

Hifi Pig Magazine

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JUNE 2014
Issue #7

REVIEWS

JoSound Ra Loudspeakers
Roksan Darius S1 Loudspeakers
Ophidian Solo Loudspeakers
Audio 4 Soul OC IT Xtreme Loudspeaker Cables
DirectWave Directors Interconnects
Analogue Works One Turntable

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INTERVIEW Behind the Brands with
Steve Halsall of KEF UK

PLUS Editorial, Reader System, Dealer System,
Album Reviews

Hifi Pig
Magazine

@ High-End Munich 2014



CONTENT
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This Year's Trios?
The British Are Coming!
The Newcomers
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Rooms To Rely On
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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Cranage Hall Audio Show

This is the newest of the hifi shows in the UK and takes place on the 15th June 2014 at Cranage Hall in Cheshire. Hifi Pig are the official and sole media partners for the show and we will of course be bringing you all the news from the show on the website and in next month's free magazine. The show is FREE and it's on a Sunday so there really is no excuse not to make the effort and attend what promises to be a great day out for all.

Yes you read that correctly the Cranage Hall Audio show on the 15th June will be absolutely free of charge to enter, you just need to [register here](#).

The show is located just two miles from the M6 motorway on the A50 between Holmes Chapel and Knutsford in the heart of the beautiful Cheshire countryside. You can access easy to follow directions and a [map here](#).

Cranage Hall is a former country house in the village of Cranage, Cheshire, England. It was built in 1828–29 for Lawrence Armitstead, and designed by Lewis Wyatt. In 1932 a parallel wing was added and the venue really lends itself well to an audio show.

There are some great hifi retailers, distributors and brands attending this inaugural show(see right) who will have kit that you can not only see but also hear in comfortable and somewhat luxurious surroundings.

All our exhibitors have worked very hard to prepare visitors for truly audiophile experience. Carefully selected components for the show guarantee the best sound....and if you hear something you like you can arrange to buy it!

Amongst well established brands there are new companies exhibiting at the show. Some of them for the first time in UK. Don't miss out this great opportunity! Be the first to see and hear these by [booking your ticket now](#).

If you'd like to know which brands specifically will be at the Cranage Hall Audio Show then [click through this link for a full and comprehensive list](#).

Look out for Hifi Pig at the show and be sure to say hello to us - we're always happy to meet new people!



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Cranage Hall Audio Show - 15th June 2014

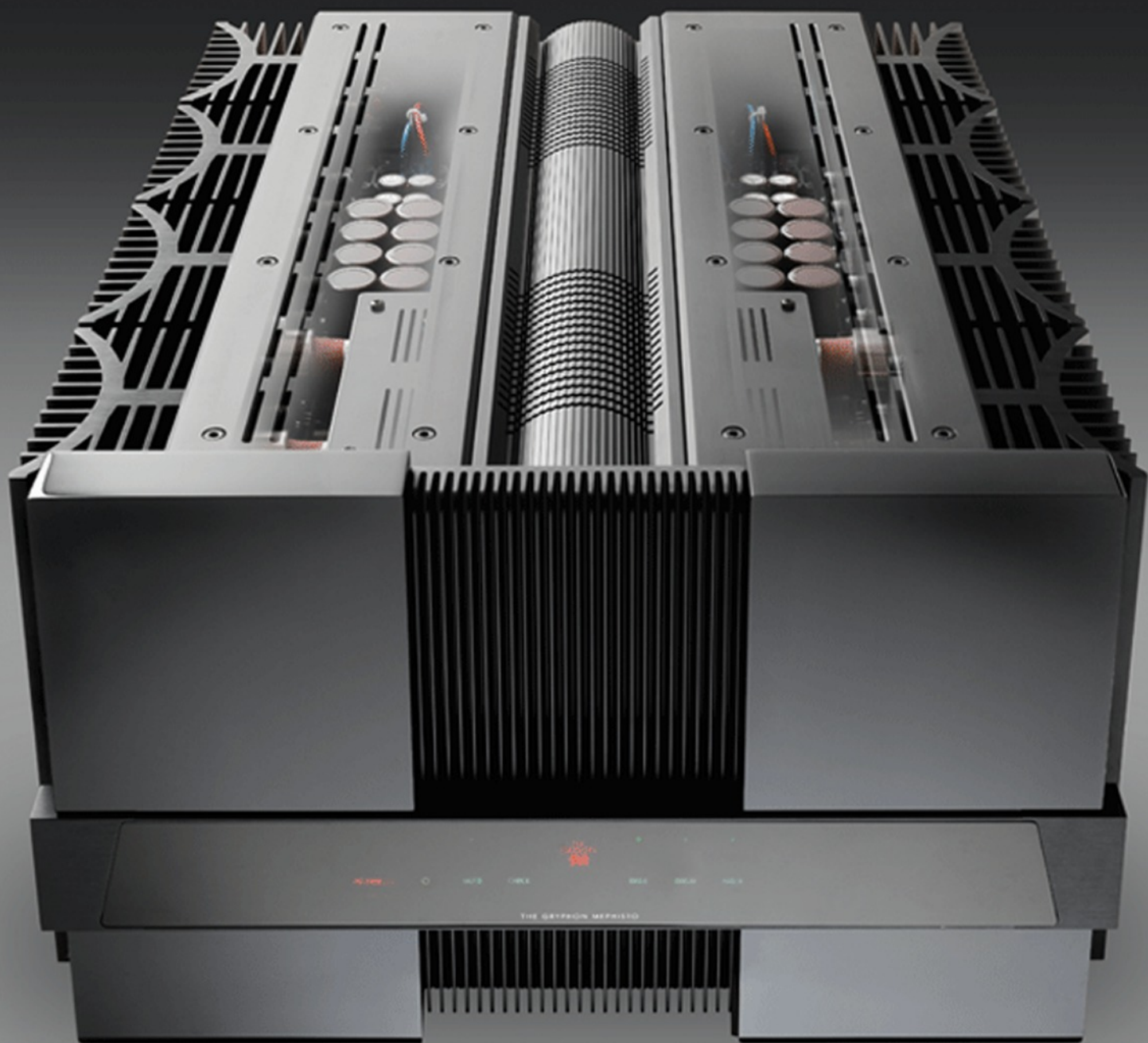
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The end of my journey...or is it?

Hifi Pig reader Alan Brownstone from Stourbridge tells us about his long and winding journey to audio nirvana.

I believe I have reached the end of a long, usually enjoyable but sometimes frustrating, audio journey.

I was reared in a music loving, mostly classical, family and music has always been very much in my psyche.

I began my hifi interest some 45 years ago at the tender age of 30 and during that time I have owned many amplifiers, CD players, turntables, DACs, speakers not to mention the ancillaries like valves,

mains/interconnect/digital and speaker cables.

I feel quite embarrassed when I think how much I have spent in the pursuit of *my* perfect sound system.

Vinyl to CD

After using cheaper turntables I graduated to Pioneer, Garrard, Thorens, Ariston, Pink Triangle and finally a Linn Sondek/Valhalla/Ittok. I can't remember which stylus I ended up with but I believe it



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was a Stanton. At the advent of CD around 1982 I bought one of the first players. It was a Marantz CD63 I believe. The ease of use and lack of snap, crackle and pop convinced me that was the way to go and the Linn went. Many CD players passed through my systems including a few with valves. I think back with affection on a couple that were, in my opinion, a cut above the norm such as a Theta transport and DAC that went wrong after some time and parts were impossible to replace, the other was Tom Evans Eikos. The Eikos is a player that I believe would stand against many so called 'killer' players even now. In the last year I have relinquished CD playback in favour of computer streaming.

DAC's

In an effort to get the best out of CD playback I ventured into the DAC world and had several of those. Again some were pure solid state and a couple came with valves.

Amplifiers

The number of amplifiers is countless, but about 30 years ago my love affair with valves began. Like most love affairs it turned sour, but more on that later. This affair started with a Croft pre/power and then I returned to solid state and then some time later I had a Rogue Tempest. Dare I say Rogue by name and Rogue by nature. When it was working it sounded beautiful, but it was always playing up. Later had a hybrid Unison Research and eventually after that I had a few more solid state amps. I returned to valves with Primaluna and, believe it or not, owned five of them. Trouble free listening and I could tube roll to my hearts content. Yeah! The slippery slope!!

I have lost count of the number of power valves I tried of which some were very expensive and rare. Signal valves? Don't be silly.....the postman was delivering those little boxes almost weekly. It had become an obsession.

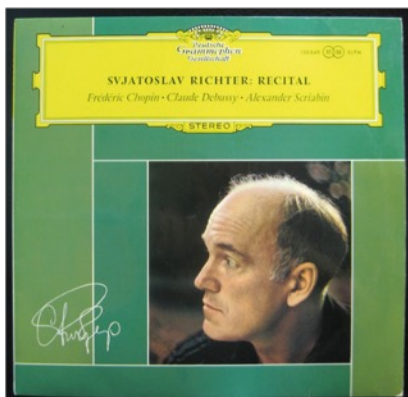
I had had enough and returned to solid state. I tried several amps and finally settled for an Audio Analogue Maestro (and matching CDP). Lovely amp but didn't give me that 'sound' I craved from valves. I had the amp some time before I finally gave up and made my entrance into the world of valves again in the form of a Mastersound Due Trenta SE - a wonderful amplifier that looked and sounded superb. But the OCD was kicking in again and I had to constantly try different valves and to make matters worse I had a valve DAC at the same time. It was an illness and although I have never been a good sleeper I was up half the night either thinking about valves or on the net searching for them. I was such a good customer of one particular dealer he, on a couple of occasions, sent me some nice pairs of NOS valves free of charge. Stoke the fire eh?



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I realised that my hobby, instead of being a pleasure was becoming something ugly in my life. So back to solid state...

Speakers

Again there have been loads of them from small monitors – Proac Tablette to the wonderful ESL63's. There have been too many to mention but several stole my heart at the time. A

pair of Sonab omnidirectionals, KEF 103-2's, Quad ESL63's, Proac Response 1SC's, Proac 1.5's, Sonus Faber Guarneri Homage (so beautiful to behold), Vandersteen 1c and 1ci's. Some speakers I had high hopes of, most especially Harbeth 7ES's and LV Avatar's just didn't seem to gel for me.

Different rooms in various abodes governed the size etc of the speakers.

Cables

I have to confess I am very much a cable

All pretty good but I was still valve rolling and driving myself (and my poor long suffering wife) to distraction.

believer. Pity me! They can be almost as compulsive as valves. I daren't think how many cables I have owned and auditioned. Many bit the dust within days and were returned to the dealer or manufacturer.

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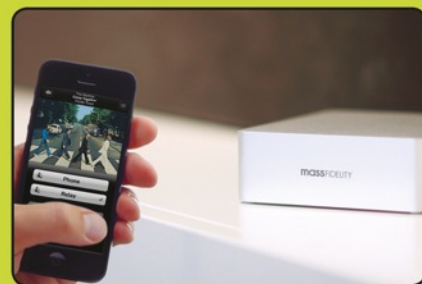
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Over the past couple of years either I have become lazier or the osteoarthritis has kicked in more, but having to get up and change a CD has become more and more uncomfortable for me. My neighbour, a fellow hifi sufferer had given up on his turntable and CD player some time ago in favour of streaming music via a NAS. I wasn't convinced that I could get musical satisfaction from this form of music making. I tried a Squeezebox Touch and was never convinced when compared to my CD playback. The involvement I sought wasn't there. Onto a Sonos which was, for me, much better, not only in sound but the software was much more user friendly. I was convinced this was going to be the way to go and so ripped most of my CD collection and sat back. I eventually sold the Sonos and went with JRiver Media Server. Nearly satisfied.

All pretty good but I was still valve rolling and driving myself (and my poor long suffering wife) to distraction.

I had recently had my listening room decorated and felt I wanted to make it feel more inviting. First step the Vandersteen 1ci's went and I replaced them with a beautiful pair of stand mounts. Enter the Revel Performa 3 M105. In my small room they sounded better than anything I had ever heard.

One day I gave myself a good talking to and decided my valve amplifier and DAC had to go. But how could I get that elusive sound I craved.

I returned to my local dealer from whence I bought the Revel's for a long chat. He has known me for about 30 years and when I told him the valves had to go he nearly had a heart attack.

I felt that from past experience (I owned a very early Lavardin IT that blew) that Lavardin may be the way to go. I tried an IS



Reference and was convinced this was 'it'. This was closely followed by a Naim Dac V which sounds as enveloping as can be. I had been using mostly Audioquest cabling but in this new system they didn't 'sing' as they did with my valve gear. They went out and in came some lovely MIT cabling. This has brought the whole system together to what, I believe, is the best sound I have ever achieved. It sounds as involving as any valve system I've owned with a huge wide and deep soundstage. Bottom end is tuneful with a little warmth and the treble is as silky as can be. The midrange is something else with very communicative voices that feel as though they are 'singing just for me'. It seems to catch all the musical cues that I even missed with valves and is totally involving and non-fatiguing. Several friends have visited and agreed this system sounds quite magical and the best they have heard in my house. I haven't felt the need to change any of the major parts for some time which, for me, is nothing short of a miracle.

Have I reached the end of my journey? I can honestly say "I think so".

Now.....what cable did you say would improve it?

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Based in The North of England MCRU are best known as an online retailer but they also have a pair of dedicated listening rooms so that customers can review their chosen products before making their purchase. Hifi Pig asked MCRU to put together a system which tipped the scales at around £15000 and very interesting it looks too.

When MCRU were asked to compile a dealer system for Hifi Pig we thought it may come as a shock to many readers that we have 2 dem rooms and full systems in them! Many of our customers regarded us as internet retailers only, in the beginning that was true, fast forward 3 and a bit years and we now support major brands like Clearaudio, IsoTek Systems, Furutech, Tellurium Q and many more.

The system chosen for this feature was decided upon based on the best performance against price without going to stratospheric levels of expenditure, isn't it nice when a hifi system can sound so good and cost so little in relative terms!

Many of our regular customers have been into vinyl since the 1970's and even earlier, indeed MCRU's owner had his first deck at 14 years of age, fast forward another 37 years and vinyl is as strong today as it ever was and remains the best way to listen to recorded music in our opinion. The Germans know a

bit about engineering, the Mercedes and BMW of the analogue world as far as we are concerned has to be Clearaudio of Germany. With the mighty "Statement" turntable costing £80,000 that sort of budget would easily buy a 7 series or S class with enough spare for a nice run about for "her indoors" as Arthur Daley used to say.



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Dealer System



Even though we have a Clearaudio Innovation in one of our dem rooms (shortly to be up-graded to Master Innovation level) we have chosen to be more modest with our dealer system and allocated £2500 for one of Clearaudio's top selling turntables the Performance DC, aimed at both entry level vinyl lovers and those up-grading from a basic deck. The turntable is fitted with Clearaudios Clarify tonearm as standard which sells for £950 separately, so its as close to plug and play as possible and features true German build quality, we have partnered it with another award winning product, the Concept MC cartridge.

The signal is fed into a Longdog Audio MCj2 MC valve phono stage, who are they I hear you ask? LDA is owned by valve guru Nick Gorham who is



responsible for designing all MCRU's linear power supply's as well as a rather excellent DAC which also features in our system. We think anyone hearing the "Dog" will be totally seduced by the sound, we are.

Vinyl rules of course but a true hi-fi system must cater for all requirements which includes computer

audio which when done right can sound stunning, the MCRU Music Server MKII takes a humble FLAC file and makes it sound truly wonderful, one reviewer describing it as on a par with the finest CD players. The server stores your music either on internal ssd drives (totally silent) or an external NAS, either way it has sound quality to rival the very best CD players. The server outputs via usb into the Longdog VDt1 Tube DAC which has been awarded the top accolade by Hi-Fi World, Choice, HiFi+ and even the "Pig" there simply is no better DAC anywhere near the price sound quality wise.

Amplification is provided by a brand called "Canor" who are based in Slovakia, the TP134 is considered by many audiophiles as the best amplifier in it's price range period, we agree wholeheartedly, an integrated valve amp with a remote control, that's a novelty! EL34 valves do sound rather nice we think, the Canor delivers detail in spades, once heard never forgotten. Class A up to 20 watts and utilising four 12AT7's and two pairs of EL34's the amp has also been awarded a Hi-Fi News outstanding product, for



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SKOGRAND  CABLES

Dealer System

£2500 we cannot think of anything that touches it without spending considerably more. It makes the music sing with both digital and analogue and has no particular weak spots with any music genre.

The final component in the chain is often the most difficult to pick and get right, the loudspeakers. MCRU do not follow the herd when it comes to speakers, we had our own range designed and built in the UK, the range only features 3 speakers, we have chosen our No. 101 for this system which is a small floorstander suitable for small to medium sized listening rooms. It is a 2 way design featuring a rear firing tweeter with adjustable L pad, turning the rear tweeter to the desired listening level adds extra air and ambience to the performance, proven by existing customers feedback. The speakers feature a high frequency planar magnetic tweeter and are wired internally with Black Rhodiums very best cable.

Just a quick mention about IsoTek Systems, MCRU have been using their mains filtration and conditioning equipment for nearly 10 years, we used it before MCRU was formed as its the best value for what it achieves, we have used the excellent Aquarius in this system which offers un-rivalled performance way above it's price point, IsoTek are the leaders in mains filtration we say!

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Once Bitten forever Smitten. In the world of the hifi hobbyist things can soon balloon from a simple means of listening to some tunes to a full on, full time occupation...or perhaps obsession.

In the world of audiophile audio, to my mind it doesn't matter whether you are an advocate of tube amplifier technology, vintage audio or even an all in one home audio system. What matters is the fact that you can appreciate high end audio as the means to enjoy the music you love. Or is it?

About 6 years ago I got back into home audio and bought a one brand system and I loved it. It had a good quality CD player, an integrated amplifier that I believed punched way above its weight, a pair of floor standing loudspeakers and a turntable. The whole lot cost me 300€, though to this day I consider it something of a bargain amongst stereo systems – it gave me an introduction to the hifi sound that had been so lacking in my life for around 10 years and it gave me a glimpse at what could be achieved with an audiophile audio system.



Perhaps I was wrong...I was certainly becoming a little obsessed with audiophile audio and perhaps pastimes are just obsessions after all.

Of course the audiophile audio bug bit and I was feverish with the need to upgrade. To the integrated amplifier I added a matching power amplifier and a new pair of loudspeakers...I also played with audiophile interconnects, high-end speaker cables and all manner of DIY hifi tweaks. I read about hi fi online and learned all I could about putting together hi fi systems that really worked at getting the very best out of the recorded material and I was loving it.

A lot of the online hi fi forum members were taking about this being a hobby, but I've never thought of hi fi systems being a hobby as such – a hi fi, a stereo, a home audio system (call it what you will) is surely a

means to an end... to get the very best from home audio at a price that suits your pocket. Perhaps I was wrong...I was certainly becoming a little obsessed with audiophile audio and perhaps pastimes are just obsessions after all.

OK, I admit it...I was hooked. The power amplifier was now connected to the mains with expensive mains cables, the wires between the integrated amplifier and the power amplifier were changed for audiophile cables and of course the CD player was linked to the integrated amplifier by identical cables of as short a length as possible. Phew... my wife was becoming worried! The turntable was sold to fund a

Audiophiles Anonymous

new purchase... (In hindsight I should have remembered audiophile audio rule number one – never sell your turntable!!)

Online hi fi and high end audio meeting places on the web

fuelled the obsession and I became interested in vintage audio and (cue dramatic music)... valves, tubes,

glowing bottles – call them what you will. Now my skills with a soldering iron are pretty much non-existent and so true vintage audio equipment would be out of the question for my home audio system – I didn't want my hard earned cash to end up in some kind of audiophile audio scrap heap. What I needed was a tube amplifier that would be reliable and would gel with my existing home audio set up. Now, finding a hi fi shop isn't easy in these parts – I live in rural France where getting to the nearest hi fi shop is a bit of a quest - and so most of my shopping was done online and I bought blind. Finally, I made a short list! Only thing it wasn't really that short: Should I go for a power amplifier or an integrated amplifier? If I bought a power amplifier I'd need to buy a pre amp and that would be more expensive and would complicate things! If I bought a separate power amplifier and pre amp rather than an integrated amplifier then I'd have more boxes...and I like boxes. It's not easy this you know!! Finally fate was on my side and after searching for hi fi online for what seemed like forever, I came across a integrated tube amplifier that was in my price range and would work in my hi fi system. I still own it 3 years down the line which suggests I did my research well!

Since getting back into “high end audio” six years ago I've had 6 different turntables, a couple of solid state integrated amplifiers, the tube amplifier, a solid state power amplifier...oh hang on I've had 4, 3 pairs of floor standing loudspeakers, 3 pairs of stand mount loudspeakers, countless high end audio cables, high end audio racks and hi fi supports...I've obsessed about the tiniest details and of course I've invited friends around to bring their home audio kit round so we can compare and contrast.

I admit it. I have a problem! There needs to be a support group. Alcoholics have AA and even gamblers have a network. We need Audiophile Audio Anonymous where we can stand with other

I admit it. I have a problem! There needs to be a support group. Alcoholics have AA and even gamblers have a network.

people suffering a similar fate. We need to be able to stand up and say in front of our peers “My name is Stuart and I'm an audiophile audio addict”. It wouldn't work though would it! I know that pretty soon any Audiophile Audio Anonymous meeting would degenerate into hectic discussions of which tube amplifier would work best in a particular home audio system and whether an integrated amplifier would offer the same performance as a separate power amplifier and pre amp or would a solid state amplifier trounce a tube amplifier.... Wherever there is mention of a tube amplifier it won't be long and the conversation will soon turn to horn loudspeakers and again vintage hi fi would raise its ugly head. We'd all be comparing our hi fi systems and without pausing for breath the well meaning Audiophile Audio Anonymous meeting would become little more than breeding ground for our addiction. It would start innocently enough – “I'll swap my solid state power amplifier for your tube amplifier for a week” or “Come round to mine I've got a new pair of speakers”. In no time the well intentioned Audiophile Audio Anonymous meetings would become shooting galleries for high end audio junkies hungry to get their next fix of their drug of choice.

Me, I'm going to retreat back into denial, walk over to the mains, switch it on, move to the power conditioner and flick the switch, warm the valves up on the tube amplifier, insert a CD into the tray (or place a record on the turntable), sit in my listening chair and let the music wash over me and carry me far from this world and into audiophile audio nirvana.

Oh hang on, there's this new cartridge I have my eye on....



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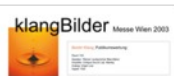
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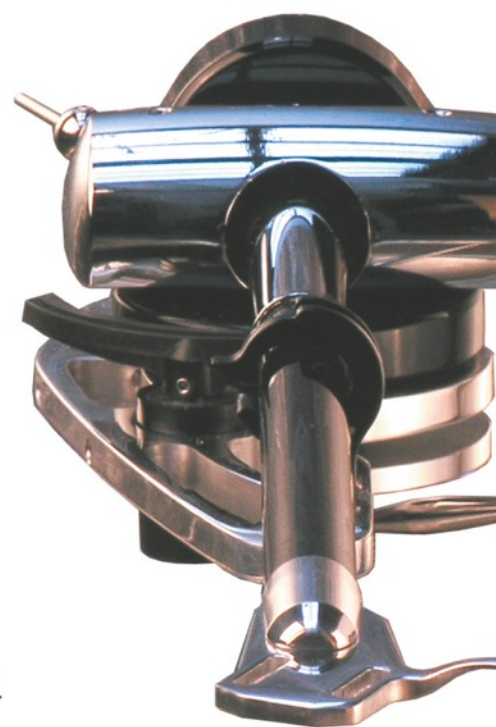
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JoSound Ra Loudspeakers

Hifi Pig

RECOMMENDED



An unusually distinctive design the Ra from JoSound certainly look impressive and carry a £43 500 price tag. Stuart and Linette Smith live with them for a month and find it hard to give them back.

When Joe from Jersey based JoSound telephoned out of the blue a month or so ago and asked if we'd like to spend a month or so with the company's Ra loudspeakers I for one was really pleased. I'd really enjoyed the Cartouche loudspeakers we had in for review a while ago and we've heard the Ras a good few times at show too.

Okay, these are expensive loudspeakers at £43 500, but lets put things into perspective a little here. The drivers in the sample we have for review are the Voxativ AC-4A, and they come in a £10 000 a pair, and the craftsmanship in the actual cabinets is pretty stunning. Given their price tag these speakers are never going to be accessible to the vast majority of people, but then there are lots of things in this world that aren't. Some will be able to afford a product of this type and some will bitch about the price point to anyone who will listen. This is a high-end product and some people can access the high end whilst others can but dream...I put myself firmly in the dreamer camp here!

So let's put the price point to one side for a moment and look at what you are actually buying when you pull the trigger on a pair of the JoSound Ra loudspeakers.

They arrive in purpose built wooden crates, one for each speaker and once unpacked the first impression can be little but WOW! These are not for the timid or those looking for a loudspeaker to blend into their environment. The Ras pretty quickly establish themselves as the focal point of the room with their unusual and unique shape and proportions. Despite their size and shape they're actually quite an elegant design I think. They're basically a large cylinder about 72cm across and 40 cm deep sat atop a horn shape which opens to the floor. They stand 120cm in height and the single driver is sat slap bang in the middle of the cylinder....look at the pics. The whole of the speaker cabinet is, like the company's Cartouche, made of bamboo. The adjustable stainless steel feet (clearly very high quality and costly) fit to the bottom of the horn structure raising the whole speaker a couple of inches from the matching bass stand. Despite being a very heavy speaker moving them around on the stand is a simple affair of sliding them about until they're where you want them. Around the back is a beautifully crafted speaker terminal plate with a single pair of binding

posts and a set of inputs that allow for the connection of the power supply if you choose the field coil drivers from Voxativ.

Now the drivers are interesting in their own right and as I mentioned make up a good proportion of the Ra's asking price. They're 8", full range affairs with the cones being made out of wood...yep, wood! Apparently which wood is used is a trade secret but they are seemingly put together by seamstresses which sort of makes a lot of sense.

Visually the art deco look of the Ras appeals to me, but I am sure that they will divide opinion quite dramatically.

Joe arrived and set the speakers up and once wired up to the usual reference kit there's an immediate impression that you are listening to a quality product. There's an immediate aural sensation of there being a little more stuff going on and in a more refined manner than our reference speakers (hORNS



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Mummy). The speakers were initially set up pointing straight forward about 190cm apart but I think that playing about with the positioning yields significant rewards and a slight toe-in snaps the soundstage into focus. I've heard these speakers at shows and to be honest the set up has not been ideal and I think JoSound could get much more out of them with a little careful placement - that said the rooms I've heard them in are hardly conducive to careful loudspeaker placement!

Before we started to listen critically to the Ras I did a little search on YouTube to see what had been said about them and came across a video where the poster asked the question, where's the bottom two octaves? Whoever this was is one of several things, but whatever they may be it's certain he's never heard these loudspeakers at their best because they do have bass and they deliver it remarkably well. Bass is fast, it's low and it's really tight. It isn't overblown though and I think our YouTube friend is probably more accustomed to a boom and tizz presentation.

As regular Hifi Pig readers will know we listen to a lot of bass heavy music and playing as I write is Todd Terry's Blackout from the Resolutions album and I can say with honesty and conviction that there is certainly nothing lacking here at all. The sub bass synth is very well rendered but not over blown. Yes there are of course speakers that will go deeper (the Avantgarde Trios with Basshorns as one example) but in our relatively large by most standards living room this is often overkill and lots of nasty speaker/room interactions start to come into play.

Visually the Ras are an elegant and yet imposing design but sound-wise they seem to offer a pretty open window to the sound and add very little overall.

Quality wise bass is, as I said tight, fast and a little dry with no bloom whatsoever. As a serious fan of the techno genre I really enjoyed this aspect of the Ra's performance. Moving away from electronic music and the opening few bars of Neil Young's Unplugged version of Like A Hurricane the organ is deep, resonous and with no over hang.



These are a hugely dynamic loudspeakers and on well recorded live drums the experience is somewhat exhilarating. There's a real visceral quality and a truly live feel but not at the expense of subtlety - gently hits on hats and cymbals are offered up with just as much expression of the snap of the snare and the individual player's character and style of playing shines through. With electronic drums the effect is similarly well portrayed with their being clear differences between the kick of a 707 and an 808.

With acoustic music, particularly acoustic guitar, there is a palpable feeling that there is a live guitar being played in the room. Decay of notes is just as it should be and there's none of this notes left hanging where they shouldn't be - the same with simple piano music. However, room reverbs and the acoustic of the recording space on well recorded live material is easily discernable and this only adds to that in the room and live feel you get with the Ras and this kind of music.

As you'd expect from a high quality full range driver the midrange presented with the Ras is particularly

Reviews

strong and well recorded vocals were a real joy. There's again a real insight into the singers individuality and take on a recording and they offer up a true rendition of what they are being fed with. With this in mind I'd suggest that poor quality kit in front of the Ras will be highlighted...but then spending this kind of money on a pair of speakers you are unlikely to be pairing them with poor kit!

Overall the Ras are very well balanced with no one frequency band dominating the others at low to medium-high volumes, but turn up the dial to LOUD the very highest frequencies can become a little too much in the mix.

When a little time has been spent positioning the Ras they offer up a very realistic soundstage with excellent width and height but they are certainly not forward sounding – they do a similar thing to the Cabasse Spheres in that they present a natural stage that presents itself in your minds eye that is neither artificial or over done.

In many ways what you get with the Ra loudspeaker is what we heard with the company's Cartouche

loudspeakers and in many ways this is a very good thing. However what you seem to get more of it and with a little more refinement. This really shouldn't come as any surprise as the speakers share the same family of drivers.

To my ears these loudspeakers are a very natural sounding speaker and able to take pretty much any kind of music in their stride. On real acoustic instruments they are superb and the dynamism of live drums has only been bettered by large bass horns and the Cabasse Spheres I mentioned earlier.

OK, the JoSound Ras are not going to be to everyone's taste and I think that the price is certainly prohibitive for most folk. People who love the single driver sound and the benefits it can often bring in terms of speed and dynamics will absolutely adore these speakers. For folk used to multi driver loudspeakers with complex crossovers then I think they will take a few tunes to appreciate their differences in presentation style.

Visually the Ras are an elegant and yet imposing design but sound-wise they seem to offer a pretty open window to the sound and add very little overall.

When reviewing any bit of kit the question we all find ourselves asking is can we live with these? With the Ras the answer is a resounding yes I could. However if I was in a position to buy these I'd want to be sure that their presentation was to my tastes in my own living space as the possibilities at this price open up a world of choices of presentation.

The Ras ooze high-end confidence, they sound terrifically natural and they deliver well on all genres of music but being somewhat impoverished (and finding it difficult to shake this mentality) I'd probably go for the company's Cartouche loudspeakers as they offer a good percentage of what the Ra offers at half the price...however, as always what we have here is the law of diminishing returns raising its ugly head and the Ras are, of course, a better speaker overall!

Sound Quality 8.5

Build 9

Value for Money 7

Overall 8.2

Stuart Smith



And here's Linette's review. It should be stressed that, as always we listened together but wrote the reviews in isolation and without seeing each others copy...despite the remarkable similarities!

House of Bamboo part 2.

There is a whisper going around the world of High End Hifi.

Maybe not a whisper, more of an old wives' tale...but something that a lot of people seem to believe.

I guess it is fuelled by snobbery, in the same way that wine 'experts' scoff at those who quite like to neck a cheap bottle of cold plonk on a hot day..... rather than spending hours extolling the virtues of a pricey bottle tasting like freshly rain washed pebbles and a threat of cabbage patch.

And what is this nasty little untruth that is being touted a rule to listen by?

'You should only listen to classical music on High End Hifi'

Now, you are probably going to split into two camps here. Some of you will be with me and immediately jump up and shout 'WTF, of course not!!!'

Some will say 'yes, what's wrong with that???'

I think this myth comes from the fact that yes, classical music can be very complex and very beautiful, it is moving and emotional and when played on a great system sounds incredible....but I'm afraid it just is not my bag.

I listen to a lot of different music, acoustic and electronic, but my big love is dance music.

You know when you hit a point in your life and the music and the social scene all comes together perfectly and just feels right? That happened to me in the very early 1990's. The years of glowstick waving ravers and illegal parties in fields and warehouses. That was when I found my groove.

It happens to us all and it could be any genre of music in any decade, but whether it's rock, jazz or disco you will have found your groove at some point and it will always be the music that you come back to.



The term 'Dance Music' covers a whole range of music and the name tags change and evolve...from the funkier disco and bounciest house to the deepest, darkest techno there is something for every mood.....rather like classical music.

And like classical music it can be complex, detailed and emotional.

So why am I wittering on about classical and dance music?

Well, Josound are breaking that High End mould.

Let's make no bones about it...a £43 500 pair of speakers is pretty high end, whoever you are. There are still places where you can buy a house for that money.....or a pretty flash car.

The drivers alone cost around £10,000....that's more than many people would even consider spending on a complete pair of loudspeakers.

But Mr. Sound doesn't just want you to listen to classical music on his creations; you can play what the hell you like.

Reviews

Joe has a real 'open door' policy at shows, as we have mentioned before he invites people to bring their own music to listen to when he exhibits.

Having the Ras 'chez nous' for a few weeks has been heavenly. I thought I was happy when we had their little brothers, the Cartouches here....but these ones really made me smile.

They are tight and fast...no hint of flabbiness here, and they bring out every intricacy of the music, bass included.

I am going to find it very difficult to let them go when Joe comes to spirit them off to Munich...there may be tears!

There is a consistency with Josound speakers. They are all made from bamboo, have mainly Voxativ drivers, but the Ra is a bigger speaker than the Cartouche and it does have a bigger, fuller sound.

Looks wise they are even more impressive. The number of people whose jaw has hit the floor when they have walked into our house has been, well it's been everybody who walked in!

I love the 'sun rising over the pyramid' design and they have that same wonderful Art Deco styling as the rest of the range....no they won't be everyone's cup of tea but I think that is a good thing. The world would be a very boring place if all hifi looked and sounded the same!

They have the same 'moreish' quality as the Cartouche, the more you listen then the more you want to listen...but I found there to be more detail to the sound than I remember from the previous Josounds we had visiting.

'Real' instruments sound so incredibly real. It is a very natural sound. Listening to a piano one can hear everything, from fingers hitting the ivories to the hammer hitting the strings, if you close your eyes you are sat in front of a piano....not a hifi.

Proper goose bumps time.

Drums also were amazing; the sound of brushes on a snare drum whilst listening to jazz was incredible.

Like the Cartouches, guitar and female vocals were beautiful. There was a real emotional connection.

But let's get the crux of things here, the reason I've gone off on one a bit about dance music.

There is a track, a tune (or choon) of the hugest proportions.

It is an epic anthem of the dancefloor and a celebration of the legendary Roland TB-303.

But is also perhaps the best test of a hifi's performance that you can get....I think it gives a system a better workout than any classical music, Hardfloor's 'Once again back'

The Ras do more than cope with this tune, they bring it alive. There is so much bass in this track that it can sound awful, flabby, farty and downright nasty. The Ras sound superb with it.

They are tight and fast...no hint of flabbiness here, and they bring out every intricacy of the music, bass included.

We have listened to a lot of music on these loudspeakers, and like the Cartouche, I can't think of anything that didn't sound right, but I love the fact that the Ra is not just a refined speaker for lovers of classical and jazz, its also a loudspeaker for people who like to crank it up and have a bit of a party listening to Pete Tong, Todd Terry or Carl Cox.

I think there are some people who would be very happy to keep High End Hifi as their own little Classical club, don't let the plebs in, good lord what might happen then?

More and more people though are getting a taste for it and will be battering down the doors and making ourselves at home...bringing with us music of every genre.

Something other High End brands should bear in mind, just like Josound.

Build Quality – 9/10

Sound Quality – 8.5/10

Value for Money – 7/10

Overall – 8.2/10

Recommended for people that want something a bit different....and have a big budget. Amazing build quality and addictive sound.

Linette Smith

Roksan Darius S1



Many readers will remember the Roksan Darius from 1985 with its distinctive design and sprung tweeter. The Darius S1 from this British company is a very different beast!

Danny Worth and Stuart Smith

Reviews

Roksan has once again produced a speaker with the name Darius, however now adding S1 to the title.

The old Darius' were a rather large speaker in comparison to these more modestly sized standmounts. The older Darius model came in a frame which was also the stand and was cleverly coupled/decoupled to the speaker enclosure with a floating tweeter design, a high frequency driver mounted slightly forward of a recess in the front baffle via springs in the four corners.

Today's design is more conventional - thinner front baffle sporting a ribbon tweeter protected with a wire mesh and a 6" mid/bass driver with a metal cage which protects the driver from knocks, a brushing past the enclosure or projectile toys!

They have a deepish cabinet and are rear ported with bi-wireable binding posts.

The cabinets themselves are weighty and solidly made, they sound extremely well damped with the tapping of the knuckles test.

The Darius S1's are £4500 including stands and the ones I had for review were in a hard lacquered piano black finish (white is also available).

Unboxing everything was a chore, it took me a good hour and a half to get everything out of the packaging, set up and playing music and I'm not one of these people who puts on the white gloves (which Roksan do supply) and carefully inspects everything and gently peels open the tape and lids of the containers. Although of course I am careful with equipment.

Each speaker and stand has multiple layers of packaging, triple boxes, layers of Styrofoam, material bags, plastic bags and tissue paper.

Each component is meticulously packaged and the cut outs of the foam are a complete OCD on package design, absolutely no amount of care was spared when ensuring that the S1's arrive in the same condition they leave the factory in and this really adds to the initial perception of a quality product and pride of ownership.

What was in the box was an elegantly finished pair of speaker and stands with fantastic attention to detail, quality of finish and those small details such as the companies branding on the top of the speaker that exudes quality.



Assembly was simple and took less time than unpacking.

I set the speakers up on their three point stands which will generally self level by their very nature, however adjustments can be made on the gunmetal coned feet.

With four small balls of blue tack between speaker and stand I felt they were secure enough and positioning the speakers on the floor as whole piece was an easy task.

The finish of the speakers and stands is identical, both in the same piano black finish with Matt black metal outriggers at the rear bottom of the stand and a cable tidying void through the rear of the stand.

Roksan has even taken the care to address resonance in the outriggers by having an oval machined out of each arm, a touch which shows great care and attention to detail again.

The Sound

Positioning the speakers wasn't a fiddly affair to ascertain the best sound in my listening space, a foot and a half from the wall and about 7 feet apart was the ticket. In larger rooms a few feet from the wall and a little further apart dependant on listening position would factor in good benefits I'm sure. Toe in made more difference in my room, most speakers I

Vocals were smooth, natural with top to bottom frequency correctness and all the clarity and vibrancy of the best female artist.

toe in to fire over each shoulder, The Darius I preferred a little less toe in than normal to open them up as much as the room would allow whilst still retaining good depth.

Speaking to Roksan prior to the review I asked how the Darius' would respond to valve amplification and

I was assured that the 40wpc from the Emille would work very well with their 89db sensitivity and fairly easy to drive load and produce very nice results. I also asked for a solid state amplifier from them, to hear the companies electronic/speaker synergy. I have the Clones Audio AP1 and 55pm monos here at the moment also, so a couple good tests for the modern day Darius were on the cards.

As the Clones were already in situ in the rack, the obvious first listen to the Darius S1's was via them.

After a little warm up time whilst I was finding

somewhere to store all the packaging the speakers arrived in, I went straight into ascertaining what the bass response was from these average sized stand-mounts, a real key decider for me when buying standmounted designs over larger floor standing speakers.

I went straight in for some serious pumping David Guetta dance beats and my oh my, where does that come from? was my first reaction. Bass has a rich weight to it with punch a slap to a kick drum that shocked me - really! There's a serious tonal quality to the bass, it's so rich, controlled, rhythmic, dynamic and bouncy. It's 47hz limitation has a smooth roll off which never allows for the bass to seem as if it's lacking by having a steeper cut off curve. Of course the very lowest frequencies are not there, but there is a sense of sub bass with the slope they have down low. The integration into mids and the reinforcement bass gives the other frequencies, is superb.

Driver dispersion is vast and wide and the harmonic sense of encapsulation is strong in these speakers. Details are produced very accurately, dynamically but with a controlled robust sense of flavour throughout the range, every note is under-pinned with weight, body and fullness.

Moving into some vocal work and acoustic material the Darius S1's had a chance to show off their mid-range.

Vocals, wow! Vocals were smooth, natural with top to bottom frequency correctness and all the clarity and vibrancy of the best female artist. Deep rich tones of male vocals are conveyed just brilliantly and again it's the overall integration and coherence of a



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'whole' that prevails even when focusing on different areas of the sound. I found myself being drawn away from one aspect of the sound so easily and unintentionally listening to the whole again, which is something which doesn't happen very often at all in my experience and just reinforces my previous comment on their overall coherence.

The midrange as a whole is just so liquid and delicious. Listening to favourite artists such as Chris Jones, Nils Lofgren, The Civil Wars, Loreena McKennit, Norah Jones and many others their vocals have a balance and quality that puts the S1's down as one of the best standmounts I've had the pleasure to listen to, even if they just did 'this' type of music right, but there is so much more to them, so before I get too caught up in writing the whole review with the Clones feeding them, I think it's time for an amp change.

A quick note on the higher frequencies first though, just to be consistent. In one phrase - sparkly, airy and utterly refined yet ready to dance with decays that add such 'trueness' to the overall presentation and amalgamates the last portion of the overall picture into one.

Valves - Emille KI40-L

The Darius are recommended to be driven by amplifiers rated between 40-200 watts per channel at 4 ohms, the Emille is rated at 40wpc.

With Emily heading the system, notes marched into space which seemed to have been freed up at her command, overall resolution and retrieval was a fair step ahead of the Clones which produced a soundstage of such satisfactory proportions I almost didn't plug her in on the same day, as I was enjoying the performance so much.

Vocals gained added texture and a sense of greater unpixelated control. Guitar strings rasped and the wooden body resonated so naturally. Precision was really at the forefront of this coherent window into the music. Decay which had been so well conveyed took on an almost luxurious roll and a grace of beauty was presented right through the S1's frequency range.

Theres a realistic integration of organic detail which is woven into the musical fabric.

There's a definite synergy at work here that has me questioning my Ayons somewhat, their speed and attack is fantastic, however sometimes I wish that



they would slow down just a little. The Darius seem to have more ease with various genres and partnering equipment, so far even though the two amps used have different characters and different levels of obtainable performance the S1's haven't seemed to change their core flavour proving to be incredibly well voiced. The Ayons can sometimes show up little nasties in the top end with some amplifiers, whereas the Roksans almost say 'I'll take what detail you can offer me and just let me do my thing'.

Soundstage depth was better with the more capable Emille and centre focus was solidly portrayed with a nice bit of layering leaving a good void for the vocal to present itself with solid stature.

Smaller transient nuances, reverb and inner details seemed to emerge more strongly now and acoustical space was more apparent on live recordings. The S1's really have the ability to convey micro details and subtle shifts of texture within the performance and the soundstage never became over saturated or muddy in any way and what people relate to as a valve distortion or I'd say quality, gave an embodiment to

the sound which was fantastically musical and harmoniously flavoured.

Bass did gain another level of texture and layering, a more organic embodiment of the representative sound... a typical characterisation of valves of course. I am dreaming of a good hybrid to cover all music types with an even better potential, maybe a valve pre and class A power? That would make for an interesting listen indeed.

At this point I can not fault the sound of the Darius one bit, really. It does give me fond memories of what I liked about the MK1 Caspian. I always enjoyed it with whatever gear I partnered it with at the time, I always have referred to it as a completely non-offensive amplifier, but in truth that doesn't do it justice, it was a lot more than that and always punched above its weight in terms of refinement and musicality.

Pairing with Roksan's Caspian M2 Integrated

Which nicely brings me onto the latest M2 version of the Caspian. I've wanted to hear the new model for a while and being offered the Darius was a great op-



portunity to make the most of the opportunity to hear how the newer version compared to the MK1 (the M1 for me was not as special as the earlier amp) and also try the company's speakers with one of their own amps.

Candy Dulfers 'Nikki's Dream' Live In Amsterdam sounded magical on the Caspian, generous amounts of controlled bass coupled her Sax as it tore through the air with textural vibrancy, emanating from deep in the soundstage, which was accurately portrayed with Ulco Bes's electric guitar just to the right of her and layered with applause from the crowd. The sense of liquidity remained strong through the Darius right through Roger Happel's vocal.

In Lauryn Hill's MTV Unplugged performance of 'Adam Lives In Theory' she refers to the context of the lyrics being about all mankind without exception and one phrase she uses is;

"Fantasy is what people want but reality is what they need"

This is a fantastic quote which for me relates to how the Darius S1 performs. Audiophiles talk about resolution, dynamics, big bass slam and huge sound staging, often being initially fooled by a piece of equipment or a pair of speakers when auditioning them by their initial, what we refer to as 'wow factor'. Yet find when the equipment is in their own homes for a prolonged period of time it becomes tiresome. The Roksans simply don't, they just continue to grow on the listener as he/she explores their music library further and in more depth - the S1's are "reality".

The overall flavour of the Roksan combination was great, soundstage was completely solid and realistic. Detail retrieval was strong and the integration of frequencies was harmonious and didn't lack anything at both ends of the musical spectrum.

Conclusion

During my time with the Darius S1 standmounts I can confess I fell in love with them. With their cohesive well tempered rhythms, their detailed and engaging approach, with the ability to handle delicacies and beats with ease, the S1's offer a tonal completeness which will put an immediate smile on your face.

Depth was a notably exceptional attribute to point out from a soundstage which conveyed natural timbres and transients, without an artificially over emphasised edge, unless it was demanded of the speakers when listening to heavy electronic dance music.

Reviews

They may not be the absolute pinnacle of resolution but any hifi product which boasts these claims in my experience tends to be lacking in musicality and generally has a hard edge, swapping it for a wow factor which very quickly become unlistenable. Roksan have spent some serious time listening and fine tuning these to reproduce a sound which lacks nothing musically and conveys an awful lot more.

These are simply one of the best standmounts I have heard.

Style, fit and finish as well as attention to detail, right down to the efficient use of and complex nature of the packaging adds to that pride of ownership and compliments their high end sound.

It has been a very long time since I have heard a speaker of this calibre able to reproduce music in such a sensational way, I really cannot convey the joy of my experience enough. Well done Roksan, well done!

Build quality: 9/10

Sound Quality: 9/10

Value For Money: 9/10 - in today's market these will give many higher priced speakers a real run for their money.

Overall - 9/10

Highly Recommended - For simply being a truly outstanding conveyer of music (full stop)

Author - Danny Worth

Having achieved an overall score in excess of 8.5 the Darius S1 loudspeakers from Roksan was sent for second review to Stuart Smith to see if it would score 8.5 again and get the Hifi Pig Outstanding Product Award

This is going to be a relatively short second review as I think Danny has conveyed pretty accurately what I've heard with the Darius S1s from Roksan.

The packaging is indeed outstanding and the fit and finish is exceptional on the speakers. The gloss piano finish is really lovely. They have good weight to them and the stands match them perfectly – if they were staying I'd be tempted to fill them with lead shot or similar. Bolting the speakers to the stands is a relatively painless task, but tolerances are very tight – which is a good sign that there has been a good deal of care taken over the construction. They are made in England!



Speakers were set up 1m from the back wall and 1.5m from side walls with a small degree of toe in towards the listening position. We tried them nearer the back wall but found a little into the room opened the staging up nicely for us.

The Tellurium Q Iridium amp with its 9W into 4 Ohms produced a really lovely tone overall with the speakers, but it's clear that the Darius demands a bit more power to really get them singing. So with no further ado I plugged in the excellent Soul Note SA 730 we have in for review which delivers a healthy 115W into 4 Ohms.

Doug MacLeod's terrific album "There's a Time" comes alive with the guitar being portrayed in as real a fashion as I've heard in the house. There's a real feeling of "being there" and the stage is wide and deep. There's a bass drum kick on his Black Night tune that's very dry sounding and the Darius portray this perfectly...as well as the little touches on the hats. Bass guitar sounds deeper than the specs would have you think and this was one area I thought I'd find these loudspeakers to be lacking – I needn't

have worried - it is tight and accurate! There's texture to the vocal and you hear all the little inflections and intonations in MacLeod's voice which brings you emotionally closer to the feeling of the blues style of this record. Danny is right in that it's easy to appreciate the tonal coherence of these speakers across the whole frequency range, though you can't ignore that the open and airy top end is really rather special in these speakers and this is down to the ribbon tweeter! The way the tweeter integrates with the woofer is really wonderful and the crossover design and implementation is clearly very clever which is not something that can be said of some.

They are a great loudspeaker for a reviewer as they are just so accurate, but at the same time not clinical or fatiguing so you do find yourself listening for hours on end.

Our bass test track is Hardfloor's "Once Again Back" and this can leave a lot of speakers all a fluster with the extremes of bass and electronic hats. With the Darius you get that the bass is pretty much all there other than the very lowest frequencies, though you do get a sense of them being there...if that makes sense - I've just read Danny's review back and he says pretty much exactly the same here. To me a speaker needs to be able to reproduce bass with realism and be fast (no overhang or unreal decay) and the Darius' do this brilliantly which is surprising given they only have a six inch driver!

These are very much like a very high quality monitor speaker in that they don't accentuate or push forward any one frequency in the mix and I like this a lot! They also sound a lot bigger than their relatively small size would suggest. You do find yourself turning up the volume to quite high levels, but at no point do the Darius' become tiring or too much as some speakers can - they just keep their composure and just go ...well, louder! Our room is relatively large, but not once did I feel the Darius were out of their depth!

Kathryn William's wonderful album "Crown Electric" is again brought alive when played with this set up and I really loved it! The vocal is represented accurately and there's a real silkiness to

her voice. Likewise the vocal on Melphi's "Through the Looking Glass" album - the Darius' just never get flustered at all and the music and vocal sound correct.

Soundstaging is really great (deep and wide) but not over done on all the tunes we listened to and this gives you a very non-hifi sound. You can listen to these off axis and away from the hot seat, but sit in the sweet spot and what you are given is a very realistic portrayal of the stereo image.

Conclusion

I've listened to the Darius non-stop for the last week or so and they are very good indeed. My personal preference is for large floorstanding speakers, but I would be more than happy to live with these had I a more powerful reference amplifier - my current speakers would be up for sale if I had a suitable amplifier and I'd

love to try them with an American muscle amp or Roksan's own Oxygene amp we reviewed a while ago.

They are a great loudspeaker for a reviewer as they are just so accurate, but at the same time not clinical or fatiguing so you do find yourself listening for hours on end.

With the Darius' you are given more of the subtleties of the recording, which is particularly notable on vocals, though the steel stringed guitar on the Doug MacLeod album I mentioned is absolutely believable and somewhat stunning!

I like these speakers a lot!

Build Quality - 9

Sound Quality - 9

Value For Money - 9

Overall - 9

Highly recommended for anyone looking for a speaker that delivers an accurate representation of the recording without being clinical or fatiguing and they fully deserve their Outstanding Product award and despite their asking price I do think they offer great value for money in comparison to the competition!

Stuart Smith

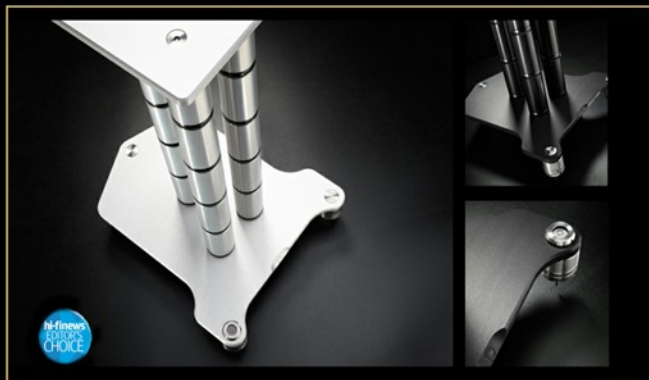


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Ophidian Solo Standmount Loudspeakers

Hifi Pig

RECOMMENDED



Danny Worth takes a listen to this unusual looking £1795 loudspeaker system.

Reviews

Arriving in a smallish single box with some serious weight to it the new kid on the block Ophidian Audio sent for review a set of standmount speakers named Solo.

The finish I received was in black Ash, with a gun-metal toned aluminium grill design to the front baffle which conceals both the tweeter and the recessed mid/bass driver.

The main driver is loaded into a tuned chamber and aperture which improves dispersion and integration. The drivers themselves are high quality Scanspeak units.

The reflex port arrangement is also novel wherein the port is built as part of the cabinet and includes anti-standing wave devices.

I initially rigged the Solos up with an old Inca Tech Oberon amplifier, a good old trusty solid state amp from Colin Wonfor. After about 200 hours of burning in time I began to listen to a mixture of music to gauge a feel of what these heavy little boxes were all about before exploring things a little further.

The top end is incredibly airy and clean sounding with an unmistakable first class presentation with pop, dance music and crisp cymbal work, projecting elements with excellent timing and precision.

The midrange is clean also and with a brightish amp I thought "these could run into problems". Bass is extremely tight with no overhang or boom at all, detailed and fast.

Listening to some complex string work the intricacy and detail the Solos extract is nothing short of incredible for its price point in the upper frequencies, but I missed the fuller nature of instruments and lower-end roll off seemed a little steep which limited decay somewhat. I wondered if it was due to the tighter punchier nature of the Oberon after playing around with speaker positioning for half an hour or so.

I plugged the Emille in and fired her up listening to some more string based acoustic material again. Yes! Much better! Detail retrieval was still excellent and the cleaner airier top end of the speakers prevailed.

Midrange now took on a more natural rather than clean and neutral presentation with the valves injecting that magic that they do into vocals and instrument undertones which to my surprise matched the Solos perfectly. I was convinced that they would be a speaker which would bias strongly towards solid



state amplification! How wrong I was and how glad I was that their character shifted from clean to more natural as the midrange did become too sharp at increased volumes (not to discount a warmer solid state amp of course) but with what I had to hand on the day solid-state wise it proved that the Solos like that added bit of flavour offered by the valve amp.

Bass now also became more natural and less of that steep slope which I interpreted to be their stated characteristic was true now, a gentler and softer roll off at the lower end was clearly audible yet it retained some good punch with faster more beat driven music.

Listening to a variety of beat driven music really showed that the little Solos have great rhythm and timing capabilities, although with comparisons to larger floor standing speakers and larger stand mounts they don't have the SPL's, or go as low, but just listening to the Solos on their own I never felt that I was lacking anything. Using the Oberon gave a tightness to the bottom end which rocked the symmetry and exposed their capabilities, but with the valves they seemed more coherent, bouncy and en-

joyable and the mids or top no longer outshone or ripped the balance of the presentation.

I recently listened to some Art Stiletto Monitors here on the same rig and they did lean more towards a mid/treble enthusiasm and I felt that they just couldn't reproduce quite the coherence or impact that the Solos have.

Another note in the Solos honour is their holographic nature. After just a slight toeing in dispersion was at its peak in my room and they did convey a very good three dimensional and holographic soundstage with more manufactured Electronica which is good test for a speakers ability in this department. Although artifacts were a little softer than the best, their solidly controlled edges of details in the forefront of the soundstage was the real draw in, pin pointing artifacts wonderfully strongly.

Dynamics for the same music were also very strong throughout the frequency range, there were even times where I felt and heard a bass note flare out and suck back in again which I've generally only heard with larger speakers. The Solos have a way of drawing you into the full music spectrum without even being able to reproduce those lowest of notes. I attest this is due to their cabinet design and driver implementation, with the bandwidth they offer. I really couldn't hear any attenuated portions or a sense of over filtered areas due to their unique design, which I can imagine some may expect from understanding their construction. I personally think that they are very cleverly done and admit I didn't expect the level of coherence and quality that I heard from them.

I also played a whole heap of music from Spotify, 320kbps MP3 and the top end was still great and didn't over expose any nasties in poorer recordings at this level. I would imagine that anybody buying a set of speakers bordering on £2k wouldn't be throwing nasty recordings at them so the lower quality Spotify is what I consider as a fair test for lesser recordings and they coped admirably.

Conclusion

In conclusion I can firmly state that once a bit of fiddling with positioning is done (which I think is largely related to the width of the room more than the depth due to the speakers' wide dispersion) to attain a strong centre stage and that holographic nature which I mentioned, the Solos will really sing.

Be careful not to partner them with amplification that is too clean or bright and punchy, it will spoil the



broth in my experience and to look at them they immediately say, powerful solid state to me with their modern and clean styling. But do not let their appearance fool you, get some good valve watts up them and their own characteristics of excellent clarity, timing and punchy presentation will really give a most enjoyable performance. If you're a bit of a bass monster the Solos don't have the room pulsating character and lack the lower octave reproduction, though the addition of a subwoofer would solve this.

The clarity in the top end is standout, so airy and clean without edginess and absolutely up there in its price bracket at retrieving everything the recording has to offer.

The Ophidian Solos are absolutely rhythmic, fun and bouncy and can also do delicate and engrossing, immersive and musical. I for one was extremely surprised by this new kid on the block.

Price at time of review - £1795

Build Quality - 8.0/10

Sound Quality - 8.0/10

Value For Money - 8.0/10

Overall - 8.0/10

Recommended for their coherence wonderfully detailed top end and ability to explore many genres very well.

Author - Danny Worth

Audio4Soul OCC IT! Xtreme Speaker Cables by Jerry Jacobs

Hifi Pig

RECOMMENDED

My initial impressions of the cable were very positive as the first notes of music issued forth with a distinctly lucid and open quality to them. I was impressed!

In line with their philosophy of providing straight forward products at pricepoints within reach of many music lovers, Audio4Soul offers one and only one speaker cable - the OCC IT! Xtreme speaker cables, with a very reasonable price, by audiophile standards, of 300 Euro for a 2.5m pair, worldwide shipping costs included. Custom lengths are available. Stuart (Mr Hifi Pig himself) has already reviewed [Audio4Soul's Xtreme16 amplifier/DAC](#) and gave it a Recommended Award. As you might be able to deduce from the name, the cable's conductors are high purity copper made with the Ohno Continuously Casting (OCC) methodology. With most copper casting methods the metal forms into a multitude of grains, each having a distinct boundary which the signal has to traverse. The OCC

method results in cable lengths of up to 125m made of a single copper 'grain', so avoiding the grain boundary signal distortions - sonic benefits, of course, suppose that such distortions exist and are audible! Carefully sidestepping the rather controversial issue just raised, a very high purity of copper is

used in these cables - somewhere around 99.9999% (so called "six nines").

The cables appear robust and well made, the banana plugs are lightweight and fit fairly snugly into equipment sockets although a tighter fit might be beneficial. They aren't the easiest of cables to handle and lay, as they have a pronounced "sproingy" characteristic. By which I mean that they are quite stiff and are impossible to lay in curves of radius less than about 8 inches (20cm) without actually nailing them down!

I guess the labelling / identification scheme will be a matter of taste, with the "Audio4Soul" identification being made with a large doublesided Velcro-backed rectangle of stiff material that wraps around the cable

and sticks out rather like clumsy wings. I must admit I was rather taken aback by this - consider me to not be an admirer of this scheme. On the other hand, these labels are easy to take off!

Sonics

My initial impressions of the cable were very positive as the first notes of music issued forth with a distinctly lucid and open quality to them. I was impressed!

Resolution is very good, with rapid lute finger runs, for example, being distinct and well separated. Many a cable will tend to slur the individual notes together. Vocals are tangible with excellent presence and immediacy, where appropriate.

Tonal neutrality is very good, although a slight lightening in the lower bass does tend to produce a sound that is just a little bit forward on full range music.

Bass is taut with very good texture and definition. Some folks might prefer a bit more 'bloom' or fullness, but that's a matter of taste. Slam is good, and transient edges are well captured throughout the frequency range, but the overall feel of the deep bass is that it is a bit lightweight compared to my more expensive reference cables.

Complex music is deftly handled and remains nicely coherent and lucid as the going gets going, it doesn't get smeared or confused. But the sheer scale of really 'big' music isn't fully conveyed, lacking a bit in dynamic scale and heft in absolute terms. In my experience, sadly, the sheer scale of music is only to be had with more expensive cables ... perhaps a double run of the cable would achieve this? That would be an interesting thing to try.

Imaging is nicely focused and tangible, and the overall impression is one of being close to and involved with the music. The feeling of the overall acoustic space of the recording is a little diminished compared to some cables, the musical focus is more on the musicians themselves than the environment they are in.

Comparisons

Tellurium TQ Black is a highly regarded speaker

cable at around the same price point as the Audio4Soul and provides a similar overall standard of musical reproduction, although the two cables do offer a rather different presentation.

With the TQ Black the sound is a little more laid back, a bit smoothed off at the high frequency end, rather more relaxed and easy-going. Image focus is vaguer and less well-defined, the resolution of detail subtly but noticeably reduced. But soundstaging is more open and spacious. Overall you are placed a bit further away from the music with the TQ Black than you are with the Audio4Soul cables. My own preference is for the latter cable's approach, others may prefer a more relaxed and immersive presentation.

If deciding between these two fine cables, I think it comes down to personal taste and system synergy - if your system seems a little too laid back and you'd like to pep it up a bit, go for the Audio4Soul cable as it does provide a more explicit sound, a more open window to the signal. If you prefer a more relaxed and less forward sound then go for the Tellurium TQ Black.

My own reference cables do show, though, that there are further sonic gains to be had if you are prepared to spend significantly more money. My XLO Pro600 and, even better, XLO Type 5 cables do offer a worthwhile improvement in transparency, resolution and sheer scale and dynamic heft. But the XLO cables are substantially more expensive.

Conclusion

I enjoyed the Audio4Soul speaker cables a lot. So they are definitely Recommended! at their price point for their fine resolution, focus, clarity and sheer musical involvement.

Build quality: 7/10

Sound Quality: 7.5/10

Value for money: 8.5/10

Overall: 8/10

Author - Jerry Jacobs



New British company DirectWave recently launched their first product, the Directors interconnect recently and Hifi Pig's reviewer Danny Worth took a listen to this new kid on the block.

The DirectWave Directors interconnects recently appeared connecting some very nice equipment at the Bristol 2014 Hifi Show.

The Directors are a parallel design twin conductor cable utilising ultra pure silver, gold plated conductors. Each conductor has thick Teflon tube covering then the cable is covered with a copper braid which is connected to ground at one end in a pseudo balanced configuration. Utilising WBT's top of the range Nextgen RCA and silver solder for maximum signal transfer and covered in a nice black braid sleeping the Directors look very well finished, simple and elegant.

Derek Robinson, Managing Director of DirectWave who constructs the Directors completely by hand and to order sent along a set of 1m for me try in my system.

Our initial chat to point of delivery was very quick and the cables come pre-burned in as standard, which is great for the customer to be able to demo the cables instantly. Note to other cable manufacturers –

send your cables for review pre-burned, it's MUCH more convenient for us guys!

The cables come in a stylish box, adding a nice touch of pride of ownership whereas too many cables these days arrive in Jiffy bags and plastic sandwich/freezer bags despite having a considerable price tag attached. Although the packaging cannot help the sound quality it's nice to have some consideration to packaging and DirectWave gets a tick here.

The Sound

There's always a first noticeable aspect or impression to any system change and the Directors gave fantastic separation without damaging the flow of the music. They retrieved details very well if not a little cleaner and leaner in the midband than the Oriron Symphony Oranges which are my day to day cable. This allowed for more articulation of the timbre and lacked a little bit of its body.

Turin Brakes 'Underdog' displayed a vast soundstage of clearly depicted instruments, acoustic and light electric guitar notes were easily ascertainable and a

clean vocal was presented. The undertones of the midrange made way to a tauter and precise bass image, allowing for good layering properties and information to be conveyed.

I am used to hearing this track with a little more flavour, coloration? I wouldn't say so just a little more body, however thinning down on the body a little allowed for more upper bass information with more perceivable detail.

I felt a lack of harmonic richness again on bass guitar during John Martyn's 'Solid Air'. There was plenty of detail conveyed, but overall a little tighter at the very bottom, which becomes more noticeable at higher volumes, throwing the balance ever so slightly towards the cleaner upper frequencies. I do tend to listen louder than most people however.

Sound staging and layering once again was exceptional and Martyn's vocal was fantastically portrayed along with plucked strings.

The slightly cleaner nature and tautness of the cables worked in harmony on Moloko's 'The Time Is Now'. I can't say I have often heard as much information from this track and there was a perfectly neutral controlled vocal which shone strongly from a solid centre focus and harmoniously with other soundstage details, making for a rather enjoyable and better take on this track than I was used too.

Listening to some more upbeat and rhythmic music such as an array of recent and past pop music the Directors are incredibly controlled and just don't show any hints of grain at all. Dynamics were strong at both ends of the scale, possibly a little shy of the lowest note fullness, but an undeniable quality of punch that really bounces the music along.



Silences were golden adding a great feeling of space and realism to the overall sound, The DirectWaves also add a really addictive plus point to that out of the box sense of holography and three dimensionality.

The slightly richer lower mids of the Oriton's took a couple listening sessions to get used to being without and the more detailed representation of these areas portrayed by the Directors really grew on me and I found myself exploring a great deal of music, concentrating quite heavily on this area of the sound.

In Chris Jones' 'Angel From Montgomery' snare drums were absolutely on the money, lower bass notes were accurate and cymbals rang true. The slight cleaning up of Chris' vocal was a nice surprise to me as it didn't lose any body, yet seemed to register with fewer undertones and had a more legible feeling of accuracy. This is a favourite of mine along with 'Long After Your Gone' from the Moonstruck album which opened up an extension of bass notes I hadn't heard from the Directors up until this point.

So my earlier reflections on hearing 'less fullness' in the very lowest notes are actually a reflection of a lesser coloration in general to some lower notes as here the notes were extremely extended and controlled, weighted and accurate.

So I concede, the DirectWaves are in fact portraying a truer representation of the music and I can categorically state this as the past two tracks are very well known to me in their entirety.

'Blanket' by Urban Species has a sultry vocal from Imogen Heap with big strong weighty bass notes fully extending through a sleazy, smokey, intimate little back street Brooklyn Jazz Club. The Directors really helped the system to create Heap's vocal in a pure



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manner. I'm used the bass sounding fuller at its extremes, but with these cables in there was an upper roundness, with a more detailed articulation - a little less smooth but with more organic hit.

Conclusion

With a realistic top end full of detail and air the Directors from DirectWave are a neutral to clean cable that is wonderfully controlled and arguably 'truer' to the music. They are definitely not a warm sounding, coloured cable and their neutral midrange reflects this. I am firmly the type of audiophile who runs away at speed from analytical overly detailed sounds and the Directors even with their tauter bass still do not fall into that category. Later reflections on this area of the sound actually confirmed to me that the lower frequency response is also truer to the music.

Their controlled and fast edges are representative of silver done correctly, exceptionally well timed without the smear or lag, giving a soundstage of huge proportions.

They are a really noticeable change in a system and if you feel your setup is lacking clarity and presence, then I urge you to try these cables. They inject life into the sound without overstepping the mark and I'd imagine a beautifully smooth vinyl rig would benefit well with their characterisation.

At first glance they come across as quite clean, on further inspection they show themselves to be accurate and controlled as I for one found out during the course of this review.

Build Quality - 8/10

Sound Quality - 7.5/10

Value For money - 7.5/10

Overall - 7.6/10

Price at time of review £360 - 1m pair

Recommended - For accurately describing the music without coarse hardness and reflecting a true representation of the material played.

Danny Worth

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Analogue Works One Turntable

by Stuart Smith



I'll be absolutely honest and say that when the Analogue Works turntable turned up I was a bit jaded with the whole vinyl thing and had been rather enjoying listening to music using a dedicated computer as the source. However, when I was initially asked to review the Analogue

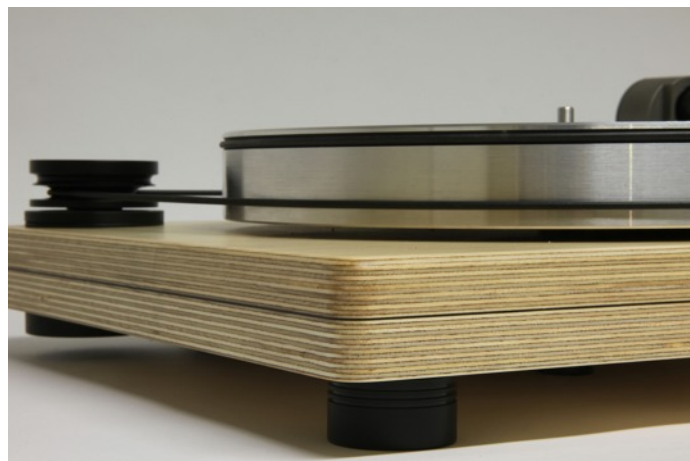
Works Turntable One I thought why the hell not...and I was glad I did. Tim at Analogue Works was keen to tell me on the phone that the turntable was based on Tom Fletcher designs and was getting rave reviews from users, but the proof of the pudding and all that...

Analogue Works make just three turntables (The Zero, The One and The Two) with the One costing £799, the Zero £649 and the Two £1599 and they sell direct to the public to keep the costs down to a minimum. The turntables are made exclusively in the UK!

The One comes in a choice of two plinth finishes, with the one supplied for review arriving in furniture grade plywood (a black laminated version is available for an extra £50) and very nice in a minimalist kind of way it is too. You can get the turntable sup-

Guitar sounds like guitar and is pitch stable! Instruments are well separated in the stereo image and remain where they are supposed to.

plied with a variety of armboards, but I use the Origin Live Silver tonearm and so a Rega board came packaged. Fitting the arm is a simple affair and the armboard is nicely made out of what appears to be black acrylic.





Packaging is really rather good giving a high end feel immediately and the instructions are comprehensive yet very easy to follow. Set up is a piece of cake with the separate Premotec motor unit resting on whatever surface you put the turntable on and fitting through a cutout in the turntable at the back left. The cutout is ever so slightly oversized so that the motor can be positioned so that it doesn't connect with the plinth in any way other than the belt!

It is a belt drive turntable unsurprisingly, offering both 33.33 and 45.11 RPM with the change being made with the accepted and widely used movement of the belt to a different "cog" on the motor. The low torque motor unit has a remote power supply box which can be sited away from the turntable itself which is a nice touch.

The platter is a hefty unit, weighs in at a not inconsiderable 6.7Kg and is made of an aluminium alloy. It looks rather pleasing set against the plywood I think and has a rubber "band" around it which I'd assumed was for dampening (more on this later) and tapping on the platter produces a solid thud rather than any ringing – this is a good sign! Supporting the platter is the bearing utilising a polished silver steel shaft with a precision ground nipple and a phosphor bronze sleeve with a hardened and polished roller... it's as smooth as silk and the platter rotates perfectly. You get a choice of mats to put on the platter, a thin rubber one, a foam one and one made from compressed cork so that you can play around and find the one that suits you best. I ended up using the rubber mat with the foam mat on top of that but the differences are marginal I'd suggest.

The One comes with three solid adjustable feet which make leveling of the turntable a much more simple process than those using four feet and you can add suspended feet for an extra cost, though I don't think it's necessary. All in all and even with cartridge

alignment, you should be up and playing your favourite black discs in a matter of an hour or so...probably much less.

Throughout the review I used the Cartridge Man Music Maker III and the Origin Live Silver tonearm both of which I have used for a good while and know well. The photographs used in this review were supplied by Analogue Works.

On With Some Tunes

And first on the platter is a bit of reggae in the form of Dub Syndicate's "Strike the Balance" LP. This is a good record to play to see what's going on in the bass department and there are certainly no complaints from me here. Everything is tight and deep, with the flute on the song "Mafia" sounding correct pitch-wise and with no wobble suggesting that the speed is accurate and stable on this turntable. I don't have a strobe disc to check this but I'd be very surprised if it's not cock on!

A fairly hefty knuckle rap on the unit the turntable was sat on didn't perceptibly travel through to the speakers (or headphones) and you can tap the actual plinth fairly hard before it's picked up massively by the cartridge. This was a bit of a surprise to me if I can be frank – this is a very simple (but well engineered) turntable with no suspension or clever gizmos aboard, but it seems that plywood is actually a pretty sensible material to be used in turntables – I'm not sure we'd have seen the same result with a solid piece of MDF!

In the spaces between the tracks I couldn't perceive any vibrations or noise coming from the motor and reaching the cartridge and it seems the simple method of isolating the motor from the plinth is effective as well as simply elegant.

Some guitar music to have another listen to the speed and next on the platter is Concierto de Aranjuez with



John Zaradin plucking the strings. If speed is awry you'll hear it on this record, but I have to say there's nothing for me to moan about here! Guitar sounds like guitar and is pitch stable! Instruments are well separated in the stereo image and remain where they are supposed to.

Music has plenty of drive and, though it pains me to say it, I preferred the Analogue

Works to my Wilson Benesch Circle as it just seems to connect you with the actual music in a much more organic and involving way. I even preferred it to my heavily modded Technics 1210 with the same arm and cartridge arrangement which is high praise indeed coming from me! The One has plenty boogie factor and the music bounces along really nicely and it's a really addictive way to listen to your music.

The motor on this turntable is a low torque type that you have to spin above the desired speed and it then slows to the correct speed – this is what the rubber band around the platter is for I guess. Don't spin the

Despite its no nonsense looks and approach it does play music ...and it plays music in a way that really gets under your skin

motor fast enough and it will run slow. I'm aware this is the nature of this kind of motor but I found this took a bit of getting used to, but it's not an uncommon arrangement and you do get used to it after a few album sides.

I suppose this no nonsense motor arrangement is one area that costs have been kept low and it works perfectly well, but in these modern days of "give me convenience or give me death" this may be an irritation for some who would prefer an electronic speed



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shift. This is not to suggest the motor itself isn't more than up to the job...it is (and then some) and my comment is more about convenience than anything else! Most audiophiles and music lovers should be more than happy to forgo this convenience for the sake of getting great sounds from their records.

As I said at the start of this review, the Analogue Works turntable arrived at a time when I was getting a bit jaded with the whole vinyl thing, but it's had me reaching for album after album across loads of different genres which is a good sign – very often I find a bit of kit can often lean towards (be tuned for) a specific style of music – not so here and it will do banging techno just as well as it does folk or acoustic music! Despite its no nonsense looks and approach it does play music ...and it plays music in a way that really gets under your skin to the point where you stop analysing what the turntable is adding or taking away and just get on listening to the tunes...and this is what the components in a hifi are supposed to do isn't it? In fact I don't think the turntable is actually adding very much to the mix at all!

Ideally it should be placed on a wall shelf (sadly we're having a move around and mine wasn't available at the time of review) but the One is surprisingly unaffected by normal footfall. I did try placing the turntable and motor on an isolation platform, but found that this utterly ruined the coherence of the sound making it muddy and so when you go out and buy one of these stick with a solid surface rather than shelling out on fancy platforms!

Conclusion

This is a simple turntable that has been put together using high quality materials and components without frill or frippery and using solid engineering principles. It does its job of spinning the vinyl at the right speed very well and brings very little of its own flavour to the party.

I found myself putting down the tablet and computer files and delving into my record collection once again and, as I say, this is something I've not really done in a few months.

Overall, what I think you have with the Analogue Works One is a good looking, straight-forward and well engineered turntable that is sensibly priced (very sensibly priced and hence its high score). With the cartridge and arm that I used (and I think

they're priced around the right price point to be the kind of things folk would use) you end up with a very capable analogue front end that just plays music for you and punches well above weight with regards its asking price. I'm certain that buyers could use a less expensive arm and cartridge combination on the One and still get very acceptable results, but I'd suggest it warrants spending the extra and it will take arms and cartridge combos even further up the ladder than mine I'm sure.

It does its job of spinning the vinyl at the right speed very well and brings very little of its own flavour to the party.

Regular readers will know that I always ask myself "Could I live with this?" and the answer here is a resounding yes, to the extent the WB Circle has gone to make way for this much less expensive model in the reference system.

This is a very good turntable at a price that makes it something of a bargain and I think it fully deserves the scores I have given it!

Its solid and no frills approach will make it a turntable that should last you years and when you do want to upgrade I'd suggest you can do this by improving the arm and cartridge rather than needing to go out and buy a different turntable.

The Hifi Pig review process demands that this turntable now gets sent to a second reviewer, but had it been my decision I'd have awarded our Outstanding Product award independently.

Build quality: 9/10

Sound Quality: 8.5/10

Value For Money: 9.25/10

Recommended for people that want a simple to set up analogue front end that performs with exceptional musicality and at a price that makes it something of a bargain.

Stuart Smith

The Analogue Works One turntable will now go to a second Hifi Pig review team member who will see if it scores highly enough to be awarded the Outstanding Product Award.

Hifi Pig Magazine

@ High-End Munich 2014



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2014

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High-End Munich 2014

Munich High-End offers people attending the opportunity to see a whole host of kit that they wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to see or hear, as well as being able to meet friends old and new.

For the industry it's a must and the trade day was buzzy and full of distributors, dealers and manufacturers closing deals.

In the main the quality of the exhibitors is very high indeed and if you enjoy hifi then this show really should be in your diary for next year.

The build up to High End Munich has been huge and the long awaited expo didn't disappoint. After arriving on Press day I was thrown straight into the deep-end at my first ever hi-fi show.

I'm going to talk about my thoughts on the show in general and my favorite stands and rooms. I started by going round the main halls on press day and then went around the rooms on the following days. Press day was a blast and here is a few of my favourite stands:

-The Carot One stand was small and wasn't showing many products but they were great. I loved the inexpensive in-earphones and their preamplifier. I talked to the CEO Antonio Scialo who was very friendly and passionate about his product. So passionate that

Of course Hifi Pig was there and we were welcomed by pretty much every one we met and it is clear that we have now become part of the audio world's accepted furniture, which for a site that is barely two years old is something of an achievement. This year both Linette and myself attended, but also our son Harry whose Tens Perspective article focuses on what the show means to those brought up on ipods and computer audio and should provide an interesting read for our younger readers.

he gave me a preamplifier and some earphones to review at the end of the show. (That review will be uploaded soon).

-Another stand that stood out was the Jarre Technologies stand. Lots of color and anyone was allowed to play there own music from their phone or mp3 player. They showed of the AeroSkull, the aeroTwist and many others. It looks like the products are very unique and personable (maybe not for audiophiles though more for teens). I wasn't able to get a very good listen to them from all the noise of the show,



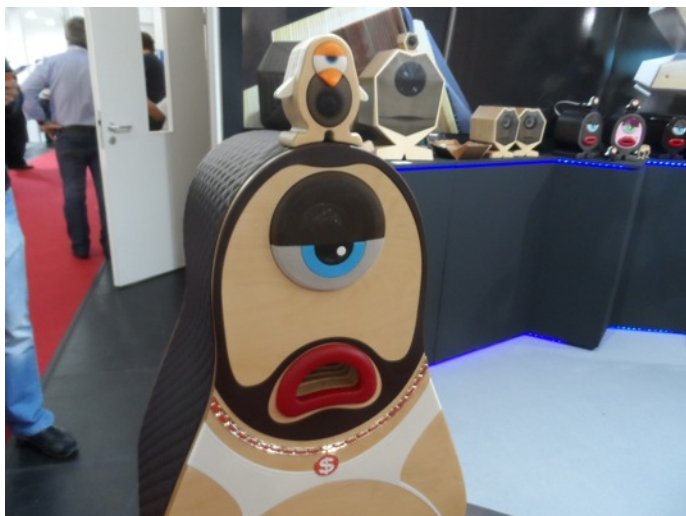
but I would love to hear them again.

-Roma was another unique and new brand I saw. This time I was able to get a really good listen of a couple of their speakers including the Vario's. These



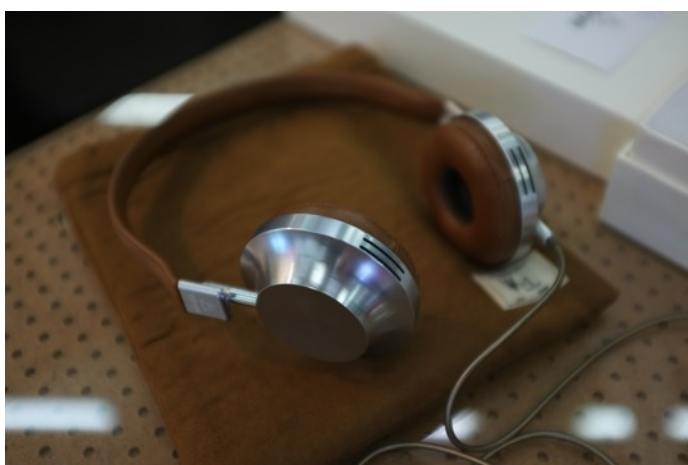
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speakers were probably the most eye-catching



speakers at the show and sounded great. There was a huge presence of headphones and wearable hi-fi at the show this year and I was able to listen to some great headphones:

-Aedle's offering at the show were a pair of reasonably priced and expensive feeling on ears. The stand was very minimalist which let the headphones speak



for them selves.

- I was able to listen to a few Monster headphones. I spoke to Rene Erler from Aqipa who showed me the Inspiration and the Inspiration lite. Great headphones, the kind that I would buy for myself and wear everyday.

-Oppo are mostly known for their phones, but I was able to discover their (fairly limited) range of headphones. Quite expensive but sounded amazing. I spoke to James Soanes who discussed the possibility of a range of more affordable headphones.



-One of the best headphones there were the Final, great unique earphones from around £300 to £10 000. Sounded very good . Not much else needs to be said.



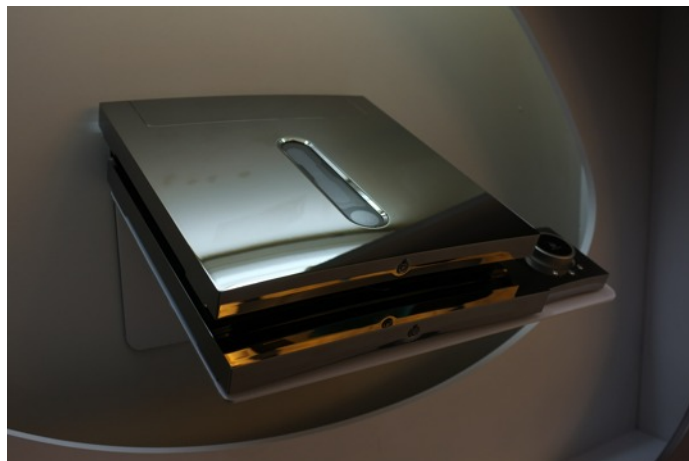
I also attended the Fine Sounds press conference which was a huge eye opener in high end hi-fi. If you didn't already know, Fine sounds is a huge name in the business, it's a collaboration of brands including

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Meridian, McIntosh, Sonus Faber and many others.



A huge dark blue lit room where the main attraction was a Devialet amp and a pair of speakers with the new SAM technology. It made the room come alive and I've never heard music sound so real.



The following days I visited the rooms at the show:

-One of my favourite rooms was the Voxativ room featuring a new pair of ginormous speakers and the Josound Ra and Cartouche which I already rate very highly. The room was dark and quite small but the sound was sublime. Jo, Pierre and Holger were as friendly as always. It makes my top 3 of the best sounding rooms of the show.



The whole experience of High End Munich is amazing and I was surprised that I was the youngest person (well... youngest person with a press pass) to be there. I will definitely be there next year and I will be attending many more hi-fi shows now I have got a taste for it.



That said, the stand out room for me was the Devialet listening room. (their showroom was very informative and personally not great, but the listening room was an experience like no other)

Harry Smith
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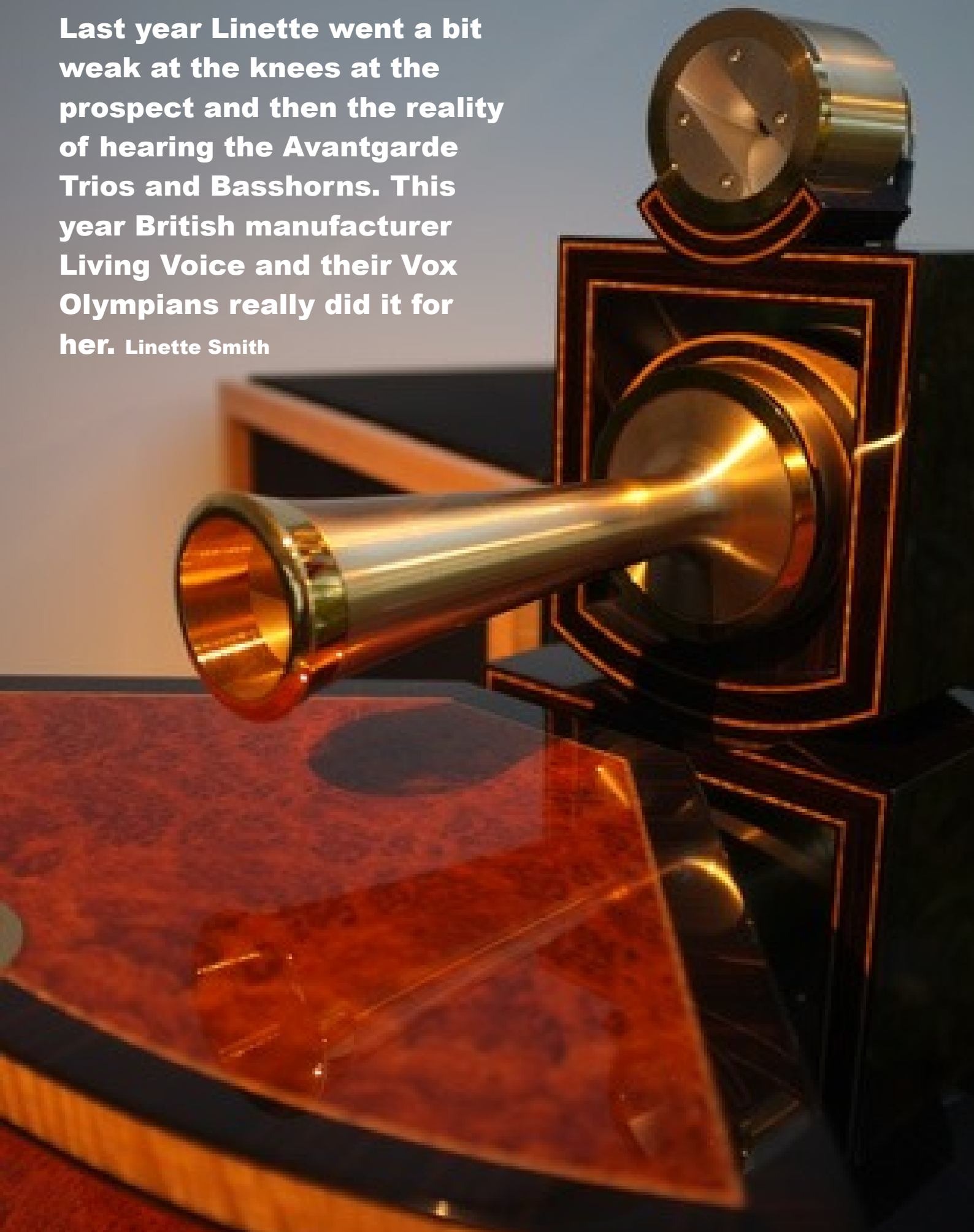
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This Year's Trios?

Last year Linette went a bit weak at the knees at the prospect and then the reality of hearing the Avantgarde Trios and Basshorns. This year British manufacturer Living Voice and their Vox Olympians really did it for her. Linette Smith



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Last year was my first ever High End Munich Show and I did indeed get myself quite worked up at the prospect of hearing [Avantgarde Acoustic Trios](#) for the first time.

For me, loudspeakers are the part of a system that I get most excited about.

They are generally the first part that you see when you walk in a room, the eye-catchers of the outfit and the mouthpiece of the system.

I like the fact that loudspeakers can be a work of art in your living room even when they are silent.

I tend to measure all my show experiences by last years encounter with the Trios.

It was incredibly emotional. Avantgarde Acoustic make incredibly beautiful loudspeakers that people really connect with and they give me goosebumps.....but this year there were no new loudspeakers, or ones that I had not heard, from Avantgarde, so what was going to give me this

The Vox Olympian is a stunning horn loudspeaker

year's 'Trio' moment?

Last year I heard Living Voice's smaller loudspeakers but not the Vox Olympians. I had vowed that I would not miss out this year so I was very excited when we made it up to the top floor of the show to see Lynne and Kevin.

The room sounded great, but we had managed to arrive when the smaller OBX system was playing.



Not a bad thing at all as it sounded incredible, with a much bigger and fuller sound than one would expect from a pretty diminutive floorstander. We were warmly welcomed and, after a quick chat and a listen we promised to return in a couple of hours when the big boys were coming out to play.

The Vox Olympian is a stunning horn loudspeaker. It oozes quality, the cabinet building and the finishing is a master class in 'how to do it right'.

Paired with some serious Kondo valve amplification there is an air of quirky but classy Steampunkness to it. The beautiful woods and bronze make me think of the Time Machine, vintage but futuristic at the same time. Yes, these are some of the most expensive loudspeakers that you can buy....for good reason.

When we walked back into that room there was standing room only. A hifi show can be a challenging place for an exhibitor; there are loads of issues that can make your products sound less than their best but that didn't seem to bother Living Voice.

Walking into that room was an instant 'wow', seriously impressive sound and that instant connection with the music.

Now, I am not a fan of much classical music and much less opera. I have no idea what the piece of opera was that Lynne was playing but it just sounded, well, to be fair, it just sounded that we had



popped out to an actual opera....there was a woman with a stunning voice there just singing her heart out. It really was a spectacle of sound and vision, beautiful, beautiful hifi that sounded incredibly real....I don't really think I can add much more except to say make sure that if you go to a show and see the Living Voice Vox Olympians, you damn well get your act together and go back and hear them, you will not be sorry!



The British Are Coming!

Stuart Smith

Hifi Pig had a whale of a time in Munich and we met a lot of friends both old and new. One of the things that we found particularly pleasing was the presence of a good number of British manufacturers at the show. We managed to say hello to a good number of them whilst at the show but if we missed you then we apologise...there was just so much to see and lots of people wanting to meet with us.

FUNK FIRM

[Funk Firm](#) makes a handful of turntables and also offer arms and upgrade services. All three of the company's turntables were on display and very fine looking they are too. For those that don't know the turntables are the Little Super Deck (great name we thought) that retails at £1450, the Saffire III that retails for £3600 with their Strata Platter and the Funk Vector IV that goes for £1400 with the Strata Platter. There's clearly a good deal of clever engineering gone into these turntables and prices seem



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exceptionally reasonable! Anyway here's some pictures!



driver that they make by hand at their UK Factory.



HARBETH

Harbeth make loudspeakers and have a great following around the world...indeed we reviewed their [SHL 5 Supers](#) way back in July 2012. The new loudspeaker unveiled at Munich was the update of the speaker we reviewed and is called the Super HL5 Plus. At the heart of the Harbeth sound is their Radial bass/midrange



BESPOKE AUDIO COMPANY

Harry O'Sullivan heads up this new company based in Hastings who make just one product - a line stage preamplifier. This one product looks absolutely stunning in the flesh and can be

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tailored to your own exacting specifications. Despite being a new company Bespoke have been involved in the design, making and supply of highly acclaimed products for the last ten years or so. The pics really don't do this product justice!



CHORD ELECTRONICS

We've written about the Chord room elsewhere and we're sure readers will be aware of this company so won't go into too much detail other



than to say that matched with the PMC speakers their room was very nice indeed!

GRAHAM AUDIO

Graham are an English company making the well loved BBC monitors for studio and home use. They've been producing the LS5/9 for a while now and launched the LS5/8 at the Munich High End show. We had a brief chat with Paul, the sales director and it was good to see them selling product when we returned for a catch up on the Sunday.



JOSOUND

We've spoken about JoSound quite a bit in the past and really enjoy this Jersey based company's Cartouche and Ra loudspeakers. They're single driver, made from bamboo and sound very fine indeed! Always a bit of a must see room for us and this years room was the best we've heard the Ra sounding.



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KEF & ARCAM

When I was a teenager KEF was one of the manufacturers who everyone knew and lusted after owning. They launched the company in October 1961 but certainly haven't let the grass grow beneath their feet with constant innovation and growth. We loved their little desktop X300 A speakers when we reviewed them and the Reference speakers were sounding mighty fine in the Munich room.

ARCAM launched a couple of amplifiers and a new universal disc player at Munich High End too.

This room is always a bit of a highlight for me and without a doubt the people are amongst the most enthusiastic about their products anywhere...particularly Johan!



NEAT

We popped by the neat stand a couple of times on our tour of the show but never managed to chat with anyone sadly. This year the Hifi Pig pink speakers were not in evidence but there were some colourful offerings amongst the more



traditional looking speakers from this well known and well renowned British manufacturer.

ROKSAN

Roksan are the sponsors of Hifi Pig's Hifi News section and it was good to catch up with [Tufan](#), Simon and Robert. Danny has just reviewed the new [Darius speakers](#) and gave them an overall score of 9/10 ... we've got them set up in the listening room at the moment for a second opinion and first impressions are very positive. The [Oxygene](#) kit continues to look stunning and Linette so wants a set in Hifi Pig pink! The new range of amplifiers and CD player and DAC was on display and it looked very nicely made indeed. Chatting to Tufan he is adamant that Roksan will continue to be made in the UK and we love this approach! Thanks for the drink by the way!



CYRUS & HIFI RACKS

We've spoken about these guys previously but it's nice to mention them in this article again as they're certainly doing a great job of representing Britain on the international stage!



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PMC

Again we've spoken about how much we enjoyed this British loudspeaker manufacturer's room before and it's great to see how technology used in the studio is being implemented in loudspeakers for the home.



NAIM

Naim joined forces with French loudspeaker manufacturer FOCAL some time ago but the NAIM brand has been synonymous with British Hifi since as long as I can remember. In the 80s the dream system of pretty much any teenager was a combination of Linn and NAIM and so it's good to see that they are moving forward at a pace. The [NAIM Statement](#) amps and preamplifier is a stunning piece of engineering but their [MUSO](#) system brings high end sound to the masses. We attended the press conference and were blown away with the sound, though it was a bit dark to get reasonable photos!



Q ACOUSTICS

We loved the little [Concept 20s](#) when we reviewed them some time ago and so it was good to catch up with the guys on the stand and chat about their new Concept 40 floorstander that uses the same technology as the Concept 20 in a larger cabinet and with more drivers.



LIVING VOICE

Kevin and Lynn Scott are based in Long Eaton in the UK and make very nice loudspeakers indeed. The first time we visited their room the OBX RWs were making a very fine sound indeed on the end of some very expensive Kondo kit. However, the main event (we missed it last year) was their Vox Olympian/Elysian loudspeakers...but we'd have to come back in the afternoon. When we arrived there was standing room only at the back and I can understand why. Ok, this combo will cost you the best part of half a million of your Euros and will be out of reach for all but the super wealthy but a cat may look at a king! Opera was playing and it's as lifelike a rendition of the music I have

heard on any system and takes the “in the room” cliché to a whole new level. I’d have liked to have heard music more familiar but beggars can’t be choosers and the people in the room were clearly lapping the sound up! You could go on all day and wheel all the superlatives in the dictionary out and attach them to these speakers but you just have to hear them at some point. The finish is superb and they really do look like works of art. Probably the highlight of the whole show from a sound perspective for me. Must remember to get to the room and get myself installed at the front next time...and take along some tunes I know.



The Newcomers

The newcomers part of Munich High End is a great idea and gives those company's that are relatively new to the industry the opportunity to showcase their products without having to shell out huge amounts of cash for a stand or room proper. It's a great thing that the High End Society does and I for one hope they continue this tradition in the future!

New to Munich High-End this year but not to regular readers of Hifi Pig is **Audio 4 Soul** who make a great sounding [True Digital Amplifiers](#) that we reviewed a while ago. At High End this year they were showing off their latest addition to their range - the Reference 50, plus a new

set of OCC speaker cables that Jerry has reviewed and will be live on the Hifi Pig site very soon.

Next on the Newcomers stand was (*Stack Audio (pictured over with the new streamer)*) from Great Britain and Theo Stack who is straight out of college and designing this streamer that has been engineered from the ground up and is machined from a solid billet of aluminium. It comes complete with a never connected power supply, separate rails for the Clock and DSP. It's heavy bit of kit and it's certainly very impressive to look at with plenty of brownie points as far as cool goes and inside has low noise clocks. Hifi Pig certainly wish Theo and his team all the very best with this project that we're sure will be the first of many!

Nippon Hifi in the guise of Jani Leppälamm (pictured) from Finland distribute the Japanese made **SoulNote** kit in Europe were on the newcomers stand too. We were really impressed with their little [SA 710 integrated amp](#) we reviewed not too long ago



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and have reviews of its bigger brother and a CD player coming up in the next couple of weeks.



Evolution Audio and head honcho Alfred Langer (pictured speaking with Stuart) make a turntable which is direct drive and it's an impressive looking bit of kit. They offer the turntable as a full package in a range of finishes that uses the same sub chassis through out. It's a brushless design and you can buy



the motor and speed control unit on its own for putting into your very own DIY turntable for €2900 whereas the finished turntable tips the scales at €7500. Be an interesting comparison to the direct driver turntable we have at Hifi Pig as a reference.

A Charlin powered by Roboli Design make solid state amplifiers and very nice they look too. Their 4S amplifier boasts 100w a channel and costs € 80 000 and we'd have liked to have had a chat to the French chap manning the stand but it appeared every time we approached he was engrossed in something far more important.

Hemiolia Records are an independent record label based in Perugia, Italy and do master tapes for reel to reel machines and offer a small collection (so far) of recordings that are bound to be of interest to the



enthusiast of this format..

Stepnext UG are a German company and make the Next Board which is a modular board system with a size of 60 x 45 centimeters offering space inside to accommodate HTPC, hard drives, routers, or DA converters. If more space is needed they can

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be arranged horizontally or vertically and extended as required. Optional accessories include a universal docking station for smartphones and tablets and a cable channel.



Best of luck to all the newcomers at this years Munich High End, all at hifi Pig wish you every success for the future of your businesses!



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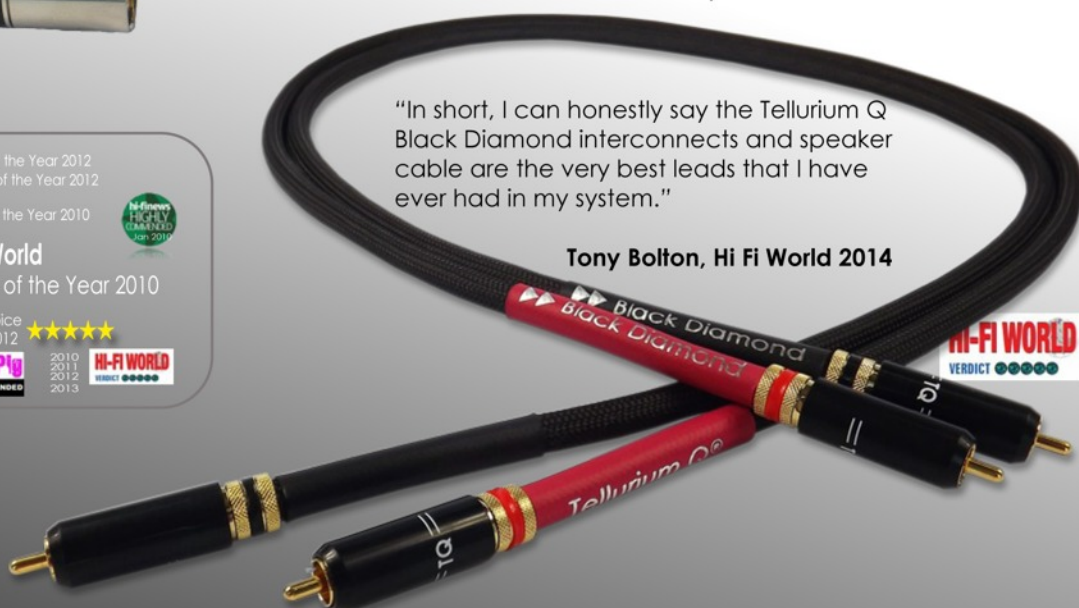
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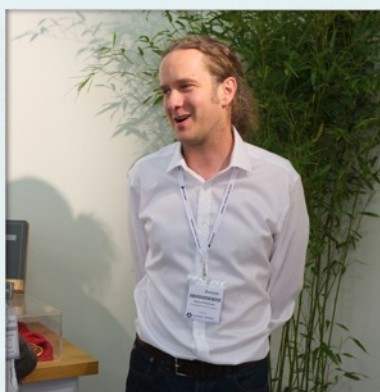
Steven R. Rochlin from Enjoy The Music



Armin Krauss of Avantgarde Acoustics



Thomas Scherer of TSAE



Harry O'Sullivan from the Bespoke Audio Company



Having a beer with David from David Denyer PR and Astrid and Marijn from Snip records



Alfred and Alissa explaining the new Extreme Speaker from Estelon



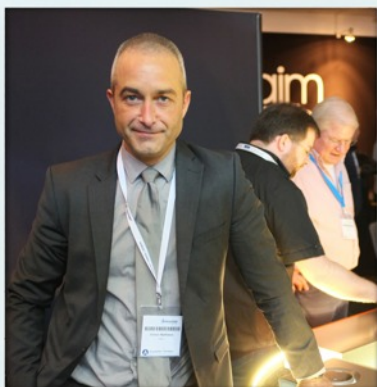
Jani of Nippon HiFi



Alfred Langer from Evolution Audio

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High-End People



Simon Mathews is the Group Design Director for Focal & Naim



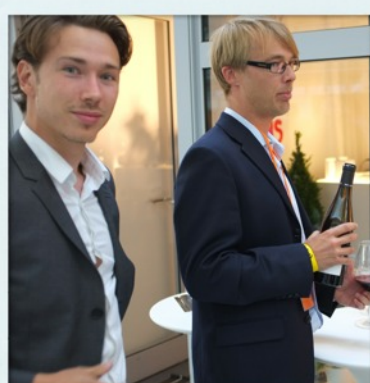
Dan D'Agostino



Theo Stack



Nola's Carl Marchisotto



Hugo and Rune from Triangle



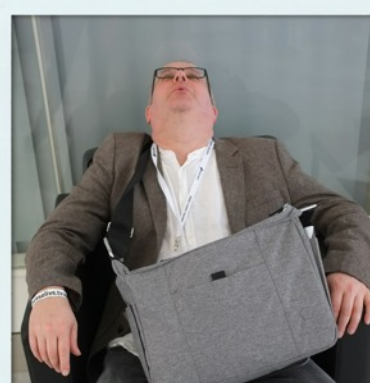
The Gryphon's Flemming



Arthur from Funk Firm



Mr. MCRU - David Brook



A very tired Mr Hifi Pig

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Linette (Mrs Hifi Pig), who became quite the celebrity at High-End Munich, takes a look at the rooms at the show that you can always count on to put on a great show.

There are certain manufacturers that can be relied upon to always put on a good show at Munich High-End.

It's not only about the sound in the room, it's about making people feel welcome, giving them a pleasant environment to sit in and listen and being a bit more inclusive in their music choices.

It's not just about how you treat the guys with the press passes either; we like to see how you look after Joe Public too.

If there is anything guaranteed to make me leave a room fast its obnoxious people who just want to chat among

themselves, play on their phones and generally behave as if the general public is a nuisance.

Some brands though have really got it right and can be relied upon to make you feel welcome, show after show.

Yep some of these are big name brands, and that's probably half the reason they are big name brands, they make great kit and know how to treat the public well. But there are some much smaller brands that still know how to look after people and make sure that they always come back to their room at a show.

The following are five of the brands that, in my humble opinion as a punter, get it right consistently.

If there was an award for enthusiasm, it would have to go to Johan, UK Brand Manager for **KEF** (*see picture to the left*). He is always bouncing about; having a bit of a chat with people and playing music that he knows the crowd will love. He knows his stuff too and, along with the rest of the KEF and Arcam guys, makes their room THE place to be if you want to feel you've just walked in to a really cool party.

I was a bit worried this year as the KEF and Arcam room looked very grown up, all black, grey and opulent. This was, of course, to showcase their new Reference line of loudspeakers.

These are serious looking loudspeakers in a beautiful, grown up finish...but they still have the KEFness that I love, they deliver all types of music making it fun to listen to. Nice one.

Avantgarde Acoustic makes some of the most beautiful, and wonderful to listen to, horn loudspeakers in the world. It is not just the quality of their products though, or the fact that at Munich they have a big, airy, spacious room, with plenty of Avantgarde branded seats for people sit on and lots of kit to look at.

They are always pleased to see everyone that walks into their room

They are professional but also friendly and approachable. They speak and present in several different languages, making sure that everyone is included.



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They play a wide variety of music too so no body gets alienated.....they see nothing wrong with wanting to listen to pop music on their kit.

And of course they make one of my favourite loudspeakers ever, the Trio, but whether they are playing the Trios or the Zero 1, their room has to be on your must visit list.

JoSound may well be a fairly new name to the world of Hifi, but they consistently have one of my favourite rooms at any show I see them at. This year at Munich, everything came together right and the system was really singing...(actually, I put this down to my tender loving

care of the Ra loudspeakers for the 6 weeks or so previous to the show!)

It's not just the stunning and different looking kit in Mr Sound's room though, Joe was, and always is, very warm and welcoming...positively encouraging visitors to play whatever they like. People tend to walk into Joe's room and stop there because they like how it sounds, and they feel at home.

If you haven't made time to get into the **Manger** room this time, then make sure that you do next.



It always gets my vote as a really nice place to be. Daniela makes even a small room work well, splitting it

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so that there is a place to talk and get info about the products and a listening space that is comfortable and lounge-like.

Like Daniela, the Manger room is calm and serene...just what is needed in a hectic place like a Hifi show!



I always love visiting **Gryphon**. Flemming and his team are always welcoming, in a quiet and unassuming way. In fact Flemming always seems a little surprised that so many people want to come and hear his kit.

Gryphon make some of the most amazing sounding and purposeful looking electronics and loudspeakers around (and consistently have one of the best sounding rooms).....and that should be reason enough to get you into his room for a listen, but if you can, grab a few moments to have a chat with the tall, softly spoken Dane to tell him what you think,.....you will make his day.

There are of course loads more rooms that always go to great efforts to make sure the people visiting their rooms feel welcomed and enjoy the experience. Unfortunately we just don't have the time to name them all in this supplement but you know who you are.

Linette Smith

Xpression Carbon



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Valves and Horns

Munich was awash with some fine looking and sounding horn loudspeakers and valve amplifiers so we thought we'd put together a few photographs of some of the best looking kit we saw at the show.

The KR Audio kit is seriously impressive looking and has to rank amongst the most individually proportioned hifi out there.

We think this photograph is of the company's Kronzilla monoblocks. (We were busy speaking to the very lovely Dr Eunice Kron who heads up the company and failed to get the information down.)If you'd like to read all about how KR go about making these bespoke tubes then you can [read our factory visit here](#).



For me one of the best sounds of the show was these horns and valve amplification from Italian company Azzolina.

Refreshingly they were playing some serious disco in the little room when we went in and the other people present could hardly keep themselves in their seats. The finish on these horns is seriously beautiful and likewise on the amplifiers.

The price on these horns was a very surprising €52 000 which we thought seemed a reasonable price given the cost of similar sets of loudspeakers.



One of the most surprising sounds of the show came from these amplifiers from Auris Audio powering a diminutive set of desk top speakers placed on stands.

Auris are a Serbian company with the legend « Handcrafted with Soul » beneath their name. Definitely a name to watch out for in the future!



No Munich High-End would be complete without having a listen to some Avantgarde Acoustics' loudspeakers. Last year Linette was all a quiver when she heard the Trios with the company's bass horns.

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This set of Trios with a single level of bass horns was presented by Fono Acoustica and very impressive it was too.



The HornFabrik loudspeakers below looked really beautiful and the sound they were making certainly impressed too.

This is the Papageno model from the German company's small range of horns.



On the day the HornFabrik speakers were being driven by what we thought very cool looking amplifiers from American manufacturer Atma-Sphere.



We mentioned Living Voice and their mighty Vox Olympian horn speaker system earlier in this publication but we also really enjoyed their system using a whole load of Kondo valve kit through their own more conventional looking loudspeakers.



The new handcrafted Audio Research amplifiers have a distinctly industrial look to them but never the less look absolutely beautiful with even the transfor-



High-End Munich 2014

mer casings being hand welded so that no two look the same.

The amp you see below was driving the Nola loudspeakers but we think it worthy of a mention in its own right .

It's a Union Research Absolute 845 delivering 40 watts per channel and weighs in at an impressive 199lb



The horns below come from Polish manufacturer HORNS and are a three way design called the Universum. They have an active bass system driven by a pair of valve amplifiers in an attempt to simplify the crossover network. This was a busy room and sounded very nice given its size.



Korean company Silbatone always put on a bit of a show at High-End and this year was no exception. Along with their exquisite looking valve amplifiers they had managed to shoe horn in a huge pair of Western Electric horns from 1926.

Many people I know commented on how great this room sounded but for me it didn't meet the quality of last year's Silbatone room and came across as being

just too much for the room to cope with resulting in a boomy bass.



Tune Audio had their Prime loudspeakers powered by Modwright amplification and it did sound rather nice in there with very nice tight and deep bass coming from this unusual looking design.

The Prime is a three way design with the bass horn firing downwards and there's also a separate sub which is out of shot.



Estelon Extreme Loudspeaker System

Munich High End is a hot bed of innovation and clever engineering but we thought that the Estelon Extreme deserved special mention because of just out there its

We like Estelon here at Hifi Pig and were really excited to hear that their Extreme loudspeaker system would be making its debut at Munich High-End. Visually this is a stunning looking pair of loudspeakers and I defy anyone not to be impressed with their looks...but they also sound rather nice too with some very clever technology on hand.

They first played some electronic music and the effect was like being in front of a great set of studio monitors with really (REALLY) deep bass and pinpoint imaging. The deep bass wasn't at all domineering but it was a little bloomy in this less than ideal setting.



They're made of a marble based composite with automotive finishes and are actually two cabinets. The idea here (in part) being that the bass cabinet cannot interfere with the mid and tweeter drivers.



Now, the Estelon Extreme have a bit of a party piece and very clever it is too. Sit in your listening position, pick up the remote and you can move the mid and top section in a vertical arc so that you can get the very best sound for your room and its height. This is very clever engineering and the effect on the mids and tops is clearly heard with the sound coming in and out of focus as it moves up and down.



Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms

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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](#)
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[Origin Live Modified Technics 1210 Turntable](#)
[The Cartridge Man Music Maker III Cartridge](#)
[Mike New Bearing for Technics 1210 Turntable](#)
[The Cartridge Man Isolator](#)

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Loudspeakers

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[MBL 116F Radialstrahler](#)
[Horning Agathon Ultimate](#)
[Audio Note AN-e/LX](#)
[Audio Physic Virgo Mk2](#)
[ProAc Future Point Five](#)
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[CA-Electronics AP10](#)
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[Marshall Choong FS-1](#)
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ALL REVIEWS

Rebolledo - Momento Drive Kompakt

Kompakt is fast becoming one of my favourite "go to" labels when it comes to techno but this release from Rebolledo is a bit different in that it's actually a DJ mix...yes, remember them??



This is the first major outing for Rebolledo since his first full length debut Super Vato way back in 2011 and it contains exclusive edits and sought after remixes alongside original material from the likes of Barnt, Red Axes, Justus Kohnke and more.

I always thought (even when I was DJing years ago) that the job of a good DJ is to take the listener on a bit of a musical journey and on Momento Drive Rebolledo certainly manages to do just that!! In the album's accompanying blurb he says "I always liked the word 'momento' because of its double meaning in Spanish...as in 'moment' when talking about space in time or 'momentum' when talking about inertia. I truly enjoy the feeling of constant motion - music can take you places without ever leaving the room".

Musically this album is very grown up and whilst in places the music is somewhat 'banging' it certainly isn't main room cheesy EDM fodder. As a whole (and you really do need to listen to this record from start to finish in one sitting) it builds and builds with little twists and turns along the way that do indeed take your mind on a trip of its own.

The highlight, if I was to choose one, is Rebolledo's own tune "Windsurf, Sunburn and Dollar" whose eerily repeated vocal and accompanying effected backing track take you down a slightly disturbed and disturbing sidetrack.

Like the fabulous Dusty Kid's III album (also on Kompakt) this is music for the mind as well as the body and comes across as raw and stripped back where every sound in the mix is carefully placed to create the DJs desired effect on the listener.

It's a while since I've listened to a DJ mix (it's a bit of a forgotten format) and it's certainly a bold move for Kompakt to put out this kind of record, but it works brilliantly and it's been played and played again over the last few weeks here at Hifi Pig.

Definitely a record for the turned on and tuned in people out there...Linette and I loved it!!

Elefantz - Dark Tales and Love Songs D.O.C

This is the first full length album for Elefantz Daniel and Leo who first met over 20 years ago when they played together in a blues band. Daniel is well known in his native Brazil and is something of a local hero where he is considered one of the country's finest DJs. Leo on the other hand is a professional drummer, singer and composer and has played with some of Brazil's best known artists.



Dark Tales and Love songs is accessible and in parts poppy but always in the same house/tech tradition - it's also beautifully engineered by D.O.Cs (the label) boss Gui Boratto. To me, musically it's a little reminiscent of HotChip at their best and that's a good thing I think!

It's a clever and infectious record and there are proper songs on the album like the incredibly funky "Diggin on You" - the bass line on this tune is relentless, driving and is a perfect foundation the the funky guitar and laidback vocal style.

"Teasing Me" has elements of Moroder (again no bad thing) and a bit of a 2western" feel to it whilst "The Quiet Before The Storm" opens with lush strings and pads before launching (at 2' 20") into a twisted chord stab and then settling into a blissed out, 4am, arms in the air, waiting for the sun to come up vibe.

"Surrender" is more straightforward techno with a nice vocal over the top and it's a really great tune reminiscent of The Beloved.

There's 12 tunes on Dark Tales and Love Songs and I'd like to suggest that it could be a bit of a hit in certain circles. It manages to blend moody elements with a much more "up" vibe and, like i said, it contains proper songs...some with words and everything! Out June 5th.

LEEDH E2

A totally revolutionary technology for a simply lifelike sound

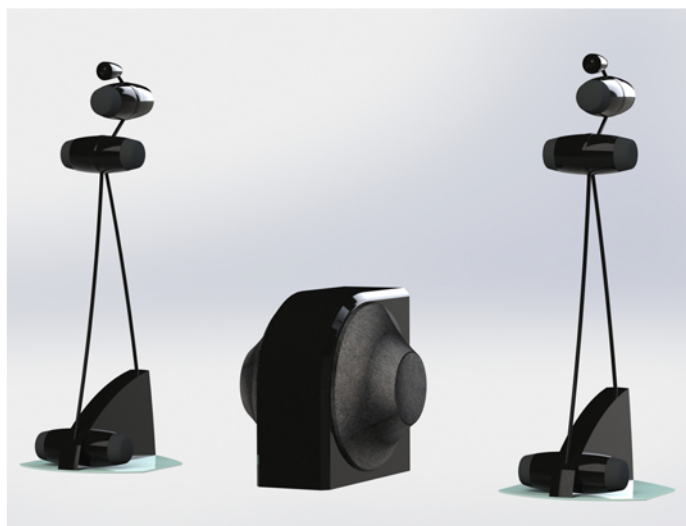
The ABD (Acoustical Beauty Driver) module was created from a blank sheet to eradicate defects of traditional loudspeakers :

- 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.

ACOUSTICAL BEAUTY
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LEEDH E2 TEST **Hifi Pig**

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.

Looking for retailers
in Europe and
North America

Steve Halsall is the Managing Director for KEF UK. In this month's Behind the Brands interview Steve tells Hifi Pig about his history in the business plus a few insights into what he thinks of the industry and his musical preferences.

Your History

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

I was working for Wharfedale on the Pro Audio side after 10 years working in design of sound and lighting systems in the leisure industry when I got a phone call from GP. I assumed it was Celestion Pro but it was actually for the job as KEF marketing manager.

Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

Probably the loyalty to stay where I am as long as I am challenged. Otherwise I would be somewhere else after 20 years.

Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

Several successes but probably the KHT2005 'egg' of 2000 which was developed very quickly by a small team but which became a massive success

You and your system

What was your very first system?

Garrard GT20 deck, Amstrad amp, Celestion Hadleigh speakers at university. It was poor but all I could afford. Summer jobs changed it quickly to Rega Planar 2 (6 months waiting list) and NAD 3020 plus AR18s. This was 1979.

Tell us about your system history.

Rega replaced by Linn, many pre-amps including home made, many power amps, many speakers. Notable items AE1s and stands.

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



NAD 3020 (still have the AE1s). Still have the 4020 NAD tuner also. Wish I had owned/could have afforded at the time the A&R Cambridge A60.

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

Ben Duncan's Hi-Fi News preamp (I own one). Op amps can work well.

Tell us about your current system(s).

Linn LP 12, Electrocompaniet pre power, Marantz SACD, KEF LS50s, AE1 stands (still great today).

The state of the industry

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

Like all technology, good and bad examples exist of all types. I hear good and bad valve amps, good and bad bipolar class A amps, good and bad FET amps,

Behind The Brands

good and bad class D amps. All can be made to work well with a designer who knows what he is doing.

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

Separates audio will polarise into two audiences : hobbyists/enthusiasts that understand it and richer folks who experience it via custom installers.

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

Certain cables where the tech story is incredulous and so called high end speakers where the MF cone breaks up at 1kHz meaning that the 1-3kHz region where the ear is most sensitive is really just distortion yet some magazines review products well even when they are just distorting in this region. .

The way you work

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

The fact that a piano and a drum kit sound like the real thing.

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

The last one as long as a piano and a drum sound real.

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

Sadly mini monitors no sub (my room).

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

What is your favourite recording?

So many but MFSL version of 'A quarter moon in a 10 cent town' by Emmylou Harris is pretty good.

Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings.

Lyle Lovett , North Dakota (male vocal, piano, guitar) , Keiko Lee, Beautiful Love (female vocal, sax) , Brian Bromberg, 3 views of a secret (bass timing and even level of the notes from the double bass)

What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures?

Anything by Slade or Smokie from the '70s.

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?

Free - Fire and Water on the Island label.

