

Hifi Pig Magazine

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FEBRUARY 2015
Issue #15



REVIEWS

Diesis Aura Loudspeakers, Merrill Audio Veritas Power Amplifiers, Paul Hynes SR5 Power Supply, Russ Andrews Balanced Mains Unit 1000, Simply Audio Cadenza Interconnect, Speaker Cable and Jumper Links, Vincent PHO-700 Phono Stage, Vinyl Passion Dustbuster

PLUS Album and Gig Reviews, The Classics - (Neil Young's the Ditch Trilogy), Boozers Corner, Behind the Brands with Robert Kelly Of German Physiks...and a topless page three model.

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HiFi World, Awards Edition Jan 2015

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PAGE THREE

Hifi Pig's Monthly Topless
Beauty Feature.

Name: Chord CPM2800MkII
Type: Commanding integrated with playful Hugo
DAC stage
From: Maidstone, Kent, UK
Likes: Music. Cosy nights in. Seductive perfor-
mances. Correction: transforming naughty old
digital sources into compliance. Taking control.
Banana plugs. Going at it all night long.
Vital Stats: 420mm (w) x 355mm (d) x 133mm
(h)
Weight: 2 stone 7lbs (16kg)

CHORD BLIMEY GUVNOR



GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO BARE ALL. GET IN TOUCH

Hifi Pig Magazine

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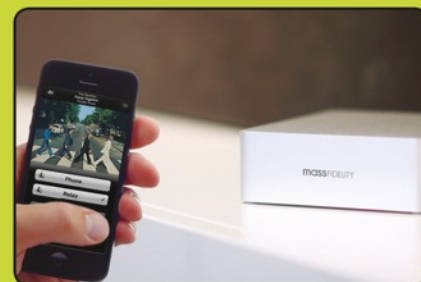
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HI-FI WORLD



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DEALER PROFILE



For this month's Dealer System we asked Audio Counsel to put together a couple of systems at vastly different price-points and give us a little bit of an insight into their philosophy of what a hi-fi should deliver. One system is made up purely of Audio Note products whilst the second system is a mixture of Audion, Consonance and Audio Note.



DEALER PROFILE



DEALER PROFILE

“Think of life
without
music.
Silence the whole day
long”

Songs are a personal journey into the life of the artist.

What makes a great musician is the unique way they use their instrument. The subtlety. The intonation. The space around the notes. The interplay between the musicians. The emotion which flows through their voice.

I feel that a correct system plays music in a natural and pure way so that you are not listening to the equipment (system) but to a "musical instrument". The sound should have this "organic" feel of real instruments being played before you. Wood should sound like wood, metal like metal, voice like voice etc. A true music system allows you into the space where the music was recorded. Once your system starts communicating, a whole world of music opens



DEALER PROFILE

up. At Audio Counsel that is what we sell. Music systems. Not Hi Fi systems.

These are two systems that embody this philosophy.

System 1

Audio Note TT2 Deluxe with Arm 3 and IO Moving Coil Cartridge £5600

Audio Note Transport 2 £4600

Audio Note DAC 4.1 balanced £10700

Audio Note M2 Phono Balanced Pre Amp £4800

Audio Note Conqueror Silver £4300

Audio Note AN-E HE SPE inc stands £6200

Audio Note Isis Interconnects & Bi wired Speaker cable. £330 per metre

System 2

Consonance 2.2 Linear Reference £1695

Audion Sterling Anniversary EL34 £2200

Audio Note AZ-2 Hemp £1250

Audio Note Lexus Interconnect & Mogami Speaker cable. £170 and £15 per metre

We feel that Audio Note equipment simply and consistently allows you to get past the equipment and other audiophile phobias and on to the more important task of listening to music and being swept away.



DEALER PROFILE



We feel that Audio Note equipment simply and consistently allows you to get past the equipment and other audiophile phobias and on to the more important task of listening to music and being swept away.

“Nothing in the last 30 years prepared me for the sound of these speakers. The sound that comes out from them is beyond my words. It stirs my emotions and it is easy on the ears. It sounded more like live music than any system I had ever heard.”

We do not fall into the category of labelling certain types of equipment as superior. All that really matters is that the equipment allows you to get on with the real task at hand. Listening to music. That is at the very essence of every single product we stock. Every single upgrade we recommend.

Does this item bring a significant improvement in musicality to my system? That is the question you want to address. Every change will make a difference but a different sound is simply that. Different. What we are interested in is bringing more music out of the system.

An experienced dealer knows what the weakest link is and how to get the biggest improvement for the money. The crux of this being trust. Trust is something that cannot be bought. Cannot be advertised. Cannot be demonstrated on a website. It

That is the question you want to address. Every change will make a difference but a different sound is simply that. Different.

takes time to establish. It is at the core of everything we do. But it is something that cannot be seen. It has to be experienced. Just like the equipment itself.

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DIESIS AURA LOUDSPEAKERS



The Diesis Aura Loudspeakers (*the smaller loudspeakers in the photograph above*) are built in Italy, cost upwards of 15 000 EUR and incorporate open baffle and horn technology. Stuart Smith takes a listen.

I've wanted to further explore the world of open baffle (OB) loudspeakers for a few years now ever since a friend Paul visited us and brought along a pair of DIY OBs (with a horn on top) for a listen. From what I'd read I was expecting to be disappointed with them from the perspective of bass performance – regular readers will be well aware of my penchant for bass..and good quality bass at that – but I couldn't have been more wrong and I soon set about collecting the bits and pieces to build a pair...needless to say, like a lot of my DIY projects nothing came of it and so it was with a good deal of excitement that I awaited delivery of the Diesis Auras.

The Diesis Auras are a 2 way plus 1 system that uses three speakers – a 12" paper coned driver and a 10" paper coned driver in the open baffle and an exponential horn (compression driver) on top which flares to around 16.5 cm across. They stand 114cm high, are 41cm wide at the bottom of the OB, taper to 29cm at the top and have a depth of 30cm. They weigh 47KG each! The Auras are pretty sensitive at 93db and crossover points are at 200 and 1800 Hz with the speakers having nominal impedance of 6 Ohms. In room measurements say they will go down to 42 Hz and up to 23 000Hz plus or minus 3dB.

DIESIS AURA LOUDSPEAKERS

The baffle itself is made from a resin like material made up of mineral powders (marble), cement and resins which are thrown in a single mould. Crossover parts are high quality military spec' affairs, as is the cabling. The front panel, which is made of 1" thick fiberglass flares a little around the drivers and is designed so that it can be changed to match your room décor. The woofers are cleverly fixed in place by a proprietary system (Totalfix) so you don't see any screws on the back of the baffle... or the front. The speakers come with a three year warranty. They're a very elegant looking loudspeaker oozing Italian style, their aesthetics will certainly appeal to those looking for a "statement loudspeaker" and without exception everyone who has been to the house whilst they were in place has commented positively on their appearance.

Obviously the Diesis Aura are open at the back and the crossover is clearly visible. The claims of military grade components is beyond argument I'd suggest and likewise the binding posts are of a very high quality. I suppose that with everything being on show there's really nowhere to hide shoddy components or finish.



Where these speakers really excel to my mind is with acoustic music and Mike Softley's "The War Goes On" sounds really incredible.

Positioning

You can't just plonk these speakers down and expect to get the best from them. I messed about with positioning a great deal (no mean feat given their weight). I had them out in the room and closer to the back wall, but given the open plan nature of our listening room a "close to back wall" position was difficult to achieve...and indeed not really beneficial. In the end I preferred the sound when they were about a metre out into the room and well away from side walls, with a good bit of toe-in towards the listening position. Yes, absolute bass response did suffer a little, but you also benefit from a more open and expansive feel to the sound.

Sound

These speakers should really not work with lower frequencies as the baffle is just too narrow and at low listening levels you do get the impression that they are a little light in the bass department – quoted response is down to 42 Hz. However, what you miss in absolute "oomph" at low levels is made up by a tightness and tunefulness of bass, with speed and absolutely no flabbiness. Actually, and after only a short period of acclimatization, the quality of the bass these speakers produce is really quite addictive – it's not plumbing the depths of some speakers, but it is that speed and tightness that I enjoyed... perhaps this is down to the directness of the sound reaching the listener.

DIESIS AURA LOUDSPEAKERS

You are obviously paying a premium for the level of finish here, but this is high-end audio and fit and finish matter, but this will affect the attractiveness on a sound per pound basis.

Crank the volume up a little and you just get more of the tight bass sound, but on the likes of Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" from Made in Japan I was left wanting a little when the grunty bass guitar kicks in.

Where these speakers really excel to my mind is with acoustic music and Mike Softley's "The War Goes On" sounds really incredible. The slight "twang" and "liveness" of the acoustic guitar is as good as I've heard in the house. Likewise Doug MacLeod's "Black Night" sounds pretty wonderful with the single blues guitar sounding sparkling and clear. MacLeod's voice shows restraint and has a plaintive quality coming through, whilst the bass guitar and percussion work well together without any one part being overshadowed by the other – nicely balanced. With female vocals the quality of the mids really shine through and again you get that sense of openness to the sound. This sounds pretty obvious given the lack of boxes but it's something that you need to hear if you haven't experienced it. I'd have loved to have heard these speakers with my old 300B amp in PSE configuration – that mid-band quality that you get with the 300B tubes would be a winning combo with the Auras I reckon.

On relatively simple music these speakers really are good when given a little power, in this case provided by the Tellurium Q Iridium that pumps out around 17 W of class A power per channel...I'd have liked a little more power, but more on this later. It may seem an odd one to say these work really well on simple music and then to talk about them sounding good with techno, but some techno (here is was Trésor's

109 album) is actually very simple music with not a great deal going on. Here the speakers sounded composed and well balanced across the frequencies with just enough bass to satisfy. Again there is crispiness to the upper registers, an openness to the mids and a lovely tight quality to the bass that is hard to define – it seems more immediate (uncoloured?) than with conventional loudspeakers.

However, on heavy rock the Auras can become a little shouty and over bearing in the upper frequencies at loud volumes and it is for this reason that Diesis include a choice of crossover components that users can swap out to get the sound they enjoy dependent on the music type and the room conditions. Basically Diesis have developed a system that allows the end user to manually change the resistance and they supply 3 Mundorf resistors 3.3, 5.6 et 8,2. With the 3.3 resistor in place in the crossover they can become a little harsh and over-bearing in the highest frequencies – it's almost as if there is just too much information coming through. Swap the resistor in the crossover and things become a little less unforgiving and a lot more even handed.



DIESIS AURA LOUDSPEAKERS

It's a useful feature that allows you to find the sound you are most happy with. These loudspeakers have a strong point and that is, as mentioned, with simpler music and so it is on with Vladyslav Sendekci at Schloss Elamau (solo piano). This is something else, and the 3.3 resistor is back in place. The detail in the upper registers that was too much on rock music allows the detail of the recording to shine out. The piano sounds like a piano and there is a real insight into the recording space. Mid-band is really beautifully rendered. Likewise with Jerome Sabbagh and his album "The Turn", you are presented



with the musicians in front of you with a good and deep soundstage that projects out nicely into the room too. Hi-hat play is crispy and snare hits are visceral, whilst the over-driven guitar is reproduced excellently.

During the last few days of the review period with the Diesis Aura a pair of Merill Audio Veritas amps came in for review and it seemed only right to give them a whirl with these speakers. The TQ amp is rated at 17W a channel and whilst it controls everything very nicely I wanted more power. Popping in a Quad 606, whilst offering this power, did little but highlight the inadequacies of the Quad in a high-end environment and I preferred the limited power but control and refinement of the TQ. The Veritas amps use NCore modules and deliver a huge amount of power and the Diesis Aura's like this a lot! The sound immediately steps up and there is just more oomph to proceedings, with more power to the bass and more slam. Smoke On The Water comes alive when the bass guitar kicks in comparison to how it sounded previously, but it's certainly not the best loudspeaker i've heard with this kind of music. With rock music you still need to add the attenuation in the crossover otherwise the sound becomes shrill, unbalanced and fatiguing.

Conclusion

These are a fine loudspeaker with regards build quality, finish and sound quality. You are obviously paying a premium for the level of finish here, but this is high-end audio and fit and finish matter, but this will affect the attractiveness on a sound per pound basis.

You do need to play with the attenuation in the crossover (this is a simple job carried out in the

matter of a few seconds) and speaker placement to get the very best out of them, but do so and you will be rewarded with an open and well defined rendition of the musical performance. There are compromises here, as with all loudspeakers, but overall the effect is even-handed and well balanced with the strong points being mids and upper/mid-bass clarity and openness. If cost and time were no object then I'd like to have had the chance to have heard the Auras with the TQ amp (or 300B amps) feeding the mids and tops and the Veritas amps (or some other high powered amp) dealing with the bass frequencies. These speakers are at their very best when fed with very well recorded music that is simpler in its nature, but to a lesser extent they can do rock music too when partnered with a suitably refined and powerful amplifier and with the crossover sorted to your taste. Bass is not trouser-flappingly low (it was never going to be) but it's tight, direct and with a lack of overhang that makes it very enjoyable. Personally I would have liked some way of dialling in my preferred crossover set up without having to change out components.

Sound Quality – 8

Build – 9

Value – 7.5

Overall – 8.17

Price as reviewed 15 190 EUR 17 080 EUR in other finishes.

Recommended for people looking for a visually stunning loudspeaker and for those who love an open and mellifluous mid-band.

Stuart Smith

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VINCENT AUDIO PHQ-700 PHONO

For more than a decade, Vincent Audio has been designing and manufacturing interesting phono stages. Peter Stanton-Ife puts the company's £549 PHQ-700 through its paces.

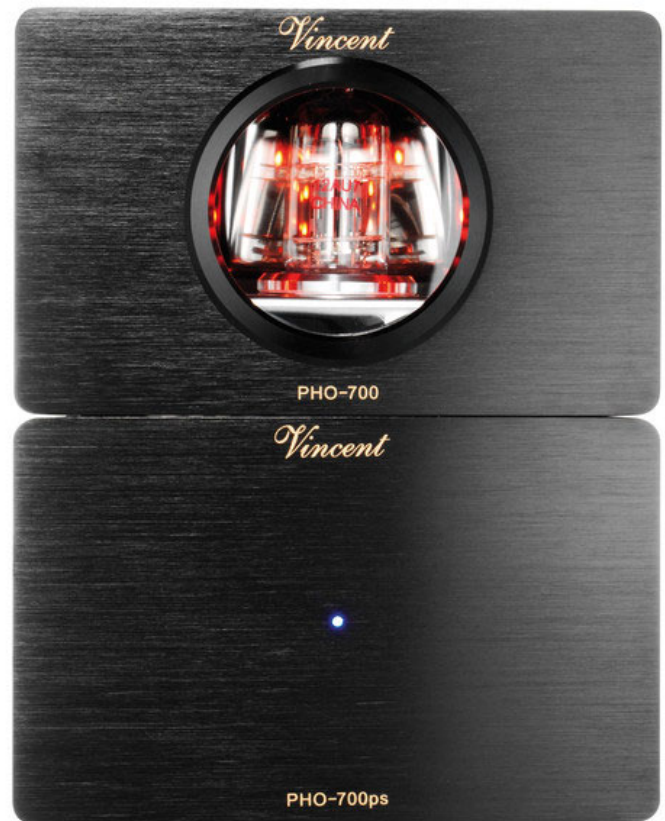
The PHO-700 may be one of Vincent's best designs to date, meeting the challenge of building a phono stage with low-noise and as much loss-free transmission as possible. For a very reasonable price (£549.00), the PHO-700 does just that. It also looks the business with a nice (artificially enhanced) valve glow through the window on the front).

Down to business.

This is a two piece affair with power supply and phono stage kept apart. Excellent! The looks are good - fairly retro but well engineered and solid with a front panel 'window' on the PHO-700 through which you can see a 12AU7 valve which is used here in dual triode mode.

Lifting the lid shows quality components from Nichicon, Wima, and their ilk. There is a four position switch which varies the intensity of the six orange-red LED backlights to the valve. If you get bored with the light show, they can be completely switched off as well.

One of the most interesting aspects of this unit is the specially designed and highly developed outboard power supply. It weighs a ton and speaks to the quality of the transformer, metal chassis, shielding, and other components. At this price point, most



manufacturers (Dynavector and Electrocompaniet included) simply provide a noisy OEM wall wart. The PHO-700 uses a similar power supply to that used with the well-regarded (but cheaper, at £280, PHO-8 phono stage).

This unit explains in large part of how the PHO-700 achieves its low-noise performance. The voltage is highly regulated and filtered, so that the ripple and hum found in unconditioned AC power cannot reach the phono section.

One of the most interesting aspects of this unit is the specially designed and highly developed outboard power supply.

It is connected to the separate-chassis audio circuitry by using a very long cable with D-Sub nine pole connectors at each end. This permits the power supply to be positioned at a safe distance from the phono stage itself, although it cannot really be

VINCENT AUDIO PHQ-700 PHONO

hidden as the power switch is on the back of the power supply, and it would not be good for safety or for the life of the valve if it were left constantly on.

The phono stage features a double-sided circuit board with good quality Burr-Brown opamps, Wima polyprop capacitors, Nichicon electrolytic capacitors, and metal film resistors. But the key feature is a Chinese ECC82 with a triode used for each channel (cue tube rolling at some stage?). The valve output stage is delayed from operating until a relay is released only once the valve has reached operating stability.

The PHO-700 can cater for both MM and MC cartridges with a selector switch on the back of the phono stage. The input impedance are fixed value with MM the standard 47 kilohms and the MC cartridge 100 ohms. That should match a wide range of cartridges and at this price point it would be a bit churlish to want or expect anything else. There will not be many instances where an exotic (generally read eye-wateringly expensive) cartridge would be used with this stage and, where they are, it might be worth noting that I got better results, for example, feeding my low impedance Yamamoto Soundcraft through a SUT into the MM input rather than straight through the MC input. Certainly, I had no problem with my Ortofon MMs or MCs, nor with my various Denons.

Compared to my Whest RS30RDT, this little unit generally delivers most of what it is fed – it can go fast, it can go deep with a powerful and clean sound, going much deeper than I'd expect at this price but with the rich coloration you'd expect from a valve output, and with a perfectly respectable balance from top, middle to bottom and a good wide and deep soundstage.

It will be caught out by good quality MCs on good recordings but how often will it realistically be paired with such a beast? My Ortofon Blue MC complemented it fine, although my Zu Audio 103 did not get shown to such good effect - poor impedance matching, I wonder. The Yamamoto simply performed more naturally through a SUT and the MM stage but it is an odd cartridge, anyway. The MMs generally blew me away on all sorts of music. I had to remind myself of the cost of this phono stage. The Vincent and the Ortofon Black (and generally the Cartridge Man's Music Maker MI) seem made for each other but if the Vincent has a vice, it is exactly where you'd expect it, in the treble. It could do with a little more clarity but, to be



fair, I don't know a comparably priced unit that does any better, and I am clear that it cannot be put down to the usual gripe of valve "wooliness". It simply is not wooly with the right cartridge.

With cheaper cartridges, this unit, although not as clinical or analytical as the Whest, does about 85% of its work and is probably slightly more forgiving of the weaknesses of those cartridges. It might therefore be easier to live with. I genuinely struggle to think of a phono stage below £1000 which will best this unit although the Electrocompaniet and Dynavector would bear comparison.

The good news is that it is available on home demonstration through the UK distributor Vinyl Passion, so prospective buyers can see how it matches to their equipment. Certainly worth any vinyl buyers shortlist.

Build quality: 9/10

Sound Quality: 9/10

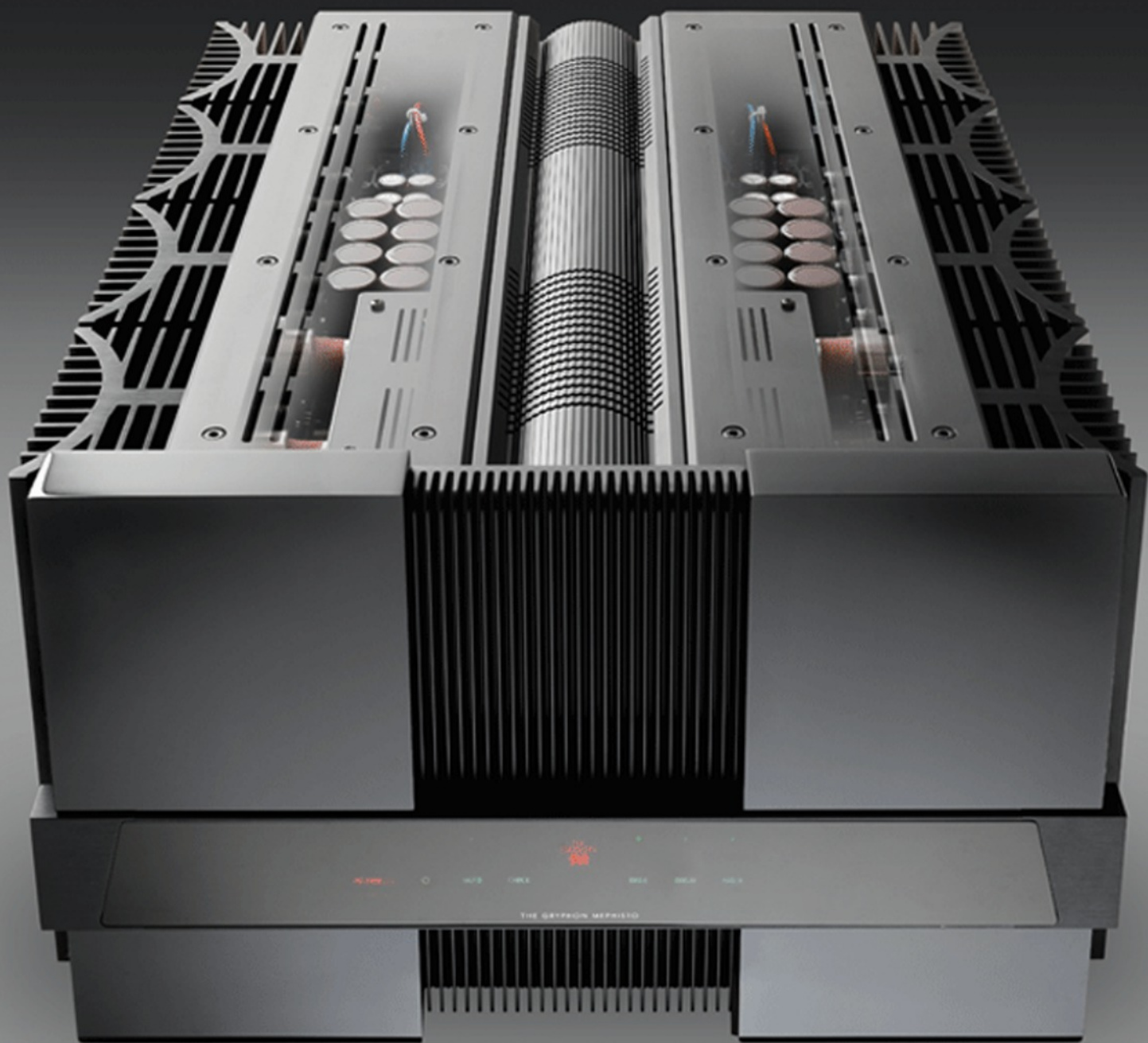
Value For Money: 9.5/10

Overall - 9.17

This is a bargain. Recommended for people who want a simple phono stage for a decent turntable and good MM cartridge that performs with exceptional musicality and at a price that makes it something of a bargain. The valve goodness is a bonus!

Peter Stanton-Ife

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MERRILL AUDIO VERITAS POWER AMPS



At \$12 000 the Merrill Audio Veritas power amplifiers use the nCore NC1200 modules and are hewn from solid lumps of aluminium. They give out a massive 1200W into 2 Ohms but do they deliver on sound quality? Stuart Smith finds out.

The Merrill Audio Veritas monoblock amplifiers arrived a few weeks ago and from the moment you open the main packaging they whisper understated high-end at you. The packaging is low key luxury and you get that expectant feeling that what is inside is going to be something rather special...and it is. Each of the amplifiers is machined from a single block of aluminium weighing 66 pounds with chambers inside for the electronics. The walls of the "casing" are kept at an inch thick to reduce vibrations. Inside the amps the wiring is kept as short as is feasible so that there is no need for the use of shielded cables which introduce capacitance and, argues Merrill Wettasinghe the owner and designer, affect the sound quality, resulting in a "bloated bass and reduced high frequencies". Inside the amplifiers the wiring is all of a Litz construction and is point to point. This is time consuming stuff and, like a luxury motorcar this attention to detail adds to the build costs of the amplifiers.

Bi wiring is "done from the board to provide true bi-wiring" with each bi-wire cable being Cardas 11 AWG Litz. This cable is then connected to the wonderful Cardas speaker posts that are Rhodium over copper. This is the first time I've come across an

MERRILL AUDIO VERITAS POWER AMPS

amplifier using the Cardas binding posts and they are a bit of a revelation for me. They look completely unlike any binding post I've ever come across. They accept bare wires and spades only and, without exception, are the most secure binding posts I can imagine. Say what you will about the importance of these kind of things, but if we are to get the very best from our audio I reckon this attention to detail is at worst reassuring and at best vital.

The amplifiers use the Ncore NC1200 modules and feature a true balanced design which is designed to reduce noise and the inputs are Cardas XLRs.

On the shelf there is little to write home about and little to really feature for photographs. They look like two silver coloured boxes of standard width. There are no lights on the front, but there is a muting switch located just under the front panel on the bottom of each amp. Note, the muting switch is not an on off switch and once the amps are connected to the mains they are essentially live and the literature that comes with the amps stresses that no connecting of speakers should be done unless the wall socket is unplugged. This mute button has a blue LED that illuminates when the amp is un-muted and you really don't see it unless the amps are placed on a reflective surface. On the front of each amp is the Merrill Audio logo and the name Veritas. That's it. These

This is Class D technology and I am well aware that it has its detractors, but what Bruno Putzey (the designer of the Hypex modules) has done with the NC1200 is take the Class D technology of the UCD circuit developed in 2001 and transformed it into a truly audiophile component.

amps really are a masterclass in understated elegance. Some will find them boring looking I'm sure, but sat on their Stillpoint feet they look stealthily purposeful. It has to be said that if you are looking for an amplifier that shouts "look at me, look at me, I'm over here" then these are not the amplifiers for you. Personally I love the fact that the Veritas' don't feel the need to bellow their presence, much in the same way that a discreet but luxurious timepiece needn't. Ok, you get the picture, these are unquestionably and undeniably a luxury and high-



MERRILL AUDIO VERITAS POWER AMPS

end product judging by their exterior appearance and their attention to detail with their inner workings. To an extent the price reflects this too...they are \$12 000 in the US and more in Europe where import taxes will need to be added, though Merrill says that he will cover the 20% import duties for EU orders. This is a good chunk of money for most people (myself included) and so if you are the kind of person that thinks the high-end in audio is a decadent waste of resources and finances then I suggest you stop reading right now.

Sound

The Veritas were in the system for barely a quarter of an hour before both Linette and I looked at each other agog and realised that these unassuming lumps of aluminium were something rather special indeed. The first thing you notice is an absolute lack on noise in between tracks. Nothing. Nowt. Crank the volume up as loud as you dare and all you are getting here is a clean signal devoid of added distortion, devoid of unwanted distractions and you know what, I reckon that what I'm hearing is just how good the preamplifier I'm using actually is. OK, the set up isn't ideal as my pre isn't balanced but you get the picture I'm sure.

This is Class D technology and I am well aware that it has its detractors, but what Bruno Putzey (the designer of the Hypex modules) has done with the NC1200 is take the Class D technology of the UcD circuit developed in 2001 and transformed it into a truly audiophile component. What Merrill have then done is implement this technology in a pair of amplifiers that make the most of what the modules can do. Measurements, done not by us, show that the modules are perfectly linear and stable right down to loads of 2 Ohms. They deliver 350 Watts into 8 Ohms, 650 W into 4 Ohms and 1200 W into 2 Ohms and so forget your difficult loads and forget (if the measurements are to be believed) roll off at the frequency extremes.

The system we used throughout the review period was our normal Coffman Labs GA-1 valve preamplifier fed with the VAD DAC and hi-res files from the computer. Cables were a mix of Tellurium Q, Chord, CAD and Merrill's own whilst speakers were the hORN Mummies.

Convention dictates I talk about some music by way of trying to describe the sound of these amplifiers so here goes. Allan Taylor's "The Tennessee Waltz" from the Behind the Mix album really is something else with the banter at the start of the recording being right there in front of you...like two blokes having

**Crank the volume up
as loud as you dare
and all you are getting
here is a clean signal
devoid of added
distortion, devoid of
unwanted distractions
and you know what, I
reckon that what I'm
hearing is just how
good the preamplifier
I'm using actually is.**

the conversation RIGHT THERE. Every nuance of the guitar is there once the music starts and the layers in the mix are clearly definable. This is no homogenous gloop but pinpoint accuracy of what is on the recording. It's an odd one to find a suitable comparison and so I'm going to have to go all "Pseuds' Corner" on you - if we go to one of the restaurants in town and order water with our meal we get just that...water. It's clearly water and it's perfectly potable. However, get home and pour a glass of water from our tap (which is spring fed) and the water is cleaner, purer and without chemical artefacts. You'd be perfectly happy with the water at the restaurant but there is a difference. And that's what you have here with the Veritas' amps...they are a purer and cleaner rendition of the music on a recording. Is it a colder and more clinical rendition...I'm not so sure, but I'm pleased to have the valve pre in the chain.

Switch the music to Hardfloor's "Once Again Back" and there is a feeling of power. The electronic hats are crisp and defined, whilst the rumbling bass is controlled and tight. What's interesting here again is the way the music appears to be layered so that the kick drum not only reinforces the bass line, but it is also clearly definable in its own right. The snare

MERRILL AUDIO VERITAS POWER AMPS

drum (again electronic, obviously) cuts through the mix. Crank up the volume as loud as you dare and you get nothing but an increase in the volume - no distortions, no break ups, just clean and precise music that seems to cut an image in the space in front of you.

Jethro Tull's "Thick As A Brick" from Original Masters is precise and again there is that layered quality...I can imagine that studio engineers will love these amplifiers. There is a feeling of truth.

OK, I'm gushing a bit (a lot) here but these really are very good amplifiers indeed and play to my tastes. Yes, they are analytical and clear-cut, not to mention completely unforgiving of crap recordings, but they're not tiring to listen to in our set up and when fed with good quality recordings sound magnificent. Miles Davis' "Concierto De Aranjuez" has castanets at the start and you hear every clap of wood against wood (it reminds me of cicadas) and then the trumpet cuts the air sounding warm and dreamy - it's a beautiful thing!

On the album "Big Band Time" (Paquito D'Rivera) and the tune "Moon Dance 2" each of the percussive elements has its own space in the soundstage and the feeling of being there is palpable...not least because you can have real volume without distortion. The lower registers are deep and powerful and that word "controlled" has to be used again. This is explosive stuff and sounds utterly fantastic.

Sarah Marie Young's "Little Candy Heart" album has her voice sounding warm and emotional...and controlled...throughout her range.

On rock music such as Bush and their brilliant album "Sixteen Stone" the rawness and guttural nature of the recording shines out.

Here's the thing - these amplifiers are as transparent as I have heard and I really (REALLY) like them.

They are made to throw clichés at - "open window to the recording, veils lifted, inky black silences blah blah blah" and it is hard not to sound like some evangelical nut job when describing my experiences with them, but I have enjoyed these immensely.

Conclusion

Forget your preconceptions about Class D, these amplifiers from Merrill bring the listener an insight into the recording that is clean and transparent. There is power and control and they play every kind of music without adding anything of their own



character. As a tool for music lovers they are a great thing - you can bring your own preferences into the mix with your choice of preamplifier, source, DAC etc so your listening experience can be tailored to your wants.

The Veritas amps do have a few issues in that if you have poor kit ahead in the chain forget them as they will make it blindingly obvious. If you steal your music and have crappy MP3s likewise forget these amps.

Yes they are expensive, but then so are a lot of things in life and here you have a product that not only delivers the goods in absolute sound quality terms, but also in terms of the perceived value of the workmanship of the cases, the fittings etc. Could I live with them, yes, most definitely ... I sort of wish I had the Roksan Darius S1 speakers here to try them with as I reckon that would be a real match made in heaven.

Hard to fault in my opinion but I just don't give perfect tens. Had I the means to buy the review amps I certainly would.

Sound Quality - 9

Build - 9

Value - 8.75

Overall - 8.92

Price as reviewed \$12 000.

Highly Recommended for those looking for an amplifier that is fit and forget and that brings you as close to the truth in a recording as you are likely to get.

Stuart Smith

LEEDH E2

A totally revolutionary technology for a simply lifelike sound

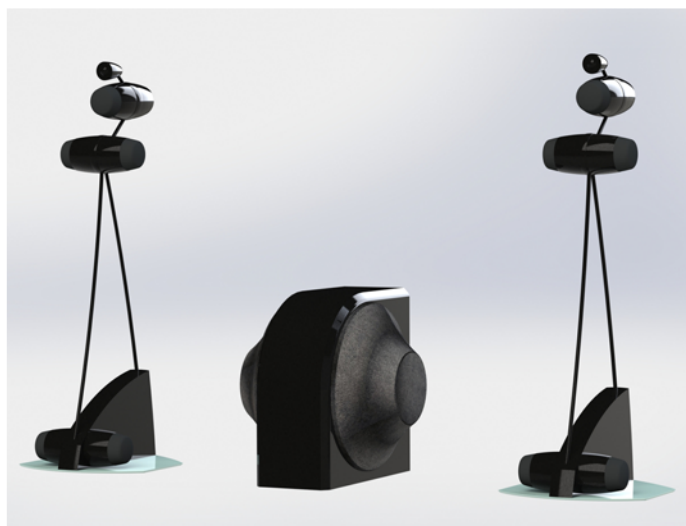
The ABD (Acoustical Beauty Driver) module was created from a blank sheet to eradicate defects of traditional loudspeakers :

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- Ferrofluid suspension to transform the mechanical signal into acoustic signal without distortion and remove the speaker cabinet
- Pistonic membrane in UHM Carbon (Ultra High Modulus) to eliminate standing waves in the pistonic membrane which could otherwise cause colouration of the sound. Because of the small size of our driver and the stiffness of its material the frequencies of colorations are up to 1500Hz instead of 50Hz for a conventional driver which in effect means that there is no audible colouration.

Distortion reduced to the same level as the best amplifiers (less than 0.02% above 500 Hz with 50W power) Sound source controlled directivity and the compactness of the acoustic modules ABD ensures there are no faceplate or baffle diffraction and this leads to a 3D sound image (holophonics)

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LEEDH E2 TEST **Hifi Pig**

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The two 9' drivers, loaded by 16L volume inside the box, work together to displace exactly the same volume of air in amplitude and in phase as the two 15' would in open air, i.e., making them work as they were in an infinite volume.

A 300W amplifier is used for each couple of drivers, both equalized to reach 20Hz at -1dB.

This technology eradicates the boomy effect and the low frequency ringing, by simulating a box of infinite volume, but also to meet the dynamic range by simulating a box of infinite mass, as the four drivers cancel each others mechanical reactions on the box.

The result is an ultracompact and powerful subwoofer able to reach 20Hz at -1dB that we logically baptised : 20.1

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PAUL HYNES SR5 PSU



**Hifi Pig regular
Dan Worth gets
to grips with the
Paul Hynes SR5
power supply
priced at £650
and reports his
findings.**

Some time ago now I reviewed the Paul Hynes SR3 linear regulated power supply. At the time I had the equivalent in a Teddy Pardo PSU which I was using on a modified Squeezebox Touch. The PH supply was a wonderful edition and an upgrade from the Teddy Pardo, excelling in organic detail retrieval and natural dynamics. Since the review and the purchase of the SR3 I began to talk more with Paul and his business partner David Webb where we discussed the benefits of power supplies with even greater performance, their bespoke implementations and overall benefits. Subsequent to our conversations and me having my Mac Mini upgraded in various ways, Paul built me an SR5 power supply to replace the awfully noisy switch mode power supply that came as standard in the new Unibody Mac. Before its completion and after doing some further research it seemed liked a confident adoption to the Macs extensive upgrades to have the SSD ran separately in a matching 'mini stack' case to match the Mac Mini's main body. The unit would then connect via a galvanically isolated firewire cable and

PAUL HYNES SR5 PSU

powered separately also.

This called for another supply and on Paul's recommendations another SR5. This one would have twin 12v outputs and a total current output capability of 6 amps, capable of running the external OSX drive and the Airport Extreme router which connected the Mac to the NAS. The first was of the same specification power wise but had the ability to be switched from 12v to 5v on a single output as Paul wanted me to be able to compare the differences between the SR5 and the previous SR3 that I had powering the Squeezebox.

From a visual point of view the volumetric capacity of the SR5 is around four times greater than the SR3 and it weighs considerably more. This is somewhat due to the toroidal transformer which is installed in the SR5. A 160va bespoke custom made Toroid from the leading UK manufacturer, the tolerances are tight and the construction is extremely exact and to Paul's specific requirements. The toroid is very quiet and avoids core saturation under heavier loads. The SR3 is 50va and is what Paul considers to be the very best 'off the shelf' toroid he could possibly obtain.

The casework on the SR5 is very nice indeed with a nice aluminium front panel and a centred on/off switch. A blue LED shines downwards onto the shelf from underneath the front panel to indicate power and has no feedback into the circuit avoiding injecting noise.

The rear sports some nice big black fins to dissipate regulator heat. During my listening tests and under heavy load the fins did get very warm but never breached the 'damn that's hot!' point, they are very adequate for the unit and do great in transferring the units internal heat to the outside world. Most of the time they simply remain Luke warm.

Connections on the SR5 are via XLR connectors, a choice can be made during purchase to have either the standard 3 milliohm plug and socket or the low impedance 1 milliohm combination unlike the SR3's locking DIN plug. DC cable is a three core plaited pure fine silver to required DC Jack and the internal regulator cabling also matched. A copper variant is also an option here but after using the copper option previously on the SR3 then upgrading to the silver it was a no brainer to go immediately for silver on the new supplies as it was a solid upgrade in sound all



around.

The Sound

It would be safe to state very quickly in this review that the SR5 is a large upgrade over the SR3 which is a fantastic supply and gave me many hours of enjoyment so I don't really want to spend this whole review in comparison of it. Although to gauge the SR5's performance please accept that it and other power supplies which I have used will automatically be in the back of my mind when making statements regarding its overall performance.

The SR5 took around six weeks to be in a completely settled state where I truly believed that it's burning in period was complete. At this point my sound was glorious! cymbals rang true and far into the abyss of natural decay and my all time favourite instrument the acoustic guitar was sublime, full of organic timbre and realism subjecting me to a truly different and more opulent sound than the Mac was ever able to obtain previously.

I remarked several times to myself and others at how confident my presentation was and how stable and three dimensionally crafted the soundstage had become. People always talk about the veil being lifted (such a cliché) but for me it was as if the mummy had been unwrapped and it could breath again - if it was alive of course!

The system seemed to take one gasp of air, settle, relax and just confidently churn out song after song with expression and command over the notes.

Derrin Nuendorf, Nils Lofgran and Newton Faulkner's acoustic guitars rang through the air, strummed with a new found undertone and a radiated amount of tonal wealth now emerged from the instruments cabinet than previously heard on the Mac - or when I listened to the SR5 connected to the Squeezebox to repeat the process. The SR3 with its 3.5 amp capabilities gave the Squeezebox a good amount of dynamic headroom and produced a wonderfully natural sound but the SR5 had around four times the headroom (as well as a more complex overall design) than the Squeezebox required and its effects were simply effortless, increasing the perception of smaller micro dynamics, interactions with decay fades as they left the body of instruments and interacted with the room and although both units had low back ground noise the SR5 has the ability to allow pauses and quite points in a track to seem more eerie and prominent. I firmly believe that these gaps in playback and pauses really add to the drama of a performance, especially when listening to classical or

Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor conveyed a dynamic speed and volume to the string and bass notes were terrifically controlled and subtle, allowing for the violin to be the true star of the performance. The impact of larger notes was timed and separated extremely well showing the cohesion of the musicians talents and abilities.

operatic music, which I'm beginning to do a little more these days.

Paul refers to this new found confidence with the SR5 as the difference between a family car and a high performance vehicle, I'd say it's the difference between walking across the Moors in trainers or hiking boots, the trainers will get you there but the boots will support and carry you much better. Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor conveyed a dynamic speed and volume to the string and bass notes were terrifically controlled and subtle, allowing for the violin to be the true star of the performance. The impact of larger notes was timed and separated extremely well showing the cohesion of the musicians talents and abilities.

Now as a contrast I played (as I usually do) some strong and pretty hard dance music. Well the SR5 certainly delivered the power here and bass notes were huge with great impact and extension. Details in the top end were massively dynamic, harmonic and soared through the gigantic soundstage way past my speakers in width and height leaving the midrange open and exposed but just so controlled. The definition and resolution to midrange was and is something that my brain always focuses on first over any other aspect of a sound, the vocal has to be strong, not recessed or overly forward but projected singled out and free without becoming dislodged from the performance or ever sounding sterile and with the aid of the SR5 on both of my sources the sound of male and female vocals was simply stunning. Anyone who hears my system knows instinctively that it has been created for acoustic and vocal music and the SR5 in my all digital streaming system really has been the cherry on the cake, releasing the inner ambition of the system and allowing it to breath and express its true nature in a far more effortless manor.

Conclusion

My last comments already really conclude this review. The added definition, natural dynamics and intense musicality that the Paul Hynes SR5 has given my sound has been a solid upgrade. Those of us in the know realise how important the quality of power supplies are in our system and if u don't get the mains right then the soufflé just collapses when it comes out of the oven so to speak.

Many people including myself when in the early parts of their hifi journey couldn't comprehend how power makes a difference and to be honest it's not something which we would even consider being a crucial part of the bigger picture. As time progresses and knowledge and experience grows we realise the true importance of it.

In today's modern age of streaming and networking a simple power supply upgrade can add so much to a units performance. Most come with nasty outboard switch mode supplies that inject horrid little gremlins into the system - you don't even have to feed these little critters after midnight or get them wet, they are in full force all the time.

However a superior linear regulated power supply such as Paul Hynes' will be an even more impressive upgrade to any standard unit and are extremely well designed and constructed from one of the most respected guys in the business. A Paul Hynes Power

The added definition, natural dynamics and intense musicality that the Paul Hynes SR5 has given my sound has been a solid upgrade.

Supply will supersede your expectations and prove to you what your components are truly capable of.

Build Quality - 9/10

Sound Quality - 9/0

Value For Money - 8.9/10

Overall - 8.96/10

Price at time of review - £650 (PSU), Cables vary Recommended - for being a huge upgrade over any standard power supply and a significant upgrade over many bespoke offerings, justifying its price tag and providing sublime rhythmic engulfing sound quality.

Dan Worth

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RUSS ANDREWS BMU 1000

There's a good deal of chatter about balanced mains units flying about in audiophile circles at the moment. Janine Elliot checks out the £1599 unit from Russ Andrews.



I am quite fanatic about my mains. I have mains conditioners on every piece of my hi-fi, and numerous zapperators, filters, chokes and surge protection. Indeed, for a very short time in my life I helped in the design of mains conditioners for a UK manufacturer. The question is, though, why clean up dirty mains when you can start out with perfect mains in the first place with a transformer? Indeed, Russ Andrews advise you not to mate the BMU 1000 with any kind of mains filter, and certainly not on the balanced (output) side. The Balanced Mains Unit 1000 is exactly what it says on the (plastic) tin; a balanced nominally 1000VA transformer, which splits the voltage to 115V on live and 115V on neutral, as opposed to 230V live and 0V neutral. The advantage of this is that noise on the positive half of the signal is cancelled by that on the negative side. Having worked with balanced mains circuits in broadcasting and recording studios, I can vouch for hearing the benefits of reduced hums and buzzes. As hinted above, the 21cm x 29cm x 9cm box is made of ABS with a 10mm anodised aluminium front panel. Russ found it gave better sound quality than solely metal boxes, and which also helps keep down the weight to 9.82Kgs. This is a very heavy unit for the size and needs a sensible and secure placement, preferably not a resonant glass cabinet, because as a transformer it vibrates.

Indeed, the degree of vibration depends on matching to the house voltage. The unit is supplied as 225V, and mine hummed at 100Hz pretty badly unless I damped it on a surface such as a carpet or cloth. The

hum is caused by the fact that the core laminations in the transformer are extending and contracting as they are magnetised, called Magnetostriction, and so this will happen twice in each 50Hz UK current cycle. Because there are more windings at 250V than at 225V, less current is drawn and therefore has less flux and less vibration. It is therefore important that the primary side of the transformer is set to the same voltage as what is feeding to it, otherwise flux will

The Balanced Mains Unit 1000 is exactly what it says on the (plastic) tin; a balanced nominally 1000VA transformer, which splits the voltage to 115V on live and 115V on neutral, as opposed to 230V live and 0V neutral.

RUSS ANDREWS BMU 1000

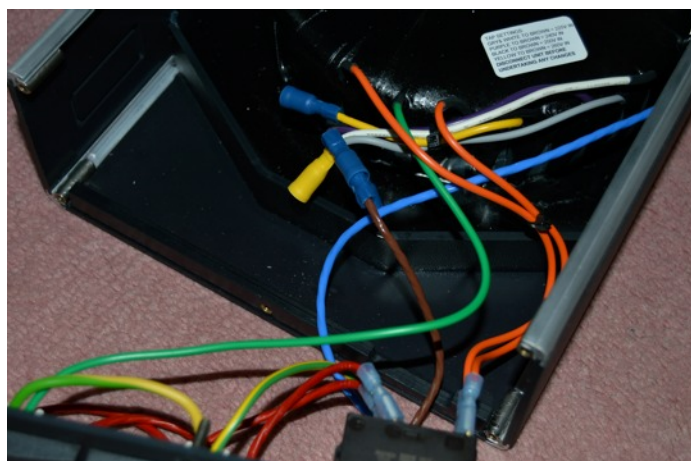
increase, meaning it could get excessively hot and make noises. The good thing is that you can change the output voltage to 240V, 250V, 260V in order to reduce that hum. These are simply different TAP settings on the transformer, connected by mating a plug at the end of the brown live cable with one of a choice of colour leads with insulated sockets on them. Obviously you need to do this without the unit connected to the mains. This really is a suck-it-and-see task. Mine worked best at 250V, as my voltage supply is usually around 244V. The transformer is made using “innovative” core technology, with high quality materials to help to reduce transformer noise and DC, offering very low mains impedance and giving the most stable supply possible. Whilst a little effort is required to get inside this unit to make these changes (7 screws), it also has a resettable thermal breaker tucked in the corner which can be pressed to reset the unit if it fuses, though perhaps this could have been on the outside, even under a flap, like in many industrial grade transformers. The unit has an aluminium metal front and is generally well made, though the supplied rubber corner feet are smaller than the lip of the metal front (see photos), and therefore of not much use unless it overhangs the platform on which you place it. For demonstration I placed the unit on Iso-pod sorbothane feet supplied by MissingLink Cables.

The unit came as standard without any IEC plug to connect it to the mains and surprisingly needing a 16A IEC connector as opposed to the usual 13A IEC kettle lead, not that I'd ever suggest using one of those. So, having spent £1,599, a further outlay would be needed before you could listen to anything. Lucky for me Russ sent a Powerkord-300. The 1m £240 power cord with Kimber weave and the new WattGate EVO IEC plugs is quite a sexy looking item with a thick girth, and my cat (bless him) would have enjoyed chewing away at it (as he does with all my own cables when he wants food) had I given him



the chance. No, I protected both these classy looking items as I would the Crown Jewels.

On first listening even my cat sat up and listened; maybe all those extra frequencies from my Townshend SuperTweeter. I could hear a new clarity in all that I played, with pin point precision in all frequencies, not just the very highs. Cymbals in Dave Brubeck 'Direct Cut Disc' LP were of a new order of clarity and realism, and the trombone played by Chris Brubeck filled the room with bite and zest. Even on vinyl the greater noise floor was immediate and stunning. Music was easier to engage in, and my Krell power amp was like a stallion tamed for young children to ride. It wasn't that it was slower, just not so impatient and with a far greater authority and more open to enjoy all the frequencies. The greatest awareness of change in my listening tests was of the extended and weightier bass frequencies, even from my bass-generous Krell KPS 20i CD player. Who says CD can't be fun. The talented Yes guitarist Steve Howe was clearer in the excellent "Masterpiece Guitars" album he did with Martin Taylor (p3 Music Ltd). In 'Two Teardrops' the two guitars were distinctly separated left and right with Steve or was it Martin breathing between the phrases on the left speaker, as if he were in the room with me (I wish). The double bass in 'No Pedestrians' was clear and extended. 'Harpnosis' was hypnotic in its clarity and poise, and showed CD to be what was claimed it could be in the early eighties. A myriad of plucked instruments from around the globe knitted together with clarity and authority and I was whisked



RUSS ANDREWS BMU 1000



away to another world, where in other systems the track could be a traffic jam mishmash of unconnected noises. The repeated C-diminished and C-major phrase wasn't boring and I felt I was there amongst the musicians. Turning to classical music I heard more detail in the Naxos Brahms 1st Symphony (BRT Philharmonic orchestra). Not only was stereo spread noticeably improved, but front to back detail was clearer, meaning there was better separation between first and second violins, something which can be hard to pick out. Indeed, I could even pick out edits in the recording such as at 05'52" track 5 in the Brahms 'Haydn variations', something I usually only detect on headphones. Playing some of my own 24bit/96kHz recordings using basic X/Y stereo configuration allowed an even greater natural depth and accurate imaging than without the mains unit.

If I have any gripes against this product it is that it only has two outputs at the price, meaning daisy-chaining further extension blocks in order to connect more than two units, and possibly introducing RFI. Yes, there is the 1.5KW BMU1500 but this still has two outputs (though with two transformers, one for each socket) and the 3KW DMU3000 has five outputs and twin transformers, and is at £3500. For

me the DMU, which ever one you decide on, is the purest way to upgrade your Hi-Fi to how it should sound. Having it connected to my own hi-fi for this review gave me nothing but smiles on my face for every second that I used it. This was the quickest, and effectively the cheapest, upgrade to my home audio, and when connected to my TV gave me greater colour and sharper definition to boot.

Conclusion

This might seem like an awful amount to pay for a mains double adaptor, but once you get past the fact that this is much, much more, and feed this to your prized Hi-Fi or TV, you'll wonder why you didn't do it sooner. It might be very expensive but the change it makes to your music and video is exponentially greater than the sum of its cost.

Sound Quality – 8.7/10

Value for Money – 8.2/10 (there are cheaper balanced mains units, but the cheapest aren't tailored for hi-fi, nor made so well)

Build Quality – 8.6/10

Overall – 8.5/10

Janine Elliot



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Dominic Marsh takes a listen to the Simply Audio Cadenza Interconnect, Speaker Cable and Jumper Links.

Overview

Simply Audio hail from the Netherlands, specialising in bespoke hand made cables and the Cadenza range they have created encompasses an RCA interconnect, a screened RCA “phono” interconnect for turntable connection, loudspeaker cables, biwire terminal jumper cables, power cords and a USB cable, all of which I am given to understand to be made from fine stranded pure silver wire. The outstanding feature is the small diameters of all their Cadenza cables, far smaller than the vast majority of cables on the market. They also say they can also build custom cables to customer's own specifications.

Construction

Submitted for review is an RCA interconnect, a set of speaker cables and a set of four biwire jumper cables. All of them have a diameter of only 4mm including the outer sheath, which initially causes some consternation at first sight, but I have owned a Crystal Cables Piccolo interconnect which has a

SIMPLY AUDIO CADENZA



diameter of only 1.3mm and that is a lot tougher and a lot more robust than it looks.

The interconnect consists of a twisted pair of conductors forming the signal and return respectively, with no outer screening at all.

Connectors are Audio Note AN-GP-AG silver plated plugs. There is a “phono” version of this cable (not submitted for review) which is screened, aimed specifically at turntable connections where screening is almost mandatory to protect the delicate output signals from a phono cartridge.

Conductor material is said to be pure silver with a Teflon dielectric. No further details regarding construction have been supplied. The same construction and sizing also applies to the speaker cables and biwire jumpers, but the twisted pair wires are joined together into one within the connecting plugs.

The speaker cables are supplied as four individual identical runs rather than packaged into two pairs for left and right as you would find with 'conventional' speaker cables. These cables were fitted with silver plated 4mm banana plugs with “leaf spring” type of contacts which didn't grip the sockets particularly well and experience tells me they may tend to lose their springiness over time. Thankfully, Simply Audio have stuck a red dot onto the connectors of two of the four cables enabling correct polarity to be maintained when connecting up. The review pair submitted were three metres each side and once or twice I managed to create a wonderful bird's nest of tangles with the one metre of surplus cables laying

on the carpet unused behind the rack.

Similarly, the biwire jumpers mirror the speaker cable layout, with a 4mm banana plugs at one end with spade connectors on the other end, again with the conductors doubled up together into a single cable.

Sound Quality

Initial impressions were very good, with an open uncluttered sound that was rather pleasant to listen to. The sound was full of detail and small nuances, bass was full and rich, although the mid band seemed a little clouded and therefore coloured a tad. During one of our recent discussions with

fellow Hifi Pig reviewer Dan, we talked about bass content of recordings and especially kick drums whereby we should not just hear the kick drum itself, we should be able to hear the beater actually striking the skin, able to tell if there is a soft or hard face doing the actual striking. We played several solo drum recordings to demonstrate that and I decided to add this listening criteria to future reviews. Having just said that, the Simply Audio Cadenza suite managed to recreate that on several recordings I now keep for that purpose.

I played London Grammar's “If You Wait” CD and the vocalist's voice seemed a touch hoarser than I am used to, which matched my earlier finding of the mid band sounding a little recessed compared to other cables I have evaluated lately. Mind you, these “other” cables have a considerably high price tag than the Simply Audio cables reviewed here so take my comment in context. Imaging seemed to expand no further out than the speaker boundaries, yet the perception of depth was conveyed very well. Moving on to Peter Gabriel's live album “Real World” I was pleased to note how realistic the audience sounds were, with clapping, whistling and cheering portrayed in a very clear concise way, so good marks there. Again, this is another one of my benchmark tests which is quite a tough challenge of a cable's performance. Treble detail was extraordinarily good, clean, vibrant and without fizz or splashiness. The sound stage and imaging were not as wide as I would have liked, although the depth

SIMPLY AUDIO CADENZA

perception was impressive, particularly so with the sounds from the audience.

So, on to the real workout known as Porcupine Tree's "Deadwing" album which either sounds sublime or dreadful, depending upon how everything in the system (including cables) synergizes together. The title track is full of rawness in the recording that takes no prisoners, so it is either a pleasant listen or a long wince to contend with as the music collapses into itself and almost turns into a cacophony of noise when the system is not hanging together as it should. At the start of the track I would expect to hear the sounds of an underground train pulling into a station and the Simply Audio cables managed to convey that well. However, when the music became more hectic then I did hear blurring of the instruments with one mixing into all the others and becoming less distinct, so were much harder to follow. At around 6 minutes 40 seconds into the track a long low bass guitar riff should roll and flow out of the speakers with both power and a defined 'growl' to it and these cables did that rather well. While the music remained at a sedate pace the music came across as detailed and lithe, it was only when the band was at full tilt that it became a bit fuzzy and raucous.

Next, something with a gentler pace, namely Loreena Mckennitt's "An Ancient Muse" album which has plenty of midrange content to hear although unusually very little treble. I noted that bass content was solid and powerful, but could become loose and with diminished grip at times, especially so with the heavy drum beats contained within several tracks, making it sound a trifle ponderous. Loreena's voice sounded slightly deeper than I was used to hearing and imaging seemed fixed between the speakers, with almost a two dimensional sound stage with little real depth.

I then played a selection of chamber and choral music which was delightful to listen to and really showed up the Cadenza cable suite's true forte.

Conclusion

One would have expected a lightweight bass performance from these cables due to their small diameter, but not so and that's one myth dispelled. Bass was certainly full and powerful, sometimes a bit overblown too,

losing absolute control at times. Treble performance on the whole was very good, although as we moved down into midrange a cloudiness could be detected which affected female vocals, lowering the tonality of their voices. Not hugely, but there nonetheless. While being fed with simple uncluttered music they performed very well, yet fed with something a bit more raw and hectic, then there were small signs of distress with the music beginning to blur. Let me add that other cables that didn't show any of these attributes cost three or four times more than the Simply Audio suite and that puts my comments into context.

Given that they cost from €299 for a 1 metre set of interconnects, €389 for a 2 metre set of speaker cables and €149 for a set of speaker biwire jumpers, made from pure silver wire too and Audio Note connectors no less, then it puts the price fairly and squarely into the middle of the marketplace where we do not expect "perfection", so accordingly their price reflects the available performance which is well balanced in that respect.

Construction:	6.5/10
Sound Quality:	7.9/10
Value For Money:	8.00/10
Overall:	7.46/10

Recommended for: Listeners who enjoy simply recorded music. Audition before purchase for system suitability is advised.

Dominic Marsh



VINYL PASSION DUSTBUSTER



I've been using the Dust Buster from Vinyl Passion for a few months now and thought it about time I wrote a few words about it. It's £21 from Missing Link/Vinyl Passion.

What is it?

It's a pot of sort of gel-like stuff that is designed to get the crap off your stylus quickly, easily and safely. I've used a few things in the past for stylus cleaning duties and whilst I ended up using the old favourite Magic Eraser - it works well enough - I was never comfortable with it and lived in fear of the diamond or cantilever getting ripped off one day.

I've also used a brush and alcohol, but again I was always wary of the scare stories of the glue being compromised and the diamond dropping off at some point.

How's It Work?

Dead simple. Remove the screw lid of the pot, lower your stylus into the middle of the pot, lift up your stylus and that's it. The stylus doesn't stick, the cantilever isn't ripped off and all the gunk that was on your stylus is left on the Dust Buster's gel. If it gets dirty you can wash it off apparently.

It's quick, it's safe and it's cheap and as such represents a bit of a no brainer for me.

Does it Work?

Yep. I've not got a microscope to check, but looking at the stylus it looks as clean as I've seen it when I've used the other methods of cleaning.

Unlike the Magic Eraser there is no fear of ripping off the stylus cantilever and there appears to be nothing left behind other than a clean stylus with which to play your records.

Conclusion.

It's quick, it's safe and it's cheap and as such represents a bit of a no brainer for me. The main consideration is that playing your records with a dirty stylus may well degrade them over time and so a clean stylus is essential. With the dust buster you can afford to clean your stylus as often as you want, between each side if you choose and this will extend the life of your valuable discs.

No scores but highly recommended.

Stuart Smith



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MUSIC

Sleaford Mods - Divide and Exit (*Harbinger Sound*)

Released in April 2014 by two seasoned lads from Nottingham, Divide and Exit, as the title alone suggests, is akin to musical Marmite - love it or hate it - this will divide the audio marketplace.

It is not something you play when Great aunt Maud or the Vicar call around for tea. On the other hand I cannot remember reacting so strongly or positively to anything else since the day I first heard "Neat, Neat, Neat" by the Damned tearing out of a cheap transistor radio back in 1977.

On that occasion my musical world imploded, like that of so many others, and this exciting new music we called Punk caused an essential musical appraisal - the rest we say is history.



**...love it or hate it -
this will divide the
audio
marketplace.**

The Sleaford Mods have the same effect when you hear them for the first time. Here instead of 3 chords on a guitar Jason Williamson and Andrew Fearn use simple drum and bass beats with the same Punk attitude that excited us in the tail end of the 70s. Savvy, streetwise, visceral and edge of the seat exciting this music illicit a response. The vocals are direct and explode from the speakers like ricocheting bullets and demand that you pay attention. Music this smile inducing and riveting comes along very rarely. When it does, it should be received and embraced with open arms.

This album is more relevant to our political times than anything else I have heard all through 2014. This comes highly recommended if exciting and vital music is important to you. You really do deserve to hear this.

Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

Flower Travellin' Band - Satori (*Polydor*)

You may very well not have heard of this band let alone seen or heard their 1971 album Satori. I feel obliged to put that situation to right because hand on heart this is one of those stellar overlooked gems that ought to be in every rock music collection.

The band formed in Japan in 1968 and are part of the Proto Metal genre that included Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and Cream etc. These bands used a combination of blues-rock with psychedelic rock which would later evolve into heavy metal.

Whilst the names of bands like Cream, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Steppenwolf are mostly well known to us there are other lesser known and overlooked groups that demand an appraisal.

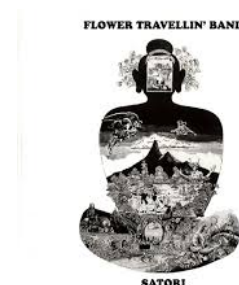
Without a doubt the Flower Travellin' Band and especially their first original album Satori demand attention.

Recorded over one day and mixed in another this album is now being re discovered and regarded as an influential album by those fortunate enough to have heard it.

The album consists of 5 tracks all called Satori and numbered parts 1-5. The album cover, with its meditative Buddah like figure and cartoon characters, gives some clue to the sonic adventure that the listener is about to embark upon. The five sections evolve and change and create an alternative and mind expanding universe of sound. If this sounds pompous and grandiose it is simply because that is what it is.

Metal guitar chords, Eastern rhythms, African strings, tom toms and earth rattling bass combine in a mesmerising melange of musical madness. This Japanese band have taken a myriad of influences and combined them into an LSD tinged world that seems familiar and foreign all at the same time.

Listening on headphones one is made to reappraise ones understanding of early rock music. This truly does stand out as a truly great rock album and stands shoulder to shoulder with all the classic albums of the late 60s and early 70s. This comes highly recommended.



Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

Belle and Sebastian - Girls In Peacetime Want to Dance (*Matador*)

Few bands bifurcate opinion as vociferously as Belle and Sebastian. Many people simply can't see past the image of them fostered in their early publicity shots and sleeve notes: Duffel coat donning, butterfly net wielding perma-students gathered in a gang like some Vimto version of Dexys Midnight Runners. Building that band brand was a calculated risk - winsome, lose some - but the detractors who focussed on their Fotherington-Thomas feyness missed out on some great pop music.

It's nearly twenty years since Stuart Murdoch pulled



...has not quite appropriated the Pet Shop Boys idea of "Che Guevara and Debussy to a disco beat" but it does encompass a greater degree of large P Politics than we have seen before and welds it to a dance pop aesthetic to produce a kind of mirrorball manifesto.

the band together as part of a college project. Inevitably, band members have come and gone and different styles and diversions have been explored but Murdoch's storytelling songwriting has remained at the band's core. Girls In Peacetime Want To Dance, the band's ninth studio album, has not quite appropriated the Pet Shop Boys idea of "Che Guevara and Debussy to a disco beat" but it does encompass a greater degree of large P Politics than we have seen before and welds it to a dance pop aesthetic to produce a kind of mirrorball manifesto. Highlights include Nobody's Empire which does borrow its opening arpeggios from the Pet Shop Boys' version of Always On My Mind. Murdoch has described this as the most personal song he has

written, combining his succumbing to ME with his first flourishings of faith.

If Enter Sylvia Plath threatens to cross The Bell Jar with Erasure - The Andy Bell Jar? - it's to the band's credit that they succeed in creating something genuinely stirring.

It's not all Eurodisco big beats though. The Everlasting Muse is anchored to a double bass, breaking into an Eastern European klezmer-esque chorus. Final track Today (This Army's For Peace) mines that swooning summer sound at which early Pink Floyd excelled.

If you have already fallen for Belle And Sebastian's charms then there is much here to love. On the other hand, if you'd rather rub tin foil across your fillings than give B&S a listen, this album is unlikely to convert you. Me? I'm off down the disco in my duffel coat.

John Scott

Little Feat - Feats Don't Fail Me Now (1974) (*Warner Bros*)

There are those who regard the Lowell George era Little Feat as one of the greatest American bands of the 1970s. Their musical chops and deep soulful funkiness meant that they were as much a live



phenomenon as they were a 5 star recording unit. Some would say that it all came together in the studio on the classic Dixie Chicken album that preceded this one. With Lowell's idiosyncratic and wildly surreal lyrics and some of the finest songs he had ever written, Dixie Chicken was Lowell's masterpiece. Feats Don't fail Me Now is more of a band effort and in many ways is more accessible and enjoyable as a result.

Here we find the band making more of a contribution and Lowell, who would eventually leave the band, taking more of a back seat this time around. This togetherness along with the musical tightness acquired over many months of constant touring ensured that every track is as funky and tight as any band would want to get.

Here we find two stone cold classic tracks in 'Rock and Roll Doctor' and 'Skin it Back' written by guitarist Paul Barrere. Alongside these Bill Payne

pens the crowd pleasing 'Oh Atlanta' and both share co-writing credits with Lowell on other songs. On this album then we find a more band orientated effort and this guarantees that the album stands as one of the finest that the band ever recorded.

Other stand out tracks include 'The Fan' and the much loved title track. The music on the album is a mixture of Pop, R&B, Rock, Blues and Country mixed together in a funky surreal stew. A heady concoction that is taken by the scruff of the neck and played with an assurance few bands could muster. This album is one that any Little Feat fan will return to again and again. It is an outstanding album by one of the greatest American bands and one of the best they ever recorded. An album that once heard will find a place in any true music lovers collection.

Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

The Woodentops - Before During After - Remasters, Remixes & Rarities 1982-1992 (*One Little Indian*)

Occasionally, when asked to review a reissue of an album, one discovers a band that failed, for one reason or another, to show up on the radar the first time around.

Some of these discoveries are similar to opening a treasure chest that has been gathering dust in a dark corner only to reveal a wealth of (musical) gems. This is definitely the case with this The Woodentops, Before During After Reissue on the One Little Indian label from May 2013.

This 52 track 3CD set includes their first album 'Giant', the follow up album, 'Wooden Foot Cops on the Highway' (both remixed with additional rarities) and a 3rd CD of other Remixes and Rarities. So all in all an abundance of treasures to explore. Treasures whose value was recognised at the time by such fans as David Bowie (who invited them to support him), Morrissey and Noel Gallagher.

In 1984 Morrissey is reported to have said, "Anyone sane living in this world will realise on hearing 'Plenty' that The Woodentops bring with them a new age of enlightenment." In September 2011 Noel Gallagher curated the cover mount CD for Mojo magazine and elected to include the Woodentops single 'Why Why Why'.



The band formed in South London in 1982 and signed to Rough Trade. They soon gained a name for themselves with a string of well received singles. Their sound focuses on an array of percussive elements including cow bells, woodblock skulls, tom toms and tight rhythmic snares with electronic and rudimentary sampling creeping into the mix by 1986. They were also something of a live fixture on the Spanish coast in the mid 80's and DJs like Paul Oakenfold, Carl Cox, Andy Weatherall and Danny Rampling all recognised the greatness of the band. Kindred spirit Adrian Sherwood's remixes dominate on these 3 CDs and all add to the range and variety of sounds on offer.

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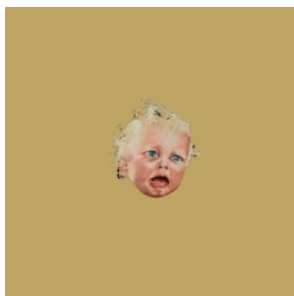
Many of the tracks here, especially the remixes, present themselves as indie/dance style single material and it is not surprising that the band were received so ecstatically by the club culture in the UK in the late 80s. Stand out tracks include the forementioned 'Why Why Why' that briefly placed the band at the forefront of the developing indie/dance crossover scene. The Latin American tinged 'Give it Time' and the hyper rhythmic 'Get It On' which stand out as sounding just as fresh today. There are so many tracks I could list here that reward close listening and exploration.

As I initially said The Woodentops passed me by at the time but I am so glad that I have had this opportunity to discover a band that have shown themselves to be such a class act. If discovering great music from the past and appreciating bands whose influences are still felt today is important to you then you could do no better than to discover The Woodentops.

Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

Swans - To Be Kind (*Young God* -Mute)

My favourite album of 2012 was 'The Seer' by Michael Gira's band Swans. To say that I was anticipating the release of 'To Be Kind' last year would be a profound understatement. For over 30 years Michael Gira has been producing some of the most experimental and interesting rock music that can be had. His solo work and collaborations, alongside his work his other band 'Angels of Light' and his albums with 'Swans', have all received great critical praise and attention.



Never one to concern himself about the opinions of fans of the band Gira, nonetheless, appears here to have responded to people's raised expectations.

To Be Kind is the Swans 3rd album since Gira resurfaced with the band after a break of 14 years. In 2010 they released 'My Father Will Guide Me Up a Rope to the Sky', but it was with the release of 'The Seer' in 2012 that Gira really started to flex his musical muscles. The Seer was a six sided vinyl

release with a running time of over 2 hours. The fact that it was almost exhausting to listen to in one sitting did not prevent it from increasing their fan base incredibly. This dark majestic masterpiece of immense scale was a hard act to follow. Never one to concern himself about the opinions of fans of the band Gira, nonetheless, appears here to have responded to people's raised expectations. To Be Kind is just as massive in length, sound and power as its predecessor. The Seers cover is dark and foreboding whilst the cover of To Be Kind is lighter in colour and has pictures of children. Was this in someway meant to represent a lightening of approach and a more accessible sound. On listening to the music within one soon realises that accessibility in the Swans case comes at a cost.

The music that Swans produce can in many ways be seen as spiritual in its intensity and use of repetitive mantras. Here on this album this is profoundly the case with its massive sound and some really heavy crescendos. Like some kind of religious singalong with a much heavier and powerful instrumentation and focus. There is too within the songs a constant wave of tension leading to periods of release and this is carried out with precision and mastery. On this album the members of the band are obviously playing to their strengths and enjoying the experience.

The percussion and drums especially on this album play a significant role and are recorded clearly and with precision. They add power and heft to the long drawn out climaxes found in some of the longer tracks. There is also a wide ranging variety of instrumentation and sounds used by the band to provide a greater variety of textures within the songs. Its general heaviness does not in anyway prevent some of the songs becoming almost meditative and contemplative in their repetition and power. The overall high quality sound and production also help create a profound and overwhelming listening experience.

I have already purchased my tickets for the Swans gig in London in the Spring and cannot wait to see and hear this vital and powerful force of nature in the flesh for the first time. Those of you who know Gira's work will, I am sure, already have this album. Those new to Swans, if they are prepared to take a leap of faith, will discover here a music that could prove to be both powerfully hypnotic and mesmerising.

Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

Sun Kil Moon - Benji (Caldo Verde)

When deciding which albums to place in my top ten of last year (2014) there were a number that deserved a place without any doubt nor discussion. Mark Kozelek, under the pseudonym Sun Kil



Moon, released one of the most emotionally demanding and yet fulfilling albums of the year. On this album Benji, Mark's 6th solo release, the loves, lives, fights and deaths of a series of people are faced head on. He does not mince words here and the 11 songs are personal tales of all that makes us human in the true sense of the word.

On these songs he does not speak down to the listener nor does he give us any slick easy answers. Instead on this truly exceptional and heartfelt singer songwriter album he simply tells us their stories. And what well crafted stories they are with detail, emotional impact and complexity. When one is listening to these songs the lyrics draw us in to the lives and deaths of these people. Yes, in these songs many people meet their sometimes tragic and untimely end. However despite the sadness inherent in these songs it is done in such a way that we find ourselves entertained by what we are hearing.

I was initially struck by the lyrics on these songs and from the opening song 'Carissa' realised that here was an album that was worthy of my full attention.

The opening line introduces us to his talent as a storyteller when we hear, 'Carissa, when I first saw you, you were a lovely child/And the last time I saw you, you were 15 pregnant and running wild', and we know we are on to something special. Then later another line or couplet or verse such as 'And when my kid's eighteen/He'll be out there like I was and probably chasing his dreams/And when your kid's twenty two/ He'll have an internship at a law firm and hey that's ok too.' Meaningful and truthful lyrics that reveal more to us on repeated listening.

Musically the whole album can be described as being beautiful and a pleasure to listen to. It is also an album that reveals more and more of its levels on each subsequent listen. Here is an album that you will not tire of quickly. The music is diverse with calming tender passages of harmonizing as well as more poppy and rough hewn rock songs. In fact the stand out track reflects Kozelek's love for classic

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rock in it's title, 'I watched the Film 'The Song Remains the Same', an acknowledgement of the impact Led Zeppelin have had on his musical development. A musically satisfying album then that is a joy from start to finish.

To my mind 2014 was a year of great rock music with many albums worthy of your time and attention being released every month. This album, despite the fact that the songs are mainly sad, is an uplifting, inspiring and beautiful work of art and Mark Kozelek/Sun Kil Moon has recorded one of the finest singer songwriter albums I have heard for a very long time.

Islwyn Paul Mainwaring

MUSIC

The Waterboys - Modern Blues (Harlequin and Clown)

In Modern Blues, the 11th studio album by The Waterboys, Mike Scott sums up his career to date in a single phrase: "I'm not bitter and I'm no quitter". Right from their 1983 eponymous debut album, Scott has used The Waterboys as a vehicle to explore his own particular vision - The Big Music. By 1985's This Is The Sea, Scott had honed The Big Music to a widescreen, anthemic sound that with a just a little bit of compromise could have morphed into arena rock and taken over the world. Instead, Scott hired a fiddle player, decamped to the west coast of Ireland and left world domination to Simple Minds and U2. Essentially, Mike Scott is The Waterboys. Band members have come and gone - according to Wikipedia more than 70 people have performed live as a member of the band - but The Big Music has never deserted him. It was there over 25 years ago on Fisherman's Blues and it is here today on Modern Blues: Churning, soaring Hammond organ; riffing, spitting guitars, and in Scott's songs, an unerring ability to seek out the magic in the seemingly mundane.

Having just edged past his mid-fifties Scott is in reflective mood, lyrically if not musically. In November Tale, Scott re-encounters an old love and reflects on what was, what might have been and what could yet be. Two old flames burning down their past mistakes. Rosalind (You Married The Wrong Guy) provides detailed evidence as to why the fragrant Ros made a massive mistake by not agreeing to become Mrs Michael Scott. On a more fanciful note, if you have ever wondered how The King spends his days in the hereafter, wonder no more. It's all here in I Can See Elvis. I won't spoil it for you but suffice to say, he's still taking care of business. The current incarnation of The Waterboys imbues these songs, and the others on the album, with that timeless quality that Scott has made his trademark, carrying the past securely into the future. Let's hope he keeps on hearing The Big Music for many years to come.

John Scott



LIVE

Adam Cohen at The Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh

Adam Cohen's show at The Voodoo Rooms in Edinburgh - the first night of his European tour - was opened by local lad Dean Owens, supported on guitar and vocals by Calais Brown. Owens, former frontman of alt-country band The Felsons, showcased some songs from his forthcoming Nashville-recorded album Into The Sea along with others from his extensive back catalogue. Owen's songs are thoughtful and crafted: "Some of my songs are quite melancholy" he informed us, "The others are just miserable". Perhaps the most melancholic and certainly the most affecting is Man From Leith, a tribute to his father.&

Cohen has grown comfortable with being his father's son but as he tells us tonight, it's not all he likes to talk about.

Dean Owens' father worked in a shipyard but Owens chose to be a singer/songwriter. Adam Cohen is a singer/songwriter too - just like his dad. You might think that if your father was one of the greatest songwriters of our times, you might want to steer well clear of following in his footsteps and maybe go work in a shipyard instead. Fortunately, rather than growing up in his father's shadow, Adam has evidently flourished.

Cohen has grown comfortable with being his father's son but as he tells us tonight, it's not all he likes to talk about. Leonard can never be too far away though. He's there in Adam's looks, his voice, and in the hats that the girls in the band wear with wry, knowing humour during Fall Apart.



Fall Apart is a song about inevitability and acceptance; the inevitability that Leonard won't be around for ever and the acceptance that Adam is carrying on the family business - it's in his bones and his blood: "You'll be hearing his voice, as you're hearing it now". In the end though, as one audience

Over the course of the evening Cohen & Co. treat us to ten tracks from the new album We Go Home and a handful of earlier songs.

member succinctly puts it: "Adam, you're a star. We don't care who your parents are".

This being the first night of the tour, Cohen tells us that he is going to take it slow and use tonight as a warm up. There is no actual evidence of this happening. The multi-talented band: Justine Bennett-guitar, bass, vocals and keyboards; Stephanie Colletterie-violin and vocals; Genevieve Clermont-cello, vocals and keyboards; and Michael Chaves-drums, percussion, guitar, keyboards and Johnny Cash impression are perfectly drilled and make the sound of a band twice their size.

Over the course of the evening Cohen & Co. treat us to ten tracks from the new album *We Go Home* and a handful of earlier songs. Standouts include a dramatic *Swear I Was There*, a dynamic *Love Is* and a triumphant *Uniform*. Whether he wants to or not, Adam Cohen will spend the rest of his life talking about his father. On tonight's evidence however, his songs are more than capable of speaking for themselves.

Adam Cohen is touring Europe right now. If he is playing a town near you, go and see him. You won't regret it.

We Go Home by Adam Cohen is out now on Cooking Vinyl.

Into The Sea by Dean Owens will be released in April on Drumfire Records.

John Scott

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Digging The Ditch

John Scott loads up on honey slides and peers into the abyss with the help of three albums from Neil Young's darkest days.

Between 1962 and 1969, Bob Dylan changed the face of the singer/songwriter genre, continuously developing it by moving it from protest-based folk music to cutting-edge rock - introducing electric instruments and stream of consciousness lyrics, tapping the well of American mythology and creating his own thin wild mercury sound.

Between 1973 and 1975, Neil Young changed the face of the singer/songwriter genre by giving it a bloody good kicking and sending it home in an ambulance, nearly destroying himself in the process.

Following the release of his fourth solo album, **Harvest**, in 1972 Young was at the forefront of the singer/songwriter scene and ought to have been basking in his own success. The reality, however, was very different. Young had been preparing to tour in support of the album and had planned to include his friend, Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten, in his touring band. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that Whitten's drug dependency - Whitten's drug problems had partly inspired Young's song *The Needle And The Damage Done* - was a serious impediment. Against Whitten's wishes, Young gave him some money and a plane ticket and sent him away to LA to recuperate. Soon after, Young received a phone call to tell him that Danny had died from an overdose.

"That blew my mind" Young said. "I loved Danny. I felt responsible. And from there, I had to go right out on this huge tour of huge arenas. I was very nervous and ... insecure." Young had always cared more about his own artistic vision than commercial success and his instinct was to recoil from the acclaim that **Harvest** had brought. He later wrote that *Heart Of Gold* had: "...put me in the middle of

Between 1973 and 1975, Neil Young changed the face of the singer/songwriter genre by giving it a bloody good kicking and sending it home in an ambulance, nearly destroying himself in the process.

the road. Traveling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch. A rougher ride but I saw more interesting people there." The next three albums he would record became known as The Ditch Trilogy and would chart Young's journey through very dark times.

CLASSICS

Young had put together a band for the Harvest album recordings and named them The Stray Gators. This band: Kenny Buttrey on drums, Tim Drummond on bass, Ben Keith on steel guitar and Jack Nitzche on piano was also convened as Young's touring band for a 62 date tour. Buttrey, no doubt sensing Young's growing instability, demanded a \$100,000 guaranteed salary. Unsurprisingly, the rest of the band soon insisted on the same payment resulting in a degree of resentment from Young and souring the atmosphere between the musicians.

Whitten's death had cast a heavy shadow and Young was drinking heavily - Tim Drummond had introduced him to tequila, which he took to with bleak enthusiasm - and he soon started behaving erratically. Before long, Keith and Nitzsche were drinking too and Buttrey, who was a country music session musician and, accustomed to neither the chaos of life on the road with a rock band nor the hard rock music that the band were playing, quit the tour and was replaced by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young drummer Johnny Barbata.

The tour wasn't going down well with audiences either. A sizeable proportion of the audience expected to experience the relatively mellow ambience of the Harvest album. What they actually got was a raw solo acoustic set from Young followed by a set of new, unfamiliar rock songs. As the tour rolled out Young took to cancelling sound checks, haranguing audiences before walking off stage and criticising the band's performances.



The electric section of the gigs formed Young's next release **Time Fades Away**, a live album of new songs. Neil has subsequently stated that this is his least favourite album. He said:

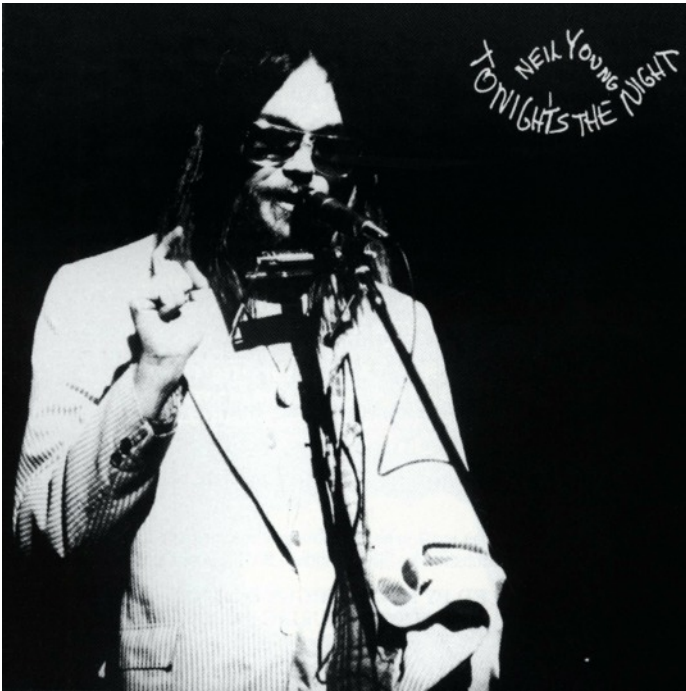
"Time Fades Away was the worst record I ever made – but as a documentary of what was happening to me, it was a great record. I was onstage and I was playing all these songs that nobody had heard before, recording them, and I didn't have the right band. It was just an uncomfortable tour. I felt like a product, and I had this band of all-star musicians that couldn't even look at each other. Money hassles among everyone concerned ruined this tour and record for me but I released it anyway so you folks could see what could happen if you lose it for a while. I was becoming more interested in an audio verite approach than satisfying the public demands for a repetition of Harvest. "

All ragged and no glory, then? Well, not quite, the record has its moments and only occasionally hints at the madness behind the performances. In fact a bit more madness would be welcome. *Don't Be Denied* is a fine song, written just days after Whitten's death but the band struggle to get behind it. Compare the version here to the one on the recent CSNY 1974 live set. The CSNY performance may be more languid but the story within the song has room to make itself heard. Young sounds unhinged on *Yonder Stands The Sinner* but again there is a slightly perfunctory quality to the band's accompaniment. Towards the end of the tour Young's voice was giving out and David Crosby and Graham Nash were called in to bolster the vocals and add additional guitar.

Young had never released the album on CD, probably due to his own dissatisfaction with the performances and the sub par sound quality. The performances were recorded straight off the soundboard to the first-ever commercially available digital mixing system, known as CompuMix. The album has now been released however, as a high resolution digital download as part of Young's Official Release Series available via his Pono online store.

The tour ended on 3 April after ninety days on the road. By August, Young had convened a new band, The Santa Monica Flyers - with Billy Talbot and Ralph Molina from Crazy Horse on bass and drums and, remarkably given his recent experience, Ben

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The next track contains a shock of a different kind. *Come On Baby Let's Go Downtown* is a live recording featuring Danny Whitten on vocals and guitar, appearing like a ghost at his own wake.

Keith on guitar. The band also featured Nils Lofgren, who had played on **After The Gold Rush**, on guitar and vocals. Astonishingly, Young had suffered another stunning personal blow. His friend Bruce Berry died just months after Danny Whitten, again from a heroin overdose. Berry, the brother of Jan Berry of Jan & Dean fame, had roadied for CSNY and for Young and had worked with Whitten who had turned him on to the drug. Young was already in bad shape and this new loss hit him hard but he did the only thing he could - write some new songs and thrash out his grief.

Tonight's The Night was recorded mostly in one day - 26 August. Young's songs had always been personal but never more than here. **Tonight's The Night** is an undisguised tribute to Berry and Whitten and a clear insight into Young's state of mind at the time: "Bruce Berry was a working man, he used to load that Econoline van, a sparkle was in his eye, but his life was in his hands". It's not clear what the "Tonight's the night" refrain means. Perhaps it's a personal reference - something Young and Berry used to say to one another. Maybe it's a statement of intent; Young laying down a marker to say that the loss of two friends is two too many and that things need to change from this point on. **Tonight's The Night** is a visceral, uncomfortable album: File under Uneasy Listening. It is never less than gripping though. *Borrowed Tune* is just Neil on vocals, piano and harmonica. "I hope that it matters" he sings, "I'm having my doubts". He continues: "I'm singing this borrowed tune I took from the Rolling Stones...to wasted to write my own. In the hands of, say, Loudon Wainwright that might be played for laughs but there is no humour here.

The next track contains a shock of a different kind. *Come On Baby Let's Go Downtown* is a live recording featuring Danny Whitten on vocals and guitar, appearing like a ghost at his own wake. *Roll Another Number For The Road* is as close as we get to get to humour but it's gallows humour at best. Like in most of the songs here Young is looking for escape, for succour, but with no particular expectation of finding it. *Albuquerque*, the album's

When I read the letter, I'm Waterface. It's just a stupid thing—a suicide note without the suicide”.

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most beautiful song continues that theme: “I’ll find somewhere where they don’t care who I am”.



This time round, the tequila was jettisoned in favour of “honey slides” – lightly toasted marijuana buds sautéed in honey – which apparently “felt like heroin” according to Elliot Roberts, Young’s manager.

Ending with a reprise of the opening title track, **Tonight’s The Night** is twelve tracks of near-unrelenting darkness. Sleeve notes in Dutch and cryptic messages to “Waterface”, a Neil Young alter

ego cranked up the weirdness factor even further. Young said later: “Waterface is the person writing the letter. When I read the letter, I’m Waterface. It’s just a stupid thing—a suicide note without the suicide”. The record company, who were no doubt still hoping to reap another **Harvest**, felt that the album wasn’t what Young’s audience wanted from him at that point and sat on it until 1975.

As cathartic as the **Tonight’s The Night** sessions may have been, they clearly hadn’t yet exorcised all of Young’s demons. **On The Beach**, released in July 1974, may not be as dark as **Tonight’s The Night** but it is not exactly a picnic either. This time round, the tequila was jettisoned in favour of “honey slides” – lightly toasted marijuana buds sautéed in honey – which apparently “felt like heroin” according to Elliot Roberts, Young’s manager. Stalwarts such as Ben Keith, Tim Drummond, Billy Talbot, Ralph Molina, David Crosby and Graham Nash were supplemented by Rusty Kershaw on slide guitar, George Whitsell on guitar and The Band’s Rick Danko and Levon Helm on bass and drums.

The opening number Walk On is musically upbeat but there is a bitterness to the lyrics: “I hear some people been talkin’ me down...I can’t tell them how to feel”. The mood changes with the sombre electric piano and steel guitar of *See The Sky About To Rain*. Over the course of the album, Young points his sights at the oil industry, the Laurel Canyon lifestyle that he had previously been part of and, of course, himself. Young is in stronger voice than on **Tonight’s The Night** and the performances are somewhat less ramshackle but he was still a long way from **Harvest**. Fans expecting him to return to that style would have to wait until 1978’s **Comes A Time**.

It’s not unknown for artists to let us into their times of crises: Dylan famously documented the emotional turmoil of the breakup of his marriage on **Blood On The Tracks** and Robert Wyatt’s **Rock Bottom** obliquely references his coming to terms with paraplegia. The Ditch Trilogy may be unique though in revealing the inner psyche of a mainstream rock star in extremis over an extended period of time. For the first time, all three albums are available in a digital format. If you have ever been curious about these albums but never got round to hearing them, tonight’s the night.

John Scott

Caribbean Music and Rum

Taking us away from the cold and grey of winter

Louis Bricka flies us South to the Caribbean.

With Carnival season in full swing, in a majority of Caribbean islands and South American countries, I will try to send a little sunshine our way to remind us that Spring is just around the corner.

So, on to the plane, let's leave our pale winter sun that fails to thaw the ice, let's meet him further south where its rays are warming the trade winds, the warm, tropically scented breeze that will greet us as soon as the Hostess releases the door.

Already you would hope to hear the steel bands, and you do, it's everywhere, in the children's laughter, the ivory smiles, the cacophony of the streets, car horns, dogs barking, the assault of bright colours, the shimmering of the sea.

Tomorrow the Carnival will begin, a classless affair where Paganism rubs shoulders with Religion. All colours, all sizes and shapes, amateurs and professionals, will unite under the rhythms of a samba or a merengue. Plumes galore or scantily clad, yellows and reds or coconut oiled skin, it doesn't matter, all will be moving to the same frenetic cadence.

But in the meantime, if, like me, you are a sunset person, you will want to wander to the water's edge to watch the colours change, to listen to the sea breeze ruffle the palm trees, catch the melody of a distant Calypso song, all this with a glass of Ty-Punch in hand.

She Who Speaks Her Mind commented: "You have to excuse him, he has been feverish the past few days and now I know why!"

The Ty-Punch is the sundowner of choice in the French Antilles, creole or patois for

Petit Ponch (little punch, as in fruit punch). The traditional recipe goes something along these lines: In a small stem-less glass add a teaspoon of lime juice to a teaspoon of brown cane sugar or, better still, sugarcane syrup, add 5cl of Rhum Agricole Blanc and a slice of lime, stir until well mixed. Ice is not usually used, however this is



down to individual taste, as is the use of Vieux (aged) Rhum, this would be a shame if it is a good one, a little bit like adding a mixer to a good Cognac or whisky. The ideal rum would be the 59% abv Rhum Agricole Blanc from the Bielle Distillery on the island of Marie-Galante, part of Guadeloupe.

Rhum Agricole is the distillation of fresh sugarcane juice (sometime referred to as 'vesou') that has been fermented. Non 'Agricole' rums, such as Traditional or Industrial, are produced with the distillation of molasses, a by-product of the cane sugar refinement process.

Louis Bricka

[You can read Louis Bricka's website WineSpiritRegion.com Here](#)

This Month Hifi Pig goes Behind the Brands with Robert Kelly of German Physiks



Your History

How did you get into/what was your first job in the industry?

The answer is a bit long I am afraid. My father was an electronic engineer. He used to build all his own audio amplifiers, he even built our first television – this was the days of 405 line indirect projection televisions - and I always wanted to follow in his footsteps.

My first full time job was as a junior engineer with what was then The Decca Navigator Company. They sponsored me through college. When I was interviewed

for the sponsorship I planned to get into the recording division. I had always been interested in tape recorders because of my father and working in a studio would have been my ideal job. By the time I had finished college and joined Decca full time, they had been bought by Racal and the record division sold off, so I ended up working in the navigation systems design labs.

Decca Navigator had a Japanese distributor and I became friends with one of the Japanese chaps in their London office. Through him, in 1984, I managed to get a job with the main company in Tokyo, where I designed and built custom interfaces to be used with various Decca navigation systems. The biggest project was for a system that was fitted into an aircraft and logged radioactivity with geographic location. I never thought it would need to be used in anger. Sadly the Fukushima disaster probably proved me wrong.

This company was also acting as a trading company exporting Japanese electronic components, mostly to Europe and Scandinavia. At this time the big Japanese electronics components manufacturers did not have direct sales routes, so this was good business. My friend had returned to Tokyo and shortly after started his own trading company, exporting electronic components. I joined him in 1986. At that time the end-user prices of imported high-end audio in Japan was very significantly higher than their home markets, so we decided to import high-end audio and try and sell at a more reasonable price. I had trained as an engineer and knew nothing about selling things and at that time barely spoke any Japanese. All I had in my favour was great enthusiasm

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for music and audio and being British meant that miracles only took a little bit longer than the impossible.

The first products we chose were Arcam, Ariston and Heybrook. Things didn't work out with Heybrook and Ariston, though the products were excellent. John Dawson at Arcam was very supportive and we started with their Arcam Alpha integrated amplifier. This was a 30W integrated amplifier with a cleverly moulded and rather distinctive front panel. They received a design Council Award for this, which was quite an achievement for what was a small and still young company. I used to demonstrate Arcam electronics in dealers around Japan, usually with Arcam loudspeakers, initially the Arcam 2 and later the Delta 2. Almost everyone was very impressed with the sound – I most certainly was. On a number of occasions people thought they were listening to bigger and very much more expensive systems that were in the same room, when in fact it was the small Arcam system. Arcam products always impressed me in that they gave excellent sound quality at a fair price.

The major problem we faced was that at that time Japanese customers wanted their high-end audio to have big heavy chassis. If it did not have this, then it lacked credibility in their eyes, regardless of how it might sound.

We did make sales, but it was hard work. That was where I learnt the importance of how a product was presented. I learnt a tremendous amount in Japan and was very lucky to have worked there when the high-end audio market was booming. Everyone I met there was very kind. At the start my ability to speak Japanese was poor, but armed with a notebook, pen and an English to Japanese dictionary, I managed to communicate. A shared passion for music and hi-fi also helped. I suspect that some of those I met were curious about the madman from England who was trying to sell them hi-fi.

In my 9 years in the audio industry in Japan, we also sold Audioquest cables – at one time we were their main supplier for copper and silver strand, RCA and XLR connectors, optical fibre cables and tone arms; VAC valve amplifiers; Reference 3A loudspeakers and dCS D/A converters. In the early 1990s we started selling *dCS* professional D/A converters to Japanese audiophiles and this led to *dCS* later entering the audiophile market. Japanese audiophiles loved products that had professional connections, such as Garrard (301/401), EMT, JBL and Studer. *dCS* had this, as well as an exceptional design pedigree from their work designing converters for the aerospace industry and they had excellent sound to boot.



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Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

Easy. My father.

Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

Being involved in the project that produced the *dCS Elgar* D/A converter.

You and your system

What was your very first system?

When I was 5 my father built me a record player using a transistor amplifier he had designed. I had a tiny Garrard turntable that only played 7-inch records and ran off a 6 volt battery. At that time my record collection was limited to children's stories - Goldlocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Riding Hood etc – and a boisterous rendition of 76 Trombones. I still have this player.

My first system as such was a home built tape machine. It used a second hand Collaro tape transport, a Mullard Type C valve preamp, a mono valve power amplifier my father designed and I built and a column loudspeaker that my father designed.

Next came a Connoisseur BD-1 turntable fitted in a plinth I made fitted with an SME 3009 and Shure V15, feeding a home made phono EQ and fed into a Sony TC377 tape machine. I listened via a pair of Sony headphones. There wasn't the space for two loudspeakers in my bedroom, my parents wouldn't have appreciated the noise and most importantly I did not have the money to buy loudspeakers.

When I started working for Decca in 1981 and had a salary the Connoisseur was replaced by a Thorens TD-160s. At that time I was living in Lewisham and the Billy Vee hi fi shop was just around the corner. I wanted to get a set of modern loudspeakers and an amplifier and arranged a demonstration with them. They kindly allowed me to bring along my Thorens to use as the source. Initially I was looking at a NAD 3020 integrated amplifier, which was very popular at the time and was a very good amplifier. The salesman suggested I tried a Nytech CA-252. This was clearly better, though more expensive. Having heard it I couldn't go back to the NAD. The loudspeakers I chose were Heybrook HB-1s: an extremely good 2-way design that was also very popular at the time. During the demonstration I noticed a Linn LP-12 in the corner of the demonstration room. I had read about this in hi-fi magazines, but had never heard one. I certainly did not believe it could be better

than my modified TD-160S/SME/V15, nor did I believe it could be worth more than twice as much. I asked the salesman if I could try it with the Nytech and Heybrooks and quickly realised that as good as the Thorens was, the Linn was a lot better, so an LP12, Linn LVII arm and Rega MM cartridge was added to the purchase I made that day. The loudspeaker cable was the parallel twin Naim cable that was popular at the time and the loudspeaker stands a rather basic model the salesman threw in gratis. These were replaced a few weeks later with Heybrook HBS-1 stands and the LVII replaced by an Linn Ittok arm a year later.

The Nytech is still being used by my brother and the HBS-1s are the centre of a friend's system, though I did have to replace the surrounds on the woofers before I gave them to him.

When I went to work in Japan I took my system and 300 LPs with me. My new employer was not amused when they got the bill for the airfreight cost.

The first change to the system in Japan was to replace the Rega cartridge with a Garrott modified Decca. I bought this after reading a review in Hi-Fi News by Ken Kessler. The Decca was amazingly fast, but despite experimenting with VTA adjustment and various cartridge loadings, it had a top end that could be ferocious. The Ittok's headshell would also wobble from side to side alarmingly, due to the Decca's need for damping. This was fixed by replacing the Ittok with a Well Tempered Arm. I bought this from the designer Bill Firebaugh in the USA after reading another Ken Kessler review. It also helped to ameliorate the top end problems.

Shortly after, I met Stig Bjorge in Tokyo. Stig was later to found the Lyra company, maker of the wonderful cartridges of the same name. Stig was already making cartridges and he gave me his latest prototype to try, which was called Tsurugi. Combined with the Well Tempered Arm this was a huge improvement. Gone was the harsh top end, replaced by a smooth clean top. Female vocals no longer screeched. Everything else about the Tsurugi was right and I could sit back and enjoy LP after LP, wrapped up in the music and not bracing myself for where I expected the record to try and bite me. I have since had a number of Lyra cartridges, each better than the last and all wonderfully musical.

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The next change was the replacement of the Nytech integrated amplifier by a Heybrook C2 pre amp and P2 power amplifier. These were designed by Tim de Paravicini and were roughly equivalent to the Naim systems of the period. Being a Tim de Paravicini design, the phono stage was extremely good. Altogether this moved the whole system up a good couple of steps.

Around 1987 I was introduced to Audioquest's Bill Low by Arcam's John Dawson. Arcam had recently started to distribute Audioquest cables in the UK. I told Bill I was sceptical about how important cables were, so he sent me over a box of his lower cost cables to try. I was wrong, not for the first time so this was not a new experience. Even Audioquest's budget cables were clearly better than the Naim loudspeaker cable and "good quality" interconnect I had been using. Over the years the cables were replaced by successively better Audioquest cables as they became available. I have always been a fan of their cables and use them today.

I also used Audioquest cable to rewire the Heybrook HB-1s when I modified them to be bi-wireable. That relatively cheap modification produced a very noticeable improvement in clarity and imaging. So much so that even I was surprised.

About that time, after a long period of lusting, I acquired a second hand Nakamichi ZX-9 cassette machine. This produced excellent recordings and the way everything worked so smoothly and precisely added to the enjoyment of using this machine. When it developed a fault, Nakamichi provided excellent customer service. They collected the machine from my apartment, repaired it and brought it back for the then equivalent of £30.

Around 1990 I was introduced to the loudspeaker maker Reference

3A. At that time they were based in Switzerland, though they had started life in France. We started to import and sell their products in Japan and for a time they proved very popular. I added a model called the Royal Master Control to my system. This was a very solidly made two-way design. It had an 8-inch woven carbon fibre cone woofer/mid range unit that was driven full-range without a crossover and a soft dome tweeter, with a very simple crossover of just a single capacitor and two resistors. These loudspeakers were a revelation. Very transparent, very fast with very well extended bass. They were also very efficient at 92dB, so worked really well with modest power valve as well as transistor amplifiers.



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During in my time in Japan I mostly listened to vinyl, but I did have a number of Arcam CD players to listen to the small but growing collection of CDs I had.

After a short spell in the US, in 1996 I returned to the UK, with the same system I had used in Japan, except that the Ittok had been refitted to the LP12 and it was fitted with the latest Lyra cartridge.

A year or so later I added early dCS Elgar D/A driven by an Arcam Delta 250 CD transport and shortly after that the Heybrook P2 power amplifier was replaced by a Sirius D100 stereo power amplifier, which provided a more solid bottom end. Sirius later changed their name to Gamut.

A dCS Purcell upsampler was added about 2001.

A couple of years ago I had Tim de Paravicini rebuild the electronics in a Technics RS1500 tape machine I brought back from Japan. My love of tape machines remains unabated. I just need some tapes worthy of Tim's work. When I visited the reviewer Janine Elliot I nearly fell over my tongue when she showed me her collection of Sony, Revox and Ferrograph machines. Being invited upstairs to see a tape machine collection was quite a new experience. One normally expects such an invitation to be to view etchings...

I have not done much to my system for several years now, as I am more interested in enjoying music than swapping out boxes. After 30 years of trouble free use, the Heybrook C2 is due to have the capacitors replaced with high quality ones I bought in Japan recently. I just need to find the time to do this. I have also had a number of rather good loudspeakers from a German company who I am not allowed to name.

What component/product do you miss the most/wish you had never got rid of?

None. I still have nearly everything!

Best system (or single component) you have ever heard (no brands you represent please...!)

The system that I have the most vivid memory of was one I heard at a dealer in Holland. I had been set up by a chap called Harry van Dalen, who had exceptional system set-up skills and comprised Avalon speakers, Spectral pre and power amplifiers and a Marantz CD player. It was exceptionally musical and even CDs that were clearly not good recordings sounded good. Spectral is a very underrated amplifier maker, which is a shame as they really very, very good. Part of the problem is that people expect a high-end amplifier to have a big box. They need to listen with their ears and not their eyes. This is a problem

I have encountered time and time again in my time in the industry and this applies to dealers and reviewers as much as it does to end users.

The state of the industry

What's your view on the valve renaissance of the past 20 years or so? I am quite pleased to see this. Ultimately what we should be aiming for is to recreate a musical performance with our hi-fi system that is emotionally involving, because emotion is the essence of a musical experience and without we just have noise. As long as we can achieve this, then the technology involved is irrelevant. I have heard very expensive systems that have left me cold and I have heard very modest ones that put a smile on my face. You have to listen with your ears and not prejudice.

What are your views on the state of the industry/where is it going/what will it look like in 5 years/what will typical systems look like?/What will happen to prices?/What will happen to the high end – will it carry on regardless?

I really wish I knew the answer to this. I expect we will see more streaming, as a greater proportion of users will only have grown up with downloads and will not own much if any physical media. Advances in technology will probably mean that the digital end of this will become cheaper.

I also expect to see more class D amplifiers as these improve and become more accepted by high-end users. Prices may also fall here, especially if makers don't go for elaborate metal work. This can be a significant part of a build cost.

I think vinyl will remain popular for some time as it is being picked up by a lot of young people. It is a niche market, but a viable one none the less.

The market for top-level high-end products has decreased significantly during my time in the industry, but some of the slack may be picked up in China and other new economies. I don't think we will see the boom of the 1980s again, but I would love to be wrong.

What are the industry's biggest con(s)?

I suppose expensive cables. There are some excellent cables that cost a lot of money and if they are used in a system with very high performance components they make sense. Just as you would put very expensive tyres on a high performance car, as this is the only way to

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extract that last bit of performance. It is however very easy to take low cost materials, cover them in a fancy jacket, add impressive looking connectors and market them with a load of mumbo jumbo. You have to judge them by what they do.

The way you work

Presuming the measurements are fine, what do you listen for when assessing products?

Does the music sound relaxed and natural? If you listen for long periods is there any sense of fatigue or anything that is unsettling? Are the elements that make up the sound of an instrument present and in the same place, rather than being spread out?

Your sound preference - ‘Smooth, listenable musicality’, ‘forward, driving, ‘foot-tapping’, involving sound’ or ‘detailed neutrality and transparency’?

I want a performance that is natural and musical and does not leave me fatigued. I want to be able to listen to the various instruments, but also to be able to listen as a whole: just as one might in a real concert.

Your preference - Full-range floorstanders or freestanding mini monitors with a sub?

Full-range floorstanders.

It’s all about the music, man...

What is your favourite recording?

I cannot say that I have one particular favourite. I will keep coming back to one disc for a while and then something else will take my fancy and so on. I like variety. I have an old LP of the Elgar Violin Concerto played by Jacqueline du Pre that I find very uplifting. I am a big fan of Elgar. That’s why the first *dCS* audiophile D/A was called the Elgar. When I worked in Japan I found that not many people had heard of Elgar. Knowing that this would be one of the main markets for *dCS* audiophile products I thought that by

naming the first one after Elgar I could do something about this.

Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings

I have just the one that I really trust which is a sampler made for *dCS* by the Dutch recording engineer Bert van der Wolf. Everything is recorded in real acoustics with just two microphones, using first class musicians, minimal editing and no eq.

What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures

The only slightly embarrassing recording is a very old CD by a Japanese group called the Folk Crusaders. The title loosely translates as “I Came Back Drunk” and is in the style of a Japanese version of the Chipmunks.

It’s about a man who goes to heaven after getting drunk and being killed in a car accident. When he gets there he enthuses about how pretty the girls are and how good the sake is. This causes him to be kicked out after being told to behave. At the end there is a faux Buddhist funeral chant which lapses into, “It’s been a hard day’s night”. I used to put this on at shows when I saw people from Japanese makers come into the room. First they would stop and look puzzled, as if wondering if they were really hearing what they thought they were hearing and then most would laugh. One of the members of the band was Kazuhiko Kato who later founded The Sadistic Mika Band. They had their own very enjoyable style of Japanese rock and are well worth a listen. Sadly Kato is no longer with us, but he left a large

body of recorded work.

Having safely ushered your loved ones out of the house as it is burning down to the ground, you ignore all standard safety advice and dash back inside to grab just one recording – what is it?

I really cannot think of an answer to this question, as there are so many recordings that I treasure.



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