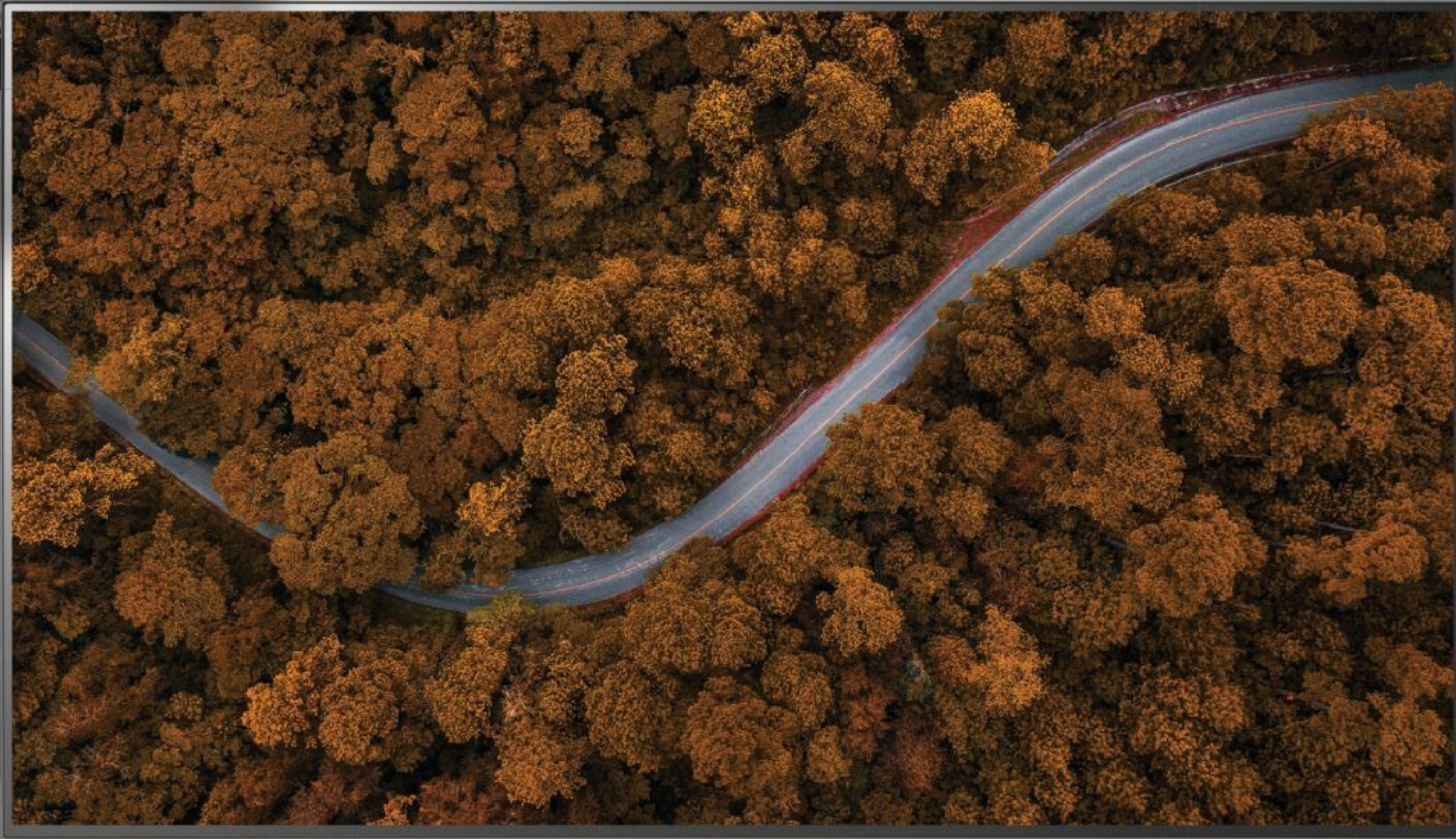
The new Triangle Borea BR-A1 speakers are multi-purpose surround effect loudspeakers which can be incorporated into an existing Home Theatre system in two different ways: They can be placed on top of existing speakers with the drivers facing upward to act as height channel speakers (Atmos etc) where it is not possible or practical to install speakers in the ceiling, as pictured at left.

They can also be wall-mounted as good-quality surround speakers.

The Triangle BR-A1 surround speakers join this famous French manufacturer's award-winning, keenly priced and versatile Borea range.

Priced from just \$900 per pair and available in black, white and walnut finishes, the Triangle Borea BR-A1s are designed to sit neatly and unobtrusively on Borea BR03, BR07, BR08 and BR09 speakers and used as an upward-firing height-channel speaker. They can also be installed on top of virtually any floor-standing speakers that have a sufficiently-sized flat top surface.

These exciting new speakers allow for a wide range of applications and opportunities for enhancement of existing hi-fi and home theatre systems — particularly where one has an Atmos-enabled AV receiver but previously has not been able to utilise its fully immersive sonic potential.



New OLED range from LG

LG have recently released a raft of new TVs, building on the excellent platform that they have developed over the last few years. Without doubt the hero of their extensive offerings is their OLED technology, utilised in screens from 48" all the way through to the newly-released 83" OLED83C1PTA.

LG's new OLED83C1PTA is an exceptional screen. It is large enough to suit the biggest of domestic viewing areas, but still maintains the picture quality of the very best screens available.

LG are the developers of OLED technology and are still the only company manufacturing OLED panels.

All other manufacturers purchase their OLED panels from LG and then use their own processors to control the pixels. At the risk of rehashing 'in our day everything was better' there is much to be said for the long-demised plasma screens of the past, and manufacturers the world over have ever since been struggling to try to recreate the picture quality that plasma screens delivered. Neither LED nor LCD technologies ever achieved this, and for a decade high picture quality remained an elusive goal — until OLED arrived.

But there is more to recommend about LG OLED screens than simply their superior picture performance.

OLED screens are less expensive, they are lighter and they are more energy-efficient. Add to this the great advantages of the smart technologies that are now included and there is a lot to like — particularly when the TV boasts an 83" screen.

Variations on a Theme

There are two versions of most of LG's OLED TV offerings available — the 'C1' and the 'G1' variants. While these appear to be the same in most aspects there are two major differences.

Unlike the last series where the screens were identical for the two versions, with this series the screen is slightly different with the 'G1' TVs using Evo screens which are slightly brighter than the 'C1' version.

The other difference is the method of wall mounting. The 'G1' (incidentally the G stands for Gallery — for reasons which will now become obvious) comes with an integrated wall bracket that folds into the TV when pushed back against the wall, allowing the screen to sit a lot closer to the wall than a separate mount would allow. In other respects — connectivity, smarts etc. the screens are the same.

(Note: The 83" TV shown at the top of the page is only available in the C1 variant.)





New models from Yamaha begin to arrive

It has been a long wait, but it has been worth it. The new Yamaha '10' series of AV receivers have begun to arrive — in fact we now have all models in-store with the exception of the RA-A6a, which is due within weeks. In his 'From The Desk of Len' on page 4, Len spoke of ongoing product delays — to put that into perspective, initial orders for the Yamaha RA-A6a were placed 'way back in May 2020, with expectations that the stock would arrive within weeks.

This new series includes a new model positioned above the RX-A3080, which was the pinnacle of their previous range.

The Yamaha RX-A8a is a 11.2-channel power-house of a receiver that is rated with a power output of 150 watts per channel and is packed with all the technologies necessary (and then plus some!) to set-up a first-rate home theatre system. **\$6,299**

Yamaha have also taken this opportunity to extend the warranty on their AV receivers. By registering on-line you now get an additional 12 months warranty on the RX-A2a, RX-A4a and RX-A6a, taking their warranty period to a total to 5 years, plus Yamaha has added an additional 5 years warranty to the

RX-A8a, resulting in an impressive 10 year warranty for this model.

In the meantime we had been buying up stock of the existing models to tide us over until this new series arrived and now that it finally has, we need to on-sell what is left of that stock. We have two models available that we are offering at excellent prices:

Yamaha RX-A1080: 7 × 110 watt per channel AV receiver.

Reduced from \$2,399 down to \$1,699

Yamaha RX-A2080: 7 × 130 watt per channel AV receiver.

Reduced from \$2,899 down to \$1,999



Bang & Olufsen BeoLab 28 Speakers

When it comes to style there are few in our industry that can rival famous Danish manufacturer B&O, and the BeoLab 28 is proof of that. This is a slimmer, smarter speaker than you have experienced in the past. Position them anywhere in your home and they will automatically adapt to your environment via B&O's Active Room Compensation (ARC) technology.

The BeoLab 28 is an active wireless speaker with Digital Sound Processing (DSP) controlling every driver individually. It features a custom-designed downward-facing bass driver built into the base. You can stream to it via Chromecast, Airplay or Bluetooth, or from Spotify Connect, but the BeoLab 28 also features its own inbuilt tuner service — Bang & Olufsen Radio. Each speaker houses five Class-D power amplifiers (four rated at 100 watts and the fifth at 225 watts).

The speakers can be floor- or wall-mounted and come in a variety of finishes that can be combined in up to thirty different combinations. As the interior designs of our living spaces trend towards sleeker and cleaner looking lines, there is an increasing demand for aesthetically pleasing speakers. In many cases people compromise performance by settling for small unobtrusive loudspeakers that offer little in terms of performance.

The BeoLab 28 has a great deal to offer in terms of performance, plus it's also sleek, modern, and functional and comes in finishes to suit any domestic environment.

From \$18,300/pair depending on finish.



Inakustik Air Technology Cables

Inakustik have been developing their Air Technology cables for some years now, which has led to some stunning products such as their \$11,500 LS-4004 speaker cables (yes, we have a pair on demo).

More recently Inakustik have turned their attention to more affordable variations of this technology and have released a range of MICRO Air speaker cables — all of which are factory terminated in 3 metre lengths.

All the copper used in these cables is smelted and refined in Germany, and only the highest quality oxygen-free batches are used in this Reference range.

The construction principle behind each of these cables is the same. All utilise Micro Air technology with AIR dielectric and concentric wire construction, where the conductors are grouped as signal and return pairs, and wound around a polyethylene fibre core. Each conductor comprises multiple, lacquer-coated copper strands, arranged in four concentric layers, and jacketed in a polyethylene sleeve.

The difference between the models is the number of cores used — ranging from the single-core LS-104 to the four-core LS-204 and then to the six-core LS-204XL.

There are three versions of this cable:

Reference LS-104 Micro Air
\$850/pair

Reference LS-204 Micro Air
\$1,150/pair

Reference LS-204XL Micro Air
\$1,400/pair





MUSICAL FIDELITY RE-PRICES

In an unusual move in the current market Musical Fidelity recently repositioned the prices of all their models — downwards! — and by a considerable margin. Already considered to offer good value here in Australia Musical Fidelity now represents exceptional value, and the good news is that barring unforeseen circumstances (collapsing A\$ etc.) they have committed to retain these prices at least until the end of the year.

For example:

M2Si integrated amplifier:
now \$1,590 (previously \$2,000)

M8Xi integrated amplifier:
now \$9,450 (previously \$12,000)

M6xVinyl phono stage:
now \$2,650 (previously \$3,000)

New from Musical Fidelity

M3x Vinyl phono stage: \$2,090

While designing their first fully discrete phono stage, the excellent M6x Vinyl — which has three inputs, Musical Fidelity realised that the technology employed also lent itself to a single-input/single-output version. This led to the development of the M3x Vinyl Phono Stage which — surprisingly given the price — also utilises fully discrete circuitry, and offers both MM and MC connectivity.

This is an excellent phono stage for the money — easily outperforming the phono stages built into all but the most exotic of amplifiers.

Nuvista Four-Valve Set

There have been a large number of Musical Fidelity Nuvista valve-based products sold over the years: A good proportion of them are now many years old.

One of the great advantages of Nuvista valves is their longevity; they do not deteriorate at the same rate as traditional valves. However, while this deterioration rate may be slow it is still a factor of the design, and the time has come where some of these components could do with a Nuvista valve replacement.

Musical Fidelity have released sets of four selected Nuvista valves for \$425 per pack — limited to 200 numbered sets worldwide.

It's worth remembering that due to the way valves are constructed, they will not deteriorate at all if they're not used. The so-called 'shelf life' of an ordinary valve is usually around 100 years. And unused old valves, called 'New Old Stock' or NOS, can attract premium prices on the second-hand market. So purchasing a 'spare' set of Nuvista valves could turn out to be an excellent investment!



Marantz PM6007 Integrated Amplifier

The successor to the long-running and very popular Marantz PM6006 integrated amplifier is now in stock. While the power output remains the same at 45 watts/channel (we give credit where credit is due — Marantz is very honest with their power ratings) the PM6007 features a new power transformer and more substantial power supply capacitors. It also includes an improved DAC, along with a host of other minor improvements.

The good news is that despite all these upgrades the Marantz PM6007 is only \$50 more than its predecessor, at \$1,290.

MARANTZ PM6006 RUNOUT!

We were lucky enough to secure a limited quantity of the outgoing PM6006 — in black finish only — at a very good price, which we are passing on: \$899. Excellent value!





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DALI Oberon 9 Speakers Reviewed!



SOUND TRAVELS

Peter Smith's audio journey has seen him frequent dozens of high-end audio shows around the world, leading him to own and love a multitude of high-end gear.

INTERVIEW BY **TOM WATERS**

Tom Waters: *Do you have a first memory, a first unforgettable musical experience that left an impression?*

Peter Smith: In 1984 I heard the first WATTs (Wilson Audio Tiny Tots) with Entec subwoofers and a good Jeff Rowland preamp. I then discovered sound-staging and dynamics! A school friend of mine had this gear. Back then, you could record your music to VHS tape. Jeff Rowland had made a modification to his gear so that he could output that digital stream to an external Sony PCM501 DAC. External DACs were not common at all back then. It really impressed me because the sound-staging and

tonality were so good, so convincing. The speakers seemed to just disappear. My friend went on to become the largest Indian dealer of various esoteric brands for many years.

TW: *And did that start you on the hi-fi journey or did something else start you on the audio equipment quest?*

PS: Yes, most certainly, it started me on my quest for better gear and learning more. At that time, I didn't even know that such expensive speakers existed! I remember in 1985 I went to Japan for one of my first holidays overseas.

The very first Sony Walkman was about to be released — I begged this dealer to sell me one the day before the launch so that I could bring it home. 1985 was also when I started buying CDs. And I had the first Sony Discman — it wasn't even called the Discman then; it was just known by its model number. Same with the Walkman — it was its popularity with customers that ultimately gave these devices the trendy names they became known by!

Shortly after my Japan trip, I bought some Japanese Technics speakers — SB-7000s. They were three-way speakers with a huge fifteen-inch woofer in its own enclosure, along with a five-inch midrange in its own separate enclosure, and then the dome tweeter — all the drivers were time-aligned. I also bought a Technics preamp and a Technics power amplifier. The power amp was rated with a power output of only 50-watts per channel and the preamp had no bass or treble controls! That was very different and new to me! At the time it was the top-of-the-line in audio quality.

TW: *Where do you think your system is going, or has it already arrived?*

PS: My system has never arrived, nor will it ever! This is because technology and

materials are constantly developing, constantly improving. Because I have an active system, I always look at new technology in speaker drivers. Sometimes I can't buy such drivers though, because some manufacturers don't sell them, they keep them only for themselves. But you can buy some, such as the Acapella plasma ion tweeter. Companies such as YG Acoustics and Vivid make their own drivers for instance. I would love to get hold of some of Vivid's drivers for my speakers, but they just aren't available. Magico make great drivers too, but they haven't learned the science of how to make great-sounding speakers without the excessive weight they require for sound deadening. Vivid speakers are designed where the drivers cancel out the nasties from other drivers, which then allows the cabinet to be much lighter. As you can see, I'm very much into speaker drivers!

TW: *Do you have a favourite piece of equipment, one that you would not sell?*

PS: Music software would be the most cherished. I have many open-reel master tapes that I will never sell. It can be so hard to decide which to buy because it's so difficult to determine their provenance — you don't want to spend \$800 on a master tape to then discover the sound quality is poor. Of course, I have vinyl and hi-res digital as well. They all have their own colourations, their own characteristics. What you like comes down to what colourations you like, and that tends to influence what you buy. But if something was originally recorded on tape then I usually prefer the analogue version. Good digital can sound excellent: You'd be hard-pressed to determine the difference between it and the master tape.

In terms of my favourite hardware, I'd say my Pass Labs Crossovers. Pass Labs stopped making them and they are hard to come by on the used market. When they do come up second-hand, they sell for their original retail price or more! All the diehard Japanese audiophiles use the Nelson Pass crossovers. They are the best analogue crossovers. I don't think the digital crossovers are as good.

TW: *What do you see as your next hi-fi purchase or upgrade?*

PS: Most likely a digital-to-analog converter. Either an R2R DAC or a DAC that doesn't take the signal and convert it. I've lived with EMM and Playback Designs. Many convert to DSD and upsample before converting to analogue, I don't want that.

I recently bought a Grimm MU1 music server, and when I asked them what DAC they'd suggest, they suggested I look at the Mola Mola Tambaqui. But it converts PCM to DSD and upsamples before conversion. It's very good, but its sound quality hasn't totally convinced me. I am also considering the MSB Reference. I've also had the Concert Fidelity DAC from Japan with the NOS chip in it. The DAC in my Playback Designs is very good, so I really don't have much to complain about for a while. It's a player, but you can access the digital inputs so you can use the DAC section.

TW: *What's the most memorable pair of speakers (or system) you've ever heard?*

PS: As a whole system, I think it'd be Mike Lavigne's system in North Bend, Seattle. Everything was good — the room, the equipment, the source music. I have many audio friends around the world and they all

rate Mike's system as being in the top five in the world. Mike's room and his attention to detail are absolutely fantastic. When I was last there, we went to a jazz club in the evening and then went back to Mike's place for some music. We felt very much transported back to that jazz club. Of course, we were playing master tapes — every song transported you to the venue.

As for the most memorable speaker, I always remember hearing this Western Electric Mono Horn in Yokosuka Japan. This retired doctor had eight rooms with 3-4 complete audio systems throughout his house! Along one wall was a pair of Avantgarde Trios with Viola amplification ... no expense spared. He had one dedicated room where he had only Western Electric. The mono horn hung from the ceiling, and the horn's mouth was six feet wide and four feet high. It sounded amazing!



TW: *Is there any component you've sold that you now regret selling?*

PS: So far none. I hardly ever sell. I tend to collect! I am reluctant to let something go, in case I miss it and want it back. Besides, sometimes you lose so much money when selling that I think I may as well keep it. When Joe (the late Joe Riediger of Audio Connection) was in Bankstown I'd be there every couple of months, going through what he had... Mark Levinson, Krell, Sonus faber, Martin Logan... Joe would allow me to trade — and he'd give me back the original cost I'd paid so I'd then only have to pay the difference. He was so generous.

TW: *Do you use the same music for comparing components as you do for listening pleasure?*

PS: No, I have a few selected tracks that I use for critical listening. Not many, five to ten albums. Otherwise, I just listen to music that I like. I don't listen to drums or trains or special effects; I listen to music!

TW: *What genre of music do you listen to mostly and can you tell me the names of some of your favourite artists?*

PS: Jazz, world and classical genres come to mind. Famous artists would be the ones of yesteryear such as Ella, Sinatra, Basie, Oscar to new favourites such as Jose James, Claire Martin, Chantal Chamberland and others. I enjoy any music if it's performed well, and especially if the engineers have taken the trouble to capture it properly. Just a while ago I got the master tape of Oscar Peterson's "We Get Requests" and a Norah Jones too. They were expensive: each tape set me back \$800. I listen to a bit of pop music too, but not much rock. Somehow, I missed out appreciating rock when I was young so I never really got into it. You see, my parents were both into classical when I was young. In fact, they knew the famous violinist Zubin Mehta many years ago — actually he lived just five minutes away from us. So my early exposure was mostly to classical music. Perhaps rock was too 'advanced' for me, it even took me a long time to understand and appreciate jazz.

TW: *What would be your 'desert island' music albums if you could only choose, say, three works?*

PS: Any Frank Sinatra album, 'We Get Requests' by Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown and 'Kind of Blue' by Miles Davis.

TW: *How would you describe the sound you're getting from your current system?*

PS: It's neutral, transparent and conveys emotion, which is what motivates me to keep listening. I look forward to turning on my system so I can listen. Tonality is very good. After having practiced piano for 15–18 years, I have the sound ingrained in my memory. That allows me to more easily compare recorded piano to real piano. My system is also very revealing provided the source is good. The upper midrange Raven ribbons and Raven tweeter ribbons are very resolving. And it's all with very low distortion, so you can hear deep into the music.

TW: *In what way does music affect your life, your emotions and the way you feel?*

PS: It certainly is my soul food to get me over work's problems and life's hurdles for the coming week. Most of us don't have bosses that pat us on our backs, so we have to have each other to do that. Mike Lavigne once said to me that it's his music listening over his weekend that motivates and inspires him to drive to work on a Monday morning. I feel like that too.

TW: *Where do you see the high-end audio industry going in the future?*

PS: It's certainly not shrinking with the pandemic, as people want to reward themselves with better sound quality. We'll continue to see shrinkage in the mid-level market, as the bigger brands buy the smaller brands and private equity companies expand their portfolios, as Sound United has done. [The company now owns Bowers & Wilkins, Boston Audio, Classe, Def Tech, Denon, HEOS, Marantz and Polk]. I think we'll also have a few 'cottage' industry companies springing up — they are the really serious innovators with new ideas. There will always be enough audiophiles around with enough money that want to buy the best — I don't think that will ever change — and they will keep the high-end market going.

TW: *Where would you like the audio industry to go or to evolve to?*

PS: I would certainly like the work of the mastering and production engineers to be left as made by them and not get compressed by the music industry management. And I certainly don't want to see a continuance of any type of DRM embedded into the music signal.

I'd also definitely like to see DACs continue to get better and more affordable.

Lower-cost brands such as Denafrips Audio and Holo Audio are already leading the way but I'd like to see even more. On the high-end side, there are companies that want to make products that few can afford so that their products convey a certain mystique and a covetable factor. Getting back to digital for a moment, I'd certainly like the music companies to distribute the real studio versions to end consumers like us, but I know that'll never happen! 🎧

EQUIPMENT LIST

Pre

- Concert Fidelity LSX-2
- Pass Labs XV-R-1 Crossovers

Power

- Lamm Industries ML 2.1
- P&C Electronics 211 Amp
- SVS Amplification

Source Digital

- Grimm MU-1 Music Server
- Playback Designs MPD-5 Series 2
- Concert Fidelity DAC-040 (battery driven)

Source Analogue

- Basis Audio 2800 Signature (fully optioned)
- Vector 4 Tone arm
- MySonics Ultra Eminent-EX phono cartridge
- Allnic H-5000 phono stage
- Ampex ATR-102 Open Reel Transport with flux heads
- Doshi Electronics Tape Preamp

Loudspeakers

- Avantgarde Duo Omega (20–800Hz) (driven by Lamm)
- Raven Line Source (800Hz–3kHz) (driven by P&C Electronics)
- Raven R2 Tweeter (3kHz–20kHz) (driven by SVS)

Accessories

- Entreq Olympus Tellus Grounding System
- Plixir Power Balanced Conditioners for individual source components
- Silent Running Audio Stands Ohio Class
- Sound Application Reference Power Supply
- Playback Designs Pinot A/D converter
- Cables by Pure Silver Connection and other manufacturers
- ROON software

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DALI OBERON 9

LOUDSPEAKERS

The DALI Oberon 9 is the newest and largest loudspeaker in the Oberon range. If the model name rings a bell, you've obviously seen William Shakespeare's play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in which the Oberon character is the king of all fairies, but Shakespeare borrowed the name from 'way back in the 13th century, at a time when Oberon was merely an elf.

As for the number, it seems to suggest that there are nine models in the Oberon Series, but in fact there are only seven. The number is actually the diameter, in inches, of the two bass drivers fitted to the Oberon 9's front baffle. If you've guessed that the model beneath it, the Oberon 7, has seven-inch bass drivers, and that the Oberon 5 has five-inch bass drivers, go to the top of the class. But if you then infer that the Oberon 3 and Oberon 1 have three inch and one-inch bass drivers respectively, you wouldn't even be close. (They have seven-inch and five-and-a-quarter inch drivers respectively.)

Oberon may have started out as an elf, but there's nothing at all elfish about the Oberon 9s, because they stand a dauntingly-high 1.17-metres. They also have an impressive armada of drivers on display — two bass drivers, a midrange driver and a tweeter. We need to look at the design in some detail, because there's a lot that's new and different about this new model from DALI.

EQUIPMENT

If you have already twigged that a 9-inch (230mm) diameter for a bass driver is fairly unusual, it comes about because DALI is one of the few manufacturers that builds its own bass drivers. Most manufacturers purchase drivers from companies that build only drivers, and those companies tend to build drivers in pretty standard and very specific diameters. Usually, because everything originally started in imperial measurements, those 'standard' driver diameters are (for bass drivers) 6-inches, 8-inches, 10-inches, 12-inches and 15-inches—increments that don't look nearly as uniform if you look at the metric equivalents, which are 153mm, 203mm, 254mm, 305mm and 381mm.

So if any other speakers you might be considering buying have bass drivers that fit into one of the standard driver diameter increments, there's a good chance they were not made by whosever name is emblazoned on the grille cloth of those speakers. And if that manufacturer is also claiming something about the drivers it's using is 'unique' in any way, it's not — because that same technology would be available to all other manufacturers using that same driver.

So why did DALI decide to build a 9-inch driver? The obvious reason is simply because it could! The less obvious reason is that the larger the cone diameter, the greater the area of the cone, and the greater the area of the cone, the more air it can move. And, to bring this train to its obvious last stop, the more air a driver can move, the better the bass! So if a 'perfect' 8-inch driver could move 327 square centimetres of air, the 'perfect' 9-inch driver would move 416 square centimetres of air. That's about a 27 per cent increase in surface area. (Pedants please note that these figures are based on the Thiele/Small diameter, not the actual chassis diameter).

But you don't really need to look at the diameter of the driver to tell you that DALI is building its own drivers. Just take a look at the cones. The only other place you'll see a cone like that is on another speaker made by DALI. It's that unusual. So what is it made of? Actually it's a wood pulp product, not unlike that used by other driver manufacturers using so-called 'natural' plant materials for their cones. But instead of completely pulverising the wood it uses, like other cone makers, DALI has elected to include wood fibre reinforcement by actually embedding larger wood fibres into the pulp. It also doesn't bleach the cones, so not only is the

cone's surface a bit uneven, due to the large fibres, but it's also a rather 'woody' colour. It's also more environmentally friendly to use unbleached cones.

Yet another unusual feature of all three of the cone drivers DALI is using on the Oberon 9 is that the central 'dustcap' is made from exactly the same material as the cone, and is dished to follow the cone's profile. You need only glance at a few other speakers to realise that many manufacturers make the dustcap from a different material to the cone, and fix it to the central part of the cone like a mini-dome.

The larger cone size is complemented by a larger (and four-layer) voice coil, which means higher efficiency, higher power handling, and less distortion because the cone doesn't have to move backwards and forwards as much as a smaller cone in order to create the same sound pressure levels, so the motor system (magnet and voice-coil) operate in the most linear region of the magnetic field.

The large drive magnet is made from ferrite (as are most driver magnets at the Oberon 9's price point) but the pole-piece is made from a cylinder of iron at the top of

which is a disc made from a proprietary material

DALI calls a 'Soft Magnetic Compound' or 'SMC'.

The SMC disc's purpose is essentially

the same as the 'flux shorting rings' or 'Faraday rings' used by some other manufacturers in their drivers. The concept behind all these devices is that they

counteract the eddy currents and flux modulation induced by the voice coil as it moves through the magnetic field. They also help linearise the inductance as input current varies. The end result is reduced distortion, both harmonic and intermodulation (THD and IMD).





Interestingly, although DALI puts the diameter of the bass drivers at 9-inches, my tape measure put the overall chassis diameter at a shade over this, at 9¼ inches (235mm). I was pleased about this, because many manufacturers ‘over-quote’ the dimensions of their drivers to make them seem larger than they really are. But of course the important dimension is the Thiele/Small diameter, which is what tells us how much air the driver will move, and for the Oberon 9’s driver, that was 180mm, which puts the effective cone area (Sd) at 254cm².

However, because there are two drivers producing bass in this design, the overall area available to move the air in your room is twice this, or 508cm². This means that if DALI had decided to build a single driver that had the same cone area and install this in the Oberon 9, it would have had to have had an overall diameter of around 310mm, or a bit over 12 inches, which would have been too wide to fit into the cabinet, which is only 260mm wide.

MIDRANGE DRIVER

The first important thing to note about the DALI Oberon 9’s midrange driver is that it’s there at all. By which I mean to emphasise that this speaker is a true three-way design, where the low frequencies are handled exclusively by the two bass drivers, the high frequencies are handled exclusively by the tweeter (about which I’ll have more to say in a moment) so that the frequencies in-between — the midrange frequencies — are handled exclusively by the midrange driver.

Why is this so important? It’s important because of a peculiar type of distortion called phase modulation distortion, or PMD. Phase modulation occurs when a single speaker cone is called upon to reproduce low and high frequencies simultaneously, which is what happens in all two-way (and 2½-way) loudspeakers.

If a driver is required to produce a single low-frequency sound (at, let us say, 55Hz), its cone will move backwards and forwards fifty-five times per second and your ear would hear the resulting movement of air caused by this movement as the musical note ‘A1’. This pitch is an octave above the lowest A on a piano keyboard and also the one to which the second string of a double-bass is tuned. So far so good.

But if that same driver is also asked to produce another musical note, let us say middle-C, which has a frequency of 261.63Hz, it would have to move backwards and forwards 261.63 times per second at the same time that it’s also moving backwards and forwards 55 times per second. This means the frequency of what should be ‘middle-C’ will actually not always be precisely 261.63Hz but will be shifted up to 55Hz higher or lower (depending on the direction the cone is moving) as a result of having to produce the 55Hz signal at the same time.

It’s because of phase modulation distortion (PMD) that it’s preferable that a low frequency driver (or drivers) be used to produce low frequencies and for a completely separate loudspeaker to be used to produce midrange frequencies. (For more information about PMD read the article

‘Doppler Distortion in Loudspeakers – Real or Imaginary?’ by Rod Elliott, at <https://sound-au.com/doppler.htm> in which he not only discusses and explains phase modulation distortion in great detail, but also demonstrates how it affects loudspeakers by actually measuring it.)

Another important thing to note about DALI’s midrange driver is that its construction is the same as that of the bass drivers, using the same cone and roll surround materials. This means that the sonic ‘signature’ of the driver will be the same as that of the bass drivers. In designs where a midrange driver is of different construction to the bass drivers, it will have a different sonic signature, which is obviously not desirable.

Anyone living in Australia (or New Zealand) should also note that the surrounds of both the bass and midrange drivers are made of rubber. This is very important for longevity because in both countries, because of the high levels of ultraviolet radiation which mean that drivers that use foam surrounds tend not to last very long (sometimes, in fact, only just long enough for the loudspeaker to be no longer covered by warranty.) Rubber is a far more durable material.

TWEETER

The soft-dome fabric tweeter in the Oberon 9 is also a strange size. At 29mm it’s midway between the two more usual tweeter diameters of 25mm and 32mm. This is because, yep, you guessed it, DALI makes its own tweeters as well, and it says the one in the Oberon 9 was specifically developed for the Oberon Series, with the larger dome size enabling it to perform better at lower frequencies than a 25mm diameter dome, while performing better at high frequencies than a 32mm diameter dome.

So far as the tweeter’s drive magnet is concerned, DALI is using a tried-and-tested ferrite magnet rather than one of the new neodymium super-magnets. This means that there’s more than enough metal and surface area to dissipate unwanted heat that would otherwise cause dynamic compression.

DALI says the ultra-light fabric it uses to fashion the dome weighs 0.060mg/mm² which the company claims makes the dome less than half the weight of most other soft dome tweeters and so reduces its inertia.

The tweeter sits at the bottom of a small horn that improves the tweeter’s efficiency and controls its dispersion. I initially thought the dots on the large circular plate that surrounds the dome and horn were actual dimples in the surface of the material, which many manufacturers use to help smooth

the high-frequency response, but when I examined them closely, I found they're just painted on, so they serve no acoustic purpose at all.

Why is the tweeter positioned below the midrange driver, rather than above it? DALI doesn't say, but it's not an uncommon arrangement. It could be in order that the tweeter is 90cm above floor level, which would put it at the ideal height for most seated listeners, or it could be in order to minimise 'ceiling bounce' caused by the sound from the tweeter reflecting from low ceilings. Or it could be for both reasons.

CABINETS

The Oberon 9's cabinet is made from high-density MDF that's covered in your choice of vinyl finish — black ash or walnut — though no matter what finish you choose, the front baffle will come in a black satin finish. Internally, the cabinet design is quite unusual because the two bass drivers are each in their own totally separate enclosure, with each one ported to the rear.

This is unusual because most speakers that use two bass drivers have those drivers 'share' the same volume of air inside the cabinet. I rather like DALI's method because it means that the output from the rear of one bass driver cannot affect the motion of the other. It also minimises the potential for 'organ-pipe' resonances that can affect tall enclosures. There's a further benefit too, which is that the internal baffles required to separate the drivers increase the cabinet's rigidity by acting as braces, again reducing the potential for cabinet resonances. The midrange driver is also in its own enclosure, completely isolated from both the bass chambers, from which it, too, benefits.

The Oberon 9 has a completely different grille design from other models in DALI's range (except other models in the Oberon Series). Instead of being flat, it's curved outwards, into the room. DALI has achieved this by creating an ABS moulding that's perforated with hundreds of small holes, then covered with black (DALI calls it 'Shadow Black') fabric. The company says of this new grille design that: *"The new rounded front grille adds a lighter and more contemporary visual look to the speaker series."*

I actually preferred the look of the speakers without their grilles, because I thought the speakers looked a bit 'monolithic' with them in place, and I rather admired the black satin of the baffle and the woody look of the drivers, so I didn't end up using them at all during my listening sessions.

As you can see from the photographs, the Oberon 9 sits on an aluminium base that,

quite unusually, comes pre-attached right out of the packaging (most bases are supplied as separate items). Perhaps because of this, the base isn't that much wider than the cabinet itself, increasing the cabinet's 260mm width to 340mm, so it doesn't do much to improve the stability of this tall (1172mm) and heavy (37.1kg) design.

I found that although the speaker cabinet was moderately stable side-to-side, and also stable in the 'backwards' direction, it was relatively easy to push forward, due to the cabinet's dimension in this axis and the fact that all four drivers with their heavy magnets are at the front of the cabinet.

DALI supplies 'spikes' and rubber feet that can be attached to the aluminium base, but these are not what I expected. The 'spikes' are the smallest and most basic I have ever seen, being simply a 13mm long cylindrical section of threaded black steel, one end of which is conical. The short thread means that after you've screwed them into the base, there's not enough left protruding to allow much adjustment, and there's nowhere near enough to penetrate through thick carpet and underlay to reach any underlying solid structure. Luckily the thread is a standard size, so if you need longer, adjustable, carpet-penetrating spikes, you'll be able to buy and fit aftermarket ones yourself.

As for those rubber 'feet', these too were really basic, being an 'off-the-shelf' peel-off/stick-on item made by 3M that are just 11mm in diameter and 3mm thick. They will certainly do the job of protecting your floor's surface, but I would recommend buying and fitting a set of more substantial rubber feet.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Some loudspeaker manufacturers do not give positioning instructions at all, whilst others are very vague about where they think you should put their speakers in your room. DALI is one of the few that's very specific about where it thinks its speakers will work best.

Says DALI: *"The speakers are designed to meet our wide dispersion principle, so they should NOT be angled towards the listening position, but be positioned parallel with the rear wall, see Figure 2. By parallel positioning, the distortion in the main listening area will be lowered and the room integration will be improved. The wide dispersion principle will ensure that sound is spread evenly within a large area in the listening room."* The company then goes on to say: *"The speakers should ideally be positioned minimum 20cm (8") from the rear wall."*

I followed these installation rules to the letter and it proved that the engineers at DALI knew what they were talking about. Not only was the bass response massive as a result of this positioning, but there was a very wide 'sweet spot' so that stereo imaging was flawless. And, despite the listening position being essentially off-axis because the speakers were not angled inwards (DALI says *"DALI speakers are not designed to be toed-in"*), the high-frequency sound was beautifully balanced against the midrange and treble.

The bass response I heard from the Oberon 9s was super-impressive.



It's fast, taut, totally dynamic and essentially distortion-free. It was so well-extended to the bottom-most octaves of music that I'd imagine that few — if any — listeners would consider a subwoofer necessary unless, perhaps, the Oberon 9s were being used as the front channels in a 5.1-channel sound or home theatre system, in which case you'd need a subwoofer in order to fill that "point 1" position.

There are very few reasonably-priced home loudspeaker systems that can do justice to pipe organ recordings, and the DALI Oberon 9 speakers are amongst these few. Even if you're not a pipe organ *aficionado*, you should do yourself a favour and use a pair of Oberon 9s to listen to Jeremy Filsell playing Louis Vierne's *Symphony No 1 in D minor, Op 14* on Signum Classics (it's part of a 3CD set which has all six of Vierne's organ symphonies).

This excellent recording will allow you to hear the depth of the Oberon 9's bass response, as well as the fluidity of the sound in the lowest octaves. You'll also hear how fast and dynamic it is. You'll also clearly hear the lack of harmonic distortion and intermodulation distortion, plus you can admire the clarity of the resonances as the echoed notes reverberate in the glorious

acoustic of the Abbaye Saint-Ouen de Rouen. This particular organ is one of the most important in France, being a four-manual instrument with a 32-foot *Contre Bombarde* stop. It was built in 1890 by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention that you can also hear the rousing *finale* of this marvellous work, played on a rather more-wonderful-sounding organ — and in 5.1-channel surround sound to boot — on an SACD titled 'Premiere' (Fuga 9297). The organist is one of the hottest new talents on the scene, Pétur Sakari, and the organ is the one in Finland's Central Pori Church, which was built by the German organ-building company, Paschen Kiel Orgelbau in 2007 and has both *Soubasse 32'* and *Bombarde 32'* stops. The acoustic of this church is simply magnificent.

On this disc Sakari plays not only the *finale* of the Vierne symphony but also works by Jehan Alain (*Litanies*), Maurice Duruflé (*Scherzo, Op. 2*), Joseph-Guy Ropartz (*Introduction et Allegro Moderato*), and César Franck (*Choral III* and *Prélude, Fugue et Variation, Op. 18*). But the ear-buster (and potential speaker-buster!) on this one is Léon Boellmann's *Suite Gothique, Op. 25*.

The Dali Oberon 9s delivered the block

chords of the introductory *Chorale* from this Suite with such power that I blinked with amazement. Then later, in the quiet *Prière à Notre-Dame*, the Oberon 9s were able to elegantly detail the notes while at the same time conjuring up the acoustic space of the recording. Then, in the *Toccata* we hear the totality of the Oberon 9's impressive sonic palette.

Needless to say, given the bass I heard on both these works, I didn't have to wonder how well the DALI Oberon 9s might deliver drums, electric and double basses, cellos and other low-pitched instruments. No matter what recordings I played featuring these instruments — or how loudly I played them — it was as if the Oberon 9s were saying "too easy, too easy... give us something difficult."

Also, as I rather expected from the sound of the higher pipes of the organs, the midrange sound of the Oberon 9s is not only perfectly balanced, it is also beautifully voiced. No matter whether you're listening to bass, baritone or tenor male voices, or alto or soprano female voices, the articulation of these speakers is perfect and the tonality of their delivery superbly accurate. Listening to Ariana 'Japanese barbecue finger' Grande's most recent album, 'Positions', I heard her amazing voice being delivered perfectly in my listening room, and with such clarity that my other half heard a whole lot of lyrics in 34+35 that she also wanted to object to!

The precision and clarity of the Oberon 9s' high-frequency delivery was demonstrated to great effect on *just like magic* with its finger-snaps and synthesised percussion, but you can also hear how good the highs are by the way they're arbitrarily temporarily dispatched 1.20 in — it's like the soundfield just collapses. But this is also a good track for evaluating the speed of the Oberon 9s' bass response. Just listen to those machine-gun-like repeated bass patterns!

But it really takes the standout title track to highlight the Oberon 9's incredible stereo imaging and sound-staging abilities. The stage was so wide that it almost sounded as if the backing singers were behind me. But the closer track always reminds me that her earlier album 'Thank u, next' is a much better one, so it was onto this for a bit of an Ariana Grande binge session.

Right from the first track (*imagine*) two things are immediately obvious. The first is the outstanding bass response of the DALI Oberon 9s. The second is that the production values of 'Thank u, next' are so much higher than those of 'Positions'. Maybe she

WHAT'S IN A NAME?


DALI says its name is an acronym for Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries. So it must be true. But it wasn't always so. Long before current CEO Lars Worre became a major shareholder in the company, the letters stood for Danish American Loudspeaker Industries.

That earlier acronym was coined by the company's founder and still majority shareholder Peter Lyngdorf, who has also founded and/or owned many other famous hi-fi companies including NAD, TacT Audio, Steinway-Lyngdorf, Snell Acoustics, Gryphon, and Soundbox. He also founded (and still owns) a chain of hi-fi stores called HiFi Klubben which has outlets in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands.

DALI was originally founded in 1983 to manufacture US-designed Cerwin-Vega loudspeakers for sale to Lyngdorf's HiFi Klubben stores as well as to other retailers in the UK and throughout Europe. Due to customs tariff controls in place at the time, plus the cost of freight, and a poor exchange rate against the US dollar, it was very expensive to im-

port US-made Cerwin-Vega loudspeakers into Denmark and Europe.

DALI was founded to circumvent these costs by importing only the Cerwin-Vega drivers and crossover networks (which did not attract a tariff, and were easier and cheaper to ship than complete speaker systems) which were then installed in cabinets built entirely in Denmark by DALI. This was initially a joint operation in partnership with Cerwin-Vega, hence the name Danish American Loudspeaker Industries. DALI only ceased manufacturing Cerwin-Vega speakers for Europe in 1999.

The Oberon 9 is not manufactured in Denmark, but in DALI's own 5,500-square-metre factory in Ningbo, China, a factory it established in 2007 which not only makes completed speakers but also makes many of the parts used in the loudspeakers that the company does build in Denmark. Many DALI parts, including drivers, are also manufactured entirely in Denmark, in the company's mammoth 22,000-square-metre factory in Nørager, just outside of Aarhus (on the east coast of Denmark's Jutland peninsula). 

thought she'd spent too much on 'Thank u' and cut the budget for 'Positions'. Make sure you listen carefully to the fade-out on *bloodline*, which demonstrates the linearity of the Oberon 9s' drivers across different volume levels. And by the time I get to *fake smile* I am even more impressed by the Oberon 9s' stereo imaging and soundstaging capabilities: All the instruments and vocalists are positioned exactly where they should be, totally rock-solid.

Grande's song *7 rings* may have caused a lot of controversy (as well as at least one law suit for copyright infringement), but it's a great song, and I am ready to forgive anything of a woman who says: "*I am champagne. You know how people say we're 60 percent water? I'm 60 per cent pink Veuve Clicquot.*" I made a note of how well the Oberon 9s handled the subtle pitch changes in the introduction to this song as well as how well they delivered the myriad strands that went into making it a masterwork.

CONCLUSION

Well-balanced sonically, the new DALI Oberon 9s will deliver all the bass you need and more, a wonderful midrange sound and beautifully balanced and wide-spread high frequencies, plus their very high efficiency will allow you to extract the most from whatever amplifier you use to drive them, as well as ensure you get highly dynamic and realistic reproduction of music, no matter what the genre. Peter Giles

CONTACT DETAILS

Brand: DALI
Model: Oberon 9
RRP: \$2,999 per pair
Warranty: Five Years
Distributor: Amber Technology Pty Ltd
Address: Unit 1, 2 Daydream Street, Warriewood NSW 2102
TF: 1800 251 367
T2: (02) 9998 7600
E: info@ambertech.com
W: www.ambertech.com.au

- Massive bass
- Super efficient
- Midrange clarity
- Grille design
- Stability
- Supplied feet

Readers interested in a full technical appraisal of the performance of the DALI Oberon 9 Loudspeakers should continue on and read the LABORATORY TEST REPORT published on the following pages. Readers should note that the results mentioned in the report, tabulated in performance charts and/or displayed using graphs and/or photographs should be construed as applying only to the specific sample tested.

LABORATORY TEST REPORT

Newport Test Labs measured the in-room audio-band response of the DALI Oberon 9 as being 35Hz to 24kHz ± 3 dB which is an excellent result, and is very close to DALI's specification of 35Hz to 26kHz ± 3 dB.

Graph 1 shows the section of the response below 20kHz measured using pink noise and you can see that the Oberon 9's frequency response is particularly smooth across the midrange and high frequencies, and not spectrally skewed in any way, so the balance of low to mid to high frequencies is ideal. Although there are some peaks and troughs above 3kHz, all are constrained to within ± 2 dB.

The high-frequency response rolls off very gently and very smoothly above 10kHz, which is a desirable trait and indicates that the tweeter's dome has none of the ultrasonic resonances that are typically found in tweeters using domes made of hard materials.

Graph 2 shows the Oberon 9's anechoic high-frequency response, using magnified scaling and measured without the grille (black trace) and with the grille fitted (red trace). The higher resolution enabled by the use of a sine signal rather than pink noise reveals more peaks and dips in the on-axis response above 3kHz, but the variations are so small (less than ± 2 dB) that they would not be audible, and the overall response is still within ± 3 dB out to 24kHz where you can see the tweeter rolls off quite steeply.

The same was not the case for the response measured by *Newport Test Labs*

when the grille was fitted. As you can see, this time there are significant peaks and dips in the response, such that over the region between 1kHz and 26kHz, the response graphed is ± 12 dB. A very minor re-design of the grille might be worthwhile, perhaps by removing a small circular section of the grille directly in front of the tweeter, but in fact the main variations are so high in frequency and affect such a narrow bandwidth that I doubt they would be audible.

The anechoic low-frequency response of the Oberon 9 is shown in Graph 3, isolating the contributions to the sound from both bass drivers (the two green traces) and both bass reflex ports (the red and orange traces). As you can see, the low frequency response of the bass drivers holds up very well right down to 60Hz, after which there's the expected roll-off, with the minimum output at about very low 31Hz (the very slightly difference for each driver suggesting that their rear enclosure volumes are not identical).

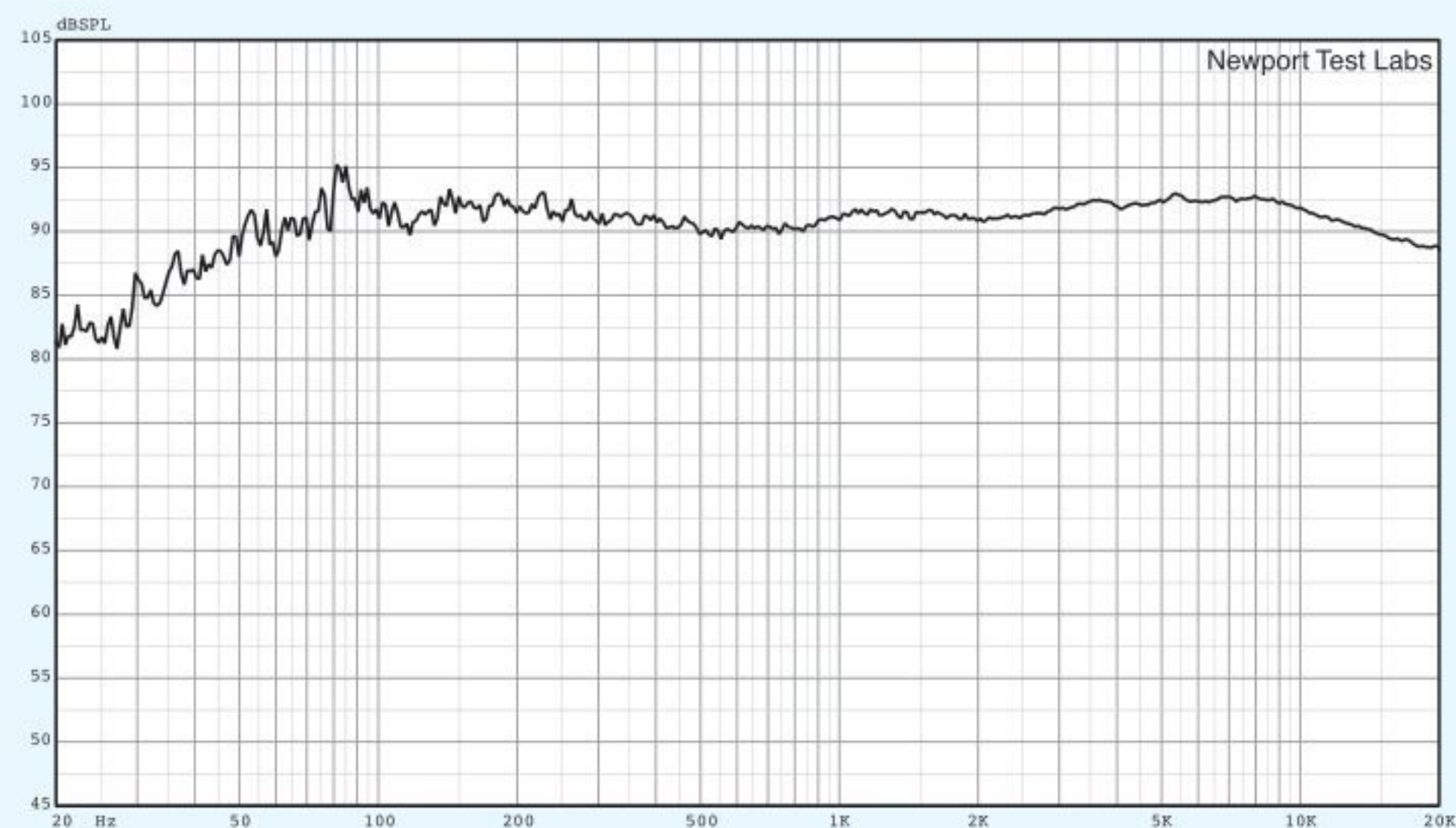
Both bass reflex ports appear to have been tuned identically, and specifically to deliver output over a much wider range than usual, with the ports delivering significant sustained output from below 20Hz right up to 70Hz. You can see that the shapes of the enclosures behind each of the drivers is slightly different by the differences in the traces above 150Hz.

The impedance and phase angle of the DALI Oberon 9 are shown in Graph 4, as the red and blue traces respectively, with the black trace under being that of a precision calibration resistor. You can see that the impedance of the Oberon 9 dips below 4 Ω at 84Hz and drops down as low as 3.4 Ω between about 100Hz and 150Hz before rising above 4 Ω again at about 225Hz.

Despite this dip below 4 Ω , the Oberon 9 is still nominally a 4 Ω design under the rule applied by the European loudspeaker standard IEC 60268-5 which specifies that the minimum impedance should not drop below 80% of the nominal value. And despite the low impedance in a fairly busy section of the music spectrum, the speaker will be quite easy to drive, due to the benign phase angle over this frequency range.

The saddle between the two low-frequency resonant peaks is at 31Hz, which is the cabinet tuning and means that acoustic output below this frequency will roll off considerably. The rising impedance above 14kHz makes this a very amplifier-friendly design, and one that is particularly well-suited for Class-D amplifiers, old or new.

Graph 5 is a composite response, which grabs the traces from the previous frequen-



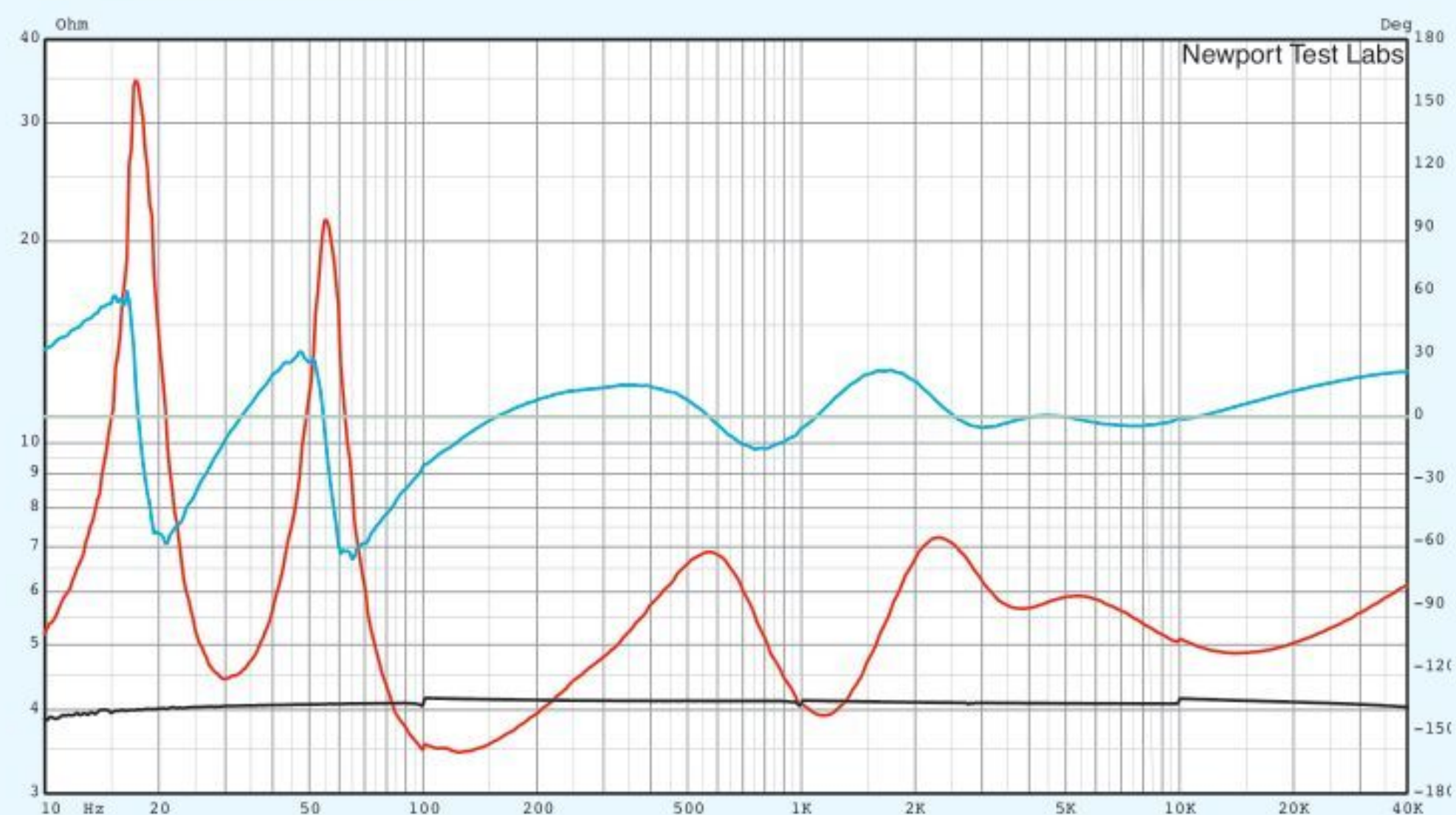
Graph 1: In-room frequency response.



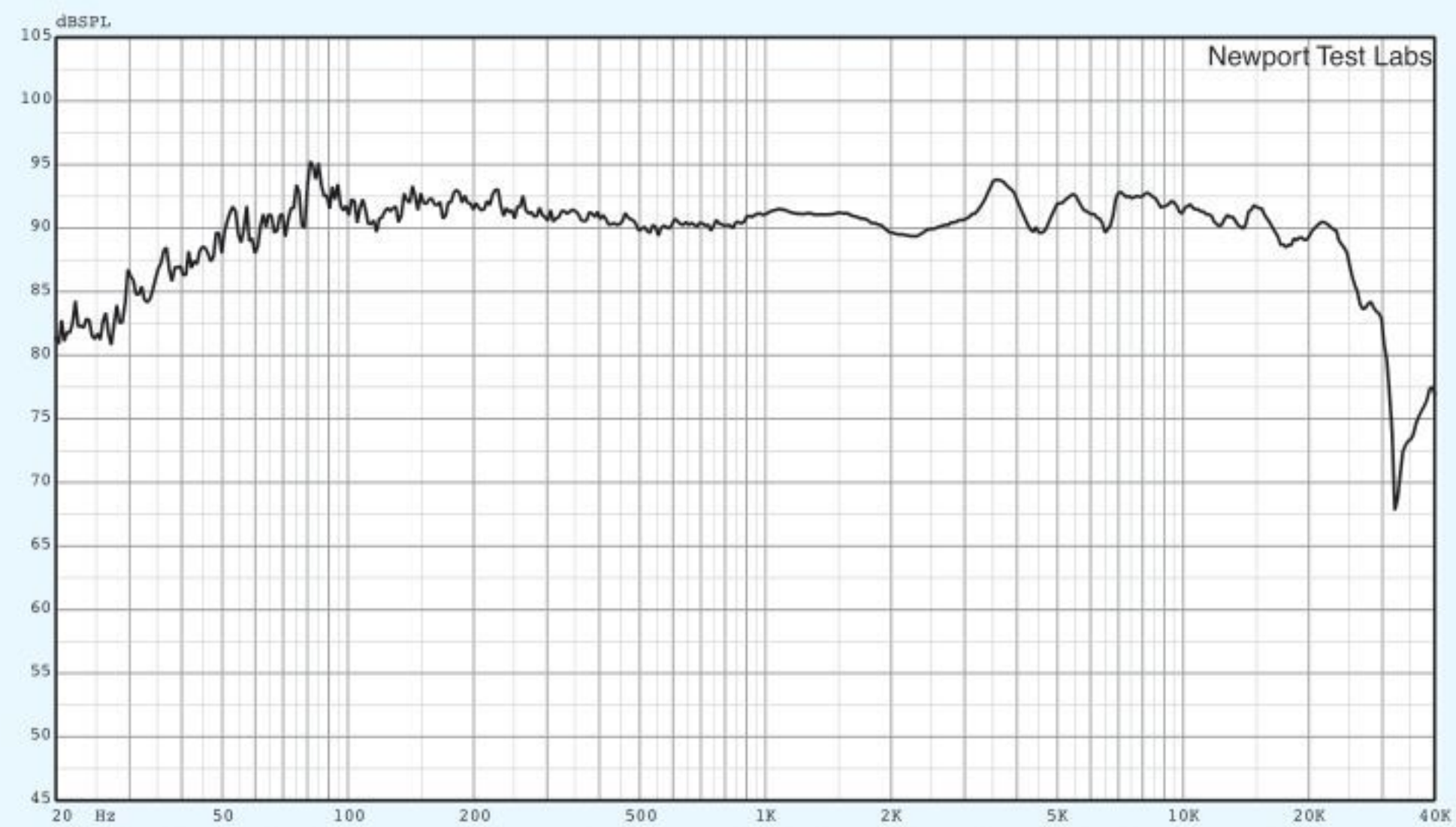
Graph 2: Anechoic high-frequency response, on axis, with grille off (black trace) and with grille on (red trace).



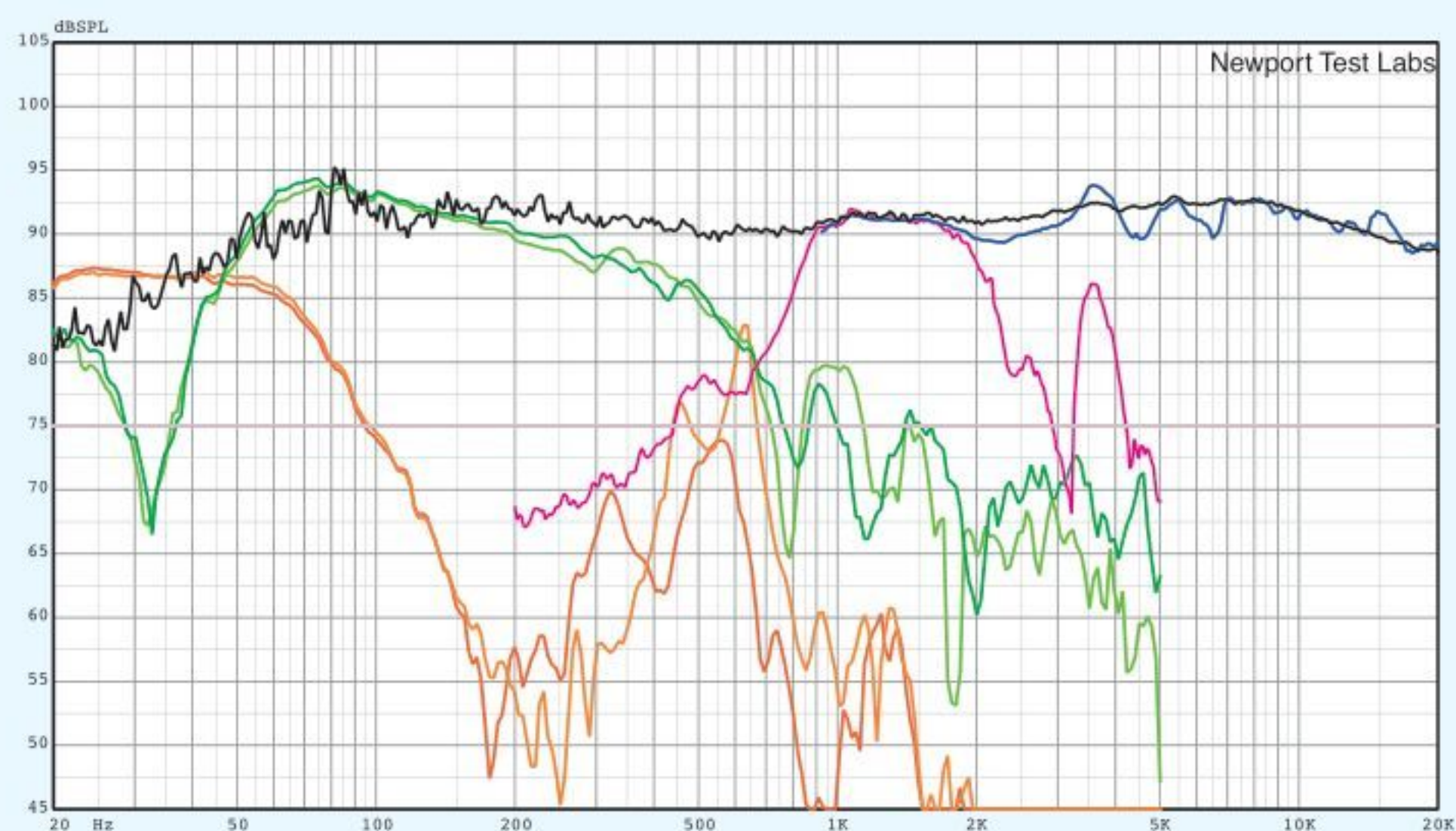
Graph 3: Low frequency response of bass reflex ports (red/orange traces) and bass drivers (dark/light green). Nearfield acquisition. Port/woofer levels not compensated for differences in radiating areas.



Graph 4: Impedance modulus (red trace) plus phase (blue trace). Black trace is ref 4 ohm calibration resistor.



Graph 5: Composite frequency response using in-room data below 1kHz and anechoic data above 1kHz.



Graph 6: Composite frequency response plot. See copy for guide to traces.

cy responses and plots them on the same graph, plus Newport Test Labs has added in the anechoic response of the midrange driver (pink trace), which wasn't shown on the other graphs. You can see the midrange

The DALI Oberon 9s delivered excellent measured performance across all the acoustic tests performed

driver operates from around 900Hz out to 2kHz and has a very smooth response. However, you can see that it also has a resonance in its output 3.6kHz, which is what causes the 'bump' in the anechoic high-frequency response (dark blue trace). However, this bump would not be audible when listening to music, as shown by the pink noise response (black trace) which approximates what the human ear would hear.

Graph 6 is another composite, this time a single trace where the data below 1kHz was derived from the pink noise room response and the data above this frequency was derived from the on-axis anechoic response when no grille was fitted. This essentially shows the overall frequency response of the

DALI Oberon 9 was measured by Newport Test Labs as 35Hz to 24kHz \pm 3dB.

Newport Test Labs also measured the Oberon 9's sensitivity, reporting it as being 90.6dB SPL at a distance of one metre, for a 2.83Veq input. This is notable both for being higher than DALI's own specification of 90.5dB SPL and also for being more than 3dB higher than the average for floor-standing designs. Indeed it's one of the highest Newport Test Labs has ever measured, which means the Oberon 9 will make maximum use of amplifier power.

Overall, the DALI Oberon 9s delivered excellent measured performance across all the acoustic tests performed on them by Newport Test Labs. *— Steve Holding*

First listen to the experts.

Then listen to your music – through our EISA winners!



Bluesound Node EISA Digital Music Player 2021-2022

BLUESOUND

What the Experts Say: “Bluesound’s multiroom wireless system was revolutionary when it first appeared, its BluOS platform having been designed to play music all the way up to hi-res, with a process of refinement and development ever since. This latest version of its NODE music player is a simple way to bring multiroom to your system,

with Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Apple AirPlay 2, aptX HD Bluetooth and USB-A to access audio content from streaming services, Internet radio and your own music library. And the new NODE now also has HDMI ARC, for audio from TVs and gaming systems – all controlled using the intuitive BluOS Controller app or via the popular voice assistants.”



NAD C 298 EISA Power Amplifier 2021-2022



What the Experts Say: “NAD started its story making amplifiers, and has been researching and developing the technology for almost half a century. All that shows in the unassuming-looking C 298 power amplifier, designed for use in everything from conventional hi-fi and home cinema systems to hideaway custom installations. It has single-ended and balanced inputs for flexibility, and

switchable signal-sensing for remote operation, while its energy-efficient Purifi Eigentakt amplification technology gives it the ability to drive just about any speaker with impunity. The sound is spectacular, and upgradable too – switch it into bridge mode, and you have a 600W+ monoblock!”



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 200M

DAC

There is a long history to Cambridge Audio's 'DacMagic' stand-alone digital-to-analogue converter. The first of its line arrived back in the mid-1990s when 'off-board' DACs, as they were then called, were still a new notion, the idea being that audiophiles could use them to upgrade the performance of their CD players.

This was very forward thinking by James Johnson-Flint and Julian Richer, who had only recently revived Cambridge Audio by harnessing some of the UK's top hi-fi designers — Mike Creek was behind their first new product, the outstanding A1 budget amplifier in 1995, followed in 1996 by that original DacMagic.

The original DacMagic was designed by John Westlake, who had started his days with legendary turntable company Pink Triangle, designing its surprising DaCapo DAC in 1991. Westlake was involved with the first three DacMagic designs, as well as being hands-on in getting Cambridge's China manufacturing facilities up to scratch, before later going on to design DACs, amplifiers and other electronics for Peachtree Audio, Audiolab (under IAG) and, more recently, Pro-Ject.

So this is a product with a respected lineage of high performance; that first

DacMagic back in 1996 netted Cambridge its first *What Hi-Fi?* award, and its descendants have maintained momentum: the miniature DacMagic XS USB DAC took Australia's own *Sound+Image* magazine's award in 2015. Can this new model maintain Cambridge's record for achieving heights of performance significantly beyond its asking price?

THE EQUIPMENT

The new DacMagic 200M is a compact unit at 215mm wide (half standard hi-fi width), which matches for size recent products such as the Alva Duo phono preamp, while its design and 'Lunar Grey' finish follow the lines established by the AX and CX ranges, indeed right up to the no-holds-barred Edge amplifiers.

Here the front panel has just three press-buttons — for power, source select and filter, though these are also re-used in combination to access various 'hidden' menu functions, for example switching the normally fixed outputs to become variable, under control of the volume knob. That turns the DacMagic 200M into a useful digital preamp which could directly drive power amps or active speakers, especially with the balanced XLR output at the rear. I used it in this way to great effect with Elac's Navis speakers, the balanced inputs of which are their path to greatest sonic purity.

Otherwise when used just as a DAC with a fixed voltage at the rear output terminals, the DacMagic's well-damped volume control will adjust only the volume of the full-sized headphone output positioned at the right of the front panel. It's driven by Class-A/B amplification which, thanks to a reduction in output impedance, promises more power and less distortion than the headphone circuit in the previous DacMagic design.

Those who like to be well-informed will appreciate the two rows of small LEDs which illuminate to indicate the format of the digital signal being received. These will immediately impress DAC addicts by including lights for sampling frequencies right up to 705.6 and 768kHz PCM, and for DSD from 64x right up to 512x. That's enough to handle not only all of today's high-res files and streams but also those for the foreseeable future. (To test those highest PCM rates, I downloaded special test files made by Stephen Dawson, which can be found via tinyurl.com/SI340SD.)

All these LEDs and labels make for a slightly busy aesthetic on the front panel, but fairly subtly so, and I suspect audio fans will take information over obscurity any day. Indeed I'd add one more, a light to distinguish between 16-bit and 24-bit, given the increasing availability of 24-bit/44.1kHz files from streaming services such as Qobuz.

Around the back of the DacMagic a full third of its width is dedicated to the outputs, thanks to the inclusion of balanced XLR analogue outputs, which are a pointer to the aspirations of Cambridge with this unit.

If you have an amp with balanced inputs you can enjoy the higher signal level and lower noise available from these, especially over longer distances — in preamp mode you could run them to power amps alongside your speakers. And in addition to XLR, of course, there's also a pair of standard RCA unbalanced analogue sockets.

There are four digital inputs, with the first two offering the choice of optical or coaxial connection. The optical inputs are limited to 24-bit/96kHz, the coaxial inputs to 24-bit/192kHz.

The 96k 'limit' is not really a hard limit, because it can work up to 192k, despite being designed for only 48k, but it might not do so reliably, as indicated by Cambridge's *Owner's Manual*, which says "some optical cables may not work correctly at 192kHz."

The USB-B connection for a computer is the input which allows the leap to higher PCM and DSD rates. This also supports MQA, so enabling playback of MQA-encoded files and the streaming of Masters files from the higher level of Tidal replay.

An 'MQA' LED on the front panel will glow blue to indicate it is playing an MQA Studio file, which has supposedly been either approved by the artist/producer or verified by the copyright owner, or will glow magenta to indicate that the unit is merely rendering an MQA stream or file to its maximum resolution.

The latter function — to compress files for easier streaming — is rapidly becoming redundant now that most people have sufficient bandwidth to enable uncompressed high-res FLAC streaming, as delivered by Qobuz, Deezer HD and others.

Finally, Bluetooth is also available, for which a small external antenna screws into the back.

In terms of codecs this Bluetooth provision caters better to Android devices than Apple ones, since there is the aptX codec available, which many Android phones can use to achieve slightly lossy CD-quality performance, but no AAC, which raises Apple devices above the base-level SBC codec.

Nicely though — and unusually — you get confirmation of aptX flow from the input light on the front panel, which will be continuously bright for SBC but will briefly darken every few seconds when receiving aptX.

LISTENING SESSIONS

I note that the twin DAC chips within the DacMagic 200M are the ESS ES9028Q2M SABRE32 Reference DAC, a popular choice, though listed by ESS as mobile-friendly chips, with low energy consumption. They're also specified as limited to 32-bit/384kHz. So the first thing I did was plug my MacBook Pro into the USB-B input and head to my Mac's Audio-MIDI settings to see what it offered. Sure enough, I could address it at up to 768kHz. Selecting that max, I played a 768kHz test file and it replayed fine, with the 768kHz light illuminating on the DacMagic. Ditto a 705.6kHz test file. I did have to set these manually in the Mac's settings; a Mac alone delivers a fixed output frequency and won't follow a file's native rate. Roon does, but as yet supports only 384kHz, for the reasonable reason that almost nothing has been released beyond that. But I certainly confirmed the DacMagic 200M's input abilities.

I then reverted to less esoteric file types to enjoy my full range of available music, with one of the first tunes up being the gentle live version of *Kid* from the Pretenders' 'Isle of View' set, for which the DacMagic delivered what emerged as the unit's defining characteristic — not a particular trait, but an overall heart-lifting clarity. The acoustic guitar plucking was cleanly edged, the strings resinous and rich, Hynde's vocal yearningly sweet, the overall mix perhaps just a little peaky at high volume, but as a whole holding me rapt.

The DacMagic's defining characteristic is an overall heart-lifting clarity

Full points for letting the musical soul through.

This ability held across genres from raging to classical. I pumped it with Future Cut's magnificent production for Tom Jones' 2008 album '24 Hours'; there's plenty going on during the track *In Style and Rhythm* but the Cambridge cleanly separated it all with top timing and serious soundstage depth, delivering Sir Tom on form from the flange-laden opening to the brass-stabbing close.

An even more dense challenge is Holst's *Jupiter* (von Karajan, 1981), but the DacMagic again kept everything in place while rolling out the emotion behind the sonics, especially in the slower section that Holst recycled for *I Vow To Thee, My Country*. (Warning to Brits: tears may roll.)

I experimented with the Cambridge's three digital filters — Fast, Slow and Short Delay — which match the three built-in options that come with the ESS chips, where the last option is instead called 'Minimum Phase.'





As usual the differences between the three filters are very subtle and Cambridge doesn't have much to say on the subject either: When describing the filter button in the manual it says "see later section for details", but then doesn't bother. If you have a highly resolving system, feel free to perform your own experiments with audibility.

For headphone listening I switched to the Qobuz Mac desktop app, which usefully takes control of the Mac's output rate. With a nice pair of open Sennheisers plugged into the DacMagic's headphone jack I was able to enjoy entirely smooth and congestion-free replay up to the highest levels of replay — as far as I was prepared to take ears anyway (and that's louder than most). It's a slightly safe headphone sound, revealing but never overly edgy, smooth rather than brash, so that Robert Plant's vocal on Led Zeppelin's *The Rover* (at 96kHz) was held in check but still clear and solid over the also central drums and bass, while Jimmy's main track

guitar chugs to the right and his overdubs to the left — one of the best portrayals of the often-difficult Zep remastered digital files I've enjoyed.

Tyler, The Creator's EARFQUAKE showed that there's plenty of power in the headphone output to drive high bass content where it's on the recording, and here without it overly masking the stuff happening higher-up. If I've heard things a bit more sparkling up top, it's a fatigue-free balance that keeps you listening over long sessions. And its powers of separation and grace under pressure were confirmed by its avoidance of the tendency of lesser equipment to flatten k.d. lang's layered vocals on the crescendos of *The Air That I Breathe*; here it felt more like the headphone amp was just hitting its stride, and I was encouraged to turn it up a notch further still.

I still have not warmed to Cambridge's new power switches; I just can't tell when they're on or off, especially in daylight — the light just becomes brighter when it's on. At least here there'll be an input indicator also lit when it's on, so I learned how to interpret the combination. But I would still prefer the light simply to be off when the unit is off.

When I was using the DacMagic 200M as a preamp for the Elac Navis active speakers, I had hoped to plug my TV's optical output into the DacMagic to play through them — but the signal suffered regular and constant interruptions, as if the sync was dropping. I played around with the settings of the TV (a current model Samsung) but had no luck fixing the problem. This is by no means an isolated occurrence, and other companies have previously told me that TV optical outputs can be wayward enough in their digital delivery to cause such issues. And sure enough, there's a warning about this in the DacMagic 200M's Owner's Manual: "Non-hi-fi products such as TVs and set-top boxes may experience interruptions, glitches or momentary dropouts during use. This is due to an inconsistent sample rate being produced by the TV, that the DAC inside DacMagic 200M is unable to process, thus creating disruptions to the signal." So you have been warned.

I later tried an older Toshiba TV, and it worked fine, so if TV replay is to be a key part of your proposed use for this DAC, I would suggest you attempt a trial before buying.

CONCLUSION




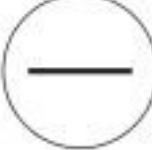
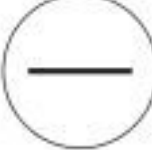
The DacMagic 200M is versatile on inputs, excellent in offering a balanced output as well as unbalanced, and with useful feedback on the stratospheric conversion rates available via its USB-B input.

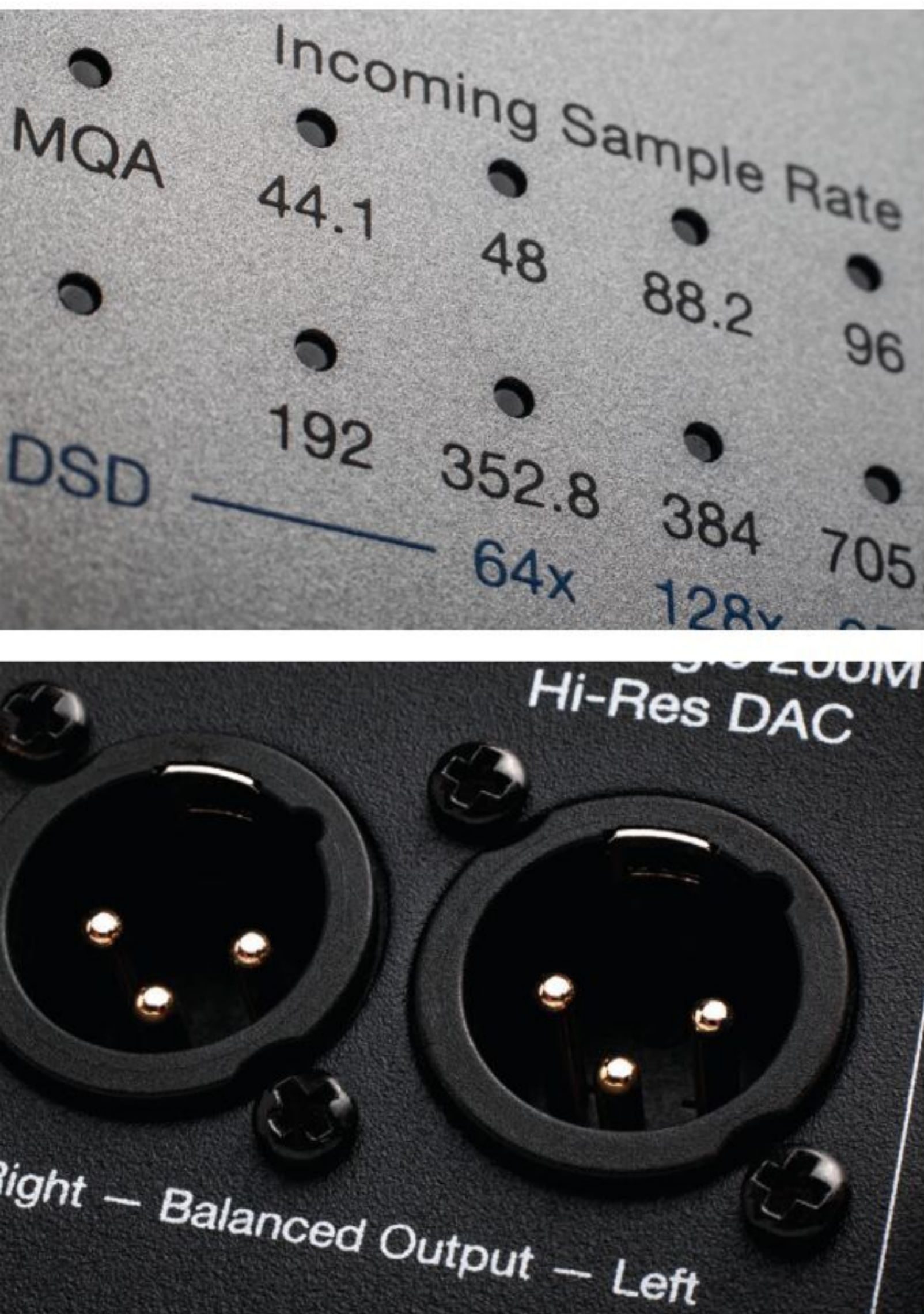
But of course it's the sound quality which puts it up with the very best at this price, whether listening to attached headphones or playing from its analogue outputs. Given the company's history in this regard, I was not surprised by this, but was nevertheless thrilled by the performance of this well-armed, high-performing all-rounder. **— Jez Ford**

Readers interested in a full technical appraisal of the performance of the Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M should continue on and read the LABORATORY REPORT published on the following pages. All test results should be construed as applying only to the specific sample tested.

CONTACT DETAILS

Brand: Cambridge Audio
Model: DacMagic 200M
RRP: \$899
Warranty: Two Years
Distributor: Synergy Audio Visual
Address: 107 Northern Road
 Heidelberg Heights
 VIC 3081
T: (03) 9459 7474
E: info@synergyaudio.com
W: www.synergyaudio.com

-  • Great audio quality
-  • Can work as a preamp
-  • Balanced outputs available
-  • AAC Bluetooth codec
-  • Volume control markings



LABORATORY TEST REPORT

Graph 1 shows the distortion spectra in the Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M's analogue output when it is delivering maximum output voltage (3.9-volts) with a 1kHz digital signal at maximum level (0dB). This is a little unrealistic, because it would never happen outside an audio test laboratory environment, but you can see the performance of the DacMagic was excellent nonetheless.

There is a third harmonic component at -102dB (0.00079%), then a string of odd-order harmonics across the spectrum, but each one of these is around or lower than -110dB (0.00031%).

Graph 2 shows a more realistic test for distortion, with the same 1kHz test signal, but at a digital level of -10dB. This is about the maximum digital level that would be expected, as it leaves a comfortable 10dB of headroom for peaks. You can see that this time there's only that single third harmonic distortion component in the DacMagic 200M's output, and its level has dropped to -110dB (0.00031%) where it would be completely and totally inaudible. There is a small ninth-order harmonic visible, but it's around 135dB down, or (0.00001%).

Also note in Graph 2 that the noise floor is sitting down at -140dB right across the audio spectrum, and although there appears to be some mains hum creeping in, it's down at -128dB (0.00003%).

Newport Test Labs has in Graph 3 reduced the level of the 1kHz test signal to -20dB and you can see there's been a corresponding reduction in the level of the single distortion (HDL3) component that is visible on the graph to -118dB (0.00012%). The tiny ninth-order component that was present at -135dB has disappeared below the noise floor. As for that noise floor, it's a little bit noisier, but it's still down at -140dB.

Graph 4 shows the DacMagic 200M's output spectrum when it's reproducing an undithered 1kHz digital signal at -60dB. The 'grass' on the noise floor is due to quantisation errors but it's all still more than 120dB down. This test is only of academic interest, because all digital music is dithered in order to eliminate quantisation errors, the effect of which is shown in Graphs 5 and 6.

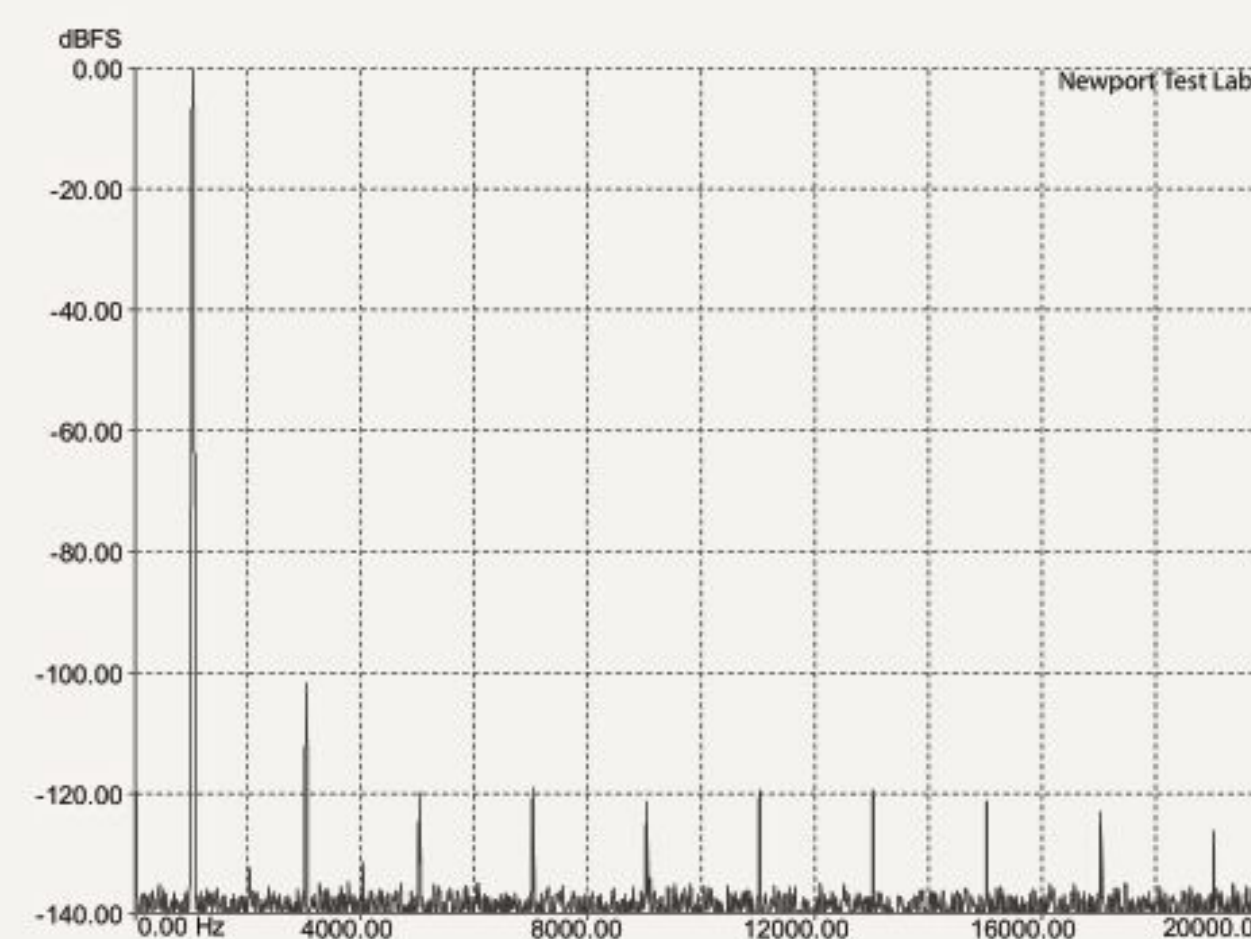
Graph 5 shows a 1kHz test signal at a level of -90dB that has not been dithered. You can see there are odd-order harmonic distortion components spread across the audio spectrum. The first four of these are between -110dB and -120dB down (0.00031% to 0.0001%) with all the higher-order harmonics more than 120dB down. You can see each harmonic is accompanied by quantisation error signals. Now look at Graph 6.

Graph 6 shows exactly the same test signal that was used for Graph 5, at exactly the same output level from the DacMagic 200M, but this time the test signal was dithered. As you can see, the dithering has removed all the harmonic distortion components, and also corrected all the quantisation errors. The only penalty for doing this is a slight increase in noise, as you can see by comparing the bottoms of both graphs. However, because the noise floor is down at -140dB, this is of no concern.

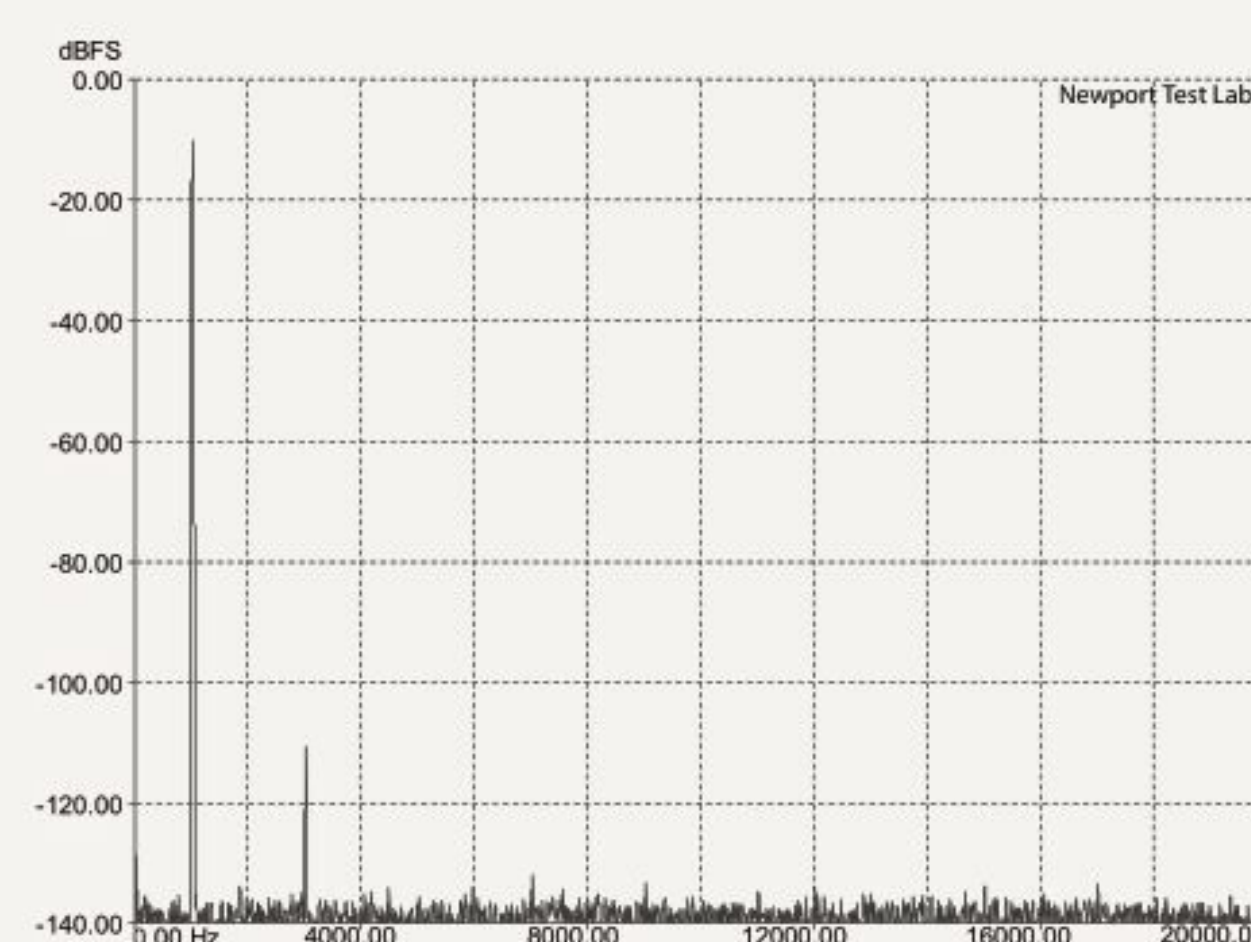
Newport Test Labs has shown intermodulation distortion in Graph 7 using two test signals, one at 19kHz and the other at 20kHz, using the 'Fast' filter setting of the DacMagic 200M. You can see there are only two sidebands, one at 18kHz and the other at 21kHz, and both are around 118dB down (0.00012%). Importantly, there is no difference signal down at 1kHz. There are some spurious signals up around 40kHz, but these are too high in frequency and too low in level to be of any concern.

Graph 8 again looks at intermodulation distortion, using the same test signal, but this time with the 'Slow' filter setting of the DacMagic 200M. You can see that the sidebands at 18kHz and 21kHz have reduced a little in level, but there are now 'images' of the test signal up at 25kHz and 28kHz due to the operation of the delta-sigma oversampling filter. It's important to note that this would not happen with music, which never contains signal levels at these frequencies high enough to introduce the imaging.

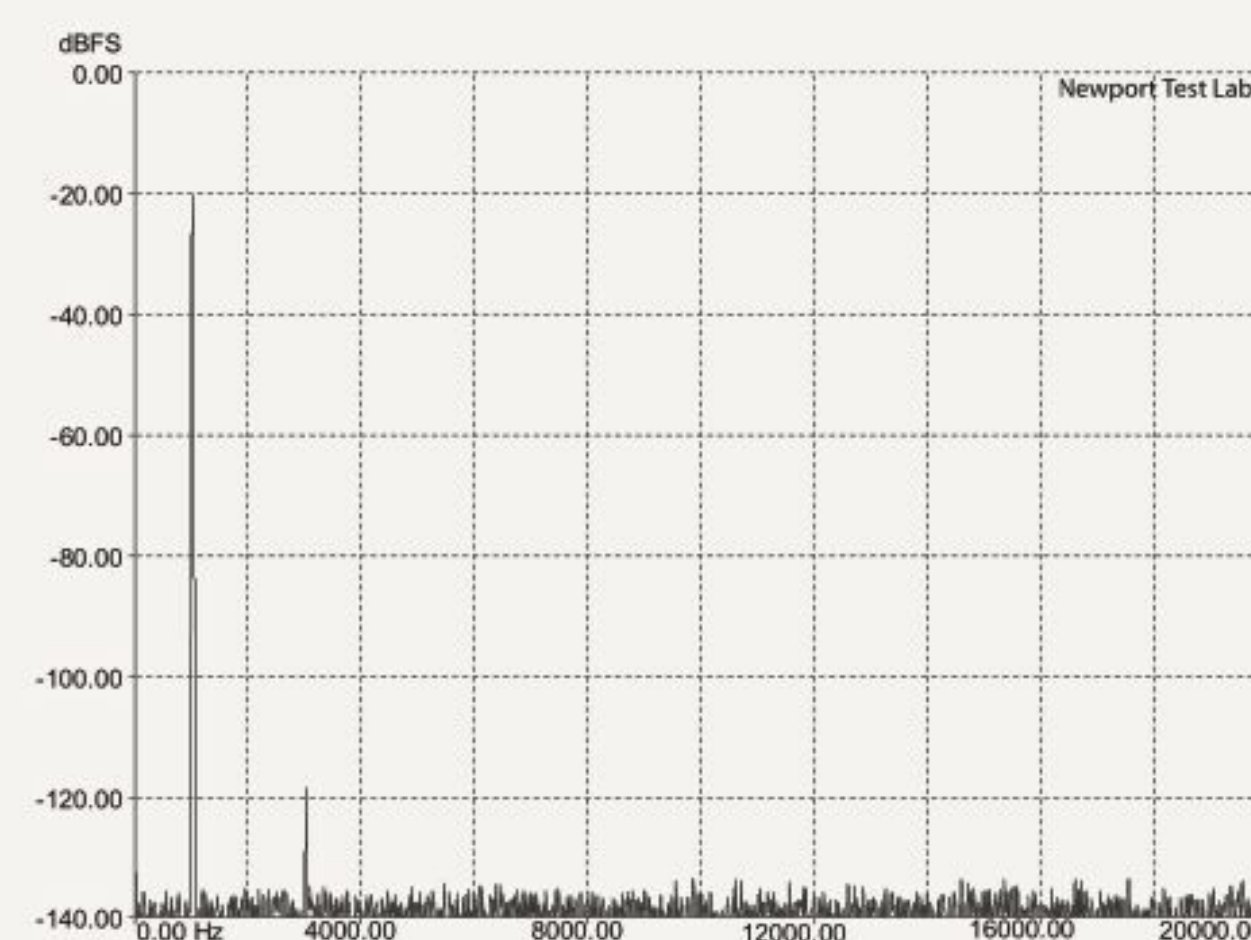
The frequency response of the Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M is shown in Graph 9 for all three settings of the filter, using 16-bit/44.1kHz digital signals, which of course have a high-frequency limit of 20kHz. (In fact Newport Test Labs used 'Red-Book' standard digital signals for all the tests



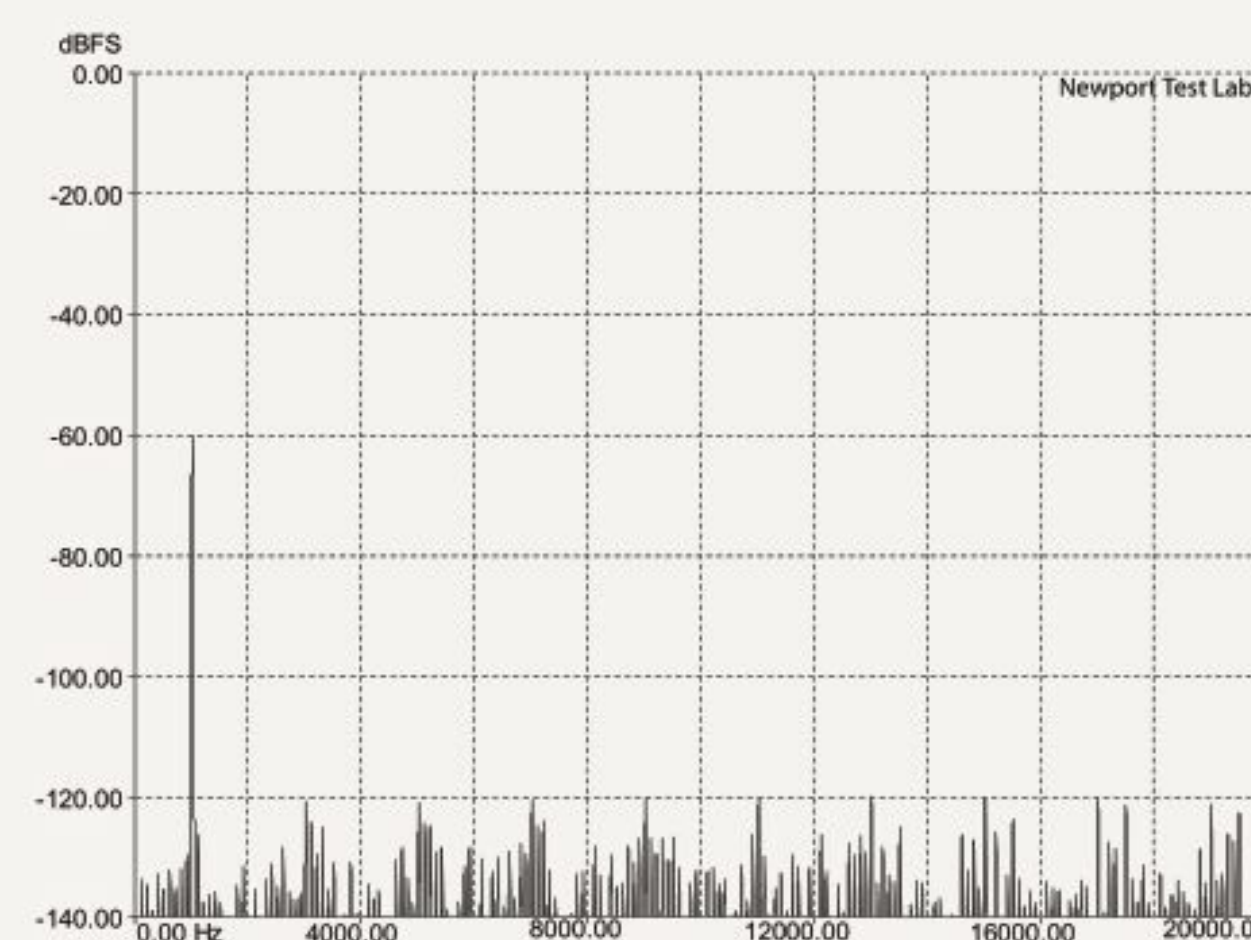
Graph 1: THD at 1kHz at



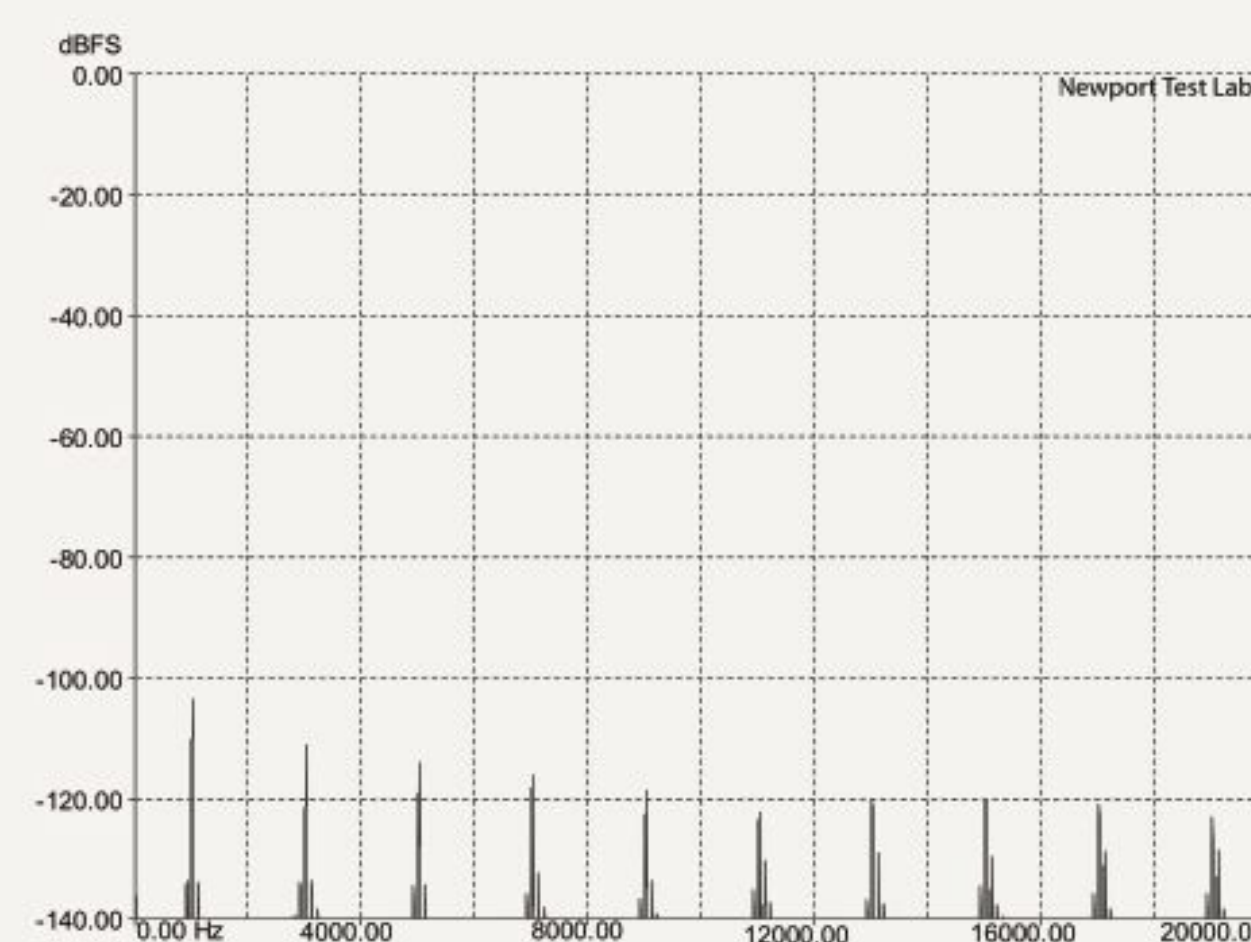
Graph 2: THD at 1kHz at -10dB.



Graph 3: THD at 1kHz at -20dB.

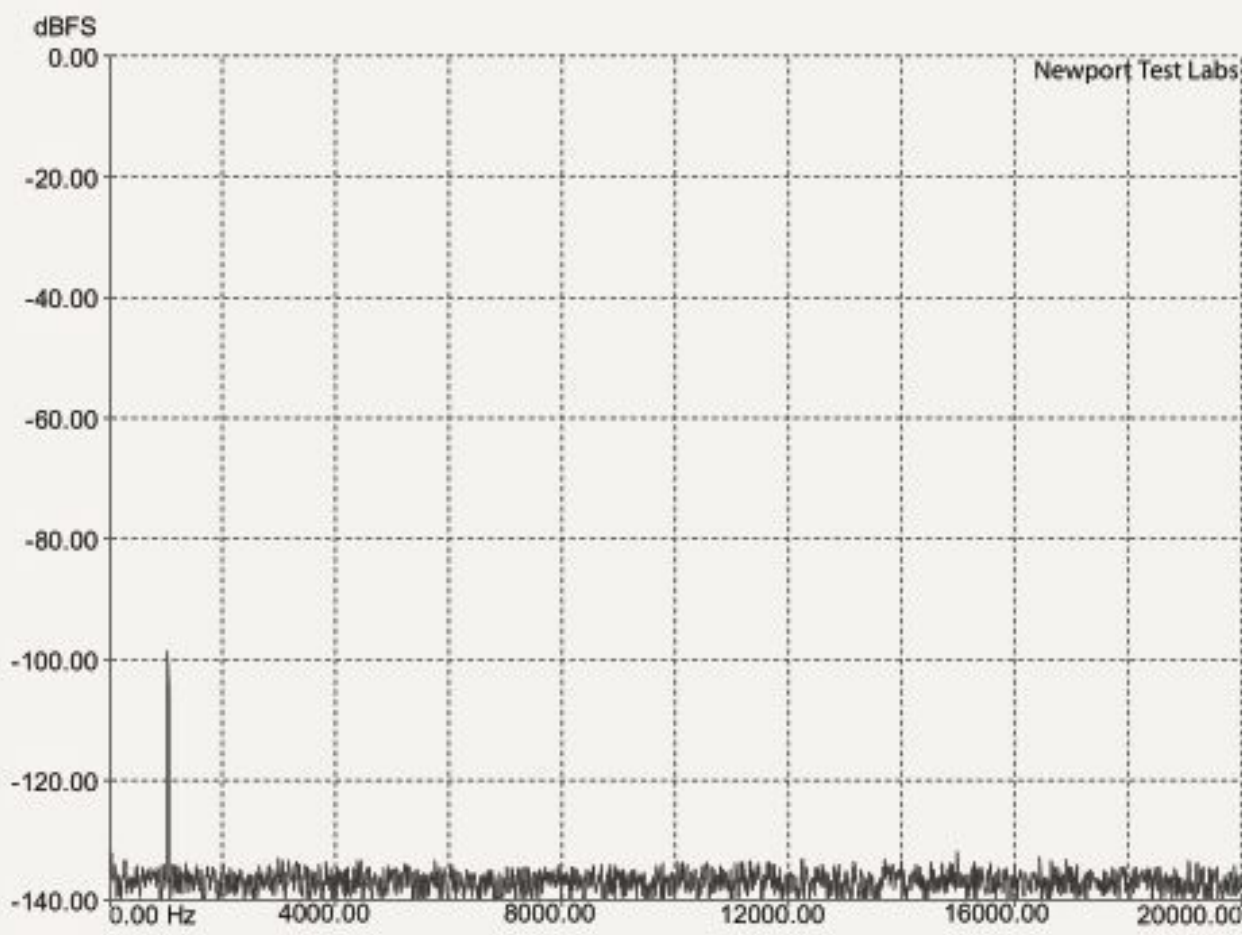


Graph 4: THD at 1kHz at -60dB.

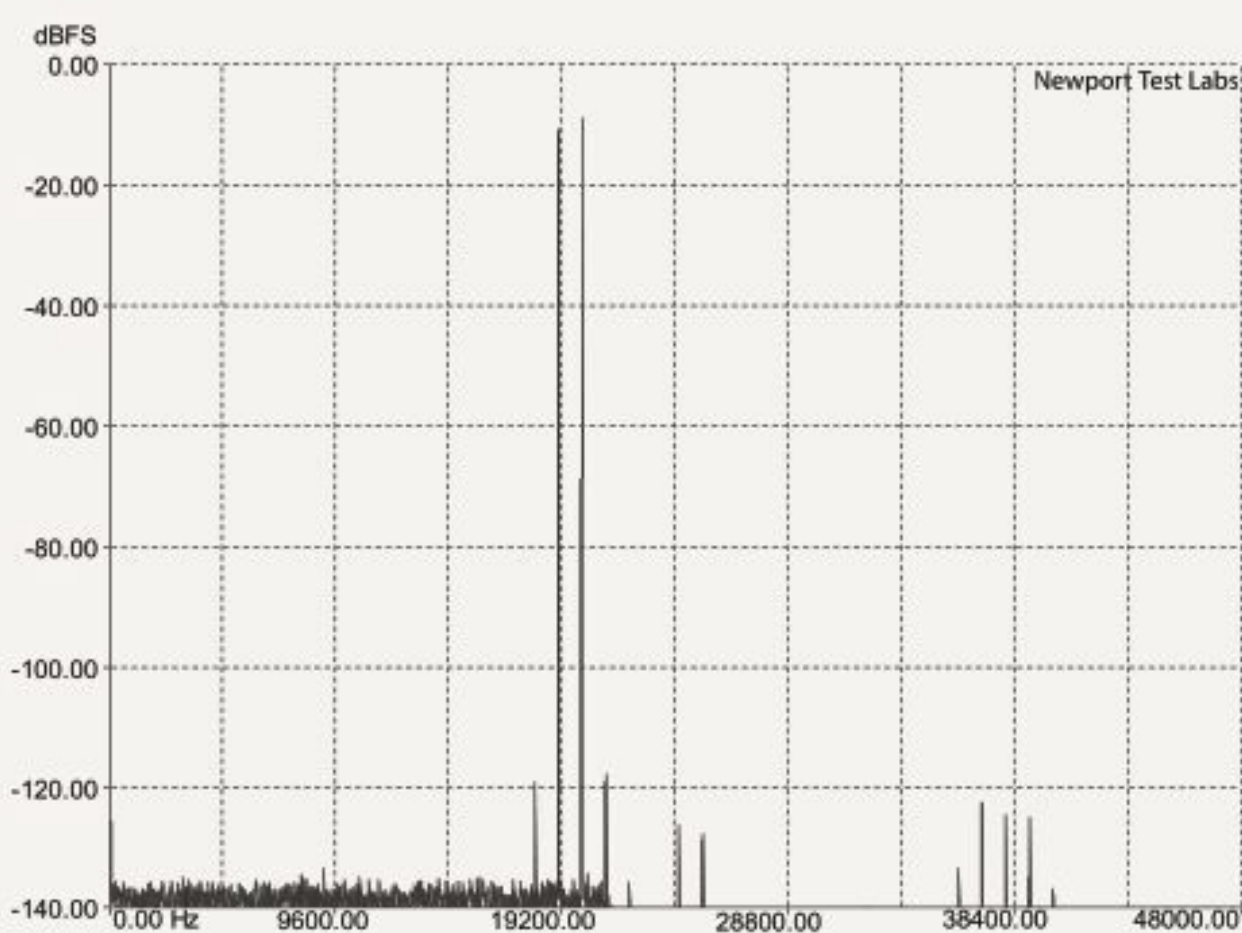


Graph 5: THD at 1kHz at -91dB (no dither).

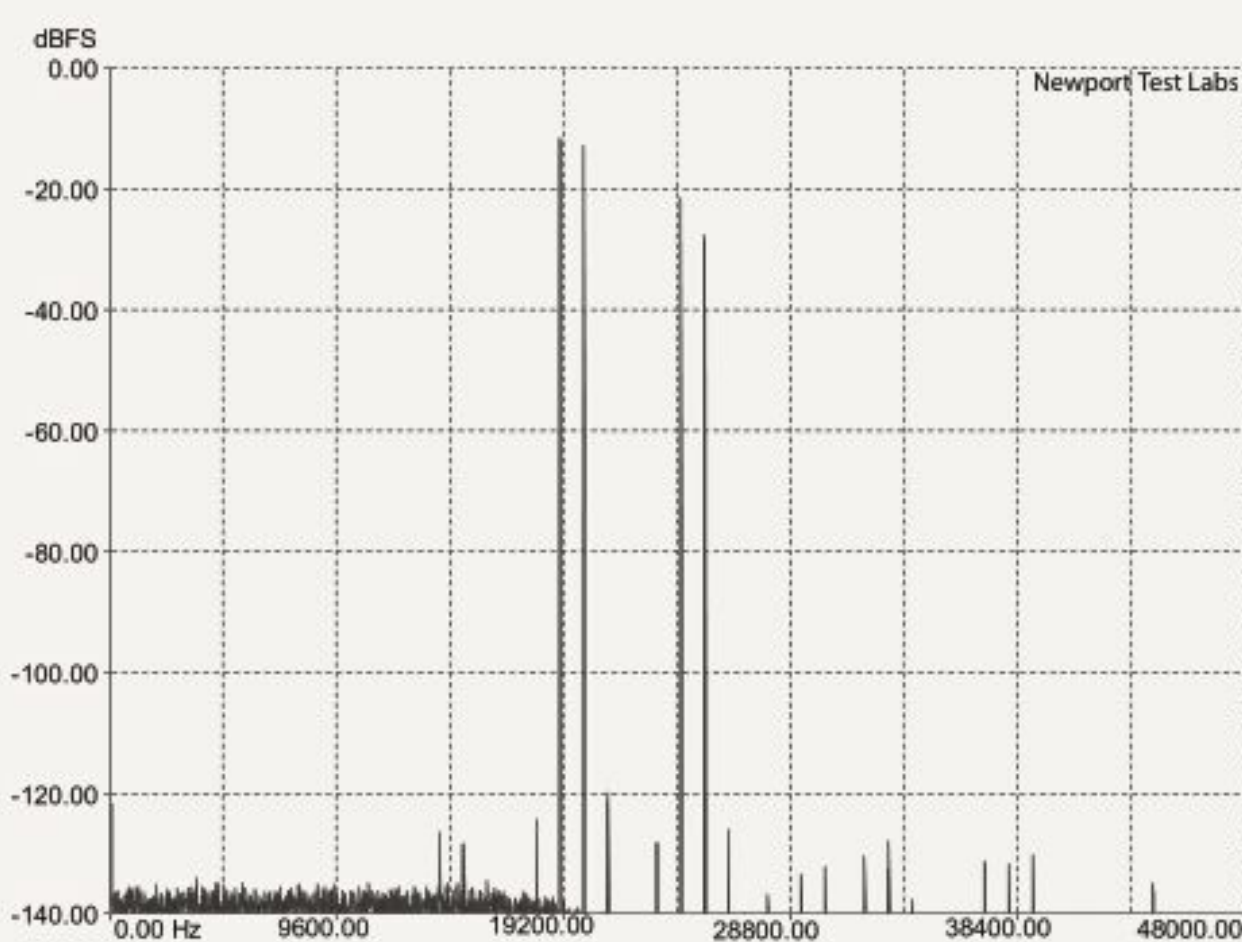
LAB REPORT



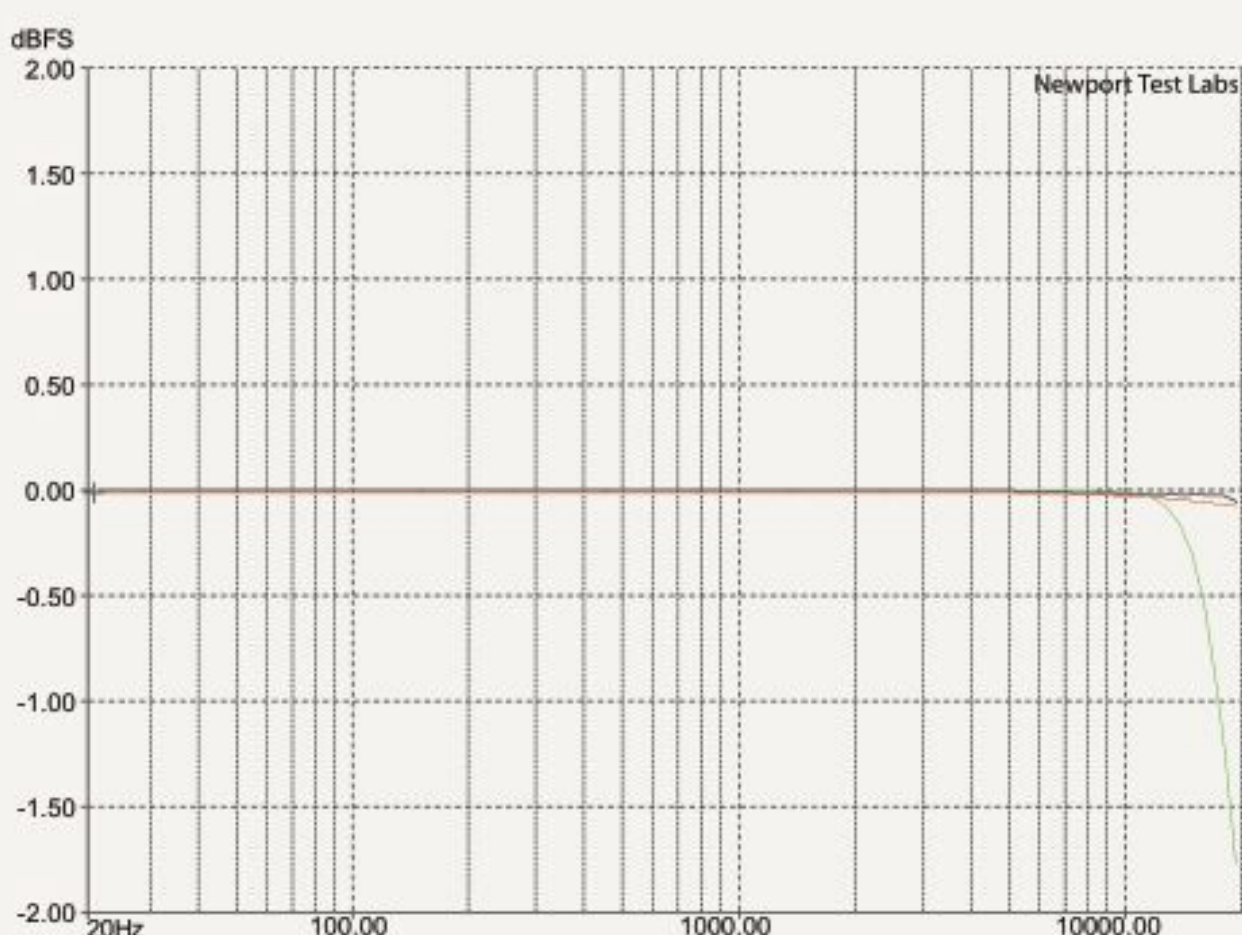
Graph 6: THD at 1kHz at -91dB (with dither).



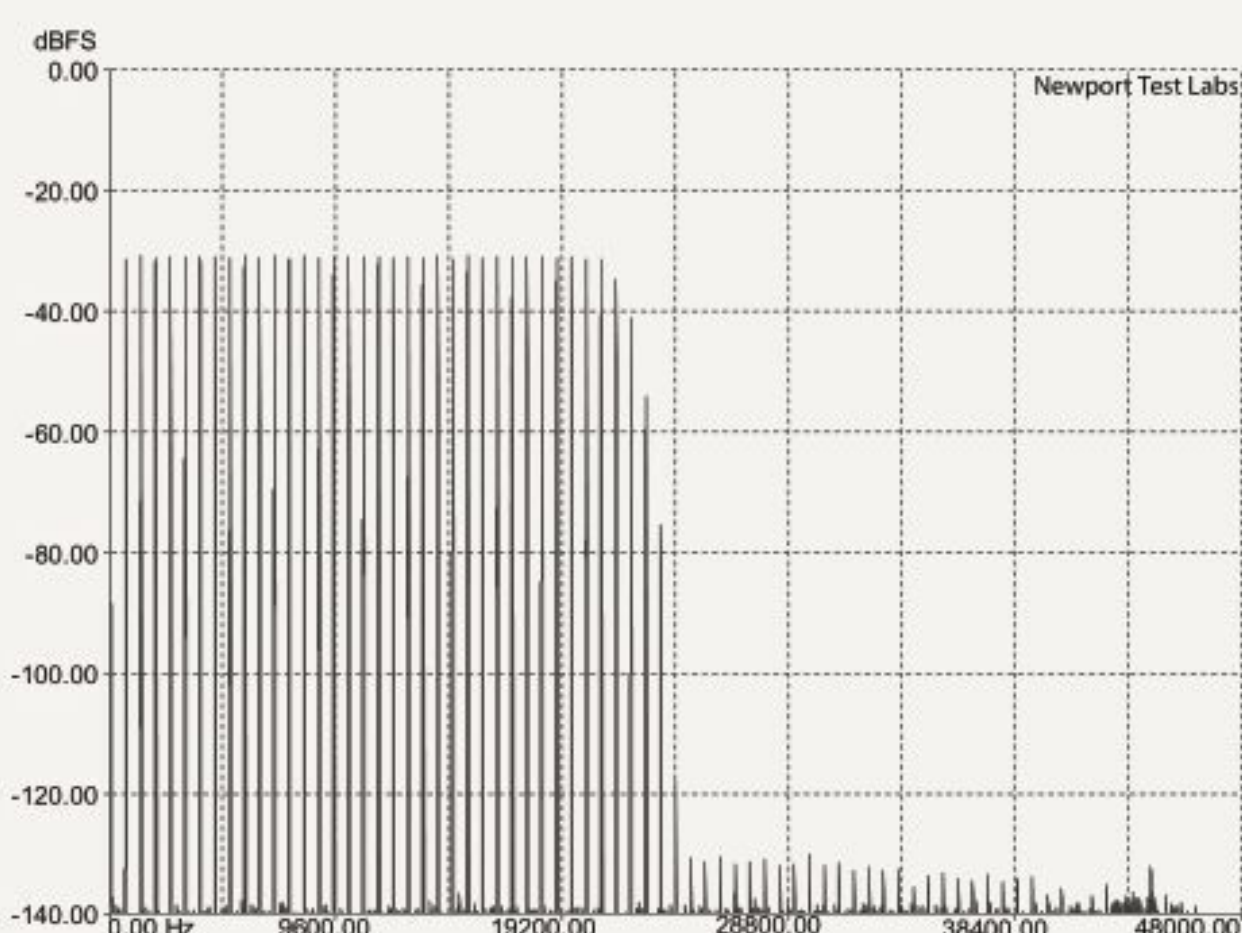
Graph 7: IMD (CCIF) at 0dB with fast filter.



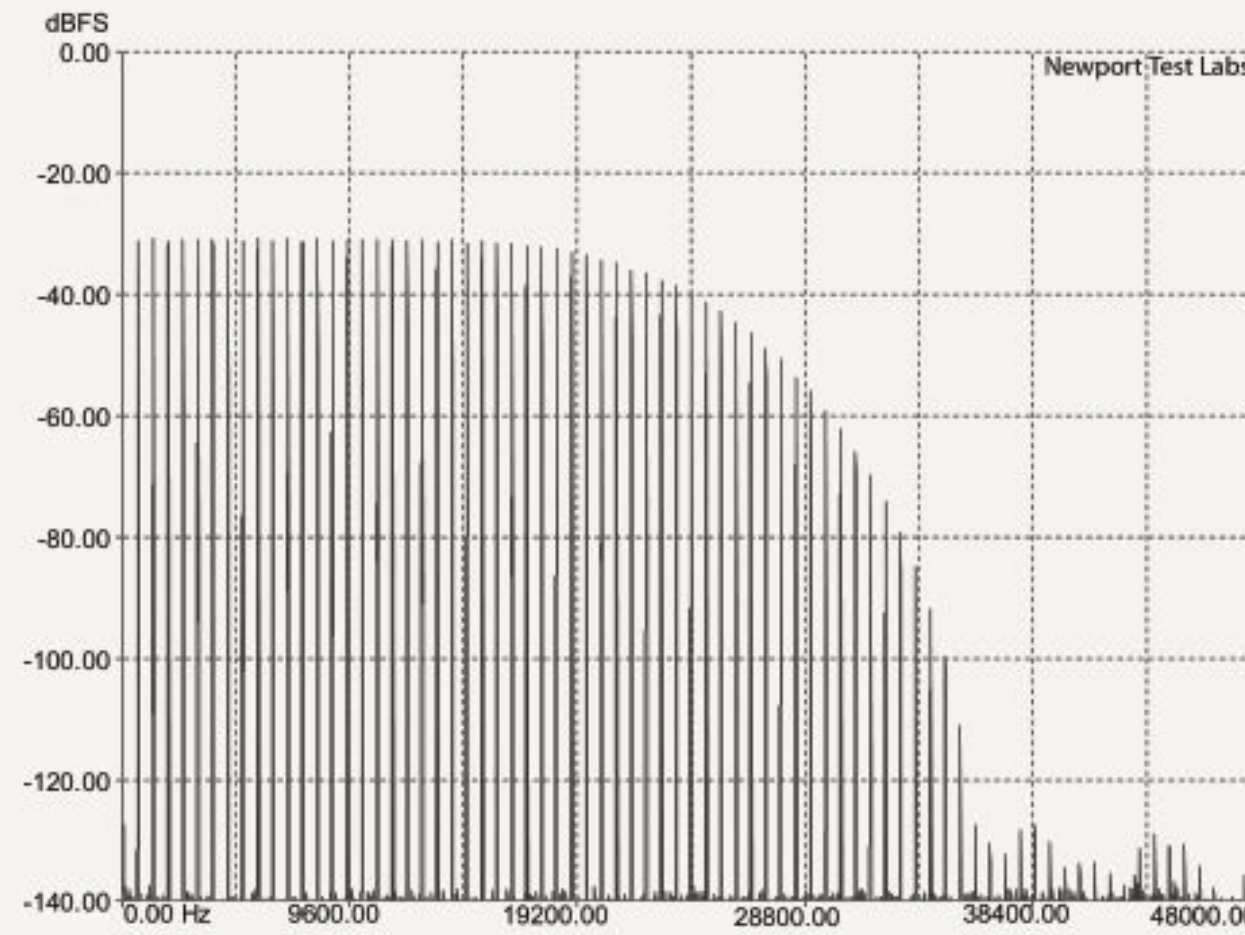
Graph 8: IMD (CCIF) at 0dB with slow filter.



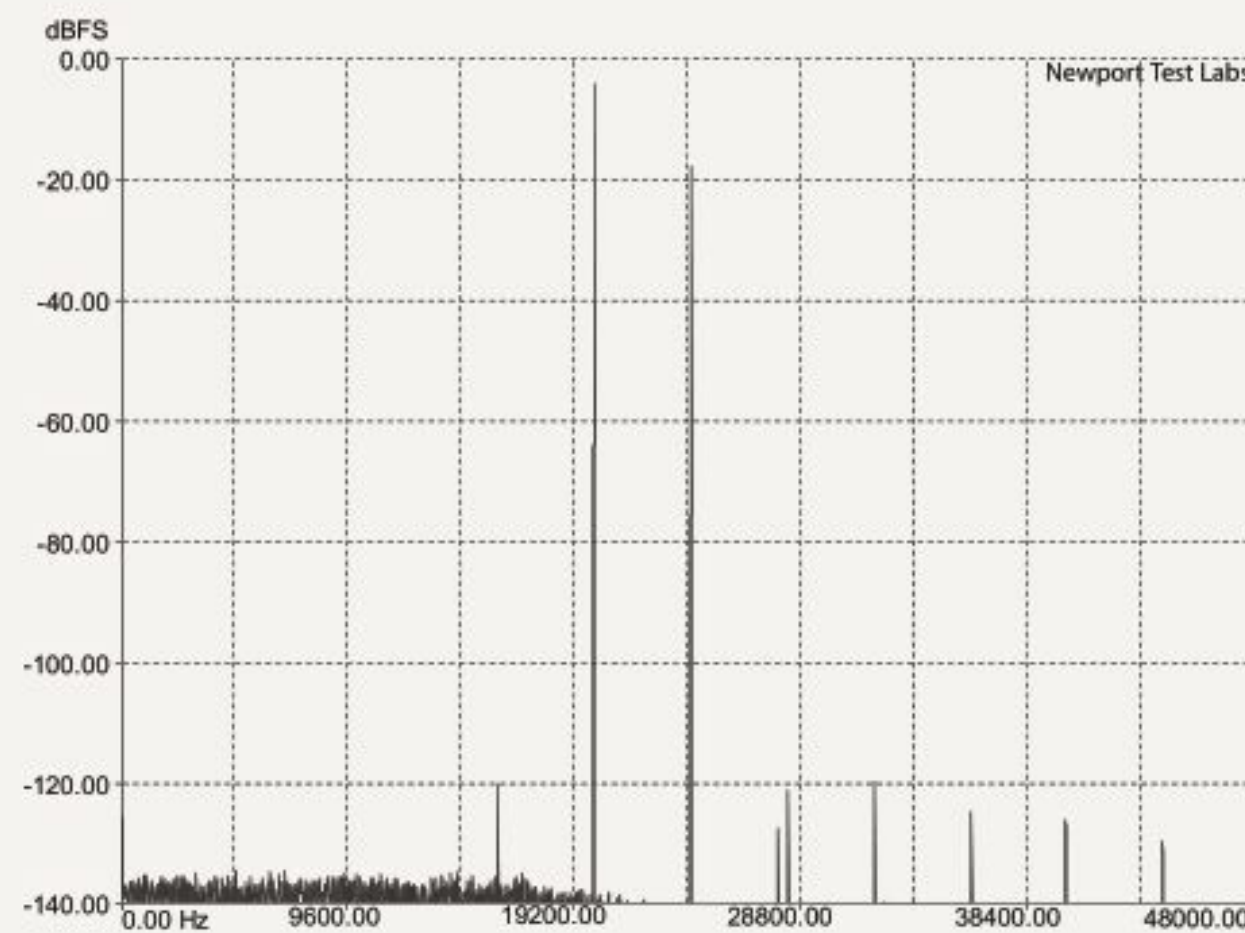
Graph 9: Frequency response. Fast Filter (green), Slow Filter (red), Short Delay (black).



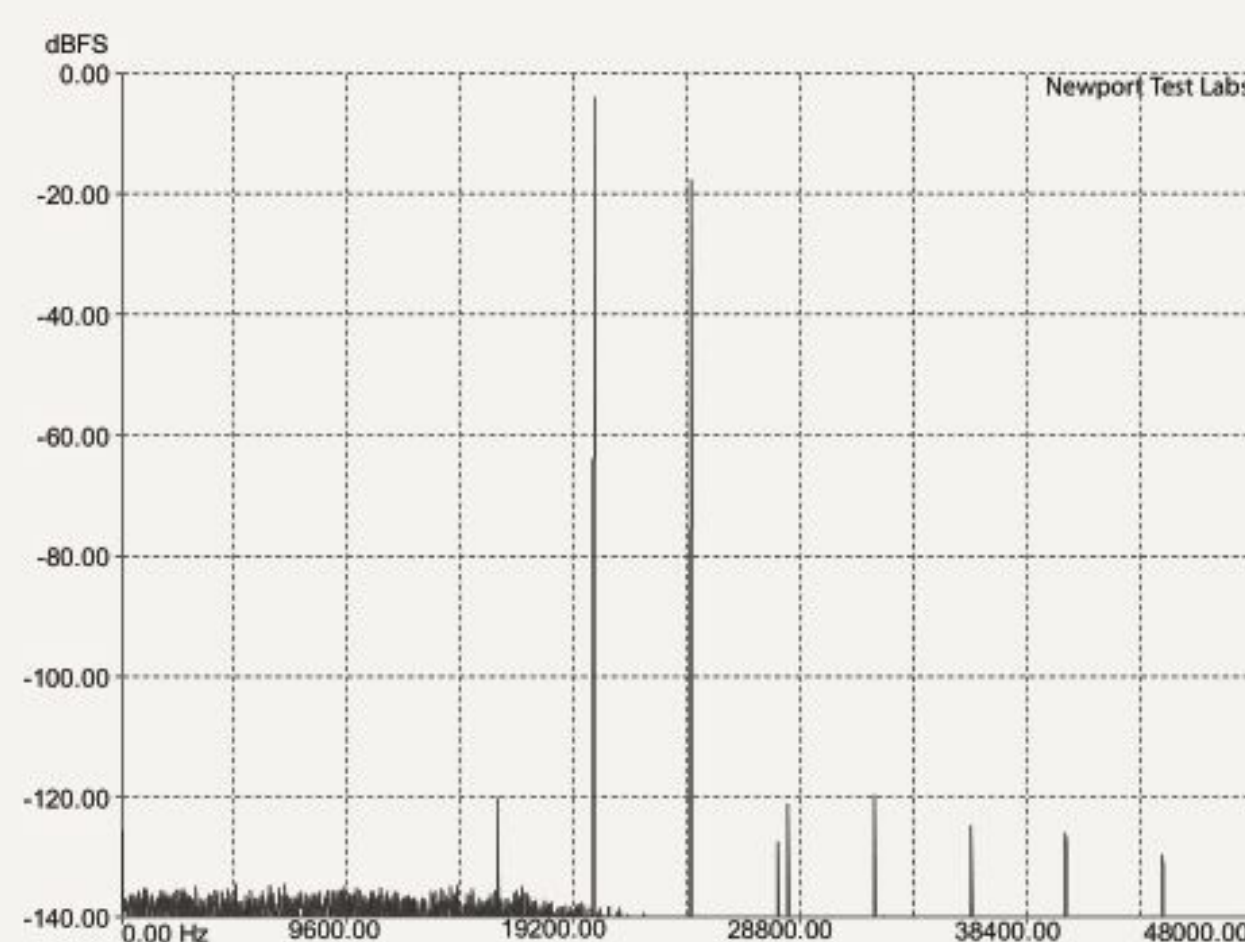
Graph 10: Frequency response using impulses showing effect of fast filter.



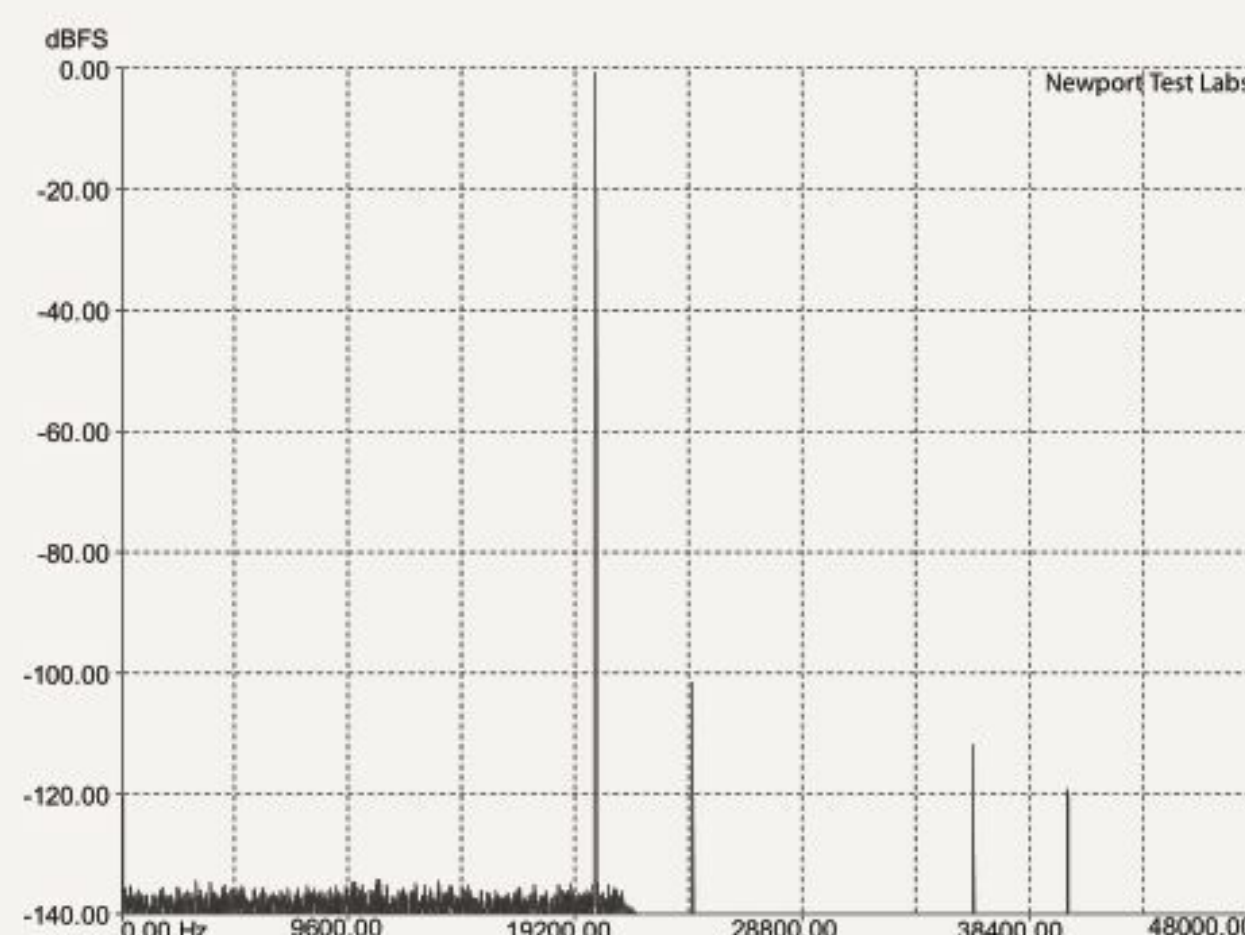
Graph 11: Frequency response using impulses showing effect of slow filter.



Graph 12: Effect of Fast Filter on 20kHz signal at 0dB.



Graph 13: Effect of Slow Filter on 20kHz signal at 0dB.



Graph 14: Effect of Short Delay (Minimum Phase) Filter on 20kHz signal at 0dB.

it made on the DacMagic 200M, input via the coaxial input.) Note that the vertical scaling of the graph is extreme, so the graph lines immediately above and below the traces are at +0.5dB and -0.5dB, so that from 20Hz out to 10kHz, all three filters are flat to within better than ± 0.05 dB. This is outstandingly good performance.

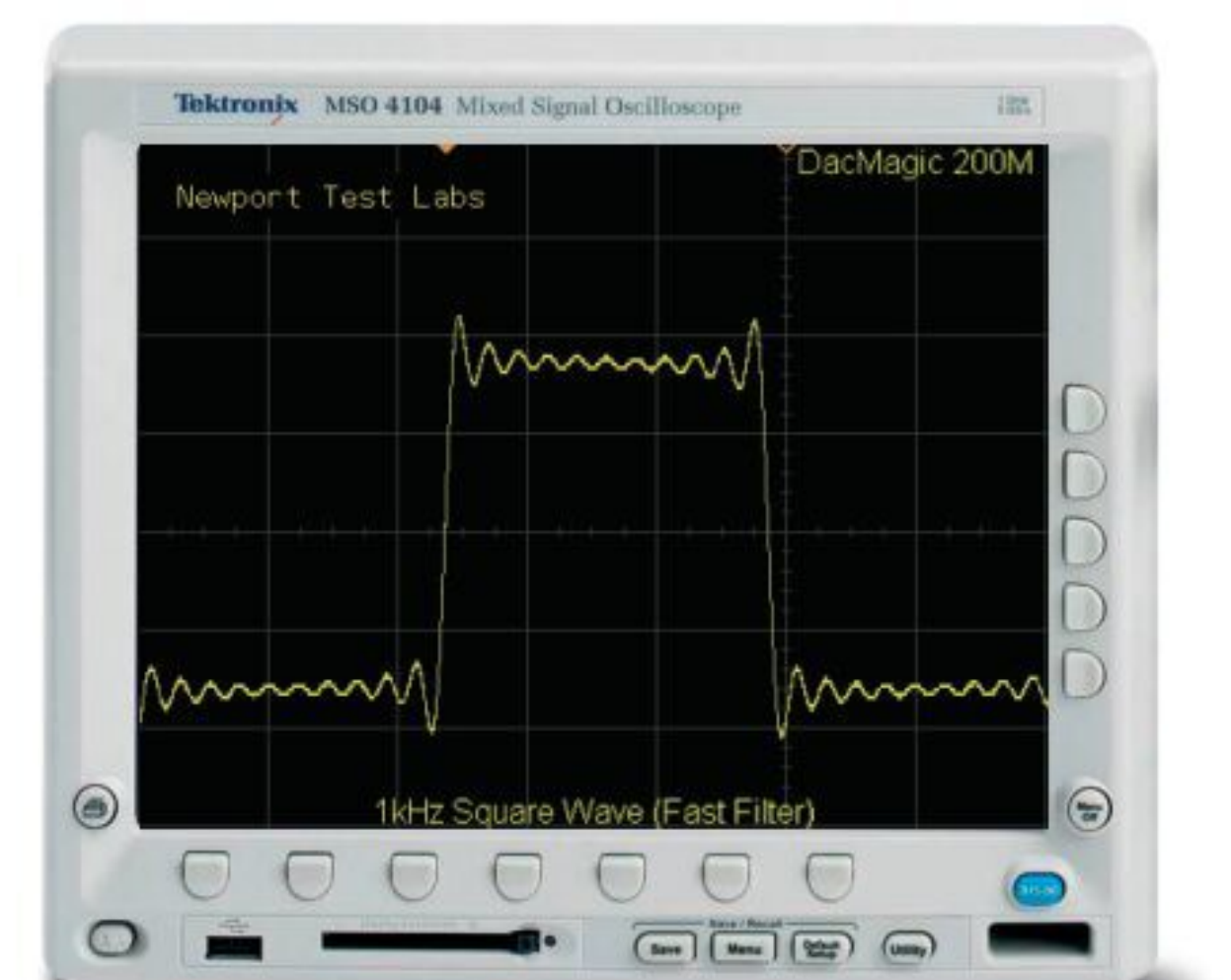
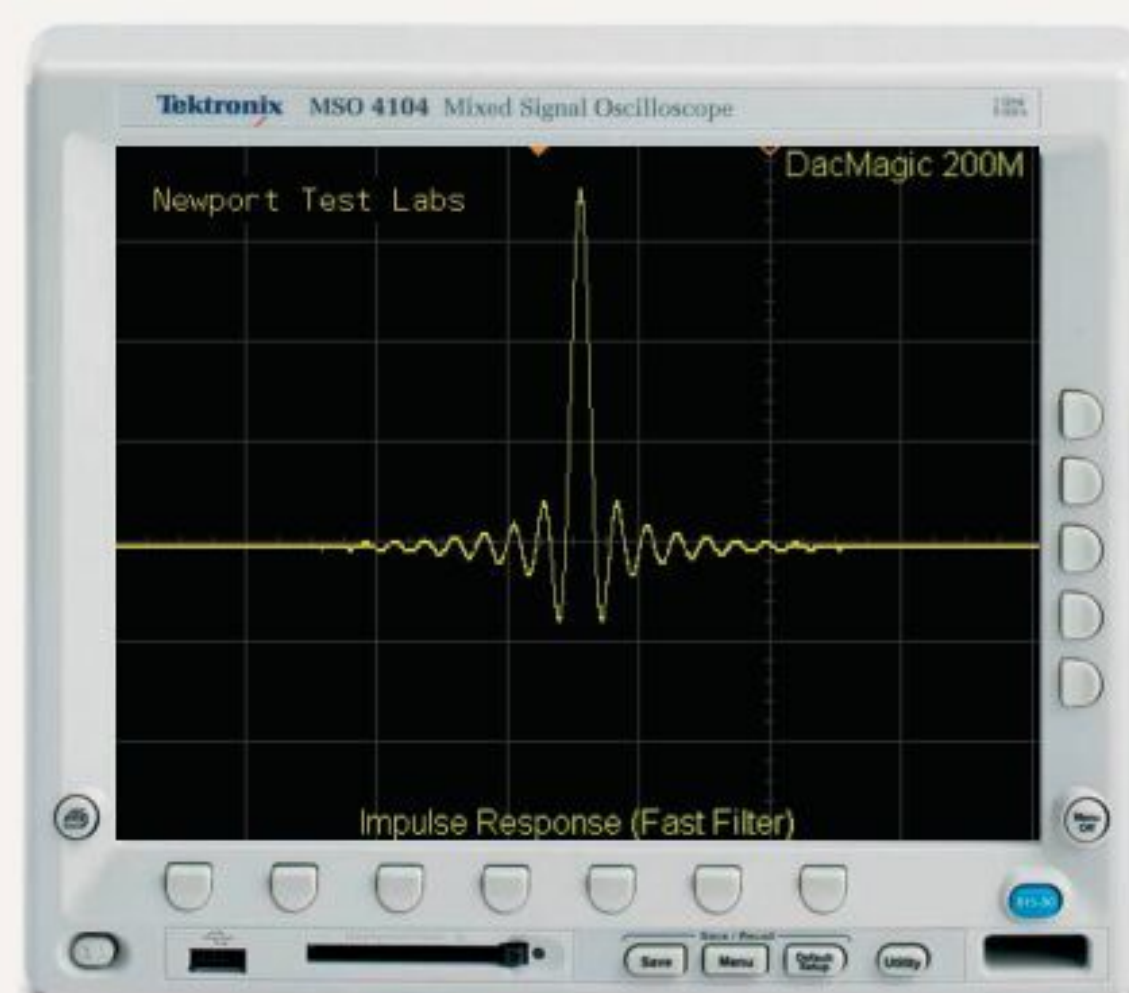
Above 10kHz the three frequency responses diverge. The black trace shows the DacMagic 200M's frequency response with the 'Short Delay' filter, and you can see that it extends right out to 20kHz, still within ± 0.05 dB. The same is true of the 'Slow' setting of the filter, though although it, too, is only 0.05dB down at 20kHz, it rolls off a little earlier than the 'Short Delay' filter to reach the same down-point.

The frequency response of the 'Fast' filter is shown as the green trace on Graph 9 and you can see that although it appears to roll off steeply above about 12kHz, the so-called 'steepness' is a function of the graph scaling, because the trace is just 1.7dB down at 20kHz, which would put the normalised frequency response of the DacMagic 200M with this filter in circuit at 20Hz to 20kHz ± 0.85 dB.

Graphs 10 and 11 show the effect of the 'Fast' and 'Slow' filters on the response above 20kHz (for a 44.1kHz/16-bit test signal). Graph 10 shows the fast filter rolls the high-frequency response off so quickly that it's around 80dB down at 24kHz.

Graph 11 shows the effect of the 'Slow' filter and you can see the response is only 10dB down at 24kHz and 15dB down at 29kHz and 50dB down at 34kHz.

Graph 12 shows the effect of the 'Fast' filter when the DacMagic200M is reproducing a 20kHz signal at maximum level (0dB).





As with the IMD tests, this is a signal that would never occur when playing music, it's included merely to show the operational characteristics of the DAC and filter. You can see the 20kHz signal just to the left of the graph's centre. There are no sub-harmonics further to the left, and only three sampling-related artefacts to the right, one more than 110dB down and the other two more than 120dB down. Graph 13 shows the output using the same test signal, but the DacMagic's 'Slow' filter. You can see there's a sub-harmonic at around 16kHz that's 120dB down.

To the right of the test signal is a mirror image at 24kHz. To the right of this are several sampling-related signals, all of which are more than 120dB down.

Graph 14 shows the output of the DacMagic 200M using the same test signal as in Graphs 12 and 13, but this time with the 'Short Delay' (Minimum Phase) filter. There are no subharmonics in the audio band, and only a vestigial mirror image at 25kHz that's 104dB down. There are only two other sampling-related artefacts, both higher than 35kHz in frequency, one of which is at

-112dB and the other at -119dB.

Graph 15 shows the DacMagic 200M's reproduction of a 1kHz square wave using the fast filter. The time-reversed ringing on the wave demonstrates that Cambridge Audio is using a standard delta-sigma oversampling DAC.

Graph 16 shows the DacMagic 200M's reproduction of a single impulse. You can see that the typical pre-ringing introduced by the delta-sigma decoding and that the pulse is positive-going, which means the DacMagic 200M preserves phase, rather than inverting it, like some DACs.


Newport Test Labs' testing revealed the Cambridge DacMagic 200M has superb channel separation, with the laboratory reporting figures of 151dB at 20Hz, 141dB at 1kHz and 116dB at 20kHz. Along with this the laboratory also reported excellent inter-channel phase characteristics — 0.01 degrees of error at 20Hz and 1kHz and j94ust 0.12 degrees at 20kHz. Channel balance was also excellent (0.1027dB at 1kHz).

Wideband signal-to-noise ratios were outstanding, as you've probably already guessed from the noise floors revealed in the graphs used to show distortion. Newport Test Labs measured it as 115dB unweighted, and 121dB A-weighted.

Rather unusually these days, the DacMagic 200M has de-emphasis correction built in, which means you'll get accurate high-frequency response with not only modern digital recordings, but also with old ones made back in the 80s. The circuit was very accurate, too, as you can see from the error figures in the tabulated chart of test results.

Linearity error was close to perfect at all tested levels, and actually perfect at -60dB and -80.59dB, as you can see from the tabulated results. Again, this is outstanding performance.

Power consumption is a low 7.95-watts when the DacMagic 200M is operating, and 1.46 when it's in Standby mode. I was a little intrigued by this, because the DacMagic 200M is powered by an external wall-mounted switch-mode power supply, so when you turn the DacMagic 200M to standby, the power supply is still on, hence the 1.46-watt consumption in Standby mode is almost entirely due to the power supply, not the DAC itself.

Overall, the Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M returned stunningly good levels of performance in all the tests performed by Newport Test Labs, performance that is made all the more stunning because all these great results were returned with standard 16-bit/44.1kHz test signals. 

Steve Holding

Cambridge Audio DacMagic 200M – Laboratory Test Results

Analogue Section	Result	Units/Comment
Output Voltage (Balanced Output)	3.9025 / 3.8566	volts (Left Ch/ Right Ch)
Frequency Response	See Graph	dB (20Hz – 20kHz)
Channel Separation	151 / 141 / 116	dB at 16Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz
THD+N	0.0013	@ 1kHz @ 0dBFS
Channel Balance	0.1027	@ 1kHz @ 0dBFS
Channel Phase	0.01 / 0.01 / 0.12	degrees at 16Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz
Group Delay	180 / 5.62	degrees (1–20kHz / 20–1kHz)
Signal-to-Noise Ratio (No Pre-emph)	115dB / 121dB	dB (unweighted/weighted)
De-Emphasis Error	0.02 / 0.03 / 0.47	at 1kHz / 4kHz / 16kHz
Linearity Error @ -60.00dB / -70.00dB	0.00 / 0.05	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -80.59dB / -85.24dB	0.00 / 0.01	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -89.46dB / -91.24dB	0.01 / 0.03	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -80.70dB / -90.31dB	0.08 / 0.01	dB (Test Signal Dithered)
Power Consumption	1.46 / 7.95	watts (Standby / On)
Mains Voltage During Testing	234 – 243	(Minimum – Maximum)



RME ADI-2 DAC FS

DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER

Have you ever heard of RME? Perhaps not, since it's fairly new to the home high-fidelity space. But it has been around for a while in professional audio.

This German company — its products are actually manufactured there — is probably best known for its high quality digital audio interfaces for computers.

A few years ago it introduced the (mostly) two-channel RME ADI-2 Pro interface — which is to say, USB ADC and USB DAC with DSP and headphone amplifiers built in. That was upgraded a couple of times and is now the RME ADI-2 Pro FS R Black Edition. This has been so well-received in the industry, you might categorise it as rave acceptance. This unit straddled the professional and consumer spaces, albeit at a fairly high price (RRP in Australia is \$3,699). But I guess it was inevitable that with its top-end performance and high-end headphone amplifiers, that a more consumer-orientated device would emerge. And it did: the RME ADI-2 DAC FS digital-to-analogue converter and headphone amplifier. It has an RRP of \$2,499 but I've seen it on sale for around \$2,000.

THE EQUIPMENT

You'd be forgiven for confusing, at first glance, the RME ADI-2 DAC FS and the Pro in-out version because they look almost the same as each other.

The main difference on the front panel is that one of the two headphone outputs on the DAC is 6.35mm, while the other is 3.5mm. The former is labelled 'Phones', the latter 'IEM' for in-ear monitors.

The headphone outputs on the Pro both offer 'Extreme Power'. On the DAC, the 'Phones' output has 'Extreme Power' available. The IEM output is intentionally limited to a lower power, low-noise state since IEMs are typically highly sensitive. (The DAC also has nice hi-fi feet, while the Pro just has stick-on rubber feet).

Also on the front panel are three rotary and clickable knobs for control, a standby on/off key, and four additional selection buttons. (You also get an infra-red remote with configurable keys.)

Near the right-hand side is a colour display which you use to navigate menus and such, but which by default displays the instantaneous left and right output levels and a frequency spectrum.

At the back there are inputs for optical digital audio, coaxial digital and a USB connection for use with computers. There is no analogue audio input, so you can't use those great headphone amps for an analogue output device. Line output is provided as both single-ended RCA sockets and balanced XLR.

The audio output control is both interesting and unusual. It uses a combination of digital control and analogue control. Basically, for the line outputs, there are four hardware analogue 'reference levels'. The digital level control is provided by the DSP, and it provides 42 bits of precision and operates in half-decibel steps. In one of the menus you can switch on 'Auto Ref Level', which switches the analogue reference level between states automatically as you're adjusting the volume, optimising for lowest noise levels.

Given RME's background, we shouldn't be surprised that it adopts pro-audio terminology. The reference levels are -5dBu, 1dBu, 7dBu and 13dBu. These figures translate to 0.43, 0.87, 1.73 and 3.46VRMS.

The 'Phones' output can deliver up to 10-volts RMS, and offers a peak power output of 1.5 watts per channel into 32Ω headphones. The quite thick manual even shows the power output against impedance on a graph. The output distortion at the headphones is typically 0.0003% and the signal to noise ratio is rated at up to 120dBA. The IEM output only goes up to 0.55 volts — says RME — and is rated with a signal-to-noise ratio of 118dBA.

One slightly surprising omission for a unit of this quality is that it lacks support for balanced headphones.

Signal handling? The unit can cope with PCM signals via USB up to 32-bits and 768kHz, and DSD64, DSD128 and DSD256. MQA is not supported, although given the built-in DSP, it probably could be implemented via firmware if RME decided that it wanted to provide MQA support.

As for that DSP, it provides bass and treble controls — they're configurable — a five band parametric equaliser and a 'loudness' control.

Note, this DAC (the FS version) is upgraded from the original RME ADI-2 DAC. The main difference is the upgrading of the SteadyClock timer. It's now called SteadyClock FS — thus the current DAC model is the RMI ADI-2 DAC FS — because of jitter specifications now being lower than one picosecond. That puts it into the realm of femtoseconds, thus the 'FS'. The DAC chip has been upgraded to the Asahi Kasei Microdevices AK4493 from a previous AKM DAC.

The AK4493 does appear in some lower-priced devices but RME's marketing materials make the point that few devices using the AK4493 realise its full specifications in those devices because of limitations in the circuitry used to support its operations. RME says that because it uses the correct support circuitry for the AK4493 its full potential is delivered in the ADI-2 DAC FS.

INSTALLATION

The DAC is compatible with no further ado with Macs. For a basic installation on Windows 10 computers running a version since the 1703 creators update, you can just plug it directly in. I played a few tracks quickly, using standard Windows 10 USB Class 2.0 Audio support. This showed support for 32-bit audio at 44.1kHz to 384kHz sample rates (Windows does not natively support higher than 384kHz sampling, for which you can't really blame it). All these sampling frequencies played properly. I also tried DSD, but the JRiver Media Centre player I was using does not appear to support native or DoP DSD via the Windows WASAPI audio interface. For that it needs ASIO. So the player software converted DSD to 176.4kHz PCM. So in order to ensure the unaltered delivery of DSD you should download and install RME's own drivers. [<https://www.rme-audio.de/adi-2-dac.html>]

However, DSD is tricky with this DAC. It can work in two modes. In the default mode, the DAC chip converts the DSD to PCM and also manages volume control (this conversion is necessary for digital volume control — the DSP sits before the DAC in the signal flow.)

So this is probably not preferred by DSD purists, who prefer native DSD decoding by the AK4493 chip. For them there is the DSD direct mode. But then there's no volume control, just the four analogue output levels. So in DSD Direct mode, the headphone outputs are switched off. That's one consequence of eschewing analogue volume control.

A little whinge: the driver package installed the necessary MADiface ASIO and WDM drivers, but it also installed the Fireface drivers and RME's TotalMix FX mixing software used by some of RME's other products. None of those is needed or useful with this device and very annoyingly I could not easily find a way to uninstall these unwanted and unasked-for extras.

Since the display shows you the signal being received, you can be confident that you've set up the system correctly (assuming that you have). But you can be doubly confident because you can download a bundle of a dozen 'Bit Test' files and play them. They are very short — just a blip — and offer formats between 16-bits and 44.1 kHz and 32-bits and 192kHz. When you play one, the unit detects that it has been played and places a message on its screen saying that the Bit Test has been passed. You can download them here: www.tinyurl.com/rme-bit-test

IN USE

First impression of the sound with the headphones — I used a pair of Sennheiser HD 560S cans, they being the ones nearest to hand — was appalling. Lumpy, heavy, overblown bass. Awful. So I tapped the EQ button on the front only to find that someone had applied a +12dB shelf below 100Hz. The unit was review stock, so presumably it had been in hands other than those of the factory before reaching me. A factory reset fixed that.

Very annoyingly I could not easily find a way to uninstall these unwanted and unasked-for extras

As I like to say, with great configurability comes great complexity. Yes, out of the box you can just plug in the RME ADI-2 DAC FS, install the drivers, select the MADiface USB driver and start playing. But if you want to use some of the many features — perhaps tame that slightly irritating 4kHz peak in your headphones? — then you'll need to dig into a somewhat confusing interface. Despite its length and seeming detail, I found the manual hard to understand, even for such seemingly simple things as using the controls to make adjustments.

The adjustments are all made by means of four push-buttons and three rotating knobs, all of which can also be pressed. Which press or turn is required seemed to vary according to circumstances. So be prepared to put in a little time. Fortunately, RME has published a bunch of YouTube videos showing how to do things such as adjust the EQ (and save the results to presets), fiddle with input/output parameters and so on. Watch these with the RME ADI-2 DAC FS beside you, pausing it and practising as you go, and you'll soon be the master of your own domain.

Because the DAC manages output levels separately for line, phones and IEM, you can do things such as set the line output to fixed while keeping the ear-gear levels adjustable, which is very nice.



There isn't a simple consumer-appropriate switch for fixing the line output, but it's easy enough to do in the I/O settings. Near the top of the menu, set Auto Ref Level to Off (that switches off the automatic range adjustment, then set the Ref Level to +7dBu. That's around a 1.73VRMS output. Then go down a fair way through the same menu to Volume and set that to 0.0dB and set Lock Volume to On. That means that the full scale output will be 1.73VRMS. Or you can go +1dB for the fixed Volume output, which is pretty much 2.0VRMS, which is about the same as most consumer hi-fi components. Note that by setting the unit to this level, you have at least 6dB of headroom for intersample peaks and I think it would be difficult to get anywhere near that kind of level unless you're using test signals.

By default, plugging a headphone into a socket switches off the line output. But the extensive settings — of course! — allow you to change to manual toggling. So you can leave your headphones in all the time, but have the output inoperable while the line output is running. (There are more options too.) Also, the unit smoothly ramps up volume when the signal comes through so if you accidentally have the level too high, you have time to do something about it.

The remastered 'Pictures at an Exhibition' CD, delivered via S/PDIF through Focal Elear headphones was full of detail and authority. These headphones are moderately sensitive (spec is 104dB SPL/mW) but even so they didn't test the RME amps in the slightest. They remained in 'Low Power' mode. To switch over to 'High Power' mode I had to turn the volume level to a deafening -15dB.



PRODUCT DETAILS

- Inputs:** 1×USB-B (for computer audio), 1×optical digital audio, 1×coaxial digital audio
- Outputs:** 1×6.35mm stereo headphone, 1×3.5mm stereo headphone, 1×line output (unbalanced RCA), 1×balanced line output (XLR)
- Digital Formats:** PCM 16/24/32-bits, 44.1–768kHz sampling; DSD 2.8MHz, 5.6MHz and 11.2MHz
- Dimensions (WHD):** 215×52×150mm
- Weight:** 1.0kg
- Firmware:** USB: 34; DSP: 34

Listening to 'Pictures', a level of -24dB was entirely engaging — and that was still a full 11dB short of the amp switching.

Even my old Sennheiser HD 535 headphones, which are much lower in sensitivity than today's models, were easily driven to wonderfully high levels, initially without needing 'High Power' mode to kick in. But as I played Kent Poon's recording of *3 and 1* from the Audiophile Jazz Prologue III album, delivered in DSD128 format, on those old headphones, I found myself bumping up the level higher and higher, finally settling on -13.5dB. There was a hesitation in the sound as the analogue stage kicked over into the higher mode, but otherwise there was no audible indication. The music had an astonishing presence through these old headphones, so I switched over to something a bit newer: Sennheiser's HD 660S headphones.

When I plugged these in, the unit flashed up a warning message, saying that the unit was in 'High Power' mode and that I should check the volume. That gave me plenty of time to turn it down. About six decibels did the trick. The headphone change brought to life the deeper elements of the drum kits and the beautiful upright bass.

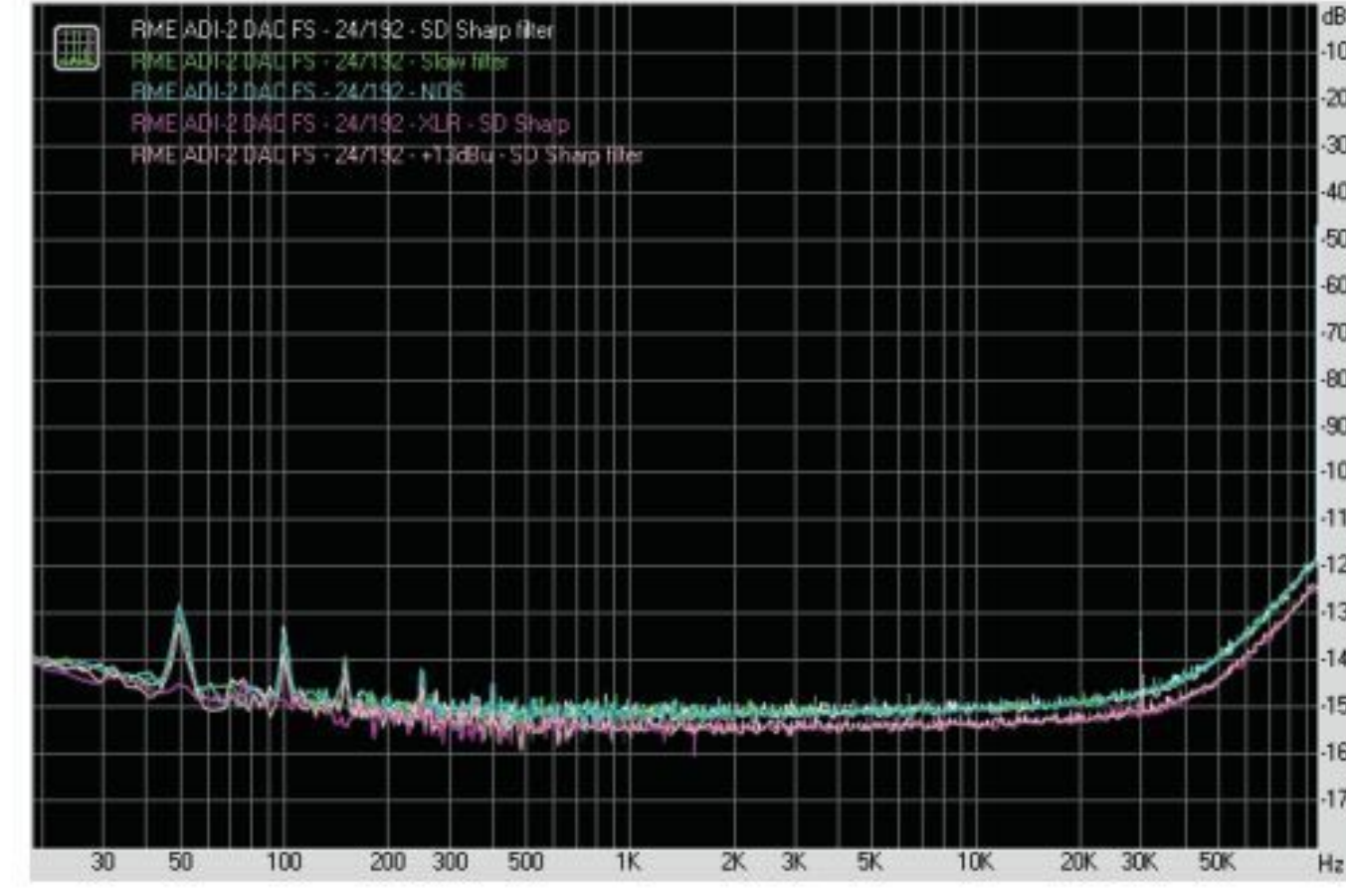
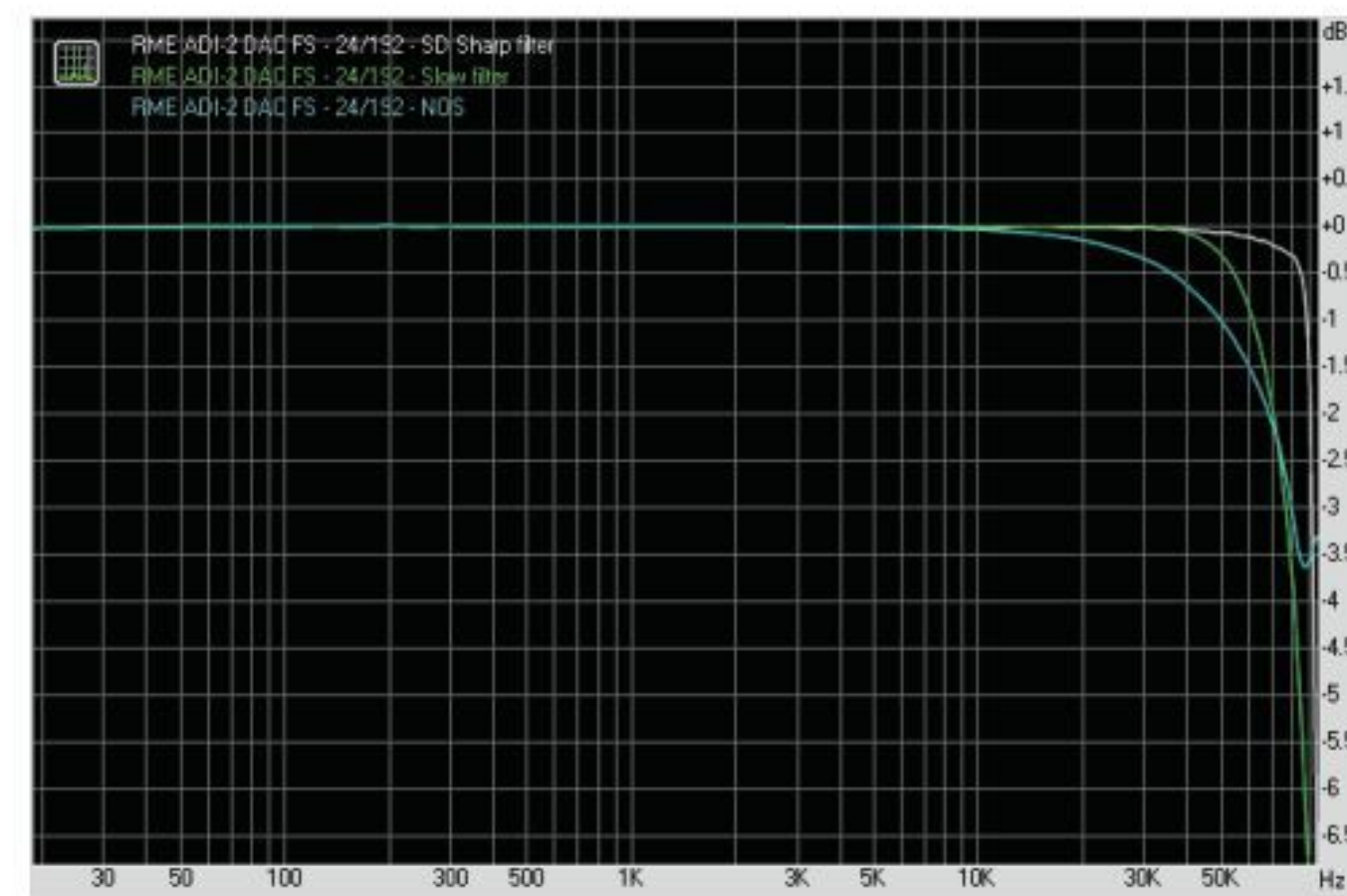
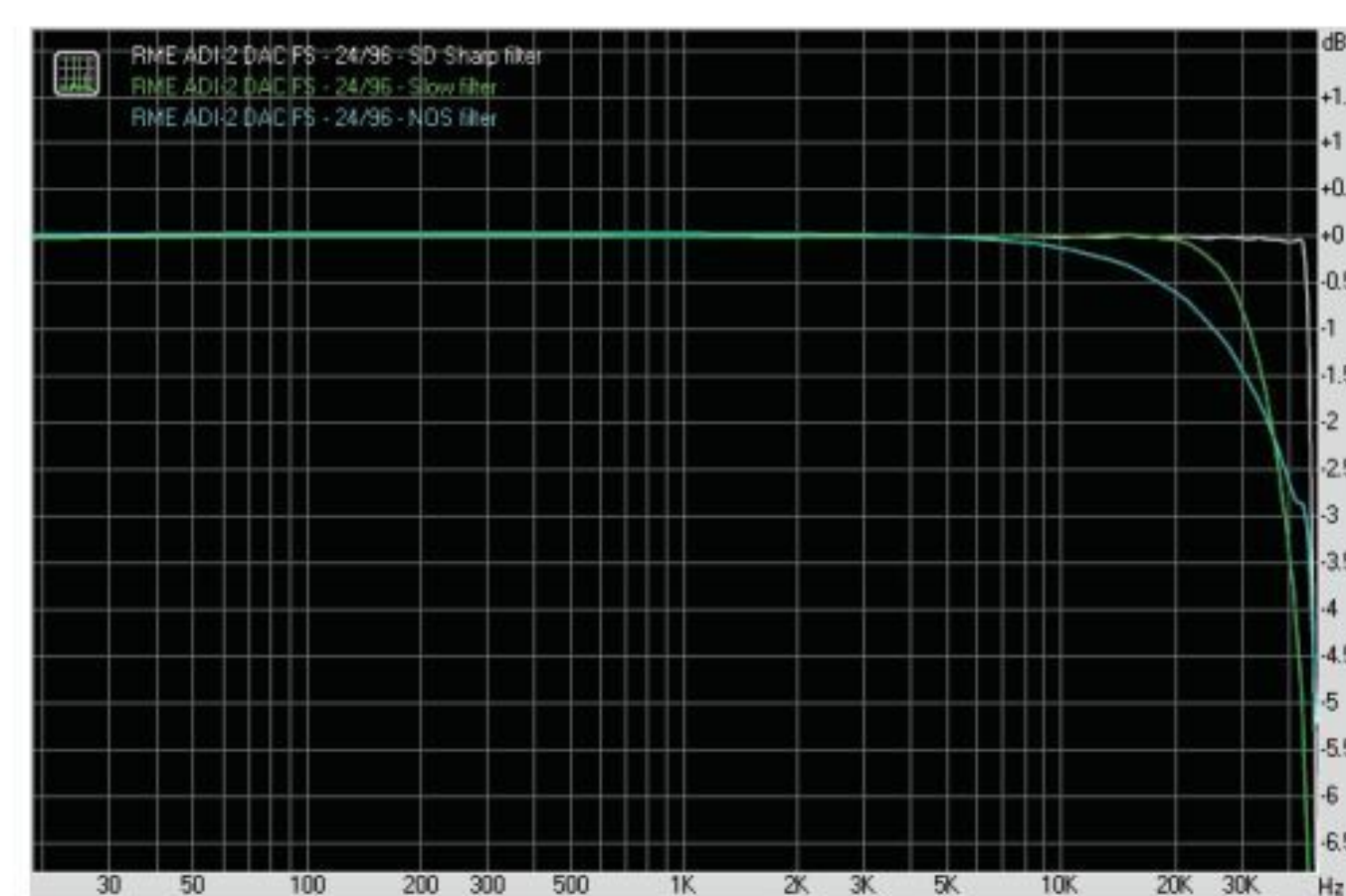
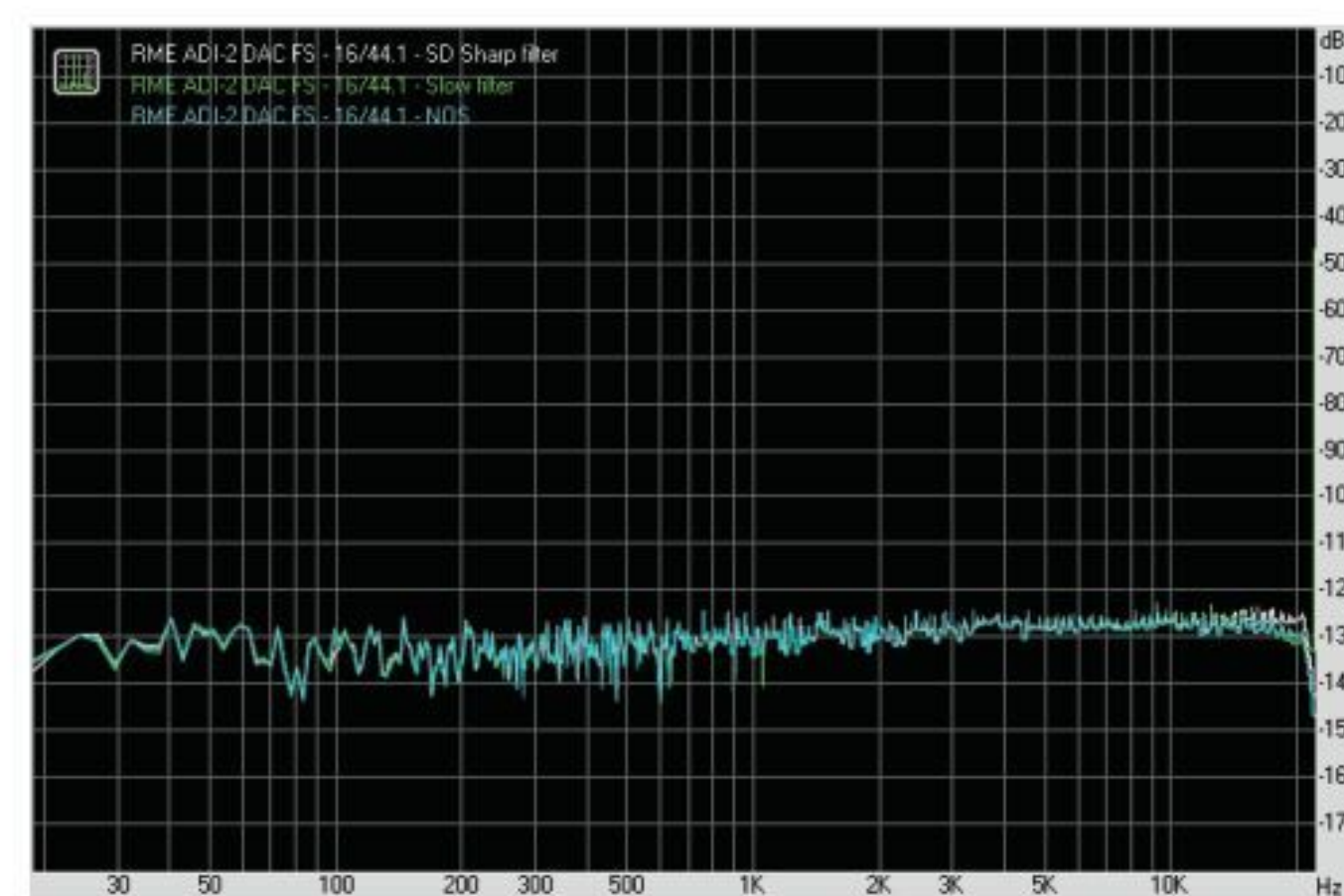
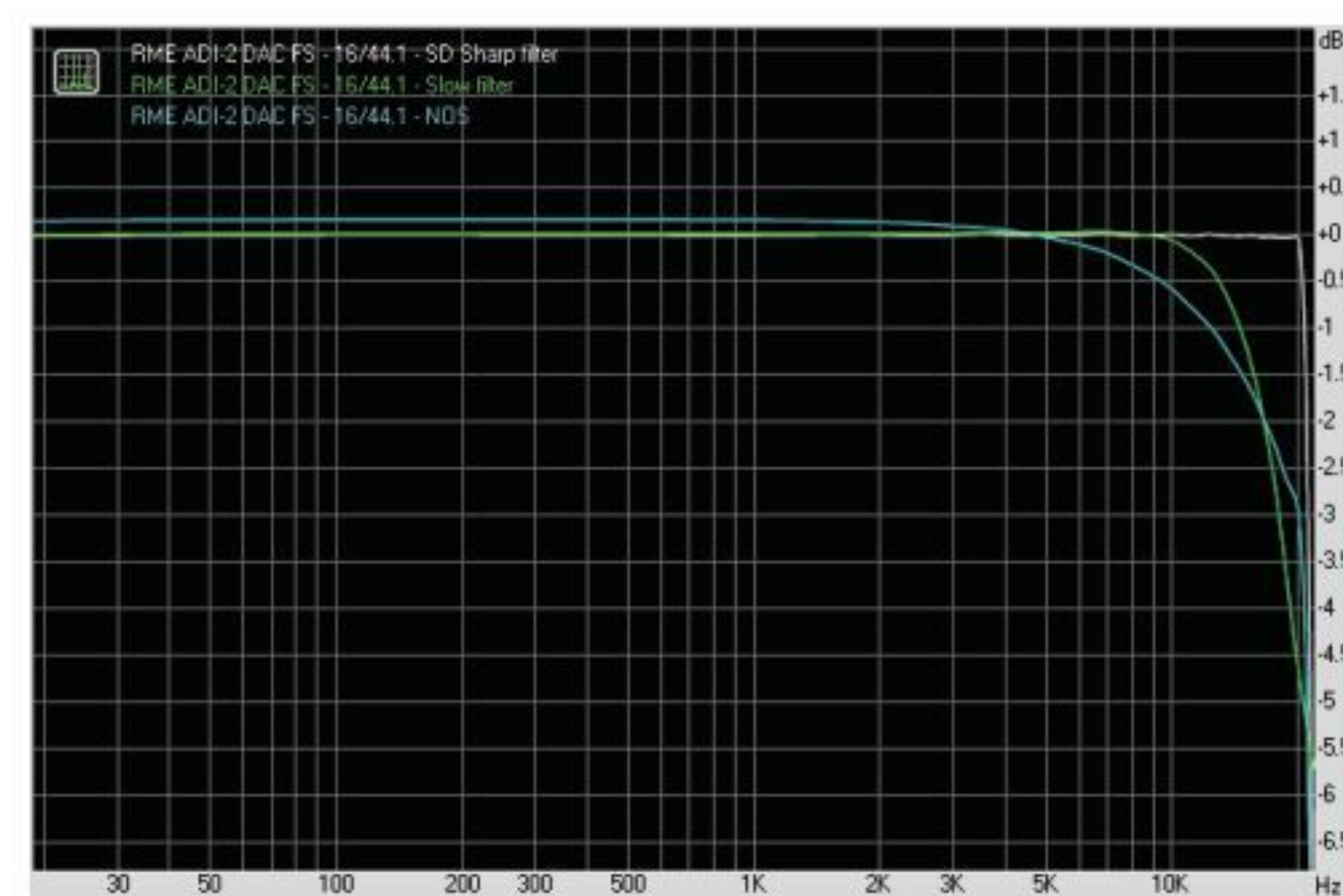
From genre to genre, from digital format to digital format, the result was the same: magnificent performance that was utterly revealing and engaging, with no headphone limitations whatsoever.

I used Audiofly AF180 Mk 2 IEMs with the IEM output, and it provided ample levels with them. There was not the slightest skerrick of noise and just as much authority in the music delivery as there had been in the Phones output.

I should note that the digital filters are configurable, with six to choose from (and two for DSD). I used the default filter: Short Delay Sharp.

MEASUREMENTS

The headphone output power was more than ample for all but the strangest of headphones. I measured it as capable of producing more than 350-milliwatts into 300Ω — that's 25dB on top of the sensitivity measurement of the headphones — and a massive 1.1-watts into 16Ω headphones. That's 30dB. That output is the highest I've measured into high-impedance headphones from a high-quality headphone amp, and only exceeded a few times for low-impedance headphones. Those results match the curve shown in the manual, so I'd expect that the full claimed 1.5-watts would be available into 32Ω loads.



The IEM outputs are locked into the lowest hardware output setting and this is reflected in the measurements. Basically, they could deliver up to a little over 0.7-volts into a load, or into an open circuit (the manual says 0.55-volts). That limits it when it comes to insensitive high-impedance headphones.

Into 300Ω, it can deliver less than 2mW, or around 2.5dB above headphone sensitivity rating. But, of course, this output isn't intended for such headphones. That's what the Phones socket is for. But for low-impedance earphones, that 0.71-ish volts is around 33mW, or 15dB above sensitivity. Which is plenty.

For measuring things such as frequency response, signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) and distortion, I've just switched over to a new ADC. Over the years, affordable (or semi-affordable) tech has gotten increasingly better. I started measuring with a Focusrite Forte ADC and then about 18 months ago took a large leap in performance with the strangely-named RME Babyface Pro interface. Yes, that's the same RME. Now I have taken another large leap by going to the RME ADI-2 Pro FS R Black Edition. And, yes, that's from the same family as this DAC.

To give a sense of the difference, with the new ADC this DAC achieved between 5.5dB and 8.0dB better noise levels.

It turned out that setting the output to 2.0VRMS — and that's the way to measure it, given this is a magazine for consumers, albeit high-end ones — the best non-clipping input setting of the ADC left more than 6dB of headroom. That 2.0VRMS output falls pretty much smack in the middle of the +4dBu and +13dBu input settings of the Pro FS ADC.

So, with 24-bit audio, the measured noise was -118.7dBA. THD was around 0.00015%. IMD+noise was around 0.00066%. Crosstalk was around -115.3dB. All those measurements were via the RCA outputs.

I repeated the measurement with a perfect level match between input and output, so as to see ultimate SNR.

That meant setting both devices to +13dBu. Noise came in at a stunning -121.7dBA, THD at 0.00018%, IMD+noise at 0.00048% and crosstalk at -115.5dB.

Using the XLR outputs the levels were a good match, so the signal-to-noise ratio was -121.9dB, THD was ever so slightly up to 0.00021% and IMD+noise remained at 0.00048%. Crosstalk also benefited a touch, coming in at -117.1dB.

Looking at the graphs, you can see how the two higher-output noise levels pretty much track each other, a little below the other traces. Except for one thing: the XLR trace shows none of the 50Hz and harmonics breakthrough. Presumably that (utterly inaudible) noise makes it through from the mains via the ground plane. This shows that the balanced circuitry really is balanced, floating apart from the ground.

As you can see from the graphs, with 192kHz sampling the frequency response with the SD Sharp filter (the Sharp filter was the same) was ruler-flat to above 40kHz and down by only around 0.3dB at 82kHz. The Slow filter (SD Slow was the same) was flat to almost 40kHz and down by 1dB at 61kHz, and down by 3dB at 77kHz. The NOS filter started rolling off at just 10kHz, and was -1dB at 50kHz and then -3dB at 80kHz.

A reminder: NOS stands for Non Over-Sampling. Fine. But don't be fooled into thinking that means how old-school DACs worked, like on the early CD players. You see, it also omits the output filter, so this setting generates significant levels of ultrasonic artefacts.

With 96kHz sampling, the Sharp filters were flat to nearly 44kHz! That's easily the most extended response I've seen at 96kHz. The others roll things off earlier.

Again, the sharp filters were flat to the extreme, this time with 44.1kHz sampling, hitting a brick wall just at 20kHz. The slow and NOS filters acted earlier and were down by 3dB or more at 20kHz.

I was also interested in the noise levels of the headphone outputs. I went for the big one, simply because it's more flexible. I first ran it with that output set to Hi-Power and adjusted the volume level so that 0dBFS delivered 0.5VRMS. The result was quite decent with a 24-bit, 96kHz signal. The frequency response was identical to the line outputs, SNR was -99.2dBA, THD was under 0.0005% and IMD+Noise just over 0.003%. The results were much the same whether the signal was running into an open circuit, a 300Ω load or a 16Ω load.

But remember, the output level is a combination of hardware analogue output level and digital volume control.

I experimented by changing the phones output to Auto Ref Level so that it automatically balanced the two for any given volume level to achieve best performance, then again chose an output level of 0.5 volts at 0dBFS. With the same signal, the SNR was now an astonishing -110dB, THD nearly halved to 0.00024% and IMD+noise better than halved to 0.0015%. In short, at the top of the class, or even better if such is possible.

CONCLUSION

In this ridiculously long review I have skimmed over a huge amount of material. The manual has 70 well-stuffed pages of content. I found it assumed way too much knowledge on the part of the user, but nonetheless there's a lot there.

For example, even though this unit doesn't have an ADC, there's no particular reason why some of the other signal routing capabilities of the ADI-2 Pro couldn't be retained. So it turns out that you can use the RME ADI-2 DAC FS to record onto your computer, via the USB connection to the unit, either optical digital audio or coaxial digital. I tried it. It works.

But all the extra features this unit offers are a bit beside the point. The fact is, in addition to superb audiophile performance, the RMI ADI-2 DAC FS has extraordinary control features — though you will need to study for a bit to get the best out of them. *⚡ Stephen Charles*

CONTACT DETAILS

Brand: RME

Model: ADI-2 DAC FS

Price: \$2,499 (RRP)

Warranty: Two Years

Distributor: Innovative Music Australia

Address: Unit 5, 31-37 Howleys Road
Notting Hill VIC 3168

T: (03) 9540 0658

E: info@innovativemusic.com.au

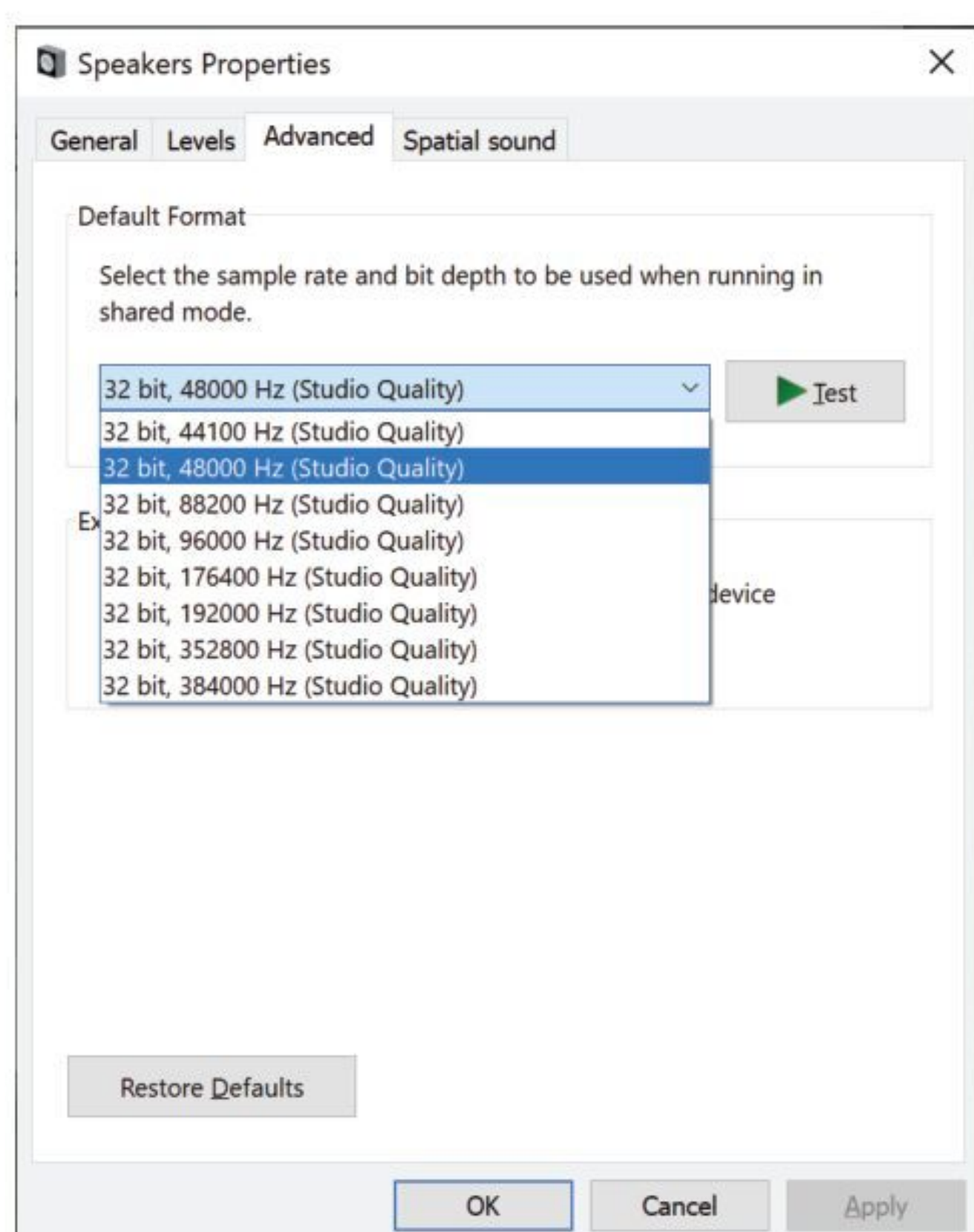
W: www.innovativemusic.com.au



- Brilliant performance
- Should handle absolutely any headphone, no matter how insensitive
- Excellent configurability



- MQA support
- Balanced headphones support
- Native DSD decoding not available to 'phones





Philip Swift SPENDOR

Before he bought the company, Philip Swift had been a fan of Spendor speakers, right back to the company's very beginnings.

Interview by Jez Ford

JEZ FORD: *Spendor recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, and I gather you were aware of Spencer Hughes' speakers from near the beginning. Where did you first encounter them, and why did you warm to them?*

PHILIP SWIFT: Even as a child I was fascinated by sound and music. While at school I made various amplifiers from scratch and built several loudspeakers.

Then, when I was a student at Imperial College, I began working part-time at the original Audio T hi-fi shop in London's Oxford Street. We had amplifier test equipment there which was better than most manufacturers had, and we had a proper demonstration room with a custom-built high-quality remote-controlled comparator. We got involved in some quite complex installation projects and we offered home demonstrations and part exchanges — at the time most dealers simply sold sealed boxes with no demonstration and no technical support or after-sales service. We did things very differently and we got noticed — we caught the attention of the hi-fi press, several professional sound engineers, many equipment designers, and several like-minded dealers. They would regularly drop by for a chat and a listen, or to show us their new products and sometimes to see how they measured.

So that's where I met Spen [Spencer Hughes], before Spendor was even incorporated as a limited company in 1971.

I remember also hearing a very early version of the Spendor BC1. It sounded amazing — so real, so clear, with a stable stereo image and, surprisingly at the time, articulate bass. It wasn't cheap: a pair of BC1s was about twice the price of KEF Concertos or B&W DM3s. Relative to these and other popular loudspeakers of the day the BC1s were slim, compact, and stand-mounted. I had to work a lot of hours to afford my first pair of BC1s! A few years later I had Spendor BC3s serial nos 1 and 2.

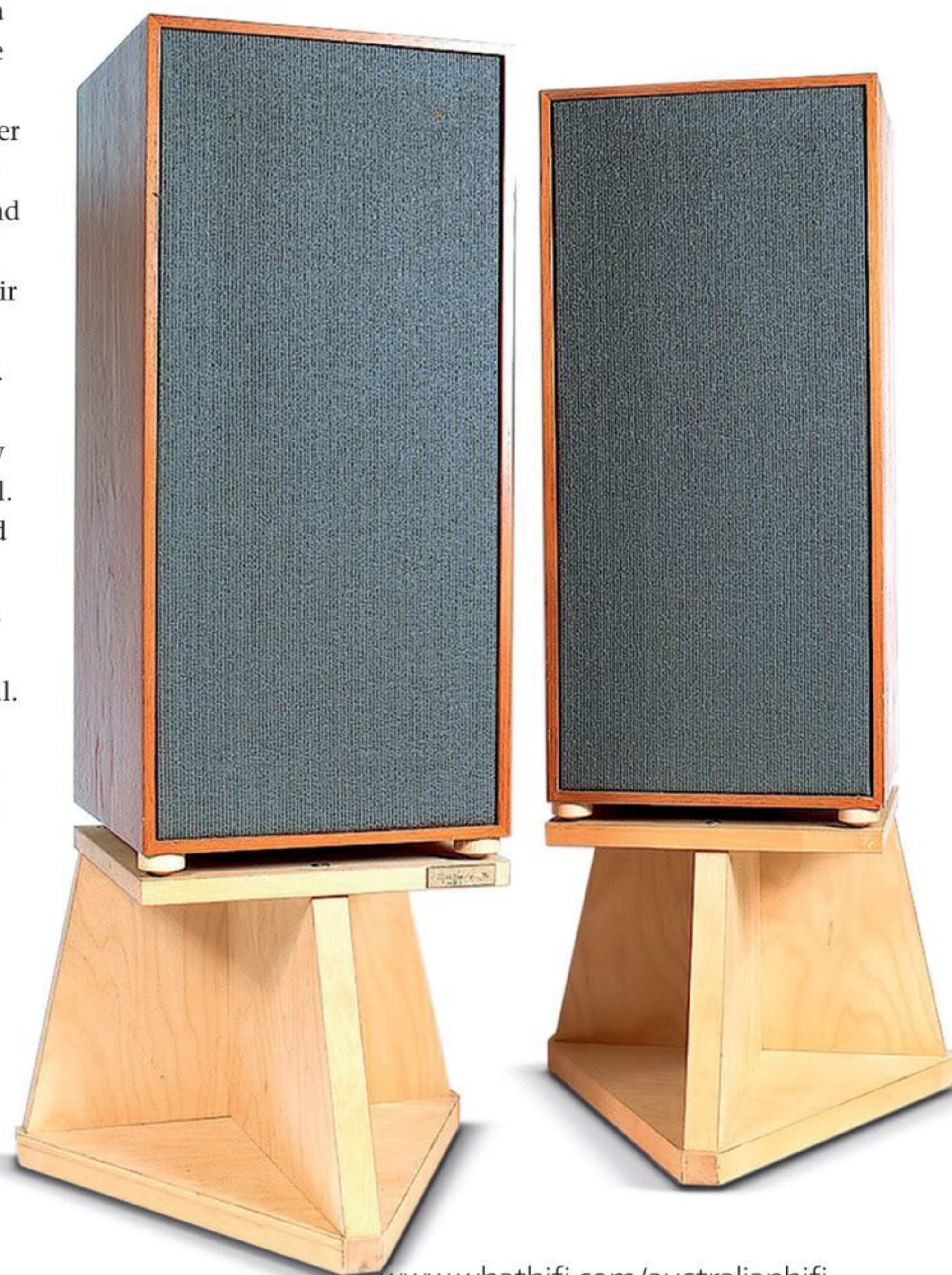
We sold many Spendor loudspeakers and I got to know Spen and his 'family' team well. I spent many hours talking and listening with Spen. He was happy to explain all the design and engineering that made Spendor loudspeakers so special.

So I guess I've always been a fan of not just Spendor loudspeakers but also the company and its elegant intelligent approach to engineering and manufacturing.

The original Spendor BC1s: "Relative to other popular loudspeakers of the day the BC1s were slim, compact and stand-mounted. I had to work a lot of hours to afford my first pair of BC1s!" says Philip Swift.

In my first year at university I also spent a summer working in the R&D department of Bang & Olufsen in Denmark, and I got to see how serious hi-fi manufacture was a complex and challenging business. So when I left university I knew there was only one thing I wanted to do. I spent a little while longer working as a consultant and service engineer for Audio T, then I joined the guys who went on to establish Mission — they were distributing KLH loudspeakers at the time.

I'd met Derek Scotland [co-founder of Audiolab] at university, and we decided to design our own products which subsequently became Lentek products when we moved to Cambridge to join the company with me as MD and Derek as Technical Director. Our products — loudspeakers, the Entre moving-coil cartridge, the Lentek head-amp and the Lentek Integrated amplifier — enjoyed good success, and we were also the first distributors outside of the US for Mobile Fidelity, Sheffield and Telarc. After we decided we were sure that our concept for a new range of affordable high-performance hi-fi electronics was viable, we decided to quit our day jobs to focus totally on developing the 8000A, 8000C and 8000P. That was done in a bedroom in my house. The original 8000A (over 13 years there were seven production versions, each one better than the last, but we called them all 8000A) was launched in October 1983 and I guess we never looked back.





The Audiolab 8000A amplifier, a classic design which was part of the initial Audiolab range, was developed, says Philip, in a bedroom of his house.

Today our turnover is about 10 times what it was back in 2000... so we must be doing something right.

JF: Can you untangle the timeline of who was designing Spondor speakers when?

PS: Initially Spondor loudspeakers were designed and engineered by Spencer Hughes. After Spencer passed away in 1983 Derek Hughes took over. When I acquired Spondor in 2000 Derek continued as consulting engineer until 2003 when he decided to semi-retire so he could pursue other projects. Graham Landick (ex B&W and TAG McLaren Audio) joined as Head of Loudspeaker Design and Engineering — that was when we started to introduce the major changes and innovations which were realised in our multi-award-winning S-Series loudspeakers. Terry Miles, who had over 30 years of experience working for Spondor as chief technician became Technical Design Manager in 2007.

In 2010 we moved to our own brand-new custom-fitted premises in Hailsham (East Sussex UK) and we now have our own specialist cabinet manufacturing facility (Timberworx) alongside our new Spondor R&D facility at the Advanced Manufacturing Park in Sheffield, where I am now heading up our new team which will include a number of fresh graduate engineers with the vision and skills to implement the most modern measuring techniques and simulation software. I believe this is the only way forward because it opens exciting possibilities for significant sound quality advances. Already we've come up with some exciting new ideas for future products, but they will take time to develop and prove.

Our new design team has some of the sharpest ears I've ever encountered, and everyone has a real passion for music and sound.

The Lentek Stereo Integrated amplifier of 1980, one of the first products created by Philip Swift with Derek Scotland before they founded Audiolab in 1983.

I knew if I didn't buy Spondor it would be sold to a Chinese company who were keen to acquire the brand and business and re-locate it to China

I saw there was great potential to transform Spondor into a progressive modern business and put the name firmly back on the international map. I realised that this would require new thinking, major changes and some time. Since I acquired the business I think we've transformed, streamlined and thoroughly modernised almost everything. Alongside our all-new product lines [the A-Line and D-Line, see overleaf] we've carefully and sensitively — and successfully — introduced the most significant ever advances to the Spondor Classic Line without losing any of the heart and soul of the 70s' originals.

JF: In 1998, Udo Zucker took over Audiolab to create TAG McLaren Audio. Was there an interim before you took on Spondor?

PS: I remember well — it was one year and one week, three months of that on gardening leave. Zucker didn't want any input from me and made it blatantly obvious he wouldn't be keeping me on. I wish I could have left sooner!

Then in 1999 I was on the phone to an industry friend in Taiwan. He mentioned that Spondor was for sale, was I interested? My initial reaction was that I wasn't thinking of getting involved in the loudspeaker business. I was well advanced with developing my own home automation — including high-end audio — business and had got involved in some exciting design/marketing/research projects with others. Then I thought — this is a unique never-to-be-repeated opportunity to acquire one of the world's most highly respected UK loudspeaker brands: I have to do it.

Spondor was owned by UK company Soundtracs plc [a professional audio mixing console manufacturer] who had acquired the business around 1993 when Dorothy Hughes [MD and wife of the late Spencer Hughes] decided it was time to retire and Derek Hughes [Spondor chief engineer, son of Spencer and Dorothy] who enjoyed his engineering role, didn't feel he wanted to take on the responsibility of running a business day to day. Spondor was doing steady business, but sales were not growing. The brand had lost some of its visibility, but Spondor's fine international reputation was solidly intact. I knew if I didn't buy Spondor it would be sold to a Chinese company who were keen to acquire the brand and business and re-locate it to China. A few minutes later Todd Wells [MD of Soundtracs] was on the phone to me! I acquired the business at the beginning of January 2000.



While engineering provides the tools we need to realise our ideas, our ears will continue to guide our decisions on what sounds right.

JF: You are still firmly based in the UK, where your drivers and cabinets are made, and the speakers assembled. Have you ever considered moving production to Asia, as have so many others?

PS: We design and manufacture all Spendor drivers and cabinets in-house in the UK. This gives us complete control over the quality of our products and manufacturing processes. It also means we can experiment with new ideas and realise/test them quickly in-house. Our cabinet manufacturing facility Timberworx is set-up specifically to make quality hi-fi loudspeaker cabinets and some turntable parts and plinths — we don't make kitchens or furniture. We make cabinets for Spendor and also for several other internationally respected specialist hi-fi manufacturers.

We have considered sourcing cabinets or even finished loudspeakers in Asia, but unless you are quite a large (by volume) manufacturer then the numbers, minimum orders, lead times, logistics, transportation transit times of manufacturing in Asia don't stack up for Spendor or for our cabinet customers. And interestingly we were recently approached by a well-established Chinese hi-fi manufacturer investigating the possibility of setting up some manufacturing in the UK!

It would be difficult to continue using some of the special — some proprietary — materials and techniques, hand finishing methods and special calibration and testing we have developed for our drivers, cabinets, crossovers, cabinets and complete loudspeakers if they were made in Asia or outside the UK. We also prefer to contribute to the UK economy as a value-adding manufacturer rather than to be an importer of outsourced products.

Our end-customers, dealers and distributors in Asia have always liked that our products are totally made in the UK. We wouldn't want to lose that advantage — it's an inherent element of the personality and individuality of our company.

JF: Is there anything exciting in the pipeline?

PS: Later this year we will be launching BASE. BASE is a new division of Spendor specialising in Vibration Control Technology. Our first three products have been three years in development, and they incorporate unique, elegant, and highly effective patented technology. They offer a solution which eliminates the all-pervading vibration which adversely affects the sound of all hi-fi and audio components — from streamers, to amps, turntables, power supplies, whether digital, analogue or tube, and regardless of cost. The effect of adding a BASE platform is instant, dramatic and clearly audible. 🎧

Spendor Loudspeakers and BASE vibration-cancelling platforms are distributed in Australia by Indi Imports Call (03) 9416 7037 or visit www.indiimports.com

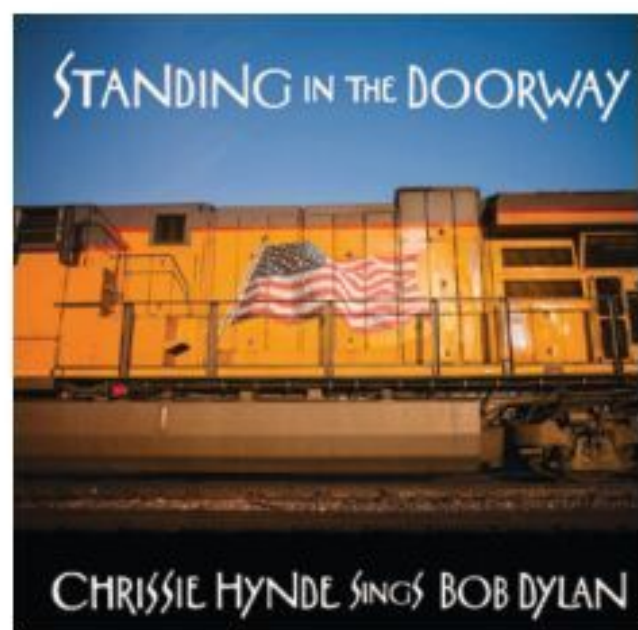


Examples from Spendor's three ranges today. ABOVE LEFT Spendor A7 (\$7,499) from the A-Line; ABOVE RIGHT: the D7.2 (\$9,499) from the D-Line; BELOW Spendor's Classic 200Ti, the titanium-baffled version of the company's flagship Classic 200 (\$38,999).



CHRISSIE HYNDE

Standing In The Doorway [BMG]



Bookended with songs from Christian-era Dylan albums 'Saved' and 'Shot Of Love', Hynde's perfectly formed and ravishingly personalised gift for Bob's 80th birthday avoids the obvious. Those two songs, *In The Summertime* and *Every Grain Of Sand* both serve as invocations of the Lord as the great redeemer. No need to push the metaphor, either. Throughout, Hynde's naturally

sensual vocal is guided by the sure touch of a no-slouch writer herself. The diamond heart of Bob's song for Elvis, *Tomorrow Is A Long Time*, is located, Blind Willie McTell and the title track get the connoisseur touch, and the spry lustful longing of *Love Minus Zero/No Limit* is bottled one more time, for the ages. Lockdown-enforced recording with producer Tchad Blake and her judicious Pretenders musical accomplice James Walbourne add to the focus and intimacy. The nine-song eulogy assumes the quality of a heady elixir. All told, a very wonderful thing.

JOHN HIATT

Leftover Feelings [New West]



Arriving in Nashville in 1970, John Hiatt rented a \$15-a-week flea-pit within spitting distance of RCA Studios. A lifetime later, the 68-year-old arrives full circle with a live-tracked session in RCA's Studio B. With the spirits of Elvis and Waylon in the air, lap-steel master Jerry Douglas bringing crystalline twang and Christian Sedelmyer's fiddle a constant flavour, Hiatt's palette here tends a

little towards country, but the best cuts still fall to the blues. *Mississippi Phone Booth* and *Little Goodnight* have sun-baked grooves and *Buddy Boy* offers a Douglas solo so heartfelt it hurts. The lyrics land, too, with Hiatt darkening *Light Of The Burning Sun's* lilt with the tale of a 21-year-old blowing his brains across the dashboard over a gambling debt. Nor is the veteran afraid of modernity: opener *Long Black Electric Cadillac* might be in the Sun Records vein, but Elon Musk would be interested to hear that the titular vehicle 'goes a thousand miles on a single charge'.

LOVEBREAKERS

Primary Colours [Wiretap]



Not many albums arrive out of the blue as polished as this debut from Birmingham's Lovebreakers. Bright and sunny and positively beaming with power-pop radiance, it's a bit Arctic Monkeys, a bit Replacements, maybe a touch Pixies, and the kind of record that sweeps you along helplessly on wave after (new) wave of melody and hooky choruses.

Complementing the pop-rock jauntiness, there's also a nice line in wry, bittersweet lyrics — *Family Man*, *Eye Roller*, *Horizons* ('I want my twenties to last forever') and *I Will Love Life* all showcase a firm grasp of irony and well-observed storytelling. Top honours, however, must go to the very fine nostalgic-sounding *L-A-UR-A (Vintage Movie)* and the closing headlong rush of the title track (complete with handclaps), surely designed to end any live set on a stratospheric high. Summery, effortlessly effervescent and pointing the way to a bright future.

THE FLATLANDERS

Treasure Of Love [Rack 'Em/Thirty Tigers]

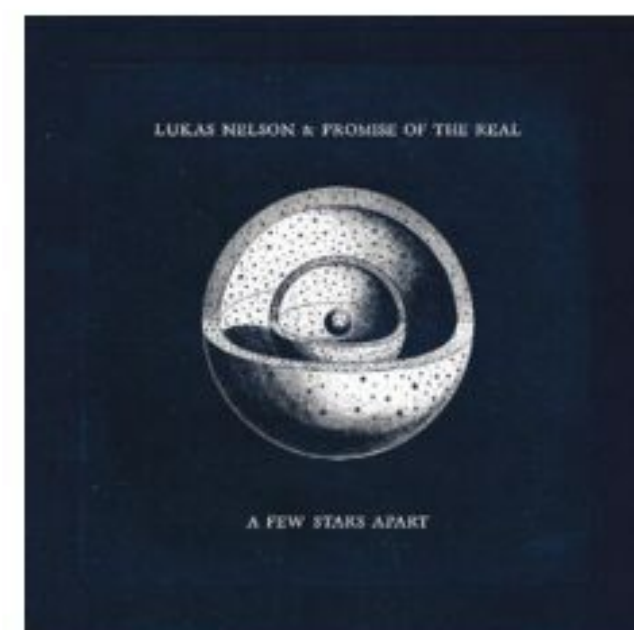


Twelve years between albums is a long time, but *Treasure Of Love* finds Texas trio Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely and Butch Hancock reactivating The Flatlanders to share some of the classic songs they have collected over their 50-year career. Essentially a country-rock history scrap-book, the album comprises for the most part a shedload of cover versions, some of which the band

once played 'way back in the early 70s, plus a handful of original tunes. The Hancock original *Moanin' Of The Midnight Train* is a terrific opener, as is *Long Time Gone*, which follows, but the real meat lies in the cracking covers, most notably *Give My Love To Rose* (Johnny Cash), *She Belongs To Me* (Bob Dylan) and *Snowin' On Raton* (Townes Van Zandt), while *Sittin' On Top Of The World* (Mississippi Sheikhs) used to close their set almost 50 years ago. And for us Aussies, there's the bopping *Mama Does The Kangaroo*. Altogether, tons of twang for your buck.

LUKAS NELSON/PROMISE OF REAL

A Few Stars Apart [Fantasy]

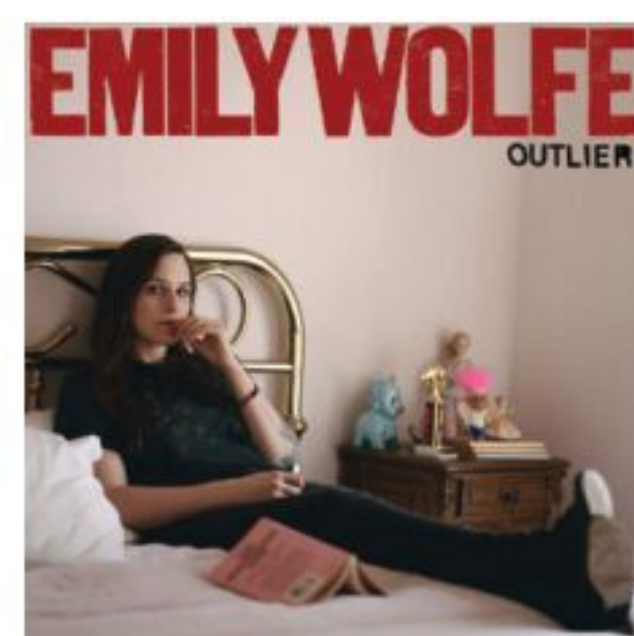


It can't be easy being Willie Nelson's son. Too naturally talented to spurn music, Lukas joined his father's band as a teenage guitarist, learned his craft and forged his own path with his band Promise Of The Real, as well as backing Neil Young, collaborating with Lady Gaga, and winning a BAFTA and a Grammy for his work on 'A Star Is Born'. *A Few Stars*

Apart is their sixth album and their finest by some distance. Lukas is consummate songwriter, who offers balm on *We'll Be Alright* and the heartstoppingly gorgeous *Hand Me A Light*, rue on *Throwin' Away Your Love*, and wry wit on the finger-picking *More Than We Can Handle*. Musically, he harkens to both the Gram Parsons-spawned cosmic country, most obviously on *Giving You Away*. The anthemic *Perennial Bloom (Back To You)*, is driven by power chords, and *Wildest Dream* shows he can get loud and ragged when the mood takes him.

EMILY WOLFE

Outlier [Crows Feet]



Once you've made your name playing blues guitar, people are always reluctant to let you do anything else. But after impressing with her 2019 self-titled debut, showcasing startling instrumental skills and well-crafted blues/rock tunes, *Outlier* shows that Texan Emily Wolfe is determined to break out of that ghetto. While *No Man* evokes a rootsy strain of grunge reminiscent of PJ Harvey,

there's a gutsy electro-rock sheen enveloping *Cover Of Virtue* and *LA/NY* that evokes images of Joan Jett guesting with Royal Blood. On this album her celebrated fret-frazzling abilities are kept largely under wraps, in favour of yearning, anthemic pop such as *Something Better* and the nostalgic *Vermillion Park*. *Heavenly Hell's* love-lorn dream-pop even recalls Fleetwood Mac. They, of course, started out in a similar vein to Wolfe but have since gone every which way but blues. If Wolfe is planning on heading the same way, she's sure made a sure-footed start. 🎸

DR FEELGOOD

Singles: The U.A. Years+ [PLG UK Vintage]

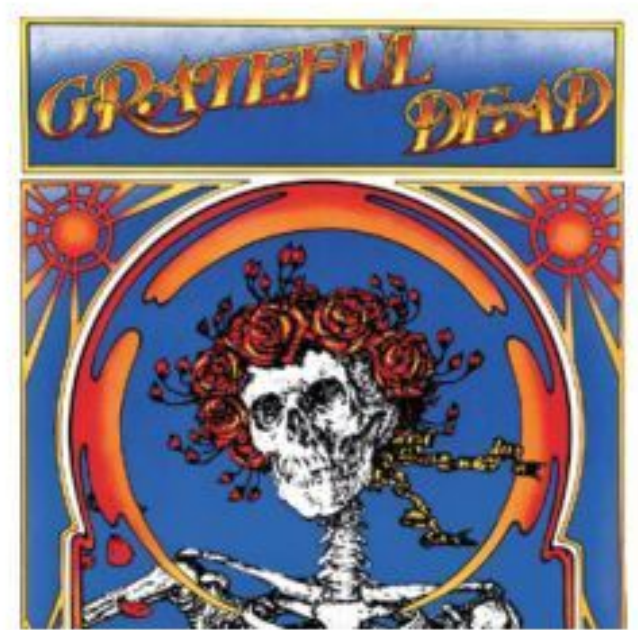


For those seeking respite from the bloated mainstream rock of the mid-70s, London's pub-rock scene provided a pre-punk oasis, where bands reconnected with the genre's R&B roots. Dr Feelgood's original line-up cut a menacing dash on stage and on record with their stripped-down, hot-wired R&B sound. This two-LP set, originally released in 1989, delivers more than its title implies,

packing in 15 years' worth of Dr Feelgood singles covering the band's two most celebrated line-ups and later post-UA singles from formations centred on frontman Lee Brilleaux. Early cuts *Roxette* and *She Does It Right*, driven by Johnson's taut riffs, connect like uppercuts. The band's rise is charted with *Back In The Night*, fuelled by Brilleaux's searing slide guitar, and a potent live reading of *Riot In Cell Block No. 9*. Brilleaux's vocal charisma shines on the raucous *Crazy 'Bout Girls* and the raw-boned *Mad Man Blues*. A satisfying, comprehensive overview.

GRATEFUL DEAD

Greatful Dead [Rhino]



This is a 50th-anniversary edition of an in-concert classic, now bundled with a previously unheard live disc. The Dead were on a roll in 1971, having twice made the US *Top 30* the previous year with 'Workingman's Dead' and 'American Beauty', albums that shifted them onto the relatively conventional terrain of rootsy Americana. As if to reconnect with core principles, the band's

response was *Skull and Roses* (aka 'Skull And Roses'), a live double from New York and San Francisco that found them in their natural habit, squaring melodic rock with long-form experimentation. An 18-minute *The Other One* is the keenest expression of the latter, both a striking showcase for skins man Bill Kreutzmann and a wonderful example of the Dead's gift for telepathic improv. The album really hops up a notch with the inclusion of three new songs: *Bertha*, *Playing In The Band* and *Wharf Rat*, the latter featuring one of Jerry Garcia's finest vocals.

KISS

Off The Soundboard: Tokyo 2001 [UME]

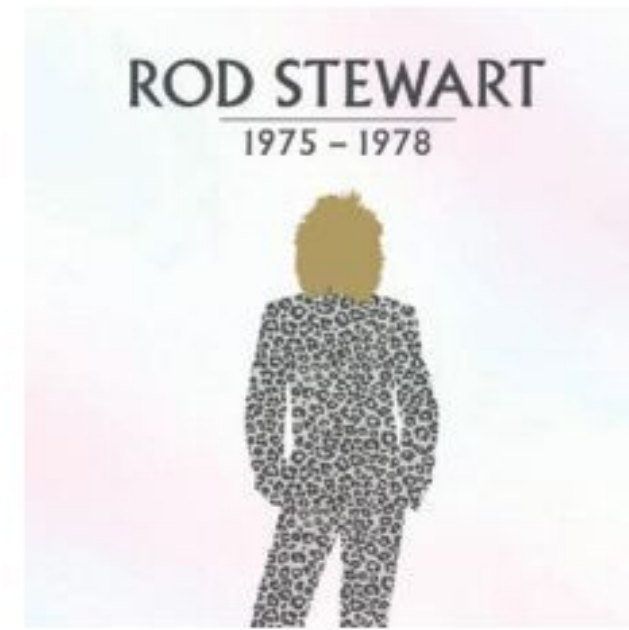


Although Kiss and the Grateful Dead have little else in common, both command loyal fan armies obsessed with the *minutiae* of their line-up fluctuations and recordings so in 2019, Gene Simmons decided to follow the Dead's example and release archived live shows. Tokyo 2001 is a strong start to the series, providing an official recording of a short-lived line-

up that was convened at the end of the reunited original band's farewell tour, with early-90s drummer Eric Singer replacing Peter Criss. By comparison, the same tour's *Alive: The Millennium Concert* sounds sluggish, Singer's drive and energy here lighting a fire under his bandmates. The sound is raw, clear and appears to be free of overdubs (Frehley plays well but fluffs the odd note), so it really is straight from the mixing desk, and with deep cuts such as *Talk To Me* alongside plenty of hits this is a die-hard fan's delight.

ROD STEWART

Rod Stewart 1975-1978 [Warner]



Rod Stewart's relocation to the US in 1974 for tax reasons might have taken some of the shine off of his Faces image as a streetwise charmer, but for all his supermodel-squiring antics he never lost touch with his musical roots, as this wallet-damaging (\$278) five-LP box set reminds us. Spanning the period between 1975's 'Atlantic Crossing' and

1978's 'Blondes Have More Fun', it captures Rod in his imperial phase, morphing effortlessly from satin-suited balladeer (*Sailing*) to funky social commenter (*The Killing Of Georgie*) to leopard-skin-clad lothario (*Do Ya Think I'm Sexy?*). The bonus 'Rarities' disc includes five previously unreleased songs: Smokey Robinson's *You Really Got A Hold On Me*, the Stones-y *Honey Let Me Be Your Man*, *Don't Hang Up*'s disco shuffle and a spiky *Silver Tongue* that prove that, for all the glitter and gladrags, Rod hadn't lost his bite.

ALICE COOPER

Three Temptations From Alice [RetroWorld/Floating World]



As far as reissues go, this one is pretty much straight down the line: three solid quality Alice albums in one vanilla package — 'Trash' ('89), 'Hey Stoopid' ('91) and 'The Last Temptation' ('94). 'Trash' signalled a bit of a late-80s resurgence for Coop. Produced and co-written by Desmond Child and led from the front by smash hit *Poison*, the album is quite the commercial showcase, featuring a

plethora of guest stars from most of Aerosmith to Bon Jovi and beyond. 'Hey Stoopid' was an attempt to replicate the chart-bothering, guest-strewn alchemy of 'Trash' but lacked Child's magic touch as producer, although *Love's A Loaded Gun* and *Feed My Frankenstein* are pretty nifty. With grunge in the ascendant 'The Last Temptation', shorn of 80s flash and glam, was a bit of a return to lean hard-rocking form, a classic thematically focused album with Alice playing a sinister ringmaster, and Chris Cornell's excellent *Stolen Prayer* and *Unholy War*.

THE SORROWS

The Complete Sorrows [Grapefruit]

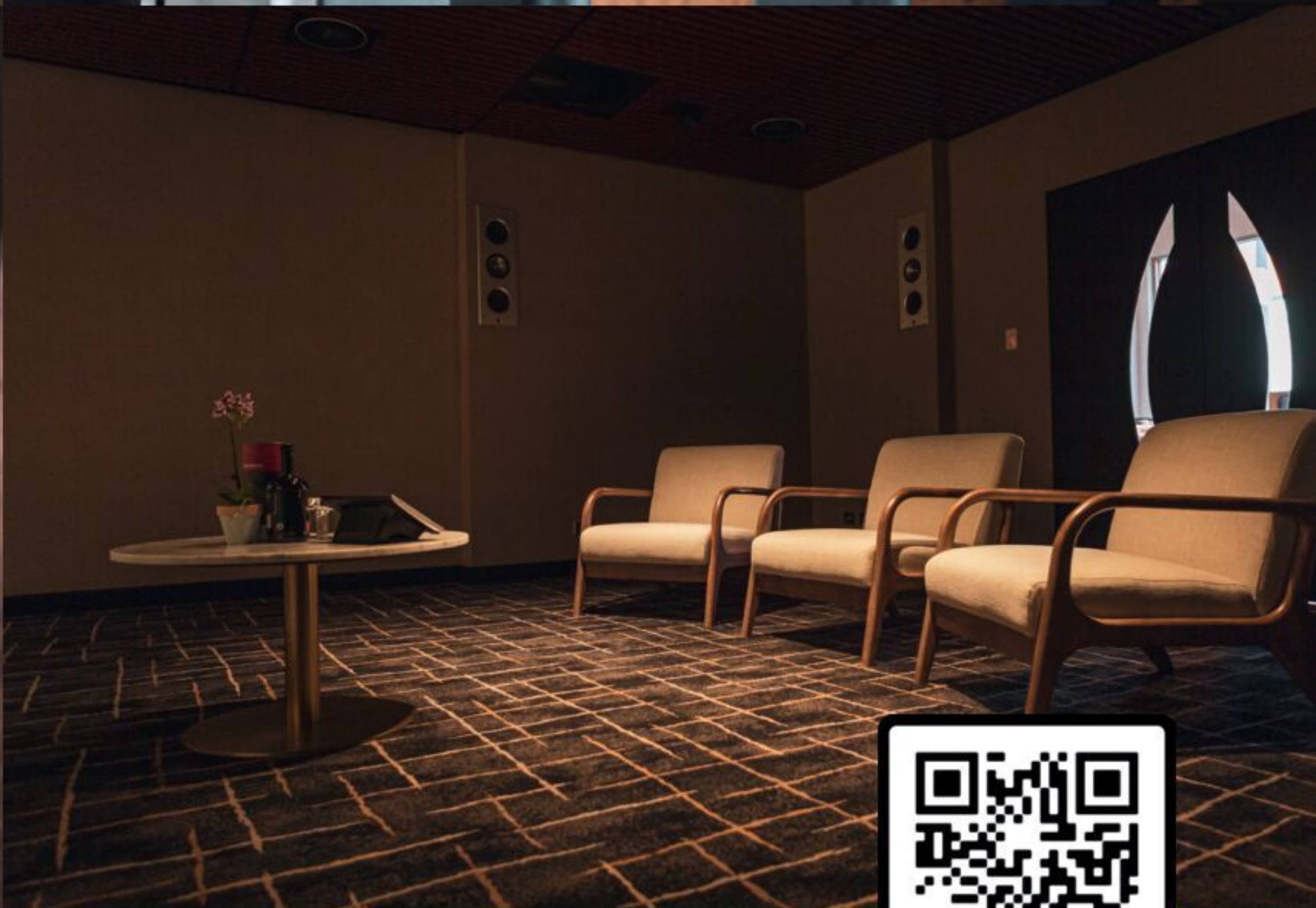


This four-CD box set proves that The Sorrows deserve to be far more than a footnote in pop history. A tightly wound five-piece, their not-so-secret weapon was singer Don Fardon, whose soulful versatility sees him cope admirably with everything from Kinks-style pop (*I Don't Wanna Be Free*) to Merseybeat (*No No No No No*) to thuggish, Animals-style R&B (*Go And Find A Cave*) on

their impressive 1965 debut 'Take A Heart'. The departure of Fardon to pursue a solo career saw no dip in songwriting quality — check out 1967 psych-pop gem *Pink Purple, Yellow And Red* — and a move to Italy saw them collaborate with Nico Fidenco on the movie theme for Ypotron, and release an album of contemporary covers including solid versions of Traffic's *Mr Fantasy* and the Small Faces' *Rollin' Over*. Collectors will want the four previously unreleased tracks, but anyone with even a passing interest in the 60s beat boom will find much to enjoy here. ♪

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BEABADOOBEE

Our Extended Play [Dirty Hit]



Brought to life on the idyllic English countryside, it's quite fitting that Our Extended Play revels in a summery, effervescent essence of playfulness. Opener *Last Day On Earth* is dreamy and wistful, pairing nicely with the subtle lap-steel twang on *Animal Noises*. The jagged riffage and dense, glitchy production on *Cologne* makes it stand out between the two softer

cuts, but it doesn't sound out of place at all. The record *en masse* is cohesive, but each track illuminates a disparate angle of Beabadoobee's prismatic musicality, previously demonstrated to good effect on her four previous EPs and her album *Fake It Flowers*. The track *Lucid* is the input from Matty Healy and George Daniel (of The 1975), who co-wrote all four tracks on the EP; their folky, pseudo-whimsical indie-pop zest seeps through in different ways, but thankfully never takes the spotlight from Bea's (actually Beatrice Laus) own idiosyncratic character.

ALICE SKYE

I Feel Better But I Don't Feel Good [Bad Apples/University]



Equally pensive and punchy, Triple J Unearthed Indigenous winner Alice Skye's second LP following her debut album 'Friends with Feelings' back in 2018 is nothing short of breathtaking. Ebbing and flowing between deep, simmering melancholy and bright, captivating dreaminess, the Wergaia woman from Horsham, Victoria, simply refuses to hold

back; she's crafted a record perfect for those long, introspective late-night road trips. Guitars on the record are subtle and understated, but strikingly impactful when they do lead the fray — take for example the gravelly, distorted leads on *Everything Is Great* or the shimmering, '70s-channelling strums on *Grand Ideas*. Less really is more throughout; the bold, attention-grabbing solo on *Browser History* feels so because it's underscored by a simple, cantering beat, Skye's warm, honeyed ruminations so easy to melt into on either side of it.

BILLIE EILISH

Happier Than Ever [Darkroom/Interscope Records]

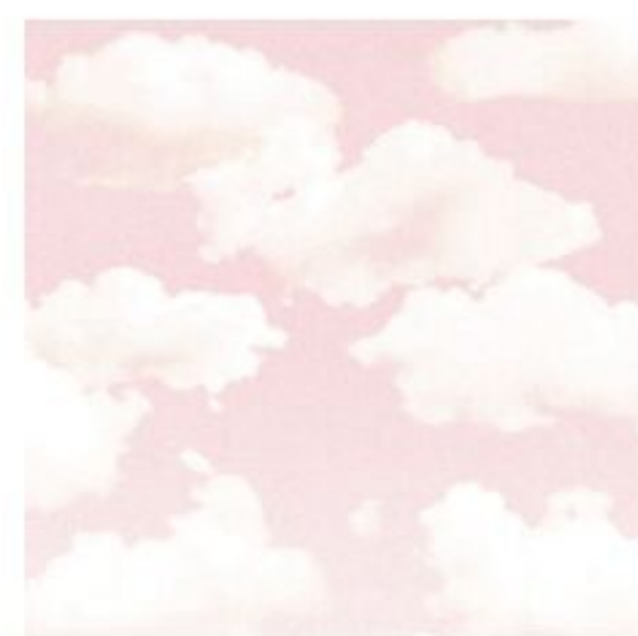


You don't need to take a close look at the album's cover to see she's not happy. And if you take a closer look, you'll see the tears. And in fact her second album isn't a happy one at all, with various of the tracks dealing with abuse, emotional turmoil, unhappiness at leaving a relationship (temporarily or permanently) and titles such as *Lost Cause*, *Getting Older*, and *Everyone Dies*. But Happier

Than Ever is not a patch on her wonderful first album. When on *Male Fantasy* she sings "I'm going back to therapy" she probably would have been better going back to re-write some of the lyrics and some of the melodies and most of the arrangements. "I wanna do bad things to you/ Don't want to treat you well" she sings on the oddly-titled *Oxytocin*. The recording is fabulous though. The guitars and bass on *Billie Bossa Nova* are absolutely outstanding, the clarity of the percussion is also amazing and her voice is as beautiful as ever. So an audiophile favourite then.

TURNSTILE

Glow On [Roadrunner/Warner]



Turnstile have always tackled their slate of scream 'n' shred with an outsider's perspective, spicing up their palate with summery grooves and kinetic percussion. But on LP3, it's like they've finally cracked the code to making an infallibly calamitous, uncompromisingly headstrong hardcore album. *Glow On* is cinematic, riveting and rhapsodic; the sheer depth and dynamism

of its musicality cannot be understated. It's a notably short record at 35 minutes, but they really make every second count. *Endless*, for example, clocks in a few seconds off two minutes long, yet it takes the listener on a full-fat adventure through a sonic forest of shimmering bass, effects-soaked vocals and a tearing breakdown. *Glow On* makes their previous efforts look embarrassing in comparison. This is the kind of record that makes us feel justified in spending \$500 on a pair of headphones; a true masterclass in the art of heavy music.

COURTNEY BARNETT

Things Take Time, Take Time [Milk/Remote Control]

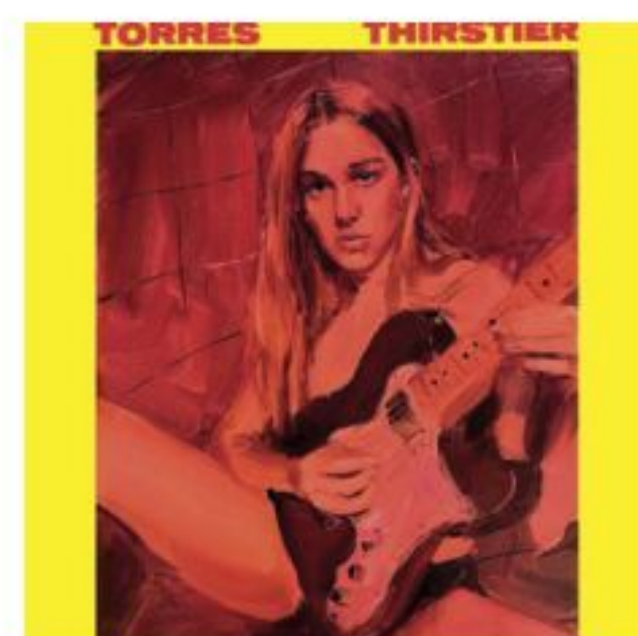


Courtney Barnett's 2015 debut, 'Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit', was brisk, bright and lively, like a summer's day at the beach. Its follow-up, 'Tell Me How You Really Feel' was sharp, ripping and acerbic, like the storm that night. So, naturally, LP3 feels like the morning after: foggy and humid, debris caused by the wind in the trees scattered over the lawn. It's clear

Barnett is much more comfortable in her storytelling these days — the songs are reflective, inspired, and distinctly human. Production is loose and experimental; percussive clicks and pops meld with raw, cerebral fretwork. The soundscape is overall very sparse and relaxed, letting tracks such as the drowsy, pseudo-celestial *Here's The Thing* and the groovy, buoyant and punchy (if far too short) *Take It Day By Day* really shine. Though certainly not as immediate or memorable as Barnett's earlier work, *Things Take Time* is beautiful and brilliant in oh so many ways.

TORRES

Thirstier [Merge Records]



Writing and recording a great album during Covid-19 is difficult, but Mackenzie Scott (aka Torres) has pulled one out of the hat with her latest, *Thirstier*. It's also her second album in 18 months, so her new romantic relationship obviously suits her. Though most of the songs are reflections on love, her new relationship and stories of self-discovery, not all are upbeat. *Big Leap* is about the near-fatal accident of someone close to her. Despite the subject-matter, she makes it into a beautiful song. She also shows her talent as a singer, managing to deliver lyrics that have little rhyme. However this track's orchestration is a little too much over the top, which is also true of many others on *Thirstier*, though she also uses this to good effect, as on *Keep The Devil Out* and *Kiss The Corners*. The title track needs some work on the lyric, but it's a great song, though not up to the best two on this one, which are *Don't Go Putting Wishes* and *Hugs From a Dinosaur*. 🎸

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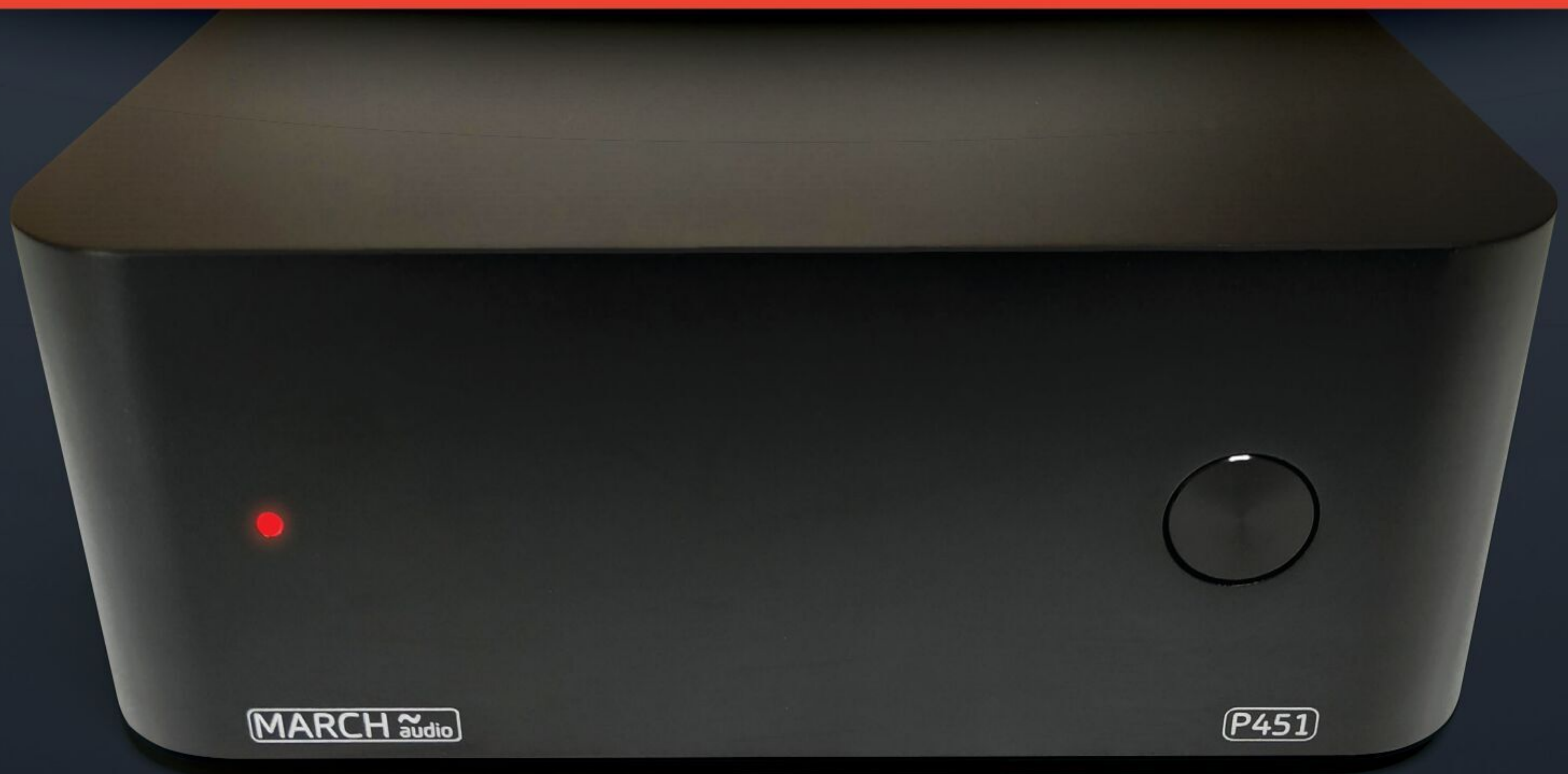
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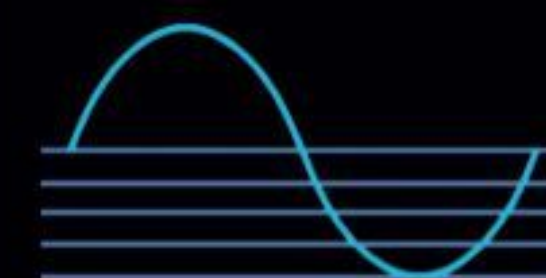
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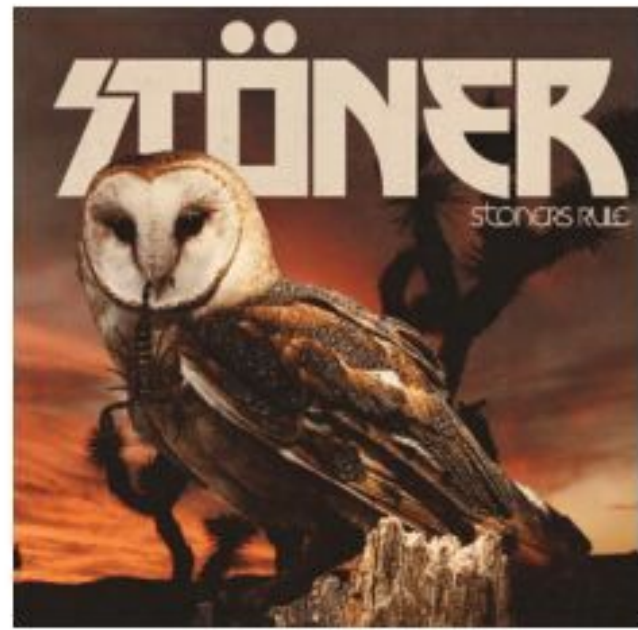


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STÖNER

Stoners Rule [Heavy Psych Sounds]



Kyuss's influence vastly outstrips the number of people who gave a shit about them at the time. The four albums Kyuss recorded before their abrupt split have become the holy tablets of modern stoner rock, inspiring a generation of red-eyed longhairs in greasy t-shirts to attempt to replicate their desert-mystic enigma and steamroller-heavy low end. Stöner have more right than most,

given that they're centred around two ex-Kyuss members: drummer-turned-guitarist Brant Björk and bassist Nick Oliveri. Stoners Rules' seven sunbaked tracks sound like they've blown in from the heart of the Californian desert. The fuzzy guitar and inimitable rolling bass that usher in opener *Rad Stays Rad* simultaneously connect to the duo's past and tease at what's to come here. But the old magic never quite materialises. That's largely down to Björk's voice. His inert singing style lacks the sense of drama needed to kick the music to the next level.

THE SCIENTISTS

Negativity [In The Red]



There is an argument to be made for Kim Salmon's Scientists starting grunge in a dingy Perth garage in 1978. You can trace a direct link between their swampy blues and psych rock and the no-wave jag of Melbourne's Tropical Fuck Storm. This new album, featuring a line-up last caught together on an album 35 years ago, is a riot of bad intentions. Songs such as *Make It Go*

Away and the Rowland S. Howard-esque *Naysayer* tumble sprawling into the harsh light of night, plectrums twitching, Salmon moaning like a defrocked clergyman. The sound is basic, raw, and bitingly sarcastic. There's no pretence here, just good old-fashioned rock'n'roll that The Scientists helped cement Australia's reputation for. *Seventeen* ODs on the feedback like prime-time Cramps. *The Science Of Suave* and aptly-titled *Dissonance* are just plain rockin'. The Scientists are back again (did they ever go away?) to haunt and taunt your darkest nightmares.

TIM FINN & PHIL MANZANERA

Caught By The Heart [Expression]

Tim Finn & Phil Manzanera
Caught by the Heart
ft. Elliot Finn



This teaming of former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera and Crowded House's Tim Finn has its roots in a 1975 meet when his pre-House band Split Enz supported Roxy Music in Sydney. Caught By The Heart, the first in a series of EPs, majors in Cuban rhythms and Latin American styles. Opener *Mambo, Salsa, Guaguanco* is a riot of references to Tito Puente and Celia Cruz,

celebrating the atmosphere of a Havana nightclub, with saxophonist João Mello shifting the current. The title cut is a Covid-19 love story given a global twist — Auckland meets London and Stuttgart. More international feel drives the Spanish-sung *Bajo Luz Distinta*, while *Vamos Despacio* could be Bowie in the barrio: a funeral march built on sparse synth and a cracking flugelhorn. You could use this album to brighten a sopping wet staycation with some deep-pop escapism, because these veteran glamsters have sent us a postcard from sultry climes.

BIG PAUL FERGUSON

Virtual Control [Cleopatra]

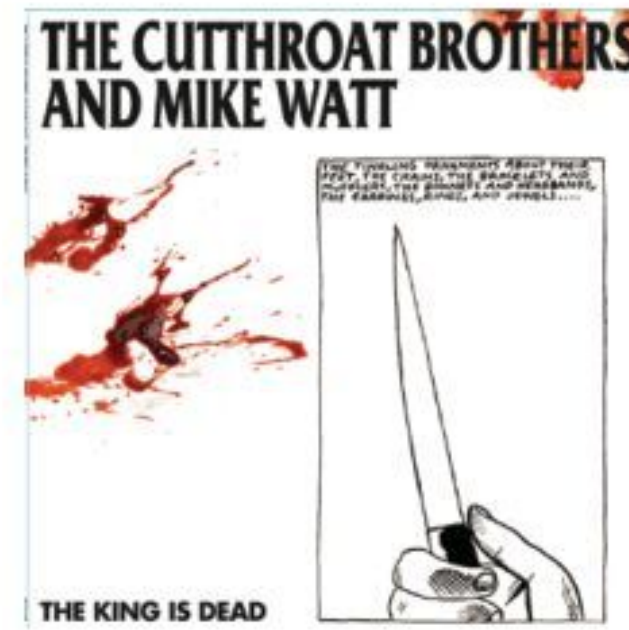


The densely woven soundscapes of this, Ferguson's first solo album, affirm how his role in Killing Joke's apocalyptic maelstrom extended 'way beyond hugely influential tribal drum patterns. Although he's been singing backing vocals since the first Joke album, Ferguson's subtly expressive voice is here couched in steely intensity. Underscored by his quintessential drum

tattoos, he addresses isolated modern times with concise eloquence, enhanced by collaborator Mark Gemini Thwaite's Bunnymen-evoking guitar, ominous electronic drones and subliminal voices, bolstered by Marilyn Manson escapee Tim Skold's industrial riffing on *Seeping Through The Cracks* and Die Krupps co-founder Jurgen Engler's intoning on the claustrophobic *Dystopian Vibe*. While younger Joke disciples will love it, older fans will welcome the drummer finally stepping up and getting wicked, still with his eternally lethal cool.

THE CUTTHROAT BROTHERS

The King Is Dead [Hound Gawd]



If you're going to bring a bassist into the mix for the first time, you might as well aim high. As a duo, Jason Cutthroat and Donny Paycheck (barbers in their day jobs) have launched a thousand puns about their razor-sharp, super-slick garage rock. For *The King Is Dead*, though, they've teamed up with Minutemen, Firehose and Stooges bassist Mike Watt, which adds a whole

new dimension of cool to their sound. The touch points are on familiar ground: the swinging rockabilly punk of *Medicine* and *Wrong* aiming a wink at The Cramps, the fuzzed-up pop melody of *Out Of Control* doffing its cap to the Jesus And Mary Chain at their cheeriest. But it's all presented with such vintage panache and cinematic swagger that it comes off as completely timeless, a pean to unfiltered rock'n'roll passed down through the ages. With Cutthroat's howling guitars in battle with Watt's rumbling bass, this album is a thrill from start to finish.

BUCKCHERRY

Hellbound [Earache]



How does a band with nearly 25 years and eight albums on the clock manage to top everything they've done before? It would seem that Buckcherry's answer is to make a great upbeat record that has both anthemic stompers and more considered, polished moments. Powerhouse frontman Josh Todd leads the Bucks through the blazing opening trio of *54321*,

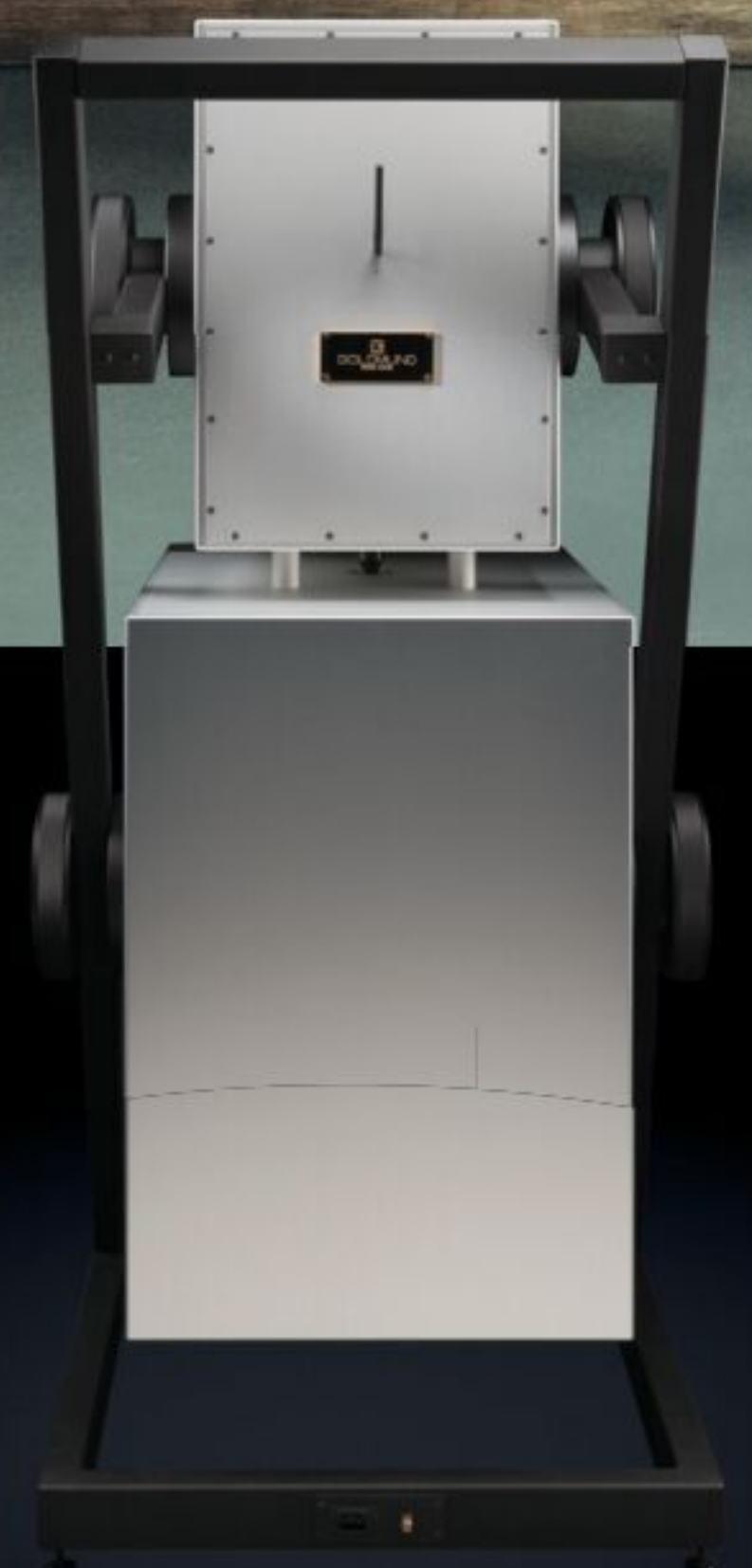
So Hott and the title track, *Buckcherry*. Here is one of those rare albums where everyone involved in recording it was clearly out to have a good time, and we listeners joyously get caught up in the fun and the debauchery. The band then head for a more bluesy strut with *Gun*, mirrored later on *Wasting No More Time*, while *No More Lies* offers Billy Rowe the chance to shine during a laid-back lead guitar workout. Stuffed with killer material, *Hellbound* is the party-rock album of 2021 and by far and away the best yet from Buckcherry. 🎸



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