

Hifi Pig Magazine

WWW.HIFIPIG.COM

January 2014
Issue #2



A DAY WITH CABASSE



Exclusive interview with Holger Fromme of Avantgarde Acoustics

REVIEWS

Pluto, Van de Leur, Monster, Isotek, Resonance Labs, Wireworld, Tellurium Q

PLUS Editorial, Reader System, Dealer System, Album Reviews, Albums of the Year...

WIN

**CHORD COMPANY SPEAKER CABLES WORTH £750 plus
AKIKO TUNING STICKS**

Tellurium Q®

Audio products designed
to combat phase distortion



The return of the Claymore!

"I've talked a lot about Tellurium Q of late. I've also sung its praises constantly. To be honest, I wish I had something to grump about, it would make a change but when a company gets a series of products "this right" it is difficult to say anything negative."

Paul Rigby, HiFi World 2012

"A certain magic when it comes to absolute sound quality"

Jimmy Hughes, Hi Fi Choice 2012

Power amp Product of the Year 2012
Mains cable Product of the Year 2012
Cables, amplifiers and the unexpected!

"Whatever you do, don't audition the Ultra Black. As I said before, once you do, there's no going back."

Steve Dickenson, Hi Fi Plus 2010

"The Iridium mines details other amplifiers only dream about"

Noel Keywood, Editor, HiFi World 2012

Power amp Product of the Year 2012
Power cable Product of the Year 2012

hi-fi+ Products of the Year 2010



Hi Fi World
Cable of the Year 2010

Hi Fi Choice
2012 ★★★★★

Jan 2011
Jan 2013

HiFi Plus
RECOMMENDED

2010
2011
2012
2013

HI-FI WORLD
VERDICT



www.telluriumq.com

+44 (0)1458 251997

Hifi Pig Magazine

January 2014 Issue 2

www.hifipig.com

Telephone: +33 (0)2 97 23 70 78

E mail: Stuart@hifipig.com

Siret - 488 244 898 00018

Well what an interesting year it's been for us here at Hifi Pig. We celebrated our first birthday in February, attended our first Munich High-End in May, have seen some really great products come and go through our listening room's door and have encountered lots of great new music too. Last month saw the launch of the first of our Free PDF magazines and it has been incredibly well received by readers and industry figures alike.

This month we visit the well known French loudspeaker manufacturer Cabasse, interview the head honcho at Avantgarde Acoustics and review some great new products.

We hope you continue to enjoy reading Hifi Pig and I'd like to wish you all the very best for the coming year.

If you have any comments you'd like to make or have any questions then [let us know](#).

Stuart Smith

WIN

Chord Company's

Epic Reference Loudspeaker Cables worth £750 plus Akiko Tuning Sticks. [CLICK!](#)



CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

4 Editorial

9 Readers System

12 Dealers System

15 Cabasse Visit

REVIEWS

22 Pluto Ultimate Loudspeakers

27 Van de Leur 002 Pre and 402 Power Amps

34 Monster iSport Freedom Headphones

38 Isotek EVO Mains Cable

40 Resonance Labs Herus DAC/Headphone amp

46 Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable

48 Tellurium Q Claymore Integrated amp

45 COMPETITION Win Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables worth £750 and Akiko Tuning Sticks

52 REVIEW LINKS

55 ALBUM REVIEWS

57 ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

59 BEHIND THE BRANDS with Holger Fromme of Avantgarde Acoustics

SUBSCRIBE TO HIFI PIGS FREE MONTHLY MAGAZINE BY FOLLOWING THIS [LINK](#) AND SIGNING UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

The World of WAF? By Linette Smith

There is a lot of talk at the moment about WAF, in fact it has become a bit of a buzzword in the audiophile community, we use quite often ourselves in HiFi Pig....but is it really an accurate term to use....or is it just a teensy bit patronising to women?

So for starters, what is WAF?

The acronym stands for Wife Acceptance Factor or Wife Approval Factor. A bit of internet digging reveals that Larry Greenhill first used the term "Wife Acceptance Factor" in September 1983, writing for Stereophile magazine, but Greenhill credited fellow reviewer and music professor Lewis Lipnick with the coining of the term and Lipnick himself traces the origin to the 1950s. Lipnick's wife, actress Lynn-Jane Foreman, suggested the term Marriage Interference Factor (MIF) and thought that audiophile husbands shower their wives with expensive gifts of holidays and jewellery to offset their purchases.

HiFi isn't the 'boys club' that it used to be, so perhaps using terms like WAF isn't right any more.

What do we actually mean by WAF?

HiFi never used to be very attractive. Most things were black or metallic boxes and tended to have wires and valves sprouting from them...loudspeakers were big and cumbersome and none of it was particularly attractive.

Back in the day, telling someone that you were an Audiophile would cause either raised eyebrows (them) and a hasty explanation of what an Audiophile was (you) or they would just regard you with the kind of pity usually reserved for trainspotters or twitchers.

If you, the Audiophile, wanted to get a set of loudspeakers that sounded incredible but that were large and imposing enough for you to be buried in them, you were going to have a hard time convincing your wife to let them in the house unless you were prepared to do a LOT of grovelling and present buying.

There was no Wife Acceptance so their WAF was very low.

Jump forward to the present day where HiFi has evolved, not only in sound quality but in its looks. You could take your pick from a whole range of loudspeakers that look stunning and will add to the beauty of your home, or that are small and discreet enough not to cause offense...so their WAF is high.

But surely the HiFi market has changed and the people that are buying high-end HiFi are not just the traditional Audiophile who wants to drag his purchase back to his 'man cave'. People are a lot more interested in technology and in hearing their music played back in the best way possible...and



those people are both male AND female.

So, why do I think that using the term WAF is patronising to women?

For starters, there are a lot of women involved in the HiFi industry at every level. From women organising the company finances, to women who are at the cutting edge of technology, designing and engineering the HiFi of the future.

Yes, it is a male dominated business, but women are there and we are coming to the fore and making our voices heard.

Using the term WAF is a bit like going into a bar and telling the barman 'I'll have a pint, and a white wine for the lady please'. Maybe we don't want a white wine....maybe we actually want a pint too!

It's the same with HiFi, we are quite capable of making our own decisions about what we like the

look and sound of...and what we fancy trying.

HiFi isn't the 'boys club' that it used to be, so perhaps using terms like WAF isn't right any more. I am sure I am not alone in this; there must be loads of female audiophiles out there, whether (like me) they have got into HiFi because their partner has introduced them to it or just got into it under their own steam. Yes, we might well really like a product that is traditionally 'high WAF'...but then we may well fall in love with some massive valve monoblock amps and a huge set of impractical horns!

I recently really fell for the Roksan Oxygene kit that we had in for review.... very high WAF products. Sleek, stylish easy to use and with a great sound, but I didn't like it just because of its

WAF; I liked it because it worked perfectly and looked great. Our teenaged son loved it for exactly the same reasons and I am sure that people are buying the Oxygene range because it gives high quality sound in a lifestyle friendly package.

So perhaps using WAF is just missing the point?

Perhaps we need to come up with a different term for 2014, one that explains that a product is well designed, easy to live with, great to look at and amazing to listen to; that it will enhance your home and life but without being too obtrusive.

These kind of products appeal to the style conscious youth as much as the style conscious older audiophile. And to men as much as women.

So what will be the new WAF?
Answers on a postcard

please.....I'm sure that someone will coin a new and catchy phrase soon...

Having noticed that there seems to be a lot of women either in the HiFi Industry or just into HiFi, but not a lot of women using HiFi forums, I thought it would be a good idea to set up a Facebook group... there are a lot of Audiophile groups so this one is just for females, it's very new but hopefully it will take off and become a place where we can exchange ideas and have discussions in a female friendly environment.

I also hope that we can use it to organise meet ups at various HiFi shows in the future.

So, if you are female, into HiFi or in the HiFi industry come and join in at our new dedicated [Facebook page](#).

The Devious Audiophile

by Stuart Smith

...most of us have to share our environment with other people, not least 'She Who Must Be Obeyed'

This article was first published in October 2012 but I thought it a suitably tongue in cheek response to the above article.

If you are paying large sums of money for a piece of high-end hifi then it is perfectly reasonable to assume that some thought has gone into the way that the kit performs on an aesthetic level as well as, of course, into its audio performance.

We live in a world where there is increasing emphasis on the home

and the way it reflects the home-owners personal lifestyle choices and as a result product design in every sphere, not just hifi, is becoming ever more important. Gone are the days when a loudspeaker manufacturer could simply do the maths, ponder the physics and then put together a box of suitable proportions, pop in the drivers and then sell it to the audiophile masses. Whilst to the seriously committed audio enthusiast the bottom line will be "how does this product sound", to a growing number of people great



sound needs to be complemented with great looks.

Of course, there is no accounting for taste and what may appeal to one person and their sense of style, may be abhorrent to another individual and their idea of what looks desirable.

Editorial

High-end audio and audiophilia is, for the large part, a male dominated diversion, but most of us have to share our environment with other people, not least 'She Who Must Be Obeyed' (SWMBO) and so the 'Wife Acceptance Factor' (WAF) can play a major function in what bits of audio and hifi equipment are sanctioned as being suitable to cross the threshold and make their way into the family home. For the solitary audiophile all this is of little consequence and, if they so choose, they are free to import whatever piece of equipment into their man-cave they so wish.

I know that I've pushed her aesthetic sensibilities just that one pace too far and quickly retract my application for permission to introduce said item.

Now I'm very fortunate and had the good sense to carefully select a mate who allows pretty much anything hifi, however hideous into the house, though the line has been drawn on some items even with her. A simple "No" and I know that I've pushed her aesthetic sensibilities just that one pace too far and quickly retract my application for permission to introduce said item. The first rule is to know how far you can push it and to push it no further if you want to maintain a harmonious living arrangement. Push it too far and the home can become a discordant environment and your listening pleasure will (I assure you) be compromised.

Some Audiophiles develop certain strategies to gain acceptance for a particular item of kit that has been beaten with the ugly stick and the

main tactic goes something like this:

1. Audiophile sets his heart on item X that he knows has low WAF and knows that his life will not be worth living unless he acquires said item and manages to install it in the front room of the house.

2. Audiophile does not mention to SWMBO that his heart is now set on item X and goes out and buys or loans an even uglier item Y.

3. Item Y is stored out of site, a garage is good for this purpose,

and only installed in the home when SWMBO is out for the day. The truly astute audiophile will send his beloved out for a special days pampering at Rancho Relaxo, or some other spa by way of ensuring that he has the best chance of securing success with his Machiavellian undertaking.

4. SWMBO returns from Rancho Relaxo and is greeted by a pair of loudspeakers the size of a small shed, constructed by a team of trained orangutans and so loathsome and repugnant that not even their mothers would love them.

5. All the pampering seems to have been for nought and the lady of the house seems to have been possessed by a demon whose only utterance seems to be a guttural (and somewhat menacing) "get that piece of crap out of my house

now!", but no...this is all part of the wily audiophiles plan.

6. Audiophile looks somewhat dejected and compliant and says to SWBO "You are, of course, absolutely right and what was I thinking? I'll remove these carbuncles from your sight with immediate effect!"

7. Carbuncles Y are removed to previous hiding place.

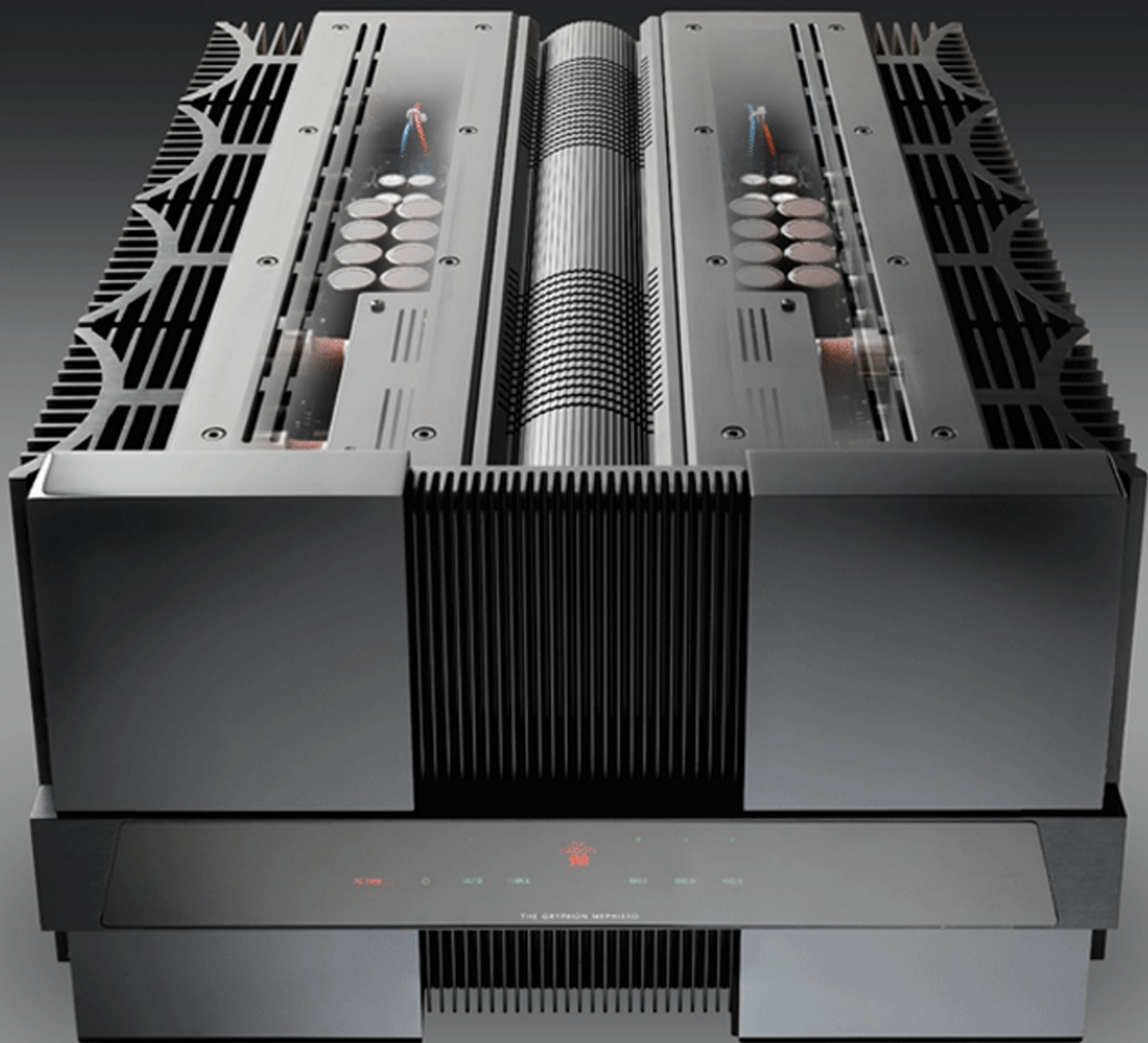
8. The next day the devious audio enthusiast loads the offending items into the car/van and returns them from whence they came, loads up original item X from the shop, drives them home, waits until SWMBO is out for a short while and installs them in the living room, safe in the knowledge that his plan is about to come to fruition in a wholly acceptable manner for everyone involved.

9. SWMBO returns to find husband stood next to new item X freshly installed and playing calming music and then utters the words that he has been longing to hear "Now don't they look so much nicer than those monstrosities you had in here yesterday. Make me a cup of tea and I'll have a listen to them.

10. Our intrepid hero retires to the kitchen to prepare a refreshing brew with a big grin on his face and a new bit of kit in his set up.

Of course all the above nonsense can be successfully avoided if you accept that certain concessions will have to be made from the outset, but the truth is that these days there is so much really beautiful looking kit out there to suit every palate that you can have your cake and get to eat it too.

THE GRYPHON



GRYPHON MEPHISTO

www.gryphon-audio.dk

"THE ULTIMATE REAL WORLD TONEARM"

HI FI WORLD MAY 2009

The most advanced tonearms?

Multi-award winning Origin Live tonearms make an enormous difference to vinyl replay, over conventional arms due to their leading performance. This lead has been well documented by reviewers and owner comments.

The secret of such performance lies in an extraordinary depth of research. Origin Live designs eliminate resonance, employ high strength materials, and unique low friction, dual pivot bearings. The critical low level electrical signal path is optimized, with the highest grade wiring and elimination of all mechanical joints - a meticulous attention to detail, in every aspect of the design produces the incredible levels of transparency and outstanding "true to life" performance that Origin Live arms are renowned for.

Why not experience outstanding improvements to all aspects of music, by owning one of these arms? See Origin Live web site for full information and reviews.

"So far ahead of the pack looks about to lap them" **STEREO TIMES**



Winner of Analogue of the Year prize 2009 **FIDELTA DEL SONO (ITALY)**

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



Winner of Stereo Times magazine Most wanted component of 2007 award

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

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

"Price tag is laughably low...could probably charge 5 times this amount...words can't express how good this is - one of the designs of the decade." **HI FI WORLD**



6 Moons Awards



Voted best sound
at Vienna show



World Awards

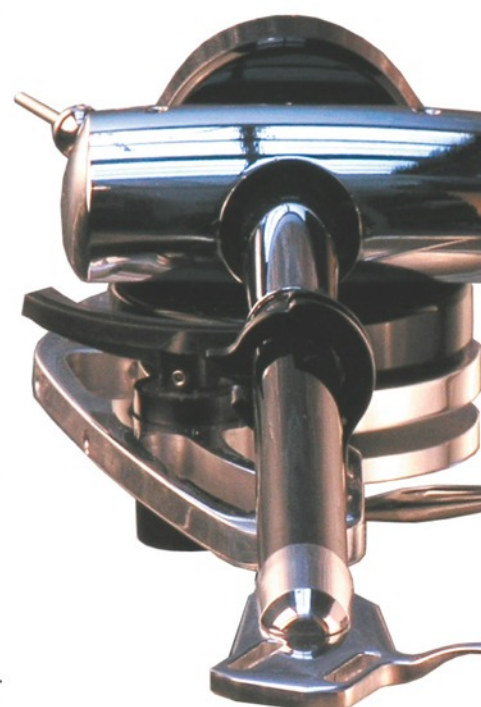


Stereo Times Awards

Origin Live Ltd Tel:-02380 578877

E-mail:- originlive@originlive.com

Web site:- www.originlive.com



READER SYSTEM



Steve Petch is a health professional living in the North East of England. He has played keyboards all too briefly for a Prog band in the mid to late seventies and has always loved music since childhood. "I'd rise very early in the morning during the sixties listening to my sister's records on an old radiogram". He was bought a Philips cassette player/recorder one Christmas and a year later a Bush stereo system. In 1975 he started serving his Engineering apprenticeship and bought his first real hi-fi system from Comet in Stockton on Tees - Rotel RP1500 turntable, Sansui AU717 amplifier and a pair of Wharfedale Linton 3XP speakers. Since then he's owned some very high end components but it his his passion for music that has precedence. Steve runs his own website aimed at promoting and reviewing new Prog music www.progmeister.com

Steve's current system is a melange of valve and solid state amplification to suppress any hankering he may have for one or the other when the urge arises. Steve spends a lot of his time reviewing Progressive Rock music as well as

enjoying other genres such as jazz fusion, folk, pop, electronic and world music where much of his listening is done via his Exposure XVII pre and XVIII monoblocks. CD is handled via a Naim CD5i CDP which seems to tick all the boxes for him. Having owned high end CDP's in the past Steve says that he lost faith in the format and all its paraphernalia but he kept his faith in all things vinyl favouring instead his Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace/Ace Space Arm which has an Ortofon Kontrapunkt *b* bolted to it at the moment. "The only downside to Nottingham Analogue turntable in my humble opinion is the need to swap the belt over on the spindle when changing speeds" Steve commented. This has prompted him to acquire a second turntable to listen to his collection of 12" and 7" records. "Originally I planned on getting a Technics 1210 until I heard a friend's Lenco. Once I heard the Lenco magic I was smitten and it wasn't long before I acquired one from my friend Neil Blackwood who refurbishes and rebuilds them. I found myself listening more to the Lenco than the Nott's so I recently asked Neil to rebuild it for me and double up the platter. The results are Stunning. I will very likely upgrade the arm from its present Linn Basik+ to a Jelco 9" or 12" in the near future."

Reader System

When the mood takes Steve and he fancies “a little valve magic” he has a Ming Da MC368-BSE behemoth on hand which can be used in triode or ultra linear modes. “When I am in the mood for Susanne Vega, Christine Collister, Capercaillie or Clannad I hit the triode switch, whilst the ultra linear feature sounds great with eighties pop tunes etc”. The phonostage in Steve’s system is also a valve based number in the form of an Eastern Electric Minimax. “I find the Minimax just a little on the lean side, though it suits the dense sound qualities of the Ming Da’s KT90’s and keeps in check the



Naim, Ming-Da and Exposure in Steve's rack.



The whole rig.



Nottingham Analogue and Lenco? Steve's spoilt for choice it would seem.

Reader System

sometimes over enthusiastic presentation of the Exposures” commented Steve.

At the end of the chain Steve uses the Usher Dancer Mini 2 loudspeakers which he says have taken a lot of effort to start sounding somewhere near what he would like to hear from them. “They are a couple of heavy lumps too so moving them around on my lonesome has proven to be rather challenging but now I believe I have them somewhere near perfect for my tastes”.

Speaker cables used are Van Damme Blue speaker cables and interconnects are by Mark Grant. His mains solution is a little off the wall as he uses two distribution blocks, one is an un-switched Olson that Steve rescued from a condemned anaesthetic machine many years ago and had rewired and star earthed Mark Grant. The other is from B&Q’s that again he’s had rewired with Mark Grant mains cable. “As my system stands at the moment I like to think of it as a meld of old and new giving me two ways of listening to music. It allows me to listen to old favourites as well as assisting with my review technique. I see a few tweaks around the corner but for now it’s playing tunes”.



Dealer System

Oxford Audio Consultants

Cantay House, Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1JD

Tel: 01865 790879

shop@oxfordaudio.co.uk

Music Ripper Server Player – Naim UnitiServe
2TB - £2,220

Integrated Amplifier/DAC/Streamer - Devialet 170
Black Chrome - £6,390

Speakers - Sonus faber Olympica II Walnut -
£6,998

Headphones – Sennheiser HD700 - £599

Interconnect – Chord Sarum Digital Tuned ARAY
- £1600

Speaker cable – Chord Signature - £960 (3 metre
pair)

Mains supply – PS Audio P3 Power Regenerator -
£1949, Perfectwave AC-5 Mains cable - £189 x 2
= £378

TOTAL £21,094



our expertise behind the scenes to deliver a great solution”.

Speaking to the guys at Oxford Audio Consultants they say they have a number of key priorities including not being wedded to just a few brands and always exploring new products and if they bring something special introducing them to their range. They’re also keen to point out that they recognise the benefits of new technologies whilst not abandoning proven ones and have a holistic approach to building performance into a system rather than concentrating on one individual great product. They also say they look to offer value rather than price.

The system Oxford Audio have put together makes an elegant solution that should work well in both modern and traditional décor. The Naim UnitiServe will rip CDs automatically in WAV complete with extensive data and happily for the computer-phobic no computer knowledge is required. There’s a free iPad/iPhone app that controls the music and it will play CDs as well. It will serve music files via a digital coaxial cable directly to the Devialet and back up will be done automatically using either a local disk or a NAS drive so there’s no fear of having a catastrophic crash and losing all your precious files.

Oxford Audio Consultants are 25 years old this year so we assume they’re either doing something right or they haven’t been found out yet!

Hifi Pig invited them to put together this month’s Dealer System for a customer who listens mainly to classical, jazz, and music with ‘real’ instruments. Their current main source is CD but they’re interested in moving to streaming plus headphones for late night listening. System is to go in a large living room so must look good.

So what is the overall philosophy of the guys at Oxford Audio?

“We believe choosing hi-fi should be fun - albeit with a purpose. Our aim at Oxford Audio is to enable our customers to enhance their enjoyment of music by providing something special as the means of reproducing it. So the key for us is that the customer knows what he/she likes and it’s our job to find a system that gives them more musical enjoyment. We don’t expound a particular philosophy but rather use

Dealer System

We asked the guys at Oxford Audio to describe the sound of the system for us. "This combination has an exceptionally assured sound with great tonal accuracy and a really gorgeous, tactile solidity. It's a clean, detailed yet thoroughly engaging sound thanks to great timing and all-round coherence. Every nuance is present in a detailed presentation yet one that's not artificially etched and dissected to the point of musical destruction. A piano sounds like a piano". "Soundstage is simply superb, immaculately spread out in all directions and utterly stable. Listening to an orchestra is particularly rewarding with detail and air whilst still retaining the flow and integrity of the music. Play some opera and the many players and singers are there before you, listen to the simplest voice and guitar ballad and the intimacy is immediate". "Bass ticks all the boxes, with extension, weight, and tuning together with an absence of overhang or bloom. Midrange is natural and lifelike, treble is open and pure.

Add that all-important sense of emotional attachment and live jazz sound like you're there in the club. And with the speakers offering increased flexibility of placement in the room, because of the large side firing reflex ports and slanted baffles, achieving a great sound is less problematic than usual".





MAINS CABLES R US

CHRISTMAS "MAN" GIFTS



Knosti Antistat Record Cleaning Kit

Perfect stocking filler with 1000's sold worldwide, cleans your LP's with no fuss.

£39.95



Clearaudio Concept MM Turntable

The concept is a german made turntable complete with arm and cartridge already set up.

£995



Oscars Audio Headphone Stands

Keep your precious cans safe from harm, 7 different designs available.

from £15



Turntable Up-Grades for Technics

MCRU offer many ways to improve your decks performance, please enquire.

from £50



Oyaide MWA-RC

Fit over your empty RCA sockets and hear the improvement.

£15 set of 6



Regulated Linear Power Supplies

MCRU award winning power supplies for DAC's, Music Servers, Streamers etc.

from £195



Vinyl Care Products

We stock record brushes, cartridge cleaners + lots more.

from £5



Clearaudio Goldfinger Cartridge

Solid gold body, simply one of the best sounding cartridges around.

price on application

WWW.MCRU.CO.UK

@Mainscablesrus

/mcrultd

FROM MAINS TO MUSIC

07908 056978

david@mcru.co.uk

Hifi Pig Visits Cabasse



Cabasse have their headquarters on the beautiful South Western coast of Brittany, France. They're a company with over sixty years in the loudspeaker industry so we thought it about time we paid them a visit. Stuart and Linette Smith

A Potted History

Cabasse have a long and interesting history going right back to 1950 when Georges and Elisabeth Cabasse first started repairing and producing drive units in the suburbs of Paris. The company got off to a great start as their launch coincided with the launch of Cinemascope leading to their drivers being used in movie-theatres including the Paris REX.

Their first two-way coaxial driver, the Diphone, was launched five years later and two years after that they opened a sales office in Paris.

The first four-way fully concentric and active system with digital processing was introduced in January 2006 in Las Vegas when La Sphere was premiered to a world audience.

By 1958 the company were building active loudspeakers with active crossovers and valve amplifiers but later in the sixties launched a range of two and three way, solid state, active loudspeakers. A factory at Brest followed in 1960 and this included a 2000m³ anechoic room for development purposes but by '74 a new factory in N France was opened and the Brest site became involved solely in R&D and production of high-end speakers, active speakers for broadcast and home use plus sound reinforcement systems.

In '75 Cabasse launched a range of servo-controlled loudspeakers which offered control of speed and acceleration and by 1980 they were producing honeycomb dome drivers and launched four-way loudspeakers fitted with low-midrange and woofers based on the technology.

A new range of sound reinforcement drivers including tweeters and midrange units fitted with a carbon fibre diaphragm came about in '84 and loudspeakers fitted with these drive units and their honeycomb dome woofers were used in the Omnimax theatre, La Geode in Paris for its 12 channel sound system.

The company's Duocell based drivers were launched in '86 and in '92 Cabasse opened their factory in

Troncais where they combined production of cabinets and drivers with the assembly and control of the speaker systems themselves. This year

also saw the company premiere its SCS technology based on the co-axial three-way TC21 low-mid/midrange/tweeter and by August they gave the first presentation of the Atlantis – a four way active coaxial system that was the flagship of their SCS range.

The DOM40 and DOM30 midrange/tweeters were launched in '96 and in '99 an entry level (MT200 series) with new woofers and DOM20 midrange/tweeters was introduced with the home-cinema market in mind.

This brings us to the new millennium and the launch of the iO system and Jean-François Gautier taking leadership of the company. In 2002 the new Artis range with the TC22 and BC13 drivers was on the market and the company had doubled its turnover in just two years.

The Cabasse Acoustic Centre in Plouzané (where Hifi Pig

visited) opened a year later with a new anechoic chamber, a power test bunker and listening and measuring rooms. Sales, marketing, purchasing and accounting all shared the centre with the R&D department.

Cabasse started a cooperative relationship with international giant Canon in 2004 with Canon becoming a supplier for Cabasse and also assembling speakers such as the iO2 and the Ki.

The first four-way fully concentric and active system with digital processing was introduced in January 2006 in Las Vegas when La Sphere was premiered to a world audience. In October of that same year Cabasse was acquired by the Canon group and determined to help the brand become a major world player in high-end audio.

Rapid expansion has followed and in 2011 at the Munich Hi-End Show Cabasse unveiled L'Ocean, a loudspeaker that combines both coaxial technology and digitised signals from the source to the amplifiers in the speakers and which was the result of three years of close collaboration between Canon and Cabasse.

The Stream 3 active streaming system came in 2012 and the stream family grew in 2013 with the Stream 1 a standalone loudspeaker and streaming source.

Our Visit

When we got the invitation to visit Cabasse we were really very pleased indeed and we saw it as a bit of a milestone in the development of Hifi Pig becoming even more recognised in the industry.

Our afternoon started when we met Christophe Cabasse, Laurence Kerduff and Sylvain Quainon at the company's acoustic centre in Plouzané where after we headed out to lunch at a nice little crêperie overlooking the Atlantic. Returning to the centre we were shown the facilities by Christophe.

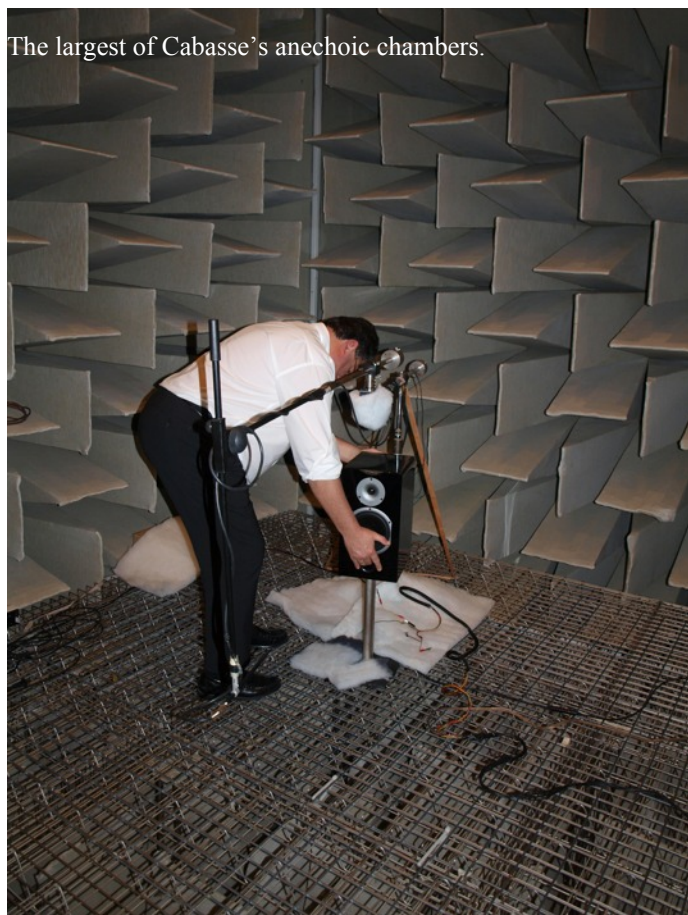
First up we were led to the largest of the company's three anechoic chambers which is treated on all six surfaces and is the place where all the testing of their drivers and loudspeakers takes place. It's clearly a facility that has taken up a good deal of investment and it's very cleverly thought out being isolated from the main building and "floating" separate to it. It's the first time either of us had been in an anechoic chamber and it was an eerie experience for us both. What was nice to see immediately outside the room

was that amongst the computers and high tech gadgetry was a nod to the past in the form of an ancient 1m measuring stick and an old resistor board that both looked like they could have come from the very first years of the company.

The main R&D department was next on the agenda and the company are clearly in the midst of designing something top secret as when we entered everyone was asked to cover their work. Without a doubt these are a talented group of designers and engineers with Bernard Debail having only very recently been awarded the Prix de l'Ingénieur du Numérique de l'année by L'Usine Nouvelle & Industries et Technologies. I made a comment about the size of one of the subwoofers on the floor of one of the offices and was then led to a listening room where we were shown a HUGE sub and told "Now that's a big subwoofer"...and it was (See photograph). These humongous subs were created specifically for home cinema and boast 1000W amps - there is a passive professional version available also..

Next up was "The Bunker" a reinforced, subterranean room where new products are soak tested at the maximum of their power ratings for weeks at a time. Old and it has to be said massive amps are used to drive kit under test and Christophe

The largest of Cabasse's anechoic chambers.



With the design team.

Cabasse



One of the listening rooms and the huge sub for home cinema use.



Christophe Cabasse shows us 'The Bunker'.



In the workshop.

mentioned that they were initially designed by Cabasse (1000 W RMS – load down to 0.2 Ohms) for use in the French navy.

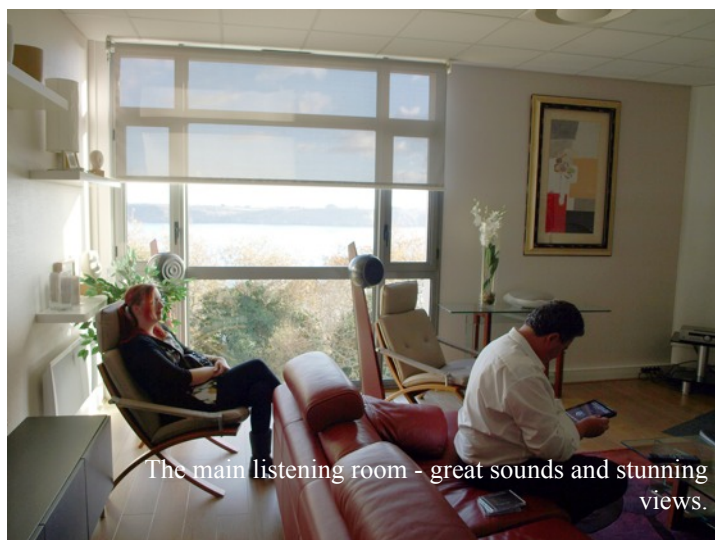
The engineering workshops were visited next where we were shown where their high end drivers are developed and put together. It's an impressive and almost cottage like industry in here ...albeit a very high tech cottage industry. What was really impressive was the range of drive units dating back as far as the 1960s which are used as replacements

for drivers that have failed – most Cabasse drivers come with a lifetime first user guarantee! The final room we were shown was the dedicated listening area which is a purpose built and very comfortable space. Dominating the room were the company's Sphere loudspeakers and both of us were itching to have a listen. The Spheres are a fully concentric, active, four-way loudspeaker that come with eight dedicated amplifiers and a control

amplifier. Sound-wise... Suffice to say Linette now has another pair of loudspeakers on her "If we win the lottery" shortlist (They are €135 000 after all...but that does include Christophe personally flying wherever in the world you are and setting the up to your taste) – Avantgarde Trios with Basshorns and Gryphon Audio Trident II make up the rest of the list. They really do sound great in a very coherent, dynamic and well gelled sense. Move around the room and it's as if you are moving around an auditorium with the stage being fixed directly in one space – difficult to describe but mightily impressive. One particular snare hit on Cabasse's test CD is so powerfully rendered it's as if you're in the room with the drummer –REALLY in the room!!

But it wasn't all high-end and Christophe was keen to demonstrate their new Streamer. It's an unassuming unit that connects to your amp or DAC and allows you to stream Bluetooth or wifi to your hifi. At €350 it's a reasonably priced bit of kit that performs well and sounds very good indeed.

We also had a listen to their streamer with inbuilt speakers which also sounded great – not an audiophile product at all but a great addition to the home if you want music in your kitchen, bedroom or wherever but don't want to go the whole hog. All in all a very enjoyable afternoon and our thanks go out to Christophe, Laurence and the rest of the team at Cabbasse for their kindness and hospitality.



The main listening room - great sounds and stunning views.



The main listening room highlighting the Sphere loudspeakers.

audioemotion

www.audioemotion.co.uk

e: info@audioemotion.co.uk

f: facebook.com/audioemotion

t: 01333 425 999



"With deep resolve and HUGE soundstage size, the AURALiC Vega presents music in a way that's impossible to ignore – it's utterly engaging."

digitalaudioreview.net

AURALiC VEGA



DIGITAL AUDIO PROCESSOR

ORFEO CLASS-A OUTPUT STAGE ■

ACTIVEUSB ADVANCED BUFFER ■

FLEXIBLE FILTER MODE ■

MEGAHERTZ UPSAMPLING ■

NATIVE DSD HANDLING & FEMTO MASTER CLOCK ■

'BEST HIGH-END DAC' - AVTECH MEDIA AWARD 2013/14 ■

only £ 2890

AURALiC MERAiK

400W POWER AMPLIFIER MONOBLOCK



HYBRID ANALOG AMPLIFIER TECHNOLOGY ■

PURER-POWER LINEAR POWER SOLUTION ■

ADVANCED POWER MANAGEMENT ■

ORFEO CLASS-A OUTPUT STAGE ■

only £2090



Music is our Passion

Epiphany Acoustics

Use discount code PIG20
to claim 20% off any order
in December!

Headphone Amplifiers . DACs . Interconnects



EHP-O2 Portable Head Amp



E-DAC 24 bit Miniature DAC



Atratus RCA Interconnects



You can find out more about the ever expanding
award winning range of British Hi-Fi at:

www.epiphany-acoustics.co.uk

Pluto Ultimate Loudspeakers

by Richard Joyce



For my first review on HifiPig I really thought 'Excellent - they'll send me something entirely straightforward like a phono stage, or a small & cheap integrated amplifier' but no. What I actually ended up with was a pair of £2950 omni-directional loudspeakers in gloss red that look as though they're built from drainpipes. In at the deep end? Possibly, but nothing wrong with a challenge.

I'm not new to omnis, having had the chance to try some NVA Cubes a few years ago, and really falling for them, so was rather excited to hear the Pluto

I'll start off by saying that I've had a lot of fun with these

Ultimates.

The PU's are an active speaker, but as opposed to having the power amp(s) built-in, the whole system arrives as a package with its own multi-input integrated amplifier with crossovers contained within. It's also fully controllable via a solid, aluminium remote. About as plug & play as it's possible to get in other words - even down to being

supplied with speaker cables (which are also very neatly made).

The finish on the speakers is impeccable, and the gloss lacquer flawless. Their bases are made from a single piece of aluminium, machined from billet into which the adjustable floor spikes are screwed. Setting up, and having them working, is but a matter of a few short minutes' work - no more than any other conventional amp/speaker combination in fact.

However, setting up the speakers' position within the room takes a lot more time and care although, as with

the Cubes, this can be part of the fun. They're extremely sensitive to position but will reward the

listener's time and effort by telling him/her when it's exactly right - everything clicks into focus quite beautifully. Worth mentioning though that the owner's manual is very specific, and extremely helpful with its guidance on set-up. Follow it closely and you really won't go too far wrong.

Anyway, enough of all that - how do they sound?



The Pluto Ultimates with their amplifier and crossover box in the background

Reviews

I'll start off by saying that I've had a lot of fun with these - it's not all been plain-sailing but that's purely down to me having to think outside the box somewhat (if you'll excuse the pun). They sound best when used in a near-field setting, with the distance between them a good deal greater than that to the listener. They will sound excellent wherever one sits/stands in the room but the true sweet-spot will be obvious.

In terms of balance, they're fairly neutral with strong bass output which goes remarkably deep considering the size of the driver. The strength of it is probably just about the only criticism I can level, and of course different rooms will react differently - our room is quite reactive. The up side of this though is that because the PU's are effectively a sealed box the bass is fast, with extremely well-defined pitch, and even throughout the range. The final few bars of Vaughan Williams Symphony No.5 (1st mov't) have two low notes played against each other - a D & E - which I've rarely heard as separate entities so naturally - they sound clouded on lesser speakers. Another good example is 'Song for Claire' from Dave Weckl's 'Rhythm of the Soul' album - the closing bars have a

bass line, mostly on one note, made up of synchopated patterns which keeps the track alive with musical colour until fade-out. This really needs a speaker with both great timing, and the dynamic clarity to pull it off. On so many other speakers the track just dies away and as a result the listener misses out. Such a shame when there's more to come!

I've spent quite a few hours listening to symphonic wind music, one example being particularly tricky to sound convincing, namely Holst Prelude & Scherzo: 'Hammersmith'. Not only does the piece contain huge dynamic contrasts, but at the start the Tubas/low brass are playing in D minor, but are soon joined by French Horns playing against them in E Major (you'd think it was a recipe for chaos - but Holst is too clever for that). Each of these keys has a very different colour - the Minor is dark, brooding, sinister, yet the Major is much lighter and 'floats' across the top. The Plutos pull this off, keeping the colours separate yet not stripping the sound bare, or artificially detaching them - there's a natural interaction between the tonalities.

I'll lay my cards on the table here by stating I'm not really a soundstage or stereo imagery freak - it's not one of the major aspects I look for when listening to

This box contains the amplifiers and crossovers



music through a hifi system. However, it should still sound natural. Now, I'm not sure if it's down to the Pluto's up-firing main driver (or just a consequence of the design of an onmi in general - the Cubes were the same) but I've really enjoyed - refreshingly so - how instruments which do 'project' (ie some brass instruments) do just that, as of course they should. However, those which don't (eg strings/woodwind) are allowed to breathe in their own space rather than being hurled at the listener - a Violin isn't a Trumpet after all (and vice versa).

In summary, I'll be honest the Plutos had me worried to start with. They look different, some would even say 'challenging', and will definitely need some user-input to get them singing at their best. However, I've had so much fun with them and as a result provided many hours of listening pleasure. They've also (as did the Cubes) opened my eyes to something that whilst different in so many ways, is a speaker which goes about its business in a very natural way and therefore gets a definite thumbs-up from me.

Equipment used:

Pioneer PL-71 turntable/Benz Micro ACE SL
NVA Phono 2 + 2xPSU
MacBook Pro using Decibel Music Player
Sony X303ES CD Player (as transport)
TEAC UD-H01 DAC

Music List (*denotes vinyl):

Vaughan Williams Symphony No.5
(Hickox/LSO)
Shostakovich Symphony No.11
(Haitink/Concertgebouw)*
Holst: Hammersmith (Kosei Wind Orchestra)
Richard Rodney Bennett: Reflections on a
16th Century Tune (Central Band of the
RAF)
Bernstein: Prelude, Fugue & Riffs (Central
Band of the RAF)
Dave Weckl: Rhythm of the Soul
Fleetwood Mac: Tusk*
AC/DC: Back in Black*
The Kings' Singers: Landscape & Time
GRP All-Stars Big Band: 'Live'



Speaker cable inputs.



Getting straight to the point, I was impressed. I very much enjoyed using these cables in my system and they suit my own preference in sonic presentation well.

hi-fi+

Jade Audio's cables are sensitive and delicate souls, not exactly built for the studio. This is a deliberate move on the part of Jade Audio, because the company feels over-engineering of the cable would undermine the performance it gets.

STEREOMOJO
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION

The Moontails present a wide sound stage with the height being on par with my reference cables along with pinpoint imaging. Now comes the all important mid range. Crystal clear moonlight with the speed of a gazelle.

STEREO
— & VIDEO —

Jade Audio

MoonTails



Jade Audio LLC, 18900 Rutledge Rd, Deephaven, MN 55391 - USA



Experience a new, musical sensation with the brand new Jade Audio MoonTails!

Jade Audio has reverse engineered their revolutionary audio cables to build an entry level interconnect with many of the attributes of their all pure Gold Reference cable at an entry level price point. This resulted in the MoonTails. Discover them now!

Dealer inquiries welcome! Contact: JD MacRae - E-mail: jadem6@hotmail.com - Phone: 952-404-2090 - www.thejadeaudio.com

Van de Leur 002 Preamplifier and 402 Power Amplifier by Stuart Smith



Van de Leur Audio is a relatively young company with just two products in their portfolio – the 402 power amplifier and the 002 preamplifier. Both products are designed and hand-built in Holland and the power amplifier is of a class D design using Hypex modules, whilst the preamplifier uses valves. Both units come with a five year guarantee and arrived double boxed and very well packed.

Cranking up the volume you get more of the same and you get the impression that the amplifier is barely even breaking a sweat

We first bumped into Pim Van de Leur on the last day of the Munich High end show, but we never got more than a cursory listen in less than ideal conditions to what looked like very interesting first products from a young, vital and funky Dutch

company. You only need to take a look at the company's website to see they're setting themselves apart from the often straight-laced high-end branding that is prevalent.

002 Preamplifier

The 002 preamplifier certainly looks the part with its brushed aluminium fascia, hefty carrying handles and "Van de Leur" engraved top plate. On the front you get a large volume control knob, source selector, a funkyly lit on/off button, a balance control knob and a headphone output.

Move around to the back and you have

four line inputs, a home theatre pass through and inputs for both moving coil and moving magnet cartridges – when ordering the 002 you will be asked the MC cartridge brand and model you intend to use and the unit will be set specifically for this cartridge.

Reviews

The moving coil input uses Vanderveen MC10 step up transformers. You get outputs for power amp, record and direct out for connecting to another pre/processor.

All in all the 002 is a very well equipped preamplifier and the included infra-red remote is weighty and well made with just volume up and down buttons.

Tubes used are two E88CCs for the line stage, four 12AT7s for the phono stage and wiring throughout is silver.

Plug the pre in to the mains and the on/off button glows red. Press it and it glows light blue whilst the preamp sets itself up and then brighter blue when ready to use – set up takes a few seconds. Nice!

402 Amplifier

The 402 power amplifier matches the looks and styling of the 002 preamplifier perfectly and the

pairing certainly looks handsome and purposeful on the rack. On the front you get an on/off switch, whilst round the back you have switchable inputs for RCA and balanced XLR. Now this struck me as a bit of an odd one – clearly the 002 and the 402 were created to work together but the preamp doesn't have the option for balanced XLR output. You also get a pair of Audio Note silver plated speaker connectors which will accept banana or spade connectors.

The amp is dual mono, delivers 2 x 400 watts via its Hypex modules and inside looks very clean and tidy.

...the pairing certainly looks handsome and purposeful on the rack.

Let's Have a Listen

Naturally the sensible thing to do here is to listen to the preamp and the amp together as they were made to compliment each other. Straight into the main system they go with the VAD DAC, the usual vinyl

Van de Leur Pre and Power - formidable looking Guy Fi.



front ends and the hORN Mummys. First up is an album that's hardly been off the CD player since it arrived and Sano "Sano". Bass is deep, bouncy and well controlled with the stereo mix being fairly wide and with good depth - sound effects do jump out from the mix as they should. The overall character is

If you enjoy an accurate portrayal of the studio mix then you'll love this pairing as there seems to be very little added or taken away.

quite "analytical" and very accurate and dynamic which may not be to everyone's taste and I think this is down to the nature of the Class D amp, but the pre-amp does seem to be tempering this Class D-ishness a tad. Cranking up the volume you get more of the same and you get the impression that the amplifier is barely even breaking a sweat – given its quoted output it certainly shouldn't be.

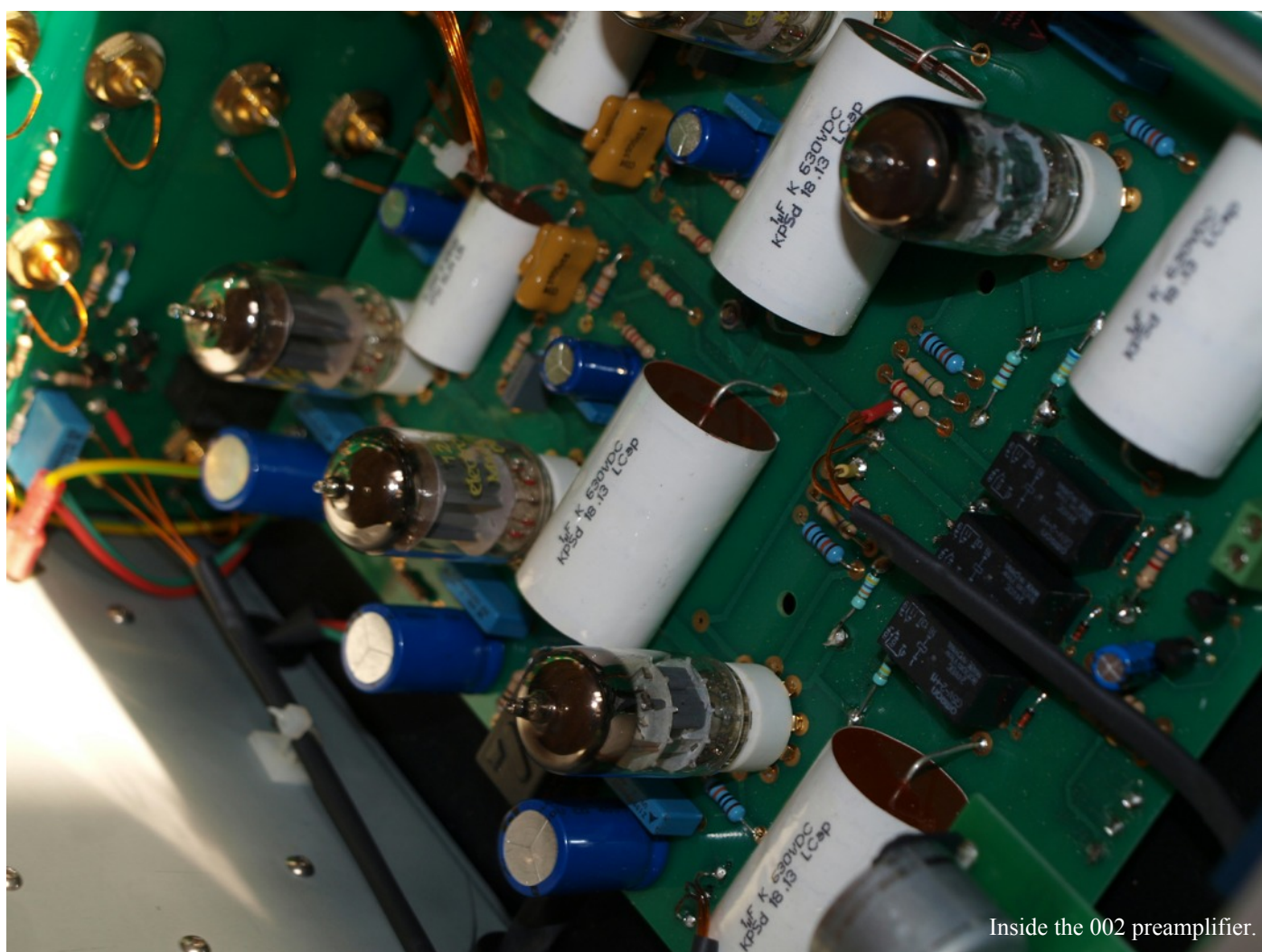
Popping on "Apostrophe" by Zappa you get the vocal very much centre stage and slightly forward in

the mix. Lead guitar has good attack and decay and is fast in that not lingering in the air kind way that I hate. Instrument separation is very good with instruments being positioned left to right and back to front correctly. Where the Black Pearl integrated we reviewed recently was quite "warm", with the Van

De Leur you seem to get what is on the recording without a great deal of embellishment – some will enjoy this whilst others may find it not to

their individual tastes. I suppose like a lot of things we all have our own personal way of preferring how things are done – and the World's a better place for it! The Van de Leur amplifier certainly could never be accused of being warm in its character; it's very matter of fact "here's what you gave me and that's what you'll get".

If you enjoy an accurate portrayal of the studio mix then you'll love this pairing as there seems to be very little added or taken away. There is certainly plenty



Inside the 002 preamplifier.

Reviews

of detail in the sound and with “Cosmic Debris” you really can hear everything that’s in the recording – it just hasn’t got that X factor for my taste – some will say that the X factor I’m referring to is an artifice and shouldn’t play a part in true high-fidelity audio reproduction anyway.

On Vibert/Simmonds’ “Rodulate” there is a real power to the music with the machine drum hats sounding just like they do on the actual drum machine. Here I found myself thinking that this would be the perfect amplifier to have in the studio. Bass is deep and powerful and does that stop start thing that I like – no overhang. On complex passages in the mix the pairing is nonplussed and just gets on with banging out what it is presented with without getting befuddled or confused in any way. Sub bass sounds (Room 28 Rap) go LOW and are very well controlled.

I think that what shines through with the Van De Leur pre and amp pairing is that there is an overriding sense of the amp being very much well implemented Class D in that it sounds accurate, fast

and detailed ...but bit lacking in creating an emotional involvement with the music for my own taste. This is all very subjective I’m well aware and I know lots of people will really love the no nonsense approach to the presentation!

Pop the pre in front of the Tellurium Q Iridium power amplifier (SECA) (at around double the price it has to be said) and here things seem to take a leap towards what I’d consider to be a great pairing. Gone is the sound I’d like to hear in front of a pair of monitors in the studio and out comes a fabulous bit of home audio.

Jean Michel Jarre’s “Sessions 2000” simply comes to life and is the best I’ve heard with any pre in front of the Iridium. The detail is still apparent but the preamplifier doesn’t seem to be there only to give the amp a bit of character as it seemed with the Van de Leur amp in the chain.

The Van de Leur pre adds something to the Iridium that has my own preamplifier cowering in the corner, afraid to show its face – musical is the word I’d use I suppose – gloriously musical!

Inside the power amp.



Fat Freddy's Drop again comes to life with "Shiverman" bouncing along in the bass department and being nicely controlled too. The reverbed sound effects come out of the mix in a totally 3D fashion and the soundstage is deep with excellent height. Vocals are very clearly defined as being separate to other instruments and the whole thing is wonderfully coherent in a believable home-audio-experience sense. There is delicacy when it's needed and there is whoomf when it's needed.

Vinyl O'Clock

Switching from CD to vinyl and the MM input using the Wilson Benesch Circle turntable, Origin Live Silver arm, the Cartridge Man Music Maker III and the SECA amp in place you are rewarded with a great sense of the music. Hats are snappy, bass is deep and controlled and vocals just sound right. This is certainly a step up from my Electrocompaniet phonostage I hate to say. Gus Gus "Arabian Horse" is deep in the bass, shimmery in the tops and the mid frequencies bring everything together nicely. Vocals leap out from the mix and are correct in tone. There's

masses of detail and a wide and deep soundstage ...much more so than with my reference pre and phonostage in place.

Time to switch turntables and over to the Technics 1210, Origin Live Silver arm and Audio Technica EV33 Moving Coil cartridge we go. There's a little toggle switch on the back of the preamp to switch between moving coil and moving magnet – it would have been nice to have it on the front, but to be fair I'm sure not everyone who buys this pre is going to be switching between MM and MC every five minutes.

Fleetwood Macs old faithful "Rumours" comes out of hiding and there just seems to be a whole lot more of the record there than I'm used to with my pre/phono combo – lots more detail and on "Second Hand News" and there's an extra layer to the top-end which sounds sublime. "Dreams" is bouncy with the vocal silky and hats sparkling and crisp. I love this album and this is as good as I've heard it sounding anywhere with any pre/phono/amp combo. Guitar strumming is fast and controlled and there's a

The rear of the amp and pre showing a whole host of connectivity.



nagging hi-hat noise that I've honestly never been aware of before. The sound is hugely detailed, delicate and yet powerful. "Songbird's" vocal is wonderfully rendered and the sense of space within the recording is very apparent. Again, as with the MM section of the pre there are certainly no complaints here.

One of the things I enjoyed about the 002 preamp in particular was the inclusion of a full function phonostage and a headphone amplifier.

As a bit of an experiment before the Van de Leur amp and preamp are returned to Holland I thought I'd plug them into the little Concept 20 loudspeakers from Q Acoustics – they're still in the main listening area and firing across the room. Now I wasn't going to bother with this as price-wise this is a complete mismatch...but how wrong I was. There certainly seems to be a bit of a synergy thing going on here. Yes you've still got that overall sense that the amp is Class D but the combination is very pleasing. The amp just seems to grab hold of the little Concept 20s and it drives them really well. Well whoda thunk it – a few hundred quids worth of loudspeakers on the end of €8498 of amp and preamp? Actually I'm a bit gobsmacked by the combo. Bass is rendered tight and controlled on "One Night in Comene" whereas Phantom Limb sounds nice and fast with a lovely velvety rich tone to the vocal. There just seems to be a little more musicality brought out with the 002, 402 and Concept 20 mix than with my Mummy speakers - vocals in particular stand out as being well done, appearing warmer and more rounded, whilst still accurate, but without that analytical feel I mentioned - bass is deep and powerful. There's definitely more of an emotional connection to the music than with my own speakers. Perhaps a bit of clever loudspeaker partnering with the amp is what is needed to bring out the very best from it!

Headphone Time

It's good to see a headphone amp on a pre and this looks like a feature more and more manufacturers are embracing...and that's a good thing for occasional headphone users. There are certainly no complaints from me with regards to the headphone output. It drove all the headphones I plugged into it very well and the sound was good, clean and well balanced.

For most but the diehard headfi fanatic the included output will be more than satisfactory.

Conclusion

Build of both the 402 amp and the 002 preamplifier is of very high

quality and the overall design aesthetics will please many – they manage to pull off that "guy-fi" image whilst maintaining an elegant stance on the rack which will satisfy those in need of keeping domestic bliss. I can see it appealing to those who want to have a fantastic looking bit of kit on display and who want a no nonsense, accurate and powerful reproduction of their music collection.

One of the things I enjoyed about the 002 preamp in particular was the inclusion of a full function phonostage and a headphone amplifier. The phonostage is easily better than my current Electrocompaniet stage and would stand its ground in company of stages up to the £1500 mark, perhaps beyond, I would have said.

In isolation the stand out product here is the preamplifier – it's musical and has a host of features that add to the usefulness and value. When paired together you have a very competent duo that compliments each other very nicely.

The preamp comes in at €4999 and the amp is €3499 which isn't a drop in the ocean by most people's standards, but for your money you get well made, great looking kit that delivers on sound quality. The Class D amp will not be to everyone's taste I am well aware (some folk just don't get the Class D sound whilst others do), but even if you aren't a fan of this implementation you really should give the Van De Leur pairing a serious audition as this is Class D done well.

Roksan is one of the most renowned names in specialist audio with a multitude of international awards to its name. The Oxygene series, being the company's flagship range, incorporates all of Roksan's award-winning sound quality in its stylish housing, resulting in a highly desirable package for our increasingly design-astute customers. The Oxygene sound is full, detailed and involving, truly bringing you to the heart of the music.

UNCOMPROMISING
FLAWLESS
PURE



ROKSAN
OXYGENE
WWW.ROKSAN.CO.UK
TELEPHONE +44 208 900 6801

Monster iSport FREEDOM Headphones by

Linette Smith



Oooh lovely, stuff in the post for me! Monster wanted a bit of a Bird's Eye View of their new Pussycat Doll-fronted headphones....so they rushed a pair over to me, even

To my eyes they look a lot nicer than the much maligned Beats headphones with which I am sure the FREEDOMS will be compared ...

if I am a bit more Madcat Lady than Pussycat Doll!

Now, any of you that have read my reviews before will know that I do put a lot of emphasis on the whole package, not just performance.

I like things to look and feel right and that starts the minute you get presented with the box.

Headphone manufacturers seem to have cottoned on to the fact that it's not just performance focused audiophiles that will be buying their products, the whole Head-Fi market is opening up the world of high-fidelity sound to a broader spectrum of people, people that want the feeling of luxury and quality in

every aspect of their purchase.

The packaging is lovely, well designed and with everything that you need for your headphones including cable, USB charging cable, neat carrying bag and even an antibacterial cleaning cloth.

So it should be because at £240 these are not cheap.

Living up to the packaging the phones themselves look pleasing and, even though they are made predominantly from a rubbery/silicone material, they have a satisfying weight to them, not too heavy but not throwaway plastic tat either.

They feel rugged enough to cope with being folded up and slung in your bag without worry that they will disintegrate!

To my eyes they look a lot nicer than the much maligned Beats headphones with which I am sure the FREEDOMS will be compared – of course Monster used to manufacture the Beats by Dre until the end of 2012.

They fold up rather niftily and also the headband extends if you need it to.

They were never going to be an understated headphone coming from the company that brought us a [£20k gold and black diamond encrusted pair of headphones](#) , but I like bright colours and think that they still manage to look tasteful.

I was concerned that as an on ear rather than over ear headphone these might be a bit uncomfortable.

We have all tried headphones that clamp your skull in a vice like grip and leave your ears feeling like you've been in a rugby scrum but I needn't have worried, the wearability of these headphones is excellent, my ears felt cushioned and cradled rather than clamped.

However, they also fitted snugly and didn't dislodge even with some rather furious head shaking!

They also...and this may seem a trivial thing to non spec wearers, do not interfere with your glasses or push them into your head.

The cocooning feeling is enhanced by the fact that these really do close you off from the outside world, even with no music playing outside sounds are significantly muted...I may just take to wearing these all the time so I can't hear what Stuart is rattling on about!!

The headphones are actually Bluetooth enabled so that you have the choice to use them with the supplied mini jack cable or wirelessly.

The headphones are actually Bluetooth enabled so that you have the choice to use them with the supplied mini jack cable or wirelessly. This means they have to be powered and the battery charges pretty rapidly (under 30 minutes from flat to full) from a USB port using the supplied USB to micro USB cable. Both the micro USB and cable socket are hidden when not in use by little flick up covers.

Monsters iSport FREEDOM headphones showing the 'on ear' controls.



Reviews

The blurb that came with the phones said a 30hr playing time could be expected from 1 charge with up to 100hrs on standby.

So, let's play some choons!

First of all I paired them with the ipod touch to test out the Bluetooth, this was a painless affair.

With the control buttons on the right hand headphone you feel for, rather than look for the buttons....this could be tricky but the layout actually makes it pretty intuitive so that you get the hang of skipping tracks and changing the volume really easily.

You can also turn off the music instantly by hitting the centre button.

I did use the headphones for a while before actually doing some critical listening and really liked the fact that you could leave the ipod where you liked and wander about while listening...also worth noting that there was little or no sound 'leakage' so would be perfect for on public transport too.

With the styling of the phones and the fact that they are designed for 'working out' I expected them to be good with dance music so I kicked things off with a bit of Deadmau5 and >albumtitlegoeshere<.



Linette with the Monsters in place.

On 'Closer', a track featuring the iconic communicating-with-the-aliens 5 note sequence from the film Close Encounters of the Third Kind, the sound was anthemic, good deep bass...possibly a little bass heavy for some people's taste but I rather enjoyed it. Top and mid did not suffer...there wasn't bass and nothing else as I have seen complaints about for other headphones of this kind of genre.

Of course, the ipod meant I was using MP3 but the sound was overall pretty good and bearing in mind that these are designed to be worn when exercising and give you the freedom of Bluetooth wirelessness...it was not a bad compromise.

I ran through quite a bit of dance music from Calvin Harris to Daft Punk and was impressed with what I heard.

I then swapped over to some more acoustic and vocal music, the 2012 Radio 1 Live Lounge CD always sounds well recorded to me, and even on MP3 sounded great on these, Emily Sandé's voice was particularly beautiful and clear and acoustic guitar was a pleasure to listen too. The sound was very natural, which did surprise me.

It is worth noting that I did compare these to the NAD Viso headphones that we reviewed recently, although the NADs are over ear rather than on, they are priced similarly to the Monsters. I found the sound detail slightly better on the NADs but not by much and the FREEDOMS are headphones clearly aimed at a very different market and with extra features.

Wired for sound?

I did try the ipod using the supplied cable but did not notice a difference in the sound quality, though using the cable disables the on ear controls

I then switched to the Hi sound music player to listen to FLAC, going through many of the same tunes I had just heard on the ipod.

Of course the sound was much better, this little music player blew the ipod out of the water when I reviewed it. The sound stage opened up becoming much more 3D and the bass was more detailed, overall very impressive.

I purposefully did not use a headphone amp with them as...well, it kind of defeats the portability purpose that they are designed for; I can't see many people using them with a headphone amp, more

likely straight from the music player on bluetooth.

Would I recommend these headphones? Yes, but with a couple of caveats.

Despite their styling they are not just for the 'yoof', if you are looking for headphones that you can use for exercising and perhaps you travel on public transport a lot they would be really handy...especially if you want great quality sound.

I would not recommend them if you are just going to sit and listen to your home hifi with them, that isn't what they are designed for.

I also did not test them with classical music so can't comment on the suitability there.

Now perhaps I am not the target market for the iSport FREEDOM headphones, I am neither a Pussycat Doll or a Gym Bunny, but I feel that the wearability and comfort of the headphones would suit anybody looking for the convenience of headphones that you can put on and forget about...go for a run or a walk without worrying about getting rained on (or sweaty...no perspiring ears with these!)

To get the maximum performance with them then pair them with a device that can play high quality music files AND has Bluetooth, that way you will get to experience the true freedom that they offer the user.

One tiny little gripe....perhaps a few different colours please, Hifi Pig Pink would be rather fetching.....

A TEEN'S PERSPECTIVE

Harry Smith

As I knew that Monster used to make the Beats by Dre headphones, which I feel don't have a particularly good build or sound quality, I was a little sceptical about how these new Monster headphones would perform.

Monster have extended their iSport range of headphones to the over-ear category with the new iSport FREEDOM, a headphone that offers high performance audio and that is easy to use when doing sport.

As the other reviewer Mrs HiFi Pig (AKA my mum) doesn't do a lot of running, I was asked to test these out as I do frequently run in the local countryside.

The FREEDOM's felt heavy to hold at first but they had plenty of cushioning in the headband so felt very light once over my ears.

The build quality is quite impressive, the main construction feels strong and sturdy and the rubber

used for the ear pads feel's very comforting. They also feel 'airy' and don't make your ears sweat...which is a common problem with many headphones when using them for sport.

The Blue-tooth works very well I was able to connect to my Ipod in under 10 seconds and the battery lasted a long time.

The sound is very good when the headphones are charged, the bass is heavy but unlike the beats by Dre the top end doesn't suffer as much.

However when the battery is flat the sound loses it's oomph and falls short of what I expect from a headphone of this price (around £240). I would make sure to use them charged and switched on, even if using the cable.

All in all the Monster iSport FREEDOM's are a very well built, easy to use, comfortable headphone. I think the styling and the bright colours are great and stand

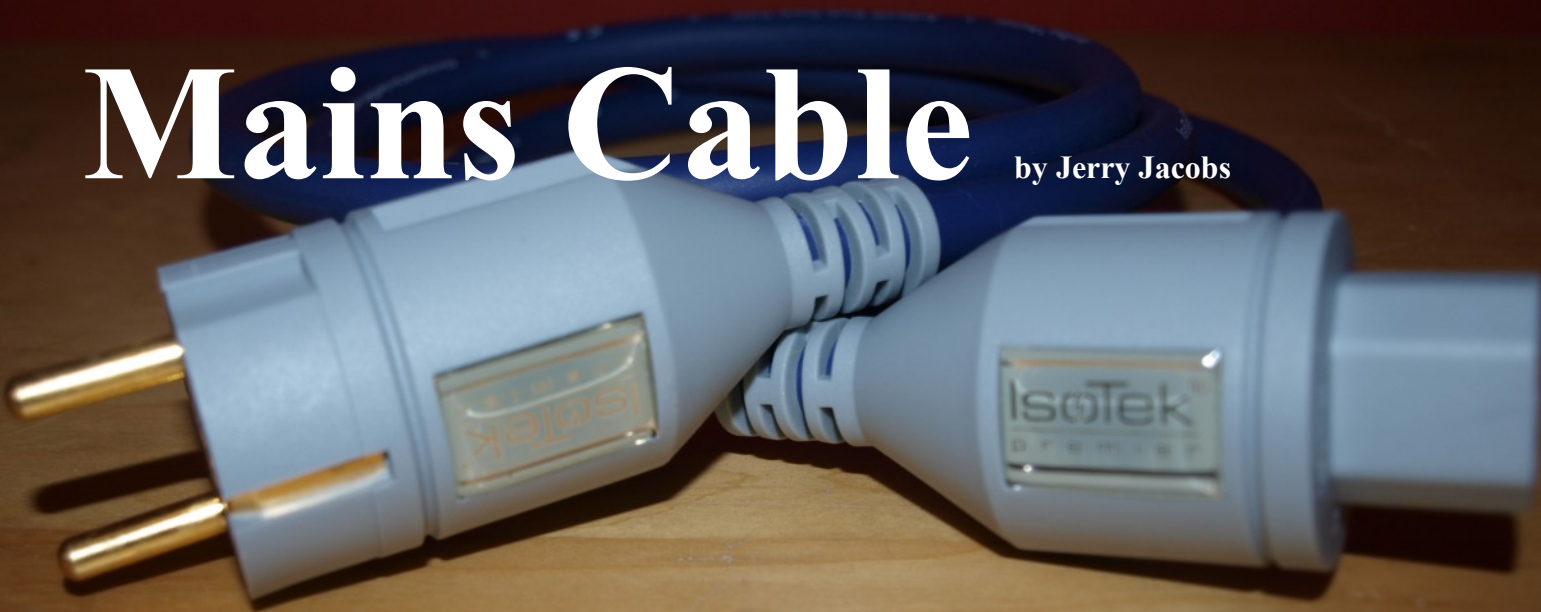


out from the crowd. They look very 'sporty' and trendy, but more individual than some other brands.

I recommend them to anyone who likes doing sport to great sounding music, just remember to keep them charged, which is really simple and remember to plug them in between uses.

Isotek EVO 3 Mains Cable

by Jerry Jacobs



I hadn't planned to review this cable at all, but one was supplied by David Brook at Mains Cables R Us (MCRU) as part of the package with the excellent LongDog Audio VDt1 DAC that I recently reviewed here. Swapping out this mains cable for one of my own favourites produced an unexpected diminishment in sound quality. "Hmm", I thought, "interesting".

Solidity and control, dynamics and resolution, clarity and precision. All seemed to benefit from this cable on the LDA DAC.

At £95 or so for a 1.5m length, reasonably flexible

How can mains cables affect the sound of a component? - I have no idea, but experience demands me to accept that they do.

and looking very well made and presented, this cable is by no means expensive as such things go.

It's available in any configuration of plugs you care to think of, including high current, Schuko, Figure-8, UK 3-pin, US 2-pin etc

Technicalities

Three 2 sq mm conductors made from silver-coated 99.9999% OFC (oxygen free copper) are used to carry the current. The dielectric covering is extruded Teflon and the conductors are given a rotational twist to improve RFI rejection.

A cotton filler reduces microphony and bolsters the internal strength of the cable and a paper wrap is used to secure the construction prior to the application of the flexible PVC jacket

The moulded IEC and three pin mains plugs are designed and made by Isotek, and the solid copper conducting components are coated in 24ct gold.

Comparisons

Ah, the 'sound' of mains cables. One of the more contentious issues in hifi! How can mains cables affect the sound of a

component? - I have no idea, but experience demands me to accept that they do. I could list a discouragingly large number of mains cables that spoil a component's sound for me.

I tend to keep several brands, each with their own sonic characteristics that suit some components but that do not necessarily synergise with others.

Here's a comparison between the Isotek cable and a couple of my established favourites

Nordost Magus (re-branded as Blue Heaven at around

£150 for 1m) has been one of my 'keeper' mains cables for quite a while. As well as looking great with its lovely deep blue outer sheath, it also performs admirably sonically! It has a slightly relaxed but fluid take on the music; there's a natural flow and tonal richness that is very appealing. In comparison to the Isotek, though, it seems a bit too laid back, less tonally neutral and missing out on some of the excitement, boldness and solidity of more rhythmically propelled music.

The Isotek EVO3 Premier sounded closest to my old MusicWorks mains cable, the latest version of which retails at around £350 for a 1.8m length. Similarly controlled and dynamic, it was actually quite difficult to tell them apart on small to medium scale music. When the music really gets going, though, and with higher powered amps like my 250wpc Krell, the benefits of the more expensive cable can be heard as a further expansion of dynamic freedom and heft. With a lower powered amp like a Topping TP-60 27wpc t-amp, or with low powered source components, differences of this kind were marginal at best.

Summary

All 3 of the power cables mentioned here are fine examples of the cable maker's art, and I would happily commend any and all of them to you. The Nordost has a bit more 'flavour', and that may suit your system or preferences. The MusicWorks is similarly neutral, defined and explicit as the Isotek, and is capable of taking a high powered amplifier's dynamic freedom even further - but it also costs several times as much!

So, the Isotek EVO3 Premier power cable is a bit of a no-brainer as far as I am concerned - the benefits of high end power cable design, but without the high price.

So, the Isotek EVO3 Premier power cable is a bit of a no-brainer as far as I am concerned

Equipment used:

Speakers: MBL 116F, Dynaudio Excite X14, Waterfall Audio Victoria Evo Power Amps: Atoll AM-80, Topping TP-60 and Krell KAV-250a

Pre-amp: Restek Consens

Source: Vincent CD S7 CD Player.

Signal cables: RFC Pluto & Oscar's Audio Dark Knight i/c and Tellurium Q Black speaker cables.

Mains cables: Nordost Magus, MusicWorks



A bit of a no brainer says Jerry Jacobs

Resonessence Labs Herus DAC and Headphone Amp

by Danny Worth



Mark Mallinson is President of Resonessence Labs and along with his brother Martin, launched the company in 2009. Prior to this Mark was the Operations Director for ESS Technology where his team was responsible for the design of the company's Sabre Audio DAC chips. Mark left ESS in 2009 to start Resonessence Labs...a coincidence?... Mark laughed and said 'not really!' The brothers saw a business opportunity. Sabre Audio products from ESS are now employed in many high end systems, but back in 2009 Mark

manufacture, assemble and test our all of our products locally.'

Resonessence Labs' products are 'Field Upgradeable' giving the end user the ability for hardware and software tweaks and changes, which presents interesting options for those in the know and with the required skills.

Review Overview

I have a few options in the way I could use the £299 Herus in my system:

The presentation of the sound was crisp and clean, with a great openness to the vocal...

and Martin noticed that some audio companies were not doing a particularly good job of designing the chip into their products and felt that they could do better. Resonessence launched their first Audio DAC product, [Invicta](#) in 2011 and now have 6 DAC products ranging in price from \$350 CAD to \$4,995 CAD.

Mark states, 'Our goal is to produce audio products that we can all be proud of. To this end we design,

range of different headphones to throw into the mix.

- Secondly I planned to use the Herus as a standalone DAC feeding the Icon Audio HP8 valve headphone amp.

- Lastly as standalone DAC into my main rig.
- I also have a few different USB cables ranging from the modest in price Chord Silver Plus and Wireworld Starlight 7 to the more expensive Tellurium Q Black Diamond and another option the

- As intended from a USB source such as the Mac or Squeezebox Touch (SBT) then with an iOS and Android tablet (Resonessence claim compatibility with IOS and Android devices) with a

Astintrew Concord which has a split data and power cable.

Using the Herus as intended (as a combined DAC and headphone amplifier)

Firstly was to use the Herus fed by the USB of my SBT using the free 'Enhanced Digital Output' software. Plug in the Herus (red backlit logo) and enter the Audio settings on the SBT, navigate to the Digital Output menu (where the Herus now shows up as a selectable device), a quick click and the SBT reboots with the Herus showing as the device ready for use (now a blue backlit logo on the Herus to inform the user of lock on). I plugged in a pair of AKG K702's into the device and the Chord Silver Plus USB and unchecked the fixed volume control on the SBT in order not to damage the headphones - the Herus as it has no volume control itself and is fixed at full output. Without going into all the techy details, basically the source's volume control becomes obsolete and the on screen volume slider actually is the Herus' internal volume which is transposed onto the screen so to speak.

I began to play some Stevie Nicks. The presentation of the sound was crisp and clean, with a great openness to the vocal, a typical sound for these headphones I felt. I continued to play on through some more vocal and acoustic based albums from the likes of Chris Jones, Norah Jones and Jack Savoretti concluding that the Herus was extremely transparent to the character of the source and headphones, but I was concerned that the top end was a little too sharp and the headphones, although extremely revealing

even with the Icon valve amp, has a tamer top end which can be exploited and refined to expose some beauty in the detail and so I tried swapping out the Chord USB for the Wireworld Starlight 7.

Playing Annie Lennox's 'Little Bird' proved that a simple change of the cable calmed down a slightly spittier response, yet still retained the source's character along with the revealing presentation of these headphones. I have a tendency to listen to headphones very loud, not great for the lug-holes but it's a fetish of mine. Even if it's late at night and I'm just intending to play some gentle background type music within 6 or 7 tracks the volume is cranked right up, so for me at louder volumes I need to be able to hear the clarity of a track especially with these cans, otherwise it's headache time after a while. The Herus in this respect came across to me fantastically, the amplifier inside is very powerful and belies the units size, driving these headphones to volume levels I really never expected, distorting minimally as the full volume was nearly reached and remaining clean and neutral.

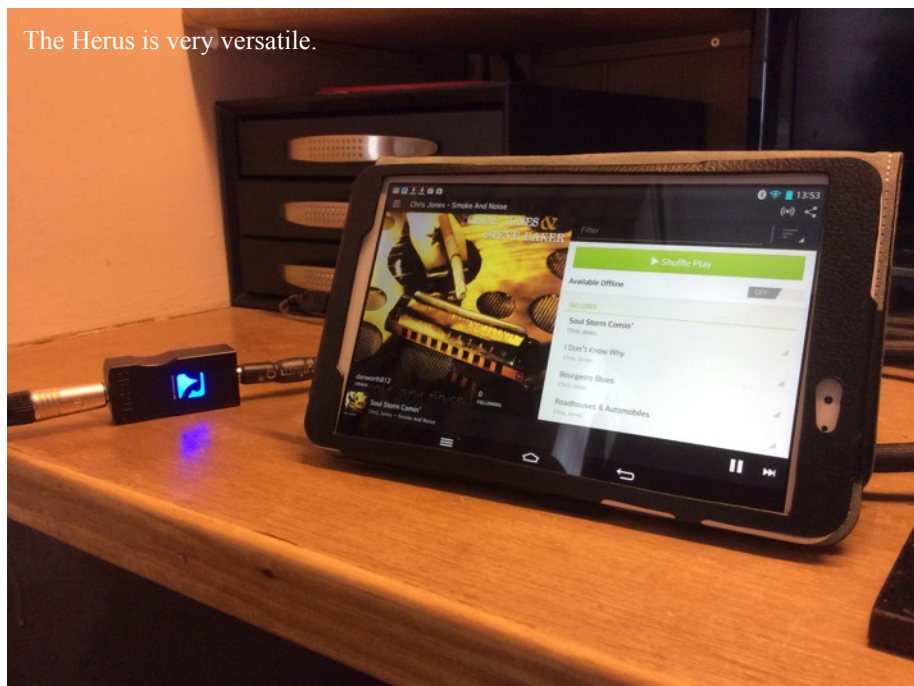
Using the Herus with the [Tellurium Q Black Diamond USB](#) cable was a step up in performance again, cleaning and expressing a midrange that breathed with presence in the soundstage and giving a noticeably greater width to the sound. Smaller details were more defined and cymbal work especially shimmered very realistically. Bass which had been taut and tuneful gained more detail and rhythm which was gratefully received especially with Electronica.

The last USB option I had with this rig was to try

Astintrews 'Concord' USB which has split power and data cables and their patented power supply design. This gave a punchier and little leaner upper-bass/lower-mid response, most noticeably a lower noise floor which added a really nice spaciousness to the sound - to be expected I guess from what I have heard with this device partnered with my Mac already.

The modded SBT is already very quiet, but the Concord did take the background hash down a little further and due to the AKG's having that extremely revealing presentation they were ideal for this part of the review and the Herus

The Herus is very versatile.



Reviews

was left as the true heart of the system, decoding and amplifying a sound that was complete in resolution and powerful enough to really drive the AGK's very well indeed.

When listening to the Civil Wars 'I've Got This Friend' the Herus presented remarkable detail in the string work and each vocal was beautifully rendered in harmony stating their own position on the track, clearly defined and wonderfully recorded.

The transparency, accuracy and robust presentation of the Herus is absolutely astonishing, each piece of music sounds the way it should. Listening to specific music for certain attributes when testing equipment is something we all do and I can quite confidently say that the Herus ticks virtually every box for me. Critically against much more expensive headphone and DAC combos there will be flaws of course, but I have ticked way more boxes than I ever expected and more than with my previous PS Audio DAC combined with other standalone headphone amplifiers around the £300-£500 mark. The resolution, detail, excellent dynamics and balance that the Herus has is pretty awesome.

Further testing with other headphones

An obvious next test to confirm some of my initial thoughts would be for me to try other headphones, fortunately enough I have a pair of Sennheiser HD598s and some [Beyerdynamic DT-990s](#), both very different from each other and from the AKG's. Leaving the

Concorde USB in to exploit the best of the Herus and reveal as much of the other headphones

character partnered with the amp/dac as possible I plugged the Beyers full size jack into the tiny Herus. I'm not a great fan of these partnered with the Icon amp, I feel they thrive with good solid state amps, They can be a tad laid back, have a gorgeous midrange but can lack that bit of air in the top end. The Herus really exploited the midrange as suspected, darker than the AKG's but wonderfully rich and fleshed out, I like the Beyers on the [Epiphany Acoustics](#) head amp very much but found the Herus to transmit better low end grip into them, the top end never got that air like with the AKG's, yet still had a nice sharpness and sparkle with great clarity and control, it was all just a little darker and

...the Herus presented remarkable detail in the string work and each vocal was beautifully rendered...



not as transparent sounding, still very true to the source I feel and the character of the headphones,

fantastic for some genres and poorer recordings, but after listening to the 702's just lacked that bite

and punch, I'm sure if I listened to them first I would have raved about how well the Herus drove the 300 Ohm load and how fantastic I thought they sounded, but then that has to simply be down to me and my personal preference of cans and in no way makes light of the Herus' charms.

Onto the Sennheiser HD598's which are a great and not too expensive, fun headphone and on the little Resonance amp these for me are a great match both sound-wise and price point-wise. Clarity and vocals are at the forefront of their presentation with a fantastic volume level that would be more than adequate for anyone - even me!

Back in went the Wireworld cable and the smoother and less clean sound that it gave against the Astintrew was actually preferable - overall a more fun, musical and bouncy sound rather than a more revealing type of sound that has you listening out for details and attributes. I spent a fair bit of time with this combination in place, writing part of this review and surfing around the net on my iPad, feet up and rocking backwards and forwards in my computer chair, probably with a daft grin on my face!

I even put a stock USB into the Herus from the SBT as I realised I hadn't done that (I always use a better than stock USB cable for piece of mind for build quality on everything) and even with that in place I was happy with the presentation of the Herus, although I would recommend something mid priced as it does help performance.

Android and IOS device tests

Resonessence Labs claim on their website that the device is compatible with iOS and Android devices – fantastic, so I can take the Herus anywhere I go and enjoy my Spotify playlists in their full glory! I'd ordered the camera connection kit for the iPad Air assuming that this must be the way to connect the USB type B connector on the Herus to the iPad. Plugging the adapter into the iPad with a normal A to B USB cable illuminated the Herus' logo in red and then quickly into blue to confirm that a lock and compatibility was made. Next I simply chose the device from the Airplay menu and I was away. Sound wise the Air sounded fantastic through the little DAC/amp, the Herus' balanced and powerful sound drove the three sets of headphones great, though I found the iPads physical buttons when

streaming Spotify gave larger than preferred volume increases/decreases but moving the volume slider in the software gave a more precise control to the listening levels.

I had a little bit of a setup issue initially using the Android based LG G Pad 8.3" V500. I had bought a few variations of adapters and connecting cables to achieve what was a micro USB to required male B

into the Herus. Using a micro USB 'Host' adapter cable which had a female A socket to micro USB male cable proved the answer, although its simple adapter duplicate did not work so make sure it is the 'Host' cable type adapter you use. Again no complaints with the sound, the Herus sounds great in all tests and only has moderate levels of increased performance with the more expensive USB cables and I would be satisfied with a well made and inexpensive cable. Characterisation of the sound does vary dependant on source, but the control and balance of the Herus' DAC and amp's sound prevails to keep everything neutral and very musical.



Using the Herus as a Standalone DAC (Icon Audio HP8 Headamp)

To achieve the connection to the Icon I used a 6.3mm headphone jack to stereo RCA adapter from the Herus and my [Oriton Symphony Orange RCA](#) interconnects and as the Astintrew cable was still on the desk I re-plugged it in to the Herus from the SBT feeding the AKG headphones.

A very similar character as previously mentioned was heard through the Icon as I revisited tracks and

albums from this review, the Icon added some great liquidity to the vocals with the Civil Wars playing and gave more control to louder listening levels in the upper regions. Lower mids and upper bass were fuller with transients a little more energetic. Not big differences in the performance really just the flavours.

Comparing the presentation to the Totaldac through the Icon was interesting, there were differences in performance and a slightly different character, an obviously perceivable tonal difference between valves and transistors but to the credit of the Herus I thought 'well I could definitely live with this'. Popping in Chords Crimson Vee3 with the Wireworld cable again for sensibility against price point retained my previous thoughts. I also tried the recently reviewed [QNKTC DAC](#) in placement of the Herus and found its upper end to be quite sharp considering my favourable comments about it in the main rig. I found the overall enjoyability and musicality of the Herus to be closer to the Totaldac than the QDAC which isn't as transparent and doesn't allow the SBT to show its character.

Using the Herus as a Standalone DAC (main system)

Using the SBT to Herus via the Asintrew cables and into the Emille KI40-L integrated via the Oriton interconnects connected to the Herus via the adapter I immediately took note of the superbly balanced and detailed sound. Consequently whilst using the same setup through the Mac using Amarra there was a noticeable bass hump around the lower mids/upper bass, a trait of the Mac which in the QDAC review was most favourable to its character but here, hearing the difference between the SBT and Mac, the hump does get a little irritating in comparison to the modded SBT's extremely detail driven bass which is neither too tight or loose.

The Herus with its ability to pass through what's in front of it accurately really gelled well in this context and supplied the amp and speakers with a tremendous amount of information and imaging with a great tonal balance across the frequency range. I would conclude that the DAC, although not as critical in exploring the finest of details, the extended handling of notes, or the dynamic shifts of the much more expensive Totaldac, was a very respectable achiever in conveying a solid and most enjoyable music performance from 16bit and 24bit music streamed from the NAS.

Conclusion

Using the Herus as a portable device outside of the house is of course possible but it would require some careful laying out of the cables in a pocket as there would be a couple of connections from an iOS or Android based smartphone and of course the headphone connection itself. My concern would be with the connection to the phone itself as most smartphones these days have the smallest of connectors which could easily break or damage the sockets, so not ideal. I myself would still prefer a small Fiio for outdoor purposes, however if there was an option for Resonessence to add a small Bluetooth module with the correct USB socket and an integrated rechargeable battery then for outdoor use it would be a winner.

Indoors and listening from a PC or Mac or as an upgrade to a gaming rig the Herus is simple to use and sounds very 'audiophile' and extremely musical. The Herus can perform how you would like it to with a good chunk of its character being source and headphone dependant, it has enough power to please even the daftest of loud listeners. If there was any sort of characterisation I could pin on the Herus apart from its obvious transparency it is that with all the headphones and USB cables I used I never got a bass heavy approach to any of the combinations or genres - bass is very evenly balanced and never overblown in any way but it's all there. I have heard more bass from these headphones through other amps but not as detailed and taut a bass in some cases. With headphones I have to have a shining midrange and an open and airy top end and the Herus caters to this perfectly. Coupled with fantastic detail and tone the tests on this products primary intended use are extremely positive and the fact it requires no external power supply means it can be taken anywhere with the above caveats about cabling?

As a standalone DAC with the Astintrew Concord supplying a clean power source the Herus was elevated in performance, although in standard form without upgraded cables made for a fantastic companion and upgrade to any computer streaming rig with a solid, detailed, robust sound which completely took me aback for its size and price point and with the ability to simply whip out the connecting analogue cables and pop in the headphones it covers both areas of listening with a computer based audio system wonderfully. Highly recommended for its ease of use, flexibility and high fidelity sound quality.

WIN!

A pair of The Chord Company's Epic Reference loudspeaker cables worth £750



Epic Reference is based on 2x12 AWG 19-strand silver-plated oxygen-free copper conductors (in twisted-pair configuration), with each conductor set enjoying its own shield. The Chord Company strongly believes that to obtain the most neutral tonal characteristic from silver-plated conductors it is vital to use PTFE insulation. A PVC spacer jacket is then applied to correctly space the conductor in relation to the dual-layer shielding, which comprises a high-density braid and overlapped foil. The external jacket is PVC.

"Epic Reference is particularly good at helping systems sound coherent and musical. It has been comprehensively tested during the development phase and has been carefully designed to help reveal the true potential of high-quality systems and loudspeakers." say the company, adding "Epic Reference's ability to carry audio signals with a high degree of accuracy makes it particularly ideal for wide-bandwidth floor standing loudspeakers: one of the major benefits of shielded speaker cable is the definition and control brought to bass, which is not only useful in a multitude of musical performances, but really helps produce properly coherent rhythm – illustrating just how close the relationship is between a drummer and the a bass-player in an conventional band set-up, for example".

PLUS!

One of four Akiko AC Tuning Sticks worth €119 each



TO ENTER

To be in with a chance of winning any of the prizes above simply subscribe to the Hifi Pig monthly newsletter and we'll randomly draw the lucky winners from everyone registered on the closing date of the competition.

CLICK HERE

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The winner of each of the prizes will be drawn randomly from all the people subscribing to the Hifi Pig monthly newsletter on the 28th January 2014. The competition is open to all readers with a European address and aged over 18 except for Hifi Pig contributors and their household.

By entering the competition you are giving permission for Hifi Pig to publish your name and information when the winners are announced.

No Cash alternative is available.

HIFI PIG DOES NOT AND WILL NOT SHARE YOUR INFORMATION WITH ANY THIRD PARTIES.

Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable

by Danny Worth

The Wireworld Starlight 7 is a well constructed, flexible and pretty snazzy coloured cable. Sitting in the lower mid-price band of USB cables (£99.95 for a 1m length) it is the next up the Wireworld line to the multi-award winning Ultraviolet which is a cable which I had previously owned for a prolonged period of time with my Mac Mini due to its warm and pleasant easy listening character that is very favourable to digital playback. I received two Starlight cables from The UK Distributor; one had an ordinary type B connector on the end and the other with a mini B connector. The cable is very easy to route around the back of a rack and due to it being flat, bends around other pieces of equipment and shelf edges very easily. The cable is lightweight, very well built and has nice gold connectors.

The Sound

Connecting the Starlight to my Mac and streaming music with Amarra 2.5 the cable has similar qualities

The sound could be referred to as 'safe' but is also one of detail, balance and warmth.

of presentation as the UltraViolet but with a fair gain in detail and sparkle in the top end, a warm rounded midrange leading into a firm bass, solid and full. I found the Ultraviolet to be much warmer throughout the range and not as revealing of smaller inner details as the Starlight.



Male vocals were strong and fleshed out and women's vocals had a good smoothness to their upper registers. Instruments had good timbre but not as naturally true as the likes of the higher priced TQ Black Diamond. Due to the warmer nature of the cable it can lack that extra little ring or rasp at the end of a note to give the most convincing of performances but what it does put forward is an utterly musical and enjoyable presentation.

Dynamics from the cable are fairly average really, not huge and fatiguing nor too soft and gentle, so I may sound like a politician when I say they're just "nice".

I go into detail in my Q N K T C review about the DAC being fed by the Starlight with the mini B type connector and how the overall 'Class A' flavoured sound of the combination was extremely enjoyable and very musical so I won't touch on it too much

here, although I will mention that I found the Starlight to be great with upper frequency detail and air which coupled with mid and lower end warmth sounded great.

Comparing the Chord Silver Plus with the Starlight7 into the TotalDAC was interesting. The Chord has more of an emphasis on a detail ridden sound - a bit more crash, wallop bang whilst the Starlight just cruises along in an easier fashion reproducing all the details I had heard from the more revealing Chord but in a less forceful and smoother manner. Hearing the Chord allows the lis-

tener to really pick out details and dynamics and on first inspection I thought 'there's more going on here' but hooking the Wireworld back up proved that it was a characterisation difference not a lack of ability. Deeper rolling extended bass was an advantage of the Star-

light, a more natural rendition of an instruments trailing edge. The Chord is exciting and great for lower listening levels but for vocals and instruments the a Wireworld really explores the music better.

Once again in detail on the Resonance Labs Herus review I explore the Wireworld further, I concluded that out of all the USB cables I used I found the Starlight 7 to be a very musical match for the little DAC/amp adding a nice bit of smoothness to some quite revealing headphones I had partnered with the device.

Conclusion

The Wireworld Starlight performed admirably in my system using the two configurations sent to me and

with the products tested. The sound could be referred to as 'safe' but is also one of detail, balance and

Overall the Wireworld Starlight is a solid performer at a great price point.

warmth. Forgiving may be a good phrase to use with this cable - it has a very forgiving nature which takes away any edginess which digital equipment can inject into the system and also lends its hand to a similar take with poorer recordings.

The Ultraviolet was a great award winning cable but the Starlight is a bit of a leap ahead in detail retrieval and resolution, yet still having that gentler, easy to listen to character than that of the Chord Silverplus.

Overall the Wireworld Starlight is a solid performer at a great price point.

Recommended for build quality and sound per pound.



JoSound

... just the music !

"Do I recommend these loudspeakers, hell yes! Would I go out and by them...if I had the asking price yes I would.

After living with them for a week and consistently rating JoSound's room at HiFi shows as one of my favourites I can honestly say I would like to own them....."

Linette Smith
HiFi Pig

HiFi Pig
RECOMMENDED

Tellurium Q Claymore Integrated Amplifier

by Stuart Smith



Many of you will be forgiven for thinking that you've heard the Claymore name somewhere before and you'd be absolutely right - Colin Wonfor, the Technical Director at Tellurium Q, was the person behind the somewhat legendary IncaTech Claymore amplifier from the 80s. So it was with a good deal of excitement that we awaited the arrival of the all new £3760 Claymore.

It's a stylish looking unit being quite slim on the rack and with just a motorised volume knob, a headphone jack and a series of LEDs to let you know what source is playing on the front – source selection is controlled from the elegant and weighty wand-style remote control.

The first thing you notice once you do fire up the amp is that it seems to really energise the bass in the room.

So what functions do you actually get with the Claymore? Well it's pretty well specified to say the least and this seems to be a route many companies are taking, realising that not everyone wants to have boxes and boxes littering up their front rooms. In just the one box you have a phonostage catering for Moving Magnet and Moving Coil cartridges (switchable on the rear), three line inputs, a mini-jack input for MP3 players plus a USB DAC input.

There's a pre-out, a tape loop and a pair of hefty binding posts for loudspeaker cables.

Speaking to Colin Wonfor it is clear he is passionate about the need for high quality power supplies in all his amplifiers and the Claymore is no exception with Colin saying that the amplifier has a "total of fourteen power supplies... Complex it may be but it gives superb noise and interference rejection." Even the infra red detection circuit for the remote gets its own power supply that is only active when a button on the remote is pressed.

Into 8 Ohms you get a continuous 72 Watts a channel and into 4 Ohms 81 Watts. p the Claymore is not just a case of pressing on and letting it do its

thing. First you turn on the unit which defaults to mute, you wait a few moments until the unit is ready and then you can press mute and you're ready to go. It takes a few goes to get your head around it but it becomes second nature after a few

goes.

The first thing you notice once you do fire up the amp is that it seems to really energise the bass in the room. On Ben Frost's "By the Throat" the bass is guttural with the Claymore and being a bit of a bass junkie this is right up my street – though the bass frequencies are not over domineering, just tight and powerful. The prepared pianos on the same album

sound very “real” and there’s an overall sense of the soundscape enveloping you.

I’m used to listening with just 20 Watts of Class A from Tellurium Q’s Iridium amp but I have to say I really enjoyed having the extra power on tap, though I struggled to turn the volume knob much past 10 o’clock (and I do listen pretty loud) with the 95db Mummys. With the little Q Acoustics Concept 20s (possibly a more realistic partnering) there’s a real feeling that the Claymore has grabbed the speakers firmly and is taking control of them to get the best from them.

The Claymore isn’t as refined as the Iridium (I really wouldn’t expect it to be) but it has a real sledgehammer weight to the way it portrays music. This is not to say that the Claymore can’t be subtle, but I’d liken it to how I’d imagine stepping out of a chauffeur driven Bentley and into a V8 muscle car must feel.

Techno seemed the order of the day, so on with The Field and the brilliant “Cupid’s Head” album and again this amp really plumbs the depths with the bass kick underpinning and giving a real solid foundation to the overall sound. On “20 Seconds of Affection” the evolving soundscapes just build and build and whilst that bedrock of bass is still evident, other sounds and ‘instruments’ throughout the frequency range are easy to pick out of the mix and offer a coherent and balanced presentation.

I’ve said it before and I don’t mind saying it again, some bits of kit just have you reaching for certain genres and with the Claymore I found myself being drawn to bass heavy music as this seemed to play to the amp’s strengths.

However, on Rumours from Fleetwood Mac and the tune “Songbird” the amp shows that it is capable if subtlety too – not as ultimately refined as the Iridium as I mentioned, but it manages to give a pretty realistic portrayal of the recorded space with the vocal and piano sounding unforced and natural.

There’s one track I was dying to try with the

I’d liken it to how I’d imagine stepping out of a chauffeur driven Bentley and into a V8 muscle car must feel.

Claymore and that was Hardfloor’s “Once Again and Back”. There’s a bass break at the start that is a must for anyone of the bass addicted persuasion. Here the bass doesn’t take over (I thought it would) and what you get is a nicely balanced rendition of the track.

Gil Scott-Heron’s “Pieces of a Man” was popped on next and you do get a really nice insight into the emotion in his voice. The vocal is slightly forward in the mix with the other instruments sitting behind and around the stereo image. Piano sounds as it should and the bass sounds realistic too. Perhaps on this tune is where I most noticed the difference between the Iridium and the Claymore – the Claymore doesn’t have that last smidgen of finesse, particularly at the top end, but it’s really not that far off at all. On “Sign of the Ages” from the same album there’s a feeling that you are listening to a live recording and there is a good degree of delicacy and deftness of touch from the amp. It’s hugely dynamic with it dealing with quieter passages very nicely, but having immediate power on hand to deal with louder passages or instruments in the mix as demonstrated

The Claymore is a sleek and elegant looking integrated.



Reviews

on Ry Cooder's "Paris Texas" soundtrack where there's bags of detail and texture and also on "Night Train to You" by the Marcin Wasilewski Trio.

Phonostage

The inbuilt phonostage gives a good solid performance with pinpoint imaging and a wide and especially deep soundstage. Instruments seem to have good space around them and I'd say that the Claymore's phonostage at least equals my own Electrocompaniet stage.

Vocals on Chie Ayado's "Don't Let Me Down" from the album "Good Life" are natural sounding with a good insight into the recording and the piano too is natural sounding missing only the Iridium's very top end effortlessness.

USB/DAC

This works very well indeed and I'm sure for folk who don't want to go to the expense of shelling out loads on an external USB DAC it will be very popular. Did it match the VAD DAC? Well no it didn't to be honest as it lacked that last nth of a degree of sophistication and polish, but then the VAD DAC costs more than this whole amp put together. Would I be happy to use it day to day— I'm pretty sure I would.

Headphone Amp

This is a useful addition to the Claymore and one I'm glad to see more and more manufacturers adding to their amps and pre's as more and more music lovers demand a no-nonsense all in one solution.

I was able to use a couple of pairs of headphones and it performed perfectly well. Volume is adjusted by the main volume knob or the remote and when the headphone jack is fully inserted into the amp the speakers mute.

Similarly to the recently reviewed Van De Leur preamplifier the Claymore's headphone amplifier should satisfy all but the most hardened headfi enthusiast. For those looking to listen occasionally to cans, or those forced to use headphones late at night, the inbuilt amp will be absolutely fine. Actually it's pretty good with an even, balanced sound and with good drive.

Conclusion

At £3760 the Claymore isn't a cheap integrated amp, however I do think it offers good value for money none the less. Add up the constituent parts and the quality of those parts and you can start to appreciate that to have all the extra boxes and wires would not only be more hassle, but would also be more expensive for the average music lover that just wants great sound with minimum bother.

I don't really have anything negative to say about the Claymore overall, but if I was to be nitpicky the start up procedure is a bit of a pain at first until you get your head around it.

The phonostage is a bit of a boon I think given the growing resurgence of vinyl and I reckon that adding something like a Project Debut Carbon Turntable (£300), a pair of speakers like the Q Acoustics' Concept 20s (£550 with stands) and using your computer running Foobar 2000 or similar you'd have a great sounding system for around £5K with cables and what not included. Add a reasonable pair of headphones and you have something that you can listen to when the family goes to bed leaving you to get your music fix in peace.

The amp will easily outgrow the relatively budget kit I've mentioned however and should allow you to upgrade ancillary kit a good deal further up the tree without feeling the need to change your amp for anything more expensive.



Your Listening Experience

www.highend-design-loudspeaker.com

 **SCHERER**

+49(0)234 4597 4655

audio engineering

Review Links

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms

[A Cacophony of Cartridges \(Dynavector Mcs\)](#)
[Shelter 5000 Moving Coil Cartridge](#)
[SME309 versus Michell TechnoArm \(A\)](#)
[A Cacophony of Cartridges Part 2 \(Denon MCs\)](#)
[Rega P25, Michell Gyro SE, Garrard 401](#)
[Pro-Ject Debut Carbon](#)
[Oracle Paris Mk V Turntable](#)
[London Jubilee Cartridge](#)
[The Funk Firm Technics SL1200](#)
[Roksan Radius 5 Mk2 turntable, Nima tonearm & Corus Silver cartridge](#)
[Origin Live Modified Technics 1210 Turntable](#)
[The Cartridge Man Music Maker III Cartridge](#)
[Mike New Bearing for Technics 1210 Turntable](#)

CD Players and Transports

[Consonance Mini Droplet Linear CDP3.1](#)
[Cyrus CD8x](#)
[MHZS CD88](#)
[Musical Fidelity X-Ray V8 CD plus Triple-X Power Supply](#)
[Lampizator "Transport"](#)
[Unison Research Unico CD Primo](#)
[Roksan Oxygene Amplifier and CD Player](#)

Loudspeakers

[Infinity RS2.5 Standard Ribbon Hybrid](#)
[MBL 116F Radialstrahler](#)
[Horning Agathon Ultimate](#)
[Audio Note AN-e/LX](#)
[Audio Physic Virgo Mk2](#)
[ProAc Future Point Five](#)
[Totem Acoustic Forest](#)
[CA-Electronics AP10](#)
[Akkus V1](#)
[Harbeth Super SHL5](#)
[Eminent Technology LFT-16a](#)
[Eminent Technology LFT-8b](#)
[Ancient Audio Studio Oslo](#)
[hORNS Mummy](#)
[Marshall Choong FS-1](#)
[Quadral Chromium Style 30](#)
[Tannoy Turnberry SE](#)
[Alacritty Audio Caterthun](#)
[TSAE Evince](#)
[electricbeach Frugel3](#)

[German Physiks Unlimited Mk2](#)
[JoSound Cartouche](#)
[Q Acoustics' Concept 20](#)
[Dynaudio Excite X14](#)
[Waterfall Audio Victoria EVO](#)
[Pluto Ultimate](#)

Amplifiers

[Cary Audio Design 572SE Monoblocs](#)
[Parasound Halo A21 Stereo Power Amp](#)
[Chord CPM 2600 Integrated Amplifier](#)
[CR Developments Romulus Valve Integrated Amplifier](#)
[Amptastic Mini-T](#)
[Radford STA15 Series 3 Re-Issue Amplifier](#)
[Ming Da MC-7SE Pre-amp, MC-805 Power-amps](#)
[Consonance Cyber 10 Signature Integrated Amplifier](#)
[Radford Revival STA15 Meets the Original Radford STA15](#)
[Absolutor Pre-amplifier](#)
[Custom Hifi Cables HA10 & HA10SE Headphone Amps, DC1 & DC2 PSUs](#)
[Epiphany Acoustics EHP-O2 Portable Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Linear Audio Research IA30 Mk 2 Amplifier](#)
[Tortuga Audio LDR6 Passive Pre-amp](#)
[Roksan Caspian M2 Integrated Amplifier](#)
[Puresound 2A3 Integrated Amplifier](#)
[Clones Audio 25i Integrated Amplifier](#)
[King Rex 'Headquarters' HQ-1 Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Peachtree Decco 65](#)
[Audio4Soul Xtreme 16](#)
[Cyrus X200 Signature Mono Amplifiers](#)
[Onix RA125 Integrated Amplifier](#)
[Tellurium Q Iridium Power Amplifier](#)
[Mistral DT-307a Hybrid Amplifier](#)
[Tisbury Audio Mini Passive Preamplifier](#)
[Roksan Oxygene Amplifier and CD Player](#)
[Black Pearls' Birth 100 Ampilfier](#)
[Roksan K2 BT Amplifier](#)
[Van de Leur 002/402 Pre/power amps](#)
[Tellurium Q Claymore Integrated amp](#)

Digital to Analogue Converters

[Audio GD Digital Interface USB to S/Pdif Converter](#)
[Lampizator DAC Level 4 Review](#)
[Human Audio Muto Dac](#)
[Neko Audio D100 DAC](#)
[Human Audio Tabla USB to SP/dif Interface](#)

[Resonessence Labs Invicta DAC/Pre-amp](#)
[Antelope Zodiac+ DAC/Pre-amp](#)
[DARED EF-99 Headphone Amplifier and USB DAC](#)
[Epiphany Acoustics E-DAC 24bit Miniature USB DAC](#)
[Resonessence Labs Concero DAC](#)
[Audio4Soul Xtreme 16](#)
[Miniwatt n4 Headphone Amplifier and DAC](#)
[Cyrus X DAC Signature](#)
[Schiit Modi USB DAC and Magni Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Totaldac D1-tubedac](#)
[Longdog Audio VDt1 DAC](#)
[AMI Musik DDH-1 DAC and Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Q N K T C AB - 1.2 DAC](#)
[Resonessence Labs Herus Headphone amp/DAC](#)

Cables

[RFC 'Reference Mercury' Interconnect Cables](#)
[Epiphany Acoustics Atratus Interconnect Cables](#)
[Black Rhodium "Twist" Speaker Cables Part 1, Part 2](#)
[Black Rhodium Interconnect Cables - Opus, Rhythm, Prelude & Symphony](#)
[RFC 'Reference Pluto' Interconnect Cables](#)
[Vermouth Audio 'Black Curse' Interconnects](#)
[Albedo Interconnects](#)
[Tellurium Q Black Loudspeaker Cable](#)
[Tellurium Q Ultra Black Loudspeaker Cables](#)
[Jade Audio Moontails Interconnects](#)
[Neutral Cable - Fascino Interconnects](#)
[Neutral Cable - Fascino Power Cables](#)
[Oriton Diamond Red and Symphony Orange Interconnects](#)
[Graditech Kide Digital, Kide3 Interconnects and Lumi3 Speaker Cables](#)
[Chord Crimson VEE 3, Cobra VEE3, Chameleon VEE 3 Interconnects](#)
[Tellurium Q Black Diamond USB Cable](#)
[Atlas Ascent 3.5 Mkii Speaker Cables](#)
[Isotek EVO 3 Mains Cable](#)
[Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable](#)

Digital Audio Players

[Hisound Audio Studio-V and RoCoo Digital Audio Players](#)
[Astell and Kern AK100](#)
[HiSound Audio Nova 1 Digital Audio Player](#)

Computer Audio and Streaming

[QED uPlay Stream](#)
[Lampizator "Transport"](#)

Phono Stages

[Electrocompaniet ECP 1](#)
[Ming Da MC-Phono 2006](#)

Headfi

[Grado 325is Headphones](#)
[Custom Hifi Cables HA10 & HA10SE Headphone Amps, DC1 & DC2 PSUs](#)
[Epiphany Acoustics EHP-O2 Portable Headphone Amplifier](#)
[DARED EF-99 Headphone Amplifier and USB DAC](#)
[Musical Fidelity EB-50 In Ear Monitors](#)
[King Rex 'Headquarters' HQ-1 Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium Headphones](#)
[Miniwatt n4 Headphone Amplifier and DAC](#)
[Beyerdynamic DT770 Pro Headphones](#)
[Schiit Modi USB DAC and Magni Headphone Amplifier](#)
[NAD VISO HP50 Headphones](#)
[AMI Musik DDH-1 DAC and Headphone Amplifier](#)
[Musical Fidelity MF 100 Headphones](#)
[Teufel Aureol Real Headphones](#)
[Monster iSport Freedom Headphones](#)
[Resonessence Labs Herus Headphone amp/DAC](#)

Accessories

[Reso-Mat LP Mat](#)
[PS Audio Power Plant Premier](#)
[CA Electronics Isolating Feet](#)
[Diffraction Begone Baffles](#)
[Speaker Angle App](#)
[SPIN CLEAN Record Washer](#)
[RJC Audio 'Hush' Turntable Isolation Platform](#)
[Audio Suspension ASU-100 Turntable Shelf](#)
[Oriton Support Cones](#)
[Akiko Audio Tuning Sticks](#)

Advertise with Hifi Pig

Hifi Pig
Magazine

WWW.HIFIPIG.COM

January 2014
Issue #2



Exclusive interview with Holger Fromme of Avantgarde Acoustics
REVIEWS Pluto, Van de Leur, Monster, Isotek, Resonance Labs, Wireworld, Tellurium Q
PLUS Editorial, Reader System, Dealer System, Album Reviews, Albums of the Year...
WIN CHORD COMPANY SPEAKER CABLES WORTH £750 plus AKIKO TUNING STICKS



"The advert on hifipig.com has been great; it's boosted daily traffic to our website considerably and has proven to be a cost effective way of gaining exposure." Tisbury Audio

To find out how Hifi Pig can help drive targeted traffic to your website and create direct enquiries from people wanting to buy your products, get in touch with us and we'll find a solution that's right for your business.

Telephone +33 (0)2 97 23 70 78 or E mail us at Stuart@hifipig.com

Hifi Pig - Snoofling out what's **HOT** in hifi!



Akiko Audio 音

World of Twist - Quality Street

by Stuart Smith

Another band I missed first time round as I was in full on house and techno mode in 1991 when Quality Street, the band's only album, was first released. This re-release on the 3 Loop Music label is a two CD package with the original album, a CD of selected B sides and two

Gallagher's band Beady Eye even covered the track.

First of I should say that even on the first listen through I really enjoyed this record - it's a space-indie-pop amalgamation - sort of Roxy Music meets Madchester - with this being most evident on the track that should have been a



I can see this album getting played to death in the coming months in our house.

Radio 1 sessions plus a 24 page booklet.

World of Twist were seemingly a great influence on a lot of bands and Noel Gallagher apparently almost named Oasis after the second track on the album, "Sons of the Stage" and Liam

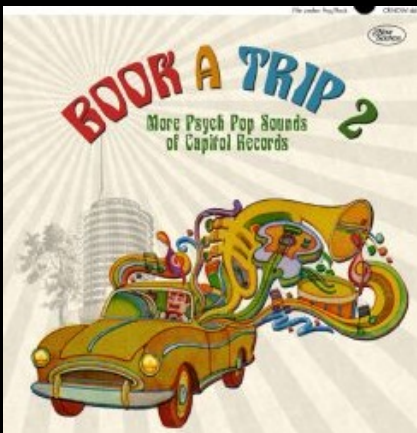
huge single, Sons of the Stage (which sounds very reminiscent of Hawkwind's Brainbox Pollution). I'm very surprised that Quality Street didn't get higher than it did (#50) in the UK charts. The songs are nicely crafted indie pop tunes with sound effects and synth warbles over the top and in the

background and it really is a very enjoyable listen indeed. Stand out tracks are Sons of the Stage, The Storm, the dreamy final track Life and Death and the blessed out version of the Stones "She's A Rainbow. I can see this album getting played to death in the coming months in

our house.

Sadly the second CD in the pack refused to play on my CD player or in the laptop so I can't comment on that, but the booklet is an interesting read with an engaging foreword by the bands guitarist and co-songwriter Gordon King.

Book a Trip 2 - More Psych Pop Sounds from Capitol Records by Stuart Smith



Now Sounds have raided the vaults of Hollywood's Capitol Records to bring us 24 slices of

psychedelic pop pie from the late 60s with many of the tunes being on CD for the first time, all sourced from the original master tapes and compiled and produced by Steve Stanley. Needless to say I was a babe in arms when these tracks first made their way onto the Dansettes and radios of the US but that's not to say they're not worth a

listen. Indeed the collection here harks back to a much more innocent time, but it's good fun and shows us why Capitol were the undisputed kings of pop in this era.

With song titles like Catch the Love Parade and Groovy Day and band names such as The Laughing Wind and The Pink Cloud this is clearly not hardcore acid-head-freakster fare. No, this is a collection of fun, happy

jingle-jangle tunes aimed at a mass market audience that perhaps caught a whiff of patchouli from a passing hipster - more Mom's apple pie than Kool Aid Acid Test and certainly more pop than psychedelia. Like I say, it's good fun and nicely put together collection of tunes that comes complete with an informative booklet with detailed notes on the bands and the music.

Album Reviews

Radio 1 Live Lounge 2013 *by Stuart Smith*

I stopped listening to BBC Radio 1 a long time ago but that's not to say I don't enjoy dipping into that totally uncool territory that is the hit parade as I believe it's called by the younger people.

We bought last year's Live Lounge sessions and enjoyed it a great deal despite my preconceptions and so getting hold of this year's CD seemed obligatory. For those that don't know Live Lounge is where Radio 1's DJ Jo Whiley gets in current big names and some lesser names to perform live on her show. Some perform their own tunes while some perform other artists' songs, indeed most of the tunes herein are

covers: Arctic Monkeys perform Hold on "We're Going Home" by Drake, Vampire Weekend do a version of Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines" and Mumford and Sons have a bash at "Tessellate" by Alt-J.

What I like about this two CD collection is that it's in the main pretty simply recorded and it really is a good record to pop on onto the CD player of a Saturday night to set the mood.

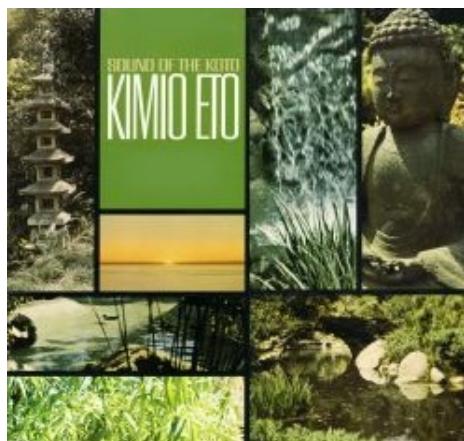
Highlights for me are the fabulous Rudimental who kick off the album with "Waiting All Night", Naughty Boy and the infectious "La La La", Daughter doing a wonderfully stripped back version of Daft Punk's "Get Lucky", Jake



Bugg's skiffish "Lightening Bolt" and the aforementioned "Blurred Lines" by Vampire Weekend. There are no real howlers on the album at all but on a matter of principle I skip Little Mix and their cover of Mumford and Sons' "I Will Wait".

It's a feel good blast of an album and it is getting a good deal of airplay here at the moment.

Kimio Eto - Sound of the Koto *by Stuart Smith*



The Koto is the traditional 13 string Japanese instrument and Kimio Eto is widely regarded as its master. He began training on the instrument at the

age of eight and composed his first work aged eleven. Amazingly he was blind from the age of five according to the sleeve notes and this makes this record all the more astonishing.

Here on this *él* release we have an amalgamation of different bits of albums on one disc, "Art of the Koto" from 1962, "Sound of the Koto" from 1958 and "Koto and Flute" (with Bud Shank) from 1960 and they're an interesting collection of tunes. I'm not going to suggest for even the briefest of moments that I understand the nuances and the virtuosity of

Eto's playing, but this album makes for an interesting and different kind of listening experience.

You get pretty much just the instrument for the entirety of the record, though the track "Yachiyo Jishi" (Lion of a Thousand Generations) does have some voice on it and of course there's flute on the last three tunes.

There are themes of nature throughout with titles like "Sakura" (Cherry Blossoms), "Yuki No Genso" (Snow Fantasy), "Izumi" (The Spring) and "Kinuta" (Sound of the Water) and "Tanima No Suisha" (A waterwheel in a Gorge) and the music does bring to mind scenes of the natural world.

My favourite tracks on the record are the three with the flute accompaniment and I think this is because it's an instrument I'm more familiar with. That's not to say this is a difficult listen, it's not – though there was the obligatory "What the hell is this?" when I first put it on the main rig as it's just so different to the kind of music I listen to.

If you're feeling contemplative and in need of drifting off then pop this on, close your eyes and drift away with the music.



BEST OF 2013

Regular Hifi Pig contributor and all round good egg
Stewart Hall picks his favourite albums from last years
releases.

Yes, it's that time of year again; when objectivity goes out the window and I select my esteemed top ten albums of the year. Forget chin stroking analysis, these are the albums which made my hair stand on end... gave me goose-bumps... made me belt out the lyrics and madly air-drum/air-guitar with impunity! So, without further ado...

10) CARCASS- SURGICAL STEEL

The British grindcore legends showed that a 20 year break between albums did them no harm whatsoever with this thrashing return to form. Brutality and melody in equal measures.

9) KOЯN- THE PARADIGM SHIFT

Surprise of the year. The former nu metal anti-heroes are all grown up and It shows in this urbane, stomping and innovative release.

8) QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE- ...LIKE CLOCKWORK

With a mind boggling list of guest musicians, this album was never gonna be anything but great. A superb combination of the best elements of their earlier works.

7) STONEFIELD- STONE-FIELD

The girls from rural Victoria delivered a lesson in what the essence of rock'n'roll is really about. No bullshit, straight up. Anthemic.

6) BAD RELIGION- TRUE

that this band is as relevant as ever.

5) DAVID BOWIE- THE NEXT DAY

Bowie once again shows himself to be the master of image manipulation and reinvention, parodying his own album cover! For a dude who's been around this long (and pretty much done it all in rock) to release an album of this quality and inventiveness is nothing short of incredible. The man is a genius.

4) ALICE IN CHAINS- THE DEVIL PUT DINOSAURS HERE

Minus their original singer and focal point in the late Layne Staley, AIC unleashed a bombshell. Easily the equal of anything from their "classic" period, this record is chock full of gargantuan riffs, imaginative songwriting and eclectic styles from metal to country. A must see on this year's Soundwave Festival lineup!

3) MUTATION- ERROR 500

Who said avant garde music had to be esoteric and self serious? For anyone lamenting the demise of Mr Bungle and Naked City, get onto this album! A supergroup featuring electro terrorist Merzbow and members from groups as



NORTH

The LA punk veterans gave us one of their strongest albums in this catchy yet uncompromising effort. Driving rhythms, infectious choruses, vitriolic lyrics and a sense of melody throughout prove

Albums of the Year

disparate as Napalm Death, The Fall and Cardiacs, this is quite simply visionary guitar driven music. Brutal, fractured and pervaded by an inconceivable sense of sing-along-catchiness, this album is a total anomaly... and utterly brilliant.

2) NINE INCH NAILS- HESITATION MARKS

Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross' foray into film scores has paid off immeasurably. Hesitation Marks is a triumph of emotional control. Malevolent, brooding and at times frightening, it's also eminently danceable, catchy and ethereal. Heaven and Hell rolled into one. The equal of anything they've ever produced.

1) GHOST- INFESTISSUMAM

You could throw a blanket over the top five this year, I agonized over the order, but in the end there can be only one... and this is it. The second album from Sweden's Ghost. Is it metal? Is it pop? I'm

not sure, but the band has somehow combined occultist lyrical themes and a ghoulish stage presence (and hidden identities) with utterly epic songs, soaring vocal harmonies, and an unashamed penchant for pop hooks. Gothic undead zombie chic, a devilishly clever image and an absolutely brilliant album.... congrats nameless ghouls, you're number one!

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Projected Twin- Earth vs World
Franz Ferdinand- Right Thoughts, Right Words, Right Actions
Eels- Wonderful Glorious
Kanye West- Yeezus

STINKER OF THE YEAR- FALLING IN REVERSE- FASHIONABLY LATE

Y'know... it sorta pains me to name this as the worst album of the year, just thinking about it makes me laugh out loud! But sadly, the band are not comedy geniuses. This record is an embarrassingly egregious example of

what happens if you inexpertly attempt to combine every genre that's popular right now into a single work. Lame-arse whiteboy rap, second rate metalcore and bits of power metal and So-cal punk/pop snottiness are uncomfortably mashed together on this complete abomination. It's only redeeming feature is that it's funny as fuck... unintentionally....

DISHONOURABLE MENTIONS:

The Flaming Lips- The Terror
Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds- Push The Sky Away
Goldfrapp- Tales of Us

Well, that's it for my musical year that was 2013... it was a strange year. It was no 1967... but it sure turned up a few terrific albums... and heaps that were merely "pretty good". As for next year, I'm fascinated by the prospect of what it might have in store...

Bring on 2014!

Stewart Hall

Well it's been an interesting year for music in the Hifi Pig household. I've discovered a load of bands from the past that didn't register first time round – Kitchens of Distinction, World of Twist, Phantom Limb, Held Lampi Project, Big Sexy Noise and Drugstore. I've heard some cracking house and techno in the shape of The



Field, Kaito and Sano. Then there's been some great releases from the likes of Hawkwind and Kate Williams, but if I was to choose just one album that really knocked the socks off me it would have to be Bird Radio's "The Boy and the Audience". It's quirky, it's out there and it's wonderful. Roll on 2014 and let's hope the musical year is as good as this one has been.
Stuart Smith.



Holger Fromme is the managing director of the German horn loudspeaker and electronics manufacturer Avantgarde Acoustics. Here he answers Hifi Pig's Behind the Brands Questions

Your History

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

Being a regular concert goer (e.g. seeing Pink Floyd live several times), I was always quite disappointed by HiFi performances. Still I had a decent system at home in my student days, as it was the “thing to have” at that time (mid seventies). But then I was demoed a pair of Klipschorn-like speakers at a HiFi shop – and was blown away! This was much closer to the performance of a live concert, vibrant, and “in the face” the way I liked it! So I started investigating horn technology, even getting me some rare literature from universities in Eastern Germany (GDR), which took a year to arrive here in the West... I soon started doing my first horn calculations, but still did not know very much about appropriate drivers, crossovers and other technical issues. That's when Matthias, our engineer came into play: we met by happenstance on the wedding party of a mutual friend, and started talking... about horns! In a way this was

meant to happen! So we joined forces, and after a few experiments with laminated horns, I finally decided to make horn speakers a real serious business model, investing into the moulds for ABS injection moulding and founding Avantgarde Acoustic.

Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

That's not easy to say, there have been many memorable events along the road in the past 22 years. Maybe it was the IFA in 1993, where Matthias and I had swollen tongues in the evening, because people were so enormously intrigued by our designs that we had to explain what we do 10 hours a day. That really gave me the final “kick” to believe in the strength of our concepts!

Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

Of course the TRIO, being our first product. It was so radical when it was conceived, and now became a kind of “industry standard” for ultimate horn speaker design.

Behind the Brands

That's certainly an achievement I'm really proud of. But for a different reason I'm equally proud of our latest baby, the ZERO 1. Because it is the first product that truly and fully incorporates all our company stands for today: horn design expertise, unique know-how in electronics, and forward thinking in regard to digital technologies. I can't help but being extremely proud of this concept, too!

You and your system

What was your very first system?

The amp was a big ROTEL receiver, the turntable was by Thorens and the speakers made by Infiniti... nothing too special, anyway.

Tell us about your system history

Working hard for my company, I did not have the time to "evolve" my system like a true audiophile would. But I have always had a decent system at home since the TRIO was available, with Matthias recommending or building me some nice electronic components from time to time. Only when our BASSHORN came out in 2003, I could

finally make a big step in performance and have owned a TRIO + 6xBASSHORN system ever since.

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

That's probably my old ROTEL receiver! It was so cool to finally own one, with its big pro-like handles and the heavy wooden casing. Should I have kept it for its sound? Rather not, I guess, but I should have kept it for being the hifi device I was ultimately proud of owning.

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

I'm much more impressed by music than by sound. And there I know where I belong... So I rather won't answer this question.

Tell us about your current system(s)

I'm using TRIO with 6 BASSHORNS, in tri-amped configuration with our XA electronics. My music sources today are purely digital, with a MacMini feeding a



prototype DAC (based on what we use as a DAC in the ZERO 1 speakers).

The state of the industry

What's your view on the valve renaissance of the past 20 years or so?

I do welcome it because it certainly drove the interest in high end audio, differentiating our industry from the “big player” market. But I have a problem with our products being seen as “made for tubes” because of their high efficiency. It's almost like some people ignore the evolution and the achievements of solid state designs.

But what counts is the outcome, the sonic result, and if I hear great designs like realized in Matthias' XA amp circuitry, I can only say: stay open, and don't judge too early!

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 meanwhile enjoy the convenience of using digital streaming, and I can't deny that I'm also very happy with this concept's sound. In my view this will carry on, making this technology more and more attractive and accessible to a growing audience. This will also help in making people aware of the quality they can possibly achieve, as there is no more need for largely compressed formats. So people will start to understand that the format is no longer a bottleneck on the way to experiencing a life-like sound at home, raising their standards regarding the playback chain – up until the speakers. I also think that the ZERO 1, with its integral “all-in-one” concept shows us the way to a possible future of high end audio. If this will work for each and every music lover I can't tell. But I'm pretty sure that it will soon work for a majority!

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

It has no lobby! Thus the public tends to be unaware of high end audio and politics keeps setting up obstacles for our almost artisan manufacturing, by introducing standards that fit the “big players” best.

The way you work



Behind the Brands

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

Our engineers are not looking for a specific sound, we try to be true to a signal in the first place! With our super-fast horns it is easy to capture all the detail of the signal, thus preserving the inner detail of the music. And to our own amazement, the result of further improving detail resolution often acts like an “elevator” for all other audiophile criteria like staging focusing, natural smoothness, timbre etc. And along the way you'll also get the speed and punch that I like so much with certain music...

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

I'm certainly more the forward driving type of listener. But without neutrality and transparency I would certainly not be able to thoroughly enjoy a system.

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

A third category: big monitors (UNO/DUO horns, TRIO horns) with a sub (BASSHORN)!

It's all about the music, man...

What is your favourite recording?

Currently I'm always impressed when listening to Tommy Schneider's “Plan B3”. When the Hammond B3 kicks-in during his version of “Ain't no sunshine”, my jaws drop...

Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings

For human voice: Nat King Cole's “Love is the thing”. For guitar rock: Gregor Hilden's “Sweet rain”. For alternative: Master Choa Kok Sui “OM”

What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures?

No specific ones, I'm in general not a big fan of Jazz. Oh, and I can't stand “Hotel California”, not even in its highly praised live version.

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 will run back and grab my 1TB hard disk with all my music :-)



Involved in the Industry?

If you think Hifi Pig readers would be interested in finding out who's behind your brand then get in touch with us by clicking [here](#) or calling us on +33 297237078