

VINYL AND VALVES MCINTOSH'S ALL-IN-ONE

hi-fi+

REPRODUCING THE RECORDED ARTS
www.hifiplus.com

MARCH 2020 • 181



ISSN 1465-5950
\$5.99
9 771465 595042 81

MUSICAL MASTERY

WORLD EXCLUSIVE KARAN ACOUSTICS MASTER
COLLECTION LINEα REDEFINES THE HIGH-END PREAMP!

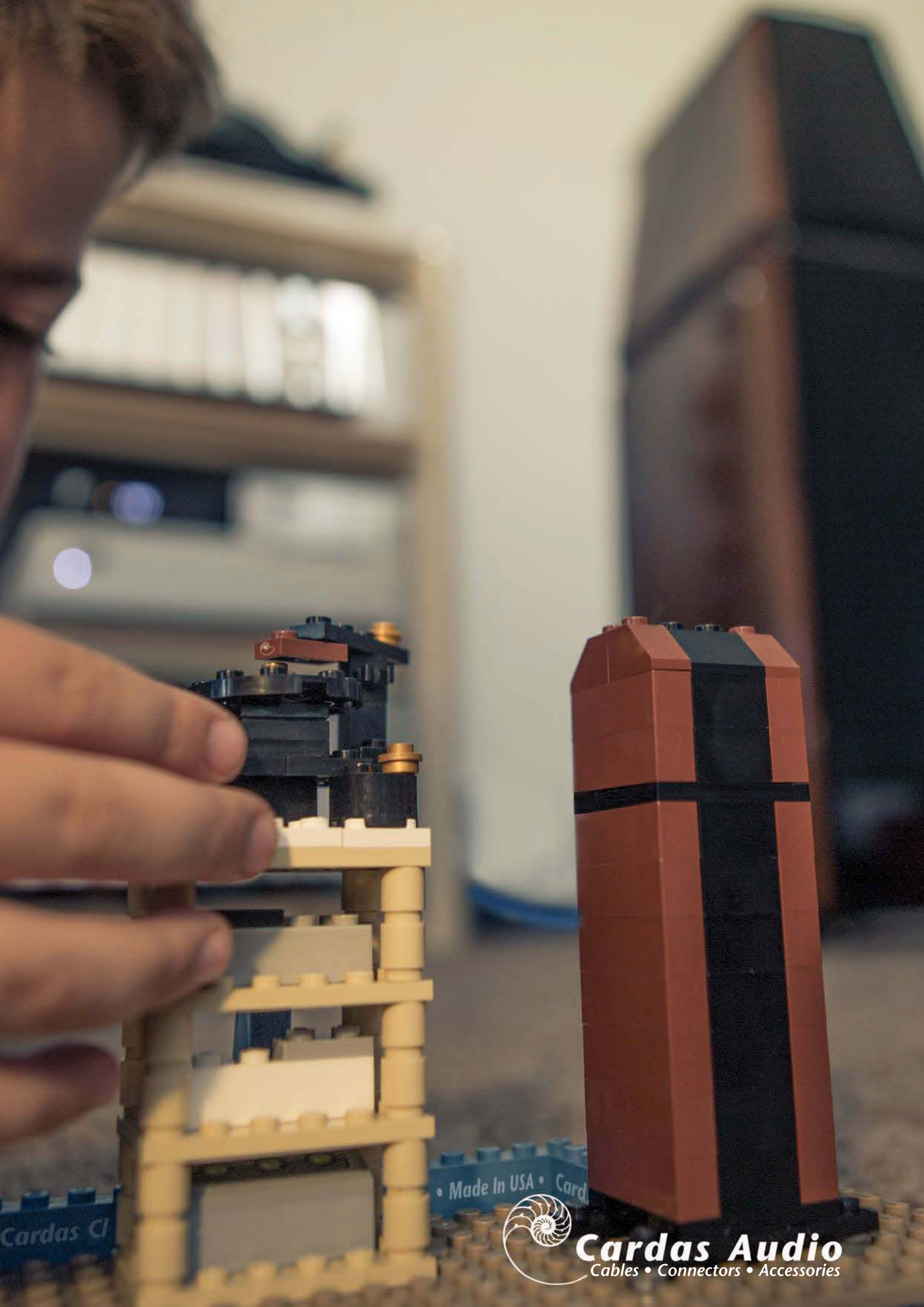


CYRUS ONE CAST AMP
FIDELICE BY RUPERT NEVE DAC
MAGICO A1 SPEAKERS

WIN!
ALLNIC AUDIO
ZL-5000 POWER
CORDS WORTH
THOUSANDS!



MYTEK MAKES A BETTER BROOKLYN? HAVE WE GOT A BRIDGE TO SELL YOU!



Cardas Cl

• Made In USA • Card



Cardas Audio
Cables • Connectors • Accessories

EDITOR

Alan Sircom
Email: editor@hifiplus.com

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:

Dennis D Davis
Steve Dickinson
Sean Hannam
Andrew Harrison
Buzz Hughes
Jimmy Hughes
Jason Kennedy
Simon Lucas
Chris Martens

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Jenny Watson
Fonthill Creative, Salisbury

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Tom Hackforth
Tel: +44 (0)1425 655255
Email: tom@hifiplus.com

PUBLISHER

Pete Collingwood-Trewin
Tel: +44 (0)1425 655699
Email: pete@hifiplus.com

THE EDITORIAL OFFICE CAN BE CONTACTED AT:

Hi-Fi+ Editorial
Absolute Multimedia (UK) Ltd
Unit 3, Sandehead Industrial Estate,
Sandehead, Hampshire
SP6 1PA
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1425 655255
URL: hifiplus.com

Absolute Multimedia (UK) Ltd is a
subsidiary of TMM Holdings LLC,
2500 McHale Court, Suite 100
Austin, TX 78758, USA

PRESIDENT

Lee Scoggins

CHAIRMAN AND CEO

Thomas B. Martin, Jr.

All Rights Reserved.

Not one word of *Hi-Fi+* may be
reproduced without the written consent
of the Editor. We are perfectly happy
to co-operate, but we don't want
quotations to appear out of context.

Printed By
Pensord Press, Caerphilly

Hi-Fi+ is published twelve times a
year by: Absolute Multimedia (UK) Ltd

ISSN 1465 5950

hifiplus.com

editorial

The evolution of audio is a fascinating subject in and of itself, because sometimes it takes unexpected turns. Back at the turn of the century, people in the audio press were constantly discussing 'final vinyl' – that last turntable that manufacturers were hoping you would buy to play those LPs in the loft. But, secretly and in quiet moments, we would turn to makers, distributors and retailers and ask, "when did you actually last sell a record player?"

Today, sales of vinyl and all things turntable are doing well, far better than they were at the turn of the century, when most of the music business had all but written off the format in favour of the CD. While CD sales still outsell LP by a significant amount, the CD has seen a marked decline and has become so unfashionable that its numbers are no longer included in annual statistics published by the music business. Put a question about CD sales figures into Google, and vinyl figures pop out. It's streaming and vinyl please... let's forget about Compact Disc.

All of which means for the last few years, when we have those quiet moments, members of the audio industry turn to one another and say, "but when did you actually last sell a CD player?" Meanwhile, in the topsiest of topsy-turvy events, we have all-in-one systems that feature streaming alongside vinyl and valves, as if 1960 and 2020 collided into one another. Even open-reel and cassette have seen something of a comeback.

CD, on the other hand, remains the red-headed stepchild of audio. It's hard to imagine a CD revival aping the success of the LP revival to the same

extent, if only because the start of the vinyl revival coincided with the retro-obsessed hipster movement. And to most people, CD is as 1980s as big hair and shoulder pads. It seemingly has no place in modern life.

And yet...

In among some audiophile groups, the CD is still desirable and collectable. It's the way people acquire and listen to music. Some as a reliable one-time digital delivery format, as they rip it to FLAC or WAV. But still more have walked away from streaming because they feel CD sounds better. And, in fairness, many of the listening tests are compelling.

We are remaining firmly unpartisan on the subject. CD is a very mature digital format now, but streaming is improving as we learn more about the infrastructure and methodology; an 'everything matters' approach is rewarding. But maybe, just maybe, there's still life in the polycarbonate disc.

Alan Sircom
editor@hifiplus.com

ISSUE 182 (OUR 21ST ANNIVERSARY!) ON SALE APR 2 (UK), MAY 7 (US)



YOUR SONIC STANDARD IN **HIGH-END PORTABLE** AUDIO.



Crystal Cable Portable's **DUET**, **DOUBLE DUET** and **DREAM DUET** series provide absolute high end sound and **superb musicality** to your favorite headphone, IEM and HD player.

To find out more about Crystal Cable's cables, loudspeakers and amplifiers visit:

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

contents ISSUE 181 EQUIPMENT+

COMMENT

- 5** **INCOMING!**
Your views on all things audio
- 8** **TURNTABLE ACCESSORIES**
The second part of our vinylista round-up
- 99** **MEET YOUR MAKER**
Swiss electronics experts CH Precision
- 105** **MEET YOUR DEALER**
Soundstage, in North London

MUSIC

- 116** **THE HANGING STARS**
Country-psych-folk-rock from the heart of London
- 122** **CONTEMPORARY, CLASSICAL AND AUDIOPHILE MUSIC**
- +**
- 68** **COMPETITION!**
Allnic Audio ZL-5000 power cords worth \$2,200 must be won!
- 110** **BACK ISSUES**
- 112** **SUBSCRIPTIONS**
- 127** **ADVERTISER INDEX**
- 128** **NEXT MONTH**
Find out what's happening next month!

REVIEWS

- 15** **KARAN ACOUSTICS MASTER COLLECTION LINEa**
preamplifier
- 23** **MCINTOSH MTI100**
integrated turntable/receiver
- 31** **HEGEL H190/AMPHION ARGON 7LS**
amplifier and loudspeaker system
- 39** **MAGICO A1**
stand-mount loudspeakers
- 45** **MYTEK BROOKLYN BRIDGE**
network streaming DAC/preamp
- 51** **MOON AUDIO BLACK DRAGON**
interconnect, loudspeaker and power cables
- 57** **CYRUS AUDIO ONE CAST**
integrated streaming amplifier
- 63** **1MORE TRIPLE DRIVER**
on-ear headphones
- 69** **FIDELICE BY RUPERT NEVE PRECISION**
digital to analogue converter
- 75** **MEZE RAI PENTA**
universal-fit in-ear monitor
- 81** **NOVAFIDELITY N15D**
music server/streamer/DAC
- 87** **GUTWIRE CONSUMMATE GROUND**
grounding cable
- 91** **REL S/510**
active subwoofer
- 95** **WBT PLASMA PROTECT**
cable termination system

Zanden

A P Φ M R

State Of The Art musicality, transparency and holographic rendering regardless of musical genre!

Model 3000 mk2 vacuum tube line preamplifier w/remote control



Model 9600 mk2 vacuum tube mono power amplifier



Model 120 solid state MC stereo phono preamplifier



Model 3100 vacuum tube line preamplifier



AUDIOFREAKS

DISTRIBUTION AND CONSULTANCY OF FINE AUDIO INSTRUMENTS

tel: 020 8948 4153

email: info1@audiofreaks.co.uk

www.audiofreaks.co.uk

Audiobyte • AFI - flat (The Record Flattener) • Cardas • conrad-johnson • finite elemente • HighResTech
Karan Acoustics • Magnum Dynalab • Rockna Audio • Running Springs Audio • Vienna Acoustics • **Zanden Audio**

Please send your letters to Hi-Fi+, Unit 3, Sandleheath Industrial Estate, Sandleheath, Hampshire, SP6 1PA, United Kingdom.
Or email them to editor@hifiplus.com

incoming!

in association with **audioquest**

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS A DRAGONFLY BLACK

Both AudioQuest and *Hi-Fi+* are passionate about music and the sound it makes. We know what makes a good audio experience, and we know what makes it better. Most modern audio equipment is good, but with the right attitude, right advice, and the right components, the sound it delivers can move from 'good' to 'great' to 'fantastic'. AudioQuest has to deal with a lot of queries regarding audio systems, because almost everything in an audio system is connected with a cable. The company has amassed a wealth of information on a range of topics in audio, both in general terms and with a team comprising keen, specialist audio experts willing to impart their expertise.

Which is why we've teamed up with the good folks at AudioQuest to award the letter of the month a free AudioQuest Dragonfly Black headphone amp/DAC.

Recording the radio

In the old days, I used to record radio stations by simply taping them from my tuner on to cassette. Then, when I moved to a DAB/FM tuner, I used a digital output connected to a MiniDisc recorder to do the same. Now, I get all my radio listening through my computer, and the ability to record seems to have gone. Why? And how can I get it back?

Marc Shaw, via email

Taping radio recordings was legal in so far as if you were using it for 'time shifting' (recording a programme that you intended to listen to once at a later date). The problem that emerges once you store those recordings for future use and multiple replay is one of copyright. If you remember those 'home taping is killing music' piracy logos on the sleeves of records, that's part of what they were pointing to.

Such recordings were not considered too much of a problem when it was kids recording the chart show onto low-quality cassettes. By the time MiniDisc emerged, CD companies were already creating digital fingerprinting and rights-management systems that rendered digital-digital recordings unplayable; even if they weren't commonly used. However, now that potentially someone could make a perfect digital copy of an internet radio broadcast with ease, rights management and copy protection became uppermost in the minds of content providers. Also, as the broadcast can be played at any time, the time-shifting argument has gone away. The upshot is that recording an internet radio stream is intentionally 'difficult', although most people use dedicated software like RipCast, Freecorder or StationRipper.

Robert Hay – AudioQuest



High-end, low-standards

I have enjoyed hi-fi for more than 40 years. Then around 5 years ago I decided to move towards more high-end equipment. Firstly, I registered with *Hi-Fi+*. What a wonderful feel your magazine has... real quality. Secondly, I trailed several retailers to experience at first-hand, selected equipment. This was a great experience. Great willingness from them to demo kit. Without any sales pitch, they were happy for me to listen to various choices. This is a great experience and well recommended without any reluctance. Retailers at the high end are great people.

Finally, I chose my system after demonstrations at home, and so started my intro into high-end. I was very happy with what I was hearing and enjoyed many times with friends. But then, faults started to occur. I have incurred around £2,500 of repairs on a £40,000 system! With kit out of warranty, manufacturers were reluctant to help with charges and shipping costs.

► This all within five years of purchase. As a consequence, I strongly recommend readers spend a little less on budget and hold monies back to purchase extended warranties and to purchase kit manufactured in their home countries to avoid shipping costs.

My experiences have spoiled what started out to be so promising road into high end, especially after 40 years of trouble-free lesser equipment. Maybe you might include some reliability measures when reviewing equipment. At least with the manufacturers' record in general as a guide to helping your readers avoid faults.

Anthony Annis, via email

I am extremely dismayed to hear this. One of the big benefits in owning high-end audio equipment is its 'staying power'; that it is designed not only to perform well in its first years, but to remain competitive and serviceable throughout a longer than normal product life cycle. That benefit quickly decomposes in the face of to-and-fro repairs and especially in mounting shipping costs.

This is why we feel local distributors still have a part to play in the process. The out-of-warranty shipping of a product back to a local distributor might still be expensive, but nowhere near as bad as the cost of shipping the same product around the world. Especially if those problems are not fully resolved in the first round of repairs.

The problem with publishing figures on reliability is they often happen in deep retrospect. A product launched today might not display its reliability issues for several years after the review is published. Instead, we keep an eye out for repeat reliability offenders... and don't review their kit. – Ed

Reader feedback part three – keep it coming!

You are asking for some feedback, so here is a quick look at my hi-fi history.

Please, please stop with all the streaming and headphones stuff. It's of no interest to me and of the few people I know who are also into the hobby, it's of no interest to them too. Music really only comes from two sources in my book: LP, and reel-to-reel tape. Digital is an abomination, in my opinion, and one that was at best short-lived as the return of LP categorically proves.

While the music business hoodwinked itself over CD from the mid-1980s, most audio companies – to their infinite credit – were not convinced and stuck to their guns. Now, with CD setting and vinyl back in its position of dominance, order is restored!

However, the audio industry does itself great disservice by falling back into bad habits by promoting the amusical sound from digital once more with streaming, and this time it's worse than ever in my opinion. Also, headphones are for kids and commuters, and have no place in a true audiophile's system. So why include the products when all you do is waste paper that could be better spent reviewing things people want to know about, like the latest LP releases.

Keith Chater, via email

While you echo the thoughts of some audio enthusiasts, I have to admit I believe this is a fairly extreme viewpoint. I know of many music lovers who see LP and streaming happily co-existing in a system; some use online streaming as a discovery service for their next LP purchases, others consider the service as their main listening post, with LP either for special recordings, special occasions, or as a physical back catalogue.

Sound quality is an interesting matter. Like many, I prefer the sound of LP on balance, but I know of many LPs where the CD or high-resolution digital cut is superior to the analogue one, and vice versa. This doesn't sound like an abomination in action to me.

When it comes to personal audio, again your view is shared by some, but not by all. Many see personal audio as an adjunct to traditional two-channel audio, while others see it as a full-blown replacement to their old audio system, although sometimes that is through necessity. While we have scaled down the amount of personal audio in the magazine recently, we have no intention of abandoning the category.

Finally, and not wishing to cast doubt on your whole audiophile edifice, but this 'no true audiophile' sounds like an appeal to purity that is, in reality, an informal fallacy, changing the definition in an ad hoc manner to suit the argument. Someone who likes music, loves the sound it makes, and tries to improve that sound through audio electronics consciously chosen for their sonic performance is an 'audiophile', whether they are 'true' or not. – Ed



2GO

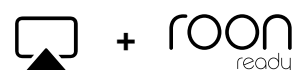


Hugo 2 has taken one giant leap: with a new addition of the 2go streamer/server device, which brings wireless and wired streaming, up to 4TB of storage, plus auto source-switching for seamless music playback between playback applications. Hugo 2 with 2go is now a DAC, preamp, headphone amp, streamer and digital music library, all in one class-leading British-built device.

**GO ANYWHERE
STREAMER/SERVER**

HUGO RANGE

Made in
BRITAIN



Turntable Accessories Slight Return

by Andrew Harrison

Back in June last year (issue 172), we ran a short round-up of some of the latest, greatest and occasionally off-the-wall products for vinyl enthusiasts to preen, clean, set-up and adjust their LPs and turntables. This is effectively the second part to that round-up.

We have decided not to be limiting here. Products that act in the service of good LP sound often have a long lifespan in the audio world, and more than a few of the products seen here have been reviewed on the pages of *Hi-Fi+* before. However, some of these products have not been reviewed by a magazine in a dozen years (long before the vinyl revival) and are still relevant, so some might think of this as an aide memoire and to others it's the first time they have seen such a product in the NeoLP age.

As ever, the products here vary in price, performance and operation. This is a round-up, not a comparison. But in these pages is your next great vinyl accessory that can and will bring out the best in your turntable.

Kirmuss Audio KA-RC1

Vacuum suction has been the best way to clean records since the first Keith Monks machine launched 50 years ago. Until, that is, ultrasonic machines appeared, starting with the Vinyl Cleaner from Audiodesksysteme Gläss. Ultrasonic cleaning relies on high-frequency transducers to excite a bath of water, into which a record is suspended and revolved slowly for several minutes. Microscopic bubbles in the water start to burst, a process known as cavitation, and the shock waves effectively remove any soiling or contamination in the grooves. In the case of the Audiodesksysteme device, the record is then dried by an air fan, then ready to play.

Competing products are now available at lower prices, some even in kit form, typically based on commercial ultrasonic cleaning baths which are now readily available online. For the KA-RC1 machine (£1197.60), Kirmuss Audio uses a high-quality 7.5 litre cleaning bath, and adds its own clever gearing mechanism to support and slowly revolve up to four records simultaneously – two 12-inch, one 10-inch and one 7-inch disc.

Kirmuss suggests using a mix of 6 litres of pure distilled water with 40 ml of 70% isopropyl alcohol. With one or more records in place, a touch of the button on the control panel starts an automated five-minute cycle, and this can be adjusted up or down in one-minute increments if required.

To complete the cleaning requires placing the wet record on a supplied microfibre cloth, and then applying

a dilute solution of propylene glycol from a spray bottle. This is thoroughly brushed in with a blusher brush of goat hair, a process which will typically create a soapy lather across the playing surface. This shows that there is still contamination in the groove and further treatment is required, says Kirmuss, so further ultrasonic cleaning and brushing is repeated.

Given that every clean-and-polish cycle takes around 10 minutes, and most records require upwards of two or three runs before the record qualifies as 'restored', this is perhaps the slowest and most labour-intensive of all vinyl cleaning systems. It's also not particularly cheap in running costs as Kirmuss advises that the distilled water solution should be changed after 15–20 records. With pure distilled water costing over £1 per litre, the costs in both time and money quickly escalate.

Much time can be saved by using a regular vacuum-suction machine to dry the record after cleaning, although Kirmuss describes its multi-stage process as the only way to confirm that a record is completely clean, namely when no further lather is produced after brushing more of its solution into the surface.

The final results from ultrasonic cleaning are outstanding. The noise floor on even records that had been through multiple vacuum cleaning was always conspicuously lower, making it easier to hear into the acoustic space of any recording. There is also sometimes random impacted debris in the groove wall that no amount of wet brushing and vacuuming can shift,



which can be magically removed with the Kirmuss. It's not a total panacea but it's easily the closest I've come to experiencing the mythical silent groove.

Knosti Record Drying Rack

The most cost-effective way to bath-clean vinyl must be the £50 Disco-Antistat from Knosti, a simple cleaning bath with hand-cranked revolving mechanism. With this kit comes the essential drip-dry drying rack, and the latter is available separately (£18.99, *Analogue Seduction*), invaluable as a way to store records recently cleaned by any system. Vacuum-suction machines

for instance should Hoover up all the cleaning solution from the groove, but the more fanatical vinyl custodian will want to leave the finished record to stand for a few minutes before sliding into its sleeve, in case of any lurking droplets of water on the rim or label.

The Knosti Drying Rack holds up to seven records at a time, with upright supports that prop up the record near the label. It works with seven, 10- and 12-inch discs, although bizarrely the plastic tips aren't quite long enough to reach the actual label of an LP, instead settling in the run-out groove. There are no other products to compete so, unless a DIY solution is created, this is

still the simplest way to allow records a final air-dry before packing away.

Loricraft L'Art du Son

The first generation of vacuum-cleaning machines from Keith Monks relied upon a dilute solution of ethyl alcohol, impossible to obtain now without a licence since the ethanol is a controlled substance. Isopropyl alcohol became the default replacement and is widely used with various vacuum machines, although today it carries a question mark over its safety on records – always a no-no for shellac 78s, and increasingly frowned upon for polyvinyl LPs.

► Among the non-alcoholic alternatives readily available, one of the most enduring is L'Art du Son (£33, Analogue Seduction), a powerful concentrate of detergents and surfactants that launched in 2003. The actual composition is not published, although its developer Martina Schöner told me there are 20 different compounds, including anti-static agents to reduce electrostatic recharging of the cleaned record.

One small bottle of 100 ml is normally diluted with five litres of water, but it's best mixed up in smaller quantities as required as the solution includes no preservatives to combat airborne funguses, for instance. A smaller batch could be 20 ml to one litre of water, with advisory limits of 18 to 26 ml of concentrate depending on record soiling.

In my experience the solution works commendably well, and I always use it now on older records and early Soviet bloc pressings, both of which may comprise less-pure PVC and so may be more sensitive to alcohol. Compared to IPA-based solutions L'Art du Son cleaning may not be so squeaky clean-sounding, but the results are typically quieter overall.

Ortofon Turntable Bubble Level

Getting a turntable absolutely level is crucial for best performance, and a variety of specialised spirit levels are available to help that may be better suited than a regular handyman's 'bubble'. One of my favourites was a clear Perspex block embedded with two tubular bubble guides on X and Y axes. I also found the Ortofon Bubble Level (£29.90, Henley Audio). This takes the not-unfamiliar idea of a single bubble in a circular housing that can ride around the disc to show the position on both planes simultaneously.

This device is 60 mm in diameter, 12 mm thick and made from metal to give a slightly weighty mass of 78 g, but not too high to upset the suspended sub-chassis of my Michell Orbe SE. A series of concentric rings additionally show the angle of inclination up to three degrees in each direction, while the underside has a hard rubber base to prevent any marking of the supporting surface – you could place it on a vinyl record without harm, for instance.

Nasotec Tweezers

Installing a new cartridge is always a finicky operation, and attaching tiny cartridge leads is one of the more scary stages so anything to aid the process is always welcome. Nasotec is a Japanese company specialising in turntable accessories, including these precision tweezers imported by Analogue Seduction (£22.99), designed to grasp the cartridge plug shank securely with a circular grip, without squashing the micro plugs. Needle-nose pliers are still necessary, I found, for pulling off tight-fitting plugs but the Nasotec tweezers are handy for pushing in and manoeuvring the plugs in the tight confines of a tonearm headshell.

Acoustical Systems SMARTractor

The horizontal tracking angle must be got right, or as close to right as we can humanly achieve, to reduce avoidable distortion caused by lateral tracking error (LTE) from tonearm/cartridge geometry. But given the choice of setups, who is right anyway?

The SMARTractor (£475, Select Audio) offers five different alignments, two each for Lofegren A and Lofegren B, using either IEC or DIN specification for minimum recorded radius, plus

a proprietary new curve based on the work of the tool's designer Dietrich Brakemeier.

The best quality of the SMARTractor must be the extreme exactitude with which a cartridge can be aligned. That's thanks to a unique precision in design and construction, which ensures that there is no 'play' in the fitting to the turntable spindle, combined with the very fine (0.1 mm) laser-etched markings on the silvered acrylic half-moon platform. The horizontal tracking angle is only one of several routines to let the turntable sing of course, but with the help of this device and its sub-millimetre accuracy it's quite possible to perfect HTA and strike it from the list of setup uncertainties.

VEE Vinyl Record Holder

Any record enthusiast with more than a few dozen LPs will likely have invested in decent storage shelving to house the collection – I use stacked birch-ply modular boxes made by the now defunct iCubes company. There's always the overspill though of recently played records, and the about-to-be-played new acquisitions, and that's where the VEE record holder (£39, Analogue Seduction) comes into its own.

This simple pine wood construction holds around 50 LPs in an easy-to-browse portable shelf. It's made up of just four carefully cut wooden pieces that slot together to form a portable caddy that makes casual sifting more like a record shop experience, with full view of the sleeve as you browse. The wood components are a relatively tight fit and will hold together after slotting together; but for more secure installation – and the possibility of picking up the whole frame without it falling apart – you



The new Ultra 2

The smallest things can have the largest effect...

 **Stillpoints**TM

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

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

Analogue Seduction	Peterborough	01733 350878	Lotus Hifi	Walton-on-Thames	07887 852513
Audio Destination	Tiverton	01884 243584	Lintone Audio	Newcastle	0191 477 4167
Audio Therapy	Newcastle	07976 496218	Martins Hifi	Norwich	01603 627010
Castle Sound & Vision	Nottingham	0115 958 4404	Nintronics	Welwyn	01707 320788
Choice Hifi	Richmond	020 8392 1959	Oxford Audio	Oxford	01865 790879
Homesound	Edinburgh	0131 662 1327	Rayleigh Hifi	Rayleigh	01268 779762
KJ West One	Marylebone	020 7486 8262	Studio AV	Chobham	01753 863300



Distributed by
KOG AUDIO

www.kogaudio.com

info@kogaudio.com

024 7722 0650

“The scientist in me long wanted to consign it to the woowoo step. Remove the magnetism... from a vinyl record?”

- could apply a little PVA wood glue to cement the joints permanently. A straightforward solution for the overspill from the main shelves.

Furutech demag α

This item has been on the periphery of my knowledge for some time, and the scientist in me long wanted to consign it to the woowoo step. Remove the magnetism... from a vinyl record? So, I tested with care, ready to replace column inches when it disappointed.

And here it still is, the Furutech demag α (£2,615, Sound Fowndations), a bonkers record accessory that strangely makes your records sound better. In essence it's a degaussing platform, with electromagnets fixed below the broad plastic top that send a pulse of magnetic flux into the record above; and then the field is gradually reduced over a 15 second period down to zero. The same principle has long been used for demagnetising magnetic tape heads, for example. Flux level is probably enough to wipe your credit cards (untested), but power draw is relatively low, starting at little over 20 watts.

Furutech states it works on additives in the polyvinyl mix, due to ‘minute amount of ferrous material in the pigment [that] causes LPs to become magnetized’. The company includes a small clear pot filled with steel ball bearings that you can watch dance to prove it's actually energised.

Evaluating it is tricky, as it's a one-way processes where you can't double back and hear the ‘before’ sound

again. So, I revisited some well-known LPs before activating the process.

The end result was almost universally a removal of ‘haze’ that you'd swear wasn't even there beforehand anyway; but its subsequent lifting was quite evident. It didn't seem to improve bass reach or timing, nor make crashy cymbals suddenly dulcet and bell-like. The most immediate benefit was to the midrange, and in particular the vocals. These sounded smoother and more ‘human’ post-treatment, with contributing harmonies and double-track effects easier to spot and focus upon. Some records scrub up better than others, but if your system is suitably transparent, the change can be tantamount to a decent tonearm rewire.

Aesthetix ABCD-1 MC Demagnetizer

Adding to the list of things you might not think would be affected by unwanted magnetism, let alone would be receptive to demagging, is the humble moving-coil pickup. For the cartridge though, and unlike vinyl itself, it's no secret that magnets are already involved, although a cynical view might be that demagnetizing the cartridge would deprive it of its purpose.

The Aesthetix ABCD-1 (£275, Sound Fowndations) was inspired by the long-obsolete Sumiko Fluxbuster, which aimed to remove magnetism that builds up in the permeable components of a fixed-magnet pickup. They work by the same principle of degaussing, in this case applying a supersonic HF signal into the cartridge

coils, then reducing its level to zero. Why degaussing should be necessary is unclear; perhaps neutralising fields generated by the spinning platter.

To operate, detach the tonearm cables from your phono amp and plug into this compact metal box. Press the button marked Activate, and wait 25 seconds. For the ABCD-1, the signal is at 25 kHz and a few tens of millivolts, ramping up for five seconds, holding for 15, then reducing over another five seconds.

On reconnecting the turntable and playing an LP, you're likely to hear a cleaner, more transparent soundstage with a little more twinkle through the treble. The cartridge doesn't need to be years old to hear an effect – I heard the change on one low-use Audio Technica AT33, while conversely found no change on a similar AT ART-7. Make sure you avoid MM cartridges though, which will be damaged by the process. +

Accessories provided by:

Analogue Seduction

Tel: +44(0)1733 350878

URL: analogueseduction.net

Henley Audio

Tel: +44(0)1235 511166

URL: henleyaudio.co.uk

Kirmuss Audio

Tel: +44(0)1929 794411

URL: kirmussaudio.net

Select Audio

Tel: +44(0)1900 601954

URL: selectaudio.co.uk

Sound Fowndations

Tel: +44(0)1189 814238

URL: soundfowndations.co.uk

innuos

ZENMINI Mk3

MUSIC SERVER SERIES

POWERED BY INNUOS



Rip. Serve. Stream.
Your music, anywhere you want it.

USB, Coaxial, Optical and Analog outputs
Custom motherboard with Streamer Port
Optional Linear Power Supply





soultion

nature of sound

Hiend Audio Equipment
made in Switzerland

Distributed by Select Audio
Tel 01900 601954
www.selectaudio.co.uk

Karan Acoustics LINEa preamplifier

by Alan Sircom

It has become a cliché in audio circles to claim 'there are no good preamplifiers'. Fortunately, there are exceptions to the rule and they are increasing in number. Ten years ago, the number of really good preamps could be counted on the fingers on one hand, and a hand that had a bad fight with a combine harvester at that. Today, they number in the double-figures. The Karan Acoustics KA L Reference was always one of the contenders, but that didn't prepare us for the LINEa, Karan's latest and greatest top-of-the-line preamplifier.

The LINEa is the first in a new Master Collection from Karan, the whole collection a reflection of 30 years of Milan Karan's outstanding range of amplifiers. A second, one box line preamplifier, a two-box statement and one box ultimate phono stage, stereo and mono power amplifiers will follow, each establishing themselves as the definitive Karan statement in that field of amplification. That would be a bold statement from any brand but given

Karan's ability to already make 'world-class' products in any amp sector, these models have a lot to live up to. Judging by the LINEa, however, that's not going to be an issue.

The Master Collection is a worthy product line to show off Karan's 30 years of quality amplification; the products are a distillation of the best of Milan Karan's engineering smarts developed both before and during his time with the brand that bears his name. The circuit is made using the best components, and what constitutes 'best' is more than just a trawl through a Who's Who of famous names in the electronics business ▶



“This means noise, distortion and other interference are kept even and therefore low, cancelling out signal by-products.”

► and is instead an iterative process of laboratory measurement and listening test evaluations for all the active and passive components in the LINEa circuit. This even comes down to using different thickness copper traces for different stages of the circuit; 120µm for the power supplies, and 75µm for the amplifier sections of the LINEa.

Naturally, a company that works out performance differences in circuit traces takes the same almost obsessive care throughout every aspect of design. Attention is paid to the topology and isolation properties of each circuit board. Where components are not exacting enough to meet Karan's demanding standards, the manufacturers have been tasked with building to the company's proprietary specifications. In terms of the circuitry itself, the LINEa is driven in pure Class A with no global feedback in order to reduce or even eliminate intermodulation distortion.

Moreover, the LINEa is fully balanced from front to back. Although many domestic audio components claim a symmetrical circuit, often this is little more than lip service. This Karan amp, by way of contrast, is fully differential and

DC coupled, with any potential DC offset resolved in custom DC servo circuits instead of putting capacitors in the signal path. There are two RCA inputs alongside the four XLRs and one of the two XLR outputs (shown in the photographic sample) is now also a single-ended RCA pair. The topology remains as complementary as it gets and this means noise, distortion and other interference are kept even and therefore low, cancelling out signal by-products. Of course, this degree of circuit symmetry is for nothing if there's a pinch-point in the volume control, but even here, the output level of the signal (volume control) has been designed as a 4x fully balanced and symmetrical attenuator with ►





AUDIOVECTOR

Handmade in Denmark since 1979



KRONOS AV · West Sussex
NOTTINGHAM HI-FI CENTRE · Nottingham
P.J HI-FI · Guildford

PREMIUM SOUND · London
SUPERFI · Lincoln
THE AUDIOBARN · Essex

www.audiovector.com



“What you hear through the Karan is a resonant, breathing, percussive instrument, played by a master.”



ultra-fast relays and custom made, non-magnetic resistors of 0.1% tolerance. The result is a preamplifier that is linear to within $\pm 0/-3\text{dB}$ from 1.5Hz to 3mHz, while the LINEa's extremely fast and DC coupled circuits guarantee no phase shift of the audio signal or any time aberration within the full audio bandwidth. Even by the obsessive levels often found in audio, this raises the bar.

The stepped front fascia is replaced by a curved panel, which is both easier on the eye and less likely to be a source of resonance. The top plate has a graduated series of holes for heat dissipation and the Karan logo inset, which also looks more elegant than existing Karan products. The front display layout and graphics are subtly changed; simply removing the second smaller 'acoustics' line in the logo gives the Karan name cleaner lines. The remote handset pebble is more substantial. Even the feet get their own place in Karan history. Most companies would just think 'feet', but Milan Karan researched, listened and ultimately selected the excellent (and *Hi-Fi+* Award Winning) CS21.0 CenterStage2 feet by Critical Mass Systems.

I try not to be swayed by the first impressions, especially when dealing with the sort of top end equipment that often unveils its story over time. But here, it was impossible not to be won over by the LINEa from the get-go. The first track I played – Andreas Schiff playing the *Apassionata* from his Beethoven piano sonata cycle on ECM – it was clear I was in the presence of something special. The piano – a notoriously difficult instrument to get right, both at the recording and replay ends – has the percussive impact and the decay and sustain of a piano in the room, but with the fluidity and 'legato' coherence needed to realise that piano sound. What you get in most cases is the sound of fingers tapping keys and hammers hitting strings; what you hear through the Karan is a resonant, breathing, percussive instrument, played by a master.

Detail is, of course, paramount here. But it's only one of the benefits to the Karan sound. There's something akin to making thematic sense of the music that's really hard to describe, but it's as if the performance is better honed and more nailed down. It's as if one of the already finest pianists of his generation just got a little more practice in before the recording. Everything is a little more polished and precise. The piano too snaps into focus. It's a very dynamic, extremely natural presentation, but one that portrays the 'spaces around the notes' brilliantly.

This track gets a lot of play time, but I noticed something close to a velvet effortlessness and smoothness to the sound that is not commonly heard. At first, I thought the LINEa was being a little too smooth, but the more I listened to other tracks, it was just that it was getting so far past the surface sonic performance and getting to the heart of the recording itself.

Oddly, this resolved itself by an abrupt shift to 'Afterglow' from Lydia Ainsworth's *Darling of the Afterglow* [Bella Union]. This

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE

BUY • SELL • EXCHANGE

GREAT VALUE NEW & PRE-OWNED HIGH END HI-FI

Huge range of high end brands • Expert system matching advice • Used High end hi-fi bought and sold Part exchange available • All items checked and guaranteed • Major credit cards accepted

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Vitus RI 101	£8,500
Symphonic Line RG10 mk4 Reference HD Master Integrated Amp	£7,990
Sonus Faber Musica Integrated Amplifier	£1,890
Rogue Audio Cronus Magnum II	£1,650
Rogue Audio Cronus Magnum 2	£1,650
B.M.C. Audio CS2 Integrated/Power Amp	£2,990
Analog Domain Audio M75D mkII (X-Demo)	£11,990

POWER AMPLIFIERS

VTL ST150 Stereo Power Amp	£3,490
VTL S200 Signature Stereo Amplifier	£8,990
VTL MB-450 Series III Monoblock Amplifiers	£12,500
Symphonic Line Kraft 300 Power Amp	£8,250
Sunfire 600 Signature	£1,200
NAT Audio Magma SE Limited Edition	£17,900
NAT AUDIO MAGMA Limited Edition	£11,900
MBL Model 9011 Stereo/Mono-Block Power Amp (Price each)	£18,700
Mark Levinson Monaural Reference Amplifier No 33	£17,900
Luxman MQ88 Power Amplifier	£4,990

Linn Klimax Chakra 500 Twin (x4 Available)	£2,650
Linn C4200 Chakra	£1,990
Jeff Rowland Model 2 Power & Synergy III Pre	£3,990
Gryphon Antileon Signature Monoblocks	£22,990
Gryphon Antileon	£5,990
Bel Canto EVO 6 Gen III	£1,990
Bel Canto Black- Ultimate Amplification System	£27,500
BAT VK250se (Bridged, single Mono)	£2,990
BAT VK 600se Stereo Power Amp	£5,490
B.M.C. Audio M3 Monoblocks	£7,990
B.M.C. Audio CS2 Integrated/Power Amp	£2,990
Audio Research Reference 250SE Monoblocks	£17,950
Analog Domain Audio M75P MKII Stereo power (X-Demo)	£9,900
Analog Domain Audio Calysto Monoblock Power Amplifier	£49,990

PRE AMPLIFIERS

VTL TL-7.5 Series III Reference Line Pre-Amplifier	£12,990
Tom Evans The Vibe & Pulse SEMKII	£3,500
Symphonic Line RG3 mk4 Pre-Amp (Chrome)	£7,350
Plinius CD LAD	£1,290
NAT Audio Magnetostat SE Absolute Reference	£9,990
Linn Kisto System Controller	£1,990
Jeff Rowland Model 2 Power & Synergy III Pre	£3,990
Classe SSP 600	£1,490

Boulder Amplifiers 1008 Phono Pre-amplifier	£9,900
Bel Canto Black- Ultimate Amplification System	£27,500
BAT REX I	£7,990
B.M.C. Audio DAC1PreHR	£2,250
B.M.C. Audio DAC1PreHR	£3,250
Audio Research Reference 3 Pre-Amp	£3,500

Audio Research Reference 10B Pre-Amplifier	£17,990
Audio Research LS25 MKII	£2,000
PRE & POWER COMBINATIONS	
VTL TL7.5 Series III & MB 450 series III Mono Combination	£23,500
Orpheus Laboratories System (see details)	£5,990
Jeff Rowland Model 2 Power & Synergy III Pre	£3,990
Bel Canto Black- Ultimate Amplification System	£27,500

McCormack Audio Micro Phono Drive	£390
LFD MC1 phono	£490
Graham Slee Era Gold V & PSU1	£390
Boulder Amplifiers 1008 Phono Pre-amplifier	£9,900
B.M.C. Audio MCCI Phono Stage	£1,990

PHONO STAGE

Whest Audio MC RefV mkIV	£8,500
Van Den Hul The Grail Phono Pre-Amp	£2,750
Tom Evans The Groove Plus SRX mkII psu	£2,990
McCormack Audio Micro Phono Drive	£390
LFD MC1 phono	£490
Graham Slee Era Gold V & PSU1	£390
Boulder Amplifiers 1008 Phono Pre-amplifier	£9,900
B.M.C. Audio MCCI Phono Stage	£1,990

TURNTABLES & ARMS

Wireworld Platinum Eclipse 7 RCA/SME DIN	£790
VPI TNT 5HR/ SDS/ JMW12.5 Arm	£3,490
Thales Simplicity II	£7,990
SME Series V Tone-Arm	£3,990

SME Model 30/2	£16,500
SME Model 20/12A (with 312s Arm)	£9,990
SME Model 15A	£7,500

Kodo The Beat MagDrive Turntable	£17,990
Graham Engineering Phantom Elite (TechDas Spec)	£8,999
Graham Engineering Phantom B44	£2,490
Brinkmann Oasis with SME Series V arm	£7,990
Bergmann Sindre Turntable & Arm (Air bearing)	£9,990

CARTRIDGES

Van den Hul Colibri XGW Koa Stradivarius (for heavy Tonearms)	£3,900
Van den Hul Colibri XGW	£2,490
Heed Audio Zene MC Cartridge	£450
Clearaudio Titanium V2 Cartridge	£2,490

CABLES- SPEAKER & INTERCONNECTS

Wireworld Platinum Eclipse 7 XLR/XLR Audio Cable	£1,490
Wireworld Platinum Eclipse 7 RCA/SME DIN	£790
Vertex AQ Silver Monocay 5m Speaker cable Spade/Spade	£1,750
Transparent Audio MusicLink Super MM2 XLR	£850
Transparent Audio Music Wave Plus 25ft Bi-Wire	£750
Transparent Audio Music Link Ultra XLR 15ft Pair	£1,250
Townshend Audio Isolda DCT 8m Pair Speaker Cable Banana/Banana	£1,490
Townshend Audio Isolda DCT 5m Pair Speaker Cable Banana/Banana	£1,250
Townshend Audio Fractal 1m RCA Interconnect	£790
TelluriumQ Ultra Black 2x2m Spade/Spade	£750
Tara Labs The One Balanced 1m XLR + FGS	£990
Synthetic Research Atmosphere UEF Level 4	£3,050
Siltech Tripple Crown XLR/XLR Interconnect	£13,990
Naim Audio Hi-Line	£425
Entreq Challenger 3V Speaker Cable (3.7m pair)	£1,990
Entreq Challenger 3V Interconnect XLR	£1,350
Entreq Atlantis XLR Interconnect (1.65m)	£4,500

Entreq Atlantis Speaker Cable (3.7m pair)	£7,500
Entreq Atlantis Speaker Cable (2.5m pair)	£6,500
Entreq Atlantis Speaker Cable (1.65m Pair)	£5,900
Entreq Apollo XLR 2012	£2,990
Entreq Apollo USB Cable	£490
Chord Company Signature 1m RCA Interconnect	£290
Cardas Golden Reference XLR 1m	£450

CD/SACD PLAYERS & DACS, STREAMERS/DIGITAL STORAGE

Weiss DAC202 Firewire	£2,250
Wadia S71 Integrated CD Player	£4,900
Theta Jade CD Transport	£1,250
Theta Generation VIII Series 3	£3,990
Theta Compli	£1,790
Symphonic Line Belcanto CD	£5,500
Sony SCD1 (CD/SACD) Player	£1,990
Proceed PDT3 CD Transport	£800
Proceed (By Madrigal) PDP2	£350
Prism Sound Callia DAC	£1,490
Orpheus Laboratories System (see details)	£5,990
Naim CDX2	£1,490
Mark Levinson No.36 digital Procesor	£1,295
Linn Sondek CD12	£4,250
Linn Klimax DS mkII/ Renew	£4,990
Krell Connect Digital Streamer	£1,490
Exogal Comet DAC with Comet Power Supply	£1,990
Esoteric P03/ D03 (CD/SACD DAC/Transport)	£5,500
Esoteric P03/ D03	£7,500
EMM Labs XDS1 V1 (V2-MDAT DSP upgrade)	£16,990
DCS Paganini DAC	£4,990
B.M.C. Audio DAC1PreHR	£2,250
B.M.C. Audio BDCD1.1 CD Player	£2,750
Analog Domain Audio DAC1/v	£16,500

LOUDSPEAKERS

Wilson Audio Sasha 2	£18,990
Wilson Audio CUB Series II & Stands	£3,990
Vivid Audio Oval B1	£6,990
Vivid Audio Giya G3	£18,990
Ubiqu Audio Model 1 (Duelund Edition)	£7,500

Townshend Audio Maximum Supertweeters	£990
Tannoy Canterbury GR (OW)	£15,990
Sonus Faber Electa Amator 2 & Iron-Wood Stands	£2,150
Sonus Faber Amati Anniversario GR	£11,990
Shahinian Acoustics Diapason Zetranio	£14,900
Shahinian Acoustics Diapason	£13,500
Rockport Technologies Mira	£4,990
Revel Ultima Voice 2	£4,500
Revel Ultima Studio 2	£8,500
Raidho Acoustics XT-3	£13,990
Neat Motive 2	£590
Martin Logan Fresco (x2)	£490
Linn Klimax Aktiv X-overs for Linn Klimax 350P Speakers	£2,200
Linn Klimax 350P (Aktiv/Passive)	£9,990
JBL Project EVEREST DD67000	£44,990
Funk Audio 15.2 Dual opposed Subwoofers (x2) & 4.8kW RMS M1 Amplifier	£5,750
Estelon XA	£16,990
Eggleson/Works Andra III SE (Signature)	£13,990
Dall Euphonia MS4	£2,990
Crystal Cable Arabesque Minissimo	£7,990
Crystal Cable Arabesque Glass Master	£59,900
B&W Matrix 800	£5,990
Avalon Transcendent	£13,500
Avalon Time Loudspeakers	£37,990
Audiomachina CRM & CRS	£13,990
Audio Physic Scorpio II	£2,490
Audio Acoustics Sapphire Ti-C SE	£55,000
Audio Acoustic Sapphire Ti-C	£21,990
Apogee Stage	£1,990

HEADPHONES

Audioquest NightHawk	£290
MAINS CABLES, FILTERS, POWER CONDITIONERS & GROUNDING	
Torus Power AVR 16	£4,990
Tice Audio Solo	£390
Siltech Tripple Crown Power Cable	£9,990
Entreq Silver Tellus	£990
Entreq Silver Minimus	£325
Entreq Silver CleanUs	£1,450

...much more at www.choicehifi.co.uk

Email info@choicehifi.com

Telephone 020 8392 1959 / 07768 720456

STOCKIST OF Acapella Audio Analogue Domain **ATC** Lab Physic Aurosol Avalon **B.M.C. Audio GmbH** Burmester Cat Clear Audio Denon Entreq Estelon Exogal Graham Tonearms JBL JM Lab Kiseki Lexicon Mark Levinson Melco Monitor Audio Nad Note Audio Origin Live Ortofon Panasonic Parasound Pioneer Plinius Primare Pro-Ject Revel Roksan Shun Mook Audio SME Stillpoints T+A Telluriumq Tom Evans Townshend Transfiguration Ubiqu Audio Velodyne VTL Yba **AND MANY OTHERS**

“I feel the Karan Acoustics LINEa is perhaps the most approachable and universal of the ultra-preamplifiers.”



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Line-level solid-state preamplifier

Inputs: 4× XLR balanced, 2× RCA single-ended

Outputs: 1× XLR balanced, 1× RCA single-ended

Input Impedance: 30 kOhm (balanced/unbalanced)

Output Impedance: 90 Ohm

Output Level: 1.55 V/RMS (nominal), 18.0 V/RMS (maximum/balanced/600 Ohm load)

Max. Input Level: 5.4 V/RMS (balanced/unbalanced)

Gain: 3.6 V/RMS (balanced/unbalanced)

Frequency Response: 20Hz-20kHz, ±0 dB;

Distortion: 0.003% (Full output, 20Hz to 20kHz)

Signal to Noise Ratio: >120 dB (unweighted)

Dimensions (W×H×D):

504 × 126 × 390 mm (Main control unit and Power supply unit)

Weight: 16.2kg (Main control unit), 17.1kg (Power supply unit)

Price: £29,000

Manufacturer: Karan Acoustics

URL: karanacoustics.com

UK Distributor: Audiofreaks

URL: audiofreaks.co.uk

Tel: +44(0) 208 948 4153

► slow, almost chanting trip-hoppy electronica couldn't be more different to solo piano, but the way the LINEa unveiled the processing on her voice and the synth sounds filling the room showed both how 'angular' the processing, but also how refined her voice was underpinning all that synth modelling.

There was a sense of precision to this sound that permeated every track played; from acoustic Rolling Stones to Choral music, and even to the old and rather shrieky sounding Vivaldi Four Seasons by Marriner and the AMSF [Argo]. This is a record many of us have been able to maintain a love/hate relationship over the years, thanks on the one hand to perhaps what is the best playing of Vivaldi, on one of the worst recordings. Curiously, the Karan manages to side-step the bad and focus on the instrumentation and the musicianship. Moving to more modern classical recordings again, the preamp's ability to put you in the same room as Joyce DiDonato in her *Stella di Napoli* album [Erato] explains it all, as you are left speechless and breathless at the scale of her singing, as if hearing it anew.

There's a category error made by some, in thinking that because well-recorded acoustic instruments in a live space is an audiophile Gold Standard, that's all good audio can do. However, the same goose-bumps moments apply equally to everything from electronica to hard rock, too. Of course, to fully realise that goal, you need a preamp as musically honest as the LINEa.

I feel the Karan Acoustics LINEa is the perhaps the most approachable and universal of the ultra-preamplifiers. That could have gone one of two ways; the preamplifier that the highest of high-end respected... as they were buying another preamplifier, or a preamplifier that carves out its own niche as the best choice for the widest number of listeners. I can't help but think

the LINEa ticks that second box brilliantly. If a £29,000 preamp could be called 'the preamp of the people', the Karan Acoustics LINEa is that preamp! **+**

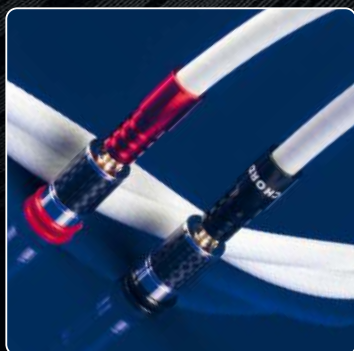
[master]

The definitive version. Ultimate performance, bespoke audiophile cable collection

Chord Company Signature, Sarum and ChordMusic form the vanguard of our cable ranges. A master collection that features our latest conductor, insulation and connector technology.

High-end audiophile quality at a realistic price and each one built to **your** specific requirements. Book a demonstration and hear the difference for yourself.

Designed and hand-built in England since 1985 by a dedicated team of music-lovers. Arrange a demonstration at your nearest Chord Company retailer. Find out more: www.chord.co.uk



CHORDTM

COMPANY





The 175 unites finest signal processing with phenomenal authority in the reproduction of music.
An analog monument which unfolds the magic of vinyl treasures.

Burmester

McIntosh MTI100 Integrated turntable

by Simon Lucas



Not all audiophile satisfaction is delivered aurally. Protest all you like that sound quality is the be-all and end-all, we all know there can be more to sonic gratification beyond straightforward sound quality.

Take, just as a for-instance, a softly glowing green light. Or a big, bold brand

logo in a none-more-heavy-metal gothic typeface. Neither of these things are going to directly enrich your audio experience – but let's not pretend they have nothing to contribute to your overall listening enjoyment.

For over 70 years McIntosh has been delivering some of the most forthright and fulfilling experiences available anywhere in the world of hi-fi. It's been mostly doing so thanks to a sort of rigorous, wide-screen, 'iron fist/velvet glove' sonic characteristic that's routinely able to make a listener's hair stand on end. But it's also developed an unmistakable aesthetic that's undeniably contributed to the overall experience of McIntosh ownership, beyond the sound it produces. ►

“Described by McIntosh as an ‘integrated turntable’, it’s a record player, an integrated amplifier and wireless receiver.”

► Not too many hi-fi products can provoke longing in prospective customers before they’re even making a noise. But McIntosh’s line-up is full of them. And with the MT1100, the studied McIntosh come-on is as strong as it’s ever been.

By the standards of a company that’s no stranger to delivering stereo amplification in three hefty boxes, the MT1100 is a remarkably flexible and self-contained device. Described by McIntosh as an ‘integrated turntable’, it’s a record player, an integrated amplifier and wireless receiver – all in an enclosure that will only occupy one shelf of your kit-rack.

Yes, it looks like a turntable with a basement. But check out that oversized logo, check out those lighting accents. Look at that pair of valves. You’re halfway to wanting one, aren’t you? And that’s only from seeing a picture.

Nothing about the MT1100’s feature-set is likely to dampen your ardour, either. As far as the turntable element goes, a 3kg aluminium platter is belt-driven by a permanent magnet AC synchronous motor. The speed-change

between 33.3 and 45rpm is a manual exercise. The straight, machined aluminium tonearm is pre-fitted with a couple of hundred quid’s-worth of Sumiko Olympia moving magnet cartridge. The whole assembly is mounted on a 10mm-thick pane of glass.

Beneath the glass, inside the substantial metal casework, there’s Class D amplification to the tune of 50 watts per channel (into an 8 ohms load). It’s prefaced by a main preamplifier section that’s driven by the two 12XA7 vacuum tubes. This pair of caged valves also provide the majority of the visual drama on the plinth of the MT1100 itself. A dedicated phono preamp inside a shielded box completes the amplification story.

On the back of the unit there is a single pair of speaker binding posts. So, if you own a pair of speakers and a vinyl record, the MT1100 is ready to go. But because this is a self-contained system, the rear panel also features a Toslink digital optical input, RCA digital optical socket and single pair of line-level stereo RCA analogue inputs. In terms of outputs, there’s a single pre- for a subwoofer, and two pairs of RCAs arranged in a bridged in/out fashion in case you’re overcome by the desire for a power amplifier.

There’s also space for a stubby Bluetooth aerial and the McIntosh is packing an eccentric (but effective) Bluetooth 4.2 via Sierra BC127 module specification, which puts aptX HD capability on the menu. All incoming digital information is dealt with by a Cirrus Logic DAC with a native 24bit/192kHz resolution. It’s a proven device, not exactly at the cutting edge of digital audio management but as reassuring as shopping at John Lewis.

The front of the unit is dominated by the brand logo, of course, but McIntosh has also managed to squeeze in a 6.3mm headphone output socket. ►





Years of excellence is no accident.



Products of sound engineering
www.siltechcables.com



EXPLORER
SERIES



CLASSIC
ANNIVERSARY
SERIES



CROWN PRINCE
SERIES



ROYAL
SIGNATURE
SERIES



TRIPLE CROWN
SERIES



Distributed in the UK and Ireland by Padood
www.padood.com | info@padood.com
+44 (0)1223 653199 | 20 Station Road, Cambridge CB1 2JD

- ▶ Cans are powered by the company's 'High Drive' headphone amp, which is intended to give the widest possible compatibility with (wired) headphones.

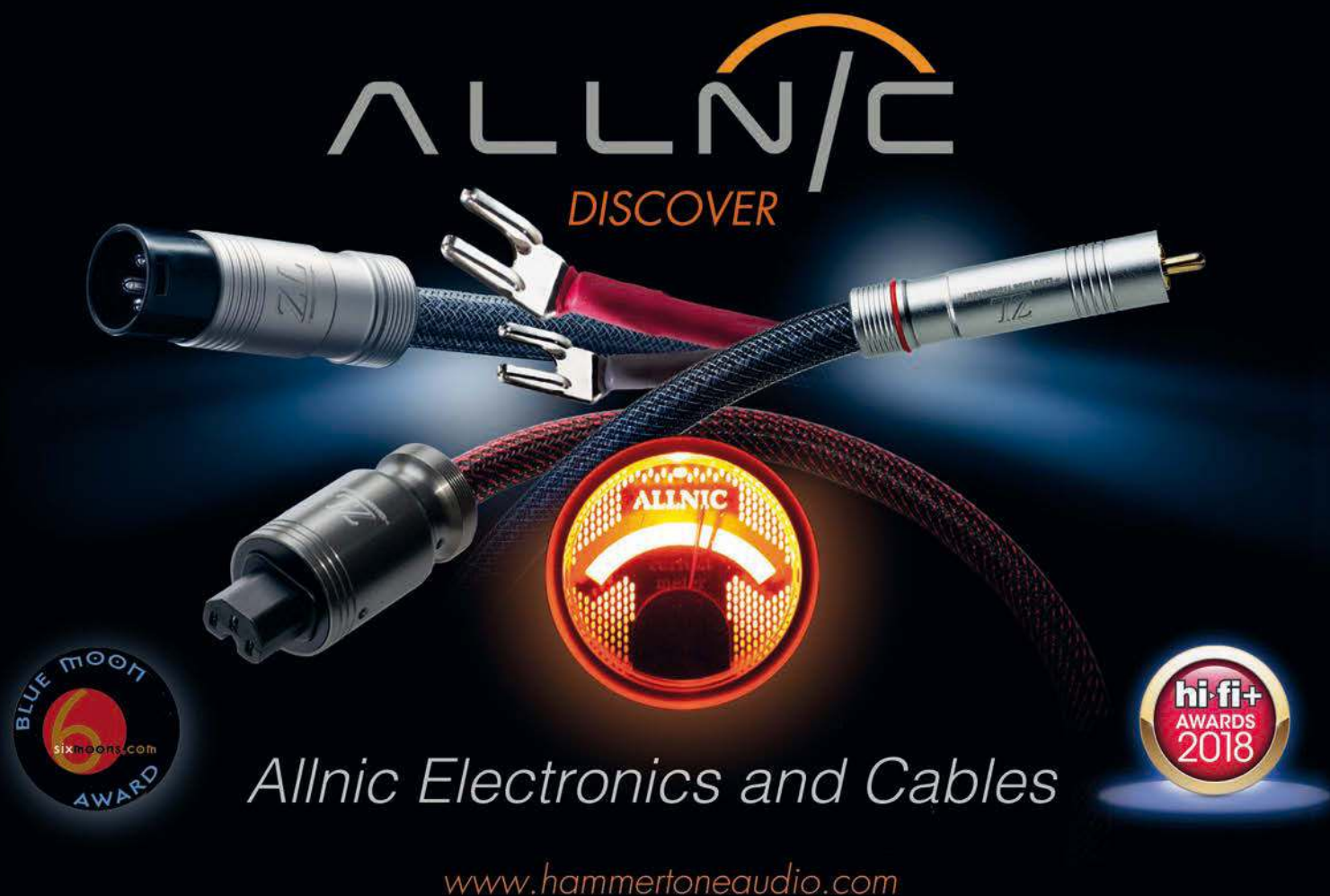
Given that it is (to a large extent) a record player, there's a lot of manual operation involved in the MT1100. It's supplied with a modest and nondescript remote control (that needs a proper line-of-sight to the IR sensor just above the headphone socket if it's going to be of any use), and while it's hardly the most luxurious item in the world it does, at least, feature only as many buttons as is necessary.

While virtually everything else about the product seems to have a sort of bank-vault solidity about it, that doesn't wholly extend to the two rotary/push controls at the bottom

left of the top-plate. As they control volume, input selection and wireless pairing, an owner will be in contact with them fairly regularly and the accuracy or alacrity of the way in which they both function and feel is crucial. That being said, the functionality is excellent and the feel is entirely consistent with the 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air-esque looks of the McIntosh MT1100. So 1950s in fact, you have to actively try not to play Buddy Holly tracks at first.

Get some appropriate speakers attached, though – this test was almost entirely conducted using Acoustic Energy's AE1 mkIII SE standmounters – and the MT1100 sounds so articulate, so candid, that nit-picking about the weight and tactility of a couple of controls seems churlish-going-on-irrelevant.

As a turntable, the McIntosh manages to deliver on almost everything vinyl enthusiasts prize about the format. A heavy pressing of Thom Yorke's *Anima* [XL] has all of the low-end presence and solidity you could hope for, but still manages to describe precise, straight edges to the attack and decay of the muscle-bound bass synth sounds. Jabbing, chirping electronic pulses in the midrange track Yorke's treated vocals in precise, unwavering orbits, while the surging treble rushes in and out of the mix cleanly. The weight and momentum of the sound is predictable, but the speed and crispness is perhaps less so.



ALLN/C
DISCOVER

BLUE MOON
SIX MOONS.COM
AWARD

hi-fi+
AWARDS
2018

Allnic Electronics and Cables

www.hammertoneaudio.com

“As a turntable, the McIntosh manages to deliver on almost everything vinyl enthusiasts prize about the format.”

At its heart this is a recording that makes as much use of absence as it does presence and the MT1100 serves up this sparseness in really convincing fashion. The wide-open spaces, the cavernous gaps between instrumental strands, serve to illustrate the McIntosh's ability to create a big, convincing soundstage and to lock each sound on there with absolute certainty.

Switching to an entirely different flavour and temperature with Tubby Hayes Quartet's *Grits, Beans and Greens: The Lost Fontana*

Studio Sessions 1969 [Fontana] allows the McIntosh to demonstrate its facility with texture as well as tone. The scandalously indulgent bass-walks, the instinctive flow of Hayes' tenor sax and the meticulous percussive washes are all loaded with detailed information and as a result, the music sounds freshly laundered. Forking over this amount of detail without sounding in any way prissy or analytical is no easy task, regardless of how much McIntosh is charging. The mastery of low-level harmonic dynamics on display here is considerable.

The story is similarly agreeable from other sources, too. Whether it's a TIDAL Masters stream of Lana Del Rey's *Ultraviolence* [Interscope] via Bluetooth or a CD copy of Funkadelic's *Free Your Mind... And Your Ass Will Follow* [Westbound] via the digital optical input, the MT1100 draws a big, vivid ►

Incomparable Value!
H-1202



WORLD'S BEST \$5000 PHONO STAGE
IS ONLY **\$3750!**

“Forking over this amount of detail without sounding in any way prissy or analytical is no easy task.”



► picture with the same low-end speed and extension. Detail levels are sky-high, and vocalists are given the elbow-room to properly express themselves. The even-handedness of the journey from the bottom of the frequency range to the top is gratifying, while the unity and togetherness of collective performances (whether it's the Tubby Hayes band or Funkadelic) contributes to timing so instinctive it's almost matter-of-fact.

At 8 ohms impedance and 87.5dB sensitivity, the Acoustic Energy loudspeakers present an unremarkable load. Yet it's only where broad-strokes, loud-quiet-loud dynamics are concerned that the MTI100 is anything less than thoroughly convincing. It's not bereft of dynamic headroom, of course, but putting meaningful distance between the softer, more contemplative moments in a recording and the 'final chorus before the outro' climaxes is not the McIntosh's forte. On paper, 50 watts per channel ought to be enough to give a crescendo the intensity it deserves; but somehow the MTI100 doesn't seem to breathe quite deeply enough. Oh, it'll go plenty loud enough if that's how you like it, but that means even the quiet bits will be pretty loud too.

In every other respect, though, the McIntosh is a thoroughly satisfying, periodically thrilling listen. Seven grand spent elsewhere will buy you similar functionality and similarly enjoyable performance, naturally; but not from one box. And certainly not from one box with a unique look that's basically shorthand for 'enlightened, serious and judicious'. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Integrated turntable system with phonostage, DAC and hybrid two-channel amplifier

Analogue inputs: one unbalanced line-level (via RCA jacks)

Digital inputs: one coaxial, one optical

Bluetooth: A2DP, AVRCP, SBC, HD

Phonostage: Built-in Moving magnet

Analogue outputs: one unbalanced line-level (via RCA jacks)

Supported sample rates: 16Bit, 24Bit–32kHz to 192kHz

Power output: 50wpc @ 8 Ohms

Headphone loads: 100–600 Ohms

Bandwidth: 20Hz–20kHz

Distortion: THD <+/- 0.5%

Signal-to-noise ratio: 93dB

Distortion: 0.2% from 20Hz to 20kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio: 75dB

Turntable section

Rotational speeds: 33.3, 45 rpm

Drive mechanism: Belt driven via AC motor

Platter type: aluminium, 3.18kg

Tonearm

Type: damped machined aluminium, lateral bearing

Tonearm Length: 9"

Phono Cartridge

Type: moving magnet

Stylus/cantilever: elliptical/aluminium

Tracking Force: 2.0g

Load: 47kOhms

Dimensions (HxWxD):

172 × 489 × 356mm

Weight: 15.2kg

Price: £7,500

Manufacturer: McIntosh Labs

URL: mcintoshlabs.com

UK Distributor: Jordan Acoustics

URL: jordanacoustics.co.uk

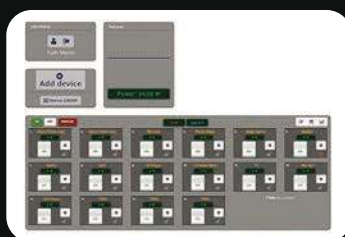
Tel: +44(0)1202 911886

IsoTek® SMART Power

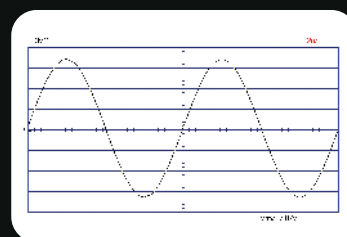


"The new Alpha, Delta and Theta models offer full system control (and monitoring) of connected electronics through RS232, LAN and over WiFi, all via a custom application. The demo was mighty impressive!"

Hi-Fi News



Intuitive easy to use interface



Delivering clean power



Supporting the UK's finest home cinema installers

To learn more on about IsoTek products, please contact Pulse Cinemas:
Unit 4, M11 Business Link, Parsonage Lane, Forest Hall Road,
Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex CM24 8GF

Email: info@pulsecinemas.com
Phone: 01279 647039
Web: www.pulsecinemas.com



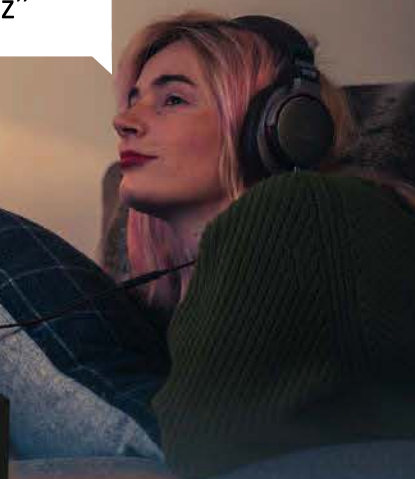
This ONE Cast is compatible with AirPlay 2. iOS 11.4 or later is required.

A new era of smart

"Alexa, play BBC radio 1 on ONE Cast"

"Hey Siri, play some cool jazz"

Hey Google, play my Dinner playlist downstairs



ONE

ONE SERIES from Cyrus is the definitive range of small, integrated hi-fi systems. All use our unique amplifier technology, giving amazing scale and remarkable control of the music.

The ONE includes Bluetooth™ streaming, built-in phono stage, dedicated headphone amplifier and seamless AV integration.

ONE *HD*

The ONE *HD* adds high-resolution digital inputs, including a bespoke 32bit, 192k DAC implementation with asynchronous USB.

"Simple to use, incredibly versatile and blissfully enthralling."

ONE *Cast*

The ONE *Cast* further adds to this already impressive specification with complete voice control and 'direct from app' high resolution streaming integration. It also features an HDMI(ARC) input, making it as simple to use as a soundbar, but taking your TV audio to Cyrus levels of music performance.

Smart Music Amplified

CYRUS
ONE SERIES

www.cyrusaudio.com

Hegel H190 integrated amplifier and Amphion Argon 7LS floorstanding loudspeakers

by Steve Dickinson

We've put together a pairing for this review of the substantial yet understated Amphion Argon 7LS, floorstanding loudspeakers and the Hegel H190 integrated amplifier which, with its built-in DAC and generous 150W output offers pretty much all the connectivity, networking and system driving ability you could reasonably want. We've done it because Amphion and Hegel is a combination we've quite often seen at shows, or in dealer dem rooms, so we wondered why. Partly, it might be because

both are available in a subtle soft white finish, so they tick that blond wood and white linen Scandi aesthetic box, but is there more to it than that? Is this a marriage of convenience, or a match made in heaven?

The H190 chosen here is the mid-point of the Hegel integrated amp range. It needs no introduction to *Hi-Fi+* regulars, having been reviewed by JK in issue 156, so the interest here is in how it fares when partnered with the Amphion Argon 7LS, a middling-to-large sized floorstander at the top of Amphion's Argon range. The Scandi-chic is more than skin ▶





“Hegel is more about that image of clean-limbed freshness and vitality, as if Norway were a spotless toothpaste ad.”

- deep: Amphon is Finnish, while Hegel is Norwegian. But it's a different Norwegian to its compatriot, Electrocompaniet. While Electrocompaniet delivers on the hygge, Hegel is more about that image of clean-limbed freshness and vitality, as if Norway were a spotless toothpaste ad.

Amphon, by contrast, is a little harder to get to know. I suspect it suffers in a short dealer dem when put up against the typical reflex-ported loudspeakers we're all familiar with. Amphon, perhaps because of its strong presence in the pro audio community, eschews ports and the Argon 7LS has instead a pair of ABRs on the rear, mirroring the d'Appolito configuration of the main drivers on the front panel. Initial impressions can be misleading, the Amphions sounding almost diffident, compared directly against a ported speaker with its free-breathing characteristics, but give them an hour or so, and they start to get under your skin. And once there, they're not easy to forget.

And the reason for that is partly down to that lack of ports. Amphon contend that while ports may extend bass depth they also mess with its timing, and their thoughts are borne out by the listening experience. The Amphions exhibit a quite remarkable degree of bass control: deep, fast and tuneful, and gratifyingly tolerant of room placement. But the Amphions' subtle beguilement is also probably down to the uncomplicated crossover design and its operating range which, at 1.6KHz, keeps the crossover point well below the frequencies the human ear is most sensitive to. The tweeter sits back from the front baffle, deep in a specially contoured waveguide for optimum dispersion. The net result is remarkably solid and stable imaging, and a somewhat wider than usual sweet spot. Coupled with the tolerance to room placement, this is a loudspeaker that probably deserves serious audition if you have a difficult or awkwardly-shaped listening room.

So, in combination the sound is precise, clean and tight, with ample deep bass which underpins without overwhelming. Imaging is quite extraordinary, placement, whether singers, soloists or string sections is approaching holographic levels of precision; the Hegel/Amphon combination quickly starts to feel comfortable and confidence-inspiring. Pink Martini's 'Hey Eugene' from *Hey Eugene* [Wrasse Records] is a good ►

MOON

by SIMAUDIO

Your music like never before

700i v2 - Integrated Amplifier
780D v2 - Network Player/DAC



Distributed in the UK and Ireland by  Renaissance

info@renaissanceaudio.co.uk
www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

“(the Amphion Argon LS7) speak clearly and emphatically, like a statesman, rather than bellowing in your face, like a drill sergeant.”



► example. The solo vocals are firmly anchored front and centre, while the rest of the 18-piece ensemble is arrayed behind and to the sides and it's easy to pick out the individual contributors, pretty much at will. And that's not merely a party trick, it shows how strong this combination is with timing. Pink Martini, for all its size, always gives a tight and often surprisingly intimate performance, they're always 'on it' and here you see exactly how good the individual musicians are, and how well they contribute to the whole.

The Hegel 190 wears its power lightly, almost deliberately so it would appear, because realistic levels require a volume setting somewhere north of 60 (it tops out at 100); the Amphions are pretty efficient, so this seems to be a design choice, perhaps to allow greater discrimination at lower levels. Consequently, venturing into the top third of the volume range became normal enough and the amp never exhibited any signs of stress; no harshness, shoutiness or grossly oversized, misshapen instruments. Indeed, composure under pressure is one of the hallmarks of the Amphion/Hegel combination. Yes, even with The Bad Plus' '1979 Semi-Finalist' from *Give* [Colombia] was powerful, with deep, tight, tuneful and very well controlled bass. The track starts with a simple, subtle piano motif, then explodes with a hammering drum riff. This was indisputably emphatic, but sometimes there was an impression that the overall presentation of the track was less energetic than I've heard it elsewhere. I don't think that was the issue though, it's quite likely to be an illusion due to the

clean and fuss-free delivery. Sometimes that sense of energy is the sound of your system losing the plot. There was some slight impression of bass notes pressurising the room, a subtle 'pumping' sensation that isn't apparent with my normal ported loudspeakers; I suspect this is partly indicative of the different way the Amphions seem to drive the room.

And different they definitely are, but not in the sense of being coloured or less than transparent. Understated, yet communicative in an almost subversive way, they speak clearly and emphatically, like a statesman, rather than bellowing in your face, like a drill sergeant. The opening percussion riff to Peter Gabriel's 'Red Rain' from *So* [Realworld] is perhaps best described as 'neat': tight, fast, neither splashy nor over-emphasised, just in its place. 'Here Comes the Flood' from *Shaking the Tree* [Realworld] was poignant and affecting, underpinned powerfully by the superb tunefulness and harmonic impact of the deceptively simple piano part. The piano was a particular strength, invariably powerful but not overblown. Roberto Fonseca's 'Mi Negra Ave Maria' from *Yo* [Jazz Village] is a case in point. This track can sound a bit bombastic and there's clearly a huge and impressive piano here; Fonseca makes full use of its capabilities but his phrasing and range of expression is clearly heard, and the tunefulness of the lower registers underpins the harmonies, bringing out the thoughtfulness that's clearly behind the musicianship.

Visiting the LSO Tchaikovsky 'Capriccio Italien' [Decca], the nicely focussed imagery helped lay out the different ►

WHAT HI-FI?



Electronics shown Roksan K3 Series

Step up in sound Silver Series

Combining fabulous sound and elegant design, Monitor Audio's Silver Series reaches new levels of audio excellence.



monitoraudio.com/silver



“The Hegel H190/Amphion Argon 7LS combination is clearly more than merely a marriage of convenience.”

- sections of the orchestra as the thematic material passed between them in the opening section. The system maintained its composure with a sense of the – sometimes exuberant – energy levels being carefully yet sensitively managed. Big, ebullient jazz, Abdullah Ibrahim with the NDR Big Band was presented with insight, clear and lucid. Sometimes Ibrahim's piano can get a bit lost in the melee but here his expressive and sensitive phrasing came through clearly. In ‘Black and Brown Cherries’ from *Ekapa Lodumo* [Enja] the energy of the band was clearly apparent, well expressed but controlled. It was easy to hear into the complexity, and the tunefulness of the lower registers – in particular the trombones – was again a particular joy.

Of the pairing, I have to say it is the Amphions which impressed me the most. I briefly reinstalled my regular Albarry pre-power combination for a point of familiar reference. Despite conceding, on paper at least, some 40 Watts to the Hegel, the Albarry-Amphion pairing did deliver more vigour. There was a slightly diminished sense of order compared to the Hegel however, the individual parts perhaps not quite so clearly delineated. Given my bond with the Albarry amps runs very deep, that it didn't simply ‘blow away’ the Hegel integrated says much for the Scandinavian integrated.

So, to answer the question in the first paragraph, the Hegel H190/Amphion Argon 7LS combination is clearly more than merely a marriage of convenience. Splitting the pairing up shows they are both very fine products in their own rights. Speaking for myself (not in the more dispassionate tones of the reviewer) I think the Amphions are the better part of the pairing, but I can see why many would say the opposite, and that is at best nit-picking and both are capable of delivering a very musical experience in combination and in other systems. It's easy to hear why people are excited about the products of both brands, and it'd be interesting to hear the bigger (£4,900) H390 amplifier in place of the H190. Whether that might be closer to a match made in heaven will have to wait for another day (and the successful pitch to the Editor for a follow-up review), the combination of Hegel electronics and Amphion loudspeakers is clearly one of those partnerships which has settled into long-term, happy contentment. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Hegel H190

Type: Solid-state two-channel integrated amplifier with onboard DAC

Analogue inputs: 1 balanced via XLR connector, 2 unbalanced line level via RCA jacks

Digital inputs: 1 coaxial (BNC connector); 1 coaxial (RCA connector); 3 optical; 1 USB; 1 network (RJ55)

Analogue outputs: One unbalanced (RCA); one pre-amp (variable) (RCA), one pair multi-way loudspeaker binding posts

Rated power into 8Ω: 150 Watts, both channels working

Damping factor: >4000 (main power output stage)

Signal to Noise Ratio: >100dB

Frequency response: 5Hz–100kHz

Intermodulation: <0.01% (19KHz & 20KHz)

Crosstalk: <-100dB

Distortion: < 0.01% @25 Watts, 8Ω, 1KHz

Minimum load: 2Ω

Finishes: White; Black

Dimensions (HxWxD): 12 × 43 × 41 cm

Gross Weight (packed): 19kgs

Price: £3,200

Manufacturer: Hegel Music System AS

URL: hegel.com

Amphion Argon 7LS

Type: Two way, floorstanding loudspeaker with passive radiators

Driver complement: 1 × 25mm titanium tweeter; 2x 165mm aluminium woofer

Crossover frequencies: 1600 Hz

Frequency response: 28 Hz–251Hz (+/-3dB)

Impedance: 4Ω

Sensitivity: 91 dB

Finishes: White (grill accent colour options available for driver grilles); walnut

Dimensions (HxWxD): 116 × 19.1 × 30.5cm

Weight: 30Kg

Price: £3,600 (white); £3,840 (walnut)

Manufacturer: Amphion Loudspeakers Ltd

URL: amphion.fi

UK distributor: Auden Distribution

URL: audendistribution.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)7917 685759

Award-winning Digital Cables from Shunyata Research



Digital Audio Cable of the Year
Alpha USB



Digital Cable of the Year
Sigma USB



Shunyata Research's digital cables are produced using a **Precision Matched Z (PMZ)** concept. This means that tolerances of the conductor surface, dielectric extrusion, and the precision of the braided shield are held to minute variances. To achieve these tight tolerances, the extrusion and braiding machines must be run at one-quarter speed during the manufacturing process.

Distribution in the U.K. and Ireland by The Shunyata Distribution Company
Guillaume Boyer // t: 0330 223 3769 // www.shunyata-uk.com



Empire Apollo

By ENTREQ

Generating Pure Power and a Cleaner Network



Streamed music never sounded this good

AIRT

Connecting you with the brands you love

For more information contact : fraser@airtaudio.co.uk 07548796382

Magico A1 Stand-mount loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

If there's one thing all audio people think is 'a done deal', it's the sealed-box two-way standmount loudspeaker. We've been there and done that, whether it was an LS3/5a, a Linn Kan, or any one of dozens of models, some well-loved, some not so. The sealed-box two-way is a known quantity, and we all know its strengths and weaknesses.

Probably.

The Magico A1 is a two-way sealed-box stand-mount loudspeaker, bearing more than a close family resemblance to the A3 floorstander we tested in issue 172. And as such, you could be forgiven for just reading that review and truncating any observations about the lower end. You'd be part right, but mostly wrong, because the A1 does a lot more.

Even so, the A1 still takes a lot of its design cues from the A3. It has a single 165mm Graphene Nano-Tec midrange unit (used in this case as a mid/woofer), and the distinctive 28mm Beryllium coated diamond tweeter. We went over just how hard it is to make Beryllium and diamond like one another in that review of the A3, and it still holds today.

Like many of its stablemates, the A1 cabinet is made of sheets of aluminium. Beneath the surface there beats a heart of pure Magico, too. And like its stablemates, it uses 6061 T6 aircraft-grade aluminium enclosure (like Big Boy Magico models) includes a complex series of internal polished aluminium bracing sections, designed to add mass and stiffness while lowering internal resonance. This has similarities with the internal structure of loudspeakers in Magico's considerably more expensive S, M, and Q series. To make the A1 both attainably priced and not weigh so much it destroys the stand on which it rests, this is just internal bracing (essentially the plates of the outside of the A1 here form the enclosure itself, where in bigger Magicos they are a heavy skin on an aluminium skeleton).



The 85dB sensitivity figure coupled with a four-ohm impedance figure actually holds, with no nasty little phase angle impedance dips that would rip the MOSFETs from many good amplifiers. This makes the loudspeaker ►

“The Magico A1 is not so amp-fussy as to be allergic to audio electronics’ nursery slopes.”

► slightly more demanding than its tower brother, and that means both quality and quantity in amplification. But not to insane levels; Magico includes some more real-world amplifiers in its design criteria and listening tests for its A-series loudspeakers, knowing that there is less of a guarantee that a loudspeaker at this price point is going to wind up the cheapest part of the system. In particular, the company has been known to use Hegel’s integrated amplifiers in the design process. While you can raise the performance level of the electronics several orders of magnitude above that of the Hegel models (and if you can, you should!), the Magico A1 is not so amp-fussy as to be allergic to audio electronics’ nursery slopes.

A caveat to that, however, is where the A3 was equally undemanding of placement, that’s not the case with the A1. The loudspeaker does need to be positioned carefully in the room, and used with appropriately heavy loudspeaker stands. If not, it can sound a little bass light, and even a touch bland sounding. At its worst, if you hear a sound that is light in the bass, bland-sounding and divorces bass and treble, the A1 has been set-up by someone who might be best sticking to their day job. Or rather, it has been deliberately set-up to sound bad by someone wanting to sell something else! That all being said, the dial-in process isn’t overly obsessive and the sound snaps into place over the course of a few inches, rather than a sweet-spot that falls apart if you move it one electron layer to the left. Particular care should be taken with the precision of the rear- and side-wall placement, and toe-in. Run-in is harder to determine because the review sample came with some miles on the clock.

As I said at the outset, we ‘know’ two-way stand-mounts. That’s especially true among British audiophiles, who still hold to the notion that UK designers are the best at making two-way stand-mounts. While the need to make a two-way stand-mount is understandable in a country where any room sized 12x16’ or more is considered ‘capacious’, the A1 shows that we don’t have exclusivity over the design.



In fact, if anything, what the Magico A1 shows is that, with a few notable exceptions, the UK stand-mount market has been asleep at the switch! Granted, many of our best and best-loved stand-mounts are less than a quarter of the price of the A1, but the level of uncompromising design that is put into honing and perfecting the sealed-box two-way from Magico effectively completes a project started – and more or less abandoned – by the BBC in the 1960s. The A1 is no BBC LS3/5a clone... it’s what the BBC LS3/5a might have become had it not become frozen in time.

This sounds almost disrespectful to both Magico and the LS3/5a, but if anything it’s complementing both. The BBC design set standards for neutrality and speech clarity ►

No more hiding



K10

Hogging the spotlight



EXCLUSIVELY AVAILABLE
FROM A DEDICATED TEAM OF
UK INDEPENDENT DEALERS
AND INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTORS

For your nearest dealer call
01280 700147
OR VISIT
proac-loudspeakers.com

 **ProAc**
perfectly natural



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way, two driver, sealed cabinet stand-mount loudspeaker

Driver Complement: 1× 28mm Beryllium dome tweeter, 1× 165mm Graphene Nano-Tec mid- bass unit

Sensitivity: 85dB

Impedance: 4ohms

Frequency Response: 35Hz–50kHz

Recommended power: 50–150W

Dimensions (H×D×W): 39.6 × 30.5 × 21.6cm

Weight: 20kg per loudspeaker

Price: £8,888 per pair

Manufacturer: Magico, LLC

URL: magico.net

UK Distributor: Absolute Sounds Ltd

URL: absolutesounds.com

Tel: +44(0)208 971 3909

- ▶ in its day, but that day was 50 years ago and the A1 is one of the very few products that takes that inherent neutrality as a starting place and builds from there.

As a consequence, the loudspeaker is one of the most uncompromisingly uncoloured stand-mounts you can find, yet without the dynamic foreshortening that high-enders equate to small cabinet designs. Yes, it rolls off at 35Hz, but that is an honest roll-off rather than an exaggerated tale-wagging exercise. It's the difference between bass that is 'taut', 'dry' and 'honest'. And bass that is 'impressive' yet ultimately 'flubby', 'flaccid' and 'indistinct'. This means it aces the 'Trentmøller Test'; playing 'Chameleon' from Trentmøller's *The Last Resort* [Poker Flat] results in bass notes that are clean and precise; other similarly-sized loudspeakers make those bass notes sound deeper, but on closer investigation they come with a lot of overhang, and that slows the sound down.

Long after you have grown accustomed to its bass (cue Rex Harrison), it's the clarity and detail that really hit home. Like most Magicos, the A1 is a resolution monster. If it's on the recording, it's presented for you through the loudspeakers without grace or favour. This is something that people who haven't experienced it think is something like over-stimulation of the senses. Another way of looking at this much detail is "where have you been all my audio life?", and that usually comes from those who have heard what this much information can do for their audio pleasure. Take 'Tearjerker' from Jarvis Cocker and Chilly Gonzales's *Room 29* [DG]. This simple recording (just voice and piano recorded in a hotel suite) can be played on any system and it sounds good, but through the A1, it's truly mesmerising. The level of information puts you not just in the room, but almost between the two musicians, and the bittersweet (but mostly 'bitter') lyrics hit home. It's the antithesis of 'easy listening', but leaves you hungry for more. More, in this case being everything from a string quartet playing Schoenberg to all of Joy Division's *Closer* album [Factory]. Such is the power of the A1, it took some time to shake off the sads.

Naturally, such an inherently informative loudspeaker gives good dynamic range and soundstaging, but these elements are more 'there' than 'directly noticeable'. Some systems are so dynamic they can make a piccolo sound like an atom bomb, but the Magico has more restraint. Not too much restraint though. It's like the dynamic equivalent of the Han Solo 'fly casual' quote. Ultimately, there are few things the Magico A1 doesn't do really well, and most of those are more to do with not trying to bend the laws of physics with respect to cabinet size. In other words, what it doesn't do is be dishonest with the music.

For the last 30 or more years, stand-mounts speakers have tended not sell as well as their floorstanding counterparts. The Magico A1 deserves to be one of the rare exceptions to that rule. If you want uncompromising sound in a room compromised by its own size, the A1 is one of the few to really meet those demands. +

ESSENCE

is Music



The Gryphon Essence Mono & Stereo Amplifier



www.gryphon-audio.com



AMBITIOUS
AUDIO DESIGN

HIGHEND LOUDSPEAKERS

MADE IN DENMARK

Mytek Digital Brooklyn Bridge streaming DAC

by Andrew Harrison



Mytek's half-width and affordably priced D-A converter is now in its fourth incarnation after the line began with the Stereo192-DSD in 2011. Successive models were dubbed the Brooklyn and each time they gained upgrades in converter silicon.

Each time, that is, until the Brooklyn Bridge, which launched this year with not a new DAC chip, but added network, Wi-Fi and USB connectivity and no longer requiring a separate streamer or computer to deliver the digits.

Mytek has long turned exclusively to ESS Technology and its Sabre series of DAC chips, and the Bridge here takes the same ES9029PRO as the previous Brooklyn DAC+. It's a well-respected high-specification converter that decodes PCM up to DXD-spec (24-bit and either 352.8 or 384 kHz), as well as the highest commercial DSD files at 4x baseband rate – DSD256 – albeit with the usual ceiling of DSD128 when used in a DoP setup.

It's a very tidy unit, available in black or silver finish, with a multi-faceted fascia to provide some textured interest. A quick tour around the Bridge shows it really doesn't want for much in features, serving as an all-round digital (and analogue) pre-amplifier.

Menu navigation is via the main encoder knob plus four concealed buttons, two either side of a colourful and detailed OLED display that's replete with dancing peak meters when active. The company M logo lights up in a choice of 16 intense colours, or the backlight can be disabled if desired. For remote control, Mytek includes the aluminium Apple Remote.

On the rear are RCA and XLR balanced outputs, plus four digital inputs – two S/PDIF through RCA, Toslink optical and USB Type B. The S/PDIF pair can be combined to create an SDIF-3 three-wire connection with the help of a BNC word clock, the professionals' choice for piping raw DSD.

An extra power supply input is a useful feature, instated after Mytek dropped its linear power supply for the first Brooklyn. It ►

- allows in one easy move to sidestep the internal switched-mode unit, a custom SMPS inside its own semi-Faraday cage. More on that later.

Besides its core D-A function, the Brooklyn Bridge can serve as pre-amp. Two volume schemes are offered – purely digital attenuation, and an analogue resistor-ladder volume. The final choice is left to the listener's taste. A relay-switched bypass mode disables either option for a clearly audible better sound, providing one has a half-way transparent pre-amp already.

By default, the line-level output is rather hot, at 4.8 V unbalanced and 9.7 V through the XLR sockets, but thankfully this can be trimmed down through the menu by –12 dB in 1 dB steps. Unlike the previous global attenuation, this works per input, so it's necessary to adjust for every digital source. In practice a –6 dB adjustment works well to bring volume down to similar levels as with most other consumer audio kits.

There's a phono stage ready to work with either moving-magnet or moving-coil cartridges, and this can be disabled to access a regular line-level input. There's no adjustment for sensitivity or impedance, and in practice the MC input proved too high in gain and in noise, with added MW radio intrusion. The MM on the other hand is very good, clean and revealing. Two 1/4-inch sockets on the front will either drive two pairs of headphones, or with the help of an additional XLR adaptor can be combined to provide balanced-mode operation. As such, the 6 W headphone stage is no afterthought.

For its network streaming function Mytek has added a UPnP module from Korean developer ConversDigital, overseen by the 'mconnect Player' app for Android and iOS (£5.99). This mostly works well, giving a slick interface to navigate through thousands of albums on a NAS drive, for example. The same app is used for logging into rental services Tidal and Qobuz, and it can find your own music files stored on certain cloud accounts, namely Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive and Apple iCloud Drive. Unfortunately, missing currently is any means to access internet radio.

There does seem to be a formatting limit on high-res audio via the network input though, as I was unable to play PCM beyond 192 kHz and DSD higher than standard DSD64 when using MinimServer on various Synology and QNAP NAS drives. Gapless playback is a tick box in the app settings – two in fact for 'by App' and 'to Renderer' – although no combination would successfully play albums through without a fractional pause between tracks. For some listeners that could be a deal breaker if this was the primary input source.

The app suffered a few random quits over several months of use, still making it one of the more stable when set against the worst offenders here.

In core sound quality, the Brooklyn Bridge is a neutral and highly resolving digital convertor, able to extract the musical essence from a variety of digital formats. A good starting point is with CD audio, here played from a Mac mini running Audirvana Plus with CAD USB cable.

Before finishing the setup though, it's wise to find the preferred digital interpolation filter for PCM, from a selection of seven that are hard-coded into the ESS convertor chip. By default, the Brooklyn has an MQA decoder enabled with a supplemental minimum-phase filter running in DSP. This gives the semblance of a detailed and spacious sound, at the expense of coherent musical timing. High frequencies are delayed behind mid and bass, making for an ultimately confusing and soulless listening experience.

Even after disabling the proprietary phase-distortion feature, a FRMP (fast roll-off minimum-phase) filter is still enabled. If you wish to preserve musical timing, switch to linear-phase. There's a choice of four: fast and slow roll-off linear-phase filters (FRLP and SRLP), brickwall and what ESS calls ►





SPENDOR

REVEALING EVERY DETAIL

The new Spendor 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.

spendoraudio.com

“Against the original Mytek Brooklyn, the Bridge certainly benefits from the later ESS DAC chip.”

- an Apodizing filter, which in this instance is actually also linear-phase. FRLP and SRLP were the favourites; the former more incisive and fractionally more impulsive, the latter slightly more flowing and organic.

Wideband high-resolution formats are renowned for rendering bass textures with realism, but even with 16/44.1 material there's notable depth and timbre to be found from the Brooklyn. An apt example is the five-string electric bass and acoustic piano on *Minione* (Universal Polska 573 980 8), Anna Marie Jopek's beautifully sparse collaboration with Cuban jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. Bassist Armando Gola's fretless underpins the underplayed piano and Jopek's breathy purr throughout, tripping playfully through 'Kogo nasza miłosc obchodzi' to delightful low-toned effect.

Halfway between standard and high-res releases are those odd fellows mixed down to 24/44.1, such as Medeski Martin & Wood's *Omnisphere* (Indirecto Records), a strangely beguiling blend of the jazz chameleon outfit's humoured funk supported by avant-garde classical collective Alarm Will Sound. The opener 'Kid Tao Mammal' is a kaleidoscopic journey from rocky jazz with John Medeski on echoed Wuritzer electric piano, to an other-worldly collage of winds and strings before settling back into the offbeat funk groove for which the trio are celebrated. The Brooklyn laps up such challenges, keeping the pace where needed, revealing the scratchy timbres of slow string glissandos, the strangled mute-brass squeaks, before focusing on the crisp timing of drummer Chris Wood.

Against the original Mytek Brooklyn, the Bridge certainly benefits from the later ESS DAC chip, with a lighter and more revealing mid-band and sweeter top end. There's more light on the upper treble, already a hallmark of the ESS sound, more vivacious overall but never tiring unless the music wants it so.

A step forward in that excitement was also found using the streamer module, versus USB connection to PC. With the Ethernet cable in place, the Bridge plays well from UPnP-enabled NAS drives on the network, sounding a little crisper and more resolving, if losing some of the low-level subtlety I heard through a decent USB connection.

Mytek doesn't make its own upgrade power supply. However, of the third-party units I've tried, the Longdog Audio PSU rings the nicest changes. It brings a more rich, cinematic telling, airier and more spacious.

The Brooklyn Bridge is truly a jack of many a trade, and will suit, well, anyone looking for a compact do-it-all DAC plus pre-amp plus headphone amp. It even makes a good stab at vinyl when set to MM mode. For the most part it was tested as an audiophile stereo DAC though, and here it has mastered its trade. There are even sweeter sounding DACs if you have another £1,000 or so in your budget, but for under £3,000 it is very hard to better. And if streaming isn't your bag or you already have that covered, the Brooklyn DAC+ is still available at around £800 less. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Conversion: up to 384k, 32bit PCM, native DSD up to DSD256, DXD, 130dB DR, ES9028PRO chipset

Mqa hi-res decoder: built in certified hardware MQA™ decoder, full unfold to original sample rate

Network inputs: Ethernet CAT5 (PCM up to 24/192k, DSD64, WiFi (PCM up to 24/192k, DSD64)

Digital inputs: USB2 Class2 (OSX, Linux driverless, all formats up to 384k), 2x S/PDIF (PCM up to 24/384k, up to DSD128 DOP), Toslink (up to 24/176k, DSD64 DoP)

Clock: 'Mytek Femtoclock Generator™' 0.82ps internal jitter

Analog outputs: RCA, balanced XLR, simultaneous, 75 Ohm impedance

Headphone outputs:

Reference High Current, High transient Headphone Amp, 500mA, 6 Watts, dual headphone jacks, designed to drive hard to drive headphones

Built-in attenuator: Choice of 1dB step analogue attenuator, separate for main out and head-phones, 1dB step digital 32 bit attenuator and purist relay bypass

Built-in analog preamp: Line level input or Phono M/M, M/C input, relay controlled

Audio interface function: All digital inputs can be routed into computer via USB2. Allows connection of digital sources

Remote: universal remote capable

Price: £3,000

Manufacturer: Mytek

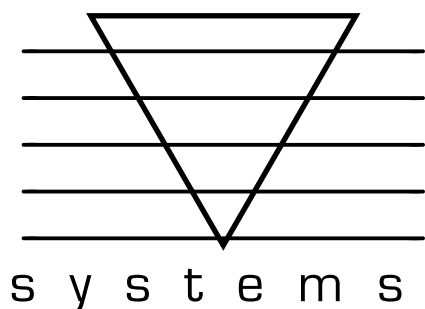
URL: mytekdigital.com

Product supplied by: MCRU

URL: mcru.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)1422 250590

critical mass



Critical Mass Systems
proudly supports the entire
MASTER COLLECTION of
KARAN ACOUSTICS products

Center Stage²

I can't help thinking that this is the best of the best.

– Alan Sircom, Editor, *Hi-Fi+*



DISTRIBUTED IN THE UK BY

Select Audio

Tel. 01900 601954

www.selectaudio.co.uk

REVOLUTIONARY AUDIO FEET | MADE IN THE USA | TOTAL IMMERSION EFFECT

A FULL LIST OF DEALERS CAN BE FOUND AT
WWW.CRITICALMASSSYSTEMS.COM



Peerless performance

The SGM Extreme music server elevates both stored music files and streamed services to a level you have never heard before. An incredible effort to optimise mechanical, electronic, and software design achieves both the best available sound quality and the best user experience (room software is standard).

With the SGM Extreme, Taiko Audio have clearly advanced the state-of-the-art of digital audio.



Distributed by
KOG AUDIO

www.kogaudio.com
info@kogaudio.com
024 7722 0650

Moon Audio Black Dragon cable system

by Buzz Hughes

America's Moon Audio is located in Cary, North Carolina in proximity to North Carolina's famous research triangle. Living in and around the sophisticated vibes created by some of America's top tier universities has rubbed off on Moon Audio's diverse approach to high end audio. There are many ways you might have already run across Moon Audio's expertise: a trusted retailer of top personal audio brands, perhaps, but probably most likely as a manufacturer of an entire portfolio of stereo and headphone cabling solutions. Since 2003 Moon Audio's kingpin Drew Baird has set his company apart from the herd with dedication to sharing their extensive expertise and pushing customer audio experiences into a higher plane one individual at a time.

My recent experience with Moon Audio was established by reviewing a 'full loom' of their interconnects, power cords

and stereo cables for use in my analogue based stereo chain. Consultation is a key aspect of the Moon Audio experience and given my current stable of humble gear (Clearaudio Maestro Ebony V2 cartridge, VPI Prime turntable, Fosgate Signature Phono Stage and Luxman LX-380, integrated for those interested), Drew personally recommended his Black Dragon line in order to complement the inviting tube driven sound my rig offers. Drew's goal for this full loom review was to demonstrate what the Black Dragon cable line could do to enhance and focus a more tube-oriented audio experience. However, if you find yourself a digital buff or prize a different set of signature sonic attributes make no mistake that Moon Audio has you covered. Drew's capable team has developed several lines of cabling solutions and can help you select between their Silver Dragon and Blue Dragon lineup depending on your preferences, goals and cabling budget.



“After spending several weeks with the BD interconnect, I found the quieter background to be its most winning attribute.”



► In the cabling world Moon Audio is best known for the signature Silver Dragon line, but it would be a mistake to think of the Black Dragon series as a step down or perhaps second fiddle. The Black Dragon lineup was conceived specifically to fill repeated demand verbalised by returning Moon Audio customers for a slightly warmer presentation than could be achieved with the silver material-based Silver Dragon. The Black Dragon was born in essence to tread the tightrope of a finely detailed performance associated with Silver Dragon while adding a more inviting smoother presentation. The customised loom of Black Dragon cables Moon Audio prepared for my system included two sets of Black Dragon interconnects with RCA terminations, two sets of V1 bi-wire speaker cables with banana plugs and two V1 Black Dragon power cords. All the cables shipped to me were given a few hours of preliminary burn-in at the factory (Moon Audio recommends at least 40 hours of play before they can reach their full potential) and arrived to me neatly packaged and well-labeled.

The Black Dragon interconnect starts at \$250 for a 1.5' pair which is by no means 'throw away' money. Mr. Baird asserts that interconnects can provide the most bang for the buck in any system, so I elected to start my audition there. A \$250 Black Dragon interconnect investment will buy you a completely pure low crystalline structure copper-based design, 99.9998% pure if you really feel like splitting hairs. The interconnect design is based around a new special stranded geometry containing four 21.5AWG gauge conductors. The new stranded geometry is a key upgrade to keep out unwanted noise interference over a solid copper

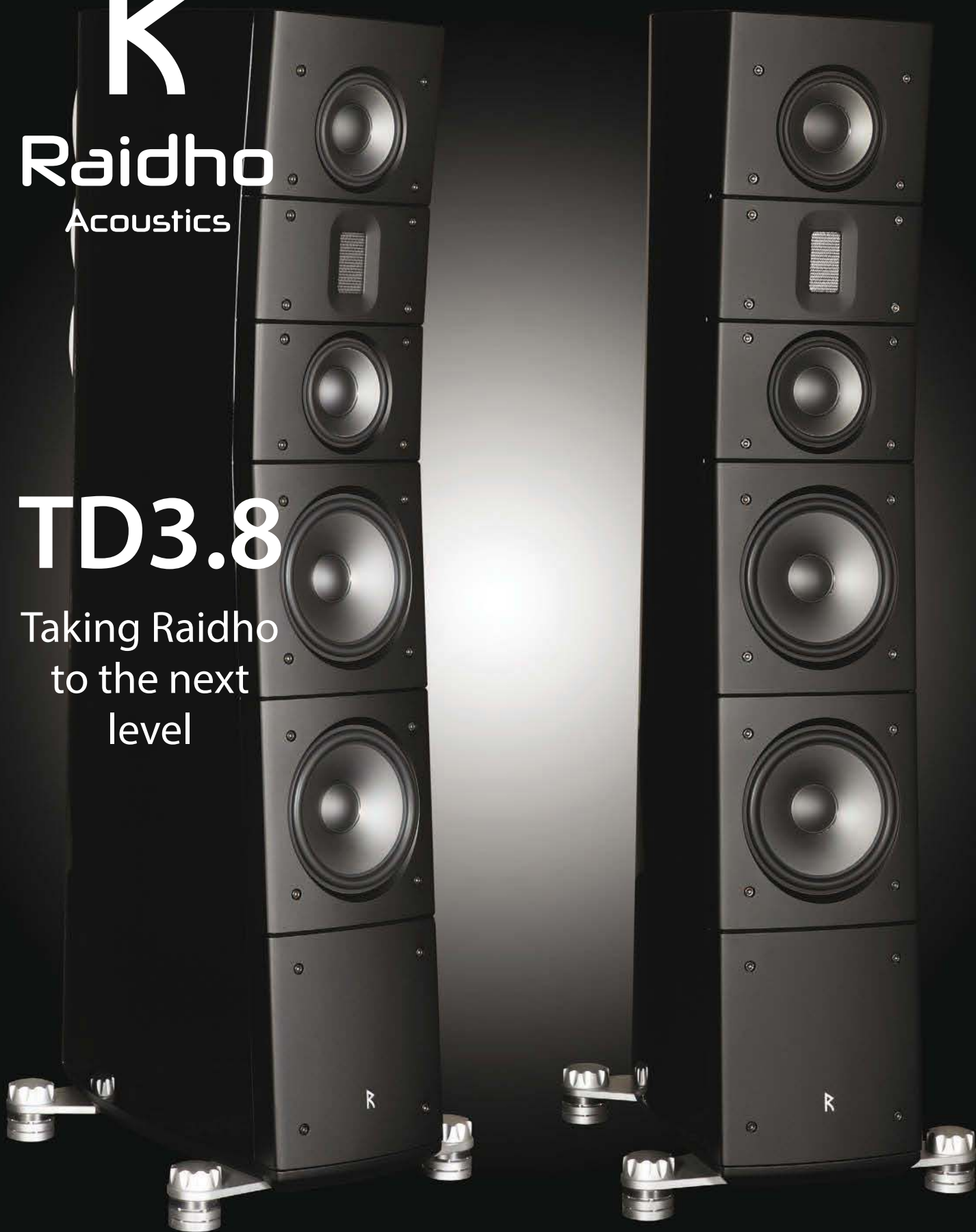
core-based design found in Moon Audio's Blue Dragon. The Black Dragon interconnect is then shielded with one foil shield and one complete multidirectional braided wire shield. Moving outward to the edge of the cable you will find the interconnect is Teflon coated, covered in a protective layer of Techflex and then fitted with a highly regarded Cardas copper based WBT NextGen RCA connectors. When the two Black Dragon interconnects were inserted between my turntable and phono stage and then again from the phono stage to the integrated, my first impression was something along the lines of 'good God, this is a dead quiet cable!'. This initial impression of the Moon Audio cable held true over time and, after spending several weeks with the BD interconnect, I found the quieter background to be its most winning attribute.

The Black Dragon power cords which list at \$400 per cord were next in the spotlight. The BD power cords are comprised of four 11 AWG stranded high purity slow drawn copper conductors. The BD power cords also have a newly designed quad-star geometry driving at a reduced noise infiltration. Inside the power cord there are two strands for the positive and two for the negative resulting in a total sized per signal polarity of 8 AWG. Again, similar to the BD interconnects, the power cord wraps the individual conductors in a Teflon tape to reduce thickness size and reduce dielectric value. The four wrapped conductors are next curled together and receive another Teflon tape wrap. The male and female outlets used are high quality three-pronged, Alpha Copper Furutech FI-11M with 24 karat gold plating and can support a 15amp and 20amp rating. Moon Audio's materials-focused ►

R
Raidho
Acoustics

TD3.8

Taking Raidho
to the next
level



Meet us on facebook · uk distribution: www.decentaudio.co.uk

“With Moon Audio’s full loom plugged into my system and working as a unit, the sonic improvement was undeniable and quite head-turning.”

- engineering for the BD power cords was by a good margin the highlight of the experience and really knocked my socks off across all my tests. As an illustration of the experience I would point you to Dave Mason’s criminally under-rated rendition of ‘All Along the Watchtower’ from his 1974 *self-titled* Columbia release. Playing this track without the BD power cord and then soon after with the power cords installed was the difference of taking a wet rag and cutting through caked sludge on a dirty window to see the light streaming in. Virtually all background noise was whisked away and it was as if the bass guitar, the drum kit and of course Mason’s talking guitar took another giant step out of mix into my listening room. Up and down my LP collection the Black Dragon power cords allowed players to hint a new angle in their respective performances and seemed to allow instruments and vocals to strengthen at the core and boil down to their very essence.

While still marveling at the visceral impact of the power cords on my system I last added the Black Dragon speaker cables to round out the audition. My pair was the internally bi-wired variety featuring two 6 AWG terminations on the amp end and four 11 AWG terminations on the speaker end and will run you \$520 for a 6’ long pair. My requested terminations were Furutech rhodium locking banana plugs, but Moon Audio is perhaps even more fond of terminating the speaker cables with Cardas CCMS silver plated billet copper spades. The copper Black Dragon speaker cables—possibly even more so than the interconnects and power cables—are positioned to compliment the Silver Dragon line with their tonal vibrancy. Moon’s careful selection and results-based approval of copper in this application was not taken lightly and was only made possible by focusing again on a new special stranding geometry and ratios of four 11 AWG conductors.

With Moon Audio’s full loom plugged into my system and working as a unit, the sonic improvement was undeniable and quite head-turning. Each component cable of the loom presented its own distinct sonic advantages and disadvantages but in the physical world all cables were stylish to look at, well-constructed and extremely easy to manipulate and get into the right place behind a heavy credenza nestled tight up against a wall, thank goodness! While billed as a warmer sounding set of cables my ears gave me the lasting impression that the Black Dragon loom still favored more of

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Premium-class copper power, interconnect and speaker cables. Offered in various lengths.

Available power cord lengths:

4, 6, 8, 10 or 12-foot lengths

Available interconnect lengths:

1.5, 3, 4.5, 6, 7.5, 9, 10.5, 12-foot lengths

Available Speaker cord lengths:

4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, or 16-foot lengths

Power Cord Pricing: Starts at \$400 US

Interconnect Pricing: Starts at \$250 US

Speaker Cord Pricing: Starts at \$480 US

Note: Although Moon Audio is a US-based firm it routinely arranges sales and shipments to the UK and to Europe. Contact Moon Audio for details.

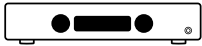
Manufacturer: Moon Audio

106 Brady Ct., Cary, NC 27511 USA

Tel.: +1 (919) 649-5018

URL: moon-audio.com

an analytical presentation. My experience was that the Black Dragon loom helped corral my tube-based system’s warmth, added organising and detail to my soundstage, and never let my already warm system sound run off into any undue romantic interpretations of the music. Cabling is a personal journey though, and each will have to wade through the pros and cons of any interconnect, power or speaker cable selection on their own. The real slam dunk here is the value Black Dragon presents. The Black Dragon series is extremely well priced for the level of engineering, material selections and sonic benefits you receive in return. You could most certainly spend gobs more money than the Black Dragon on other cabling and probably would be able to bring your goals into better focus, but at *quite* a bit more cost. Moon Audio’s Black Dragon has illustrated to me that this cabling line now exactly marks where price and performance intersect and where the law of diminishing returns begins. +



H120 Integrated Amplifier



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.



SoundEngine2

Now available:

Mainz8 D-TC SUPREME Power Distributor!

ansuz
ACOUSTICS

NEW



d·tc | SUPREME

THE VERY HEART OF YOUR HIGH-END MUSIC SYSTEM

– that is exactly what this NEW power distributor is designed to be. The Mainz8 D-TC SUPREME power distributor is a further statement of the amazing innovative prowess of Ansuz audio technology. This power distributor is equipped with the latest state-of-the-art Ansuz technologies and reflects the accumulated experience that emanates from the development of all our other Ansuz audio components – SUPREME quality power distribution has invariably been at the forefront of our audio engineering endeavors.

Soft lines and organic shapes



Mainz8 D-TC SUPREME power distributor has 8 dedicated mains outlets and features Ansuz's extremely low impedance star grounding system, which is a unique hallmark of all our power distributors.

The visual design is extremely appealing; soft lines and organic shapes will make this power distributor blend in ideally with your other audio components.

Features:	Low impedance star grounding system Noise-reduced 110/230 power supply with 8 outlets (EU/US) Designed with outstanding mechanical grounding Massive Ansuz NSC & ATC technology Highly efficient shielding
Finish:	Black lacquered composite wooden cabinet and leather top
Chassis:	Steel
Power:	110V or 230V
Dimensions:	96 x 499 x 300 mm / 3.77 x 19.65 x 11.81 inches (HxWxD)
Weight:	8.2 kg / 289.25 ounces

Go to <http://www.ansuz-acoustics.com> to learn more.

Contact your local dealer for an exclusive demo, or contact the Ansuz team: sales@ansuz-acoustics.com

Cyrus One Cast Integrated streaming amplifier

by Simon Lucas

Having a 'lifestyle', rather than a plain old-fashioned 'life', can make significant demands on your possessions. After all, if you just live a 'life', then your belongings are simply part of it. Aspire to a 'lifestyle' and suddenly everything you own has to complement it and enhance it. Simple functionality is no longer enough when you're enjoying a 'lifestyle'.

For some of the more dogmatic brands involved in the hi-fi industry, the ideal of 'lifestyle' is anathema. If concessions are going to be made, they'll be made by the lucky owners of these manufacturers' products rather than the other way around.

But more sensible – or pragmatic – audio companies accept there's no longer any virtue in complexity for its own sake. Consumers' lifestyles don't allow for it. Products have to be simple to set up and operate, wide-ranging in their functionality, and impeccable

in their performance. Because if they're not, then they're hardly enhancing their owners' lifestyle. Are they?

Probably the most resonant recent example of a previously rather hairshirted company seeing the 'lifestyle' light and amending their products accordingly is that of Naim. Its 'Uniti' range of streaming amplifiers has done wonders, both for the company's profile and its balance sheet, and at the same time has made a few nominal rivals look rather like Luddites.

Mind you, Cyrus – to choose a brand not entirely at random – has, perhaps inadvertently, been pandering to the lifestyle-obsessed ever since its very first product launched in 1984. The Cyrus One amplifier set the Cyrus 'half-width/shoe-box' design template, and the company has enjoyed this particular USP ever since.

36 years is a fair while, though, even in two-channel hi-fi. To keep up with Naim et al, and to convince lifestyleers of its credentials, Cyrus has served up the One Cast. It's the usual half-width box comprising amplification and extensive connectivity, including streaming – on paper, at least, it has everything it needs to compete in this brave new lifestyle world.

'Everything', in this instance, means 100 watts per channel of Class D amplification with a heady 78 amps of instantaneous current available. It means a fair number of physical inputs: digital optical, digital coaxial, HDMI ARC, stereo RCA line-level and stereo RCA moving magnet phono stage. There are a pair of stereo RCA analogue outputs for connection to a power amp, ►





“The One Cast has plenty to recommend it and sounds like its worth the money all day long.”

▶ and chunky speaker binding posts for just a single pair. It also means aptX Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay 2 and wi-fi connectivity for use with any Chromecast-compatible apps and services. Even Amazon's Alexa gets a look-in.

The USB is a Type-B socket you're probably more used to seeing on the back of a printer. Connected to a laptop, it can handle incoming digital files of up to 32bit/192kHz or DSD128 standard—both the optical and coaxial inputs are restricted to PCM stereo only. All incoming digital signals are dealt with by a 32bit/192kHz (and heavily breathed-on) ESS Sabre DAC.

What 'everything' doesn't include is an Ethernet socket. The One Cast has a pair of Wi-Fi aerials, can operate at 2.4 or 5GHz and proved rock-solid in its connectivity during this test—but still, we're all serious people aren't we? Is the lifestyle market really so cavalier about signal stability?

Control of wireless devices is via the app of the relevant streaming service, and the basics can also be controlled using voice commands—the One Cast can be prompted if there's an Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant mic-equipped device on the network or can be Siri'd via an Apple HomePod. If all else fails, though, the Cyrus is supplied with a basic remote control that feels as inexpensive as it looks.

The 'look' and 'feel' undermine the One Cast a little. While we'll soon come to just how great the Cyrus sounds, it doesn't make much of a case for itself where looks, ergonomics, finish or (to a far lesser extent) build quality are concerned. For example, the lacquered plastic that forms the fascia resonates if tapped with a fingernail, while the two big control dials that govern input selection and volume feel no more luxurious. Meanwhile, the lights that indicate the volume level and input selected are a nice enough touch, but for some inexplicable reason Cyrus has chosen very small, unilluminated icons to indicate input.

Three of those inputs (Chromecast, turntable, and the analogue line-level input marked 'AV') are in white, and the other five (Bluetooth, HDMI, USB, optical and coaxial) are in that traditional Cyrus tricky-to-read dark red. They're very difficult to see under normal domestic lighting conditions, meaning you either commit the sequence of inputs to memory or be prepared to shine your smartphone's torch on them every time you want to change input. That being said, this graphical layout gives it minimalist chic, something Cyrus does well.

On the rear panel, everything is well laid out. However, in the review sample the HDMI and USB sockets weren't quite central in their cutaways, and

the digital optical Toslink input wasn't level. In and of itself, this is hardly a catastrophe, and speaks of an early sample. And, as a reviewer, I would far rather see a "warts 'n' all" sample that was one of the earliest models (which usually end up as dealer demonstrators) than a pimped up hot-rod made specifically to impress the reviewer. But, regardless, these minor fit and finish shortcomings should be noted.

These shortcomings are doubly frustrating—because in purely sonic terms, the One Cast has plenty to recommend it and sounds like it's worth the money all day long.

All it needs is some appropriately talented (and priced) speakers strapping on to form a system. Alternating between Acoustic Energy AE1 mkIII SEs and KEF LS50s, and between QED XT40i and Atlas Equator 2.0 speaker cable, allows the One Cast to confirm itself as a rapid, lavishly detailed and whippet-lean listen in the long-established Cyrus manner.

Chromecasting to the One Cast is a simple here as it is with any other Chromecast product. Once the Cyrus is on the wi-fi network, simply fire up the app of your favourite streaming service on your phone or tablet. Then all that's required is a tap of the 'cast' icon. Spotify, Tidal, Apple Music, Deezer and Qobuz are all available in this painless and intuitive manner, as well as a stack of podcast providers and so on. We didn't spend long with Amazon's app, however, simply because Alexa's music-wrangling properties fall into the 'must try harder' part of the report card. ▶



TONEARM CABLE +

NORDOST'S REVOLUTIONARY REDESIGN

Nordost's new Tonearm Cable + redesign optimizes every aspect of tonearm cable construction, from conductor layout and shielding to grounding capability, in order to ensure signal transfer fidelity and reveal subtle nuances in the music, while completely eliminating noise from the signal chain.

EXPERIENCE YOUR VINYL LIKE
IT'S THE VERY FIRST TIME!



AVAILABLE IN

BLUE HEAVEN

HEIMDALL 2

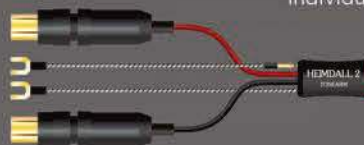
FREY 2

TYR 2

VALHALLA 2

Detachable Ground Wire

Bond Ground Wire



Individually shielded twisted pairs, wrapped in an additional layer of braided shielding.

NORDOST
MAKING THE CONNECTION

Distributed in the UK and Ireland by **Renaissance**

0131 555 3922

info@renaissanceaudio.co.uk

www.nordost.com

Made in USA 

“It has the profile of one of those rangy long distance runners rather than the power-packed, muscle-bound weightlifter.”

► With DJ Shadow's *Walkie Talkie* [MCA] casting from Tidal via a Sony Xperia 5 smartphone, the One Cast fairly motors along. Like every digital Cyrus product (and, let's be honest, the majority of its analogue products too), it puts the emphasis on precision, detail and manoeuvrability. It's conceivable you'll encounter more meat on a butcher's pencil than on the One Cast's low-frequency reproduction, but that's not to say it lacks extension. And it's certainly not lacking detail—the textures and second-stage dynamics of the tune's kick drum and grimy analogue bass synth sounds are unambiguous. But there's just no fat on the One Cast's bottom end – it has the profile of one of those rangy long-distance runners rather the power-packed, muscle-bound weightlifter alternative.

It's similarly balanced through the rest of the frequency range. Lawrence's vocals throughout Felt's *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* [Creation] aren't done any favours in absolute terms—the poor lad's just not much of a singer. But the Cyrus allows all his character, all his effort and all his commitment to shine, and the result is thrillingly informative. And though the organ is right at the front of the mix too, the One Cast doesn't sound in any way crowded. It lays out a properly defined stage and allows every element a bit of breathing space.

Broadly speaking, the fundamentals of this sound—the deftness, the sheer quantity of information, and the even-handed tonal balance—is maintained across the Cyrus' physical inputs too. Everything from a heavyweight reissue of Can's *Tago Mago* [United Artists] via the phono stage to the blaring, grinding soundtrack of Christopher Nolan's *Inception* [Warner Bros] using the HDMI ARC socket sounds full (but not rich), fast (but not hurried) and subtle (but not analytical). The headphone amp (accessed via a 6.3mm socket at the bottom right of the fascia) is similarly talented and enjoys a similar sonic balance.

Despite the emphasis on alacrity, the Cyrus has no difficulty managing the club-footed rhythm of My Little Airport's *Love Is Not A Romantic Song* [Harbour Records] or knitting the many disparate threads of Talk Talk's *Laughing Stock* [Verve] into a convincing whole. This facility with timing consolidates the Talk Talk album into a unified statement, despite the One Cast having sufficient insight to occasionally allow you to hear the join, or the splice, where different takes have been bolted together.

So as far as audio quality is concerned, the Cyrus One Cast needs no excuses made for it. The company's specific sonic flavour is evident throughout, and while it's an acquired taste, years of Cyrus amps prove that's an easy taste to acquire and there's more than enough here to keep many a listener coming back for seconds. With the debatable exception of the missing Ethernet socket, it's hard to pick a hole in the way the Cyrus is specified, too – the One Cast could conceivably form the heart of an expansive two-channel system for years to come. (In fact, thanks to 'AV Direct' mode it can power the front channels of a home cinema set-up too).

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Solid-state, two-channel integrated amplifier

Analogue inputs: One MM phono input (via RCA jacks), one single-ended line-level input (via RCA jacks)

Digital inputs: Two S/PDIF (one coaxial, one optical), one USB port (Type B), HDMI ARC, wi-fi (2.4/5GHz), aptX Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay 2, Google Chromecast, Amazon Alexa

Analogue outputs: One pre-power loop (via RCA jacks), one 6.3mm headphone socket

Supported sample rates:

Coaxial and optical S/PDIF: 16-bit, 24-bit/32kHz–192kHz

USB: 16-bit, 24-bit, 32-bit/32kHz–192kHz

Input impedance:

High-level: 47kOhms

Phono: 47kOhms, 50pF

Output impedance (preamp): 47 Ohms

Headphone Loads: min 8 Ohms

Power Output: 120WPC @ 6 Ohms

Bandwidth: Not specified

Distortion: THD <+ 0.02% with both channels driven (1kHz, 33% power)

Signal to Noise Ratio: 95dBA

Dimensions (H×W×D): 86 × 220 × 390mm

Weight: 5.2kg

Price: £1,295

Manufactured by: Cyrus

URL: cyrusaudio.com

Tel: +44(0)1480 410900

Flexibility, and thoroughly enjoyable audio performance? Is that enough for you? Cyrus will have its fingers crossed—because if you're going start bringing up all the other stuff, about finish and perceived value and other intangibles, then it's possible you'll pass the One Cast by. Which, while understandable, would be a pity. +

BUCK THE OLD

Zero Feedback - Vastly clearer sound

Zero Deadtime - Zero distortion

GaN Advanced Design - Immediacy like never before

Organically Musical

Learn About Zero Feedback

MerrillAudio.net/zero-feedback

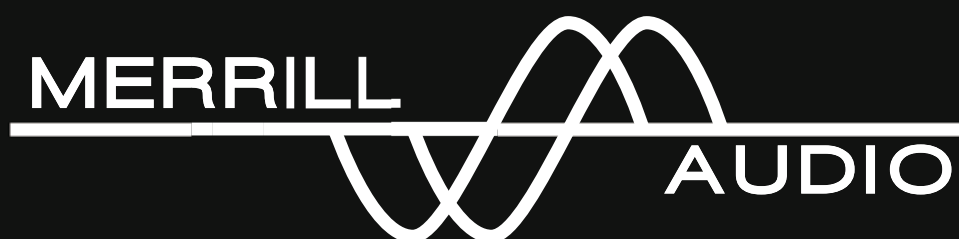
116 Monoblocks



114 Stereo



118 Monoblocks



Audio Purity

ATC – CREATING THE ULTIMATE HIFI EXPERIENCE

FEATURING : THE SCM50SE SPECIAL EDITION 3-WAY ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKER IN PIANO BLACK



ATC Premier Dealers are located throughout the UK. Retailers listed* hold the most comprehensive range of ATC demonstration products, including the premium Classic/Tower Series 3-way loudspeakers.

LONDON & SOUTH EAST

Audio Lounge*
London
020 7487 4080

Audio T*
Brighton
01273 609431

Audio T
Portsmouth
023 9266 3604

Harrow Audio
Harrow
0208 930 9933

Igloo Audio
Tunbridge Wells
01892 532995

Oranges & Lemons
London
020 7924 2040

Soundstage*
Barnet
020 8440 9509

SOUTH WEST

Acoustic Streams
Penzance
01736 741580

Audio T
Bristol
0117 926 4975

Paul Green HiFi*
Bath
01225 316197

MIDLANDS

Audio Affair
Birmingham
0121 224 730

Castle Sound & Vision
Nottingham
0115 958 4404

Frank Harvey Hi-Fi
Coventry
02476 525200

Musicraft*
Derby
01332 346284

Oxford Audio Consultants
Oxford
01865 790879

EAST

Analogue Seduction*
Peterborough
01733 350 878

Criterion Audio*
Cambridge
01223 233730

Signals Hi-Fi
Ipswich
01394 672464/5

The Audiobarn*
Old Harlow
01279 454 860

Tom Tom Audio*
St Albans
01727 810047

NORTH WEST

Acoustica*
Chester
01244 344227

Audio T
Manchester
0161 839 8869

Audiovation (Huddersfield Hi-Fi)
Huddersfield
01484 424000

Brian & Trevors*
Manchester
0161 7664837

The AudioWorks
Cheadle
0161 428 7887

NORTH EAST

Audio Images*
Sheffield
0114 273 7893

DNA Audio
Leeds
01943 850 650

Fidelity Sound and Vision
Doncaster
01302 563123

Hifisound*
Stockton-On-Tees
01642 267012

Peak Hi-Fi*
Sheffield
01226 761832

The Audio Room
Hull
01482 891375

WALES

Acton Gate Audio
Wrexham
01978 364500

SCOTLAND

Hi-Fi Corner*
Edinburgh
0131 556 7901

Hi-Fi Corner*
Falkirk
01324 629 011

The Movie Rooms*
Edinburgh
0131 558 1310



1MORE Triple Driver over-ear headphone

by Chris Martens

1 MORE is a Chinese company that built its reputation on a series of excellent, high-value universal-fit earphones, several of which have been favourably reviewed in our pages. Two particular stand-outs were the original

Triple-Driver earphone and the subsequent Quad-Driver earphone, both of which offered laudable value for money and found devoted followings among music lovers on a budget. In fact, I fondly remember my chiropractor asking for advice on affordable earphones and my loaning him a set of 1MORE's Triple-Driver earphones to try out. He found them downright revelatory because he felt their build and sound quality far surpassed that of like-priced competitors. Consequently he purchased a pair and began recommending them to others.

This sort of immediate, positive reaction perhaps results from 1MORE's innovative product planning approach. More so than many companies, 1MORE begins the product development process by polling prospective customers in depth to understand what they do (and do not) want in new earphones or headphones in a given price class. Consequently, 1MORE might ask consumers what physical or sonic qualities they most value in headphones, or what specific shortcomings they feel headphone manufacturers should strive to avoid. The point is that 1MORE relies on customer inputs to shape design briefs for its upcoming products, creating 'punch lists' of must-have features and functions aimed at giving customers what they want.

1MORE's Triple Driver earphone was the product that put the firm on the audiophile map, ►



“The 1MORE Triple Driver headphone employs three drive units, although purists might quibble that only two of those are active drivers.”



► largely because it offered solid build quality, unexpectedly refined sound quality, and a useful set of accessories at a very reasonable price. Building upon this initial success, 1MORE sought to branch out to offer an equally high value, high-performance, full-size, over-ear headphone. Perhaps hoping to encourage a commercial ‘lightning to strike twice’ the firm has named its first multi-driver, full-size headphone the Triple Driver—just like its famous earphone. While it sometimes gets confusing to have two different products sharing the same name, it’s a moniker.

At its inception 1MORE’s Triple Driver headphone sold for \$249 US/£259, but over time that price has been rolled back to an even more manageable \$199/£154. In an era where audio prices always seem always on the increase, it’s refreshing to find a well-made headphone where pricing has moved in the other direction.

Let’s begin by looking at the configuration of the Triple Driver headphone. As its name suggests, the 1MORE Triple Driver headphone employs three drive units, though purists might quibble that only two of those are active drivers, while the third is a passively driven bass radiator (or ‘Trident Bass Reflector’ as 1MORE calls it). The headphone’s driver array centres upon an ‘audiophile grade’ full-range 40mm graphene dynamic unit, which is supplemented by a ceramic tweeter and the aforementioned passive bass radiator. 1MORE says the ceramic tweeter is, ‘capable of faster response time for exquisite detail and shimmer’, while adding that the bass radiator provides ‘extended bass and depth’. The passive bass radiator employs a weighted radiator disc with a protective polymer surround ring at its rim. Then, behind

the passive radiator is a clear plastic protective plate that lets users see (but not touch) the radiator from the outside.

Like other 1MORE products the Triple Driver headphone looks and feels more expensive than it actually is. Many headphones in the Triple Driver’s price class have a certain toy-like quality, but the Triple Driver does not. For example, the headphone’s curved top strap offers a soft and comfortable headband pad clad in leather. Similarly, the Triple Driver’s curved frame and metal ear cup yokes are well made, tastefully finished and highly adjustable—especially the ear cup yokes, which can rotate up to ‘45 degree to conform to your head and ears.’ The ear cups, in turn, are fashioned from machined aluminium and treated to an attractive two-tone, natural silver/satin black finish.

The ear cups provide multi-part sound chambers whose sandwich-like frame pieces provide mounting points for the headphone’s ear pads, ceramic tweeters, graphene full-range drivers, passive bass reflectors, and clear plastic driver protectors. Finally, sets of spoke-like black outer frames hold the clear driver protector plates in place. Completing the picture are a set of detachable and user replaceable signal cables using ‘audiophile-grade oxygen-free copper wire’ that is ‘wrapped in a Kevlar core braided sheath to provide enhanced durability and freedom from tangles.’ A 6.35mm headphone adaptor plug is included as is a hard-shell travel case.

Readers might ask whether the Triple Driver headphone is an open or closed-back design, though the answer is somewhat ambiguous. The headphone is primarily configured as an open-back design, but one whose clear driver protection plates serve both to attenuate sound output from the rear ►

NOVAFIDELITY

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



Multiple control options

- Full remote control
- 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**



Now shipping with MusicX NEO

Remote control app compatible with iOS and Android

*HD implementation due early 2020

**Dependent on model



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

“It is a sound that favours an exciting and dramatic presentation over a strictly neutral one.”

- sides of the ear cups and (partially) to block out noise from the outside world. Another question is whether the Triple Driver is an on-ear or over-ear headphone. 1MORE certainly bills the Triple Driver as an over ear headphone and for me it proved to be exactly that. However, because the Triple Driver’s ear cup pads are comparatively small as over-ear designs go, some users—including my friend and frequent *Hi-Fi+* contributor Steven Stone—feel the Triple Driver should be classified as an on-ear design. My suggestion: Try the Triple Drivers for yourself to see which fitting works out best for you and your ears.

For my listening tests I ran the Triple Driver headphones with an Apple iPad Air tablet, a Samsung Galaxy Note 9 smartphone and the excellent Astell&Kern A&ultima SP1000M high-res portable digital audio player. I found the Triple Driver was surprisingly easy to drive, meaning it gave quite respectable results when powered by my tablet and smartphone. Naturally, the Triple Drivers sounded even better when driven by my Astell&Kern DAP, owing to the A&K’s superior DAC section and audio electronics. The key point is that while the unfussy Triple Driver headphone benefits from higher-end source components, it also is able to work and play well with comparatively mundane ones.

Voicing: As for most 1MORE products, sound engineer Luca Bignardi developed voicing for the Triple Driver headphone. If there is a Bignardi ‘house sound’, and I think there is, it is a sound that favours an exciting and dramatic presentation over a strictly neutral one. In practice, this means the Triple Driver headphones exhibits a noticeable amount of bass lift, plus—to a somewhat lesser extent—a degree of upper midrange/lower treble boost.

To hear these characteristics in action listen to ‘You Don’t Know What Love Is’ from Melody Gardot’s *Live in Europe, Bonus Edition* [Verve, 16/44.1]. The track features deeply pitched acoustic bass, a drum kit with a delicate smattering of cymbals, a muted trumpet for accompaniment and of course Gardot’s sumptuous and evocatively contoured vocals. From the outset, the bass and kick drum sound extremely prominent, deeply weighted and tightly focused. Heard in isolation both bass instruments sounds very good, but as one listens it becomes apparent that both are pushed well forward in the mix. Similarly, upper midrange and lower treble sounds both from brushes on the snare drum, cymbals and the subtle

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Three driver, hybrid dynamic/ceramic driver-equipped on-ear headphone with passive bass radiator

Driver complement: Ceramic tweeter, graphene dynamic driver, passive bass reflector

Frequency Response: 20Hz–40kHz

Impedance: 32 Ohms

Sensitivity: 104dB

Connector: 3.5mm gold plated

Weight: 293 grams

Price: \$199 US, £154 UK

Manufacturer: 1MORE UK

Tel: +44 (0) 203 637 9650

URL: 1moreuk.com

UK Distributor: 1MORE USA

Tel: +1 855-551-6673

URL: usa.1more.com

‘embouchure buzz’ of the muted trumpet are also given a share of the spotlight and subtly pressed forward in the mix. In contrast, Gardot’s voice, which has a beautifully textured lilting quality and by rights ought to be the centrepiece of the track, instead sounds gently recessed. Overall, the Triple Driver makes it clear that ‘You Don’t Know what Love Is’ is a well-made recording, but with the headphone’s voicing putting more emphasis on the accompanists than on the vocalist.

On other tracks, however, the Triple Driver does a much better job of complementing musical performances. A perfect example would ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ from Van Morrison’s *Three Chords & The Truth* [Caroline International, 16/44.1]. On this track the Triple Driver gives Morrison’s accompanists—including bass, guitar, percussion and Hammond organ—a generous and appropriate amount of energy, while at the same time making Morrison’s voice sound articulate and well balanced (not overly forward or ‘shouty’ as can sometime be the case on Morrison’s recordings). The result is a good track made better, with excellent dynamics; a fine balance between the vocalist and his band mates.

1MORE’s Triple Driver headphone is well made, affordable and sounds more dynamic, articulate and texturally refined than many of its competitors. Only you, however, can decide if its voicing characteristics suit your tastes and preferences. +

Less noise. More music.

"The difference that the Ground Controls make is so profound... they have become indispensable"

— HiFi+



"The CAD GCs banish noise and bring life, space, and colour in its place"

— Roy Gregory

The CAD GC1, GC3 and GC-R Ground Controls are a stunning innovation in high frequency noise reduction: Designed to help any audio system sound better.

Contact CAD for a dealer near you:



+44 (0) 203 397 0334



+1 (541) 728-3199

info@computeraudiodesign.com

www.computeraudiodesign.com

CAD

COMPUTER AUDIO DESIGN

COMPETITION

WIN! Two chances to win a fantastic Allnic ZL-5000 15A conventional 1.8M power cord each worth \$2,200



power cord uses a double shield of aluminium and nickel-plated alloy and copper mesh rather than conventional screens and shields for the power cords. "This was chosen," says Alan, "because while copper or silver are fine electrical shields, they are still influenced by magnetic fields; this three-metal shield is less magnetically prone."

He went on to say, "The ZL-5000 maintain a very deft touch on the music, with a strong accent on detail resolution, but not at the expense of warmth or musicality. What I found particularly attractive was the way it could help unmask subtle microdynamic cues in the musical performance, ones that usually lurk at or just below the sonic waterline".

He concluded the review by saying, "It's hard not to be impressed by their innate sense of rightness, making the sound of a good system really come to life, but without over-exaggerating anything." +

We have teamed up with our friends from Kevalin Audio to bring you an exciting competition and a chance to win one of two ZL-5000 15A conventional 1.8M power cords.

Alan Sircom reviewed this in *Hi-Fi+* issue 180 (pages 91 & 92). He noted that Allnic Audio's ZL-5000

Competition Question

Allnic Audio uses double-shielding in the ZL-5000. What is it made from?

- A. Aluminium and nickel-plated alloy and copper mesh
- B. Gold-pressed latinum and Tholian silk
- C. Quantum vibranium and Administrontium wishalloy

To answer, please visit the Kevalin Audio dedicated competition page at <https://www.kevalinaudio.com/hifipluscontestregistration> Alternatively, send your answer on a postcard (including your name, address, and contact details) to Allnic Competition, Kevalin Audio LLC, 9138 NW Murdock Street, Portland, OR 97229-8074, USA

Competition Rules

The competition will run from March 5th 2020 until May 7th 2020. The competition is open to everyone, but multiple, automated or bulk entries will be disqualified. The winner will be chosen at random from all valid entries, will be contacted via email (where possible) and their name will be published in the magazine. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Absolute Multimedia (UK) Ltd. is compliant with the Data Protection Act and UK laws apply. Our policy is such that we will not pass on your details to any third party without your prior consent.

Rupert Neve Designs Fidelize Precision Digital to Analog Converter

by Jason Kennedy



If you saw Dave Grohl's documentary about the Sound City studio in LA, the hallowed ground where *Rumours*, *Nevermind*, *Damn the Torpedoes* and many, many great albums were made, you will have realised that the real star of the show, and the reason for Grohl's interest was the Neve mixing desk. Rupert Neve is a British engineer who's still designing at the tender age of 93! Neve sold the original Neve Company in 1976, but he has been very active in the recording business (and mixing desk business) since then. His current company is Rupert Neve Designs, which manufactures high-end mixing desks and recording equipment. 'Fidelize' is a sub-brand of Rupert Neve Designs, producing high-fidelity playback equipment. Alongside this DAC, there is currently a headphone amp and phono stage in the Fidelize line.

The Fidelize Precision DAC bucks a number of trends found in contemporary converters, it has no wi-fi capabilities, Bluetooth and Airplay are for kids as far as Rupert is concerned and when it comes to sound quality I'm with him all the way. Just listen when someone switches to BT enabled hands free on their mobile and you'll get the picture. It has analogue inputs in both balanced and single ended form so can be a preamp for a whole system. There is no mention of Roon readiness but there are extensive notes on how to get good sound from a PC in the manual. It also features seven filter settings and the response curves for some of them are included in the manual. Volume can be controlled with the red knob on the front or switched to line level on the back, the front of this DAC is professionally executed and the back ▶

“This contemporary piece of electronica has acres of reverb and juicy bass, which sounded very nice indeed on the Fidelice.”



► is no different, there are just a lot more connections. Many of them for headphones, three in fact: four-pin XLR balanced, Pentacore balanced and regular quarter inch jack.

Despite its comprehensive preamplifier functionality there is no remote control, you literally have to get out of your seat and walk over to the device, however as fitbit users will know this is a good thing. Also a little odd is the absence of a power switch on the front, there is one by the mains inlet on the back and the box is fairly shallow so it's not hard to reach. There are more switches than usual on the back, including fixed or variable output, variable input gain for analogue connections and the aforementioned filters. The RCA inputs are inverted with red/right at the top and the XLR inputs have TRS jack sockets in the middle for full pro credentials. For this is what the Fidelice is, a pro audio DAC with some audiophile features and a nice box with inlaid wood on top.

Inside it has an AKM converter chip that's capable of reproducing PCM up to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD512 (4x), the filter set includes one called AKM 'high quality sound' as well as another dubbed DSD high pole. The majority of the filters relate to roll-off and group delay and you can have hours of fun trying the various options, alternatively you can connect to one of the three digital inputs and enjoy your music. Given Neve's frankly awesome pro-audio credentials and background, it's odd that there is no AES/EBU digital input, something that's pretty well *de rigueur* on hi-fi DACs at this price.

My listening started off with an Innuos Zenith SE server connected to an Auralic Aries G1 and the USB output of that

hooked up to the Fidelice, I used fixed output to begin with and noted that that output is pretty high although it is specified as a Red Book 2V RMS. Playing EST's *Live in Gothenburg* [ACT] revealed wide dynamic range and clearcut leading edges, the sound is solid and taut with strong dynamics and excellent low end extension. Given that bass is a clear strength of digital audio you would think that it was the easiest bit to get right, but clearly the efforts that many engineers make to voice the critical midrange and treble have a softening/smoothing effect on the bass. That is not the case here, it's not hard or edgy but it doesn't hold back and the result is glorious, especially with live recordings where the bass is what gives such events their power, or, the bass isn't carefully tailored as it often is in the studio.

I tried one of the alternative filter settings to the standard slow roll-off/standard group delay at this point, not realising that the DAC still wasn't at optimum operating temperature and thus a little more hard edged than it could be. I opted for super-slow roll-off because the graph showed this having a more (but not very) rolled off treble, which did sound more relaxed but ultimately lacked the energy to bring music to life. So I returned to the standard setting and enjoyed the cavernous scale of Leifur James' *A Louder Silence* [Late Night Tales], this contemporary piece of electronica has acres of reverb and juicy bass, which sounded very nice indeed on the Fidelice.

In an attempt to focus on the hardware and not be distracted by the music I checked out how the volume control ►

ELEVATE YOUR MUSIC

Chord Hugo M Scaler

Chord Hugo^{TT2}

Chord TToby

Silver Dragon
Digital Cable

Silver Dragon
Optical Cable

Silver Dragon
USB Cable

Black Dragon
Interconnect

Black Dragon
Speaker Cable

Astell&Kern



AUDEZE™



Chord Electronics Ltd.



FOCAL®
LISTEN BEYOND

SONY®

and more

All the brands you love.
A name you can trust.



www.moon-audio.com
919.649.5018

MOON  AUDIO

“I really like the way the Fidelice brings out the power and vitality of a good live recording.”

- compared with a Townshend Allegri+ passive preamp. The comparison made the passive Townshend sound very clearcut and well defined, the Fidelice volume being relatively soft and vague by contrast. Later on I did the same thing with a Moon 700i integrated by setting one of its inputs to bypass mode, this time the DAC sounded a little congested compared to the onboard volume, but the Moon is a £13k amplifier so you’d expect it to have a decent volume control.

I also contrasted the USB and coax inputs from the same source but not with same brand cables, so the fact that USB sounded quite a lot more revealing, better defined and timed more precisely could be put down to the CAD USB cable. The result with an Atlas coax cable was very musical however, a bit short on detail but very enjoyable thanks to a warmth that might appeal to some ears.

Some of the other filter settings were also tried and while the changes were subtle it was always preferable to come back to the setting that Fidelice have chosen for the default. This was also true with DSD where the DSD high pole filter seemed to make the balance more forward leaving the default option sounding more natural. I tried contrasting DSD and PCM versions of *Kind of Blue* but the difference in mastering outweighed any differences in sound quality, the 192 PMC having a much heavier bass and clearer cymbal work (‘So What’), but it did seem to time better which is something I’ve noted with this contrast in the past.

I really like the way the Fidelice brings out the power and vitality of a good live recording, the EST album mentioned above has an electricity about it that you don’t get with many studio albums and the Fidelice goes a long way to placing the listener in the time and the place of the original event. This is to do with the extension in the bass but also because of its even handed resolving powers, Zappa’s *Roxy Performances* (Zappa Records) is an ancient recording, but there’s an awful lot of the energy on the tape and this DAC brings this out to compelling effect.

I like the combination of precision and weight that this DAC brings to the music, it seems entirely neutral but there are always decisions made about which parts to use in an analogue output stage. The difference here is that those decisions were made by people with experience in the

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Solid-state high-resolution PCM, and DSD-capable digital-to-analogue converter/preamplifier

Digital Inputs: One Coaxial, one Toslink, and one USB

Analogue Inputs: One stereo single-ended (via RCA jacks), one balanced (via XLR connectors)

Analogue Outputs: One stereo single-ended (via RCA jacks), one balanced (via XLR connectors). Both outputs are configurable for fixed or variable level operation

DAC Resolution/Supported Digital Formats: All PCM from 44.1KS/s to 384KS/s with word lengths up to 32-bit, DSD64 (2.8224MHz), DSD128 (5.6448MHz) and DSD 512 (22.4MHz)

Frequency Response: 5Hz–112kHz, ± 0.1 dB (unbalanced RCA jacks)

Distortion (THD + Noise): <0.0003%, 10Hz–22kHz (unbalanced RCA jacks)

Output Voltage: not specified

Headphone output impedance: 0.02 Ohms (via 4-pin XLR connector), 0.01 Ohms (via 1/4inch unbalanced jack)

User Interface: front panel LEDs

Dimensions (H×W×D): 89 × 450 × 235mm

Weight: 5.5kg

Price: £4,749

Manufacturer: Fidelice, by Rupert Neve Designs

URL: fidelice.com

Tel: +44 (0)7860 153950

recording side of music production, not, as is usually the case, by those trying to make the most of what comes out of the studios. That doesn’t necessarily give Rupert Neve Designs an advantage though, audiophiles are not necessarily interested in the unvarnished truth, we want transparency but not to the limitations in the recording. This is why there are some very smooth and rich sounding products on the market, a lot of people want an aesthetically appealing result when they play their favourite records, but embellishing digital sound for this purpose often gets in the way of the power and energy in the music. By virtue of its designer’s pedigree the Fidelice gets us pretty close to what the artist hears in the studio, this may not be as sweet as is found with many high end converters but it’s probably closer to genuine high fidelity than most. +

GutWire Audio Grounding Cables



An extremely effective and simple way to improve the sound of any audio system. A single cable to enable the proper grounding of electronic components.

Simply attach the RCA (or XLR) connector end to any spare input socket on your integrated amplifier or pre-amplifier. The mains plug end goes into any spare wall socket, or into a mains distributor. This creates the shortest route to ground from the circuit boards and introduces a different ground potential into the system.

It takes moments to hear the sound stage increase in size, both depth and width, that the tonal balance has more weight to it and the sound is more natural, less “hifi”. Increased transparency provides more resolution of detail and a sharper focus of images.

Far more effective than passive grounding boxes, wooden or metal, which also require the use of multiple additional cables. No compression of dynamics, or added colouration, which can occur with alternative systems.

An elegant and simple solution; a single cable does it all.

Three models available:

Consummate Ground	£1300
Ultimate Ground	£599
Perfect Ground	£399

Audition a cable in your own system; full refund if not completely satisfied.

UK exclusive from The Audio Consultants.

GutWire Audio Cables hand made in Canada

UK Distribution by Epicurean Audio

It just sounds right
conrad-johnson



HAIFA TOKYO PARIS VIENNA LIMA HANOI NEW YORK BANGKOK

TAICHUNG BANGALORE LJUBLJANA BRISBANE

SINGAPORE DURBAN ATHENS RIMINI LISBON MANILA SAN JOSE

AMSTERDAM BERGEN LONDON HONG KONG MONTREAL

Meze RAI Penta universal-fit in-ear monitors

by Alan Sircom



Romanian personal audio experts Meze are known for making headphones. For good reason, as the excellent original 99 Classics and the no-compromise Empyrean are highly prized and extremely well-loved by personal audio enthusiasts. Now, it faces that 'difficult third album' phase, and the expectation (based upon the actions of most personal audio makers) would be to make a third pair of headphones, possibly somewhere between the 99 Classics and Empyrean price and performance points. Instead, Meze produced the RAI range of universal-fit in-ear monitors, encompassing the

value-driven single-driver RAI Solo and – the model tested here – the RAI Penta.

The clue is in the name. If the Solo has a single driver in its elegant raw aluminium body, the Penta features five drivers in its equally elegant anodised aluminium body. The Penta is a hybrid design, too, featuring four balanced armature drivers with one dynamic driver. In effect, that means the dynamic driver does the heavy lifting, with the balanced armatures filling in key points in the upper registers. The result is either a seamless way to combine the depth and range of dynamic drivers with the frequency precision of balanced armatures, ►

“The Pressure Equalization System... is drilled in a distinct, tiny Y-shaped pattern to control the airflow and hence the internal pressure.”



► or a way to make an inconsistent-sounding earphone that manages to make the worst of both possible worlds. In truth, we've heard both options in the past, and the potential worry is that a company used to dealing with headphones would simply fail to bring the same skills to the in-ear world. In fact, Meze knocked the RAI Penta out of the park, as we shall see.

Before that, it's worth looking at the whole package. Literally... the packaging is extremely good. The RAI Penta ships in a sturdy cardboard box with a charcoal-coloured stiff foam insert. It comes with one of the largest arrays of eartips I've seen as standard (and including extra small as well as small, medium and large softies, double flanged tips, deep insertion double flange tips and Comply tips). In all there are eight pairs of tips and if you can't find a match after all that, consider a new hobby!

There is also a grained hard 'pleather' clam-shaped zip case, which ships containing the high purity silver-plated copper signal cable. This uses 20 Litz strands in a twisted quartet of wires, terminating in a pair of MMCX plugs for the earphones and a small jack for the amp. There is an adaptor for a 6.35mm jack and the all-but-forgotten two-pin in-flight adaptor. Meze also supply custom cables for balanced systems, and we opted for 2.5mm TRRS balanced jack for a DAP. Couple all this with a very rich dark shade of anodised grey with a contrasting Meze Lyre-shaped logo picked out in natural aluminium (which someone on the London Underground seemed convinced was a Warhammer faction symbol), and the RAI Penta tops the elegance charts.

In fitting, the RAI Penta does sit a little proud of the concha, but is nonetheless extremely comfortable and needs to do so because the MMCX connector and the two ports, one of which is called the Pressure Equalization System (PES). PES is drilled in a distinct, tiny Y-shaped pattern to control the airflow and hence the internal pressure around the drivers. This is flanked by three even smaller holes that act as ports for the driver sound tube/dampening system. In most earphones, these sound tubes are made entirely of plastic, but here they are machined aluminium. The whole package (this time including the electronics and the box) exudes quality and solidity of build. I'd like to say it has that kind of James Bond chic to it, but when you see some of those Bond 'props' up close, they don't look as well made as the RAI Penta.

I'm going to say this now; this review contains adult themes. No, that doesn't mean anyone is going to utter "I've come to fix your heating" in a heavy Scandinavian accent, or even the rest of the review is going to be heavy on four-letter words with artistically-placed asterisks. No, the 'adult themes' here is just how 'grown up' the sound of the RAI Penta is compared to many in-ear monitor systems. Typically, when I've heard multiple balanced armature or hybrid dynamic/BA systems, they have invariably been detailed and exciting, but so edge of your seat, the sound teetered on brightness. And by 'teetered', sometimes that meant so damn bright you could use it as a head-torch! While initially impressive and good for cutting through the background noise of commuting, this brightness isn't sustainable for long-term listening. ►

DYNAUDIO



This is performance
This is Confidence

View all four models at
dynaudio.com/confidence

“The Meze RAI Penta is perfect for whiling away the hours listening to music.”

► The RAI Penta isn't that sort of hybrid, and instead delivers a sound that makes you hungry when you write about it; rich, warm and satisfying. Not so rich and warm and satisfying as to make a meal of things (stomach rumbling now), but enough to make you hungry (!) for more. In other, more low-calorie words, the Meze RAI Penta is perfect for whiling away the hours listening to music, and both the ergonomics and sound of the in-ear monitor do nothing to attenuate that desire.

In listening to the RAI Penta (both direct out from a computer and an AudioQuest DragonFly Cobalt and a Chord Mojo DAC, and from the balanced output of an Onkyo DAP), I realised my standard listening ways for personal audio and domestic audio were subtly – and unnecessarily – different. Most of the music used for personal audio was rock and electronica, with only token listening made on jazz, acoustic, folk or classical. I had fallen into the mindset that places personal audio on a different pedestal to domestic audio. Domestic audio plays to an older, more audiophile crowd, so it gets more audiophile music. This is wrong-headed; music is universal, and the RAI Penta plays all genres of music with similar full-bodied aplomb. It wasn't a case of 'goodbye deadmau5, hello Delius' but more universal listening, where deadmau5, Delius and Miles Davis are equally celebrated. Plus, you can work through the back catalogue of all three easily, even if 'Sofi Needs A Ladder' by deadmau5 [4x4+12, Virgin] is never going to be the start of a long listening session regardless of system. In fact, this raucous track from deadmau5's best years is an almost perfect musical example of material that shouldn't suit the RAI Penta's sound, but does: an in-ear monitor that is all about tone and retrieval of melody and timbre rather than edgy detail shouldn't sound good when playing music that is all about edgy detail over tone. And yet, it works and works well, thanks in part to a deep, powerful, and well integrated bass.

Despite the hit with deadmau5, if you want music laid bare, this isn't the in-ear monitor for you. On the other hand, if you like that more neutral and natural frequency response that is reminiscent of some of the more classic two-channel audio, the lithe sound of the RAI Penta is likely much more to your tastes. The RAI Penta is an outstanding integrator, making the sound a bastion of mid-range clarity and vocal articulation, even on patter songs like 'The Major-General's Song' from

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 'penta-hybrid' universal-fit in-ear monitor

Drive units: four customised balanced armatures, one dynamic driver

Frequency range: 4Hz–45kHz

Impedance: 200Ω

Sensitivity: 110dB SPL/1mW

Max input power: 30mW

Distortion: <1%

Cables: Rhodium-plated MMCX-3.5mm as standard.

MMCX-2.5mm TRRS balanced and TRRS-4.4mm balanced optional accessories

Price: £949

Manufacturer: Meze

URL: mezeaudio.eu

UK Distributor: SCV Distribution

URL: scvdistribution.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)3301 222500

Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* [Decca]. This wry bit of Victorian operetta replayed with astounding staging and depth in the late 1950s is a test of just how articulate a system can be, and in the RAI Pentas lines like "I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus" are distinct and easy to follow, even if few of us could repeat at the same pace. The soundstaging on this classic Decca recording is flawless, and the RAI Penta makes a good attempt at reproducing it, although there is a degree of in-head 'lateralisation'. The staging is extremely natural and the RAI Penta delivers that kind of staging better than the more unnaturally defined, more modern 'echo and pan' imaging. This is especially impressive given the hybrid nature of the design, as the combination of dynamic and BAs can too readily make the image disjointed.

The more I listened to the Meze RAI Penta, the more I wanted to listen to music, which is perhaps the best praise you can make of an audio component. If there is a criticism, even that's a positive one; it doesn't draw attention to itself sonically, which might weigh against it next to more immediate-sounding in-ear monitors. But, in the long run, that easy, unforced accuracy, coupled with excellent bass and imaging that is more out of the head than it is inside, all add up to an in-ear monitor that's hard to beat for the long game of listening. +

TOTEM 
Discover yours



TORRENT 
TECHNOLOGY

The new V2 woofers are a dramatic advancement of our famous 7" Torrent driver. Evolved and meticulously developed over the past 10 years, exclusively by Totem, they are at the very top of the world's dynamic speaker pyramid.



The New Element V2 series ... A state-of-the-art musical experience!

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

Novafidelity N15D Network streamer

by Simon Lucas

Changing a brand name can sometimes be tricky. When 'BackRub' decided to become 'Google', for example, it worked out just fine—mostly because no one had the first idea what 'BackRub' was (or 'Google' at first, for that matter). When 'Prince' became 'The Artist Formerly Known As Prince', on the other hand, everyone just kept on calling him 'Prince'.

The reasons for 'Cocktail Audio' to become 'Novafidelity' in the UK don't all concern just how dicey the word 'cocktail' is when it comes to spam filters. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to expect a transition like this to be smooth—but try Googling (or BackRubbing) the word 'Novafidelity' and then try to look beyond all the 'Cocktail Audio' results. But nevertheless, for the purposes of the UK (a country which seems to think it's a special case at every turn) what we have here is a Novafidelity N15D network streamer.

It's the entry-level product in a fairly comprehensive range of network audio streamers. And as the 'affordable' Novafidelity option, it's a combination of quite lavish specification and some fairly understandable cost-cutting.

The 'merit' column is the more extensive, though, so it's probably best to start here. The N15D is a compact, all-aluminium network streamer/USB DAC into which it's possible to slot a 2.5in hard disk or solid state drive. It's able to access DLNA network attached storage devices (it's also Roon ready, which is useful), and has a Giga Fast Ethernet socket for just that purpose. It can incorporate accounts from many of the planet's more discerning streaming services (such as TIDAL, Qobuz and Deezer, for instance) into its Music X Neo control app. Internet radio is available directly, from the i-Radio app. There's Apple AirPlay connectivity (rather than Bluetooth), and it will accept a connection from a Spotify account via Spotify Connect (albeit as 'cocktailAudio N15D').

Music X Neo control is both better than before and better than most, if not all, small-to-medium sized companies' alternatives. But it's not flawless—and its readiness to reset the volume level to 'uncomfortably loud' when moving from track to track on the internal hard drive is at once startling and annoying. Novafidelity suspects this issue is restricted to Android control devices and is working on a fix. iOS controllers don't exhibit the same eccentricity and, given the



“Used purely as a digital streamer, the N15D seems content to get out of the way of music and simply hand it over to an external DAC.”



- ▶ UK's fetishisation of Apple smartphones and tablets, it may not be a deal-breaking fault. But out in the wider world, where Android rules and Cocktail Audio is still a thing, it could make all the difference.

There's also a USB type B input—which, along with the Ethernet socket, is about it for physical connectivity. No matter how music gets on board the N15D, though, it's dealt with by an ESS Sabre ES9018K2M DAC—this is a 32bit/384kHz device, with DSD256 and DXD 32bit/352.8kHz capability. The digital outputs, however, are capped at 24-bit, 192kHz resolution. It can handle all popular file types (including MQA) and most of the unpopular ones too.

There are a single pair of stereo RCA analogue outputs for connection to an amplifier, and—in the unlikely event you have a system with a more capable DAC than this and yet are in need of a digital audio streamer—digital optical and digital coaxial outputs too. At the front of the N15D is a 6.3mm headphone output, and a big volume/mute control.

Conspicuous by their absence are a display on the device itself or a remote control with which to operate it. All functionality, in fact, is taken care of by the Music X Neo app, which is generally a fair bit better than most control apps from companies of equivalent size. Typing in the IP address into a browser on the network also controls the N15D.

As luck would have it, there's three-and-a-half-grand's-worth of Naim Uniti Star network streamer/amp up and running when the Novafidelity arrives for testing—so in the spirit of experimentation the N15D is attached to one of the Naim's digital optical inputs using a QED Performance optical cable. At the other end, the Uniti Star is hooked to a pair of Acoustic Energy AE1 mkIII SEs (still one of the most accomplished and likeable stand-mounting designs of this century) using Chord Company Rumour X speaker cable.

As well as having access to TIDAL Hi-Fi and Spotify Premium accounts, the N15D is also able to access some networked audio files and has been fitted with a hard disk drive loaded with a selection of Novafidelity favourites in a range of formats. Out of politeness more than anything, then, the hard drive is used to select the first tune: a PCM file of The Beta Band's *The Three EPs* [Regal].

Used purely as a digital streamer, the N15D seems content to get out of the way of music and simply hand it over to an external DAC. As a result, the hard drive-derived songs of The Beta Band sound broad-shouldered, carry a lot of low-frequency momentum and enjoy very acceptable levels of detail—especially in the midrange, where the vocals sit in a pleasant little pocket of space while the music seethes and fulminates around them.



Vantage™ is the latest product to be launched by YG Acoustics™. Slotted between Carmel™ 2 and Hailey™ 2, recipient of The Absolute Sound's **2020 Editors' Choice Award**, Vantage incorporates seven of the YG key technologies and the same materials and precision production methods utilized in the flagship, Sonja™ XV.

Vantage is widening the opportunity for discerning music lovers to enjoy the sonic hallmarks of YG Acoustics.



HAILEY™ 2.2



SONJA™ 2.2



SONJA™ 2.3

yg-acoustics.com

Distributed in the UK by [podbood](#)

“What is quite startling is just how much more adept and convincing the Novafidelity sounds.”

► The same is true of a TIDAL Masters stream of Donny Hathaway's *Everything Is Everything* [Atco]. There's credible drive and attack across the board, detail- and character-packed midrange communication, and a pleasing sensation of unity to the individual performances that contributes no end to the overall timing of the recording.

And sure enough, step down in bandwidth to France's FIP radio station via the i-Radio tuner (a measly 128kbps) and everything becomes more closed in and round-shouldered. Detail levels fall away and clarity diminishes. This relative lack of positivity and resolution doesn't prevent FIP being one of the world's most enjoyable radio stations, mind you.

Make the obvious switch, and connect the N15D to one of the Naim's analogue inputs (using Chord Company's Clearway interconnect) and thus let the Novafidelity's internal DAC do all the heavy lifting, delivers across-the-board sonic improvements. It may not come as any great shock to realise the N15D's digital-to-analogue conversion process is more accomplished than that of a Naim Uniti Star, but what is quite startling is just how much more adept and convincing the Novafidelity sounds.

First things first: the N15D has no problem dealing with a DSD (1bit/2.8224MHz) rip of Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* [CBS]. And after it's served the decoded analogue information to the Naim, the resulting sound is wide, tall and simply loaded with fine details of instrument timbre and vocal toil. The leading edges of individual notes are described with absolute certainty, their decay is similarly well controlled, and the minor harmonic divergences are highlighted just as fully as broader dynamic variances.

And there are equivalent improvements in the way the other selections are delivered. The Donny Hathaway album, in particular, benefits no end from the N15D's greater insight and fidelity—his voice, so warm and pure in its tonality, is given even greater emotional resonance as the Novafidelity brings the listener closer to a true understanding of his technique.

The N15D is capable of significant drive and attack if the music demands it, but it's just as comfortable being tender as it is muscular. The emptiness of Ólafur Arnalds' *Ljósíð* [Erased Tapes] carries just as much significance as the delicate instrumental strands, and the Novafidelity gives

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Solid-state music server with DAC and optional plug-in storage
Storage: Plug-in 2.5in HDD or SSD
Analogue inputs: None
Digital Inputs: USB type B
DAC Resolution: 32bit/384kHz; DSD256; DXD 24bit/352.8kHz
Supported Digital Formats: FLAC; WAV; MP3; WAV; WMA; ALAC; AIFF; MQA; PCM; DSD; DXD; M4A; AAC
Analogue Outputs: 6.3mm headphone socket; unbalanced stereo RCA
Digital Outputs: One coaxial S/PDIF (via RCA jack), one TOSLink
Frequency Response: Not specified
Distortion (THD + Noise): Not specified
User Interface: Music X Neo app (iOS and Android)
Other Features: Roon Ready; Apple AirPlay; i-Radio internet radio
Dimensions (HxWxD): 45 × 180 × 180mm
Weight: Not specified
Price: £599

Manufacturer: Novatron Co Ltd
Tel: +82 31 898 8401
URL: www.novatron.co.kr

both the presences and the absences in the recording equal importance.

In short, then, if you've a cherished system of let's say a certain vintage, the N15D is a thoroughly effective way of upgrading it with some high-quality streaming. It's compact, discreet, well made and, given the right stuff to work with, is capable of very agreeable sound indeed. The lack of Bluetooth connectivity is a minor drawback, but it's more than balanced out by the Novafidelity's readiness to incorporate some internal memory. Not for the first time where products like this are concerned, though, the user interface is a cause for concern. +



KJ WEST ONE

EST. 1965

Connoisseurs of Sound



The High-End Show That Never Ends

Our Central London showroom is constantly kept refreshed with the latest creations from the world's finest audio brands. We are proud to offer a sanctuary for audiophiles to try combinations impossible to find anywhere else in the UK.

Latest additions to the collection

Focal Diablo Utopia Evo Loudspeakers (FRA)

Lumin T2 Streamer (HK)

Shunyata Omega QR Mains Cable (USA)

Sonus Faber Olympica Nova II Loudspeakers (ITA)

Brinkmann Taurus Record Player (GER)



KJ West One

26 New Cavendish St, London W1G 8TY

T: +44 (0)20 7486 8262 E: info@kjwestone.co.uk

kjwestone.co.uk



Harmony



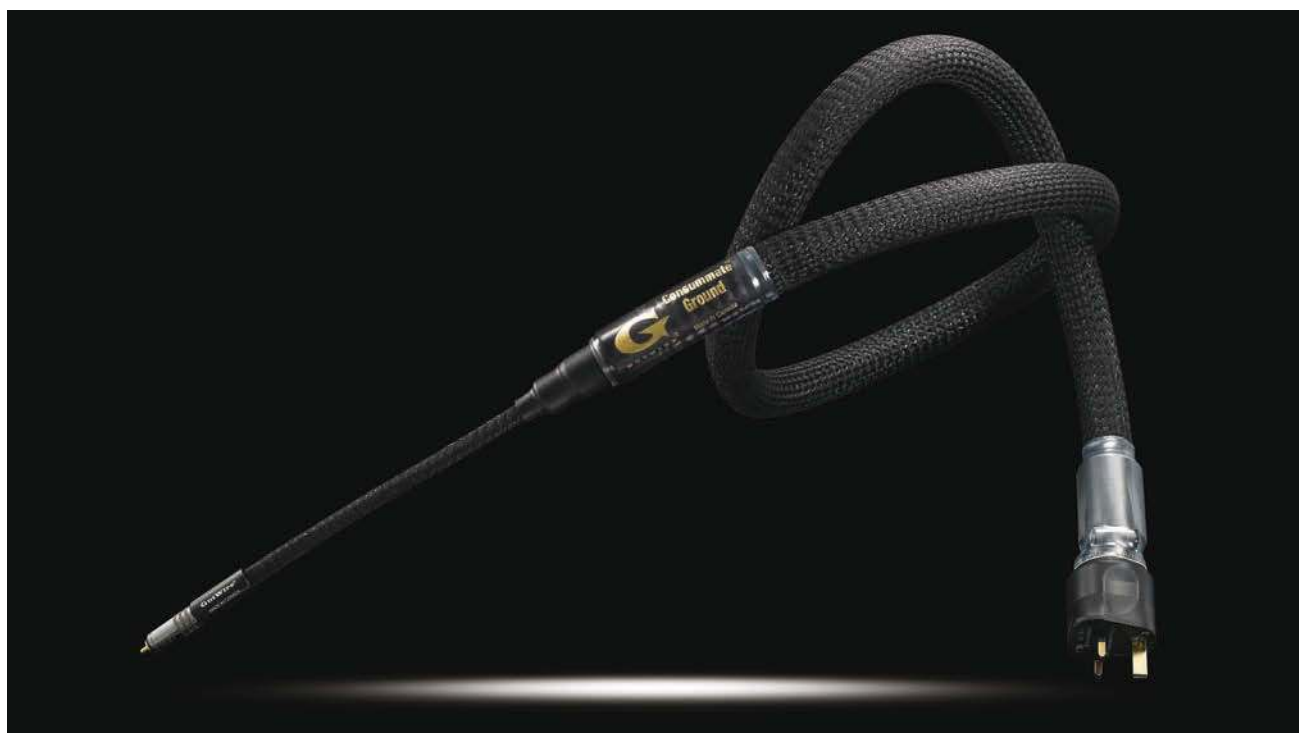
Von Gaylord

+44 7908 815959 | info@vongaylordaudio.com
Boldmere, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, UK.

www.vongaylordaudio.com/uk

GutWire Consummate Ground grounding cable

by Alan Sircom



I'm not playing the 'woe is me' card (I get all the toys, all the time), but one of the problems with being a reviewer is your system is in a near constant state of flux. While products that need burning-in or running-in can be divvied out to secondary systems, those products that need to sit in a system for several hours to really come to life often never get the chance to shine. Grounding systems often fall into this category, and sometimes the better the grounding system, the longer the time it takes to get all its ducks in a row.

GutWire's new Consummate Ground – the pinnacle of GutWire's grounding system – is one of those devices that takes surprisingly long to come on song, but it's worth the

effort. With a near continual re-strip of a jobbing reviewer's system, it takes three or four such re-strips to come to life. Fortunately, like many British types, we hit Christmas hard. Activity slows to a crawl mid-December and doesn't really start up again until the New Year. Or, in some cases, June. This gave the Consummate Ground the chance to fully bed-in and make its difference felt.

The Consummate Ground follows broadly along the same lines as many grounding systems, in that a passive filtration box connects to the RCA socket of a device in your audio system. Where Consummate Ground differs from most grounding systems (but follows along the same lines as GutWire's Perfect Ground and Ultimate Ground cables) is that filtration box is periodically desaturated thanks to its connection to a mains/AC socket. This is not an active connection; that desaturation is the Consummate Ground 'draining' to the earth terminal in your socket.

GutWire doesn't disclose the inner workings of its grounding cables, although a combination of Binchotan (a charcoal made from Japanese ubame oak), amethyst and an unnamed rare-earth metal are used in the grounding device itself. The cable itself is pure copper, air insulated with a Mylar metallic ►

“If you use GutWire’s ground cables into a power conditioner, you will not achieve the same performance.”

- braid shielding and features a noise reducing sleeve. A high-grade Furutech mains plug (FI-1363 in the case of the UK) connects to the wall, while the other end has the option of a RCA connector, XLR, spade lug, banana socket or simple clip.

An important consideration is where to ground the grounding cable. If you have a power conditioner, or especially if you have a regenerator, the best place to use it is ‘not there’. The optimum connection is into the wall itself or, failing that, a simple distribution box connected into the wall with no active filtration, conditioning, surge protection or even other components... apart from more GutWire ground cables. If you use GutWire’s ground cables into a power conditioner, you will not achieve the same performance. Another point to note is the cable is big, and cable management with the Consummate is like wrangling a python (that sounds like a euphemism).

GutWire suggests using its ground wires in a ‘source first’ configuration (as in, start with your primary source, then add further grounding cables to preamp, power amplifiers, and secondary sources until your whole system is suitably grounded). Naturally, you can use the Consummate Ground in combination with GutWire’s other ground cables, but if funds are stretched I’d argue it is better to go for one Consummate and start saving for the next, rather than use several Power Grounds; such is the improvement Consummate brings.

The improvement to the performance of the system is clear from the get-go but seems to be singularly noise-floor related for the first 50 hours or so of music play time. Then, it seems to fill out and continues to improve for quite a few hours after that. Whether this is the ground bedding-in and then going through a saturation-desaturation cycle or just settling in for a long stay is unclear and ultimately immaterial; it does what you want from the outset and gets better from there. After it has reached its peak, however, it maintains that level of performance, so the ground-line desaturation process clearly works.

When it has bedded in, Consummate Ground takes all those familiar aspects of audio performance and hones them. That both is and is not system dependent; a system with the focus on soundstage over dynamic range will not change its emphasis, but both the soundstage will seem more ‘fleshed out’ and the dynamic range broader and instantaneously changing. Similarly, a system that focuses on detail just got a lot more upon which to focus. Tonally, the Consummate Ground is neutral, with just a hint of added body to the upper mids; more flavour than thickening and is entirely sonically benign and positive. Most of all, however, what it does so well is strip back that almost intangible edgy, ‘hashy’, near brash sound of digital audio played through some modern amplifiers. It makes the sound seem more ‘organic’ sounding and does this better than the already excellent GutWire ground cables.

I had something of an epiphany during the test of the GutWire Consummate Ground. The effect is important in two ways; yes, it has the aforementioned

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

GutWire Consummate Ground:

£1,300/1.5m

Connectors: Furutech AC plug

(depends on region), choice of RCA, XLR, Spade, ZPlug, or USB

Manufactured by:

GutWire Audio Cables

URL: gutwire.com

Distributed in the UK by:

Epicurean Audio

URL: epicureanaudio.com

Tel: +44 (0)780 556 7630

improvements to the overall performance, but perhaps even more importantly, the Consummate Ground gives your system a sense of consistency over time. The hi-fi equivalent of a ‘bad hair day’ is lessened by the Consummate Ground; while this might anger the audio gods and their constant demand for sacrifice, £1,300 is less than a year’s supply of goats to appease them. No system will be ‘on form’ every time you play it; atmospheric, a thicker than normal RF ‘soup’ and more can make even the best systems have an off day, but the GutWire Consummate Ground seems to both reduce the frequency and intensity of those off days, and that consistency is more marked here than many of the Consummate Ground’s peers, even within the GutWire portfolio.

GutWire’s Consummate Ground makes a good system better and keeps it there for longer. Consummate’s only real downside is its addictive properties; after about 50 hours of playing, you will start thinking about adding more Consummate Ground cables throughout your system. On the other hand, taking out of the system is a wrench and your system begins to go back to having a few mood swings. +

MTI100

Just add your music and speakers

McIntosh®

LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE™

McIntosh Reference Dealers

Hard To Find Hi-Fi
08456 803 489
www.hardtofindhifi.com

Jordan Acoustics
Bournemouth
01202 911886
www.jordanacoustics.co.uk

Jordan Acoustics
Glenrothes
01592 744779
www.jordanacoustics.co.uk

Kj West One
020 7486 82 62
www.kjwestone.co.uk

Nintronics
01707 320788
www.nintronics.co.uk

McIntosh Dealers

Adair Acoustic Design
07956 236 108
www.adairacoustic.co.uk

Audio-Philia
0131 221 9753
www.audio-philias.co.uk

Avande Uk
020 7987 3555
www.avandeuk.co.uk

Cornflake
020 7323 4554
www.cornflake.co.uk

DB Hi-Fi
01379 873451
www.dbhifi.co.uk

Finite Solutions
0207 371 8761
www.finitesolutions.co.uk

HiFi Lounge
01767 448 121
www.hifilounge.co.uk

Icon Connect
08702 330044
www.iconconnect.com

Ideaworks
020 3668 9871
www.ideaworks.co.uk

Kronos AV
03435236169
www.kronosav.com

Maxwell Audio Visual
020 3384 6968
www.maxwellav.com

Nottingham HiFi
0115 975 8613
www.nottinghamhifi.co.uk

Robert Taussig
020 7487 3455
www.roberttaussig.co.uk

Soundstage AV
020 8440 9509
www.soundstage.uk.com



Auden

DISTRIBUTION



AMPHION AUDIOMICA
CAAS AUDIO HEGEL MUSICWORKS

REL S/510 subwoofer

by Alan Sircom

We've taken a little bit of a hiatus with subwoofers of late, for an odd reason. Of recent years, our reviews have tended to be mostly of REL subwoofers (and a few notable exceptions like Eclipse). This seems partisan, but the reality is we've struggled to find subwoofers that integrate with music as well as REL: Eclipse being one of the rare exceptions. The problem then becomes do we hold back on REL reviews because they are the only brand that consistently makes musically-credible subwoofers (thereby

punishing REL for being good at its job and the rest of us for missing out on good subwoofers), or do we lower our standards? After much soul searching, we went for – rather than hid from – quality, and the new S/510 from REL is every bit the 'quality' option.

The S/510 manages to achieve the seemingly impossible task of squeezing a quart into a pint pot, without either shattering the glass or making the outcome not worth the effort. It uses a 10" front firing long-throw continuous cast alloy cone bass driver, with a second passive radiator firing into the floor. It also uses the NextGen3 version of REL's evergreen 500W powerpack. It fits all of this into a relatively small and deceptively heavy box.

We have somehow got into our respective heads that high-quality bass performance requires big subwoofers with large bass drivers. It's the old motoring adage, "there's no replacement for displacement" in action. The trouble is that when you bring the big bass guns to bear, sometimes what you



“With the S/510, if her voice was any more rooted, she’d need watering.”

- get is big and slow bass. Bass should be deep when needed, underpinning the sound when not directly called for, and in both cases... it needs to be fast. While ‘moving air’ is all about displacement, if that air is moved even a 256th note behind the beat, it sounds ‘off’ and if the transient speed of a large driver means the bass note is even a 256th note behind the beat at the attack and release phase, it makes the musical performance sound ‘slow’ and ‘ponderous’. By delivering bass through a faster, harder working smaller bass driver, it can keep pace with the rest of the musical delivery and therefore lets the music be a little freer.

You can hear the difference between ‘musically integrated’ subwoofers and their more cinematic brethren by playing a simple piece of music with a bass line. It’s perhaps no wonder that REL uses ‘The Ballad of the Runaway Horse’ by Jennifer Warnes and the late bassist Rob Wasserman, either from the 20th Anniversary version of *Famous Blue Raincoat* by Warnes [Private Music, BMG] or from Wasserman’s *Duets* [MCA]. The recording is simple (effectively a voice and a bass), but tells you all about a sub. Switching a correctly set-up subwoofer in and out adds some depth and ‘shape’ to the bass notes, of course, but what it does when set properly is lock Warnes’ voice in the centre of the soundstage. The better the sub, the more precisely that voice is solidly rooted between the speakers and with the S/510, if her voice was any more rooted, she’d need watering.

Expanding that out to more complex music, what makes the sound so well focused and precise with voice and bass extends to a complete band or a whole orchestra. Of course, the call of the bass is impossible to resist, so out came ‘Mein Teil’ from the Rammstein album *Reise, Reise* [Universal], followed closely by the title track of Infected Mushroom’s *IM The Supervisor* [YoYo]. First we used these on the affordable yet excellent Swisstone by Graham Audio LS3 loudspeaker on its own stands. This two-way has a lot to offer, but its bass – though good – is constrained by the size of the cabinet. The S/510 is like swapping the LS3 for a bigger, and in many respects better loudspeaker. Obviously these two tracks gave the subwoofer something meaty to get its teeth into, and didn’t disappoint. Bass lines were thicker, faster and with more of a fuller ‘thack’ to each bass note. On the other hand, in both cases what you also got was more separation around the rest of the instruments, more of a sense of scale to the sound and size to the soundstage, and a greater sense of lyrical articulation. On the Rammstein track it felt that my sub-schoolboy German suddenly passed an exam, as I could sort of understand the lyrics slightly more. Curiously, the same benefits were bestowed on big speakers too.

There is almost a generational improvement with REL subwoofers. Last year’s best model is often eclipsed by this year’s second from the top, and so on. The REL S/510 is a fine example of this generational evolution. The late Richard Lord who first came up with the original concepts for REL



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Front-firing active woofer, down-firing passive radiator

Inputs: Hi Level Neutrik Speakon, Lo Level single phono, LFE phono

Active drive unit: 300mm alloy driver with aluminium chassis

Passive radiator unit: 300mm carbon-fibre

Power output: 500w (RMS)

Lower frequency response: 21Hz at -6dB

Gain control range: 80dB

Dimensions (WxHxD): 39 x 45 x 44cm

Weight: 26.3kg

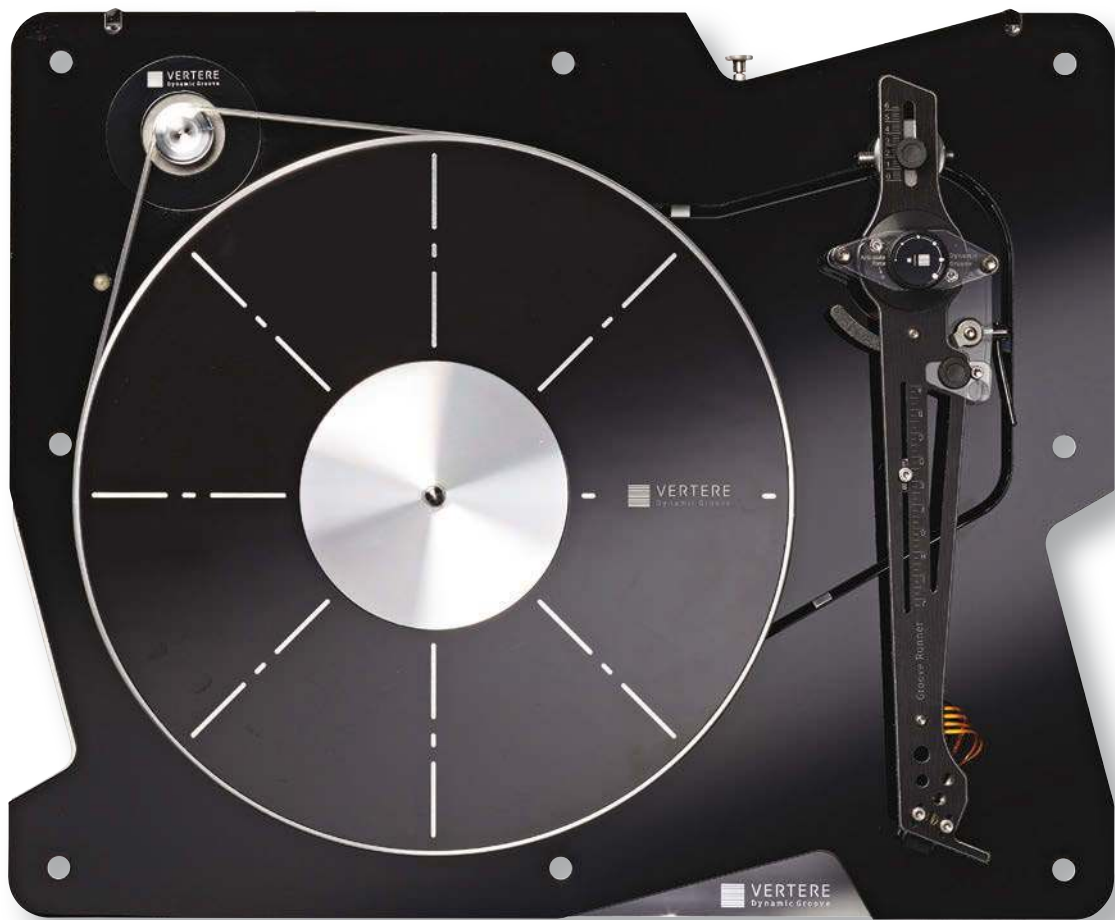
Price: £1,899

Manufacturer: REL Acoustics

URL: rel.net

Tel: +44(0)1656 768777

loudspeakers would likely have approved of the S/510, because he loved his bass, but he also loved his bass controlling the sound of the rest of the system with an benign, yet, iron authority. That’s precisely what you get here, and those who think they don’t need a subwoofer because they have big speakers or a small room are wrong, and the REL S/510 is waiting to show you how wrong. +

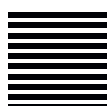


Introducing DG-1 Dynamic Groove, the first 'plug and play' record player from Vertere

The Vertere DG-1 is our most affordable record player yet; the easiest to set up and use, and also contains some of our most innovative thinking.

We have examined every element of the design, rethinking the way record players work, and removing every superfluous element that got in the way of our ultimate aim: getting you as close as possible to your music.

The result is an elegant record player that draws on the engineering of our flagship models to deliver outstanding performance and ease of operation in a fun and dynamic way.



VERTERE™

vertereacoustics.com

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

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

DECENT AUDIO
sound distribution
OFFICIAL UK DISTRIBUTOR

Enjoy the Music.com®

Reviews News Show Reports And More...

hi-fi+ VIVID AUDIO 50th Anniversary Special

hi-fi+ Hi-Fi+ AWARDS THE FINEST AUDIO PRODUCTS MONEY CAN BUY THIS YEAR

HIFICRITIC

hifimedia REPORTAŽA

HI-FI WORLD AWARDS ISSUE 2019

NOVO STEREO The Rise of Location Based Entertainment

McIntosh Labs MC312 Power Amplifier

Tech Trends for Summer 2019

TOP SOUND FROM 800 TO \$500K

WBT Plasma Protect connectors

by Alan Sircom

Those who subscribe to the 'wire is just wire' school of thought have a bit of a problem reconciling their personal hard objective stance with a company so unremittingly science-led as WBT. The German brand WBT is famed for its no-nonsense – if resolutely high-end – connectors, and its Nextgen terminals are among the most highly sought-after plugs and sockets in the business. As with most companies that get described as 'no-nonsense' and 'unremittingly science-led', the Essen-based WBT doesn't change its products with the seasons, so while there is a lot to talk about, we don't get to talk about it regularly enough.

That being said, on the face of it using a plasma current to gold-plate copper terminals might not seem like too much to talk about. After all, the physical vapour deposition process that WBT calls 'Plasma Protect' might be of interest in an industrial chemist's journal, but must be a bit of a reach in an audio magazine? Or perhaps not.

OK, a bit of chemistry is needed here. As most people know, pure copper might be a great electrical conductor but when exposed to air, the clock is ticking because as copper oxidises its conductivity falls away rapidly. The usual method of side-stepping this gradual and inevitable decline is to electroplate the copper in a material that doesn't oxidise, and gold is the most common metal used in this context. The problem then falls to the conductivity of the metal plating and while gold is a fairly electrical conductor, it is not as good as copper. As a result, engineers try to balance just the right amount of gold (for its corrosion resistance) to not undermine the electrical integrity of the connection. And they do this using a technique that pre-dates



the steam locomotive. Granted, the electroplating process has become more refined in the last 215 years, but hi-tech it isn't.

By way of contrast, PVD or 'physical vapour deposition' is a child of the 1960s. In PVD, a block of the material to be used as plating (in WBT's case, a block of gold) is subjected to strong electron bombardment (think of the klystron tube in your microwave oven, on an industrial scale), creating a plasma field of gold atoms in a vacuum. The copper parts are passed through this gold 'mist' and by use of a magnetic field are deposited on the surface of the copper itself. The result is a denser, yet thinner layer of gold less than 1,000 atoms thick.

Aside from creating a thin, more homogeneous coating that gives the optimum balance of corrosion resistance and conductivity, the process is a lot eco-friendlier. Anyone who has ever visited an electroplating site will attest that it isn't particularly good for the environment; the stripping, plating, and post-plating processes all feature some very toxic and hazardous materials and although many can be reused and recycled, it's not the cleanest of processes. WBT's Plasma Protect system, however, just dunks the components in a single salt-bath in preparation for the vapour deposition, then sprays the finished product in alcohol as a post-plating clean. The slurry that forms after this ▶



“This is evolution not game changing revolution but it’s enough to hear and justify the differences readily.”

- cleaning process is recycled and any gold is extracted; and while ‘alcoholic slurry’ sounds like the start of a really bad Friday night, I’m reliably informed it’s not recycled as discount cocktails.

A better conductor retaining corrosion resistance and made more environmentally-chummy – so far, so good. But audiophiles are a mercurial lot, and many would not care about its putative electrical properties or its eco-credentials if it didn’t sound ‘right’. And it’s here that WBT has rigged up a neat demonstration box; essentially a passive pot with a single line input and two line outputs, one of which is a standard socket, the other a Plasma Protect treated WBT-0210 CU Nextgen socket. The best way of demonstrating this is to slip this between a streamer or CD player and an amp or preamp, with the WBT box occupying identical line inputs on that box. In fairness, this box is designed to be used by demonstrators rather than some kind of cable evaluation device for end users, so its construction is ‘functional’ at best. Nevertheless, it’s an effective demonstration of just how big a difference a seemingly small difference can make. The side-by-side comparison gives a greater sense of stereo depth and separation to the soundstage, a little more focus to the overall sound. There was also more detail on offer right across the board. Not massively – this is evolution not game-changing revolution – but it’s enough to hear and justify the differences readily.

WBT also supplied a set of RCA sockets and WBT-0610Cu bare-wire-4mm speaker terminals. I have a set of functionally identical pre-Plasma terminals that I have had since the late Jurassic era, which are useful for connecting bare-wire cables. I also have some QED 79 Strand cable made by the same dinosaurs, which I stripped down to two sets of 2m cables and

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

Prices: WBT-0110 CU Nextgen RCA plugs £152.48/four plugs
WBT-0610Cu loudspeaker plugs: £40/pair

Manufactured by: WBT
URL: wbt.de

Distributed in the UK by: C-Tech Audio
URL: c-techaudio.co.uk
Tel: +44(0)7738 714 619

exposed fresh copper cables at both ends. The difference between the two terminals was clearly noticeable, even despite the relative age and basic performance of the cable involved. As with the RCA connector box, the difference between the WBT connectors and – surprisingly – even bare wire was marked and noticeable, with the improvement going to the WBT connection. Perhaps the biggest change was comparing the WBT connectors with some very old and tarnished generic 4mm gold-plated Michell knock-off plugs. The drop in quality when using the old plugs was palpable, with a lot of stereo congestion and muffled upper bass notes by comparison. Treating the knock-offs with contact cleaner improved their lot, but even seemingly pristine, the WBT links were still sounding sonically superior.

The WBT Plasma Protect connectors – speaker, RCA and presumably any subsequent connectors for power or digital – have the advantage of being good sounding, will stay good sounding for longer and are better for the environment. Feel free to reset these three big bonuses in whichever order you find most important, as they are all good. Granted some of the more high-falutin’ cable providers will make their own solutions, but if the option is there, go with the WBT option where possible. It makes a lot of sense. +

The Funk Firm

Come and see us at the show!

Funk's "Rave" upgrades now combine Funk Tech with detachable headshell convenience for all Technics 1200 owners in addition to conventional fitment.



Technics Rave!

Hi-Fi AWARDS 2019



TONELARM OF THE YEAR

The Funk Firm FXR | Presented in Silver UK



funk + chick

The Funk FXR: Awarded "Tonearm of the year" in hi-fi+ awards 2019.

Funk's "Rage" upgrade enhances Rega's from P1 through to P10.



Rega Rage!

web: www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

Funk *Ever Closer!*

Studio Sound Comes Home.



The legendary Rupert Neve Designs have appointed us as the first UK Audio Specialist for their new Fidelice home audio range. Book a demonstration with us and hear why.

Fidelice Precision DAC . Fidelice Precision Phono Preamplifier . Fidelice Precision Headphone Preamplifier

brianandtreavors

The Original House of Hi-Fi

info@brianandtreavors.com

Just Listen

+44 (0) 161 766 4837





WBT-PlasmaProtect™
 A leap in quality for audio connectors

For further information visit wbt.de



KRONOS
 TIME FOR MUSIC™



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

- Alan Sircom, HiFi+

Life's just better with a
DECENT AUDIO System

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

DECENT AUDIO
 sound distribution
 OFFICIAL UK DISTRIBUTOR

MEET YOUR MAKER

CH Precision

by Alan Sircom



This has been a long time coming. I visited CH Precision's small, efficient manufacturing and design facility in the middle of last year. CH Precision was named after the first letters of the surnames of founders Florian Cossy and Thierry Heeb, although 'CH' also just happens to be the data-code for Switzerland ('Confoederatio Helvetica', meaning in theory that CH Precision's website could have been 'ch.ch' instead of 'ch-precision.com'). The two cut their audio teeth at Goldmund before founding the OEM company Anagram Technologies in the 2000s. We spoke to Florian Cossy (*above, centre*).

CH Precision has two sites within metres of one another in a business park in the small Swiss town of Préverenges, just west of Lausanne. The ground-level site combines a manufacturing facility, an upgrades and repairs section, and warehousing. The

second is across the way and up two levels, and sports prototyping, R&D, sales, marketing and other admin, and a dedicated listening room. This last is used in part for listening to new components during development, and for dealer and distributor demonstrations and training. Put together, the whole CH Precision workforce combined could just about field a soccer team, so long as it was unisex and there weren't too many substitutions.

That places significant demands on the workforce; with over half the personnel dedicated to design, there's no room for an "I just make the power amp" team member. However, to ensure quality and consistency, that workforce is extremely well-trained and highly self-motivated. The company also relies on exacting documentation in its build-up plans and flexible work-benches/assembly lines. The products are typically constructed in batches of up to six at a time. The workforce is divided between those who prepare for assembly, and those who actually assemble the products, with sub-assemblies and modules built, tested, and stocked. Final assembly itself is more of a 'Lego Brick' process than 'board stuffing'; true to the atelier tradition that supports the Swiss-watch industry, the boards themselves are built by a third-party also in Switzerland, however testing, additional processes and tuning, and final assembly is all performed in house. Having someone potentially building a CD transport one day and a power amp the next helps prevent worker boredom (there is no excuse for a 'Friday afternoon car' in high-end audio, but CH Precision's manufacturing schema practically guarantees a happier ►



► work-place environment, and more satisfied workers means better built components).

However, CH Precision is not about making custom products for the sake of it; “We design from scratch,” says Cossy. “But we use off-the-shelf products whenever we can. There is no point designing a new op-amp if there is a perfectly good op-amp already in production.”

Alongside a flexible construction environment, another big element in CH Precision’s ethos is the upgradable nature of its components. Since making its first products in 2009, the only ‘legacy’ components that are no longer available are the company’s two ranges of interconnect and speaker cables. All other products, save

the A1 amplifier, made over the last 11 years are still on CH Precision’s order books. Of course, there have been periodic upgrades to these products, with the aforementioned A1 power amp being extensively redesigned to create the A1.5 and the M1 upgraded to create the M1.1. However, these upgrades are available to existing CH Precision owners, A1s being traded in at advantageous terms and M1s being upgradeable *in situ* – which given the weight of the unit and the cost of shipping is no small thing. Often, when it comes to upgrading a CH system it’s more about additions to the system itself rather than swapping out one product for another (as highlighted in our Issue 175 test that turned a single-box stereo L1 line preamplifier into a full-blown, four-box mono L1 preamp with twin X1 power supplies, or in adding a more advanced streaming input card to an existing DAC). They might also come in the shape of repairs, but as is often the paradox; those companies with the best repairs departments are also the companies with the least need for a repairs department. As CH Precision started from the outset thinking of ‘the long game’ in terms of product supply, the products are built – and the components are chosen – in terms of longevity and performance. Although these are claims common to manufacturers in ►

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+



Life's just better with a
DECENT AUDIO System

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

DECENT AUDIO
sound distribution
OFFICIAL UK DISTRIBUTOR

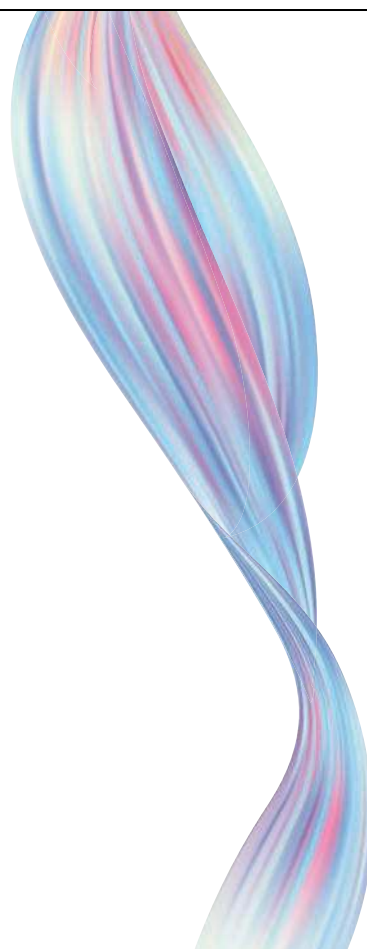
Audio Art

exquisite sound through art

STENHEIM
CH

Swiss excellence

0208 9779996
paul@audioarthifi.co.uk



“Owners tend to upgrade or add more CH Precision products, and that means there are more unicorn horns on sale than second-hand CH kit.”

► the audio world, surprisingly few ‘walk the walk’, but with a product range that remains effectively unchanged in more than a decade, CH Precision lives by this ethos.

CH Precision strives to break down boundaries, in an industry that loves to pigeonhole. This hasn’t always been easy, “We were long considered as a maker of digital sources (because we manufacture a drive and a DA converter)” says Cossy, “but we fought against this. Now, thankfully I think that fight is over and people recognise us as a designer of amplifiers as well.” Similarly, and perhaps more importantly, the same line-blurring applies to the products too. “We have enough expertise in both digital and analogue domains to create products that ‘have enough digital in them’ to counteract the inherent drawbacks of an analogue circuit, but in the digital domain. The other way round is happening too; we take something like the external clock and treat it like it is producing an analogue signal.”

Nevertheless, in a large range of electronics, there are products that designers feel best highlight their outlook. For Cossy, there are two products that demonstrate that; “The power amps, for the ability to adjust the ratio of global to local feedback circuit. This controls the damping factor and allows better loudspeaker and room matching. But also the P1 phono stage and its current mode inputs: These moving coil inputs remove the need for impedance matching and make for superior signal to noise ratio when compared to voltage inputs.” Demonstrating understated Swiss reserve, it’s clear that while all CH’s products are important to Cossy, these two design blocks best demonstrate what the company stands for.

I visited CH Precision at the time of one of its biggest changes in years; it announced and showed in early prototype form, the L10

and M10 amplifiers destined to sit atop the already mountainous peaks of CH Precision’s amplifier hierarchy. Alongside these ‘concept’ amplifiers came the substantial updates to the A1 stereo and M1 mono power amplifiers and – as seen in pre-release form – a Roon-Ready Ethernet streaming HD board for the C1 and C1 mono digital controllers and the I1 integrated amplifier. For a company as deliberately compact as CH Precision, this is a lot of heavy lifting for the R&D team in the company’s 10th anniversary year.

The longevity of each product – both in terms of the length of time it remains on sale and potential time it stays in a system – does impose unique disciplines on the brand. In 11-years of audio manufacturing, a company that has only ever discontinued one product that places severe strictures on both its designers and their designs; you don’t want the next model to be the first one that only stays around for a few years. That eradicates any complacency in product development, even if it does make for unchanging industrial design. This can make the brand a victim of its own success in terms of visibility; owners tend to upgrade or add more CH Precision products, and that means there are more unicorn horns on sale than second-hand CH kit. Also, a company that doesn’t launch a new product every six months doesn’t get the exposure of a brand that panders to the ‘yes, but what have you done for me lately?’ cabal of high-end audio buyers (and reviewers). Instead, CH Precision appears to sell its products on the revolutionary idea of making products that sound good, knowing their investment will still be current a decade or more from now. As such, distributors, retailers, reviewers, and listeners alike who have matured past the ‘flavour of the month’ club find themselves in lock-step with CH Precision’s approach.

The CH Precision concept posits that an owner of their products need not change their electronics, ever. The products are kept up to date through their modular nature and periodic and optional upgrades. Should you wish to improve the system, there’s a whole extended family tree of additional power supply and dual-mono options, a structure that applies to almost every core component and that can be worked through before you run out of CH Precision road. Should you decide to change your cartridge or loudspeakers, the electronics have unique flexibility to adapt. And with every component wearing a CH Precision logo still closely related to (or upgradable to) a current model, listeners aren’t likely to find themselves left with a discontinued ‘white elephant’.

It’s an approach that imposes its own rigour but creates its own opportunities too. Longevity brings long product cycles and modular design allows both future proofing and upgradability. But just as importantly, the design and technology remains common and complementary, the company agile and true to those original goals. +

ch-precision.com

NEW! THE POWERKORD HAS EVOLVED



Find out more at www.russandrews.com/powerkord
or call us on 01539 797300



60 DAY HOME AUDITION
WITH MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Russ Andrews[®]
**EVOLUTION
POWERKORDS™**

AUDIO ANALOGUE
soundpleasure



Life's just better with a
DECENT AUDIO System

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

DECENT AUDIO
sound distribution
OFFICIAL UK DISTRIBUTOR

"ONE OF THE BEST TURNTABLES IN THE WORLD"

Long Live Vinyl Magazine

Helping you recreate the original sound

Origin Live's range of analogue products have consistently won awards for their exceptional performance, innovative design and outstanding musicality.

"A new benchmark for musical communication" **STEREO TIMES**

"One of the truly special products I've reviewed in the past 18 years" **STEREOPHILE**

"One of the best turntables in the world the sound is stunning. An incredible design with amazing insight in sonic terms" **LONG LIVE VINYL**

"The best tonearm I've heard" **HI FI WORLD**

"The singularly most addicting piece of gear I have ever heard" **10 AUDIO**

"The best musical results I've ever heard from any turntable regardless of price. Since I've been listening to turntables professionally for 32 years and am aware of the pitfalls of ultimate proclamations, I hesitate somewhat to make this statement. Nevertheless, it is true. The level of musical communication available from the Illustrious/Aurora Gold is in a class by itself. It sets a new reference." **STEREO TIMES**



Sovereign Turntable with Enterprise-C Tonearm

What Makes the Best Turntable?

Our success comes from better design.

- Light Speed Controller ensures your records spin at absolutely constant speed.
- Multi-Layer Platter absorbs vibration from your playback.
- Superior Materials bring you the best performance.

"Our turntables leave one wondering how such massive differences can possibly exist, when to all outward appearances things look the same" - Mark Baker M.D 1986-present

Read the full article "What makes the best turntable?" online at: www.originlive.com

Origin Live Tel: +44 02380 578877 E-mail: originlive@originlive.com

For full information see: www.originlive.com



SUNDARA

Beautiful Music to Your Ears

HIFIMAN
Innovating the Art of Listening



[hifimanelectronics](https://www.facebook.com/hifimanelectronics)



[hifimanofficial](https://twitter.com/hifimanofficial)



www.hifiman.com



store.hifiman.com

MEET YOUR DEALER

Soundstage, Cockfosters

by Alan Sircom



In that part of North London where Barnet and Cockfosters intersect, amid leafy detached mock-Tudor houses from the suburban sprawl of the 1930s, and in a parade of shops where chic coffee houses rub shoulders with traditional high-street premises, sits Soundstage, an independent hi-fi and home cinema store that has been providing the best in audio and video products to those who live at the ends of the Northern and Piccadilly Underground lines (and beyond) since 1978.

Of course, Dean Butt, owner of Soundstage wasn't running the place back in 1978, but he could have been

(unofficially) working there back then, as the store was started by his father. The business has been in the family ever since.

It's a small store (even some 12 miles from the centre of London means real estate prices and rates are still in the 'astronomical' level), but a friendly and passionate one. The store is very selective in its product selection, with many traditional British names (Arcam, B&W, both Chord Company and Chord Electronics, Cyrus, Linn, Naim, and Quadraspire all featuring strongly) rubbing shoulders with brands best known as specialists in their fields (such as Anthem for AV amplifiers or Astell&Kern for Digital Audio Players). While the team are all ►

“The company has strong working relationships with architects and high-end builders in the area.”



► passionate about music, they are also a pragmatic lot; home cinema and custom installation systems dominate the modern audio business and that is no exception here. The rear of the showroom is given over to a very slick home cinema projection system, and the company has strong working relationships with architects and high-end builders in the area. Given that this area is popular with Premiership soccer stars from both Spurs and Arsenal, Soundstage's 'catchment area' for high-end custom installation is excellent.

There is some inverted snobbery about Premiership soccer stars in the business, something absolutely not echoed by Dean as he has direct experience of working with a number of big names that he will never publically divulge. "Most people think they just buy 'bling', but many are more knowledgeable about audio, video, and especially custom install than some dealers. They know the state of the art of what's possible, where others are more 'can you do that?'" he says.

Music replay is the first love for all, however. Soundstage is the kind of store where people drop by to talk music, and recently the company has diversified into stocking a small, carefully curated stock of records. While the only part that's surprising about this was that it took the company so long to jump on that bandwagon, the truth is different; "We're a small store with a big interest in records. The two are not easily compatible and we started looking like a record shop," laughs Dean. So, instead, the key word is 'curated'; a select list of must-have records, recommended in part by the enthusiastic listeners in the team, and in part by their customers who keep dropping by.

That's one of the key components of the store, possibly more than famous brand names. The friendliness that keeps people coming back. Some of that is upgrades and introducing newcomers to the place (while as a magazine we would naturally point to the success or otherwise of well- ►

hi-fi+

NEWSLETTER



Want regular updates on the hottest audio products? Sign up to our weekly newsletter! Go to hifiplus.com to sign up today

www.hifiplus.com



► targeted advertising, a lot of their business is through direct word-of-mouth recommendation). This is helped by Dean being one of the most loquacious people in audio. OK, so he won't talk the hind legs off a donkey (unless invited), but his friendly, inviting and unassuming manner permeates the store and is well received by the clientele.

In a way, it's kind of a uniquely 'Norfolk Lundhann' experience (as someone who grew up in the area, it's almost hard-wired into my psyche). There's an unassuming, yet professional 'chumminess' to the atmosphere of Soundstage, and a complete absence of the snooty experience you can get in some high-end 'boutiques'. That doesn't mean the end result is any less professional, the installation and follow-up in any way slipshod or the service is short-changed. It's just exposing that notion of stand-offish Londoners as a bit of a sham.

Yes, this is a store with a minimum entry level and something of a price ceiling. If you walked into Soundstage wanting to spend £150 on a good system, like many audio retailers they couldn't help (but they would likely know someone who could help, and point you in that direction). Similarly, if you are in the market for a pair of £150,000 loudspeakers, there are places that can service that need, but they aren't Soundstage (although, once again, they could recommend someone). But more likely, they would work out your needs rather than show you the door, and you might end up becoming a Soundstage customer in the process!

That's what the company does so well. That effortlessly friendly approach that makes people stay customers for generations. It's the Soundstage way! +

URL: soundstage.uk.com **Tel:** +44(0)20 8440 9509



sonority design

Two bespoke designed & built listening rooms, in which we can demonstrate:-

- Our custom isolation platforms
- Bowers & Wilkins 800 / 700 series loudspeakers & formation range
- Simaudio Moon Electronics
- YG Acoustics loudspeakers
- Kef Blade, LS50 & Reference range loudspeakers
- Chord Cables
- VPI turntables
- Chord Electronics
- Innuos music servers – entire range



Please feel free to book your time here by calling **01384 79965**

Sonority Design Ltd | Tel: 01384 79965 | Fax: 01384 265039 | info@sonoritydesign.co.uk | www.sonoritydesign.co.uk

AURIS

Euterpe

HeadAmp . DAC . PreAmp . Stand

Everything you need...

According to the Greek Mythology, Euterpe was one of the nine Muses, the Goddess of music and a "giver of delight" and that's exactly what Auris Audio Euterpe will bring to audiophile community, more happiness.

Designed in a single ended configuration, integrated audiophile asynchronous DAC xMos/ESS Sabre, it allows you to use digital sources such as PC or mobile devices. Integrated in a piece of art chassis, Euterpe gives you everything you've always dreamed of.

HiFi+ Review



www.aurisaudio.rs

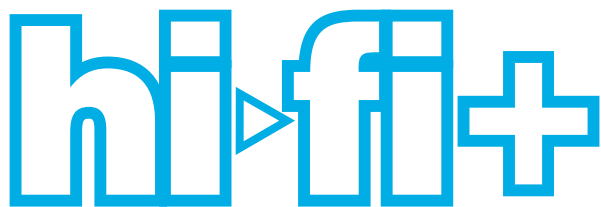


Award winning Pre Amplifiers



Call now for a
home demonstration

01424 858260 info@mfaudio.co.uk www.mfaudio.co.uk



BACK ISSUES!

Complete your collection

Read previous reviews of the
UK's best loved audio magazine



ORDER TODAY!

www.hifiplus.com

POSTAGE & PACKING

UK: £1/Magazine

Europe: £3/Magazine

Rest of World: £5/Magazine

UK orders are sent by Parcel Post, please allow
2 weeks for delivery.

Overseas orders are sent by air mail.



£6
PER ISSUE



SUBSCRIBE

hi-fi+



1 YEAR
SUBSCRIPTION
**Save
16%**

2 YEAR
SUBSCRIPTION
**Save
25%**

In order to ensure prompt arrival of your copy of hi-fi+, it is best to take out a subscription. This lasts for a year (12 issues) and means that your magazine is delivered to your doorstep as soon as it is published. You never miss an issue again!



www.hifiplus.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK, Western Europe & Rest of the World

ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION /12 ISSUES

Within the UK	£50
Western Europe, USA & Canada	£60
Rest of the World	£80

TWO YEAR SUBSCRIPTION/24 ISSUES

Within the UK	£90
Western Europe, USA & Canada	£105
Rest of the World	£140

SPECIAL OFFER

Save 16% (1 year subscription)

Save 25% (2 year subscription)



TO SUBSCRIBE COMPLETE THIS FORM BELOW AND RETURN TO:

HI-FI+ SUBSCRIPTIONS

Unit 4, College Road Business Park, College Road North, Aston Clinton, HP22 5EZ, UK

or call: +44 (0) 1442 820580
or email: hifiplus@webscribe.co.uk
via the web: www.hifiplus.com

I would like my subscription to start from **current** issue/**next** issue (please delete as appropriate)

One year ☐ Two years ☐

ABOUT YOU:

Title _____

Forename _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Country _____

Post code/Zip code _____

Daytime Tel _____

PAYMENT:

UK ☐ Europe, USA & Canada ☐ Rest of World ☐
Cheques made payable to Absolute Multimedia UK Ltd.

Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐

Card no

Expiry date

3 digit security number

Switch ☐

Card no

Expiry date

3 digit security number

Direct Debit ☐

Originators Identification No



Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay Direct Debits
Name(s) of account holder(s) _____

Bank/Building Society account number

Branch sort code

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society branch.

To: The Manager _____ Bank/Building Society
Address _____

Country _____

Post code/Zip code _____

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society. Please pay Webscribe Ltd Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that the instruction may remain with Webscribe Ltd and, if so details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signed _____

Date _____

Bank and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

The Direct Debit Guarantee

This Guarantee is offered by all Banks and Building Societies that take part in the Direct Debit scheme. The efficiency and security of the Scheme is monitored and protected by your own bank or Building Society • If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit Webscribe Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Webscribe Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request • If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by Webscribe Ltd or your bank or building society you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society. • If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Webscribe Ltd asks you to. • You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.



DEALER DIRECTORY

ae
AUDIO EXOTICS

ASIA'S AUDIO PLATFORM

www.audioexotics.com

Audio Oasis
Beautiful Styling & Real Musical Enjoyment

sales@audiooasis.co.uk

T: 01722 322215

www.audiooasis.co.uk

HAMPSHIRE WILTSHIRE DORSET

booplenth

"Finally, a new and advanced plinth upgrade reveals more recorded detail from any Linn LP12 and a transformational musical performance."



booplenth

booplenth LP12 performance upgrades and installation

www.brianandtrevors.com

info@brianandtrevors.com +44 (0) 161 766 4837

bn
BROOK AUDIO
HIGH END HI-FI IN HUNDREDS

PURVEYORS OF
FINE AUDIO EQUIPMENT
AND ACCESSORIES

01484 538438
www.brookaudio.co.uk

Choice hi-fi "where dreams meet reality"

Visit our NEW WEBSITE

The HiFi Exchange
New and Used HiFi

www.choicehifi.co.uk

Email info@choice-hifi.com
Telephone 020 8392 1959 / 07768 720456

criterion audio



Criterion Audio is a premium hi-fi dealer in Cambridge.

From vinyl and valves to the latest in streaming and headphones, we can help you find the perfect system to suit your budget and needs.

www.criterionaudio.com
info@criterionaudio.com
01223 233730

The Finest Hi-Fi & Home Cinema
Come and treat your senses!



Drake House
1 Pavilion Business Park
Forest Vale
Industrial Estate
Cinderford GL14 2YD

Ceritech AUDIO

www.ceritech-audio.co.uk 01594 540268

DB HIFI

SUFFOLK

01379 873451
WWW.DBHIFI.CO.UK

Your ad could be here!

Tel: +44 (0) 1425 655255
Mobile: +44 (0) 7900 252975
Email: tom@hifiplus.com

divine audio

AnalogueWorks
Creek Audio
Croft Acoustics
Graham Audio
Jelco Tonearms
Neat Acoustics
Omega Loudspeakers
Rogue Audio
Supra Cables

www.divineaudio.co.uk
07918 728860 tim@divineaudio.co.uk

hmfSOLUTIONS
Hi-End Audio Products

Accuphase
Acoustical Systems
Amari LP-82s Turntable
DMSD Decouplers
Focal Evo - Focal Sopra
Grand Prix Audio
Innuos Servers
Nagra Audio Classic - HD Line
Purist Audio Design

hmfinfo@sky.com | 020 8771 7106

hifisound

Stockton on Tees...the North's
hotbed of audio delights

- Anatek
- Audeze
- Chord
- Clearaudio
- Dynavector
- EAR
- Esoteric
- Focal JMLab
- Funk
- Grado
- Koetsu
- Kronos Audio
- Lyra
- Michell
- Magneplanar
- Naim
- Nordost
- Notts Analogue
- Pathos
- SME
- Sonus Faber
- Stax
- Sugden
- Transfiguration
- Unison Research
- Usher Audio
- & many more

t: 01642 267012 w: hifisound.co.uk
e: simon@hifisound.co.uk

Infidelity
MUSIC & CINEMA SYSTEMS

020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk
info@infidelity.co.uk

9 High Street, Hampton Wick
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT1 4DA
Tuesday to Saturday 10-6

CEDIA MEMBER **clarity**

MonoPulse

New
Models AA & SA
Full hi-fi streaming
Reality you can
almost touch

midlandhifistudio
Wolverhampton 01902 380083

audioelevation
Doncaster 0800 035 1620

zouchaudio
Ashby-de-la Zouch 01530 414128

audiooasis
Southampton 01722 322215

www.monopulse.co.uk

max
MidlandAudioxchange

w: www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk
e: sales@midlandaudiox-change.co.uk
t: 01562 731100

Refreshingly different

**OXFORD
AUDIO
CONSULTANTS**

01865 790 879
www.oxfordaudio.co.uk
Cantay House, Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1JD

rayleigh...sound & vision
Smart home technology

Superb range of world-class hi-fi
on demonstration.

Rayleigh, Essex SS6 7EA
01268 779762
rayleigh@rayleighhifi.com
www.rayleighhifi.com

Stores also at Chelmsford and Southend

SONATA
high-fidelity

APPLAUSE

west hampstead london
0330 111 5653 www.sonatahifi.com

studio AV

SEE, HEAR AND
FEEL THE
DIFFERENCE

Get in touch to arrange your
personal audition of some of the
world's most highly respected
Hi-Fi and Home Cinema products.

WWW.STUDIOAV.CO.UK
01753 863300
sales@studioav.co.uk

**SUBSCRIBE
AND SAVE!**

Get your copy delivered to your
door as soon as it is published

www.hifiplus.com

**The VINYL
ADVENTURE**

Purveyors of
audiophile quality
vinyl & accessories

01484 538438
www.thevinyladventure.com

The Hanging Stars

by Sean Hannam

London country-psych-folk-rock band The Hanging Stars are in a good place – and I’m not just talking about the traditional East End pub that we’ve agreed to meet in.

The five-piece – singer and guitarist Richard Olson, bassist Sam Ferman, drummer Paulie Cobra, Patrick Ralla on guitars, keys and vocals and pedal steel guitarist Joe Harvey-Whyte – have just released their third album, *A New Kind Of Sky*, and it’s their best, most cohesive and sonically adventurous record to date.

From the hypnotic opening track, the shimmering, magical and otherworldly ‘Choir of Criers’, which features a Marxophone – a type of fretless zither played by a system of hammers – you know that this is going to be a truly special and richly rewarding album.

There are several cinematic songs: ‘Three Rolling Hills’ has Mariachi horns and a Spaghetti Western vibe; the trippy ‘Lonely Rivers’ has an electric piano-led groove and echoes of Pink Floyd, while the spiritual and hymn-like ‘I Was A Stone’ opens with a church organ and has a brass arrangement reminiscent of a New Orleans funeral.

‘I Will Please You’ is a catchy, glam-rock-tinged sing-along; the stripped-down, acoustic ballad ‘Song For Fred Neil’ is a paean to the ‘60s and early ‘70s singer-songwriter; ‘Heavy Blue’ is classic-sounding country rock and first single, ‘(I’ve Seen) The Summer In Her Eyes’ is pastoral, Byrdsian jangle-pop.

The bulk of *A New Kind Of Sky* was recorded live at Echozoo

studio in the Sussex seaside town of Eastbourne. The sessions were produced by Dave Lynch and took place shortly after The Hanging Stars had returned from a tour of Germany – Lynch has really captured the energy of the band.

On the night I interview Richard and Sam – a few weeks before their new album is due out – Richard is almost ‘expectant father’ excited, as his own vinyl copy of his own album should be waiting for him at home when he gets back from the pub.

“I’m still trying to come to terms with it all,” he says. “It usually comes together when I get the vinyl...”

You’re very prolific, aren’t you? This is your third album since 2016.

Richard Olson: We don’t stop recording – it’s the only way we can do it, as we can’t afford to take two weeks off to go and make a record in the country. It’s an ongoing situation – that’s one of the reasons it’s so much fun to play with this group.

So how did you approach this record?

Sam Ferman: When we started The Hanging Stars, we had a definite idea of what we wanted our first record to be like – cosmic, psychedelic, spacey country music.

With our second album, other influences came in and it was a bit of a transitional period, as our original keyboardist and pedal steel player had both left. I love the last record for its variety.

The new one could’ve been

a completely different album – we talked about what type of band we were and what the core of the record should be. There was the potential for it to be more of an acoustic country rock album.

When we did the recording sessions in Echozoo, we’d just come back from a tour of Germany – we were playing the new songs in our set and by the last date of the tour something magical happened, because we were so synced-in with playing with each other.

We wanted to capture that energy from the tour, so we recorded most of the songs live at Echozoo in three days, playing as a full band.

It’s a big studio, so we had plenty of space to play live – the live thing is who we are. Dave Lynch’s production and engineering were brilliant – he coached us through the whole process.

RO: We had a lot of songs for the new album, but we decided to make a 10-track record – it is a very coherent album. I think we’ve got something really special – I can’t wait to play the new songs live. It’s amazing to be in a band that’s made up of five arrangers – everyone has great ideas.

SF: One of the great things about being in The Hanging Stars is that Rich brings us beautiful melodies and choruses and then we jam and work out the arrangements.

How was it recording in Eastbourne?

SF: It was nice being by the sea and feeling a little more detached from the



THE HANGING STARS

*"It's amazing to be in a band
that's made up of five arrangers –
everyone has great ideas."*



"The new album is very coherent. I think we've got something really special – I can't wait to play the songs live."

► vagaries of modern life. Eastbourne is a beautiful town.

Let's talk about some of the new songs. 'Choir of Criers', the opening track, is majestic, and it has a groove to it...

RO: It caresses your ears, but, lyrically, it's also a bit of a protest song. I'm really pleased with it – it was fun to do. That was one of the songs that we hadn't played live.

SF: I can remember Rich coming over to mine and showing me the idea for 'Choir of Criers'. It sounded like something off David Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name* – that kind of vibe. We jammed it and worked it up over three or four days.

Both 'Three Rolling Hills' and 'I Was A Stone' have brass arrangements by Sean Read, who has worked with Dexy's Midnight Runners, Edwyn Collins and The Rockingbirds. How was it working with Sean?

RO: Sean is great – he's part of the team. I don't see 'Three Rolling Hills' as a Spaghetti Western song – it's more Bolero. I think 'I Was A Stone' sounds like Spacemen 3.

'Lonely Rivers' reminds me of Pink Floyd...

SF: Yes, but I think it's closer to Neil Young's *On The Beach*.

'Three Rolling Hills' was inspired by a trip to Marin County, in California, to hang out with friends from the band Asteroid No. 4. Can you tell me what happened?

RO: I can't tell you anything that's printable! It was awesome, but we ended up getting into a weird situation.

What's influenced a lot of our records is us hanging out with other ►

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

Spring listening sessions.
PRESENTED BY Ultimate Stream

SEE, HEAR & DISCOVER ALL THE LATEST PRODUCTS
FROM OUR BRAND PORTFOLIO BY JOINING US
AT OUR STUDIO IN ELSTEAD, SURREY FOR OUR
EVENING EVENTS & WEEKEND WORKSHOPS
DURING MARCH & APRIL 2020



FOR MORE INFORMATION & TICKETS CONTACT
SURREY'S HI-FI STREAMING SPECIALISTS

Ultimate
Stream

ultimate-stream.co.uk 07423 603035
@ultstream @ultimatestream

ORANGES & LEMONS



oandlhifi.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

PRECISION AUDIO EQUIPMENT



PERCEIVE
THE DIFFERENCE



www.canor-audio.com



► bands that are good pals of ours – like The Brian Jonestown Massacre.

There are recurring lyrical themes on the album – the idea of escaping and getting away to a better place.

On the title track, you sing:

“had enough of today – of the grey skies and rain – think I’ll pack all my bags and start walking away...”

There’s a lyric on ‘I Was A Stone’ which says: “When the world is cruel and mean, I’ll show you the way to your dreams...”

RO: I wrote ‘I Was A Stone’ about my children – it’s about how much light they shine into my soul.

‘A New Kind Of Sky’ is about Brexit – it was one of those songs that wrote itself.

‘I Will Please You’, which was the third single from the album, has some pounding piano on it and is a bit glam and very poppy – it has some ‘bah-bah-bah’ backing vocals. It’s a different kind of song for you...

SF: Patrick came up with the piano riff during one of the interludes in our rehearsal sessions – I started singing the backing vocals and Rich started humming a melody.

RO: I think it’s quite British and a bit Small Faces – I’m a massive fan of

the Small Faces, but I hate the way that the mods have hijacked that band. As far as I’m concerned, the Small Faces should be spoken about in the same breath as Love. Look at Ronnie Lane – there was so much folk and country music in the Small Faces...

The lyric for ‘I Will Please You’, is written from the point of view of someone who’s joined a cult. What inspired it?

RO: I think I was watching *Wild Wild Country* at the time...

What can you tell me about ‘Heavy Blue’ – which has a drinking theme – and the very personal ballad ‘Song For Fred Neil’?

RO: ‘Heavy Blue’ is about finding yourself in a place where you wouldn’t normally be – and it’s not necessarily a good thing.

I’m really fond of ‘Song For Fred Neil’ – I like self-confessional songs. It’s a love song to music – how it can genuinely touch you – but it doesn’t sound anything like Fred Neil. His music means so much to me, but it took me a long time to get into him.

SF: Rich and Patrick recorded ‘Song For Fred Neil’ in a studio in Nashville. When I heard it, it was clear that nothing needed to be added to it – it’s so beautiful.

With a new album out and some live dates coming up over the next few months, how are you feeling about 2020?

SF: We’re really looking forward to playing gigs around the UK – we’re doing quite a few dates. This record feels like a long time in gestation, but I’m super-proud of it. I’m really looking forward to people hearing it.

RO: When you release a record, you can feel like a lost ship on the

ocean, but there are a lot of people who suddenly give a s*** about us, which is really nice. We’ve got a lovely fan base.

Would you like to get bigger and go to the next level?

SF: If McDonald’s suddenly wants psychedelic-country-space-rock...

Would you do it?

SF: Yes. We have worked so hard to put the stuff out that we have, so if someone comes along and says, ‘here’s a bit of money...’

Ninety or 95 per cent of people who get big record deals are those who’ve been to places like The BRIT School – you have to have come from quite a comfortable background, rather than a working class one. I find it depressing that they’re the only people who get a shot.

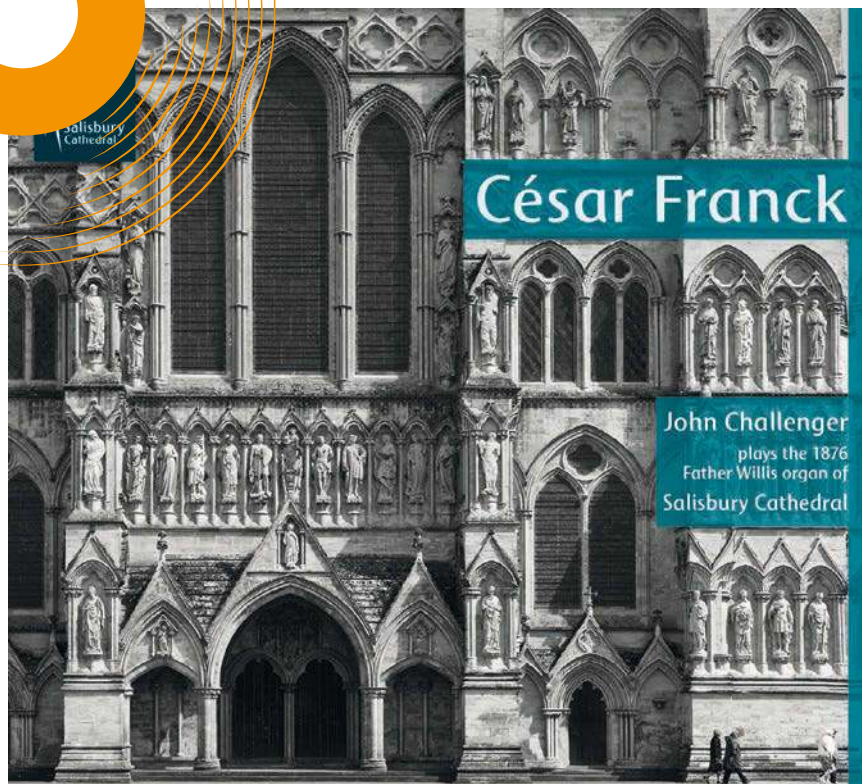
Rich and I aren’t from comfortable backgrounds. I wouldn’t classify myself as poor working class, but, when I was a kid, my parents sacrificed a lot to get me a guitar. You shouldn’t knock people who come from a poorer background who take the money when they’re offered it.

In the past, when you made a deal with a record label, even if the money was low, you got a good proportion of what you were owed – that’s now disappeared completely.

RO: Things have changed so much – it’s now a completely different game. I have friends who can sell out Shepherd’s Bush Empire but they still have to have day jobs.

Bring on the next level whenever you f***ing want, because I’ll deal with it.

A New Kind Of Sky by The Hanging Stars is out now on Crimson Crow.
thehangingstars.com



AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM

hi-fi+

We at *Hi-Fi+* are proud and excited to bring you the *César Franck* CD, priced at £12.50 +p&p.

John Challenger is the Assistant Director of Music at Salisbury Cathedral. You don't get to do that job unless you are uniquely passionate about both the music and the sound it makes within that 800-year-old space. A large part of that passion is expressed through the cathedral's remarkable 65-stop Victorian organ, built by Henry Willis (who earned the sobriquet 'Father' Willis through his immense contribution to the art and science of organ building). The organ has recently been dismantled for a full restoration, but not before John Challenger took the opportunity to cut a second CD, following the success of his 2015 *Elgar From Salisbury* [Regent]. This time, however, he's chosen the music of a different country and produced the recording entirely under his own steam.

To purchase please visit www.hifiusstore.com

**Available
today**

record reviews

How To Read Them

The information contained in the record reviews is presented in the following way. Albums are identified by label and – where possible – serial number. Beneath this you will find one or more icons that denote the available formats for the recording. The first icon refers to the format reviewed.

The ratings at the bottom of each review reflect the reviewer's opinion of the recording quality, and musical merits of the album. You'll soon realise that a great many musically significant albums offer less than wonderful sound. Don't let it put you off! For your information, the scale rates a standard, good quality pop recording as slightly below average.

This issue's featured reviewers are:

DD – Dennis Davis
SH – Sean Hannam
JK – Jason Kennedy
SL – Simon Lucas

	CD		120g LP
	Gold CD		150g LP
	HDCD		180g LP
	XRCD		200g LP
	Double Disc		10" LP
	DVD		Availability As S/H LP
	SACD		Vinyl Double Album
	Hybrid SACD		45 RPM
	Multi-Channel		Download
	Blu-ray		High-Res Download



Winterreise – arranged for string quartet

CD

Schubert

Voyager Quartet

Solo Musica SM335

For those of us who love the late works of Schubert, but just wish he'd lived a wee bit longer to write more (preferably 30 or 40 years longer), a recording like this is hugely welcome. It effectively gives us a 'new' work – albeit, a piece based on one of Schubert's most famous and celebrated late compositions.

Schubert's great song cycle *Winterreise* is the starting point, but there's no voice and no piano – just a string quartet. *Winterreise* has been arranged/recorded for voice and string quartet before, but this new arrangement (by the Voyager Quartet's viola player *Andreas Horicht*) is for quartet only. She gives us 12 of Schubert's 24 songs, and employs newly-composed *intermezzi* to link the songs. The music takes the form of a big single-movement string quartet lasting 50 minutes.

By mostly concentrating on the quieter more introspectively lyrical songs, a mood of resigned melancholy is created which give the entire piece a welcome consistency. The Schubert/Horicht transitions always sound organic and cohesive. The lead in to the final song – *Der Leiermann* – is a case in point; Horicht's music is harsh and borderline dissonant, only to segue into one of Schubert's strangest and most touching melodies.

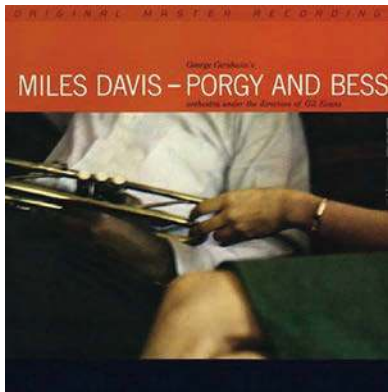
The contrast between Horicht's *intermezzi* and Schubert's songs has the effect of creating a fresh context for the latter so the work registers as a 'new' piece, albeit with familiar passages. The result is akin to a meditation on Schubert's *Winterreise*, rather than a normal 'arrangement' that simply clothes a familiar work in new colours. The greatest compliment I can pay this new arrangement is to say – one never really regrets the absence of a human voice. It's *missing*, but not *missed*.

The recording is technically good, presenting the quartet clearly, so every detail can be heard. Appropriately, the sound is a little bright and tonally cool rather than rich/warm. But the tonal balance, while crisp and fairly immediate, is not unpleasantly-close. It sounds smooth – even though you sense bows on strings, and feel the scrape of rosin. The four instruments are evenly balanced, dynamically, so you hear the inner/lower parts clearly even when the two violins are carrying the main thrust of the argument. Unlike many string quartet recordings, the violins don't tend to dominate the viola and cello, and the lower voices cut through clearly.

So – an interesting and enterprising new disc; more please! After this, I sincerely hope Andreas Horicht arranges other song cycles from the Romantic era for string quartet. **JMH**

RECORDING
MUSIC





Porgy and Bess

Miles Davis

Columbia/Mobile Fidelity
MFSL 2-485



Mobile Fidelity's recent release of *Porgy and Bess* raises hope that it will complete its run of Miles Davis' late 1950s Columbia recordings, with only *Miles Ahead* left to be reissued. Following his work with arranger Gil Evans on *Birth Of The Cool*, Miles Davis moved to Columbia and recorded three collaborations with Evans, extending his fusion of jazz and classical music during the nascent development of stereo recording. *Miles Ahead* was recorded first in 1957 as a mono only LP employing a big band of sixteen woodwind and brass players. It was a critical and commercial success, and Davis' new producer at Columbia, Calvin Lampley, suggested Gershwin's 1935 opera as the subject of his next Evans collaboration. The music was already entrenched in the jazz lexicon having been recorded by Louis Armstrong with Ella Fitzgerald among others. Its recent stage production had drawn much criticism for its stereotyped portrayals of African Americans, a story set to music written by a white man. It tells the story of Porgy, a disabled black beggar and his attempt to rescue Bess from an abusive lover. It's a collection of great songs in a story that escapes sentimentality by a hair's breadth.

Davis – never one to follow the opinions of others and taking comfort in the fact that his producer

was African American and that the music was accepted in jazz—decided to proceed with the project despite the controversy over racial profiling. Evan's arrangements strip the music of Gershwin's pop sensibility and create a truly 'modern' interpretation of the music, one that has stood the test of time. Like *Miles Ahead*, this was a big band arrangement, with seventeen horn players plus bass and drums. With nineteen instruments, the ensemble was at the upper reaches of big band size, and the five-trumpet and four-trombone complement of horns ensured a pretty aggressive sound, with no guitar or piano to soften the blow of all those horns.

As all the music derives from a single composer, the feeling of the album is more coherent than that of *Miles Ahead* and employs a more uniform and slower pace. The focus is always on Miles Davis, who switches between trumpet and flugelhorn. His horn replaces the singers, with his plaintive tone conveying a wide range of vocalisations. It's a *Porgy and Bess* like no other. The music is much more challenging than other versions but contains nothing that is too difficult to absorb—Davis' eloquent playing has never been more passionate or more hypnotic than here.

Like all Davis' 1950s Columbia recordings, *Porgy and Bess* was recorded at Columbia's famed 30th Street recording studio in Manhattan. Unlike the other two Gil Evans' collaborations though, this time recording engineer Frank Laico was in charge rather than Fred Plaut.

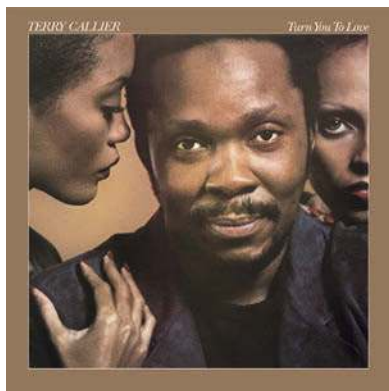
Plaut and Laico acted as recording engineers on more great sounding recordings than any other labels top two engineers. With each of the three Davis/Evans collaborations, the sound improved, as Columbia's engineers kept up with new technology and adjusted to Davis' restless and unpredictable ways.

Porgy and Bess lacks the 'super disc' sound of *Sketches of Spain*, but that doesn't mean it isn't great sounding. In a few places (most notably the opening bars of the album) the horns are recorded somewhat hot. That said, it's still among the best jazz recordings of the day, although I always found that the stereo imaging of the original seemed a bit artificial or 'early stereo' sounding. That was a shame, as this is exactly the type of recording for showing off what stereo can achieve.

Mobile Fidelity's new reissue completely resolves this shortcoming. Not only does the reissue achieve a tighter grasp on tone quality, allowing you to turn up the sound without scorching your ears, but it cleans up the soundstage and creates a very credible stereo image. Working from the original master tapes, Sony's senior mastering engineer Mark Wilder is credited with remixing while Mobile Fidelity's Keith Wunderlich mastered the vinyl assisted by Shawn Britton. Another gem in the Miles Davis discography! **DD**

**RECORDING
MUSIC**





Turn You to Love

Terry Callier

Speakers Corner

180g

In the sixties when the 'British Invasion' re-introduced Americans to the blues, enthusiasts went searching for the artists living in their own back yard. Something similar happened in Britain in the late 80s when the soul jazz movement popularised by DJ Gilles Peterson started playing music by forgotten artists from the 60s and 70s. One of those artists was Terry Callier whose first album *The New Folk Sound* was clearly an attempt to jump on the folk bandwagon that unfortunately was petering out when it was released in 1965. It's a fabulous album and arguably his best although his resurgence in the early seventies produced the work that provoked Acid Jazz label owner Eddie Pillar to seek him out nearly twenty years later.

Turn You to Love was the last album that the singer and guitar player was to release during this effective second phase of his career. It led to a degree of touring success but Callier spent the next decade working as a computer programmer and a student of sociology. The re-release of *New Folk Sound* and the albums he made for Cadet brought him a following in the UK which was to see him touring and recording new albums from 1998 up until his death in 2012.

Turn You to Love was recorded in 1978 and sounds as if it was made to appeal to the burgeoning disco market. Engineers Jimmy Schifflert (Shalamar, Steve Arrington), Sye

Mitchell and Roger Dollarhide (Bobby Womack, Sly Stone) were all from a disco background and brought in horn and string sections to fill out the sound. It includes two of Callier's early seventies songs, 'Ordinary Joe' and 'Occassional Rain' alongside a classic Steely Dan song and a tune written by Smokey Robinson for the Four Tops.

The album is mysteriously labelled Side One on both sides but officially starts with 'Sign of the Times' (not the Prince song). This is essentially a blues dressed in upbeat disco tones with slightly cheesy horns and a strong melody. The song laments the way that the world is heading; the underlying message being that we have lost our way, which at the end of the 70s is understandable. It provided Callier with his only US chart success and resulted in an appearance at the Montreux Jazz Festival. 'Pyramids of Love' is a soulful and melodic piece that's crammed with instrumentation but led by conscious lyrics once more. This more than anything is likely the reason that Callier's music didn't appeal to the audience at the time, it was a bit too deep for the good time crowd that the production was designed to attract. It should perhaps have gone for a Womack & Womack vibe but that would have required rather more visionary production.

The title track is also a soul number that highlights the artist's superb voice, here it's given a bit more space to express a message of love and hope with strings, rhythm section and keys kept down so that the singer and his guitar can make their

mark, the latter forming a tight but groovy bridge on several songs. The highlight of this side for Steely Dan fans at least is 'Do it Again', a Becker and Fagen classic from *Can't Buy a Thrill*, the odd tempo instrumental intro means you don't recognise it until the 'Back Jack and do it again' tune drops but it's a blast with a great arrangement and a scorching guitar break. The second side starts with the two older Callier songs, 'Ordinary Joe' and 'Occassional Rain', which aren't exactly enhanced by the dense, jaunty arrangements but the beauty of the voice is as obvious as ever. The second song is enriched by a great sounding bass and augmented by harp no less, it's a classic sweet/sad ballad that shines through its overdressing.

'Still Water (Love)' was a hit for the Four Tops in 1970 and it's lyrical simplicity makes it stick out as clearly of a different origin to the other numbers here, Callier gives it his best shot but when you get to 'You and Me will always be in Love' and 'A Mother's Love' you know he is in his element. The smooth groove of the latter cannot disguise a beautiful tribute that's full of thought and heart. *Turn You to Love* is not Callier's greatest work but it reveals that he was always a great songwriter and singer who richly deserved a comeback. **JK**

RECORDING
MUSIC





The Soft Parade

The Doors

Elektra/Rhino



While it's hard to do anything but admire Jim Morrison's determination to turn himself from a leather-clad, snake-hipped, sexy psychedelic shaman into a fat, bearded drunk, there's no denying this preoccupation played havoc with the quality of his band's recorded output.

By the time The Doors convened to begin work on their fourth album, they were dealing from a position of strength. The third album, *Waiting For The Sun*, had reached No.1 in America and No.16 in the UK (both career-bests), and the single, *Hello, I Love You*, had topped the US singles charts. The band were selling out the largest venues of their career. So, inevitably, it all went badly wrong.

There were several fundamental problems. Morrison was feeling the pressure, and more interested in poetry and 'film-making' (a.k.a. booze and drugs) than rock'n'roll. This put more of the song writing onus on guitarist Robby Kreiger, and he was demonstrably not up to it.

In addition, the late-60s fashion for baroque psychedelia had gripped producer Paul Rothchild. In the absence of any strong leadership from the band, he recommended piling brass and string arrangements onto the flimsy song structures. They could not bear the weight.

The resulting album was, by any measure, underwhelming. Songs ranged from 'reasonably catchy'

('Touch Me') to 'utterly vapid' ('Do It, Runnin' Blue'), and the sound was all bluster and little substance. Sales of *The Soft Parade* were disappointing, and The Doors' artistic reputation struggled to recover.

Nevertheless, there's gold in them Boomers. So, to mark its 50th anniversary *The Soft Parade* has been given the 'super-deluxe reissue' treatment. That means three CDs and a 180gm vinyl LP, all remastered by original engineer Bruce Botnick using the MQA master file. The resulting package is a game of two halves.

While the second CD of 'Doors Only' mixes is initially intriguing thanks to the removal of the orchestration, it really only serves to expose further the poverty of most of the material. The addition of some new guitar overdubs by Robby Kreiger is as flat-out pointless as it is mystifying. The inclusion of an early sketch of *Roadhouse Blues* (with vocal by keyboard player Ray Manzarek) is mildly diverting, right until you remember that its appearance as the opening track of 1970's *Morrison Hotel* is, basically, responsible for the whole of Status Quo's career.

The third CD includes a 64-minute jam entitled *Rock Is Dead*. Obviously, it was never intended for public consumption, and it's hard to picture even the most ardent Doors completist finding it anything other than tedious and indulgent.

But the sound, especially of the first two CDs and of the vinyl, is an entirely different matter. Between the fearsome MQA algorithms and

Bruce Botnick's inside-out familiarity with the original material, there can be little doubt *The Soft Parade* has never sounded so crisp, so focused, so natural and convincing.

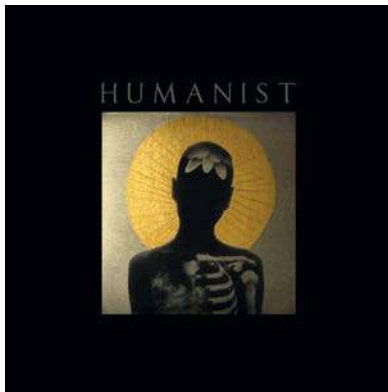
Really, the true revelation here concerns clarity. There's a complete lack of ambiguity to these remasters. Whether you choose to concentrate on John Densmore's virtuoso drumming, and the varying weight of his snare-drum attacks, or on the fluency of Kreiger's interjections, or on the woefully miscast Curtis Amy's tenor saxophone, there's more information to be gleaned than ever before. There's a remarkable amount of space in these remasters, so much breathing room for each performer to stretch out on the stage that, for the first time, the original mixes don't sound cramped and overcrowded.

Every song is much easier to peer into, much easier to pick apart and much easier to understand on a mechanical level. The resolution of low-level harmonic dynamics brings greater subtlety and nuance to performances than was discernible previously, and as a result, it's a richer and more involving recording.

It's still a rotten LP, though. MQA is a remarkable tool, and Botnick's decision to use it when remastering every source (vinyl, CD, digital stream) is justified, but it's not about to make a silk purse out of this particular sow's arse. **SL**

RECORDING
MUSIC





Humanist

Humanist

(Ignition Records)



When Rob Marshall, former guitarist with English alternative rock band Exit Calm, decided to make his first solo album, under the moniker Humanist, he drew up a wish list of guest vocalists he'd like to collaborate with. Nearly all of them said yes, which meant he ended up working with many of his musical heroes.

It's certainly an impressive and varied cast he's assembled, including Depeche Mode front man Dave Gahan, Mark Lanegan (Screaming Trees, Queens of the Stone Age), John Robb (The Membranes, Goldblade), Canadian singer-songwriter Ron Sexsmith, Ride's Mark Gardener and American musician/poet/playwright Carl Hancock Rux (Portishead and David Holmes). Marshall provided the vocalists with the finished music and song titles and they then penned their own lyrics.

This self-titled album is the first record Marshall has ever fully produced – he also played and recorded almost all of the instrumentation on it. The inspiration for the Humanist project came about after he watched *The Living Room*, a documentary about the brilliant, but troubled, singer-songwriter Gavin Clark (Sunhouse, Clayhill, UNKLE), who Marshall once shared a manager with. Waking the next day, he found that Clark had died. The situation moved him so much that he started to write songs that developed into the album.

It's heavy stuff – and I don't just mean the loud goth guitars and clanking, industrial beats that Marshall employs on several of the tracks – some of the themes explored in the lyrics are life, birth, death and religion.

After a brief, noisy and slightly eerie instrumental passage that sounds like a snippet from the soundtrack of a horror film set on a subway train, the first song, 'Kingdom', featuring Mark Lanegan, creeps up on you with its pulsing and slinky, dark disco groove. Marshall's explosive guitar arrives without warning and takes no prisoners. It's unsettling and brilliant.

Depeche Mode front man Dave Gahan sings vocals on 'Shock Collar'. However, he plays against type, lending his pipes to a glorious, head-spinning, '80s indie-rock song, with nods to early U2 and Echo & The Bunnymen.

When Marshall played in Exit Calm, they supported The Bunnymen on tour – it sounds like he spent plenty of his downtime studying Will Sergeant's guitar playing and checking out his effects pedals...

Looking down at the floor is something that Mark Gardener of Ride is also guilty of, and, to be fair, his contribution to the *Humanist* track 'When The Lights Go Out', doesn't stray too far from the shoegazing sound his band is known for.

Ghosts are a recurring theme on this, ahem, haunting album. On 'Kingdom', Lanegan tells us 'a ghost is riding by my side...' while on the post-punk-influenced 'Skull', he sings

of 'ghost ships' and 'ghost planes'. There's even a track called 'English Ghosts' – a stunning, nine-minute Krautrock tune with John Robb on vocals.

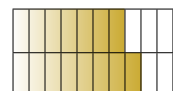
It's not just the sound of '80s post-punk that looms large on *Humanist* – '90s trip-hop also rears its head. 'Ring Of Truth', with Carl Hancock Rux, is slow-burning and cinematic and could've come off Massive Attack's *Mezzanine*.

Some of the album's best songs are actually the quieter, more reflective moments. 'Truly Too Late', featuring Ilse Maria – the sole female lead vocalist to appear in the line-up – is an alluring ballad with Cure-like guitars, while on the gorgeous, '50s-style torch song 'How're You Holding Up', Ron Sexsmith does his best Richard Hawley impression.

'Gospel', which closes the album and has Lanegan on vocal duties, starts as a simple, stripped-down and bluesy spiritual song, but then transforms into a majestic, hymn-like epic. It recalls his work with the duo Soulsavers.

As debut albums go, *Humanist* is bold and ambitious – with 15 songs, its running time clocks in at over an hour – but it certainly isn't an easy listen. It's often brooding, overbearing and claustrophobic, but also, occasionally, very beautiful. Stick it on when you're having a dark night of the soul. **SH**

RECORDING
MUSIC



WE'VE GOT THE PROS COVERED.

PRO Look.
PRO Build.
PRO Results.

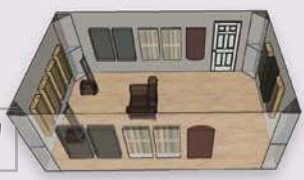


"The wide selection of colours, sizes and modularity of their panels were a major factor in our decision to use GIK products."

LUCA BARASSI, ABBEY ROAD INSTITUTE

FREE ACOUSTIC ADVICE

GET HELP WITH ROOM SETUP



GIK Acoustics
Solutions. Innovations. Quality.

ORDER DIRECT

GIKACOUSTICS.CO.UK +44 (0) 20 3815 8608 (UK)

studio **AV**

SURREY'S LEADING HI-FI DEMONSTRATION LOUNGE

Listening to music has never sounded so good.



UNRIVALLED BRANDS
COUPLED WITH
UNRIVALLED CUSTOMER SERVICE

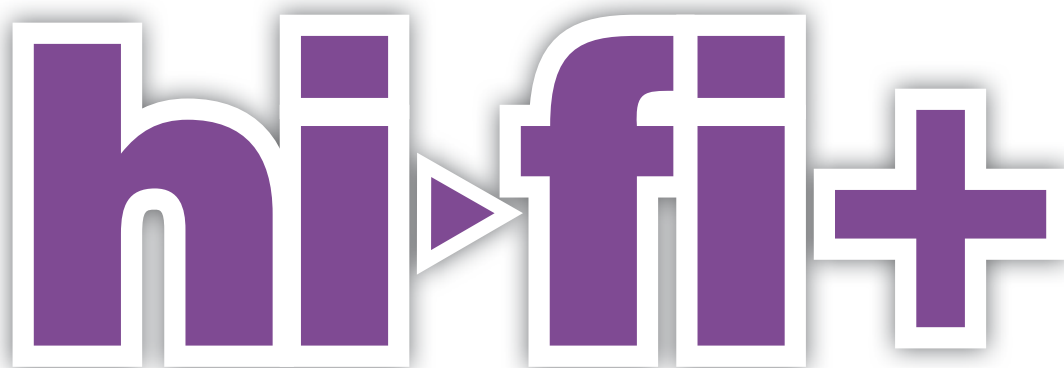
Get in touch to arrange your personal audition of some of the world's most highly respected Hi-Fi products.

Home demonstration and part exchange welcome.

WWW.STUDIOAV.CO.UK
01753 863300 sales@studioav.co.uk

hi-fi+ ADVERTISING INDEX

Absolute Sounds OBC	Ceritech Ltd 114	HMF Solutions 114	Russ Andrews Accessories 103
Allnic 26 & 27	Choice HiFi 19 & 114	Infidelity 115	SCV 65
Ambitious Audio Design 44	Chord Electronics 7	Innuos 13	Select Audio 14
Ansuz Acoustics 56	Computer Audio Design 67	Isotek 29	Shunyata 37
ATC Loudspeaker Technology 62	conrad-johnson 74	Jordan 89	Siltech 25
Auden Distribution 90	Criterion Audio 114	KJ Westone 85	Sonata Hi-Fi 115
Audio Art 101	Critical Mass Systems 49	Kog Audio 11 & 50	Sonority 109
Audio Destination 119	Crystal Cable BV 2	Merrill Audio Advanced Technology Labs 61	Spendor Audio Systems Ltd 47
Audio Exotics 114	Cyrus 30	Midland Audio Xchange ... 115	studioAV Ltd 115 & 127
Audio Oasis 114	DB HiFi 114	Monitor audio 35	The Audio Consultants 73
Audioreaks 4	Decent Audio 94, 98, 101 & 103	Monopulse 115	The Chord Company 21
AudioVector 17	Divine Audio 114	Moon Audio 71	The Funk Firm 97
Auralic IBC	Dynaudio International GmbH 77	Music First Audio 109	The Vinyl Adventure 115
Auris 109	Enjoythemusic.com 94	Oranges and Lemons 119	Totem 79
Black Rhodium 80	Entreq 38	Origin Live 104	Ultimate Stream 119
Brian & Trevor's 97 & 114	GIK Acoustics 127	Oxford Audio Consultants Ltd 115	Vertere 93
Brook Audio 114	Gryphon Audio 43	ProAc 41	Von Gaylord 86
Burmester Home Audio GmbH 22	Hegel 55	Raidho Acoustics 53	WBT-Distribution GmbH 98
Canor 119	Hi-Fi Sound 114	Rayleigh Hi-Fi 115	YG Acoustics 83
Cardas Audio Ltd IFC	HiFiMAN 104	Renaissance Audio ... 33 & 59	



NEXT ISSUE



Editor's Choice special issue

As a part of our 21st anniversary, *Hi-Fi+* will collate a complete list of those best products we've seen. Some are Award winners from recent years, and some are outstanding in their own right. Magazines and readers alike are often drawn toward the latest products, and sometimes those excellent products that stay on the market for years or even decades can get overlooked. This is our chance to redress the balance!



Reports from the latest audio events around the world, including the hottest products from Bristol and Tampa + The best new releases to play on your audio system + and more!

ISSUE 182 ON SALE APR 2 2020 (UK) MAY 7 2020 (US)

Bring all your **digital sources** to *life*

The SIRIUS G2 Universal Upsampling Processor focuses on the processor functionality of the digital system, dramatically improving and stabilising performance, delivering unheard of detail, nuance and natural beauty to all digital sources.

AURALiC
G2



High-quality digital to analogue conversion is a key function in any advanced digital audio system.

Frequently, however, due to variations in the quality and design of hardware, the signal fed to the DAC may suffer from distortion and noise ahead of its arrival at the conversion stage, and consequently audio quality may be impaired.

Performances from sources such as AirPlay, Redbook CD transports, low-resolution streaming services, compressed and lossy formats such as MP3, AAC and CD-quality FLAC files can all be substantially improved by utilising SIRIUS G2's proprietary upsampling processor.

A powerful upsampling processor

Many systems can be further enhanced by the advanced room equalisation and speaker placement compensation software incorporated within in the processor. And, whether you're using a Delta-Sigma DAC, or an R2R DAC, the SIRIUS G2 will optimise the signal for the DAC chip's protocol, should it have been developed as a DSD native chipset or focused on PCM. These operations are only possible through the use of a suitably powerful upsampling processor.

For your nearest authorised dealer please visit **auralic.com**

The Auralic Proteus G2 Co-Processing Platform

AURALiC's proprietary Proteus G2 Co-Processing Platform provides more than adequate power to handle the task of delivering the highest levels of performance. This technical tour-de-force built within AURALiC's substantial Unity Chassis, employs a triple-channel purer power supply, dual-galvanic isolation, 8th order noise-shaping SDM, and dual Femto clocks. All of which is made possible through use of an advanced Xilinx FPGA processing chip with 200,000 logic blocks, 740 DSP slices and 512 MB of DDR memory, providing any DAC a quiet, distortion-free digital stream. This extraordinary, source maximising performance will bring any digital system to life.

AURALIC PRESS AWARDS



pure innovation.

'...one of the finest amplifiers I have ever heard, regardless of price.'
HiFi News - Ken Kessler



Audio Research's Reference Series demonstrates once again that it is worthy of the name. A reference is a benchmark by which others should be judged. The flagship models from ARC have always represented the state of the art in vacuum tube electronics, with the Reference 6 pre-amplifier continuing to serve as the control unit of choice for countless music lovers, reviewers and manufacturers who, indeed, demand a reference point for their listening.

Joining the existing Reference line-up is an all-new

design, heralding a major evolutionary step in the Series' development. With the 160M mono amplifier, powered by the jubilant KT150 tube, auto-bias has finally met all of ARC's demands, with the option to switch between Ultralinear and Triode modes. Now, the Reference amplifier owner can enjoy peerless operation without the need to monitor valve settings.

The look is captivating, with a glimpse inside the workings of one of the finest amplifiers ever created.

 **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

audio research
HIGH DEFINITION®