

# Hifi Pig Magazine

WWW.HIFIPIG.COM

MAY 2014  
Issue #6



## REVIEWS

Pro-Ject Xpression Carbon UKX Turntable  
KEF X300A Loudspeakers  
PrimaLuna Prologue Premier Amplifier  
Tellurium Q Ultra Black Interconnect  
MS Power Distribution Filter and Mains Cable  
CLONES Audio Pre-Amplifier and Monoblocks



**INTERVIEW** Behind the Brands with  
Gérard Chretien of Focal

**PLUS** Editorial, Reader System, Dealer System,  
Album Reviews and Vintage Classics

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## May 2014 Issue 5

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Amplifier

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**Linette Smith**  
**HiFi Pig**



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# It's Munich Time Again!

So, the whole Hifi universe is packing its bags and setting off to Munich this month, at least that's what it feels like...I've lost track of the number of people I've seen recently whose parting words have been 'see you in Munich'.

Here at Hifi Pig Towers we are VERY excited, we had a ball last year and are looking forward to this year's show. It is a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and to meet new ones....and of course to drink a few beers!

**Attention to detail, small or limited editions and a more artistic, design-led development process brings us products that not only sound but look stunning and will often divide the market the same way as Marmite.**

But the main thing is of course the Hifi. What's new? What's happening? Whose doing what???? So I thought I would take a little time to think about what key trends we might see at High End Munich 2014.

Now any one that knows me will know I like a bit of colour in my life! I expect colour to be a huge trend at this year's show.

2013 saw white loudspeakers everywhere. Some brands like Amphion and Dali stood out with their rainbow of colours and we are starting to see more brands become braver with their palettes and break away from the tradition of Black/silver and wooden boxes.

Last year I commented that there were a lot of brands pushing the provenance of where their products are from.

Proudly displaying, 'Made in Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, USA'

I expect to see this even more this year as more Hifi brands look to take stricter control of manufacturing quality by bringing the process back home.

The public is becoming more and more curious about where everything they consume is from...be that food or Hifi.

Some brands already realize how important this is...look at Triangle and Focal or Roksan.

There was a lot of Head-Fi

kit last

year...I reckon there will be even more this year. For lots of reasons it is a growing market and needs to be catered to with 'proper' products, otherwise a generation will be lost to the clutches of Beats!

I know in particular our very own Hifi Pig Teen

correspondent is going to be

snoofling this area with high interest.

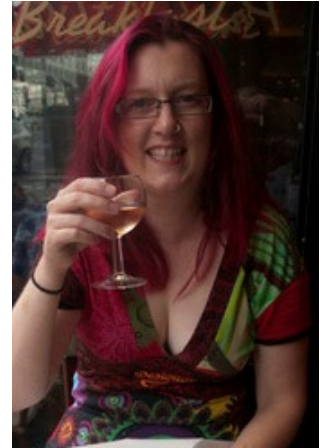
Innovations in more 'green' materials will be something to look out for. Bamboo, featured at Josound, is becoming more evident as a replacement for traditional woods and it will be intriguing to see what other materials are coming to the fore.

Home Hubs and system integration...making life easier for people who want to watch a film with surround sound then play music in the kitchen.....then pick up their personal music player and go out for a run or a drive.

This is where the tech really starts to come into play and it will be interesting to see how different brands put their proposition forward for how we become more linked in with our approach to listening to music and living our lives. This year we even have an expanded 'High End on Wheels' section.

I don't think this is a bad thing but what I don't want to see is Munich to become a Tech or gadget show or just be filled with huge TVs.

If done the right way then it will bring in more people to the audiophile world, make it more





# Black Pearls

DIVE DEEP INTO YOUR SENSES



inclusive rather than all exclusive and rarefied.....we shall wait and see how it all pans out.

As well as the big guys, Munich is a fabulous place to find smaller, Boutique brands. Attention to detail, small or limited editions and a more artistic, design-led development process brings us products that not only sound but look stunning and will often divide the market the same way as Marmite.

For me the quirky and the different is one of the most exciting areas for me.....I want to be surprised and delighted...perhaps even horrified sometimes!

I can't wait for the sleek and chic and the unashamedly 'manly' ...huge horns and gigantic valves, portable tech and headphones...think it might be kid in a sweetshop time!

**See you in Munich!**

## Stu's Views

**Y**et another interesting month here at Hifi Pig and it's beginning to become a bit of a recurring theme...which is nice. April saw us visit Bordeaux as the guests of French loudspeaker manufacturer Triangle where we heard some great kit in the most beautiful surroundings...and there was some fabulous wine to taste too. There'll be a full write up in the next couple of months.

I tried my hand at DIY for the first time and built a pair of loudspeakers. OK, this is actually a bit of an exaggeration if truth be known and I actually paid someone to put a pair of cabinets together and help fit the drivers...and the crossovers were already built...so actually not really all that DIY at all really and more of a build by delegation. Again we'll be bringing you all the details in the next couple of months about this build. .

Things are moving at a pace here with new people joining the team and this month sees the first of Grant Birch's look at Vintage Classics with the QUAD ESL 57 loudspeakers which are celebrating their 57th anniversary!

Not only that but we're in discussions to publish Hifi Pig Magazine in a different language too with new reviewers and content...watch this space.

However, the thing that is occupying all of our minds at the moment is the forthcoming High-End show in

Munich that takes place in a week or so. Linette is clearly very excited as you can read in her Bird's Eye View article, but so are the rest of the team who will be attending. This year there'll be three of us at the show and we'll be bringing all the news and photos both on the site and in a special supplement to the magazine. We'll be taking along our 16 year old son Harry who some will know from the articles and reviews he's written in the past for us. We think having a young pair of eyes and ears at the show is vital. Young people are the future of this industry and it is at our peril that we ignore their musical needs and aspirations...and speaking to pretty much everyone out there they agree.

Of course all the high-end kit is going to be absolutely great to see but what perhaps is of equal interest is the newer companies looking to bring fresh products to the market. One look at the innovation that is taking place in the world of hifi and it becomes clear that we are on the cusp of an industry that is about to move into a period of renewed growth and vigour. We certainly hope so. As well as Munich we've also got the Cranage Hall show on June 15<sup>th</sup> that Hifi Pig is media partners for. The event is pretty much full we hear and there are some great brands at the event and what's better it's free – just register online [here](#).



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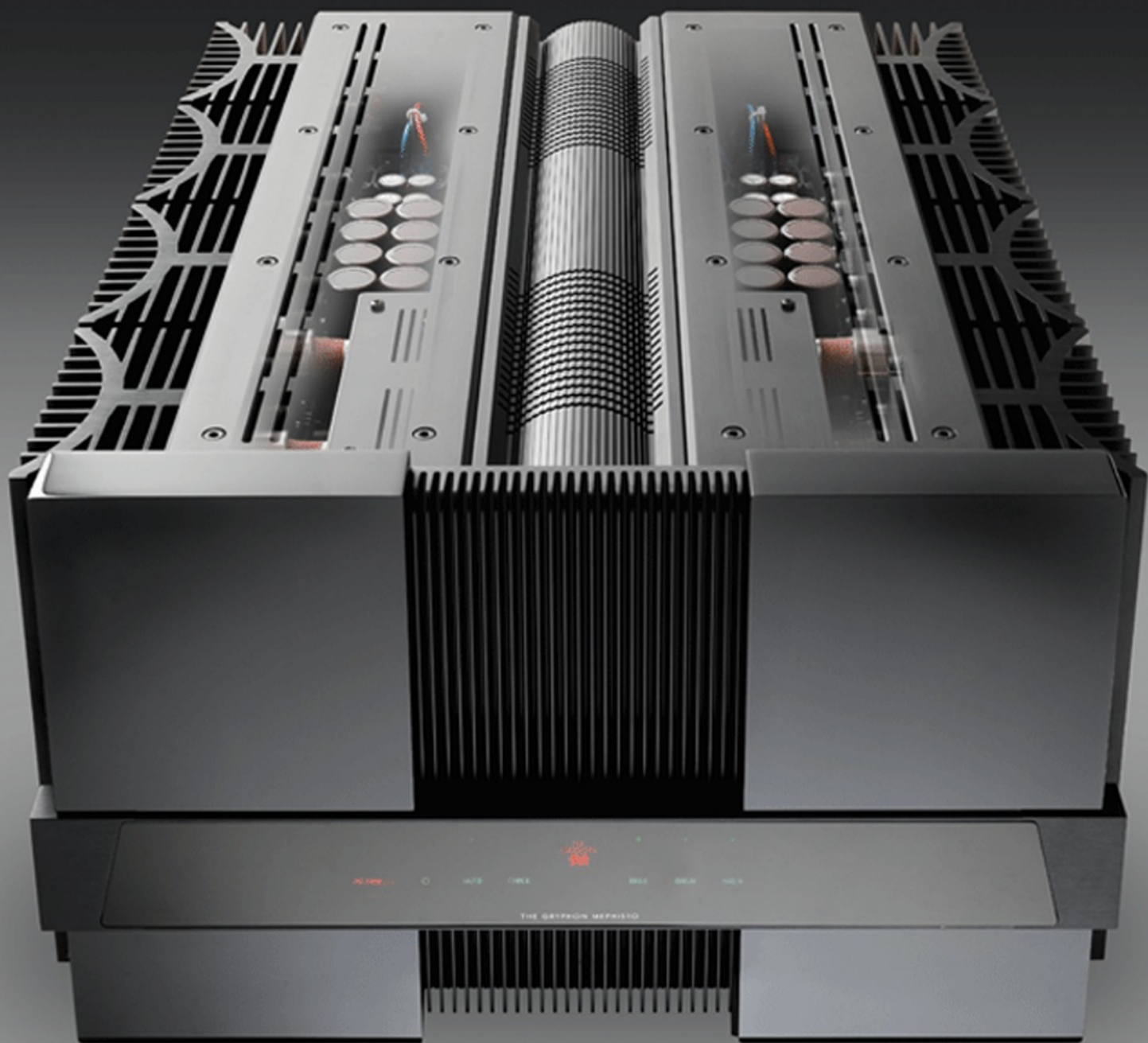
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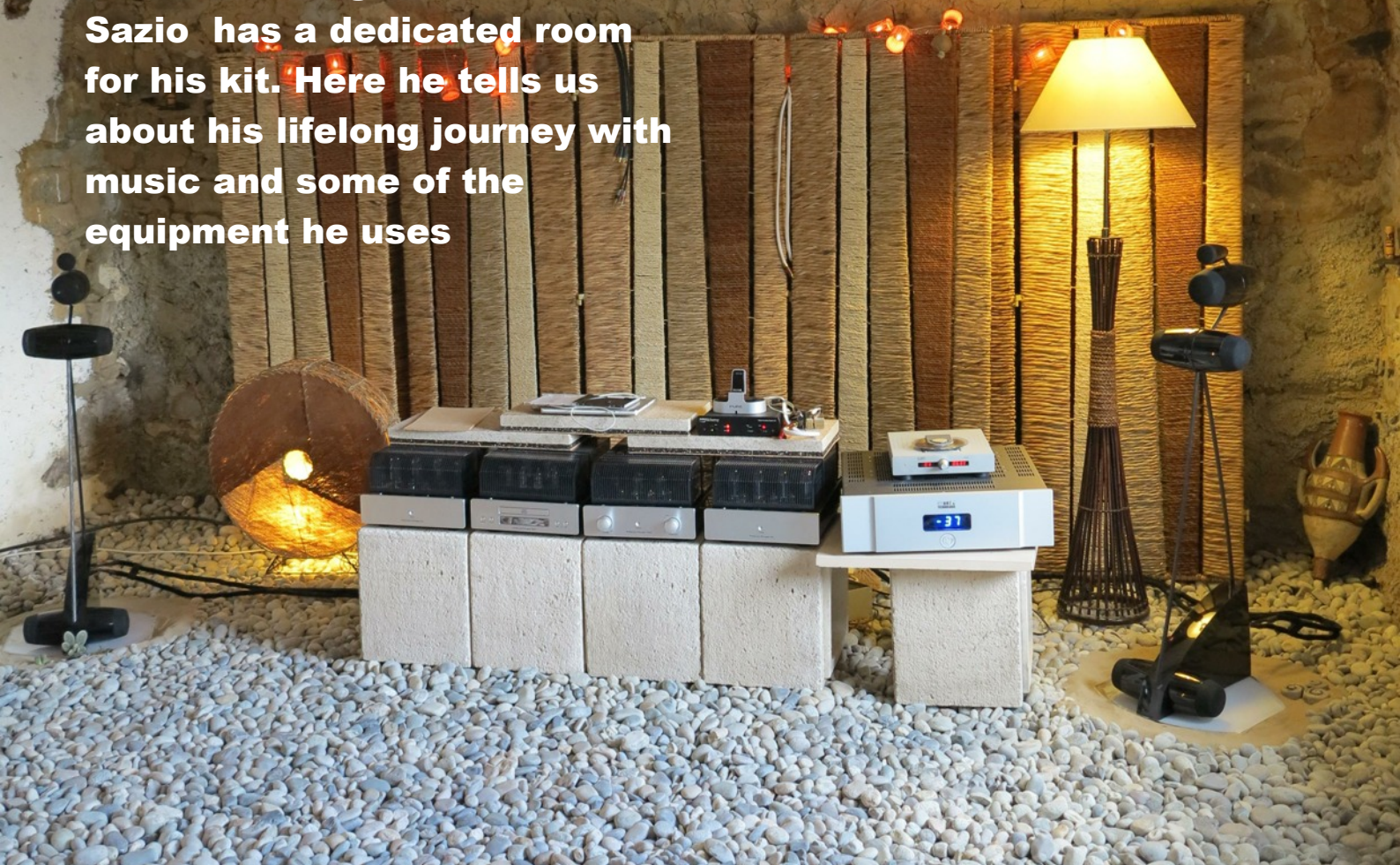


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# Birth of a Life-Long Passion

**French Hifi Pig reader Jen-Luc Sazio has a dedicated room for his kit. Here he tells us about his lifelong journey with music and some of the equipment he uses**



I'm 6 or 7 years old. I'm running around the table in the living room.

My dad chases me.

He also attends some correspondence 'radio courses'. Eurelec, rue Fernand Holweck, Dijon, France.

Every month, he receives a booklet about radio theory, a manual and electronic components to build measurement material, little amps and an FM radio. It's still the 'valve' era.

He eventually catches me and spansks me.

Well, this might be because he was actually soldering who knows what, because there was a speaker on the table, with a wire ended by a plug. I had cleverly decided to plug it to the 220 volts plug on the wall. Small 'ploc', then nothing... Then... a slap on my butt.

My audiophile vocation could have stopped here, but it's actually where it started!

Thanks to him, we have been one of the first families in our village to have a television (in 819 lines,

British people can get it), then to have the 2<sup>nd</sup> channel, then colour television...

52 years later, while listening to my system, I still remember this episode.

52 years later, this passion has never left me. How many DIY amps, often never finished (electronic is fine, but boxes...), with transistors or tubes, speaker kits, a small collection of vintage devices (vinyl decks, old radios...), loads of components. How many specialised magazines: Le Haut Parleur, Radio Plans, LED, L'Audiophile, Hi-Fi Stereo, La Revue du Son (almost all of them have now disappeared), and the ones you can read nowadays, Elektor, Stereo Prestige and Image, Haute Fidélité and, sometimes, Hi-Fi News in english, when it can be found in newsstores.

I can recognize from far away the great majority of vintage or brand new devices, quoting their brands, models and main features...

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# Reader System

I remember my parents' first Hi-Fi system, bought at the TV/radio repairer of our village after an insistent lobbying from me: a Garrard SP25 deck, with automatic changer, nameless speakers and amp. Piézo cell. Hours of listening.

Each month, with my pocket money, I bought a record. Classical music. I was studying the trumpet at Grenoble's conservatoire. No time for Jazz, the Beatles et al in this very serious institution at that time!

My first salaries, in 1975-76 if I remember well, were dedicated to buying an amp, a tuner and a Sanyo deck. A TP1000 turntable with direct drive, a Grace tonearm and a Grado cartridge. I still use it today. I funded it partly by working extra hours at a TV-radio repairer in addition to my first job as a trumpet teacher (the equivalent of 2 months of earnings for the whole package, quite a big thing).

And my roommate, a clarinet teacher, who transmitted his passion for jazz to me.

And then, one day... soldering iron in hand, leaned over a DIY prototype of a valves amp 4xEL84 single ended in parallel, trying another combination of paper condensers and valve rectifiers, I raise my head and realize that, because I'm always willing to improve the latest improvements, I don't listen to the music anymore, but only to the system.

I tidy up everything, soldering iron, multimeter, oscilloscope, amp...

And with Marie, my partner who is also a musician, we start a quest for commercialized material in working conditions...

Being both musicians and in daily contact with live music of all genres and eras, our jobs lead our quest: try to find not what could be called an audiophile listening quality, but audio realism. Tones, fidelity of reproduction, lack of directivity or distortions. Is it a utopia?

## A LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER

Paris, October 2009, Hi-Fi Showroom



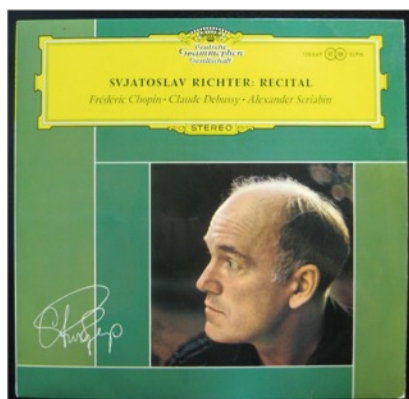
After reading an article in Stereo Prestige and Image about a prototype of the new Leedh (whose name might not have been Leedh at that time), I went to the Pullman hotel for a listening session. First thing in the morning, I went directly to the listening room, convinced, based on what I had read, that I would experience a revelation, an artistic shock. After half an hour, I was actually troubled, destabilized, puzzled, without being able to do a proper analysis of what was a blurred feeling, almost an embarrassment. Was something missing? References? I thus decided to walk around the showroom and to do some more traditional listening sessions: Waterfalls, massive Triangles, brand new Davis, JM Lab... I think I found what I had missed, but that I was now considering as a 'too much': too much bass, too much distortion, too much level, too much colour, too many vibrations, too 'in your face'?



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# Reader System

After a too-expensive-for-what-it-was lunch, I decide to go back and listen to the Leedh again. I think I stayed more than 3 hours (I would have loved to stay longer, but had a train to catch): what I felt was missing that morning was indeed the ‘too much’, I needed some time to ‘rehab’! And there, after an aimless discussion with Gilles Milot and a few others in the corridor, I felt I had heard what I was looking for confusingly, forever: a natural sound, very close to reality, a transparent system.

Using the wisdom of patience, I started to look for a new amp (my DIY with 4xEL84 class A SE tubes in parallel with its 18 watts and unique out entry in 8 ohms didn’t seem to be suitable). Step by step, the perspective of spending €8,000 (retail price of the time, quite an investment!) to buy a new system instead of refurbishing the kitchen blossomed in our mind.

Since then, Gilles Milot comes to our place on a regular basis: he offered me the chance to listen before anyone else to his E2 prototype (they’re still at our place since then!), his cables (they’re still at our place since then...), the prototype of his subwoofer (which will be at our place, one day.)

Laughter and sarcasms often take place in front of these confusing objects (especially from the ones who have never listened to them). But every time a musician came to visit and listen to them, he or she rediscovered sensations experienced in gigs. And my son, very good musician expatriated in London for Deezer UK, brings some devastating playlists that confirm, if needed, a choice that might have seemed a risky one.

## THE CURRENT SYSTEM

### •The ‘Listening’ shed:

22 sq m (4,20x5,20x2,53) annexe made of stones from Brittany (70 cm-wide walls) with one floor. Inside walls in stone with joints made of ground, the wall at the back of the room is covered in wooden planks, vibrating. The floor is concrete on top of which I’ve put 4-5 cm of river pebbles, diam 20/40mm, 1.9 tons, yes, indeed (you can imagine the face of the delivery man).

Ceiling with exposed beams, compressed wood for the ceiling and flooring. The idea is to have as few vibrating surfaces as possible and as few parallel



surfaces as possible. No wall, except the wooden-covered one at the back, is plain.

Double glazing PVC door and window. Usage of as many ‘natural’ materials as possible. Power source: the EDF current transformer that provides electricity to the 18 houses of the hamlet is located c. 20 m from the house. One 4x10mm<sup>2</sup> cable (original) goes directly from it to the annexe to provide power to a box with 30mA differential. This box provides power to the system, after a bipolar circuit-breaker, through a 3x6mm<sup>2</sup> cable terminated by a 20A plug with a 16A adaptor (the diameter of the cable doesn’t allow to plug it directly to a 16A plug).

Two other circuits for plugs for light and other usages. No wi-fi (no way to make it go through the walls anyway!, neither do mobile phones), no CPL system.

The system is plugged to a good quality multi-socket, but it’s not an audiophile one.

### •Sources:

Primaluna Prologue 8 CD player: this is a valve CD player, including a mini triode in the clock’s circuits. It delivers an analogic sound close to what you can hear when listening to vinyl records.



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***“Had this review been written in 2013, the pre would have been my joint ‘electronics’ product of the year...”*** -Stuart Smith



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# Reader System

A vintage DAC Audioalchemy with a DIY power supply, plugged either to a Windows 8 tablet via a USB M2Tech Iface2 interface (SSD hard drive and battery power supply) with Foobar or Aimp3 players – Wav, Flac, Wma audio files are stored on the SSD hard drive – or to an iPhone dock with optical output to listen to Mp3 files on Deezer.

Vintage record player: Sanyo TP 1000, Grace arm, Grado signature cartridge and Thorens TD 145, SME 3009, Shure V15III cartridge, RIAA DIY Elektor scheme pre-amp.

The Sanyo record player has been used since c. 1976...

•**Amplification:** Primaluna Prologue 3 preamp with JJ Electronics valves, 2 Primaluna Prologue 6 mono blocks, 70 W, JJ and KT 77 Genalec Gold Lion valves.

The choice to use valves material is as much an aesthetic one as an emotional one, a sort of bridge with my past, a link with my lost-but-still-here father.

The interconnect cables are either vintage Leedhs and Kimber cables from the 90s, or Baie Audio ones (French brand now disappeared)

And, of course, HP Leedh speakers and cables.

## CONCLUSION

Life, the building of a human being, has according to me a lot to do with people you meet.

Music, Hi-Fi, are two factors that help these encounters: passion, sharing, artistic emotion, exchanges.

And since I'm a happy owner of the Leedhs, the house is never empty!



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# Dealer System



## **South West London dealer O'Brien Hifi talk to Hifi Pig about how they put together an £ 80 000 system for a very knowledgeable classical musician client.**

**I**n this month's dealer system we asked O'Brien Hifi to speak about a real life high-end system that they'd put together for an actual paying customer. The result is a system that has a retail value of around £80 000 and is very specific to the needs of the customer. We'll let them tell the story in their own words.

**We knew that the choice of digital source was going to be a tricky one, so rather than rush this through in the shop, we offered to install the system so far in the customer's home, and let them take their time with this part of the process.**

One of the joys of this crazy business is the regular opportunity of putting different customers in front of different systems and learning from them about what they find important; one person's 'attack and pace' is another person's 'overblown hardness'. There are very few absolutes of right or wrong in music reproduction - what each individual prefers is what is right for them.

Our job is to listen carefully to everyone's descriptions of what they're hearing and what they like and then present alternatives if necessary.

In this case our customer was a classical musician and teacher. This system is the product of over fifty hours of listening in the shop by them and our entire team.

It started with the choice speakers - and the customer's brief was twofold: clarity and naturalness. They'd heard any number of systems where the detail was

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# Dealer System

there, but at the expense of musicality and natural timbre. Ten minutes into the demonstration with the Martin Logan Summit X, it became obvious that we were heading in the right direction - here was a musician listening to technique, its impact on the whole performance, and how that changed what the piece communicates. We often find that a customer's expertise and experience leads us to a better understanding of what our systems can offer.

What we believe Martin Logan continue to achieve with their electrostatic range are speakers that combine the transparency and speed of an electrostatic panel with the bass response of a traditional moving coil cone. And in a way that you don't hear any gaps between the two! The Summit X is the pinnacle of that achievement - with a huge sound stage and truly convincing bass response.

Next we considered amplification, and settled on Simaudio's Moon brand as meeting the needs of the customer. The P8 pre-amplifier keeps all of the sensitive audio circuitry separate from the power supplies, control circuits and micro-processors,

leading to an insanely low noise floor, and ultimately: more music. We needed to consider integration into a surround sound AV system, so partnered this with the MC-8 7 channel power amp.

**What our customer ended up with is one of the finest music systems we've ever installed, integrated into an AV system that the whole family enjoys.**

We knew that the choice of digital source was going to be a tricky one, so rather than rush this through in the shop, we offered to install the system so far in the customer's home, and let them take their time with this part of the process. We set everything up, tweaked positions and then installed five different players over the course of about five weeks, giving them the chance to really hear how each would perform in the system.

Again, their detailed listening and eloquent description of what they were hearing have taught us a lot about what the machines can do, and how they differ.



# Dealer System

Eventually we all settled on the Moon 750D DAC/CD Transport - its overall scale and sense of realness, along with four digital inputs for high resolution music swung the balance.

You might have spotted the Naim NAT01 lurking in the Spectral cabinet - there is still something magical about a live BBC broadcast through this classic FM tuner. We had it serviced by Naim, and upgraded the interconnect cable to squeeze the last gram of performance out of it.

Cables had a similarly detailed appraisal - settling on Studio Connections Platinum speaker cable and Reference interconnects.

What our customer ended up with is one of the finest music systems we've ever installed, integrated into an AV system that the whole family enjoys.

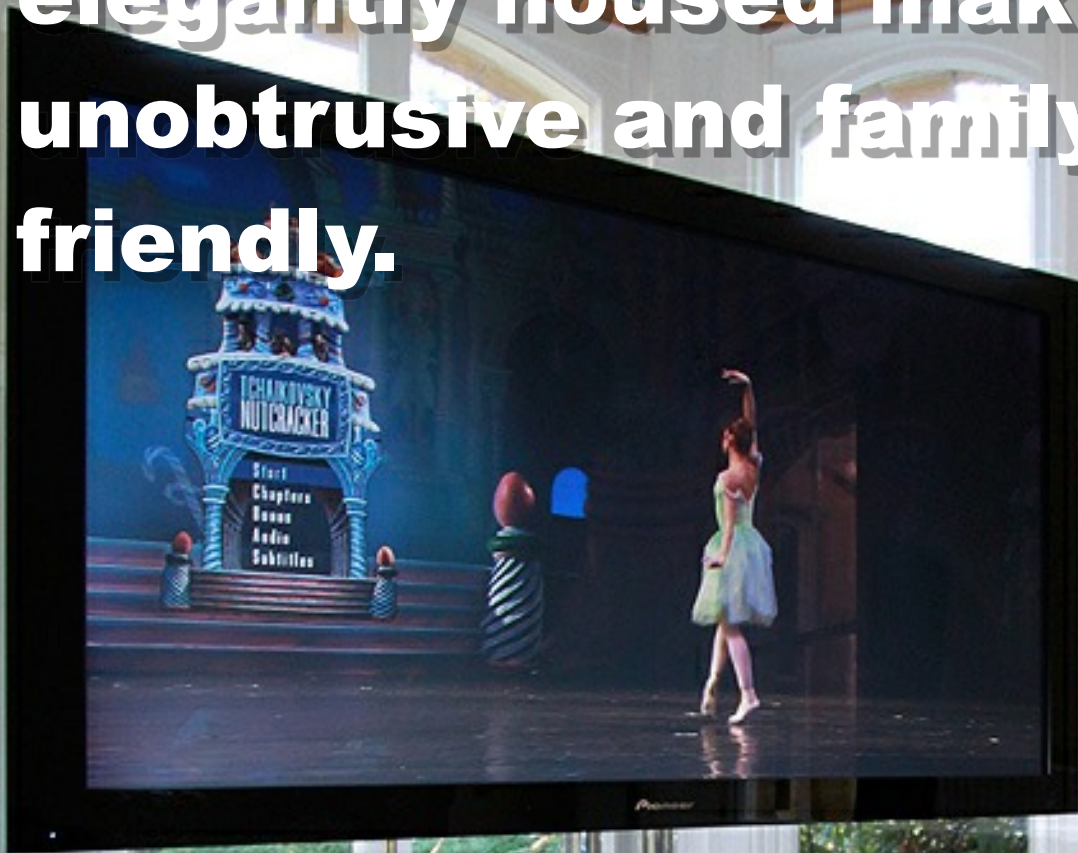
We ended up learning so much about a musician's perspective on performance!

## THE FINAL SYSTEM AND PRICING

Moon 750D DAC / CD Transport	£ 10250
Moon P8 Pre Amplifier	£ 19750
Moon MC8 Power Amplifier	£ 17500
Naim NAT 01 Radio Tuner	£ discontinued
Martin Logan Summit X Loudspeakers	£ 14998
Studio Connections Platinum speaker cable	£ 5900
Studio Connections Reference interconnects	£ 560 each
Anthem D2V	£ 8750
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# 57 Years of the Quad ESL 57



**In the first of his monthly Vintage Classics series of articles, new Hifi Pig contributor Grant Birch looks at the iconic Quad ESL 57 loudspeaker, a speaker that still manages to warm the hearts of many even 57 years after it was first introduced.** Grant Birch

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# Vintage Classics

"One liked music and one liked a challenge to make things sound better" (Peter Walker, founder of The Acoustical Manufacturing Company Ltd, and QUAD)

## AN ELECTROSTATIC TIMELINE

**1879:** (yes, you read that correctly, 1879!) The first electrostatic contraption was patented and first came to the public's eye when demonstrated by Amos Dolbear of Delaware Ohio, who exhibited a working electrostatic telephone system at the Paris Electrical Exhibition.

**1918:** Edward Wente invents the first Electrostatic Microphone.

Patents were issued and technical articles written about electrostatic loudspeakers.

These included patents granted to Frederick W. Lee in 1925 and Walter Hahneemann in 1926.

Both of these are referred to by Williamson and Walker when researching their own project.

**1920-1935:** Patents were issued to Rice and Kellogg working at Bell Laboratories in 1934, and several technical articles written about electrostatic loudspeakers.

These included patents granted to Frederick W. Lee in 1925 and Walter Hahneemann in 1926.

Both of these are referred to by Williamson and Walker in researching their own project.

Several ES speakers and microphones were made, mainly in Germany.

It was said that one day there would be a great auction house where these would sell for the price of a small township.

**Post World War 2:** Significant effort was expended on electrostatic speaker design on both sides of the Atlantic for the next 20 years. However, the only Electrostatic audio devices in general use were condenser microphones. Some of these were superb and no doubt played a key role in bringing the technology to the keen young eyes of a certain master Peter Walker, who was then busy with The Acoustical Manufacture Company, founded in 1936.

**1953:** Arthur Janszen in the United States develops and patents his famous high frequency

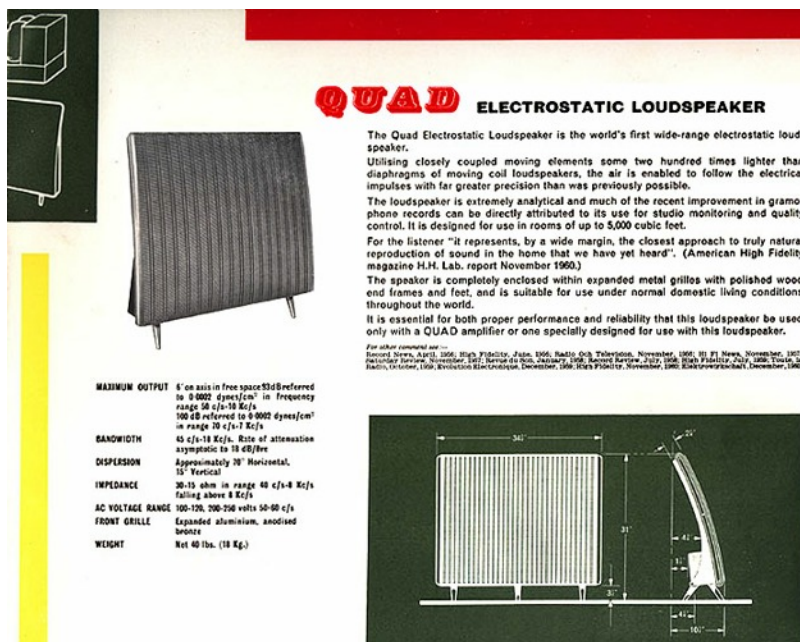
units. (His second patent of 1959 describes a unique (for the time) method of manufacturing stators from wound wires instead of perforated metal, inspiring P. Walker in the design of the 63 ).

**1954:** Prof. F. V. Hunt's pivotal book "Electroacoustics" provided the key to the previously experienced distortion problem. He gave a very rigorous mathematical examination of the ESL in various forms.

**1955 -** The legend himself, P. J. Walker of the Acoustical Manufacturing Co., produced two laboratory models and these were demonstrated at the B.S.R.A. Annual Exhibition May, 1955. One was open back and front and handled middle and high frequencies with amazing clarity. The other covered the whole frequency range with equally good quality and used a large closed cabinet, or infinite baffle, to maintain its bass response. The Quad was a 'horizontal' design compared with Janszen's 6 foot high line source. H.J Leak also developed an electrostatic tweeter, but it was never brought to production...

**1956:** Walker's initial completely open prototype was further developed to cover the whole frequency range, and in March it was demonstrated to the 'Physical Society'.

**1957 -** Quad ESL, deemed "Walker's Wonder !!" were released onto the market, selling for the princely sum of £52.00 sterling and they remained thereafter in production until 1985.



**QUAD ELECTROSTATIC LOUDSPEAKER**

The Quad Electrostatic Loudspeaker is the world's first wide-range electrostatic loudspeaker. Utilising closely coupled moving elements some two hundred times lighter than diaphragms of moving coil loudspeakers, the air is enabled to follow the electrical impulses with far greater precision than was previously possible. The loudspeaker is extremely analytical and much of the recent improvement in gramophone records can be directly attributed to its use for studio monitoring and quality control. It is designed for use in rooms of up to 5,000 cubic feet. For the listener "it represents, by a wide margin, the closest approach to truly natural reproduction of sound in the home that we have yet heard". (American High Fidelity magazine H.H. Lab. report November 1960.) The speaker is completely enclosed within expanded metal grilles with polished wood end frames and feet, and is suitable for use under normal domestic living conditions throughout the world. It is essential for both proper performance and reliability that this loudspeaker be used only with a QUAD amplifier or one specially designed for use with this loudspeaker.

For other comments see: Sound Review, April, 1956; High Fidelity, June, 1956; Radio and Television, November, 1956; Hi Fi News, November, 1957; National Lampoon, December, 1957; Stereo 45, November, 1958; Stereo Review, 1957, 1958; High Fidelity, July, 1959; Youth In Radio, October, 1959; Evolution Electronics, December, 1959; Stereo Pilot, November, 1960; Electrostatics, December, 1960.

**MAXIMUM OUTPUT** 5' on axis in free space 93dB referred to 0.0002 dynes/cm<sup>2</sup> in frequency range 50 c/s-10 Kc/s  
100 dB referred to 0.0002 dynes/cm<sup>2</sup> in range 10 c/s-7 Kc/s  
45 c/s-10 Kc/s. Rate of attenuation asymptotic to 18 dB/oct. falling above 8 Kc/s

**BANDWIDTH** 45 c/s-10 Kc/s. Rate of attenuation asymptotic to 18 dB/oct. falling above 8 Kc/s

**DISPERSION** Approximately 30° Horizontal, 15° Vertical

**IMPEDANCE** 30-15 ohm in range 40 c/s-8 Kc/s falling above 8 Kc/s

**AC VOLTAGE RANGE** 100-120, 200-250 volts 50-60 c/s

**FRONT GRILLE** Expanded aluminium, anodised bronze

**WEIGHT** Net 40 lbs. (18 Kg.)

So what made these speakers so different to everything that had been available to music lovers previously? There are many ways of converting electrical energy into sound, but only two main ways had been utilised successfully in 1957. The first, the interaction of magnetic fields produced by a flow of current, had been developed to a very satisfactory level of performance in moving coil and ribbon speakers and it was this technology alone that was used in the growing market for household speakers at the time.

The second, exemplified in the QUAD 57s, uses the attraction and repulsion of electric charges. As Peter Walker explained, "though the existence of these forces has been known at least as long as our knowledge of magnetic forces, only quite recently have we been able to exploit it to our satisfaction." The QUAD 57s represented a completely new approach in home audio equipment and quality of sound.

They flew out of showroom doors and demand far outweighed supply. They were also quickly adopted by both Philips and the BBC as studio monitors.

With an attempt not to be long-winded, there now follows a very brief and layman's technical section:

The QUAD electrostatic speaker consisted of five components: two bass units, one treble unit, an audio transformer unit and an EHT supply unit.

The Treble panel diaphragm was made of polyester film, or more technically Mylar and the Bass panels were made of Saran, which is a PVC film, not unlike the stuff the sarnies in our packed lunch are wrapped in, except Saran is only 6 microns thick.

They were coated on both sides with a substance called Calaton, a form of Nylon.

The thin plastic/polyester sheet was given an electrically conductive coating and suspended between two rigid perforated metal plates, or stators, on each of the units or panels.

When powered, this plastic diaphragm is charged to a high voltage, and when signal voltages are applied to the outer plates, it will move, pulling one side and pushing on the other. As the signal is an alternating voltage, the diaphragm motion will be to and fro and will drive air to and from through the perforated metal plates.

The two mid-range strips were placed either side of this strip in the same panel, but were separated from the central strip electrically whilst the bass panels

were placed symmetrically on either side of the treble panel.

The treble panel is charged to 1 500 Volts and the bass panels are charged to a staggering 6000 Volts. "It was designed as a mono device. After we made about 500 or 600, then stereo came in and it was modified to give a better horizontal directivity because of the interferences on stereo. This was the world's first full-range ESL in open or doublet form." (Walker)

The QUAD 57 remains one of the most sought after 'vintage' speakers of all time and almost 60 years later its iconic design still appeals, but primarily so does its involving and detailed sound quality. Criticisms the 57s have attracted through the years include a lack of bass, fairly small dispersion and a relative fussiness about which amplifiers they are paired with. There can also be issues with power input: too much power can cause arcing, while an unstable power supply can quickly turn an amp into a smoke machine. However, this last problem can be remedied with clamp boards, and the fact that the speakers remained in production until 1985 is testament to their enduring popularity. I could sell mine tomorrow, but I'm not going to.

As any owner of one, two or even multiple stacks of these speakers would agree, these Quad electrostatics are like an open window into the music. You are given what the very best of speakers hope to give you, a personal connection, a vital role in the music as the listener and the subject; the person who the music was actually created for. I believe the reason these speakers are still so phenomenally popular is the instant and alluring difference in the sound. The contrast between the 57s and the many other sound boxes we drag in and out of our houses, especially in the vintage market, is so striking that you often meet people who have kept their QUAD 57s for decades. And that's not just because they're a pain to get in and out of the car.

It seems fitting to end with another quote from Peter Walker who sums up the reason behind his speakers' longevity:

"We don't produce a new product every six months or even 12 months. No..only two reasons for producing a new model: either you did it wrong the first time or there's been a fundamental improvement in the science. And all the others now sound more like ours! "

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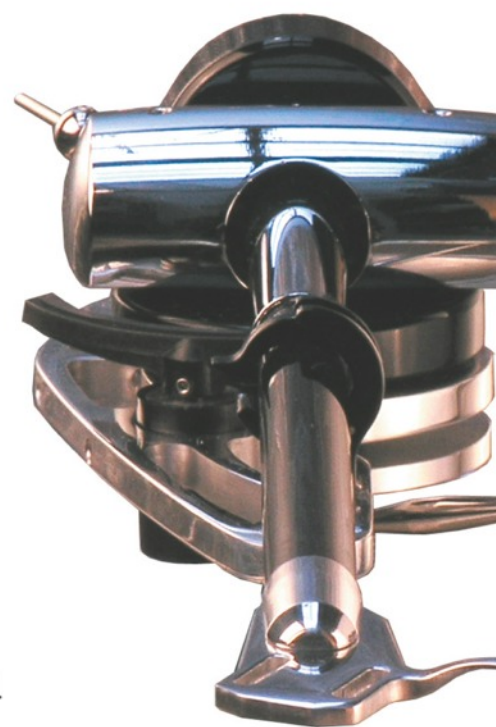
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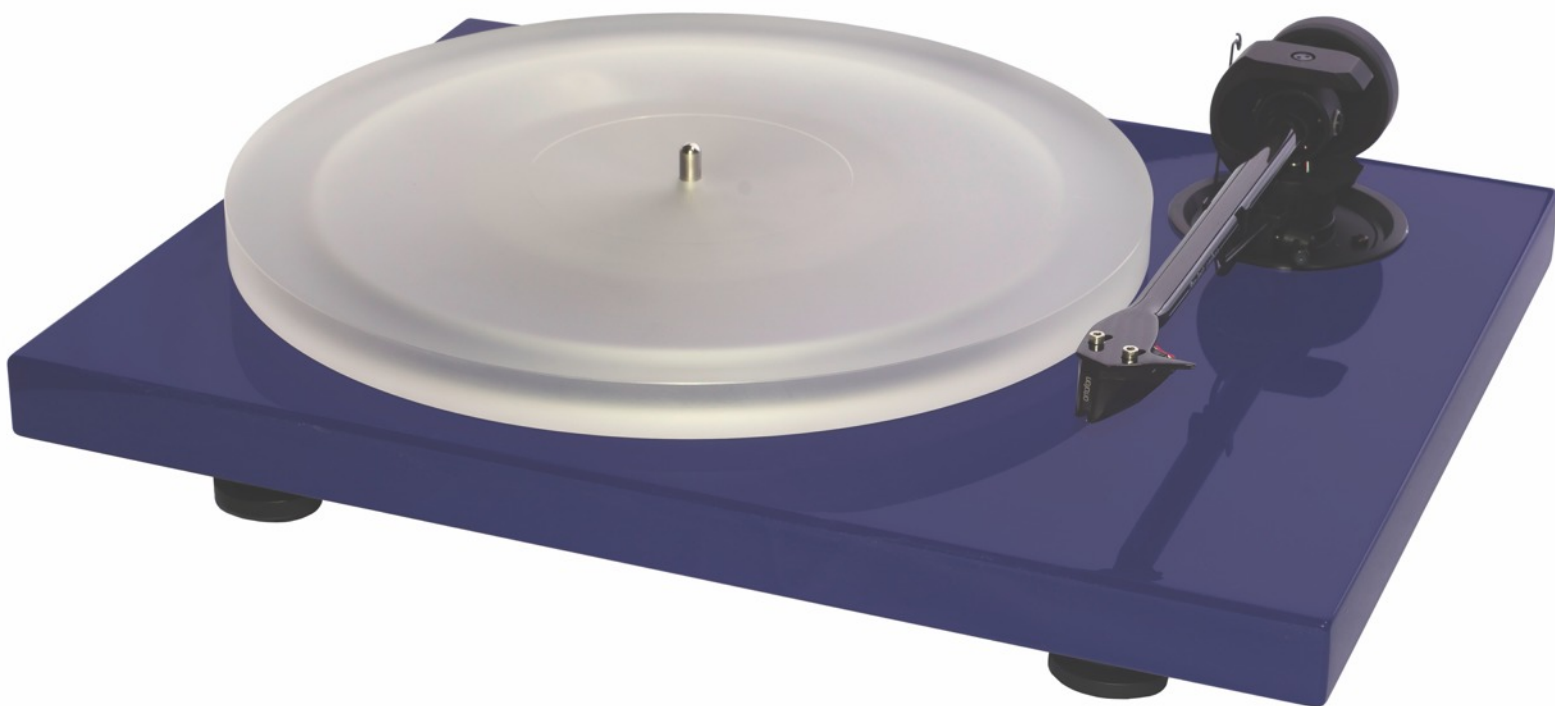
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# Pro-Ject Xpression Carbon UKX

**Peter Stanton-Ife takes a listen to this £575 turntable package made especially for the UK market and finds that it's really rather good!**



*This is the first of two reviews of the Pro-ject Xpression UKX turntable.*

Let's get straight to the point: I have never seen a piece of kit show this degree of musicality for so little. For less than £600 all in, here is a complete turntable package that will show a clean pair of heels to almost anything digital that I have heard up to twice its price. I am also struggling to identify an analogue package in the same price range that comes close to competing on sound quality or finish.

Listening to the UKX, I had to remind myself time and again of the cost as I found myself holding it to much higher standards than its RRP justifies.

## WHAT IS IT?

The Xpression Carbon UKX is a belt drive deck, tonearm and cartridge package, specially produced

for the highly competitive UK market with an RRP of £575.00.

## WHAT DO YOU GET?

The Pro-Ject arrived well packed in a compact box. Inside the box are a turntable with pre-fitted carbon fibre tonearm and an upgraded Ortofon 2M Red cartridge which form the main parts. Also included are an acrylic platter, a Perspex dust cover, a pair of RCA connectors and earth lead, a wall wart power supply and two mats, one felt and one cork. Clearly, there is no desire to scalp purchasers with expensive after-market extras here. This really is a complete package.

The plinth for the UKX comes in two colours which suggest that this package is not aimed at the pipe and slippers brigade – my review sample was a Burgundy Red; a rather vivid Midnight Blue is the other. I found the UKX well finished, unobtrusive, low profile and visually neat. The paint finish on the turntable is well executed and the deck itself is designed to resist audio and mechanical feedback.

Rapping the plinth does not seem to affect either speed stability or tracking in the slightest. Like most turntable users, I don't usually attach dust covers but for thoroughness I installed the cover; it can be a bit stiff and is liable to drop suddenly if not put up at a high enough angle.

The on/off switch is easy to reach on the front left of the unit, although it is tucked out of sight on the underside of the plinth. The music signal is output via 2 RCA phono sockets on the rear of the unit. The DC supply from a wall wart is changed to AC via a mechanically decoupled low-voltage custom-built 16V AC generator underneath the turntable. Pro-Ject claims that gives a very clean and stable power supply for accurate speed consistency. The low voltage generator is designed keep radio magnetic interference to a minimum.

At this price level, a credible fully suspended sub-chassis and platter would not be viable, and this approach brings its own problems anyway. Instead, the engineering solution for the suspension system is by the use of vibration absorbing spikes and a sorbothane-type material in the turntable's three adjustable feet. The motor is isolated from the plinth via two, Ortofon-designed, rubber grommets, designed to avoid resonance transferring from the motor to chassis. This is very simple and very effective engineering.

Obviously from the same stable as the Evolution version of the 9cc carbon-fibre tonearm, the supplied tonearm is well engineered. It has an oversized outer ring and one-piece carbon-fibre arm. The oversized outer ring is open to avoid resonance but is also very rigid to provide the most stable platform for the arm to work from. Carbon fibre is highly rated for its damping qualities and, when used in a tapered tonearm, can largely eradicate standing waves within the armtube itself. Carbon fibre is also very expensive.

The supplied MM cartridge is an uprated Ortofon 2M Red, tweaked here with silver spools for optimum signal generation. It has a tipped elliptical shaped stylus, designed for a low wear rate on the vinyl.

The platter has been upgraded from the standard model to an acrylic version with the aim of better matching the vinyl that sits on it, improving the

timing and cohesion of sound and offering superior detail over the standard platter. Two mats (one cork, the other felt) are provided and can be used according to taste. No clamp is provided or necessary.

## SETTING IT UP

This package is as close as I have found to a 'plug & play' solution, given that the supplied cartridge arrived already mounted and accurately set up. I had the package up and running within fifteen minutes from opening, of which a full five minutes were spent with my digital stylus gauge, confirming that I had dialed in the correct tracking weight by following the Pro-Ject instructions (I had).

The instructions are clear and worth reading through before starting on set up, if only to locate where in the box the parts are. All the buyer has to do is take the parts out of the box; put the belt around the sub-platter and motor pulley; put the platter (with or without its felt or cork mats) on the centre spindle; loop the bias weight thread onto the short rod sticking out the rear of the arm; screw the tonearm counterweight onto the rear of the arm and balance the arm for level and then adjust the playing weight to suit the cartridge (around 1.75g for the Ortofon 2M Red); and, if so inclined, fit the clear perspex lid onto the two metal hinge rods at the rear. Attach the supplied (reasonably good quality) phono leads and ground wire to connect the turntable via its rear RCA sockets to your amp or phono stage and that's it – ready to go.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The build quality on offer here is extraordinary for the price. The platter, bearing and tonearm seem to be built to very tight tolerances. The platter is precisely balanced and it is hard to discern any motion at all while the platter is spinning without an LP in place. Speed control (33 and 45 rpm) is achieved by removing the platter and adjusting the belt on a two-step pulley. I tested the platter with a strobe light and it was rock solid at both speeds. Listening to a Satie LP later, the quality of timbre and decay of the solo piano notes rather confirmed by ear what the measurements suggested.

I also checked that the cartridge was properly fixed in the tonearm, and found that the mounting had been done very well by the factory. No adjustments were needed for overhang, azimuth or VTA. The cartridge tracks very well. Although I notched up

# Reviews

the counterweight to 1.8 grams, that is a matter of taste, and it was a new cartridge requiring a bit of breaking in.

The tonearm lowering mechanism is damped and works smoothly, although it is not as silky smooth an action as more expensive arms, but the arm does lower accurately, gently and safely onto the record.

## The UKX managed to dig up and convey enough of all of these features to give a real sense of the playing.

I initially set up the turntable on my Townshend Seismic Sink Stand, checking all planes with a spirit level. Leveling was easily done by simply adjusting the three spiked feet. Also bearing in mind that likely buyers for such a turntable might not have specialist hifi isolation equipment, I also tried the unit out on a bookshelf and a table; neither caused any problems. Putting the plinth on either Isoplat or Dark Rock isolation platforms had little effect, either positive or negative, that I could discern.

I can only conclude that the decoupling engineering built into the unit is very effective and this turntable is very tolerant of most surfaces. As a result, unlike many much more expensive turntables, this one will not go out of kilter because there is an R in the month or because the CD player gave it a nasty look.

### ASSOCIATED KIT

For the purposes of testing, I used the excellent Whet RS30 RDT phono stage for most of my listening, although I also got good results from the Dynavector P75 MkIII, Electcompanion ECP-1 and the Clearaudio Basic Symmetry phono stages. I used a series of Naim amplifiers and my Audiovalve System 20 for listening purposes. Speakers were a Sonus Faber Grand Pianos and a pair of Open Baffles (a la Bastani). I also used a pair of cheapo Eltax speakers for completeness' sake. The Pro-Ject was not obviously out of place with any of this kit.

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

On first hearing, it immediately became plain that there was little point in comparing the Pro-Ject with either my Clearaudio Reference or my Kuzma Stabi S. They are both in a completely different class to the Pro-Ject, as would be expected given the many

times price differential and any comparison would have been unhelpful and uninformative. I decided therefore to listen to the Pro-Ject on its own terms and also to compare it against a couple of digital sources where I had duplicate media.

### THE MUSIC

Before getting on to the listening to music. I should report that on all (cleaned) records, the surface noise was low and rumble close to undetectable.

To put the table through its paces and to get some sense of the table's limitations, out of devilment I decided to put that audiophile favourite, Thelma

Houston's 'I've Got The Music In Me' (Sheffield Lab 2), on. The Pro-Ject took the record remarkably well in its stride. I assumed that this highly dynamic LP would cause all kinds of trouble (much in the way of torture tracks on setup discs) but actually it gave a good account of itself. The transients and climaxes for which this direct-to-disc recording are famous worked well enough, for which I imagine the carbon fibre arm is most to thank. The treble was a little peaky and with a rapid high frequency roll off. The midrange was a little overshadowed by the mid-bass. The deep bass wasn't really there, but I wasn't expecting to hear it either, but there was enough painted in to give a rounded picture of the music.

What I did hear mostly, though, was a decent and stable if not especially deep soundstage, with a clear and consistent spatial positioning of instruments and voices. There was much more there than I had any right to expect from a budget MM. The downside was that drums and female voices could sound a little thin and brittle at times.

So onto some "normal" records - 'Sad Old Red' from the 'Simply Red' album has a full rolling bass line, up and down, which is a good test of how capable a turntable is in the bass regions. The UKX gave a good account of itself although the bass did roll off at the bottom end. The integration with the well-recorded vocals was also good.

Up next was Brubeck's 'Time Out' album: on 'Blue Rondo a la Turk', the cymbal on the left should have a different and very discernible emphasis on each strike. The recording is also good enough to highlight the sound of the reed when the saxophone

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# Reviews

is playing. On 'Take Five' the turntable should be reproducing the drum on the left but the drum's echo sweeping back from the right. The UKX managed to dig up and convey enough of all of these features to give a real sense of the playing. It also managed to convey the timing of the music very convincingly within a credible soundstage.

Bearing in mind the pricing and possible youth market for this package, I then put on the Black Eyed Peas' 'The END' and Li'l Wayne's 'Tha Carter IV' and compared them to the Redbook versions I had ripped into WAV files onto my Mac Mini and played back through my Naim DAC stage. I also dug out the original CDs to play through my TEAC VRDS. Both LPs were more authoritative in the bass and felt more airy than their digital counterparts. Interestingly, neither album sounded as musical, dynamic or convincing on my Kuzma/Cadenza Blue set up as they did on the Pro-Ject which suggests that the deck might be better adapted to, or more forgiving of, some more modern recordings than some more

expensive decks. Whatever the reason, the UKX took the material in hand and made the most of it.

On to more testing types of music; Louis Auriacombe's Debussy orchestrations of Satie were an excellent test of speed stability. The spare tones of the piano are some of the easiest things to hear when they are "off", but among the hardest for any electronic equipment to reproduce well, let alone a budget turntable. The cartridge, assisted by a stable motor and quiet tonearm, made a good job of capturing the sound of the piano and the decays of its strings. The sound was recognizably a piano and the space it was playing in. This is quite a feat for a budget MM and I was impressed.

However, large-scale classical music, generally, presented more challenges. I think it was the cartridge that did not really have quite the prowess to decode busy orchestral scores, leaving a broad sense of what was on the disc, but not much detail and a little sense of clutter and congestion during busy



periods. Some soprano voices could also sound a bit shrill and sibilant, but then I've heard the same from MC cartridges at thrice the cost of the whole UKX package.

In all fairness, however, I would suggest that opera lovers and Wagnerians might want to look elsewhere (and probably spend a lot more, too) for a one-stop solution, or at least consider my caveat below about upgrading the cartridge pronto.

All of the comments above are made by a reviewer spoiled for choice with a range of expensive turntables, arms, phono stages, step up transformers and moving coil cartridges. Of course, a relatively cheap turntable package will fall short in almost all technical areas against these. The interesting point is that it did not fall nearly as far short as I thought it might – and its virtues tended to mask its vices. I enjoyed having the UKX and really did not want to give it back...despite its shortcomings, the UKX really gets to the core of most music and then boogies with it. I cannot think of any other budget equipment I have had where I kept digging up recording after recording to give it a go and where I have found myself going to bed at three in the morning quite so often! The UKX is nowhere near perfect but it really does put a grin on the face.

Thinking of it metaphorically: it is like a modern diesel engine; it is only really in certain rev zones and at certain times that it is caught out and then suddenly it is clear why it will never beat a good petrol engine. But for most of the time it does the job very well and very economically.

## WHO'S IT FOR?

There are, I think, two credible and distinct markets for the UKX.

I am open to suggestions, but I am struggling to think of a turntable package below £1000 which, in my estimation, improves on the UKX package. While extra expenditure on a dearer turntable might give better dynamic range, a deeper, more authoritative bass, better image focus and a more convincing soundstage, that is by no means certain until this threshold, and even then not guaranteed.

On that basis, the UKX should be considered a very good starter turntable – it has all that is needed (with a phono stage or compatible amp) to start playing

and getting real pleasure out of vinyl. Any money left in the budget could then be invested in enough new LPs to start a respectable collection.

The other possible market is for those whose emphasis is more on the digital part of their systems but who wish to keep a small collection of vinyl. This machine is quite capable of providing a sound quality at least equal to any digital kit I have heard up to twice its price. I had it plugged into a £5000 amplifier designed for the digital world that I am currently reviewing and it did not feel out of place at all.

## SCOPE FOR UPGRADE

Over time, and as budgets allow, I can also see that the UKX could provide considerable opportunities for tweaking. My first stop would be the cartridge. As would be expected, while good enough for a sub £100 piece, the 2M is very much the limiting factor in this package. If I owned the UKX, I would hesitate before trading up either 'table or arm until I had tried a better cartridge, possibly even an MC; keeping to the Ortofon theme, I see no reason why any of the new Quintet series would not partner happily with the excellent arm, but any medium mass cartridge might be worth a spin.

Although I do not imagine many people would stump up for this level of upgrade, I hear that another reviewer has fitted a Koetsu to very good effect on a Pro-Ject Carbon turntable and tonearm, confirming my view that the arm and table might well be worth sticking with rather more than the cartridge.

## CONCLUSION

The UKX package provides great musical fun. It is much better for overall drive and general atmosphere than any digital source that I can think of in its price range and some way above.

It would be ridiculous to suggest that this package is a giant beater – it isn't. Clearly, the UKX package does not offer the highest resolution nor are its dynamics world-class, but the sound is smooth and reasonably well balanced over most of the range, with good imaging and tonal colour. Timing is excellent and, for most forms of music, it gives a very clear and coherent idea of what is on the disc. It

# Reviews

does not get on brilliantly with large orchestral pieces and can make some sopranos sound a bit brittle, but show me a turntable package below the £1000 mark that does, and I do wonder if that is the limitation of the supplied MM. The arm is more than capable of extracting all the detail from the cartridge that it can dig up. The turntable is, of course, because of its relatively low mass, a bit deficient in the lower bass but it gives a reasonably convincing story generally.

Regardless of any cavils I may have, the UKX easily passes my main test of any hifi equipment – I found that I was able to listen to most forms of music for hours without fatigue and always wanting more.

I'm genuinely astonished that Pro-Ject can bring this package to the market at this price but this is not the place to muse on the economics of electronics manufacture. I'd simply suggest that anybody in the market for a turntable package in the sub-£1000 bracket should put the UKX on the audition shortlist. For the money being asked, I cannot think of a better source system – full stop.

**Build Quality - 10/10 - (it really is hard to see on any standards, let alone budget kit, what they could do better)**

**Sound Quality – 8.5/10**

**Value for money – 10/10**

**Overall – 9.5/10**

**Price when reviewed - £575**

**Absurdly good value for money plug and play analogue system for people getting started in vinyl or who need a secondary analogue system for their residual vinyl collection.**

**Peter Stanton-Ife**

**Having achieved an overall score in excess of 8.5 the Pro-Ject Xpression Carbon UKX will now be sent for second review to a different Hifi Pig reviewer. If in that review it scores an average of 8.5 or over the turntable will be awarded our Outstanding Product award.**



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# KEF X300A Loudspeakers

**This £600 pair of speakers from KEF includes amplifiers and a DAC so you can plug them straight into your computer and away you go!**



**Hifi Pig**

**RECOMMENDED**

**W**hen we heard the X300A loudspeakers from KEF ever so briefly at Munich High-End 2013 we were pretty impressed by these powered desktop speakers and so when KEF approached Hifi Pig and asked us if we'd be interested in taking a listen to them at home we jumped at the chance.

The first thing you notice when unpacking the speakers is their physical size (they're pretty big for desktops) and then it's their weight, they're 7.5 Kg per speaker. The next thing is the finish which is a sort of metallic textured grey that looks pretty smart and contemporary and finishes off the black front baffle very nicely indeed. They look solid and well put together.

Pop them on the desk and you realise that these really are quite large speakers for the role they're supposed to fulfil – they're about the same size as the Q Acoustics Concept 20s we had for a while. I use an ancient child's double-width school desk that

I've modified for a large person (I've stuck new legs on the bottom) and the KEFs take up a good deal of the available space leaving very little extra space for paperwork – I'm left with room for my laptop and mouse mat and that's about it, which isn't exactly ideal but then I'm aware my desk is a little unusual and most other people will have more conventional grown up spaces on which to work.

The internal volume of the speakers is 4.7litres and what you have essentially is a two-way bass reflex speaker using KEF's Uni-Q driver array which is a 25mm vented aluminium dome in the centre of a 130mm magnesium/aluminium alloy mid/bass unit. What this gives you is a point source arrangement and so I was expecting imaging to be pretty impressive...we'll see.

The X300 are active and each has twin AB amps that deliver 50 watts to the woofers and 20 watts to the tweeters. Of course, being active both speakers need to be plugged into a mains supply. Using the

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computer as source it's a simple matter of plugging the included USB from computer to the back of the left hand speaker and then connecting the two speakers together with another included USB cable. Set up takes a couple of minutes and on powering up JRiver Media player you've got tunes – you can also connect via a mini jack so you can connect to an ipod or whatever.

Controls are minimal and on the back of the left speaker you've got a tiny little knob for system gain and on the right speaker a similar knob for balance. I'd have preferred to have the controls for gain and balance more accessible on the front panel. Apart from the IEC, the port and an on/off switch (left hand speaker only) that's about it...apart from the heatsink and a switch for desktop or standmount positioning – I don't think the connectivity needs make these really ideal for standmounting and so it remained in the desktop position, as did the speakers. The only indication the speakers are turned on is a tiny and unobtrusive LED above the driver on the left hand speaker.

They're modern looking, nicely put together and I quite like them sat on my desk, despite their size and I'm quite happy to sacrifice the space given the music I'm hearing.

They'll play 96kHz 24bit files straight from the USB jack of your computer and so what they do take up in desk space you sort of make up in that you don't need an extra amplifier...they're still pretty big though.

First file on the player was Armand van Helden's "2 Future 4 U" and the imaging is an immediate (and expected) strongpoint of the X300As. OK, these speakers are around 70cm apart as I have them set up, but you get thrown up a nice and enveloping stage that is actually very 3 dimensional and you can pick a mix apart pretty easily. Cranking the volume up a bit gives you decent enough but not mega low bass which is never-the-less tight and controlled and all the frequencies seem pretty well how they should be here. If you listen to electronic music on your desk top then the X300As are really very good indeed...I found it hard not to just play this style of



music if truth be known! My youngest son (you can read his review below) has had the KEFs for a week or so before I got to hear them and, given his taste in music, I know he will have loved them.

Essentially what you have here is a nearfield monitor that has been designed specifically for the home market. I had a play with Ableton Live mixing some of my own tunes and they're really rather good in that role and I suppose a good few people will use them as both desk top monitors for music making and for listening to tunes in a more conventional sense. It's a long time since I've listened to professional monitors if truth be known and so I can't really compare on this front to what's available today...and besides I don't think this is where KEF sees its market for these loudspeakers being.

The new David Cosby album "Coz" is a bit of a cracker and I have it as high-rez file and it has to be said that the little X300s sound pretty good with this album despite them only handling 96kHz/24bit. I have to say here that I'd have liked to be able to have the hi-rez files I have to play at their proper resolution and the DSD crowd obviously don't get a look in which will possibly put off a few desktop audiophiles I'm afraid to say.

There's that enveloping sound I mentioned before, which is a little headphone-like, but the speakers are so close to my ears that there's little I can do about this – in fact I quite like it. However, push the chair back a foot or two and you get what is basically a normal stereo image but on a smaller scale than with the main rig. The imaging and staging of instruments in front of you is obviously quite narrow (but well beyond the speakers) in width, but it's really nicely layered forward and back as well as in the vertical plane.

Mid ranges, as demonstrated by vocals are very well portrayed, as is piano as heard on Fleetwood Mac's Songbird. Crank the volume up and there's a little braking up of the sound at the very top end and things can get a little not quite right overall because of this but at normal listening levels all is well.

Phantom Limbs "Tumbling Down" sounds deep, resonant and there's an overall warmth to the sound that is really quite appealing and makes the X300As an easy listen in that it's not over analytical (perhaps precise would be a more audiophile word to use) ... in fact I found myself listening for hours whilst I was working and I know I'm going to miss these when they go as they surely must.

The X300s are a dynamic, great fun and really engaging listen. I wouldn't want them as my only speakers, but for a desktop speaker that sounds really great whilst I'm working they offer a great solution that is plug and play.

Here's the thing, with all hifi systems there are compromises and I think what KEF have achieved here is a system that will appeal to those folk who want the convenience of being able to plug in a pair of speakers to their computer and just listen to music without having to mess about or think about cables, amps and DACs.

The X300s do play music and they play it in a really engaging and enjoyable fashion and if the ultimate in resolution isn't a main consideration, but having a very good overall sound in a relatively compact package is a priority then I think you will love these speakers.

£600 is quite a lot of money for a desktop system in many ways, but then you've got no amp or DAC...or cables come to think of it... to spend extra money on and whilst I wouldn't suggest these offer exceptional value for money they're certainly not outrageously priced. They're well built, solid and look the business in a cool and modern kind of way.

I've really enjoyed these loudspeakers a great deal and if I could justify spending another £600 on yet more speakers I'd buy them in a flash as I know they'd allow me to listen to loads more music and in a more enjoyable and more inclusive way than I currently do on the desktop headphone set up. Perhaps I've actually justified the spend to myself in that last sentence...

**Build Quality - 9/10**

**Sound Quality – 7.5/10**

**Value for Money 7.5/10**

**Overall 8/10**

**Price when reviewed £600**

**Highly recommended for people who love music and want to hear it presented in a foot tapping and enjoyable fashion whilst at their desks.**

**Stuart Smith**

*Given that these loudspeakers are very much aimed at the computer generations we thought it would be interesting to get the opinion of a 16 year old so off they went to our 16 year old son Harry to give his opinions on them.*

# Reviews

Ever since I started listening to music, I've been part of the "ipod Generation" and my primary source of music and entertainment has either been my PC or my portable audio device with mid to high end headphones.

The KEF X300A speakers make the transition from headphone to speaker very easy. I only used them in the desk configuration and coupled them up with my gaming/media PC setup (I should point out that there is a stand mode as well). The installation is pretty simple, but can get a bit messy with the amount of cables that are needed for them to function. (2 power cables and 2 mini USB to USB cables). The cables are nothing special, just bog-standard ones.

The speakers on the other hand are sublime. First of all they look drop dead gorgeous with their brushed metal sides and highly detailed drivers, the KEF logo sits proudly on the front of both speakers.

Moving on to sound, the X300A's sound very good, they give an all round punchy and dynamic sound without being over the top. They're also very versatile and can excel with all music from electronic to acoustic. I also tested the speakers with other types of media like films and games, where they performed just as well.

Some may say that £600 is a bit steep for a pair of desk speakers but being powered speakers they are the only thing you need to buy to have a fully functioning hifi setup (obviously you need a PC or MAC but I'm guessing that everybody already has one). The sound quality and finish more than justifies the price.

In conclusion, KEF have made a great first impression with me, showing me that entering the world of hifi isn't so complicated (or expensive) and that a pair of speakers can change the way you listen to music.

**Build Quality- 9/10**

**Sound Quality- 8/10**

**Value for money- 7/10**

**Overall- 8/10**

**I would recommend these speakers to anyone looking for a well rounded speaker for their PC or for a secondary/ bedroom setup. For me as a teenager, they fit the bill perfectly.**

**Price when reviewed- £600**

**Harry Smith**

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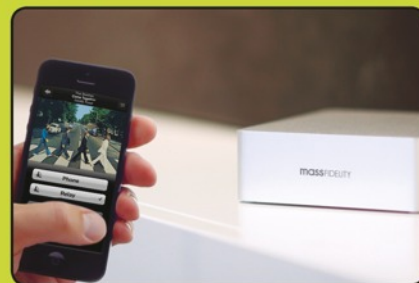
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# PrimaLuna Prologue Premier - Valve Integrated Amplifier

Danny Worth



One are the days when valve amps sounded like a lush, overly warm and romantic interpretation of the music. These days a typical valve amplifiers circuit is more geared towards a sparkly more dynamic and gutsy type of presentation and the PrimaLuna Prologue Premier continues this trend. This particular valve integrated from PrimaLuna was sent along to Hifi Pig for review from Absolute Sounds in the UK.

The amp looks modern and clean and on the front has just the volume control (ALPS Blue Velvet) and

the source selector knob. A valve cage is included to protect the valves from inquisitive fingers and the power switch is on the left hand side of the amp. Around the back is a good selection of four line level RCAs, a home theatre pass through and speaker terminals for 8 and 4 Ohm loads. Inside wiring is point to point. Included in the design of the PrimaLuna is a Bad Tube Indicator which takes the form of a small LED on the chassis in front of each valve and as its name suggests this indicates if a valve is bad. The Power Transformer Protection

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circuit allows the amp to switch off and reset should the power transformer overheat and there's a similar circuit (OTP) for the output transformers. In place of a plate fuse the amp utilises a “+B relay” which works in conjunction with the OTP circuit to protect in case of valve failure.

The model we were sent had 4 EL34 power tubes and 4 smaller ECC82/12AU7 valves. The more typical 'old school' valve enthusiast would take one look at this valve compliment and suggest that the amp would have a large, overblown midrange, soft bass and perhaps a rolled off treble. How wrong he would be!

It's such a common misconception with valves that they are nothing but trouble ridden unreliable and unnecessary parts of an audio setup - this is also untrue. Yes, a valve can have issues of its own from time to time, but they are far from unreliable in their modern form and with the ability for a user to replace a valve rather than send an entire transistor amplifier to an engineer for repair general maintenance is somewhat simpler in the main. I have personally been using valve amps for a fair few years now and apart from one instance (which a quick valve change

solved) have not had any trouble with them whatsoever.

One of the main advantages for me is that the valve platform allows for tube rolling where the valves can be changed to offer a slightly different sonic characteristic and flavour to the music, which is certainly something that cannot be achieved with solid state amplifiers.

The Prologue Premier being all valve has this tube rolling capacity, but taking this notion one step further the PrimaLuna has the ability to configure its Auto Bias settings via the flick of a switch to power KT88 valves and it's variant a 6550 - as well as the EL34's (provided for this review) and their variants of KT77 and 6CA7 valves.

Then there are the four ECC82/12AU7 which also have various and different sounding equivalents in modern or NOS (new old stock) vintage tubes, industrial, military and broadcast forms. A minefield you say? No, a fun way to tailor the amp to specific requirements and tastes in that all valves convey slight variations in bass, treble and midrange presentation with some have larger effects than others.



There's a certain unmistakeable quality to vocals and instruments using a good valve amplifier, a richness of tone, a naturally glorious and beautifully liquid midrange which is both expressive and organic. The PrimaLuna Prologue Premier is one of those valve amps which certainly ticks these particular boxes for me.

## SOUND

The first thing apparent when switching the PrimaLuna on is its cleanliness in the top end. It has a wonderfully sparkly and airy treble which blends down into a clean upper midrange. Details are prominent and easily depicted even when listening to large crescendos and larger orchestral pieces. Dynamics in this portion of the frequency range are not overly strong, they are however far from subdued or mellow and they are a little more energetic and cleaner than natural.

Moving down into the midrange most listeners would agree that this is the strongest area of the sound reproduction with valve amplifiers (and which I agree with) although there are vast differences in tonal balance in this area from amplifier to amplifier. Vocals on the Prologue Premier are strong vibrant

and clean in nature, projected and very slightly up-front - which is how I like them. An EL34 tube will always have some added warmth in the midrange and the cleaner circuit on the PrimaLuna allows for a great flavour to vocals. As well as the cleanliness the midrange conveys there is an unmistakable richness to the undertones of male vocals and an organic and natural rasp to the sound which really allows the listener to hear the great vocal range of the likes of Frank Sinatra... or his modern counterpart Michael Buble.

Female vocalists like Rachelle Farell, Ilse DeLange, Mariah Carey and Diana Krall all have a pitch of tone respective to their vocal presentation. Here, although a little bit cleaner than some other modern EL34 amplifiers, upper midrange factors in a bit more forwardness when hitting higher volumes, but at reasonable volumes it's not as apparent.

Moving along into the bass regions – another common trait of an EL34 amplifier is that its bass is a little fuller, less driven and a little less complex. The nature of the PrimaLuna circuit actually compliments this very well! There isn't a lot of bloom, there is a tightness compared to other amps such as the Eastern Electric M520 and a simple change of the power



# Reviews

valves to the 6CA7 or KT77 would increase pace, drive and lower mid information. Bass as I said is full and it's surprisingly well extended for an EL34 which is a testament to the circuit used in the PrimaLuna. I would say that overall it was more complementary to live performances than manufactured music.

**With its ability to switch between KT88, EL34's and their variants via a simple flick of a switch and its non-deadly auto-biasing feature, the PrimaLuna is extremely flexible and should cater to the specifics of most users.**

Exploring some other aspects of the sound a little further Damien Rice's 'Volcano' showed marvellous timbre to the running of guitar strings to the left hand side of the realistic soundstage allowing both the male and female vocals to sound fluid and engrossing. This is a great late night listening track with great flow and although a modestly stripped down piece of music, the Premier really brings out all the small nuances and finely detailed sounds within the soundstage in a true 'out of the box fashion'.

I wouldn't say that there is a great amount of refinement in this amp's presentation, although it can convey delicacies which for a bit of soft rock such as 'The Sultans of Swing' from Dire Straits allows for the electric guitar to pierce the air and give a bit of an edgy grunt to proceedings.

Of course, being an ardent tube roller I just had to swap out the tubes in the amp and opted for a quad of Gold Lion (GL) KT77's which bias from the EL34 switch on the side of the amp. I also changed the stock 12AU7's for a quad of Siemens and Halaske (S & H) triple mica E82CC long plates from the early 60's. From experience the GL's should provide more bass drive whilst retaining warmth whilst the S&H will add bandwidth, balance and control.

Switching back on and allowing the PrimaLuna to preheat the valves and do its usual safety circuit checks the differences that could be heard were immediate.

There was a larger bass response which was also tighter and more driven. Midrange gained openness and the silky clean expression of the vocals attested

to a more 'in the room' feeling with them being more lifelike, less muddy and absolutely wonderful in every way.

Top end was a huge leap for me with the depiction between details and the airy silences really added a more intense and lifelike feel to the sound. Notes were crisper yet more controlled and the detail retrieval seemed greatly improved with added bandwidth and rendering.

Dynamics also seemed to sound freer and came from a darker background which was never overly dead and still allowed for

that seductive valve flow to wash across an improved soundstage.

I ended up concluding my time with the PrimaLuna listening to some rock and I'm sure most of you that follow my reviews know this really isn't my favourite genre, but then I do like a little from time to time. One of my favourite rock albums of all time is the 'Hysteria' album by Def Leopard, definitely their best work and with the rolled tubes on board I easily went through the whole album. The amp still retained the previous grunt with the genre that I enjoyed earlier when listening to some Dire Straits and this was truly unexpected. I'm sure some would argue that valve amps just don't do rock music but I enjoyed it very much with the PrimaLuna in the system.

Accompanied with the amplifier is a seriously sleek 'wand' type remote in black metal and with just six shiny stainless buttons. I never touched on this earlier in the review as my example had run out of batteries - probably due to having a button depressed when it was packaged after its last review, I never bothered to change the batteries as you need to remove the two rubber rings (which prevent it from being scratched (or scratching) a flat surface and which stop it from sliding about on a table) to reveal a couple screws which then expose the battery compartment.

ment. I'm used to having to turn two volume pots on my Emille so one was still an easier solution than normal.

I just found myself holding the remote from time to time and admiring it instead... and playing air guitar with it too from time to time!

## CONCLUSION

I would conclude that the PrimaLuna Prologue Premier's circuit is highly accomplished and with the stock valves in place it sounds fantastic. However with a few changes in valve compliment there really is a whole heap of detail, complexity (amongst other attributes) which can be achieved to provide for a really engrossing listen.

With its ability to switch between KT88, EL34's and their variants via a simple flick of a switch and its non-deadly auto-biasing feature, the PrimaLuna is extremely flexible and should cater to the specifics of most users.

Looks-wise it's simple, attractive and well made and it comes with that super sexy all metal remote control.

I for one would certainly stump up the pennies for one of these. Have a listen and see what you think and if your already on the valve train and have any of the variants of the tubes mentioned take them along and see if your dealer will let you have a play - if not wait 'til you get it home.

**Build Quality - 8/10**

**Sound Quality - 8/10**

**Value For Money - 8/10**

**Overall - 8/10**

**Price when tested EL34 - £2300 (KT88 - £2600)**

**Highly recommended for its flexibility, simple good looks and core sonic signature.**

**Danny Worth**



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# Tellurium Q Ultra Black Interconnects

Danny Worth

**Hifi Pig**

**RECOMMENDED**

I've actually had a chance previously to try the Ultra Blacks from Tellurium Q in my system, however it was at the same time as I had the opportunity to listen to the Iridium amp and so in all honesty everything else went out the window and my concentration was unintentionally fully focused on the Iridium and nothing else for the time I had with it.

So now with nothing else to stray my ears from the target I once again have the Ultra Black interconnects in for my undivided attention and review.

First of all I'll pass judgement on their build quality which is very nice, flexible and they look sleek. I like the locking Tellurium Q TeCu RCAs as they are lightweight and low mass, something that some manufacturers fail to address all too often.

Routing them into the system is completely simple and I didn't need to pull the rack out into the middle of the room to accommodate them or employ a two man team to bend them around to the neighbouring component.

Tellurium Q pride themselves on a simple "suck it and see" philosophy when offering their products rather than filling the mind with jargon and science to attain a somewhat preconceived idea of what to expect, so let's switch on and have a listen...

## THE SOUND

The first impression I had of the UB (Ultra Black) was how strong and focused the central focus was,

how projected the vocals were and how clean the midrange was as a whole.

Bass notes are very full, a tad dry and with a great amount of weight. Bass extension rolls out separately to the punch, a beat can be heard and before you think "is that it" all of a sudden a rolling wave of extension spreads out across the room.

Top end is a little more relaxed than a lot of cables I've heard, it's all there but the mids dominate a little more and there isn't a complete evenness or balance from the treble through to the upper mids. The cables render vocals strongly and there isn't that upper-mid treble harshness or glare that a lot of cables suffer from. It's a very different presentation and my ears took a little while to get used to the sound as it's so different to the Oriton Orange Symphonies that I use on a day to day basis (which have a far more relaxed midrange) but the UB really showed off some amazing details in the centre stage and completely placed the performance in front of the listener without an artificial spread or unnatural interpretation of the performance.

It's easy to imagine a singer at the forefront of the stage and the band and/or speaker system being placed around the edges of the stage and further to the rear of the main focus of the vocalist.

I always have issues with cables that suck out the midrange and try to give an enhanced depth to the soundstage allowing for smaller finer details to sit closer to the listener to give an artificial "wow factor". Personally I'd rather have the main artist at the

forefront and be exposed as the star of the performance. Don't get me wrong, there's bags of detail being conveyed by the cables here but not to the expense of over shadowing the vocals.

Also during first listening I kind of thought to myself "is this sounding a little disjointed", but after exploring many different genres and vocals from both male and female artist I grew to appreciate what I was hearing.

There is a certain quality to the separation of the music with the Ultra Black interconnects - rather than having an overall wall of notes that blend into one another (with time smearing or added/extra decay) there were clear definitions and a quality of air and space around the individual sounds.

Vocals are strongly projected from centre stage, accompanying instruments have volume levels relative to their depth on the stage and lower bass notes have that slight delay before their respective sound waves roll out to the listener. I perceived some notes as being completely independent of the performance in various places in the room and they seemed to have little initial connection to the music but once adjusted I gained a respect for this completely spatial and defined effect - if the notes were supposed to be over there then that's where they were heard.

It seems as if the UB has such precision with regards to timing that it gives a presentation which is very

different to virtually every cable I've ever heard, no bloom, added decay, colouration or drag.

It's simply on point, to the point and all there for you to hear.

I'm not going to add a conclusion to this review, I will just add that the UB is a cable of very different characteristics to any I've ever heard and it took me a little adjusting to this sound, but I have a great respect for what they do and they certainly stand out from the crowd with their unique character.

Now if this sounds like something that would suit you then do what Tellurium Q suggest and try it for yourself.

**Build Quality - 8.5/10**

**Sound Quality 8 /10**

**Value for Money 8.5/10**

**Overall - 8.3/10**

**Recommended for their bold and unique approach to reproducing music accurately and with great timing.**

**Price at time of review - £380 - 1m Pair**

**Author - Danny Worth**



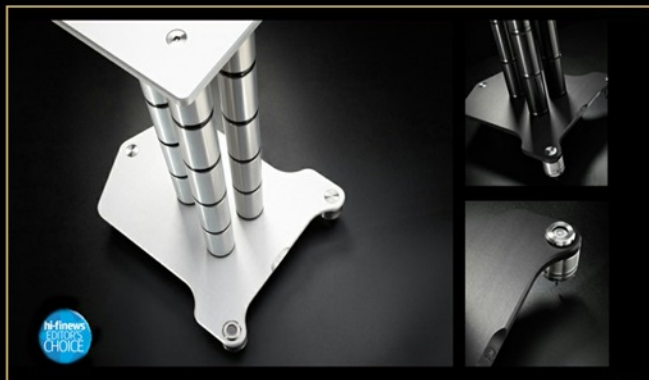


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**Hifi Pig**

**RECOMMENDED**

# MS HD Power MS-E01 Power Distribution Mains Filter and MS-40PUK High Current Mains Cable

**Danny Worth**

**M**S HD Power featured in Hifi Pig a couple months ago with their new take on the UK wall plug and here we have their MS-E01 filtration distribution block. The MS-E01 has six upwards pointing rhodium plated sockets arranged around its elongated triangular shaped all aluminium body. The end plate has a standard iec input rather than the 16amp horizontal pinned design of others similar in style.

Next to the iec connector is a push button circuit breaker rated at 20amps which is a far more transparent feature than fusing the unit.

The block is beautifully designed and constructed and its crowning glory is the highly polished gold branding plate, etched with the company's logo.

The unit comes in at slightly over 5kg and feels very substantial. On the underside there are 3 rounded brass spiked cones which are removable if chosen allowing the unit to be seated on its rubber feet. This is a useful feature and interchangeable dependent on either the surface you're standing the unit on or personal preference.

Also supplied for review was the MS high current MS-30PUK, a thick, well constructed, silver plated copper, shielded mains cable with a rhodium plug.

# Reviews

**The initial feeling was that adding the conditioner wasn't like opening a window to the music it was more like opening up a window to the artist.**

## THE SETUP

Placing the E01 block on my wooden rack with its brass cones in place I connected it in using the Oriton AC-5 mains cable which usually feeds my Isol-8 Axis Powerline DC Blocking distribution unit. I have used many different units from the likes of PS Audio, Isotek, Dezorel, Vertex AQ, Power Inspired, Russ Andrews/Kimber, Black Rhodium and Ayre amongst others and my greatest success has been with the Isol-8 which I do tend to recommend frequently coming in at around the £500 mark. It's terrific value for money and has been a better performer for me against far more expensive units of varying technologies ie regenerators, filters and conditioners.

For initial set up I left the Emille Ki40-L integrated plugged directly into the wall as usual and used Oriton AC-3 cables from the MS Filter to power the modded squeezebox and the Totaldac d1 tube.

## THE SOUND

The first piece of music I played was 'All Of Me' by John Legend and immediately I stood back and thought 'wow, this is more holographic'. Legend's vocal was rendered with a quality which I could only describe as organic, the end phrasing of each word had a breath of such natural throatiness that I have not heard using my Isol-8 Axis. Piano notes hung in the air for perceivable longer period of time and sounded more accurate and true to the instrument.

The initial feeling was that adding the conditioner wasn't like opening a window to the music it was more like opening up a window to the artist.



I played the duet 'Say Something' from Christina Aguilera and A Great Big World deciding to stay with recent popular music I'd been listening to during the course of the day. I found myself completely engrossed in the music - more so than I have done

## **The MS 40P is quite similar in presentation to the Harmonic Technology Fantasy AC10 with proportions of front soundstage performance depth and detail leading to an unforced and easy to appreciate cable with no nasties.**

with my current system previously. The vocals were so expressive and meaningful, piano, violin and bass were totally magical and the airy nature to the soundstage conveyed that the music was set in an intimate scene. There was a definite finesse to the softer side of Christina's voice which is a rarity on many albums from her.

The E01 seemed to make sense of the music adding a greater sense of appreciation for my system, conveying notes and harmonics which I have simply not heard produced in such a manner before in this listening space and making more efficient use of the room.

Playing a range of Dance and Electronica pushed the rooms boundaries so far that the room didn't seem to exist anymore, all that was left was a front to back, left to right encapsulation of absolutely holographic, detailed rhythmic beats and rhythms, a glorious mass of intricate detail, dynamic rushes sweeping the void my system had carved into the atmosphere with such complexity I can only describe it by referring it to visiting the French Science Museum and experiencing 4D technology.

Dynamics, details and harmonics were just dashing around in all directions and what was so special was that this never became exhausting in the slightest.

I had a friend come over as I had to involve someone else in the excitement that I felt towards the improvement the unit has given the system. After he had stopped looking around for hidden surround speakers

he just sat there and said "it sounds ridiculously incredible. What have you done to the setup?" When I showed him the MS E01 he just stood there with a blank look on his face and I said 'honestly, that's all I've changed'. He still continued examine the rest of

the components on the rack and cables, looked at me and just sat back down staring into the centre of the soundstage whilst I went and made a drink with a grin.

The beautiful saxophone solo by Candy Dulfer on 'Nikki's Dream' Live in Amsterdam again conveyed excellent emotion, a trueness to the soundstage and concert hall acoustics with reverbs manifesting as I felt they should have been seated a few rows back of centre stage. Similarly the electric guitar solo was smooth and echoed through the

room decaying tremendously as each note cut through the last and the odd tighter pluck held a very different space slightly bouncing towards the left rear of the room.

When both musicians joined forces and began playing together I could feel the rush of excitement in the crowd as if I was sat there.

A common trait of many filtering conditioning appliances is a brightness, a leanness, a lack of dynamics or a sucked out midrange whereas the MS E01 only adds spatial awareness, more natural tonality, timbre and an overall lifelike appeal coupled with an absolutely silent background which allows decays, smaller harmonics and that magical breath of a vocalist which people spend thousands in other areas of the system to obtain.

'Swinging on the Tree of Life' Eric Komar and 'Mi Shebeirach' Debbie Friedman (two tracks produced by Craig Taubman) expresses the timbres and tonality of instruments against the dark background allowing strings, piano and woodwind to really tell the story of the song so elegantly without being pretentious.

The E01 from MS HD Power almost seems like it has the intelligence to adapt itself to the musical genre and give sonic benefits which make it more interesting and enjoyable. Vocals have breath and tone, instruments are true to the engineered construction,

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intimate passages have refinement and hard beats have drive and rhythm.

Listening to Chris Jones' 'Angel From Montgomery' clearly showed the enhanced soundstage attributes I have talked about, with air and space between instruments (and around the vocal) being greatly improved and the soundstage appearing more realistic and taller in comparison to the Isol-8.

## ADDING THE MS CABLE

Supplied with the distribution filter was a MS-40PUK mains cable as recommended by MS HD Power for its high current capabilities. The cable is an added cost of £450 and is constructed from 6N Silver plated Copper in an all shielded design. It's extremely thick and solidly made with MS Rhodium UK plug and IEC.

Switching out the higher current Oriton cable, which also use MS plugs, I began to troll through the music previously mentioned and a range of other tracks I had been previously listening too.

The overall sense of the music was still there, although in comparison to the Oriton cables (£795) the MS 40 had a slightly warmer and bloomier midrange whereas the Oriton is more focused and more refined and natural to the vocal presentation and has a more holographic sensation to the soundstage.

Drive of lower notes was similar yet slightly more rounded in bass presentation, although layering and control was marvellously informative.

Higher end notes were still airy and the soundstage involvement was still terrific, the cable is just slightly smoother throughout.

Comparing to the \$700 DH Labs Red Wave mains cable showed the MS to give a wonderfully central focus just a handful of rows from the performers. In comparison the DH Labs was very much more upfront and its overall presentation was heavily detail driven. The DH Labs is an impressive cable, but I felt the richer smoother tones of the MS 40 made for a more musical and intimate listening experience with a delicate approach to recreating smaller details with generosity and finesse.

The MS 40P is quite similar in presentation to the Harmonic Technology Fantasy AC10 with proportions of front soundstage performance depth and detail leading to an unforced and easy to appreciate cable with no nasties.

I am still a firm believer of running the amplifier direct from the wall and although I have terrific results using isolated or balanced power supplies I still continue to use this method.

## CONCLUSIONS

The MS-E01 filtered distribution unit is a product which is extremely well constructed from high-end parts with great attention to detail.

With a simple swap out of the Isol-8 the performance of my system reached new heights, particularly in the rendition of detail in a superbly organic and natural way, a real sense of feeling from an artist and a presence to instruments which gave them a true "in the room" feeling that allowed for even the body construction of wood based instruments to be conveyed.

Using my everyday Oriton mains cables for me was a bigger improvement in performance all around than the supplied MS-40PUK cable but then they are twice the price. However, the MS cable in its own right is still a fantastically musical cable. It is non-offensive, non-fatiguing and actually performed better than some other higher priced cables. It conveyed a smooth sound with no forwardness, had good soundstaging abilities and great detail retrieval all presented in a musical manor.

I've put an order in for the E01.

### MS-E01

**Build Quality - 8.5/10**

**Sound Quality - 8.5/10**

**Value for money - 8.5/10**

**Overall - 8.5/10**

**Highly recommended for its build quality and holographic natural sound.**

**Price when tested £1699**

### MS-40PUK

**Build Quality - 8.0/10**

**Sound Quality - 7.5/10**

**Value for money - 7.5/10**

**Overall - 7.6/10**

**Recommended for it's musically detailed and smooth presentation**

**Price when tested MS-40PUK - £450**

**Danny Worth**

# CLONES Audio Pre-amplifier and Monoblock Power Amps

Stewart Wennen



**M**y first contact with Clones was when I reviewed their [25 watt per channel integrated amplifier the i25](#). I was quite literally stunned when I opened it up and saw the wonderful quality of workmanship the unit contained.

As a result of the auditory results this unit achieved, I immediately asked them if they would like me to review their, soon to be released, 55 watt monoblock power amplifiers. I got in touch with Stuart and all I had to do was to wait!

The UK Distributor LW audio were contacted and a loan pair of amplifiers and the matching Pre-amplifier were duly dispatched.

They took a couple of days to arrive and from their double boxed packaging they emerged unscathed.

## **55pm. Monoblock Power Amplifier.** **Amplifier specification.**

Output Power - 55Watts (into 8 ohms) 100Watts (into 4 ohms)

Input Impedance - 22Kohm (unbalanced only)

Gain - 30dB input

Signal to Noise Ratio - <95dB (minimum)

Dimensions - 170(w)x100(h)x170(d)

Nb. all dims are in mm.

Weight - 4.2 kg each.

These units are covered by a five year warranty.  
Cost - £890.40 per pair inc VAT and delivery

## **AP1 pre-amplifier comprises**

Three line level inputs

One pair of line level outputs ( a dual line level output is an option)

This is the same size as the Mono Blocks

Weight - 2.5 Kilo

Guaranteed for five years.

Cost. - £543,60 including VAT and delivery.

## **HOW ARE THEY BUILT?**

These power amplifiers are elegant in an understated way, and have a diminutive footprint. Ideal for those amongst us that value aesthetics. Although, how they look is not all of the story! They are equipped with excellent socketry, the phono sockets are amongst, with the legend CMC USA engraved on them, the finest I have ever used. They grip the plug with just the right amount of pressure. They are not the usual phono sockets fashioned from rather cheap plate, they are properly cast and machined sockets which are located with nuts and washers. Along with the usual, switched and fused, IEC mains socket on the rear they also have a pair of heavy duty Loudspeaker terminals, these are large enough to accept any type

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of cable or termination. The front panel has the Logo along with a green led to indicate when the unit is powered up. This shows some thought has gone into this as Funjoe (he owns the company) has resisted the urge to put a blue high intensity LED in. I find these really bright LEDs draw my eyes all the time and cant take my eyes off them!

Inside the robust case sits a large toroidal transformer, in the compartment at the front. Along with the power supply regulator board and of course the power indicator. In the rear compartment is the output stage and most of the internal wiring.

So the amplifier is built along logical lines. From its alloy case to its three cone type feet, although care must be taken when using large and heavy mains power leads, this amplifier has been thought through properly. The case is built from sensible materials and is screwed together using metric thread machine screws rather than the ubiquitous self tapping screws

that we see on most of the other amplifiers we see these days. Funjoe's soldering is second to none, each joint has been made correctly - again unusual as all of the soldering has been fashioned by hand.

All of these points instilled into me absolute confidence in the manufacturers build quality. This is important to Hi Fi enthusiasts as it promotes pride of ownership.

Funjoe built these amplifiers to drive larger loudspeakers that needed a bigger current swing. This of course is not a bad thing and it shows that he is aware of his clients needs. This awareness continues with the,"stiff", power supply, which almost doubles the amplifiers output into 4 ohm loads.

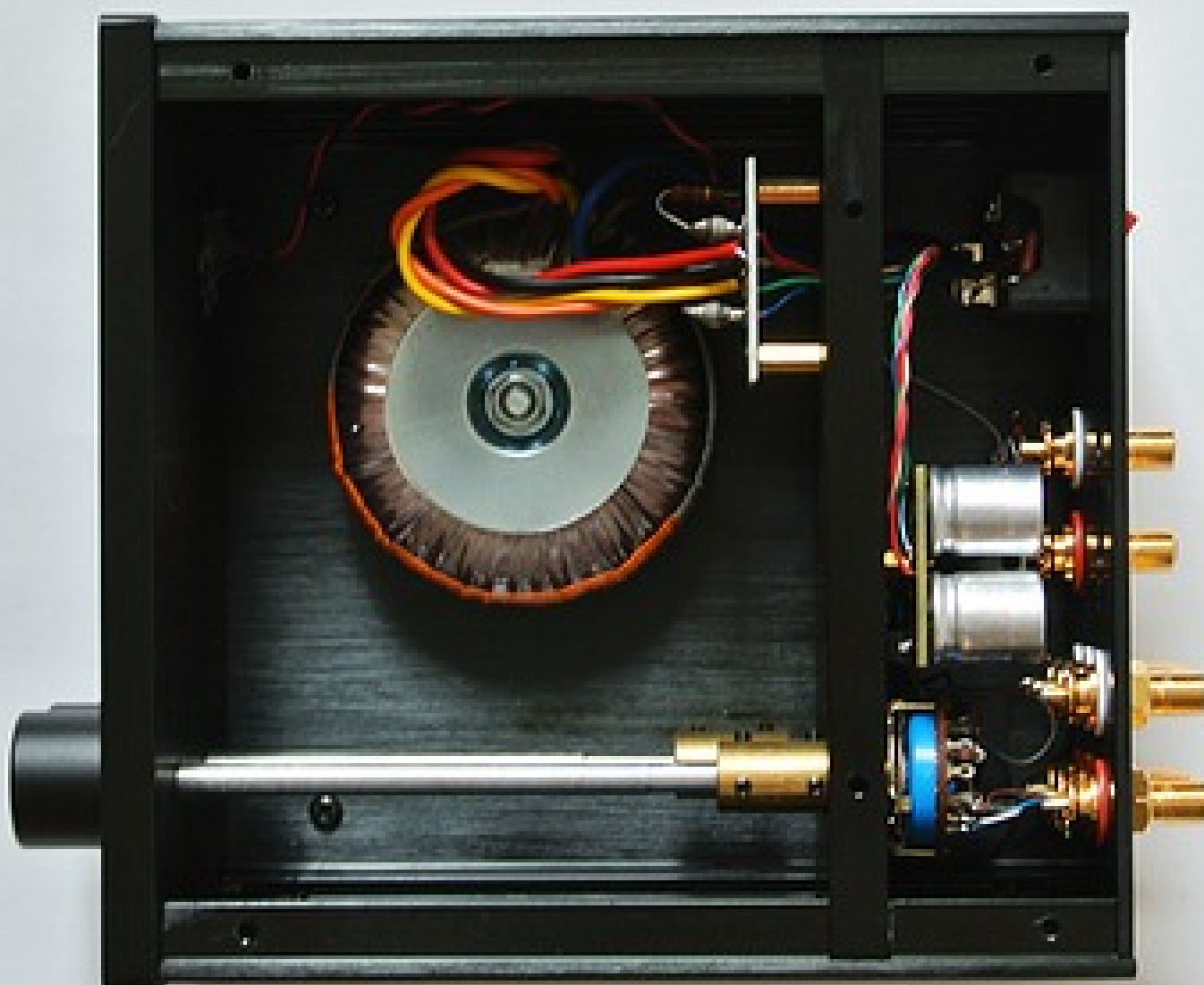
Before switch on I always check the DC offset, as a matter of course, which was commendably low.



The AP1 pre-amplifier is built along the same lines as the 55pm power amplifiers. It has the same front face as the 55pm's save for two control knobs. These are the selector switch and the lower one is the volume control. Inside the case the transformer sits in the front compartment. All of the active circuitry and switch and potentiometer sit behind the "Firewall" which is a logical choice as toroids can be responsible for RF pollution unless mounted correctly. Funjoe uses the same phono sockets as he does on his power amplifiers. The pre amplifier also uses the same IEC switched and fused mains input socket. The AP1 is identical in size as the 55pm units, but as you may suspect the AP1 is almost half the weight, at 2.5 Kilos, of the 55pm.

If you are not familiar with the use of separate power amps and a dedicated pre amplifier, you will find that

it is best practise to switch the pre on first, wait a few seconds and then switch the power amplifiers on second. Of course you will make sure that the pre is turned down to zero before switching on. If you do this then you will get no "Burps" nor noise at all. The Clones units made no sound at all on switch on or indeed when powering down. Switching them off is the reverse of the instruction I have just written. Upon switch on I always listen to a mono radio programme at low level, at first, to make sure that the amplifier is working correctly. Also, I give any amplifier at least fifteen minutes to allow the power supply to stabilise, before turning the amplifier up to normal levels! Ben Duncan alluded to this some years ago in an article about power supply design.



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## HOW DO THEY SOUND?

As regular HiFi Pig readers will be aware I am on a quest to replace my ageing Crown DC300a amplifiers. The replacements must be physically smaller, deliver large amounts of current and use less power from the mains and must sound as good if not better! You may say this is an impossible quest, but I have tried many power amplifiers and only three have come close!

The amplifiers are warmed up, I have a pot of tea, milk and sugar, and loads of music so let the listening begin!

As is usual I first listened to some Radio Four, the stereo image was HUGE! With all the newsreaders spread in an arc between the loudspeakers. The famous R4 signature was evident, in that they always sound as if they are too close to the microphone. Coupled with the usual bass lift on the voice.

First disc into the machine was Joni Mitchell, "Turbulent Indigo", from the first bar of the music I knew this was a very good pair of power amplifiers with a sumptuous, tight bass and the almost liquid presentation of the mid range allied with crystalline treble. It was easy to identify the instruments in the cavernous sound stage. The depth of the stereo image was astonishing, although it was a little foreshortened in comparison to the Mighty Crown and the large Sumo Five (a 50 Watt per channel "A class" monster), although the HH AM8/12 amplifiers gave a very similar presentation. As an aside the HH amplifiers were designed for BBC use along with their LS3/5A speakers. The internal equalisation was set to "flat" before the test was started. This proved the manufacturer of the Clones has gone for an essentially flat frequency response, rather than a "Rose tinted Spectacle" type of response.

Larry Klein's bass playing was a joy to listen to, as he plays the melody on his instrument. Along with Wayne Shorter and Jim Keltner on the drum kit. I judged this album to be represented correctly.

The Reiner Beethoven discs were inserted next, Symphony No 6 rang out in my large listening room. Confidently played, I think this piece is happy music. With little or no restriction on the dynamic range of the original recording this piece always brings a smile to my face and although rarely heard on Radio

3 these days it is amongst the finest use of a symphony orchestra. From its very first performance on December the 8<sup>th</sup> 1813 it still sounds like it has been composed recently. The image was almost shoulder to shoulder in a wide arc in front of me. Along with precision, as the music demands, you can almost see Fritz waving his arms frenetically in his attempt to control the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Although if I were to be critical I would say that the

**The Clones units have the ability to transport me to the recording studio, or the venue where the event took place.**

version was played with a little too much gusto and was a little quick. From the woodwind to the huge bass section this piece certainly is a show stopper. Along with the lush first and second strings this was displayed as a very emotive rendition.

The next disc was the Archiv production of the Brandenburg Concertos, played by The English Concert directed and led by Trevor Pinnock. This is one of the most unusual recordings as the Orchestra uses period instruments. It was recorded in the Henry Wood hall in between 1982 to 1984.

With the use of period instruments there had to be a large amount of care taken during the recording so as to not make the instruments sound "artificial!" Concerto Number four was played next, and I was greeted with a huge stereo image coupled with excellent transient attack and recovery. All of the detail of this small orchestra was described within the image. I did notice a little colouration in the upper bass. This gave a warm presentation to the music. Although it did not take any enjoyment from the Concerto.

I was loaned a copy of Melody Gardots album "My One and Only Thrill" and this was duly inserted into the CD player. Oh WOW! She sounds so.....sleazy, as if she was in a smoke filled bar late at night, instead of a modern recording studio. From the first track, "Baby I'm a Fool" to the last, "If the Stars Were Mine", her voice was so captivating. I am sure this was due to the engineer on the desk as well as her rather fine musicians. Larry Klein no doubt had a large part to play in this as this

album is full of subtle parts, as well as a well balanced recording. The musicians seem to play in their own space, in other words a well built amp does this. I must go out and buy a copy of this album! The sound was so infectious that I listened to very late at night, but I had to just try another album.....

Amadou and Maria, "Welcome To Mali" was pressed into service next and there's that spacious image again, displayed with plenty of space between the musicians. The bass instrument was delicious, and the percussion was almost perfectly played, both technically and from the sound quality perspective. Again this album was played from end to end. I am not familiar with all of the instruments, but can say that this is a great album, although if you are into heavy rock it maybe wont suit you.

I played King Crimson,"Red" next, with plenty of bass definition and loads of lower midrange to upper treble detail this album certainly scooted along.

Robert Fripp dancing on his guitar pedals was evident from the beginning, coupled with John Wettens bass mastery, as well as Bill Bruford on the drums. A wonderful three piece band, but on this album they had the assistance of a couple more musicians who certainly fill out the sound. I have listened to Mr Fripp for more years than I care to remember, and the excitement generated as I cued the album up was almost tangible!

Tentatively I placed the next album into the machine, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, with their album, "The Tracks Of My Tears", from the introduction as the drum solo kit gives way to the band, which had weight and drive, words fail me to describe the album, as this takes me back to my youth in the Night Clubs spread over the North East of England. But the sound quality was exemplary. The amplifiers describe the album with pace, precision, and weight. Oh and the songs.....proper



# Reviews

songs that tell me a story, recorded in the heyday of Soul Music. The pick of this album has to be, "Shop Around", a warning to young stud from a worried mother.

Funk was the next genre to be played with an album you probably have never heard before, "The J.B's". In James Brown's career there were loads of bands in America who copied his style, the J.B's were amongst the best as they captured his sound and energy, and James Brown appeared with them on numerous occasions. He took this copying of his style as a compliment. From the weighty bass line to the flautist this album just makes me want to do a couple of spins and drops, but sadly I am not in the first flush of youth. Although the music is full of subtle licks as well as brass and strings, and of course James Brown appears on some tracks as well as Fred Wesley. This has to be one of the stand out Funk Compilations, so if you are not yet into Funk go get a copy and listen to it.....LOUD!

The final disc was put into the machine and Play was pressed. It was Diana Krall, "Live in Paris", the disc opens with applause ringing out, and it did sound realistic. Unlike a lot of much more expensive amplifiers, on poor amplification applause sometimes sounds like rainfall but this was not the case with these Mono blocks. I settled myself into my sofa, and the music begins.

My large listening room was transformed into the Paris Olympia. From the sumptuous piano, to the crystal delicacy of her voice this album is one of my most prized recordings. Of course the room acoustic was displayed with alacrity. This is not an easy trick to achieve and as we are all aware the acoustic of the recorded space depends on the equipment having an almost ruler flat frequency response.

I could almost hear the musicians breathing with this album in the machine. As well as the huge stereo image there seemed to be a definite cavernous depth to the image as well. The music was played with breakneck pace as the set settled down, At track Five, "East of The Sun", the playing slowed down and the subtlety of Diana's band showed themselves to be extremely fine musicians. A very fine result, the CD was played from to the end and I almost had tears in my eyes as the final track was played.

## CONCLUSIONS

These are fine amplifiers, along with a fine pre amplifier. They display music as it was recorded

save for a tiny bit of upper bass boost. But, because of my size of listening room, they didn't quite have enough power for me. With my equipment they really shone. From their excellent build quality to the lovely aesthetic they represent an almost obsessively built Solid State amplifier. Although I do have one complaint! The control knobs have no cursor on them, and in dim lighting it can be very difficult to see what input is connected, and what level the pre is set to.

I did notice a difference when I plugged in the Clones pre amplifier rather than my home built passive pre-amplifier. The sound became much richer, although the sound stage shrunk a little. This was only in depth not in width. Now the thorny question, would I replace my Mighty Crown Power amplifier and my Denon pre amplifier with them. Firstly I sadly won't be replacing my Denon as the Clones does not have enough inputs and outputs in it, but its sound quality is not that much different. This is because my system is rather large and the Clones does not have any video inputs nor a monitor out. The Clones power amps are very good and really well made, but sadly don't have the power output I require. If I was just starting with my first or second system and I had a smaller listening room then I would buy these three units at the drop of a hat!

The Clones units have the ability to transport me to the recording studio, or the venue where the event took place.

Simply put, they are truly astonishing units, I will miss them after they are returned, sigh.....

**I rate these power amps and pre very highly!**

**Build quality - 10**

**Sound quality - 9.5**

**Value for money - 9.0**

**Overall - 9.5**

**Stewart Wennen**

**Having achieved an overall score in excess of 8.5 the CLONES Audio 55pm amplifiers and AP1 preamplifier will now be sent for second review to a different Hifi Pig reviewer. If in that review they score an average of 8.5 or over the combo will be awarded our Outstanding Product award.**

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[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](#)  
[The Cartridge Man Isolator](#)

## CD Players and Transports

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[MHZS CD88](#)  
[Musical Fidelity X-Ray V8 CD plus Triple-X Power Supply](#)  
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[Atoll Electronique CD200 SE-2 CD Player](#)

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## Amplifiers

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[CR Developments Romulus Valve Integrated Amplifier](#)  
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[Lampizator DAC Level 4 Review](#)  
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[Black Rhodium "Twist" Speaker Cables Part 1, Part 2](#)  
[Black Rhodium Interconnect Cables - Opus, Rhythm, Prelude & Symphony](#)  
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[Jade Audio Moontails Interconnects](#)  
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[Chord Crimson VEE 3, Cobra VEE3, Chameleon VEE 3 Interconnects](#)  
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## ALL REVIEWS

## The Salsoul Orchestra - Street Sense Big Break Records

As soon as I see that rainbow coloured logo and the name Salsoul I know I'm gonna just love the record it's attached to - somewhere I've got a press cutting of me Djing with the caption "Salsoul at Nine o'clock" underneath.



And the six original (and four remixed bonus tracks) on Street Sense really don't disappoint at all despite this being the first Salsoul Orchestra record that Vince Montana Jr (whose brainchild TSO was) does not take part in. However, where Montana Jr left off legendary Dj and remixer Tom Moulton steps in on production duties with Thor Baldurson taking care of arrangements and conducting the orchestra.

Right from the first track (Zambesi) you know you're in for a driving, funky extravaganza of discoteque. Zambesi is an instrumental tune with a nagging, dance floor filling bass line and if it doesn't get your feet moving there's something seriously amiss and a visit at the earliest opportunity to Dr Feelgood is in order.

Burning Spear is another instrumental tune with a brilliant squelchy synth run and lush sax laid over that wonderfully infectious rhythm section that TSO do so well. This is music that was made for the dancefloor and the hedonistic highs of a different era, but it's still relevant today and it's still a great listen at home too.

Somebody to Love is a disco freakout version of Jefferson Airplane's classic tune and somewhere here the tracks and track listing seem to go awry. To me messing with the Airplane's tunes is something of a sacrilege but this sort of works in a cheesy disco sense.

All in all this is a good album that is very much of its day, but then this kind of overblown production is always going to have a back to the seventies vibe about it...and there's nothing wrong with this to my mind. If you love disco you'll like this album and it should be in your collection.

## Patrick Adams Presents PHREEK Big Break Records

More funky disco rereleases here and I really make no apology for it...disco is making a comeback in the Hifi Pig household and we're loving it. And so this time we have the

expanded edition of the classic Patrick Adams Presents PHREEK. I think the opportunity to rediscover some of these classics from the 70s is most welcome and BBR (the label that are releasing a lot of these albums) should be applauded for making some real classics available to a new and younger (in some cases) audience.

Patrick Adams is a bit of a legend and the New Yorker contributed to no less than 32 gold and platinum releases, mainly on Salsoul and Prelude but also on the Atlantic label too. He's worked with a veritable who's who of disco including Sister Sledge, Loleatta Holloway and Jocelyn Brown...plus a whole load more. Listening to PHREEK you can certainly hear that the music has had a huge influence on modern day dance music, particularly the early 90s house scene.

Weekend opens proceedings and I'm sure you'll recognise a good few samples in there that have been lifted and used elsewhere. It's an absolute barnstormer of a disco classic and it's the percussion elements on this (and other tunes on the record) that REALLY do it for me.

The album has been remastered and repackaged with some really good liner notes...and a couple of remixes tagged on the end and the record really stands up as being relevant to today. Of course it's hedonistic D.I.S.C.O all the way and at its very best - crisp hats, relentless basslines, horns, synths...you get the funky picture I'm sure.

The word classic is bandied around all the time when talking about music from another era and sometimes it's not really warranted but with PHREEK you've got a record that thoroughly deserves the label! There's not one filler (other than dance floor fillers) on the record but stand out moments are the



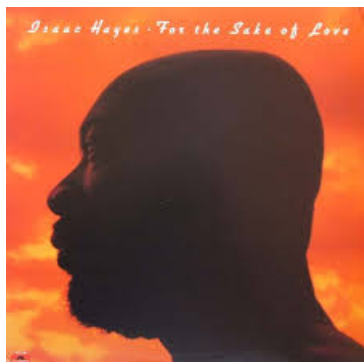
# Album Reviews

aforementioned Weekend, Much Too Much, and I'm A Freak (RU12).

An absolutely fantastic record that every disco phreak should have in their collection.

## Issac Hayes - For The Sake of Love Big Break Records

This is the first of a couple of Hayes releases that I took a listen to this month and this particular album was released in '78 on the Polydor label. For the Sake of Love was Hayes second studio album for the label and reached #15 on the US R&B album chart.



Just the Way You Are kicks off the album but the first three minutes of the tune are taken up with a breathy, spoken word (admittedly over a funky laidback instrumental) introduction before Hayes launches into his version of the well loved, and well known, Billy Joel classic proper. It's a lush string lead and slow moving version that's a real perfect vehicle for Hayes' velvety vocal style and this is the style that continues through the next track, the Hayes' penned and gospel tinged Believe In Me.

If Ever We Needed Peace finishes off side one of the original vinyl record and is a really beautifully arranged tune with electronic piano chords, gorgeous strings and a heavenly backing vocal supplied by Hot Buttered & Soul Unlimited.

Things take a decided step for the livelier with Shaft II with incessant hats and kick, funky guitar, horns and strings and this is right up my funky street...as is Zeke The Freak, though the latter is somewhat less lively in tempo.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight takes the mood back to a slow and smoochy style of the record's first three tracks and is a lovely laidback tune with a nice and dreamy sax line that really gets your mind wandering - it's a beautiful tune and perfect for when the sun is shining and all is good with the world.

Overall I quite enjoyed this rerelease but certainly heavily preferred the second half. The two remixes on the CD (Shaft II and Zeke The Freak are welcome

additions and as usual with BBR the liner notes are a good and informative read.

## Melphi - Through The Looking Glass Snip Records

Melphi are a Dutch four piece and say that they are inspired by contemporary Scandinavian pop music. Through The Looking Glass is their first full length album being preceded by an unnamed EP in 2011.



The band were formed in 2010 by Rogier Telderman who writes most of the music here (and plays piano) but the the real focus of the band on this record is Lotte van Drunen the silky voiced vocalist. That said the musicianship on Through The Looking Glass is really pretty fabulous. Jurriaan Dekker on bass has a beautiful, solid and yet somewhat free-form style that complements Willem van der Krabben's eminently danceable rhythms on drums and percussion.

Ok, I haven't the faintest idea of what "Scandinavian pop" sounds like specifically but if this is what inspires Melphi then I'll be exploring it a bit further after this.

Through The Looking Glass is jazzy, it's soulful and whilst it's definitely on the intelligent side of the pop spectrum it doesn't lose itself in trying to be over clever and ...noodly, though there are some very nice instrumental passages to be heard. The record remains solid, coherent and foottappingly infectious throughout. It's musical and irresistible, soulful and uplifting.

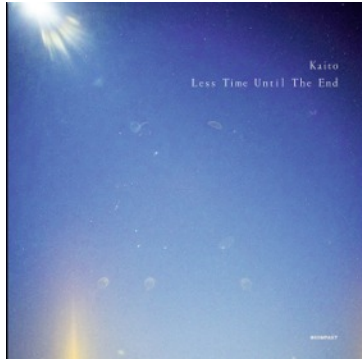
The recording is very nicely done and carried out with a nice light touch that allows the music to shine through. there is a good deal of thought gone into the recording process and you can hear it. the individual musicians manage to keep their own personalities and musical identities throughout but are brought together to produce a wonderfully coherent noise throughout.

Through The Looking Glass is a great record of modern, jazz tinged rhythms with a soulful touch offered by the vocal style of Lotte van Drunen that

will appeal to a wide audience. the record works as a whole and it's recommended to listen as a whole but the standout track for me is Slow Motion...or perhaps Last Night....hell, it's all very good indeed. Out now on Snip Records and downloaded in this instance from HIGHRESAUDIO. Recommended!

## Kaito - Less Time Until The End Kompakt

I really enjoyed the last Kaito offering, *Until The End Of Time* which came out in October on the Kompakt label calling it thoughtful and thought provoking and indeed this record could be summed up similarly - in fact it's the same tunes bereft of their drum tracks.



**For the Sunday morning come-down brigade this is in many ways the perfect record to sooth the twisted mind and allow bodies to readjust to normality after the weekends excesses.**

Essentially it's an ambient album that has a real dreamy, ethereal and trippy feel to it. Musically it is grown up electronica which is both alien and recognisable, organic and yet synthetic. It's not challenging music in any way and you'll find yourself happy to close your eyes and drift with the exquisiteness of the delicate music that builds on repetitive themes adding new textures and new themes that have the effect of carrying you in different directions of thought and feeling.

For the Sunday morning come-down brigade this is in many ways the perfect record to sooth the twisted mind and allow bodies to readjust to normality after the weekends excesses.

A record for the psychonauts and inner-space cowboys but also clever enough to have much broader appeal I think - perhaps folk who enjoy gentler classical music would do well to give this a listen. Out now on Kompakt and limited to 500 copies on vinyl.

## Sontaag -Sontaag Cherry Red

I was very excited when the post lady pipped and handed me the envelope that I knew would contain what is being heralded as “A stunning new album in the finest tradition of progressive rock and space rock” because being a bit of an ageing hippie I’m partial to both a smattering of prog and a healthy double dipped dose of space rock. But this hasn’t been the records only accolades and “the space opera that Pink Floyd never wrote” and “a prog rock War of the Worlds” whetted my appetite for this record even more.



This eponymous album is out on Cherry Red on the 28th of April and was recorded both in New York and London and has been co-produced and mixed by Youth of Killing Joke fame (I like a bit of Youth I do).

Sontaag are essentially Richard Sontaag who plays instruments, came up with the concept, did the composition and also co-produced and Ian Fortnam who adds vocals and also helped with the concept and the story, with additional musicians Milo Venter (drums) and Amanda Cross (female vocal). The album was mastered by Michael Rendall at Meridian and the whole, quite nice artwork package was directed and photographed by Julie Kendall.

The concept is apparently that “The Ancients, through a long process of trial and error, had discovered the secret of synthesizing essential energy from harmonic sound, giving them the power to reanimate extinct planets by utilising giant orbiting generators. But life came at a price. The newly supplanted inhabitants of MP-5 were compelled to provide the musical fuel for The Great Harmomodulator simply to stay alive”. Mmmmmm I like a good sci-fi story a la “Space Ritual” etc.

The song titles alone look promising; The Great Harmodulator, Minor Keys of Anguished Weeping, Interstellar Genocide, The Skull-Scraping Caterwaul....amongst others. All in all there’s 13 tracks on Sontaag so it's time to take the protein pills (Cheese sandwich) and put my helmet on (they’ll be my headphones actually) and blast off into what the

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bumph says is a “stunning and immersive listening experience”.

The music lives up to expectations it has to be said. The opening track Empyrean kicks off with desolate swirling synth pads and a soaring lead guitar line and sets the scene very nicely before the driving rock beat and bass line get things moving at a pace...all with that great lead line over the top. It's a good start it has to be said and the tune breaks into spaceyness before resuming the driving beat. It's clever and accomplished...and really quite good. Ok it's a bit grandiose but isn't that what great prog' and space rock are about?

The Great Hoarmodulator introduces the story and sets the scene on MP-5 with a spoken word narration over a multi-layered sequenced musical backdrop that is a bit Tangerine Dream in parts (this is no bad thing!). there's a lot going on musically within the noises and headphone wearers will love it.

The third track is Spaceshifter and is clearly very much influenced by Hawkwind (it even mentions Sonic Assassins) and the lead guitar playing is quite reminiscent of Huw Lloyd Langton and again this is a good thing! It's derivative this particular track, but it fits with the story and is a great, if all too brief, rock out tune.

Minor Keys of Anguished Weeping is back to the more symphonic swirling swathes of sound that continues the story with spoken word before morphing into a really nice synths and guitar tune that is really quite beautiful, as is Serena Serenarum with its female vocal pad taking centre stage and playing off the soaring guitar.

Interstellar Genocide is space rock done proper and again is reminiscent of Calvert era Hawkwind.

I'll not dissect every tune on the album suffice to say I quite enjoyed Sontaag and it's spaceprog in the finest tradition. The story is suitably sci-fi and it's told well both from a spoken word perspective and a musical perspective with distinct musical parts to the album to complement the narrative.

There are bits of Hawkwind, bits of Pink Floyd, bits of Tangerine Dream and bits of Steve Hillage...and many others, but Sontaag works and manages to stand apart from its influences to create its own sound that is very pleasing overall. It will definitely get played a good deal I think and I'd really like to see the band do the whole record as a live, expanded set with full overblown stage show to go with it. If

you enjoy any of the bands and musicians I've mentioned in this review then you'll enjoy Sontaag. Pour yourself a syn-and-ponic, sit back and enjoy the show that unfolds before you - it's really rather pleasant.

## Jan Lundgren Trio - Flowers Of Sendai Bee Jazz

**R**ecorded and mixed by Stefano Amerio in Italy on July 15th - 16th and November 1st 2013 Flowers of Sendai is released on the Bee Jazz label and here it's been downloaded from HIGHRESAUDIO. The trio is made up of Jan Lundgren (piano), Mattias Svenson (bass) and Zoltan Csors JR (drums).



Style wise Flowers of Sendai is jazz of the accessible kind and not the kind of "challenging" jazz that you need a degree from the University of Cool to understand never mind enjoy.

The Jan Lundgren Trio highlights the melodic improvisation of Lundgren's very accomplished piano playing of course, but when brought together with his band mates you are left with an album that is really quite beautiful in its complexity and intricacy. Now, that's not to say that Lundgren hogs the limelight at all and the rest of the trio get their chance to shine somewhat too.

To be perfectly honest if you'd asked me twelve months or so ago to listen to this kind of laidback and somewhat cool jazz then you'd likely have been given very short shrift but the mellow style and superb musicianship (as demonstrated with this record) have me reaching for this style more and more. With Flowers of Sendai you've got a very modern sounding record that is still steeped in tradition and it's a bit of a winner as far as my opinion goes.

The music here is never forced in any way and despite it being complex and really quite clever it's music that you can get lost in quite easily without wanting to over analyse it or get all goatee stroking about.

There's not a tune on the record that isn't really enjoyable but the title track is particularly enjoyable despite it being just piano. There's a simple (at times) left hand part with Lundgren creating interwoven, intricate and compelling melodies with his right. It's clever but not clever for the sake of it and there's a feeling that you're listening to really great music and musicianship. Lundgren has a bit of a reputation in the world of jazz as being a really great pianist and I can fully understand where this reputation comes from. The playing is clearly accomplished and complicated but it really does sound like he's not trying at all - everything flows, sounds natural and unforced.

Mulgrew is another standout track on a bit of a standout record for me but here the main focus is on the bass and the drums while the (still great) piano playing takes a bit of a back seat. The piano is still vital but there's a fabulous bit of bass solo and a really great drum solo part that just lifts the record as a whole.

If you're looking to impress your none audiophile friends with an album that will show off your system then this is one of those kinds of records. I put it on to when some old friends we've not seen for seven years visited yesterday and their jaws nearly hit the floor!

Accessible yet complex, clever yet deceptively simple sounding and well worth buying whether this is your kind of music or not. Out on 24th April.

## Helge Lien Trio - Badgers and Other Beings Ozella

**W**hat a great title for a record first of all! Badgers and Other Beings is an album of clever jazz featuring pianist, drums and bass. The Helge Lien Trio has been a bit of a hit on the jazz

scene since their breakthrough album Hello Troll and it's no wonder really. Lien is joined here by Frode Berg on bass and Per Oddvar Johansen on drums with the album having been recorded at Rainbow Studios in Oslo and released on the Ozella label.



Here it was downloaded from HIGHRESAUDIO and the quality of the recording is again superb.

Listening to Badgers and Other Beings it's very easy to see (hear) why Lien is held in such high regard as a musician and composer. His playing has a really dynamic feel to it and a deftness of touch that sets him apart from some others I have heard recently.

The compositions here are definitely in the jazz arena but, like the Jan Lundgren album we recently reviewed, it's accessible and not at all overly challenging...this is a good thing to me as a newbie to this style of music.

The album and music therein is somewhat dark in its character and a touch moody in places but then on the other hand it is uplifting and bright as demonstrated on tunes such as Calypso in Five. The tunes Joe and Knut throw the spotlight on the other musicians a little more, but the real star here is clearly the piano playing. This said the three musicians play off each other very nicely indeed and the whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts.

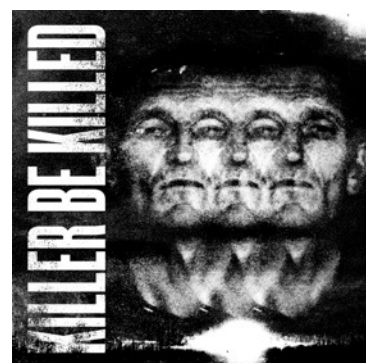
As a whole the album works really well and is quite contemplative in its style. As mentioned the musicianship is exemplary with light and dark passages in places and managing to go from subdued understatement to quite full on stomp (The New Black) without losing track of the musical theme.

I didn't know the Helge Lien trio before this album I'm sorry to say, but it's been played a good deal over the last week or so. It's a complex enough album to be a very interesting listen but not so difficult or challenging that it becomes over bearing and pretentious to the point of unlistenability.

## Killer Be Killed - Killer Be Killed Nuclear Blast Entertainment

"A perfect blend of a legend, a freak, a beast and a wookiee." - Troy Sanders.

A strange thing happened today: unusually I was stumped at an appropriate way to start this particular review and was mutely & vacantly staring at a blank document,



# Album Reviews

but the Mastodon frontman and Killer Be Killed protagonist has provided a fitting rubric for me... thanks Troy. On paper at least, the prospect of this debut album from KBK is surely one of the most tantalizing of any metal supergroup ever and has metal fans worldwide practically slaving over its imminent release... with very good reason. Allow me to introduce the participants:

Greg Puciato (The Dillinger Escape Plan)- Vocals

Max Cavalera (ex- Sepultura, Soulfly, Nailbomb, Cavalera Conspiracy)- Guitar/vocals

Troy Sanders (Mastodon)- Bass/Vocals

Dave Elitch (The Mars Volta)- Drums

Ok... so with a lineup like that there's no way it's gonna suck, it's just not possible... is it? Well...

The record launches with the surprisingly melodic "Wings of Feathers and Wax" which displays a disquietingly harmonic chorus reminiscent of contemporary melodic metalcore or even pop-punk which wasn't what I was expecting... raised an eyebrow that did, maybe even both of them.

However after a couple of minutes the track quickly grows fangs and the band launch into material that's more representative of the rest of the album.

Thrashing heavy-as-fuck riffs, characteristic vocals from all three singers... and Dave Elitch battering his drum kit within an inch of its life... yeah, you never heard him like this in The Mars Volta. It's a strong, if partially unexpected start certainly, though to be honest there aren't many early highlights and the album takes a little while to make an impression. This is indicative of its biggest weakness (yeah might as well get it out of the way): there's not a lot in the way of scream-along, punch the air, lounge-room-moshpit inducing moments. Don't get me wrong, the material is tight and well executed but memorable? Not so much. I expected a bit more given the personnel... Filler Be Filled?

Having said that, by the halfway point things begin to pick up. "Fire To Your Flag" and "IED" display the kind of hardcore-punk ferocity and juggernaut riffing I was expecting from the record: it's definitely a disc of two halves, the latter part being far more energetic and explorative.

Well, so what does it sound like then? In terms of overall feel, the album is rooted firmly in hardcore punk & crossover with nods to the glory days of thrash metal and downtuned chugging riffs reminiscent of a heavily distorted Black Sabbath.

You can definitely hear the Mastodon and Sepultura/Soufly influence, but not so much Dillinger Escape Plan (besides Puciato's signature screech) or The Mars Volta. It would be obtuse to call it a cross between Mastodon and Sepultura however and there are moments of inventiveness and ambiance which defy such categorization, particularly in the later tracks.

**Thrashing heavy-as-fuck riffs, characteristic vocals from all three singers...**

From a musical performance standpoint, all three vocalists provide excellent contributions with Cavalera in particular delivering some unfathomably guttural roars. Instrumentally, the six string work is pretty darn good too, with plenty of crunchy riffs and tasteful leads thrown in. Max has never been one for virtuosic lead work but his efforts here are among his best. Sanders' bass parts are not given a lot of time to shine, but when they do, they're excellent, particularly in the final two tracks. Elitch's drumming is terrific: pummelling yet focused, with just the right combination of brutality and finesse.

At this point I must give a nod to producer Josh Wilbur. The production is superb and for a heavy release it's crystal clear and provides some of the most thunderous bottom end I've heard since Sepultura's classic 'Roots'.

Standout tracks are the surprising melodic/brutal/melodic shifts of the opening track "Wings of Feathers and Wax", the ripping hardcore intensity of "Fire to your Flag" & "IED" and the slower, more ambient & introspective final two tracks "Twelve Labors" and "Forbidden Fire" which still manage to provide some crushing heaviness as a stylistic contrast.

To sum it up in a rather simplistic fashion, Killer Be Killed is a good heavy metal record. No, it doesn't come close to the finest moments its members have achieved in their progenitorial bands, but it's still unarguably meritorious and any fan of heavy music should definitely check it out.

7/10

**Stewart Hall**

# LEEDH E2

## A totally revolutionary technology for a simply lifelike sound

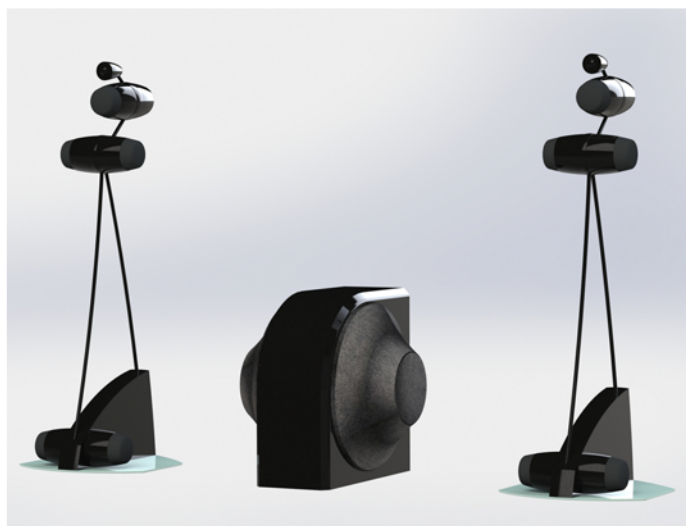
The ABD (Acoustical Beauty Driver) module was created from a blank sheet to eradicate defects of traditional loudspeakers :

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

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

The LEEDH E2, built with 5 ABD modules, is the first deconstructed High End Speaker !

Low frequency reproduction (-3dB at 50 Hz) without speaker cabinet (total volume of acoustic load 1, 5L). Listening space integration optimised : organic design - no acoustic coupling at low frequencies - No parasitic vibration transmitted to the floor of the room, giving the opportunity to place the speaker near the wall. The Leedh E2 is also very light (15Kg) and so very easy to pick up and move to find its optimum position in your room.



### THE LEEDH SYSTEM

Composed of a pair of LEEDH E2, the UNIVERSEL speaker cable and one 20.1 subwoofer, each of which could be used individually to optimize a system or together to allow a musical approach without artefacts.

The UNIVERSEL has been designed not to create the usual vibrations due to the currents within the wires of the cable, and to eliminate the usual preferential connecting direction.

Its filter eliminates the capacitive effect so it could be connected with every kind of amplifiers even with long cable lengths.

Each wire has its own electric armor plating which are polarised by a lithium battery to eliminate parasitic electronic charges optimizing the connection of all every speakers with all amplifiers as the name suggests : UNIVERSEL.

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The 20.1 is a subwoofer uses a revolutionary technology to optimize the push-push operation of two 15' drivers into an acoustic load volume of 16L.

This infinite load simulator technology used in our subwoofer is original as it mounts one giant excursion 9' driver behind each 15' driver.

In this configuration the two 9' and the two 15' work in push-push and each pairing of 15' / 9' drivers work in push-pull.

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

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

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

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

With the 20.1, each system sounds more natural because the ears are accustomed to listen to the sound and music without attenuation and compression down to 20Hz, at the same time improving significantly the reproduction of the high and medium ranges.

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# Behind the Brands with Focal's Gérard Chretien



# Behind The Brands

## Your History

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

After my PhD in electronics the only job I founded to work in the industry was journalist. Editor of L'Audiophile Magazine during 15 years.

### Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

Jean Hiraga for his encyclopedic audio culture & Jacques Mahul for his confidence, Steve Jobs, Miles Davis and many very Great Concert ;-)

## Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

Grande Utopia EM, Focal XS 2.1...

## You and your system

### What was your very first system?

Thorens turntable + Marantz amplifier+ DIY loud-speaker with Heco drivers

### Tell us about your system history:

Source stay on belt drive turntables with DIY /Verdier turntable. Main evolution with electronics, with Nytech, after DIY 20W amplifier, Lectron JH30, Audio Research, Micromega, Naim. Concerning speak-





ers Allison One, JMLab Vega, Alto Utopia, Scala Utopia....

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

None, no regret, looking ahead !

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

Onken horn system in japan end of the 70... in term of definition and harmonic richness, limited in sound stage. Probably a memory that is a myth !

**Tell us about your current system(s).**

2 systems, Main with Scala V2 speaker and Micro-mega AS400+CD30 - Second Electra Speaker with Naim DACV1+NAP 100

**The state of the industry**

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

For me, the tube had a great influence rather late 70s and 80s to help raise awareness of the musicality of the amplifiers. Today I have no orthodoxy, what I care about is respect for the sound texture, the elegance of the timbre and the harmonic richness

**What are you 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?**

There will always be a market for High End fans. Just like the photograph I think most users will be satisfied with affordable devices, easy to use and compact... And those who continue to buy Reflex and photo lenses !

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

# Behind The Brands

Miniaturization and ease of use ranking in priority, the money is put in electronics to the detriment of quality acoustic components.

## **The way you work**

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

First the tonal balance, the notes extinction, the definition... the air around the music.

### **Your sound preference - 'Smooth, listenable musicality', 'forward, driving, 'foot-tapping', involving sound' or 'detailed neutrality and transparency'?**

I want everything, subtlety and power, refinement, elegance and **groove**

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

In large space no doubt, floor standers. In small apartments, a bookshelf and certainly the best solution for experience the Music you love.

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

### **What is your favourite recording?**

Kind Of Blue is certainly the record I listen most often to the sweetness of the atmosphere. I love jazz because there are always new ways explored: EST, Bugge Wesseltoft ...

### **Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings**

La Symphonie Fantastique Leonard Slatkin HD-2012 Naxos/

Bill Carrothers After Hours / Arvo Pärt Tabula Rasa  
Lesley Hatfield 2000 Naxos

### **What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures?**

None, no complex ;-)

### **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?**

Thelonious Monk- The Complete Riverside Recordings



# **Hifi Pig** Magazine **COMPETITION**



## **WIN an amptastic Mini-1 amplifier worth £99**

**When Jerry Jacobs reviewed the amptastic Mini-1 amplifier for Hifi Pig he had the following to say about it. "I am awestruck by this amp. Not just 'for the money', but in absolute terms. It's a great amplifier, full stop. If I was unable to continue my 'boxswap' habit, enjoying the variety provided by a frequently varying audio system, what would my "final amp" be? - in truth, I'd be more than happy if it was the Amptastic Mini-1. I could not say that for the vast majority of the many amps that have passed through my system over the past 30 years or so of my obsession with this hobby. I'm not sure that I can give a recommendation stronger than that.**

## **TO ENTER**

To be in with a chance of winning 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 **MAY** 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.

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