

hi-fi news

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI

& Record Review

Exclusive

MICHI MAGIC

**Rotel's star '90s
amps rebooted
& supercharged**

BAT REX3 DAC

**Artisan blend of
custom digital tech
and luxurious tubes**

**18
PAGES**
of Music
Reviews &
Features



**SIMON & GARFUNKEL
BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER**

Primare R35
**Flagship phono stage
is an analogue triumph**



Vertere DG-1
'Entry' deck gets into the groove



INVESTIGATION

Classical Cannons

**We recommend the best recordings
for the classical music buff**

SVS Prime Pinnacle

Floorstanders from the bass kings

• **OPINION** 12 pages of letters & commentary • **VINYL RE-RELEASE** Gong's *Camembert Electrique* LP
• **FROM THE VAULT** Wadia 16 CD Player • **VINTAGE REVIEW** Back to the '70s with JVC's JA-S11 amp
• **SHOW BLOG** We report from the Bristol Hi-Fi Show • **READERS' CLASSIFIEDS** Hi-Fi bargains galore

UK £5.25 US \$13.00 Aus \$13.50



05

MODEL 12A

A Lifetime of Music Discovery Begins Here...



Available Finishes:



Based on the award winning Synergy, the Model 12A has been designed for those who prefer to select their own special combination of phono stage and cartridge for a unique listening experience. It comes equipped with the legendary SME 309 tonearm and high-end Crystal Cable wiring. Precision engineered and handcrafted perfection with the close attention to detail that SME is famous for.

Transparency, detail and sound purity that will simply take your breath away.



"This is a no-nonsense, compact, user-friendly package that will cut to the heart of the musical mix to reward with a sound that's taut, precise and highly detailed."

Hi-Fi News, September 2019

For dealers in the UK please call Padood on **01223 653199** or visit www.padood.com

For international sales please call SME on **+44 1903 814321** or visit www.sme.co.uk

SME

CONTENTS

MAY 20

VINYL & RECORD REVIEWS

- 72 Classical Companion**
This month Christopher Breunig turns his attention to the work of German violinist Isabelle Faust
- 74 Vinyl Release**
Steve Sutherland reassesses the 'cavalcade of craziness' that was Gong's *Camembert Electrique*, now it's available afresh on 180g
- 76 Vinyl Icon**
It's 50 years since the release of one of the defining LPs of the '70s. Mike Barnes on Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*...
- 82 Meet The Producers**
Steve Sutherland salutes the reggae legend who invented Lovers Rock – the Barbados-born Dennis Bovell
- 86 Music Reviews**
Our selection of audiophile LP and hi-res downloads reviewed by our specialists alongside the latest rock, jazz and classical albums

DEFINITIVE PRODUCT REVIEWS

- 36 Rotel Michi P5/S5**
This month's cover stars see a return to the high-end for a '90s brand, but will its pre/power amp duo be a 21st century contender?



ABOVE: Few prizes for style, but the SVS Prime Pinnacle is a must-hear speaker, p58



- 42 Vertere DG-1**
Can this entry-level plug 'n' play deck with flat tonearm and ready-installed cartridge turn the tables on its price rivals, right out of the box?
- 46 Balanced Audio Technologies REX 3 DAC**
Big-ticket tube DAC from pedigree brand new to UK shores weaves its magic with a novel conversion tech and a sound worth every pound
- 50 Extraudio X250T**
Dutch company combines tubes with its own take on Hypex's Class D module to create an amp ready to rock or soothe, to suit your mood
- 54 Primare R35**
The emphasis is on analogue once more as Swedish company turns its attention to vinyl with a highly flexible flagship phono preamp
- 58 SVS Prime Pinnacle**
US company draws on its subwoofer heritage to bring you high-value speakers boasting all-round appeal
- 62 Quad Vena II Play**
For fuss-free wireless streaming, is this all-in-one integrated amp/DAC the new no-brainer buy? We find out
- 66 AKG K371**
Closed-back, open-ear cans promise to strike the perfect balance between studio-quality and audiophile sound

VINTAGE

- 114 Vintage Review**
How do yesterday's classics shape up today? We test the JVC JA-S11, a 1977 amp with beginner appeal
- 120 From The Vault**
It's *HFN* Sep '94 and Martin Colloms hears a CD player he reckons could redefine the market – the Wadia 16

NEWS AND OPINION

- 15 Welcome**
A message from the editor
- 16 News**
D'Agostino Progression Series gains integrated amp, Audio Analogue adds DAC to PureAA series, two new decks from Thorens, Audio-Technica unveils two new headphone models
- 18 Show Blog**
Jonathan Gorse, Paul Miller and Adam Smith head West for the most popular dealer-run audio event in the UK – the Bristol Hi-Fi Show 2020
- 28 Investigation**
Whether you're a budding classical music buff building a library or are simply seeking the best recordings, Christopher Breunig is your guide
- 96 Opinion**
Comment and analysis as Barry Fox, Barry Willis, Jim Lesurf, Steve Harris and Christopher Breunig consider the hot audio topics of the day
- 106 Sound Off**
Relentless amp measurements explained, help with restoring reel-to-reel, ripping vinyl to PC, why a 3-element FM aerial may be best
- 130 Off The Leash**
Surprises still lurk in affordable kit, says Ken Kessler, as he shares an unexpected, mind-blowing moment he experienced with an eBay buy



ABOVE: Batons at the ready as we bring you our definitive guide to the best classical music recordings to buy. See p28

SUBSCRIBE!
hi-finews
Save 75% on digital with a print subscription See p112



STREAMING'S NEW CUTTING EDGE

ES9038PRO
SABRE DAC

DSD512
22.6MHz

PCM
768kHz

USB
OUTPUT

ALL-NEW
PSU

OPTICAL
NETWORK

LUMIN

Authorised distribution

selectaudio[®]
exquisite audio products

www.selectaudio.co.uk
info@selectaudio.co.uk

LUMINMUSIC.COM



Ultra-pure monocrystal silver
conductor in its largest diameter.
Revolutionary construction and connectors
for an ultimate performance.

**Absolute clarity,
Extraordinary musicality.**



Balanced, solid and powerful.

www.siltechcables.com



ELEGANT, FLEXIBLE AND BEAUTIFUL.



THE ULTIMATE DREAM SERIES

Six all-monocrystal silver conductors and a
center silver-gold core, terminated with the
highest grade of Oyaide connectors. A perfect
combination of engineering and design.

Exceptional neutrality,
Unforgettable transparency.

What many dream, only you experience.

www.crystalcable.com



Distributed in the UK and Ireland by Padood
www.padood.com | info@padood.com

+44 (0)1223 653199 | 20 Station Road, Cambridge CB1 2JD



Natural selection.

Atlas cables are designed with clear, consistent objectives in mind, making it possible for us to have ideas and technologies created for our 'high-end' products quickly trickle down through the range – the new Element Mezzo XLR and Equator XLR cables are the latest examples in our evolution.

In recent years there's been something of a resurgence in the popularity of XLR connections, with brands such as Auralic, Chord Electronics and Hegel featuring XLR on their latest products.

It's created an opportunity for interesting original thinking, with some devices having sufficient output to drive 'awkward load' planar headphones or even loudspeakers – and yes, we have XLR cables and adapters to suit those applications and more.

Atlas cables are hand-made, by one person, in Scotland – so to complement our standard XLR configurations, creating custom variants for your needs is usually pretty straightforward. Selecting which of our cables to buy could be the only tricky bit.

Precision audio
engineering.

Contact your dealer or Atlas direct for more info & advice.

ATLAS[®]
the performance connection
atlas cables.com

D E S I G N E D & H A N D M A D E I N S C O T L A N D



kudosaudio.com

Meet the Titans

We spent years creating our flagship speaker range. Designing, building, listening and then tearing it all up and starting over. We only stopped once we knew that the Titan range delivered the essence of what we're all about. Music in its purest form, as the artist intended.

That's the Kudos difference.



TITAN 707

Combining all of our design expertise, bespoke industry-leading components and signature pure sound, the Titan 707 delivers everything our reference Titan 808 offers, but in a beautiful hand-crafted single cabinet.

Flagship-level performance with a slightly lighter footprint. Who says you can't have it all?



K U D O S

DESIGNED AND HAND-CRAFTED
IN ENGLAND



H120 Integrated Amplifier

HEGEL
MUSIC SYSTEMS

baby
Giant



Standing on the shoulders of GIANTS, the H120 carries forward the proud history of HEGEL amplifiers. The multi award winning designs that over the years have

dazzled listeners with their combination of raw dynamics and delicate naturality. The H120 carries that legacy with it, but in a smaller and more affordable package.



33 Revelations Per Minute

MoFi

ULTRAPHONO

“

The MoFi UltraPhono redefines what you get for £500, even if you don't factor in what is a mighty fine headphone section. The cartridge matching facility ensures that audiophiles-on-a-budget needn't go without, while the sound quality banishes any thoughts of compromise.... ”

HiFi News, March 2020



karma

audio - visual

01423 358 846 karma-av.co.uk



STUDIODECK+

“

For (a) painless introduction to proper vinyl playback, this is a no-brainer.

HiFi News, January 2020

”

ULTRADECK+M

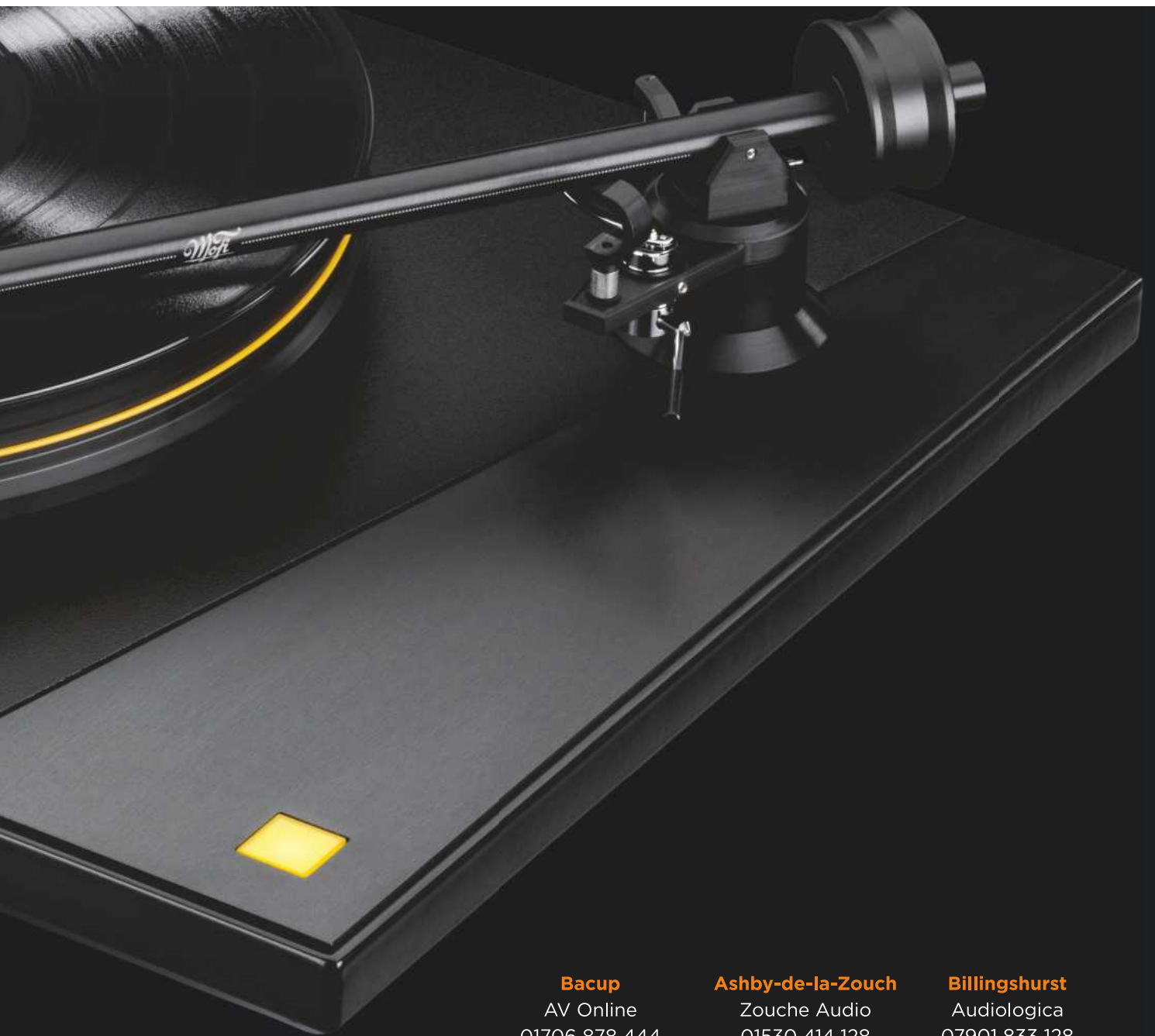
“

Here the UltraDeck+M again belied its price/heft category, like a boxer knocking out a contender in the next weight class....it's a dream choice for those who want components that can evolve along with them. ”

HiFi News, July 2019

MoFi





Bacup
AV Online
01706 878 444

Ashby-de-la-Zouch
Zouche Audio
01530 414 128

Billingshurst
Audiologica
07901 833 128

Edinburgh
Hi Fi Corner
0131 556 7901

Glasgow
The Music Room
0141 333 9700

Leeds
The Audio Republic
0113 217 7294

York
Wall of Sound
01904 704 107

Nottingham
Nottingham Hi Fi
0115 975 8613

Lincoln
Superfi
01522 520 269

Birmingham
Audio Affair
0121 224 7300

Wolverhampton
Midland Hi Fi Studios
01902 380 083

Norwich
Basically Sound
01362 820 800

Ipswich
Signals
01394 672 464

Warrington
Doug Brady Hi Fi
01925 828 009

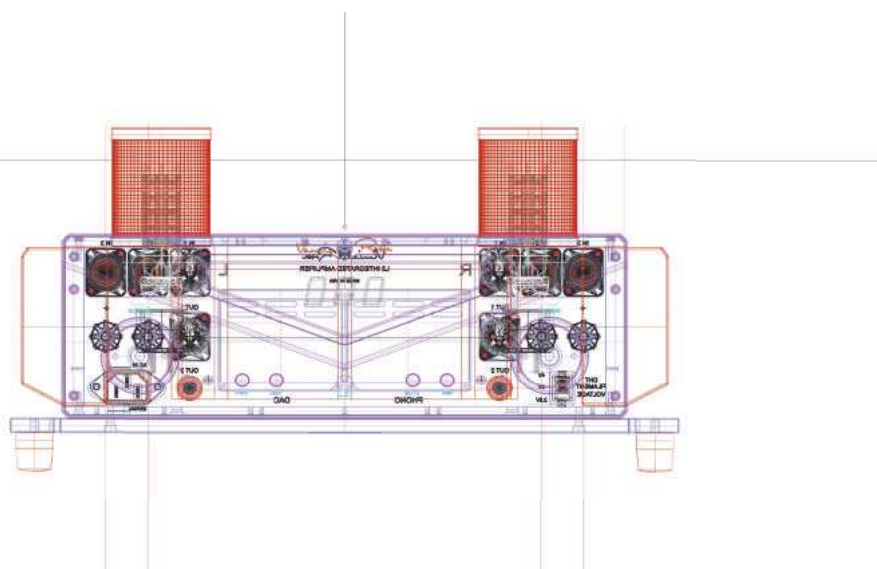
Cinderford
Ceritech Audio
01594 540 268

Torquay
Kingscote Audio
01803 313 714

Truro
Senso Systems
01872 273 215

01423 358 846 karma-av.co.uk

karma
audio - visual



L2 Signature Preamplifier
- with L2 DAC & L2 Phonostage Modules
RRP: £23,985.00



L2 Signature Monoblocks
RRP: £15,995.00

www.eliteaudiouk.com/vinnie-rossi

contact us to find out more about our part exchange and interest free credit terms



Retailing the world's most sought
after Hi-Fi components.



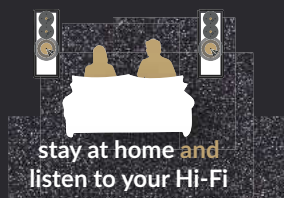
Vinnie  Rossi

amplification.performance.style



L2i 'Signature Edition' Integrated Amplifier
- with L2 DAC & L2 Phonostage Modules
RRP: £25,985.00

exclusively available in the UK
through **elite** audio



T: 01334 570 666
E: INFO@ELITEAUDIOUK.COM
W: WWW.ELITEAUDIOUK.COM



Retailing the world's most sought
after Hi-Fi components.

THE UK hi-fi SHOW

The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience

Live

Tickets
available
NOW!

THE UK hi-fi SHOW
The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience *Live*

www.hifishowlive.com

SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 19-20th 2020

ASCOT RACECOURSE GRANDSTAND • ASCOT • BERKSHIRE

EXCLUSIVE HIGH-END AUDIO

ON DEMONSTRATION • LIVE MUSIC

- VINYL & HI-RES MUSIC SALES • SYSTEM TUNING
- HI-FI WORKSHOPS • PANORAMIC HEADPHONE ZONE
- MEET WORLD-CLASS DESIGNERS & HI-FI PERSONALITIES
- FREE CAR PARKING • FULL BAR SERVICE • HOT & COLD FOOD ALL DAY

For more information, updates & ticket sales:
www.hifishowlive.com

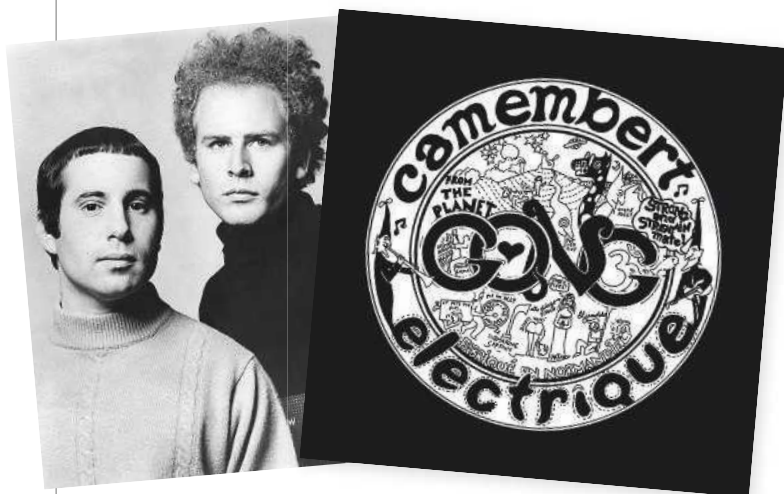




RIGHT: Designed for semi-pro and domestic users, the AKG K371 'phones are a smash hit, p66



ABOVE: The elegant simplicity of Primare's R35 MM/MC phono preamp belies its flexible gain and loading options, see p54



MUSIC: Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* is our Vinyl Icon (p76) while Steve Sutherland celebrates Gong's *Camembert Electrique* as it's re-released on 180g LP (see p74)

RIGHT: *Hi-Fi News & RR* is the UK's representative of EISA's Hi-Fi Expert Group. Editor Paul Miller took over as EISA's President in June 2016

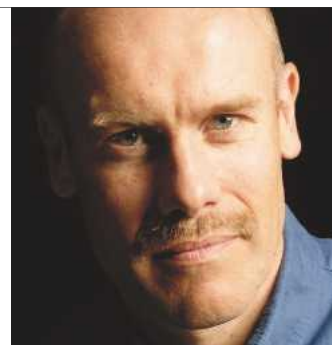


As a matter of good publishing principle, we try to keep mention of current affairs out of *Hi-Fi News*. After all, something that seems of great public or political interest one day can seem incongruous if read in the context of a column or review a year or two later.

Nevertheless I feel safe in assuming that the Coronavirus pandemic, and the upheaval – both trivial and tragic – will live forever in our collective memory. So this will be a far more personal and heartfelt 'Welcome' than our regular readers might have become accustomed.

Hi-Fi News & Record Review is the world's oldest hi-fi magazine, publishing uninterrupted for 64 years. And that tradition will not be derailed by a 100nm virus. So here I am, 'self isolating' and solo at *Hi-Fi News* towers, surrounded by the photo studio, the lab, the listening room, more exclusive high-end audio than is decent, and all the production resource I need to keep the show on the road!

When we finally emerge, blinking in the sunlight, we'll all have our own personal tales and, provided we follow 'the rules', I sincerely hope that as few of those tales as possible will be regretful. In the meantime, many of you will have met Mrs P working on the desk and



generally looking after you at our UK Hi-Fi Show *Live* this past six years. In the real world, she is an NHS health worker, now stationed about 60 miles away. We'll not see each other for at least another three months.

So while you'll all soon get to see and read about the great hi-fi that I am living with, I'd like

'Share your stories with *Hi-Fi News* and fellow audiophiles'

you to send your pictures and stories to us at letters@hifinews.com. Tell us about your favourite music, your 'hi-fi journey' and all the tweaking and system housekeeping that you've now finally got time to indulge.

Take advantage of our great 'stay@home' subs offer (see website) and, particularly if you are living alone through this extraordinary period, then make a point to reach out to *Hi-Fi News* and your fellow audiophiles. We really are... In This Together.

PAUL MILLER GROUP EDITOR

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



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



DAVID PRICE
An avid collector of audio treasures, and life-long hi-fi addict, DP lends his ears and experience from analogue to digital



KEN KESSLER
is a long-serving contributor, luxury goods writer and champion for the renaissance in valves and 'vintage hi-fi'



KEITH HOWARD
has written about hi-fi for 40 years, and edited *Hi-Fi Answers* for nine. KH performs our speaker and headphone lab tests



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



ANDREW EVERARD
has reviewed hi-fi for over 30 years and is still effortlessly enthusiastic about new technology, kit and discovering new music



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

Ultimate integrated?

D'AGOSTINO ANNOUNCES FULLY-LOADED PROGRESSION SERIES INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Latest addition to Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems' Progression Series is the Progression Integrated Amplifier pictured here, with prices

ranging between £18,500 and £26,250 according to which options are included.

The analogue base unit is a traditional line-level integrated amplifier offering two unbalanced inputs on RCAs and three balanced inputs on XLR. To this can be added an optional moving-coil phono input module, which raises the price to £20,750 (or the module can be added later).

For digital inputs, a second module offers coaxial, optical, USB-B and both wired and wireless network connectivity. Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and Spotify streaming subscription services are available, and MQA decoding is standard. With this added to the base configuration the price is £24,000, rising to £26,250 if both the optional modules are fitted. Bluetooth remote control removes the line-of-sight restrictions inherent to IR remotes, and also increases the effective range five-fold. Power output is rated at 200W per



channel into 8ohm, doubling to 400W into 4ohm. Finishes are anodised black or silver.

D'Agostino LLC, Connecticut, USA, 0208 971 3909;
www.dagostinoinc.com; www.absolutesounds.com

AA goes digital

AADAC JOINS ANNIVERSARY AMPLIFIERS

Audio Analogue's PureAA series, launched by the Italian company in 2018, has been expanded to three products with the introduction of the £3299 AAdac digital-to-analogue converter. Digital inputs comprise USB, two S/PDIF coaxial on RCAs, optical S/PDIF via Toslink and AES/EBU balanced on XLR. The USB input supports PCM sampling rates up to a specified '392kHz' (which we presume means 384kHz) and native 1-bit datastreams up to DSD512. Seven different digital filter options are provided and a Wi-Fi antenna allows for Bluetooth aptX streaming. Analogue output is fixed or variable, unbalanced via phono sockets and balanced via XLRs. Available finishes are silver or black.

Audio Analogue, Italy, 05602 054 669; www.audioanalogue.com; www.decentaudio.co.uk



HI-FI NEWS' NUGGETS

RUSS'S SWITCH

Suppliers of accessories to the audiophile diaspora, Russ Andrews Ltd is keeping its mail order business operating during the coronavirus lockdown. So, for those customers taking the opportunity to give their hi-fi systems some TLC and perhaps an upgrade, RA has introduced a network switch to its range designed specifically for use in networked audio systems. At the heart of the £989 Russ Andrews Network Switch is a Trichord clock, like those used to upgrade CD and other disc players. In this instance it is complemented by a dual-output, offboard power supply connected using Kimber PBJ cable. www.russandrews.com

VINNIE ROSSI

Distributor Elite Audio has added Vinnie Rossi – US manufacturer of a high-end valve preamp, MOSFET monoblock power amps and hybrid integrated amps – to its portfolio of brands. Expect a review of the L2i 'Signature Edition' integrated in *HFN*. www.vinnierossi.com

TD 160 reprised

THORENS LAUNCHES TWO NEW DECKS



Legendary turntable manufacturer Thorens, still headquartered in Germany, has recalled one of its greatest products, the TD160, introduced in 1972, to create the new TD 1600 and semi-automatic TD 1601. Familiar design elements include belt-drive, a heavy two-part platter and adjustable sprung subchassis, but there are modern updates. The top plate is made from an 'Alucobond' aluminium sandwich and its three-point suspension incorporates a steel cable to prevent sideways motion. Both are fitted with Thorens' TP92 tonearm and prices are £2399 for the TD 1600 and £2899 for the TD 1601.

Thorens GmbH, Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany, +49 224 86777 22; www.thorens.com

Wooden cans

AUDIO-TECHNICA ANNOUNCES KOKUTAN AND ASADA ZAKURA

Audio-Technica has introduced two new models in its long-running series of closed-back headphones that use exotic woods for the capsule cups. Costlier of the two, the £1700 Kokutan, uses striped ebony – a dense hardwood employed in the manufacture of pianos and woodwind instruments – for its closure, which gives it a striking appearance and ensures that structural resonances are effectively damped. In the £1300 Asada Zakura (pictured), ostrya japonica is used which

gives the cups a warm red colour. Both headphones have 53mm moving-coil drive units, with a titanium flange in the Kokutan and diamond-like coating in the Asada Zakura. Both also use A-T's familiar DADS (double air damping system) for improved bass but have a conventional headband rather than the distinctive 3D Wing Support of old, which appears to be out of favour. **Audio-Technica Corp, Tokyo, Japan, 0113 277 1441; <https://eu.audio-technica.com>**



World of cables

ELEMENT MEZZO AND EQUATOR BALANCED INTERCONNECTS

Scotland's Atlas Cables has introduced two new XLR-terminated interconnect cables intended to make high-quality balanced connection available at a lower price point than previously. Available in lengths of 0.5m, 0.75m, 1m, 1.5m, 2m and 3m at prices ranging from £146.25 to £188.75, the Element Mezzo XLR features OFC conductors, high-density foamed polyethylene dielectric,

a braided screen and new XLR plugs with copper alloy bodies and pins. The costlier Equator XLR, available in the same lengths at prices from £475 to £600 and which Atlas says offers a step up in performance, uses OCC conductors, high-density foamed polyethylene dielectric and XLR plugs having OCC pins. **Atlas Ltd, 01563 572666; www.atlascables.com**



iFi Audio goes silent

TWO PLUG-IN DEVICES TO CUT USB AUDIO NOISE

Continuing its efforts to improve sound quality when digital audio is conveyed via USB, iFi Audio has replaced its iSilencer3.0 and iDefender3.0 with improved versions, the iSilencer+ and iDefender+, both of which are priced at £49 and insert between a USB outlet and USB DAC. Three connector combinations are available – Type A to Type A, Type C to Type A, and Type C to Type C. Both devices support USB 3.0 and are backwards-compatible with USB 2.0. The iSilencer+ is the more generally applicable, claiming to reduce power supply noise using a



combination of passive filtering and active noise cancellation circuitry. The iDefender+, for situations where ground loops cause annoying buzz or hum, disconnects the computer ground if a loop is detected. **iFi Audio (Abbingdon Global Group), Merseyside, 01900 601954; www.ifi-audio.com**

HI-FI NEWS? JUST ASK...

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

Subject to availability

Please reserve/deliver my copy of **Hi-Fi News**

on a regular basis, starting with issue.....

Title.....First name.....

Surname.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Postcode.....

Telephone number.....



IF YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS AN ISSUE...



Upcoming Events

IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR HI-FI DIARY

- 19-20 SEPT** The UK Hi-Fi Show *Live*, Ascot Racecourse Grandstand, Ascot Berkshire SL5 7JX; www.hifishowlive.com
- 27 SEPT** Audiojumble, Tonbridge; www.audiojumble.co.uk
- 17-18 OCT** World of Hi-Fi, Dorint Kongresshotel, Düsseldorf Neuss; www.highendsociety.de/world-of-hifi
- 06-08 NOV** Audio Video Show, Radisson Blu Sobieski Hotel, Warsaw, Poland; www.audioshow.pl
- 21-22 NOV** North West Audio Show, Cranage Hall (De Vere Cranage Estate), Cheshire; <http://audioshow.co.uk>

Bristol Hi-Fi Show 2020

Words & pictures: Jonathan Gorse, Paul Miller, Adam Smith



Now in its 33rd year, The Bristol Hi-Fi Show is the longest-running dealer-run audio event in the UK. Taking place at the Bristol Marriott Hotel City Centre, this year's three-day showcase ran from Friday the 21st to Sunday the 23rd of February, with no fewer than 160 brands eager to present

their latest products to an enthusiastic audience.

Valves, vinyl, CD and streaming... companies were showing everything from the largest loudspeakers to the smallest of accessories needed to upgrade your system. And there were more than a few product launches too, not to mention plenty of discounts to ensure that nobody needed to have left empty-handed!

DALI's Rubicon C series boasts two fully active speakers – the £5540 floorstanding 6C and £3840 2C standmount pictured here. Both models come complete with the DALI wireless Sound Hub, which is

a preamp that sends music at 96kHz/24-bit to the speakers via Wi-Fi while offering both analogue and digital inputs and the ability to stream from Tidal, Qobuz and Spotify. www.dali-speakers.com



Chord Electronics unveiled its £12,500 ULTIMA PRE 2 preamp [pictured above] alongside the £9250 ULTIMA 5 and £5995 ULTIMA 6 power amps. Also shown were the £995 2go streamer and £495 2yu digital interface, which plug into the Hugo 2 DAC/headphone amp [HFN Aug '18]. www.chordelectronics.co.uk

Concealed within this stack of Exposure electronics is its VXN active crossover with outboard PSU [HFN Feb '20]. Available in three- and two-way guises, and used here with its XM-series CD player and monoblock power amps, the ensemble was making great sounds with Kudos's Titan 505s. www.exposurehifi.com



The first of two Pro-Ject and Klipsch combos [see p19] this time featuring the compact, but high sensitivity Heresy IV speakers. Based on the original 1957 design this three-way system features compression midrange and

titanium treble drivers – a formula that filled the room with ease. Pro-Ject's Xtension 10 deck was joined by the CD Box RS2 T and Pre Box RS2 Digital feeding an Amp Box RS stereo power amp. www.henleyaudio.co.uk

The ground floor reception area of the Marriott was significantly enhanced by this colourful display of Arcam and JBL equipment. On demo when we arrived were the L82 Classic standmounts, complete with retro Quadrex foam grilles, newly launched on the coat-tails of the larger L100 Classic [HFN May '19], adjacent. On the table is Arcam's sub-£1000 CDS50 SACD/CD player and impressive SA30 integrated amplifier. www.harman.com



Keith Tonge and Rachel Goodwin of PMC pose with the company's new twenty5.24i speaker, priced from £4995 and available in a range of finishes including Walnut, Amerone, Diamond Black and Oak. The 1015mm-tall cabinet houses a transmission line-loaded 170mm bass unit allied to a 19mm Sonomex soft fabric dome tweeter. A pair of the speakers was driven by Bryston amplification and its partnering BDA3.14 streamer/DAC/preamp. This offers decoding up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256. www.pmc-speakers.com



Henley Audio was out in force, here demonstrating Pro-Ject's £699 X1 turntable [HFN Aug '19] with a white plinth alongside the £999 X2 [HFN Nov '19] in Walnut. Both decks were teamed up with Musical Fidelity's

M2si amp via the company's £199 LX2-LPS MM/MC phono stage. Speakers were the £625 Klipsch RP-600M [HFN Sep '19] with spun copper 'Cerametallic' bass unit and Tractrix horn-loaded tweeter. www.henleyaudio.co.uk



Distributor Kog Audio showed off a series of T+A products from the German brand, including the £3660 PA 1100 E [HFN Mar '20], based on the PA 1000 E integrated amp but now equipped with BT and a USB DAC. The slimmer R-series [right] was represented by the MP 2000 R media player and PA 2000 R integrated [HFN Feb '16]. www.taelektroakustik.de



Sound Foundations repeated the set-up it used at last year's UK Hi-Fi Show *Live* at Ascot with Kerr Acoustics' £3495 K300 Mk3 speakers driven by Exposure's 5010 preamp/monoblocks [HFN Nov '18] with a Clearaudio Innovation turntable [HFN Sep '09] as source. Sound Foundations is now distributing Kerr Acoustics in the UK. www.soundfoundations.co.uk



SENDER

REVEALING EVERY DETAIL

The new Sendor D-Line loudspeakers reveal every nuance of the performance with absolute clarity and realism. With their transparent, superbly natural sound and extraordinary resolution, they create an airy, spacious soundscape, then invite you in to explore it, uncovering new depths, textures and definition in your music.

MADE FOR MUSIC. DESIGNED FOR YOU.

sendoraudio.com



Alex Foxon of B&W proudly displays the new Michi range of amplifiers from partners Rotel [see p36]. The Michi brand was last seen in the Britpop era and its return is a welcome one. The series comprises the £3299 P5 preamp and 500W/ch £5399 S5 stereo power amp [right of display] plus the £5399 M8 monoblock which is rated at 1080W/8ohm. www.rotel.com



After several teasers over recent years, Michell finally launched its MC cartridge range: the £675 Cusis E, £1275 Cusis S and £2300 Cusis M. All models are built around a samarium-cobalt magnet housed in an Acetyl body but feature different

cantilevers and stylus profiles. The flagship Cusis M, with its microline stylus and boron cantilever, was fitted to a GyroDec SE turntable [top right] feeding a Sugden Sapphire DAP-800 amp and ProAc loudspeakers. www.michell-engineering.co.uk



Kudos produced some of the best sounds at the show through its £13,000 Titan 707 speakers [HFN Feb '20] hooked up to a Naim set-up. This saw an NDX 2 streamer feeding a Supernait 3 integrated amp, dedicated to driving the 707's

woofers, while a NAP250DR power amp fed the tweeters. Operation was active via a Naim/Kudos optimised SNAXO 362 crossover. The sound was remarkably lifelike and clean with no shortage of slam. www.kudosaudio.com



AVID HiFi's CEO and designer Conrad Mas was on hand to spin some vinyl and explain the engineering behind the brand's £1250 Ingenium P&P (Plug&Play) turntable and 90W/8ohm Integra integrated amplifier. Newest products in the room were the partnering EVO4 two-way, deep-enclosure standmount speakers, first seen in early form at Munich's High End in 2019 and then at the UK Hi-Fi Show Live in Ascot. www.avidhifi.com

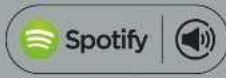


Neat Acoustics launched its new Minista loudspeaker at the show. Following on from the Ekstra floorstander, this is a compact standmount with Neat's signature isobaric bass loading and ribbon tweeter. Demonstrated on matching stands and driven by a Revo IPA-70 amplifier

from Italian company Norma Audio, each cabinet measures 30x17x29cm (hwd) and weighs in at just 8kg. Sources used were a Well Tempered turntable and Norma digital front-end. If the sound of this set-up was anything to go by Neat has another winner. www.neatacoustics.com

NOVAFIDELITY

Innovators in streaming devices offering unrivalled future-proof feature sets since 2003.



Multiple control options

- Full traditional remote control
- Full front panel control with 7 inch colour screen**
- Web interface via PC, iOS or Android device
- [NEW] Music X Neo control app for iOS and Android

Highly flexible

- Up to 8TB internal storage (16TB on X50/X50PRO)
- CD ripping functionality
- Network protocols supported
 - °UPnP(DLNA) Server/Client/Media Renderer
 - °Samba Server/Client
- Bluetooth, Airable (internet radio), DAB/FM
- Wide-ranging analogue I/O including phono stage***

*HD implementation due early 2020

** Excludes N15D. app/webinterface control only

***Phono stage on X35, X45, X45Pro



**Now shipping
with MusicX NEO**

Remote control
app compatible
with iOS and
Android



WWW.NOVAFIDELITY.COM

Distributed exclusively in the UK and Ireland by **SCV Distribution**
www.scvdistribution.co.uk | 03301 222500

Auralic demonstrated its new Altair G1 streamer/DAC. At £1899 it's the most affordable one-box solution in the US company's lineup and is built around an ESS Sabre ES9038Q2M chip. Paired with Spondor's £4500 D7.2 floorstander, the combination

provided weighty and detailed performances with a wide variety of musical styles. The D7.2 itself is a 2.5 way design sporting a 180mm Kevlar composite bass driver, 180mm mid/bass driver and a 22mm LPZ tweeter. www.spondoraudio.com



Audiolab treated visitors to components from the more affordable end of its catalogue in the form of the 6000N streamer (£449), 6000CDT CD player (£379) and £599 6000A integrated amp/DAC [HFN Mar '19],

which is said to deliver 50W per channel into 8ohm. Echoing the design cues of the company's 8000 series, the electronics here were partnered with Wharfedale's Evo4.4 loudspeakers. www.audiolab.co.uk

Here's Andy Whittle with his hand on Roger's LS5/9 Classic standmount – constructed as close to the original BBC spec. as possible and using a 7.5in polypropylene bass/mid unit and Son Audax

HD34 textile-dome tweeter. Inset is a Thorens TD124 deck with 12in SME arm and, below, an Audio Note CD Zero player with Revox B77 tape machine. Also on display was the new E20A/2 tube integrated, albeit seen here in the old E20A chassis. www.rogers-hifi.uk

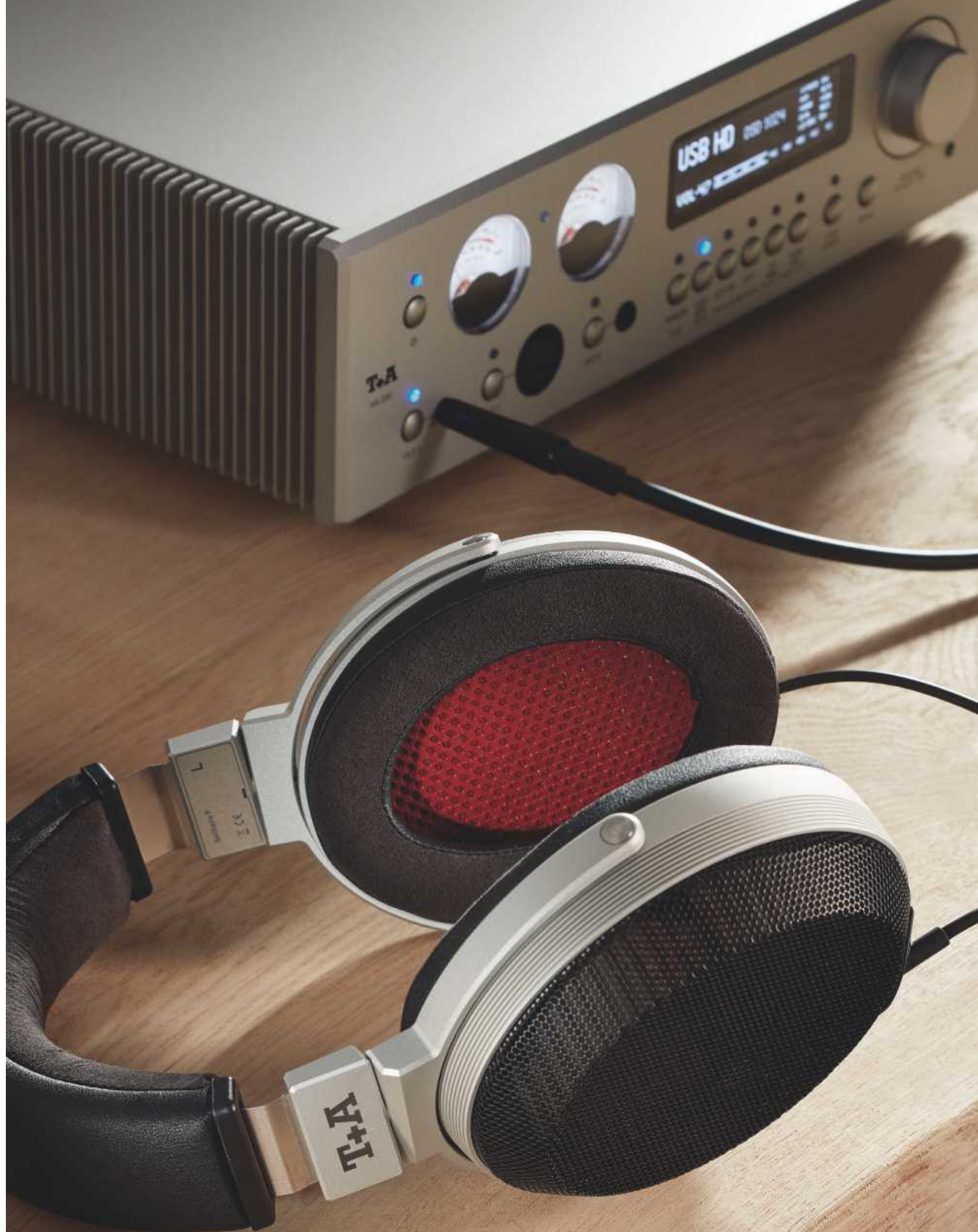


A three-year research programme has seen in the launch of two new flagship Wharfedale loudspeakers, both employing woven glassfibre composite mid and bass cones. Pictured here is the smaller three-way, three-driver, standmount Elysian 2 which costs £4500 a pair. The larger three-way, four-driver, floorstanding Elysian 4 is priced at £6500 a pair. www.wharfedale.co.uk

California-based Definitive Technology showcased its 33cm-tall Demand D11 loudspeaker. Costing £999/pair this two-way design features a 25mm tweeter and 165mm midrange/woofer allied to a 152x254mm oval passive bass radiator. Resplendent in a gloss white finish, the D11 was teamed with a midrange Marantz system. <https://en.definitive-technology.com>



Start your journey by scanning the QR code or contact: The Audio Business
hello@theaudiobusiness.co.uk



#music reengineered
Solitaire® P

T+A
Engineering Emotion



Its room dominated by a rather imposing throne – the most majestic of listening chairs – newcomer Audio Art demonstrated a system fronted by the exotic Neodio Origin S2 CD player/DAC [HFN Jul '19] from France.

Seen alongside [left] is the partnering Origne A2 integrated amplifier. This has a PSU based on a 1kVA toroidal transformer and a MOSFET output stage rated at 2x150W/8ohm. www.audioarthifi.co.uk



Comprising DAC, preamp and twin, bridged power amp stages in one substantial chassis, Musical Fidelity's M8xi follows in classic MF tradition, despite its new ownership, in offering both a high specification and prodigious

power output at a competitive price. Rated at 550W/8ohm, increasing to 870W/4ohm, and boasting a peak output of 1.6kW/2ohm, the 48kg M8xi will be priced at £5649 when it goes on sale this spring. www.musicalfidelity.com

Elipson treated visitors to two stylish loudspeakers in the form of the spherical £799 Planet W35 wireless active model [left] and a new flagship: the £7490 Legacy Series 3230. These floorstanders hark back to classic Elipson designs and feature two aluminium-surfaced bass drivers, a ceramic-coned midrange driver in its own enclosure and an AMT ribbon tweeter. www.elipson.com



Chord Company unveiled its Ohmic fluid for the cleaning of electrical connections and Leyline X speaker cable, the latter incorporating the company's XLPE insulation and priced at just £5 per metre. Also announced was a high-performance network switch under the historic English Electric brand. Costing £549 it is optimised for audio/video use. www.chord.co.uk

ATC showcased its SCM40 active speaker [far left] driven by a CDA2 CD/DAC/preamp and the SCM7 driven by the SIA2-100 integrated amp/DAC. Both sounded effortless, transparent and dynamic. www.atcloudspeakers.co.uk



Naim always aims to inspire visitors to the show and this year used its Statement NAC/NAP S1 pre/power [HFN Jun '15] with Focal Scala Utopia Evo speakers. Mammoth scale and whip-crack speed were the order of the day. Elsewhere a cool line of Naim T shirts satisfied those with £20 to spend, rather than £200k! www.naimaudio.com



Next month

HFN reports from the Praha Show in the Czech Republic

THE ULTIMATE



 **absolute sounds ltd.**

International Distributors & Consultants of Specialised Hi-End Home Audio & Video Systems

58 Durham Road, London, SW20 0TW T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62

absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com



MUSIC PLAYBACK

For Your Nearest Dealer Please Visit The [Absolute Sounds](#) Website

Classical spectacular

Christopher Breunig recommends the best classical audiophile recordings



ABOVE: Our top choices for audiophile classical recordings are detailed in the boxout on p33

When I first heard a demonstration of stereo records, given at a local department store all those years ago, I came away thinking I'd heard mostly distracting surface noise. If this was 'high fidelity' I'd stick with my old Pye Black Box! But soon, of course, I was on the upgrade path avidly taking up recommendations in *Hi-Fi News* and *Audio Record Review*

magazines, and reading Thomas Heinitz's regular columns in the now defunct *Records & Recording*.

I aspired to Quad amps and its electrostatics (then £52!); turntables went from Garrard 301 to Thorens TD150, Linn LP12 and now a Rega RP10. I followed John Crabbe's reviews of pick-ups from Ortofon, Empire and Shure – always looking for the 'trackability' promised with Shure's two 'torture test' records (*HFN* created its own in 1996).

SAILING BY

We all had records with problem spots to check with each system upgrade. One such came in a 1966 Vladimir Ashkenazy LP of Schubert's Sonata D784 [Decca SXL6260], where a sequence of very loud repeated chords in the finale defeated pretty well everything

then (my MC today sails through this passage and asks 'so what?').

Angus McKenzie, who was a *HFN* contributor for many years, had a North London record shop where Ashkenazy was a customer. McKenzie told him he should leave Decca promptly as they overmodulated his LPs!

Now retired from public performance, Ashkenazy stayed with Decca and in 2017 the company issued a series of six of his recordings on 180g vinyl, cut at Abbey Road. Fine though they were, to my ears they didn't quite capture the full 'ffss' flavour of the original pressings.

I found the same thing with a nonetheless excellent Speakers Corner version of the outstanding set of 13 excerpts from Prokofiev's ballet score *Romeo and Juliet*, recorded with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducting the

RIGHT: The Telarc 1812 Overture from 1979 came with a warning that playing it might cause damage to your hi-fi system



Minneapolis Orchestra [Mercury SR90315]. We had this 1962 Northrop Memorial Auditorium production as a Philips transfer [SABL 3463] where the sound was even more vivid. Speakers Corner's 180g LP is still available while Amazon lists a Japanese CD import [UCCD-4739]. But there's a CD which can more than rival the Mercury: Claudio Abbado's 1996 DG with the Berlin Philharmonic [453 4392]. Tracks are arranged in the order found in the complete score and this is in every way a 'demonstration disc'.

GETTING IT TAPED

During the war, the Germans had developed a method of recording on wire and in the days of the mono LP their tapes were patently superior to those used by, say, HMV. The Bartók reissues with the Hungarian Ferenc Fricsay and his Berlin RIAS (Radio in American sector) Orchestra, made in the early 1950s, still sound excellent – *Concerto for Orchestra*, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, *Divertimento*, *Dance Suite*. And his Prokofiev 'Classical Symphony', in the same box set [479 2691], also sounds remarkable – pre-CD it was on a Heliodor reissue but in 'electronic stereo'.

Mercury Records boasted a 'single mic' technique for its mono orchestral recordings: this was devised in 1951 by engineer C Robert Fine. Mussorgsky's *Pictures At An Exhibition* was the first production, with the Chicago SO then with Rafael Kubelík as its principal conductor. The resulting LP was hailed as 'one of the all-time greats in the history of recorded music'. I feel lucky to have discovered the 3LP box [MG 3-4500] many years ago, although all of Kubelík's CSO recordings were reissued on a 4CD set [Mercury 475 6862]. More on *Pictures* later.

Highlights in the Decca mono catalogue were Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet's Stravinsky *Petrouchka* [Suisse Romande;



ABOVE & RIGHT: Erik Smith, Kyril Kondrashin and a young Vladimir Ashkenazy at a Decca playback in 1963



PHOTO: DECCA CLASSICS



PHOTO: AVIE / HYPERION RECORDS



ABOVE: Steven Isserlis recording the Elgar Cello Concerto with Paavo Järvi and the Philharmonia for Hyperion at Henry Wood Hall and (inset) Andrew Keener, the producer

LXT2502] and the Rossini/Respighi ballet score *La Boutique Fantasque* [LSO; LXT2555]. Britten's 'Four Sea Interludes' from *Peter Grimes* were memorably done by Eduard van Beinum but inevitably superseded by versions I'll detail further on.

This, and *Petrouchka*, were included in a 6LP Decca limited edition box set celebrating the company's mono era recordings; and the remarkable first Sibelius Symphony cycle, with LSO/Collins, was reissued on vinyl.

However, both sets are now deleted.

Among the credits for those early Fricsay monos you find the venue preferred – and still used today (for example, by Linn Records working with Robin Ticciati) – was the Jesus-Christus Kirche Dahlem. Its excellent acoustics were the Berlin counterpart to Kingsway

Hall, London (although Underground noises were sometimes audible on records produced there).

TEAM SPIRIT

Henry Wood Hall has become a regular substitute – the Elgar Cello Concerto was done there

for Hyperion with one-time HFN contributor Andrew Keener producing, and Simon Eadon the engineer. They're often referred to as the 'dream team', given the quality of

"The LP was hailed as 'one of the all-time greats'"

their work, just as EMI had 'the two Christophers' – Bishop and Parker – who made a distinguished series of EMI recordings, notably with André Previn and Sir Adrian Boult in his Indian Summer period.

The appeal of the many Argo recordings of the St Martin's Academy and Sir Neville Marriner ➤

The First Word in Music Streaming.



Music. Literally the first word in 'music streaming', and always our top priority. Our network players feature cutting-edge technology – developed over 3 years by 25 expert engineers at our Salisbury HQ – but more importantly stay true to our founding mission, to take you closer to the authentic emotion of the music you love.

So, whether you're listening to your own digital library, commercial music services such as TIDAL, Spotify, Qobuz and internet radio, or exploring the world of Roon, you'll enjoy music streamed with our signature pace, rhythm and timing. Handmade here

in England, the slimline **ND5 XS 2**, Classic superstar **NDX 2** (pictured) and flagship **ND 555** players are winning Awards around the world. Hear the difference with your favourite music at your local Naim specialist retailer.

Now featuring native Qobuz integration



naimaudio.com/streaming-awards

Awards for NDX 2



JOURNEY INTO SPACE

Composers have long enjoyed creating echo and spatial effects in their music – Britten's *War Requiem* and Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* are just two obvious 20th century examples. But well before quadraphonic LPs or multichannel SACDs, in Dec '59 Decca recorded Mozart's *Notturmo* for four orchestras at Kingsway Hall. Erik Smith was the producer and Kenneth Wilkinson his engineer. Speakers Corner has this recording [SXL2196] on 180g vinyl. Though two-channel, the performance by the LSO under Peter Maag offers good separation effects.



was partially attributable to the acoustics of St John's, Smith Square. The group's Rossini String Sonatas was always one of my test records [now in Decca 478 6883].

In Vienna, there was the Sofiensaal, destroyed in a fire in 2001 although now rebuilt. This was where the legendary Wagner *Ring* cycle with Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic was done [see Classical Companion, *HFN* Mar '20]. Principally, it was used by Decca from 1956 up to the mid '80s, the last classical recording made there, shortly before the fire, a second Schubert CD by Russian pianist Arcadi Volodos [Sony].

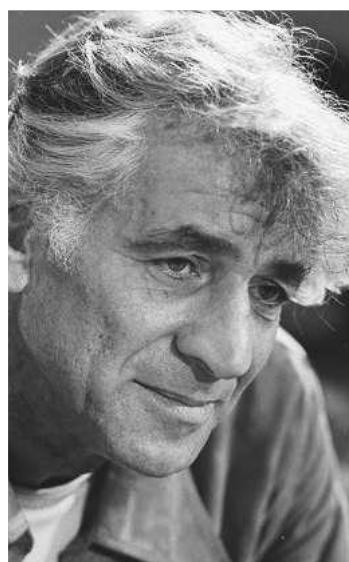
'The Telarc 1812 caused my Quad ESLs to arc!'

Planets and the 'Four Sea Interludes' from Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, with its church bells and storm over the sea. In the opera itself they flow into singing, and Decca's excerpted version from its Britten set [483 0392] has this rather unsatisfying overlap. But

the composer's LSO coupling, *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, is well worth having.

In our review of the D'Agostino Relentless amplifier [*HFN* Mar '20],

Andrew Everard mentioned a Sony recording with Bernstein conducting the NYPO and this prompted me to listen to my UK original Columbia LP copy. I don't feel quite at home with what Bernstein does in the 'Interludes' but the following *Passacaglia* is another matter



altogether. Superbly played and with the best possible sound, this can be bought as a single 192kHz/24-bit track [Sony G0100037201313]. I strongly recommend it.

DOWNLOAD ONLY

André Previn's 'Interludes' and *Passacaglia*, with the LSO, was a typical example of EMI analogue recording by Bishop and Parker [ASD3154; SQ 1966]. All three Warner remasterings now appear to be available as 44.1kHz/16-bit download-only. Even finer was Sir Colin Davis's 1978 ROH Orchestra LP (without *Passacaglia*) issued on the 'Sequenza' Philips label [6527 112] and *not* taken from his complete opera recording.

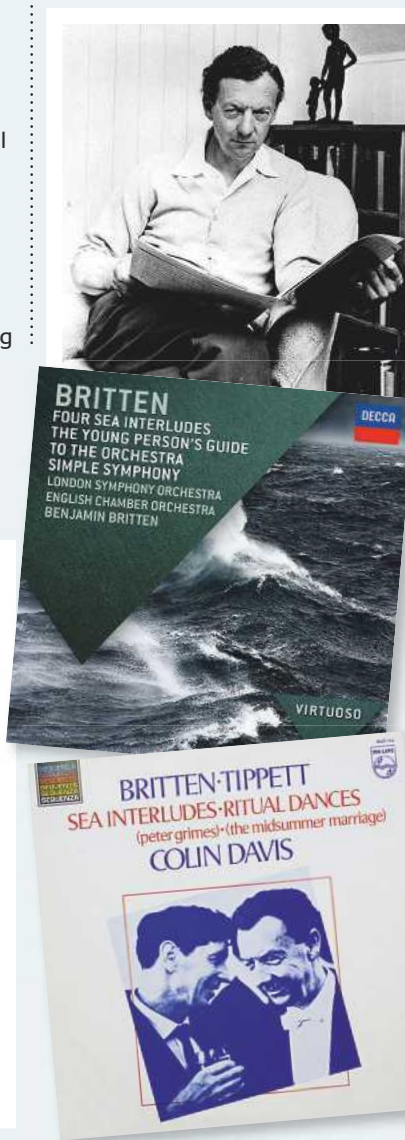
It's Previn and the LSO again for my top choice for Holst's *Planets*, where we had both LP and SACD →

LEFT: Mozart's *Notturmo* for four orchestras would have intrigued 18th-century listeners. Decca's recording was with the eminent Swiss Mozartian Peter Maag

LEFT: Benjamin Britten pictured in the late '60s. The 'Four Sea Interludes' from his *Peter Grimes* (below left) make a good 'demo' disc, the composer's version being taken from the complete opera recording

FAR LEFT: Leonard Bernstein caught on camera in 1971. He gave the US premiere of *Peter Grimes* and has recorded the Interludes and *Passacaglia*

LEFT: Now deleted but well worth hunting for is Sir Colin Davis's Interludes LP with the ROH Orchestra issued on the 'Sequenza' Philips label [6527 112]



ALL AT SEA

The Solti Mahler Symphony No 8 came from the Sofiensaal – the first production (Oct '72) to recreate the scale of this 'Symphony of a Thousand' [Decca SET534-5, now on one 79-minute CD 4757521].

Boston's Symphony Hall was built in 1900 and is considered one of the world's top acoustic successes – you can hear it, typically, in the mid '70s Ravel orchestral series with Seiji Ozawa, produced for DG by Thomas Mowrey. Mowrey also worked with Donald Johanos and the Dallas Orchestra in Copland and Rachmaninov scores: recordings much praised in these pages over the years, and with audiophile reissues, in formats including open-reel tape, by Analogue Productions.

Two English pieces have long appealed to audiophiles for the potential sound quality and colourful scoring: Gustav Holst's Suite *The*



How to build the ultimate 15 Series system

Start with the compact combination of I15 MM with CD15 Prisma, shown above, providing superior all-analog integrated amplification and inboard MM phono preamplification, with digital disc, stored and streamed media playback.

Need digital inputs? Replace CD15 Prisma with DD15 CD transport and SC15 Prisma network player preamplifier with multiple digital inputs.

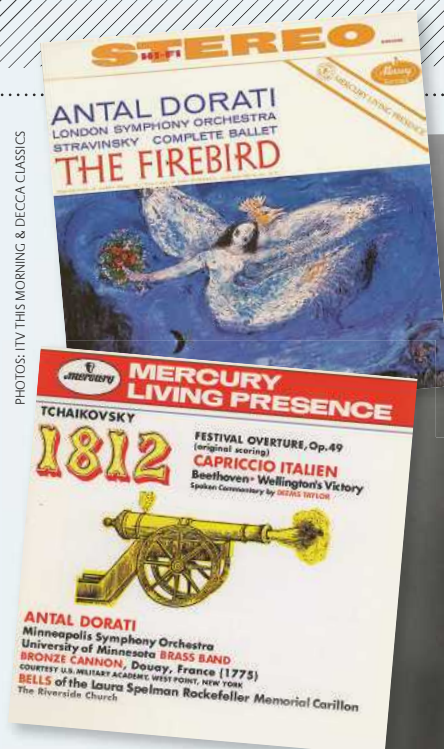
Need more sophisticated phono preamplification for use with a low-output moving coil cartridge? Substitute the MM15 board with R15 MM MC phono preamplifier.

Just need a network player and system control centre with or without amplification for passive or powered speakers? Select either I15 Prisma or SC15 Prisma.

**Whatever your system needs,
the 15 Series provides.**

► For more information go to primare.net





post-synched, but its very well done, and the filler Debussy's *La Boîte à Loujoux* is charming [4509 97418 2].

ENCHANTING TALES

Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is another audiophile favourite – in both the original piano version (and I've picked the Paul Lewis version in my boxout here) and Ravel's orchestration. The RCA 'Living Stereo' with the Chicago SO under Fritz Reiner you'll find on 200g vinyl from Analog Productions [AAPC 2201] or as a 176.4kHz/24-bit download). Reiner's Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade* is on APLPR2446, while his Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra* is on AAPC 1934 (both 200g vinyl, the former 2x45rpm).

Today, we are more likely to take out a laptop than an armful of LPs when we go equipment auditioning, so why not let our HD Music reviews [p88] point you in the right direction? ☺

remasterings on the Hi-Q label [HIQLP003 and HIQSR03]. It was originally produced at Kingsway Hall in Sep '73, but you'd need to find stocks somewhere as Hi-Q has pulled out of reissuing from the now Warner catalogue. Warner itself appears to have dropped the physical option, but Presto Classical offers a 192kHz/24-bit download.

Sir Adrian Boult gave the first performance of this music and made various recordings for different labels. His last EMI, with the London Philharmonic, was sponsored by KEF but the playing was more disciplined in his previous New Philharmonia version [ASD2301].

RUSSIAN VICTORY

One of the most formidable LPs ever to appear was the Telarc Tchaikovsky *1812 Overture* with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra [DG-10041]. It came in 1979 with a warning that replay might damage your system (it caused my Quad ESLs to arc!).

The music had long been a challenge to engineers: Antal Doráti made two Mercury versions, with the Minneapolis SO, in 1954 (mono) and 1958 (stereo) – both are paired on two current LPs [478 9757], the latter with authentic period cannons and muskets, brass band and church bells. The 'Living Presence' CD [475 8508] included a 12-minute commentary on how all these elements were put together.

Sonically not far behind, Decca's very first stereo LP release [SXL2001]

ABOVE: Antal Doráti and two of his Mercury audiophile must-have recordings: Stravinsky's *Firebird* ballet and – with cannons, bells and musketry – Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*

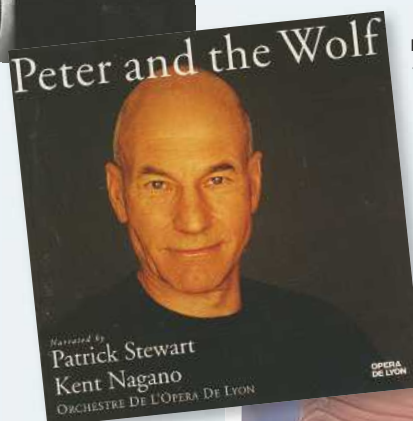
RIGHT: Patrick Stewart (also pictured far right) narrates *Peter and the Wolf* on Erato – a favourite test CD for the author

was the LSO version of *1812* with conductor Kenneth Alwyn. Speakers Corner's 180g reissue is still current.

Doráti also made one of the great Stravinsky recordings: his *Firebird* ballet played by the LSO.

You might with luck find the deleted Speakers Corner 180g LP [SR90226].

Speech is really the acid test for equipment appraisal – if you read our headphone reviews you'll know that Keith Howard likes Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* in the old LSO/Sargent Decca, with Sir Ralph Richardson narrating. I more often play the Erato CD with the Opera Lyon Orch/Kent Nagano and Sir Patrick Stewart. You can just tell he's



TOP TEN CHOICE RECORDINGS

Composer	Title	[Label]	Format
Bartók:	<i>Concerto for Orchestra</i>	LSO/Sir Georg Solti [Decca]	CD/vinyl
Bartók:	<i>Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta</i>	CSO/Fritz Reiner [RCA]	high-res
Britten:	<i>War Requiem</i>	Soloists LSO & Choirs/Benjamin Britten [Decca]	CD
Mahler:	<i>Symphony No 8</i>	Soloists, Chicago SO & Choirs/Sir Georg Solti [Decca]	CD
Mussorgsky:	<i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i>	Paul Lewis [Harmonia Mundi]	CD
Prokofiev:	<i>Peter and the Wolf</i>	Lyon Orchestra/Kent Nagano [Erato]	CD
Rimsky-Korsakov:	<i>Scheherazade</i>	Chicago SO/Fritz Reiner [RCA]	vinyl
Rossini:	<i>String Sonatas</i>	ASMIF/Sir Neville Marriner [Decca]	CD
Stravinsky:	<i>The Firebird (complete)</i>	LSO/Antal Doráti [Mercury]	CD/vinyl
Stravinsky:	<i>The Soldier's Tale</i>	Ens/Jean-Christophe Gayot [Harmonia Mundi]	CD

KRONOS
TIME FOR MUSIC®



“...the best of all decks with none of the downsides.”

- Alan Sircom, HiFi+

MAGNEPAN
INCORPORATED

“The 30.7s deliver sound quality competitive with (and in some respects superior to) loudspeakers ranging from two to nearly ten times their price.”

- Chris Martens, HiFi+



Life's just better with a **DECENT AUDIO** System

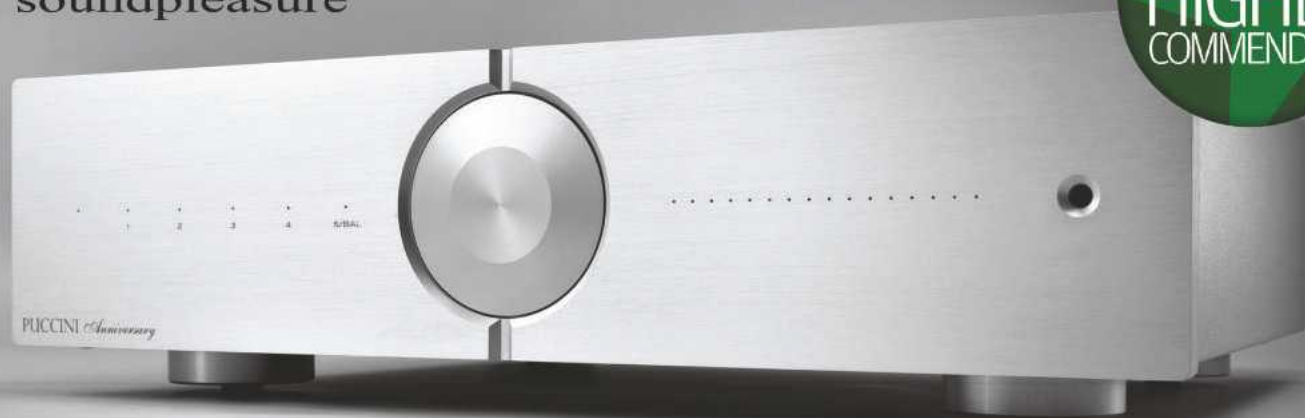
Raidho acoustics

“ Pick an album, play track one, intending to listen to only that track. Five tracks later you are still mesmerised. ”

- Alan Sircom, HiFi+



AUDIO ANALOGUE
soundpleasure



“ More than worthy of an extensive audition... a near ideal performance. ”

- James Parker/Paul Miller, HiFi News

t: +44 (0) 56 0205 4669
e: info@decentaudio.co.uk
www.decentaudio.co.uk

DECENT AUDIO
sound distribution
OFFICIAL UK DISTRIBUTOR

Rotel Michi P5/S5

A sleek new look heralds the return of Rotel's premier sub-brand, and its new control amplifier – or preamp – and stereo power amp have the wherewithal to succeed

Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Michi is back: last marketed in the 1990s, Rotel's elite sub-brand has rejoined the hi-fi fray after a three-year development project, and the establishment of a dedicated facility within the company's factory to hand-build the new products. And I have to admit to a pang of nostalgia for I reviewed the company's RHCD-10 player, slimline RHA-10 preamp and substantial RHB-10 power amp back in the dim and distant, and it was a case of lust at first listen, not to mention sight of the high-quality metalwork with its red-lacquered wooden side-cheeks [see boxout, p37].

Given how high the brand was riding at the time, with class-leading CD players and amplification, that meant the Michi line was, to these ears, very good indeed, and I'd convinced myself that if I ever had the money, I'd have a set in a heartbeat. And then Michi was gone, and we were back to best basic black Rotels. But it seems I wasn't alone in my affection for the range. To my eyes the styling hasn't dated, unlike so many designs of the time, and the fact that the original components are relatively scarce on the usual used platforms suggests those who bought into the range are hanging on to them.

ROTEL REVIVAL

Now, however, the brand has been revived under the auspices of Bowers & Wilkins, but Rotel remains a family-owned project. The initial offering, seen here, comprises the £3299 P5 'control amplifier' – or preamp – and 500W-rated S5 stereo power amp at £5399. There's also an exceptionally powerful M8 monoblock power amp, rated at 1080W/8ohm and 1800W/4ohm, and also selling for £5399. Except, of course, you'll need two for stereo.

These are all very much Michi products, but not 'Rotel Michi' for the M-word is the

only branding you'll find on the gloss black fascias. And the styling is a very long way from the 'cooking' products coming out of the company's own purpose-built factory, on which production has concentrated for at least the past couple of decades.

Indeed, I'm tempted to suggest that the look isn't a million miles from that of the products of Canadian company Classé, which was part of the B&W fold until being adopted as part of the Sound United portfolio. I'm not suggesting there's any connection, but the simple fascia design with large displays and rounded edges subscribes to the same aesthetic – it's purposeful, and undeniably clean.

I first heard the new Michi products in action during the 2019 High End show in Munich, where B&W had the Michi amps

driving its own 800 D3 speakers (we used the same, of course). Given the fact the demo was held in a huge penthouse with a high background level of conversation, what I heard was nonetheless sufficient to pique my interest. Not that I needed much

piquing given my past affection for the Michi brand [see boxout, p37].

'The S5 is simpler, but tips the scales at just under 60kg'

FULLY FEATURED

So, what do we have here, now that the new Michis have landed? Well, the P5 is a very long way from

those slender preamps of the past, both in looks and facilities. This is a full-featured preamp, designed to form the hub of a modern system, with both analogue and digital inputs, and the 'custom install' features to allow it to be integrated into a complete remote system.

RIGHT: The P5 has two toroidal transformers and 17 regulated supplies [bottom and centre] feeding an AKM DAC-based digital section [far right], MM/MC phono stage [top right] and Class A balanced preamp output [top left]





For analogue sources, the P5 has two sets of balanced inputs, four line-ins on RCAs, and a switchable MM/MC phono stage. There's also one line out, two mono subwoofer outputs (which each output a summed signal from both channels), and a front-panel headphone output.

The digital provision is also generous. In addition to three optical and three coaxial digital inputs, the P5 has a USB-B port for connection to a computer, plus Bluetooth. A network port is also provided, but this is for control over IP and firmware updates, not network audio streaming, while the USB-A socket is only there to power external devices, and has no audio input capability. Other control options extend to a socket for a remote infrared sensor, 12V triggering, and serial RS232. Digital outputs are also provided on both optical and coaxial sockets.

MICHİ MILESTONES

Launched at the beginning of the '90s, the Michi range – taking its name from the Japanese word for 'direction' – was an attempt to move the Rotel brand into the high-end. This was a status the company had already hinted at with models such as the RC-5000 preamp and RB-5000 of the late 1970s – models that stated on their front panel 'The CONTROL amp' and 'The POWER amp'. In the style of the time, these '5000 models looked very 'technical': the preamp was a fiesta of knobs, flip-switches and sliders – not least thanks to the provision of a ten-fader Octave Equaliser – while the power amp had both VU meters and peak level LEDs, and another battery of switches.

The Michi lineup was a complete change, being subtle in its industrial styling, with a minimum of controls and not a sniff of VU meters. The lacquered side panels emphasised the use of traditional Japanese craftsmanship, with the RHC-10 passive control amp in particular being a masterpiece of simplicity. And the sense of artisanship went even further, each of the three initial models having not just a number, but a name [see inset picture]. Thus the RHC-10 was also known as Takumi (or craftsmanship), the RHQ-10 phono preamp Shih (poetry), and the RHB-10 dual mono power amp, delivering 200W/8ohm, Kokoro (heart).

The Michi range expanded from that initial core in the following years, with the additional models varying between markets. An active preamplifier, the RHA-10, joined the lineup, as did an RHT-10 FM tuner, and there was also a truly huge CD player, the RHCD-10, and a second power amp, the RB-05.

The extensive menu system allows tone control configuration, or bypass, the setting of a fixed level on any input, and the renaming of those inputs. In addition, unused inputs can be turned off. MM/MC phono selection is also buried in these menus, which can be accessed from the front panel or via the slender metal-clad remote handset [see pic, p41].

'VELVET SOUND' DACS

Under the hood the P5 uses a pair of AKM DACs, allowing it to handle content up to 384kHz/32-bit, with DSD, DoP and MQA support via the USB-B connection. The analogue preamp section operates in Class A, the whole enterprise being powered by 17 regulated supplies hung off a pair of toroidal transformers. As



ABOVE: Preamp front panel is simple and clean – source and volume selectors dominate, along with its large, crisp display. Headphone socket is below volume knob, on/standby below display

is the way with Rotel, these transformers are custom-wound in-house in the company's Zuhai factory, and are both potted and placed right at the front of the P5, well away from the audio circuitry.

The S5 power amplifier is, of course, a much simpler animal, if a rather substantial one, standing as it does almost 24cm tall and tipping the scales at a whisker under 60kg. Inputs are provided on both balanced XLRs and RCA sockets, selected by a switch, and there are two sets of solid,

rhodium-plated speaker terminals per channel. If you so desire, the S5's front panel can also show a VU meter, or a choice of three frequency spectrum analyser displays. Thank heavens for the 'display off' option!

The power amp again uses in-house transformers – two 2.2kVA units, feeding a bank of British-made capacitors totalling 188,000µF. The dual-mono Class AB design is of a symmetrical layout, with the two channels in separate fan-cooled housings, and packing a total of 32 high-current output devices. The fan speed is controlled according to the temperature inside the amp – despite this cooling the S5 can still run warm when working hard, and needs plenty of breathing space.

THE MODEST MAMMOTH

Although relatively modest – at least by the standards of some of the behemoth amplification we've had through PM's listening room in recent months – the Michi combination swiftly sets out its stall once in action. Driving the flagship B&W 800 D3 floorstanders [HFN Oct '16] which, while excellent, are a pretty demanding load and

“This big loudspeaker has a massive, uncompressed, live soundstage quality,
with more than a hint of a classical large professional monitor about it.”

Martin Colloms, HIFICRITIC OCT | NOV | DEC 2019



BORG: MUSIC SOUNDS **BETTER WITH YOU**



FinkTeam | Maxstraße 75 | 45127 Essen | Germany | Tel.: +49 - 201 - 23 64 12 | www.finkteam.de

Distributed in the UK by: www.kogaudio.com | info@kogaudio.com | Tel: +44 [0] 24 7722 0650



ABOVE: Front panel of the S5 power amplifier is as understated as that of the preamp – well, except for the prominent display, which can be switched between VU meters and a choice of ‘Frequency Spectrum Analyser’ readouts, with 8, 12 or 16 bands. Fortunately, it can also be turned off...

don’t suffer foolish partnering equipment gladly, the P5/S5 quickly established itself as being able to exert plenty of control while delivering an open, captivating sound.

With sources including our usual dCS Vivaldi One [HFN Feb ’18] and a direct connection from the Melco N1ZS20/2’s [HFN Jun ’17] USB out into the P5’s USB-B input, the Michi sound revealed itself to be not the last word in detail, but at the same time mercifully free from the kind of sting and forwardness some find untenable in ultra-high-end systems. If you’re the kind of listener who finds you’re reaching too often for the ‘brash’ and ‘abrasive’ pages of the hi-fi description lexicon, you’re going to be in a much more comfortable place here.

SCOPE AND SCALE

That’s not to say the Michi P5/S5 sounds soft or overlush – instead, they deliver a full-blooded, holistic sound in which it seems the hi-fi bag of tricks is put aside, and the music moved up to centre stage

for enjoyment. Which, of course, is just as it should be. Take the audio assault course that is ELP’s ‘Karn Evil No. 9’ [from *Brain Salad Surgery*; Razor & Tie, 96kHz/24-bit] as an example, for here the amplifiers immediately reveal a sound that’s big and bold, with both striking bass extension and speed across the frequency range. This remastered version sounds a lot better than the original, which can be all top and bottom, and via

‘These Michi amps simply sweep the listener along’

these P5/S5 amplifiers there’s a very good balance of attack and substance.

Perhaps there’s not quite the analytical revelation of every thread you’d get with a more overt amplifier, but given the scale of sound being created (by just three musicians, remember) the system does an excellent job of drawing the listener in to the music, and powering it along to exciting effect. Carl Palmer’s characteristic ‘eleven-tenths’ percussion is especially well-handled, feeling taut and full of impact.

With less processed recordings, this natural, generous balance is even more toothsome. The burst of brass opening ‘Blowin’ The Blues’, from Kyle Eastwood’s *Time Pieces* set [Jazz Village JV ↗]



LEFT: The S5 is dual-mono right from the 2.2kVA epoxy resin-filled transformers and two UK-sourced PSU reservoir caps (47,000µF each) per channel. Each Class A/B output stage has eight pairs of high-current power transistors on a fan-assisted heat pipe

DAREN ORTH

Interviewing Rotel’s CTO, Daren Orth, during the course of this review, the first question was clear – why Michi, and why now? ‘The original Rotel Michi series was launched in the mid ’90s and was mainly aimed at the home (Japanese) market despite quickly achieving a global reputation’, says Daren. ‘Twenty-five years later we felt there was nothing of this quality currently in the market, so we embarked on a three-year project to develop a series of completely new and dedicated electronic designs that combine superlative performance with real overall value.’

The parent brand, Rotel, is no slouch when it comes to value-oriented engineering, so how is Michi different from Rotel? ‘It would have been easy to simply build a bigger, better Rotel’, says Daren, ‘however, this would not have been true to the heritage of those original Michi products’. In practice, Rotel’s engineers returned to the archives to gain an insight into those 1990s designs before re-imagining them through the lens of modern power supply, digital processing, audiophile component and PCB layout technologies. So where does it go from here?

‘The current Michi products are only the beginning – our engineering teams are actively engaged in extending this platform and new models are scheduled for launch later this year. Michi will also extend to digital sources and other options but we don’t currently have firm timings on a launch for those products.’ Watch this space!



PMC[®]

twenty5



A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

Find out more about the new series at your
local retailer: www.pmc-speakers.com



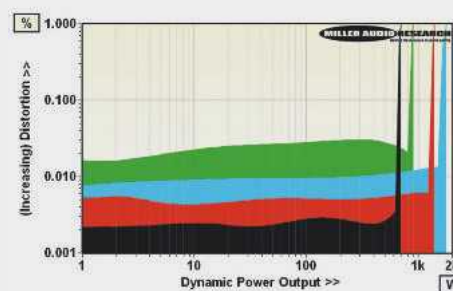
UNRIVALLED
twenty year warranty*

LAB REPORT

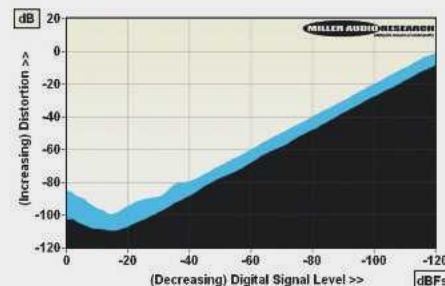
ROTEL MICHİ PS/S5

The exceedingly powerful and yet 'gentle' sound of the S5 power amp is fully explained by the measurements. The 2x500W/8ohm and 2x800W/4ohm spec. is very conservative as the S5 actually delivers 2x670W/8ohm and 2x1.17kW/4ohm with 691W, 1.39kW and 1.78kW achieved under dynamic conditions into 8, 4 and 2ohm. A 30A current limit gives a dynamic output of 902W/1ohm [see Graph 1]. THD climbs slightly with output, from 0.0015%/1W to 0.002%/10W, 0.0027%/100W and 0.0037% at the rated 500W/8ohm (all at 1kHz). Distortion also climbs at HF, from 0.0003%/20Hz to 0.002%/1kHz and 0.016%/20kHz (all 10W/8ohm) and noise is quite low, yielding a healthy 93dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW). But the response is not flat, shelving down above 5kHz to reach -0.4dB/10kHz, -0.65dB/20kHz and -1.0dB/100kHz. This trend is magnified into lower loads, reaching -0.5dB/10kHz, -0.9dB/20kHz and -2.3dB/100kHz into 2ohm.

The P5 preamp offers a maximum 22.6V balanced output, clipping at vol '90' with a peak level digital input. Tested at a 6V (vol '72') the P5 offers a modest 106dB A-wtd S/N ratio, minimal ± 0.1 dB error in linearity over a 100dB range and very low THD – between 0.0002-0.0006% through the midrange over the top 30dB of its dynamic range, increasing to 0.001-0.006% at 20kHz [see Graph 2]. Alias rejection is merely 'average' at 69dB because Rotel has elected for the minimum phase/steep roll-off digital filter option of the AK4490EQ DAC – the impulse test showing no pre-ringing but extended post-ringing. Responses extend out to -0.2dB/20kHz, -1.3dB/45kHz and -3.9dB/90kHz with 48kHz, 96kHz and 192kHz media while its source impedance increases from 120ohm and high/mid freq. to 375ohm/20Hz (bass). PM



ABOVE: S5 Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 30.0A



ABOVE: P5 Distortion versus 24-bit digital signal level over a 120dB range (1kHz, black; 20kHz, blue)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	670W / 1170W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	691W / 1.39kW / 1.78kW / 902W
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz, Pre/Amp)	121-375ohm / 0.016-0.075ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	-0.23 to -0.63dB/-1.05dB
Digital jitter (USB / S/PDIF)	350psec / 370psec
A-wtd S/N ratio (DAC/Amp)	106.1dB (0dBFS) / 92.8dB (0dBW)
Distortion (DAC, 0dBFS/Amp, 0dBW)	0.0006–0.006% / 0.0003–0.016%
Power consump. (Pre/Amp at rated)	28W / 1.65kW (143W idle)
Dimensions (WHD, each unit)	485x238x465mm / 60kg (total)



ABOVE: The P5 preamp [top] offers MM/MC phono and six line ins (two balanced on XLR), a fixed line out, two sub outs, four preamp outs (two on XLR). Digital ins include six S/PDIF (three coax/three optical), USB-B and wireless BT. Network port is for control only and USB-A for charging. The S5 power amp has balanced (XLR) and RCA ins, trigger connections and two sets of substantial 4mm speaker cable binding posts

570034; 44.1kHz/24-bit] is a real wake-up in its immediacy, and as the track develops it's easy to relish every element, from Eastwood's propulsive bass-line to the stabs of piano and powerful drumming. The sound is bright, breezy and bracing, yet underpinned with weight and substance and, as my listening progressed, so grew my appreciation of the way this pre/power amplifier combination presents music.

LIGHT AND SHADE

Playing the sparky, darting recording of Mozart's overture for *La Nozze di Figaro* [Linn CKD 460; 192kHz/24-bit], and the Michi P5/S5 delivers a rich, ripe sound, yet one with the agility and detail to convey the exuberance of both score and performance. There's no shortage of dynamic extension here, making clear both the light and shade of the orchestra and the playful writing.

Yes, some intimate recordings can sound a little more distant than they might through more forward amps – for example the vocals on Lake Street Dive's 'Better Than' [*Bad Self*

Portraits; Signature Sounds SIG 2061] – but this Michi pairing is all about conveying the music, and sweeping the listener along with it. That's readily apparent with the classic Tallis Scholars recording of Allegri's *Miserere*, recently remastered [Gimmell GIM 639; 192kHz/24-bit], which comes with all its luminous ambience intact – and especially effective with the distant 'second choir' deep in the Merton College Chapel.

But this quality is just as revelatory with the slow build of Mike Oldfield's *Return To Ommadawn* [Mercury; 96kHz/24-bit]. The recording opens with clean, precise acoustic guitar, and then the amps simply allow the music and the soundstage to swell and open up as the piece develops, always in control, and yet filling the room with sound. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Oh, Michi, you're so fine: this new amplifier combination brings a welcome breath of weight, scale and entirely natural music-making to an overpopulated high-end arena, displaying a wide-ranging ability across a broad spectrum of genres. Some may wish for more attack and overt slam, and for every detail unearthed, but Michi is all about the emotion and spirit of the music, delivered on an entirely human scale.

Sound Quality: 88%



LEFT: Rotel's elegant Michi remote offers input select and volume plus access to the display and menu options

Vertere DG-1 Dynamic Groove

Supplied with or without a partnering MM cartridge, this new 'entry-level' deck to the Vertere range comes equipped with a re-imagining of the archetypal flat tonearm

Review: **Adam Smith** Lab: **Paul Miller**

In a world of plug 'n' play convenience, having to manually configure a piece of equipment before it can be used is felt by some to be far too great a barrier to enjoyment. And perhaps in no area of hi-fi is this truer than vinyl replay. I know of many people who have consciously shied away from exploring the ol' black stuff because they believe it to be 'just too much hard work'. So any manufacturer able to help eliminate any of the perceived faff and complexity that comes with putting together and setting up a turntable – not to mention its arm – is onto a winner.

The latest company to pick up the baton is Vertere, with its DG-1 'Dynamic Groove' record player – a complete package for £2850 including arm, cartridge and cabling. The DG-1 draws on designer Touraj Moghaddam's extensive knowledge of turntable design but makes it available at a much lower price point than the company's MG-1 (£7300), SG-1 (£13,900) and RG-1 (£21,500) stablemates. For example, the DG-1's motor is derived from the RG-1 but is integrated onto a single PCB here, and housed inside the turntable plinth rather than being in a standalone enclosure.

ENGINE ROOM

So, what has Vertere done to make life easier? Generally speaking, assembling a good quality record player involves lubricating and installing the bearing, fitting the belt, fitting and aligning the tonearm and then mounting and aligning the cartridge to the arm. Add in VTA, azimuth, tracking force and bias adjustment and it's no wonder the less technical music fans out there are tempted by the rash of online streaming services!

Fortunately it is possible to eliminate a few of these stages. In the case of the DG-1, the arm is pre-fitted to the turntable plinth and the deck can be bought in this

state for £2750 including a Vertere D-Fi interconnect cable. However, £100 more adds in a ready-installed and aligned Audio-Technica VM520EB cartridge. This MM pick-up has a bonded 0.3x0.7mm elliptical stylus and aluminium cantilever. It tracks at a nominal 2.0g and has an output of 4.5mV, so should match easily with any MM phono stage you care to employ.

The DG-1's engine room includes a 24-pole synchronous AC motor, driven by a microprocessor-controlled circuit, a machined aluminium pulley and circular cross-section silicone rubber belt that runs around the periphery of the platter. The drive circuitry is well-screened and the processor is fully programmable, holding out the promise of accommodating future improvements to the motor drive.

The slim, disc-like platter consists of three layers – a central core of machined aluminium alloy with bonded layers of cork, Neoprene and nitrile rubber. This

composite helps control resonance across the entire platter, but the cork is not an LP mat – it's actually on the *underside* of the platter. In fact the platter is topped-off with a layer of PETG (a thermoplastic polymer most often used in extruded form for 3D printing). This 'mat' is both stylish and well finished, but also has two small dots printed onto it that are used for cartridge alignment, should you be bitten by the aforementioned 'vinyl faff' bug and wish to change the cartridge at a later date.

UNUSUAL SIGHT

The platter itself spins on a stainless steel shaft and tungsten carbide ball bearing that, the manual is at pains to point out, is lubricated on assembly and requires no maintenance. It should also never be removed as it requires specialist tooling to re-fit. The turntable plinth is another laminate, comprising a clear acrylic with coloured acrylic layers bonded above and



RIGHT: Vertere's choice of AC synchronous motor [top left] is decoupled from the main chassis, as is the acrylic 'subchassis', the latter suspended via four white silicone strips. The laminated tonearm looks striking from above!



below. A sub-plinth sits within a cut-out here, suspended via a series of white silicone-rubber straps.

Meanwhile, the flat 'Groove Runner' arm is an unusual sight. Outwardly similar arms already exist and work very well, such as the EAT E-Flat and the Scheu Cantus and these have successfully expunged the memory of the old NAD 5120

flat arm from the 1980s [see PM's boxout, below]. That said, the DG-1's arm is similar to the 5120 design as it's also based around a central PCB track that carries the connections from the cartridge to the rear of the arm. Either side of this, however, are layers of aluminium to add strength and rigidity, while also providing electrical shielding.

As per other tonearms in Vertere's range, the DG-1 variant does not employ conventional ball bearings. Instead, both vertical and horizontal movement is achieved through hundreds of twisted micro-fine nylon threads, which the company claims are light, noiseless and

have minimal friction and stiction (an initial resistance to movement). Tracking force is applied by a stainless steel rear counterweight, augmented by a fine adjustment weight situated along the length of the arm 'beam'.

Operation is simplicity itself with one illuminated button pushed sequentially to select 33rpm (green), 45rpm (red) and a longer press for off. A sustained press also selects between illumination LEDs mounted on the plinth that are always on, always off or on only when the deck is in standby. My only gripe here is that the button is slightly close to the belt – it could do with moving to the left.

**'It is Dynamic
in name and
also dynamic
by nature'**

SOLID STAR

During set-up of the deck, the word 'wobble' kept coming to mind. The diameter of the bearing step on which the platter sits is very small so the platter

ABOVE: The DG-1 'Dynamic Groove' makes good use of laminates, from the steel chassis and three-layer acrylic plinth to the cork/alloy/polymer platter and flat, sandwich tonearm

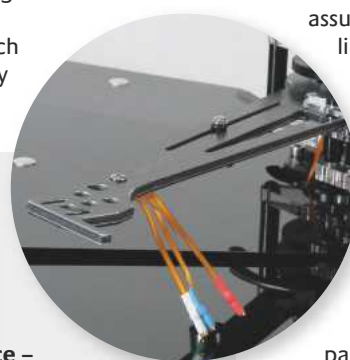
can tilt if pushed. Equally, the nylon arm bearings make the arm feel loose and not unlike a unipivot to handle. However, as soon as the music started playing through my regular Anatek MC1 phono stage, Naim Supernait amp and PMC Twenty5.24 loudspeakers [HFN May '17], the word that sprang to mind was 'solid'. Frankly, how a small, slim and light deck such as the DG-1 can produce a sound that is so fulsome, weighty and capacious is little short of remarkable. This deck is Dynamic in name and also dynamic by nature

This is no shrinking violet of a turntable by any means. It dives straight into the heart of the performance, brushing aside any rough edges to serve up the overall musical message with a confidence and assurance that is not just superb but like little else at its price point.

I was also reassured to hear that the deck was pleasingly stable in pitch terms. When I heard a prototype of the deck on its release at the 2019 Munich High End Show, some piano tracks sounded decidedly 'watery' but Vertere's continued development and work on the motor and drive system has clearly paid off. The DG-1 was as steady as a rock during its stay in my listening room.

FLAT EARTH?

Vertere's cartridge carrier owes more to the ultra-flat arm of the NAD 5120 turntable, launched in late 1983, than to the 'flat-sos' of the 1950s-1970s. More recently still, EAT launched a flat, rigid Kevlar arm to accompany its E-Flat turntable [HFN Jan '12], but only Vertere shares NAD's novel idea of using PCB track – or flexible PCB wiring in this instance – for its tonearm wiring. Unlike the three-layer laminate of Vertere's tonearm, NAD's super-thin flat arm was cut from circuit board material, the idea conceived by designer Jili Janda at the Tesla Research Institute in Prague and NAD's then-Director of Research, Bjorn-Erik Edvardsen. At the heart of the accompanying 'white paper' was the claim that this arm design could neutralise resonance by means of a reverse wave, a product of the arm's flexibility, fluid damping and a sprung weight. Unfortunately the arm was not universally well received, suffering the epithet of 'the floppy tonearm'. Regardless of how the 5120 sounded – and many thought it was a fine package for the price – commercial pressure obliged NAD to replace the flat arm with a conventional tube. EAT's E-Flat variant is still going strong, so perhaps Vertere will also benefit from today's more enlightened and tolerant hi-fi age. PM



PLEASED AS PUNCH

If further proof of the deck's stability were needed, it was to be found at the bass end of the spectrum. The DG-1 digs deeply, of that there is no doubt, but once again it does so with a precision and detail that is utterly bewitching. The main synth bass notes on 'Girlfriend' from Christine And The Queens' *Chris* LP [Because Music BEC5543602] rumbled deliciously from my loudspeakers without any sense of wallow ➔

Heresy

Titanium Diaphragm Hi-Frequency Driver

Polyimide Diaphragm Midrange Compression Driver

12" Fibre Composite Cone Woofer

Stylish Magnetic Woven Grill

MDF Cabinet With Three Fine Veneer Finish Options

Tractrix Horn Ports for Improved Airflow

Klipsch
HERITAGE
LOUDSPEAKERS



A little heresy is
good for the soul...

The Heresy IV offers unparalleled sound quality from a relatively small speaker. Utilizing Tractrix geometry, the all-new Heresy IV ports allow for the most efficient, fastest air transfer in their class, which reduces port noise for punchier low frequencies. In addition to delivering smooth, dynamic and low distortion sound, the Heresy IV is available in a high-quality Natural Cherry, Distressed Oak, American Walnut, or Satin Black Ash wood veneer finish. A slant riser base is included for floor placement that is removeable for cabinet installations.



FINISH
OPTIONS:



TURNTABLE PACKAGE



ABOVE: There's no external PSU here but a direct AC mains power connection to the onboard speed synthesiser. 'PCB' tonearm wiring is terminated in RCA outputs

or uncertainty. What's more, the bass guitar line that is tucked subtly behind the synth skipped along with a lightness of touch that had me playing the track twice in a row, just to enjoy it once more.

Give the deck something with a bit more bounce and it typically rises to the challenge. The snappy drum beats from The Colorblind James Experience's 'Considering A Move To Memphis' from their eponymous debut LP [Fundamental Music SAVE 50] punched out with impact and precision. Every cymbal strike sounded gloriously realistic and was imbued with just the right level of metallic sheen.

ABSOLUTE RIOT

Soundstaging impressed too, the deck having a masterful way of drawing the main performers from the loudspeakers and out into the room towards you. With one or two tracks I played there was an almost 'reach out and touch' sense of realism. While the old claim that CD is two-dimensional and only vinyl has proper depth is unrealistic, the DG-1 could well have you sympathising with that argument all over again.

Even better, this grasp of space and depth seemed largely independent of musical type. Diane Schuur's heartfelt vocals on 'Love Dance' from *The Diane Schuur Collection* LP [GRP Records GR-9591] were seemingly right in front of me and had the hairs on the back of my neck rising in response. Equally, the bass line was once again deep and sinuous, while the icing on the cake was the sound of the piano which had a rich, resonant impact.

In complete contrast, the unruly whooping, hollering and applause that make up The Art Company's 12in single of 'Susanna' [Epic TA

4174] made for an absolute riot as they seemed to bounce around my room with breezy abandon.

And the top end? At this price it's as good as you'll hear. Treble detail was very fine indeed and the combination of the Audio-Technica VM520EB cartridge and Groove Runner arm worked harmoniously. That said, as the VM520EB is new to me, I did spend time listening to the DG-1 with my regular Ortofon 2M Black cartridge installed and the results were just as impressive.

When fitted onto the Groove Runner, the 2M Black sounded both purer and cleaner than I have heard it for a long time. There was not the merest whisper of sibilance or distortion, the pair working uncannily well together.

Moving back to the VM520EB only confirmed it to be a highly capable cartridge. It's one I'll happily give a thumbs-up to in its own right, and proof that Vertere has chosen its matching 'packaged' pick-up very well. However, it was also clear that the DG-1 has much more to give when you feel like an upgrade. ⬇️

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

In case you hadn't gathered by now, I'd say the Vertere DG-1 really is something quite special. It isn't quite as 'plug and play' as some, but it is still easy to set up and the results are truly outstanding. It may look unusual and it certainly feels unusual at times when in use, but all that is forgotten when it starts playing. Put simply, the DG-1 redefines what is sonically possible at its price point.

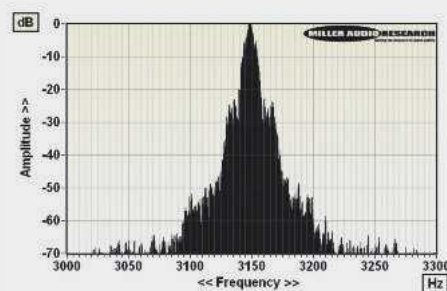
Sound Quality: 88%



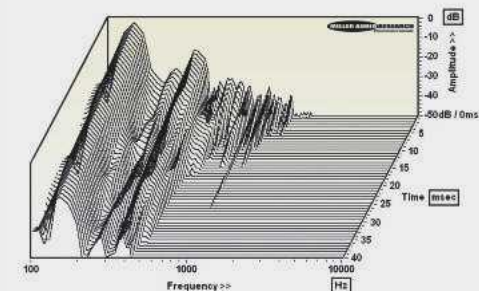
VERTERE DG-1 DYNAMIC GROOVE

Whatever the pros and cons of the arm [see boxout p43, and below] by incorporating the cartridge leads as flat, flying PCB conductors within the laminate, Vertere has reduced hum pick-up to below -61dB (re. 5cm/sec). The brass/stainless bearing, with tungsten ball, is put under minimal strain by the lightweight cork/alloy/polymer platter and this is reflected in the hearteningly low -73dB rumble, increasing marginally to -72.2dB through the vinyl groove (DIN-B wtd, re. 5cm/sec). These are class-leading results for a sub-£3k deck even if the speed stability is marginally less impressive. Start-up is a swift 3-4secs, absolute speed is almost bang on the money at just -0.03% and peak-wtd wow acceptable at 0.4%, but higher-rate flutter variations appear at $\pm 15\text{Hz}$, $\pm 19\text{Hz}$ and $\pm 23\text{Hz}$ and amount to 0.6% [see Graph 1, below]. This same cluster of peaks is also visible on the unweighted rumble spectrum [not shown here].

In common with EAT's flat Kevlar tonearm [HFN Jan '12] Vertere's laminated version trades the beam resonances of conventional tubes for its own unique set of bending modes, further complicated here by the three-way 'split' in its construction. The main 'springboard' mode occurs clearly enough at 150Hz with other modes at 280Hz, 375Hz and 420Hz [see Graph 2, below]. Clearly this laminate does exhibit bending (flexing) and higher frequency torsional (twisting) modes from 700Hz-2kHz, but they are evidently high-Q and rapidly damped. Finally, the twisted nylon thread 'bearings' necessarily have a degree of 'play' (movement) but are also free of chatter and have very low levels of stiction/friction (typically <10g in both planes). PM



ABOVE: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted $\pm 150\text{Hz}$, 5Hz per minor division)



ABOVE: Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.32rpm (-0.03%)
Time to audible stabilisation	4sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.04% / 0.06%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-72.2dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-73.0dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-61.0dB
Power Consumption	4W (<1W idle)
Dimensions (WHD, with lid) / Weight	469x130x384mm / 8kg

Balanced Audio Technologies REX 3 DAC

Launched to the audiophile world at CES in 1995, Balanced Audio Technologies may have lifted off like a rocket but has only had patchy distribution in Europe. Until now...
Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Balanced Audio Technologies – BAT for short – has been much discussed over its 25-year life to date, but until now has remained an object of distant interest for UK audio fans. Now, thanks to distribution by Yorkshire-based Karma AV, all that might be set to change, so perhaps now is the time to take a closer look at the brand.

Where better to start than the latest version of the company's DAC, the £19,995 REX 3? After all, the company has its roots in digital technology, co-founders Steve Bednarski and Victor Khomenko having met at Hewlett-Packard, and bonded over an interest in recorded sound. Legend has it that, growing up in what was then Leningrad, Khomenko built his first crystal radio set when he was just eight, and was sourcing parts from various places including the dump used by the Svetlana factory, best-known for its manufacture of valves.

TUBE POWERED

Not surprisingly, the company's debut products – the VK-5 linestage preamp and the VK-60 power amplifier, which launched at the 1995 CES (in an age when that show was still a major focus for hi-fi) – both used valves and, given the name of the new company, were of balanced circuit design. Joining forces with Geoff Poor, then sales director of Dunlavy speakers and later to join BAT, the pair demonstrated the new products driving that company's SC-V loudspeakers, which were also being introduced at the show that year.

That's the history: scroll forward a quarter of a century, and the Wilmington, Delaware, company now has an extensive offering covering six preamps, eight power

amps (both valve and solid-state), an integrated amplifier and two phono stages, each available in a range of specifications. And a DAC... the REX, now in '3' guise and reviewed here for the very first time. The REX 3 is part of the company's flagship valve-powered line alongside the REX II preamp and 'no-compromise' all-triode REX II power amp.

The latter employs two single-ended power amps per channel, summed at the output transformers to deliver 80W in stereo, according to the company, or 160W when it is bridged as a monoblock. You can even go further should you want, by daisy-chaining two mono'd REX II power amps per channel, to yield a claimed 320W.

Which, as they say, should certainly be adequate for most requirements.

UNIQUE SOLUTION

The REX 3 DAC shares the styling of the REX II preamp, which is striking with its thick, curved front plate (available in either silver or black), and also much of its tube technology. Editor PM covers off the proprietary DAC technology [see extended boxout, p47], but the 'executive summary' is that the REX 3 uses independent designer Andreas Koch's unique signal processing solution that, in this implementation, handles PCM inputs up to 384kHz/24-bit and DSD512, at least via its USB input.

'Its freshness and vitality has the illusion of total ease'



RIGHT: Our REX 3 DAC was fitted with BAT's 'Super Pak' PSU reservoir bank [centre] which feeds the 6C19 tube stage [right]. Two of these tubes are used in the PSU itself, the others in the transformer coupled output [top right]



As is usual, a driver is needed to connect the USB input to a PC: the fact that this is also provided by Koch's AKDesign company via the BAT website indicates that the USB interface is also designed by Koch. Mac users won't need a driver, but in this case DSD input is purely by DoP.

Other inputs are provided for AES/EBU (XLR) and S/PDIF (two optical and two coaxial), these selected using front-panel pushbuttons or the VK-R4 remote handset supplied. As far as controls go, that's almost it on the REX 3, apart from standby and mute buttons. It's also possible to dim the display from the handset and – slightly laboriously – rename the inputs.

Back to the internals of this DAC, and while the digital-to-analogue conversion is essentially an 'off the shelf' solution (if a very superior one), the BAT philosophy is clearly apparent in the design of both the

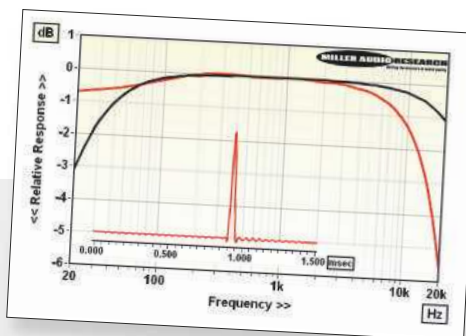
analogue output section – which only feeds balanced sockets, by the way – and the power supply provision. Like BAT's preamps, the REX 3 uses an all-valve output section (complete with a wrench in the box in the unlikely event you should need to pop the lid to do a spot of tube-reseating after transportation), using six 6C19s in total.

Two are employed as PSU current sources for the output stage, the latter using no overall negative feedback, buffers or followers in the signal path, and which BAT calls 'UniStage'. It also lacks any signal path capacitors, and has amorphous-core transformers for output coupling – a technique rare in 'consumer' audio, but

ABOVE: Big and imposing, yes, but the REX DAC 3's fascia is simple: input selectors at the centre, standby and mute buttons either side, and a function control to tinker with the display

widely used in pro-audio equipment. Amusingly, where this design is used in the REX II preamp, BAT refers to this transformer-coupled layout as T-REX.

The other element of the design is the use of the company's 'SuperPak' capacitor bank [see our internal picture, p46], now in its second generation, and previously available as an upgrade for the last REX DAC model, as indeed it still is for models such as the VK-P12SE phono amp. Fitted as standard to the REX 3 DAC here, it adds to the usual electrolytic power supply capacitors a bank of large oil capacitors, greatly increasing the energy on tap. It's all part of the design of this DAC's highly-specified output stage.



ACTING ON IMPULSE

Designed by one of the founders of the SACD format, and all-round ambassador for DSD, Andreas Koch, his AKDesign AKDAC-3 filter and converter solution lies at the heart of the REX 3.

Key to this DAC is its proprietary upsampling and adaptive digital filtering, the latter bearing a conceptual similarity to Denon's 'Advanced AL32 Processing' (ALPHA or Automatic Low-Pass filter Harmonic Adjustment). Koch's vision of the adaptive filter also has the transient integrity of the music signal at its core, choosing the optimal algorithm on a sample-by-sample basis. Ultimately the data is upsampled to 11.3MHz, and the wordlength truncated to a bitstream, before it is low-pass filtered to reveal the desired analogue (music) signal.

It is possible to expose the extremes of Koch's adaptive filter by comparing its performance with continuous and transient test signals. The former might indicate the REX 3 uses a fairly standard linear- or minimum-phase filter with its superb 104dB rejection of stopband (alias) distortions and steep roll-off beyond 22kHz with CD/48kHz inputs. At 20kHz the response drops by only -1.05dB [black trace, inset Graph]. The transient impulse [red] however reveals an interpolation filter with no pre- or post-ringing – a more 'natural' result – but with poorer stopband rejection and a heavily tailored HF response, -1dB/8.7kHz, -3dB/14.7kHz and -5.6dB/20kHz with some visible passband ripple. With constantly changing music signals, the digital filter algorithm will adapt and segue between these sets of mathematics. PM

RIGHT OFF THE BAT

Clearly, then, the REX 3 DAC is a long way from the fallacious stereotype of 'well, all DACs are not much more than a chip and a simple output stage, so why are they so expensive?'. There's a lot of engineering going on here – even if the remote looks like it's escaped from a 1980s TV – and fortunately no shortage of performance to set the REX 3 apart from its peers.

Fire it up and right from the off – well, right from the minute or so's wait while it soft starts and stabilises itself ready for action – you realise you're on to something special, even when doing something as simple as playing CD-quality music in through one of the coaxial digital inputs.

An album like Yazz Ahmed's *Polyhymnia* [Ropeadope RAD506CD] is immediately notable for the way the transients of Sophie Alloway's percussion opening 'Ruby Bridges' really zings out of the speakers, and then remains just as crisp, tight and focused however busy the track becomes, the slinking beat driving the music along. ➔

aqua
acoustic quality

"I must highlight Aqua Hifi's Formula with one of our sparsely administered awards. True, it's serious money. But it's seriously well built. And it delivers very serious performance."
Srajan Ebaen | sixmoons.com



delivering **digital** at its very best!



antipodes.audio



"The precision of the [EX] sound was immediately ear-grabbing"
Andrew Everard | Hi-Fi News

exclusively distributed in the UK by **elite** audio

contact us to find out more about our part exchange and interest free credit terms



Retailing the world's most sought after Hi-Fi components.



T: 01334 570 666

E: INFO@ELITEAUDIOUK.COM

W: WWW.ELITEAUDIOUK.COM

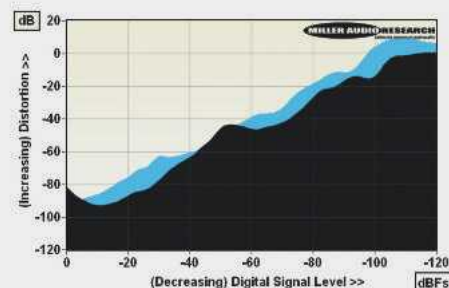


aqua
acoustic quality

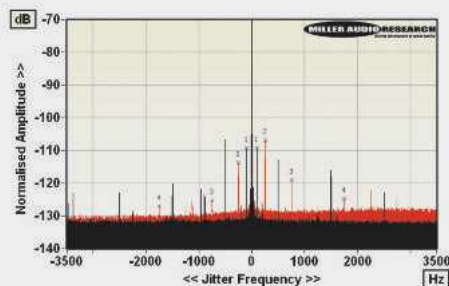
BAT REX 3 DAC

High-end outboard converters featuring bespoke DAC architectures – the dCS Vivaldi One [HFN Feb '18] and MSB Premier [HFN Aug '19] being good examples – will typically exhibit a distinct technical behaviour, all of which can inform how the product will *sound*. This is not entirely true of the REX 3 because, although the adaptive nature of the digital filter can be examined in the lab [see boxout, p47], other 'features' of Andreas Koch's AKDAC-3 DAC module are masked by BAT's 6C19 tube-based output stage. For example, while the DAC's low-level linearity is good to within $\pm 0.2\text{dB}$ over a 100dB dynamic range, the overall A-wtd S/N ratio is reduced to just 95dB because of a prominent 100Hz PSU noise component. PSU noise does influence the REX 3's jitter spectrum but the overall figures of 280psec (48kHz/24-bit data) and 155psec (96kHz data) are still very low [see Graph 2, below]. Furthermore, the sharpness of the main test signal suggests very low phase noise on the part of the AKDAC-3 design – always a good indicator of stereo focus.

The moderate 530ohm output impedance, decreasing to 315ohm/20Hz, is a function of the transformer-coupled balanced output, as is the loss in sub-100Hz bass which falls to $-0.7\text{dB}/50\text{Hz}$, $-2.9\text{dB}/20\text{Hz}$ and $-6\text{dB}/12\text{Hz}$. With non-transient signals the response reaches out to $-1.1\text{dB}/20\text{kHz}$, $-16.5\text{dB}/45\text{kHz}$ and $-23.7\text{dB}/90\text{kHz}$ [48kHz, 96kHz and 192kHz media]. In all likelihood, the tube output pushes up (2nd harmonic) distortion uniformly higher than might be incurred by the AKDAC-3, but the unusual *pattern* of distortion vs. digital level is indicative of the DAC's digital processing and final bitstream mapping. At its lower-than-typical 1.55V maximum output, the tube stage incurs some 0.003-0.006% THD. PM



ABOVE: Distortion vs. 48kHz/24-bit digital signal level over a 120dB dynamic range (1kHz, black; 20kHz, blue)



ABOVE: High resolution 24-bit jitter spectra via S/PDIF and USB inputs (48kHz sampling, red; 96kHz, black)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	1.55Vrms / 315-565ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (S/PDIF / USB)	95.1dB / 95.1dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0059% / 0.017%
Distortion & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.0025% / 0.095%
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/45kHz/90kHz)	-2.9 to -1.1dB/-16.5dB/-24dB
Digital jitter (48kHz / 96kHz)	280psec / 155psec
Resolution (re. -100dBFS / -110dBFS)	$\pm 0.2\text{dB}$ / $\pm 3.5\text{dB}$
Power consumption	128W (W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	483x146x394mm / 14.5kg



ABOVE: Six digital inputs are fitted including AES/EBU (XLR), S/PDIF (two on RCA and two optical) and USB-B for computer connection. Fixed analogue outputs are offered on balanced (XLR) connections only

And with more than 30 musicians involved in this album, things do tend to get a bit complex at times, yet the beauty of the REX 3 DAC's sound is that it gives every instrument, every line of the scoring, plenty of breathing space, allowing the listener that luxury of 'listening around' the performance, to focus on single performers or luxuriate in the sheer spread of sound.

It's an experience akin to that 'live performance' presentation so often sought, and a very long way from the technical fireworks with which so much audio equipment seeks to dazzle. Instead, when one reaches the album-closing homage to influential saxophonist Barbara Thompson, the lasting impression is of the rich variety of musical colours and textures on offer in the playing and recording, and not how good the hi-fi is sounding.

KING OF HEARTS

That sparkling sound, packed with freshness and vitality while maintaining the illusion of total ease, is the clever stuff here, as is clear with Compagnia di Punto's 'small band' recordings of Beethoven's first three Symphonies [Deutsche

Harmonia Mundi 19439706502-2; 48kHz/24-bit]. With just 11 musicians deployed instead of the usual massed forces, these arrangements are sprightly, crisp and intimate, and the REX 3

DAC again does that wonderful thing of taking the listener to the heart of the music while allowing each individual contribution to be examined if required.

That's not to say it can't turn on the thunder if really necessary. With the blazing 'Walk On Hot Coals' from Rory Gallagher's *Check Shirt Wizard* live set [Cadet Concept/Chess 0836846; 96kHz/24-bit], the sheer vitality of performances, recorded in 1977 on the Rolling Stones and Jethro Tull's *Maison Rouge* mobiles, is irresistible. Mixed from the original multitracks, the album allows the guitarist's performances new life, and the REX 3 DAC's winning combination of spark, speed and dynamic power makes the most of them, whether Gallagher is blues picking almost solo, or crashing it out with the band.

With all this ability, it's a given this remarkable DAC will do its thing with demo-quality jazz, too, and it passes the piano, bass and brushed drums test with total nonchalance. But don't even consider it if you limit your musical choices by what's likely to show off your system at its best. So well does the REX 3 perform across the board that you're going to be spending a lot on music. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Despite what some would have you believe, all DACs don't sound the same, and they certainly don't all deliver in musical terms as well as the REX DAC 3. Simply, this unashamedly expensive converter gets you closer to the music without you even realising it's doing it. Just let it weave its magic, and you'll be too immersed in what's being played to give another thought to all the engineering making it possible.

Sound Quality: 89%



LEFT: BAT's VK-R6 remote provides access to input selection, mute and limited display and menu items

Extraudio X250T

An artisan brand with its own take on Hypex's tried-and-tested Class D amp module offers both tube and transistor variants to taste. Here's the low-down on the latter
 Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Hybrid amps have always amused me. I still dream of Radford's TT100. This hi-fi equivalent of grafting two plant species hopes – ideally – to combine the best of a brace of disparate technologies. Too often, they marry the worst. Extraudio's X250T represents a first for me in that it promises to take efficient, compact Class D amplification and endow it with the sonic virtues of Class A, hence Class AD. Which made me think of playing with Krell's way back in 1985 [PM covers off the technology in his boxout, p51].

Given that this £8495 integrated amp's £4000-dearer sibling, the X250, is a hybrid of a different sort, in which valves and Class D are combined, one might infer that the founders of this Dutch company suffer schizophrenia, if not, ADD. But the proposal is sensible, if you are told the X250T's goal is to offer 1) value for money, 2) zero obsolescence, 3) reliability and 4) a 'listening experience at affordable price'.

MINIMALISM MASTERED

Hmmm... No 1 is relative, No 2 impossible to predict, and No 3 not calculable during the period of the review, but No 4 can be assessed. I am assuming they left out the adjective 'Pleasurable' or 'Musical', because clearly it offers 'a listening experience'. What is certain from the initial, empirical exposure to the X250T is that this is a delightful object exuding superlative build quality, sensible layout and svelte styling.

Available in matte black or silver, as opposed to the X250's more vivid orange, the X250T is surprisingly compact for a factory-rated, 200W/ch unit [see PM's Lab Report, p53], occupying only 445x125x395mm (whd) and weighing a wieldy 18kg. It is minimalist in a way that only the Northern Europeans seem to have mastered, the

front panel self-explanatory, with rotary source selector on the left and level on the right, and LEDs in between denoting which source is active: Phono, CD, Tuner, Auxiliary, Processor and Balanced. Below them is the illuminated power-on button (from standby) in the form of the Extraudio logo, which is similar in shape to rival Gato Audio's signature fascia profile. Go figure.

All inputs – four via RCA, 'Balanced' via XLR – are line level, while the one marked 'Processor' is not a throughput loop *per se*, as in the days when you might have inserted a graphic equaliser. Instead it accepts, via RCA or XLR balanced inputs, an AV preamp or processor input or audio bypass input for a home cinema setup. The X250T then

acts as a power stage only and turns off all other systems and the preamp section.

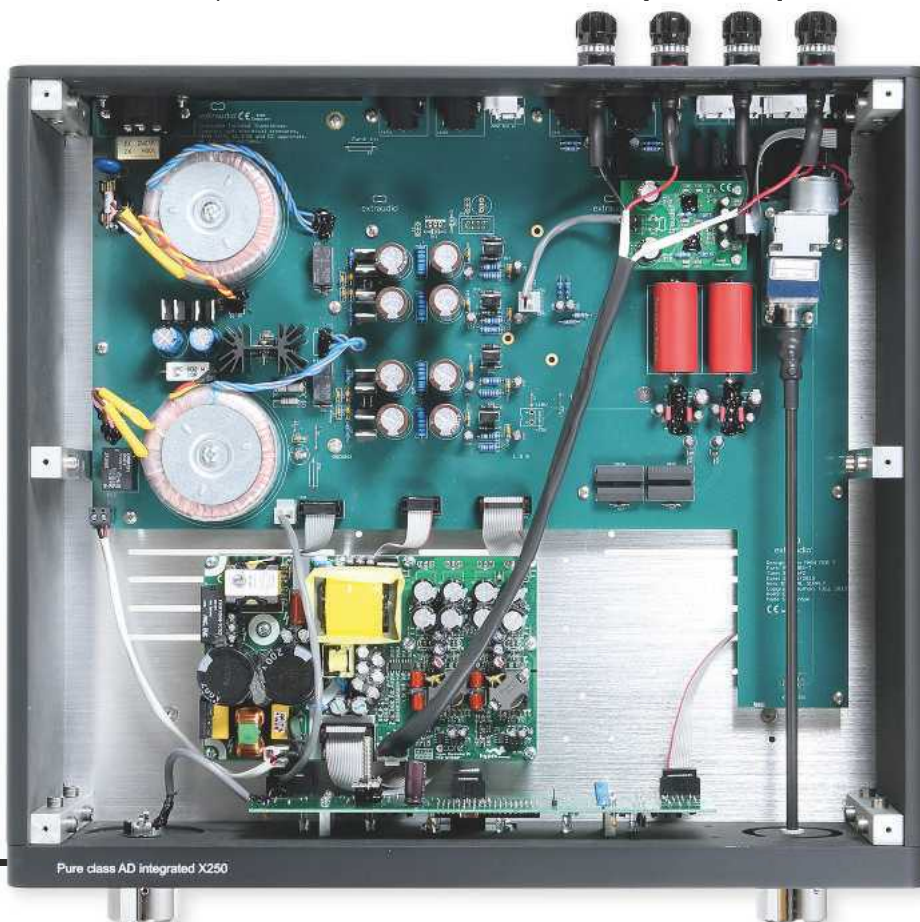
ERGONOMIC JOY

Extraudio can fit the Phono Preamp MM PH1 module as a £525 option, but supplies the amplifier with an RF remote handset to provide power on/off, volume up/down and mute. Using an RF coil to deliver instructions to the amp at distance is unusual, particularly when others are using BT remotes, but

that's all part of the charm!

From switch-on, the X250T takes exactly 62 seconds to come out of mute, the light changing from orange to white. Now I am used to this delay because, daily, I use a Quad VA-One [HFN Dec '16] and Audio

'Ryder can only ever sound like a punch in the head'



RIGHT: Dual PSU/dual-mono line preamp [top] is supplemented here by the optional HP-1 MM phono stage [top right]. Note motorised volume pot and [red] Jantzen coupling caps [also top right]. The Hypex Ncore Class D power amp module has its own switch mode PSU [bottom]



Research equipment, both of which make the listener suffer through a warm-up period. I don't like it, but I get it. What I cannot fathom, however, is the operation of the mute via the remote once the system is up-and-running.

When my phone rings, for example, and I hit 'mute', I want instant silence. This unit languidly turns down its motorised volume control for an agonising 6.5sec according to my chronometer-certified timepiece. Same procedure when you want the volume back on, but pressing the mute button again doesn't restore the level: you have to hold down the volume + button. Again, I want the sound back asap, not after I have enough time to go and bake a cake. Oh, and power down takes 20secs.

That aside, this is an ergonomic joy. As mentioned before, the front panel

is intuitive, the remote carries all you need and the back is perfectly laid out, with the nicest speaker terminals I have encountered – even when using notoriously heavy cables which were designed by some sadist to break off one's binding posts. The unit was up and running in mere minutes... warm-up included.

HAMMERING HOME

I got a short, sharp shock (not literally, that is) when I turned on the unit, because I think it remembers the previous level: it blew me off my feet, it was so loud. The dots around the volume control were lit, so I should have guessed what would come out of the Wilson Sasha DAW loudspeakers [HFN Mar '19]. Then again, it was Mitch

ABOVE: Black and chrome finish distinguishes this X250 as the 'transistor' rather than (orange) 'tube' model. Both knobs have a heavy feel – the left side is a rotary encoder for input selection

Ryder & The Detroit Wheels' 'Jenny Take A Ride' from *Sockin' It To You* [RPM QRPMT549] via my Marantz CD-12/DA-12 CD/DAC combo, chosen because it has both single-ended and balanced outputs for comparison. And that music sounds loud even when played softly.

Not knowing what to expect, as my previous exposure to Class D amps has ranged from the execrable to the excellent, I was delighted to hear a cohesive wall-of-sound as befits Ryder's music. The drums were vast, meaty, with powerhouse attack, while the detail was worthy of an audiophile pressing – and Ryder's oeuvre is such that it can only ever sound like a punch in the head. Maybe I was approaching the X250T ass-backwards, starting with material that actually demands no refinement at all.

Suffice it to say, I was listening here for immersion into a track designed to get 16-year-olds jumping a half-century ago. The coherence was impressive, the amp conveying the live, party feel which was essential to Ryder's music.

His gutsy, shout-y vocals were sibilance-free and sufficiently menacing, and the rhythm section hammered home hormonal teen passion in all its sweaty glory.

FOLK TREASURE

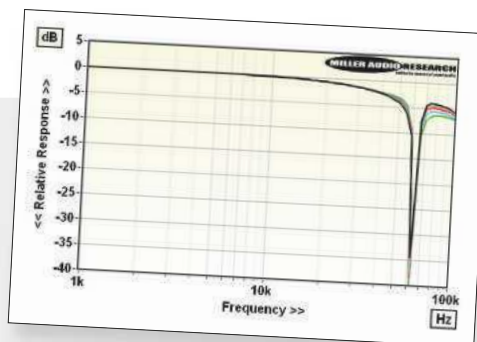
I also used this opportunity to compare balanced with single-ended, and – at the risk of repeating myself – the balanced bettered the single-ended. After an hour of raucous rock, I began to suspect this wasn't the X250T's forte, because it was so graceful even under duress. Turning to the Otari MX5050, a balanced-output-only tape deck, I dug out my copy of Joan Baez's *In Concert* [Vanguard VTC1653; 7½ips tape], a glorious souvenir from her 1962/3 tour with just voice and guitar. ➔

MOD'ING THE MODULE

Hypex offers a series of 'High Efficiency Self Contained Amplifier Modules' to hi-fi and pro audio companies. The NC252MP – used by Extraudio here – is one of six Ncore 'plug-and-play' solutions that also incorporate a switch mode PSU. They feature the brand's compact Class D technology first seen in its popular UcD modules, but now with improved load-independence, lower distortion and lower output impedance [see Lab Report, p53].

Hypex's 'special sauce' lies in the 'phase shift controlled self-oscillating loop' that takes feedback right at the speaker output rather than before the filter network. So, unlike many other competing Class D offerings, the Hypex modules offer a more reliably flat and uniform response regardless of the swings in impedance of the attached loudspeaker.

The Ncore modules are designed so that OEM brands can drive straight into the control circuit giving them a chance, it was suggested to me, 'of adding their own fairy dust'. However, the control circuit must be driven by a voltage source if the transfer functions of the various circuit blocks are not to wander. So any modification to the Ncore module that alters the response of the local feedback loop around the PWM stage can impact on the cancellation network. This may explain the 40dB notch in response at 62kHz which should, if I read Hypex's data sheet correctly, be a few dB only [inset Graph: unloaded/8/4/2/1ohm = black/grey/red/blue/green traces]. How this influences sound quality is not clear, but it shows Extraudio has stirred its own ingredient into the Hypex brew! PM



DYNAUDIO



This is performance
This is Confidence

View all four models at
dynaudio.com/confidence

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



ABOVE: This is an 'analogue-only' amplifier with five line ins (four on RCA and one balanced on XLRs), one of which has a MM phono option. Single-ended (RCA) and balanced (XLR) 'processor' ins connect directly to the Ncore power amp. The 4mm speaker cable outlets use high quality WBT connectors

The sense of space and the crowd noises were as natural as I've heard. While there was slightly less stage width than I know the recording to possess, the stage depth was cavernous, and the soundstage was filled with an airiness and presence which suited perfectly this utterly 'unplugged' recording. As a test I followed it with another Vanguard folk treasure, only this time one recorded in a studio, with more voices and instruments.

BBC GRADE

Ian & Sylvia's sublime *Play One More* [Vanguard VTX17 17; 7½ips tape] adds drumming, keyboards, organ and bass to the *Hootenanny* protest-era folkie formula. Slightly later vintage, probably similar tape stock, characteristic Vanguard sound, and with a further trial: the two are stationed at either end of the soundstage. What this did was reinforce my impression that the soundstaging is deep, the midband reproduction – especially voices – is BBC-grade convincing and the bottom end is more valve-like than transistor-y in its sound.

For the *coup de grâce*, I turned to Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass' *The Lonely Bull* [A&M OR-4101; 7½ips tape], to hear a phalanx of gorgeous trumpets. As much as I love the

title track, it's actually not that great a recording, sounding almost

LEFT: Extraudio's RF remote uses a spring coil antenna to offer on/off, volume and mute over long distances. The unit includes a rechargeable cell



like reprocessed mono. The second track – 'Let It Be Me' – features the full-on cod-mariachi shtick, abetted by that jaunty classic, 'Acapulco 1922', so I was able to hear what the amp could do with the punchiest of transients and even whistling.

This amplifier certainly belies its solid-state innards. No teeth-jarring edginess, no closed-in sensations – it reminded me of the first-generation Primare 'cube' [HFN Feb '19] and even 1970s Denon monoblocks, which were always exemplars of solid-state without the austerity. I will leave it to PM to explain how Extraudio managed to render Class D so musical, but I suspect a goodly part of it is simply down to the designers and engineers knowing how to voice their product.

Was I imagining the lushness? Turning to Ray Conniff's *You Are the Sunshine of My Life* [Columbia 1R1-6085; 7½ips tape], the room was awash with gossamer-light schmaltz so unctuous I could count the calories. This is, simply put, a sexy little minx of an amp. And I'll regard the muting intervals as foreplay. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

When the first word that springs to mind is 'finesse', and the second is 'Whoa!' because of sheer slam, you can call it a 'hybrid' in yet another context. The X250T is one of those iron-first-in-a-velvet-glove amps that lets you rock or chill as desired. It handled the silkiness of Ray Conniff with the same authority it conveys the force of Mitch Ryder in manic mode. This amp does, indeed, 'beat the Dutch.'

Sound Quality: 85%

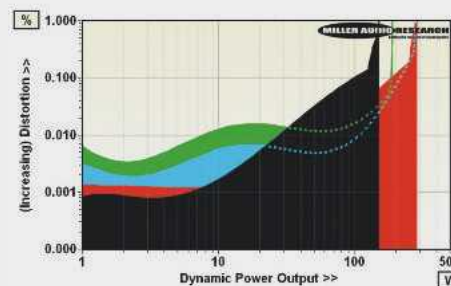


LAB REPORT

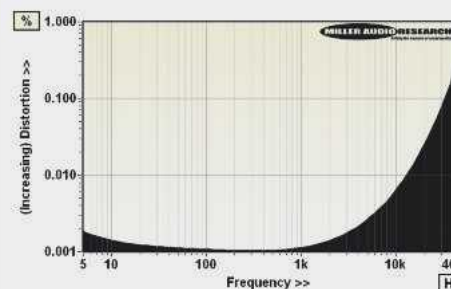
EXTRAUDIO X250T

The features, applications and specifications for the Ncore module at the heart of the X250T (and X250) are available to download here: www.hypex.nl/img/upload/doc/ncore_mp/nc252mp/Documentation/NC252MP_02xx.pdf. Extraudio changed its '200W/8ohm' power output rating during the course of our review – this is a 150W/8ohm Class D module with onboard PSU and, as expected, on test it delivered 2x150W/8ohm and 2x280W/4ohm. Also, because this is a PWM/Class D amp, there is no significant headroom under dynamic conditions, and so the X250T offers 151W, 285W, 275W and 195W into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads at 1kHz/10msec at <1% THD [see Graph 1, below]. This is more than sufficient for most 'sane' loudspeakers.

Distortion also shows a distinctive pattern. From 1-10W it bests Extraudio's 0.008%/1W/1kHz specification by a decent margin at ~0.001% but then increases to 0.007%/20W, 0.06%/50W and 0.11%/100W. However, bearing in mind that most hi-fi amp/speaker combinations are running at or below 10W for much of the time, the subjective impact of this is uncertain. On the other hand, the trend of distortion vs. freq. – from a very low 0.0009% through bass and midrange before a sudden rise above 10kHz to 0.03%/20kHz is entirely typical of this Class D module [Graph 2, below]. Output impedance remains a low ~0.019ohm (20Hz-20kHz), as indicated by Hypex, with an ultrasonic peak of 1.01ohm at 93kHz. The frequency response cannot meet Extraudio's claimed 0.5Hz-350kHz/-1dB (this spec may be for the custom preamp section only) but has a -1dB point at 25kHz and -6dB/100kHz [see boxout, p51]. Finally, the 83dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is excellent for a Class D amplifier. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 14.0A



ABOVE: Distortion versus extended frequency from 5Hz-40kHz at 10W/8ohm (one channel driven)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	150W / 280W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	151W / 285W / 275W / 195W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	0.020-0.017ohm / 1.01ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.15dB to -0.75dB/-6.1dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/150W)	201mV / 2525mV (balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/150W)	83.1dB / 104.9dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.00085-0.029%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	17W / 175W (3W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	445x125x395mm / 18kg

Primare R35

Primare's 'Prisma push' may have focused resources into network-enabling its amplifiers and CD players, but its new flagship phono pre proves its love of vinyl has not waned
 Review: **Adam Smith & Lab: Paul Miller**

Even the most ardent vinyl enthusiasts will admit that they can get bamboozled by the whole process of cartridge loading and gain matching. Some MMs and MCs can be quite particular about the load resistance and capacitance that they 'see', just as most phono stages will have a 'sweet spot' gain setting that varies from pick-up to pick-up. So there's a great deal to be said for a flexible phono stage that offers numerous adjustments. On the other hand I can appreciate the popularity of designs where the complexity extends to nothing more than an MM/MC switch!

The new phono preamps offered by Sweden's Primare look to be both flexible without being daunting – the £900 R15 model has 18 gain and loading steps across its MM and MC inputs, while the £1350 R35 model here has no fewer than 29. This is a vast increase on its predecessor, the R32 [*HFN* Jan '12], which only offered seven impedance settings and three gain options. Clearly, although Primare is making waves with its Prisma network player technology [*HFN* Dec '19], it is still taking the LP very seriously, which is good to see.

TOGGLE BEHAVIOUR

As a result, the R35 should be able to wrestle the optimum performance from any cartridge you care to use, even some of the oddball designs with absurdly low outputs or peculiar loading requirements.

The R35 is presented in a beautifully styled and finished enclosure weighing in at an impressive 9.5kg and available in titanium or black. The front panel is blank apart from the Primare logo, the centre of which doubles as an on/standby switch and also contains an operation LED. The unit reverts to standby after 20 minutes of no input signal being detected, but this function can be defeated if required.

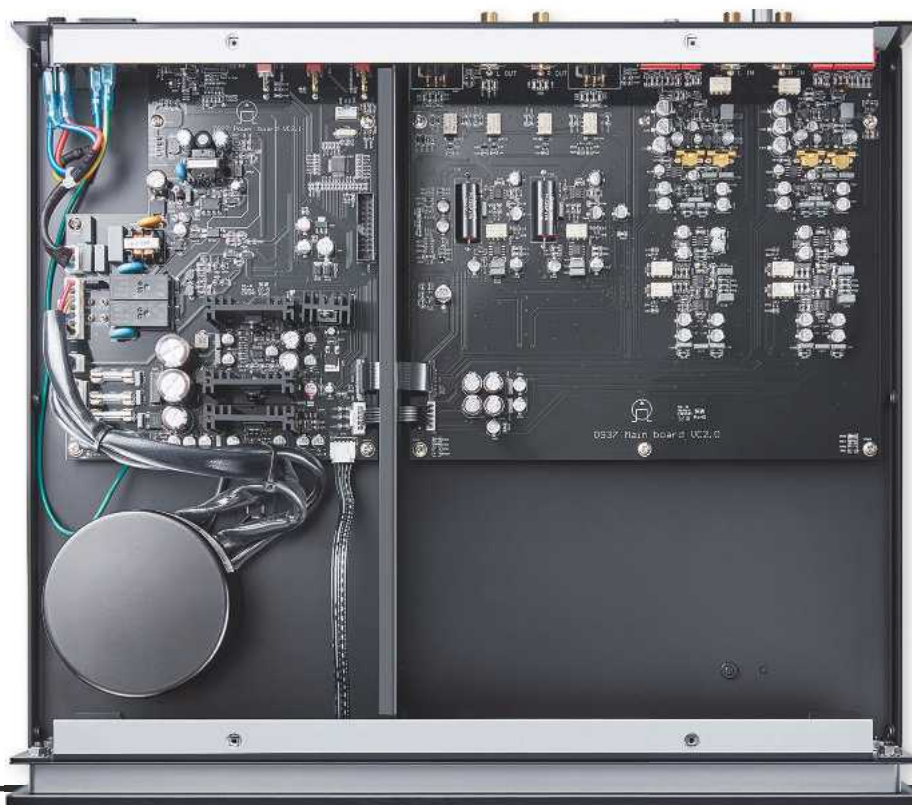
At the rear, the unit has unbalanced inputs and outputs on RCAs, plus a set of balanced XLR outputs. A row of toggle switches selects MC or MM operation, a subsonic filter and the gain of the preamp circuitry. Three switch positions give the options of +36, +40 and +44dB through the unbalanced outputs, plus +42, +46 and +50dB from the balanced XLRs, for MM. The corresponding figures for MC are +62, +66 and +70dB (unbalanced) and +68, +72 and +76dB (balanced), all of which are pretty accurate in practice [see PM's Lab Report, p57, and boxout, p55].

If you are wondering where the input loading is adjusted then look behind the screwed-on blanking panels beside each input socket [see pic, p57]. Removing the thumbscrews reveals the adjustments as a row of tiny DIP switches. I have a loathing for these infernal devices as they are a fiddly to use and, when mounted on the rear of a unit as per the R35,

completely defeat the object of being able to turn down the volume, make a quick adjustment, turn back up and listen. They are also only labelled with switch numbers, so you need the manual to hand when making changes. The R35 would be more user-friendly if the old R32's rotary controls had been retained, but moved to the front panel along with a handy muting switch.

IMPEDANCE VALUES

The two rows of ten switches are split between MM and MC sections. The numbers 1 to 6 adjust MC impedance, with 21 settings over the 10ohm-47kohm range, while number 7 sets the MC load capacitance to 100pF or 1nF. Switch 8 sets the MM impedance to 47kohm or 2.5kohm and 9/10 select capacitance values of 100, 200, 300 or 400pF. These are generally well chosen values, although I cannot ever recall encountering an MM cartridge that requires 2.5kohm loading. This might suit



RIGHT: Entirely discrete (FET-based) active MC headamp [top right] is relay-switched into the op-amp-based RIAA eq stage [below top right] and balanced preamp output [centre]. Linear PSU [left] has multiple, regulated supplies



a high-output MC if none of the closely-spaced MC impedance options and/or higher gain of the MC input are suitable.

The R35 comes with a 3.5mm jack lead that can be used to connect it to other Primare equipment for external power on/off triggering. Also in the box was something called an 'AC Polarity Pen' that Primare recommends you use on your choice of IEC mains input cable to confirm which lead is Live. This is a popular accessory in some European markets, and particularly among German audiophiles. Anyway, Primare suggests reversing the leads if it shows the polarity is wrong, as it says that this can 'make a significant difference to the sound'.



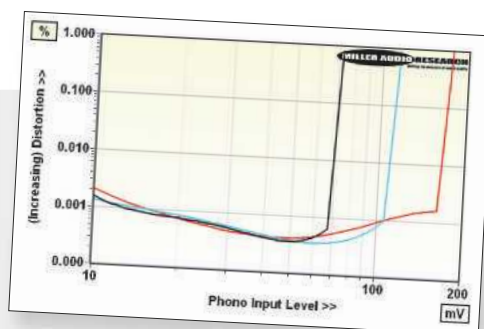
REAL WALLOP

Eager to audition the R35 in my resident system of Michell GyroDec SE/SME 309

MARGINAL GAIN

The popular 2M Red from Ortofon [HFN Oct '08], one of the highest output MMs available, still only produces 6.7mV (re. 1kHz/5cm/sec). However, you might be surprised to learn that with the most vigorous LP groove excursions (typically +15dB, and rarely +18dB), it is possible for the 2M Red to deliver peak outputs up to 50mV into your chosen phono stage. If the phono input cannot handle this, it will clip and send a burst of distortion that's amplified right up the signal chain from these tens of millivolts up to the tens of watts – or more – feeding your loudspeakers.

The ability to handle these momentarily high outputs is reflected in the 'input overload margin' that I discuss in all our phono preamp lab reports [see p57]. The higher the phono stage gain, the lower the input overload level – in the R35's case its maximum +76.5dB MC gain represents a boost of x6680 so even with its massive 22V (balanced) output it only requires an input of 3.3mV to clip the output stage. This is why it's important to carefully select the optimum gain for your choice of cartridge. Fortunately the R35 has more than enough headroom for every type of pick-up – the inset Graph shows the point at which it clips when set at the +42dB (red), +46dB (cyan) and +50dB (black) MM gain. PM



turntable, plus Naim Supernait 2 amplifier [HFN Nov '13] and PMC Twenty5.24 loudspeakers [HFN May '17], I selected from among my cartridges the Ortofon 2M Black MM [HFN Mar '11], plus Clearaudio MC Essence [HFN Aug '17] and Denon DL-103 [HFN Jul '09] MCs.

I kicked off with the Ortofon 2M Black, setting the R35 to its +44dB gain and standard 47kohm loading – a 'plain vanilla' set-up that immediately illustrated the delightfully smooth and inherently

neutral performance offered up by this phono preamp. There was no sense of it showboating or boosting any particular part of the musical spectrum, and neither did I feel compelled to change either the gain or loading away from my initial and very standard settings.

ABOVE: The elegant Scandinavian styling is unmistakable. Touch the Primare logo – machined into the black alloy fascia – and the R35 switches out of standby. A titanium finish is also offered by way of alternative

Instead, the pleasing even-handedness of the R35 lets the inherent character of the cartridge – where there is one – shine through. In the case of the 2M Black, this meant a presentation that was poised, clean and beautifully detailed. And I was also delighted by the punch, heft and insight the R35 offered at the low-end. Kick drums had real wallop behind them and bass guitar lines bounded along with gusto.

These two aspects combined very effectively on The Art Company's 12in single of their joyous pop hit 'Susanna' [Epic TA 4174]. Sure enough, I was a little concerned at the stridency of the vocals on occasion but, by way of upside, the R35 certainly projected these voices with confidence into the listening space.

The R35's treble typically imparts an appealing glossy sheen to performances. Treble detail is, as mentioned, excellent, and percussion instruments generally have just the right amount of metallic glimmer to their sound. Equally, firmly struck cymbals ring out strongly and decay much as you might imagine from a live performance, the R35 allowing you to distinguish the real from the processed.

PRICE BUSTER

By way of example, the electronic percussion at the beginning of The War On Drugs' 'Under The Pressure' from their *Lost In The Dream* LP [Secretly Canadian SC30] sounded in complete contrast to the real hi-hats used in the main body of the track.

That said, while the Primare R35 never sounds less than smooth and unflustered, the busiest and brightest of recordings can appear just a little sanitised, as if details and dynamics large and small are bundled, so to speak, into a neatly digestible package. So while the R35 never sounds ➞

MAGICO | A1 LOUDSPEAKER

Their most affordable loudspeaker yet

The NEW A1 incorporates the same pure Beryllium-diaphragm tweeter as the full range A3, newly developed multi-wall carbon fibre 6.5-inch mid-bass driver and 3/8" thick 6061 T6 aircraft grade aluminium enclosure.

With its combination of advanced technology and superlative engineering, it is no wonder the Magico A1 delivers incredible performance.

Hear it now
On demonstration
at Oxford Audio
Consultants



OXFORD
AUDIO
CONSULTANTS

TELEPHONE

01865 790 879

E-MAIL

shop@oxfordaudio.co.uk

WEBSITE

www.oxfordaudio.co.uk

SHOP ADDRESS

Cantay House, Park End Street
Oxford, OX1 1JD

BUSINESS HOURS

Tuesday - Friday: 10am to 6pm

Saturday: 10am to 5pm

Closed: Mondays, Sundays
& Bank Holidays

Sign-up (on website) to our popular newsletter for the latest news and instore events
Ask about our popular buy now pay later scheme with 0% apr and no deposit

PHONO PREAMPLIFIER



ABOVE: Single phono inputs [far left] are switched between MM/MC by a toggle, alongside other toggles for gain and subsonic filtering. Input loading DIP switches are hidden behind small panels [inset]. RIAA eq'd outputs are offered on RCAs and balanced XLRs

confused or fatiguingly congested in the treble, neither does it have quite the separation or sweetness of the very best phono preamps. At just £1345 however, comparison with far higher-end devices is academic.

On the other hand, the R35 has strengths that transcend its price point, especially in the way it projects performances out into the room. It can setup a realistically three-dimensional soundstage with seemingly little effort, while also offering an impressive sense of front-to-back layering. As a result, backing effects are typically kept exactly where they need to be and are not unrealistically pulled to the fore, just as lead instrumentalists and vocalists are sharply focused.

STAR OF THE SHOW

Brandi Carlile seemed to be standing somewhere between me and my equipment rack when belting out 'The Wheels Of Laredo' from The Highwomen's eponymous album [LCS 0075678651731] – a performance that was both impressive and slightly alarming in equal measure. Her vocal presence was strong and confident through the R35, albeit with a slight hint of stridency creeping in now and then.

Switching to MC and with the Clearaudio MC Essence in place, the Primare R35 continued to impress. The extra insight from the MC Essence was clear to hear and the R35 once again did its best to step aside, sonically speaking, and ensure the cartridge remained the star of the show. Any midband hardness, stridency or slight coarseness that

might have been evident with the high value MM quickly disappeared using the MC input and, in this instance, the more capable pick-up. Midrange detail, image focus and solidity all took a step forward, the cartridge 'upgrade' being rewarded rather than smothered by the R35.

So how about the venerable Denon DL103 moving-coil – the stalwart of many a vinyl-spinner's system in years past? Setting the load impedance using the old adage of '10x the cartridge impedance' worked a treat here. In theory, the DL103 works best into around 400ohm, thanks to its relatively high 40ohm generator impedance and, in my experience, can sound a little flat and dull into the 'standard' 100ohm loading that most MC phono stages offer. Fortunately, with the loading dialled up to 400ohm the R35 confirmed the '10x rule' as the DL103 came alive, sounding as punchy and gutsy as I have ever heard it. I suspect there'll be few cartridges that Primare's R35 cannot squeeze the very best from! ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Although the Primare R35 may appear to have a daunting array of cartridge matching options, and its physical layout is not exactly user-friendly, it is well worth persevering with. In practice, it is an incredibly flexible and capable phono stage that seemingly has the ability to extract the very best from any cartridge that crosses its path. A rare feat at any price, this only further pumps up the R35's value.

Sound Quality: 85%



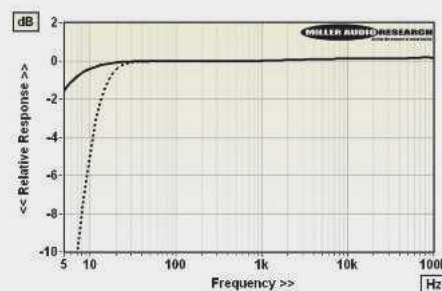
LAB REPORT

PRIMARE R35

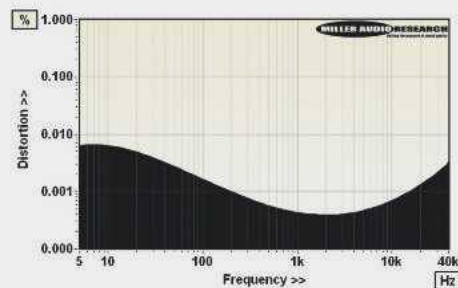
Phono stages often trade versatility for ease-of-use, obliging users to fiddle with DIP switches to select between the various options. Fortunately, the DIP switches here cater only for input loading/capacitance, so once set for MM and MC they can be shut away behind their little blanking plates. MM/MC and their respective gain options are selected via toggles, with relay muting inside the R35, so changes may be executed swiftly and without speaker-busting pops. Primare claims +42dB, +46dB and +50dB gain for its MM input and +68dB, +72dB and +76dB for MC, values that are closely matched on test at +42.1dB, +46.1dB and +50.2dB for MM and +68.5dB, +72.3dB and +76.5dB, respectively, for MC (all single-ended in/balanced out).

In practice, the lowest MM gain offers a 7.85mV sensitivity (good for high output MMs) with the highest MC gain equal to 0.15mV (149µV – and with a 10ohm load option, ideal for the lowest output MCs). With a huge maximum output of 22V, the R35 carries enough headroom to maintain a +27dB input overload margin with every input setting. The limits of 176mV, 115mV and 73mV (MM), and 8.9mV, 5.6mV and 3.3mV (MC), respectively, are sufficient to accommodate the 'hottest' >18dB groove modulations (re. 11.2µm/300Hz). See boxout, p55.

The RIAA equalisation is also very flat and extended out to 100kHz, its subsonic filter amounting to -0.5dB/20Hz and -6dB/9Hz [see Graph 1]. If you have reflex-loaded speakers then the sub filter should be engaged. Otherwise, the RIAA-eq'd distortion [Graph 2] is very low, with a max. of just 0.0035% and a min. of 0.00035% (20Hz-20kHz). Noise is low too, and the A-wtd S/N ratios impressive at 85dB (all MM gain settings) and 77dB (all MC gain settings). All versatile, textbook stuff! PM



ABOVE: RIAA-corrected frequency response (subsonic filter, dashed) from 5Hz-100kHz at 0dBV via MM



ABOVE: Distortion extended frequency (5Hz-40kHz) via MM input re. 0dBV (1Vrms) output

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm / 10ohm-47kohm
Input sensitivity (re. 0dBV)	7.85mV-149µV
Input overload (re. 1% THD)	176mV/115/73/8.9/5.6/3.3mV
Max. output (re. 1% THD) / Impedance	22.0V / 80-93ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	85.0dB / 77.1dB (MM/MC)
Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.10dB to +0.12dB / +0.18dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00035-0.0035% (MM)
Power consumption	12W (W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x92x384mm / 9.5kg

SVS Prime Pinnacle

Better known for its high-value, high-performance subs, SVS is now turning its attention to audiophile speakers

Review: **Mark Craven** Lab: **Keith Howard**

If there was ever a speaker that seemed, on specification alone, to warrant the phrase 'bang for your buck', it's SVS's Prime Pinnacle. For less than £2000 a pair, this US audio brand [and subwoofer specialist – see boxout, p59] is offering a three-way floorstander with bespoke midrange unit, an unusual-at-this-price trio of woofers, and the promise of a 'world-class performance'. Even accepting the latter as marketing hyperbole, it's impossible not to view the Prime Pinnacle as potentially superb value for money.

The name denotes this speaker's position at the top of SVS's Prime range, but it isn't the brand's flagship. That honour goes to the Tower model from its slightly costlier Ultra Series that kicks-off at £2200 per pair, depending on finish. That speaker is a curious-looking trapezoidal three-way floorstander with twin side-firing 200mm woofers.

The Prime Pinnacle, with its more conventional form factor and driver layout, seems designed to have greater domestic appeal, and carries a more affordable price tag to boot. Below it in the Prime Series is another floorstander, the Prime Tower, plus Bookshelf, Satellite, Centre and Elevation options, the latter two designed for home cinema system builders.

BEYOND THE CURVE

Standing 104x35cm (hw), these are not super-sized, but still vaguely recall the monoliths from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Bucking current trends, there's not a curved edge in sight, and they're available only in either Black Ash (£1795) or Gloss Black (£1995) finishes. SVS, throughout its more than 20-year history, has remained uninterested in the more exotic designs of its rivals.

Although the Black Gloss livery is surely worth the price premium over the prosaic Black Ash, and a smidgeon of style comes from the tapered front baffle, these are hardly speakers that will make visitors to

your listening room stop and stare. Grilles, which cover roughly three quarters of the face, are clip-in rather than magnetic, and indicate that this speaker has been built to hit a price point. Elastomer feet are fitted as standard, but can be swapped for supplied threaded spikes.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

SVS says the Prime Pinnacle has benefited from a more extensive voicing programme than any other model in its history. This, explains Director of Product Management Smith Freeman, was necessitated by its deployment of a new midrange driver, and adoption of three woofers.

'During the development of the Prime Pinnacle', he says 'we explored numerous acoustic alignments, which included

various system tunings and driver designs for both the bass and the midrange.'

These experiments, adds Freeman, included alternating the position of the mid unit below and above the tweeter.

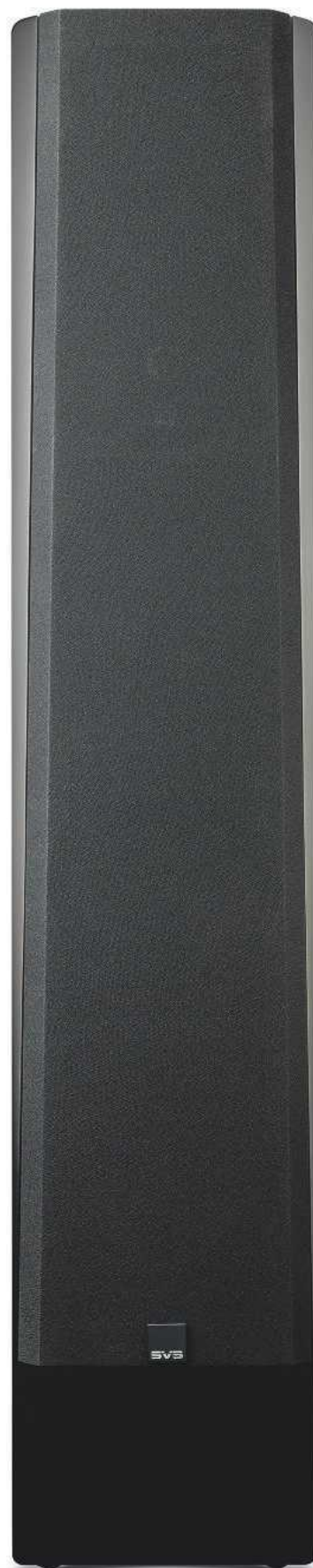
Eventually the latter

placement was chosen. 'Key parts of this design were balancing out the tweeter height relative to typical listener position, as well as controlling diffraction from both the tweeter and midrange. The best performance objectively and subjectively won, and that's the design you have here.'

For the mid unit, SVS opted for a 135mm glass-fibre cone, a change from the other models in the Pinnacle range, which all use either 115mm or 90mm drivers hewn from polypropylene. This driver is a trickle-down design from the 165mm glass-fibre cones used in SVS's premium Ultra Tower speaker, suggesting Prime Pinnacle buyers are getting something a cut above the rest of the lineup.

RIGHT: Available in Black Ash and Gloss Black finishes, the cabinet houses a 25mm alloy dome tweeter, 135mm composite fibre-glass mid unit and three 165mm polypropylene woofers, all working into their own acoustic spaces

'This '70s
Southern rock
fits the Pinnacle
like a glove'





BRING ON THE BASS

The Ohio, US-based company SVS has, since its launch in the late 1990s, been chiefly recognised for its subwoofers, and its stable of 'bass boxes' has expanded over the years to now include multiple options at prices from £500 to £3000. Regardless of model, however, it adheres to some basic design principles: all current ranges, from the entry-level 1000 series to premium 16-Ultra series, offer sealed and ported variants, use 'Sledge' Class D amplifier modules, and are based around a single driver (the smallest employed still a sizeable 12in). More recent SVS sub innovations include a Bluetooth app-based control/parametric EQ system, plus wireless transmission platform, for easier integration into stereo and multichannel systems. The company's mission to 'challenge the status quo of over-priced, underperforming' audio products now encompasses not just its subwoofers, but its Prime and Ultra passive speakers, and the active Prime Wireless.

With this mid unit mounted up top, next in line is the 25mm aluminium dome tweeter with FEA-optimised diffuser to deliver, says SVS, 'a wide dispersion and accurate on-axis and off-axis delivery'. Beneath this sits the triple stack of bass drivers, all 165mm in diameter and again made from polypropylene, a material chosen for its stiff-but-light properties. By opting for these relatively small low-frequency units as opposed to a pair of larger drivers, speaker width has been kept to a minimum, maintaining the fit-for-any-environment ethos of the Prime Series.

Each bass driver works out of a rear 50mm-wide port and each is individually tuned. The MDF cabinet – 25mm-thick at the front – features four separate internal enclosures, plus rigid bracing, in a bid to combat unwanted resonances.



BIG AND BOLD

Consider the sub-£2000 price tag, and trio of front-firing bass drivers, and you might think SVS's floorstander is all about bass brutality. But while low-frequency handling is an obvious plus point – and a trait that brand fans will no doubt be expecting – it's neither overblown nor unrefined, while mids and highs aren't relegated to second fiddle. And the Prime Pinnacle's natural talent for the low-end creates a sound that's as big and bold as they come at this price.

The title track from Michael Jackson's *Bad* [EPC 504423 2] gives this pair a chance to strut its stuff. It's a performance that's not quite as slick as Jacko moonwalking in his slip-on shoes, but is undoubtedly infectious: full-range, propulsive and large in scale. The ascendant bassline that underpins each verse is delivered evenly and fluidly, and is subjectively uncoloured. Atop this, the electronic percussion (this was

1987, after all), hand-claps and Jackson's breathy vocals have a crisp edge and believable tonality. You can close your eyes and imagine you're in that parking lot, about to have a dance off...

AC/DC's 'Thunderstruck' [*The Razor's Edge*; EPC 510771 2] is one of the Aussie rockers' more thoughtfully mixed recordings, striving to create the scale of a live stadium performance from the confines of the studio. A key component is the repetitive slam of drummer Chris Slade's tom-tom, which through the Prime Pinnacle sounds delightfully taut and immediate, and forward in the mix. Switch to the synthetic bass notes of London Grammar's 'Hey Now' [*If You Wait*; MADART1], and the speaker shows its ability to drop deep while maintaining a tight grip. The company's expertise in subs certainly seems to pay dividends.

A quieter, more considered track, such as Alice In Chains' semi-acoustic 'No Excuses' from the *Jar Of Flies* EP [Tidal Hi-Fi download; 44kHz/16-bit], finds the Prime Pinnacle in fine voice for what is arguably an affordable floorstander. Jerry Cantrell and Layne Staley's twin-tracked vocals are clearly delineated, and the low-key percussion, which blends hi-hats and rapid snares with high-pitched toms into a syncopated rhythm, finds its space within the soundstage. And again, the sheer body given to the bassline, and the Pinnacle's ability to resolve low frequencies without coming across as sluggish or boomy, is remarkable.

Rear-ported and full-range, the Prime Pinnacle naturally warrants placement out from a wall to avoid excessive boundary gain, but you don't have to venture too far for the sound to be direct and unmuddied, a benefit perhaps of SVS's triple-port design. I found the recommended placement of 30° L/R, with a slight toe-in, a sensible starting ➞

Sign up for
Paul McGowan's daily blog
<https://www.psaudio.com/community/pauls-posts/>



Watch Paul McGowan's videos
Subscribe to PS Audio



P S A U D I O

Pioneering world class audio products

**Exclusive
home demo...**
Contact your nearest PS Audio dealer
at www.signaturesystems.co.uk/dealers

Why compromise?



Hand made in Boulder, Colorado | 2000w of pure regenerated power | 13 outlets (4 high current)

PS Audio's DirectStream P20, the finest mains regenerator in the world.

20 years ago PS Audio invented the mains regenerator. In pursuit of perfection, the DirectStream P20 combines patented architecture with a DSD engine. This delivers the cleanest, lowest-noise sine wave of any regenerator in the world.

Signature
AUDIO SYSTEMS

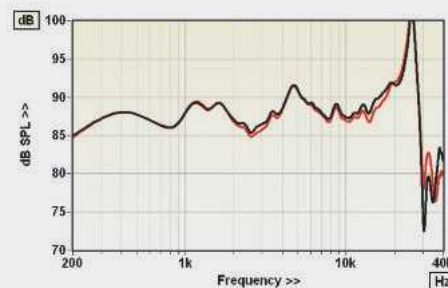
Distributed by Signature Audio Systems **07738 007776** www.psaudio.com

LAB REPORT

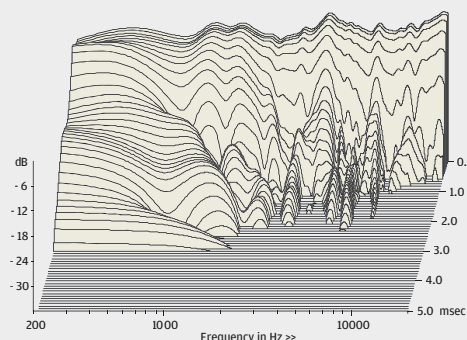
SVS PRIME PINNACLE

SVS may be better known for its subwoofers but the Prime Pinnacle gives every indication of being a carefully designed and, mostly, accurately specified loudspeaker. The one obvious exception to the latter is the quoted 8ohm nominal impedance which – as is all too often the case with modern speakers – is not borne out by our measurements. We recorded the minimum modulus to be 2.8ohm, which means that even a 4ohm nominal figure would be a stretch. (Conventionally, impedance should not fall below 80% of the nominal rating.) And once impedance phase is taken into account, the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) falls to a low of 1.4ohm, albeit at a high 3.3kHz. It dips again to 1.6ohm at 79Hz, so all told the Prime Pinnacle is a harder than average load to drive. The beneficiary of this low impedance is sensitivity. SVS quotes a figure of 88dB and our measurements show that to be right on the money, with pink noise and music figures both being 88.2dB.

Forward responses were measured at 1m on the midrange driver axis as this accords most closely with the typical seated ear height. The response trend is uptilted slightly towards high frequencies and fairly uneven [see Graph 1, below], but response errors of ± 3.3 dB and ± 3.6 dB (300Hz–20kHz) are fair, and the ± 0.8 dB pair matching error over the same frequency range is good and becomes an excellent ± 0.5 dB below 13kHz. Our diffraction-corrected nearfield bass response measurement suggested some peaking at 70Hz but, once again, a bass extension of 45Hz (–6dB re. 200Hz) is fair. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [Graph 2, below] reveals a few treble resonances above 3kHz but they are quite low in level. KH



ABOVE: Forward response shows a boosted presence and treble peak at 26kHz, but pair matching is good



ABOVE: Cabinet modes are mild as are the sequence of, presumably, mid driver resonances at 3-8kHz

LEFT: Three 50mm-wide flared rear-firing ports are tuned and optimised for three separate woofer enclosures. The three-way, 2nd-order crossover (300Hz and 2.1kHz) terminates in a single set of 4mm binding posts

EMI 50999 028944 2 3] sounds a little shy, Dave Gilmour's axe not so much cleaving through the instrumentation as gliding across it.

This is hardly a blot on the copybook for, as well as being nuanced, authoritative and weighty with bass, these SVS's floorstanders are very effective at creating soundstage depth and width.

PURE PLEASURE

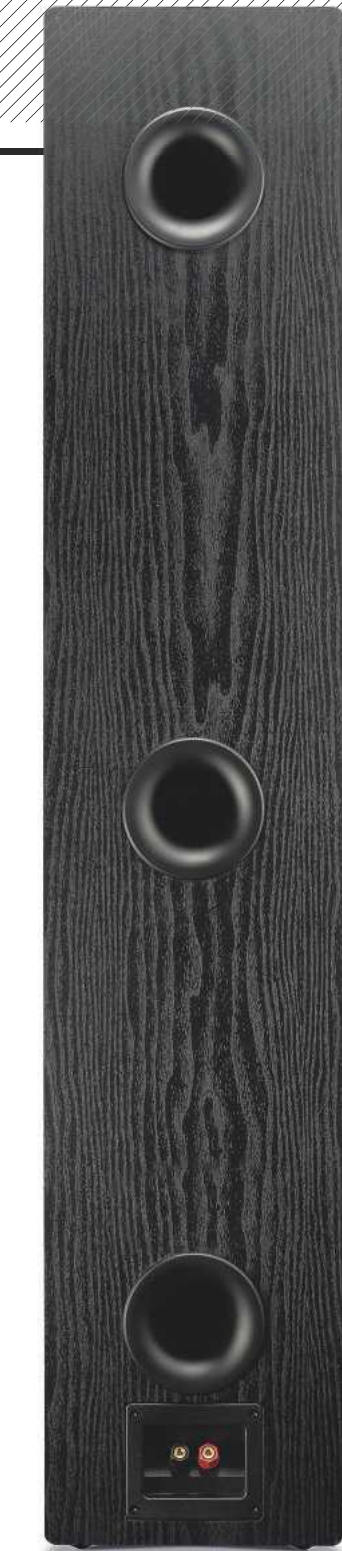
This was obvious in the precise placement of Brad Wilk's drum kit in Black Sabbath's 'The End Of The Beginning' [13; Vertigo 3735426], and the widely thrown guitar and flutes in 'Can't You See' from The Marshall Tucker Band's self-titled debut [Tidal Hi-Fi download; 44kHz/16-bit FLAC]. This languid slice of 1970s Southern rock fits the Prime Pinnacle like a glove.

SVS's voicing here favours smoothness and warmth, as opposed to the attacking sound you might expect from a company with one foot firmly in the home theatre camp, and the result is pure listening pleasure, as the track layers on instruments (piano, acoustic guitar, a gently distorted Les Paul) and gradually builds to its crescendo. Doug Gray's plaintive vocals also get the grit and texture they deserve. So if you crave a warm and a full-bodied sound, the Prime Pinnacle will have your system glowing. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Just svelte enough to slip into all but the smallest rooms, and undemanding when it comes to placement, these floorstanders have clear all-round appeal, matched by a big, crowd-pleasing performance. Music driven by bass and percussion is their bread and butter, but there's a sweeter side that makes them more than competitive. In the middle of the price/performance Venn diagram, you'll find the Prime Pinnacle.

Sound Quality: 85%



point, although removing that toe-in – for practical and aesthetic reasons – didn't weaken image integrity.

So where's the trade-off that the Prime Pinnacle's price tag implies? Sure, there's a sense that treble definition could be sharper, which robs tracks of that top layer of incisiveness, and the superb driving nature of its low-end isn't matched by the same forcefulness higher up the frequency band. As such, the astonishing lead solo in Pink Floyd's 'Comfortably Numb' [The Wall;

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – Mean/IEC/Music)	89.0dB/88.2dB/88.2dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	2.8ohm @ 4.1kHz 14.6ohm @ 22Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	–51° @ 2.6kHz 29° @ 10.3kHz
Pair matching/Resp. error (300Hz–20kHz)	± 0.8 dB / ± 3.3 dB / ± 3.6 dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	45Hz / 30.7kHz/31.8kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.1% / 0.1% / 0.1%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	1029x203x340mm / 26kg

Quad Vena II Play

It's all there in the suffix 'Play', which transforms Quad's Vena II from a comprehensive all-in-one amp/DAC solution into something with wired and wireless future-proofing

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

Is Editor PM simply testing me, or coaxing me? I'm not merely uninterested in streaming, Wi-Fi, *et al* to the point of virulent loathing, I'm actually reverting to decades-old formats for daily listening: CDs, tapes and LPs. That said, I am not unaware of DTS Play-Fi [see PM's boxout, p63], having used it for many months for the wireless speakers on my kitchen counter – though with no more concern than I show a spatula or potato peeler. Yet here I am faced with Quad's update to the Vena II, its entire *raison d'être* being the full-on wireless experience.

At £799, it's only £150 more than the regular, Lancaster-grey Vena II, which stays in the catalogue at £649. The Vena II Play looks to be the same device we reviewed last year [HFN Jun '19], but now sprouting a trio of antennae from its backside. This wondrous all-in-one was already a perfect solution for a compact, no-mess-no-fuss system, needing only a pair of speakers such as the ideally-matching Quad S1s and whichever sources you cared to feed it, analogue or digital – including phono! – to create a full set-up.

FAST TALKING

Ditto for the Vena II Play, only now you can easily and painlessly access all of those digital music streaming services with zappy names including Spotify, Tidal, SiriusXM, Deezer, Qobuz, Napster, TuneIn, iHeartRadio, *ad nauseam*. I know: it's the preference of everyone under 40 and I have to get with the programme.

So I must admit to the occasional foray into the realms of HDtracks and Amazon Music, given that much of which I have purchased miraculously finds its way into the app. With that experience in tow, I had the Vena II Play talking to my (Android) Huawei P30 Pro, iPhone 6, iPad, iMac and Mac Air so swiftly that I had to remind

myself of what it once took to get an 8-bit soundcard working, let alone a printer. DTS Play-Fi makes USB connections seem like hooking up an acoustic-coupled modem.

I wired the Vena II Play to a pair of the aforementioned Quad S1s – a personal favourite – and JBL's 4312M II monitors with YTER cable via the excellent multi-way binding posts. I also routed music to the DTS Play-Fi-ready SVS Prime wireless speakers to test the distributed sound/networking function. Because of the SVSs, I already had the DTS Play-Fi app in my phone. What I didn't try is Alexa, however.

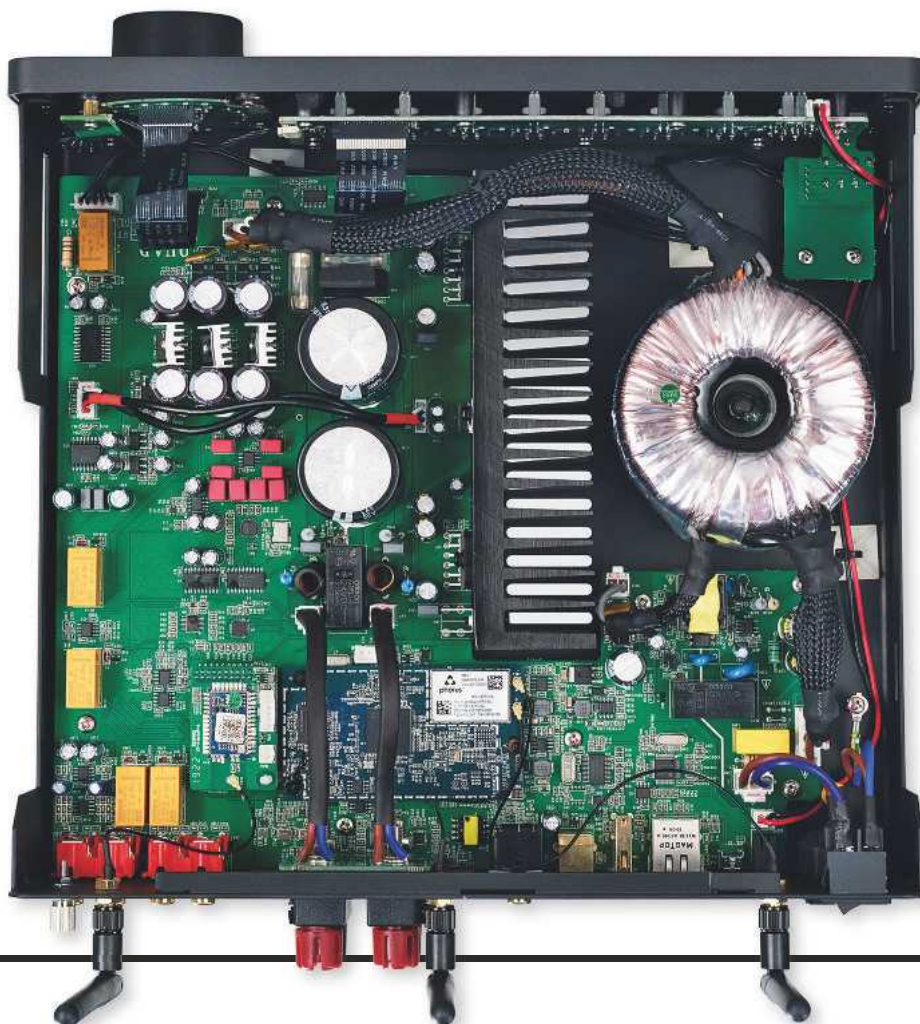
Total cost of the system as reviewed, by the way, with a Sony CDP-XE370 CD player added for playing 5in discs, but not

counting streaming subscriptions, came to £1700. (The Sony is discontinued and has a value of under £50...)

ASTONISHING VALUE

Here we must pause, however, especially during the cataclysm which is currently changing all of society's rules and values. More than ever, expenditure is now a major concern, and £1700 remains a fortune to a single parent, an OAP with a state pension, and all manner of normal folk.

I must stress too, that cost always becomes the elephant in the room when dealing with entry-level gear, because that is why the stuff exists. Even if we are accustomed to five-figure price tags in



RIGHT: Toroidal transformer [top right] feeds a linear PSU with independent regulation for the (integrated) Class A/B power amp [on heatsink], DAC section [left, centre] and network card [bottom]. The volume pot is no longer motorised



our pursuit of excellence in the context of *HFN/RR*, we must not be glib. So let me emphasise that the Vena II Play represents astonishing value. The amp has plenty of grunt, the ergonomics are faultless, while the remote is perfect in its execution.

How Quad does this is part of the charm, not least being of offshore manufacture. But PM pointed out that the motorised volume control is gone and so the remote volume, I assume, is now digitally governed. With the Vena II Play, one is treated to an array of white LEDs around the rotary that show its progress. Yes, your ears tell you it's working, but visual evidence is far more useful than trying to detect the movement of a matte-grey dial from across the room.

Connections are self-explanatory, as is the front panel: operation and connection couldn't be simpler, with everything identified and no quirks to accommodate.

'I hate to go there, but I could hear differences in digital cable'

In fact, I dropped the Vena II Play into the spot where my Quad VA-One [*HFN* Dec '16] sits, for quickly exploiting the USB link to my Mac, and realised that, in practice, the Vena II is a solid-state answer to the VA-One. Even the remotes are the same.

As I use the VA-One for headphone purposes as well, I did the same with the Vena II Play and it worked a treat with three levels of Audeze cans and two Master & Dynamic models. Without forgetting what I wrote above about placing value in context, and how Vena II Play could be the heart of a decent main system, this is also an excellent choice for a desktop system... or headphone amp.



MIRACLE PLAY

Forget everything else that may irk me about the Brave New World because DTS Play-Fi works, and it is – to one who recalls

ABOVE: The new 'Net' button provides a clue to the Vena II's enhanced streaming feature while the understated, monochrome aesthetic remains a distant echo of historic Quad preamps

Windows 3 – akin to a miracle. I felt like Rip Van Winkle, as if he fell asleep in 1959 and woke up with a Samsung Galaxy in his hand. But my role here is to assess the sound quality, not the wireless frippery, so I listened to the myriad services available at various degrees of resolution, as well as reel-to-reel tape and vinyl.

Yes, amidst all this digital-through-the-aether wizardry is a proper MM stage – and it's a good 'un. In keeping with price, I hooked up an under-£350 Pro-Ject turntable with its own arm and Ortofon MM cartridge – the one that looks like the old Concorde – and sat back to hear Quentin Collins All-Star Quintet's *A Day In The Life* [Chasing The Dragon VALCO13] direct-cut LP. Whoa. The Vena II Play threw out a massive soundstage, showed sufficient attack and even delivered the rich bottom end the LP possesses.

Playing an LP through this unit served to illustrate, in spades, why some of us prefer analogue to digital, which I'm certain wasn't the intention of Vena II Play, but hey, stuff happens. And this turns out to have real analogue chops, so there is no hyperbole if your Quad dealer tells you that the Vena II Play shows its prowess with both digital *and* analogue sources.

NO CLEAR WINNER

Because my web provider is risible, and as there are no absolutes nor control over streaming feeds as I far can tell, then I mainly used HDTracks and Amazon downloads at various resolutions, from MP3 to 192kHz. I also had good results with Wolfgang's Vault (live concerts at 320kbps MP3) streaming, and swiftly preferred the sound quality of the Wi-Fi connections.

A Paul McCartney concert in Washington, DC, recorded on the 4th of July 1990, was good enough to show ➡

DTS PLAY-FI

Quad, along with other high profile hi-fi brands including Klipsch, Rotel, Sonus faber, Arcam, SVS and Paradigm to name a few, has signed up to the Play-Fi platform developed by DTS, itself part of the Xperi audio, imaging and licencing group since 2016. Compatible with Amazon's Alexa assistant, Play-Fi is described as a 'premium whole-home wireless audio' solution that transmits audio files and streaming audio services from smartphones to speakers throughout the home using a proprietary, data-authenticating technology. The Play-Fi app is free for both Android and iOS smartphones and there's also a version that runs on Windows PCs. And wireless headphones? Yes, there's an app for those too!

Of course, Play-Fi is not only for 'speakers' as the Vena II Play aptly illustrates. In practice, DTS's receiver module can be built into any hi-fi product from network-attached DACs to multichannel audio receivers. The platform accommodates numerous services, including Amazon Music, Spotify, Pandora, Deezer, Napster, iHeartRadio and SiriusXM, and will also allow you to access music files stored on your smartphone or other NAS facility connected via your home hub. However, for us audiophiles, what sets Play-Fi apart from most generic 'around the house' Wi-Fi audio solutions is its 'Critical Listening' mode. This facilitates the transmission of files up to 192kHz/24-bit resolution with no format conversion, lossy compression or downsampling. And, in our independent Lab tests, it performed just as advertised on the can [see p65]. PM

Black Rhodium Charleston

All Cables Obey the Laws of Physics. Charleston Plays Music Beautifully.



It is a long step from understanding how the Laws of Physics describe the effects of RFI, EMI, vibration and dielectric absorption in insulation on your music, to engineering a cable that sets all these effects to an absolute minimum. **Charleston makes that step.**

'Listening to the Black Rhodium Charleston differs from almost all other speaker cables. The high notes of the choirs soar without any apparent compression, the low notes are very clear, detailed and precise.'

Opus 51 review - www.opus51.fr/nouveautes-hifi/item/899-black-rhodium-charleston

- Hand built in several layers of insulation, vibration damping and RFI/EMI screening
- Conductor wires enhanced with a Deep Cryogenic Treatment
- Each conductor is individually screened to minimise RFI/EMI between conductors
- Large ferrite rings minimise high frequency noise generated outside the cable
- Rhodium plated locking plugs used for strength, reliability and superlative sound

Download the full design whitepaper from the Charleston product page.

Contact your Black Rhodium dealer now for a demonstration or visit our website:

www.BlackRhodium.co.uk

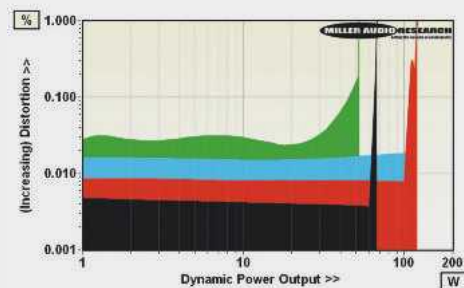
Hand made Hi-fi cables made in England

LAB REPORT

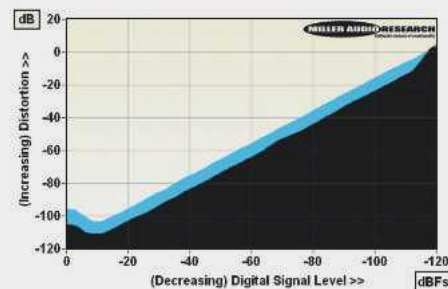
QUAD VENA II PLAY

With only minor running production 'tweaks' made to the Vena II's analogue amplifier, it makes sense to focus here on the performance of its new Wi-Fi/network audio feature. In practice, Quad's implementation of the DTS Play-Fi service is superb and, in its 'critical listening' guise, makes full use of the ES9018K2M DAC's capabilities. Jitter is reduced to <20psec via wireless streaming and, relative to a 2V preamp output, the A-wtd S/N ratio is a wide 109dB and distortion just 0.0006-0.0014% (20Hz-20kHz). Importantly, the *pattern* of distortion does not vary with frequency [see Graph 2, below]. The frequency response, and rejection of alias distortions, is set by Quad's choice of ESS's slow roll-off linear-phase digital filter, now -1.7dB/20kHz, -5.0dB/45kHz and -11.9dB/90kHz with 48kHz, 96kHz and 192kHz files, respectively. This defines the output bandwidth of the Vena II Play when used via any of its digital inputs, the response reaching out 'flatter' and further via the analogue inputs from -0.1/20Hz to -0.5dB/20kHz and -4.7dB/100kHz.

Otherwise, this Wi-Fi enabled version of the Vena II is still rated at 2x45W/8ohm and 2x65W/4ohm. In practice, it still delivers 2x53W/8ohm and 2x75W/4ohm with 68W, 120W and 115W available under dynamic conditions into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads [see Graph 1]. Frequency response, noted above, is slightly more extended than we saw in the Vena II [HFN Jun '19] and this ties in with a welcome reduction in output impedance, down from 0.089-0.125ohm to 0.013-0.045ohm here (20Hz-20kHz). Distortion is largely unchanged at 0.003% through the midrange over its 45W rated output but is slightly reduced at HF from 0.035% to 0.015%/20kHz (re. 10W/8ohm). PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 7.6A



ABOVE: THD vs. 48kHz/24-bit signal level over a 120dB range via DTS Play-Fi (1kHz, black; 20kHz, blue)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	53W / 75W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	68W / 120W / 115W / 53W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz, DAC/Amp)	96ohm / 0.013-0.045ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.1 to -0.5dB / -4.7dB
Digital jitter (USB / S/PDIF)	12psec / 13psec
A-wtd S/N ratio (DAC/Amp)	109.0dB (0dBfs) / 89.6dB (0dBW)
Distortion (DAC/Amp)	0.0006-0.0014%/0.0019-0.015%
Power consumption (Idle/rated o/p)	20W / 170W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	313x94x302mm / 6.1kg



ABOVE: With Ethernet and Wi-Fi added to the BT 'inputs', there are just two S/PDIF inputs here (one coax, one optical), plus asynchronous USB-B and two RCA line ins, one MM phono, one preamp out and 4mm speaker terminals

variances between connection types and even streaming sources. I hate to admit that iPad vs Mac Air vs elderly iMac vs Huawei P30 Pro yielded different results, but – to confound me – there was no clear winner. Via my aged desktop Mac, the soundstage was wider, while the Mac Air sounded cleaner, if less open. The Huawei phone shocked me by being so coherent, while the iPad was the warmest-sounding. This was going to be a half-dozen eggs – curate's, that is.

Repeatable whether using the least distinguished of sources – the music stored in my phones and iPad – or the best (tape and LP), the Wi-Fi link consistently bettered other non-wired avenues, especially when it came to the naturalness of the upper frequencies. I suppose one chooses either/or depending on the devices' options.

LITTLE HONEY

Flipping from Wi-Fi to Bluetooth showed the latter to be a case of convenience over quality. It has a graininess that I found most irritating when using headphones, because the sound isn't tempered by space between music and listener. When I used hard-wiring, the sound acquired discernible refinement. I hate to even go here, but I could

even detect differences in digital cables.

Having tried everything bar voice activation, I turned to the best source

LEFT: Miniature Quad handset governs on/off, mute, input selection and volume control

imaginable strictly to pass verdict on the sound quality. I was already impressed by what the Vena II Play offered for the money: everything. I cannot overstate what a little honey of a unit this is, but then I was already enamoured of its tubed sibling, the VA-One. But I had to feed this the best signal I could, so the Pioneer RT-707 reel-to-reel was enlisted, and loaded with Ray Charles' *Live In Concert* [ABC-Paramount ATC846; 7½ips tape].

Piano stage left, ringing out with all the naturalness you could hope to hear. Audience arrayed around and to the sides, percussion on the right. Ray himself just left of centre, precisely where the pianist/vocalist would be sitting. Silky, smooth, open – 'Hallelujah I Love Her So' was punctuated by authentic-sounding saxophone and brass while the 'door knocking' on the snare drum had punch and crispness to dazzle.

Above all, it was sounding so spacious that it delivered what I couldn't quite derive from the live McCartney feed. The Vena II Play was an open window into this audiophile-grade recording. £799? I am humbled. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

I've been recommending Vena IIs (and VA-Ones) to non-audiophile friends as a no-brainer answer to creating affordable, pleasurable, painless systems; now I can add the Vena II Play for those that insist on going wireless. It really is a dazzlingly accomplished answer to the modern needs of people who don't want traditional separates, and I can only marvel at its fool-proof connectivity. Wow! Wireless that works!

Sound Quality: 85%



AKG K371

There's no point in doing research to establish the optimum headphone frequency response, as Harman has done in recent years, unless you sell a product that delivers it...
Review & Lab: **Keith Howard**

If like me you enjoy the ancient notion that an engineer is someone who can make for a shilling what any fool could make for a pound, you'll share my longstanding delight at finding unpretentious, low-bling but high-achieving products which, despite modest price tags, blow away a lot of their more expensive competitors. Products which convince you that resources have been husbanded and design effort expended in pursuit of one key goal: first-class sound.

The £139 AKG K371 comes within a hair's breadth of being just such a rarity. It's as drab as could be to look at – all black and grey – and has the sort of plasticky feel we've come to expect from inexpensive headphones. But it's like the clever kid in class who hides their abilities so as not to stand out. Put the K371 over your head, note its fine isolation, plug it in and turn on the music. Only then does its worth become obvious.

LEARNING CURVE

What prompted our review of the K371 is the fact that it's said to follow very closely the latest Harman target curve. As anyone who has followed the headphone sphere for the past seven years will well know, Harman has made a concerted and sustained effort to reinvestigate and redefine the ideal ('target') frequency response for headphones of all sorts – circumaural (over ear), like the K371, but also supra-aural (on ear) and insert types. But thus far we've seen very few headphones that closely match the latest Harman target.

The K371 does. Or rather it does below 2.5kHz [see Lab Report, p69]. With all manner of frequency responses and

tonal balances on offer from headphones, the K371 – by adhering to the Harman target – attempts to bring some order and rationality to what is a very disordered sector of the audiophile world.

DOWN TO AGE

It should be added here, though, that Harman's own research shows that headphone response preferences are somewhat dependent on the age of the listener. We older citizens tend to like less bass than the whippersnappers, and I hold my hand up to that preference. I dislike speakers with thickened textures due to LF excess or cabinet resonance, and that desire for carefully metered lower-midrange and bass carries across to headphones.

Inside each of the K371's oval capsules is a 50mm moving-coil drive unit of conventional design but with a titanium coating applied to the diaphragm to stiffen it. Exactly what the plastic substrate is

AKG doesn't say. Sound isolation is claimed to be 'superior' and that is confirmed in practice – you really do get a sense that the earpads' slow-retention foam provides a good seal, and AKG's promotional material also mentions low leakage (that is, little escape of sound pressure past the pads) which should help ensure consistent low-frequency response. Having said which, like all closed-back headphones the K371

loses bass extension if the earpad seal is compromised by leakage around spectacle arms or through hair.

The K371 is generously supplied with no fewer than three cables: two straight cables of 3m and 1.2m in length, and a 3m coiled

cable. All terminate at the headset in a three-pin locking connector which attaches to the left capsule, with gold-plated 3.5mm TRS mini-jacks at the source end.

LIGHT HEADED

Meanwhile, a screw-on gold-plated sleeve adapter adds compatibility with headphone preamps fitted with ¼in jack outlets. The one other supplied accessory is a grey, soft, drawstring carrying pouch.

For transportation, the capsules may be rotated up into the headband, allowing the K371 to be carried in a coat pocket, or in a briefcase, handbag or man bag without taking up too much space.

If the K371 is comfortable to wear – and it is, mostly – that's principally due to the headset tipping the scales at just 257g, although the well-padded headband, soft earpads and modest head clamping force all play their part. The earpads aren't completely circumaural if you have large ears like mine but the squish and squash is not excessive. Although the cable sheath is smooth rather than braided, the capsules are

'It's like the clever kid in class who hides their abilities'



RIGHT: A simple mechanism allows the capsules to be rotated up into the headband for transportation, thereby avoiding the complication of a hinge

quite microphonic when tapped so there is some extraneous noise if the cable rubs over clothes or furniture. If the cable catches on your collar beneath the left capsule this can transition from mildly to very annoying.

SAIL AWAY

For the listening I used my resident Teac HA-501 headphone amplifier [HFN Apr '14], Chord Electronics Qutest DAC [HFN Nov '18] and second-generation Mac mini running Windows XP and JRiver Media Center v22. Headphone sound is dominated by tonal balance, and the K371 sounds much as you'd expect from something between its diffuse-field and Harman-corrected responses. This is the first headphone to come my way which closely follows the latest (2017) Harman target response up to 2.5kHz and I was interested to hear whether – by postponing the up-shelving of its bass output to lower in frequency than we've typically seen in headphones with LF excess – the K371 would obviate the thickening of textures which I find so annoying with many modern headphones.

Actually, it doesn't quite, but it does get close. The shelved-down treble exacerbates the effect but if the K371 lacks ultimate crispness and clarity, as it does, mostly its slight treble reticence is something you can adapt to, whereas the marginally insistent

bass and the occasional thickening it brings I have difficulty tuning out. But you may be different, of course. Indeed, if Harman's research is to be believed, a lot of you are.

Like many, but not all closed-back headphones, the K371 delivers less

LEFT: AKG doesn't say much about the 50mm drive units other than the diaphragms are 'titanium coated'. If the connecting lead rubs on your collar it can generate an annoying level of capsule noise

spacious imaging than open-back equivalents. If you listen to a good open-back model (the long discontinued and much missed Sony MDR-MA900 performed that duty in my case) and immediately thereafter play the same track using the K371, you hear this in the form of both distinctly narrowed image width and less spaciousness and 'air'.

But the longer you listen, the less of an issue this can seem. Given some adaptation time, the K371 – while never sounding as ethereal as a good open-back – no longer seems as parsimonious with image space as it initially does. I noticed this particularly with Frank Sinatra's 'It Was A Very Good Year', from *Sinatra At The Sands* [96kHz/24-bit rip from Reprise 8122 73777-9]. This track may not seem to promise spaciousness like, say, choral music recorded in a church but actually relies in large part for its impact on natural imaging that places Sinatra centre-stage and lets the Count Basie Orchestra weave its magical contributions around him.

As you'd also expect from the K371's measured response, there is no shirking of bass responsibilities. Its bass output is too prominent for my liking but there's no gainsaying its extension. It sailed through my bass test tracks, generating interesting observations along the way. For instance, there's ample evidence that, by postponing its bass shelf to lower frequencies than typical, the AKG K371 avoids some of the most obvious symptoms of bass bloat.

NICE 'N' NIMBLE

Planar magnetic headphones are often held up to be the ultimate bass performers but with their power and extension can come a loss of agility, with bass transients sounding a bit leaden – not because of extended or emphasised bass *per se*, but because the lower midrange is caught up in the act and causes the blurring effect.

There was no sign of this from the K371 when I played tracks that demand nimble as well as extended bass. The manic electric bass runs of Chris Jones' 'Fender Bender' [44.1kHz/16-bit rip from ↗



ON TARGET

While over much of the frequency range the latest Harman circumaural/supra-aural target response is quite similar to the diffuse-field response which Gunter Thiele of the IRT identified as ideal in the 1980s, it differs significantly at low frequencies where the bass is shelved up by 6dB at 30Hz (re. 200Hz). While we've seen lots of headphones in recent years with a shelved-up bass, typically the rise in output has started much higher in frequency than ~200Hz, often beginning a little below 1kHz. By contrast, the Harman 2017 target response slopes downwards below 1kHz to be -2.1dB by 224Hz. Adherents to the Harman curve have claimed that this is why so many headphones with a bass boost have sounded thickened: because their lower midrange output is raised in level too. Because it follows the Harman target more closely – unsurprisingly given that AKG is a Harman brand (owned by Samsung) – the K371 represents a rare opportunity to discover whether that claim is borne out in practice. Note, though, that the review sample – for reasons which are unknown at this juncture – measured significantly differently via its left and right capsules.



ortofon
accuracy in sound

CADENZA

The Cadenza Series of high-end Moving Coil (MC) cartridges allow you to get the most from your vinyl records. By carefully implementing cobalt-iron pole pieces, using new improved winding processes on the armature, and employing an extruded aluminium housing - amongst other changes - the Cadenza Series is able to out-perform all those that came before it.

The name *Cadenza* comes from the Italian word for cadence, which refers to a soloist during an orchestra performance where they play alone in an elaborate manner. It therefore seemed fitting that such a capable and nuanced cartridge series should use the same name.

Like other modern ranges, the Cadenza Series is structured in Ortofon's preferred colour-tier nomenclature; so there are Red, Blue, Bronze, and Black variants available to suit varying budgets and tastes.



Red

This MC cartridge and introduction to the series features a Nude Fine Line stylus which delivers open, dynamic sound with a touch of warmth.



Blue

Featuring much greater dynamics and resolution, the sound is more open and reproduces more accurate details thanks to the Nude FG 70 stylus.



Bronze

A step up in the range, this cartridge boasts a Replicant 100 stylus to produce stereo imaging capabilities that illuminate the farthest corners of the soundstage.



Black

Flagship of the range, the Cadenza Black is simply the best and features a Nude Shibata stylus which guarantees amazing tonal neutrality, dynamics and purity of sound.

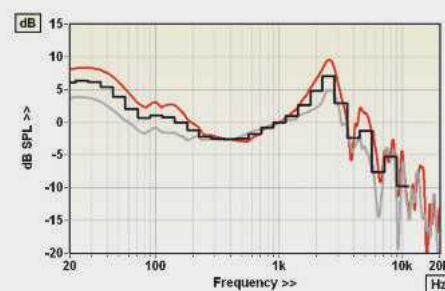
LAB REPORT

AKG K371

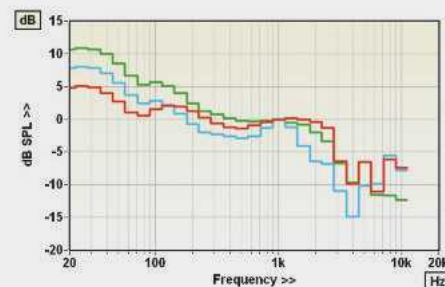
After a succession of planar magnetic designs, many of which have had relatively low voltage sensitivity (or worse), the K371 serves as a reminder of how this is rarely an issue with medium impedance moving-coil headphones. In fact the K371's 120.6dB SPL for 1V at 1kHz, averaged for the two capsules, makes it the most sensitive headphone we've tested this year. And despite the K371 being a moving-coil rather than a planar magnetic design, AKG has managed to contain its impedance variation within quite tight limits of 35.0-40.0ohm (20Hz-20kHz).

As a result, modification of the final frequency response due to the finite source resistance of the driving headphone amplifier is modest, amounting to 0.24dB with a 10ohm source and 0.51dB with a 30ohm source. Uncorrected frequency responses for the two capsules [see Graph 1, below] are more than usually disparate. The right capsule (red trace) shows the expected shelving up at LF to follow the Harman target response, and has quite a strong peak at 2.5kHz to deliver a neutral perceived tonal balance through the presence band. But with the left capsule both features are less prominent.

The outcome for the corrected responses [see Graph 2, below] is that all three (diffuse field, free field and Harman) show the K371 to have shelved-down treble above 1.5-3kHz. All also show a bass lift, which may seem surprising in the case of the Harman correction, but this is using the 2013 Harman target, not the latest 2017 target which shows the K371's perceived frequency response to be flat below 2kHz within +3/-2dB. Although, at the time of writing, I have yet to perform leakage measurements, response variability at LF suggests that the K371 will probably suffer bass loss if the earpad seal is compromised. Again in contrast to many planar magnetic designs, the moving-coil K371 delivered substantially clean CSD waterfalls, indicating few resonances, from both capsules. KH



ABOVE: The K371 demonstrated a difference in uncorrected response between capsules, the right (red) having the more appropriate presence boost



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

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL at 1kHz for 1Vrms input)	120.6dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	35.0ohm @ 5.5kHz 40.0ohm @ 20kHz
Capsule matching (40Hz-10kHz)	±5.1dB
LF extension (-6dB ref. 200Hz)	<20Hz
Distortion 100Hz/1kHz (for 90dB SPL)	<0.1% / <0.1%
Weight (headset only)	257g



ABOVE: Although the earpads aren't truly circumaural if your ears are on the large side, the earpads are still comfortable and also provide good isolation

the Stockfisch CD *Roadhouses & Automobiles*; SFR 357.6027.2] were as delightfully clear as they were weighty, and the same was true of Brian Bromberg's acoustic bass in 'The Saga Of Harrison Crabfeathers' [44.1kHz/16-bit rip from *Brian Bromberg's Wood*; A440 Records 4001]. The K371 also lapped up Robbie Shakespeare's bass in Grace Jones' 'Well Well Well' [44.1kHz/16-bit rip from *Hurricane*; Wall of Sound WOS050CD] while at the same time its polite treble smoothed away some of the graininess but also a little of the pizzazz.

RAW EMOTION

What also became clear from my collection of standard 'bass test tracks' is that my perception of the K371's bass excess was critically dependent on the source material. 'Way Down Deep' and 'Somewhere Somebody', both ripped from Jennifer Warnes' *The Hunter* [Private Music 01005-82089-2], elicited quite different reactions. The low bass of the former I found way OTT, whereas with the latter the bass was, yes, too prominent for my taste but not ridiculously so.

Solo male voice suited the K371, in every variety from James Griffett's impassioned rendition of 'The Turtle Dove' [44.1kHz/16-bit rip from Regis RRC1112] to Todd Rundgren's 'For Lack Of Honest Work' [44.1kHz/16-bit rip from *A Cappella*; Rhino R2 75761]. Yes, the latter track isn't strictly solo voice but as Rundgren sings the harmonies too I'm bending the definition here.

The big acoustic of Boxgrove Priory near Chichester was a little generalised and a little shrunken in the former but Griffett's voice

was in fine fettle and there was no undue emphasis of the annoying print-through that plagues Tony Faulkner's fine analogue recording of yesteryear. Some of the studio manipulation – principally artificial reverb – in the Rundgren song was played down but the raw emotion of the song, so different in its subject matter to the first piece of music, was well conveyed.

I suspected before I played it that another, much more recent Faulkner recording would not fare as well, and I was right. Beethoven's Op.18 String Quartet in A, played by the Allegri String Quartet [192kHz/24-bit download from www.vivatmusic.com], I count as one of the best chamber music recordings I own but it relies for its full mesmeric effect on generous imaging and unashamed presence band output that turns the sound of a violin from something vague into rosined bow on string vitality. Neither is in the gift of the K371, which is better suited to other musical forms. ☹

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Let's not forget that the K371 costs under £140. It has more bass and less treble than I prefer, but Harman's research shows that this is a tonal balance that many listeners like – maybe you're one. It's lightweight, provides excellent isolation from external sound, is readily portable, and supplied with connecting leads for every likely use. All told it's impressively good value, if not quite the star I'd hoped for.

Sound Quality: 82%





PS AUDIO

Pioneering world class audio products

PS Audio's Stellar range is affordable excellence

Stellar Gain Cell Preamplifier/DAC

The Stellar Gain Cell™ combines the benefits of an exceptional analogue preamplifier and a full-featured DAC. Fully balanced analogue circuitry from input to output, the Stellar Gain Cell builds upon years of research and innovation in the art of Class A analogue amplification and state-of-the-art digital reproduction.



£1,550



£1,350

Stellar S300 Stereo Amplifier

Breathe new life into your loudspeakers with the Stellar™ S300. The S300 combines the slam, linearity, and toe-tapping pacing of a Class D output stage with the warmth, grace, and rich inner detail of Stellar's Class A proprietary Analog Cell.

Stellar M700 Power Amplifier Monos

The Analog Cell is the heart of the M700's musicality, where richly overlaid layers of music's inner details are preserved even in the most complex orchestral crescendos. The Analog Cell is a proprietary, fully differential, zero feedback, discrete, Class A MOSFET circuit, hand-tuned to capture the smallest micro dynamics without sacrificing the loudest macro dynamics music has to offer.



£2,700

PS Audio Introduces the Stellar Phono Preamplifier!

**Redefining record collections,
one LP at a time**

"I recommend a listen to the Stellar to anyone in the market for a new phono preamp, regardless of price. I don't think I've ever written that before."

Michael Fremer - Stereophile, Jan 2020



£2,500

The new Stellar Phono Preamp has both fixed and variable loading for moving coil cartridges, fully adjustable from the remote control. The unit's ultra-low noise allows the use of MC cartridges with output as low as 0.15 mV. Two different tonearms can be selected via the remote, with either single-ended or balanced outputs. A massive, heavily-regulated power supply and full DC coupling allow the unit to provide up to 20V rms output for powerful bass and unrestricted headroom and dynamics. PS Audio's first product way back in 1974 was a phono preamplifier that outperformed and replaced far more expensive units. Since then, we've offered a number of excellent phono preamps, but the new Stellar Phono Preamplifier is the best we've ever made.

Stellar Power Plant P3

Built as an evolution from our renowned P12, P15, and P20 the P3 is our most affordable regenerator – perfect for powering sources and small to medium systems. Power Plants generate sine-wave-perfect, regulated, high current AC power from your home's AC. In the process of regeneration, problems on your power line such as low voltage, distorted waveforms, sagging power, and noise are eliminated and the power quality enhanced. The results are both audibly and visually stunning when powering either audio or video products.



£2,300



PS Audio Power Plants are regarded for their ability to reduce noise and THD to virtually zero while providing rock steady voltage output.

Traditional power conditioners can only affect a portion of incoming noise and are unable to compensate for over or under voltage. Furthermore, power conditioners raise the impedance of the power going to your system, which can bleach your sound and drain away dynamics. The P3 handles things completely differently. Through the P3's active regeneration process, it provides perfect power while also lowering the impedance, increasing the dynamics and openness of your system.

Signature
AUDIO SYSTEMS

Distributed by Signature Audio Systems, **call: 07738 – 007776**
or by e-mail to: **info@signaturesystems.co.uk** Web: **www.psaudio.com**

Classical Companion

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

Isabelle Faust *Violinist*

Outpacing her father when they both were learning the violin, she has become one of the most intrepid of today's musicians. **Christopher Breunig** focuses on the highlights

We record collectors first became aware of the violinist Isabelle Faust 23 years ago, when in its 'Nouveaux Interprètes' series Harmonia Mundi issued a coupling of Bartók Sonatas, where she was partnered by the Polish pianist Ewa Kupiec. I remember what was probably their London debut recital at that time. In 2003 they recorded a mixture of pieces by Janáček, Lutoslawski and Szymanowski.

Isabelle Faust was born in Esslingen, near Stuttgart in Southern Germany, in March 1972. When she was only five her father decided he wanted to learn to play the violin, and he took his daughter along to lessons – where she soon outshone him. When she was 11 there was a family string quartet and they were coached by leading contemporaries.

One of her two principal teachers was Christoph Poppen, and he

→ **Faust's first recording for Harmonia Mundi – two Sonatas by Bartók – won a 1997 award for Young Artist of the Year**

← **The German violinist Isabelle Faust has built up a highly distinguished discography, principally for Harmonia Mundi**



accompanied her – as conductor – in one of her first recordings: Haydn Violin Concertos [Pan Classics, 1998]. That came a year after her Harmonia Mundi Bartók CD debut, coming a decade after the young Nigel Kennedy too had set down the demanding solo Violin Sonata.

EARLY RECOGNITION

Faust's first major competition prize was in 1987, at the Leopold Mozart International Competition, Augsburg. The Genoa Paganini Competition First Prize followed in 1993. Over the years numerous recordings have received commendation awards, reflecting her wide repertoire – the *Concerto*

funèbre by Karl Amadeus Hartmann [ECM, 2002], JS Bach's Sonatas and Partitas [Harmonia Mundi, 2010], her Mozart violin concertos with Il Giardino Armonico [2011], etc.

When Bernard Haitink [HFN Dec '16] celebrated his 90th birthday with two LSO concerts, he was joined by Faust in the Dvořák Concerto (unusual for him although she had recorded it in Prague back in 2004 with the late Jiří Bělohlávek). Faust is a frequent visitor to the UK,

playing mostly at the Wigmore Hall. She was here at the end of March in an LSO Barbican programme where she played the Stravinsky Concerto, a piece she has yet to record.

My album choice [facing page] is the one CD coupling she made with Claudio Abbado and Orchestra Mozart: the Berg Concerto and the Beethoven, where she plays her own adaptation of the composer's cadenza written for his piano transcription requested by Clementi – it has a part for the timpanist too.

She'd made an earlier recording of the Beethoven, in 2007 with the Prague Philharmonia/Bělohlávek, which was later chosen as Radio 3's 'Building a Library' first choice [Harmonia Mundi HMC901944]. Notwithstanding the claims of the Grumiaux/Markevitch or Kremer/Davis versions of the Berg Violin Concerto, this one is more than their equal and has the advantage of terrific sound quality.

You can see the later performance she gave of the Berg with Andris Nelsons and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, at the 2014 memorial concert for Abbado, as a DVD [Accentus Music ACC20319]. There's also an Accentus DVD [ACC20411;

Blu-ray ACC10411] with Faust, pianist Martin Helmchen and cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras playing Beethoven's Triple Concerto, with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Herbert Blomstedt.

Swaying, crouching and turning, Faust is quite a mobile figure when playing on stage (unlike, say, the statuesque Isaac Stern or the steady Nathan Milstein) – see her rehearsing Beethoven with Daniel Harding and the Orchestre de Paris in Dec

'Crouching and turning, Faust presents a mobile figure'



PHOTO: NORDIC MANAGEMENT

2018 [YouTube] as one example. And from a year later we have a stylish concert recording of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante*, K364, with the Concertgebouw Orchestra under Iván Fischer; Tabea Zimmermann is the partnering violist.

When Isabelle Faust recorded the Brahms Concerto with Daniel Harding and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra [Harmonia Mundi HMC902075], rather than playing Joachim's or Kreisler's cadenza she opted for one by Busoni – that too had a role for the timpani player; orchestral strings also take part. This was my Album Choice for *HFN* Jul '11 and I noted 'ample flexibility and warmth' and no fears that a chamber orchestra might sound in any way skeletal. In 2016 Faust was appointed 'Artistic Partner' of this 'nomadic collective' (currently, there's a five-year partnership with Mitsuko Uchida).

SLEEPING BEAUTY STRAD

The instrument she has been playing for two decades is the



PHOTO: ACCENTUS MUSIC/YOUTUBE

Stradivarius violin of c.1704 known as the 'Sleeping Beauty', loaned by the Landeskreditbank Baden-Württemberg. But for her period instrument CD set of Bach in the Essential Recordings boxout she used a Jacob Steiner instrument with its more apt 'German sound'.

In 2004 Faust made her first recording with the pianist Alexander Melnikov and cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras in a Dvořák programme, and they have become regular partners in sonatas and trios [see Essential Recordings boxout].

When you look at the discography you wonder what else could possibly remain to be done – she didn't make a start with the Tchaikovsky and Sibelius Concertos (like Kyung-Wha Chung and Viktoria Mullova) or give us the tired old

➔ With Claudio Abbado and the Orchestra Mozart, Faust recorded Alban Berg's Violin Concerto in 2011

➔ Faust playing at the Claudio Abbado memorial concert in Lucerne in 2014



Mendelssohn/Bruch coupling (Joshua Bell). Her Mendelssohn did not come until 2017, a rather abrasive version, I thought, with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and Pablo Heras-Casado [Harmonia Mundi HMM 902325]. YouTube has session footage where Faust talks about the research they did to achieve authenticity.

And while her Russian pianist partner Melnikov has recorded Prokofiev, she's seemingly not been persuaded by his two Concertos or the Sonatas. They did record Shostakovich's Violin Sonata Op.134. It would be good, though, to hear what these two might make of Ravel's Sonata No 2, with its 'Blues' movement (I doubt that the showy *Tzigane* would be Faust's cup of tea

though – and, anyway, you couldn't wish for more than the fine Hyperion CD with these pieces played by Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien).

Next month I review her new Schoenberg coupling: the Violin Concerto and *Verklärte Nacht* in the original sextet scoring.

When Faust first encountered the Stradivarius violin, she says 'I played for half an hour and there were certain notes on the four strings – unique notes – which sounded like heaven to me'. Over a long time it reached its maximum sound quality.

'But it is still changing constantly. If in the morning you think "today is a good day", by the evening it can be exactly vice versa. It is a truly human violin.' ☺

ESSENTIAL RECORDINGS

JS Bach: Violin Concertos

Harmonia Mundi HMM902335/36 (two CDs)
Faust with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, leader Bernhard Forck. With *Sinfonias etc.*, and the *Orchestral Suite No 2* – violin ousting flute!

Bartók: Violin Concertos Nos 1 and 2

Harmonia Mundi HMC902146
Faust recorded these pieces with the Swedish RSO/Daniel Harding. 'Faust is completely attuned to the idiom' [*HFN* Dec '13].

Beethoven: Piano Trios

Harmonia Mundi HMC902125
The 'Archduke' Trio, Op.97, and Op.70:2 with Alexander Melnikov and Jean-Guihen Queyras. The Violin Sonatas: HMC902025/27 (3CDs).

Berg/Beethoven: Violin Concertos

Harmonia Mundi HMC902105
Faust's Beethoven remake with the Berg Concerto – Abbado conducting [see above].

Mozart: Violin Concertos and Rondos

Harmonia Mundi HMC902230/31 (two discs)
Cadenzas for this enlightening period-instrument set were specially composed by Andreas Staier. Giovanni Antonini directs his *Il Giardino Armonico* [*HFN* Mar '17].

Schubert: Octet

Harmonia Mundi HMM902263
Faust heads a gifted group of period instrumentalists. 'Here you think more about the music than the playing' [*HFN* Nov '18].

Vinyl Release

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

Gong *Camembert Electrique*

Steve Sutherland savours the thrillingly nutty flavours of this ripe 11-track offering from the multimonikered Aussie musician, as the album is reissued on 180g vinyl

Back in the 1950s, that perpetual scamp and eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell (then well into his 80s) created an analogy to deal with the concept of faith in the existence of God. He said that if he were to assert, without offering any evidence whatsoever, that a teapot – too small to be seen by telescopes – orbits the Sun somewhere in space between the Earth and Mars, he could not expect anyone to believe him *solely* because it could not be proven wrong. 'I think,' he concluded, 'the Christian God just as unlikely'.

TALKIN' TOLKIEN

In other words, just because you can't prove something doesn't exist doesn't give the assertion that it does any credibility (or something like that). Anyway, cat duly tossed amongst the pigeons, this was argued out endlessly by academics with the usual impossibility of any agreeable conclusion being reached.

Tip-top fun, of course, not the least because a splendidly free-spirited gentleman by the name of Daevid Allen was loosely – very loosely – inspired to create a trilogy of LPs around the concept. These albums were called *Flying Teapot*,

Angel's Egg and *You*, known to freaks the length and breadth of the universe as *The Radio Gnome Invisible Trilogy*.

But before you get too excited, I should explain that none of these estimably and astonishingly weird albums are the reason we're here right now. The platter we're about to savour is called *Camembert Electrique* which was once wonderfully, and extremely accurately, described as *The Hobbit* to the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy. Before we get into that, though, a little background's called for. The aforementioned Daevid Allen wasn't born that way. He was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1938 and named Christopher David Allen, which appears to be about the first and last normal thing that ever happened to him.

By the time he becomes of interest to us he has beatnicked his way around Europe, busking and the like, has been in several crazy bands that can't, or won't, make up their minds whether they want to play jazz, rock, folk or psychedelia, and has wound up in Canterbury, Kent. There he has been instrumental (along with such like-bonkers-

STEVE SUTHERLAND

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



minds as Kevin Ayers and Robert Wyatt) in the formation of Soft Machine.

Which was all well and good except when the band went on tour in Europe, Allen was refused re-entry into the UK because he'd previously overstayed his visa. Marooned in Paris he did what any enterprising global traveller would do. He briefly changed his name to Divided Allen and hooked up with a marvellous young lady called Gillian Smyth, who'd similarly relocated from Britain and was currently doing some educational stuff at the Sorbonne. The pair then threw themselves into the Paris Student riots, handing out teddy bears to the truncheon-wielding cops.

Finding themselves on some sort of wanted list, they duly scarpered to Deia in Majorca, where they chilled out and made plans, sneaking back to Gay Paree in 1969 at the behest of film director Jerome Laperrousaz, who was making a movie about motorcycle racing and fancied they might provide the soundtrack. That scheme fizzled out, but no matter as a splendid entrepreneur named Jean Karakos was busy setting up a label to record a bunch of free-jazzers, mostly Americans, who couldn't get their music released back home.

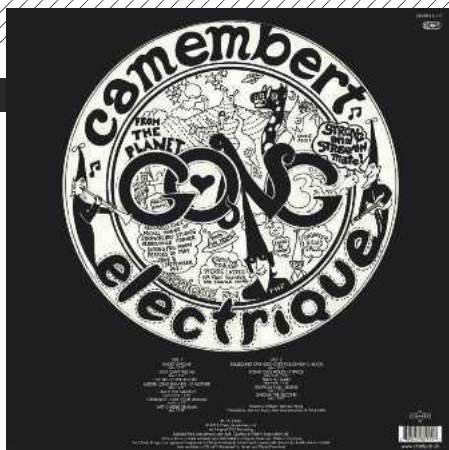
ANOTHER ALIAS

The label was BYG Actuel and, although short-lived, was the first home to Gong, the band (if you could call it that) which Allen and Smyth assembled to create *Magick Brother*, a pastoral psychedelic thing that emerged in March 1970. Which brings us to *Camembert Electrique*, but not before we introduce you to Didier Malherbe, a saxophonist amongst other things, who had met Allen and Smyth in Deia and now assumed the moniker Bloomdido Bad De Grasse – the first bit after 'Bloomdido', a stunning track by sax legend Charlie Parker.

Also on board were drummer Pip Pyle, an Englishman who soon jumped ship to



➔ Gong (l-r): Didier Malherbe (sax), Christian Tritsch (bass), Pip Pyle (drums), Robert Wyatt's son Sam, Daevid Allen, Francis Linon (sound engineer) and Gillian Smyth



➔ Priced £13.50, the 180g vinyl reissue of *Camembert Electrique* is available to order online from www.juno.co.uk

launch Hatfield And The North, and bassist Christian Tritsch, aka Submarine Captain. The jolly japes were rounded off by Bert Camembert (Allen's new, again brief, alias) and Shakti Yoni, the 'Space Whisperer', actually our Gillian who excelled in providing, well, yup, space whispers.

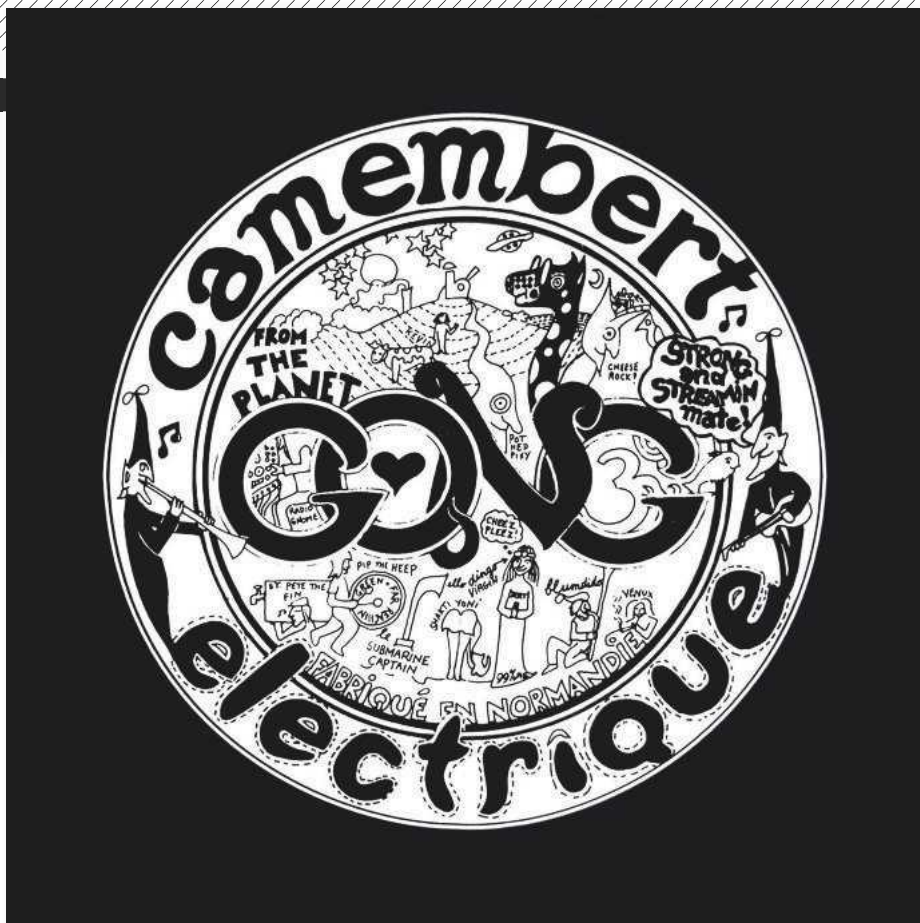
CRAZY CAVALCADE

This was the happy crew that rocked up to a posh 1740 gaff called the Chateau d'Herouville, a structure so imposing it had been painted by Van Gogh. In 1969, it had been fitted out as a recording studio. The Grateful Dead stayed there, Elton John used it for his album *Honky Chateau* and the wondrous Chris Bell recorded many of the tracks there that would posthumously be released on *I Am The Cosmos*.

Gong stayed for ten blessed weeks and blissed-out days, creating and curating their *Camembert Electrique*. Buckle up, here's how it goes/went: 'Radio Gnome', 26 seconds of voice modulation; 'You Can't Kill Me', cosmic heaviness, beginning with 'You can kill my father/You can kill my son/You can kill my children/With a gun, etc, etc'.



➔ Daavid Allen performs on stage at a festival in London's Hyde Park in 1974



'I've Bin Stone Before/Mr Long Shanks/O Mother' is a suite that starts churchy, kind of like Kevin Ayers was in Pink Floyd, then goes Sun Ra free jazzy, then all Bonzo Doggy. 'I Am Your Fantasy' is Gilli Smyth's domain, serene and spooky – 'Now is tomorrow afternoon,' and suchlike. Then follows 'Dynamite/I Am Your Animal', which was presumably designed solely with the intention of driving you crazy, while the track 'Wet Cheese Delirium' wobbles about hilariously for 29 seconds.

On to Side 2: 'Squeezing Sponges Over Policemen's Heads' is 13 seconds of more Zappaesque lunacy before the Hawkwindy 'Fohat Digs Holes In Space'. 'And You Tried So Hard' is almost normal – *almost* – and pretty terrific, while 'Tropical Fish/Selene' is lovely too, a bit like Syd Barrett fronting Gentle Giant. 'Gnome The Second' bows us out where we started – weird voices, merry chaos, much silliness.

This whole cavalcade of inspired nonsense first saw the light of day on BYG Actuel in October 1971. However, pretty much nobody got to hear it in the UK until 1974 when Richard Branson's fledgling Virgin label, enthused by the mega-success of their first ever release, Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*, decided Britfreaks were ready for a whack more of the ol' out-there stuff and embarked on a campaign to get us to sample alien sounds by releasing a series of LPs at impossible-to-resist low prices.

Camembert, which was the label's 16th release, came at the princely sum of 59p! It was cheap but it was a treasure, the cover alone worth the dosh, a weird cartoon à la The Furry Freak Brothers to endlessly study in an altered state. The LP also boasted a run-off groove that didn't run off, so the music just continued in perpetuity, just to, y'know, freak you out.

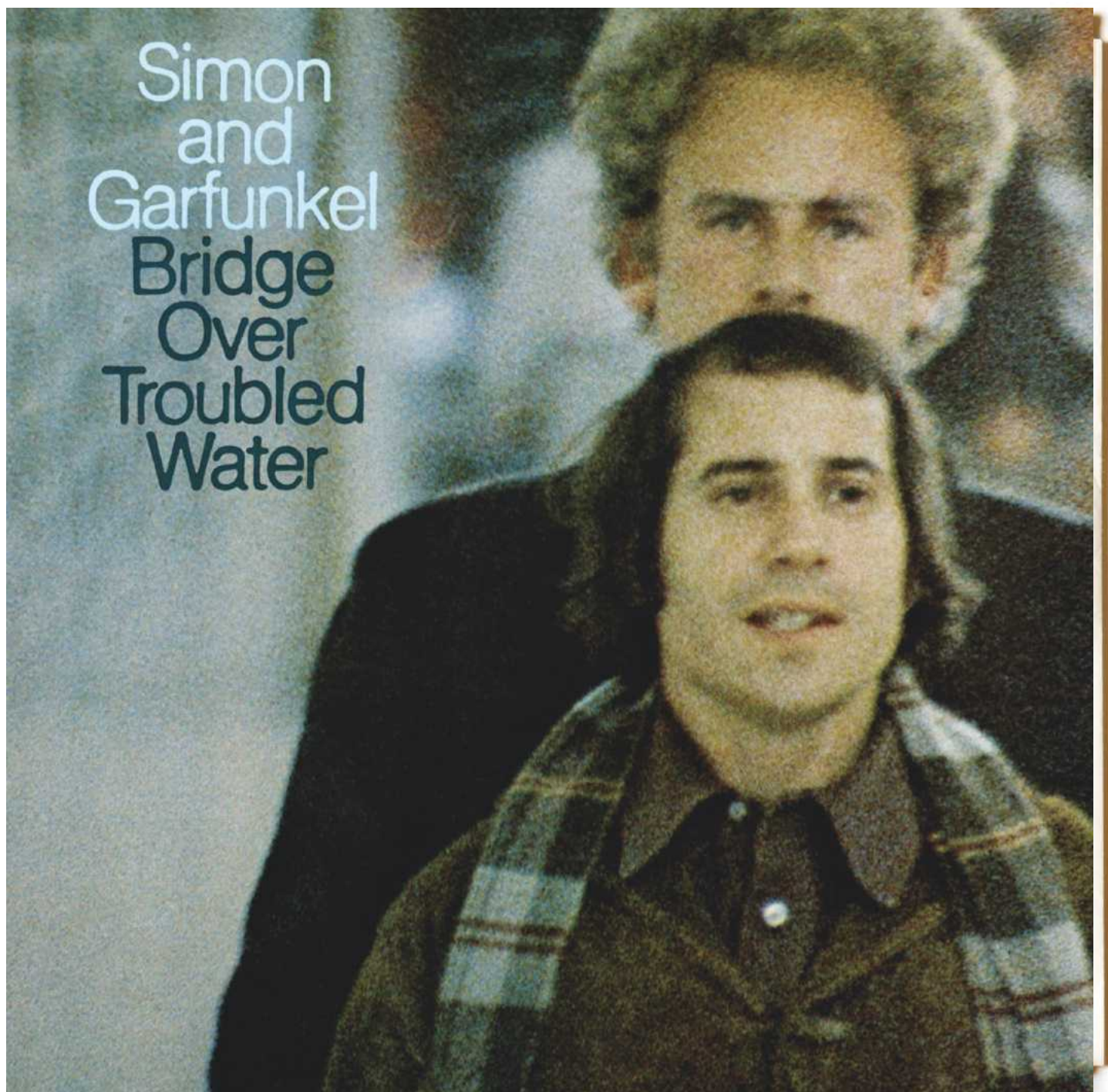
You may think this all sounds ridiculously hippy-dippyish and, truth be told, you'd be right. But against all sane and reasonable odds, it sounds as fabulously and thrillingly nutty today as it did all those aeons ago. ☺

RE-RELEASE VERDICT

As we've noted, the LP first came out as a 1971 BYG Actuel release in France [529.353] and then taken up by Virgin three years later [VC 502]. The original artwork was by Allen himself, while production was at the Strawberry Studios in Normandy. The 180g reissue reviewed here is from Charley Records [CHARLY L 117] and it comes in a replica of the original gatefold cover with four 12in inserts including new liner notes, credits, lyrics and a Charly Records advertising sheet. *HFN*

Sound Quality: 80%

0 - - - - - - - - - 100



Simon & Garfunkel *Bridge Over...*

It's now 50 years since the duo released their fifth and final studio album, which went on to top the charts in ten countries and find a place in over 25 million record collections. So why did a work that was such a commercial success only end in acrimony for the pair?

Words: **Mike Barnes**

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel first met at Parsons Junior High School in Queens, New York, in 1953. Initially they bonded over a love of doowop, but their musical horizons were expanded by The Everly Brothers. Simon bought their 1957 single 'Bye Bye Love' and played it incessantly and the two singers developed a similar harmony style. They landed a deal with Big Records for which they recorded as Tom & Jerry in 1957, when they were both 16, and scored a hit with 'Hey, Schoolgirl'.

The first ructions in their friendship came as early as 1958 when Sid Prosen of Big offered Simon the chance to record a couple of songs in the style of Elvis Presley. But neither of them told Garfunkel. Feeling betrayed, Garfunkel quit. Simon carried on writing songs and worked as a record plugger, but he was frustrated that although he clearly had musical ability he had yet to find his true voice.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

In the early '60s, young Americans who wanted a more substantial alternative to the pop music of the day gravitated towards folk, with its greater depth and authenticity. Simon was particularly drawn towards Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, who took the traditional song format but made it more personal, contemporary and observational.

The watershed in Simon's writing came with 'The Sound Of Silence',

➔ Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel pictured in 1968

↓ Rear sleeve of the album, with original Columbia red label (right)



↓ The pair arrive at Schiphol Airport in The Netherlands in 1966. Their televised performance *Live 1966* can be seen on YouTube

which he began in 1963. Simon has since said that with it he was basically trying to be Bob Dylan, although lyrically it was informed by his study of literature, particularly the writings of Albert Camus, and its steadily rising verse melody carries a lyric describing alienation and unease in 1960s America.

Simon met up once more with Garfunkel who was impressed by this new song, and they rekindled their partnership, now going out under their own names. Garfunkel's solo career – as Artie Garr – had begun to lose momentum and he needed someone to write songs. And although Simon was a characterful singer Garfunkel had a beautiful voice, and the two of them could harmonise so naturally that together they moved Simon's potent new songs on to another level.

Simon & Garfunkel secured a deal with Columbia and recorded their debut album *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* in March '64 with Bob Dylan's producer Tom Wilson, and released

it that October. This acoustic album with its cover versions and original songs mirrored Simon's solo sets. But initially, at least, the album sold poorly and so they went their separate ways again.

Yet the album's highlight 'The Sound Of Silence', started to pick up airplay and without telling Simon or Garfunkel, Wilson overdubbed the recording with drums and electric instruments and released it as a single in Sept '65. It reached No 1 in the *Billboard* Hot 100.

FRIENDS REUNITED

Simon & Garfunkel re-formed and rushed out an album – *Sounds Of Silence* – in January 1966 that included the new single along with re-recordings of songs from the album *The Paul Simon Songbook*, which had been released in the UK the previous August. The duo

suddenly became one of the biggest selling acts of the '60s.

Although Simon & Garfunkel purveyed a rather preppy college boy image, they were taken seriously, their young fans poring over the lyrics in each song in order to understand its message. There were also lighter, poppier moments all full of gorgeous vocal harmonies.

In 1966 they played extensively in the US. They were best friends and it was great fun at first but ➔

'Hal Blaine hit the toms on a ramp near an elevator shaft'



DUTCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES / JOOST EVERS



Stillpoints™

Zero-compromise isolation technology
A necessity — not an accessory.



To try Stillpoints for yourself, please contact your local stockist.

Analogue Seduction	Peterborough	01733 350878
Audio Destination	Tiverton	01884 243584
Audio Therapy	Newcastle	07976 496218
Castle Sound & Vision	Nottingham	0115 958 4404
Choice Hifi	Richmond	020 8392 1959
Homesound	Edinburgh	0131 662 1327
KJ West One	Marylebone	020 7486 8262

Lotus Hifi	Walton-on-Thames	07887 852513
Martins Hifi	Norwich	01603 627010
Nintronics	Welwyn	01707 320788
Oxford Audio	Oxford	01865 790879
Rayleigh Hifi	Rayleigh	01268 779762
Studio AV	Chobham	01753 863300



Distributed by
KOG AUDIO

www.kogaudio.com

info@kogaudio.com

024 7722 0650

VINYL ICONS

PRODUCTION NOTES

Sessions for *Bridge Over Troubled Water* began at Columbia's Nashville studio in November 1968 with 'The Boxer', with Simon duetting on guitar with session player Fred Carter using special tunings. The vocals were recorded in the studio and the brass was recorded in Columbia University Chapel, due to its fine acoustics. Two string tracks were committed to tape, one with the musicians playing along with the track, the other with them playing their parts alone, which were blended together at the fade.

The drums and bass were added at Columbia Studios in New York. For the huge Phil Spector-ish drum sound in the chorus, engineer and producer Roy Halee tested the reverberation time in different parts of the building by clapping his hands and ended up placing drummer Hal Blaine on a ramp near an elevator shaft, with two large tom-toms on a stand.

Blaine hit them as hard as he could and the acoustics of the space alone produced the vast sound heard on the record. To accommodate all



this, Halee ended up running two eight-tape recorders together to give 16-tracks. 'The Boxer' took over 100 hours to record. With only 'The Boxer' and its B-side 'Baby Driver' in the can, sessions resumed in Hollywood. Despite rumours that the epic title track took even longer than 'The Boxer' it only took around a week.

The percussion sounds on 'Cecilia' were Simon, Garfunkel and their entourage in their rented house in Laurel Canyon playing on a piano stool with whatever was available. Drumsticks can be heard hitting the parquet flooring in the room and so Halee turned this into a percussion loop. He won a Grammy in 1971 for his engineering on the album.



then cracks started to appear. Simon was disaffected by the life of a pop star, but was also jealous of Garfunkel being the featured singer, particularly as some people assumed that he wrote all the songs. Conversely Garfunkel still distrusted Simon from the Tom & Jerry days. Simon wrote all the songs, but although Garfunkel would contribute to their arrangements and production, his partner effectively took control of their musical direction.

Their popularity continued to soar, however. In 1968 they recorded some songs for the film *The Graduate* including the hit single 'Mrs Robinson' which appeared on the soundtrack album together with instrumental pieces by Dave Grusin.

The album went to No 1 before handing over the top slot to their fourth studio album proper, the musically ambitious *Bookends*.

GOSPEL INSPIRATION

For their next album Simon had written a song obliquely referencing his early days as a songwriter called 'The Boxer', but another new song prompted him to tell his lawyer 'I think I've written my "Yesterday"'. The song, 'Bridge Over Troubled Water', was a hymnal creation, which had been inspired by a 1958 album by gospel group The Swan Silvertones, specifically the song 'Mary Don't You Weep', with its proclamation, 'I'll be a bridge over deep water...'. Simon was not the most prolific of writers, but

another reason that the *Bridge Over Troubled Water* album took a long time to assemble was Garfunkel being away in Mexico acting in Mike Nichols' film version of Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*, which was running over time. Simon had also been lined up to appear but his part had been cut and he felt rather left behind. He wrote 'The Only Living Boy In New York', which was tinged with melancholy and 'So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright' in which he rather cryptically wished his absent friend well – or was he saying 'so long'?

For 'El Condor Pasa', Simon wrote the lyrics to a 1913 piece by Peruvian composer Daniel Alomía Robles, itself based on a traditional song. Simon & Garfunkel's version is overdubbed on an instrumental recording arranged by Jorge Milberg and played by his Andean folk group Los Incas, whom Simon had seen in Paris in '65.

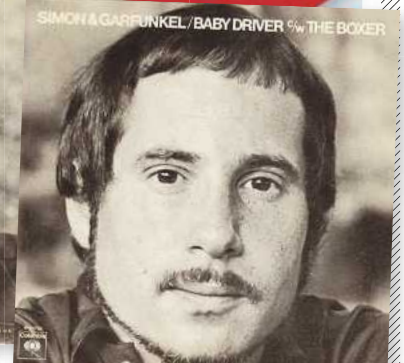
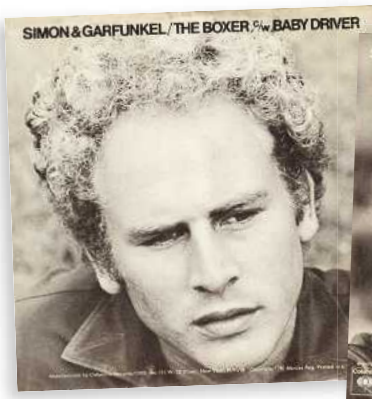
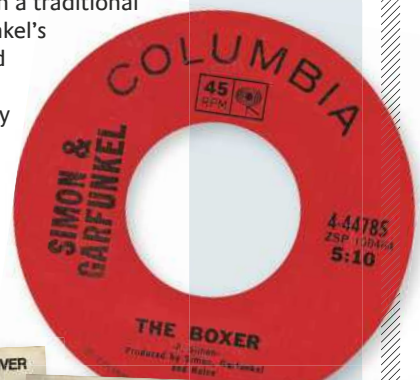
The duo argued over the final

'Simon's film part had been cut and he felt left behind'

↑ The duo perform live on stage in Rotterdam in 1982

↩ The cover of 'Cecilia', the third single from the LP, with Simon & Garfunkel pictured with producer Roy Halee

↓ Sleeve and label for the 1969 single 'The Boxer'





01202 911 886

bournemouth store

01592 744 779

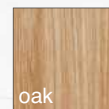
glenrothes store

website: www.jordanacoustics.co.uk

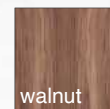


Also available: twenty5.Ci centre / twenty5.sub subwoofer

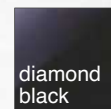
twenty5



oak



walnut



diamond
black



white
silk

PMC has launched the twenty5i series, following a substantial re-engineering of the multi-award winning twenty5 series, to benefit from the research carried out while developing the company's flagship loudspeakers. **The result is the removal of anything that detracts from the music, providing greater realism, transparency and musicality.**

0%

FINANCE AVAILABLE*

*Finance is subject to status & conditions.

For further information please call 01202 911 886 or email ask@jordanacoustics.co.uk

Alternate Format Discography



ALAINA BUZAS

Simon & Garfunkel at the 2010 New Orleans JazzFest

track and compromised with a makeweight cover of 'Bye Bye Love' recorded on a recent tour, which, given what was about to happen, took on an unusual poignancy.

'The Boxer', one of the first recordings from the album sessions, had been released as a single in 1969 and became an international Top 10 hit. Simon wanted the upbeat 'Cecilia', a song addressing infidelity, to be the next. But the title track was so highly regarded by the record label that despite its near five-minute length it was released as a single a week ahead of the album.

BOWING OUT

It embodied feelings of hope and redemption at the beginning of the new decade and was a worldwide hit. The album was the best-seller of 1970, spending ten weeks at No 1, and by 1972 it was the best-selling album of all time.

When Simon & Garfunkel won three Grammy awards in 1971 it seemed inevitable that they would go onto even greater things. But Garfunkel wanted to work on another Mike Nichols film, *Carnal Knowledge* and, apart from the delays that would produce, Simon was convinced that if he became a movie star he would leave anyway.

Another incident that had added to the duo's disharmony was when Garfunkel sang 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' at a show held at the Royal Albert Hall backed by pianist Larry Knetchel. The applause was phenomenal and Garfunkel acknowledged his accompanist. Yet he didn't invite Simon, the song's author, to take a bow.

With no formal announcement or even a discussion, Simon and Garfunkel then drifted apart. Simon told his biographer Robert Hilburn, 'I was hoping for a long career and making good enough records that people would look back on Simon & Garfunkel and say "Oh, this was what you did in the beginning"'. ☺



ORIGINAL VINYL LP

Bridge Over Troubled Water was released in January 1970. In the US [Columbia KCS 9914] the inner sleeve featured an ad for Simon & Garfunkel songbooks. One pressing later that year arrived with a sticker that read 'Featuring The Smash Hit "Cecilia"', but in a misprint there was no lettering on the record labels. The UK version on CBS [S 63699, KCS 9914] came with a more typical inner sleeve advertising other CBS releases.

Prompted by the inclusion of the Andean tune 'El Condor Pasa' a pressing was made for the Bolivian market with that song used as the album's title [CBS 50099]. Another curio was the Singaporean version, which featured the same lettering font as the standard front cover



but carried a different photo of Simon & Garfunkel.

The Spanish 1970 version had the title and record label details translated as *Puente Sobras Aguas Turbulentas* [CBS S-63699] as did pressings released in Chile [CBS 121.007] and in Argentina, which was in mono [CBS 8.998].

Quadrasonic LPs were released in 1972 in the US and Canada, although not in the UK. These had gold labels and came in a sleeve with a gold border around the cover photo [pictured above] with an ad for quadrasonic audio equipment on the inner sleeve [Columbia CQ 30995].

CASSETTE AND 8-TRACK

The American 8-track cartridge was released in 1970 on Columbia in a red shell [18 10 0750] and in the UK on CBS [42-63699] in white. Two years later a quadrasonic 8-track cartridge came out in the USA on Columbia [CAQ 30995].

As for cassette versions, these were released in 1970 with orange labels and a white shell in the UK and with black shells and orange and yellow labels in the US, both on CBS [40-63699].

FIRST CD

The first CD of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* appeared in Japan in 1982 with a grey/green obi-strip [CBS/Sony 35DP 14], and this was followed by a European release in 1984 [CBS CDCBS 63699]. The US and Canadian CDs finally came in 1985 on Columbia [CK 9914].

A remastered CD appeared in 1993 as a limited edition gold disc on Columbia/Legacy [CK 53444] and on that label in Europe the same year [01-480418-100] but on Sony in Japan [SRCS 6768].

In 1999 a special 'Millennium Edition' CD was released in the UK and boasted a facsimile LP cover within a protective sleeve, with fold-out lyric sheets and, unusually, an Obi-strip [Columbia MILLEN2, 4952142000]. A US 2001 edition, remastered by Vic Anesini, then came out on Columbia/Legacy with two bonus tracks: 'Feuilles-O' and 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' demos [CK 66004].

The first Japanese 'paper sleeve' version was released in limited edition with an orange obi-strip, and an insert with song lyrics and liner notes in Japanese [Sony Records International MHCP 96].

SPECIAL EDITIONS

A 2CD and single DVD set came out in the UK and Europe in 2011 on Columbia/Legacy comprising the original album and a second CD with the same tracks as a concert recording, 'Live 1969', which first saw the light of day on a CD in 2008. The DVD consists of a 1969 TV movie *Songs Of America* and a documentary *The Harmony Game* describing the recording

of *Bridge Over Troubled Water*.

A 12-page booklet was also included [88697828292]. The US edition came out that year in a CD and DVD Digipak but without 'Live 1969' [Columbia/Legacy/Sony 886978272423 / 88697 82724 2].



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

In 1980, a half-speed remastered version was released in the CBS Mastersound series in the US [Columbia, HC 49914] and in Europe on CBS [CBSH 63699]. In 1984, Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab in conjunction with Columbia released *Bridge Over Troubled Water* in its Original Master series in the US, pressed on 'high definition' vinyl by JVC in Japan [MFSL 1-173].

The album was released in a particularly unusual format in the US in 1999 on four one-sided 45rpm discs on 180g vinyl [Classic Records/Columbia, KCS 9914]. That same year saw the release in the US of the LP on 200g Clarity SV-P11 super vinyl on Classic Records [KCS-9914]. In 2009 Music On Vinyl released a 180g LP for European territories through Sony's Legacy label [MOVLPO46/ 4624881000].

Finally, to celebrate the album's 50th anniversary this year, CBS/Sony has announced it will be releasing a limited edition LP on 180g gold-coloured vinyl [pictured below] featuring the original red Columbia label [19439723771].



Meet the Producers

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW

Dennis Bovell

In the 1970s reggae joined forces with punk to create a sound that would reverberate throughout the British music scene. **Steve Sutherland** celebrates the Barbados-born producer Dennis Bovell, the man behind many of the period's finest dub and disco hits

It's the 13th of October 1974, a date remembered in some circles as Black Friday.

The facts are somewhat sketchy but it seems a couple of police officers decide that some black dude is driving suspiciously through Cricklewood in London. They pull him over and are about to arrest him when he legs it into The Carib Club. Six officers give chase and grab him in the toilets. They're bringing him out with a bit of a struggle when some club-goers, mates of the pursued, tackle the cops, stabbing one and setting the fugitive free.

TRIAL AND ERROR

The next thing anyone knows, hundreds of police swarm the place and a dozen people are arrested, including one Dennis Bovell, a 21-year-old from Barbados who's been living in Wandsworth, South London for nine years, carving out a reputation for himself as the guvnor of the Sufferah's sound system and as a leading member of Britain's premier reggae group, Matumbi.

His arrest hinges on the fact that, while the fracas was taking place, the police testify that the club deejays were encouraging the crowd to do the cops in. The fact that there were three sound systems in competition that night,



➔ **Dennis Bovell in Rome in 2004 and (inset) Matumbi's debut LP *Seven Seals* from 1978**

➔ **The band Matumbi in 1978 with Bovell far left**



and that only one, not Mr Bovell's, was mouthing off, shouting 'Kill the police!', seemed not to matter when the case came to court.

'It was all attributed to me,' Mr Bovell recalls today. 'I never thought people would lie in court like that. They even put their hand on the Bible! The trial lasted six months and at the end, nine people were acquitted and three people had a hung jury, of whom I was one. I wasn't proven guilty but instead of affording me what British law says, they moved the goalposts and said, "You're gonna be retried for this". And so I had a retrial.

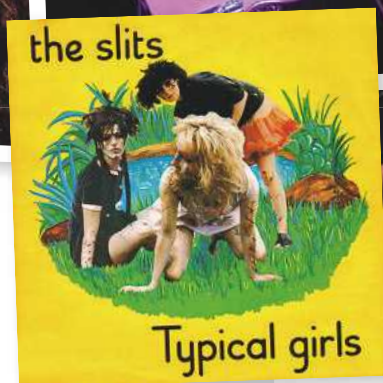
'It lasted nine months altogether with the two trials. At the end of the retrial at 12 noon the jury went to decide and by nine at night they still hadn't decided. So the judge said, "If they don't decide by ten we're going to throw it out, we can't try you three times". At five to ten, the jury came back and said, "Ten of us think he's guilty, two think not guilty". The judge said, "That's good enough for me – three years in jail".'

'I went to Wormwood Scrubs and while I was in there – I was in for six months of that three-year sentence – I appealed to a higher court. The appeal judge said, "This guy should never even have been charged with that, there's no evidence. Let him go". So they let me go that day, I was free, I was on the news, I was a big star and my band was going to be in the charts next week!'

SCHOOL STUDIOS

Dennis Bovell, as you may have gathered by now, is a remarkable chap. He picked up his production skills in the music studios at school where he also met some of his Matumbi bandmates.

'The word Matumbi was the most African-sounding name we could come up with,' he explains. 'Having been brought up in London, there was no African history, it was Richard III and Charles I. Henry VIII, what's that got to do with me? I wanted hear about Shaka Zulu and people like that. So we started to investigate African history and show



our Africanness by choosing an African name. It's ironic because that name came from an English lesson. We were doing O level English, and it was a novel called *Mister Johnson* by Joyce Carey. In that book there was a Sergeant Gallup, and he had an African woman and her name was Matumbi, and the description of her was the most beautiful.

'We became political because at that time there was an English politician called Enoch Powell, who was the father of the National Front.'

IN THE RED

There was quite a deal of resistance to the band from record labels, as the few British reggae acts at the time were expected to do crowd-pleasing cover versions. Mr Bovell had other ideas and, working as an engineer at Gooseberry Studios, he traded his wages for studio time and began doing his own stuff, sometimes under the pseudonym Blackbeard or African Stone or The Dub Band or Dennis Curtis or The 4th Street Orchestra.

Touring and recording with Matumbi, running his own sound system and creating his own new dubplates to play alongside the dubs being imported from Jamaica, Bovell was busy enough as it was. But upon his release from jail, he found himself some sort of hero and a producer in demand by default.

'Every time we went into the studio, there'd be arguments with the engineer trying to describe what kind of sound we wanted. At that time it was, "You can't have that

↖ **Ari Up** (top left) and **Viv Albertine** of **The Slits** and the 1979 single **'Typical Girls'**, produced by **Bovell**

↗ **Dub poet** **Linton Kwesi Johnson** and the **Bass Culture LP** from 1980

↖ **Janet Kay** and label of the single **'Silly Games'**, the first **Lover's Rock** song to feature on **Top Of The Pops**

much bass, you're crazy. It'll blow the speakers. You can't have your treble

like that. Everything must be very flat. Zero, zero, zero. You can't go above zero". So I'd just go, "Stand aside. You see those knobs? I know how to twiddle them... The sound is in here and I'm going to put the sound that I want on my record".

'Can you imagine saying to Jimi Hendrix, "That's in the red"? So the sound engineers would go, "But it's in the red!". I wanted it in the red 'cause it's not loud enough. Also, it was the battle of ears against eyes. Your ears would say it's good, whereas your eyes would say, "No, it's in the red". So what? Cover your eyes and the dials. It's sound, it ain't film. Use these. If it sounds good and you like it, walk with it.

'Anyway, after many arguments with engineers and recording studios, I decided to be a producer and dictate what the sound sounds like. That was my reason for becoming a producer.'

One of the first artists to come knocking to enjoy his talents behind the desk was the anti-racist poet

Linton Kwesi Johnson.

'He said, "I want to do some music with my poetry".

I was like, "Whenever you're ready, dude. I know what you're saying. Let's get in that studio". Richard

Branson gave us some money and we cut LKJ's first album.'

It was called *Dread Beat An Blood* and attributed to Poet & The Roots, the beginning of a long and fruitful partnership between the two men which included 1980's

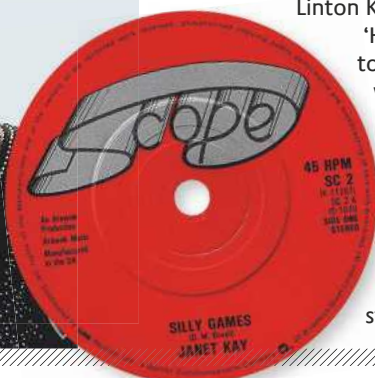
Bass Culture album, featuring the controversial track 'Reggae Fi Peach' about Blair Peach who died after attending an anti-racism march in Southall. Bovell

also found himself in demand from a different bunch of clients. The Slits and The Pop Group, pioneers of post punk, wanted to create new forms of music, and he was instantly receptive to their offers.

KEEN TO LEARN

The Pop Group's 'She Is Beyond Good And Evil' is revered as a masterpiece. Likewise The Slits' debut album, *Cut*.

'Chris Blackwell from Island Records told me: "I've signed this group and I don't know what to do with them. It's a girl group, a punk band". He gave me some cassettes of them live and I thought: "Yeah, they can play". And I agreed to do the album. We were in the studio →



Audio Venue

bespoke audio visual consultants



Vertere Acoustics DG1
£2750.00



B&W 800 D3
£22500.00



JBL L100 Classics
£4000.00



Proac K3
£9750.00



Luxman SQ-N150
£3000.00



Sonus Faber Amati
£23500.00



Mark Levinson No.5085
£7995.00



Wilson Audio Sabrina
£18998.00



Auralic Aries G2
£3899.00

Part exchange and home demonstrations available

audiovenue.com

BRANDS INCLUDE Anthem, Arcam, Audeze, Audio Research, Audioquest, Auralic, Astell & Kern, Dagastino Inc, Bowers & Wilkins, Chord, Classe Audio, Control 4, Devialet, Esoteric, Focal, Fyne Audio, Hana, JL Audio, Kaleidescape, KEF, Koetsu, Krell, Lateral Audio, Luxman, Mark Levinson, Martin Logan, Michell Engineering, Musical Fidelity, Naim Audio, Primaluna, Proac, Project, PS audio, Quadraspire, Questyle, Rotel, Ruark Audio, Sennheiser, SONOS, Sonus Faber, Spectral Furniture, TelluriumQ, Vertere Acoustics, Wilson Audio, Yamaha, and many more...

27 Bond Street
Ealing
London W5 5AS
T 020 8567 8703
E w5@audiovenue.com

36 Queen Street
Maidenhead
Berkshire SL6 1HZ
T 01628 633 995
E info@audiovenue.com

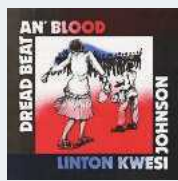
MEET THE PRODUCERS

BEHIND THE MUSIC WITH HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW



1976

Matumbi's cover version of Bob Dylan's 'The Man In Me' is released on the Matumbi Music Corp label and becomes the biggest-selling UK reggae single of the year



1978

Dread Beat An' Blood sees Bovell add heavy dub rhythms to Linton Kwesi Johnson's verse and in doing so creates a new genre of reggae: dub poetry



1979

It's five weeks in the UK Top 10 charts for the Bovell-penned song 'Silly Games', which also puts Lover's Rock on the mainstream musical map



1979

Bovell decamps to Ridge Farm Studio in Surrey with The Slits. The album *Cut*, with its hectic mesh of dub and punk, is hailed as a masterpiece



1979

Bristol band The Pop Group hire Bovell. The result is 'She Is Beyond Good And Evil' - a complex yet compelling mix of dub and disco



1981

Jazz, Afro-beat, dub and Lover's Rock as Bovell bids to expand the parameters of reggae music with his double-LP, *Brain Damage*



1983

Bovell bangs up the bass on Orange Juice's single 'Flesh Of My Flesh' to produce a funky-pop concoction that proves a favourite with the band's fans

for ten weeks, and it was solid work. The band had clear ideas about what they wanted. They had written the songs; they just needed me to shape them. They weren't good at reggae, but were keen to learn.'

LOVER'S ROCK

'In the track "Newtown" I'm on keyboards and percussion. It's about drug-taking, but the drugs are football and TV. I got hold of an ashtray, a spoon and a box of matches and that was my percussion: shaking the matches, tapping the ashtray with the spoon and occasionally striking a match. The ashtray was symbolic of smoking, the spoon of heroin. They said: "You're mad!"'

The Slits' guitarist Viv Albertine remembers: 'Dennis tidied up all the ends, but without trampling on creativity. It was so rare for a man in the 1970s to put himself inside the heads and hearts of four crazy young women'.

Which brings us neatly to the record - and the genre it birthed - for which Mr Bovell is most famous. The song is 'Silly Games' by Janet Kay and the genre, Lover's Rock.

Mr Bovell explains: 'Women weren't really involved in reggae that heavily unless they were backing vocalists for a male singer. Because it was a man's world, girls were shoved into the background. I thought, "Well, Aretha Franklin is the queen of soul, why haven't we got a queen of reggae?"'

'At that time it was all roots rock, all macho music, Rastafari and all that. Women were being shoved to the third division. We wanted to bring them to the front. So we formed this label called Lover's Rock, which I thought was a great title for music for dancing to. Call it smooch reggae if you like.'

Bovell was engineering a session on which Janet Kay was doing backing vocals and, impressed with his chops, she gave him her phone number in case anything exciting came up.

'She's a great singer, Janet Kay. She had the ability to sing really high notes, almost Minnie Riperton style. And I'd written a song

called "Silly Games", with this very high note in it and people kept telling me, "You ain't gonna find anybody to sing that!"'

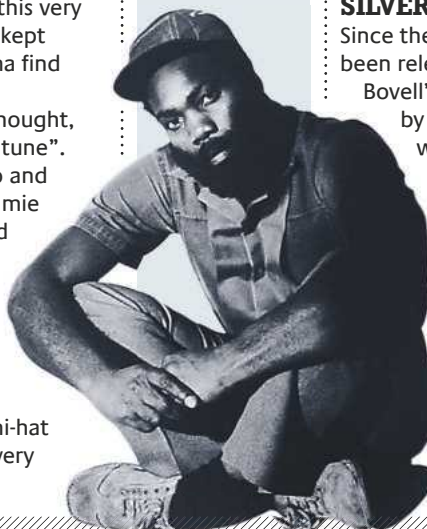
'When I heard Janet, I thought, "Woah, she can scale that tune". So I got her into the studio and also got in my friend Drummie Zeb from Aswad. I invented this drum pattern, where the hi-hat was going to lead the whole thing and the snare would come sometimes, quite similar to Afrobeat and calypso things where the hi-hat is the main focus... It was very conscious, very deliberate.

"You ain't gonna find anybody to sing that!"



Music from the 1980 British movie *Babylon*

Dennis Bovell pictured in 1981 on the rear of the LP *Brain Damage*



I was trying to carve an identity for UK reggae.

'Songs like the ones we hear in the UK charts all have a chorus and a verse and maybe an intro. It wasn't just two chords being peddled around and around and around, which is what most reggae is.

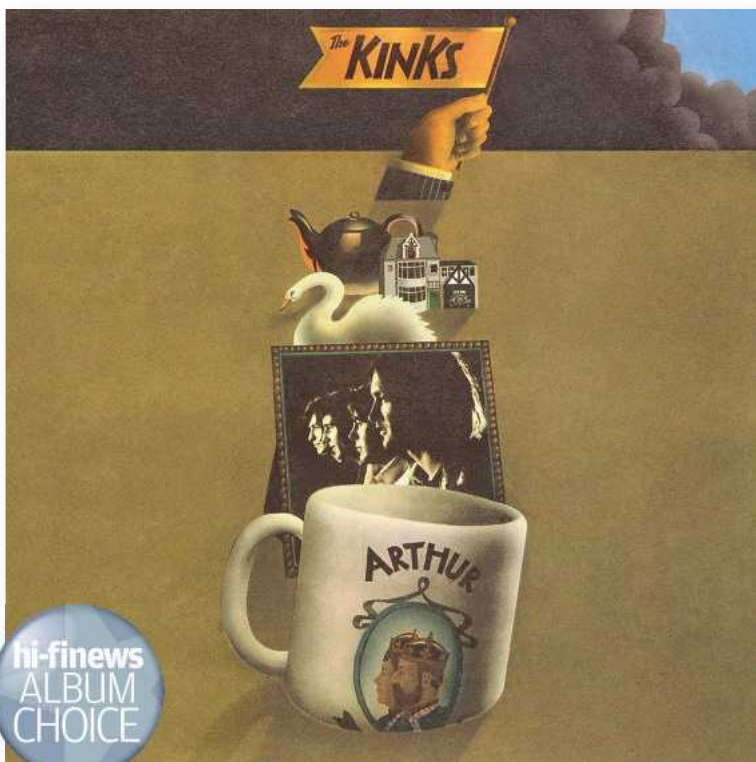
So I set about writing a tune that was like the pop tracks, that had a good story to tell and had the vocal bit for the verse, then an explosive vocal part for the chorus. You needed a chorus that people could sing out too, and to create it like any other "ordinary" pop or soul song, with different interesting parts in it.

'I put all the other instruments on the track in my own time, we released the record and it got to No 1 in three weeks.'

SILVER SCREEN

Since then a film - *Babylon* - has been released, loosely based on Mr Bovell's arrest and soundtracked

by his good self, plus he's worked with such widely differing talents as Fela Kuti, Steel Pulse and Scottish pop band Orange Juice. He's also inspired such UK dub masters as Mad Professor and continues to release his own works, still pushing the boundaries and still speaking out against racism and injustice - wherever he finds it. ☺



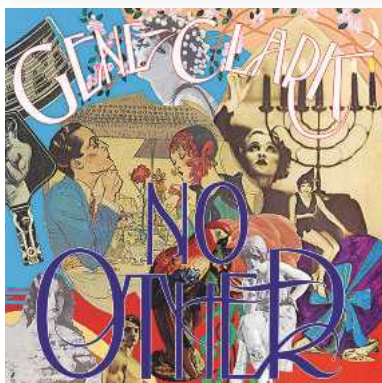
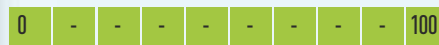
THE KINKS

Arthur Or The Decline And Fall Of The British Empire

BMG/ABKCO BMGCAT407DLP (two discs)

Some 30 years ago, I devoted a whole back page to *Arthur*, which I've loved since the day it was released. Fifty years on, and it's about time all admitted that it betters their earlier ode to lost England, *The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society*, on every level. Why this wasn't a hit is a mystery; suffice it to say, I cannot name a 'concept' album that comes near it. Fiery guitar and harpsichord? Rock 'n' roll and music-hall whimsy? The Kinks did it even better than The Bonzos. This superbly-remastered double LP adds a dozen bonus cuts, and there's a CD/singles box with even more on which to feast. 'Victoria', 'She Bought A Hat Like Princess Marina' – with a few tweaks, this could be *Brexit – The Musical*. **KK**

Sound Quality: 95%



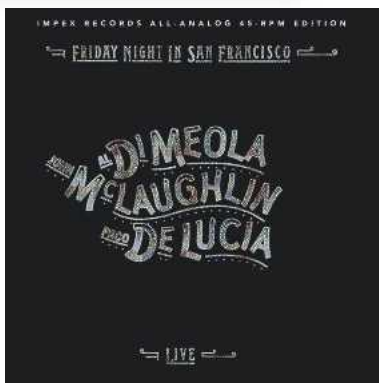
GENE CLARK

No Other

4AD 0071MXX (LP + 3SACDs + Blu-ray + 7in single)

Not already a devotee? Then this OTT box-set for an obscure LP will perplex you. Post-Byrds, Clark couldn't get arrested; the manic worship was posthumous. *No Other* (1974) is regarded as his finest effort, and the title track alone, for its melody, intensity and delivery, will dazzle you. Clark's guest musicians were the cream of Left Coast players – Jesse Ed Davis, Joe Lala and dozens more – and the resultant album is as evocative a (not-too-rustic) showcase of 'Americana' as anything by The Band. Newly remastered, it's the best version I've heard, and the SACDs and Blu-ray enable you to hear it in HD or 5.1 surround. Do I approve? To the tune of my own £145. **KK**

Sound Quality: 90%



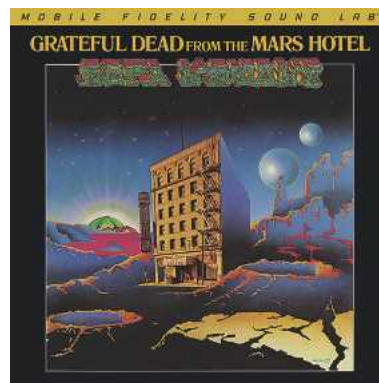
AL DIMEOLA/JOHN McLAUGHLIN/ PACO DELUCIA

Friday Night In San Francisco

Impex IMP6031-45 (two 45rpm LPs)

Love unplugged, Spanish-style guitar? Then you'll find this a welcome reissue of a truly worthwhile audiophile milestone – like *Jazz At The Pawnshop*, which no respectable hi-fi fanatic would have been without back in 1981. Terrifyingly, as this nears its 40th anniversary – it was recorded in December 1980 – it reminds me of my own mortality, but equally I'm staggered by the wide-open sound and the speed of these three virtuoso guitarists. With five tracks spread over four sides, there's vinyl real-estate aplenty to ensure the best sound. Trust me when I tell you that the 3000-copy pressing will sell out in no time at all. **KK**

Sound Quality: 95%



GRATEFUL DEAD

From The Mars Hotel

Mobile Fidelity MFSL2-482 (two 45rpm LPs)

This set dates from 1974, four years past the point where *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* had established them as peerless purveyors of roots music, rather than just a bunch of freaks putting out experimental nonsense such as *Aoxomoxoa*. A fine collection of easily-digestible songs not requiring the stimulus of mind-enhancing substances to make it tolerable, there's plenty of sublime musicianship – notably guitar work that might remind you of early Flying Burrito Brothers – and the jaunty opener is a classic. Worthy of the 2LP, 45rpm treatment? Yes, even if you, like me, think that 'Deadheads' is as apt a name as any fan group ever adopted. **KK**

Sound Quality: 90%



AUDIOPHILE: DIGITAL



COMPACT DISC



SUPRAAUDIO



DVD



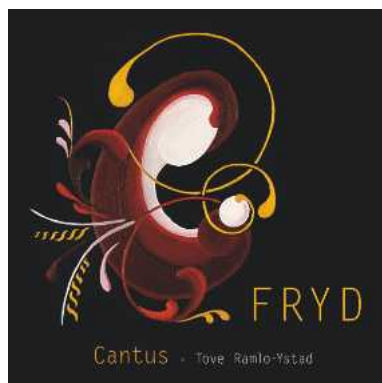
BLU-RAY



VINYL



DOWNLOAD



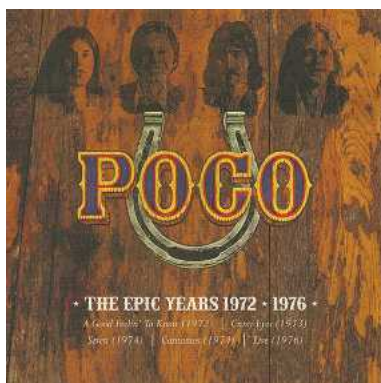
CANTUS

Fryd

2L 2L-158-SABD (SACD + Blu-ray Audio)

This ear-cossetting choir, its talents used in both *Frozen* films, have produced an album of gossamer-light material, featuring Norwegian folk songs and familiar Christmas tunes, but the appeal for you, the enthusiast, goes beyond that. In addition to sounding so gorgeous that it's chilling, this set is an obsessive audiophile's dream: both a hybrid SACD with 5.1 and stereo DSD, and 'RedBook' PCM MQA, and a Pure Audio Blu-ray with – deep breath – mShuttle MQA/FLAC/MP3, 2.0 LPCM 192kHz/24-bit, 5.1 DTS HDMA 192kHz/24-bit, 7.1.4 Auro-3D 96kHz, and 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos 48kHz. I listened to both in stereo and 5.1 but won't ruin your fun by saying which I prefer! *KK*

Sound Quality: 90%



POCO

The Epic Years 1972-1976

Cherry Red/HNE HNEBOX121 (five discs)

Bargain-priced sequel to the 'Original Album Classics' set, which offered Poco's initial Epic releases, this clamshell box finds the band experiencing the tail-end of the era with the irreplaceable Richie Furay, the ascent of Paul Cotton and Timothy B Schmit, and the baffling, continued failure to achieve the success they deserved. High points include the should-a-been-a-hit masterpiece 'Good Feelin' To Know', the underrated 'Whatever Happened To Your Smile' and a bracing live set that demonstrates the prowess of these peerless exponents of country-flavoured rock. It's not too late to meet a band that informed The Eagles. Yeah, Poco were that good. *KK*

Sound Quality: 85%



B W STEVENSON

My Maria & Calabasas

Vocalion CDSML 8565 (multichannel SACD)

Superior country-pop from 1973-4, the two albums here are the third and fourth releases from the singer who died tragically young in 1988, having delivered a half-dozen titles in his short career. 'My Maria' was his biggest hit, topping the *Billboard* Easy Listening Hot 100 in the USA, and it sets the tone: the overall feel of his work falls somewhere inbetween J J Cale and Tony Joe White, with a sufficient injection of straight-ahead country attitude to ensure acceptance with Opry-obsessed purists. For those who know their rock of the era, the most fascinating track here is the original version of 'Shambala', a huge 1973 hit for Three Dog Night. *KK*

Sound Quality: 85%



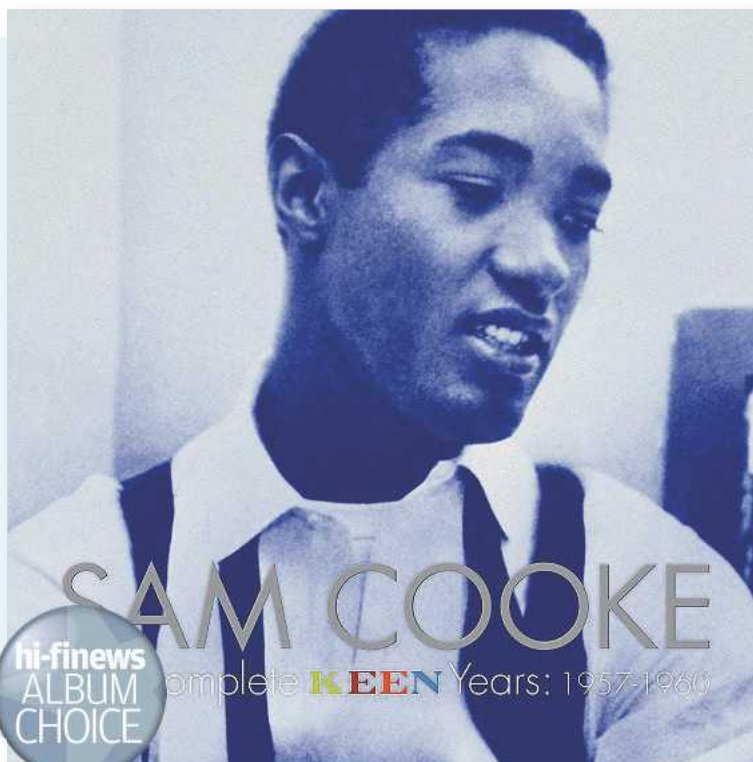
SAM COOKE

The Complete Keen Years 1957-1960

ABKCO Music 18771-85032 (five discs; mono)

Prior to his full-blown mainstream superstardom era with RCA, Cooke – arguably the most important postwar African-American singer after Nat 'King' Cole to break down race barriers for crossover success – delivered three LPs for Keen, plus two compilations. Taken from the once-lost master tapes, with killer sound quality, each is lovingly reproduced here in rich, crisp mono, with immaculate mini-card sleeves, two with bonus tracks covering his singles, while the superlative *Tribute To The Lady* also includes the glorious stereo version. This is the period that yielded 'teen' hits like 'Wonderful World', 'Only Sixteen' and 'You Send Me', but with plenty to indicate that – like Bobby Darin – Cooke could fill the Copa. *KK*

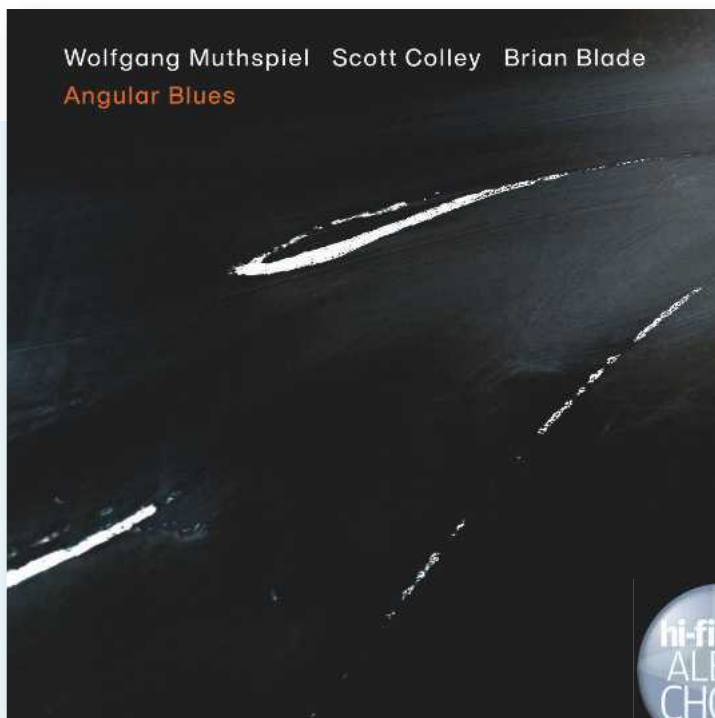
Sound Quality: 95%



hi-finews
ALBUM
CHOICE

complete KEEN Years: 1957-1960

Wolfgang Muthspiel Scott Colley Brian Blade
Angular Blues



hi-finews
ALBUM
CHOICE

WOLFGANG MUTHSPIEL, SCOTT COLLEY & BRIAN BLADE

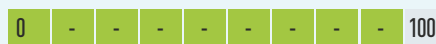
Angular Blues (96kHz/24-bit, FLAC)

www.gobuz.com; ECM 003178702

This set was recorded in Tokyo after the trio – guitarist Muthspiel, with Colley on bass and Blade on drums – had completed a three-night run at the superb Cotton Club in the city's Maranouchi district, and the familiarity shows in a relaxed, easygoing performance oozing confidence and musical harmony. With the tapes then mixed back in the renowned Studios La Bouissone by ECM founder and boss Manfred Eicher and Muthspiel, it can be taken as read

that this album bears all the label's hallmarks of fine sound and integrity. What's really striking is the intimacy of the sound, its warmth and generosity never getting in the way of the detail and the superb playing. Muthspiel's originals make up most of the list and there are two standards here – Cole Porter's 'Everything I Love' and, closing the album, 'I'll Remember April'. This is jazz recording at its best. **AE**

Sound Quality: 90%



MARC VAN ROON TRIO

Quantum Stories (DSD64)

www.nativedsd.com; Challenge Classics CR73368

Released back in 2013, but now available in DSD via NativeDSD.com, this thoughtful trio jazz set led by van Roon, with Martijn Vink on drums and bassist Clemens van der Feen, is blessed with an equally delicious, delicate sound, recorded in a reverberant church acoustic by Bert van der Wolf. The balance isn't hyper-close, but instead gives the music room to breathe, allowing the listener a real, live experience. This suits the music here, mainly written by van Roon alone or with the band, whether it's the somewhat abstract opening 'movement' of the four-part 'Quantum Story' spaced through the album, or straight down the line tracks like 'Just Friends'. Van Roon says of the project that 'being able to record our stories and improvisations in such a high quality and pure way without any filtering allowed us a true creative experience', and that's clear throughout this album. **AE**

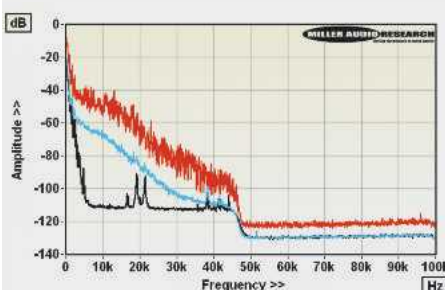
Sound Quality: 90%



OUR PROMISE

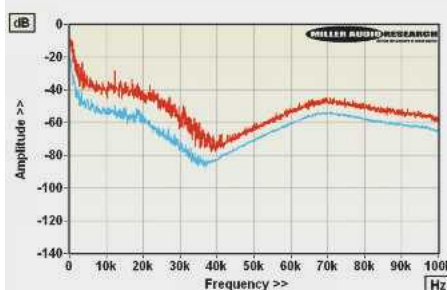
Following our Investigation feature [*HFN*, Jun '11] in which we examined the claimed quality of high-resolution downloads, *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* is now measuring the true sample rate and bit-depth of the HD music downloads reviewed on these pages. These unique reviews will be a regular source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

LAB REPORT



There are some minor spuriae at 19.5kHz and 21kHz, seemingly associated with Muthspiel's guitar feed [black trace], but the mix is otherwise clean. The ~45kHz span is well used, mainly by percussion, and peaks are well under 0dBfs. **PM**

LAB REPORT



This stereo downmix of a six-channel surround recording – produced using dCS converters – exhibits the excess ultrasonic requantisation noise inherent with DSD64, but the recording remains exceptionally vivid. **PM**



COMPACT DISC



SUPRAAUDIO



DVD



BLU-RAY



VINYL



DOWNLOAD



JOHAN DALENE

Violin Concertos by Barber & Tchaikovsky
(96kHz/24-bit, FLAC)

www.hifiresaudio.com; BIS BIS-2440

An exceptional debut coupling by this young Swedish violinist (20 this year), accompanied by the Norrköping SO under Daniel Blendulf and produced in its concert hall. The Barber is the stronger performance – if you can take the music's saccharine content – with a greater sense of equal partnership than in the Tchaikovsky. There I felt Blendulf was providing more of a background accompaniment to Dalene's spacious and evidently confident interpretation, with one whipped-up orchestral crescendo before the cadenza in (i) which seemed to me overdone. Dalene, a former Menuhin Competition prize-winner, plays a 1736 Stradivarius and he seems incapable of producing an ugly sound, and you'll hang on to his every note. He's not set too forward in producer/sound engineer Jens Braun's excellent recording. **CB**

Sound Quality: 85%



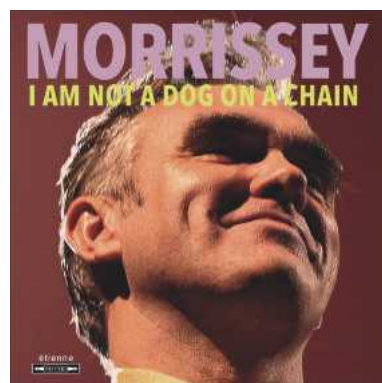
OSLO PO/VASILY PETRENKO

R Strauss: Eine Alpensinfonie; Tod und Verklärung
(192kHz/24-bit, FLAC)*

www.hifiresaudio.com; Lawo LWC1192

Lawo hasn't provided PDFs with its three Petrenko/R Strauss programmes bought as downloads, but the one for the CD here is freely available on the Lawo website. (YouTube has their complete Apr '19 concert performance of the *Alpine Symphony*.) I thought *Death And Transfiguration* had a marginally richer sound, and I was more gripped by this performance, but both works have a wide spread and detailed soundstage information. I did, however, think the offstage brass [trk 3] were *too* distant. The playing is sensitive and Petrenko does make the *Alpine* seem a symphony rather than a series of colour-slides – dawn, emerging out of a mysterious darkness, a threatening storm, water droplets (Strauss was good at those, *eg, Don Quixote* too), *etc.* But some track edits are clearly audible. **CB**

Sound Quality: 80%



MORRISSEY

I Am Not A Dog On A Chain (96kHz/24-bit, FLAC)*

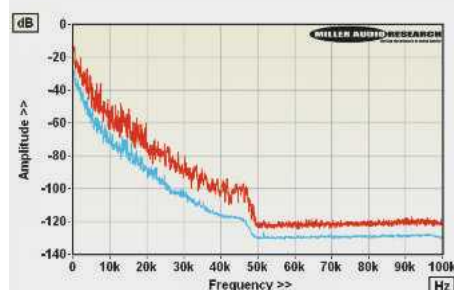
www.qobuz.com; Étienne/BMG 538589392

Prophet or pariah? Right now, few artists divide opinion like the former Smiths front man: the fanatics still hail him as some kind of genius, while others remain inescapably queasy at some of his politicking and opinions. Put that aside, and you're left with the only relevant question about this latest release: is it actually any good? Well, like the proverbial curate's egg, the answer is yes and no: certainly this is an adventurous album in musical terms, with great swathes of electronica, large-scale production (rendered well in 96kHz/24-bit) and even the soaring pipes of Thelma Houston on 'Bobby, Don't You Think They Know?'. It's all wrapped in swirling keyboards, brass and pounding bass, and certainly sounds magnificent when it's good. Just don't listen too closely to the sometimes sneering lyrics and, I'd suggest, give a miss to the rambling and baffling 'The Secret Of Music'. **AE**

Sound Quality: 75%

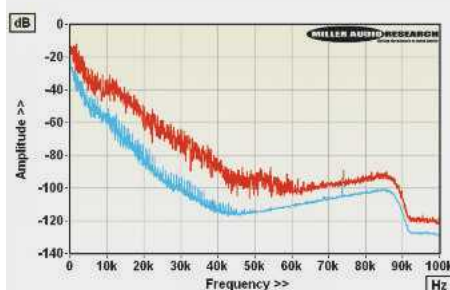


LAB REPORT



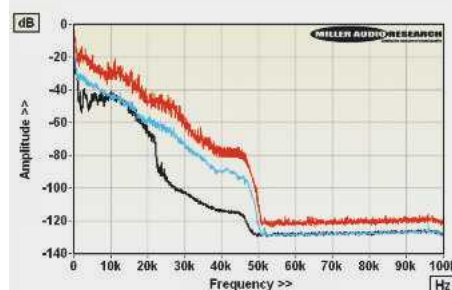
Recorded at 96kHz/24-bit, with post-processing on Sequoia and Pyramix digital audio workstations, noise levels are very low and free of spurious. This native 96kHz file captures the violin harmonics stretching out to 40kHz! **PM**

LAB REPORT



Although the 'master file' is cited at DXD resolution (352.8kHz/24-bit) the >40kHz requantisation noise is unusual, though not sufficient to suggest time at DSD128. Note alias filtering at ~90kHz from its downsampling to 192kHz. **PM**

LAB REPORT



Like many pop/rock files, this album is mastered and released at 96kHz, but the content has mixed sample rates – Morrissey's vocals found at 48kHz [black trace]. Digital level regularly hits 0dBfs with evidence of clipped samples. **PM**

**TRADE IN
DEAL**

Signature Series
SAVE £1000*

X TENSION SERIES
SAVE £500*

**£1000
OFF**

TRADE IN
**ANY Hi-Fi
TURNTABLE**
FOR MASSIVE SAVINGS*

Signature Series

We're giving analogue aficionados more reason than ever to make our prestigious high-end turntables your next purchase. Until the end of May, all Xtension line and Signature line turntables can be purchased as part of a trade-in deal, for up-to £1000 off the regular SRP.

The Signature 10 is a true audiophile device, taking all the elements of a flagship but making them more accessible and easier to fit into a typical space. To help complete the package, the turntable is also supplied with a heavy-weight record puck, sophisticated tonearm and a high-end Power Box RS UNI TT linear power supply.

*T&C apply, visit our website for further details



BURL FINISH

FIND THE FULL PRODUCT SPEC. ONLINE AT:
www.henleyaudio.co.uk



COMPACT DISC



SUPRAAUDIO



DVD



BLU-RAY



VINYL



DOWNLOAD



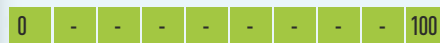
JACK HUES

Primitif

Dawn Chorus DCRC015 (two discs)

Hues is best known as the singer in 1980s popsters Wang Chung, but his other activities include playing guitar in exploratory jazz group The Quartet and composing soundtracks. This double album is something else entirely, a meditation on love, loss and passing. It starts with an impassioned take on Burt Bacharach's 'The Look Of Love', with the rhythm section of Canterbury psychedelic group Syd Arthur and sampled strings that slowly veer into dissonance. A similar tension runs through the propulsive 'Whitstable Beach' and the seesawing cellos of 'Winter', and elsewhere jazz and folk elements permeate this strong set. Hues reckons it's the album he's waited 40 years to make and one can see why. **MB**

Sound Quality: 95%



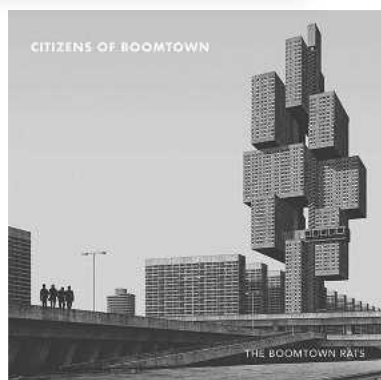
CORNERSHOP

England Is A Garden

Ample Play AMP129CD (LP: AMP129LP)

Given the current state of the nation it feels apt that Cornershop's Tjinder Singh has re-emerged to cast a wary and satirical eye over proceedings. Since 'Brimful Of Asha' in 1997, Singh has had the knack of writing earworm melodies over simple chord sequences and this album is full of them, with freewheeling flutes jostling for space with sitars, organs, synths and samples. The title track is a pastoral instrumental, but on the stomping 'No Rock: Save In Roll' the guitars come across like T Rex meets The Faces. The mood is celebratory and even 'Everywhere That Wog Army Roam', a song about police intimidation, makes its point by being wickedly funny. **MB**

Sound Quality: 90%



THE BOOMTOWN RATS

Citizens Of Boomtown

BMG 4050538592351

With its reference to 'tank top terrorists', the single 'Trash Glam Baby' comes across like the cartoonish older sister of The Boomtown Rats' 1978 hit 'She's So Modern' and makes something of a connection with their late 1970s heyday, when their punky art-pop then caught the zeitgeist. That could never be replicated, but their first album since 1984 is a punchy, entertaining affair. It's also surprisingly eclectic. We find Bob Geldof verbally jousting with the object of his desire on the bluesy 'She Said No', while 'Passing Through' is a poignant string-driven ballad and the track 'Rock 'N' Roll Yé Yé' comes across like a droll parody of a stadium rock sing-along. **MB**

Sound Quality: 85%



REN HARVIEU

Revel In The Drama

Bella Union BELLA948CD (LP: BELLA948V)

Ren Harvieu's debut *Through The Night* went to No 5 in 2012 but the follow-up was delayed due to a life-threatening spinal injury. But this is a fabulous return. Her voice is animated and refreshingly direct and unaffected, with just a little Dusty Springfield smokiness, and she gets straight to the emotional core of the songs. She gives us a mix of classic song craft, written in conjunction with Romeo Stodart of Magic Numbers, and imaginative arrangements. These cover a lot of stylistic ground, veering from piano-based torch songs to big guitars and sweeping orchestral arrangements, culminating in the triumphant drama of 'My Body She Is Alive'. **MB**

Sound Quality: 90%



Quality Digital Streaming



Clockwise from top left: Innuos Statement, AVM Evolution MP 5.2 Media Player, AVM Inspiration CS 2.2 4T Streaming CD Receiver, Innuos Zenith

After auditioning many of the best brands in this arena, two stood out to us on sound quality, **AVM** and **Innuos**. Both offer excellent sound quality from physical sources as well as offering highly commendable streaming from subscription services. Most importantly, both brands offer a more natural sound than other streaming products as they are solely audio-focussed in their design and build.

Innuos has its history in computer based equipment but has focussed on audiophile components and quality power supplies in their designs.

Their models, with their striking chassis designed to reduce resonances, have the ability to quickly rip CDs to an internal storage and then serve this data direct to the audio system, or to a separate DAC, or to the network, along with streaming services such as TIDAL, QOBUZ, Deezer.

Because they start from a physical CD basis, and have focused on audiophile qualities, they have achieved a similar sound from streaming to that with a CD, from their entry model ZENmini to the impressive Statement.

AVM is a true high-end audio company manufacturing since 1986. All models are handcrafted to the highest standards in Germany.

By using simple, logical design principals to achieve optimal performance levels, the sound quality achieved is amongst the best in the industry.

Their products offer a wide variety of options due to the modular design and have a more classic audiophile appearance.

Their Media Players and All-In-One CD Receivers include a real TEAC CD Drive integrated into their streaming units which fully support TIDAL, QOBUZ, UPnP, Webradio.



COMPACT DISC



SUPRAUDIO



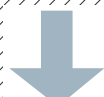
DVD



BLU-RAY



VINYL



DOWNLOAD



CARLA BLEY/ANDY SHEPPARD/ STEVE SWALLOW

Life Goes On

ECM Records 832063 (LP: 854826)

A third album in a sequence that began with *Trios* in 2013, recorded lovingly with a wonderfully lush sound. It's also somehow a warmer, more joyful experience than 2016's *Andando El*. There are three suites of new pieces by Bley, the first giving the album its title and gently based on the blues with long, loping lines from Sheppard's saxophone and Swallow's bass, a melody instrument in his hands. 'Beautiful Telephones' comments ironically on an early Trump tweet and finally, 'Copy Cat', as the title suggests, plays lightly with ideas of call-and-response, reflecting this long-standing trio's fabulous inner rapport. *SH*

Sound Quality: 90%



KURT ELLING FEATURING DANILO PEREZ

Secrets Are The Best Stories

Edition Records EDN 1151 (LP: EDNLP1151)

Elling is held to be the best male vocalist in jazz, but you won't find him scatting standards here. His issue-led 2018 album *The Questions* opened with 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', and this time he goes further. Brilliantly supported by pianist and social activist Danilo Pérez, fine rhythm players and Miguel Zenon's alto sax, Elling adds probing lyrics to tunes by Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter, Django Bates and others. Also, Pérez and Elling composed 'Gratitude' for the men's movement instigator Robert Bly, and 'Song Of The Rio Grande', about the appalling pollution of the great river. Thought-provoking and superbly crafted. *SH*

Sound Quality: 85%



PETE WHITTAKER/ART THEMEN/ GEORGE DOUBLE

Thane & The Villeins

Hadleigh Jazz Records 0001

Formed by way of an 80th birthday celebration for saxophonist Art Themen, this whimsically-named trio features organ wizard Whittaker and one-time Shirley Bassey sideman Double on drums. Formerly an orthopedic surgeon, Themen started as a clarinetist in trad bands, but then discovered modern jazz and switched to tenor sax, going on to work with Stan Tracey for more than 20 years. Here he's as boisterous and inventive as ever, paying tribute to Dexter Gordon with 'Hanky Panky' and to Sonny Rollins with a funky 'Playin' In The Yard' and a swinging 'I'm An Old Cowhand'. Many happy returns! *SH*

Sound Quality: 80%



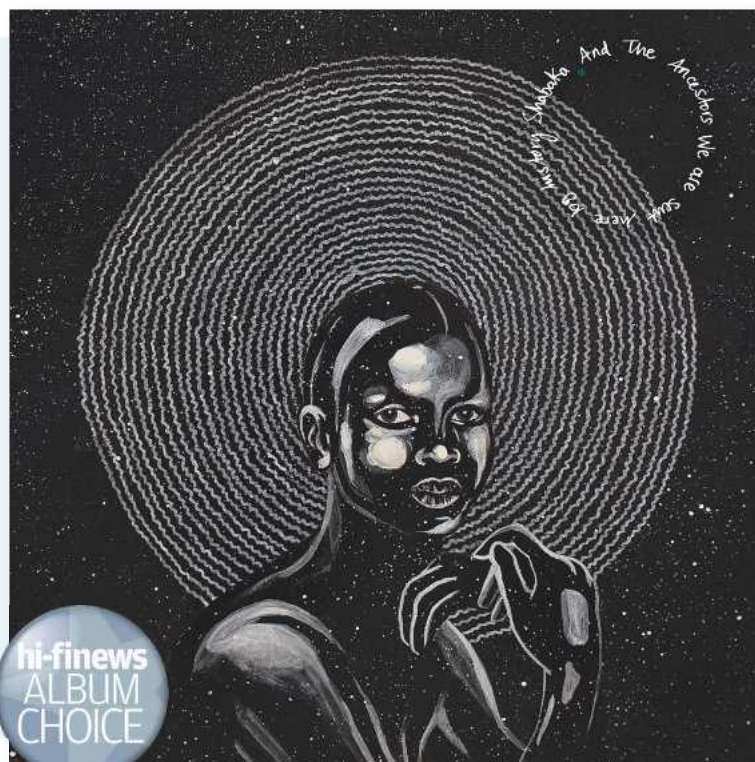
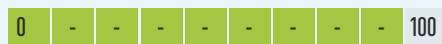
SHABAKA AND THE ANCESTORS

We Are Sent Here By History

Impulse! Records 0864560 (LP: 0864563)

Outstanding instrumentalist and determined leader Shabaka Hutchings' current projects include *Sons Of Kemet* and *The Comet Is Coming*. After several visits to South Africa, the Barbadian British saxophonist launched his 'Ancestors' concept with a group of musicians there, and *The Wisdom Of Elders* appeared on the Brownswood label in 2016. Shabaka firmly intends this new album to be heard as a whole, each song to be listened to in conjunction with its corresponding poem, which he has built on vocalist Siyabonga Mthembu's lyrics. The music is compelling and often hypnotically repetitive, but although the album is 'a meditation on our coming extinction', it also 'proclaims a visioning of the path forward'. *SH*

Sound Quality: 90%



hi-finews
ALBUM
CHOICE



DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE CRITICAL ROLE OF YOUR TONEARM

Thousands of people have experienced dramatic and surprising improvements upgrading to our multi-award winning tonearms. We're so sure you'll love our tonearms, we offer an unconditional One Month Money Back Guarantee:

We've built our reputation by offering astonishing sonic performance & value for over 25 years, contact us today to fall in love all over again with your precious LPs!

From £295 to £9750 our range suits all budgets. Take an in depth look at the benefits of a better tonearm on our website, found above.



Encounter MK3C Arm

Editors Choice Award

— THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

Product of the Year Award

— HI FI +

"One of the truly special products I have reviewed in the last 18 years"

— STEREOPHILE (USA)

Illustrious MK3C Arm

Best Analogue Product Award

— FEDELTA' DEL SUONO (Italy)

"The value of this arm is off the scale"

— John Stratton (Owner)

Silver MK3A Arm

Most Wanted Component Award "So far ahead of the pack ... looks about to lap them. ...first choice for those looking for ultra musical LP performance"

— STEREO TIMES

Best of Year Award "the Origin Live Silver tonearm is phenomenal and makes me realize what a bargain it truly is at its asking price"

— 6 MOONS

"Design of the decade"

— HI FI WORLD

Enterprise C Arm

"The ultimate real world tonearm"

— HI FI WORLD

Conqueror MK3C Arm

Tonearm of the Year Award

— HI FI WORLD

Most wanted component award

— STEREO TIMES (USA)

Best sound at the show award

— KLANGBILDER (Vienna)

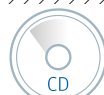
Perfect 10 award "The most addictive product I've heard"

— AUDIO 10 (USA)

"For me Origin Live in the analogue sector is the discovery of the year! ..."

— IMAGE HI FI (Germany)





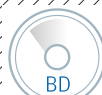
COMPACT DISC



SUPRAUDIO



DVD



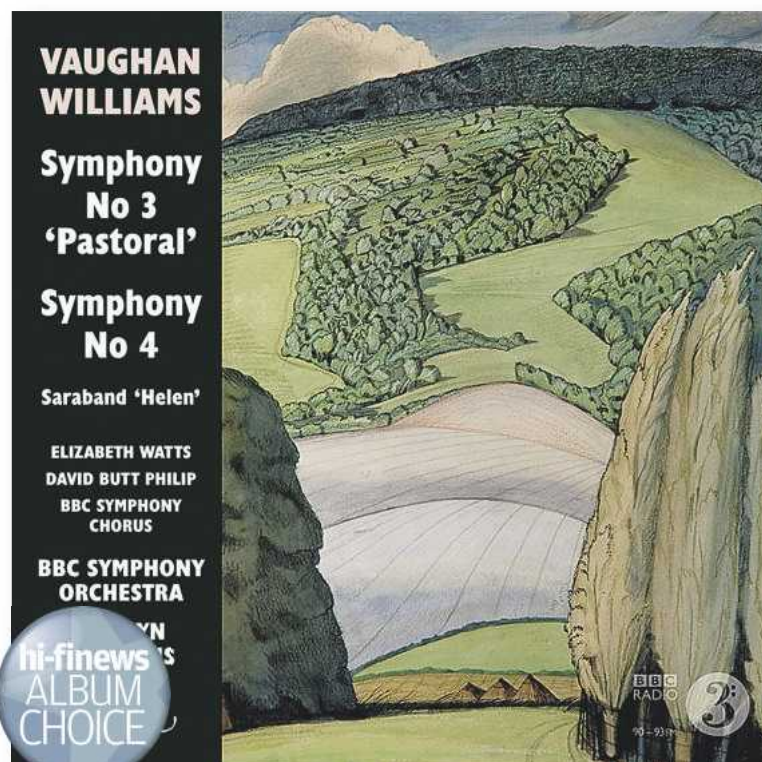
BLU-RAY



VINYL



DOWNLOAD



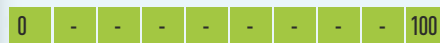
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Symphonies Nos 3, 'Pastoral', and 4; Saraband 'Helen'
Helen Watts, David Butt Philip, BBC SO & Ch/Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion CDA68280 (downloads to 96kHz/24-bit resolution)

After 'London', the countryside in landscape and spiritual reflections, then the turbulent No 4, memorably recorded by the composer in 1937 with the BBC SO [now on Naxos 8111048]. Each RVW symphony took steps in a new direction, as with Beethoven's. And the scherzo from No 3 is not unlike that composer's merrymaking folk – although here they scamper away, not heading to a storm but the inspired solo soprano voice, set far back. A shock, then, to run from that finale to the bellicose 4(i). Both works receive outstanding recordings in Brabbins' series and his completion of the 1913-14 unpublished Marlowe setting (tenor, chorus and orch), *Saraband*, is a rewarding bonus. **CB**

Sound Quality: 95%



JS BACH/BARTÓK

French Suite No 5, BWV816; Partita No 2, BWV826/
Out of Doors; Suite Op.14

Julien Libeer

Harmonia Mundi HMM902651

'Classy' just about sums up this contrasting pairing of composers by a young Belgian pianist (33) who has been studying with Maria João Pires. He plays a Steinway in the Limousin arts centre, Ferme de Villefavard (you can see film of this on the Internet), and delivers an outstanding sound. The impact of Bartók's *pesante* 'With pipes and drums' after the Bach BWV216 *Gigue* is quite dramatic; and Libeer's 'Night Music' following Bartók's 'Musette' gives an idea of his expressive range. After the Bartók 'Hunt' and lonely 'Sostenuto' finales, returning to Bach makes good programmatic sense. **CB**

Sound Quality: 90%



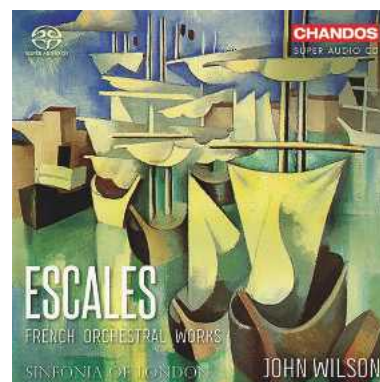
BIZET-SCHEDRIN/RESPIGHI

Carmen Suite/Pines of Rome
Bavarian RSO/Mariss Jansons

BR Klassik 900183 (downloads to 48kHz/24-bit resolution)

Schnittke's 1967 adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* (with bits of *L'Arlésienne* and *Maid of Perth* impudently thrown in) was scored for strings and 47 percussion instruments. It was written for his wife, a Bolshoi prima ballerina, to perform but immediately condemned by the Soviet authorities. Rozhdestvensky's *Melodiya*/EMI LP was acclaimed as an unmissable audiophile release (1968). Jansons' live recording is from 2017, and he brings out all of its inherent dark drama – no 'tongue-in-cheek' for the more exotic scoring. The Respighi, given six months before he died last year, is another all-stops-out performance. **CB**

Sound Quality: 90%



ESCALES

Music by Chabrier, Debussy, Duruflé, Ibert, Massenet,
Ravel and Saint-Saëns

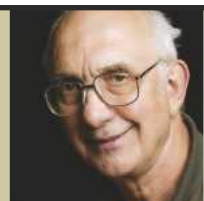
Sinfonia of London/John Wilson

Chandos CHSA5252 (SACD; downloads to 96kHz/24-bit res)

España, *L'après-midi d'un Faune*, *Rapsodie Espagnole*, the 'Méditation' from *Thais* (with a tastefully expressive violin part by leader Andrew Haveron) – for his second disc with the Sinfonia of London John Wilson adds to these popular masterworks Saint-Saëns's *Rouet d'Omphale* (rarely heard nowadays), Ibert's *Escales* and *Three Dances* by Duruflé. The orchestral quality in these French pieces reminded me of the Philharmonia in its early hey-day, and while the popular tracks are all enjoyable, you need this for the piquant Ibert Palermo/Tunis/Valencia/Tunis pictures and Duruflé's Op.6. **CB**

Sound Quality: 85%





Barry Fox Technology journalist

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

Playback time

With the BBC's licensing system under recent fire, **Barry Fox** argues the Corporation should limit the expansion of its iPlayer and that we should return to older tech for programmes we've missed

The BBC's iPlayer catchup service was first trialled in 2005 and launched for public use in July 2007. Digital Video Recorders that could 'tape' digital TV and radio broadcasts were by then widely available. But some people never learned how to use them, forgetting to set them in advance. It's easier to use the iPlayer after the event – as I happily do.

Some engineers, though, warned the BBC management that they were creating a monster. The more people who used iPlayer the more computer storage and server equipment the BBC would have to install, with snowballing demand for broadband bandwidth and power to support the ever-expanding computer hardware and networks. But like Topsy, iPlayer just kept on growing.

NARROW VIEW

At a BBC briefing to announce that BBC Three TV would no longer be broadcast, and would instead be made available only online, I asked the Director General Tony Hall how he squared his decision to stop broadcasting the station with the BBC's name – the British Broadcasting Corporation. I didn't get a clear answer.

I rather suspect that there are many in BBC management who do not understand the basic differences between broadcasting – where one transmitter services listeners and viewers over a wide area with the same programme at the same time – and narrowcasting, where every individual has a direct personal connection to the BBC's computer store.

So they wouldn't understand that the power needed for a transmitter doesn't depend on the number of people tuning in, whereas the power needed for an online service depends on the number of people accessing the service and

what they do with it. Given that the BBC still has broadcast transmitters churning out most of its programmes, the cost of letting us all not bother to set a DVR is unnecessary.

BBC managers often seem to have forgotten that the Corp is not a commercial service, which has to make a profit to survive – like ITV or Capital and Classic FM or Netflix. It is a public service that does not *have* to win good ratings from its programmes. It is funded by the licence fee, which I have been happy to pay because it means the BBC can make music and speech programmes that commercial stations cannot afford or need to clutter with intrusive adverts.

I remember once being in a lift at Broadcasting House soon after Christmas a few years back and overhearing a conversation between two BBC suits.

'You're back then – I expect you'll find a pile of stuff waiting for you.'

'No problem. I'll just sort out what and where to delegate. Then I'm off for the New Year.' Cushy...

At that time I was doing a lot of radio broadcasts, talking about what new tech stuff was worth buying and why, and how to make it work. The national stations Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 paid a

pittance, but I did it for the exposure.

With local radio the situation was – and still is – very different. The BBC has created so many local radio stations that there is literally no budget to pay anyone other than staff. Time and time again I would be called by harassed producers asking me to talk on air about some topical technical story.



ABOVE: Equipment inside the BBC transmitter at Crystal Palace relies on waveguides (inset), which look more like plumbing than wiring

'I am sorry we have absolutely no money to pay contributors anything' they would add. Meanwhile, a top-heavy management pays TV 'stars' huge sums to host a quiz, talk trivia with anyone with a movie to promote, or speak someone else's words for a documentary.

FREE CLASSES

So when I hear the BBC calling for more money to avoid cuts, I can't help thinking that maybe it is now time for the Corporation to make those cuts, return to its roots and concentrate on what it does best – making radio and television programmes that the commercial services simply cannot offer without that intrusive dollop of advertisements.

It would surely be cheaper to subsidise the cost of DVRs, and run free classes on how to use them to record radio as well as TV, than keep on growing the iPlayer Topsy. And never forget the big bonus of using a DVR: you can fast forward through radio and TV commercials! ☺

'Maybe it's now
time for the
BBC to return
to its roots'



Barry Willis

Journalist for top American audio-video publications

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

Bear necessities

Enjoying his audio porridge in different parts of the house, **Barry Willis** has assembled three different set-ups with different approaches, but says doing this needn't cost an arm and a leg

You might imagine that a big 'statement' home entertainment system would get a regular workout *chez moi*. You might also imagine that such regular workouts would occur in direct proportion to the system's retail value.

But that would be wrong. Like almost everyone working in this industry, I have more equipment than I can put into any one installation. Most of it I've purchased used, some of it's been donated, and a couple of the items are on loan.

MAGICAL SET-UP

Fortunately I have space to set up systems in separate rooms so that the house doesn't look like an overstocked hi-fi store. It does look like an overstocked art gallery, but I do try to keep the proliferation of electronics under control. Not counting a mish-mash of old gear in an upstairs bedroom, I have three audio systems that get regular use.

The most visible resides in the spacious entry way: a pair of MartinLogan Ascent i electrostatic loudspeakers flanking a yellow wall with a large abstract painting. Cabling runs under the rugs from an Audio Research CA50 integrated amp, with an Oppo BDP-83 universal disc player, a prototype Daniel Hertz M9 integrated amp used as a DAC, and a laptop running Windows 10 with a 2TB external hard drive – all fitting neatly and unobtrusively on a small glass rack. I don't consider myself to be in the valves-and-electrostatics camp, but this combination can be magical even if the THD is high!

Because this system is in the centre of the house, it's ideal for filling the place with music. In terms of cost, this is the 'Mama Bear' of the three – about \$3500 allocated thus: BDP-83, purchased new, approximately \$1000; MartinLogan

RIGHT: The electronics that make up the author's 'Mama Bear' system (top to bottom) Daniel Hertz M9 integrated amp used as a DAC, Oppo BDP-83 universal disc player and Audio Research CA50 integrated amp



Ascent is, used, \$1000; CA50 integrated, used \$1500; DH M9, on loan; Windows 10 laptop and hard drive, new \$300. Cabling is decent but not exotic.

The 'Papa Bear' system is in a nearby room. The business end includes a Stewart GrayHawk screen, James SG-10 subwoofer, Daniel Hertz M5 monoblocks, and Silverline OTL loudspeakers. The screen and subwoofer I bought many years ago; the amps and speakers are on loan.

At the opposite end of the room, on a rack behind the sofa, are a Halo C2 preamp, Pioneer Elite FPJ-Pro projector, '80s-era Linn LP-12, Margules phono stage, Nakamichi CR-2 cassette

deck, Oppo BDP-103 universal disc player, Pioneer Elite N-50 DAC/network player – all told approximately \$130,000.

This system is capable of great delicacy and nuance and bone-crushing sound pressure levels, even though I almost never push it into the red. Imposing, compelling and immersive, the system rarely gets used because doing so can

feel like attending a big formal dinner party when all I really want is a yummy snack. Sometimes big events require too much commitment...

IMAGING KINGS

But the 'Baby Bear' system in my capacious kitchen sees lots of action. The comfort level is off the chart, while total cost was insignificant. It includes a Comcast cable receiver, Oppo BPD-105 universal disc player (given by a friend), prototype integrated amp of unknown origin, Sony CDP-C245 CD changer (used, \$20), Sony SMP-N200 streaming network player (estate sale find, \$1.00), PSB Image T65 speakers (used, \$200), Sharp 60in TV (used, \$200). Total financial commitment: under \$500. The TV replaced a monstrous plasma set near the end of its life.

As their name implies, the Canadian-made PSB floorstanders are imaging kings with a surprisingly substantial bottom end and an inexplicably marvellous ability to throw out three-dimensional sound effects. I had them from a guy who'd just dropped some hefty money on something new. So you don't have to go broke to enjoy the hi-fi game ☺

'The system is capable of bone-crushing pressure levels'



Six Audio

INTRODUCING SERIOUSLY GOOD **HIGH FIDELITY**

t. 01403 713125
m. 07950 274224

e. info@sixaudio.co.uk
w. www.sixaudio.co.uk

Complete Vivid Audio GIYA range on demonstration



GIYA G1 Spirit
4-WAY, 5 DRIVER



GIYA G1 Series 2
4-WAY, 5 DRIVER



GIYA G2 Series 2
4-WAY, 5 DRIVER



GIYA G3 Series 2
4-WAY, 5 DRIVER



GIYA G4 Series 2
4-WAY, 5 DRIVER

Looking to upgrade to Vivid Audio? We offer great trade-in deals, please ask.

whole note distribution

The best brands you've never heard



A+D = Class AD

From Amsterdam comes an incredible new category of amplification.



432 EVO REFERENCE MUSIC SERVER

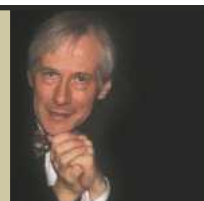


Ordinary... meet extraordinary

A new class of Music Server from Klinkt Beter.

Telephone +44 (0)203 9115 549

www.wholenotedistribution.co.uk



Christopher Breunig Music Journalist

Christopher Breunig trained as an architect but became won over by music and collecting classical recordings. He was Hi-Fi News' Music Editor from 1986-2000

Taking the plunge

Today's young musicians are unabashed by the challenges of the most profound musical scores, says **Christopher Breunig**, who welcomes resurfaced TV footage of a remarkable conductor

I noticed the other day, on Linn Records' website, a new pairing of late Beethoven piano sonatas on the Alpha label, played by Filippo Gorini. He's an Italian, now aged 28.

In 2015 he won the Bonn Beethoven Competition Award and attracted the attention of Austrian pianist Alfred Brendel [*HFN* Jan '16], who heard him playing the *Diabelli Variations* in a private recital. He has since been mentoring Gorini – who recorded the piece for Alpha to acclaim two years ago [ALPHA296].

The new disc [ALPHA591] is no less a simple matter for an interpreter. It's the last Sonata, Op.111 and the 'Hammerklavier', Op.106, with its vast *Adagio* stretching (in this case) to 21 minutes and a complicated contrapuntal finale following. It's a piece that Murray Perahia only recorded for DG at the age of 69, having set it aside for many years. And the conductor Bruno Walter [Classical Companion, *HFN* Mar '17] said he felt unable to conduct Mozart's later symphonies until he was 40 – he only came to Bruckner many years later.

IN THE CHARTS

Gorini is not the only young(ish) musician to record those formidable *Variations* early in his career. One of my 2018 *HFN* Yearbook Album Choices was the version by Martin Helmchen made when he was aged 35, and issued too on Alpha.

Some readers will recall that Daniel Barenboim was setting down his first thoughts on the *Diabelli Variations* and 'Hammerklavier' for the Westminster LP label for 1965/68 releases and embarking on a complete cycle of the piano sonatas for EMI in 1967 (when he was 25). There's nothing to be said against these kind of ventures – either they'll promote the artists or leave them open to criticism.

This has happened with Sheku Kanneh-Mason and his UK album chart-busting Elgar Concerto on Decca (No 8 after a couple of weeks' availability).

RIGHT: In at the deep end: young Italian pianist Filippo Gorini has already recorded some of Beethoven's most demanding music. He's receiving tuition from Alfred Brendel – who withdrew from public performance in 2008



PHOTO: MARCO BORGCREVE

In fact, as the Radio 4 profile admitted, it had only received mixed reviews and Norman Lebrecht saw the whole Sheku phenomenon as exploitative. Incidentally, Jacqueline du Pré too was only 20 when she made her first Elgar recording, while with Steven Isserlis's 1988 Elgar Concerto debut LP, he was already 30.

In case you've missed it, Norman Lebrecht has a website, Slipped Disc (<https://slippedisc.com>), updated daily with all kinds of information and opinion to keep readers informed about the classical music world: deaths, retirements, orchestral management, scandal, awards, etc...

As he's determined to come up with something every day, often the info is of marginal interest: some obscure Ukrainian mezzo has a fall; an Iowan clarinettist loses his instrument; Dudamel takes on Bach. That sort of thing. But there are nuggets too, with recent links to newly discovered historic recordings by pianists such as Arrau and Horowitz, and a 1986 film of Carlos Kleiber in Japan that's just surfaced on the Internet.

Kleiber was the most elegant of conductors to see. Here, he's with the

Bavarian State Orchestra in Beethoven's Symphony No 7. Yes, a party piece for him, with a commercial DVD with the Concertgebouw and two CD/SACD versions. But this is an unedited live performance full of telling closeups that makes essential viewing.

CRITICS' FOLLY

Slipped Disc has a comments section (Lebrecht has to face quite a few personal brick-bats) and you can see, for example, American conductor Leonard Slatkin

disapproving of doubled winds and brass, and repeats omitted, while there's an interesting suggestion that Kleiber 'conducts himself' and not the music. Slatkin thinks the gestures 'reflect what he wants the music to look like

as well as how it sounds... but the raw energy produced is quite stunning'.

His one Royal Festival Hall concert with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1986 – Beethoven 7 again – had poor reviews prompting *Observer* critic Peter Heyworth to pen an open apology for his colleagues' attitude. Kleiber never returned to conduct here after that. ☹

'Lebrecht saw the whole Sheku phenomenon as exploitative'

innuos

STATEMENT

MUSIC SERVER



"This Innuos 'polish' is the icing on the digital cake"

- Paul Miller, hi-finews



WWW.INNUOS.COM

f /INNUOS

t @INNUOS

y INNUOS

ig INNUOS

VICKERS HI-FI

High Fidelity Specialists Since 1967



► Visit our Stylish New 7,500 sq ft. Store at...

► **Unit 8 Concorde Park,**

- Free Customer Car Park
- Wheelchair Friendly
- Superb Air Conditioned Demonstration Rooms
- Loaded with Quality Hi-Fi Equipment at all price levels
- Awesome amplifiers, Gorgeous speakers, Classy furniture
- Independent Advice, Qualified Staff, Great Offers
- Easy Online Ordering from... www.VickersHiFi.com

Amy Johnson Way, Kettlestring Lane,

Clifton Moor, York

SatNav: YO30 4WT

Tel: 01904 - 691600

✓ TRUSTPILOT ★★★★★ "Excellent"

► Open 10:30am - 5:30pm 6 days: Mon. to Sat.



audiolab ARCAM CYRUS DALI marantz ROKSAN

clearaudio MARTIN LOGAN MONITOR AUDIO PATHOS Pro-Ject

ProAc QUAD KRELL Pioneer And Lots More...



Jim Lesurf Science Journalist

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

The real deal

If you listen to music around the home, how do you know you are getting the proper audio data? **Jim Lesurf** outlines his concerns and also explains why he'd like more detail on remastered CDs

When I listen to the BBC iPlayer output I use a fairly direct approach. This means I am able to tell if the audio data I am receiving is AAC (MP4) or not, and confirm that it is being provided at a 320kb/s. So I can have confidence that no-one has messed about with it or degraded it along the way. However I'm less certain of this in various other cases...

The obvious example is when someone uses a 'closed device' for listening to audio. For example, the ones that are voice-controlled and let you say something like 'Hey, Fred – play Radio 3 for me!'. Provided the device works and understands your accent, you should then hear what's on Radio 3. But do you know for certain that the device is fetching the actual BBC 320kb/s stream for you?

SIGNIFICANT BITS

Many consumer-grade 'net radio/TV' types of device work via an intermediate company that 'enables' the service. It might be cheaper for that company to process what it collects into another format. In principle, it might then send you 128kbps MP3 because that's what it finds most cost-effective.

So is everyone always getting the 'real deal'?

I only began thinking about this question when I was happily buying a number of CDs from companies that reissue and repackage old jazz recordings. The original

78s or LPs that are sourced in order to make these CDs are now out of copyright.

Alongside 'official' re-releases by the inheritors of the original music labels, many other specialists have appeared and either licence access to the material the large companies hold in their vaults or simply take old 78s and early LPs and rip digital transfers from them. They can then de-click and process these copies to make

RIGHT: Closed voice-activated devices certainly offer convenience when you want to access music and radio around the home, but can we be sure that the bitrate we are receiving is really the best available?



ANDREY POPOV / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

everything sound more like new. Given an excellent source as the starting point, and provided a subsequent transfer is made with due care and skill, the result can be good. Indeed, I'm pretty happy with many of the 'new' CDs I've bought that probably were made in this way.

CARRY ON REGARDLESS

Nevertheless, when faced with the choice on offer we often don't know exactly how, or by whom, the 'new version' has

been produced. We may simply have to suck-it-and-see. This isn't ideal, of course, because even if a CD sounds OK, we are left with the nagging question: might one of the *other* versions be more faithful to the original release in

pristine condition, or simply sound better – perhaps even better than the initial release would have been?

Given the rise in cheap-as-chips box sets, *etc.*, of old material, the temptation is to go on buying. And it seems clear that this suits the record companies just dandy. I have asked a number of people involved in these reissues about my concerns, and in one way or another the

small specialists have dodged the bullet and not explained in any detail how they had sourced and reprocessed old material. Which is in distinct contrast with my first encounter with the practice of remastering old material.

Decades ago I created the first website on behalf of the Sir John Barbirolli Society, which had begun arranging reissues and re-masters of his live and studio recordings. In addition to ones supplied by the original companies the society also had some remastered especially for reissue. Back then it was happy, indeed proud, to say who had done this and give details of *how* it was done.

DOUBLING UP

One offshoot of this was I that also did the initial websites for a couple of small specialist reissuers of old music on CDs. But I get the impression that 'that was then and this is now', and the general attitude from other labels has changed.

I'm not sure why, and I do enjoy much of what I've been buying. But the lack of openness about methods and sources does make me wonder what we might be missing? In spite of all of this, I guess it does prompt us to keep buying 'alternatives', searching in case we discover something better! ☺

'You might receive MP3 because that's cost-effective'

Duevel Omnidirectional high-end loudspeakers

Unlike conventional loudspeakers, Duevel's omnidirectional loudspeakers can be placed more flexibly in your living environment and will create a stunning sound-stage.

Model	Price (SRP)
Planets	£950
Enterprise	£2,600
Venus	£4,000
Bella Luna	£10,000
Sirius	£28,000
Sirius BE	£40,000

An affordable range of excellent high-end loudspeakers to fit with today's modern living environment.

Signature
AUDIO SYSTEMS

Distributed by Signature Audio Systems, call: 07738 – 007776
or by e-mail to: info@signaturesystems.co.uk
Web: www.sbooster.com

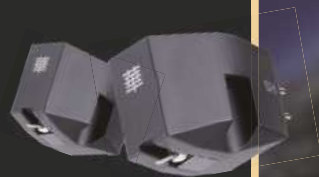
Dealers:

Audio Affair - 0121 224 7300

Midland HiFi Studio - 01902 380083



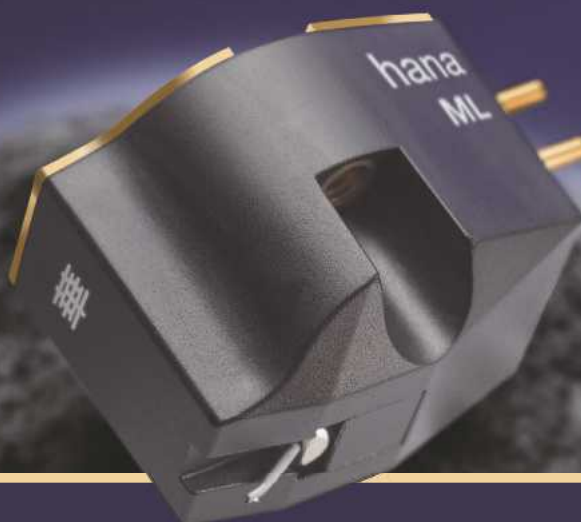
HANA EL & EH
Low (EL) and High (EH)
output Moving Coil
models



HANA SL & SH
Low (SL) and High (SH)
output Moving Coil
models

HANA ML & MH

M Series
Deluxe Models



High output
moving coil
is for use with
a MM phono
stage.

'The Hana ML in particular and the MH trailing close behind are every inch high end super cartridges, only without the high prices. As it stands, this is the best £3,000-£4,000 cartridge you can buy ... for £995.00p'

HI>FI+ ISSUE 172 REVIEW, HANA ML/MH



«AIRaudio»

Telephone: 01491 629 629 or for dealer list, visit: www.airaudio.co.uk/dealers/



Steve Harris Contributing Editor

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

All the right notes

Coming across an old Ferguson catalogue, **Steve Harris** is reminded of the unrewarded efforts by the British Audio Dealers Association to get the man in the street listening to decent hi-fi

Wonderful musician as he was, the late André Previn is remembered by the wider British public mainly for two things. First, for his memorable appearance on the *Morecombe & Wise* Christmas special in 1971. Second, for endorsing Ferguson televisions and video recorders in a long series of TV ads about ten years later, when he told us, with a straight face, 'In my view, the best picture of all time'. He's loved for the former and now forgiven for the latter.

I was reminded of this when a colleague unearthed a 1984 Ferguson catalogue and passed it on to me. Ferguson wasn't ever a hi-fi brand, and so you'd expect to find it offering only 'unit audio' products, all-in music centres and compact record players of modest specification. But at the top of the range there was the Stereomaster Hi-Fi System. I guess it would have justified its name by meeting the industry's DIN 45 500 technical standards for hi-fi performance.

ON THE RACK

Let's go back a stage. By the late '70s the Japanese electronics manufacturers were selling huge numbers of separate turntables, amplifiers, tuners and cassette decks. So, they reasoned, let's make it easy for the consumer. Put the whole lot into a smart-looking cabinet, add a suitable pair of speakers. And the 'rack system' was born. But, especially with new competition from video products, there was always a need to make the things cheaper. If sold separately, every turntable, amp, tuner and cassette deck had to include a mains transformer. But if sold together, the amplifier's transformer could provide the power for all the units.

Then why not go further, and combine all the components? Then you have, in

RIGHT: Topping the range of audio products in this 1984 Ferguson catalogue was the Stereomaster Hi-Fi System (far right) offering a belt-drive turntable, twin 'soft touch' cassette deck, three-band tuner and a '14W per channel RMS' amplifier



effect, a music centre built into a fancy cabinet. Ferguson's 1984 Stereomaster is a case in point. It came in two versions, the model 3A04 with a single cassette deck, or as the 3A04 with twin cassette decks, 'for tape to tape recording, editing or continuous play'.

In the later 1980s, those big wood veneered or wood-effect-vinyl cabinets fell out of fashion and 'rack systems' began to give way to 'midi systems', made up of units about 315mm wide, or less, instead of the previous 440mm or so. Compact Disc was now replacing vinyl

as far as most new buyers were concerned, so it was no longer necessary to make the whole set of components wide enough for a record player to stand on top.

It was in response to all this that in 1992, BADA (the British Audio Dealers

Association) launched its 'Campaign For Real Hi-Fi'. Many UK manufacturers signed up to support it, hoping that to some extent at least, they could do for British hi-fi what CAMRA (the Campaign For Real Ale) had done for British beer.

It seemed then that CAMRA, launched in 1971, was winning its war against the gassy, synthetic keg beers of the big brewers, and that more and more

drinkers were demanding a decent pint of the real stuff. Similarly, 'Real Hi-Fi' had to be above and beyond the basic DIN standards. However, raising public awareness wasn't so easy.

BADA's definition of real hi-fi as 'self-powered separate boxes that can be mixed and matched' clearly excluded many of the all-in one systems being turned out by the Japanese giants. But did this definition convey anything about quality? And did it mean anything to the man in the street?

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Most ordinary people hadn't ever heard a high-quality system, didn't know what difference it would make, and often thought they wouldn't be able to hear the difference if indeed there was one. The problem for the campaign was that if people hadn't heard better sound for themselves, no amount of advertising would persuade them they needed it.

Today, CAMRA has 192,000 members, organises hundreds of events every year, and tries to save endangered pubs from closure. But the Campaign For Real Hi-Fi, sadly, sank without trace.

And today, the term hi-fi (or perhaps sometimes 'HiFi') can be seen ever more freely and misleadingly applied to very low-grade systems. But at least, we still know what it means. ☺

'It could do for British hi-fi what CAMRA did for beer'

STOP PRESS: ST40 MKIV voted Hi Fi World "BEST VALVE AMPLIFIER 2019"



Hi Fi World
"Best Valve
Amplifier"

NEW Stereo 40 MK IV £2499

New Upgraded Model. Now With Headphone Socket



NEW HP205D DHT Headphone Amplifier £2999

High Definition With The Relaxing Sound Of WE Vintage Directly Heated Triodes



60 + 60 Watts Triode
115 + 115 Watts UL
New Tung Sol KT150
£4299 pr

MB90 MK IIm Monoblock Power Amplifiers many features



Stereo 300 MK II £3999

Sublime Sound From Vintage 300B Triodes



Stereo 25 MKII from £1399

Simplified ST40 30W UL, HQ Headphone Socket



Stereo 30se £2499

Single Ended Pure Class A, 28W UL, 18w Triode



PS1 MKII MM/MC £1549

Our fantastic value pure valve phono stage. MC and MM



PS3 MKII MC/MM £2699

Pure Valve Phono Pre-amplification At Its Best! Smooth non-fatiguing Triode Sound, Match 8-600 Ohms



HP8 MKII £999



NEW ST 60 MK IV £3799

Outstanding Performance 80w UL, 50w Triode

Buy direct from us or through one of carefully chosen dealers or worldwide distributors:

Audio Gold Crouch End, London Tel: 0208 341 9007 Web: www.audiogold.co.uk Analogue Seduction Whitby Peterborough Tel: 01733 350878 Web: www.analogueseduction.net Germany: TCG Handels GmbH Nordhorn 48831, Germany Tel: +49 (0) 5921 78849 27 Web: www.tcg-gmbh.de	Wilkinson Hi Fi Nelson, Lancashire Tel: 01282 612901 Web: www.wilkinsonstv Lighting Sound & Vision Coleraine, Northern Ireland BT52 1BE Tel: 028703 42354 Netherlands: Hi Fi Matters BV Rijswijk 2288EV, Netherlands Tel: +31 (0) 70 3193936 Web: www.hifimatters.nl	Shropshire Hi Fi Shrewsbury SY2 5EF Tel: 01743 232317 Web: www.smcsoundandvision.co.uk Canada: Audioarc Barrie, Ontario, Canada Tel: +1 249 880 5040 Web: www.audioarc.com Spain: Union Musical Casa Werner Barcelona 08010, Spain Tel: +34 933 021 792 Web: www.werner-musica.com	Audio Affair Birmingham, B9 4AA Tel: 0121 224 7351 Web: www.audioaffair.co.uk Denmark: High End Sound Vodskov 9310, Denmark Tel: +45 9829 2448 Web: www.highend-sound.com USA: Music Direct Chicago IL 60660 USA Tel: +1 800 449 8333 Web: www.musicdirect.com
---	--	--	--

0% APR Interest Free Credit

Purchases over £1120 ask for a quotation*

Up to 20% off B grade & Ex-demo
Technically perfect Fully Guaranteed. Audition in our
Leicester showroom. Most models available.
See our website, email or ring for availability.
Subject to availability*. Prices vary.

icon Audio

For 100% Pure Valve Amplification



Now its official – “One of the best valve amplifiers in the World”!

WORLD AWARDS
HI-FI WORLD



NEWS UPDATE:

Through these difficult times we aim to continue sales/service/spares from our Leicester Offices. Contact us by phone/email for advice. Delivery couriers are working OK (UK at the time of writing). Our listening room is closed to visitors temporarily, but you are welcome to collect purchases and drop off repairs. We can also uplift and return repairs to your home. Please stay safe! David Shaw CEO

BEST VALVE AMPLIFIER

ICON AUDIO STEREO 40 MKIV

Reviewed: August 2019 issue

As its name suggests the Icon Audio 40MkIV is capable of producing 40 Watts of power from its KT88 valves – although pushed hard we managed 50 Watts. There's also three feedback settings (high, low and zero) and the ability to run it in ultralinear or triode mode, as well as fixed bias. So there's wide room for experiment here, including the rare zero feedback option. It means users can find the set-up that suits them best.

And what a sound it is! Used with our Martin Logan electrostatics it was both vividly dynamic and spacious. The output transformers give clean powerful bass – a world away from the occasional softness of some other valve amplifiers. With its huge soundstage and thunderous dynamics the Icon Audio is a long way away from valve amplifiers of yore. Truly a modern classic.



www.hi-fiworld.co.uk

JANUARY 2020 HI-FI WORLD

YOUR VIEWS

Sound Off!

Correspondents express their own opinions, not those of *Hi-Fi News*. We reserve the right to edit letters for publication. Correspondents using e-mail are asked to give their full postal address (which won't be published). Letters seeking advice will be answered in print on our Sound Off pages, but due to time constraints we regret we're unable to answer questions on buying items of hi-fi or any other hi-fi queries by telephone, post or via e-mail.

MY FM AERIAL UPGRADE ANTENNA ADVICE NOT JUST FOR THE BIRDS

I am grateful to reader Christopher Lycett for providing the website address of *ATV* in Sheffield (www.aerialsandtv.com) in his letter that appeared in the February Sound Off pages. Justin Smith, who owns and runs the business, provided me with invaluable information and, as Christopher said, the site really is packed with humour and a good helping of philosophy.

My Ron Smith Galaxy 5 FM aerial was looking rather precarious after 12 years' service, being used as a perch for courting ring-neck doves not to mention scores of swallows, resting before setting off to warmer climes.

The Galaxy 5 was mounted on a 30ft scaffolding pole supported by nine guy wires. My village is 15 miles from Pontop Pike as the crow flies while the transmitter is 70° west of Grid North and the signal strength on my Magnum Dynalab MD 107 tuner was 96/97%.

With an FM 3-element aerial supplied by *ATV Sheffield* [<https://www.aerialsandtv.com/product/fm-3-element-aerial>] installed at the reduced height of 20ft, the same signal strength was maintained. So thank you Christopher, and Jim Lesurf for his enlightening reply that followed.

Revd David Bond, via email

Jim Lesurf replies: David's letter tends to confirm my belief that

listeners who want to enjoy decent FM/VHF reception should in general choose a simple 3-element design, mounted some way clear of the roof and, if possible, any nearby chimney stacks, etc, because these can affect performance. In principle you might also think 'the higher the better'. However, although that is often true, there is sometimes an optimum height. This is because an antenna may pick up a signal via ground or roof reflections in addition to the 'direct path' signal. If so, the two contributions may add up nicely at one height but cancel at another.

An experienced antenna fitter will know about these issues and take them into consideration, but the snag is finding one who knows about VHF and not just UHF TV! Usually, pointing the antenna 'boom' directly towards the transmitter makes sense. But in some locations you may face a problem due to 'multipath' effects. This is a larger scale version of receiving an indirect signal contribution via some distant reflecting object that then interferes with the direct signal.

This is probably more common than people realise, and if severe enough leads to a subtle form of distortion. In such cases, a more directional antenna may help. But simply aiming a 3-element 'slightly off to one side' may also deal with it. Whereas too much signal from a high-gain antenna might actually degrade performance by overloading a tuner.



ABOVE: Magnum Dynalab's MD 107 with signal meter and Center Tune Magic Eye

Send in your views to:

Sound Off, Hi-Fi News, AVTech Media Ltd,
Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent TN8 6HF
or email your views to: letters@hifinews.com -
please use 'Sound Off' in your subject field

True master

LP RUN OUT GROOVE REVEALS SECRETS TO READER

Just a small point regarding the 'Alternate Format Discography' that formed part of Johnny Black's Vinyl Icon feature on Steve Winwood's *Arc Of A Diver* [*HFN* Apr '20]. It appears that Side A of my copy was mastered at Sterling Sound, probably by Jack Skinner judging by the etching on the run out groove, while the mastering for Side B was undertaken at Sound Clinic, as Johnny stated when discussing the original vinyl release that appeared in 1980 [Island Records ILPS 9576].

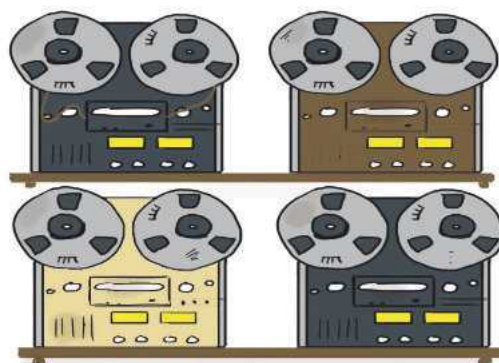
Iain Harvey, via email

Johnny Black replies: Well spotted, Iain. Four decades after the event it's almost impossible to verify precisely who mastered what, when and where. There are over 100 existing versions of *Arc Of A Diver* in various formats and, without access to the mastering studio's records, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Clearly, your eagle eye has rightly detected that your particular version was mastered in two different locations, but to determine how many of the 100-plus editions were mastered in that way is beyond my resources. Jack Skinner's own discography at Discogs.com doesn't list *Arc Of A Diver* as part of his body of work, but that too could be deficient. Maybe you could let Discogs.com know what you've uncovered!

WhitWorld

OUR HI-FI WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF WHITWORTH



Whitworth

"3 3/4, 7 1/2, 15 OR 30IPS - THESE PRICES LEAVE ME REELING."

The audio night of my life

WAGNER, TRANSMISSION-LINES AND AN EVENING SPENT WITH HI-FI INDUSTRY LEGENDS

The Classical Companion feature on Georg Solti [*HFN* Mar '20] with the picture of the latest CD box set of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* brought back memories of my old friend, Bud Fried (Irving M Fried – as in IMF speakers). I'll always recall Bud trying to convince me that only classical music was of any consequence, that opera was the highest form of classical music, Wagner was the greatest operatic composer and that the *Ring Trilogy* was the greatest opera.

I remember calling him one day and asking him if the Solti *Ring* was a good version to buy and being told it was *the one*. I'll also never forget the day I played Bud a CD by the great English folk group The Pentangle. His reaction? 'Oh, tinkle music.'

Coincidentally it was Decca records that pointed Bud towards transmission-line speakers. In the early '60s, Decca's now legendary chief engineer Arthur Haddy told Bud that he would have to give up his beloved Quad 57 speakers because Decca could now put 30dB of dynamic range on an LP, which the 57s would find too stressful.

When Bud asked for Arthur's advice as to an alternative, Arthur advised him to look into transmission-line loading and to talk to Arthur Radford, whose company was developing TL speakers. But Radford was slow to put the speakers into production. After too many broken promises and Bud announcing a TL speaker, Bud then went to John Wright



ABOVE: Solti's Vienna recording of the Wagner *Ring cycle* [Decca 478 8370]

with whom he had been working on other projects and asked him for suggestions. John proposed putting a KEF Concerto kit into a TL enclosure, birthing the first IMF Monitor speaker. This was then built by an English company John was involved with. Bud had already copyrighted his initials and used them on other products, and IMF became the speaker brand.

On another front, I can never thank Bud enough for the best audio night of my life, when he invited me to join David Hafner, Gordon Holt, Percy Wilson, Bud and their wives. Percy was entrancing with his tales of horn-loaded loudspeakers and English hi-fi over the years. I drove Percy and his wife back to their hotel with Percy reciting The Zanzibar Fallacy, his tale of the perils of circular reasoning in subjective audio judgment.

Allen Edelstein, New Jersey



ABOVE: Cabinets on the assembly line at the IMF factory in High Wycombe in the UK

Steve Harris replies: John Wright passed away in 1999 but is remembered with affection. In the 1960s, he'd become a consultant to Goldring, whose US importer was Bud Fried, and meanwhile developed his own transmission-line speakers, following Radford and Bailey. In a 1994 interview, John told how Bud had heard these speakers while visiting and insisted on them being taken to a hi-fi show in Philadelphia. He later described the work that had gone into the IMF design in 'A Monitoring Approach To Loudspeaker Design', [*HFN* Jul and Aug '70]. The story of the UK company was told in the Feb '12 issue of *HFN*.

JITTERBUG

USB Filter



Can a £39 insect make all your CD files sound better than Hi-Res?

Yes and no: Using the same equipment and a quality DAC, a 24/96 file (for example) will always sound better than a CD 16/44.1 file ... but, even a single JitterBug will often allow a CD file to be more musical and more emotionally stimulating than a Hi-Res file without the benefit of a JitterBug.

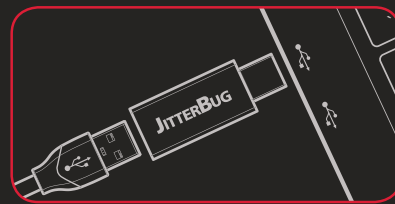
Noise is the problem. Real noise—the kind you can't hear directly. Most often, the word "noise" is used to describe tape hiss or a scratch on a record, but these sounds aren't noise; they are properly reproduced sounds that we wish weren't there.

Problem noise is essentially random, resonant or parasitic energy, which has no meaning. It can't be turned into discrete sounds, but it does compromise signal integrity and the performance of everything it touches.

JitterBug's dual-function line-conditioning circuitry greatly reduces the noise and ringing that plague *both* the data and power lines of USB ports, whether on a computer, streamer, home stereo or car audio front-panel USB input.

A single JitterBug is used in between devices (i.e., in series) as shown below. For an **additional "wow" experience**, try a second JitterBug into another USB port on the same device (such as a computer). Whether the second port is vacant, or is feeding a printer or charging a phone, JitterBug's noise-reduction ability is likely to surprise you. No, the printer won't be affected—only the audio!

While a JitterBug helps MP3s sound a lot more like music, high-sample-rate files have the most noise vulnerability. Try a JitterBug or two on all your equipment, but never more than two per USB bus. There is such a thing as too much of a good thing.



audioquest®

AVAILABLE IN THE UK FOR THE FIRST TIME



Silbatone P-105 Tube Power Amplifier



Silbatone JI-109 Hybrid Integrated Amplifier



Silbatone L-107 MK2 Tube Pre Amplifier

Silbatone

Visit www.hifitraders.co.uk for details of your nearest Silbatone specialist

LINDEMANN.

Lindemann's next generation Musicbook Network Music Player is the perfect package.



TECHNOLOGY
PARTNERS



Signature
AUDIO SYSTEMS

Distributed by Signature Audio Systems, call: 07738 – 007776

or by e-mail to: info@signaturesystems.co.uk Web: www.lindemann-audio.de

Reactions to Relentless test

READER PUZZLES OVER MEASUREMENTS – AND ARE THOSE AC MAINS TERMINALS LEGAL?

I've just read the review of the D'Agostino Relentless mono power amplifier [HFN Mar '20]. Firstly, the doubling with the lowering of the load from 8ohm to 4ohm doesn't happen. Even cranking up the input volume doesn't help! When will HFN publish this 'hidden' parameter? Secondly, are the exposed mains connections legal? Can the output voltage be greater than the 50 VAC safety voltage permissible?

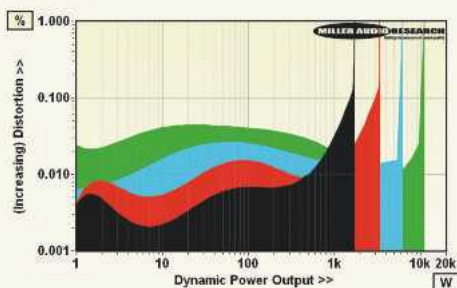
Thirdly, the review refers to the suppression of the second and higher even-harmonics by bridging the two amps. Bridging works by feeding the inverted input signal to the second amp and connecting the load between the positive output terminals of both amps. But suddenly, in the amp with the inverted signal, the even harmonics flip back to their original state and are suppressed. Really? This *can* happen, but then the signal must be inverted and a 180° phase shift must be applied. Probably this happened in the tube age with balanced input transformers, but as far as I am aware of, not today. If real, this should be easy to measure.

Joost Plugge, via email

Paul Miller replies: In practice it is very, very rare to encounter an amplifier that doubles its power (+3dB) with each halving of load impedance. Even with an exceptionally 'stiff' power supply the best that's typically realised is +2.9dB. Hi-fi brands know this, of course, but will often quote power figures that indicate a doubling of output between 8 and 4ohm – 1.5kW/8ohm to 3kW/4ohm



ABOVE: The D'Agostino Relentless mono power amplifier with a close-up of the exposed mains connection (inset)



ABOVE: Dynamic power output vs. THD into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads

in this instance. D'Agostino was confident of delivering *more* than 1.5kW/8ohm so figured that even with a shortfall into 4ohm it would still reach 3kW.

Hi-Fi News is still the only independent resource to have comprehensively tested the Relentless and we measured a full 1.605kW/8ohm at up to 1% THD with a +2.3dB lift to 2.73kW/4ohm. 'Cranking up the input volume' as Joost suggests, will do nothing except plunge the Relentless further into clipping. However, because the Relentless PSU has some headroom, these figures improve to 1.74kW, 3.35kW, 6.36kW and 11.325kW into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic conditions [10msec/1% THD – see Graph above].

Regards distortion, the Relentless is a fully balanced design and, as such, will benefit from some reduction in even-order distortions and common-mode noise. But thermal effects take precedence here in what was never intended to be a vanishingly low-THD amplifier. When

'cold' the Relentless has a higher 3rd (–94dB) than 2nd (–115dB) at 5W/8ohm, but this coalesces to –112dB for both 2nd/3rd harmonics after four hours.

The hard-wired mains connection should only be attempted by a qualified electrician and, once completed, any contacts at mains potential are isolated behind a Delrin cover. Your dealer should take responsibility for this.

**New DragonFlies!
£89 Black & £169 Red**

**Powerful, Immersive
Sound from Computers
and Mobile Devices!**



Four years ago, AudioQuest shook the hi-fi world with our first DragonFly DAC-Preamplifier-Headphone Amp—the rare audio product that brought more compelling sound to *all* music lovers, playing high-res files to MP3s on perfectionist systems and modest laptops.

Now, the new DragonFly Black and DragonFly Red exceed their predecessor in every way, delivering more beautiful music, boasting software upgradability, and providing compatibility with **Android** and **Apple iOS** mobile devices.

While **Black** offers more clarity, depth and category-defining value than ever before, the take-no-prisoners **Red** provides even more finesse, resolution, torque and more than enough power to drive even the most demanding headphones.

The word is out: DigitalAudioReview.net's John Darko calls DragonFly Red and Black "the finest examples of everyman hifi to ever grace these pages. Their value quotients explode the dial."

Let the joyful experience begin!

audioquest

Devoted to reel-to-reel decks

AUDIO OCTOGENARIAN DETAILS HIS OBSESSION WITH BOTH OPEN-REEL AND CASSETTE TAPES

While mulling through past issues of *HFN* I found Ken Kessler's review of the TEAC X-2000 reel-to-reel recorder [*HFN* Jun '86]. My obsession with the technicalities of tape recording started around 1953, when our school acquired a 'Sound Mirror' educational model. It came with a circuit diagram that included the amplifier, and I set to work building a tape deck. I already had various amplifiers, so I simply needed the mechanics and tape-heads, etc.

It was 1958 when I saw a recorder that really opened my eyes. It was visually gorgeous and even more appealing when I got to try it out. I've never seen it featured in 'From The Vault', but it was a Reflectograph 500. It had a robust drive mechanism rather along the lines of that found in the Goldring Lenco GL record players, offering variable-speed capstan drive via a precision tapered motor shaft and slim idler wheel. Its proud owner had spent his life-savings of 99gns on it.

In contrast, wanting to continue with the mechanical project I had started, I obtained some tiny mu-metal laminations and wound and assembled my own designs of record, playback and erase heads. Much fun later, I had built the mechanism and set it up with Mullard tape-record/playback amps.

I decided my deck was a bit clumsy, having used small motors from old electrical appliances (vacuum cleaners,

etc!) and was telling the manager of my local audio and TV shop that I'd heard of a firm called Wearite that made tape recorders and decks. He gave me a smug smile and reached under his counter, pulling out a heavy box marked 'Wearite Model III Tape Deck'.

Telling him I'd have to save up, he said: 'No problem. The price of 38gns has been settled by a customer, but he brought it back: too complicated for him! The man has now emigrated, so you can have it. Get it out of the way'. I was forever grateful, but think it must have been that deck which gave me a hernia as I staggered across Nottingham to the bus station carrying it in my arms.

Not one to give up easily in those days, I then drew up a design for a 'posh' tape deck and used it as a project during my adult student training, where I studied alongside Rolls-Royce trainees in Derby. When the tutors saw my dedication, they were totally supportive, even arranging for the 18kg bronze flywheel to be cast at the local, now long-gone, Stanton Ironworks.

Fast-forward to today and I own, but can't lift, one ex-studio TEAC A-7030SL of 1972 vintage from its 'Professional Line', one TEAC X1000 and an X1000-R, and a Revox A77. I mention these as I've been giving thought to having the first deck restored. The reason for this is that I spend time reading the reverse



ABOVE: The Revox A77 was introduced in 1967 and was regarded as a semi-pro deck

of my record sleeves, and this model is often listed as being the master stereo deck used after mix-downs and before the tape is committed to vinyl. Hence, I have evidence of its capabilities. I shall probably let the others go, the A-77 staying awhile as I occasionally need its 9.5cm/s playback for tapes I made around 1960 when I couldn't afford much tape. They still come up nicely for the pops of the day as I was a bit of a meticulous stickler for the equalisation, especially at that slow speed.

I also love my cassettes and have some 30 decks in my collection. I suspect they cause less wear than expensive diamond profiles. And there's another bonus cassettes bring. At 83 years old, I find that during a long late-night listening session my top response falls with each glass of sherry. To compensate, LPs can be given a gentle lift using traditional tone controls, but cassettes can be given a welcome boost simply by knocking the Dolby off!

Brian M Sandall, via email

Ken Kessler replies: Mr Sandall, all four of the open-reel decks in your possession are desirable and well worth servicing. There are numerous companies refurbishing reel-to-reel decks, and TEAC and Revox seem to be among the easiest for finding spare parts if required. Just Google 'Open-reel Tape Deck Servicing' and choose one nearby!

If you want to get rid of three and keep just one, you can't go wrong with the Revox A77, which is a default choice for many. On the other hand, the TEACs you have are exceptional, so I wouldn't want to have to choose between them. I'm glad you mention owning 30 cassette decks. It's refreshing to learn that I am not alone in my tape insanity.



ABOVE: 'Pleasant to handle...' says *HFN*'s James Moir of the Reflectograph Model 500 recorder in this 1959 ad (left) and TEAC ad from 1971 for the decks that comprised its 'Professional Line'



Rip it up and start again

ONE READER'S QUEST FOR SUPERIOR-SOUNDING VINYL TRANSFERS TO PC

I have a lot of vinyl LPs in good condition and would like to digitise them onto my PC. Can you suggest any ways to improve the quality of my vinyl-to-digital rips? I think I need a better analogue-to-digital device. I did use a Rega Fono Mini A2D phono stage, which had a digital USB output for my PC, but having upgraded my system I now connect my Michell GyroDec SE turntable with Ortofon 2M Blue MM cartridge to the built-in phono stage in my Naim Supernait 3 integrated amplifier.

I then bought a basic ADC unit to enable me to record to digital. It is a Behringer U-Control UCA222 and while it does the job, the sound quality that results is audibly inferior to that of the original vinyl – perhaps not surprising given that it costs £20.

The U-Control UCA222 is fed by the subwoofer output on the Naim Supernait 3, which is a duplicate of the amplifier's preamp output, *ie*, it is a full frequency signal with no low pass filtering. I record the digital input using Audacity.

Aside from the slightly degraded sound quality of the digitised files that result, I also find that the only way to get the recording level right is to crank up the system volume. Ideally I would like to keep my current system set-up as it is, and continue to rip the Supernait 3's preamplifier output.

Can you suggest a piece of kit that digitises files to at least CD quality and which allows the output level to be varied to achieve optimal gain in Audacity without needing to push the Supernait 3's volume up? My PC's soundcard is also connected to the Naim Supernait 3.

Neil Mercer, via email

Andrew Everard replies: Yes, a better analogue-to-digital converter (ADC) should be on your shopping list, but I



ABOVE: The Korg DS-DAC-10R ADC/DAC can be used to 'rip' vinyl to a computer

also feel you might be feeding the ADC in the wrong way, by connecting it using one of the Supernait 3 outputs under the control of the amp's volume control. It's unlikely the ADC is getting the full signal level it's expecting, which may be limiting its performance. The quick fix could be to switch to using one of the Naim's two outputs offering line-level signal, which are the 'AV' and 'Stream' DIN sockets.

For this you'll need a DIN-to-phono output adapter to connect these to the ADC you use; fortunately these are readily available from cable specialists such as Flashback Sales (www.flashbacksales.co.uk). The cable you want is one wired with a 5-pin DIN to a pair of output plugs, or one wired to a pair of output sockets to which you can connect your current cables feeding the ADC.

You'll find these as 'tape recorder' cables, and Flashback makes these using a variety of cable grades: a 1m one with two RCA plugs starts from around £20 including UK postage. That will enable you to keep your system's volume at a normal listening level, while taking a line feed out to your ADC.

With that done, you can then investigate a better ADC. I've had good results using Korg's DS-DAC-10R, which is an excellent – and easy to use – combination ADC/DAC able to record all the way up to 192kHz/24-bit as well as DSD64/128, and also offers a choice of six RIAA curves to suit a wide range of records. Yes, it will set you back around £470, but it's worth every penny.



ABOVE: Naim's Supernait 3 integrated amp has an MM phono input with three stages

EXTREME?

IT IS NOW!

audioquest

Great savings

when you subscribe to *Hi-Fi News* today

**SAVE 75%
ON DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTIONS***
Offer ends
7th May 2020

MAY 2020 WWW.HIFINEWS.CO.UK

hi-finews

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI
& Record Review

Exclusive
MICHI MAGIC

**Rotel's star '90s
amps rebooted
& supercharged**

BAT REX 3 DAC
Artisan blend of
custom digital tech
and luxurious tubes

**18
PAGES
of Music
Reviews &
Features**

Primare R35
Flagship phono stage
is an analogue triumph

Vertere DG-1
'Entry' deck gets into the groove

INVESTIGATION
Classical Cannons
We recommend the best recordings
for the classical music buff

SVS Prime Pinnacle
Floorstanders from the bass kings

VINYL
SIMON & GARFUNKEL
BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

OPINION 12 pages of letters & commentary • **VINYL RE-RELEASE** Gong's Camembert Electrique LP
FROM THE VAULT Wadia 16 CD Player • **VINTAGE REVIEW** Back to the '70s with JVC's JA-S11 amp
SHOW BLOG We report from the Bristol Hi-Fi Show • **READERS' CLASSIFIEDS** Hi-Fi bargains galore

UK £5.25 US \$13.00 AUS \$13.50

9 771472 256257



IN EVERY ISSUE Exclusive high-end equipment reviews, vinyl, CD and hi-res downloads rated, show reports, your letters, in-depth investigations, vintage tests and so much more...

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE



<http://hfn.secureorder.co.uk/HIFI/HFN0520P/>

**DIGITAL ONLY
SUBSCRIPTIONS
AVAILABLE
ONLINE...**

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 7th May 2020. *This digital discount is only available when you subscribe to the print + digital package. You can still get a great discount on the digital package, please visit the URL stated above for more information. Please see www.hifinews.co.uk/terms for full terms & conditions.

Save 34%

PRINT +
DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTION
£54.05



PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

13 Issues *delivered to your door*

Great savings on the shop price

Download each new issue to your device

A *75% discount* on your Digital subscription

Access your subscription on *multiple devices*

Access to the *Online Archive* dating back to January 2008

Save 34%

PRINT
SUBSCRIPTION
£45.75



PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

13 Issues *delivered to your door*

Great savings on the shop price

Never miss an issue

CALL OUR ORDER LINE Quote ref: HFN0520P

0344 243 9023

Lines open Mon - Fri - 8.00am - 8.00pm GMT & Sat - 9.30am - 3.30pm GMT

Calls are charged at the same rate as standard UK landlines and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances. There are no additional charges with this number. Overseas calls will cost more.

hi-finews SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS *UK ONLY*

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Hi-Fi News*

☐ *Print + Digital*: £54.05 annually (Save 34%)

☐ *Print Subscription*: £45.75 annually (Save 34%)

YOUR DETAILS *MUST BE COMPLETED*

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....

Address

.....

Postcode Country

Tel Mobile.....

Email D.O.B

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....

Address

.....

Postcode Country

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR BANK/BUILDING SOCIETY

Originator's reference 422562



Name of bank.....

Address of bank.....

.....

Postcode

Account holder.....

Signature..... Date

Sort code Account number

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyTimeMedia Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyTimeMedia Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (official use only)

Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

CARD PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Hi-Fi News*, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment

UK ONLY:

☐ *Print + Digital*: £56.05 (Save 31%)

☐ *Print*: £47.75 (Save 31%)

Inclusive of £2 card surcharge

EUROPE & ROW:

☐ *EU Print + Digital*: £77.29

☐ *EU Print*: £68.99

☐ *ROW Print + Digital*: £78.29

☐ *ROW Print*: £69.99

PAYMENT DETAILS

☐ Postal Order/Cheque ☐ Visa/MasterCard ☐ Maestro

Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code HFN0520P on the back

Cardholder's name.....

Card no: (Maestro)

Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....

Signature..... Date.....

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 7/05/2020. AV Tech Media collects your data so that we can fulfil your subscription. We may also, from time to time, send you details of AV Tech Media offers, events and competitions but you always have a choice and can opt out by emailing us at unsubscribe@hifinews.com. Please select here if you are happy to receive such offers by Email ☐ Post ☐ Phone ☐. We do not share or sell your data with/to third parties. Details you share with us will be managed as outlined in our Privacy Policy here <http://www.mytimemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy>.

POST THIS FORM TO: *HI-FI NEWS SUBSCRIPTIONS*, MY TIME MEDIA LTD, 3 QUEENSBIDGE, THE LAKES, NORTHAMPTON, NN4 7BF

Please visit www.hifinews.co.uk/terms for full terms & conditions

HFN0520P

JVC JA-S11 amplifier

Back in the '70s, a decent amp at a keen price was key for those taking their first steps on the hi-fi ladder, and this little powerhouse fitted the bill. How does it sound today?

Review: **Tim Jarman** Lab: **Paul Miller**

For budding audiophiles, that first decent hi-fi set-up represents a major step in the journey of life. So it should come as no surprise that the components frequently bought for this key event are some of the most fondly remembered in the world of vintage hi-fi. NAD 3020s, Dual CS505s, Aiwa AD-F250s, Philips CD160s... all helped turn those first few pay packets and student grant cheques into new musical experiences. And we can add to this list of first-timer classics the JVC JA-S11 amplifier, which cost less than £100 in the late 1970s yet still looked, felt and sounded a lot more expensive.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

Ignoring the company's self consciously 'pretty' JA-S10/JT-V10 amp and tuner duo, the JA-S11 was the simplest and most costly amplifier in the expansive JVC range. Despite this lowly position it still looked the part, with its brushed alloy fascia and a decent sprinkling of shiny spun knobs.

The use of standard connectors and signal levels meant that equipment from any manufacturer could be used to build up a system, but of course JVC could also supply everything you needed. Connections were provided for a turntable



RIGHT: The JA-S11 offered a good standard of finish for the price while those spun aluminium knobs and levers say '1970s Japan' like almost nothing else

with an MM cartridge, a tuner, two tape recorders – both with full monitoring and cross-dubbing facilities – and two pairs of loudspeakers. There was also an 'aux' input which, while of limited interest at the time, would later prove ideal for a CD player.

A complete JVC outfit could have consisted of the JA-S11 amp along with the matching JT-V11 tuner and KD-21D

cassette deck. The JL-A20 belt-drive turntable would have topped off a fine system, but for just a little more money the QL-A2 offered direct-drive and quartz lock, which was a real step up in sophistication.

The JA-S11's circuitry was an object lesson in striking the correct balance between economy and performance. In many ways it mirrored the principles used in amplifiers found much further up the pecking order, although there was little about it that could be called extravagant.

TROUBLE-FREE LIFE

At the heart of the amplifier were two hybrid chip modules containing the output transistors and their supporting components, all precisely assembled and trimmed for a long and trouble-free life. As these modules were fed from split supplies it was possible to couple the loudspeakers directly to their outputs with no capacitors or transformers in the way, ensuring minimum losses and the greatest possible accuracy in this critical part of the signal path. For line-level sources the music's

LEFT: Facilities were comprehensive with outputs for two pairs of speakers – switchable via the lever on the far left of the fascia – tone and loudness controls, and a headphone socket





route through the amplifier was short and direct. There was no active preamp stage, the tone controls working in the negative feedback loop of the output stage.

This stripped-down approach contrasted with some of the basic amplifier designs of the 1970s, where the established practice was to pass all the input signals through the phono stage, reducing the gain and removing the RIAA EQ as necessary. Although this method allowed for some component savings, it tended to make the resulting amplifier noisy and susceptible to overload. By rejecting this topology, the designers of the JA-S11 created an amplifier that gave the best possible performance from sources like FM stereo radio and cassette and remained useful into the CD era too.

'At the heart of the amp are two hybrid chip modules'

This is not to say that the phono stage was neglected. A specialised IC from Hitachi was employed, fed from split supplies to ensure maximum headroom.

The RIAA curve was implemented using filters where paralleled components were used to get the characteristics exactly right, with care taken to ensure an accurate 47kohm loading too. At the other end of the amp the speaker outputs were protected by fast-acting fuses and an electronic protection relay. Details like this, along with the high quality of the components used, gave the JA-S11 a reputation for reliability that has proved to be deserved. The original JA-S11 was introduced in the early part of 1977 and instantly became a big sales success. Later in the

ABOVE: The amp's styling may be bland, but its ergonomics are sound and the front-mounted tape socket is useful for hooking up modern portables or patching in alternative sources

year it was replaced by the JA-S11G, which was essentially the same amplifier but fitted with a different type of hybrid chip module. This required some minor layout changes, but the unit's overall performance remained the same. At the same time some of the resistors in the circuit were specified as 'safety' types, to bring the amp in line with the developing standards for electrical equipment in some countries.

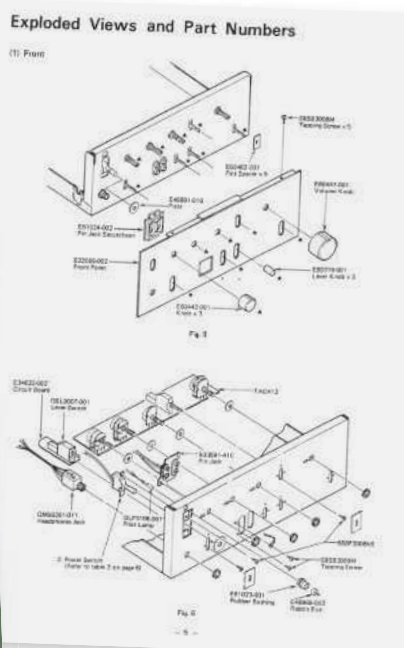
ODD COUPLE

In terms of ergonomics, all the controls will be familiar to users of modern amplifiers. And while the number of available sources has multiplied since the JA-S11 appeared, there still seems to be a place to plug everything in. Yes, the fascia-mounted

'Tape-2' sockets look odd today, even though they were a feature of the bulk of JVC's amplifiers of the period. But they are handy now, as they make it easy to plug in a portable player without having to fumble around at the back of the amp, or quickly try a borrowed or newly acquired piece of equipment in the system without having to disturb the rest of the set-up (something keen vintage hi-fi collectors will appreciate!).

Only the screw-terminal loudspeaker connectors really date the JA-S11. They are a bit too small to accept bulky modern loudspeaker cables, or even old favourites such as QED 79-strand, so buying or making up a set of 4mm adapters is probably a good idea. ☺

LEFT: A period flyer highlights the amp's power and features while the service manual shows exploded view of parts and switches



Have you tried... **hi-fi**news Digital?

**ONLY
£2.54
Per Issue**

Did you know that you can now download issues of *Hi-Fi News* direct to your mobile device or smart phone?*

For just £2.54 per issue you can download digital issues of *Hi-Fi News*, allowing you to:

- Read your magazine without an internet connection
- Keep your issues forever without needing lots of storage space
- Receive your magazine before it hits the shops – regardless of your location
- **PLUS** you can access our Online Archive of back issues, dating back to January 2008!**



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Visit: www.hfn.secureorder.co.uk/HIFID/DG20

Call: 0844 243 9023
and quote ref. DG20

IN EVERY ISSUE

Exclusive high-end equipment reviews, vinyl, CD and hi-res downloads rated, show reports, your letters, in-depth investigations, vintage tests and so much more...

*Digital downloads are currently available on iPad, iPhone, Android & Kindle Devices. You can also download to an Offline Reader on PC Computers.

**Please note terms & conditions apply – visit www.hifinews.co.uk/terms for full terms & conditions. MyTimeMedia Ltd reserves the right to withdraw this offer at any time without prior notice. Calls are charged at the same rate as standard UK landlines and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances. There are no additional charges with this number. Overseas calls will cost more. We do not share or sell your data with/to third parties. Details you share with us will be managed as outlined in our Privacy Policy here <http://www.mytimemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy>



The previously described circuit layout means that modern sources such as CD players can't overload the inputs of the JA-S11, but a machine with a full 2V output does give the volume control an abrupt action at its lower settings. Adding an attenuator will solve this problem.

Meanwhile, the 'tape 1' input is duplicated with a 5-pin DIN connector, correctly adjusted for impedance and sensitivity, of course. The standard RCAs are the preferred choice when the recorder matches them, but the DIN allows the use of certain continental machines that cannot accommodate line-level signals.

I didn't like the fake 'click stops' on the volume control which attempt to make it feel like a stepped attenuator (which it isn't), but JVC is not alone in attempting this minor act of deceit. Similarly, the loudness function should not be necessary if your loudspeakers are up to scratch, but at least it can be turned off. Finally, the tone controls cannot be bypassed but their effect seems unobtrusive enough.

TIM LISTENS

I've found that small amplifiers of this era (which the JA-S11 is – just about) often have what I describe as a 'small amplifier sound', meaning that while their presentation is certainly tidy enough it can lack dynamics, even at low listening levels. The JVC JA-S11 is pleasing free of this character. It is only rated at 30W [see PM's Lab Report, p119] but it sounds more like a unit in the 40W to 55W class. Many JVC amplifiers of this generation are characterised by a vivid, larger-than-life presentation – an example

'It threw cymbal crashes into the far corners of the soundstage'

being the A-X4 [HFN Oct '17] – and the JA-S11 sounds like another from that mould. Rather like a photograph that has been processed in a way that increases contrast, it generates clarity and drama to

a degree that is greater than that present in the original recording.

With reasonably efficient loudspeakers (88dB/W/1m or better) it plays loudly when called upon to do so, the generous power supply

helping to wring every last drop of output from those little hybrid chips. As a naturally bright-sounding amplifier, the distortion that does occur at the limit is obvious to the ear and unpleasant, forming a clear

ABOVE: Lid-off shot reveals the phono stage IC [top left] and a large mains transformer [bottom right]. The two hybrid chip output devices can be seen on the alloy heatsink [centre]

boundary to what this unit can do. Below this, though, there is still plenty of scope for quality listening at realistic levels.

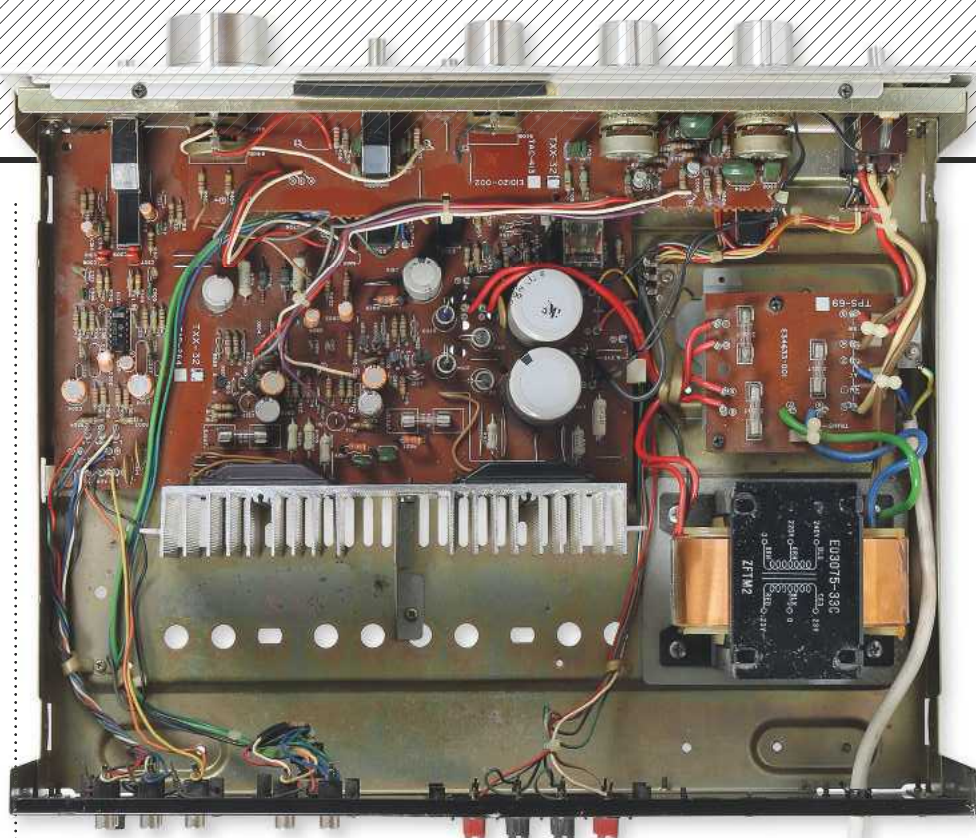
A big-sounding amplifier should be a natural partner for a big production and so it proved with the track 'Sowing The Seeds Of Love' by Tears For Fears [Fontana 838 730-2]. As the mix becomes ever more complex following its Beatlesque opening the JVC JA-S11 keeps up, throwing exuberant cymbal crashes into the far corners of the soundstage as if for fun.

LIVE AND KICKING

True, the bass lacked a little precision – understandable given the JA-S11's status – but it was nothing if not extended. Also to the amp's credit was the fact that the 'one-note boom' that so often afflicts many small designs was not present, with only a veiled midrange – most obvious around vocals – betraying the amp's budget origins. It's not sucked out, but it's just not as distinct as the sharply focused treble.

Gentler material, such as Katie Melua's 'If The Lights Go Out' from her 2007 album *Pictures* [Dramatico DRAMCD0035] did not show the JA-S11 up either. For some listeners, a richer more luxurious-sounding amplifier may provide a more satisfying

LEFT: Sanken S-40W devices were used in the JA-S11 while the later JA-S11G used STK0040s. The two types are not interchangeable as the pin functions are allocated in a different order



HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

Choice

Helping you
make the
most of your
home cinema
OUT NOW!



IN EVERY ISSUE

Kit reviews, movies & TV, accessories, systems, insight,
opinion, competitions & more

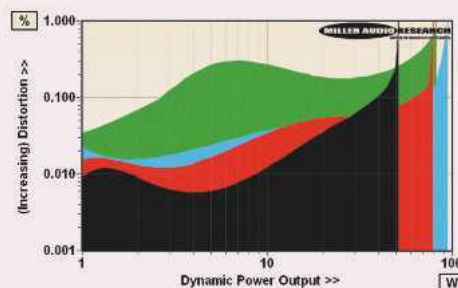


LAB REPORT

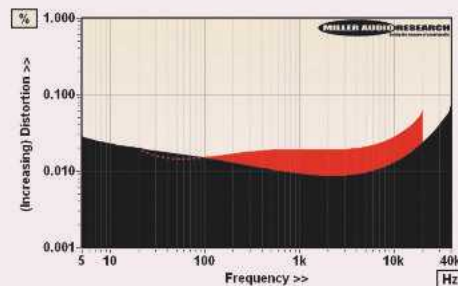
JVC JA-S11 (Vintage)

It is refreshing to look back 43 years and discover an amplifier that's not only decently production-engineered but also conservatively specified. Rated at 30W/8ohm, in practice it delivered 2x40W/8ohm and 2x63W/4ohm with sufficient headroom to accommodate 51W, 80W, 95W and 82W into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively, under dynamic conditions [see Graph 1, below]. Overall gain is high by modern standards at +42dB (just 125mV for the rated 30W/8ohm output) but then the JA-S11 is from the pre-CD era when line-level sources – tuners and tape decks – were mandated at 500mV. As a result you might want to try an attenuator between any modern digital source and the JA-S11's 'Aux' input to get anything other than a very limited range from its volume control. JVC also quoted a (rather quaint) 'damping factor: more than 30 at 8ohm' and, indeed, with its very consistent 0.190-0.195ohm output impedance (20Hz-20kHz) this represents a DF of 42.

The frequency response has a specified -1dB point of 40kHz (extended, for the day) which was met at 38kHz on test, reaching out to -5.8kHz/100kHz and down to -1.6dB/20Hz with all the tone controls in their null position. Distortion is lowest at 3-5W output (0.007%), increasing slightly to 0.015%/1W and 0.022%/20W through the midrange, and increasing also at high frequencies >10kHz [see Graph 2, below]. All these figures are within tolerance and within the range of many contemporary amplifiers. Noise, however, is slightly high – a white noise rather than hum – resulting in a reduced 74dB A-wtd S/N ratio, but perhaps this is a function of the chip power module, or an aged component, all other healthy parameters notwithstanding. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output vs. distortion up to 1% THD into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (cyan) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max current is 9.1A



ABOVE: Distortion vs. extended frequency from 5Hz-40kHz (1W/8ohm, black; 10W/8ohm, red)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	40W / 63W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	51W / 80W / 95W / 82W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	0.190-0.195ohm / 0.363ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz, 0dBW)	-1.55dB to -0.35dB/-5.8dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/30W)	22mV / 126mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/30W)	74.0dB / 88.8dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.009-0.024%
Power consumption (Idle/rated output)	16W / 117W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	390x152x330mm / 7kg



ABOVE: Nickel-plated RCAs serve MM phono, tuner and aux inputs, with another set of RCAs, duplicated by a 5-pin DIN, to service a tape loop. Two sets of speaker cable screw terminals are switched, individually or together, via a lever on the fascia [p114]

rendition of music like this, but the slightly stark sound of the JVC JA-S11 lent the song an oddly 'live' quality, which I really appreciated. Part of this effect came from the vocals, which were lifted clear from the rest of the recording, even if they did sound a little hard-edged.

Of course, I couldn't resist trying the phono stage too, which proved to be a good match for modern cartridges, such as those to be found in the Ortofon 2M range. Yes, the image projected was perhaps more limited in width and depth when compared to the big soundstage generated using a CD player via the auxiliary input, but the sound remained explicit and well lit.

As the basis for a small system with vinyl as the primary source the JA-S11 is still a convincing proposition – just as it was when new. How long will it last? Who knows? I've never met anyone who has managed to wear one out!

BUYING SECONDHAND

This durability, allied to the amp's popularity when new and a long production run means that finding



ABOVE: The later JA-S11G model (top) and 'self-consciously pretty' JA-S10 amp

a JA-S11 today is not difficult. But finding a tidy one that isn't scruffy and battered is a little harder. Units like this one went through periods of being unfashionable hacks in bedsit systems or simply being neglected and forgotten in damp sheds and garages, all of which takes its toll on the finish. The writing on the fascia is screen-printed and can wear away or become rubbed off if vigorous cleaning is attempted. Likewise, the painted finish of the bonnet is thin and rust spots will break through if the unit isn't kept dry.

The good news is that internally there is little to worry about, other than the usual dirty switch contacts – not forgetting those of the protection relay. Along with the relay, the loudspeaker fuses can fail through old age, but repeated blowing suggests a defective hybrid chip in the relevant channel.

These devices can be difficult to buy new and so the best source of replacements is a tatty 'donor' unit. However, note that the hybrid chips in the 'G' and 'non-G' versions of the amp are not interchangeable. Finally, there are no internal pre-set adjustments in the JA-S11, but the safety resistors in the 'G' version can change value and so are well worth checking during an overhaul. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

As was the case when it was launched, this remains the perfect beginner's amplifier. Fully featured, tough and decent sounding, it looks, handles and plays like something far more expensive. For bringing back old memories or creating some new ones, this is as easy and hassle-free as vintage hi-fi gets, provided you buy carefully. The other JVC system components mentioned are well worth tracking down too.

Sound Quality: 75%



Simply the best

The world's greatest single-box CD player? The Wadia 16 may be even better, since it's also a digital preamplifier. **Martin Colloms** listens...

*Hi-Fi
News
Sept 1994*

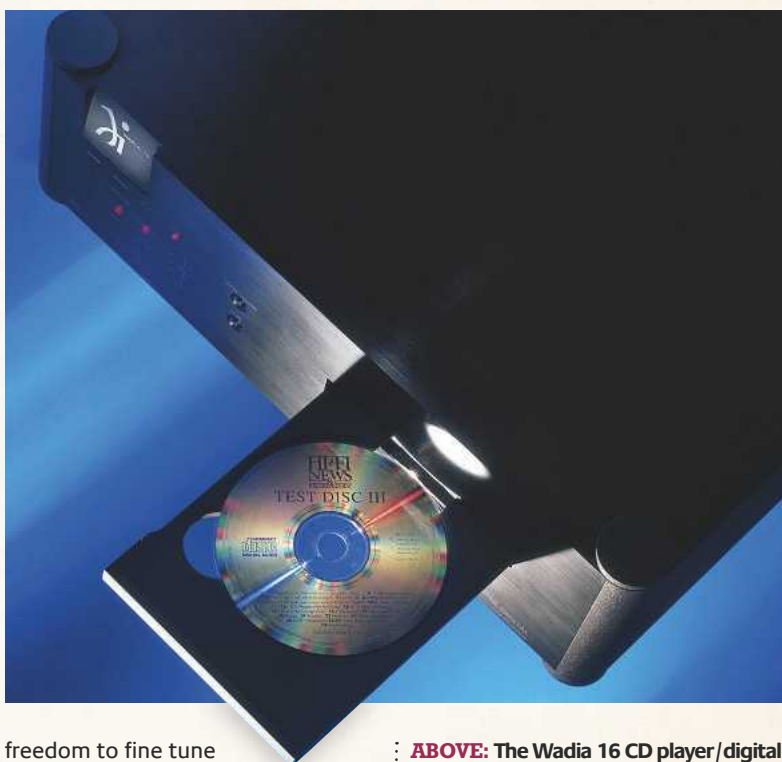
Each month
HFN will bring
you an article
from our vast
archive of
features and
reviews from
yesteryear

The US home market has such strength in depth that it can easily support a burgeoning digital audio sector. Any competently run company is capable of sustained expansion founded on a solid infrastructure in which both advanced research, and the development of high technology products, play a crucial role.

Wadia is one such company. Its products are distinguished by their digital filter software or programme code, which is executed by DSP (digital signal processor or computer). This is in contrast to the off-the-shelf, one-chip digital filters used by the bulk of the industry.

CORE BUSINESS

That is not to say that excellent results cannot be achieved with a standard filter. But Wadia's ability to write its own software gives it the



freedom to fine tune the balance between filter rates, the placement and degree of spurious signals beyond the audible range and the transient response at the edge of audibility. Digital audio requires a filter to block out signals above 20kHz, and just how that block is achieved affects many aspects of the reproduced sound in the audible range below.

Wadia's current filter software is called Digimaster and is held on EPROM IC chips that can be exchanged when superior filter designs emerge. This is like exchanging the engine's electronic management chip in a car to alter or improve its performance. In digital audio, the DSP core is the 'engine'.

A recent advance in DSP has been the development of a high-quality, remote volume control operating in the digital domain, the advantage of which is that digital source components can be connected directly to a power amplifier, bypassing the preamp, thereby eliminating a potential source of fidelity loss. The Accuphase DP-70V

ABOVE: The Wadia 16 CD player/digital preamp could be used as a transport too

was a fairly primitive example of the technology in use. More recently, PS Audio's Reference Link digital decoder/preamp [*HFN* Mar '94] and the Wadia 7/9 CD transport/DAC [*HFN* Nov '93] show just how far things have progressed.

ON THE BUTTON

Now, with the Wadia 16, we have a one-box CD player/digital preamp. This large bluff unit is presented in the characteristic Wadia brushed satin black anodised alloy finish and looks deceptively simple. The fascia carries just two controls: drawer 'open/close' and 'play'. Only by surveying the array of buttons on the infrared-linked remote control handset can the extent of this machine's capabilities be gauged.

Apart from allowing selection of 'open-close', 'programmed play', 'normal' and 'A/B phase repeat', the remote control has time display, indexing, and 'auto space' options, the latter an aid to cassette dubbing



and a ten-key numeric pad for track selection and programming. None of these controls is out of the ordinary for a full function CD player.

But then we come to the digital system controls. These comprise 'input', which controls selection of the chosen digital source; 'mute', which instantly reduces the level to inaudibility; 'absolute phase invert' and 'display on/off', two options for golden-eared audiophiles; and finally the digital volume control. There is no balance control on the remote handset.

Although the Wadia 16 is a fully-fledged CD player, it can be used purely as a high performance CD transport. It is equipped with four outputs: glass and plastic optical; and coax and AES/EBU balanced electrical. On the digital receiver side, the same four input options supplement the internal CD transport itself.

ANALOGUE IN

An outboard ADC for existing analogue signals may be connected, for example via the AT&T glass optical input. A suitable ADC would be the new Wadia 17, encoding at a specified 20-bit resolution and accepting up to four analogue inputs. A DCC or satellite signal can be linked via the Toslink terminal and a DAT machine can be hooked in via the 16's AES balanced terminal.

The digital input switching facility means that the 16 is more than a CD player. It's also a digital 'preamp'. In this context the volume control is crucial, and is likely to be the most used facility. Covering a 50dB range in 100 0.5dB steps, the control effectively adjusts output level down from a 4V maximum in both balanced and unbalanced modes. A crude visual display of volume setting is given by a vertical row of LEDs. (On Wadia's next version I would like to see a large numeric read-out, perhaps temporarily accessing the main transport display during volume setting.)

The 16 is heavy and inert, thanks to its semi-solid alloy case. To get the best sound, metal cone feet are supplied and for ultra hard surfaces, softer facings are provided. Attention to system matching and

installation detail pays handsome dividends with any equipment of this calibre. The power switch is on the rear panel, which encourages users to leave the unit powered up for optimum performance, as Wadia intended, except where long periods of inactivity are envisaged.

TECHNOLOGY

The Wadia 16 contains a customised TEAC VRDS-C Mk3 transport at the heart of the machine which is the

latest in a series that Wadia has used successfully from this source. On performance grounds it is classed between the P25 and P500 TEAC players and

a low resonance bridge marks the transport apart from other designs. Recent revisions to the clamp include a cast resin structure replacing the older, formed sheet

digital audio and analogue related circuitry. As might be expected in this class of equipment, extensive local regulation is used throughout.

A powerful series of digital buffers provides clean S/PDIF data at the four output terminals (both optical and electrical). As regards the signal processing, the core DSP is the STAR SPROC, which is a new generation, high speed 24-bit computing engine. The proprietary 'Digimaster' filter software is held in two upgradeable EPROMs.

An oversampling rate of 2x is present in the hardware section plus the equivalent of 16x oversampling in the software, giving an overall output rate of 32x. Such a high rate enables the use of simplified analogue output filters and can thus contribute to signal transparency.

COMPUTER BUFFS

When it comes to the DACs, four Burr-Brown PCM1702 chips are used in current output mode,

'Wadia writes its own filter code, executed by computer'



metal type. The 16's transport quality is approaching that of the top-of-the-line TEAC P2S fitted to the reference Wadia 7.

Meanwhile, the ultra rigid, casework and conical feet couplers of the 16 provide a clean, high inertia platform for the transport. The laser pick-up is a three beam design mounted on a noiseless linear motor sled drive and two, well sized toroidal transformers are fitted, one for the transport and less critical digital section, the other for the

ABOVE: The player comes dressed in Wadia's signature brushed satin black anodised alloy finish and looks deceptively simple, the fascia sporting just two controls: drawer 'open/close' and 'play'

two per channel in a differential arrangement providing close on 21-bit replay resolution. Current-to-voltage conversion is carried out by the Burr-Brown OPA606 IC, while the quarter ampere power buffers Wadia has chosen to use are zero feedback BUF 634 monolithics.

The balanced outputs are the 'direct' mode with a simple LC filter present at the output. For the unbalanced outputs the main signals are summed in a further OPA606 for full data resolution, feedback ➤

Hi-Fi Choice

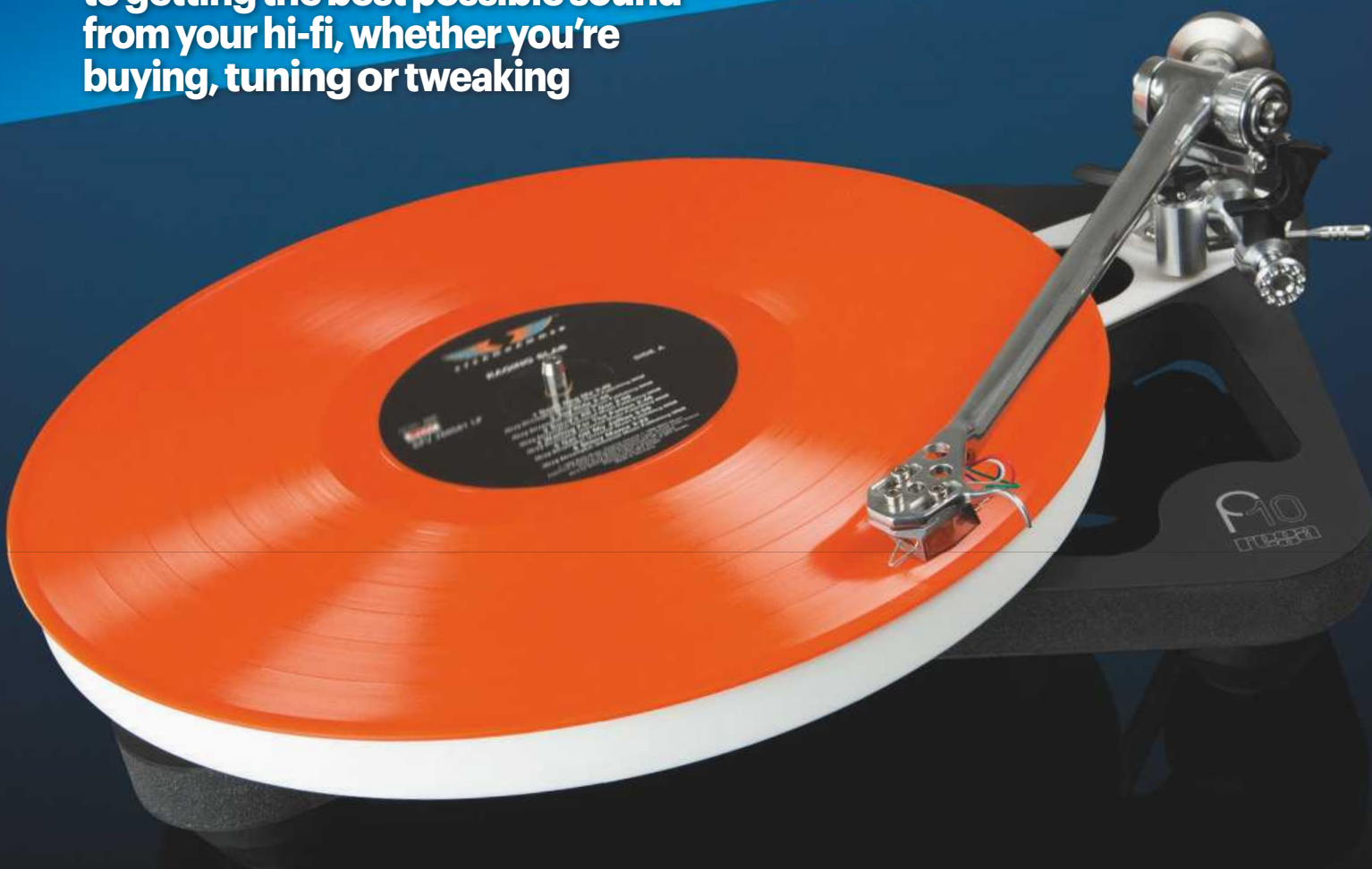
PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

Fuel your
passion for
sound and make
your music sing
OUT NOW!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE...

to getting the best possible sound
from your hi-fi, whether you're
buying, tuning or tweaking



Follow us:



twitter.com/HiFiChoiceMag
facebook.com/hifichoice.co.uk
hifichoice magazine



FROM THE VAULT

connected to another power buffer. These 'follower' type buffers have an extraordinary 2000V/ μ sec slew rate, for what it's worth. For computer buffs the internal processing rate is equivalent to a very high 80mips; the main digital audio highway, which includes S/PDIF, is 24-bit rated, while the math is computed to 56-bit resolution – a processing headroom of 336dB to be specific.



OUT OF THE PARK

The Wadia 16 was plugged directly into power amplifiers via balanced van den Hul 'The Second' cables. A Krell KSA200-S and Meridian 605 were both used to drive Wilson WATT 3/Puppy 2 loudspeakers with auxiliary speakers including the Quad ESL63 and the Monitor Audio Studio 50s. The 16 was also used via an ARC LS7 preamp in balanced mode, and this was a combination I found to be very effective.

The integrated CD sources available for comparison included Accuphase's DP-70V, Sonic Frontiers' SFD2 and the Orelle DA180. I also made reference to the Levinson 30/31, Wadia 7/9 and Krell MD10-64x high-end, two-box CD players.

I first heard the Wadia 16 briefly before its official UK trade launch and initial results were favourable. This review concentrates on a unit drawn from the first serial production run.

A heatsink fitted to the production processor protected it from overheating, the cause of audible clipping in the early sample that I had used at the outset of the review. The production 16 sounded as good as the first time I'd heard the early sample.

I have, however, one word of caution. In unbalanced mode, the 16 generated a mighty bang if switched off, or if the power cord was pulled. There is no hard muting on the output for switch-off – a surprising omission at this price level. In balanced output mode, the turn-off transient was itself balanced and the effect less severe.

While on this subject, listening tests established that the balanced and unbalanced outputs sounded different, and significantly so. The unbalanced signal had a touch of hardness and digital 'brightness'

'Fans of the Wadia brand will not be disappointed'

when judged in this elevated territory while the balanced output had an excellent tonal quality, and a very good dynamic quality, which I've found to be something of a Wadia trademark

Fans of the brand will not be disappointed by the Wadia 16's transparency, which is truly state-of-the-art. I swear it compares directly with the reference standard set by the company's 7/9 combination! When you first hear such soundstage depth and crystalline clarity it makes you think again about the

entire performance boundaries of the CD medium. That superb clarity and resolution was a continuing reward throughout all the time I was working with the Wadia 16.

SLAM DUNK

Soundstage width was also first-rate, with excellent focus and very, very good perspectives. The stereo image was highly stable, and undisturbed by inharmonic noises, audible distortion or spectral imbalances.

The sound was also very pure and this quality together with an 'open' neutrality, was evident throughout the frequency range. Resolution was also very good, so much so that some references appeared,



ABOVE: Only by surveying the array of buttons on the remote can the extent of this machine's capabilities be appreciated. These include the digital volume control, with volume level indicated by a vertical row of LEDs located on the far left of the player's fascia

by comparison, to sound 'foggy' in the bass and 'muzzy' in the treble. The Wadia 16 enabled sparkling, articulate and highly resolved treble, revealing unsuspected textures and detail at high frequencies.

Firm and well extended, the bass showed very good slam and speed. Yes, in absolute terms there was some restraint to both rhythm and timing aspects, but the Wadia 16 nonetheless compared very well with the audiophile references in this area. Fine dynamics, clarity and grip enhanced the sense of listener involvement and the 16 drew ahead of the two-box references here.

UNCANNY ACCURACY

In addition, the 16 had excellent low-level resolution where sustained notes, open guitar strings and the like showed an uncanny accuracy. The sense of atmosphere engendered by precise detailing of note decay, the preservation of harmonic detail, and good timing was nothing short of remarkable. Time and again it was during the quiet passages that it showed its true strength: a level of refinement and clarity which will bring more out of your favourite recordings.

The long-term HFN comparison one-box player is the Accuphase DP-70V. It was abundantly clear that after several years, this has at last been displaced, and not by a ➤

MARKETPLACE

To help ensure accuracy, your classified advertisements must be submitted by email or post...
Please email your entries to: letters@hifinews.com

**THE PLACE TO
BUY & SELL AUDIO
EQUIPMENT & ACCESSORIES
NOW FREE**

2. AMPLIFIERS

NORD Acoustics NC500 mono amps, silver fascia, all the upgrades including brand new power supplies, WBT copper binding posts, OCC internal speaker cabling, latest revision D buffer boards with a choice of Sparkos Labs and Sonic Imagery op-amps to be included. Good condition, have been in storage for past six months. Fine Class D amplifiers. Grab a bargain at £700 the pair. Tel: 07494 456770

MUSICAL Fidelity X-A1, X-CANS, X-LP. In good working order with manuals and power leads plus two pairs of LAT IC-50 interconnects and one pair of vDH The Name interconnects. Collection from Sheffield preferred, £35. Email: bellg8682@gmail.com. Tel: 07984 200904.

GATO Audio DIA-400S NPM integrated amplifier with DAC, 400W into 8ohm. Your sources plus streaming. Demo Newcastle/Tyne area. £5500 last year. Good reason for sale. Tel: 01661 823606. Email: grant.darras@gmail.com

BRYSTON BHA-1 headphone amplifier, black. Balanced. RRP £2000. £1000. Tel: 07939 596474

MODWRIGHT Instruments
SWL 9.0 Signature Edition amp.
Mint condition, as new, includes
two remotes, manual and original
packaging, £1100. Can demonstrate,
Email: stuartdarshan67@gmail.com.
Tel: 07870 912 963

4. CD/DVD PLAYERS

MCINTOSH MCD500 SACD CD player/DAC. One owner. Bought from UK dealer. Mint. RRP £7495. £2500. Tel: 07939 596474

PIONEER UDP-LX500 Blu-ray universal player, mint condition, light use, boxed with manual, £550, buyer to collect or pay postage. Only a few months old, reason for sale, downsizing. Tel: 07572 272939. Email: dickie1705@gmx.com

7. SPEAKERS

HECO Superior 1040. Near mint condition, classic three-way floorstander, 1250mm tall, American Oak finish, 4ohm nominal impedance. A lusty speaker with

integrated subwoofer system for a good size room and a gutsy amp. Can demonstrate, collection from Groby, East Midlands, will deliver 50 mile radius. No original packaging. £750. Email: derek.p.turner@btinternet.com. Tel: 07870 787789

WILSON Audio Sasha II, desert silver, excellent condition and fewer than 170 hours' use from new. All boxes, accessories and manuals. Can demonstrate. £17,495 ovno. Email: neilpage37@yahoo.com. Tel: 07818 848715

ATC SCM 40 speakers for sale, new type, two-and-a-half years old, perfect condition, three-and-a-half years' warranty remaining. Big, smooth and beautiful. £2000 ovno. Email: treesurglee@aol.com. Tel: 01981 242067

MARTIN Logan Expression 13A speakers in stunning piano gloss black from its top Masterpiece Series of electrostatic speakers. Twin 10in bass drivers powered by twin 300W amplifiers and a 13in-wide ELS panel. Fantastic reviews, 100% perfect condition, virtually new and unused. Includes optional Anthem Room Correction (PBK) kit, all accessories and original cartons. Audition welcome. Collect from Portsmouth. List Price over £17,000. £11,750. Email: hearehere@onetel.com. Tel: 07768 738372

FOSTEX P1000-BH folded-horn speakers with Fostex FE103En full-range drive units, £350 ovno. Boxed and mint, plus postage at cost.
Tel: 07799 475 301

SPENDOR Classic 100
speakers. New, walnut. Demo in
Northumberland by arrangement.
Email: grant.darras@gmail.com.
Tel: 01661 823606

PROAC Response 1 standmount speakers. Black ash, superb, £725. BK Gemini subwoofer, cherry, new cable, £80. Atacama black stands, £30. Tel: 01772 780976

8. TUNERS

PIONEER Elite F-91 Reference
FM tuner £130 ovno. Magnum
Dynalab ST-2 omni-directional
vertical antenna complete with
original packaging, £150 ovno.
Both items plus postage at cost.
Tel: 07799 475 301

9. TURNTABLES

REGA RP8 turntable, immaculate, plus Dynavector cartridge. Owned from new but very little use, hence sale. Detailed pictures on request. All original packaging. £1000. Email: stemar2@me.com

AUDIONOTE TT2 turntable with Goldring G1042 cartridge plus Sedley Sonneteer phono amp. £1000. Buyer collects. Helensburgh. Can demo. Tel: 01436 672038. Email: jamesscanlan@talktalk.net

TECHNICS SL1210 Mk7
complete with Ortofon 2M Ruby
cartridge. Boxed, as new, £650.
Tel: 0208 8825703

11. SYSTEMS

ROTEL RCD-965 BX CD player, remote, black. Pioneer A400 integrated amp, black. Acoustic Energy Aegis 2 speakers, beech. All owned from new, original boxes and instructions. Unmarked, little used. Am able to demonstrate. £250. Email: norbertstefan@yahoo.co.uk. Tel: 0770 4145987

12. MISCELLANEOUS

HANA SL3170 low-output moving-coil cartridge with nude natural diamond Shibata stylus. Excellent reviews, excellent condition. Maximum 150-200 hours' use on a majority of ultrasonically cleaned vinyl. Good close-up pics of tip available on request. £340 ono. Email: g_61_allen@hotmail.co.uk. Tel: 07831 267940

PHILIPS 4307 4-track tape recorder with microphone and instructions. Working, vgc. £70.
Email: norbertstefan@yahoo.co.uk.
Tel: 0770 4145987

ABYSS AB-1266 Phi headphones deluxe package. Includes additional cables, box, leather case. Mint. RRP £5850. £2500. Tel: 07939 596474

ELROG ER300B valves. Matched pair, test hours only, boxed, £1050 ovno, plus postage at cost.
Tel: 07799 475 301

REEL-TO-REEL 20 Maxell and TDK tapes on NAB reels. Mostly unused and still wrapped. Offers? Fairly heavy so collection in person (Midlands) would be easiest. Email: patloe@tiscali.co.uk

NAKAMICHI CR-7E cassette player. Boxed, in immaculate condition. Serviced by Nakamichi UK. Owned from new. Has been unused for ten years. £1250 ono. Email: chrisdebono@hotmail.co.uk

PIONEER CT959 cassette deck.
Great sounding three-head deck
with instructions and in excellent
condition. Nakamichi sound quality
without the price tag. £250
collected from Diss, Norfolk.
Tel: 07384 460278

13. WANTED

TANDBERG TCD310 Mk2
cassette deck. Either working or
non-working. Tel: 01758 613790

SONUS FABER Amati
Anniversario Homage, Guarneri
Memento, Amati Futura, Guarneri
Evolution or Serafino Tradition in
red. Must be in absolutely mint
condition. Serious buyer.
Tel: 01269 595271

FAULTY amps and CD players from brands such as Cyrus, Arcam, Linn, Naim, *etc.* Email: arfer67@gmail.com. Tel: 07506 793547 evenings or weekends.

PLACING AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE HI-FI NEWS CLASSIFIEDS SECTION

Fill in your advertisement copy here...

Please write the product category number that best suits your equipment in the first square. The product categories are: 1 – Accessories; 2 – Amps; 3 – Cables; 4 – CD/DVD players; 5 – DACs; 6 – Software (CDs, records etc.); 7 – Speakers; 8 – Tuners; 9 – Turntables; 11 – Complete Systems; 12 – Miscellaneous; 13 – Wanted

We will insert the telephone number you want to appear in your advertisement(s) as many times as is needed. You only need to fill it in once and it only counts as one word – even if you run multiple adverts.

[illegible]

Please post this completed coupon to Hi-Fi News magazine, MyTimeMedia Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, TN8 6HF, or email your advert to letters@hifinews.com
Hi-Fi News accepts no responsibility for description or condition of items advertised.

FROM THE VAULT

small margin. The above assessment refers predominantly to the 16 used in 'balanced' output mode as a CD player. But tests were also carried out on the 16's other functions – as a digital CD transport, as a digital control unit and decoder processor, and finally as the vital digital volume control. Taking the last function first, the 16 was found to be similar to the Wadia 9 decoder despite its somewhat smaller control range of 50dB in 100x0.5dB high-resolution steps, the range augmented by the user control of output gain setting in order to help level match the power amplifier and system.

Most importantly, there was little variation in sound quality or noise floor with level setting, confirming its excellent technical design. It was transparent throughout its range, unlike the digital volume control used in the Accuphase DP-70V.

As to its performance as a DAC, the Wadia 16 was effective when fed a wide range of digital signals, delivering the highest quality I have as yet heard from both DAT and satellite sources. Indeed, you could even connect a budget CD player and still enjoy much of the 16's replay quality.

Finally I found it set a very high standard as a digital transport, close to the top references including the Wadia 7. It was characterised by clean clarity, strong and open extended bass and transparent, high-definition treble. What's more, the sound was strong and dynamic. Clearly the transport provides a solid foundation for the 16 when used as a CD player.

CONCLUSION

The Wadia 16 justly takes the title 'Reference Single Box CDP'. Its performance is absolutely first-rate. As for an assessment of the 16 in value for money terms, its considerable versatility as a digital control centre must be taken into account. It has four inputs and output selections including two in the costly glass optical format. As a digital source it is clearly a high grade transport and likewise, its digital decoding function is extremely good. And then there is the high-resolution digital volume control which makes the 16 a digital



preamp, allowing direct, low loss connection to power amps.

The 16's sound quality places it at the leading edge, beyond which only small improvements can be expected, even for very large additional expenditure. If you heard the 16 you might wonder how more expensive flagships can be justified.

EASY DOES IT

On the debit side, the buttons on the remote control could have

been laid out much better and I feel that the remote infrared signal should be more powerful. The handset could also be more substantially built considering the price of the player.

While I'm on this subject, a better display of volume settings would be welcome, plus a couple more front panel controls, say for volume and input selection. After all, these are major facilities! And then there is that switch-off thump!

As for lab performance, this was exemplary. Accuracy was high, while resolution and dynamic range were excellent. Also, very powerful audio output buffers ensure excellent system compatibility. The only concern was a moderate level of low order 'analogue' distortion near full output, but this was a minor one.

The Wadia 16's very fine sound quality is both memorable and unmistakable. In the context of high-end two-box models it is something of a bargain. Indeed in the 16's sense of ease, purity and coherence it actually outperforms the bigger flagships. ☺

TOP: Original pages from the Sep 1994 issue of *HFN* in which Martin Colloms reviewed the Wadia 16, declaring it to be the best one-box CD player to date and more than a match for *HFN*'s existing long-term references

'This player is something of a high-end bargain'



Also in *HFN* this month in 1994

CHICAGO

Ken Kessler reports from the Consumer Electronics Show.

NAKAMICHI MB4-S

A multi-player with a pedigree, and the promise of audiophile sound? Peter J Comeau tests this seven-disc Music Bank player.

AUDIO RESEARCH LS7

Martin Colloms reviews the revered tube specialist's new all-triode line preamplifier.

MERIDIAN 551

An integrated amplifier that promises Meridian sound quality without breaking the bank.

HARBETH LS5/12A

Eric Braithwaite and Dave Berriman hear the Harbeth edition of the new BBC mini-monitor speaker.

SONIC FRONTIERS SFC-1

Ken Kessler on an intriguing hybrid tube/solid-state integrated amp from Canada.

TANNOY D500

Following the big D700, Tannoy adds a more compact dual concentric loudspeaker.

JM LAB MICRON CARAT

Ken Kessler hears small speakers with big sound from a major French drive-unit manufacturer.

hi-fi news Dealer Directory

ORANGES & LEMONS



oandlhi-fi.co.uk
02079242040 - London SW11
bowers & wilkins rega sonos linn naim atc pmc arcam tellurium q
chord co neat dynaudio rotel rel sennheiser chord electronics

IAN HARRISON HI FI

HEADPHONES:
**SENNHEISER, BEYER, ERGO, GRADO,
PSB, AUDIOQUEST, AUDEZE,
ULTRASONE**

HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS:
**CREEK, FIDELITY AUDIO,
GRAHAM SLEE, ICON AUDIO,
LEHMANN, PROJECT, SUGDEN**

PLEASE PHONE OR EMAIL ENQUIRIES TO:
ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk
TEL: 01283 702875

6

We are the only UK retailer where you can audition and compare the complete Vivid Audio speaker range.

WWW.SIXAUDIO.CO.UK

01403 713125



hifi lounge
here to listen...

Visit us in the Beautiful Bedfordshire Countryside for all your Hi-Fi needs

www.hifilounge.co.uk
01767 448121

www.highendheadphones.co.uk



Uk's only dedicated demo facility for high-end headphones

highend headphones
closer to the music...

new location, better facilities, same people.
hey, two out of three isn't bad!

arcam | chord | focal | innuos | kudos | linn | levinson
| melco | naim | pmc | rega | russell k | + + +

signals
hi-fi for grown-ups

01394 672464 / 672465
www.signals.uk.com

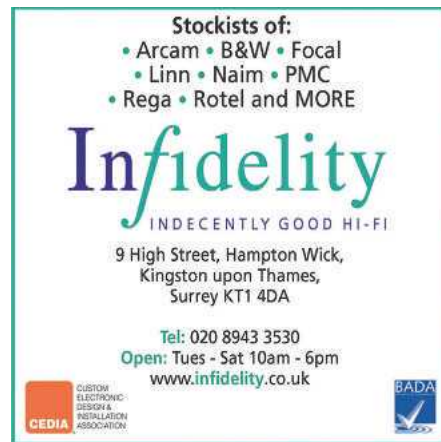
Stockists of:

- Arcam • B&W • Focal
- Linn • Naim • PMC
- Rega • Rotel and MORE

Infidelity
INDECENTLY GOOD HI-FI

9 High Street, Hampton Wick, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 4DA

Tel: 020 8943 3530
Open: Tues - Sat 10am - 6pm
www.infidelity.co.uk



**TO ADVERTISE
HERE
PLEASE CALL**

Sonia Smart
01689 869 919

The AUDIOPHILES CLINIC
SOUNDING GOOD

REEL TO REEL EXPERTS
ANY • BRAND • MODEL • AGE

www.audiophilesclinic.co.uk
& VINTAGE AUDIO SPECIALISTS
petronel@audiophilesclinic.co.uk

IAN HARRISON HI FI

HARBETH	PRICE	MICHELL	PRICE
MONITOR 40.2	£POA	ORBE	£POA
SUPER HL5PLUS	£POA	ORBE SE	£POA
MONITOR 30.1	£POA	GYRO	£POA
HLC7ES-3	£POA	GYRO SE	£POA
P3ESR	£POA	TECNODEC	£POA
40th ANNIVERSARY MODELS	£POA	TECNOARM ACCESSORIES	£POA

FREE UK DELIVERY!!

ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk
TEL: 01283 702875



For over 15 years, Audiography has created hundreds of adverts for Hi-Fi Manufacturers, Distributors and Dealers all over the world. Why not get in touch to see how Audiography can help you.

audiography

Advert/Brochure/Web Design, Product Photography, Social Media and more

www.audiography.co.uk | 07590 900 320

To advertise in this section
please call Sonia Smart on 01689 869 919

Is this your problem?



loud



too loud



way too loud

It's a common problem. The usable range of the volume control is all down at the bottom end and fine control at low listening levels is either difficult or impossible. The noise floor may be audible, too. There is a simple and effective solution – the **Rothwell In-Line Attenuators**. They can be used with pre/power or integrated amps to cure the problem of excess gain and bring sonic benefits with even the most expensive equipment.

01204 366133

www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk

Here's your answer



"this accessory is heartily recommended"
Gramophone

£39/pair

020 7226 5500

www.grahams.co.uk

GRAHAMS

"One of the five best hi-fi shops in the world"

ARENA Magazine

Grahams Hi-Fi

Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road
London N1 7BS

IAN HARRISON HIFI

SALE! UP TO 40% OFF!

TEL: 01283 702875 ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk

ACAPELLA
ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE
ACOUSTIC SOLID
AIR TIGHT
ALPHASON
AMAZON AUDIO
AMG
ATACAMA
BENZ MICRO
BEYER
BLACK RHODIUM
BLUESOUND
CABASSE
CARTRIDGE MAN
CREEK
CUSTOM DESIGN
DECCA LONDON
EAR YOSHINO
EMT
EPOS
ERGO
FIDELITY AUDIO
GOLDRING
GRADO
GRAHAM
GRAHAM SLEE
HANA
HARBETH

HELIUS
HIFI RACKS
ICON AUDIO
IKEDA
INSPIRE
IXOS
KOETSU
KUBALA-SOSNA
LEHMANN
LUXMAN
MICHELL
MOERCH
MOTH
MUNARI
MUSIC HALL
MUSIC TOOLS
MY SONIC LAB
NAGAOKA
NORSTONE
OPERA AUDIO
ORIGIN LIVE
ORTOFON
PARASOUND
PEERLESS
PRO-JECT
PSB
PURE SOUND
Q ACOUSTICS

QED
QUAD
QUADRASPIRE
REED
ROKSAN
ROTHWELL
SENNHEISER
SOUNDSMITH
SOUNDSTYLE
SRM TECH
SUGDEN
SUMIKO
SUPRA
T+A
TAYLOR ACOUSTICS
TECHDAS
THORENS
TOM EVANS
TRACK AUDIO
TRANSPARENT
TRICHORD
VALVET
VAN DEN HUL
WHEST AUDIO
WIREWORLD
ZENSATI
ZYX

SPECIAL OFFERS!!

VAN DEN HUL MC10 SPECIAL	£775
ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE	£950
ORTOFON 2M BLACK	£445
ORTOFON 2M BLUE	£160
ORTOFON QUINTET BLUE	£299
ORTOFON QUINTET RED	£210
MICHEL ORBE	£POA
MICHEL ORBE SE	£POA
KOETSU	£POA
WHEST AUDIO TWO.2	£POA
WHEST AUDIO THREE SIGNATURE	£POA
WHEST PS40RDT	£POA
EAR/YOSHINO	£POA
BLACK RHODIUM	£POA
TRANSPARENT	£POA
PRO-JECT	£POA
GOLDRING	£POA
BEYER	£POA
LEHMANN AUDIO	£POA
SENNHEISER	£POA

PLEASE PHONE TO CONFIRM PRICE & AVAILABILITY PRIOR TO ORDERING.
ALL GOODS ARE BRAND NEW & BOXED WITH FULL U.K. GUARANTEES.
NO EX-DEM OR EX-DISPLAY GOODS. NO GREY IMPORTS. GOODS ARE NOT
SUPPLIED ON APPROVAL. SORRY NO GENERAL CATALOGUES
PLEASE PHONE OR WRITE FOR SPECIFIC REVIEWS, BROCHURES OR PRICES.
* CALL FOR DETAILS ESTABLISHED 1986

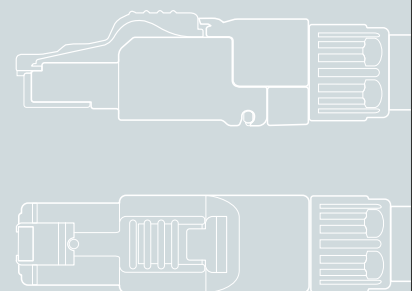
MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 6GQ
TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS

Mavros
Streaming



DESIGNED & HANDMADE IN SCOTLAND

Precision audio
engineering.



ATLAS
the performance connection
atlasclables.com

hi-fi news Dealer Directory

AUDIO DESTINATION

Where Music Matters

Moon | VPI | Esoteric | Entreq

Stillpoints | REL | Audioquest

Totem | Auralic | Hegel

and more...



01884 243584

info@audiodestination.co.uk

www.audiodestination.co.uk

All You Need In One Place

- ▶ Premium Loudspeaker Drivers
- ▶ Highest Quality Crossover Parts
- ▶ Crossover Parts and Assembly
- ▶ DIY Speaker Kits
- ▶ Cable and Terminals
- ▶ Expert Advice

Some of our Brands:

- ▶ Accuton
- ▶ Audax
- ▶ Aurasound
- ▶ Eton
- ▶ Fostex
- ▶ HiVi Research
- ▶ Peerless
- ▶ SB Acoustics
- ▶ Scan-Speak
- ▶ Seas
- ▶ Raal



madisound

Your Worldwide Provider of
High End Loudspeaker Parts

madisound.com



WANT TO ADVERTISE IN HI-FI NEWS?

Print*Digital*Online

Please contact:

Sonia Smart

01689 869919

sonia.smart@hifinews.com

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI
hi-fi news
& Record Review

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor • Paul Miller

Art Editor • Steve Powell

Features Editor • Patrick Fraser

Reviews Editor • Chris Breunig

Test & Measurement • Paul Miller

PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew Sydenham

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor • Paul Miller

Group Art Editor • John Rook

Subscriptions Manager • Kate Hall

Chief Executive • Owen Davies

ADVERTISEMENT TEAM

Advertising Sales • Sonia Smart

Tel • 01689 869 919

sonia.smart@hifinews.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

New, renewals and enquiries...

UK: Tel • 0344 243 9023

(Calls are charged at the same rate as standard UK landlines and are included as part of any inclusive or free minute allowances. There are no additional charges with this number)

USA/Canada: Tel • (001) 866 647 9191

Rest of World: Tel • +44(0)1604 828 748

Email: help@hfn.secureorder.co.uk

WE LIVE AT...

AVTech Media Ltd,

Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way,
Edenbridge, Kent TN8 6HF

UK and Overseas:

Tel • +44 (0) 1689 869 840

www.hifinews.co.uk



HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW, ISSN 2042-0374, is published monthly with an additional issue in October by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEDIA Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is 70GBP

(equivalent to approximately 100USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send address changes to HI-FI NEWS & RECORD REVIEW, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at dsb.net, 3 Queensbridge, The Lakes, Northampton, NN4 7BF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

AURALiC
DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Bowers & Wilkins

DD
DUTCH & DUTCH

innuos

KEF

kii

LUMIN

MERGING
TECHNOLOGIES

PRO

T+A

LAST WORD

OFF THE LEASH!

KEN KESSLER TELLS IT LIKE IT IS...

A desktop system, a '60s tape... Ken Kessler has an unexpected epiphany as he enjoys an eBay find



It's getting worse: my used open-reel tape collection has passed the 1100 mark, a tower of Really Useful Boxes full of them. (Twenty to each 9L XL box – the ones for 7in singles – in case you wondered.) At this rate, eBay ought to erect a statue of me. It was easier to quit smoking. Hell, I also own eight tape decks. So I may need help.

ELVIS IMPRINT

As a grown man – no, scratch that... As a fully-paid-up pensioner, I should know better. Trouble is, I am the product of a lifetime of loving music, as my earliest coherent memory is seeing Elvis Presley perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show* at exactly four-and-a-half years old. Two months later, my mother somehow managed to buy me a Mickey Mouse guitar and family legend has it that I was inseparable from it.

Over the years, and I am only now realising it, I absorbed most of this passion from my father, who was not an audiophile but a tape buff.

This is why I know how to splice tape with the adroitness of Marco Pierre White filleting a trout. And thank goodness for that: over 900 of the tapes I've acquired arrived with neither leader tape nor tail.

But that has nothing to do with the real reason I am so wedded to open-reel tape. Like many of you, my 'audio adventure' has been going on for a lifetime, and it is filled with moments that mark my progress, just as

my gastronomic history is marked by the first taste of Beef Wellington (September 1972 at the Gaslight in Portland, Maine).

DESK DELIGHTS

With hi-fi, it's my first exposure to the full-range Apogee speaker in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 1983; visiting SME's Alastair Robertson-Aikman's music room in 1989; and hearing Decca cartridges, Radford amps and BBC LS3/5As in 1979. These moments formed my tastes – or biases – and created the standards to which I still adhere. Others will have their own stories. No matter.

What caused the latest upset to over a half-century's experience? Trust me: it shouldn't have blown me away as it did – certainly not a week after living with the Audio Research Reference 160S amplifier [*HFN* Feb '20]. No, I'm not about to regale you with a tale of £500,000 turntables, £10,000 cartridges or other such dreamware. On the contrary, it's about undergoing the effect of a 'perfect storm' – not costly kit.

Unexpectedly, the epiphany came from a system I spend more hours listening to than any other, because it's sitting on my desk: the bijou Quad VA-One integrated valve amp at £1299 [*HFN* Dec '16], a pair of the criminally-underrated £445 Quad S1 speakers, and a beaten-up Sony Stereo 350 open-reel tape deck – £20 at the Audio

'The point is that surprises still lurk in affordable kit'

Jumble. Yes, that's £1764, and there are no fancy cables in the mix (life is too short). Being generous, call it £1800. Can you live with that as 'not elitist'?

What happened was this. The latest fix, er, shipment of tapes from my eBay habit, yielded a compilation called *Smash Sounds* [Atco, ATC850]. I should have suspected something because it was a 7½ips tape, when most pop and rock was issued on the slower, less sonically heart-stopping 3¾ips. Otis Redding, Sonny & Cher, Arthur Conley – I knew I was in for a treat because every one of the tracks was a gem from the '60s: soul, funk, pop, rock.

What I didn't expect to hear were the most dazzling, breathtaking versions of two of the songs in my permanent Top 10: a brace of tunes I've heard so many times that a psychiatrist would suggest I am exhibiting signs of OCD. They appeared on the A-side, the last numbers following Otis's killer 'Respect', which almost set me up for what was to come, because the sound of that familiar song forced me to look up from the work I was doing.

STUNNING SONICS

Usually, I write accompanied by background music into which I drift in and out. But then came the true stereo version of a song which meant more to me than any other, one we played to death in the bands I was in during my teen years: the punk classic that is The Shadows Of Knight's 'Gloria'. It resonated like never before, the vocals sneering, the guitars cutting through the air, the percussion rattling my desk. Stunning. Who knew this was a sonic masterpiece?

It was followed by the *coup de grâce*: Buffalo Springfield's 'For What It's Worth'. This is not a jam-packed show of excess – it's lean, minimalist. And yet I heard sonic artefacts never before exposed to me, not from a mint copy of the original LP, not from the stunning remasters. I am lost for an analogy – it truly was life-changing.

And the point of this? Not about open-reel tape, not about the equipment *per se* but about *the event itself*. I learned that surprises still lurk in 50-year-old tapes, and in affordable kit. It's why I'm still here. And you, too. ☺

June Issue
on sale 8th MAY

EXCLUSIVE TESTS:

- Audio Research REF 6 SE tube preamp
- PrimaLuna EVO 100 Tube DAC
- Raidho TD-2.2 floorstanding loudspeakers
- Bricasti M3 DAC/headphone preamplifier
- Sumiko Pearwood II moving-coil pick-up

PLUS:

- Vintage Review: Technics SL-J33 turntable
- Show Blog: Audio Video Show Praha 2020
- Classical Companion: J. Brahms' Symphonies
- From The Vault: We crack open *HFN*'s archive
- Vinyl Icon: Jesus & Mary Chain's *Psychocandy*



PS AUDIO

Pioneering world class audio products

**FREE
UPGRADE**
for all DirectStream DACs
from PS Audio Windom
now available!!

PS Audio releases Windom firmware for DirectStream



Windom is the newest upgrade for DirectStream and elevates the DAC's performance way beyond anything yet heard.

If you own a DirectStream DAC.

Go to www.psaudio.com/support/downloads/ and download either the DS or DSJ version of Windom and be prepared for awesome. Instructions for installing Windom on your DAC are there as well, It's that simple.

PS Audio's DirectStream DAC is the only DAC in the world that keeps on giving back to its owners for free. If you haven't yet experienced how great a DS is, it's easy enough to try one in your home.

Signature
AUDIO SYSTEMS

Distributed by Signature Audio Systems, **call: 07738 – 007776**
or by e-mail to: info@signaturesystems.co.uk Web: www.psaudio.com

LET IT LOOSE



THE PROGRESSION AMPLIFIER SERIES

"Progression" – it's a word that suggests forward movement. The latest in Dan D'Agostino's growing family of power amplifiers is the culmination of a lifetime spent in the research and development of components that always rise to the occasion, that always respect the demands of the music and that convey realism from the most subtle of nuances to the most thunderous of crescendos. Constraints are not allowed to affect the dynamics.

No loudspeaker poses a threat. Progression amplifiers such as the Integrated with its optional phono stage & DAC deliver sound that's visceral, tactile and authentic. And if you know and love your music, "Progression" can also describe a sequence of chords, and in the case of rock and blues in particular, "power chords". Progression thus defines, in so many ways, the very foundations of music in all its forms.

 **absolute sounds ltd.**

International Distributors & Consultants of Specialised Hi-End Audio & Video Systems

58 Durham Road, London, SW20 0TW T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09

W: www.absolutesounds.com E: info@absolutesounds.com

For Your Nearest Dealer Please Visit The [Absolute Sounds](http://www.absolutesounds.com) Website

D'Agostino
MASTER AUDIO SYSTEMS