

Hifi Pig Magazine

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JULY 2014
Issue #8

REVIEWS

Soulines Kubrick DCX Turntable
Lampizator Level 7 DAC
Astin Trew concord DAC1
Tellurium Q Ultra Silver Speaker Cables
Focal Aria 906 Loudspeakers
Van den Hul The First Ultimate Mk 2 Interconnects
LessLoss DFPC Reference Mains Cables
Carot One Titta In Ear 'Phones
Carot One Fabriziolo Pre/Head amplifier

Cranage Hall audio Show Coverage. 76 pages of photos and comment.

INTERVIEW Rune Jacobson of Triangle

PLUS Dealer System, Album Reviews, The Classics (King Crimson's "The Court of the Crimson King")



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Features

Page 7 sees Edinburghs Loud and Clear put together a system for Mr X over a period of fifteen years.

CRANAGE HALL AUDIO SHOW

Hifi Pig was the official media partner for this excellent audio event in the North West of England. Lots of photographs of the event and the date for next years event is launched.

Another whirlwind of a month at Hifi Pig Towers, plenty of kit in for review and of course, back to the UK for The Audio Show at Cranage Hall.

What a revelation this show proved to be, read my report later on in the magazine and you will find out how pleasantly surprised I was. Looks like the UK (and it's the North of the UK too) has found a new flagship show.

Stylish, fun and friendly and a great Sunday out for the whole family...this is what the UK Hifi scene needs right now and I'm looking forward to the next show already!

The date for next year's show has been confirmed as the 28th June and so get this date blocked out in your diary now and keep watching for updates about the show on the Hifi Pig website as we're the exclusive media partner for the show.

Linette Smith

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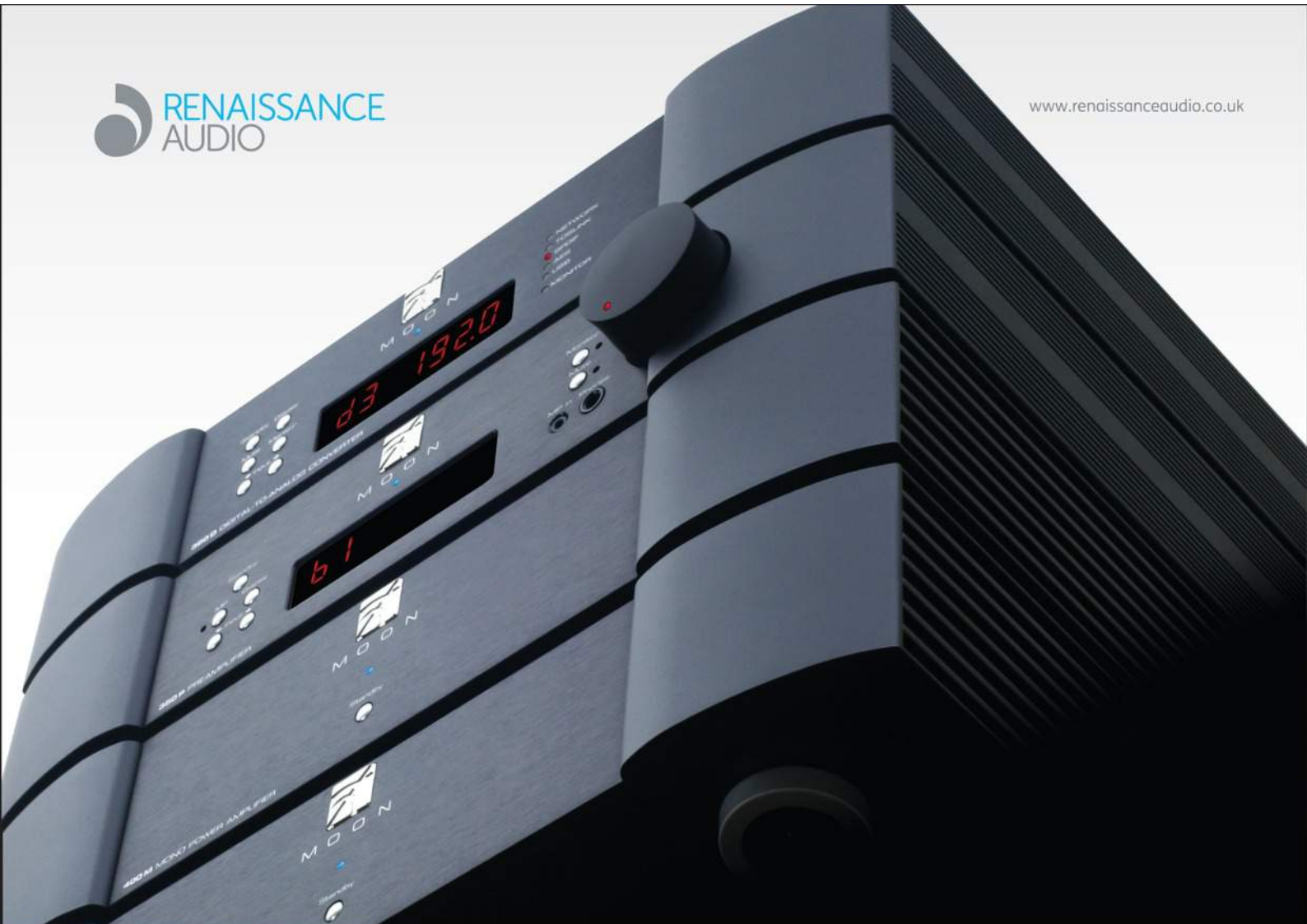
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Loud and Clear, based in Edinburgh, document the evolution of Mr X's system.



As a dealership Loud & Clear was founded in 1995 to put a fresh face on the world of performance audio in Scotland. In 1999 we opened our store in the Artisan Stockbridge area of Edinburgh. With this opening we again wanted to push the limits of the hi-fi shopping experience with what at the time we thought was nicest and most unusual hi-fi shop in the UK.

As the years passed we have always endeavoured to make moves ahead of the times. Fast forward through the years and certain services have become standard in our business with all systems sold being fully installed and a point blank refusal to be tempted to chase the easy sale of always stocking the 5 star review products. Why, because you must fully understand the products you are working with and the room you are putting them in if you want to optimise performance for the customer.

My own personal approach condenses this approach to an obsessive level allowing my customers to concentrate on the music listening experience and leave me to come up with the solutions required to

This is when the conversation got really interesting because here was a man ready to listen to advice on room structure as well as equipment choice.

gain the extra performance for them. This approach requires 100% trust from the customer and a bold step away from the classic hi-fi customer approach of buying endless pieces of high performance electronics, speakers, cables and accessories in the vague hope of achieving audio nirvana. This quest in my opinion is frankly fruitless as is proven when you hear many high end systems both in customers' homes and indeed at audio shows.

So let's look at Mr. X who lives in Northumberland. We actually met in a friends shop around 20 years ago over a cup of coffee. He gave me the background on his system buying and a run down on his existing system which at the time was a full power balanced Krell set up with Wilson Witt speakers. He was in the market for new speakers to work in the new room

Dealer System

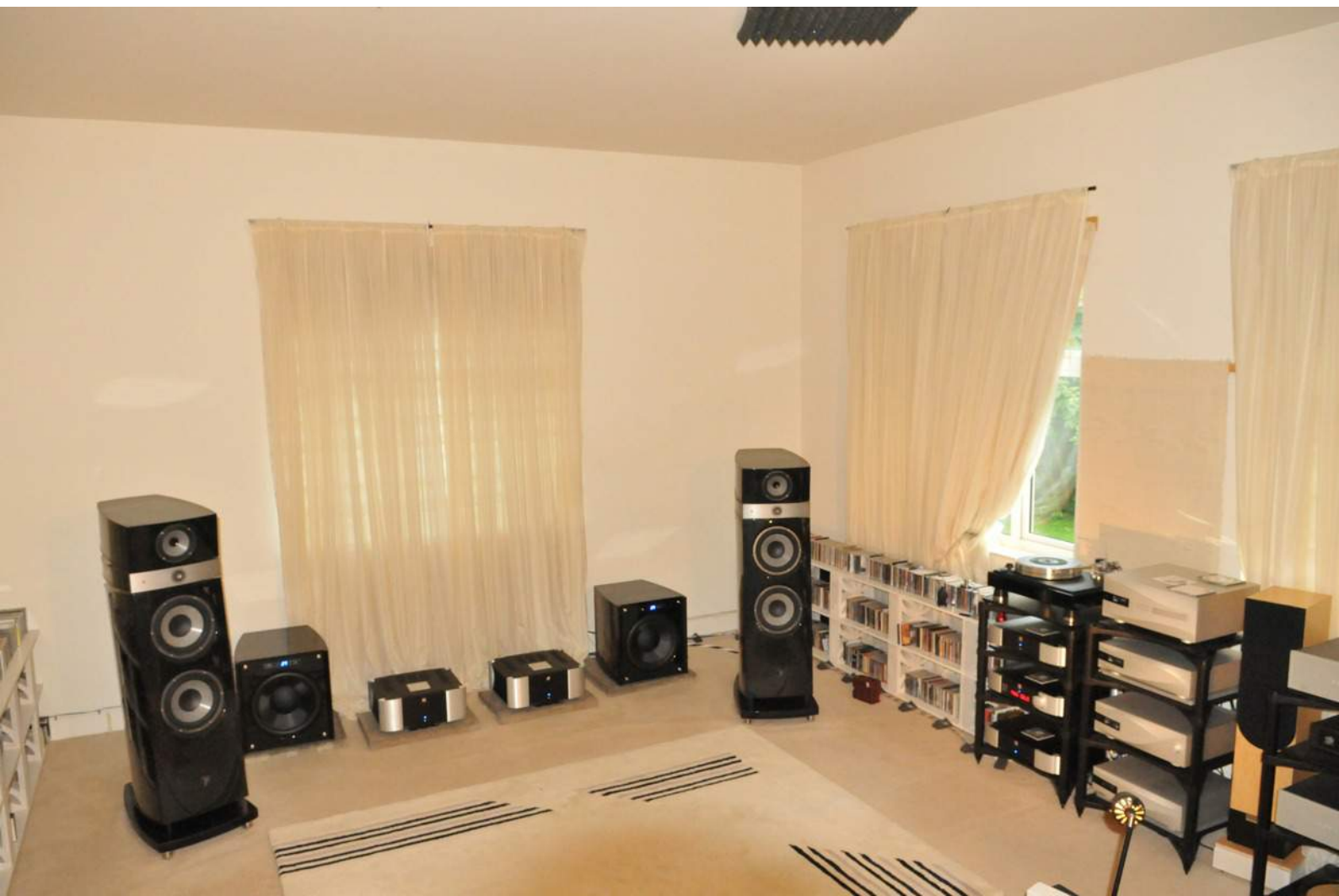
he was building. This is when the conversation got really interesting because here was a man ready to listen to advice on room structure as well as equipment choice. Cutting to the chase so that we can come up to date he took my advice and bought a pair of Wilson Maxx and had concrete pillars sunk into the foundations of the property. These speaker placement points have provided the speaker system grounding that has given incredible insight into every upgrade since.

We then moved onto a new project, he wanted to get back into jazz music at its very best and that meant vinyl..

Now a Loud & Clear customer for 15 years Mr. X has followed our lead in system optimisation fully understanding that using equipment that we understand in maximum detail we can squeeze the last ounce of performance out. If we just dropped in “hot review” products we would fail at every hurdle as they would often not suit the set up. His system had its first major overhaul with all the Krell being

replaced by Sim Audio MOON, Andromeda CD player, P-8 Pre & W7m mono amps. A bold move as Krell is always the big push with Wilson in the UK and Mr. X is an Americana V8 kind of guy! However having heard many smaller MOON systems he was always amazed at how we got so much musical engagement from the kit, how did we do that? Our answer, “Trust us”... and he did. We installed the big MOON system, glory prevailed and audio nirvana was getting closer. Soon we added another giant item to the jigsaw in the form of Focal Utopia Maestro loudspeakers. The Wilsons had given joy and the detail he wanted at the time but would never rise to the challenges he was about to throw at me. This speaker change was a big step and also required additional forms of bass correction in the form of 2 x Velodyne DD15 sub woofers to allow a little room tuning.

We then moved onto a new project, he wanted to get back into jazz music at its very best and that meant vinyl. We tested the water with a £10k budget for a couple of years based on AVID, SME, Transfiguration & MOON. We succeeded but new we could do better, much better. With a bigger budget offered and many listening sessions together I



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Dealer System

worked out his perceived strengths and weaknesses and we designed a new vinyl front end for him. To make this happen involved setting distribution for a Classic American brand, VPI. The new vinyl set up was the stunning Classic 3 with SDS power supply with JMW arm, the incredible MOON 810LP phono amp (one of the best items of hi-fi ever designed in my opinion) and the then new Lyra Atlas, The result? Frankly, mind blowing.

For a few years we then continued tweaking, the system, mains, custom Studio Connection cables, tables, Track audio feet, Black Ravioli resonance control, more records, more CDs and many more smiles.

What next? Big developments in digital sources had come along, we tried them all including the dCS Scarlatti but nothing could touch the Andromeda for musical insight and music steaming had a way to go. Then came along the dCS Vivaldi, we listened, we liked, we installed, we optimised. It needed power supply from Shunyata in the Hydra Triton/Typhon form. More custom cables from Studio Connections including the hand made Platinum speaker cable. Again the results amazed us but why stop at that.

If at the end of a session you can't sit with your customer and enjoy the music and perhaps a wee dram, together then you have missed the point of the exercise. People and music first, everything else later.

Now some 7 years in the system the MOON P-8 and W7ms had started to fall short of what I knew MOON had achieved with the statement 850P and 880 mono amps, so we swapped them out and nothing was lost and everything was gained. We did the same with the subs and put in the Velodyne DD15 plus units and unlocked more from the room.

This system is also complex in other ways which can't go into detail on in this article. However I cannot miss out the other four channels which add ambient room effect when needed. We achieved this



Dealer System

with the use of a Lexicon surround processor, 2 x MOON W3's, a pair of Living Voice Auditorium and a pair of AVI Pro9's. When the concert recording is huge so is Mr X's listening room. Achieving this was not easy but was well worth the effort.

I feel my commitment to this system best shows the ethos of what I am all about. I feel that the adoption of fully understanding the products you work with allows you to understand how to realize full potential in music playback, but most importantly I feel the trust of a great customer deserves respect and he or she should be rewarded with ever ounce of honour you can provide. If at the end of a session you can't sit with your customer and enjoy the music and perhaps a wee dram, together then you have missed the point of the exercise. People and music first, everything else later.

[Loud and Clear Edinburgh](http://loudandclear.co.uk)

Telephone: 0131 555 3963

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The System

VPI Classic 3
VPI LMW 10.5
Moon 810LP
Lyra Atlas
Studio Connections Reference Plus XLR

DCS Vivaldi - all 4 boxes.
Studio Connections Reference Digital AES/EBU

Moon 850P Preamplifier
Moon 880M Power
Focal Maestro Utopia Loudspeakers

Lexicon MC-1
2 X Moon W3
Living voice Auditorium
AVI Pro9
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Soulines Kubrick DCX Turntable

Based in Serbia, Soulines say their turntables are predominantly handmade. Here Stuart Smith takes a listen to their €4000, range topping Kubrick DCX.



Hifi Pig

RECOMMENDED

Reviews

Soulines are based in Serbia and make just four turntables, the Hermes DCX, the Dostoyevsky DCX, the newly released Elgar DCX and the turntable under review here, the Kubrick DCX.

The philosophy of Soulines is that the interaction between each component that makes up a turntable is equally important and so they balance the construction with a number of “good compromises” to ensure a finished product where all the individual parts come together to work together. Their engineering principles are solid and yet not over-complicated and their turntables are essentially hand made with the benefit of CAD and advanced CNC manufacture. Critical parts of each turntable such as the platter, main bearing and spindle are not manufactured in batches but individually made so they fit each other specifically.

The Kubrick is the top of the Soulines range and they say that it is their most advanced turntable. It is built around the company’s inverted main bearing and a 40mm thick, 3.2Kg acrylic platter (The same as on the Hermes DCX) and has a very rigid aluminium

plinth and sub-plinth that is constructed from a series of “layers” or blocks that are coupled together and damped where needed using cork-rubber. The blocks used are put together according to the “Golden Ratio” and “Fibonacci Sequence” which the company’s literature says “gains uniform vibration damping and the reduction of the moment of inertia in all three planes (along all three axes) to the centre of mass”. The motor, mounted on the main plinth, is of high quality and you can adjust the speed between 33 and 45 with the flick of a switch located on the front left of the turntable. The Kubrick is a belt drive turntable. The inverted main bearing is machined from solid brass and stainless steel and, along with the solid aluminium armboard, is mounted directly onto the sub plinth, which is in turn three point decoupled from the main plinth. The platter spins freely, smoothly and is perfectly flat.

The Kubrick is supported on three adjustable cones, is a doddle to get level and it comes with three interchangeable arm boards for SME, Rega/Origin Live and Jelco.



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Reviews

The supplied turntable came with a Jelco SA750 tonearm and I fitted my trusty Audio Technica EV33 moving coil cartridge. The arm is sub £400 if bought separately and is an S shaped arm with removable headshell. Whilst I do have the Origin Live Silver arm available I wanted to test the Kubrick as supplied as it is the turntable we are reviewing here. The price of the turntable including the arm is €4000. Packaging for the Kubrick is spectacular in its completeness and attention to detail and it even comes with a simple but effective removable Perspex cover – other manufacturers note that this is a good thing please. Also included was a set up disc for accurate cartridge alignment, which again is a useful and thoughtful addition – it has three different alignment methods. Instructions are clear and concise! All in all unpacking and set up takes around an hour with most of that being spent with the usual cartridge set up. Placement was atop the usual IKEA arrangement that serves as the hifi rack and no further isolation was used.

There are little details such as the lovely little on/off and speed control switches that certainly add to the feeling that this is a well designed and high-aiming product

First of all let me say that I absolutely adored the look of this turntable with its brushed aluminium chassis and sub chassis, all set off with the substantial acrylic platter. It's modern looking and yet quite understated. There are little details such as the lovely little on/off and speed control switches that certainly add to the feeling that this is a well designed and high-aiming product. I can't see any but the most traditional not admiring this on their rack. There is no extra box for a power supply, but there is a little wallwart. The knuckle rap test on the two forward positioned

supports has little perceptible effect on the cartridge, but when applied to the housing where the motor is located there is easily perceptible vibration reaching the stylus. However, when there is no music playing and the stylus is placed on the record there is no motor noise reaching the stylus that I could hear! The motor emits a very low volume whirr that you have to put your ear next to the unit to hear. The Kubrick is not particularly susceptible to foot fall and I didn't find myself needing to scream at people to tip toe around whilst listening to vinyl.



Some Tunes

Bass is often my first port of call when checking out a new bit of kit and so it was with the Kubrick. I found myself grabbing the excellent "SSSS" by Vince Clarke and Martin L. Gore on 180 gm vinyl. Well certainly no complaints at all here and the music forges ahead with the required drive and energy. In some ways, the bass the Kubrick brings is a little like my heavily modded Technics 1210 which suggests to me that the pitch is stable and rock solid...very similar indeed to the quality of the direct drive Techy and this is a good thing. The mix (stereo image) is solid and it is easy to identify individual instruments in their relative space, which again suggests to me that there are no timing issues that need concern us. In some ways listening to this record on the Kubrick reminded me of good quality digital playback, but with a much more organic and natural feel to it. There are no discernible pops and clicks displaying themselves overly which was nice!

On to some guitar music and Baden Powell's "L'Ame de". Here there is no wobbly pitching in the guitar which would otherwise suggest speed inconsistencies and what you are left with is just a natural sounding guitar. The attack and decay on guitar is

correct and there are great levels of detail in the stereo image. The delicate and intricate finger work on the record is all there and this record really was a joy to listen to on the Kubrick. Like the Analogue Works One turntable I reviewed recently there's a feeling that the Kubrick really isn't adding a great deal to the music, but with the Kubrick I'd suggest that there's a smidgen more detail coming through – perhaps this is due to the more sophisticated isolation at play on the Kubrick.

there's that coherence and play between drum and bass that just gets your feet tapping to the beat...

On Fleetwood Mac's "Rumours" there's a firmness and sure-footedness to the rhythm section, whilst delicate taps on the hats come through in fine detail. Again I get the impression there's more being pulled from the grooves with the Kubrick than the One, especially at the top end. Likewise with 10 000 Maniacs "The Wishing Chair" there's that coherence and play between drum and bass that just gets your feet tapping to the beat... yet loads of detail here too. But that's not to suggest that these frequencies are exaggerated or overblown and the mids are sacrificed...it's just that these are the areas in music I especially enjoyed with the Kubrick.

I notice here that I'm reaching for quite similar styles of music - music with a strong backbeat and I think this is where the Kubrick comes into its own somewhat – solidity, drive, and rhythm suggesting again to my mind great timing from the Kubrick.

Sadly I don't have a great number of 45s but reaching for an ancient copy of Timothy Leary meets The Grid proves the 45 speed seems to be spot on and constant too. With this record you get the impression again that the Kubrick is really driving the music forward and it's certainly allowing the stylus to dig out the very deep bass on the record. I do like the fact that you can change the speed at the flick of a switch without faffing around with belts and pulleys. I also like the fact that the Kubrick starts up at the flick of a switch!

Conclusions

I liked the Kubrick turntable from Soulines a great deal and I shall miss it when it goes back to Serbia...which sadly it must... via Holland. The way

it brings out the rhythm section and drive in records is really very addictive and you will find yourself reaching for this kind of record just to experience this effect over and over. As I mentioned it's very much like a very good direct drive turntable in this respect.

I don't believe that the Kubrick favours one kind of music over another though and it is as happy playing funk as it is playing "classical" guitar. Likewise it's



as equally at home playing "audiophile" female vocals as it is banging techno.

The design of the Kubrick is such that it allows the cartridge and arm to do their thing and get the most out of the grooves as possible and I would definitely class the Kubrick as adding very little of its own flavour.

Soulines have gone to a lot of trouble to produce a turntable that performs very well as well as look great and this level of workmanship really must be applauded. It's not cheap at €4000 including the arm, but neither is this an extortionate amount of money to ask for such a product.

Build Quality: 8.5/10

Sound Quality: 8.75/10

Value For Money: 8/10

Overall – 8.4/10

Recommended for people seeking a great looking, nicely engineered turntable, that is as plug and play as it gets at this level, but also delivers on sound.



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Lukasz Fikus gained an enviable reputation in modding off the shelf hi-fi but now has his own portfolio of kit available for audiophiles to purchase. Here Danny Worth gives the £7200 Lampizator Level 7 DAC a listen to see if all the hype around this product is well founded.

The latest Lampizator Dac, the Level 7, has been causing quite a stir amongst those who have had the pleasure to listen to one and when I was offered to review it I gladly accepted. I had been getting many emails and phone calls from consumers who had either listened to, bought one or wanted to know if I had heard one recently, that the offer came just as I was about to make the enquiries myself to get a sample delivered.

The Level 7 is Lampizator's most minimalist DAC to date, utilising 2A3 power output tubes. Yes 2A3's, that you only find in an amplifier! The chip is directly connected to the grid of the single ended triode, with absolutely no series components in the path.

Level 7 is a combination of insight from previous level DACs which due to the compliment of components could not be housed in a single enclosure, so there is a PSU box and that Lampizator refer to as the music box (the DAC).

The two units arrived in two separate double boxes and lined with medium density furniture foam, not the most professional of packaging but very effective nonetheless.

To connect the two units together there are two neutrik speakon type locking cables or umbilical chords, one for the main power and the other to power the 32bit Asynchronous USB, this one for the USB is very thick and substantial and the other even thicker again!

Connections on the sample I had were thin on the ground, a coaxial RCA and a USB, which is the standard input configuration for the base model, with a toggle switch on the rear to flick between them.

Lucasz's primary goal is to keep the DAC as simplistic as possible in order not to injure the signal path in anyway.



Although when ordering there is the availability for any connection the heart desires as long as they are not balanced XLR outputs, which I'm sure you have already worked out due to the tube implementation of the design.

On purchase the end user has the option to choose the tube compliment. The DAC runs with two 6X5 rectifiers known for their low sag. The main tubes can be either 2A3, 45 or 300B, the variants are not interchangeable and the option must be specified on order.

A multitude of digital connections, AES/EBU, Coax, Optical, BNC, multiple analogue output sections in order to use the DAC as a multi room hub and volume controls can be specified, but be prepared for small compromises in sound with the likes of adding a volume control as this will sit in the signal path and disturb the purity of signal transfer.

All digital inputs will read files of up to 24/192, yet with a push of the button on the front of the music box the DAC enters DSD mode, allowing for USB streamed files to be read at 64X and 128X in DoP format.

The PSU is a completely separated dual mono power supply with vacuum tube rectification stage and choke, employed for filtering in each channel. The power reservoir is big enough to serve medium power Push Pull amplifiers. This is where Lampizator says the bass control secret lays.

...you are NOT paying for expensive casing, pretty appearance and a piece of jewellery here, what you ARE paying for are two well constructed boxes of the highest grade components and experience of implementation..

The build of the Lampizator is somewhat industrial - it is a handmade product which could be more related to a workbench type product rather than a state of the art machined piece of engineering.

The front aluminium plate and it's simplicity works for me and is the face of the product... the rest of the case, which has a more industrial feel to it is covered well in my rack.

Note - you are NOT paying for expensive casing, pretty appearance and a piece of jewellery here, what you ARE paying for are two well constructed boxes of the highest grade components and experience of implementation.

The Sound

On first impressions the Lampi displays a purity of sound which I simply have not heard from any digital source, there is clarity and presence which can only be described as true 'realism'.

Kathryn Roberts 'The White Hind' conveys a breathtaking vocal which has its own three dimensional space in the centre of the soundstage, with hauntingly realistic height and an overall tonal balance which breathes with an organic and natural completeness

that only vinyl enthusiasts with rigs of the highest quality would dream of. Sean Lakeman's accompanying vocal similarly embodies its own presence and parameters of positioning totally different in character and expressively as convincing.

'Hey Laura' - Gregory Porter conveys a piano harmonic to the listener which is both totally accurate and harmonically proficient. The acoustic of the listening space is so developed, allowing for notes to appear to reflect off the rear wall of this intimate performance that it gave me the perception that my own listening room was a direct comparison in size of that of the recordings.

The Level 7 was really digging its heels into my listening experience to the point that it's holographic representation of the music all but allowed me to walk through and around the performance with the ability to look each area part of the music up and down, through and through.

'Liquid Spirit' from the same album gave remarkable depth to the bands positioning within the recording, displaying what can only be referred to as a sculptured scene of sound waves. Differing depths and heights of brass, tambourine, bass, piano and Gregory's own vocal which was convincingly a few feet back into the surrounding band simply gave that impression of undeniable realism.

The Lampizator oozes a sound of pure single ended beauty and grace. I listened thinking of how correct the sound was, how natural it was presented to me and how for each instruments dynamic a truth could be heard, effortlessly spacious captivating the listener. With a bass that delved down into the notes deepest depths with a preciseness that left me gobsmacked.

Fond memories of listening to the TQ Iridium came to mind. The midrange of the Level 7 was absolutely crystal clear and liquid, it's difficult to express an





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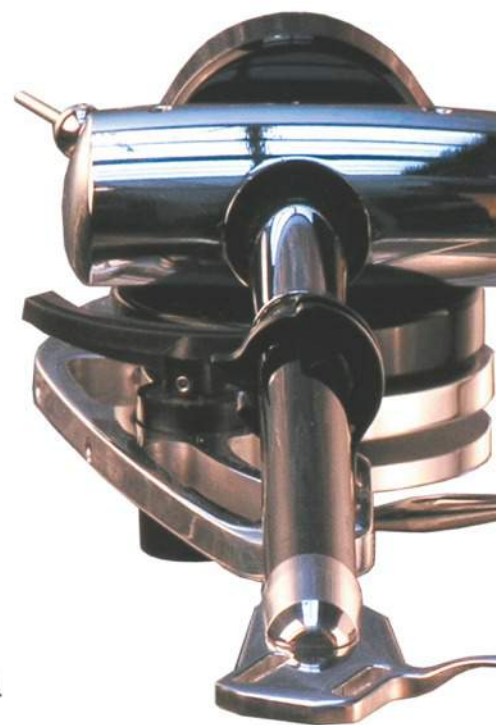


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educated take on the balance when it just doesn't seem that balance plays any factor in a sound which is so pure and true.

Being able to reproduce Laurie Anderson's robotic vocal throughout a range of her music which is so heavily midrange dependant can be a chore. Her music is plagued with many synthesized sounds and to be quite honest annoyingly repetitive lyrics.

The DAC arranged portions of the music pretty amazingly, listening for tonal effects and representation of natural and computer generated notes was the only true appeal to her music for me, but nonetheless for a few review criteria such as complex staging and rendition of midband properties it can be quite an interesting listen, which reflected again at how cohesive the Lampizator can separate many different sounds whilst still displaying a complete image.

Ben Webster's smooth sax was beautiful and emotional, each breath could be heard and the piecing nature of its dashing flow throughout the soundstage was absolutely gorgeous.

The DAC really does have that instant “draw in” factor, not a wow factor as I talk about so often, more of a mesmerising grasp, that sits the listener down in a hypnotic state for hours on end without even allowing thoughts of the day to enter the mind.

Dynamically strong and naturally expressive of harmonic flurries 'The Courier' Seth Lakeman explores fast violin work that soars across the right side of the soundstage stating its position firmly in its acoustic space. Bass notes are so full and deeply accurate. The speed of the track entwined with its dynamic flare adds an excitement to my system which is normally a more subtle affair, never noticeable until the Lampi reproduced it the way it does.

The good old saying 'you can't miss what you haven't had' comes to mind and then 'you don't know what

you've lost until it's gone' comes shortly after removing the DAC from the system.



More beat driven music such as Derrin Nauendorf's 'Universe Demands' lost out on its rhythmic flow and warmer fuller undertones for me, the tubes I were sent - the Psvane 2A3's and their cleaner flavour didn't embody the strength of the driven beat, although when talking to Greg at G-Point Audio (the UK importer) he said that the alternative mesh variants have a warmer and fuller bodied sound, which for me on this track would have been an improvement.

However 'Ghost Town' from the same artist with its more acoustic vibe hit bass notes of accurate proportions, tighter and incredibly well extended down to the darkest depths of my rooms resonant ability. The Level 7 may not have that fast punchy rhythmic flow of more up beat tracks but when it comes to reproducing the purest of natural bass notes, I simply have not heard anything that comes close.

This leaves me to reflect on the genres that I personally feel the Lampizator in its current incarnation is capable of reproducing. Acoustic and vocal was undeniably strong, involving and utterly to die for. This genre does make up the majority of my listening although I do like to listen to some other genres with a more driven beat.

Quite obviously Jazz was stunningly impressive. Ben Webster's smooth sax was beautiful and emotional, each breath could be heard and the piecing nature of its dashing flow throughout the soundstage was abso-

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lutely gorgeous. Bass notes were bouncy and weighty but lacked that little bit of warmth I personally prefer which a tube roll could offer to this and some other performances.

I do predominantly think that this DAC excels mostly with instrument and vocal work and 'excel' truly is an understatement it is pretty damn incredible!

Trad' had overlays of articulation and undertones of fullness that were a more pleasing listen with the tube compliment to hand, exploring older recordings lower end detail far better for me without losing body, adding more depiction to a naturally warmer rounder tone.

I didn't expect much from pop and dance music, but a fair few tracks I played were pretty good, the bass doesn't have that slapstick speed on upper bass notes, but then we are talking about an all tube DAC here and who really goes out to buy a DAC of this type for this type of music? Clarity, sound staging, dynamics and air in the top end were great and there are strong harmonics nonetheless.

Rock was a little too refined and didn't have a presence of weight and grunt to it which some of the other Lampizator models can do better with. I do predominantly think that this DAC excels mostly with instrument and vocal work and 'excel' truly is an understatement it is pretty damn incredible!

I don't really listen to classical music, but exploring this genre was pretty impressive. Big orchestral movements were easily separated into differing proportions, singling out instruments as well as groups of brass or woodwind for example. Spatial awareness, large dynamic shifts and reverbs were conveyed again with that single ended type of purity and clarity with absolute control and sophistication.

The Level 7 can handle complicated arrays of dynamic surges with ease allowing for larger bass notes and finely tuned harmonics to scale the soundstage

with absolute ease creating for a really complicated portrayal of a performance to sound so effortless.

Polished triangle and sharp strings floated around a particularly busy soundstage never losing there crisp appeal during busier fore-fronted brass and deep full bodied bass notes, allowing for their decay to never be overshadowed by lower end dynamic shifts.

Conclusion

The Lampizator Level 7 is a truly remarkable listen! It has the ability to reproduce naturally formed notes and vocals with an organic and breathtaking sensation of purity, embodying the true essence of a performance. It renders these aspects effortlessly giving a correct balance and tonal appreciation that is very difficult to question and can only be described as 'lifelike'.

However, it doesn't explore a huge range of genres and for me I require a DAC that can do this for the purposes of reviewing, but then it's clear to tell when reviewing this product that it was clearly voiced and focused for the natural beauty an instrument and vocalist can offer, reproduced at it's very best and as analogue as digital can truly be.

A very difficult task to really nail with true substance and if there has to be trade offs then who cares, if this DAC reproduces the music you love so much, that is the vast proportion of your listening material everything else just fades into the background and doesn't matter, leaving the listener with the truest representations of these genres that I believe is available right now anywhere in this industry.

Personally I love the understated simple appearance of the two units and thought they looked fantastic on my rack. You are not spending your money on bling here, that is obvious, it's all gone into the quality of the internal components and the obvious painstaking R&D which has given this DAC it's stunningly regal sound.

I for one have been Lampizated!

Build Quality - 7.5/10

Sound Quality - 9/10

Value For Money- 8.5/10

Overall - 8.3/10

**Price at time of review - £7200 plus £500 for DSD
Highly Recommend - For being at the pinnacle of what it's been voiced to achieve, reproducing instruments and vocals in breathtaking fashion.**



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Danny Worth Listens to the £3760 Astin Trew Concord DAC 1 and really rather likes it!

This review comes from a personal experience with the Astin Trew Concord DAC1 I recently borrowed from Tony Sallis at NuNu Distribution.

I had been very impressed with the Totaldac D1 tube since reviewing it last year and subsequently bought it. However, I began to increasingly feel that I required a unit which being my main source needed to be more of a jack of all trades rather than strong in a handful of areas.

Having a system for reviewing other products cannot always be a system which is suited perfectly to the reviewer's personal needs, or a particular flavour of

First up I'll mention that the DAC is constructed in modular form, this allows for future upgrades, which an Astin Trew insider has informed me are being tweaked and finalised for a future release.

music, as this can inherently cause a bottleneck when reviewing other products.

An amplifier strong in bass could be reflected on as being thin and light sounding in a system that doesn't have a good balance. This can be a tricky situation for the reviewer.

Fortunately I like and listen to a good few genres of music which contrast hugely in their system demands and so I admit this was my initial intention, but as I thought more about the consideration of changes the above conclusions soon became just as important for me.

There was previous talk between myself and Michael Osbourne of Astin Trew a few months ago after the release of the Astin Trew Concord USB review with the Never Connected Power Supply about trying their Concord DAC. With it having the option for balanced XLR and tube buffered RCA outputs I could run both a solid state and valve amp simultaneously, just as I did with the Totaldac.

So I put in another enquiry to have a listen as soon as it was possible, a few other DACs I had tried over the past months still didn't offer the ability to do many thing "right" instead of one or two things great for me and the option for straight transistor output or tube could well be a balance that would offer a take on the varying genres I wished to be able to cover.

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Connectivity and Specs

I'll go through an overview of what the Concord DAC has to offer connection-wise and run through some specifications before I move on to the impact the sound had on me and convey the abilities which ultimately led to me purchasing one.

First up I'll mention that the DAC is constructed in modular form, this allows for future upgrades, which an Astin Trew insider has informed me are being tweaked and finalised for a future release. A Signature version, or, by Astin Trew's past form, maybe a Plus version?

There are 6 separately regulated supplies within the DAC and power sections are 'firewalled' from the data sections reducing EMI interference even further.

The casework is substantial and solid, very nicely fitted together with a wrap around - up and under chassis lid and sides. The coating on the chassis feels like it could be scratched fairly easy (not a test I wish to perform though) by the feel of it... it's not rubber, but it is a compound specially formed to reduce resonances that the chassis may be subjected to.

The underside has four of Astin Trew's proprietary feet fitted - a wide and shallow coned footer which is created from a special mix of compounded polymers.



So what do you get connection wise? A fair bit is the answer:

There are RCA tube buffered outputs, a pair of ECC82's fulfill this task and are under run ensuring extra long lifespan.

Also included is a pair of XLR outputs, fully balanced and running in solid state. Both sets of outputs work simultaneously which for me allows me to have a constant connection to a solid state and valve

The Concord's immediate sonic signature is one of complete textural musicality with an authoritative bass.

amp without having to constantly change connections.

Two breakout cards are available when purchasing the DAC, an "either or decision", to occupy the single slot on the board and rear panel. They are an Asynchronous USB or Firewire connection, capable of decoding files of up to 24/192 from a computer based source.

An I2S connection via HDMI, this is purely an input and Astin Trew's Concord Transport due very soon will make full use of this connection for the optimum in digital data transfer.

There's also the usual suspects, which you would expect on quality DAC these days- an optical, RCA and pleasantly a BNC as well as the RCA coax input. (Another great feature for me reviewing transports).

All inputs are selectable from the front right knob via relays rather than mechanical switches conserving the purity of the signal. The left hand knob is for power on and off.

Now the important bit

The Concord's immediate sonic signature is one of complete textural musicality with an authoritative bass. Undertones are completely fleshed out, rich and rhythmic. midrange clarity is unmistakably naturally presented with each note and vocal dropping through its range into a natural bodied reflection of the material played.

Higher frequencies and overtones are marvelously displayed - notes begin with accurate rendition of edges, enter the musical performance with absolute clarity, explore the note naturally and decay with full expressive tonality and that for me encapsulates the full timbre and embodiment of the instrument.

Dynamics from the Concord are pretty huge, not sharply explosive but more of a full bodied largeness in scale and presence, they are completely cohesive and focused in the fact the higher pitches of notes grab lower frequencies with both hands and lift their

dynamic integration hand in hand with perfect timing.

Pronunciation of phrase is so well developed every spoken word has a clearly defined status due to the extremely impressive way in which the Concord renders texture.

There's no fading of the pronunciation of words trailing off into a more defined edge of the next, there is clarity from start to finish in a completely sibilant free manner.

The pace and rhythm of the Concord is utterly engaging... fluid and encapsulating... driven with a bass force and tempo which is full of degrees of speed and layering that never gets too tight or dry. There is a controlling punch and extension which leaves other higher priced DACs in its wake, a real force to be reckoned with when listening to pacier beats.

On the flip side delicate passages have a fluid and liquid characteristic to them that is so involving, extended and smooth, with attention to flow that takes the listener to a level of commitment from the sound that intimate late night listening deserves, exploiting bandwidth with care.



By contrast to these points Kathryn Roberts silky tones sounded beautifully fluid on the 'Ballad of Andy Jacobs' precise, centred, never too large, but amply projected with a clarity of tone and focus.

Then on the other hand a strong electronic beat with fantastic dynamic range, impact and harmonic excitement during Route 94's 'My Love' shows off the Astin Trews ability to hold strong, deep bass notes coupled with pace and rhythm. I found it increasingly more difficult to throw off the Concorde's balance...

Micheal Buble's 'All of Me' is also dynamically rich, with the big band giving slam and impact which never clouded or muddled Buble's lead vocal. Top end brass quality was undertoned with texture adding a

"trueness" to the range the Concord was able to convey convincingly.

The pace and rhythm of the Concord is utterly engaging... fluid and encapsulating... driven with a bass force and tempo which is full of degrees of speed and layering that never gets too tight or dry.

Gregory Porter's jazzy vocal in contrasting tempo and varying instrument backing on his 'Liquid Spirit' album proved to me how subtle, contrasting and exciting the Concord can be and how much inner detail and rhythm it can put across in layers of three dimensional imaging without leaning to a specific characteristic, which could be deemed as DAC infused.

Soft rock through to harder grungier tracks from compilation albums such as the 'Power Ballad' albums quickly reinforced opinions that this DAC can manage a whole range of genres and that it's abilities across the board were strong and competently even handed.

I have heard instruments and vocals done better, such as with the Lampizator Level 7, which has a depth and scale to acoustic and classical musical which is at the pinnacle of today's offerings, but where the Lampizator triumphs for some musical genres it fails against the Concord on others.

In comparison to the Totaldac which I have owned for the best part of a year, the Totaldac sounds very beautiful and compares well across music types such as jazz and acoustic with the Concord. The Astintrew is slightly forward in the mids and the Totaldac slightly recessed or laid back, both swing each way of a stable mid-point in the depth of a system and comparing their vocal strength is also difficult and system dependent.

My own system is already a little forward in this department which is something I tune for as I enjoy a projected vocal, I like to hear the singer really belt out the words, yet not overshadow the instruments in the music to a point where the artist sounds too forward.

I spent a great deal of time comparing the vocal contrasts between the Totaldac and that of the Astin

Reviews

Trew, both use tube outputs (both just on the single ended outputs). The Astin Trew with its tube buff-

After demoing a fair few DACs over the past few months and as I stated at the beginning of this review, I did purchase the Concord and I think that time will prove that the decision was a correct one...

ered output and the Totaldac has a full valve output.

The Totaldac has a wonderful refinement yet lacks drive, punch and excitement but has a seductive sound. The Astin Trew swaps absolute refinement for a vibrancy and excitement. Detail is still magnificent, but displayed very differently. There is an unmistakeable clarity, pace and rhythm to the sound and being buffered still gives a truly musical substance to the music and is just so involving, it leaves one not necessarily admiring the sound, but getting more involved and invigorated by it.

I had a chance to listen to the XLR outputs vs the RCA outputs when I had a Roksan Caspian M2 integrated here recently (my own transistor amp which can accommodate both connection types is away to have some work done).

Both connections do sound different as the RCA output is buffered and the XLR isn't, there's not a favourite in my mind, just a different take on the same core sound. There's an arguably cleaner, more dynamic nature to the straight transistor and a richer, slightly rounder character to the midrange of the single-ended output with a little less bass extension and firmness. The top end is also slightly more rounded and has a little less air through the RCA outputs, but it's really down to personal preference and not by any means better or worse.

I will be intrigued to compare the differences even further and more in depth with my Kavent when it comes back.

So in Conclusion

After demoing a fair few DACs over the past few months and as I stated at the beginning of this review, I did purchase the Concord and I think that time will prove that the decision was a correct one for me with my musical preferences, system needs and wants for connectivity having all been ticked.

Of course I would recommend it, that goes without saying. The only reasons I can summarise is that it's ability to reproduce so much music so well outweighs any DAC I have heard which can do one or two genres better... and from what I've heard upto and around £8k there aren't many.

Some seriously technically minded and serious music enthusiasts have had their fingers and thoughts involved in the final tweaked production model of this DAC and it shows. Great time and attention has gone into voicing the product. An ability to do all things well and nothing short of that fact, is the Concord's calling card.

I keep saying it does all things well, but I would like to emphasise it's better than just well done, the Astin Trew Concord does everything great and then some. In many cases it has punched above its weight. I can say confidently that I don't see the product being one that falls into a category of system synergy, it simply falls into the category of outstandingly diverse and musically competent!

Build quality - 8.3/10

Sound Quality - 9/10

Value for Money - 8.7/10

Overall - 8.6/10

Price at time of review - £3,760

DAC with USB input - £4,100 (as reviewed)

DAC with Firewire input - £4,200

Highly recommend for being able to perform many genres fantastically and in some cases even better than one trick ponies that cost more money... and because I know own one of course!

Having achieved an overall score in excess of 8.5 the Astin Trew Concord DAC1 now has the opportunity for a second review to see if it will score 8.5 again and get the Hifi Pig Outstanding Product Award

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“A revelation for anyone listening to music!”

– TONMEISTER JEREMY ROBINSON KIPNIS, EPIPHANY RECORDINGS LTD., KIPNIS STUDIOS

“Extreme Fidelity – The Best of the Best.”

– SENIOR EDITOR GREGORY PETAN, DAGOGO.COM



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*“A glimpse into the future
of purist cable technology.”*

SKOGRAND  CABLES



British company Tellurium Q are making quite a name for themselves amongst a dedicated group of audiophiles. Here Danny Worth checks out their latest loudspeaker cables dubbed Ultra Silver.

Ultra Silver? Since when? Since now!
So what about a basic non Ultra Silver model? Yes, they will also be available.

Can we be led to believe that these cables are made from silver, or some sort of silver alloy by the silver Z Plugs on their ends?

Who knows... in typical Tellurium Q fashion they won't utter a word of information regarding their construction, so if you want to spend £500 per/m to disassemble some to scratch an itch carry on, but from my experience with the brand I couldn't care less if they were made from ground Pelican beaks as long as they held up Tellurium Q's long standing tradition of excellent performance.

Just like Tellurium Q's other cables, they also have that Tellurium Q statement ribbon or band type design to them.

Holding the Ultra Silver next to the Ultra Black they seem similar apart from the mesh braid on the Ultra Silvers, the density and compound also has different solidity and flexibility to the central band which separates the cores. The Ultra Silvers feel stiffer but in no way detrimental to the designs routing abilities. Both cables can be flexed and bent around comparably.

So where do they sit in the range?

My first noticeable impression was the degree of extension in the upper frequencies, how exposed but without hardness the midrange felt and, from what I was used to...

This was one of my first questions when talking with Geoff Merrigan at Tellurium Q.

My question was also backed with:
"...you don't really give a lot of information technically about your products Geoff, which I can appreciate in one respect as there can be too much blurb sometimes which can put people off. So when it comes to the Tellurium Q cable range I simply assume that the higher the price the better the performance?"

While Geoff agreed that "of course there is a gain in performance to justify the cost, we are now establish-

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ing our cables into ranges and these ranges will have key, unmistakable qualities and characteristics to them."

The coloured range, which currently consists of the Blue and Green, will also be looking to move forward to incorporate further designs. These coloured cables are known for a slight soft edge or relaxed nature to the sound, ideal for brighter sounding systems or simply to suit one's personal taste.

The Black range of cables is known by many for their natural ability of reproducing a note or vocal and have fantastic soundstaging abilities.

Then there's the new Silver range, these are voiced differently again being extremely detail driven and cleaner, with increased top end air and extension and midrange transparency.

So that's where they sit and why they have been specifically created, now onto the sound.

My first impressions of the cables were not influenced in any way shape or form by either Geoff or Colin Wofford of TQ. Their normal "have a listen and tell us what you think" applied as always.

My first noticeable impression was the degree of extension in the upper frequencies, how exposed but without hardness the midrange felt and, from what I



was used to with my current Audioquest K2 cables, that bass was a little lean.

So I played through some acoustic music such as Damien Rice and Seth Lakeman. Top end was clearly beyond what the K2 had to offer me and I was really trying to hear something which presented itself to me which would lead me to believe that it was a bit over the top, harsh and spitty but it just didn't happen. A true increase in perceived bandwidth was shining through with strings giving small nuances of reverbs that I hadn't heard so well articulated before.

As with all TQ cables, fat or thin, big or small, Black or Blue, key attributes of timing, soundstage placement and a grip on the focus of all portions of the soundstage is bang on the money, no matter whether I listened to a busy ballad, a soft or octave rich vocal, a funky or flowing instrumental...

Attributes of transparency, layering and focus in the midband were wonderful, not as full and rich as the AQ's but more neutral and yet still with endearing clarity and speed.

After some very close listening to the reproduction of bass notes I feel that there is a leanness in upper bass frequencies which allows for great exposure of detail in this area and the midrange leading to arguably less muddiness to the sound.

What I didn't expect to accompany this less emphasised take on bass rendition was how low and extended the Ultra Silvers can go.

Listening to faster paced music was great in terms of speed, pace and accuracy... the Ultra Silvers do incredibly well in this department. Symphonised harmonics, dynamic shifts and detailed bandwidth shone (no sparkled) some more and if your not a bass monster this "Nordost-with-substance" type sound (that is clean and detailed without a thin or forward nature) will have you dancing before too long.

As with all TQ cables, fat or thin, big or small, Black or Blue, key attributes of timing, soundstage placement and a grip on the focus of all portions of the soundstage is bang on the money, no matter whether I listened to a busy ballad, a soft or octave rich vocal, a funky or flowing instrumental, or some strong dance, the TQ's ability to give equal portions to all of those sat at the dinner table was the mark of a true host.

Conclusions

Having the range of Tellurium Q cables banded into sections, retaining definite core characteristics, yet mixed with just that little bit of flavour here and there, proves to me in a real world situation that they have knowledge that; 1, people do use cables for tone controls and 2, that people do actually enjoy different sounds regardless of system integration.

Yes in an ideal world, cables wouldn't make a difference and yes in an ideal world they wouldn't need to, but they do and the Ultra Silvers can be seen as missing link in an already established line up of fantastic cabling. Some like it smooth, some like it natural and some like it very detailed and my god the Ultra Silver does detail in spades, but not once over the period of weeks that I had them constantly playing in my system did their clean nature ever pin me to the ceiling or have me recoiling and squinting, which has happened on more than one occasion in my cable dabbling experiences.

Build Quality - 8/10

Sound Quality - 8/10

Value For Money - 8/10

Highly Recommended - For their pin point precision, excellent timing, huge bandwidth, ability to remain clean and still stay true without hardness.

Danny Worth

Price at time of review

Speaker Cables - £500 per/m terminated mono length.

Jumpers - £336 per 12" set

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

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Focal Aria 906

French loudspeaker manufacturer Focal are perhaps best known for their megabucks Utopia range of speakers, but they also address the needs of the less well to do that still want high quality audio in their home. Stuart Smith takes a listen to the £758 Aria 906 standmounts.



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Focal are a well known, French loudspeaker manufacturer and as such will need little introduction here but they do have a philosophy which I really like in that they produce a range of loudspeakers to suit most pockets and are keen to bring audiophile reproduction to the masses.

Focal build their own drivers at the facility in St Etienne, France and they use these drivers as the foundation upon which they build the rest of the speaker – I like this approach as it means less concessions have to be made with the crossovers.

The Aria 906 we have here is a new loudspeaker that uses the company's 6.5" flax sandwich mid/bass driver which is essentially flax fibres sandwiched between two sheets of fibre glass (*see close up photograph*). The concept here is that the driver is stiff and very light, another Focal philosophical standpoint. We visited the Focal factory a few months ago and found that the quality control on the production line is high with each driver being checked by ear before being released.

The inverted dome tweeter is a magnesium/aluminium alloy and again this is designed to be both light and very rigid.

These are a front-ported, two-way, largish stand-mount that looks quite smart with its glass top, leather front baffle and non-parallel side panels. Looking around the back of the Arias there's a single pair of binding posts and these are of a high quality and accommodated the bare wires of our chosen 4mm cables easily. Finish on the speakers is good as you would expect for a speaker costing £758.

Throughout the review process we used high quality FLAC files from a computer feeding an inexpensive DAC and a Clones i25 amplifier. Cables used were 4mm Van Damme Blue and Gotham interconnects. I wanted to put these loudspeakers into a system that would be indicative of something someone in the real world might use and the system, including the loudspeakers, comes in at around £1500, which I would suggest is pretty much "entry level" and certainly not an exorbitant sum to spend on music reproduction.

I was also very careful to place the speakers in what I consider a realistic living space with them set around 2.5m apart and well away from walls. In fact, they were placed either side of a settee and firing across the room at a second settee about 3m away. The Arias were placed on modified, 50cm Target stands which put the tweeters at ear height when in the main listening position.

I wanted to put these loudspeakers into a system that would be indicative of something someone in the real world might use and the system, including the loudspeakers, comes in at around £1500, which I would suggest is pretty much "entry level" and certainly not an exorbitant sum to spend on music reproduction.

Getting away from the speaker specifics I have to say I was really surprised what this little system could do with the Focals out front. I know the amp and DAC well enough but was certainly not expecting to have the speakers elevate the whole to something I'd certainly be more than happy to live with. I found myself really enjoying listening to music and this is proof that you do not need to spend a King's ransom to put together a system that plays music really well.

Some Music

The ubiquitous Random Access Memories by Daft Punk is presented with really good extension to the lower frequencies with the bass being fairly well controlled and fast/tight. Top end frequencies come together nicely to give an overall feeling of "rightness" to the music. In some circles Focal have a reputation for producing loudspeakers that sound overly bright but I'm clearly missing something completely in this regard!

The soundstage thrown by the Arias is within the speakers and so not exceptionally wide, but there is good front to back depth with height that is really rather pleasing. What stand out with these speakers is a sense of tonal balance that doesn't over emphasise any particular frequency and this makes for an easy listening experience that isn't at all fatiguing. In

comparison to the [Q Acoustics Concept 20s](#) which are a couple of hundred quid or so cheaper when their stands are factored in, the 906 goes lower and is overall a bigger and more dynamic listen which I preferred.

In absolute terms there's a sense of something missing in refinement but then that's when comparing to speakers costing many times the asking price of the Arias and so like comparing apples with oranges. However, crank up the volume to high levels with the Arias and things can get a little much with the speakers not feeling fully in control of the music, but let's face it, these speakers are designed for relatively small spaces - when we did put them in the main rig and firing down the large living room they were a little out of their depth I think and if you do have a bigger room you should perhaps be looking at the larger floorstanders.

Playing Ti-an-guis' eponymous album on Snip Records there's good reproduction of the acoustic instruments and a solid feeling of the recording space. Instruments don't necessarily have the air around them as when using the [Roksan Darius S1s](#) but then the Darius are six times the asking price and in reality there's little to moan about at this price point. Female vocals are reproduced with clarity and there is good snap to percussion instruments.

I've found myself listening to loads of music on this little system with the Focals being the main event and they don't seem to favour one kind of music over another which is a good thing to have a broad appeal in the market.

At low to medium volumes they really do deliver and I believe they do punch above their relatively modest asking price.

However, the Aria 906 is not a high-end loudspeaker

(and to be fair, at this price it was never going to be) but what it does offer is an unpretentious, good value introduction to proper high fidelity reproduction of music around which to build a modestly priced playback system for the music lover uninterested in getting involved with all the audiophile malarkey.

The Focals look pretty conventional but aren't unpleasant to look at and they should find favour with those looking for a loudspeaker that doesn't stand out like a sore thumb in the domestic environment. They're not the smallest of standmounters (certainly bigger than the Q Acoustic Concept 20s in dimensions) but then I find that standmounts tend to take up a similar amount of floorspace to one another anyway!

There's an even-handedness with these speakers and whilst I wouldn't suggest that they are absolutely neutral in their reproduction of music they are a thoroughly enjoyable loudspeaker. High-end on a budget? I don't think so, but partner with a good budget electronics and you will have a system that you can enjoy for years to come without feeling the need to upgrade or change if listening to music is your main priority.

Focal should be applauded for the Aria 906, it's a good value, good sounding loudspeaker that is well finished. It offers music lovers a product that is well thought out and designed from the ground up and delivers musically. Focal's philosophy of getting the drivers right and building a loudspeaker around them certainly seems to have paid off.



Build Quality – 8

Sound Quality – 8

Value For Money – 9

Overall – 8.3

Recommended for those looking for a good value loudspeaker around which to build a modestly priced system that plays music very well.

Price as reviewed £758

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VDH First Ultimate MK2 RCA interconnects

Danny Worth

The VDH First Ultimate MK2 RCA interconnects are an all carbon affair. Each conductor is made from pure carbon and is arranged in a coaxial design.

The centre conductor LSC is made up of 12,000 individually insulated strands of 7 micron carbon! You thought that sounding tricky in terms of termination? Well, the outer screen of the First Ultimates are made from 6 layers of the same LSC (Linear Structured Carbon) wires, no less than 114,000 separately insulated strands?

The cable is not one the Van Den Hul will offer off the reel as terminating is a little tricky (!) and they state that it's due to internal reflection issues if not mounted to the plugs correctly. Of course the trademarked Hulliflex outer jacket is the final out finish on these creamy/lightship yellow cable.

I have had experience with pure carbon cabling in the past, namely with speaker cables and I've had many VDH cables that also have had a mixture of carbon and silver in their construction but I've never heard an all carbon interconnect, so this one should be interesting.

The Sound

As soon as the VDH's entered my system between DAC and amp a seductive musicality captivated a soundstage of such remarkable layering in knew I was in for a treat.

At the time of changing over the interconnects I was listening g to Ed Sheeran's new album 'Ed Sheeran' and the fluidity of how the First Ultimates rendered the vocal was pretty stunning. Being fully aware of VDH's trademark smooth sound after owning many of their cables in the past I didn't expect a sharp top end at all and Sheeran's guitar confirmed that the all carbon affair was going to be a musical treat rather than a rush of bandwidth, especially in the top end.

I will convey that the background is so damn quiet that transparency in the midrange and air in the top end felt very present and convincing giving each performance on the album a naturally reflected soundstage, reproducing portions of focus very nicely indeed.

The top end no doubt sounds as if it's rolled off somewhat, but the overwhelming musicality just outweighed any perceived losses in resolution.

Reviews

As well as being familiar with VDH cables, I am also familiar with the sound of conductive carbon cabling and in my experience they are very forgiving to certain digital nasties in a system, too much and the sound can get a bit under-emphasised, just the right amount and the effects can be so seductive that hunting for that next cymbal crash becomes a thing of the past and instead it's "what can I play next?".

The way I feel it's best describe is that the VDH's have bags of non-peaky bass, they give a well driven upper- bass/lower-midrange which tackles fast and slower notes equally well

With this more forgiving nature of the all-carbons sonic signature I moved into Spotify world and just started trawling through my own personal playlists, what was hot at the moment around the world and found that the cables did exactly what I expected of them.

The acoustic version of 'Your Winter' by Sister Hazel can get a little sharp in its extremities when played loudly from its live venue, the First Ultimates, as expected gave a slightly rounder nature to leading and trailing edges, bass notes were still crisp and the vocal was pretty awesome. The cable seems to begin to do its magic in between the notes first damping and cleaning up background hash and finishing its job just on the leading edge in order not to destroy pronunciation or detail.

Another part of the sound which I really felt was great was the proportions of bass the cables had to offer. The way I feel it's best describe is that the

VDH's have bags of non-peaky bass, they give a well driven upper- bass/lower-midrange which tackles fast and slower notes equally well They don't have the ultimate slap, tightness or pace of say the Oriton Symphony Oranges and TQ Black Diamonds that I use, but they have this unmistakable presence that just makes the listener feel that their power is effortless and that turning the volume up further and further just has them smiling and saying "is that all you've got for me".

Extension is deep, long and wide and the fullness never lost its tightness, although not as tight as the other cables mentioned in comparison, but there just aren't any sort of issues when hearing how well the lower mids integrate right down to the ground. In fact there's a great deal of respect for how this portion of the frequency range is handled. The amount of information produced at the lower end of the spectrum is also notably remarkable.

In Conclusion

These all carbon cables are so musically engrossing that when changing back to any other cable the sound takes a little of a readjustment and the over the top volumes that were being played ten minutes previously need to be wound down just a little to save the ear drums.

The fluid and unforgiving nature of these is unmistakable, rendering of instrument timbre is a big step up over other VDH cables I have previously heard, with a presence of soundstage layering, midrange depth and quietness of background that simply allows for vocals to shine.

If your digital rig still gives you that edge that has you running for the vinyl, give the First Ultimates a whirl, they will certainly tame all those nasties and present you with some truly seducing sounds.

Danny Worth

Build Quality - 8/10

Sound Quality - 8/10

Value For Money - 8.5/10

Overall - 8.1/10

Recommended - For absolutely pure, grainless musicality which never had me crying out for more or felt as if though I was being short changed by it's beautifully smooth and non fatiguing sound.

Price at point of review - £275 - 1m pair

LEEDH E2

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- 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.

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

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

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

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

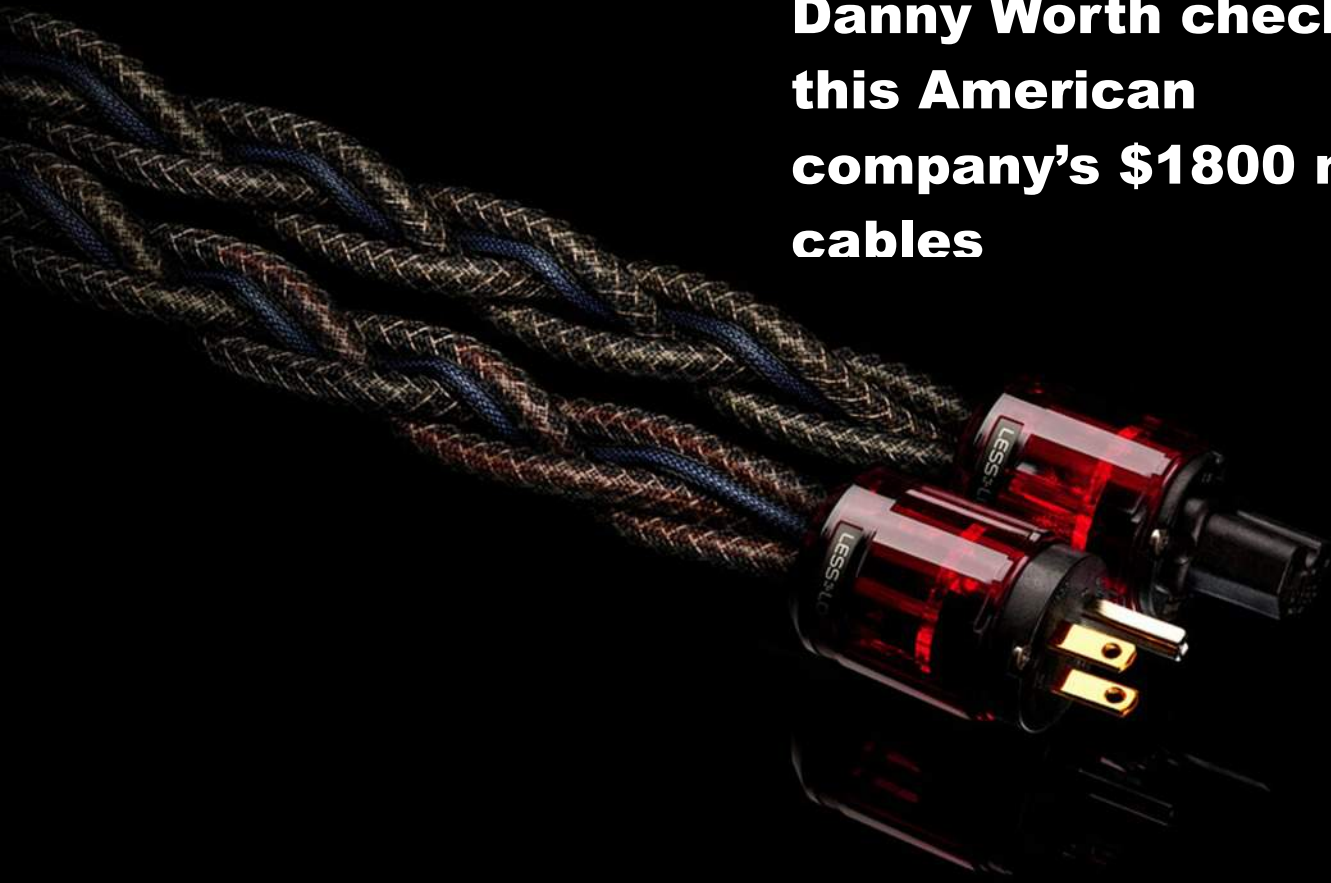
The result is an ultracompact and powerful subwoofer able to reach 20Hz at -1dB that we logically baptised : 20.1

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

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LessLoss DFPC Reference Mains Cables

Danny Worth check out this American company's \$1800 mains cables



A little while ago now I was able to have a listen to the LessLoss DFPC Signature mains cables, which made quite an impression on me and my listening experience offering fantastic refinement, liquidity, presence and an overall natural presentation, which really made for an enjoyable listen.

The Reference cables are similar in construction Utilising a similar geometry to the Signatures they employing four separate conductors - two Live - 12mm cross section, One Neutral - 12mm cross section and a single Earth - 12mm cross section.

Where the cables differ from the Signatures in the processing stages, through LessLosses' 'Skin-filtering' techniques. The Signatures reach a Level 2 whereas the Reference chords achieve a Level 4 in

what is a labour intensive and timely affair carried out in house.

I'll allow Louis Motek (Managing Director) of Less-Loss give his overview;

"Each LessLoss Skin-filtering grade marks audibly significant improvements in performance. The DFPC Original uses Grade 1. With just this technology, many customers insist that their stand-alone "caps & coils" power filters are no longer needed, and often that comparing with a DFPC reveals that their previous filter imparts an undesirable flavour to the sound. Grade 1 Skin-filtering makes a substantial step beyond the performance of standard or industrial power chords; indeed, a substantial step even over power cords with much higher price tags. The DFPC Signature's Grade 2 Skin-filtering requires a more extensive processing of the conduc-

tor's outer skin. It involves a unique utilization of pigments in a specialized in-house preprep process. This achieves more attenuation of wide-bandwidth HF noise and results in an even cleaner sound as the true nature of the signal is better revealed above an even lower noise floor.

For three years we have been refining Skin-filtering Grades 3 and 4, found only in the new DFPC Reference. Here, we not only implement all steps involved in the production of the DFPC Signature, but, in addition, carry out several more crucial steps in the processing and assembly of each cable. This level of attention to detail and performance places this cable in an entirely different category. Each DFPC Reference undergoes half a month of controlled steps in production. Assembly alone takes 12 hours of scrupulous labor. There is much more than meets the eye in this product, with performance to match."

There is a plethora of technical information on the LessLoss website referring to each aspect of the entire conception of the cables, right down their choice of Oyaide plugs implemented on each cable.

Note: If a UK power plug is required then the Furu-tech 1363 is employed.

The Sound

So on to the important bit, how do they sound and are the added techniques, processing and cost worthwhile?

Sometimes when progressing through a companies range of products, upgrades can offer a marginally subtle improvement and sometimes improvements can be larger in relation to the additional costs.

Sometimes a subtle change is all that is needed to really have a product click or just sound so right. Other times a huge difference can be obtained which presents itself very differently and can be unexpected and destroy all expectations of a house sound.

The LessLoss DFPC cables sit somewhere in the middle (no I'm not a politician, I don't have the patience to be diplomatic).

When listening to one of my favourite albums from Chris Jones 'Moonstruck' I am presented with a core sound of liquidity, exceptional detail and a smoothness that allows for leading edges to imprint their note into a wonderfully dark soundstage that oozes musicality and presence.

The References developed these leading edges with more defining realism, organic flare and responsiveness to the transient nature of strength, dependent on

how intensely each note is struck or blown. Decay just dissipates magically into the blackness where notes are still emerging from, retaining overall rhythm through smaller delicacies and nuances.

Chris' vocal is so genuine sounding and focused it just draws the listener right in, gets you toe tapping and singing along to the point where I for one thought I needed to shut up and listen, I can have a good old sing song when I've finished the review!

That didn't last for long, soon enough I was off again...

Right, so getting back on point I contrasted Jones' vocal with the power and delicacy of Loreena McKennit. What a treat her vocal really is, fortunately for review purposes I can't even begin to sing along to her voice, it's something to really sit back and admire.

I started off with 'The Mask and the Mirror' album and the track 'Full Circle'. A very old world Celtic vibe flows throughout this performance; I can imagine it being played during a Macbeth play when panning across the highlands at dusk. I can only describe the flavour of Loreena's vocal as intense. The decay of each phrase simply washes through the depths of the soundstage and the ability of the Reference cables over the Signatures was one of added control in upper octaves, instead of describing this factor as restraint is more of a freedom of expression. The violin in this track emanates from the upper centre of McKennits vocal and the breath that was added with the DFPC References allowed the graceful notes to shine... so well polished with no smear or masking of itself or the vocal.

From 'the Nights at the Alhambra' album which is a live recording I love the 'Raglan Road' track. McKennit's seductive vocal is as delicate and powerful as in any other track she has ever performed, but a real stand out performance for me. The pure liquidity of her vocal which is already established with such grace and beauty in my system was enhanced so well with the Reference power cords and violin which sat to the right hand side of centre stage had a quality that one would imagine the musician to almost be in the room. The overwhelming realism really was something special within the acoustic space of the performance.

Moving into some more beat driven music from the likes of Fleetwood Mac and The Beautiful South, rhythmic qualities were very strong and natural, de-

Reviews

tail rendition and dynamics were effortlessly proportioned in a busy soundstage of more than one lead vocalist and accompanying instruments.

A cleanliness took over Stevie Nicks vocal which had a smoothness to its edges during 'Seven Wonders' that allowed me to really turn up the volume and let her wail.

If I have to balance this review with a negative then the only portion of the wondrous display which I can be critical of is the upper bass drive. As with the Signatures when I reviewed them they stay clean in this area and my own personal tastes want for a little more fullness in this area to help really drive along the dance music I enjoy so much... but that's just me. I don't come across too many audiophiles who still think they are 18 in a nightclub, well there's one I can think of who edits my reviews before they are published, so we'll see if 'Disco Stu' leaves this comment in...(Oh ye of little faith.)

Conclusion

To sum up the time and the experience which I have had with all the LessLoss power cables (DFPC Orig-

inal review to come) it can be said that their natural presentation coupled with masses of detail retrieval, undeniable purity and smoothness just culminates in a soundstage which is enhanced with such musicality, grace and presence that they can only be described as one of the very best power cables I have had the pleasure of listening to, plus they look sexy too.

The DFPC Signatures were great, but the Reference just takes things a step further in overall refinement, precision and soundstage presence without changing the core character of LessLoss' take on the sound.

Danny Worth

Build Quality - 8.5/10

Sound Quality - 8.75/10

Value For Money - 8/10

Overall - 8.4/10

Highly Recommend - For their clean, smooth and detailed sound, build quality and great style visually and musically.

Price at time of review - \$1824 - up to a 2m length (reviewed at 1.5m)

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Carot One Fabriziolo Pre/Headamp and Titta Earphones

Harry Smith, Hifi Pig's teen correspondent, takes a listen to this Italian brand's €40 in-ear headphones and valve pre and head amplifier.



After using a headphone amp for a couple of months now I couldn't go back to just using my headphones. The Carot One Fabriziolo stereo tube preamplifier/headphone amplifier is a good example of a well rounded amplifier.

To start off the packaging is good, plenty of padding and protects it very effectively. Postage is free worldwide! In the box is the Preamplifier, some no frills cables and a power-brick.

The Fabriziolo is 65mm x 25mm x 98mm. It has a

Reviews

front panel jack for headphones and another for the input of an MP3 etc. Around the back there are a pair of RCA inputs and a line out jack. The Carot One is CE stamped!

The audio performance is amazing and unexpected.

Here is all the technical spec provided by Carot one:
Vacuum Tube: 6DJ8/6922 series or 12AU7 series (exchangeable)

Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR): 92dB

THD + Noise: 0.05% @ 10k ohm 0.15% @ 33 ohm

Input Audio: CD IN RCA (Left/Right) x 1 [3Vpp max.]

Power Socket: (5.5mm/2.1mm) x 1

Output Audio: OUT 3.5mm x 1

Headphone: OUT (3.5mm) x 1

Knob Audio and power switch x 1

Power Indicator: (Blue LED under Tube Socket) x1

Volume Knob x 1

Power Supply DC 12V-13V (max.)

After taking a close look at the preamp you start to see that the finish isn't great: The screws look cheap, the valve is lopsided and the sound knob feels flimsy. These are minor problems however and could easily be fixed by the manufacturer. This isn't to say that it looks bad. It looks great! I love the way it glows blue when turned on and its a very well thought out design to fit in such a small enclosure. The design is also very bold with the signature Carot colours of orange and highlights of blue. The single valve sits proudly on the top and makes it stand out from the crowd.

To test the sound I ran the preamp though a PC playing FLAC audio files. I ran the Fabrizioolo though a Schiit Modi DAC and used NAD Viso hp 50 headphones (I also compared it to a Schiit Magni preamplifier though the same setup). You can also play your Mp3 player through the unit using the front mounted socket or as a preamplifier if you have powered speakers.

The audio performance is amazing and unexpected. The music sounds crisp and clear without any interference. The sound isn't particularly bass heavy but it's personally just enough. I listened to many genres

of music (Rock, Electronic, Blues, Funk...) and it came alive especially with electronic music. I could hear many layers to the music and discovered parts of a song that I couldn't hear with just my headphones.

Compared to the Schiit amp I personally think the Carot amp sounds better.(This could be something to do with the valve) ...But this is to be expected as the Fabrizioolo costs more than twice as much as the Schiit.

It's a shame that the Carot One preamp couldn't make the 100 pound price point but it's price still isn't too off-putting.

I was also Given the Carot One Titta to review, a pair of in-earphones that follow the same design of the Fabrizioolo (and all the other Carot One products). These earphones are great value for money. They are extremely comfortable, they're light and isolate pretty well from outside sounds. They are very well rounded and are a good all purpose in-ear headphone. They work perfectly with, and looks wise really complement the Fabrizioolo preamplifier. If you are an audiophile on a small budget these earphones are for you!

In conclusion Carot One is a brand that needs recognition for their great sounding and stand out looking audiophile products. (based on what I've heard)

Scores

Carot One Fabrizioolo preamplifier: Price at time of review 199€

Sound: 9/10

Price: 7/10

Build quality: 6/10

Overall - 7.3

Recommended for people looking to improve their headphone experience without breaking the bank.

Carot One Titta earphones: Price at time of review 49€

Sound: 8/10

Price: 9/10

Build quality: 8/10

Overall - 8.3

Recommended as a good value all round in-ear headphone that works well with the Carot One Fabrizioolo

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



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Cranage Hall Audio Show

It was not without a little trepidation that I was attending this Hifi show...I had heard stories about UK shows, and not all good.

'You'll be the only woman there' some said....

'They'll look at you like you're from another planet!!' said others!

Hmmmm, I thought, do I want to go to a UK show? Despite being involved in Hifi Pig for the last couple of years I have only attended shows and audiophile events in France and Germany. Having looked at the UK hifi forums and found them to be places dominated by blokes, I was kind of wary about the shows there.

However, I needn't have worried; Cranage Hall Audio Show was actually a lot different to what I was expecting.

So where to start? The venue itself was stunning. This was no grotty, identikit chain hotel with dingy rooms and chipped furniture. It was high class, beautifully laid out in gorgeous grounds and easily accessible from all over the UK. Unsurprisingly, it's a popular wedding venue, tastefully furnished and finished with a sumptuous and elegant feel....things were looking up!

Food and facilities such as the bar were also excellent, with plenty of places to take a break during the day.

The hotel is also a conference venue with most of the show in the more modern part of the hotel. The rooms, even the small ones, were a good size and not stifling hot and it was a pleasure to wander room to room during the show.

What also should be noted about the hotel's suitability for a hifi show was the excellent sound isolation in the rooms, none of the noise wars between rooms that I have sometimes experienced at other shows, all in all a perfect show venue.

As for the people attending, it was great to see a mixture of people there. Groups from young couples to whole families had come out, perhaps prompted by Fathers' Day, but great to see a younger generation



enjoying the show, hopefully a few were hooked and will attend more shows.

We met up with my brother's young family and in particular it was great to put my youngest niece in the sweet spot of a few rooms in her push chair and just watch her reaction to the music, she was jigging around and loving it and we could actually see her looking around for the instruments as she picked them out in the soundstage...a priceless reaction to music played on great hifi.

There also seemed to be a lot of hotel guests that decided to take advantage of the free entry to the show...I think the fact that it was free was much more inclusive, rather than just diehard audiophiles

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superbly presented show"*

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Cranage Hall Audio Show



visiting on their own it was much more family orientated bringing in people from near and far just to see and hear what it was all about.

It being a Sunday show also lent an air of chilled enjoyment to the show, no racing about with things to do, just a relaxing day listening to music and meeting people.

The Hifi Pig Teen Correspondent was also in his element and actually bought his first vinyl...Random Access Memories by Daft Punk (nice choice, son). He even got to give it a spin in one of the rooms (cheers Kris! (*Kris is pictured above right*)) and is now scouting around for his first turntable after Mr Hifi Pig pointed out that he didn't actually have his

ryone had worked extremely hard to get the sound right and everything really seemed to click into place nicely.

Coming as it does a month after High End Munich, it was well timed to revisit Munich regulars such as Brodmann and Soundkaos, but also to meet UK based dealers and distributors and hear their chosen systems.

Like I said I didn't hear a bad room. A great variety of music was played and the rooms that were particularly engaging were those that gave visitors a choice of what they wanted to listen to...a sure sign of confidence in a systems performance.

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*"Enjoyable day out and very helpful in my search
for hifi nirvana."*

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Cranage Hall Audio Show



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*"I travelled 40 miles to this event and it was very
much worth it. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at
Cranage Hall."*

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Cranage Hall Audio Show

is not something that non traditional audiophiles need to be scared of.

So, I went to a UK Hifi show....and it was really, really great.

The Audio Show at Cranage Hall has really set the benchmark for other UK shows.

Great location, top notch systems, super friendly people and accessible to a wide audience....if this is the future of UK Hifi shows then I for one am really impressed, expecting excellent things from the show in June 2015.

Hope to see you all there!

Linette Smith

From my perspective there's not really a great deal to add to what Linette has already written. Kris did a fabulous job of getting the show off the ground and credit must surely go to all the exhibitors who put a great deal of effort in to ensure there were interesting things to listen to.

Everyone I spoke to who attended Cranage Hall Audio Show said how much they had enjoyed the day

and that they would definitely be back next year. It was also good to see a good number of families and younger people at Cranage Hall.

What is particularly pleasing for me is to see a hi-fi show that is outside the South of England and, despite there being some naysayers on social media (isn't there always), I believe that there is life beyond Watford Gap and that the Cranage Hall Audio Show is not only viable but will thrive and grow in the coming years.

What is also pleasing is that the show is FREE to visitors and I sincerely hope that it stays this way in coming years!

I know plans are in place for next years show already and that Hifi Pig will once again be exclusive media partners for the event...and personally I can't wait! As soon as the date is confirmed (it will definitely be in June) we will of course let you know.

Stuart Smith



Cranage Hall Audio Show

Astin Trew

AT3500 CD player, Concord DAC, AT 2000 amplifier, their own brand cables throughout and Tannoy Definition DC8 standmounters. Music Works power cables, blocks, speaker stands and isolators plus Audiomica cables.



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"Very well done - I will be attending next year."

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Audio Counsel

Full Audio Note system with DAC 4 balanced, CDT One balanced, M2 Line Preamplifier, Conqueror Power amps and Type E loudspeakers.



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Great brands and camaraderie."*

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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Brian & Trevors

brianandtrevors presented their House of Linn system:

Klimax Exakt DSM and Linn LP12 with Linn Aktiv Akubarik Exakt loudspeakers. All powered by PS Audio power regeneration products.

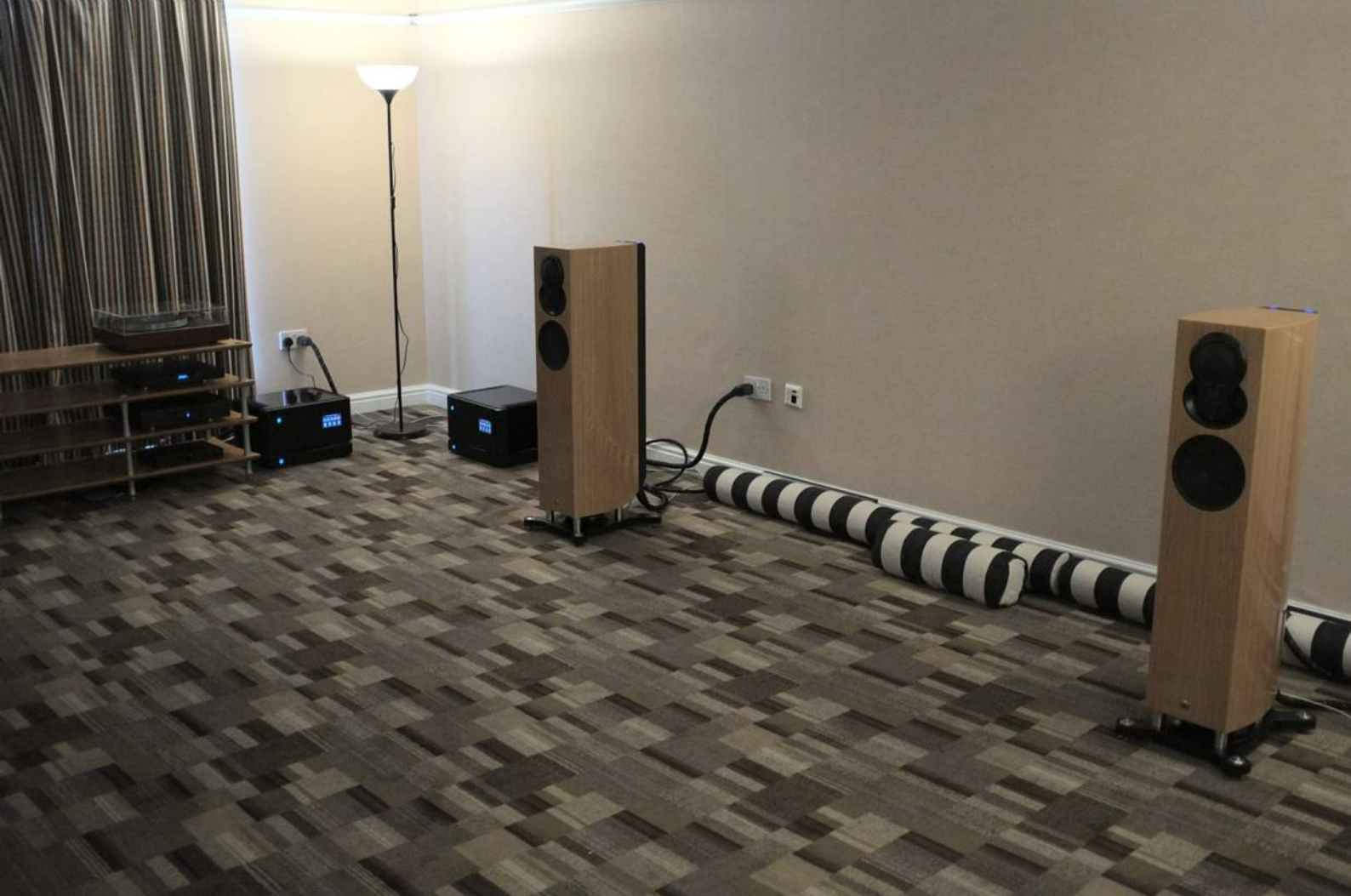


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Decent Audio

Magnepan Magneplanar MG1.7 loudspeakers with Exposure MCX electronics and Music Works racks.



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*"Quite easy to get to from the motorway and I
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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Diverse Vinyl

As the name would suggest divers Vinyl had a large and varied assortment of vinyl records on sale on the day and seemed to be doing a brisk trade.



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*"Nice relaxed atmosphere. Nice layout. Rooms
easy to find. Free parking"*

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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Doug Brady

Funk Firm Turntable, Naim NDS, Harbeth Super HL5 Super speakers, Sonneteer amps, Renaissance Rap 02 pre amps and RA02 monoblocs. Also in the room were Brodmann loudspeakers



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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Gpoint Audio

Lampizator Level 7 DAC, Van de Leur Preamplifier, Tektron Italia TK reference monoblocs and hORNS FP15 speakers. Cables were by Albedo and KBL.



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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Graham Slee

The whole range of Graham Slee headphone amps, DACS and phonestages were on display but the main system used the Reflex M phonestage, Majestic DAC and Proprius Monoblocs. Cables were Graham Slee Lautus interconnects and Spatia loudspeaker cables. Loudspeakers on the day were the Sterling LS35as.



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sound. Wife admitted it was good"*

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Flamingo Audio

A wide range of Van den Hul products on display as well as Tsakiridis valve electronics.



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equipment"***

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Henley Designs

Roksan M2 amplifier, Pro-Ject 6 perspex turntable, Pro-Ject CD Box DS, Pro-Ject Phono Box RS and Acoustic Energy AE Reference 1 loudspeakers.



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*"Great venue and excellent sounds - it gave a
real feel for the equipment's potential"*

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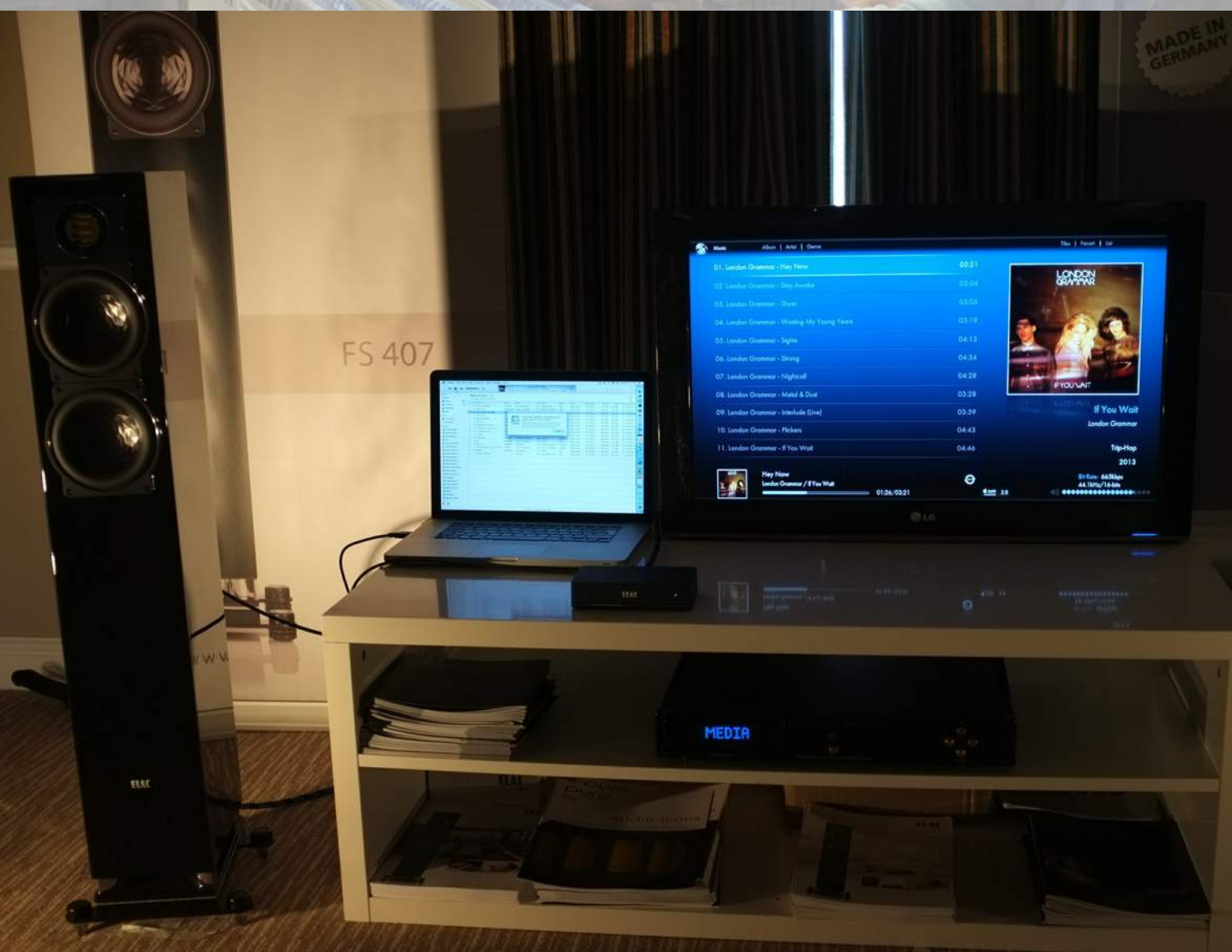




Cranage Hall Audio Show

Hifi Network

Electrocompaniet ECM2 streamer, ELAC FS407 active loudspeakers and In-akustik cables.



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events."*

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High End Cables

Raidho X-1 speakers, Bel Canto CD2 Player, Norma Audio IPA 140 integrated amp, Atacama Equinox rack, Audience Conductor and Power 'e' cables, Audience aR4 power conditioner,

Cable Lift and Panda Feet supports, Nordost Sort Kones and QRT Qv2 and Qk1 AC Mains enhancers from Nordost.



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LW AUDIO

Audio Music RT2 Silver pre, 835 Silver monoblocs, Horning Aristoteles loudspeakers, PS Audio Perfectwave DSD DAC and transport. Wow Audio Lab L1 and M1 pre and power amps were also used.

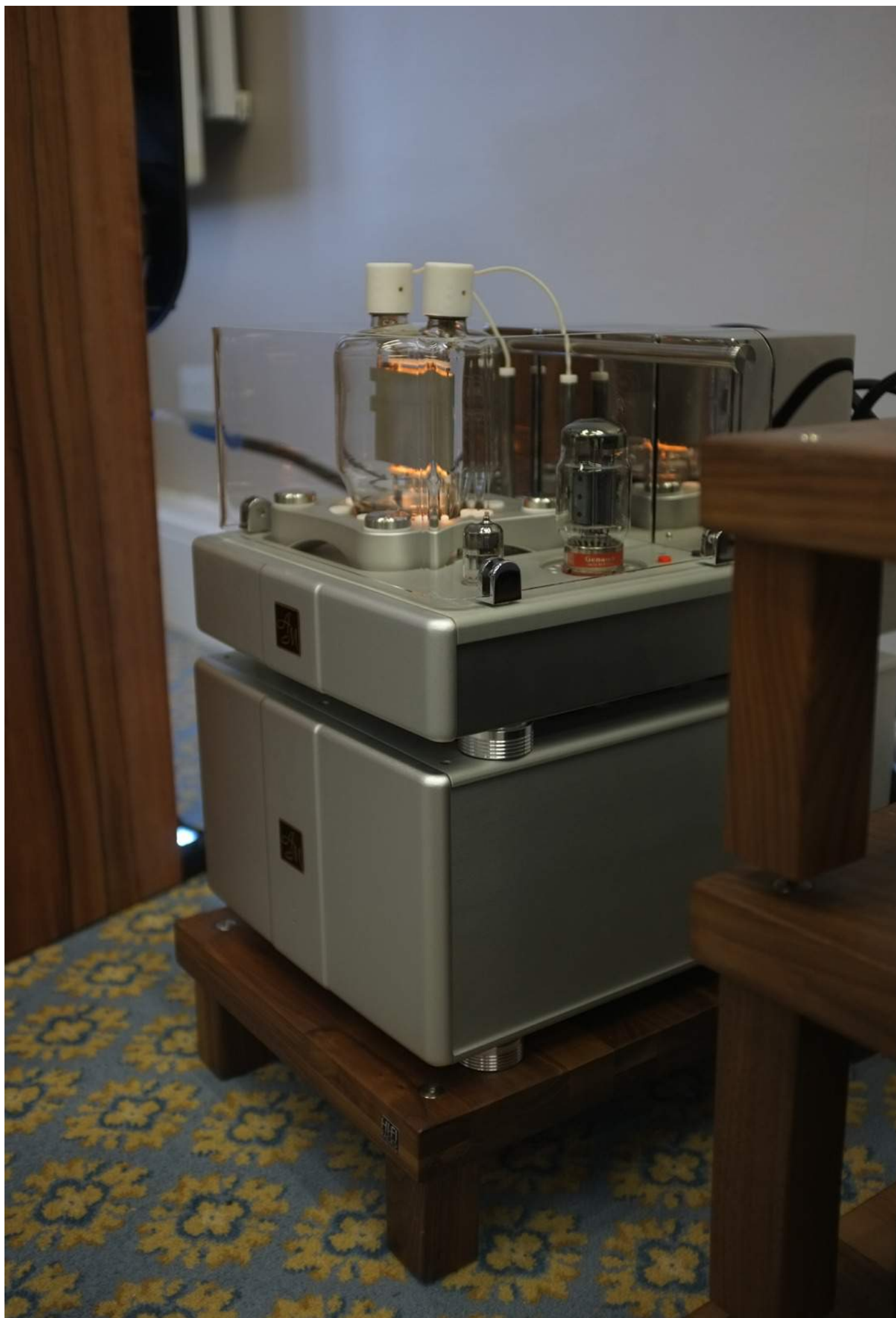


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*"Good range of expensive equipment on show.
Willingness of most reps to play my music."*

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MCRU

Clear Audio turntable, Longdog valve phonostage, Canor amplifiers, Isotek mains conditioners, Longdog Audio DAC, Music First Audio pre, MCRU Loudspeakers. Also showing a wide range of cables and accessories plus new and secondhand vinyl.



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*"Very good acoustics for dem rooms Very friendly
and informative demonstrators Good food"*

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Music First & Howes Acoustics

AMR CD Player and Voxativ power supplies for the field coil drivers in the floor horns. Amps were a pair of modded Quad IIs or Sun Audio SUT25 (1.5W/channel) with a Music First Baby reference preamplifier. Track Audio spikes and a Nagra T reel to reel tape deck were also used.



Music First Audio

"I've not heard a better preamp..."

Sam Tellig - Stereophile, 2012







Cranage Hall Audio Show

NuNu Distribution 1

A full TAD system including DA1000 DAC with a C2000 preamplifier, M2500 power amplifier powering CR-1 loudspeakers with a bespoke music server and mains conditioning and cabling Tony at NuNu and all complemented by the Creativ's reference audio racks. Also in this room were the Scherer loudspeakers and Track Audio speaker stands and "spikes".



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NuNu Distribution 2

In the second of NuNu Distributions three rooms there was Brodmann Acoustics JB 155's with Belles amplification including the new VT-01 V2 and the TAD D600 player. All on an Audiophile Base support system, with isolation platforms.



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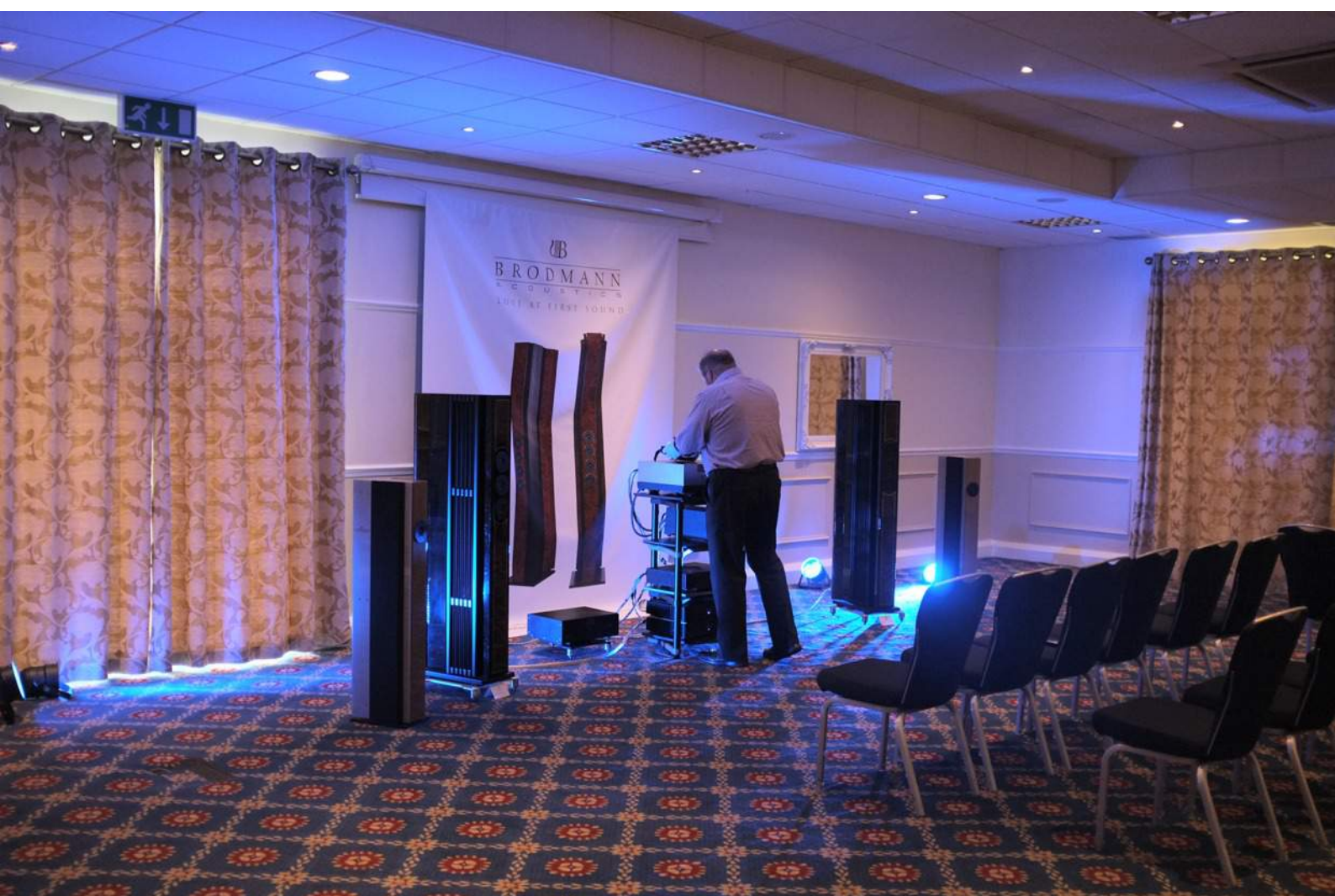


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Telephone: 02035442338





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NuNu Distribution 3

In the last of NuNu Distributions three rooms they were demonstrating Sonneteer Orton Mk IV amplifier along with some of Quadral's Platinum and Chromium range speakers. Rack by Creaktiv. There was also a Oracle Paris turntable being used.



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Puresound

STST Motus II direct drive turntable with Vertex 10" tonearm, Aurorasound Vida LCR stage, Aurorasound's Preda line stage, Tune Audio Prime loudspeakers, puresound M845 mono amplifiers and puresound A8500 CD player.



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Purité North

Pro-Ject Experience turntable, Ortofon cartridge, Hush Platforms, Puresound L500 pre, Puresound M845 monoblocs, AE Reference Series loudspeakers Supra and Van Damme cables accessories. Also M2Tech, Superspikes, Box-Design by Pro-Ject and Acoustifeet.



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RJC AUDIO

Full range of plinths and sound isolation platforms on show including insights into their construction.



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Sonido

Sonido Aion single driver speakers, Abyssound ASX 1000 amp and PAB support platforms.



SONIDO

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Cranage Hall Audio Show

SoundKaos

Wave 40 loudspeakers and their new D12 The Subwave subwoofer. Pictured is Martin Gately the CEO of SoundKaos.



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Cranage Hall Audio Show

Systemdek, Art Loudspeakers & Viero Cables

Systemdek Precision turntable with a 12" Audio Origami and Funk FXR tone arm, McIntosh MA8000 amplifier, McIntosh MCD 550 CD player, Art Alnico 8 loudspeakers and Viero cables from Italy. Isol 8 Integra substation along with Audio Suspension tables.



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[A Cacophony of Cartridges Part 2 \(Denon MCs\)](#)
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[The Funk Firm Technics SL1200](#)
[Roksan Radius 5 Mk2 turntable, Nima tonearm & Corus Silver cartridge](#)
[Origin Live Modified Technics 1210 Turntable](#)
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[Mike New Bearing for Technics 1210 Turntable](#)
[The Cartridge Man Isolator](#)

CD Players and Transports

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Loudspeakers

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Amplifiers

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Digital to Analogue Converters

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[Human Audio Muto Dac](#)
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Cables

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ALL REVIEWS

Album Reviews

Philipp Gorbachev - The Silver Album *Comeme*

Out now on the Comeme label The Silver Album from this self exiled Russian now living in Berlin is a difficult one to tie down and I must admit that on the first



This is being hailed as the "first Russian dance album" - I don't know about that but it is certainly an interesting, thought provoking, clever and all together a bit different from the norm.

few listens I found it difficult to get my head around.

The Silver Album could never be accused of being easy listening and it does need to you engage your brain as well as your feet. It's forward thinking and somewhat avant-garde with its jarring acid basslines and Russian lyrics. I want to give it the label "Acid House" because it does have a feel of the early Acid Trax tunes, but there are perhaps elements of the early Antler Subway label in there too.

All the songs on The Silver Album are performed live and Gorbachev's lyrics add a whole new dimension to the music creating something that is wholly different to anything I've heard before.

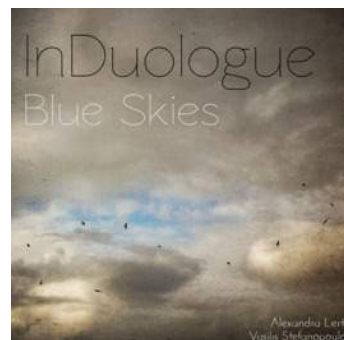
The opening track "Arrest Me" is also the first single from the album and is a dedication to the imprisoned people around the world and is for me the most accessible of the tunes on this record.

Here's the thing, music that doesn't immediately fit with anything you've heard before can often be overlooked as being too challenging or perhaps difficult, but in the long run these self same records are the ones that give the most enjoyment in the long run...and that's what you have with The Silver Album.

This is being hailed as the "first Russian dance album" - I don't know about that but it is certainly an interesting, thought provoking, clever and all together a bit different from the norm.

InDuologue - Blue Skies *Snip Records*

InDuologue are (Alexandra Lenta and Vasilis Stebbass) and is described the voice and soulful then.



Blue Skies was recorded of a Dutch National Reserve over a couple of days and this adds a really beautiful atmosphere to the record. The double bass' tone is allowed to shine through and Vasilis' playing is solid and forthright and yet sympathetic to Alexandra's vocal, which in turn is understated yet strong.

Snip Records are relatively new, but you really should jump on the train now as they're gonna be huge!

Musically we have acoustic jazz here and whilst there are only ever the vocal and bass this pared down style is really addictive in its simplicity and honesty.

The recording and production on Blue skies is superb and Marijn Kooy at Snip records really should be applauded for having the foresight and guts to record in this space.

I'm certainly no jazz buff, but I'm sure many readers who buy this record will recognise a good number of the tunes in there and the way they are performed will certainly appeal to many I think.

You are drawn in by the straightforwardness of the recording and I defy you not to tap your feet along to the tunes, but what really appeals to me is the openness of the recording and the purity of the interplay between the two "instruments".

Snip Records are relatively new, but you really should jump on the train now as they're gonna be huge!

Gus Gus -Mexico Kompakt

Out towards the end of June on Kompakt is one I've been looking forward to taking a listen to for a while now. Icelandic band Gus Gus and their Arabian Horse record were what initially highlighted the Kompakt label to me after a long time in the electronic music wilderness.



Mexico is available on 180 g audiophile vinyl for those that like that kind of thing as well as CD.

From the first few bars of the opening track “Obnoxiously Sexual” (great title that!) it's clear that this is going to be a very good record indeed. Throughout Mexico is really nicely produced and genre-wise falls into the electronic pop folder I guess. It borrows elements from synth-pop, bits of Euro-trance and others but what is a constant is that the tunes on Mexico are proper songs with proper melodies, lyrics (apart from the title track which is the only instrumental) and song structure.

The opening track, as mentioned, is a killer but Mexico doesn't rest on its laurels and each and every track builds the album into a fabulously coherent listen. Crossfade, which was released as a bit of a teaser for the album, ups the tempo just a little bit but there's still that feeling that you are listening to proper songs written with intelligence and knowledge.

Throughout Mexico you've got interesting little twists and turns and “interesting” noises in the mix that really lift it from a very good album to a really superb record.

The tune “Airwaves” kicks off with the feel that it's gonna launch into a huge club anthem and I'm sure it will get dropped by a good number of big name Djs in the coming months.

“God Application” has gorgeous strings before breaking into an electro-style groove that is faintly familiar.

It's difficult to pull together a coherent overview for a record that you find yourself just wanting to kick

back and enjoy and I really did enjoy Mexico very very much and I'm pretty certain it will do very well for the band in the coming weeks and months...and with good justification.

Natalie Merchant - Natalie Merchant Nonesuch Records

Now, I have been known to enjoy a bit of 10 000 Maniacs in the past but I never really got into them in any kind of big way and they were never top of my list when it came to choosing what got played next, so when Natalie Merchant's eponymous album landed on my virtual doorstep, courtesy of HIGHRESAUDIO and on the Nonesuch Records label, I never put two and two together and connected her with the aforementioned Maniacs. I also must admit that I've not heard any of Natalie Merchant's solo stuff since she quit the band in '93...this may have been somewhat remiss of me I think!



All of the tunes on this album are her own and it's her first collection of original tunes since the Motherland album of 2001 and from the opening bars of the first track, “Ladybird” it's clear that you are in the presence of a singer songwriter of quite awesome talent. This is not my usual fare I admit, but this record just oozes talent and “Ladybird” is a fitting opener. It's the tale of a woman stuck in a loveless marriage and it's very poignant (and somewhat autobiographical?) indeed.

The album is folk/country tinged pop with smatterings of gospel thrown in for good measure and is of the highest quality, aimed squarely at a more mature (in age and life experience) audience. The mood is reflective and melancholic with Merchant's vocal style being at once powerful and then somewhat restrained which adds to the overall atmosphere and tone of the record.

Production really is superb, as is the musicianship, and I can see that there will be a good few hifi dealers using this record at shows and demos to demonstrate what their kit is capable of. That's not to say it's

Album Reviews

dull in anyway – something I moan about when speaking about music being played at shows!

Of the eleven tracks on Natalie Merchant I can truthfully say that there is not one hint of filler in evidence and it all holds together as a whole...indeed I suggest playing it in one sitting rather than flicking through tracks. Picking out favourites is difficult, but the sad and touching “Lulu”, a tribute to silent film star Louise Brooks who refused to play by the rules of Hollywood and fell into penniless obscurity, is particularly good.

Natalie Merchant is a great record and I’m sure you will enjoy it a great deal, as I have, if you enjoy well produced, beautifully sung, intelligent music that moves on both the musical level as well as the lyrical. Really recommended!

Deep Purple - Made In Japan Deluxe Edition *Universal Music*

I've had this record on vinyl for years but apart from the odd outing for Child in Time I'd not really given it the respect that others clearly think it deserves. Truth be known apart from Hawkwind my classic rock collection was pretty much confined to the shelves of the music room...this was until about a year ago when I had been chatting to Tony from NuNu Distribution who was saying how much he loved the album. I duly dug the record out, dusted it off (gave it a bath actually) and since then it's had regular airings. Made In Japan often gets cited as being one of the very best live albums ever created and I can now appreciate why!

Made In Japan was recorded onto 8 track tape during Deep Purple's first tour of Japan in August 1972 and was subsequently released in the UK in December of the same year. Engineer for the job was Martin Birch and it is recorded at Osaka's Festival Hall and Tokyo's Nippon Budokan. It includes a classic Purple line up of Ritchie Blackmore on guitar, Jon Lord on the organ, Ian Paice on the drums, bassist Roger Glover and Ian Gillan on vocals. The budget for the recording is reported as being just \$3000!!



With this deluxe version from HIGHRESAUDIO you get two versions of the 7 songs - the original and a specially remastered version. Personally I prefer the rawness of the original mix, though I'd say the remaster is cleaner.

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The performance on Made In Japan and the way the recording captures the energy, vitality and feel of the live show is superb and you can't help but play it loud! the bass guitar on arguably the band's defining tune (Smoke On The Water) is absolutely stunning and on a good system, played loud, gut wrenching.

If you know only a little about Deep Purple you're sure to recognise a number of the tunes on Made In Japan: Highway Star, Child In Time, Smoke On The Water, The Mule, Strange Kind of Woman, Lazy and Space Trucking.

Made In Japan is a must for any collection whether you are a die hard rock fan or not and the deluxe edition download is an interesting version!

In the first of a regular series John Scott examines classic albums of the 1960s and '70s that he believes no collection should be without. This month he gets all proggy and pays tribute at The Court Of The Crimson King.

King Crimson was born on 13 January 1969 in the basement of the Fulham Palace Cafe in London. The band's debut album *In The Court Of The Crimson King* was unleashed on a largely unsuspecting public on 10 October that same year.

Although guitarist Robert Fripp is universally regarded as Crimson's leader and is its sole consistent member, the band owed its origins to brothers Peter and Michael Giles who recruited Fripp into the imaginatively titled trio Giles, Giles and Fripp whose sole album *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp* flopped, despite the band scoring several radio sessions and a TV appearance. Fripp remembers: "The Giles Brothers were looking for a singing organist. I was a non-singing guitar player. After 30 days of recording and playing with them I asked if I got the job or not – joking like, you know? And Michael Giles rolled a cigarette and said, very slowly, 'Well, let's not be in too much of a hurry to commit ourselves, shall we?' I still don't know if I ever got the job".

King Crimson - Sinfield came up with the name as a nod to Beelzebub, the prince of demons...

Deciding that they needed a bigger sound, the band brought on board multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald who would play saxophone, clarinet and flute on the album along with a variety of keyboards in addition to vibraphone and providing backing vocals. McDonald brought with him lyricist Peter Sinfield with whom he had been writing songs. Fripp had become friendly with Gregg Lake, who he had seen in a band called 123 and suggested that he



join the new band to replace Peter Giles who had become somewhat disillusioned by Giles, Giles and Fripp's lack of success.

King Crimson - Sinfield came up with the name as a nod to Beelzebub, the prince of demons - played its first gig on 9 April 1969 and by July had made enough of an impact to feature on the bill of the Rolling Stones' free concert in Hyde Park. By this time rock music was going through something of a sea change. Bind Faith had introduced the concept of the Supergroup, The Who had invented the Rock Opera. Just about any band that played electric instruments and had songs that lasted over five minutes were lumped together under the "Progressive" banner. But a new kind of music was emerging; one that would take its influences from classical music and literature as much as blues and rock and roll and would simply be known as Prog. The dividing line between Progressive and Prog remains a bone of contention. True Prog fans have developed a formula that enables them to calculate the Prog Factor of any band or solo artist. It has something to do with capes, wizards, Hobbits and Mellotrons and need not concern us here. It is universally agreed, however (except, tellingly, by the band themselves) that King Crimson were a Prog band - perhaps even the first Prog band, although that is an even bigger bone of contention. Let's look at the evidence though: 1969 was the year that several of Prog's biggest names released their debuts.

Classics

In March, Genesis released their first album *From Genesis To Revelation* but this was literally a schoolboy effort - recorded during the school holidays - and while it is a concept album loosely based on the Bible, the songs owe more to the BeeGees than Beelzebub. Yes recorded their eponymous debut in July and it certainly shows Prog potential - I could almost be persuaded. But really there is no getting away from it; *In The Court Of The Crimson King* is the album that would show all the nascent Prog-rockers how to do it. Ironically, Yes had recorded a cover of "Something's Coming" from West Side Story and yes Yes, something certainly was.

Robert Christgau was less impressed however, describing it as "ersatz shit"

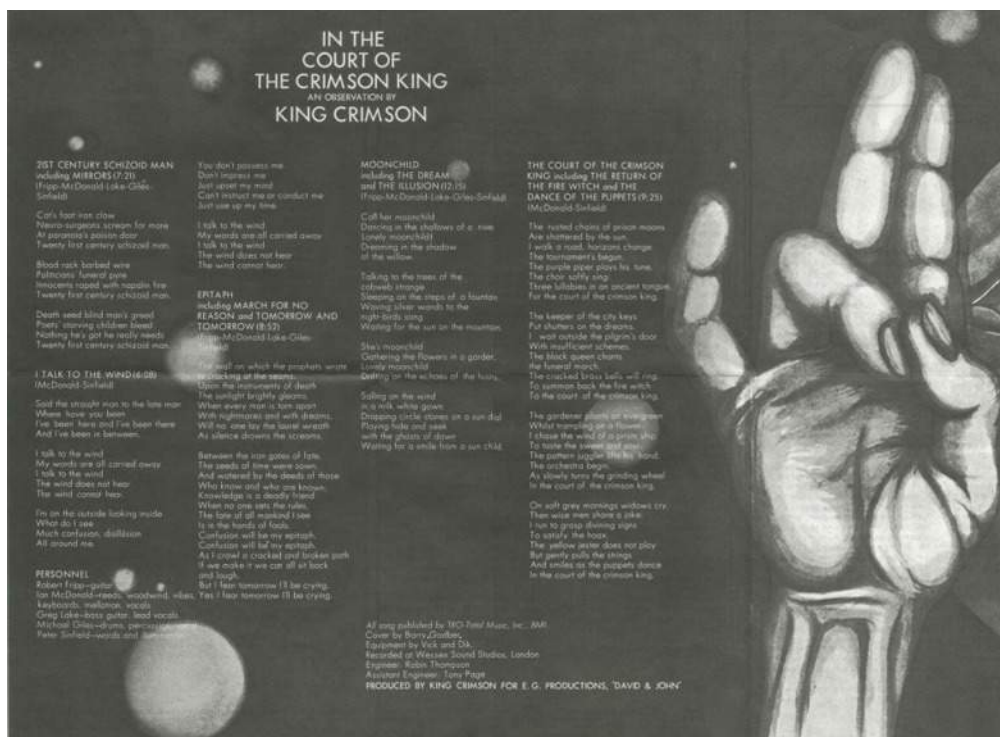
Recording sessions started at London's Wessex Sound Studios in early in the year with Moody Blues producer Tony Clarke in charge. Things didn't work out however, and the band went on to produce the album themselves with Robin Thompson and Tony Page engineering.

Before you even put the needle on the record, insert the CD in the player or tap your app to start streaming - whatever your playback preference - the album's cover lets you know that this is a record that has no intention of messing about. That screaming red face, recalling some monstrous vision by Hieronymus Bosch or mad creature from Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast novels, sets the tone perfectly. The cover was painted by Barry Godber, a friend of Peter Sinfield's, who would

die of a heart attack aged 24 just months after the record was released.

Whatever expectations the cover sets up are fully delivered by the music. In 1969, the 21st Century must have seemed a long, long way away but here we are nearly 45 years later and we can say with the certainty that only hindsight can bring that the opening track, *21st Century Schizoid Man*, sounds like nothing before it or since. This is Prog's appropriation of Phil Spector's Wall Of Sound. The album was recorded on an 8 track machine and we can only imagine the number of overdubs required to produce this aural onslaught. The end result provides some of the tightest ensemble playing you are likely to hear, with Michael Giles' syncopated jazz drumming worthy of particular praise. The second track *I Talk To The Wind* features McDonald's flute and Fripp's chiming guitar and provides some welcome breathing space before we are thrust into the ominous Mellotron-laden introduction to *Epitaph*. Tinder-dry drums lead us into a bleak tale of confusion, tears and screaming hopelessness. *Moonchild* starts as a rather generic hippy drippy song but quickly takes on a more experimental slant, Fripp's guitar exploring the edges of the melody before encouraging the whole band to deconstruct the song and then lead us into the album's epic title track *The Court Of The Crimson King*, a nightmare world of fire-witches, patterned jugglers and yellow jesters. The song is swept along on a wave of Mellotrons and backing vocals before fading to a premature silence. A mocking fairground calliope slowly stutters into life before massed banks of Mellotrons and some stunning drum fills bring the song and the album to an exhausted climax.





Of The Crimson King will feature in the set is anyone's guess but I surely can't be the only one who is hoping for a 21st century version of 21st Century Schizoid Man.

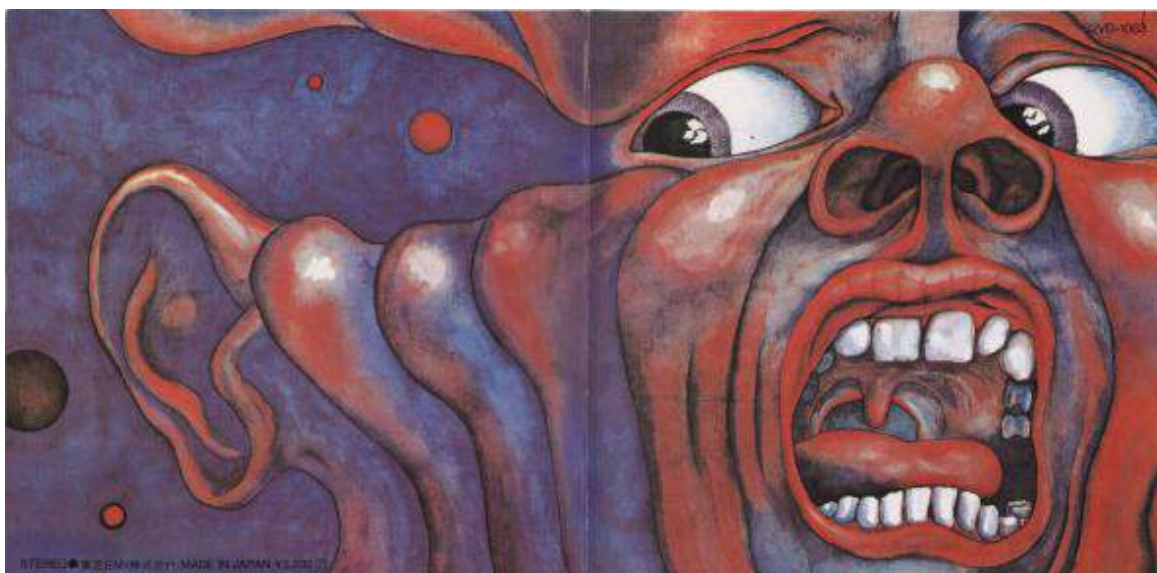
Recommended Release

The album has been remastered several times during the 1980s and '90s. However, these releases are not from the first-generation master tapes, which until 2003 were believed to be lost. To mark the 40th anniversary of the album's release, Fripp and Porcupine Tree musician Steven Wilson – who has since garnered a

The album was a commercial success, reaching number 5 in the British album charts and number 28 in the American Billboard 200. Initial critical opinions were mixed: Pete Townsend hailed the album as "an uncanny masterpiece". American critic Robert Christgau was less impressed however, describing it as "ersatz shit" perhaps proving that great art will always divide opinion. King Crimson went on to produce six studio albums and two live albums before disbanding in 1975 then returning unexpectedly for a second career between 1981 and 2003. Both the band's line up and its musical direction have evolved from album to album with more than twenty musicians having passed through the band's ranks. Fripp once said: "When music appears which only King Crimson can play then, sooner or later, King Crimson appear to play the music". In September this year Fripp will lead yet another incarnation of the band - this one featuring three drummers - out on an American tour. Whether any tracks from *In The Court*

reputation as Prog's remixer/remasterer of choice – used the original tapes to produce vinyl, CD, surround sound and high resolution versions, which are available in a variety of combinations to suit your playback preference and/or wallet.

NEXT MONTH JOHN SCOTT LOOKS AT THE 1973 CLASSIC ALBUM SOLID AIR BY JOHN MARTYN



Rune Jacobsen of French loudspeaker manufacturer Triangle answers Hifi Pig's Behind the Brands questions.



Hifi Pig visited Triangle recently at their Bordeaux headquarters where we were treated to a listen of the company's owner, Olivier Decelle's, personal system that included a pair of the company's flagship Magellan loudspeakers and a host of top flight electronics. You can read more about our visit in next month's Hifi Pig Magazine, but to whet your appetite here is Rune Jacobsen's (Triangle's export manager) responses to our Behind The Brands questions.

Your History

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

I caught the interest at a young age. I was 14, got a bit of money from delivering newspapers and wanted to buy a stereo. Looked in the local shop, at a Philips system, one of those with everything included, but I friend of my dad said I could get something much

better. He gave me a copy of the catalogue from "Danmarks Hifi klub" – and I got completely into it. I started a small business with my friend at 19, then part time job in a hi-fi shop while studying, my first full-time job was as export manager at Pathos in Italy, with who I wrote my thesis, and then they decided to keep me.

Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

In terms of my hi-fi career it is most likely my best friend Krestian Pedersen. We met at the gymnasium (high school from 16-19 years). One morning in the bus (The gymnasium was some 25 km from my home), he was wearing a "Hifi klubben T-shirt" and we got to talk. And we have kinda talked hifi since then. We collected all the magazines we could find, when we got driving licenses we started visiting all the stores, the shows. He went towards engineering and me the commercial way, and audio has been in our jobs since then.

Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

I had 7 years in Pro Audio with TC Group (Tc Electronic, LabGruppen, TC Helicon, Tannoy and also distribution of Dynaudios Studiomonitors). We often had some big projects, and it is often the toughest deals, that makes one most proud when they finally happens. I have had some huge projects in Nigeria,

Australia but the one that stands out is Iran. We sold a massive amount of studio monitors. The first communication was only via fax, it took years. Finally they wanted to come and test the products. 3 Ladies arrived to the local airport and they did not speak a single word of English, and my Iranian is not too good. The translator came 4 hours later, but that was a long day in the airport. They tested and tested and testes – for a station broadcasting in mono. But we finally got the deal.



You and your system

What was your very first system?

A pair of Dali 3b and a NAD 7240 receiver. 4340 Danish Kroner, I for some odd reason still have the recede. That did though still represent an awful lot of newspapers delivered ☺. Was a bit boring only to listen to the radio, but soon after got the money for a cd-player, tape recorder and later a turntable.

The first system took a few years to build-up. The we started building our own speakers, upgraded the NAD's to Thule Audio, and then later I worked in a Hifi shop, so got the chance to bring new gear home a lot of the time. So have had all from entry level Audio Innovations, Wadias, LC Audio, Teac VRDS, and then I went to work for Pathos, where I got to play with the prototypes and have since then staid with my Pathos amps. Currently an Inpol2. The Hybrid and Class A and then different Triangle models, I swap them around as when you live with the different models, it becomes easier for me to sell them. The Pathos amps goes extremely well with the Triangle sound philosophy, and my own sound philosophy. But I also try small and cheap amps, as it is much more challenging to make a good budget system, than a high-end system. I could not work with products that do not speak to me. I listen to my Triangle/Pathos system and I think it sounds bloody good, and it is products I look at and still think they look good, and I know the craftsmanship behind. I don't only look at the sound, but also the pleasure of owning.

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

I should maybe just had kept my very first system, and it could had been used in the basement or something today. But there was no money to upgrade without selling the old as a teenager. I should maybe had kept my Ariston RD 11, it was after-all what was "copied" to make the LP12, and I liked to provoke the Linn owners a bit with that ☺. Besides that I am not too nostalgic, and don't really have the space.

Behind the Brands



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

As mentioned I was also in pro-audio for long. In the studio we made a set of Active Dynaudios M3's and LabGruppen amps (with building processors). The amp was 4 times 5000 Watt, and the system could do something very few hi-fi systems can. I actually find that good hi-fi systems and good monitor systems, as not so different in sound as people might think.

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

Various Triangle models (Currently Signature The-tas, I have a soft-spot for 2-way speakers), Pathos Inpol2, Teac VRDS 25x (it is old and I need a new DAC, but have honestly been slightly disappointed with the DACs I have tried), But I rate my music collection above the stereo, and I rather buy more music

than new cables. I think too many hi-fi people spent too little money on music, concerts and so on.

The state of the industry

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

Having worked with a hybrid amp brand I might not have seen it as a renaissance, they have just always been there for me. I don't look as much as "technology" as I do on quality. Valves have always been there, and having also been in the music business, they eg never left the guitar amps. You still find tube-mic pres in the studios and so on, so for me it has not been a renaissance, they have always been there. We have just gotten an Octave amp in the demo room, and that has been a great experience.

- **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?**

People have never listened as much to music as they do now, but our industry might have slightly failed to inform them of the advantages of buying a good hi-fi system. We need to get "normal" consumers back to buying hifi. We e.g. work with some bigger chain stores, and those people buying Triangle there are among the proudest owners we have. We can't afford to be snobbish and close us in the hi-fi cocoon. We are naturally challenged by the way prices on consumer electronics goes down. People used to pay 2000 Euros for a TV and could then pay 1500 for a decent 5.1 system. Now people get a 42" at 500 and it is hard to convince these people to spend 2000 on the sound, so they leave with a 200 Euro soundbar. The real high-end will always be there, but it is not what's going to keep our business alive.

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

That we focus too much on the wrong things and forget the music, quite simple. We play idiotphile recordings and scare people away. Who cares which chip is inside the latest Iphone, and try and convince these people to buy a better mains cable for their charges, as it will make it sound better in their docking station, people don't care. We need to give them the experience, and involvement. We should have a big group to help us all, to promote better sound to normal people.

The way you work

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

Music ☺, all types of music. From mainstream pop music to high rez recordings, we are servants of music not high fidelity.

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

Lively, dynamic, open and fast. Able to play dynamically at low volume (which 90% of hifi systems cannot), a good spread so the speakers sounds good everywhere in the room, and not just in the sweet-spot where we sit 1% of the time (most people never).

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

I personally don't like subs. They are good for movies and livesound, but we never ever put them in my stereo. Most people cannot integrate subs the way it should be done, to work well, so no need to confusing the customers.

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

- What is your favourite recording?

That I do not have. I have records that have ben very important to me, but not any albums I take down each time I have a listening sessions. I like music more than hi-fi, so when I sit and listen, it is to enjoy music, and not to enjoy hi-fi. Good hi-fi makes the pleasue of listening to music way higher, so I prefer

to take the music that fits my mood, or the direction I want to take my mood.

- Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings

I don't have. I would typically find a few cd's and then take it with the go. I am starting relations with a few artists, to bring us closer to the music. So right now I listen to them, it completely different brands from PowerSolo (rock) and a very talented jazz singer Indra Rios-Moore.

- What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures

I don't have too much in my collection I am embarrassed about. I like to listen to some really hard rock from time to time, but with the family that is more on the headphones when travelling.

- 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?

A problem with cd's might you don't really get attached to them. My dad gave me his LP collection so would maybe take JJ Cales Troubadour or Honky Dory, they represent my hi-fi start and somehow tells more of a story than any of my cds.....

