

# Hifi Pig Magazine

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Issue #12

## HIFI PIG VISITS ROKSAN



### REVIEWS

Graham Audio LS5/9 Loudspeakers , SLIC  
Innovations Eclipse C RCA Interconnects, Triangle  
Signature Alpha Loudspeakers, Beyerdynamic T 51  
i Headphones, Blue Horizon Proburn - Cable  
Burn-In and Conditioning Machine, LH Labs Geek  
Out 1000 - Portable Headphone Amplifier and DAC

**PLUS** Album Reviews, The Classics (Laura  
Nyro's "Eli and the Thirteenth Confession), Behind  
The Brands with Mark Stear of The Missing Link,  
Tipplers Corner





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**HiFi Pig**



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# Black Pearls

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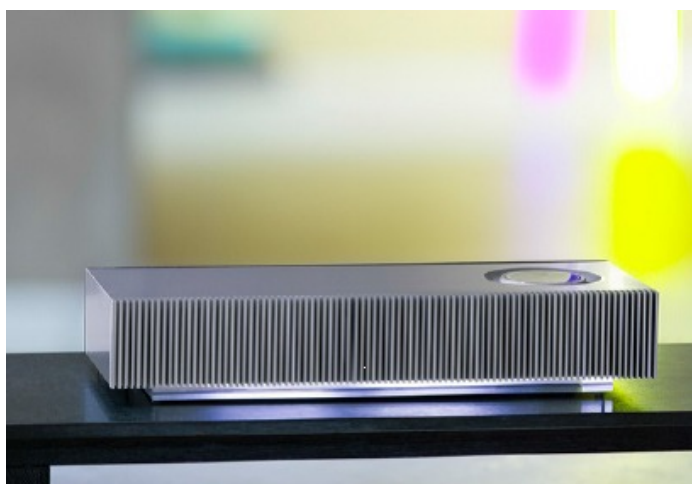
# As Christmas approaches and John Lewis' launches their TV ad' campaign, John Scott finds something in the store he quite likes

In French it's le coupe de foudre; in English, love at first sight. I don't really expect to fall head over heels as I wander through my local department store - well okay, there was that one time with the girl on the cosmetics counter - my restraining order prevents me from saying too much about that - but Cupid's arrow struck me again just the other day.

There I was, sauntering nonchalantly amongst the toasters, when I was stopped dead in my tracks by a flash of silver in the middle distance. Could it be? Surely not. I felt myself pulled inexorably onwards. Her sleek, sensuous yet solid structure sang a Siren's song that only I could hear. "I am yours" she sighed seductively "take me now". My head swam and it took every last ounce of my willpower to pull me back to reality. "I can't" I sobbed, as I eased my credit card back into my wallet - exactly how and when it had crept into my hand I will never know - "my wife would never forgive me".

Naim Audio recently announced that their wireless all in one music system mu-so would be available through UK department store John Lewis. Only a couple of months ago I complained in these very pages that my local department store (yes, I can admit it now - it was John Lewis) stocked virtually nothing to attract a potential hifi purchaser, and now a product from one of the country's leading audio brands sits proudly, and elegantly, on their shelves. I'm not kidding myself that the two things are in any way connected.

I'm a John Lewis fan; they offer quality products at good prices and, in my experience, their customer service is second to none. I'm a Naim fan too - I have owned their amplification in the past and hope to do so again at some point in the future. The two companies would seem to be ideally suited and I



wish their partnership every success. However, I can't help wondering how many serious potential mu-so purchasers will have a bit of a fiddle with it in the store before heading off to their local hifi shop for a proper listen. The mu-so wasn't playing music when I saw it but I can't really imagine that beyond its stunning good looks it will be able to show itself off to its best advantage in the middle of the electrical department. I'll be quite happy to be proved wrong about that though.

The idea of a high quality all in one system will be a new one to many -make that most - casual shoppers. The mu-so will find itself competing directly with much cheaper offerings from Sonos among others, and customers who are unaware of what a Naim system can offer may need some considerable persuasion before they part with £895.00 for something they haven't heard properly.

That said, anything that makes high quality audio products more visible to the man, or woman, in the street is a very welcome development which can only be good for the industry and I sincerely hope that more high end audio companies take Naim's lead and help to bring a new breed of products to a new audience.



**Hifi Pig visits the Roksan premises in London, UK to find out what this legendary British company, famous initially in the mid 80s for their Xerxes has in the pipeline.**



**Words and pictures Linette and Stuart Smith**



# ROKSAN

Roksan Audio was founded in 1985 in London almost thirty years ago by two young London University graduates who happened to both be committed audiophiles and shared the same aspirational vision.

The first Roksan product was the groundbreaking Xerxes turntable, which took sub-chassis turntable design to another level and became an instant worldwide success. It subsequently went on to design and produce electronics and radical design loudspeakers then furthered its design philosophy to include more products that still retained the Roksan signature of high quality sound reproduction.

Following the new formats trend the company is now also devoting research and development into streaming and digital wireless products with particular emphasis on stylish design to complement the existing range. Roksan's mandate is to take the latest technology and better it for home audio use. For example, they were the first hi-fi company to introduce aptX into home audio products and they are currently working on further groundbreaking methods of high quality wireless audio transmission and operation for near-future products.

The obvious first product of significance is the



original Xerxes turntable. At that time, in 1985, the hi-fi market was dominated by mainly two companies - Linn and Naim. Roksan burst onto the scene with the Xerxes and very quickly the world was aware of another serious contender in the audio market.

This was followed in the next year by the original Darius, a very unique and unusual speaker design that set the benchmark of what Roksan stood for and how they intended to do things their own way and without compromise.

The first electronics were the S1, M1 and DP1 high-end amplifiers and CD Player. Again, these became classics and are still collected now for their unique 'art deco' styling and aesthetic appeal. Next up was the matching Ojan 3 and 3X and the Hot Cake speakers.

1998 saw the introduction of the first Caspian products, which significantly furthered the Of course the Xerxes turntable launched in the mid 80s is the product that launched the company's success and brought the Roksan brand name to many more people.

The company launched the Kandy in the year 2000. This was Roksan's first ever entry-level range of products and it gained international recognition for the quality of performance at its affordable price point.

The Radius 5 and Nima tonearm were launched in 2003 to great acclaim and in 2005, for the company's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the Xerxes was updated and upgraded to the Xerxes.20.

Later significant products include Roksan's flagship design products in the form of the Oxygene series, a wonderfully styled range with impeccable build and





## 2014 sees the launch of the K3 Series of products, which will fit between the K2 and M2 ranges.

designs quirks that maintain the Roksan audiophile sound combined with advanced stylistic elements – we loved the amp and CD player when we reviewed them.

The latest version of the Darius, the S1, again a loudspeaker we really enjoyed, was also launched to great reviews and praise and is widely regarded already as the greatest speaker design Roksan has conceived and built.

### Future Developments

2014 sees the launch of the K3 Series of products, which will fit between the K2 and M2 ranges. This year is incredibly exciting for Roksan and everybody involved in the company. There are also many new projects in progress and a host of new products that by their nature are sure to be popular and successful.

As well as constantly developing their more traditional products such as CD players and amplifiers, there is product development in digital streaming and future wireless source formats as we

observed when touring the factory. “These products, as always, will promise to deliver the highest possible audiophile quality for their price, along with striking design elements and superior build quality” says Tufan Hashemi, Roksans head honcho.

Meanwhile, the company is still very much involved with new analogue vinyl replay products in the form of turntables and tonearms, being fully aware of its heritage and the format’s endearing and enduring attraction to customers.





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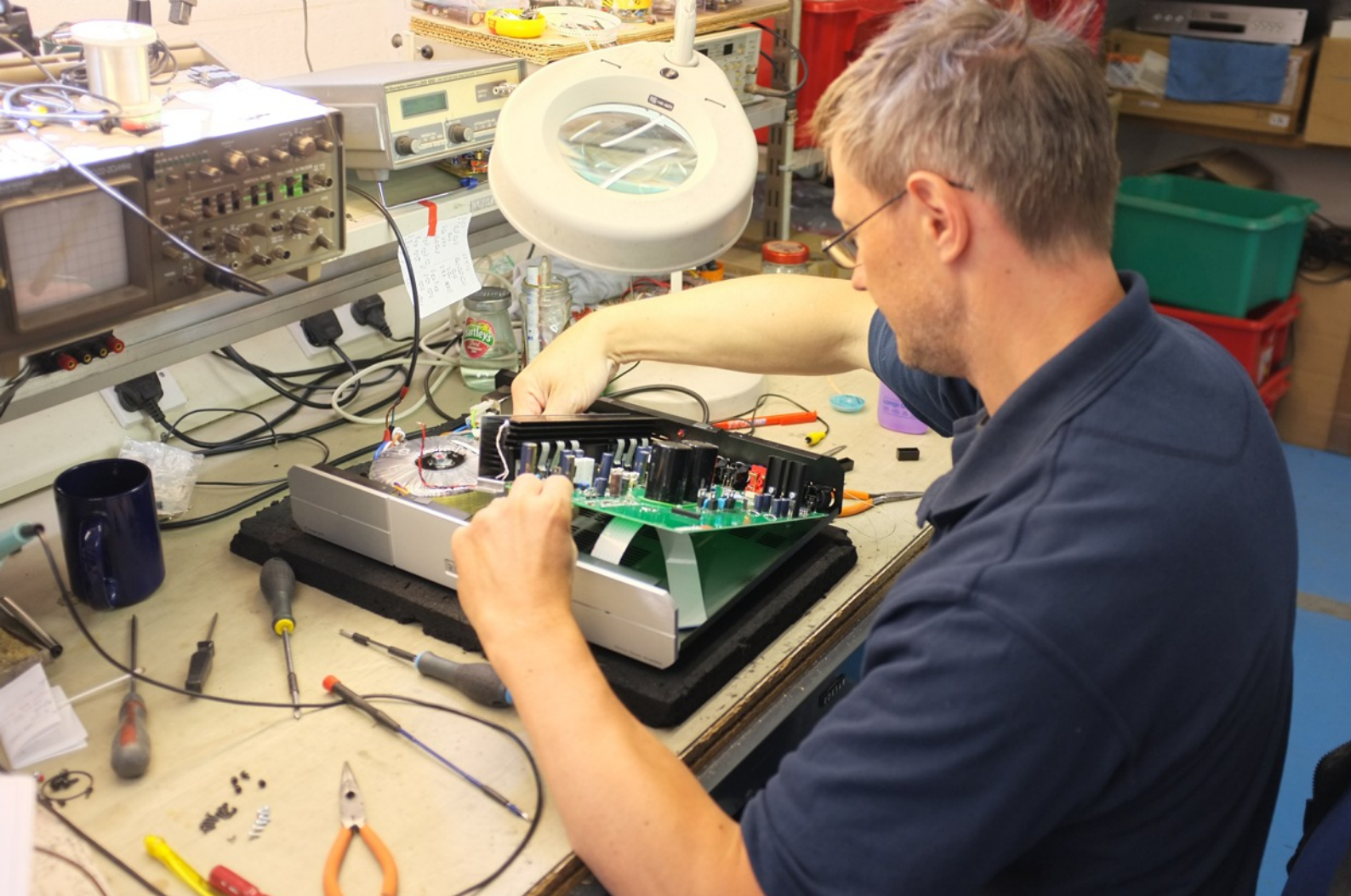
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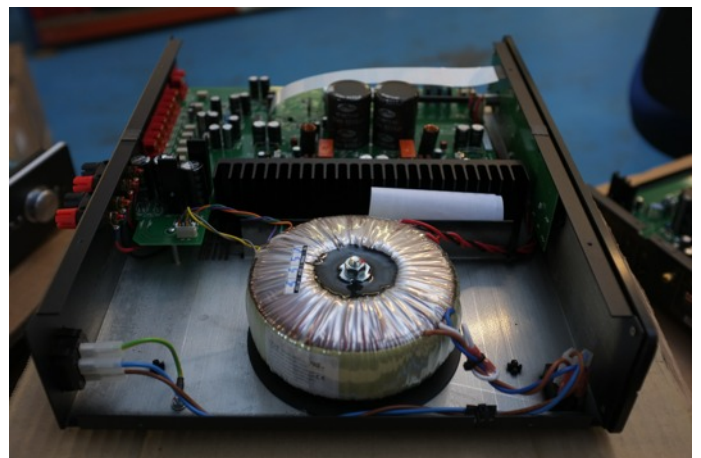
# ROKSAN







As mentioned in the brief history of the company, Roksan Audio was founded in 1985 by two dedicated audiophiles with backgrounds in engineering, business and finance. It was a combination of passion, ideas and energy that resulted in extraordinarily quick success and recognition in the audio world and I for one remember reading the magazines of the day lusting after the original Xerxes turntable – my desire was sated around twenty five years later when I bought one in a lovely rosewood finish. Consistent progress and a steadfast desire to embrace new technologies has taken Roksan to where it is now: widely regarded as one of the world's more renowned and respected Hi-Fi manufacturers and so it was with immense delight that we greeted the invitation to visit the



company earlier this year.

Of course we know the company well as they have been the sponsor of Hifi Pig's online news pages for a good time now and are always most affable company when we get to meet them at any of the hifi shows we visit.

Perhaps Roksan's best-known product and an all-time audio classic is the aforementioned Xerxes turntable but even here they have not let the grass grow beneath their feet and have developed a series of gradual upgrades and modifications. The Xerxes exists today in its latest form, the Xerxes 20 Plus and the Roksan's commitment to vinyl replay continues with the Radius 5 turntable, cartridges and a range of







innovative upgrades and accessories.

Looking around the factory with Tufan and the company's PR person Simon Pope, there are clearly defined areas for production – a handmade area where turntables and the Oxygene kit were being made, a speaker area where, needless to say loudspeakers are assembled and an electronics area. There is also an area dedicated to soak testing every piece of kit before it leaves the factory for. At this point Tufan Hashemi mentions that all the products leaving the factory have an included five year warranty and if an in-house service has been carried out a twelve month warranty is added. There is even a club they call the Cognoscenti Club where for £100 a year a consumer can send in any kit they wish to be fixed/serviced and they are given free shipping and parts at just 50% of the usual cost.

There is a clear attention to detail in the workflow and we were shown several examples of plinths for the Radius turntable that had been rejected. One of

these had just a very slight bubble in the fabric of the acrylic which was barely visible to the naked eye.

This attention to detail is carried through every stage of the construction process. PCBs are tested before any components are mounted and every single item has a "Job card" where a series of tests are ticked off and signed. The Job Card has a serial number associated with it and so every part of the production process can be traced back should there ever be an issue with a specific unit. Once a specific stage is signed off it can then move onto the next part of the process.

We were shown a number of machined knobs (made by a specialist company just around the corner) where again one example was rejected for a flaw that I simply would not have picked up on had it been attached to the finished product. Likewise, the new front panels for the K3 series were rigorously "gone over" resulting in a third of them being rejected. "One thing I'm proud of is the finishing on the panels on the K3. The finish is bespoke and available



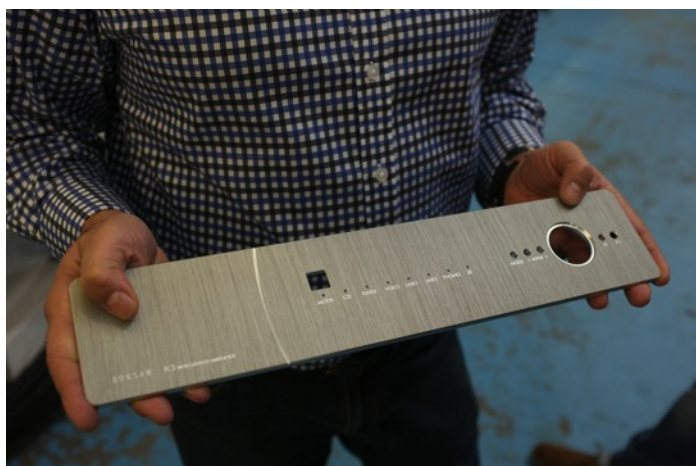
## There's clearly a lot of investment in R&D at Roksan with 21 new projects being active when we visited...

in Opium and Black Charcoal” commented Tufan. These panels are produced in Germany, but Roksan are fully committed to sourcing as much as possible from, and of course building in, the UK. Once a unit is finished it is tested on an electrical test bench and then given a sound test...carried out by a person...before its soak-test! Of course every part of this too is signed off and logged and perhaps this is why that less than 1% of units fail in the field.

The R&D department is a bit of a hot bed of activity and we were able to glimpse a few “future” products including the BLAK range which looked very much like the K3 range only bigger and bolder...you'll have to take our word for this as we weren't allowed to take photographs. The BLAK range is at the production prototype stage but we can let Hifi Pig readers know that there will be an amp, aCD Player,

a DAC, a streamer and a power amplifier. The BLAK series will utilise Aptx32i where relevant and will be modular in their construction with customers being able to preorder specific configurations. We also saw a prototype of an Oxygene DAC which Tufan claims will be “the most highly specified DAC at its price point”; He also mentioned there was still a way to go with this product but that it should be “Worldbeating”.

There's clearly a lot of investment in R&D at Roksan





with 21 new projects being active when we visited, including a new phonostage, a new speed control that will be variable to deal with the vagaries of voltage fluctuations around the world and a new tonearm called “the Pug” which will be a unipivot carbon fibre affair.

After our tour of the shopfloor we were taken to the really well appointed listening room where some of the pictures in the introduction to this article were taken... It's amazing to think that the twenty five year old DPI CD player is now selling for more than its original price. It's always difficult to assess new kit in unfamiliar surroundings, but our exclusive first listen to the K3 series was very impressive given the modest £1250 a box asking price and impressive finish.

## The Future For Roksan

The consensus here seems to be that Roksan will keep its audiophile roots but will venture into new markets. “The future of hi-fi must be going towards smaller boxes and digital” There is also a clear desire to future-proof their products and to offer a range of products affordable by a wide cross section of the

music loving public. Tufan is clearly first and foremost a passionate lover of music who just happened to get into the manufacturing game, but is resolute in looking towards innovative products that are unique and interesting propositions for the marketplace...he certainly comes across as someone who has never been a band-wagon jumper and claims that “The concept of how we listen to music has to change”

Hifi Pig would like to thank Tufan, Simon and all the Roksan team for making our journey to visit them not only very interesting but also highly entertaining.









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# Graham Audio

## LS5/9 Loudspeakers

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**The Graham Audio LS5/9 loudspeaker is a speaker built very much in the tradition of the well loved BBC monitors, indeed this is a recreation of the loudspeakers originally made by Rogers for the BBC. Being a previous employee of Aunty Beeb, who better to take a listen than Hifi Pig writer Janine Elliot.**

# Reviews

The thought of reviewing a pair of BBC speakers was, to me, like being offered a packet of jammy dodgers. Let me explain, having spent many hours, and nights, broadcasting and mixing at Her Majesty's Broadcasting Corporation (and eating jammy dodgers) I had got so accustomed to the sound it was like reliving old times when reviewing this modern incarnation.

The BBC in its heyday designed their own speakers, because no other speaker was good enough, particularly for 'speech'. When I joined the corporation as a studio manager (incidentally the same year as the LS5/9 was conceived), their premises were full of all variants of speakers designed by them, some dating back to the 1950s. There were near and far monitors numbered as LS3/ and LS5/ respectively. Generally the latter appeared in the larger studios, hence considered as "a" grade as opposed to "b" grade office speakers, where the LS3/5a were widely used. That was confusing in the LS5/12a, being the last near-field BBC speaker - the size of an LS3/5a. That one has been reborn by Spendor, but was not used much at all at the BBC. By the time BBC speakers reached the end of their broadcasting life I worked in my capacity as Resource and Development Manager to look at their replacements. In the end the BBC opted

## **The LS5/9 was a smaller loudspeaker to replace the goliath precursor LS5/8, and work began on developing this excellent speaker in 1983.**

for domestic stock Dynaudio speakers.

The LS5/9 was a smaller loudspeaker to replace the goliath precursor LS5/8, and work began on developing this excellent speaker in 1983. Regrettably it never saw service until the 90's. Harbeth later sold their own variant Monitor 30 and later still the 30.1, which is used by a number of major recording studios/professionals. Whilst the older LS5/8 was finding itself more and more unlikely to make it to the studios, and certainly the recording suite vans



and lorries, as it was too big, it could also sound too slow and lacking top end frequencies. Hence the LS5/9 was designed to match as closely as possible the "sound" of the former iconic speaker, but at 28litre much smaller than the 109litre LS5/8. Indeed, the original tweeter was identical to that in the 5/8 to aid that similarity. It also needed to have the ability to acoustically measure 100dB(A)/1m. Whereas the earlier LS3/6 and LS3/5a were 50litre and 5litre respectively, the new speaker needed to operate at a higher sound level, and be midway in cabinet volume. No mean task, and all done at only the cost of one quarter of an octave of the lowest tones of the LS5/8.

Derek Hughes, son of Spencer and Dorothy Hughes, who of course formed Spendor, was brought in to help with the Graham LS5/9 project. His dad, Spencer, had many years earlier left his job in BBC R&D to build the BC-1 after developing the LS3/6, and son Derek worked in the company, too. His experience therefore was vital in the new Graham Audio





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# Reviews

## **When testing during manufacture their objective performance is recorded for future support, and each pair is carefully matched, just like in old BBC days.**

LS5/9, in understanding the original design, and to help reinvent the original design. This was done over two years. British manufacturer Volt, who make the woofer for this incarnation worked closely with Derek to create a design similar to the original BBC 200mm unit made by Rogers, and using the same translucent polypropylene diaphragm material. The original could change its frequency curve with age, so time was spent creating a design that would last forever. The original 34mm Audax tweeter is still in production in a similar guise today, protected in a mesh housing, just as it was in the original BBC safety feature. Similarly, the speaker cabinet continues the original strategy of thin walls, largely because the BBC wanted to make them as cheaply as possible. It is important to say that it is a complicated design with bitumen damping, highly braced and with Rockwool-type insulation held together with black cloth. It is highly engineered, despite looking just like a box! The target was to create a cabinet with short resonance within a limited Q, so that resonance didn't carry across a large frequency range, as in many loudspeakers. As the original was designed for all types of music, including classical which has many small individual instrument sounds across a wide frequency bandwidth, it was important that it wasn't masked by cabinet sounds.

Whilst many within the BBC tried, and eventually won, to get rid of the 'BBC sound', including engineer and colleague Peter Thomas, who built some brilliant unusually shaped speakers using transmission line "porting", and then who left to form PMC, I still wanted to hear the traditional BBC sound. Call it 'pipe and slipper' sound, I don't mind. If anything, the

sound should be called 'Old Faithful', as will become clear throughout my spiel. The sound is very forward with a feeling of slight accentuating of mid-range, and being very easy to listen to for long periods, something which sound-engineers obviously found to be very important. Placed correctly in an isosceles triangle, slightly toed in, then these near field monitors' sound is just so right, with nothing missing or added as is the case for many expensive speakers. Indeed, one can get so used to too much top end in modern speakers that these could sound lacking. Actually, putting my meter across the output these are impressively flat, all the way to the top. At £3450 Graham Audio's remake on the theme is very reasonably priced for the sound you get and for me certainly an incredibly cheap revisit down memory lane for my days at Aunty. It can be bought with a tidy looking heavy, and typically BBC, metal stand at an extra cost, which ensures it is the correct height and is securely held.

During this test, I brought out in tribute my own LS3/5a and Spendor BC1 (closely connected with the LS3/6, but that's for another day). I always found the Spendor had a highly coloured mid frequency, and this was particularly evident testing now up against the Graham model. The aged speaker felt overworked and fragile in comparison, plus, as an early variant I was worried in case I over-drove it, so I therefore decided to mod the internal wiring with silver cabling and add, after a few calculations, a uniquely designed  $3.75" \text{ length}/2" \text{ diameter}$  port, rather than the simplistic "hole of hope" on the original. What an improvement. I'll share my design with you all soon.

Back to the Graham Audio. When testing during manufacture their objective performance is recorded for future support, and each pair is carefully matched, just like in old BBC days. The model is made from birch plywood and available in 3 finishes. It has a magnificently built enclosure in cherry, rosewood and ebony maccasa. Whilst many might laugh today at building a traditionally shaped box speaker, favouring something with curves, carbon, plastic, glass or perhaps with a baffle and no enclosure, this one really does work, and you get a piece of acoustic history thrown in. The box is critically braced in a different way to that of the original BBC model. The speaker is single-wired, and it has a 1dB adjustment panel for the tweeter level, but this is factory set.



This is done to account for minor variations in the tweeter design.

I found the speaker to work better with the front grille removed, which was easily done, since it is cleverly held on magnetically (not on the original LS5/9s, I might add). I found it happier playing classical and jazz music, being a wee stodgy on some of the pop music I played, especially when loud. Naim's 'True Stereo' CD with its uncluttered and unprocessed recording was just that; it sounded just as the engineer would have wanted it to come across to the listener, relaxed and not rushed. The flutes, whistle, guitars and drum in Mark Knopfler's vinyl album "Get Lucky" were all clear but very, very, powerful at the same time, largely because the sound was forward. For me, being used to soundstage behind the speakers, these monitors could perhaps be tiring if listening to at recording studio levels - which is what I wanted to do, all the time. At low and normal levels nothing stuck out, and bass was punchy like the drinking-straw-tuned bass ports in those Meridian M2 powered speakers, from 30 years ago. Many speakers fail miserably at low level. These certainly didn't. When going back to my reference Wilson Benesch Arcs, suddenly the sound went back to third gear as the soundstage disappeared behind the speakers and the lower octave needed support from the Torus infrasonic generator. Eagle's 'Long Road out of Eden' was so in control; the sweet vocals contrasted the punchy drum 4 beat in 'I don't want to Hear Anymore'. Ironically I *did* want to hear more, and whilst I was reliving my BBC past, I wondered why the world had ever advanced from NICAM and flared trousers. Both were statements of their time. These speakers were a statement of quality, and of a time when things ran a little slower and more relaxed. These speakers did the same for me; nothing was hurried, and all the music showed total command. For example, 'A Taste of Honey' from Patricia Barber's 'Cafe Blue' has a relaxing but informative lilt. This was how life should have sounded. The depth in recording was absolutely right; being forward speakers didn't mean the sound was two dimensional. I was amongst the musicians, not sitting back in the 10<sup>th</sup> row. These speakers are, however, like Marmite. You will either love them or not. They are worthy of a listen to fully appreciate just how good sound used to be.



The soundstage has an exceptional stereo spread, and with its clear but polite footprint it can make any music sound pleasurable, whether driven from my Krell, Roksan, Musical Fidelity, Leak, Sony, or anything else I threw at it. It works best on understated amplifiers, though whatever I connected to it gave a really accurate reading of the music. Compressed music sounded compressed, and real vinyl sounded, well, real. Whilst I perhaps would have preferred Scanspeak tweeters, doing so would render this speaker a fraud, and hence not a LS5/9, and ultimately not get that BBC accreditation. And it gets better, Graham Audio will be releasing their 21<sup>st</sup> Century LS5/8 in November.

In conclusion, this is one hell of a good speaker, and one which is so hard to evaluate. With my BBC hat off this time, I have thought much about the sound as well as build. Indeed, it is incredibly well made and boxed, and gives an equally good and honest musical rendering, though it can sound a bit boring with certain music. This is not a criticism, as there was nothing missing; it was just honest, something we are just not used to in many speakers. I was no longer listening to speakers. I was listening to the musicians, or the singers, or the spoken voice, just as the BBC sound engineers, myself included, would have needed to hear. Forget all those fancy boxes or new technologies. It was all right, back in 1983, and it's still all right now.

**Janine Elliot**

**Sound Quality – 8.5/10**

**Value for Money – 8.6/10**

**Build Quality – 8.6/10**

**Overall 8.57/10**

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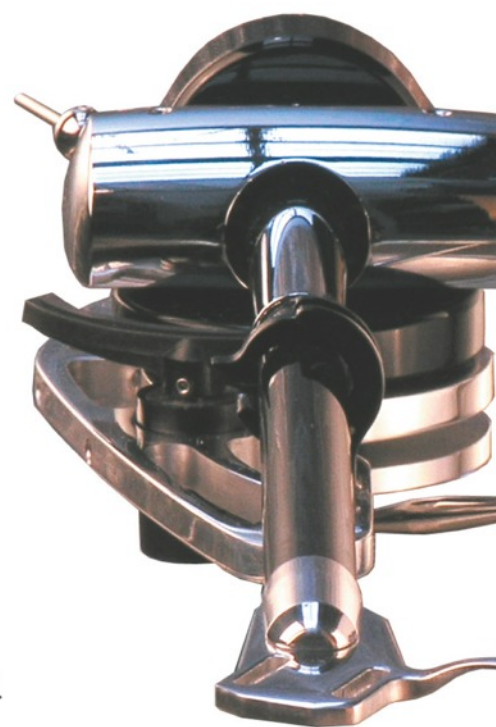


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# SLIC Innovations - Eclipse C RCA Interconnects

Dan Worth



£492



Virtually every manufacturer on earth believes that their cables are the next innovation in sound reproduction - enhancing dynamics, detail retrieval and giving a soundstage which sits in the darkest of backgrounds etc....you all know where I'm coming from.

On one hand we all like to have some sort of understanding of material choice, dielectric properties, geometry and whatever other technology may have gone into the extensive (or not) R&D that has been put into the cables which we purchase for our systems. It does add to that 'pride of ownership factor' and also allows us to make judgments on silver vs copper and other influences which we may be aware of that can influence system performance.

Some manufacturers, TQ come to mind, simply have a reputation based on market and consumer reviews - the tried and tested method rather than attempting to sell their products to you on specifications, keeping the construction of the cables close to their chest.

Well, SLIC Innovations Eclipse C is a cable which falls into this category - in the sense that any construction methods and materials used are not published, leaving the raw experience of the cable to the

**An interesting aspect for me is that I was made aware that the cable is of a design built from the ground up, taking the design back to basics, attempting to eliminate crosstalk to its very minimum and patents have been since granted for the design.**

listener, no preconceived ideas or notions on how said conductor in such a geometry with such dielectric should perform. Risky? For a new company I'd say so!

The trick is finding an established outlet which can market the cable and get it into the public eye, this is where MCRU have stepped in. David Brook strongly



## **SLIC has a way of addressing every detail so that it is apparent in the mix, yet isn't as emphatically displayed, adding a more natural listen to the sound...**

believed in the performance of the cable known in short as 'SLIC' and after a friend of mine listened to one and brought it over to me I also had the chance to appraise it.

An interesting aspect for me is that I was made aware that the cable is of a design built from the ground up, taking the design back to basics, attempting to eliminate crosstalk to its very minimum and patents have been since granted for the design. It's refreshing for me to be able to test a cable such as this that doesn't simply use an off the reel, standard RG cable or a cable made for industrial use, adopting its application to hifi.

### **The Sound**

On first listening I didn't think wow this is exceptionally good, but after spending an hour or so with SLIC I asked if the cable could be left with me so I could

do some serious listening on my own in my own time.

The reason being and what did draw me in (even though my friend and I were discussing HiFi a fair bit, not always ideal when ascertaining the performance of a product when in company) was the great deal of texture and the unforced relaxed nature that SLIC presented.

I talk so much about the initial 'wow factor' of products and how many of us can be drawn in and subsequently make wrong decisions when buying equipment or accessories, later to find that during long listening sessions the music falls apart.

When I had my first evening with the Eclipse C I had that initial first impression again that maybe the sound was a little relaxed, now I wouldn't say coloured or masked but a little lacking in excitement.

Once the amps had truly warmed through and I was confident that the sound was as it should be I put on the new Ed Sheeran album 'X'; the album is very acoustic in nature and there needs to be good transparency to the system to really expose Ed's vocal and all the texture of his guitar.

To say I got totally immersed in each performance is somewhat of an understatement, I really enjoy this album and have spent many a long nights with it being part of the playlist. This evening I had the pleasure of hearing it in a slightly different way.

Normally Ed's voice has an upper midrange vibrancy, tonight there was more of a depth of clarity, as if his voice had been warmed up for longer before he came on stage and just effortlessly put across his lyrics. Texture to the lower end of the vocal was also very well conveyed, equally too was instrument timbre, giving an extremely organic feel to the album.

SLIC has a way of addressing every detail so that it is apparent in the mix, yet isn't as emphatically displayed, adding a more natural listen to the sound which really doesn't get appreciated until you have sat down relaxed, cleared your mind and just listen to the music rather than the system.

Another favourite of mine is the 'Moonstruck' album by Chris Jones - if you have noticed I am talking about albums here rather than individual tracks. This is simply the way the Eclipse C has played out with me this evening, I'm not just listening to my refer-



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ence songs I'm playing whole albums and enjoying every minute.

There are many passages in the album which has those little small breaks and silences - which leaves the listener semi expectant on the next note even though the album is well known and has been played many times. An older gentlemen friend of mine once commented when listening to classical one afternoon 'it's the silences which give this piece substance', I forget what we were listening to now as I'm not a big classical fan but it's very true. SLIC allows for spatial cues and pauses to really become more emotionally connective.

**The Eclipse C throughout all my time with it always produced a good solid soundstage with a depth that came from its robust way of dealing with upper frequencies.**

SLIC does background silence, darkness and depth incredibly well and is one its top features for sure. The decay of Chris Jones guitar or Nils Lofgrens on the 'Acoustic Live' album is simply wonderful, a textured note just fades into the darkness for a brief second as the next begins with body and control to its leading edge.

Leading edges on all aspects of what SLIC conveys is just solid and falls into fully fleshed out and unforced delicacies which has you sinking further and further into the sofa and that bottle of wine on the table, never realising that your actually listening about 30% louder than usual.

There is so little grain and mush to the sound. If a good cable is like a windbreaker at the beach than the Eclipse C is a brick wall. It does take a little bit of time to appreciate the difference between SLIC and what has been previously used as its rendition of top edges is very different, yet I argue with myself still now that I just can't be so bold as to say it's attenuated in any way. My Roksan Darius S1 speaker review reflects on the presentation in a similar manner, simply put - it's very clever.

During my late night listening tests and being fortunate enough that my current neighbours are very good and don't have children I was quite surprised that I had reached such volumes and was still not offended by any brightness or hardness from my ceramic drivers. So I started to play with the volume knowingly.

The Eclipse C throughout all my time with it always produced a good solid soundstage with a depth that came from its robust way of dealing with upper frequencies. Increasing the volume a good bit higher than what I had been listening to which was already louder than ordinary. The cable notably helped to retain the stability to the soundstage to a point where room interaction was clearly the discerning factor with a build up of bass boom in an alcove to the left front. SLIC itself held the music together and never collapsed in on itself becoming less explanatory, confused or inject unwanted nasties into the dark background it portrayed even under pressure from busier music at higher volume levels.

## Conclusion

I must say that at first I wasn't overly impressed with the Eclipse C from SLIC Innovations, although it's organic texture warranted me to explore it further and I'm glad I did.

What I found was a clever, astute and personable take on the sound that drew me in and represented itself to me as a cable that can truly produce no frills music which in the long term was more engaging, exciting and tempting than many cables ive heard. Reproducing the body of the music rather than the top and bottom edge of a recreated note or vocal is where the Eclipse C is fascinating. There is true substance to music with the aid of SLIC in a system and that comment probably describes it best.

## Dan Worth

**Build Quality - 8.3/10**

**Sound Quality - 8.7/10**

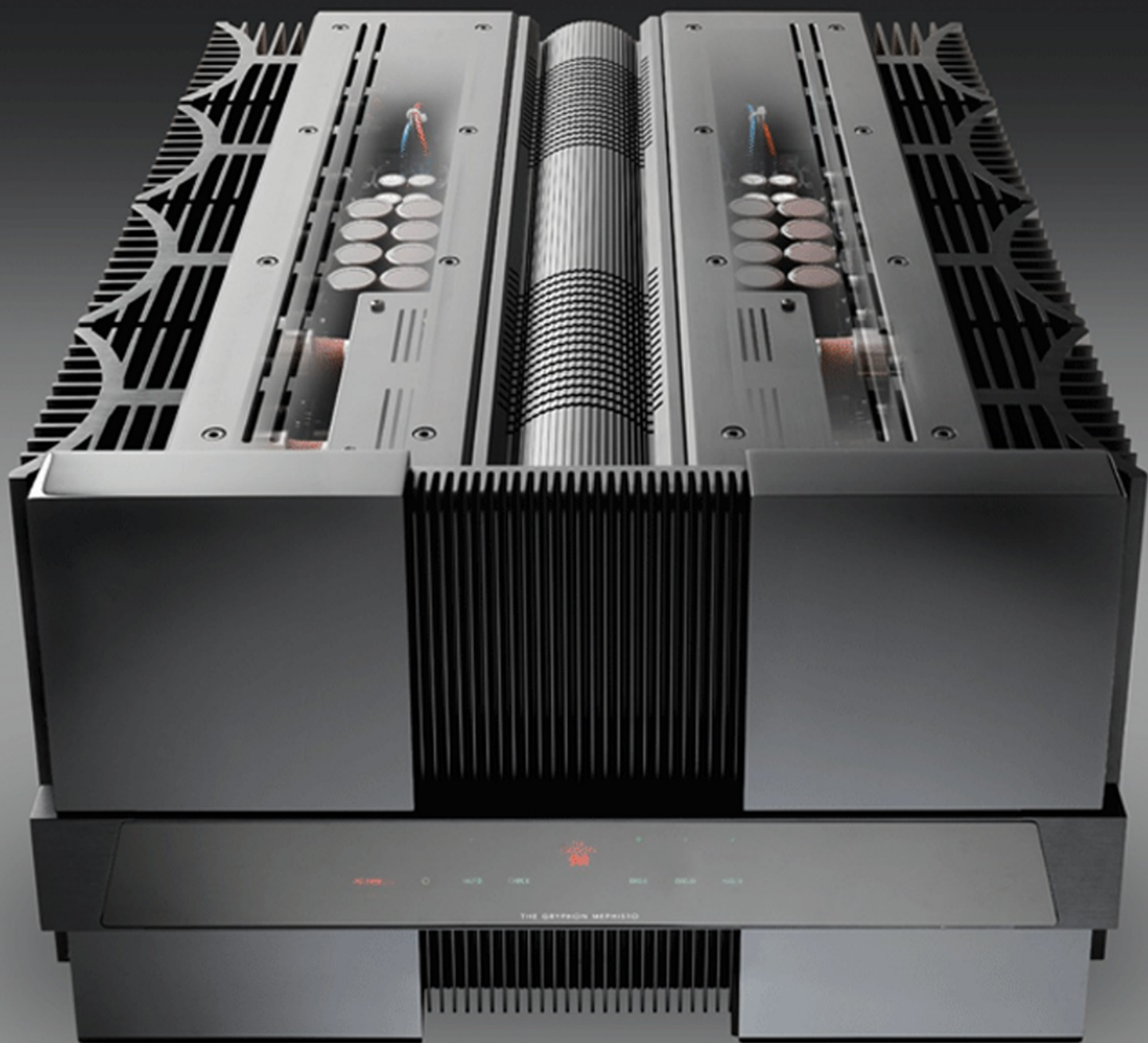
**Value For Money - 8.1/10**

**Overall - 8.36/10**

**Price at time of testing £492 for a 1m Pair**

**Recommended - for being the undercard that wins the race. A textured, grain free musical cable that does excitement without all the bells and whistles.**

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# Triangle Signature Alpha Loudspeakers

**Hugely well known and respected in their home country of France, Triangle make loudspeakers to suit most pockets. Here Stuart smith takes a listen to the company's signature Alphas.**



**£6800**



I've always enjoyed Triangle loudspeakers ever since I first heard a pair on the end of some valve amps at an enthusiasts hifi show about four or five years ago. Since then I've had the opportunity to hear several more pairs including the range topping Magellans and have never been disappointed with their sonic abilities. I also like the ethos of the company; they're inclusive and as well as having the relatively mega-bucks Magellans, they have the cool, funky and very affordable Color range and several ranges in-between to suit all pockets. Triangle loudspeakers, in France at least, are available not only in the rarefied atmosphere of the high-end retailer, but also in more down to earth "high-street" outlets.

Here for review we have the top of the Signature range, the Alpha, which is certainly an impressive looking three-way loudspeaker. It stands 1.3M high, has three fibre glass bass drivers, a paper cone mid-range driver and Triangle's die-cast aluminium horn tweeter which sports a 2mm titanium dome originally developed for the Magellan. The Alpha has a front firing port, a nominal impedance of 8 Ohms (down to a minimum of 3.3) and a sensitivity of 92dB. For the duration of this review I've been using our Tellurium Q Iridium that gives out around 17 Class A Watts per channel.

The review pair arrived in white in very substantial and well thought out packaging that is certainly a two man job to get the speakers out of. In the box is a cleaning cloth, a pair of white gloves, a very basic but detailed enough owner's manual, a warranty coupon and a little metal key device that I never really found a use for. Set up and placement is a doddle with the Alphas having a substantial plinth of their own built in, with an adjustable footer at the front to change the angle the speakers point in. The Signature Alphas are stable enough on the floor and should be safe enough should you have small children running around. Around the back are some very high quality and simple to use binding posts – two pairs to allow for bi-amping or bi-wiring.

The Signature Alphas proudly sport a "Handcrafted in France" plaque and the whole of the Signature range is conceived, designed and implemented in France at the company's facility in Soissons. The cabinets themselves are constructed from seven high density fibreboards of 3mm each which are press bent to shape and bonded to give an overall thickness of 21mm. The knuckle rap test has the cabinets

**I must confess that this review has been a long time coming as I know that once it's published the Signature Alphas will be winging their way back to Triangle...I've really enjoyed my time with them....**

sounding pretty much dead which is reassuring. The finish on the speakers is really rather nice and blemish free. They're a big speaker but they're pretty narrow so they don't dominate the room and the cabinet itself bows in the middle making the narrower at the front and back than they are at the sides – have a look at the pictures to see what I mean.



## Sound

Upon plugging the Signature Alphas in for the first time I have to say that I was a little underwhelmed at what I was hearing. There was a feeling that the Alphas were constrained and closed in and they certainly sounded nothing like I've heard Triangle loudspeakers sound before. A distributor friend who knew the Triangles were arriving for review phoned





and asked what I thought of them and I said at the time that I thought they sounded pretty dull and lacklustre. However, I kept playing the speakers and they do loosen up and start to sound better (*lots*) pretty quickly. With this in mind I'd suggest that straight out of the box you are not getting the real deal from these speakers and it is worth spending a little time banging some tunes through them for a few days before really starting to listen with anything like a critical ear. To temper this paragraph I must confess that this review has been a long time coming as I know that once it's published the Signature Alphas will be winging their way back to Triangle...I've really enjoyed my time with them.

For the duration of their stay here at Hifi Pig the speakers have been set up in our main living space, well away from side walls and back walls and toed in towards the listening position. To be fair to these loudspeakers they have been pretty unfussy with regards to positioning, but they do prefer to have a little space around them. The best seat in the house obviously gives you the best soundstaging and there is a pretty narrow window here, but off axis listening is pretty enjoyable too.

Once the speakers have had time to loosen up for a few days the first thing that hit me was how much like the Magellans they sound. They're perhaps not perhaps as ultimately sophisticated and refined as their bigger siblings, but there is definitely a family sound going on here – lively and dynamic - which I really enjoyed.

At lower volumes and listening to Massive Attack's Blue Lines record there is a really nice and energetic feel to the sound with the Signature Alphas. Nothing is overly emphasised or over done as can sometimes be the case with some loudspeakers, as if they are

trying to over compensate for something being lacking at low volumes. Crank the volume up and you simply get the same feeling only louder. Stereo image is solid and whilst it is not as wide as some, it is still very good front to back. Bass extension is good and low with good control and even with the bass heavy Blue Lines there is never a feeling of boom or their being too much of the lower frequencies, which can lead to a mushy and uninvolved listen with some loudspeakers.

At higher frequencies there's sparkle and shimmer to the hats and I think this is a positive aspect of the Signature Alphas – chatting with some people there was a couple of folk who suggested the Triangle sound was over the top at higher frequencies, but I just don't get this accusation in any way! To me this alleged "over the topness" is just that they are experiencing more high frequency information and as such more detail across the board than they are used to .

The Signature Alphas have a big sound that at the same time has poise and balance which when combined with their speed and excitement makes for a toe tapping listening experience.

**There is a naturalness to the instruments, with huge amounts of detail being brought out of the recording across the spectrum...**

Flipping over to the recently released Cheek to Cheek by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga (a great album with a classic big band sound) you really get a sense of this being a live orchestra playing in front of you, albeit on a slightly diminished stage. On the tune Anything Goes you are presented with the band positioned behind the vocalists with each of the individual sections and instruments being easy to pull out of the mix. Drums are tight which add to the great timing and feeling of rhythm and pace that these speakers add to proceedings. On the vocal, which here is slightly forward sounding, there is a good insight into the little inflections and intonations of the singers' voices – Lady Gaga has a great jazz vocal style by the way!

# Reviews

I did find myself reaching for harder dance music like the stuff that Bonzai used to put out and the Triangles do this style with aplomb – the sound is perhaps a tad more refined than is absolutely necessary for this style of tune but the speakers' punchiness, oomph and slam really do play to the strengths of this genre.

Switching back to real instruments such as with Goblin's *Beyond The Darkness* and there is a naturalness to the instruments with huge amounts of detail being brought out of the recording across the spectrum. I do think the horn tweeter employed in these speakers is responsible for much of this apparent detail and resolution. Much in the same way that a super tweeter adds space and airiness to a loudspeaker, the tweeter on the Signature Alphas adds something that

through the mix to appear more prominent, but without overshadowing the rest of the instrumentation.

## Conclusion

As previously mentioned, I kept hold of the Signature Alphas for a long time and so thanks to Triangle for their understanding. Truth is I could have had this review finished a good month or so ago, but I really have enjoyed my time with them so much I didn't want to give them back with any haste.

The speakers as reviewed are hugely entertaining in a dynamic and punchy sense, with an ability to bounce along through tunes in a fashion that is sure to get your feet tapping to the music, but that is only really half the story with the Signature Alphas. As well as this punchiness you also get the impression that this is a really refined speaker that can do subtlety too. I'm really inclined to say that these offer a good deal of what the big Magellans bring to the party at a fraction of the cost... and that is high praise indeed.

The Signature Alphas don't prefer one genre over another and are equally happy to pump out techno as they are to playing more subtle music and this is a good thing for those with a wide taste in music.

On the negative side the casing which covers the tweeter (the bit that sits on the top of the speaker) is a bit "just stuck on" and I'm not a huge fan of the driver surrounds or the plasticky bass port (*you can cover the fronts with the grilles but I didn't even have them out of the protective covering*), but then round the back the plate for speaker binding posts and the posts themselves are amongst the best I've seen... Overall fit and finish is very good other than my issues with the casing for the tweeter and given the finishes available there will be a style to suit most tastes.

**Stuart Smith**

**Build Quality - 8.25/10**

**Sound Quality - 8.5/10**

**Value For Money - 8.15/10**

**Overall – 8.3**

**Price as reviewed £ 6800**

**Recommended for listeners looking for a serious loudspeaker that delivers excitement and subtlety in equal measure when needed.**



is indefinable but effective. On the Goblin record there is a tune called Trumpet's Flight, which needless to say has a trumpet featuring as the main instrument, and the Triangles allow this instrument to cut



# SKOGRAND CABLES

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# Beyerdynamic T 51 i Headphones

Stuart smith



**Hifi Pig**

**RECOMMENDED**

**£246**

**H**ifi Pig recently reviewed the T1 headphones from Beyerdynamic and liked them a great deal and so I was curious when we were sent the £246 (279 EUR) T 51i on ear headphones from the company.

I'll not repeat the preamble in the previous review other than to say I've been a fan of Beyerdynamic

for a good while and have used their cans at home and in the studio in the past.

In the box you get a nice and compact nylon fabric carry case which looks rugged enough to pop in your hand luggage when travelling, but is small enough to carry about in its own right too. As well as the carry case you get an instruction manual, a male to female



minijack cable (I wasn't sure of the use for this I'm afraid) and a doodad for using the headphones on planes. The T 51is are clearly meant for portable use and the permanently attached cable has (*lost on me*) in-line controls and mic for your iPhone 3GS or later, iPad, iPod touch 2<sup>nd</sup> generation or later, iPod Classic and 4<sup>th</sup> generation or later iPod nano; this cable is a good length (1.2m) - short enough to not get tangled, but long enough to reach your media player in your pocket. Also labelled on the pack is a quarter



inch adapter but this was missing from the supplied headphones.

The construction of the T 51is is pretty straightforward and they look minimal and quite stylish, but I don't know if they will appeal to the youth given their distinct lack of blinginess....though I like their understated aesthetic a good deal.

The headband is metal and padded with a thin cushioning... as are the cans themselves. Despite their relatively modest padding the T51is are very comfortable indeed and easy to wear for extended periods without experiencing any aches or pains. They also fit on the ear with very little pressure and so are very comfortable in this respect, though they also feel surprisingly secure in the headshake test.

The German made T 51is are marketed as a "premium portable headphone" and utilise the same Tesla technology as their bigger T1 siblings. They have a closed design with an impedance of 32 Ohms and weigh in at just 174g.

Although clearly a headphone for the portable market I used them pretty much exclusively with my little day to day desk set up of Schiit Modi and Magni being fed with FLACs from JRiver Media Centre.

## The Sound

The first thing I noticed when popping these cans on my head was just how comfortable they are and how much isolation to the outside world they provide allowing you to really get lost in the music. Being closed back they also isolate folk on the outside from your music, which is a good thing for those wanting a set of cans for on the go.

Popping on Neil Young's Harvest album there's clearly an endearing quality to these headphones from the outset. The opening lines of Out On the Weekend have the bass nice, punchy and tight and with enough detail in the mix coming through – there's a reverb on Young's voice that's easily lost, but here it's pretty much all there. There's nothing in the mix shouting out "Listen to me, listen to me" and as such, on this kind of material, they are even-handed and quite a smooth sounding headphone. Given their diminutive size I'd expected these cans to sound closed in but they're really not at all – they have a good and wide soundstage that sounds natural and unexaggerated. Some will prefer a more artificial sounding soundstage, but I like this naturalness to the

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# Reviews

image. This naturalness of the sound was a feature of the more expensive T1s too and Beyerdynamic must be congratulated on this.

**They are comfortable, light, easy to pack away and offer pretty good value for money I'd say.**

Given the recent death of LFOs Mark Bell I thought it fitting to virtually reach for Bjork's Homogenic record on which Bell collaborated. Here the (easily overdone) electronic, low-bass notes are again tight, taut and enjoyable if a little more pronounced than other frequencies. There's reasonable insight into the recording again and whilst I'd not be comfortable doing a mix on these cans, they offer a standard of reproduction, detail and openness that is very good for their price-point. Again it's clear that there is no one part of the frequency spectrum being pushed to the fore, though arguably they do err on the side of bass a tad.

The Ship Of Fools' record Let's Get This Mother Outta Here goes on next, a sort of space rock/psychedelic album, and again there is an even handedness to the sound these little cans produce. There's a little harshness (perhaps breakup would be a better word) at the very top end of the frequencies, but the music bounces along in a highly enjoyable fashion that is a great deal of fun to listen to. There's not the refinement of the T1s, or other more costly headphones for that matter, but these are a hoot to listen to and for the money there's very little to moan about. There's good dynamics and punchiness and I could easily see me using these as my go to headphones of choice whilst traveling given their diminutive size and big sound, though I enjoyed them most when turned up loud rather than at low volumes.

On female vocals such as Lucinda Williams (Happy Woman Blues) the mids are nice and open with a little drift from overall neutrality and a slight warmth which I enjoyed and which made for an easy and non-fatiguing listen.

Time and time again though I kept going for the harder techno and dance tracks which really play to

the strengths of these cans - low and tight bass with reasonable if not perfect fidelity at the top end of things, but that's not to say they will only appeal to the bootsncats (*bootsncats n bootsncats*) brigade...there is enough detail and finesse here to satisfy listeners of more sedate music too.

## Conclusion

Given the asking price of these little headphones there's not a great deal to criticise if truth be known and a good deal to praise.

Build quality is reasonable, if a little utilitarian and sound-wise you are presented with a nicely balanced feel that is slightly on the warm side of neutral. Bass extension is good and not too over blown and whilst at the very top end of the frequency range things can become a little unstuck, it would be churlish to moan excessively.

They are comfortable, light, easy to pack away and offer pretty good value for money I'd say. No, they are not in the same league as the likes of the [Audeze](#) and [Oppos](#) of this world, or even [Beyerdynamic T1s](#), but they offer a great deal of enjoyment for relatively little outlay. Of course the T 51s have their limitations and aren't the last word in being totally neutral (they're not a monitoring headphone) and they're not bad at all on a wide range of music, but particularly I enjoyed these when banging out techno at loud volume.

The question is could I use these on a daily basis and the answer has to be a resounding yes when they are used as cans for on the go. In the home I think the majority of readers would want something more sophisticated/neutral tonally, but if you are looking for a reasonably priced out and about headphone that you may use occasionally in the home, then these little Beyerdynamics offer a great compromise.

**Stuart Smith**

**Sound – 8.10**

**Comfort – 8.05**

**Fit and finish – 8.0**

**Value – 8.30**

**Overall – 8.11**

**Recommended for users looking for a good sounding, reasonably priced headphone that is genuinely portable but that can be used for the occasional listen at home.**

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# Blue Horizon Proburn Cable Burn-In and Conditioning Machine

Dan Worth



£695



The theory goes that the material touching the conductor, the dielectric, has an effect on the performance of a cable and this has been noted from very soon after the introduction of radio and the widespread use of conducting cables. In the past there was much speculation as to why this should be the case, but the work of Nickola Tesla in the latter part of the 19th century provided the answer when he passed very high voltages and frequencies (around 2000Hz) through a human with no ill effects. This phenomena is known as the 'skin' effect and is essentially the signal passing over the skin and not through the person.

It is said that cable can act in a similar fashion and that high frequencies will be passed along the surface of the wire and will avoid the inner parts of the wire. This means that in a cable used in your hifi system, it is not only the purity of the conductor that has an effect but also the wrapping/dielctric that is used. The Blue Horizon website states "However, the manufacturing process creates tension, stress and static charges between the conductor and dielectric, and the resulting deleterious effects remain permanent unless properly dealt with". It is widely

**In my experience it can take months of use before a cable reaches its optimum potential and the reason put forward by Blue Horizon is that the music we listen to has very little high-frequency energy and as such its ability to improve a cable's performance is limited.**

# Reviews

accepted (and I've certainly experienced the effect) that sound, be it the music you listen to on a daily basis or carefully generated frequencies played through your rig (such as from a burn in CD), will improve a cable's performance over time. Blue Horizon claim that this method of burn-in is fundamentally flawed given the lack of high-frequency content being fed through the cable.

In my experience it can take months of use before a cable reaches its optimum potential and the reason put forward by Blue Horizon is that the music we listen to has very little high-frequency energy and as such its ability to improve a cable's performance is limited. Blue Horizon also claim that the limited bandwidth of the achieved recording when played on CD is only about 20kHz at best and, by extrapolation of their theory, normal music, or dedicated burn in CDs, will never allow a cable to achieve its full potential.

Time is of course a major issue for a person such as myself who may have any number of cables in for review at one time and so I'd been on the look-out for a product or doodad that could:

1. Speed up the time it takes for a cable to "burn in"
2. Improve on the results achieved by playing music/burn in CDs alone

Both these are claims made by Blue Horizon for the £695 Proburn.

## **The Proburn in use.**

What did I think of the performance after use?

Since having the Proburn here I have used it to burn in many cables that have come in for review, shaving weeks or even months off what a cable can potentially take to fully settle in and sound at its peak performance. How do I know this?

After using Proburn on XLR, RCA and Speaker Cables the most obvious experiment for me to undertake was to place each set of conditioned cables into my system again and then to leave them in with music playing as much as possible for a further week to see if their character improved further.

Placing the cables in fresh from burn in showed usual improvements which one would expect to hear after a good amount of time of usage. Bass was more fleshed out and had better extension, mids became

fuller and vocals gained presence. Top end clarity was less grainy, more airy and controlled.

Now I hear you say - How can you be so distinctive about a cable which you have only know for a very short period?

**The differences really weren't subtle, the performance of the cables were significantly improved.**

As mentioned before, I left each of the pairs of cables in my system for a week after burning and I honestly didn't notice any further improvements, I actually just moved on to completing the reviews for the said cables after a few days as the sound seemed so consistent.

I'm just an Audiophile, so what can Proburn do for me?

Moving on to what I believe is the stronger point of usage for the general consumer and enthusiast - System Enhancing.

My everyday interconnects are the Oriton Orange Symphony and the TQ Black Diamond. The Orange Symphony have been in my system for around a year and the TQ's a couple months. The Oritons have just been used in my system from new and the TQ's had a week on their own cable burning in machine before I received them.

So, I popped the Oriton interconnects onto the Proburn for a period of 24 hours. Plugging them back into the system I wasn't that optimistic to be honest and thought that if there was a couple percent improvement in performance then I would be extremely happy - a couple of percent in this game can cost a considerable amount!

The differences really weren't subtle, the performance of the cables were significantly



improved. The weight of bass notes was the first aspect which struck me. Bottom end notes were much of more expressively extended and fleshed out the midrange in a way that didn't ever tip towards overbearing in any way, just lend their hand to a new found confidence to the overall sound.

Midrange clarity stood firm and pronounced against this new found body and also seemed as if it had a step forward in performance. Treble articulation and sparkle raised an eyebrow or two also. Top end extension seemed to grow and dictated a command to the sound from the peak of the mountain right down to its depths of the valley floor.

All these aspects in culmination increased dynamic shifts, exposure to micro details and smaller nuances as well as conveying a hint more of emotional palpability during some of my very favourite performances.

The TQ black Diamonds were up next. I gave them the same 24 hour burn in time as I did the Oritons. Plugged them back into the system and, er... they sounded the same as before. Geoff Merrigan had left

them on his own cable burning machine just 7-8 weeks earlier for a week.

Would I have liked to get an improvement from the process? Of course, we always want better for our systems but I guess the experiment confirms that burning in cables on a dedicated machine makes bigger improvements in performance than general can.

**Dan Worth**

**I'm not going to score the Proburn but I am going to highly recommend it. In my experience, any cable that the Blue Horizon Proburn can accommodate will no doubt benefit from its extensively wide bandwidths of signal frequencies to bring them up to their full potential.**

Note:

It's been recommended by Blue Horizon to repeat a 24 hour conditioning period every 6 months or so along with cleaning cable plugs and sockets for positive effects.

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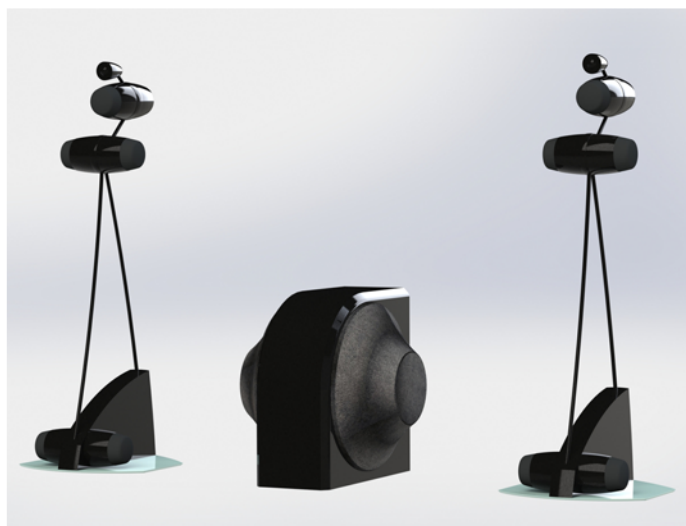
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The two 9' drivers, loaded by 16L volume inside the box, work together to displace exactly the same volume of air in amplitude and in phase as the two 15' would in open air, i.e., making them work as they were in an infinite volume.

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

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

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# Dan Worth **Checks Out the LH Labs Geek Out 1000 Portable Headphone Amplifier and DAC**



**\$299**



**F**ollowing on from last months Headphone Special you were warned that we had even more to come...

The world of audio is going crazy currently over a few things, the vinyl revival is one, computer based audio is another and portable headphone amplifiers is right up there with the latest must haves of consumers wanting the best discrete sound for their high quality music downloads.

Take a bow the Geek Out 1000 which combines a portable headphone amplifier and a HD High Resolution DAC in one dinky little device.

The Geek Out 1000 arrived this week in a nicely designed box with good artwork and inside was another

box which resembles a necklace case with soft foam inserts cut out perfectly for the Geek itself, the umbilical cord (a USB A female to USB A male) and a small nylon drawstring pouch.

The Geek 1000 is the most powerful of the three offerings from LH Labs boasting 1 whole watt of Pure Class A Amplification which in headphone terms that's a lot of welly! It's recommended that if your headphones are over 100ohm to choose this model for the best performance.

Each of the models are constructed with an aluminium body and comes in a range of stylish colours, the review sample is in anodised red and looked pretty cool.

# Reviews

The unit has only two buttons on it, used for volume and 3D mode. For 3D mode simply press both together. Both buttons are different to the touch with the down volume having a recessed dip to its centre and the up volume a raised bit - a very thoughtful touch making it easy to determine which button is which. It's unsurprising that such a simple little thought has been included as LH Labs strictest policy is listening to their customers and producing products which they really want, suggest and give input towards. Common sense you say? Of course! But you will be surprised at how many companies offer consumers what they think they want.

Plugging the Geek into a computer can be achieved via its in built USB A male Asynchronous 20 socket or with the aid of the including trailing 6 inch cable attachment for an easier placement.

**Ummm, pretty damned awesome! I'm really surprised at how good this device sounds.**

The Geek has two rows of lights on its front, the first to show sample rates and the second for indication of 3D Sound being on ...around the rear of the Geek there's a corresponding key as to what each light is indicative of.

There are two 3.5mm headphone output sockets on the Geek Out 1000, one labelled 0.47ohm for In Ear Monitors and a 47ohm socket for those big bad boys of rock!

So Geek is ready to go wherever you go...

When I say portable, more to the point I mean the Geek only requires USB power to function from a laptop, thus making it portable.

However if you wish to connect Geek to an IOS or Android device I'm afraid this is not possible -I did try and unfortunately there is currently no driver support for these devices. This is in fact a good thing as the Geek gets tremendously warm! Anyone with experience of Class A amplifiers will know how hot they get but how good they sound. I wouldn't fancy having it in a breast pocket or in a pair of shorts connected to a phone. Some sort of belt clip would be an obvious choice if LH ever decide to widen compatibility.

## **High Resolution File Playback**

Chances are if you're buying a Geek you're not listening to crappy MP3's ruining all the musical enjoyment and hopefully you have ripped your cd collection and are downloading high quality music files online.

### **Geek will support:**

Bit rates from 1bit to 32bit

Sample rates from 44.1khz to 384khz and DSD 64 and 128 protocols.

Not bad for a device the size of a lens out of a geeks spectacles!.

### **So, what does the Geek Out 1000 sound like?**

Ummm, pretty damned awesome! I'm really surprised at how good this device sounds. At the start of this review, whilst writing the introductory part I have been listening to a playlist of many genres of music which I created on the Mac using Amarra Symphony 3.0.

I don't think at any point during writing the previous paragraphs my head and body has stopped moving. Geek Out 1000 is extremely musical and is reminiscent of quality Class A amplification - a warm mid-range, concise highs and a deep informative bass line.

I'm listening through a pair of AKG K702 headphones with a custom Tellurium Q headphone cable, which produces a fantastically clean and articulate sound.

Adding the Geek 1000 over say the Resonance Labs Herus, or the recently reviewed Epiphany Acoustics EHP-02Di headphone amp/DAC, the Geek 1000 really seems to suit these headphones tremendously well, adding texture and warmth to the midrange, body to the bottom end and a thicker yet still incredibly detailed top ends which just seemed



to have gained more confidence and rapport with one another.

The detail is very realistic and whilst listening to Alt-J's new album, for the first time I quickly pulled the headphones off and slapped the side of my head... During the track Nara there is a bumble bee which flies from ear to ear and hovers about a bit to the right and with this being out of the blue and so realistic I honestly believed I was being attacked as it's late at night now here and I have a large fluorescent tube light on above my desk and a large window open next to me... and I'm generally attacked by all sorts of flying monsters!

The Geek Out 1000 has this uncanny ability to do switching between left and right of the soundstage, the entire image is very stable, but a few times on a few tracks I've had this sweeping effect from left to right and a silence left each side as if one ear has dropped out. Obviously it's a trick of the song played but the silences here on quiet passages and gaps between tracks is really very black.

Vocals on Geek are very nice indeed, they have great tone and texture and that little sprinkling of clarity that I personally prefer. I've got to have a little projection and vibrancy in a vocal, hence my headphone choice, but having this requires great care to the mid-range undertones to express tonality correctly otherwise it's popped ear drums time, or at least that last female artist you played high pitched vocal ringing your ears late into the night whilst your trying to sleep.

Geek Out 1000 ticks this box with a magic marker.

### **3D AWESOMIFICATION!!!**

What a name hey? Sounds like someone in the factory got ever so excited when they named this feature haha. Oh well, let's allow them to have their moment of fame...

The idea behind this feature is to take the sound out from being trapped inside your head and have it sounding like the performance is in front of you.

Does it, well, yeah, kinda. For me there's a definite improvement on having a mini band trapped I between your ears which is the main reason I do not listen to headphones on a regular basis.

There's no doubt that it's not like listening to speakers, but the improvements are worthwhile and add a clear positive to the headphone experience for me.

The sound has gone from 9 and 3 O'clock to between 10-11 and 1-2 O'clock. Outer and rear cues and nuances are more apparent now as the main focus of the sound has shifted forward. 3D AWESOMIFICATION, ok, I'll let you have that one!

### **Using Geek as a standalone DAC**

During my listening tests with the Geek I had a chat with Alan Rosen of AVS (UK Distributer) regarding some functionality of the unit.

Alan asked if I had tried it as a standalone DAC yet, I answered "no".



Alan went on to describe that at a dealer evening he had recently he had the Geek playing in the system as folk arrived. It was simply hanging down the back of the rack connected to his laptop whilst the main DAC was perceived to be on in the rack. The usual chat moved on towards the sound of the system in the room and many commented on the excellent sound and were left gobsmacked when he revealed the Geek to be the DAC in use.

In light of this I connected the Geek 1000 to my amp via an Epiphany Acoustics Atratus 3.5mm to twin RCA cable. I continued to listen to my previous playlist sat on the sofa.

I too was very impressed by its performance. I was presented with a soundstage which imaged extremely well. Detail retrieval was a stand-out point for me, renditioning decays on delicate notes in extremely big boy fashion. Bass notes were full and secure,

# Reviews



leaving small amounts of bloom to warm through the presentation and allowing for a smooth lower mid-range that gave body to the vocal.

I didn't have any intention on trying the Geek 1000 singled out as a DAC but I was pleasantly surprised and equally fascinated at how LH manage it.

## Conclusion

To conclude my time with the Geek Out 1000, I can truly say how impressed and taken in by its quality of sound. It's like getting a pair of tiny bookshelf speakers, plugging them in and saying out aloud holy shit, where the hell does that sound come from.

For a tiny portable device the size of the Geek to have a pure Class A amp and a DAC inbuilt had to be a somewhat tricky feat, especially what with having on-board controls, lighting indicators and twin output sockets. Most manufacturers leave the extra features to software.

Plug and play on Mac and Linux and a driver for Windows, well that's Windows for you and I'm sure you guys are used to it so not the end of the world.

Bottom line is Geek Out 1000 is easy to set up, compatible with virtually any ear sound devices and sounds fantastic.

## Dan Worth

Build Quality - 8/10

Sound Quality - 8.6/10

Value For Money - 8.8/10

Overall - 8.46

Recommended for - great size, great sound and great price, oh and it comes in snazzy colours too!

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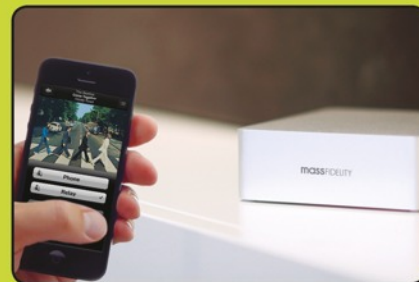
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[Custom Hifi Cables HA10 & HA10SE Headphone Amps, DC1 & DC2 PSUs](#)  
[Epiphany Acoustics EHP-O2 Portable Headphone Amplifier](#)  
[DARED EF-99 Headphone Amplifier and USB DAC](#)  
[Musical Fidelity EB-50 In Ear Monitors](#)  
[King Rex 'Headquarters'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

## Accessories

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[PS Audio Power Plant Premier](#)  
[CA Electronics Isolating Feet](#)  
[Diffraction Begone Baffles](#)  
[Speaker Angle App](#)  
[SPIN CLEAN Record Washer](#)  
[RJC Audio 'Hush' Turntable Isolation Platform](#)  
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## ALL REVIEWS

# Album Reviews

## Sarah Marie Young - Little candy Heart *Snip Records*

In 2011 Chicago resident Sarah Marie Young won the Shure Montreux Vocal competition judged by Quincy Jones and used the prize, a week at the Balik farm Studio in Switzerland, to record her first album of original material, but now she's signed to Dutch label SnipRecords and has just released her new album Little Candy Heart.

The album was recorded over two days in July in Chicago, which is pretty amazing given the quality of the recording, using local musicians Stu Mindeman on keys, Kyle Asche on guitar, Bryan Doherty on bass and Leslie Beukelman and Allison Orobia taking care of backing vocals.

I didn't really know what to expect from this record, other than knowing I've enjoyed the previous output on SnipRecords, but as soon as I hit play it was clear this was a little different. I was expecting jazz vocals, and yes in its broadest sense Little Candy Heart could easily be pigeonholed as a vocal jazz record, but that's not really the whole story here and there's a lot more going on. Of course you have Young's vocal that is rich, sonorous and full, but the arrangements and tunes are there too and played superbly by the backing musicians.

There's a soulful feeling to the record that borrows from RnB, jazz and soul influences to produce a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. It's laid-back, but at the same time engaging with a Sunday morning kind of vibe that allows you to just drift along with the tunes. It would be equally at home being played at home with a glass of wine cuddled up in front of the fire as it would played out at cool pre-club bar.

I'd expected Little candy Heart to sound a little dated for some reason if I'm honest, but it doesn't – it's fresh, vibrant and Young's voice is absolutely gorgeously authoritative, with an unquestionably fabulous range that never sounds stressed or anything but self-assured and poised.



I reckon this could well be a bit of a breakthrough record for SnipRecords given its broad appeal. There's something here for those who appreciate a fine vocal delivery, for those who enjoy relaxed vibes, but equally there's a definite 'pop' feel too...not the contrived dross we are fed by the countless talent shows on the box but a genuine flair for writing and delivering a great tune. There is clearly single potential here (the opening track Brighter Days is a killer), but I doubt that's the market this record is aimed at and the album works really well as a complete recording and this is how I think it will be best appreciated.

The songwriting is really great and given the delivery, is reminiscent of some of the great singer songwriters from years gone by – emotionally charged, musically talented and well crafted. This is a big record that belies the relative youth of SnipRecords.

A damned fine album!

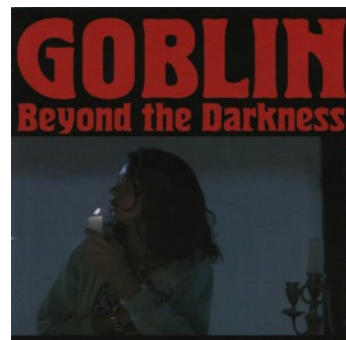
## Goblin - Beyond The Darkness

*Bella Casa: Cherry Red*

Goblin are an Italian progressive rock band that are perhaps best known for their work on film soundtracks, though I have to confess they are a new name to me. Beyond

The Darkness is an anthology of the second half of the career of the band and spans the dates 1977 – 2001 where a selection of tunes from ten film scores are used.

You can hear the influence of the classic prog' masters such as Yes and perhaps Genesis, but there is a darkness to the music in places which reflects the subject matter of many of the films it was written to accompany. That said there's also more exotic moments such as Bikini Island (from the 1979 Beyond the Darkness film) which is funky jazz rock with a latin feel to it. From 1977 there's the music from La Via Della Droga (The Heroin Busters) whose opening few bars has me thinking of one of the Smiths' tunes for some reason, before going off into a more progressive style. Similarly Sequence 4 from the same movie is reminiscent of something very familiar that I just can't put my finger on.





There are repetitive themes and rhythms that lock you into the music with analogue synths thrown in for good measure. Bass guitar is particularly well played and provides the musical backbone around which many of the tracks herein build upon. Guitar is also lightening fast in the solo parts and clearly these are an accomplished set of musicians. The music sounds good in its own right, but I'm pretty sure in the movie theatre and with the associated visual of the film it would be great – there is texture and tension.

The music here is a little out of context without the accompanying film, but it works on the whole. Yes, there are times when you just want to hear the band continue to develop the tunes into proper, fully fledged songs, but that's not to suggest that you'll not enjoy this record – I certainly did and it's prompted me to explore the bands output a little deeper...and perhaps check out some of the films the music is taken from too.

Yes, this is broadly prog' but it's a little bit funkier than the norm and is pretty interesting for a newcomer to Goblin. Progressive rock fans will appreciate this record but I think they'll be left wanting a little in that, despite the tunes being mini epics in their own right, they don't seem to be fully fledged as such.

## Thompson Twins - Remixes and Rarities *Cherry Pop*

**T**hompson Twins were another band from the early to mid 80s that pretty much completely passed me by. Of course I know some of their tunes by name like We

Are Detective, Doctor! Doctor! and Hold Me Now, but as the interview with Tom Bailey on the sleeve notes says “music was more tribal then” and synth pop really didn't do it for me and the tribe I was hanging about with. I do also recall that the band was named after the Thompson and Thompson from the Tintin comics... funny how we remember snippets of information like that isn't it.



This two CD set, out now on Cherry Pop, kicks off with Love on Your Side and so that's another tune of the Twins I wasn't aware that I knew. The sound is big and bold and it's really no surprise that between 82 and 86 Thompson Twins sold a lot of records both at home and across the water in the US and perhaps it's no surprise that I actually recognize a lot more of the tunes than the handful I named previously.

**Ok, Thompson Twins weren't really high on my radar in their heyday, but their tunes have stood the test of time pretty well.**

Of the 24 tracks (remastered from the original tapes) on this double CD six appear on CD for the very first time including In The Beginning (an early B-side), the 7" US single version of The Gap and the US remix of Lay Your Hands on Me.

Musically the Twins' music varies from the upbeat hits such as Doctor! Doctor! to the more laidback and melancholy Long Goodbye and Sister Of Mercy, but there is always the feeling that you are listening to songs crafted for that early to mid-80s audience using the technology of that period. Listening to The Gap I'm reminded of the Steve Hillage album For To Next which is of course from around the same period ('83) and it struck me that actually this kind of music isn't quite the bubblegum, throwaway pop that I assumed it would be – there is intelligence and there's social comment too at times like on the anti-heroin Don't Mess with Doctor Dream, though it's always done in a poppy, non-preachy and accessible kind of way.

Ok, Thompson Twins weren't really high on my radar in their heyday, but their tunes have stood the test of time pretty well. Yes, the synths and sounds used are pretty much standard fodder for the year but the songs manage to stand up on their own. They're catchy, infectious toe tapping and actually I really don't mind Thompson Twins so much at all.

This is pretty much an essential record if you are a fan of the Twins work, but it's also a good record in its own right. There's certainly nothing on here that I

# Album Reviews

can say is utter pap and the musicianship and production is great, which when coupled with the well written and arranged tunes makes for an enjoyable record.

## Various Artists - Pop Ambient 2015 *Kompakt*

The Pop Ambient series of albums from Uber label Kompakt has been delivering the chilled goods since 2001 and never fails to deliver. As the title suggests the style of music herein is accessible ambience and it works very well indeed.



**Label boss Wolfgang Voigt is the guy that puts the collection together and he does a damned good job at bringing together new names as well as some that will be recognisable to many.**

Label boss Wolfgang Voigt is the guy that puts the collection together and he does a damned good job at bringing together new names as well as some that will be recognisable to many.

New on this years offering are Thore Pfeiffer and Max Wurden, whilst names such as Leandro Freso, Ulf Lohmann and Jens-Uwe Beyer will be familiar to folk who have delved into the Pop Ambient albums previously.

Indeed, it is with newcomer Thore Pfeiffer's *Wie Es Euch Gefällt* that the record opens and a glorious and uplifting opening it is, full of stirring synth pads

which set the scene perfectly for what we have to come. Thore gets another look-in with the second track too. Called *Nero* this is guitars looped and looped over more pads – it sounds vaguely reminiscent of some of Pink Floyd's more meandering passages and has a maturity to it that belies this newcomer's lack of previous exposure.

Next up is Dirk Leyer's *Daydreamer* tune that, as its name would suggest, is chilled electronica of the highest order and perfect to drift away to. Synths loop away creating melodies within melodies that appear simple and yet complex and carry you with them on their journey.

Gregor Schwollenbach is up next and continues the blissed out vibe with calm and unflustered pads that create a feeling of ecstasy and tranquility. And that's part of the charm of a lot of the tunes on *Pop Ambient 2015* – the music appears to be very simple in its structure, but listen a little closer and every pad, every swirl of synth and every change in direction is carefully crafted to take you, the listener, on an inward journey where you can listen but also think. It's sort of musical dope that calms and inspires in equal measure.

It would be so easy for this kind of record to descend into wishy-washy New Age pap, but it manages to avoid this trap and stay fresh and relevant....The perfect post club chill album to get the over worked synapses tingling in a whole new and wholesome way.

There are ten tracks on *Pop Ambient* and all are very good indeed, painting wide and deep sonic images that wash over you like a warm ocean. Highly recommended and out 10th November.

## Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga - Cheek To Cheek Deluxe Edition *Interscope/Columbia*

Released in mid-September on Interscope records and Columbia Records and downloaded here from HIRESAUDIO this one was a bit of a surprise for me not least because it's not that often you get a record put to-





gether by an eighty eight year old crooner and someone famed as much for her outrageous dress sense (take the infamous meat dress as an example) as her music. This one has "Approach With Care" written all over it and I did just that, expecting it to get a quick flick through then forever to be relegated to the dustiest and seldom ventured to virtual shelf.

I don't know a lot about Lady Gaga apart from the dodgy rumours that were circulating a couple of years ago about whether Gaga was an hermaphrodite or not and her somewhat "individual" choice of outfit. That said I recall watching Glastonbury on the box a few years ago and there was Lady Gaga sat behind a piano and singing properly... I remember commenting at the time that she as exceptionally talented, but then the releases that I know since then have been throwaway pop dance that I can live without thanks very much.

This is a bit different to what I was expecting and all the better for it. The two artists have collaborated in the past with a version of Roger and Hart's The Lady Is A Tramp and Cheek to Cheek continues the theme of jazz standards and before the album's release there were two singles, Anything Goes and I Can't give

You Anything But Love which both reached number one in the Billboard Jazz Digital Songs Chart.

Ok, I may have been initially right about Gaga when I heard her on the Glastonbury coverage but then I soon lost all interest with fame Monster and the associated singles. She has a terrific jazz vocal that just oozes class and is complemented brilliantly by Bennett's well known delivery. The two sing duets for the main part on this album, but there are a handful of tunes where they sing individually. You'll certainly know all the tunes on Cheek To Cheek and the musicianship on show is exemplary and has a real feel of the great era of swing recordings.

This Deluxe version has 15 tunes whereas the standard version has just 11 and each one is a really great version of the original. Gagas voice is superbly relevant to this genre and there is clearly a great synergy between her and Bennett which come together to create a really stunning record.

Given the time of year I reckon this will be a big hit over the Xmas period

**Second Annual**

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# This month John Scott looks back at Laura Nyro's extraordinary 1968 release *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession*.

**B**ack in the dark days of the early eighties when I had very little money to spend on records - actually, come to think about it I *am* back in the dark days when I have very little money to spend on records, but never mind; at least I've got a while to go yet before I'm in my early eighties - I used to read extensively about music and file away little nuggets of information in my brain for those future days when I would be unspeakably rich and would spend all my time record shopping. Needless to say, I'm still doing more fact filing than shopping.

**Here's some stuff I didn't know when I bought *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession*:  
Born (as Laura Nigro) in the Bronx to a Russian-Jewish/Italian family, an artistic/musical temperament was in her blood -her aunt and uncle were artists and her father was a piano tuner and jazz trumpeter.**

At some point I had read a five star review of *Gonna Take A Miracle*, the 1971 album of '50s and '60s Brit Building, soul and R&B covers that Laura Nyro recorded with Labelle, and had stored Nyro's name



away in the back of my mind as something to keep an eye out for. As it turned out though, it was *her* eyes rather than her name that finally caught my attention and made me buy one of her records.

The cover of *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession* features a photograph of Nyro; shrouded in darkness but glowing with light. Her face is turned away, her eyes downcast; thoughtful, soulful - confessional but not penitent. And that is all there was on the cover - no artist's name, no album title. It didn't need them; those eyes so(u)l(e)d it to me there and then.

These days, if you want to find out about an artist before you buy one of their albums all you need to do is whip out your smartphone, check their Wikipedia entry and you'll pretty much know all you need to know in the time it takes to read the article. I couldn't do that in 1982. Here's some stuff I didn't know when I bought *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession*: Born (as Laura Nigro) in the Bronx to a Russian-Jewish/Italian family, an artistic/musical temperament was in her blood -her aunt and uncle were artists and her father was a piano tuner and jazz trumpeter. Laura taught herself piano and began writing songs at an early age and while at high school sang in street corner harmony groups with her friends. Her father's own musical activities brought him into contact with a pair of record company executives, Artie Mogull and Paul Barry, who became Laura's first managers. Mogull soon got her



a record contract and her song writing career was kicked off at the age of eighteen when she sold *And When I Die* to Peter, Paul and Mary for \$5,000. Her first album would spawn hits for 5th Dimension, Three Dog Night and Barbara Streisand, leading to an association with David Geffin and a contract with CBS for whom she would record her second album *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession* in 1968.

Blissfully unaware of any of this, I took my copy of *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession* home, dropped the stylus on the vinyl, and my first thought was: "What the hell is this?"; I didn't hate it but I didn't know what to make of it either. It seemed to be more about show tunes and Sammy Davis Junior than the Bronx and Brill Building-inspired singer songwriters. This was music like nothing I'd heard before and I was puzzled; puzzled but intrigued. For one thing, there was a time change every four to six bars and just when you'd got to grips with where the music was going it would launch itself off in a different direction altogether.

It slowly began to dawn on me how meticulously this had all been put together and it was obvious from her piano playing and multi-layered, complex vocal harmonies that it was Nyro's own unique musical vision that was at the helm here - she was no producer's lackey. It also struck me that Nyro was no more than twenty one when she recorded this. I was in my early twenties myself at the time and I couldn't imagine anyone my age producing anything of this maturity.



By this time I had reached the forth track, *Poverty Train*, and the music had taken on a darker aspect. The song is introduced by a fuzz guitar and bluesy acoustic. A hint of vibraphone is joined by a questioning flute and we are thrust headlong into an investigation of both the pitfalls and pleasures of drug abuse. The slow bluesy pace continues on the next track, *Lonely Women*. It's unlikely that Nyro had much experience of loneliness at the age of twenty one but with two individual lines of the song: "No one hurries home to call you Baby" and "Ain't got no children to be grandmother for" she absolutely nails it.

The next track, *Eli's Coming*, opens with a threatening, ominous organ note. Nyro sings: "Eli's coming" backed by a Greek chorus of her own multi tracked backing vocals. "Girl, you better hide your heart" she continues. "Eli's coming and the cards say 'broken heart'". The track builds suddenly with rising brass chord and ecstatic backing vocals like something from a Stax review. One thing is clear: the coming of Eli is going to end in tears but there is nothing you can do about it so you'd best just hang on for your life and enjoy it while you can. Somewhere in a parallel universe Barry Manilow heads up the house band at Motown and all Berry Gordy's records sound like this. And if you don't think that's a good thing, you really, really need to hear this record.



# Classics

I'd got to the end of side one and gone from "Hmm, I'm not sure if I like this much" to "This is one of the greatest things I've ever heard". *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession* hardly left my turntable for the best part of a year. I'm going to do you a favour - I'll let you discover side two for yourself. You won't be disappointed.

Nyro's next two albums 1969's *New York Tendaberry* and 1970's *Christmas And The Beads Of Sweat* are sometimes considered to form part of a trilogy alongside *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession* but all three albums are perfectly capable of standing alone on their own merits.

Following *Gonna Take A Miracle*, Nyro took a break from the music business and married a carpenter. The marriage lasted three years after which she recorded a new album, *Smile*. She continued to record and perform sporadically until her death from ovarian cancer in 1997 aged 49, the same age that her mother has been when she died from the same disease.

Nyro left a legacy as one of the great female singer songwriters of our times. If *Eli And The Thirteenth*

**Nyro left a legacy as one of the great female singer songwriters of our times.**

*Confession* had been all she had ever recorded, that legacy would still stand. Go listen to this record – you won't be disappointed.

## Recommended Discography

More Than A New Discovery (also available as The First Songs) 1967

Eli And The Thirteenth Confession 1968

New York Tendaberry 1969

Christmas And The Beads Of Sweat 1970

Gonna Take A Miracle 1971

Compilation - Stoned Soul Picnic: The Best Of Laura Nyro 1997

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## In this week's Behind The Brand Interview, Hifi Pig

### talks to Mark Sears of The Missing Link and Vinyl Passion.

#### Your History

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

I started out in sound engineering. My first job in the music industry was at Nottingham's Rock City where I worked for around ten years 1984-1994. At the age of twenty I started out (relatively) innocent working in the night club environment of Rock Bands and by the age of thirty I was glad to escape alive. In 1994 I moved out of the city to Gainsborough a Lincolnshire Market Town and worked the sound with many wonderful musicians at the live theatre 'Trinity Arts Centre' - this was a far more relaxing and enjoyable period in my life and gave me the time to pursue the various research programs I had started work on many years earlier and also where I met the other half of the company and my best friend Jan without whom there would be no Missing Link and no Vinyl Passion ( well not in the business sense)!

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

Well this could go on for a long time as there are so many-not least simply my love of music. I

think the primary thing that encouraged my interest in cables and subsequently some years later led to The Missing Link was a piece of data that was published in (I think) a magazine called 'The Audiophile'. If I remember correctly the article was written by Hiroyasu Kondo on cable capacitance and the data proved that capacitance could affect the shape of the AC waveform passing through the cable at audio frequency. This was the first paper I had seen that made any sense to my own way of thinking and from reading this publication a mild interest grew into a 30 year research monster that overtook my life with a need to totally understand cables! The yearning to understand cables at their working frequency, what could be done to improve performance electrically, the chemical structure behind the metallurgy to the micro phonic effects of the insulators as well as pre and post production studies has not left me and this lust for knowledge has helped develop The Missing Link hand production techniques that preserve the delicate cable conductors. This initial data further encouraged my curiosity about connectors - I must by now have measured well over 200 connector types from many different companies to check impedance and contact resistance is at its intended bandwidth - these measurements are what interest me in a connector used for audio as this detail is the most important factor for superb performance - not, as many companies believe - how big or shiny it is!

If I may be permitted, I have to add a second major influence here, my audio hero and one of the finest designers of our time and a true inspiration: Peter Walker - in the immortal words of Bill and Ted 'we



are not worthy'! The 'Current Dumping' amplifiers, although a joint project was a revolutionary change in amplifier design and the Electrostatic Loudspeaker a work of pure genius and my Reference Loudspeaker to this day.

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

From a work perspective certainly the pure Silver Link family of cables. There are many years of research behind them but they would not be the cables they are today without the kind assistance of Dr Anthony Swiss, a passionate and enthusiastic Archaeological metallurgist with a passion for music. His electron microscope work was essential in helping us develop the annealing process that is used in our wire post production and that is now produced from a very specific ore to our own requirements. Based on many years of research for a particular chemical finger print that offers the perfect path for the electrons to travel, this sets our cables aside from any other designs that I am aware of. The offshoot from this work has also lead to us producing the world's lowest contact noise mains connectors which we back with electrical measurement- A world first from The Missing Link in the design and production of Silver plated Mains Connectors which we started to sell commercially in 2002. They are now widely copied, sadly with descriptions that simply do not make sense - no wonder the consumer gets confused. I am also very proud of our humble Dust Buster Stylus Cleaner that is now sold all over the world at a pace I could never have imagined.

## **You and your system**

### **What was your very first system?**

If we don't include the first crystal radio kit I built at the age of 12 or the various transistor radios I owned, it would be a Ferguson music centre with an S shaped arm. I can remember drooling through my mum's catalogue pages looking at all the music centres in the 70's when I would have been around 14 and ceaselessly pestering her until the Christmas of 77 when it finally landed under the Christmas tree.

The Ferguson soon took pride of place in my bedroom - my bed was a pile of sheepskin rugs (sent from my uncle in Australia) under a fishing umbrella with Christmas tree lights. I used to lay in the dark listening to David Bowie in the glow of the vu metres.. my mum was very understanding !



## **Tell us about your system history**

Wow this would take a long time my first separate turntable was a second hand Pioneer PL 12D which at the age of 16 quickly got stripped! I made my own Balsa wood chassis (an offshoot from model aircraft making) and supported it on baby milk tins with balloons inside for suspension. The next turntable was a Sansui 222 Mk-IV and my first real Hi Fi TT . After this, simply by chance came the start of a long term romance with 3 point suspended turn tables. I was lucky enough to discover a TD-150 in a skip near my house with a missing tone arm - this is the grandfather to the modern LP-12. I took it home and the Sansui was butchered for its arm and cabling and it was obvious to me quite quickly that there was something very musical about the suspended turntable design. I then went the obvious route and ended up with an LP-12. Next came an Oracle Delphi MK II with Rega 250 and eventually an SME tone arm, still in my opinion one of the finest tone arms in the world and the very reason I manufacture many of my turntable upgrades from Magnesium Alloy but this was meant to be audio nirvana yet I still found aspects lacking. Next came an SME 10, a total departure from suspended. The SME was very particular about support by comparison but I had not sold my older turntables and over the years spent many hundreds of hours comparing them by this time (and this



# Behind the Brands

is the short version). I had also started dealing hi fi equipment by this time from our Vinyl Passion premises and home - a converted Co-op & Butchers shop, so a whole new world of equipment had opened up to me. The words 'kid in a candy store' come to mind. I now only sell what I would listen to myself and I love installing systems for our customers. The turntable I listen mostly to now is of my own design and combines what I consider to be the very best of materials and components.

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

Pioneer CTF 950 Tape Deck - superbly built machine and one of the few items I have owned that I never modified. I purchased another from E Bay a few years back but sadly it was in a terrible state on arrival. I listened to a lot of music on that machine in my first purpose kitted out listening room with a paving slab and brick built stand fully acoustic lined room with acoustic ceiling tiles ..... many happy memories

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

Apart from systems that I have set up myself the Biggest Sonic Impact that a full system has made on me must be my visit to The House of Linn in Manchester. Jan and I were among the first to hear their Linn Exact System. We spent the evening with Brian, Trevor & David Price - at the time Editor for Hi Fi Choice. Brian and Trevor are highly knowledgeable, very hospitable and have a genuine passion for music - we listened to both vinyl and digital but what stood out for me was Touch by Yello – absolutely divine. By this time we were well settled in on our second bottle of wine and the system was nice and warm ... this was a spiritual experience. The Exact System was sounding simply stunning and all enveloping. I have applied for a trade account with Linn and they never seem to reply so I am most certainly not linked! If you are reading this Linn staff feel free to contact me...

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

(s) Being the Main word.. ... I mainly listen to vinyl having a rather large collection. The Vinyl Passion Music room (also home) is a large room, being an ex co op's main sales area. I am still saving for acoustic curtains as the room has several peeks so choice of loudspeakers as with all rooms is paramount. Preferably I would use Quad 2905's but the height is a problem with the cinema screen so we opted for Quad 2805's. Wonderful Speakers.

I have tried so many combinations from so many manufactures over the years and also getting part exchanges regularly always offers a chance to broaden horizons. Nearly everything I own came about by a chance encounter or by reading technical specs that just make sense from an engineering point of view and then do not disappoint on audition. I strongly believe that the only way you can audition a piece of equipment is in your own environment and there is no right or wrong sound only what is right for you!

My analogue front ends are three main turntables - A self modified TD-150 with Rega 202 & Sumiko Pearl - for me it's where the real obsession started and still a hugely musical performer with the right tweaks and a good basic arm and cart. Next TT I listen to is my own version of the LP-12 we call it the VP-12 it still carries a Linn main bearing and platter but the rest is my own design - the arm is a Linn



# Behind the Brands

Magik carbon fibre, the cartridge a Benz Ace SL... very musical detailed and dynamic. Finally a prototype that has evolved over the years and is a marriage of the best of the LP-12 and the best of the SME, not surprising given the Linn is the most foot tapping musical turntable I have encountered for all its short comings in standard form and the SME is the most dynamic and accurate, but somehow seems to lack the musicality of the Linn so enter The Golden Ratio as I like to call it. It is fully constructed from aerospace magnesium alloy carbon fibre and titanium the prototyping alone has kept me in the poor house! This is constantly developing but in its current state I find it hugely musical - it sports an SME 309 magnesium tone arm and the mighty Benz Glider SL and when I sit and listen I really am in the zone. It is not a league better than the VP-12 but I really cannot ask for more. The only limitation tends to be the recording.

Next in line is the obvious phono stage and my reference listen is the Ming Da 2006 with NOS Russian Gold pin valves and I also use The Vincent PH-700 as my reference budget box. I don't really need to mention which cables and mains conditioning I use - I have three dedicated spurs and all sockets and connectors are pure Silver plated with the lowest measurable contact resistance available (I know as I have measured it and the data is public).

The pre amplifier I use is Ming Da MD7-SE fitted with TJ Full music's and Golden Dragon and this alternately feeds my favourite amplifiers Ming Da 805 mono's which sing so sweetly and also the Vincent MK-331 which I think is one of the most musical and affordable power amplifiers available and provides plenty of current to keep the Quads in line for my rock music.

Digital Vincent CDS-6 - rather dusty.

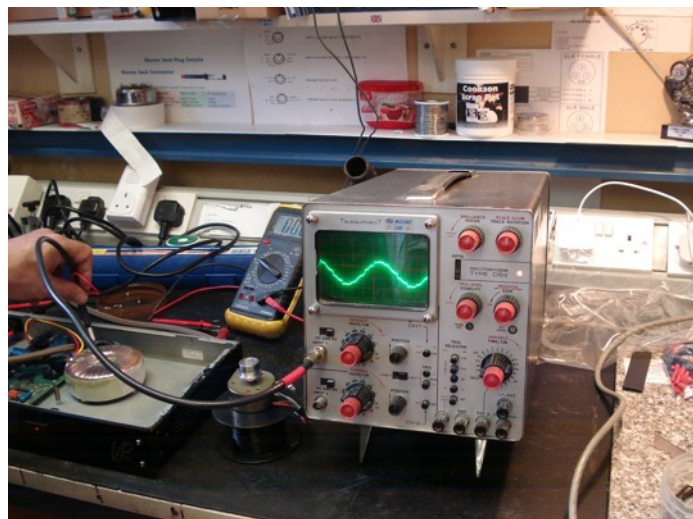
Stream flack direct from USB via Panasonic to M Audio Super DAC 24/192 ... trying the Simple Audio Room Player at present and so far very impressed. Although for pure emotion Vinyl wins hands down every time.

## The state of the industry

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

It has slowly becomes obvious to the general hi fi enthusiast, if such a person exists, that whenever you see high end equipment valves have always been present - at that level it has never changed and for good reason. Quality valve amplifier's 10 years ago were prohibitively costly to the general consumer but now with Chinese manufacturers offering arguably the same quality with really good entry level EL34 designs starting at less than £1000 new it's not surprising they have increased in popularity and in my opinion a good basic EL34 design is eminently more musical than anything solid state can offer at that price level and the second hand market is even more tempting - never has there been a more exciting time to be an audiophile.

For me valves never left. Although I think the finest all-around systems are made from both valve for its sweet and expansive if somewhat romantic sound-stage and solid state for its sheer current capability and damping factor this brings speed and dynamics to the party that a full valve system can never hope to achieve. Listening to a diverse range of music from Crass to Debussy I need a good all-rounder!!! For human voice i.e. simple female vocal or simple acoustic recordings single ended triodes are king but put Jeff Beck or Hawkwind on and they will collapse into mush unless your loudspeakers are 100+ db





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

I really don't think it will look a lot different. I do think Vinyl is on the increase and this makes me very happy. Vinyl is a very intimate and tactile way to use music. I love the feel and smell of an LP sleeve and the artwork that accompanies can simply not be matched by any other format. I have dedicated a wall at home that is covered with a choice from my favourite recordings.

It makes me feel happy to know others are now discovering what was once thought to be a disappearing experience and according to industry figures this is set to increase with new pressing plants being opened. The quality of polyvinyl is now far superior and Vinyl record sales have been outstripping the now almost dead format of compact disc. There will always be a market for high end as it seems this sector of the market is driven by passionate professionals or even borderline personalities that will forever push the envelope to the point where the line between engineering and art become increasingly blurred- there seems to be no limit to high-end as there is no limit to our passion for the recorded arts.

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

Marketing is a many edged sword and they all cut. It's a sad fact but no surprise to any realist that in this industry those with the biggest budgets and that feed most mouths will receive constant praise and awards regardless of product quality. I have several friends in the Hi Fi press and they are all on someone's leash - this may not be a popular statement but it is a fact. There are many companies that are 95% marketing and 5% product in my opinion. If you're not passionate about the music you should find another job - enthusiasts need to support enthusiasts. There was a certain magazine with a certain editor who constantly raved about a certain company for three years - the praise was stratospheric as were the

prices and it worked well and sales hit the multi millions. It is no surprise he is now employed by them in the marketing division when at the time he claimed no connection. He also claimed one of their loudspeaker cables was good value at £30k. Where I come from you can almost buy a terraced house for that much and I worked out while having a jovial chat with my good friend and ex Hi Fi News writer Janine Elliot that for that price you could have purchased enough QED79 to go around the world. I have published many engineering papers over the years and submitted them to the press and received not even a reply so I wonder how can a magazine that calls itself 'news' be News if it has no interest in the industry apart from promoting its partners? I feel sure there have been many small companies held back by this in the past but the internet is somewhat of a revolution as it enables real end users to tell other real end users what is good and not good. Sadly even this is now widely abused by those seeking their own ends but time tends to root out the obvious.

**The way you work**

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

Being first and foremost an engineer I must admit that measurements come first. I have listened to countless claims of "we developed it by listening" all too many times if you quiz so called designers who make these claims they will often know little of the relative subject relating to what they are supposedly designing and this always makes me suspicious but as they say the proof is in the pudding. I am in



# Behind The Brands

the lucky position to have many academics on my friends list and I specialise in electronics and material science, but even with a second life there would not be enough time to digest all the things that interest me. If there is something I am not sure of, as is often the case when I am problem solving, I usually know a specialist who will know the answer or will have access to the necessary test and measurement equipment required together with opportunity for some lab time. It goes hand in hand that not only the equipment I design myself but also some of the finest equipment I have listened to is based on sound engineering principals to coin a pun.

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

Natural

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

It would depend on the room size etc but acceptable floor standers every day of the week -preferably electrostatic. The transient speed of an electrostatic transducer cannot be matched by a moving coil this is simply a measurement fact based on moving mass - it measures good and it sounds good as the phase is more linear than a coil could ever dream of !

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

**What is your favourite recording?**

Stina Nordenstam - Memories of a Colour - on vinyl ( spellbinding )

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

**Thomas Dolby Astronauts & Heretics** - this was his last recording on vinyl and is now getting increasingly rare - every Dolby recording has a sound theme and this is a heady mix of blue grass and electronic - Dolby's trademark. I am a huge fan of all of his work and this is a spectacular recording the speed rhythm and dynamics - **I live in a suitcase** has a huge soundstage ironically and the **Non Sisters** is a dark and moody tale of friends lost - certainly a desert island disk.

Only being allowed 3 choices I have around 40 reference recordings I use I was torn by **Yello Pocket Universe** as this will test any system to the limit with is driving rhythmic trance or **Crime of the Century Super Tramp** MOFI both again are technical masterpieces. You choose !

**Sting Soul Cages** although I was not a huge fan originally, but the recording genius is undeniable. Hugh Padgham has to be in the top 5 recording engineers/producers in the world today and I am a huge fan of his work and even collect recordings just because he has worked on them. He is another constant on which you can trust and this is some of his finest work.

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

**ABBA** on occasion ( I don't dress up... honest ) **Debussy Children's Corner** - my website might give that away ... don't tell anybody though that's my street cred down the pipe - hang on, I am past 50 so it don't matter anymore..

**Guilty** as when I am feeling rebellious.. Not so often nowadays it takes effort .. I will spin **Feeding of the 5000 Crass** that usually makes me unpopular with the family but I do enjoy it.. I traded my walk on part in the wall!

**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?**  
**Spring by Spring** first pressing mint on the neon 6 label pride of my prog rock collection and getting rather rare. I take it out once in a while stroke it then put it back (the record sleeve that is) Enjoy !!!

Mark Sears ... Partner of The Missing Link & Vinyl Passion UK.



# Rock 'n' Rhône

**This month, resident Hifi Pig wine expert Louis Bricka takes a listen to some rock from his youth and accompanies it with a glass of something from the Rhone region of France.**

Rock 'n' Rhône, or more particularly southern Rhône, I will leave out the fine syrah dominated wines of the northern Rhône region, such as Côte-Rôtie and Hermitage, for a more specific musical match. Too easy, I hear you say, to make a play on words and to write any old thing around it. Well, believe it or not, it happened the other way round for me and you will agree I'm sure that "Wines from the southern Rhône and Rock'n'Roll" is not quite so catchy.

I often try to revisit my youth, and listening to its soundtracks is the easiest way for me to recapture the essence of those somewhat distant days. The Moody Blues, Procol Harum, Fleetwood Mac, even if their lyrics made little sense to me as a child, I have the feeling that I have always understood the rhythm of their music. Perhaps this is why it was natural for me to choose to replay these tunes to accompany a special bottle of red Châteauneuf-du-Pape. If you are going to try to match a wine or spirit with a genre of music, I believe that you must achieve as near parity as possible between the two. They must flow in the same direction, share the same character and like all good rock bands, for a while at least, achieve unity!

Bold, provocative, harmonious but liberated, it applies to both good Rock and good Rhône. You know the tunes I'm talking about, so here is a bit more about the wine; plum and liquorice, crushed pepper and thyme, voluptuous, nothing held back, no hiding behind convention. Just like music and lyrics reflect

the artist's state of mind, here, the various grape varieties allowed, dominated by grenache, syrah and mourvedre, are used in varying quantities dependent on the success of the vintage and perhaps the mood of the vigneron.

The wine enjoyed was a 2007 Domaine des 3 Cellier, Marceau, AOC Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 14.5% vol. The vines are on average 45 years old, including 4 hectares in the "Terres Blanches" area in the north of the appellation, were the 'galets' (large rounded stones, left behind millennia ago by the melting glaciers) store the heat of the sun and release it at night.

The AOC of Châteauneuf-du-Pape is squeezed between Orange (sorry, couldn't resist it) to the north, with its Roman architectural remains, and Avignon to the south, with its famous bridge and Papal palace, placing it high on any list of winegrowing region to visit, such is the richness of its surroundings. The region is home to many music festivals that will accommodate most tastes too.

Comments from She Who Speaks Her Mind: "Don't confuse Côte-du-Rhône with the South African wines Goats do Roam or Goat-Roti" he told me! I'm worried, he must really think I'm stupid. I for one really like the wines, red and white, from the village of Cairanne.



**PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY**