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Columns

Designer Notes

Interviews

Classic Kit

REVIEWS

Graham Slee Proprius Amps, Allnic T1500 Amp, JOB 225 Power Amp, Leema Acoustics Elements Amp, Symphonic Line RG14 Amp, Trends 10.2 T Amp, Clearaudio Performance DC Turntable Perreux Auduant VP3 Phono Pre, ATC SCM19 Loudspeakers, German Physiks Unlimited II Loudspeakers, Dali Rubicon 5 Loudspeakers, EclipseTD-M1 Speakers, RAaumfeld Stereo L Loudspeakers, Geneva Aerosphere Loudspeaker, Tellurium Q System Enhancement CD

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GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

FROM YORKSHIRE WITH LOVE...

Graham Slee is based in the South Yorkshire town of Barnsley and has an enviable reputation for making great performing electronics at affordable prices. Hifi Pig checks out his £1290 Proprius amplifiers.



Over the last half year I have done a few reviews on products by Graham Slee, a highly religious and uniquely kind personality, whose ideas are well known but not as often reviewed as I feel they should be. Best known for the small phono and headphone amplifiers, his background was making mixing desks and amplifiers for

the BBC in the days when even the girls wore suits. The days where you not only took pride in the work you did but also what you wore. I loved those days. So, sit me down (not in a suit) listening to his 25W Proprius monoblock Class Ab power amps, connected with Ecosse MS2.3 cabling to Graham LS5/9 speakers and I am reliving my 25 years at the corpo-

GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

ration. The Graham S and Graham A combination are just meant for each other.

The Proprius, like most of the Slee product base is simplicity in looks, but this hides some really good engineering design inside. No mass produced tech which is designed to woo in the listener with either over-accentuated bass or zillion Hz topz. This is about music; this is real class Ab – not D or T; this is about ease of listening, and an amazingly good amount of audio level despite the low power numbers; all those sudden bursts that many an amp needs hundreds of Watts in reserve to deliver with any meaning, are catered for with comfort here, even when I connected them to my 83dB sensitivity 15ohm LS3/5a speakers. Rated at 25watts into 8 ohm or 45watts if into 4ohm, each unit costs £645.90 and with XLR balanced in and conventional loudspeaker terminals is no mean product. The Proprii playing Sibelius 2 (Thomas Søndergård, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Linn Records) via Fiio X5 into Slee Majestic DAC with its balanced output is mas-

terfully performed, just as the sound engineer would have heard it. I could have been sitting behind the mixing desk. Memories from my past aside, this was a very musical and detailed performance easily justifying its price point. This is a truly dual-mono amplification system, allowing improved stereo separation. The small unit size is helped by having the 120 Watt switch-mode power supply in an external unit, and comes complete with a mounting kit so that it can be piggy-backed to your loudspeakers. That is where the balanced input really comes in, though it worked just as well unbalanced mode in the hi-fi rack. All that is missing is a power switch. I miss that as it means every time I turn the unit off or on I get a burst of current through the speakers. Whilst this is minuscule into the Graham Audio, through my aged Chartwell LS3/5a I needed to turn down the volume controls on the Proprii to protect the Kef B110 bass/mid driver. These amps are really designed to be kept on continually. Whilst the Proprius is designed to run on full power, having a volume control



GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

on each channel means it could be used as a single-input integrated. Despite its diminutive appearance

this exudes quality, including rugged 15 Amp 30 MHz output transistors, high-end professional gold plated XLRs on input and power sockets, and an effective head radiator case for cool class Ab running. Frequency response into 8 ohm went up to 47kHz with no more than 0.1% distortion and S/N A-weighted at 87dB. OK, nothing mind boggling, but bearing in mind this is a discrete component design in a 105 x 55 x 205 mm box, there is nothing diminutive about its performance. There was nothing wanting from the sound I

heard, and no confusion in the sound, whatever music I threw at it. This is professional audio amplification, often reminding me of my modified Quad 405's from years' back. Each mono-block comes complete with its own frequency chart showing that, as is very important, specification between units are as closely matched, much as was the tight consistency of quality control between every single manufactured LS3/5a, that I also paired for this review.

Playing Nielsen Symphony No 3 (New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Alan Gilbert) first movement DSD recording via coaxial output from my aged Kenwood DVD-A player into the new NuForce DAC-80 gave a compellingly purposeful performance. At 09'30" even I jumped out of my seat as the music took to a new level. The instrumentalists of course remained in theirs.

These amplifiers are not just for classicophiles, as Graham says;

“With an ever increasing audience of rock lovers, I set out to design products to not only sound fantastic with symphonies, choral music, quartets and audiophile jazz, but also to reproduce rock music in such

a way as to provide fun listening – to provide those air-guitar inspiring moments!”

All frequencies were clear and musical, from the lowest to the highest. Through the LS5/9s this was one of the best performances I had ever heard at any price.

He decided this after listening to Led Zeppelin ‘Kashmir’ in a hi-fi shop and wondering why it sounded flat and compressed. Indeed, in the 1970's Graham was himself a DJ, and also building on-the-road equipment. It was at this time he began developing phono preamps and headphone amps The Proprius certainly has enough welly to make even the most ardent Progressive Rock fan happy. And whilst this baby couldn't compare anywhere near my Krell KAV250a in terms of power output, size or cost, this was no mere sibling. This had grunt, with an exceptionally dynamic and energetic soundstage from the deepest lows to the tizzling tops. I have sat on this power amp for a considerable time now, and every time I switch it on I get surprised just how good it goes. Whilst China-built packages can sound really good nowadays, I'm not interested in cheap prices or spec or buttons or lights. I just wanted to listen to musicians, and through this kit I most certainly could.

Suzanne Vega Tom's Diner gave a sweet but solid rendition of her solo voice in all its glory. All frequencies were clear and musical, from the lowest to

GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

the highest. Through the LS5/9s this was one of the best performances I had ever heard at any price.

Patricia Barber 'Live, A Fortnight in France' had excellent depth of field, with each and every instrument played just as the musicians intended, with me there in Metz, La Rochelle and Paris. Thoughts of my 10W Valve Leak Stereo 20 came to mind; whilst the 50s design is low in output and has a technical specification today's designers would be embarrassed to quote, it still sounds remarkably musical. That this 21st Century £1299 all-in package can sound as good as it does is indicative of SLEE's compulsion with creating the very best. Today's "new" is being small, as shown in minuscule products such as Project's MaiA, or the simplistic yet beautiful Roksan Oxygene series or the respected Devialet creations, so there is definitely a place for the SLEE. As a woman, as well as liking to have less to dust, I would ask whether there could be versions in different colours; perhaps Pink (appropriately for HiFi Pig). Having different finishes not only fits into everyone's living room and taste but also makes it more of a designer product, and therefore more expensive looking. Yes, I know it would add a few pounds to the cost, but for an amplifier as good as this would add to interest from those who might otherwise not choose a SLEE.

CONCLUSION

For a complete Class AB dual mono-block power amplifier at under £1,300 is a feat in itself, but this system is more than that. It harnesses many years of experience of breathing in solder fumes and scratching of the head to create something that Graham himself is happy to put his GPSAudio dove on the front. The dove is portrayed as white and gentle, sweet and loving. This amplifier is certainly something I love, but the sound is not a white wash, nor is it only gentle. This is real class in a pint pot, and well worth the price.

Sound Quality – 8.8/10

Value for Money – 8.8/10

Build Quality – 8.2/10

Overall – 8.6/10

Janine Elliot

Having scored so highly the Graham SLEE Proprius Mono Power Amps were sent to Ian Ringsted. Here is his follow up report looking at the Proprius amps along with Graham SLEE's Majestic DAC.

Good things come out of Yorkshire and I don't just mean Yorkshire pudding and Rhubarb. GSP Audio is owned by Graham SLEE who hails from Mexborough in South Yorkshire and his business has been based there since 1998.

He was an apprentice trained engineering craftsman in the 1970s, worked in AV until 1984 when he set up his own electronics and printed circuit design business, working with a number of "blue-chip" technology companies.

In 1989 he became senior engineer at Audionics (Sheffield) Ltd, part of the Yorkshire Radio Network (YRN) group, where he designed electronics for broadcast studios – clients included the BBC, and numerous UK commercial broadcasters. 1993 he left YRN to freelance in electronics design with various companies.

Graham was also involved in 1970s disco: building on-the-road equipment and as a DJ. It was at this time he began developing phono preamps and headphone amps.

In 1999 he made his first commercial phono stage then known as the "Basic" and it received much praise from Gramophone magazine. However, as the name clashed with another manufacturer, it was changed to Gram Amp after the name broadcasters used for a turntable (the "Gram").

I have followed Graham's products for a few years and owned his Novo headphone amp for awhile before my friend decided he'd like to try it, didn't want to return it and so he bought it off me. His brother

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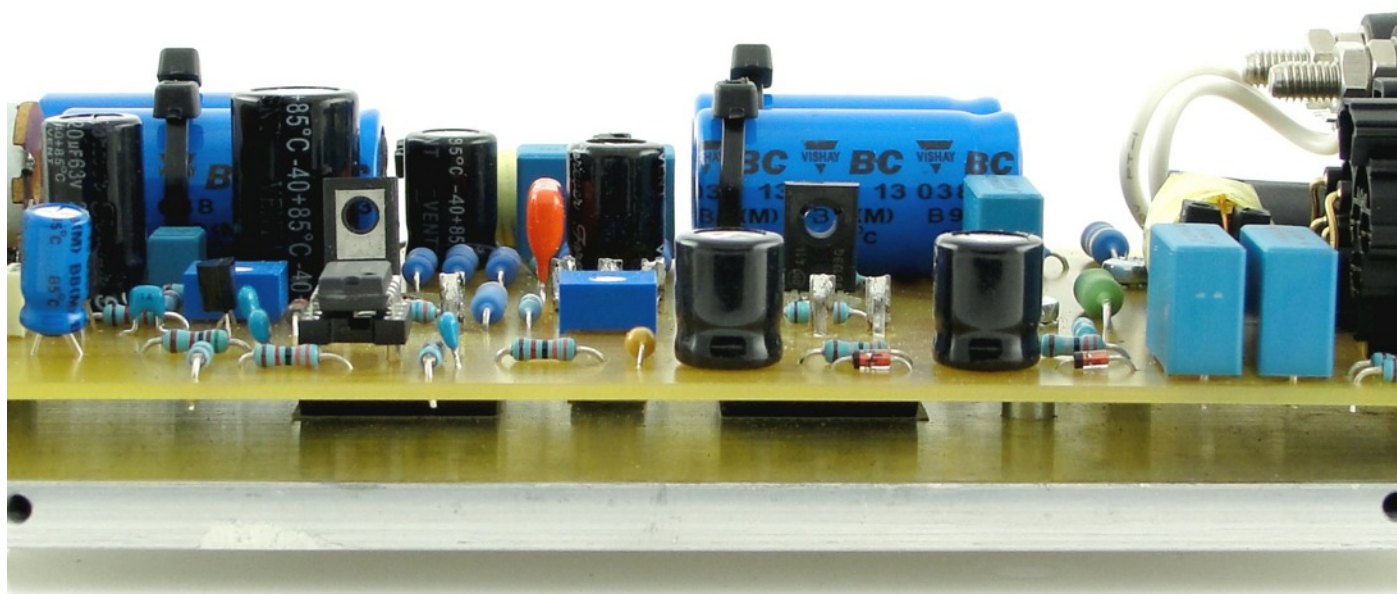
has one of Graham's phono amps and they both love his product.

My fellow reviewer Janine Elliot has already reviewed these units so this is a follow up to her in depth report and I won't bore you with all the technical details that she so thoroughly covered. I collected the units from Graham and followed the instructions on setting up which meant leaving the units permanently powered up, something I often do myself anyway if practical. I was also given a full range of cables to use that GSP recommend with their product. This consisted of speaker cables, phono cables and a digital coax. The cables are not super expensive and come terminated with good but not high end plugs costing a small fortune. Graham and his team have experimented with various wires and plugs and felt that the value for money and sound quality achieved by these components was excellent. This has been borne out by his customers who have tried them and agree they sound superb

All of Graham's products follow a basic premise of small neat and simple designs. They are not over complicated, very easy to use and reliable.

and out perform many dearer and supposedly better cables out there.

I spent sometime talking to Graham about his products and design philosophy and learnt he will not use components that don't work and sound good consistently over time and he eschews audiophile components as snake oil.



GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

All of Graham's products follow a basic premise of small neat and simple designs. They are not over complicated, very easy to use and reliable. The first thing my wife said when she saw them was how neat and dinky they were. Why couldn't all hifi be like this? True, they take up little space and are like little audio jewels in their smart anodized aluminium cases. Each unit has a single green led to indicate power and no power switches as Graham believes the amps should be left on to aid performance.

For an output rating of only 25 watts per channel and being so small in stature I couldn't believe how loud and good these little amps sounded.

The Majestic DAC is also a very comprehensive pre amp with a dedicated unbalanced analogue input for your phono pre amp and 3 coax digital inputs and 3 optical digital inputs. Finally there's a dedicated USB input for use with a computer. There are RCA phono pre output sockets and balanced outputs on jack sockets allowing for connection to the power amps and an output to a headphone amp for example. The volume control has a nice smooth action but is not remote- so get off the couch you lazy people!. All controls work flawlessly and feel solid and reliable, and the socketry is excellent without going over the top. The instructions come in a neat booklet and are concise and very informative without over complicating things. The Proprius amps are true mono blocks with their own out board power supplies... as does the Majestic. Therefore there is no possible in-

terference from the power supplies affecting the low level circuitry in the amps and DAC/ pre. The amps have a single rotary volume control on the front panel to adjust level if used direct from a fixed output source and left fully up when used with the DAC/pre using its own volume control.

THE SOUND

For an output rating of only 25 watts per channel and being so small in stature I couldn't believe how loud and good these little amps sounded. My resident Triangle Titus EZ's are relatively efficient but there was loads of power in reserve and I never felt the amps would run out of steam in my average sized living room. One of Graham's customers uses large PMC floor standers and says he has no problem driving them. The sound is very clean, smooth but detailed and three dimensional. I didn't feel any part of the frequency range suffered and on a very wide range of music types they excelled in all cases. The Majestic was a delight to use and the noise levels were very low and with no hum issues from either the DAC or the amps.

I used a Clearaudio Performance DC turntable for analogue duties and my trusty Sony CDPX 3000ES on both the analogue and coax inputs to compare the DAC in the Majestic against Sony's excellent own on board DAC.. I have to say it was a close call between the two showing how good Sony's original design was and how natural sounding and sweet the Majestic was with no digital nasties. My friend came over to hear the units and was mightily impressed. You could play anything digital through the DAC and it would sound very natural, dare I say analogue like.

A biblical analogy springs to mind with these units, the story of David and Goliath. You look at the Majestic and Proprius units and when compared with your usual behemoth amps with several hundred

GRAHAM SLEE PROPRIUS AMPLIFIERS

watts under their hoods and equally high price tags, you think it will be a very one sided contest. Well let me tell you it isn't and anyone who has heard the story knows David defeated Goliath the mighty warrior with one well aimed stone from his slingshot. Graham's units do just this, confounding all beliefs and they really made me sit up and take attention.

This combination of units just get on with it, with no fuss or shenanigans being down to earth just like their designer. In the few weeks I had the units I never tired of listening to them and will miss them now they have gone off for review abroad.

I applaud value for money products and clever simple designs that work reliably year after year. Graham sells his products worldwide but I feel he is nowhere near well known enough here. Hey his products are wholly designed and made here and he is proud of it. He doesn't have huge budgets in order to promote his products relying on his loyal customer base, dealers and word of mouth.

His product is not only fantastic value and very well made but is small so the wife acceptance factor is huge. The number of times in retail I lost sales or had to do exchanges because wives or girlfriends said no chance due to the size or ugliness factor made me despair.

The amps sell for £1250 a pair and the Majestic DAC pre is £1600. That is not beer money, but when you compare them with what else is out there for the same price you appreciate their qualities. I have heard far dearer kit which would be embarrassed by this trio.

Proprius amps

Sound Quality – 8.8/10

Value for Money – 8.9/10

Build Quality – 8.3 /10

Overall – 8.6/10

Ian Ringstead

DESIGNER'S COMMENTS

Rather than it being class-D like most mini-amps, I wanted the Proprius to be conventional class-AB because I feel the sound is more insightful.

The power rating and the choice of power supply came about for two reasons: 1. because the amp needed to be light enough for mounting on the back of small monitors (one of its uses) meaning the power supply needed to be a remote unit; and 2. I didn't want to use conventional protection circuits which can interfere with dynamic performance, cause distortion and sometimes damage tweeters. By selecting a generously rated switched-mode outboard supply which simply shuts down before things get seriously out of hand, meant that with a beefy output stage conventional protection circuits could be done-away with, whilst still having plenty of reserve current.

Whereas most amp designers throw as much technology into power amp design as they can, a mini amplifier needs a simpler approach - a sort of "less is more" I suppose.

I use a two-transistor multiple feedback configuration often seen in preamps as my input and voltage amplifier stage. Although not as voltage efficient, both transistors contribute to voltage gain instead of just one out of three in the differential input stages most other amps use.

Quasi complimentary "doubles" went out of fashion due to early power transistors being low on transition frequency, sometimes leading to bursts of spurious noise. The Proprius 30MHz output transistors coupled with voltage amp over-compensation allow for fast transient abilities without instability, making quasi-complimentary "doubles" viable - both output transistors being the same type are therefore well matched.

Because solid-state generally results in poor open-loop frequency response only fixed by lashings of negative feedback, I reduced the Proprius voltage amplifier gain to increase its open-loop frequency response (which my choice of voltage amp stage allows). The negative feedback is therefore pure 180 degrees higher up the frequency scale - a property usually only found in valve amps.

Graham Slee

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ALLNIC T1500 AMPLIFIER

Tubes From South Korea

Hifi Pig takes a look at the £5000 T15000 amplifier from South Korean company Allnic that uses the 300B power tube.



Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED

South Korea might not sound the obvious choice for great sounding hi-fi, but this part of the world is now becoming a major candidate for technology, and is Asia's fourth largest economy. Companies such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG, Kia, and more important to hi-fi fans Astell&Kern all come from this massively emerging economy. American sounding Allnic Audio is similarly becoming a major name in the audio dictionary. Despite its short life history, the company products look like they were made by a well-established major brand. The T1500 reviewed here, is solidly built, weighing in at a third of my own weight (honest) at

20kg, and needs its handles on the top (or the ones at the back) to lift it up. Being a 300B SET design made this all the more appealing for me to review. The amplifier costs £5000 in the UK.

I remember trying to build a Single-End Tube design when I was young, at a time when everyone was promoting the tiny transistor for its immediacy of sound and smaller footprint. For some reason I liked the looks of valves, the thought of building something Class A, plus the fact that class A single ended designs tend to be simpler to build. Also my poor upbringing meant that my early experience of tape recorders, radios and amplifiers were ostensibly

ALLNIC T1500 AMPLIFIER

valve. I had no idea then that valves would be so popular all these years later. The 300B is a very well respected tube for the audio aficionado, bringing with it a punchy but well-mannered sound, low noise, long life and good reliability. Introduced by Western Electric in 1937 to amplify telephone signals, little did they know it would start to become popular in audio from the 1980's. Only a few other tubes excite the audio fan, though I must admit I got excited when I first saw the Russian GU81 last year.

The 300B is the real workhorse providing the 12.5 watts per channel of pure class A power output in either 4, 8 or 16 ohm outputs.

Mr. Kang Su Park, founder of Allnic Audio, is not new to playing about with electronics. Born in 1955, he spent his teenage years showing a love for music and a fascination with electronics. At that time when being an electrician in Asia was considered a low-grade position he decided to study French and English languages at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea, earning himself a degree. After 5 years of work sitting behind a desk he got bored so went into electronics and audio design for a company called Silvaweld. After 10 years he sold his stake in the company and started afresh a new company which he called Allnic Audio. His contribution is much more than hand-building each valve amplifier, pre-amp, phono stage or DAC (oh, and also two beautiful looking cartridges, the Puritas at £3500, and Verito Z at £2000). On top of all this he has de-

signed and manufactured the constant impedance bridged T and H type, 41 stepped, silver contact attenuator used in the T1500 and his preamplifiers, and also their patented Absorb-gel tube damper sockets to reduce microphony. This is family-run business whereby only the best parts available are used, and if they cannot be found, then the firm manufactures their very own.

The T1500, available in black or silver, has two 300B and two PCL86 driver tubes and very expensive (around 25 times more) output transformer with Permalloy cores (if you're old enough you'll remember those Permalloy cassette tape heads) This Nickel alloy construction allows for fewer windings on the primary winding and high 'open circuit' inductance, resulting in a very wide frequency range and low distortion bass response.

It uses a 41 step silver contact attenuator, rather than a carbon potentiometer that is used in cheap amplifiers and preamps. Kang Su Park tells me that they have developed a constant impedance attenuator with an amazing 61 steps, but of course this one will be very much more expensive.

The 300B is the real workhorse providing the 12.5 watts per channel of pure class A power output in either 4, 8 or 16 ohm outputs. The initial valves supplied were impressive, but when I was supplied with KR Audio tubes made in the Czech Republic retailing at £600/pair the sound soon opened up further, despite not being fully run in by the time I finished with them. Each 300B tube has a separate fuse, as is there a main fuse for the unit. Indeed, Allnic's concern that the tubes are looked after carefully is enhanced not only by plastic chimney's protecting the valves, but also in their instruction manual warning about connecting the 4-pins the wrong way round;

"...in case you have removed and replaced the 300B's incorrectly..... you will have to replace fuses, and the damage to your self-esteem for getting

ALLNIC T1500 AMPLIFIER

it wrong may haunt you forever”. I had nightmares the next few nights.

As well as the 300Bs there are two PCL86 tubes, a very strong power pentode/triode. These are used to drive the 300B’s via a nickel permalloy choke plate inductor. Their chosen choke inductor has very low power loss and infinitely high load impedance. This configuration is an ideal driver stage for 300B SETs.

Returning to the chimneys, I liked the look of these, though would have preferred an LED to light them

up in orange or green, as in several other amplifiers I know. The class-A 12.5W output is enough to drive my Graham LS5/9s and also my Wilson Benesch Arc and B&W804s that I used in this review, showing no sign of struggling. This is a simple two stage amplifier giving around 35dB gain. Kang Su Park noted that most 300B amplifiers are under driven and notably distorting, largely due to conventional R-C circuits, which usually give around 70V swing voltage. The T-1500 Inductor Drive circuit more than doubles this up to 150V and with a low 0.3% distortion allowing for the higher output, and believe me 12.5W was enough for me.

THE SOUND

Being a simple design did not temper my opinion on this product. No, I was excited by the 300B. It played with authority and panache with whatever I fed it. What did surprise me, though, was just how heavy this beast was. This unit would be worth a lot just in scrap metal! Good job it has top and back handles, just to help you move it onto your reinforced shelf.

Initial comments on its performance were words like ‘flawless’, ‘spacious’, ‘musical’ and ‘wow’. This unit had a forceful, exciting and excellent depth of field, with a very clear bass performance. There are 5 inputs, one being balanced. There are two knobs on the front; one to select the input (each with its own

indicator) and the volume control. The on off switch is tucked on the right hand side. Each 300B has a small yellow screw current adjustment potentiometer next to the valve so you can ensure each is fed enough current, and which is the reason for the meters on the front. I’d prefer that after adjusting current the meters – perhaps with a button next to it to do that – would then register RMS level when not pressed. But this meter is useful if one of the valves is failing as the meter will decrease its reading, and

Being a simple design did not temper my opinion on this product. No, I was excited by the 300B. It played with authority and panache with whatever I fed it.

with the bias adjustment means that you don’t need a matched pair of tubes.

The unit comes with an equally solid and heavy remote control, aka Krell, but I wonder why as well as separate buttons for inputs 1,2,3,4 and 5 there are also two buttons for scrolling channels up and down. Overkill.

To my music. Firstly I listened to vinyl, something made for valves. Classical music gave a powerful soundstage within the limits of vinyl but with depth of field and positioning of individual instruments that DACs still find hard. I did, however, feel the limited dynamic range of vinyl became very apparent when I was listening, and at times sounded cluttered. But once transferring to identical recordings via my DAC

ALLNIC T1500 AMPLIFIER

opened up much more and gave a more appealing presentation.

Playing on vinyl the duo of Charlie Haden (double bass) and Antonio Forcione (guitar) in Naim's 'Heat Play' album and specifically the track "Silence" gave enviable musicality and space, with plenty of silence and time to think. Recorded in "true stereo" by Ken Christianson at California Institute of Art, this is easily able to convey the 3D that a coincident pair can muster.

This amplifier however needed not to feel insufficient. Output was flat all the way up and signal to noise was pretty low down, indeed much better than I expected and as good as most transistor amplifiers.

Turning to my prize Dave Brubeck's 'Direct-Cut Disc' gave a very controlled and relaxed performance with everything there, including my sensing of the musicians nerves as they tried to get through the pieces without making any mistakes (the album being recorded directly onto a specially designed inverted stylus so limited vinyl copies could be made direct from this 'negative'). I was there in the room with Dave and his sons.

Turning to digital sources gave me a very warm and musical performance that an uncomplicated Class A 300B design could do so very well. This amplifier also has a pre-output so that you could add a powered subwoofer, bi-amp or, if you need more power, plug into another power amplifier. This amplifier however needed not to feel insufficient. Output was flat all the way up and signal to noise was pretty low down, indeed much better than I expected and as good as most transistor amplifiers. Overall spec on paper might not be mouth-watering, but the performance certainly was. With a name that could come

from America the Allnic had muscle and grunt that could well originate from the new world. This product was priced well to provides great competition to any valve amplifier made anywhere. Playing Tolga Kashif's 'The Queen Symphony' track 3 cello and violin solos gave realism and naturalness in a way that many amplifiers cannot do whilst being fed from a DAC. Playing Linn Records 24/192 Chopin Piano Concertos (Ingrid Fliter, Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Jun Märkl) the pianoforte sounded

very forte, unlike anaemic upright piano sounding renditions on many so-called weighty amps. Whatever I played worked a treat. Ella and Louis "Isnt this a Lovely Day" gave a musicality full of warmth and 'class' that made me, oh dear, ignore the fact that this was recorded in mono. Christos Anesti (Agnes de Venice 24bit/96kHz) was clear and full of depth of field whether the piano, the organ, the voice, the sea hitting the pebbles on the beach, the reverb,

the ping-pong-delay in this montage. This was fun and very easy to listen to. If you want a no-hassle and mightily good looking valve amplifier, this should be at the top of your shortlist.

CONCLUSION

A surprisingly fun piece of kit that looked as good as it sounded, retrieving as much detail as there was from the music, whatever the instrument, and doing it equally well at low or high levels. This little sister to the 40kg 10-valve T2000 with its KT120's, D3a's, and 6485's, is no lesser a machine. Indeed at its price vs sound quality vs looks vs weight, this is a surprisingly agile proposition.

I fell in love for the few days I had it.

Sound Quality – 8.5/10

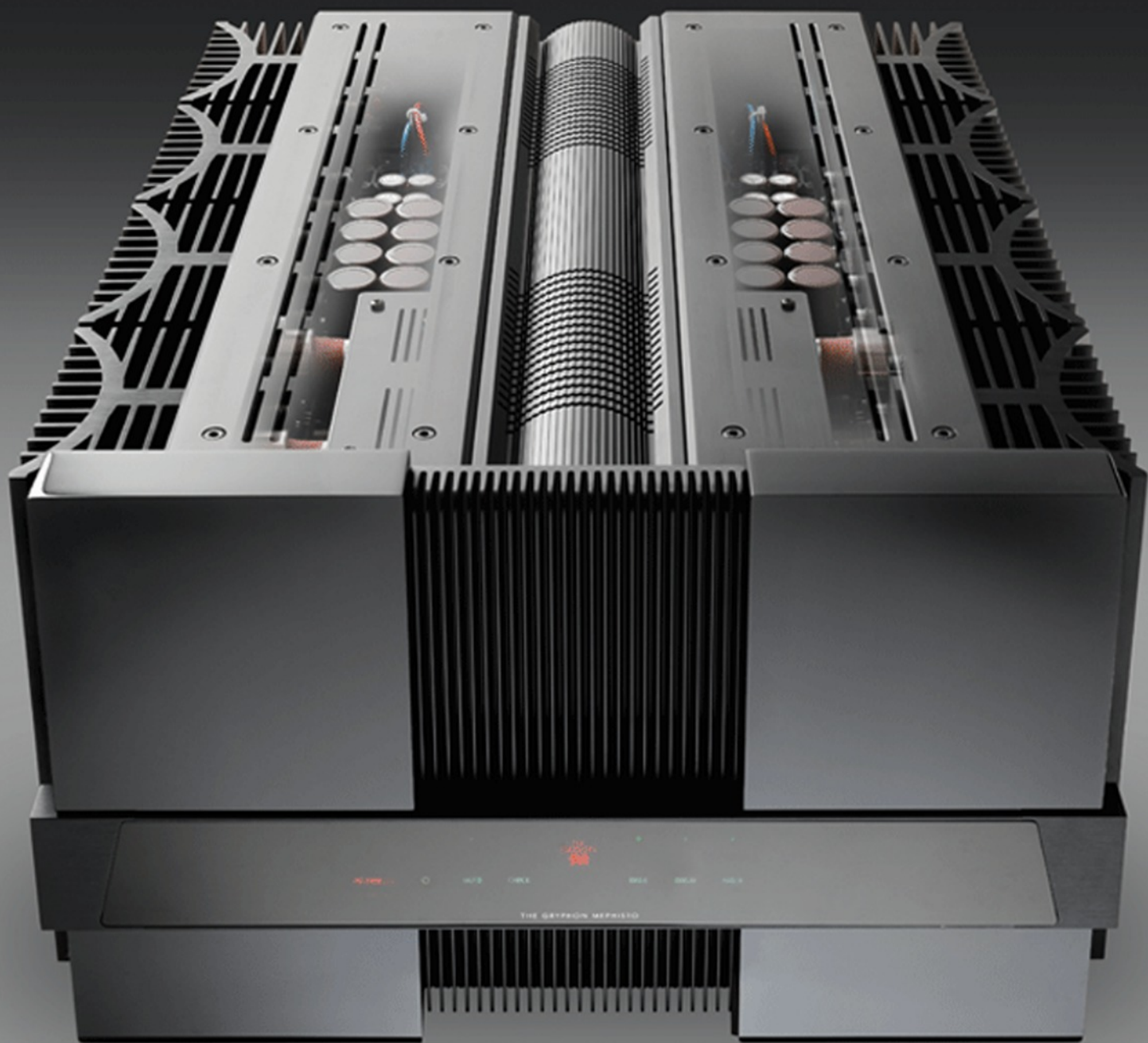
Value for Money – 8.6/10

Build Quality – 8.8/10

Overall – 8.63/10

Janine Elliot

THE GRYPHON



GRYPHON MEPHISTO

www.gryphon-audio.dk

JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

Swiss Precision!

This Job amp shares heritage with Goldmund but costs just £1300! Is this too good to be true?



JOB Systems is a Swiss based company working out of the Goldmund facility and shares the technology and machinery of their legendary manufacturing plant. JOB are however a separate entity and should be looked at as such, but with roots so deep in high end equipment the company really has a strong background and engineering know how.

The class A/B design of JOB Systems 225 amplifier is housed in a solid, well constructed enclosure with a gun metal shaded front anodised panel. I really adore the shade of grey the 225 has but for most, it may be a bit of a deviation from an all naturally anodised fascia system, so in this instance the sound of the amplifier must be a deciding factor.

For an amplifier with such modest dimensions it has some good weight to it giving it a feeling of substan-

tial build quality and looking inside doesn't deter from this feeling of wealth.

A high grade toroidal transformer with multiple secondaries feed discrete regulation and an output stage filled with carefully selected high quality components.

For me the 225 sits at a price point which is very competitive, both in the power amplifier and integrated region, knowing that a preamp is required will bump up the price further and JOB do have a passive available. To excite the sound buds I am going to tell you right now that the 225 is simply stunning, captivating and is beyond any shadow of a doubt the absolute best power amp available today for around £1300. JOB Systems and their Goldmund connections have put together an amplifier (performance-

JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

wise) that just doesn't surprise and excite the listener, or make the reviewer go 'wow, this should cost several times more' – a phrase often bandied around. The JOB truly is at the absolute pinnacle of what can be attained in this market right now for price against performance, no ifs or buts!

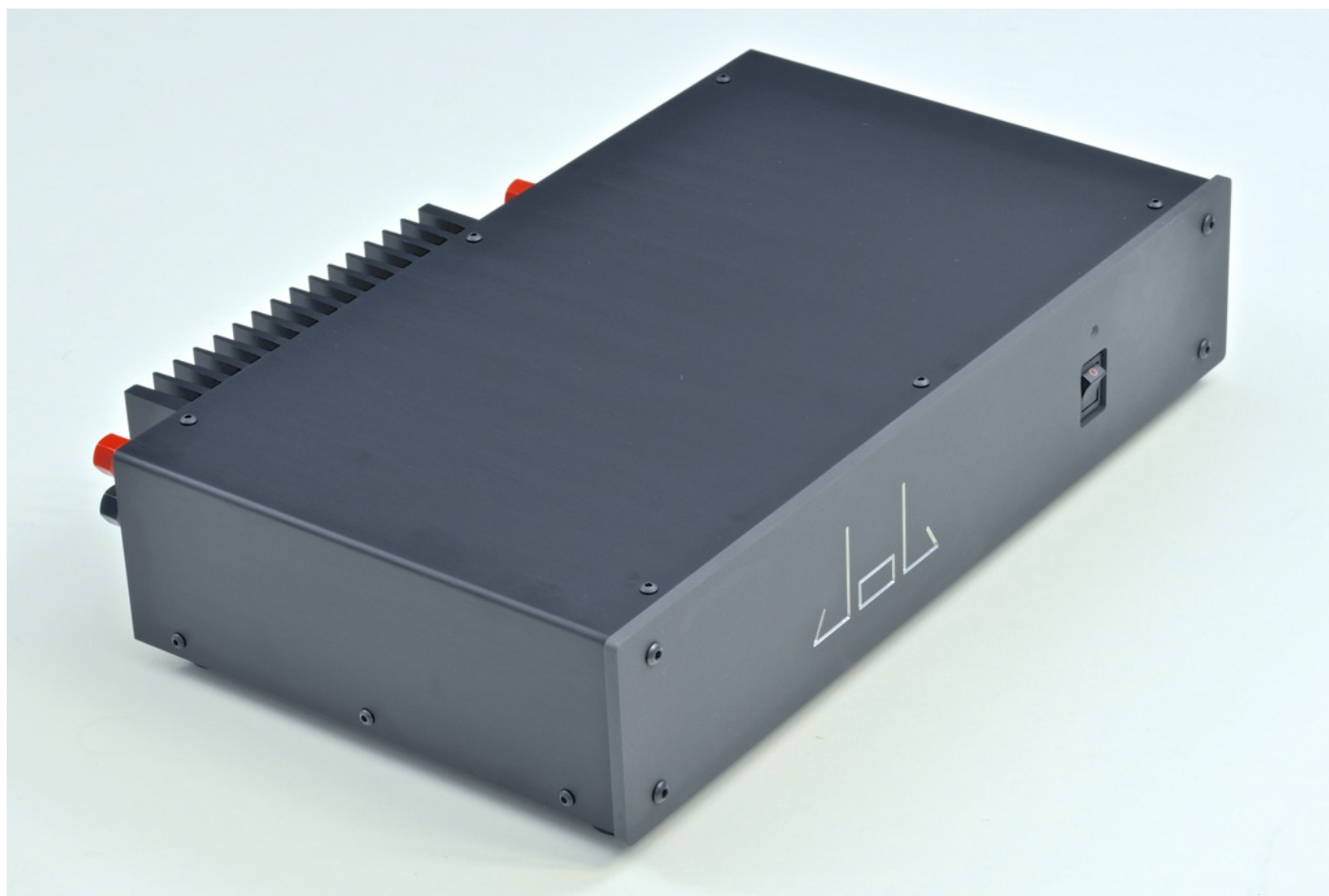
Have a read on for a breakdown and explanation of its sonic abilities, or don't bother... if you are willing to spend £1300 or \$1700 and don't have the patience to read all the following then take my word for it, order one and enjoy.

THE SOUND

On first take what did I make of the sound? This was something I was questioning myself for a while before I settled on an initial take on the 225. It does have an unusual quality and characteristic to it, imagine a single ended transistor amp with a raspy quality of organic texture, much like the harmonic distortion of a valve amp. If your brain can comprehend such a mixture then you are certainly on the right track.

Midrange is projected especially well with vocals, leaving great depth for stage interaction and placement of band/instruments. With more bass driven music the 225 sounds fun and exciting, a real captivating bounciness to the presentation which is also reflected in the lower mid/upper bass region. Kick drums have a real crack of the skin, strike of the stick and expression of the drum's cavity giving an undeniable rhythm-driven pace to music. Overall information in the lower mid upper bass area is particularly stand out, informative and very very complex underpinning everything else the amplifier does like a strong chassis on a Koenigsegg supercar – without it the sound would fall apart.

I've heard many pieces of equipment that can convey a terrific amount of lower mid upper bass detail and precision but that's always to the sacrifice of weight, leaving a leanness in this portion of the frequency range to allow for unmasking of the detail. The 225 doesn't lift a veil nor does it colour the upper bass, what you get is a level of detail and information that



JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

has a tremendous amount of weight, pace, detail and rhythm. To try and put this into terms that may relate to you, imagine a top British amp such as Rega or Quad and combine it with some American muscle and then a few drops of fines from a Swiss timepiece and I think that you will begin to get an idea of the complexity of the 225.

In the higher frequencies that harmonic distortion of a valve amp description just seems to sit well with me. When a valve goes into breakup at peak volumes it doesn't clip like a transistor amplifier and its breakup is favoured by many guitarists as it produces a raspy quality. The 225 hasn't got the pin sharp ting of a note but it certainly conveys a sparkly and airy, open treble that is playful, energetic and at the same time engaging with such a natural representation of notes. On first glance I questioned the speed of each note, feeling that a note was taking a nano second or two to express its nature, but after adjusting I concluded that there was so much insight into each note that what I was hearing was more accurate pitch information which for the untrained brain would culminate in a slower type sound as there is more to ascertain over a short period of time – once again like a very good valve amplifier.

Notes disperse very wide indeed across a very strongly imaged soundstage. There's a fullness of a note which decays in a subtle way rather than being sterile and understated, a little loser in its edges like a valve amp. You could say more liquid with more flow than a typically tighter sounding A/B design.

There's no question that the JOB does wide, deep and sculptured with height. There's a quality of responsiveness right across the front of the room where dynamic beats emanate from. The central focus, as strong as it is, becomes replicated from all angles and positions within the boundaries of the room.

Where other amplifiers in the JOB's price range of \$1700 will be able to create nuances of detailed transients in areas off axis, offering descriptions of spatial awareness very well, the 225 conveys an entire story from left to right a full and complex image

The 225 hasn't got the pin sharp ting of a note but it certainly conveys a sparkly and airy, open treble that is playful, energetic and at the same time engaging with such a natural representation of notes.

depth, many a front to back shape that has to be stated with the term sculptured rather than three dimensional.

There's is such a thickness of tone on the outer edges of the soundstage it's very difficult to adjust on first listen, weight doesn't generally lend itself to more particular areas, as by its very nature lower frequencies are difficult to pin point and disperse fairly evenly into the room, but in this case with the lower end voicing the 225 seems to have deployed a special technique which gives almost pocket like areas of low frequencies in the soundstage making for a truer representation of a performance which I've only heard from far more expensive gear.

At the time I also had in for review some ATC SCM19's, pairing the 225 with these was a revela-

JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

tion – the enthusiasm of energetic kangaroo bouncing, informative bass was simply magic. Every piece of music I listened to had a more confident and explorative bottom end than the Rowland integrated was able to convey through ATC's larger standmounts. Vocals wailed with an intensity of purpose, with delicacy and richness to match and the top end had an airy image that gave the most transparent insight into decaying notes that I had to remind myself that in British Pounds this amplifier only cost around £1300. The relationship between price and musical fulfilment is simply incredible, the sound is just simply so satisfying and then some.

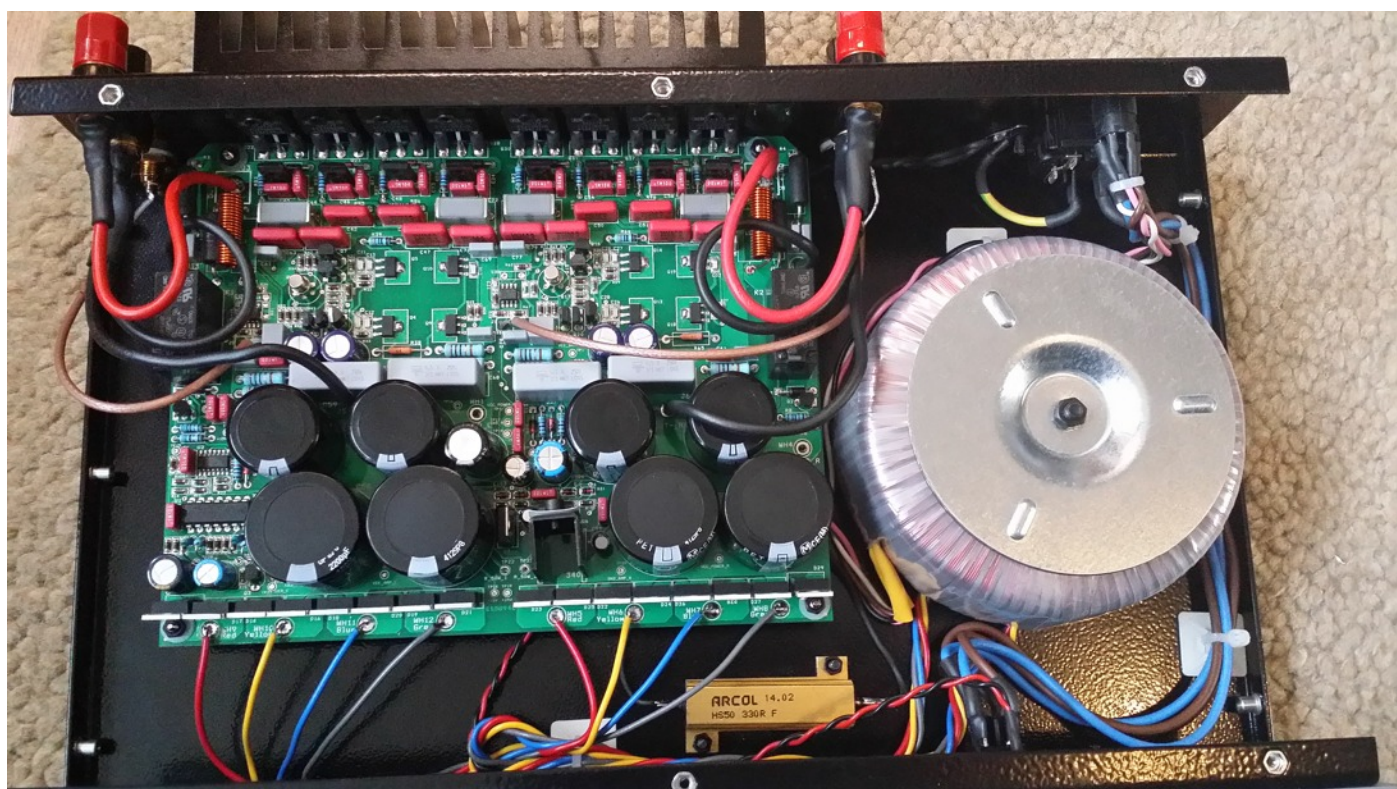
CONCLUSION

An excerpt from the Bible: JOB 22:5 – “Is not your wickedness great?” My God it is, the JOB 225 is a devilishly naughty amplifier that that systematically pushes the boundaries of all that is holy!

In other words the definition, resolution, transparency and emphatic bass performance is shocking. JOB

I think I will definitely own one at some stage, I don't have much room left for new kit but once I pass on some other equipment I can see me having a relationship with the 225 for a long time.

Systems manages to put together an amplifier of such maturity and insight into the music that the price tag simply does not reflect its achievements. To say that I was excited, captivated and surprised by



JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

the amplifier, from build to sound quality is an understatement!

I think I will definitely own one at some stage, I don't have much room left for new kit but once I pass on some other equipment I can see me having a relationship with the 225 for a long time.

Build Quality: 9.2/10

Sound Quality: 9.4/10

Value For Money: 9.6/10

Overall: 9.4/10

Highly recommended for its sheer ability to give sustained and substantial natural, emphatic rhythmic performance that first take you by surprise, toys with your mind and then just lays out exactly what £1300 can actually really achieve in this business – no frills just skills!

Dan Worth

Dan's overall score of nine point four out of ten overall means Hifi Pig then submits the item for a second view from another reviewer, in this case Dominic.

When I was a lot younger, I used to be drawn to components that had plenty of shiny knobs, switches and VU meters, naively thinking that the more there was of them, the better the component must be. With the benefit of hindsight of course, many years of experience tells you that the more money is spent on the superfluous and pretty to the outside, the less gets devoted to the insides. These days though, my interest is mostly piqued by the "Plain Janes" that arrive for review, or something that shouts good engineering without actually doing so. A good case for that philosophy is the JOB Systems 225 power amplifier submitted to me for review.

Upon opening the box it arrives in, you are greeted by a plain rectangular metal case in a gun metal grey colour finish. No bells, no whistles, no VU meters

...it has intensity, body and richness to the sound palette that doesn't leave you even remotely feeling battered by an onslaught of clinically dispensed energy...

either, in fact it is SO "plain Jane" it's looks almost home made, save for the laser etched logo on the front panel. Appearances can of course be deceptive, so a look at the specifications tells us that this amplifier can pump out 125 watts of muscular controlled power into whatever speakers you may care to mention, even the ones other amplifiers baulk at, so JOB Systems claim. Not being in possession of some swine to drive loudspeakers, then thee and me will have to take their word for that.

SOUND QUALITY

So then dear reader, what does the JOB Systems 225 power amplifier sound like? In short, it sounds like no other amplifier I have listened to. Are you serious Dominic? Yes I am, so kindly read on.

This is an amplifier you HAVE to listen to, because it is a revelation in the way it presents music. I have heard no other amplifier untangle complex and dynamic music in the same way as this one can. It is so sure footed, so controlled and so ENJOYABLE in the effortless way it can unpick the individual musical strands in a performance so you are left in no doubt how many musicians are performing, what instruments they are playing and where they are seated/stood in the soundstage... and that applies to orchestras too. That might suggest to some readers that it might be rather cold, clinical and unforgiving, but not a bit of it because it has intensity, body and

JOB 225 POWER AMPLIFIER

richness to the sound palette that doesn't leave you even remotely feeling battered by an onslaught of clinically dispensed energy, it just engages you fully all the time and that for me is what sets it apart from the herd.

Massed clapping and whistling doesn't sound like a frying pan full of bacon sizzling away either...

I think the best example of that to present to you is how the JOB amplifier engaged with my favourite CD "torture track" in the form of Porcupine Tree's 'Deadwing' album. Now this album is packed to the rafters with raw uncouth energy, surprisingly well recorded for all that and as a result it really does wrong foot many hi-fi systems, in fact the better the system is, the more raw and uncouth it sounds. With the JOB amplifier it still sounds raw, but whereas most amplifiers blur the sound across successive notes so it ends up as a sort of painful musical mush, the JOB untangles all of it and presents each note one at a time with the appropriate stop-starts where necessary so there is clear delineated pauses between each note. At first hearing I wasn't sure what I was hearing, but a second and third hearing made me understand just how controlled and precise the JOB amplifier is.

Play some live recorded music and the audience seems more "live" than ever before and the irritating person coughing three seats away will irritate you even more because if the recording microphone captured it, you will hear it. Massed clapping and whistling doesn't sound like a frying pan full of bacon sizzling away either, it will sound like hundreds of individuals all around you. Spooky. So if you are the kind of listener that revels in detail and fine nuances,

you will be positively bathing in what the JOB can do in that department.

Have I got you drooling and champing at the bit to rush out and buy one? Before you do, I must tell you the following. The JOB amplifier is a soupcon fussy about cabling and I tried several sets to get the right sonic balance, due to the variability of cable performance which the JOB easily picks up on. The amplifier is DC coupled right through and if you put DC in at one end, then DC appears at the speaker terminals, which as you may or may not know, is what loudspeakers are none too keen on accepting, so you must make absolutely sure your pre-amp does not put out any DC voltage however small.

CONCLUSION

For me it is completely refreshing to find a product where the huge majority of it's specifications and materials costing went INSIDE and not on the outside appearances, especially so at the price point we are discussing. At a mere \$1,700 it really is the epitome of a no-brainer purchase because I couldn't name another amplifier with the same level of performance for anywhere near that asking price.

If you enjoy nuances and fine details you are in for a treat, plus the amplifier's bass power and control will leave you breathless, as too will the lucid and transparent midrange enthrall and enervate. What's not to like?

Construction: 8.8/10

Sound quality: 9.6/10

Value for money: 9.8/10

Overall: 9.4/10

Recommended for: Unbeatable bang for the buck amplifier that has a truly engaging sound which redefines and dominates the price sector it occupies. Stunning performance and value.

Dominic Marsh



Could a machine have made a
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LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS INTEGRATED

Welsh Lovely!

Loads of inputs and an onboard DAC set this integrated amplifier from Welsh company Leema Acoustics, but how does it sound?



Founded in 1998 by Lee Taylor and Mallory Nicholls (**LEE** and **MAllory** = **LEEMA**) both ex-BBC engineers with an almost fanatical interest in sound reproduction.

They have around 20 products in their current lineup including loudspeakers and electronics, with some news models due to be released soon so we are told.

CONSTRUCTION

Housed in an attractive half width chassis, this amplifier is certainly well built and neatly laid out. On the front panel working left to right we find the power button, to the right of which is the infra red remote control sensor window. Below these are the 3.5mm headphone jack socket and another 3.5mm input jack

LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS INTEGRATED

socket to connect an MP3 player. In the centre of the front panel is a blue fluorescent display panel which shows the input configuration and the volume level. To the right of that is the volume control which is not a resistive potentiometer, but a rotary pulse generator which sends digital signals to a volume control processing section in the amplifier. This knob also doubles up as an input selector by pressing on it when the menu display is activated. Beneath the volume control is the menu push button and a mute push button.

There are no less than 3 TOSLINK input connections, followed by a co-axial S/PDIF input and finally a USB input, which takes care of the digital inputs available.

To the rear we find an array of inputs, the single set of speaker terminals and the mains inlet. There are no less than 3 TOSLINK input connections, followed by a co-axial S/PDIF input and finally a USB input, which takes care of the digital inputs available. The analogue inputs comprises a pair of fully balanced XLR inputs, then 3 RCA single ended input pairs and then finally a pair of “pre out” RCA sockets to connect to another power amplifier for bi-amping, or as a line level subwoofer drive output. Each of the inputs can be renamed to whatever one desires via the menu system and display. There is also the option to assign one of the RCA inputs to become a dedicated AV input. Speaker connection is by BFA sockets which will also accept standard 4mm banana plugs, which of course means you cannot connect bare wire or spade terminals. To the right of the TOSLINK connector we find a pair of sockets marked as “LIPS” which stands for “Leema Intelligent Protocol System” which links the Elements am-

plifier to other Leema products. Having only the Elements amplifier submitted for review, I could not test for the efficacy or otherwise of this connection. Finally we have an IEC mains input socket and fuse panel with the correct fuse rating for voltage input labeled accordingly.

The Elements amplifier also has a built in Digital to Analogue Convertor with a Crystal CS 434X DAC and a Wolfson receiver. It will automatically detect sample rates up to 96kHz but with rates higher than that they have to be set with the correct frequency

value via the front panel menu control system up to a maximum of 192kHz.

The sample submitted for review is in a silver/grey matt finish, a black finish is also available.

Price at time of review is circa £1,700.00.

SOUND QUALITY

Not strictly sound quality as such, but worth a mention at this point is how easy the amplifier is to set up. The front panel

menu system works really well, especially so from following the user manual which was clear, concise and lacking in ambiguity, written in plain easily understood English, which was a refreshing change from the norm. I detest graphics only based instruction manuals.

First impressions were very favourable when I connected the Elements amplifier into my resident evaluation system. It certainly had no shortage of power and drive, although refinement and sophistication were not as good as the resident amplifier, but that was no surprise and no slur to the Elements amplifier either. Treble in particular had a slight trace of fuzziness at the extreme top end that was not offensive or indeed intrusive and that was just me being very critical. I am always loathe to blight any component with adverse comments, so maybe a change of cabling could sort that out and so I tried the Leema interconnects and speaker cables that came in another

LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS INTEGRATED

package and not officially submitted for review. With the Leema cables installed the sound wasn't any better to be truthful, so immediately head first into the spare cables cabinet to find some cables which had a bit more synergy with the Elements amplifier. I tried several pure silver confections and they were way off beam with the sound I was looking for, silver plated copper was less than ideal too and realised that the Elements amp is a touch sensitive to what it is paired with. In the end I settled on a set of pure copper cables from SLIC Innovations and now we were rocking.

With these cables in place the Elements amplifier simply blossomed into a powerful and yet refined musical performer that lacked nothing in musical satisfaction. Whatever CD I put into drawer never failed to entertain, even the one or two of the infamous "torture tracks" I threw at the Elements amp got shrugged off easily, which told me there was some rounding off in performance somewhere but I was not going to carry out an autopsy to discover

why and how, I just enjoyed what I was hearing. Porcupine Tree's "Deadwing" album is a real wince listen on the majority of systems and the higher the resolving power, the worse it sounds in most instances. The Elements amplifier managed to balance on that tightrope of bringing out the details and dynamics of the album, without tipping over into a harsh fatiguing listen and assaulting the ears in the process.

The internal DAC is a peach too and I took the digital output from my CD player via the co-axial and TOSLINK connections using a glass lead and both sounded superb, along with a USB hookup from my PC for playing some Spotify tracks. I am not into hardcore streaming by any means, I just use Spotty to line up any future music purchases and the reviewer part of me must also have this facility to hand to test the increasing number of devices with digital connectivity being submitted for review.

My favourite CD of the moment is Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album recorded live in various venues. The track "Sort of Revolution" has some



LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS INTEGRATED

powerful Floor Tom whacks from the drummer and the Elements amplifier certainly did put the weight and power behind them so they were felt as well as heard, whereas some amps of reputed power cannot seem able to do this. At the time of the review a pair of Dali Rubicon 5's arrived for evaluation and there was no hesitation in hooking them up to the Elements amplifier. These speakers have a rather prodigious bass output to them and those Floor Tom whacks shook the room even at fairly modest sound levels with no boom at all. Nice. The Dalis also have a revealing yet accurate treble and if there was any doubt about the Elements amplifier's treble content then rest assured the Dalis would have found it, as this same album has some well recorded venue ambience which changes at each location and drum kit cymbals which shine with startling realism. Fink's lyrics writing and indeed diction of same is terrible when he sings but for reasons I still cannot comprehend, this album is rarely out of my CD player of late.

Factor in that it has a superb built in DAC with enough inputs and connectivity to place it at the heart of an entertainment system around the house and at a price that is pretty reasonable too given that flexibility of use.

Of course, I do play many different genres of music during an evaluation, to allay your fears that I have only played two CDs and formed conclusions from

that alone. It is only when something noteworthy crops up during the listening sessions which spans many hours over weeks that I and I suspect many of my fellow reviewers also do, will only incorporate any highlights found into their reviews. It will generally include Jazz, Orchestral, Rock, Soul, World, Ambient and many others too, although I do draw the line at opera and rap. Sheesh, no.

CONCLUSION

I cannot in all honesty find fault with the Elements amplifier – not that I look out for them in the first place as it's not within my remit to do that. My own experience during the evaluation was that the amplifier is

rather fussy with cabling and fortunately I have a veritable armoury of cables to pick and choose from to get the ideal match. My concern then is that at audition prospective buyers may not be hearing the amplifier at it's full potential and dismiss it as unsuitable to their tastes. When you get it right, it's a de-



LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS INTEGRATED

light to listen to and many hours of listening pleasure awaits. Factor in that it has a superb built in DAC with enough inputs and connectivity to place it at the heart of an entertainment system around the house and at a price that is pretty reasonable too given that flexibility of use.

Construction: 8.1/10

Sound quality: 8.6/10

Value for money: 8.3/10

Overall: 8.3/10

Recommended for: A stylish compact amplifier offering plenty of inputs including digital, connectivity capabilities and excellent sound quality.

Dominic Marsh

DESIGNER'S COMMENTS

The Elements integrated amplifier incorporates a wide number of innovative technologies. For example, the power amplifier device is manufactured by NXP (an offshoot of Phillips); NXP are better known for their microcomputer chips (CPU) which are used in many phones and mobile devices, as well as our audio products — running ARM 32-bit cores and RISC instruction sets.

Several years ago, NXP asked if we would like to get involved in a new power amplifier device they were developing. We had quite a lot of input in the development and ultimately the sound quality of the device, so it was a no-brainer to use it in the Elements series of amplifiers.

We run the device very conservatively: the power restriction being the size of transformer we can fit in the compact chassis rather than any limitation of the output stage (it's still pretty big though!) This approach has really paid off, because the perceived power output is much higher than the published figures and we have enjoyed near-100% reliability; there are only two Elements power amplifier failures in the field in total, which is statistically astonishing. The digital audio board, in particular the M1 USB interface board, uses some very interesting technology indeed. First, we looked at using one of

the commercially available asynchronous USB solutions, such as the Xmos board, but there were too many limitations (no capability above 96kHz etc.) So, we designed our own!

In order to achieve true hi-fi-quality audio from a computer source, it is necessary to completely electrically (galvanically) isolate the nasty noisy computer and its hideous switch-mode power supply from the audio equipment. This is usually done with miniature transformers, but with high-data-rate audio (above 96kHz) the transfer quality of the transformers degenerates. By 192kHz they are really struggling!

We use a technology called Spintronics which employs spinning electrons acting in magnetic sympathy across an insulating barrier only a few atoms thick, as the isolating medium. This technology is very new and highly advanced, so I'd imagine we have very few competitors! The real benefit of this approach, however, is that the transfer bandwidth is much greater. Our board will happily handle 768kHz audio, while still maintaining absolute galvanic isolation from the computer. The DACs we use are Crystal CS-series chips, chosen for their audio quality rather than specification. Many years ago, we spent a week (!) auditioning different DAC chips and ultimately, we chose the Crystal chips because they sounded the most 'analogue' and natural.

The volume is regulated via a high-quality analogue resistor-ladder device with computer control; we do not apply volume control in the digital domain. All of our amplifiers feature onboard analogue volume control. Using our proprietary LIPS interface, Leema Intelligent Protocol System, a communication bus that enables Leema components to communicate with other units in the Leema range, the audio output signal from any Leema preamp can be set to 'unregulated': a control signal is sent from the preamp to the Leema power amplifier via the LIPS interface, which controls the volume chip at the amplifier end, just before the input stage. This approach means that the signal in the interconnect, is always at a high level, ensuring the very best signal-to-noise ratio performance from your cables.

Lee Taylor



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SYMPHONIC LINE RG14 EDITION INTEGRATED

Teutonic Symphony

Hifi Pig takes a listen to the £2850 German made Symphonic Line integrated amplifier.

Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED



When asked if I could review the Symphonic Line RG14 Edition integrated amplifier I have to admit to having not heard of the company before in all my years of listening to music and hi-fi equipment. Needless to say the brand hails from Germany, that land of countless companies making superb product we Brits are totally ignorant of. Ikon Audio who import and distribute Symphonic Line are obviously keen to let us in on this companies excellent product range and encouraged me to look at the manufacturers website, something I always do anyway to research a product and company.

Rolf Gemein the man behind Symphonic Line is a passionate designer and obvious lover of music in order to have designed so many items in his companies portfolio. There are simply too many to mention here but if you are interested have a look for yourselves. The site is informative but like many foreign companies the descriptions and details get lost in translation and read rather oddly. This is not a criti-

cism of the company, just an observation I have noticed on many occasions when surfing manufactures websites. Being English we are lazy and don't speak foreign languages very well, expecting everyone else to be able to speak English. The sad fact is they often do, my friends in Germany speak excellent English and put us to shame. So it seems churlish to comment on the website other than to say don't be put off the companies descriptions due to poor translation, believe me the product is excellent.

The RG14 Edition is the baby in the companies range retailing here in the UK for £2850 and reminds me of the classic integrated amps of the 1980's when I was in retailing. It has three identically sized rotary switches, power, source select and tape monitor and a larger volume control. The bottom left hand corner of the front panel has a headphone socket near to the green power led. The front panel is substantial being hewn from thick aluminium and engraved with the companies name which is in a larger but different font style to the controls markings. This makes for a some-

SYMPHONIC LINE RG14 EDITION INTEGRATED

what odd looking style of presentation. The controls are very solid and give one the confidence they will last forever. The volume is very smooth and motorised having a remote control for user convenience. There are three line inputs , Aux, CD and Tuner and a phono input with selectable mm/mc on the back panel. Not many amplifiers have this amount of comprehensive facilities these days due to changes in tastes and styles over the last 40 years, but I for one find it very welcome to have all that convenience in one box. The remote only controls the volume but will operate other functions from the Symphonic Line of units one may accompany with this amplifier.

The back panel comes with the usual gold plated solid single ended RCA sockets for the inputs and tape monitor and one pair of substantial speaker binding posts. The phono inputs are split for both mm and mc and selected by a toggle switch. This shows the phono stage is no after thought and it performs very well in its own right. Finally there is an IEC power input socket so you can select your own favourite mains lead.

The RG14 Edition has been around some time , about 15 years and is highly regarded both in Germany and

abroad. As a reviewer I am naturally curious to see what others think of a product but ultimately it is down to personal taste and system synergy as to whether I like a product or not. I'll not keep you in suspense or going to the end of this review to find out what I thought. It is very good and I can see why it has the reputation it has over such a long period of production. I guess the design may have been tweaked over time and improvements made as new components and ideas from experimenting came about , but I reckon Rolf Gemein got it pretty right to start with as his philosophy doesn't appear to be to make a product unless he is happy with it before selling it. Something all companies should strive for but don't always in my experience.

The amplifier is bomb proof and built like a German Tiger tank , solid and foreboding with a fearsome reputation. The quality of components inside are first class and chosen for their sound quality as well as reliability and the large toroidal power transformer is shielded in a mu metal case.

Output is a 100 watts per channel into 8 ohms.

THE SOUND



SYMPHONIC LINE RG14 EDITION INTEGRATED

Now to the sound. I let the amp warm up for a few days as recommended by the importer and then began serious listening. Symphonic Line recommend 200 hours burn in but I felt it had had a pretty good run in as other reviewers had had it before me. First impressions were promising, The sound stage was solid, wide and deep. I used mainly CD and turntable and listened mostly through the speaker outputs, but tried the headphone socket with my Beyer's to assess its capability. The headphone output is very good for an integrated amplifier and when you insert the headphone jack it mutes the loudspeaker output, an obvious thing you might think but not all amps do this. As I am not a great headphone listener I didn't spend hours using this facility but it impressed me and was quiet with no hum issues, a useful addition.

The phono input was also very good and as already mentioned has switchable mm/mc sockets so catering for enthusiasts with either cartridge or lucky enough to use both. I mainly tried it with a Clearaudio Performance DC I was also reviewing at the time which has an excellent mm cartridge and this worked very well. Like the cd input the sound was very musical and smooth so allowing long periods of fatigue free listening. Comparing the built in phono stage to an admittedly much dearer unit I had (Perreaux VP3 (£1950)) showed the RG14 Edition's limitations in stage depth and ultimate detailing, but it was still very impressive and more than worthy of inclusion. This would suit anyone who didn't want to have more boxes and wires and were happy with the trade off for convenience. The built in phono stage I am sure would be as good as many separate alternatives available now at £500 to £600. Vinyl was first class and did not come a poor second to the CD input if one used a good turntable and cartridge. Hum was low and gain was not an issue with either mm or mc for the majority of cartridges people would use.

The CD input also impressed with its musicality, depth and detailing on a good recording like Kate Bush's last album '50 Words for Snow'. I loved the detail the amplifier could conjure up and depth of the recording making the music sound most lifelike. Even

on older recordings like Chaka Khan's greatest hits which was variable in its quality, I could still appreciate the music and listen to the whole album without wanting to change it, not something I can always say about some systems I have had. The top end was clear, detailed and not harsh, but neither did it feel dull. Mid and vocals were very well portrayed and the overall balance seemed right. Bass was strong and powerful but not overblown.

One minor criticism was the gain on the volume control with my Triangle Titus EZ speakers. As they are quite efficient at 90 dB I found you only had to turn the volume control up by a small margin for the amp to go loud. I contacted Ikon about this and they confirmed the design of the volume potentiometer and its characteristics meant this was the case. It wasn't a major issue, but using the remote control was tricky at times due to small changes making a big difference in the output level, so fine control was best achieved manually. If you have less efficient speakers then it won't be a problem.

CONCLUSION

The RG14 Edition is an amplifier that wears its heart on its sleeve. It is not the prettiest amp out there but like a good woman /wife, beauty is only skin deep. I have found in life it is the person within that matters not the exterior appearance. Beauty fades with time and can be fickle. The RG14 Edition is similar. It might not win Miss World in a beauty competition but it sure has fantastic qualities under its skin that are timeless and don't fade away. I felt it would be there for you years and years down the line just like a good marriage. If all the rest of Symphonic Lines products are as good as this, and I have no reason to doubt that, then they deserve to continue to do well, and the UK now has another fine product range to choose from.

Build Quality	8.5/10
Sound Quality	8.5/10
Value for money	8/10
Overall	8.33/10
Ian Ringstead	

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WHAT YOU FEEL
THEY DON'T SEE
WHAT YOU SEE
THEY DON'T HEAR
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TRENDS 10.2 CLASS T INTEGRATED

Taking a Path Less Traveled

Trends diminutive 10.2 amplifier is a switching, class D amplifier costing around \$ 200US, but does it measure up to the competition?



A class-T amplifier is a switching Class D amplifier, something I was unaware of until discussing digital amplifiers with a friend a while ago. Class T is the registered trademark for Tripath's amplifier technologies. Similar designs have now been widely adopted by different manufacturers such as B&O and Hypex and are implemented on many other manufacturers' amplifier designs such as NuForce, Bel Canto and Jeff Rowland.

It is an implementation of class-D amplifiers, but uses proprietary techniques to control the pulse width modulation to produce what is claimed to be a better performance (eg, lower noise, lower distortion, etc)

than other Class D amplifier designs. Among the publicly disclosed differences is real time control of the switching frequency depending on the input signal and amplified output.

One of the first to become famous designs was the TDA2020 based amplifiers, at their low distortion low output they were predominantly first used in a 5.25" ATX PC case modular form and were used to power desktop speakers from a computers Sound-card. We see many Tripath based Class T designs on the market nowadays which usually range from anywhere between 10-50 watts per channel but it's the 'Class D' implementations that really hit the big

TRENDS 10.2 CLASS T INTEGRATED

watts with Crown offering 500 watts per channel in their latest power amplifier and other companies touching the 1kw mark.

The control signals in class-T amplifiers may be computed using digital signal processing or fully analogue techniques. Currently available implementations use a loop similar to a higher order Delta Sigma ($\Delta\Sigma$) (or sigma-delta) modulator, with an internal digital clock to control the sample comparator. The two key aspects of this topology are that:

1. Feedback is taken directly from the switching node rather than the filtered output.
2. The higher order loop provides much higher loop gain at high audio frequencies than would be possible in a conventional single pole amplifier.

Interestingly enough vocals when played at reasonable levels gave a sonic presence which was pleasing to the ear and a little more natural and textured than I believed possible from this minute metal box.

Utilising the Tripath TA-2024 and powered externally from an external 12v switch mode power supply the main unit of the Trends 10.2 Class T amplifier remains incredibly small and light, approximately 5cm tall, 8cm wide and 15cm deep including sockets and the Alps volume potentiometer and weighing a



TRENDS 10.2 CLASS T INTEGRATED

meter 300g, the Trends 10.2 can be used literally anywhere a wall socket is available.

From its 10.1 guide the 10.2 shares some of the older units component configuration and some newer updates incorporating the likes of Rubycon caps and the Alps volume pots. The 10.2 also has the ability to be used as a straight power amp bypassing the volume knob altogether by simply moving a set of jumpers on the main board.

Whether in power amp mode or integrated the Trends will output a modest 15 per channel into 4 Ohms and 10 into 8. So it's intimate near field listening or sensitive speakers which will utilise the 10.2 to its best.

The rear of the 10.2 is also differently layer out to the previous model, the RCAs are centralised now with a set of speaker binding posts either side for easier connection. Power is via a small rear mounted toggle switch.

Trends also supply a linear power supply for \$199 which I didn't receive for this review which would no doubt increase the amps performance, but as I do not have one here I cannot comment.

THE SOUND

Using the Trends 10.2 connected to the analogue output of my Mac Mini via a 3.5mm to twin RCA cable. Playing into some small Mission bookshelves on my desk and after a suitable burn in period I was satisfied by the sound of the little T amp. The tonality is more towards a typical A/B amp rather than a Class D amplifier sounding a touch warmer than the latter.

Interestingly enough vocals when played at reasonable levels gave a sonic presence which was pleasing to the ear and a little more natural and textured than I believed possible from this minuet metal box. Bass extension too wasn't exactly deep and extended although it did produce good punch and presence allowing for more energetic pieces of music to deliver some good confident and authoritative bass.

I started to believe that the Trends had a bit of a hump in the lower mid upper bass region which needing freeing up, on closer inspection bringing the speakers a little further away from the front wall and popping them on slightly taller myrtle wood feet cleaned this up and I believe that the resonances of the alcove where my desk lives was the guilty party in this instance, I usually use a 2.1 system for the screen here as I can tailor the bass to suit and keep it separated from the upper area of the desk allowing for the satellites to breath freer.

90 degrees to the desk is a sideboard in free space, I set the system up there and still using the Mac as a source directly I compared the previous listening tests. In the freer space the system sounded far more open and transparent and it was nice to here the little 10.2 begin to soundstage with finer details outside of the speaker boundaries. The overall sound was tighter, brighter and punchier. Proving the positives of my desktop listening to grow.

At the time of my perceived issue with the lower mids I was listening to some male vocals which sounded somewhat choked up, now they were running a little lean so I took the glass off of the side-



TRENDS 10.2 CLASS T INTEGRATED

board and allowed the speakers to sit directly on the wooden top with their rubber feet. This was much more pleasing to my ear and struck a good balance. Who said that even budget gear can't be tailored with small isolation tweaks?!

I'm not going to allow the Trends 10.2 loose on my reference system as I honestly don't see the point and I do have an issue with low powered amps on speakers that aren't quite as efficient as necessary due to clipping and my tweeters aren't exactly cheap, but from what I've heard from a simple computer based analogue output I assumed there was maybe a little more to come from this amp.

Adding a comparably budget Fiio DAC from the Mac gave the little T some better layering properties and more midrange transparency. Smaller finer details were more discernible and bass speed seemed to increase whilst still remaining as weighty and taught as previously. I would have liked to sample Trwnds' own power supply with this amp as I am a big champion of everything should have good clean power

else what's the point of creating a good clean circuit. I have many power supplies and upgraded components but placing one of my own on the 10.2 would also not make sense as it simply wouldn't be relative.

CONCLUSION

Maximising space, simple to use and enjoyable to listen to the Trends 10.2 Class T Amplifier is a clear step above the run of the mill £30-£50 auction site jobbies. The Trends has a more complex detailed sound and quick nature when fed by something equivalent on a budget scale. Pop a laptop or iPod dock along side and a fairly sensitive set of speakers and the Trends will enjoy itself pleasing you with its eagerness to convey music.

Build Quality: 7.6

Sound Quality: 7.5

Value For Money: 7.3

Overall: 7.46

Dan Worth

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CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE

Performance Vinyl

German manufacturer Clearaudio are well known for their high-end turntables, but here we have a full package of turntable, arm and cartridge for just £2500.



The Germans have always been a very efficient nation and have an enviable reputation for quality. You only have to see how many German cars are on the roads of the UK to know that, I have a VW Golf now and very impressive it is. Solid engineering and clever design with great attention to detail is a hallmark of most German products. The first time I saw a Huff house on Grand Designs I was blown away by the quality, innovation and speed

of construction of this bespoke kit house of glass and metal.

Now what has this to do with hi-fi, a lot actually. Clearaudio are a German turntable company who have a long track record (pardon the pun) since the 1970's. If you've never seen a Clearaudio brochure then you're in for a treat. It is like a mini Argos catalogue having nearly 90 pages full of superbly made products all devoted to the playing of vinyl. Now some of the younger generation may wonder what

CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE

are records or why bother in this age of the instant digital download where the latest tunes are only a finger touch away on your mobile. Well let me tell you, this last year has seen an unprecedented rise in the sale of vinyl overtaking cd sales which have been on the wane for some time now since downloads became popular.

I am a child of the 60's and 70's brought up on a diet of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, progressive rock such as Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Yes etc. This diet got my juices flowing and wanting to try more types of music. As vinyl was the only serious form of replay then the record was king and I bought into it hook, line and sinker. So what has this to do with today? An awful lot. Music has evolved over time but the music I listened to 30 and 40 years ago is still as relevant today as then.

Records have always fascinated me and I still marvel at how such a fantastic sound can be obtained from a wiggly groove on a piece of plastic.

The product under review is the Clearaudio Performance DC which is a complete package designed to almost be plug and play for the serious enthusiast willing to invest in a good turntable. Good turntables at one time were seen as rather fiddly things to contend with and best left to a specialist dealer to set up for you. Rega changed all that in the 80's and Clearaudio have followed suit with this model requiring only moderate skills to set it up. If you are

still nervous about setting a turntable up a good dealer will still do this for you or an experienced friend.

The turntable is compact and very clean looking and has a newly developed DC motor with high precision bearings and is belt driven. The platter is made of

40mm thick POM which rests on a Clearaudio designed ceramic magnetic bearing, a very clever way of producing a frictionless bearing for incredibly low noise and wear. There are three adjustable feet fitted so levelling is very easily achieved. Speed change is via 3 blue illuminated buttons on the front left corner of the deck and a stop button. 33, 45 and 78 are catered for. Power is supplied from a plug in DC wall wart. No lid as standard is supplied, but custom made ones can be ordered which just sit over the whole turntable.

The arm fitted to the deck is the Clarify, another clever design where the mechanical parts don't touch.

Again this is done by magnetic bearings and means that the arm is unaffected by resonances. It has a very good arm lead fitted with excellent gold plated phono plugs and an earth tag. The cartridge supplied as standard is the Virtuoso V2 moving magnet made from ebony wood and has an aluminium cantilever producing a 3.3 mv output. The ebony body is so designed in order to produce a resonance resistant body and other features are an effective reduction in moving mass through the highly polished ebony body and the stylus is optimally polished for excellent tracking and sound quality. The cartridges are all meticulously tested and matched to produce the best

The turntable comes superbly boxed in customised foam cut out packaging with excellent instructions and a very comprehensive range of accessories supplied as standard including all the necessary tools, alignment protractor, tracking weight scales, bearing oil and a nice spirit level to make accurate levelling a doddle.

CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE



stereo channel matching, minimum phase error and distortion, the flattest frequency response and highest dynamic range. The price of all this superb engineering is £2500. The turntable comes superbly boxed in customised foam cut out packaging with excellent instructions and a very comprehensive range of accessories supplied as standard including all the necessary tools, alignment protractor, tracking weight scales, bearing oil and a nice spirit level to make accurate levelling a doddle.

Once I had mounted the arm on the deck with the cartridge, aligned it and set the tracking weight and levelled the arm I was ready to go. First impressions were how quiet the deck sounded in operation, no motor noise and very smooth and slick in operation. The arm feels strange at first when cueing it over a record as the magnetic bearing is peculiar when you are used to fixed bearing arm. It reminded me of my days in retailing when I used to sell the George Hadcock uni pivot arms fitted to Linn LP12's mainly. It was a pain to set up but once you had the knack and

persevered it sounded great. The Clarify arm is certainly far easier to set up but still requires a bit of patience to get the tracking weight correct as the magnetic floating bearing needs careful adjustment to get the correct reading. This is the only real part of the deck setup that requires some patience to get the best out of the combination.

I used the Performance DC with my resident Triangle Titus EZ speakers, Tisbury Audio passive pre and Meridian 556 amp. The phono stages were my Whest Audio Two and another product under review the exciting Perraux Audiant VP3. The turntable fitted into the system seamlessly and performed flawlessly throughout the time I had it. It is very easy to use which is what Clearaudio aimed to achieve and delivered an exceptional sound. I tried all types of music and every record I listened to did not disappoint. Surface noise was very low, no doubt as a result of the magnetic bearings in the deck and arm and superbly controlled resonances. The cartridge was a real surprise as normally at this price range

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you would expect the manufacturer to fit or recommend a moving coil which Clearaudio make a range of themselves. It is a sign of their confidence and belief that they have stuck with the Virtuoso V2. I have used and sold a lot of moving magnets in my time and I can safely say I have never heard a better one. If you had walked into the room and started listening to the deck without the knowledge that the cartridge was a moving magnet you would swear it was a moving coil, it's that good! One of my audiophile friends came over for an evening to hear the deck and we spent several hours listening in amazement. The combination with the Perraux Audiant V3 in particular was magical and I can say neither of us had heard my system sound so good before with vinyl. Compared to my cd player a Sony CDPxe3000s the turntable was streets ahead and it only took 10 seconds to decide. This is no disrespect to my Sony which is a fine machine even if dated now, cd just cannot compete with good vinyl unless you pay a fortune in my view.

I listened to 'Carmina Burana' by Carl Orff (EMI SAN162) Old Spice men's aftershave advert music for those old enough to remember. This is a favourite piece of mine and my wife's as we have both heard it live and she has sung it in concert with her local choir some years ago. The depth in the recording was easy to hear with all the attendant detail of the live acoustics of the church. This is a very dynamic re-

cording so is a great system test disc. The range of instruments goes from the subtle sound of bells to the great crescendo of the tympani with a full choir providing a thrilling roller coaster of a ride. When the music gets busy with the choir and orchestra at full tilt many systems would baulk at the complexity and information overload but the Clearaudio took it all in its stride. Granted the rest of the system had a part to play in this and the synergy was sublime especially with the Perraux. 'Wish you were here' by Pink Floyd and 'Selling England by the pound' Genesis both sounded superb and the detailing even in recordings going back to the 70's was exceptional.

CONCLUSION

As I used to tell customers without the basis of a good source component no matter how good the rest of the system was it wouldn't reproduce a great sound. The Clearaudio obviously does this and would be a fine start or upgrade for someone keen to get back into vinyl or start from the beginning. There has never been such a choice of good turntables as now. May the trend continue.

It isn't cheap, but then quality never is. The old adage you get what you pay for is very true here. Recommended without hesitation if your wallet can take the hit.

Build Quality 9/10

Sound Quality 9/10

CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE

Value for money 8.5/10

Overall 8.83

Ian Ringstead

Ian's overall score of 8.83 out of 10 overall means Hifi Pig then submits the item for a second view from another reviewer, in this case Janine Elliot.

To be able to review a Clearaudio Statement turntable would be a dream, as it would be to even afford to buy one. At £89,995 it is not cheap. So, would the Performance DC, at a mere £2495, including the arm and cartridge in this review, be even worth taking out of the box? Going by my experience with German Floorsprung Plinth Technique in the past – such as my Thorens TD160 or more recently my aged TD135 – this was, I knew, going to be quite some journey. This modest 11.5kg non-sprung beauty is a beautiful solidly built silver or black curved edged minimalist beauty with an un-

derstated black platter made of 40mm deep POM (polyoxymethylene), and a decoupled and resonance-damped DC motor (hence the name) connected to an inner plinth via rectangular belt drive. It might all look a very humble outfit but this turntable is no less important than its biggest brother. Its design is carefully planned, having an inverted magnetic bearing where the inner platter sits atop a ceramic shaft. This has the effect of stopping resonances getting to the arm, and makes for an enviable -92dB rumble. The inner platter on its own will not sit fully down on the shaft, rather needs the main black platter to push it all down. This makes it trickier attaching the belt to the DC motor, but once done this was a doddle to set up. There are three feet which can be adjusted with an allen key to ensure the whole is balanced using the supplied spirit level. Indeed the accessories supplied with this turntable, including white gloves to go with your dicky bow, and the packaging itself, put many other companies to shame. This was a very impressive bundle.



CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE

The Performance outfit was supplied with the Clarify arm retailing at £950 and the Virtuoso V2 moving magnet cartridge at £650. My last experiences of uni-pivot arms were the Hadcock of old, and the Roksan Nima of late. In my youth I preferred the conventionally balanced SME 3s, which worked a treat with the Thorens TD160 as I felt unipivots hard to get just right and looked frighteningly wobbly. This 410g arm was a lot more posh, made from carbon, and did take a while to get just right, relying on you using an electric scale as there is no “set to zero and then move the weight clockwise to the correct setting”, and the bias adjustment is done from underneath the arm which means you need to lift it up out of its housing to turn the knob, unless you can get your fingers in places you never thought you would ever need to. This carbon arm with magnetic weight adjustment is in no ways’ user friendly, but once you accepted its imperfections, it soon doesn’t become a problem. Indeed the magnetic design of the counter-weight is very clever and as long as you set up the arm parallel to the record, and have the scales at the height of the record it is very accurate. Only if you decide to play records of different thicknesses (which

is very common now with 190g, 225g, 250g etc) you might find a very miniscule change in stylus weight onto the groove. I did enjoy setting this all up, though. The main selling point of this turntable is it having no thrust plate or ball bearing at the base of the main bearing, which means there is much reduced friction and so results in it being one of the quietest turntables I have ever played. Almost all turntable bearings use a metal spindle spinning in a socket, with a small ball-bearing separating the two, but friction will still generates mechanical noise.

The ebony housed Virtuoso V2 worked best for me at 2.1g and sounded as good as any MM cartridge I have had the pleasure of listening to with a brilliant midrange and vocals to die for. The whole combination was quite spectacular with a bass end as rich and powerful as my Garrard 301 that I wished I had never sold.

The Performance DC is priced between the similarly designed Ovation and Concept turntables. The chassis consists of a specific density wood core sandwiched between two massive anodized aluminium plates. A band of polished silver aluminium is then



CLEARAUDIO PERFORMANCE DC TURNTABLE

wrapped around the plinth's edges. The DC motor is mounted to the composite main chassis, being well decoupled. The 40mm thick POM platter rotates at either 33, 45, or 78rpm, selected from illuminated buttons on the left. Precision adjustment is possible for each speed via user-accessible trim pots at the back, next to the mains adaptor socket. The unit comes without a lid as standard, nor a record clamp, but these can be bought separately, including the Statement clamp at £500 made of bullet proof wood and stainless steel sandwich.

To the sound, this was particularly good with bass and midrange, playing classics with great oomph. My re-mastered Menuhin Mendelssohn/Bruch violin concertos gave as close to the original ¼" master tapes at Abbey Road Studio as I could get. The only noise was the hiss from the tape, and a few scratches on the start of the LP. I did find the turntable fairly resonant when I tapped the platter, showing the arm wasn't quite so isolated as was the platter. Not a problem as I don't generally tap away on platters, but one reason why I prefer skeleton or solid turntables, rather than sandwiched wood. The original version of this turntable used Starion (an artificial stone), with the next version, the SE, moving to an aluminium/high-density fibreboard sandwich, which the company chose as it produces a better-behaved, more stable platform, and not because it is cheaper. Back to Menuhin, orchestra was placed prominently in front of me with a great depth of field and stereo as good as vinyl will allow. Yehudi played like he was in the room. Turning (as always) to Pink Floyd, the re-mastered 4-record 'Echoes' album showed authority and energy, with the £650 moving magnet cartridge shouting many pounds more. Indeed, the Ebony clad cartridge with its large protruding aluminium cantilever was the biggest surprise of all.

The complete setup was pretty good, but the source of the sound was the biggest surprise. Having been brought up on the Kinks, and playing with second bass player Jim Rodford and at school with his son, I have always followed Argent and The Kinks. So the new album "Working Man's Café" from Ray Davies,

The Kinks' distinctive singer, was a great album to play on this gramophone. Tight bass, punchy close-mic'd lead guitar and lisping voice was not hampered at all in this set up. My Manley Steelhead set at 47,000Ω played with a musicality that 24bits will never replicate. Bass and vocals were excellent, only top frequencies and micro-detail was short of excellent, but, hey, this complete outfit was only £2495, and looking at other outfits at this price this one is up at the top, particularly with its looks. Unlike many skeletal turntables this is duster friendly. It might allow any permutation of black or silver top/bottom and side (which mathematicians will know is "4") I just wish this turntable came in other colours, like red, yellow and blue. Turning to mono, and using the original Ecosse Tru-mono turntable interconnect (see separate review soon) allowed me to hear mono without all the stereo crackles. Indeed, the effect of summation of the stereo crackles reduced into a more acceptable mono (a famous trick used in reverse in those "Karaoke" buttons on Amstrad-eque MIDI hifi players, and later in the Audacity "vocal remover" setting to get rid of the mono middle voice) and allowed more of the music to come out. My precious "Further Studies in High Fidelity" boxed LP (Capitol 1955) gave me a chance to hear mono at its best, and good it certainly was. Some of you will know I very rarely play anything mono.

Conclusion; All in all, a gorgeous curvy looking turntable at a price that anyone serious about vinyl should be looking to start at. Everything was there, apart from a record clamp, and I liked it a lot.

What's more, you can always tell your friends you have a Clearaudio Statement's little brother.

Sound Quality – 8.6/10

Value for Money – 8.65/10

Build Quality – 8.7/10 (particularly the arm and cartridge)

Overall – 8.65/10

Janine Elliot

Plato

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Plato is manufactured in the UK and offers an all in one Hi-fi & Home Entertainment solution. With built-in pre amp, high performance power amp and phono input for vinyl deck, CD and cassettes, Plato offers recording during playback into Hi-Res 24bit/192kHz format and

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PERREAUX AUDIANT VP3 PHONO PREAMP

The Kiwi Phono Preamp

Despite the French sounding name, Perreaux is a brand from New Zealand. Here Hifi Pig tests their £1950 phonostage.



Perreaux sounds French but is actually a New Zealand based company founded in 1974 by Peter Perreaux. I first came across the brand when in retail in the early 1980's and was impressed by their reputation even then as a young company. They disappeared from these shores but years later the brand has re emerged in the UK with new distributors Audio Emotion and I am glad they have pursued this brand's promotion here in the UK. They never went away as a brand but probably fell foul of the fickle UK audio market and dramatic change in trends over the last 20 years or so.

Quality high end audio has never been more competitive but there is still a market for it here in the UK and elsewhere if done properly. Perreaux' philosophy has been a simple one , research your products and market thoroughly, use top quality components only if justified for sound quality and reliability, keep things as simple as possible and solid build. I know they spend a long time testing new designs and will not release a new product until it has been perfected and they are happy with it. Value for money is

important in a price conscious market these days but quality is not compromised and corners aren't cut.

Newly released the Perreaux Audiant VP3 vinyl phono pre amp is an exciting addition to the companies product line up. At £1950 it isn't cheap and a few years ago a phono stage at this price level would have been deemed expensive and over the top. Now of course vinyl is on the rise and has overtaken CD in sales and popularity. It never died, it just had a hiatus whilst the digital formats slugged it out for supremacy. Analogue for me is still a supreme music format and is in my DNA.

The VP3 is beautifully built and has an understated quality and air about itself because of the simple design and its layout. The pictures don't do it justice and it was only when it arrived and I eagerly took it out of its excellent packaging that I was truly impressed by its looks and build. The owner manual is superb coming in a ring binder format with very clear simple illustrations and instruction on correct use and operation. It even has its own laboratory tested performance graphs for both the MM and MC inputs showing actual measured THD , frequency

PERREAUX AUDIANT VP3 PHONO PREAMP

response and spectrum analysis results with the serial number of each unit and the date of testing signed by the technician. Now not many companies go to that trouble and detail, very impressive.

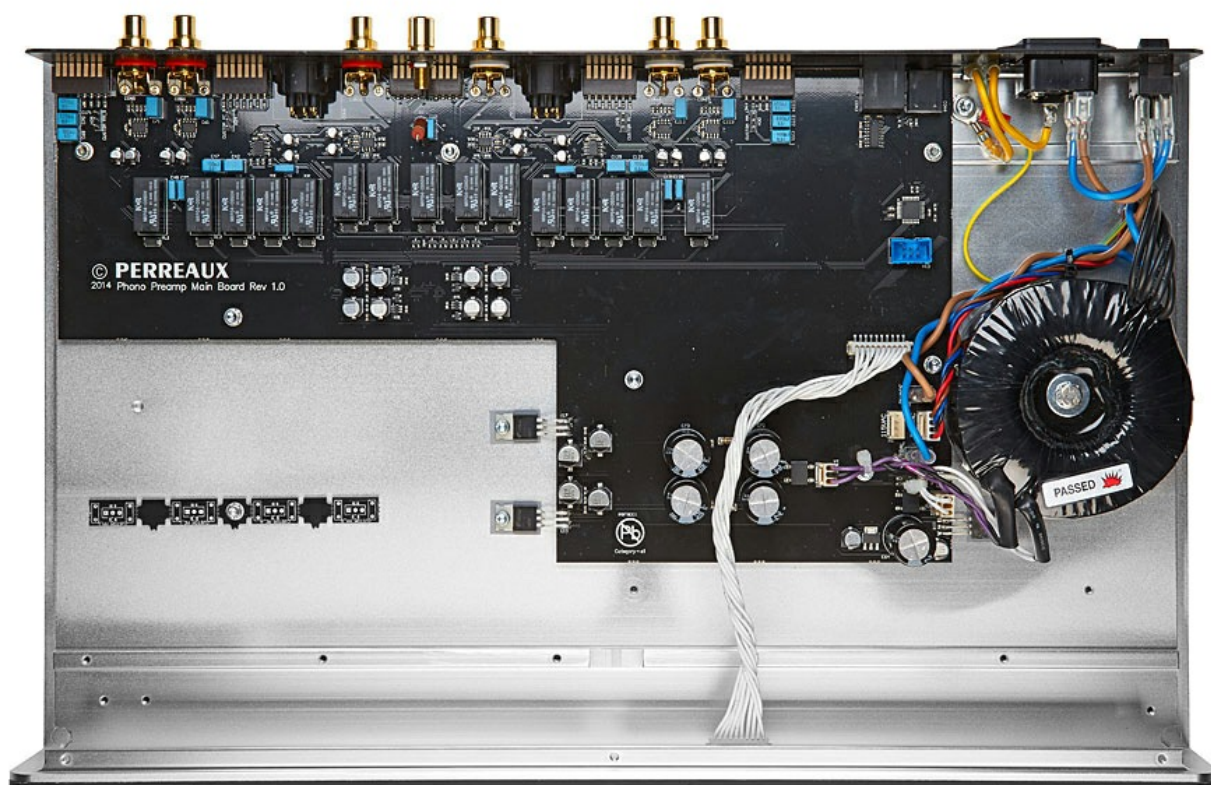
The case consists of a very solid machined aluminium monocoque top panel with the Perreux logo laser cut or cnc machined on the top and turned 90 degrees to form the slim front panel, half covered by a slick touch sensitive control section on the bottom half. The stand by , MM, MC and mono selection are the only controls on the front panel operated by touch capacitance like your smart mobile telephones these days. All other controls and connections are on the very comprehensively designed rear panel .Here the main power switch is located on the back right corner followed by the mains

IEC input socket, trigger inputs for remote switching , RS232 port , loading switches, RCA single ended inputs for both MM and MC cartridges, balanced outputs on XLR, RCA unbalanced outputs, gain /RIAA adjustment switches, phono earth terminal. Phew, pretty impressive.

Customisation is very flexible to suit a wide range of MM and MC cartridges. There are seven different loading switches , three gain switches , mono selection

and the ability to switch between a normal or IEC RIAA equalisation curve on each input. There are six different sets of dip switches on the rear to allow for maximum customisation and isolation of each input and channel. There is comprehensive loading for MM and MC inputs and variable gain for the output to suit your own cartridge or cartridges should you

Yes £1950 is not cheap, but if you are serious about your precious vinyl collection and have a good turntable, amp and speakers it is a cracking buy.



PERREAUX AUDIANT VP3 PHONO PREAMP

be so lucky to have either two or more turntables, or a turntable with two or more arms. The instruction manual really is excellent in explaining everything simply, I wish all manufactures were this good. It's obvious Perreux take great pride in their product and customer service.

Inside the VP3 is equally impressive in its build and component quality. All the circuitry, sockets and power supply are mounted on the solid aluminium top plate which acts as a solid foundation and effective heat sink. The toroidal power transformer is large and would do justice to many a decent hi-fi separate. All the switches and sockets are first rate and gold plated as expected in this price sector. The socketry is widely spaced and divided into left and right channel sides of the chassis so make sure your phono cables can split apart by several inches.

THE SOUND

I let the VP3 warm up for several days before serious listening commenced, but couldn't resist initial sessions of seeing what it was like even though the unit was brand new and had never been run in. Like all new units a few

What was so impressive was the depth of sound stage and sheer realism of the instruments and artists playing.

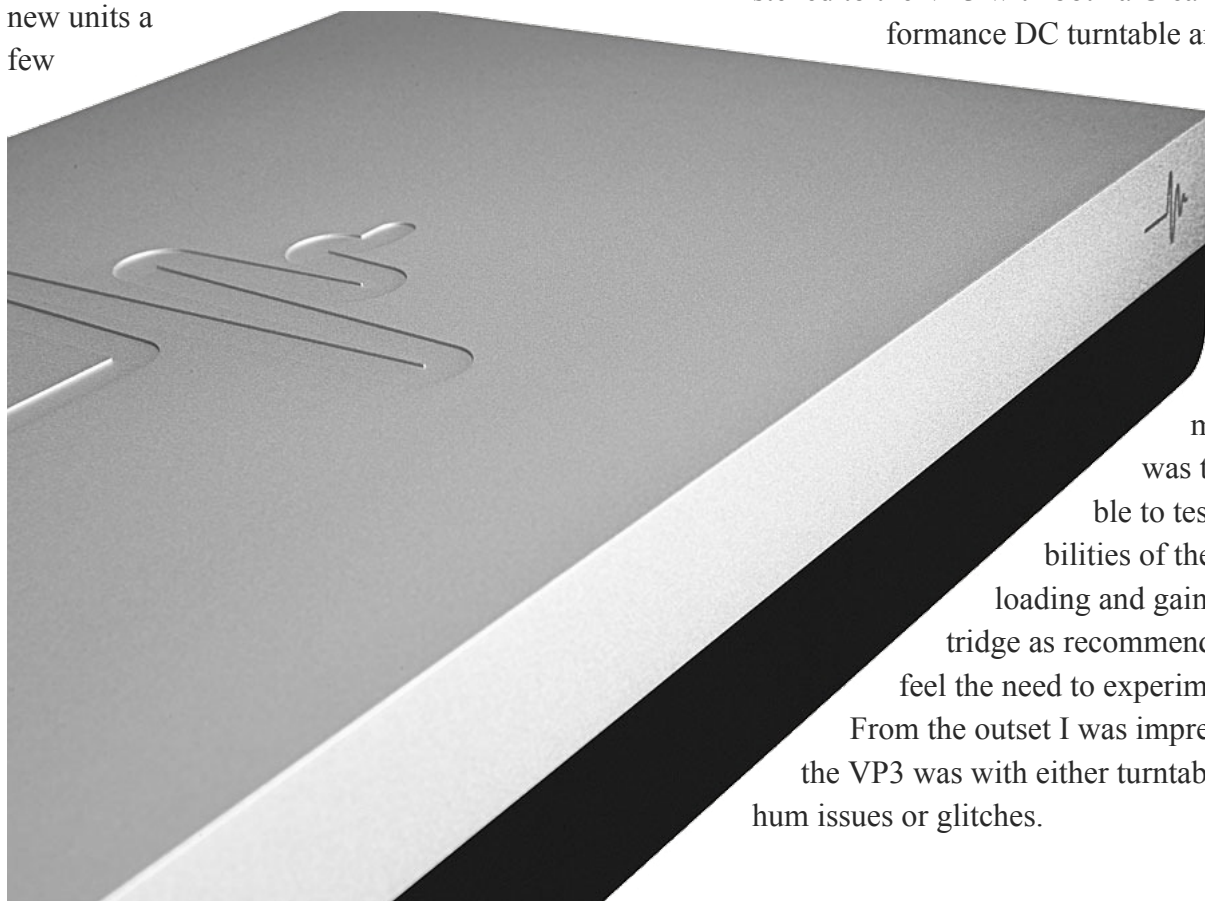
hours after switch on yielded improvements as the sound stage increased in width, depth and detail. The ability to leave the unit in stand by is essential as it cuts down warm up periods, especially once the unit is run in fully.

I listened to the VP3 with both a Clearaudio Performance DC turntable and Virtuoso

V2 moving magnet cartridge and my own Project Extension 9 with Ortofon Quintet black moving coil. It

was therefore possible to test the full capabilities of the VP3. I set the loading and gain for each cartridge as recommended and didn't feel the need to experiment further.

From the outset I was impressed how quiet the VP3 was with either turntable and had no hum issues or glitches.



PERREAUX AUDIANT VP3 PHONO PREAMP

I happily put album after album on and simply enjoyed the listening experience. An old friend came round one evening and we spent several hours just revelling in the sound of the music we love, pretty well dumbfounded at how good it was. We both love modern jazz such as Bob James, David Sanborn, The Crusaders, Joe Sample, Grover Washington, John Klemmer etc.. What was so impressive was the depth of sound stage and sheer realism of the instruments and artists playing. A lot is talked about pace, rhythm and timing, my friend calls it the boogie factor, I say musicality. The VP3 had it in bucket loads and we both said it was the best phono stage we have ever heard.

Now I certainly haven't heard all the phono stages out there and there are many superb models I am certain of that and far more expensive than the VP3, but in my opinion the sound of the VP3 is pretty sublime in its price sector. Perreux state their aim is to make as good a product as they can with value for money factored in. Well I think they have achieved this admirably. I won't bore you the reader with all the different types of music I listened to, (it was wide and varied) as you will probably like totally different styles to me, my wife certainly does.

One album my wife and I did listen to was Fleetwood Mac's Rumours, an absolute classic loved by millions which has sold over 30 million copies worldwide now. We love all the tracks on the album but 'The Chain' BBC's theme music for Formula one's Grand Prix programme has everything we love about a great track. The build up, the bass line and drumming is superb. When Mick Fleetwood hits the bass drum with the foot pedal you hear the skin on the drum and it really sounds as if the band are in your room. The bass line reverberates menacingly around the

room in front of you and then the track builds up to its climax like a race and leaves you thrilled and emotional as if you were part of it. Now that is what good music and hi-fi is all about.

CONCLUSION

I think Perreux have made a great product in the VP3. Yes £1950 is not cheap, but if you are serious about your precious vinyl collection and have a good turntable, amp and speakers it is a cracking buy. I know it's clichéd in reviewer speak but I will be very sorry when the VP3 goes back. My Whet Two is very good for its price £800, but at less than half the VP3's price can't compare with its versatility due to cost constraints or sound staging capabilities. That's why Whet make several other models themselves above the Whet Two, the MC Ref mk 4 being an eye watering £10000.

As I said at the beginning of my review vinyl has never been so popular for many years now but its renaissance has spurred many companies to push their research and passion into producing some brilliant bits of kit now. Enjoy.

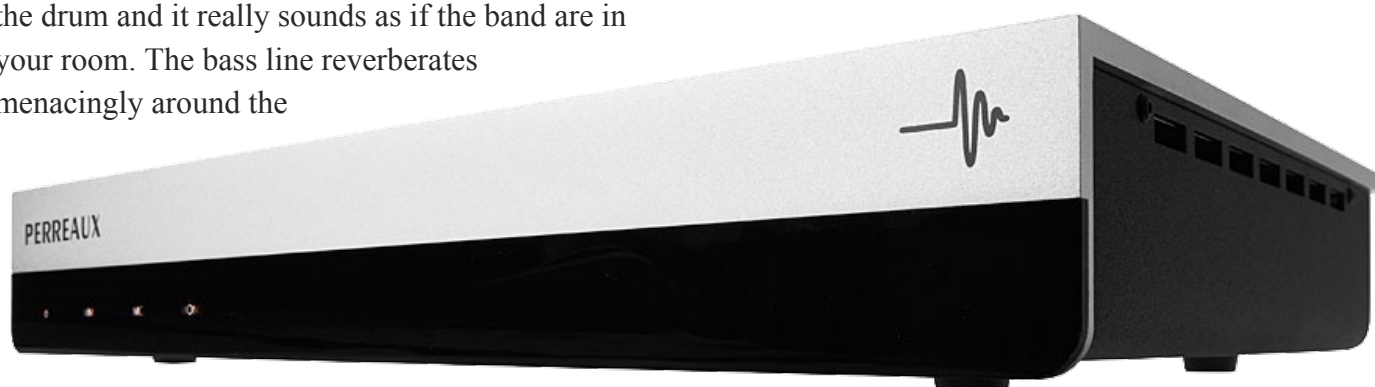
Build Quality: 8.75/10

Sound Quality: 9.0/10

Value For Money: 8.5/10

Overall: 8.75/10

Ian Ringstead



brianandtrevors

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ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

Bigger Brother

When Hifi Pig reviewed the smaller ATC SCM11 loudspeaker it was awarded our Outstanding Product Award, but will its bigger sibling impress equally?



ATC were respectfully awarded our Outstanding Product Award earlier this year when their PR Agent Keith Haddock asked us to review the new SCM 11 stand mounts from the all new SCM range. Both Dominic and I fell in love with them for their sheer speed, enthusiasm and timing abilities.

Not unnaturally therefore we relished the opportunity to review the SCM 11's bigger brother – the SCM 19. Utilising a larger cabinet of 19 litres internal volume (hence the “19” designation) otherwise the construction and form is the same as the smaller 11's, in sporting the new curved shaped and structural design. The 11's and the 19's both share the new SH25-76 tweeter but whereas the 11's have the linear mid/bass driver the 19's are adorned with the 'Super Linear' mid/bass driver.

THE SOUND

When listening to a speaker or a piece of equipment in fact for the first time, there is always a particular attribute that stands out over the initial interpretations of the sonic characteristics. Frequent readers will know that I tend to mention one or two of these qualities before I delve deeper into the review. In the case of the ATC SCM

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

19 I found myself particularly impressed with the acoustic reverb and environmental interaction of the venue based within the recording. The 19s have an ability to transparently seek out deep shaded harmonics and micro details.

One of the first tracks I played after connecting the 19s to my Jeff Rowland Concentra II was 'I Put A Spell On You' Annie Lennox, room acoustics were noted in a spatial nature which one

would associate with an airy undamped smallish venue. Note decay was long and returned a small echo from the parameters of the performance's space, whilst vocals were strong and very well defined in their response, conveying a clear and clean open nature which for me allowed me to imagine Annie Lennox singing very concentrated within a fixed point in space, giving a rather personal performance.

Rhythms were equally attractive with the 19s producing great detail in the lower registers and a well defined and airy top end.

An old quirky song I remember from my youth came to mind – The Proclaimers 'King Of The Road' – Don't worry, your winces are noted! I bring this track up as an example – it's always easy to throw HD recording after recording and well mastered music and test tracks at every piece of equipment to analyse a speaker's infrastructure but it's when we play the more mundane non-Hifi type of music that we like that we are really testing a speaker because it's only then that we can appreciate any pitfalls and triumphs that we are not concentrated in looking for...

At the time I was cooking dinner and Spotifying. Usually I will do this on the Squeezebox Boom in the kitchen but as the system was on, so I just let the music play from there as the kitchen and living room are side by side. The twangy full bodied and bouncy nature of the bass guitar that is more singled out at the beginning of the track drew me back into the other room, I was impressed how it remained in an un-

bloated position. It's often the case that speakers can give an over large bloated rendition of instruments which in term wows the listener but at the same time is unrealistic. The 19's poise and accuracy delivers a truer interpretation of instrument width and spread giving the listener the opportunity to place an instrument yet fully appreciate its decay and timbre.

When the brothers' vocals came in the bass guitar

The 19's poise and accuracy delivers a truer interpretation of instrument width and spread giving the listener the opportunity to place an instrument yet fully appreciate its decay and timbre.

was still clearly positioned without smear just a few feet behind them and just slightly to the left. I like the confidence of the 19s, the way they image and their accuracy, which never becomes hard and remains fantastically controlled. As well as having the nice bouncy beat that seems to make ATCs so involving that soundstage was now prodding at me saying 'come on give me something interesting so I can show you what I can do.'

Typically it's a known concept that a stand mount speaker will image strongly but not all in my experience. Speaker placement, side walls and other room interactions can really harm many of them with their reflex design which allows for deeper bass notes yet at the same time makes positioning slightly more awkward.

With the SCM 19s infinite baffle design, placement is far simpler and more forgiving. Situating them closely to a front wall is no problem and as long as you are able to keep them a little away from the side walls they remain as open and as engaging as the designer intended them to be, allowing for the image to

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

reach outside of the speakers footprint and convey inside pin point accuracy equally as astute.

To move on now to explore some better recordings most would look towards some intensive classical music, big concertos and orchestras to appreciate the sound staging accuracy of the ATCs. I'm not adverse to some classical music but I don't play it all that often here so I need to remain with some music which I listen to on a regular basis and as I am already satisfied with the soundstage of the moderately sized 19's and have expressed my feelings concerning their accuracy I feel it's important to hear whether they have an emotional connection.

Damien Rice's 'Older Chests' although a somewhat lean performance on the scale of assortment of instruments and band members etc is a very intimate listen that exposes a lifelike rendition or an interpretation of a sound that leaves the listener wanting more by exposing all aspects of Rice's vocal and instrument timbre.

I hate to use the word 'sultry' when talking about a male vocal but in order to really connect with the music in question the seductive and emotional vocal given by Rice really will draw a listener in, especially late in the evening with low light in a relaxed state. The realism that the 19s convey starts at low volumes and keeps its grip all the way up to louder levels with the ability to convince the listener of realism with subtle and strong dynamics. Half way through this track there is a window or set of doors seemingly opened to the left of the soundstage which exposes daytime child's play in say a park or garden to flood the area of the soundstage

and atmospheric noise grows. What matters here is that the vocal is never overshadowed and all of Rice's emotion is cleverly heightened rather than toned down, it's a very clever layout to this otherwise bare acoustic track when enhanced by the ATC's accuracy, soundstage placement and musical appeal is done justice.

The SCM 19s produce a fuller bodied sound and dig deeper into the bass regions than the previously reviewed SCM 11s, which is no surprise due to their larger by 8 litre cabinets and larger 'Super Linear' mid/bass driver. Characteristically the ATC family sound progresses further with a fuller midrange and a deeper bass line that has a very appreciable slope allowing for rolling off of lower notes to be gradual and very natural.

What I like about the SCM 19 over the SCM 11 is the stronger underpinning of all other frequencies culminating in a step up in refinement. Midrange is more fleshed out, texturally and slightly warmer than the characteristic of the cleaner, punchier, less weighty SCM 11. Being

able to achieve this without deviating from the ATC house sound of vibrancy, accuracy, openness and timing is a real triumph.

The SCM 19 is still a speaker that will excite with big punchy fast bass notes, yet I find to achieve this requires an extra 10-12% from my Rowland Integrated to give them the kick they need to really get going, unlike the smaller 11's that are slightly easier to drive. The lower mids also come thicker, fleshing out vocals with a very natural appeal that holds great body and at the same time remains completely open and tactile.



ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

With the larger driver and cabinet treble artefacts have greater fluidity. Extension and decay is underpinned more maturely and the transient response is also embodied with greater drama and presence, denoting its area within the soundstage to lay out flow and rhythmic upper registers giving the listener enthusiastic and playful notes from eccentric guitarists, speed violinists, Funky Jazz musicians and Electronica alike.

Execution of the soundstage is one the ATCs most endearing attributes, rarely can a stand mount of this price hold such sophisticated focus, width dispersal and convey such a harmonic of upper frequencies whilst energising the room in such a natural manner without becoming leaky or hard, which as I stated in the 11 review is a testament to the wonderful new tweeter employed throughout the entire new SCM range .

Often my room will throw back in the face of a speaker which is too clean, upper bass heavy or forward in nature but the SCM 19s have the airy clarity, full bodied mids and such a linear bass re-

sponse which is controlled with a firm hand in their infinite baffle cabinets that it seems as if my room has been treated as they seem to suit the space just so well.

I had also got in at the time of the review the ATC P1 power amplifier. I thought I'd see how it fared connected to my Jeff Rowland preamplifier. I put on some UB40 and immediately leading edges became more taut and focused than the Rowland amp, reproducing the clash of a note the way a greyhound will to the gates of the stall being opened. I perceived a

greater power and control at the highest and lowest audible frequencies, a crispness and a little bit more attitude to the sound.

The P1 will dish out the same power levels as the Rowland and now partnered with the JR preamp, the smooth nature of the JR amp had a better tonal balance I feel with the SCM 19s, cleaning up the bass very well and giving more insight into upper bass detail. On the flip side dynamically the P1 was great

but fell a little short at the bottom end weight and mid to top refinement, although there was plenty of control to the power it wasn't as explosive. Now this for me is down to the characterisation of the two amps in question the Rowland is thicker and fuller and the ATC cleaner sounding.

The two different flavours of sound was an interesting experiment for me as the P1 brought me back to my fond memories of the SCM 11s with their more playful and fun nature, whereas the Rowland integrated was more sophisticated and more refined and when partnered with the 19s added to their already

more refined mature. Both variations were great and taste would be a deciding factor between the smoother and cleaner amplifiers but what the experiment showed to me to appreciate was how transparent the 19s are, they really reflected an honest portrayal of what was happening downstream. Yes I know different amps are bound to have a marked impression on the sound but the ATCs reflect a real insight into the musical nature and characteristics incredibly well and better than most, much like my Ayons.

I perceived a greater power and control at the highest and lowest audible frequencies, a crispness and a little bit more attitude to the sound.

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

What the SCM19s from ATC offer the listener is an open window to the music and the electronics...

As with the Ayons the ATCs didn't just convey tonal changes reflecting modifications upstream, they transparently uncover the nature of any changes deep into the playback material whether it be a simple cable change or piece of equipment that has been swapped out.

CONCLUSION

Forming an initial opinion of something new is in every walk of life from meeting somebody, buying a new home or car or appreciating a piece of art or music. Equally so listening to a piece of Hifi installs initial and sometimes rash conclusions.

The trick to evaluating anything in life is to be patient take your time and give things a fair chance. Often rash judgements leave us missing out on something that could have been truly wonderful. Being a reviewer this is something that we have to persevere with all too often, we have an awful lot of kit coming into us here at Hifi Pig and not everything gets a review, but it does receive our due care and attention before any premature decisions are made.

My initial opinions regarding the SCM 19s were not as flamboyantly exciting as when I first listened to the SCM 11's and here's why...

Due to their added weight and richer undertones the 19s were not as impressive a pairing with my Rowland amps as the slightly more sprightly 11s and this had me feeling a little down. I was absolutely engaged by the 19s but the 11s had offered an attack to the leading edges of notes which I didn't seem to be able to replicate at first. This was until I introduced ATCs P1 Power Amplifier to the system – normal service had been resumed and the 19s with all their

added attributes came alive with that extra sprinkle of magic for me that I loved so much about their younger sibling.

It all comes down to taste, system synergy and the room and that's why these tests are important and why successful musical happiness comes from perseverance and patience. What the SCM 19s from ATC offer the listener is an open window to the music and the electronics, allowing for changes, tweaks and modifications to be more easily heard making them a great tool to aid in building a great system.

Build Quality – 8.5/10

Sound Quality – 9.1/10

Value For Money – 9.2/10

Overall – 8.93/10

Recommended for being insightful, transparent, accurate, controlled and addictive.

Dan Worth

Having achieved an overall scoring of 8.93 out of a possible full 10 marks, we now hand over the SCM 19's to another reviewer for their verdict on these loudspeakers. The natural choice for this task fell to Dominic Marsh, given that he also reviewed and scored the SCM 11 from ATC for Hifi Pig.

If my memory serves me well (which it usually does), I remember the ATC SCM 11s with some fondness. I clearly recall their fun bouncy nature, bursting with vitality and the lack of bass extension into the very lowest registers didn't cause me any concerns, rather they endeared me even more because they had real verve and excitement, which almost made me wish I had two full systems to listen to, one where tonal accuracy and total fidelity was at the top of the agenda, while having a second system that wouldn't bother at all with that staid nonsense, it would just let it's hair down, kick it's shoes off and

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

give plenty of outright entertaining FUN, dancing all over the rule book in fact.

If I had expected the SCM 19s to merely fill that void in the lower bass yet retain the SCM11s other cherished vitals, then I would have been rather disappointed in this instance. Yes, I could clearly tell that the tweeter unit in the 19's maintained the same DNA of it's smaller sibling, but then again that would be no surprise as it is exactly the same drive unit found in both models. The enclosure layout too remains the same basic design, both being infinite baffle types. There the similarities end though, as the SCM 19 has a different bass driver and of course a larger volume cabinet than the SCM 11, so one can only presume the crossover parameters have also been tailored accordingly to suit.

The specifications for the two loudspeakers don't give away too many clues how the sound of each speaker is achieved:

SCM 11 Specifications

Drivers: HF ATC 25mm Neodymium soft dome,
Mid/LF ATC 150mm CLD
Matched Response: $\pm 0.5\text{dB}$
Frequency Response (-6dB): 56Hz-22kHz
Dispersion: $\pm 80^\circ$ Coherent Horizontal, $\pm 10^\circ$ Coherent Vertical
Sensitivity: 85dB @ 1W @ 1metre
Max SPL: 108dB
Recommended Power Amplifier: 75 to 300 Watts
Nominal Impedance: 8 Ohm
Crossover Frequency: 2.2kHz
Connectors : Binding Posts/4mm Plugs, bi-wire
Cabinet Dimensions (HxWxD):
381x232x236mm (grille adds 28mm depth)
Weight: 10.9kg

SCM 19 Specifications

Drivers: HF ATC 25mm Neodymium soft dome,
Mid/LF ATC 150mm SL
Matched Response: $\pm 0.5\text{dB}$
Frequency Response (-6dB): 54Hz-22kHz
Dispersion: $\pm 80^\circ$ Coherent Horizontal, $\pm 10^\circ$ Coherent Vertical

Sensitivity: 85dB @ 1W @ 1metre
Max SPL: 108dB
Recommended Power Amplifier: 75 to 300 Watts
Nominal Impedance: 8 Ohm
Crossover Frequency: 2.5kHz
Connectors: Binding Posts/4mm Plugs, bi-wire
Cabinet Dimensions (HxWxD): 438x265x300mm (grille adds 28mm to depth)
Weight: 17.8kg

According to the specifications, the SCM 11s bass extends down to 56Hz while the SCM 19s bass reaches 54Hz so only 2Hz difference between them, which does not and cannot explain why they sounded so different to me. The SCM 19's sounded full and powerful, articulate and communicative, so a plucked bass guitar string just seemed to carry on long after it was expected to die away. Kick drum had that real whack in the guts power that made the SCM 11s sound rather tame and a little anaemic by comparison. Perhaps the SCM 19 has more impact in the upper bass that obfuscates the similar bass extension range that the 11's demonstrate? Don't know and without a frequency plot to reveal what's going on I can only surmise what the actuality is, but what I do know for sure is that the 19s gave a more satisfying listen with regards to bass content in the music – via a quoted 2Hz frequency difference or not.

Moving up to the mid band now, there was just a touch more warmth to male and female vocals, but not a huge amount, just enough to let the listener perceive some sophistication and finesse to the sound, because the SCM 11s had a matter-of-fact kind of presentation in the mid band, which manifested itself the most in male vocals which tended to sound a touch dry rather than lean or clinical. When it comes to fast transients though, the SCM 11s were very fast and agile, with a razor sharp leading edge and a sharp guillotine of a trailing edge too so there was no overhang, whereas the SCM 19s were just that millisecond or so behind on the leading edges, not sufficient to be concerned over and only if you have the luxury of hearing both models to make comparisons with.

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

While the tweeter in the 11s and 19s are of the same parentage, there were differences in sound to be noted. The SCM 19s lower treble registers had just that modicum of warmth that I didn't hear from the SCM 11s. Once again, the specifications suggest a 300Hz difference in the crossover frequencies, the 11s at 2.2kHz while the 19s crossed over at 2.5kHz, so this noted warmth could be attributable to the bass driver employed in the 19s being driven further up the frequency range.

That is as deep as I intend to delve into the mysteries of how the two models have both shared similarities and indeed some differences, so I will now concentrate on putting the SCM 19s through their paces in their own right, as if I had not heard or compared them at all to their smaller siblings.

My first impressions of them were that they had a "big" sound. Not in terms of loudness, more a case of the sound leaving the speaker cabinets and hanging out into the listening room, with real depth and width to the sound stage. Instrument placement was so easy and effortless, rock solid and stable too, so the imaging didn't vary or drift around in space. Dynamics really are explosive and drums in particular had a visceral power that was felt every bit as much as was heard. On the live album "Wheels Beneath My Feet" by Fink, the track 'Sort of Revolution' has the drummer really driving down into the Floor Tom with his sticks and a lot of speakers portray this as a mere whimper, lacking in depth and weight, but the SCM 19s really did flesh out these drum strikes so you could hear the body of the instrument too, rather than just the drum skin contact with the drumstick, and uncannily too they also managed to reveal the venue reverb of those drum strikes too, which to my knowledge only a short list of speakers I have personally heard can actually muster. The audience sounds and various venue acoustics on this album are also very well laid down and each track therefore is different in presentation.

I then moved on to my favourite "torture tracks" in the shape of Porcupine Tree's "Deadwing" album.

It is usually this album that reveals if there are any crossover issues and happy to say I could hear none at all with the ATC speakers.

The title track on this particular album either sounds raw and uncouth, or it will sound smoothed out and rolled over, depending upon how revealing a system is, speakers in particular. With the SCM 19s that rawness was full on and made it rather a wince listen, whereas lesser speakers are a lot more forgiving. Having said that, there is a bass guitar riff around 6 minutes 40 seconds into the track where I would expect to hear a long low bass note flowing outwards from the speakers rather than just emerge from the cabinet and the SCM 19s gave a great rendition of that bass note, growling, resonant and almost snaking it's way across the carpet towards you and in that respect the SCM 19s gave just about the best I have heard it performed from any stand mount speaker.

Female vocals are always a stern test of a speaker's capabilities and so I listened to Loreena McKennitt on her "An Ancient Muse" album. She sounded as sweet as ever, soaring and melodic, with not a trace of congestion or muddiness at all. It is usually this album that reveals if there are any crossover issues and happy to say I could hear none at all with the ATC speakers.

But of course there is always a cautionary note to these stories and here it is; In a roundabout way Dan mentioned in his review that they were a little bit finicky with what they are partnered with 'upstream' of them and I want to emphasize that again. Whatever system you connect the SCM 19s to, it has to be almost impeccable upstream of them otherwise these speakers will root out whatever weaknesses are there and lay them all out before you, so don't expect a

ATC SCM19 LOUDSPEAKERS

budget system to do these speakers any justice at all. They are not a ruthless or explicit speaker by any means, so I will make that clear, they do have the knack of homing in on fine details and a great tool for fitting into a long term upgrade plan because the speakers won't be the limiting factor in system performance thereafter. Cable differences too were well manifested and several sets were tried until the right combination was found before the listening sessions were carried out.

CONCLUSION

I thought the SCM 11's were stonking good value at £1,200 a pair. The SCM 19s retail at around £2,000 a pair still represents good value from where I am, but of course that also rather depends on what your own tastes and preferences in a loudspeaker are for you to consider their true value.

The SCM 11s while being fun and vibrant, lacked that perceived lower register extension, which I didn't find objectionable, rather endearing in fact and I could happily live with them. The SCM 19s have a more mature and grown up sound with a fuller more "whole" flavour to their presentation which is tonally richer and a more fleshed out than the SCM 11s and as a result offers true long term listening satisfaction. In any event, I can only suggest that you put either one of these loudspeakers on your audition shortlist as they truly deserve a high accolade from me too, the SCM 19s particularly so.

Build Quality 8.7/10

Sound Quality 9.2/10

Value For Money 9.1/10

Overall 9/10

Recommended for: A superb performer, insightful, revealing and communicative in a highly musical natural way.

Dominic Marsh

DESIGNER'S COMMENTS

Specifications only ever tell part of the story, especially published specifications for sales and marketing material, the level of detail the specifications cover has to be limited to fit the format. They are also usually tailored for whom the manufacturer sees as a 'typical' reader. This has the obvious downsides that too much detail can put a novice off, too much and the well-read enthusiast is disappointed.

In relation to the low frequency balance, a more accurate picture of the true response could be illustrated if manufacturers specified the -3dB and -12dB frequency points as well as the -6dB point we use in all our published data.

The level of distortion in the low frequency will also influence the listeners subjective impression and we feel this is most probably the major contributing factor when discussing the SCM11 vs SCM19. The SCM19 uses a superior bass driver, with an under-hung coil (short coil in a long magnetic gap) and also features our Super Linear technology that reduces magnetic hysteresis problems in the motor. When compared to the bass driver in the SCM11 the SCM19 motor topology results in:

- More linear Bl (force factor) vs Coil Position
- More linear inductance vs Coil Position

The benefit is that distortion is reduced.

Another contributing factor is the voice coil diameter. The SCM19 uses a 3"/75mm voice coil whereas the SCM11 uses a 45mm voice coil. The 45mm coil diameter, by no means 'lacking' when compared to our competitors, (quite the opposite in fact) is dwarfed by the 75mm coil which, has a diameter 2.77 times larger! This leads to reduced heating when the loudspeaker is in use and the results are:

- The system 'Q' is maintained to higher driver levels (low frequency response stays 'tight' when driven hard)
- Reduced Power Compression (less reduction in efficiency when driven hard)

More stable coil temperature maintains 'correct' crossover behaviour up to higher drive levels

Ben Lilly



MC Step-Up Transformers
Phono Amplifiers
Pre Amplifiers



GERMAN PHYSIKS UNLIMITED II

Two Unlimited

German Physiks' £8900 Unlimited II is an omnidirectional speaker with some interesting features.



Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED

Many will know that I reviewed the German Physiks HRS-130 several months ago, and was very impressed then. So, to be offered a cheaper, square, vinyl-covered version with a smaller 8 inch bass unit, the same as in the HRS-120, the precursor of the HRS-130, was to be initially less exciting for me. However at £8,900 the Unlimited MkII is not quite a spring chicken as most of the speakers I get to play with, and I wasn't going to be disappointed. The first Unlimited II was favourably reviewed in 2013. But this is the latest version which has had several iterations of crossover refinement.

This is a four-sided highly-braced cabinet with downward firing woofer at the base and the other end has their famous DDD driver, now only available in Carbon fibre, operating from 220Hz upwards to 24,000Hz. This is a downward firing driver with carbon fibre cone allowing all frequencies to radiate uniformly in all directions from its surface. DDD stands for Dick's Dipole Driver, and comes about from a similar technique created in the early 70s by an American company led by American Engineer Lincoln Walsh, who designed unidirectional speakers utilising the sides of the up-turned drivers like funnels to flex and ripple and 'bend' waves out to the listener in all directions. From 1978 Peter Dicks worked on improving this principle to be taken up by the company later to be called German Physiks. This is exactly the same driver as in their more expensive HRS-130 and indeed all their speaker products, including their \$300,000 Gaudi. Only are financial savings attempted in the square shaped cabinet, which is cheaper to make than the octagonal HRS-130, though it is still a highly braced MDF construction.

GERMAN PHYSIKS UNLIMITED II

The Unlimited MkII has some history worth understanding. Originally called the Limited 11 it was introduced at the start of 2011 as a limited production of 100 pairs. Within weeks it sold out, so a new “unlimited” version was brought out to replace it, hence the model being reviewed here. Now featuring acoustic vinyl in four colours (black, white, brown or grey) I did think at first that it would look cheap, but boy, was I wrong. This satin textured and cat-friendly material (always a good test having Toby in the room) also looked very modern and classy in my room. We tend to put wood vinyl on everything, so it was a welcomed relief to have something looking less like a loudspeaker in my living room. Additionally it claims to reduce vibrations by up to 17dB, already tethered together by the reinforced MDF. Additionally, damping is increased by the addition of lots of square blocks each containing special damping material, called ‘Hawaphon’ fitted to the insides of the cabinet (see photo). This material, like miniature ball-bearings, adds considerable weight and converts the vibrations to heat, and ultimately reduces vibrations by a further 50dB. Interestingly, the Square blocks of Hawaphon were originally designed to combat eavesdropping from government buildings. And, taking up a footprint of 9 1/2 inches square, the whole caboodle didn’t take up much space. More importantly, the fact that there is no “sweet spot” with its placement means you don’t have to rearrange your living room before you start listening!

Having loved the HRS -130 I thought that this speaker might be a disappointment. Bearing in mind the same DDD driver was being used this made sure that the same crossover point was below the frequencies that are so important for our listening;

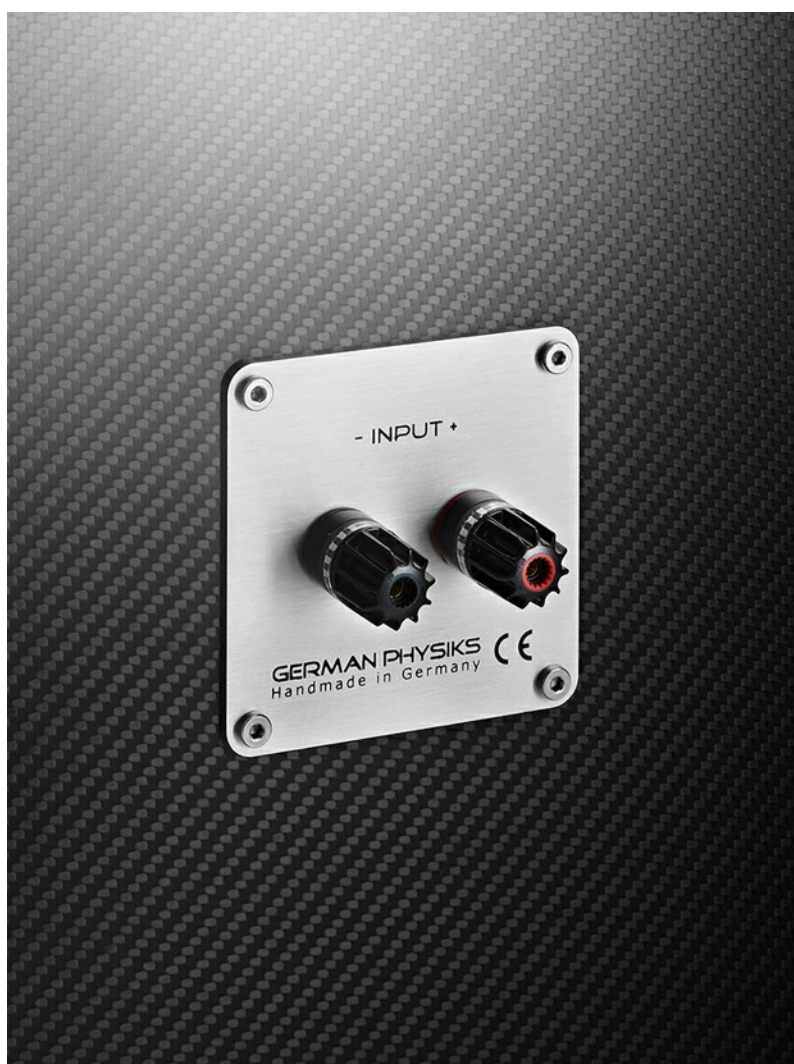


GERMAN PHYSIKS UNLIMITED II

where all that detail that we use to decipher from voice and instruments. This allows for a greater tranquillity and naturalness of sound without circuitry interfering at that point (no crossover can be totally flat, especially when also taking in to consideration the properties of the drivers). OK, the down-point is the loss of that “sweet spot” if you really need to have it. As a sound engineer desperate for detail I have to admit I like to sit chained to that same point, that worn-away space on my settee where Toby is NEVER allowed to sit. However, with the Unlimited Mk II I could sit anywhere I wanted, and actually got a more natural and easier-to-listen-to musical experience. Listening to vocals was particularly pleasurable from wherever I sat or walked. The singers were in the room with me. The speaker positioning was nowhere near as time consuming as I normally find it; very useful in my busy life. As long as it was around two feet away from a reflecting surface, the speaker was easy to please.

Having helped set up BEAST, the Birmingham Electro-Acoustic Sound Theatre, many years ago whilst starting my B.Mus degree, the idea was and still is to perform music using multiple loudspeakers positioned around the room and above, each controlled in performance via separate faders on a mixing-desk, long before Dolby was ever known for anything other than hiss suppression for noisy cassette decks. Listening to electroacoustic music during this listening test, such as works by Stockhausen, Varese, Smalley, Harrison, Dhomont, Liffen, etc, the music experience was almost 3D. OK, the sound didn’t ping-pong around the room, but the amount of space in the listening area occupied with sound was uncanny. The detail was still there, and I didn’t need to sit in one space. The large internal area for the 8” base driver allowed for a surprisingly good bass tailing down to 32Hz, relying on the spikes or feet to allow sound escaping, similar to a large number of subwoofers and ala Helmholtz

resonator bass. The cheaper cost meant that visually this was a little less fanciful than the HRS -130, but it still worked. The bass unit found no problem with sudden explosions or rattling saucepans provided by this type of music. Moving onto something a little easier for my cat to listen to, Pink Floyd’s “The Endless River” gave a greater ambience than I had experienced before, something fitting so well with the style of music. The bass was efficient and ride cymbal taps from Nick Mason were both clear and with endless decay. This ambient music was fittingly portrayed, and an exciting listening experience for my favourite Pink Floyd album “The Division Bell”, track 3 ‘Poles Apart’ (24/96kHz recording). This was a new experience for me. Depth of field gave me an eerie lifelike escape into the complicated minds of the Floyd, and left me knowing more about the music at the end than I had done before. OK, the bass wasn’t quite as grand as in the HRS-130, but the control I actually preferred. Maybe it was the smaller driver size, or just that it fitted better



GERMAN PHYSIKS UNLIMITED II

in with the physics of my room, but I left every listening test with a greater smile than at the start. This was getting pretty damn good. Popular music gave a much more musical and relaxed performance, largely due to the fact that there was no sweet spot shooting sound-waves directly into my head. I could listen for longer, though at times missed some of the effect a sweet spot could bring. The detail was still all there but covered a larger area and sounded more realistic. I know I could continue to waffle on endlessly about particular pieces of music and how I liked them, but that would be pointless. Understanding what these speakers are trying to do is far more important and relevant. Understanding how it can transform your listening space is what German Physiks is all about. And, like many things in the world of hi-fi, you will

either love it or hate it. It's a matter of whether you want to listen to music or musicians.

CONCLUSION

These, like MBL speakers which use a similar process, are unlike everything else at this price point. If you are happy to spend £8,900, and content at not being pinned down to one space in your living room to get that sweet spot, these could be a very pleasurable investment.

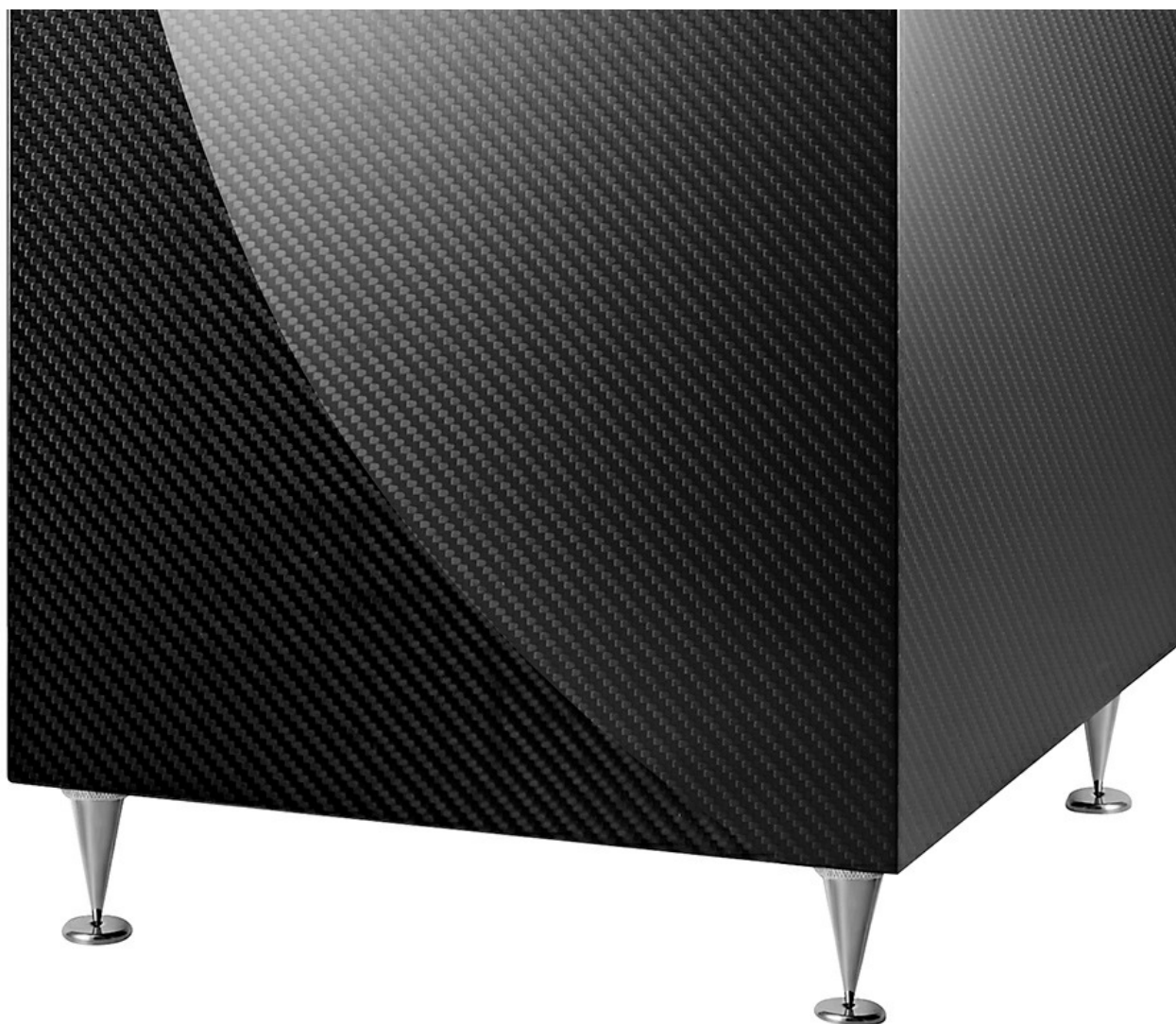
Sound Quality – 8.45/10 (tighter bass than the HRS-130)

Value for Money – 8.5/10

Build Quality – 8.5/10 (great looks)

Overall – 8.48/10

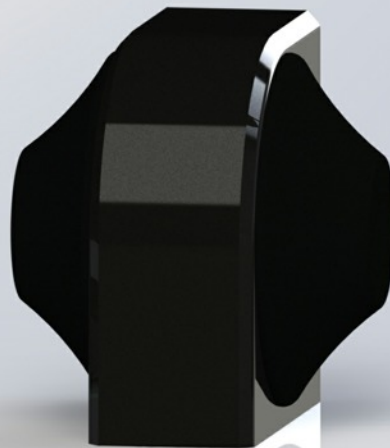
Janine Elliot



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others

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DALI RUBICON 5 LOUDSPEAKERS

Crossing The Rubicon

From Denmark Dali make a range of loudspeakers to suit most pockets, here Hifi Pig looks at their £2399 Rubicon 5 which uses both a ribbon tweeter and a more conventional tweeter in one box.



Hifi Pig

RECOMMENDED

Every once in a while Stuart our Editor will ask us is there any component we would like to review, opposed to what we would normally get assigned to do by him. By chance at that moment I was browsing the internet looking for a pair of speakers I would like to have a listen to and was perusing the Dali website. The reason for this is because I have owned Dali speakers in the past so was curious what the latest generation of models were offering and the Rubicon models happened to catch my attention, particularly the Rubicon 5 as it had the “dual tweeter” pairing similar to the Ikon 6 speakers I used to own some years ago and also a pair of Suite 2.8’s which I parted with rather reluctantly and foolishly too may I add, with the benefit of hindsight.

For those of you unfamiliar with the marque, Dali have been designing and manufacturing loudspeakers since 1983 and are located in Denmark. Their current hi-fi speaker range spans no less than 50 models in the lineup starting with the Zensor and culminating with the Megaline and that’s not including their additional designs aimed at the AV market, so diverse applications and affordability are ably catered for from their product ranges.

CONSTRUCTION

The pair of Rubicon 5 speakers submitted for review had a high gloss white finish and measured some 890mm high x 195mm wide x 339mm deep. Driver array is a six and a half inch bass/mid driver with a wood fibre cone, complimented by high frequency drivers consisting of a 17mm x 45mm ribbon tweeter

DALI RUBICON 5 LOUDSPEAKERS

and a 29mm soft textile dome tweeter. The cabinet is rear reflex ported. Connections are via a biwireable set of sturdy 4mm binding posts able to accept 4mm banana plugs, spade terminals, or bare wire. The base of the speaker has 8mm inserts for spikes or rubber feet (supplied as standard). Cross-over frequencies are 2,900hz and 14,000hz respectively and sensitivity is rated at 86dB, while impedance is a nominal 4 Ohms. Grilles are also supplied, with a plastic frame supporting acoustically transparent fabric, attaching via plastic pegs into additional recesses in the driver mounting plates and screws. I found these to be rather flimsy and delicate, the slightest touch would easily unseat them, so were left off for the entire review period. Each speaker weighs in at almost 16 kilogrammes. Price at time of review is circa £2,399.00 per pair.

SOUND QUALITY

My last encounter with Dali's twin tweeter arrangement was not altogether satisfying from the Ikon 6's that I once owned. The treble dominated the sound and as a result seemed almost detached from the bass drivers, the midrange in particular suffering from this mismatch. However, the twin tweeter arrangement within the Rubicon 5's are truly a world away from that. I found a seamless blend between the tweeter pairing and were perfectly aligned to bass output, neither upsetting the balance of the overall tonal palette. The rear reflex port meant a distance of some 30cm was ideally needed behind the cabinets in my listening room otherwise the bass acquired a tad of boom artefact, while slight toe-in towards the listener had little or no perceptible improvement, with there not being a narrowly defined sweet spot. Midrange in particular was crisp and clear with not a trace of colouration, female vocals being delivered with utter realism. Bass was fulsome in every sense of the word and you would easily believe the driver was physical-

ly larger than it actually was without sighting it or knowing beforehand what the true size is.

These are not difficult speakers to drive and you don't need a megawatt amplifier to provide room filling sound levels. As you crank the volume up it isn't easy

Listening to Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album recorded live at various venues revealed a depth of image and soundstaging that was all enveloping, extending beyond the speaker boundaries and depth-wise not lacking by any means.

to get them to lose their grip either, or for them to start blaring at you. I ran them with a 60 watts per channel solid state amplifier and a 30 watt single ended valve amplifier in triode mode and both drove the Rubicons more than adequately.

Listening to Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album recorded live at various venues revealed a depth of image and soundstaging that was all enveloping, extending beyond the speaker boundaries and depth-wise not lacking by any means. My biggest bugbear with this album is Fink's diction which makes following the lyrics rather difficult, nay impossible at times despite the songs inviting you to sing along (I use the word "sing" here with some caution as I am a great bathtub singer but rather dreadful in reality). The album's true forte though is the instruments, with some stunningly well recorded drum playing and bass guitar. When the drummer hits the Floor tom in the track "Sort Of Revolution" it should penetrate to the centre of your being with it's power and slam and the Dali Rubicon 5's certainly did just that, while the cymbals sounded exactly like struck cymbals should sound like, full of vibrancy and energy so you were in no doubt metal was being hit. Track one on the album is called "Biscuits For Breakfast", opening with some delicious acoustic guitar and Ride Cymbal playing,

DALI RUBICON 5 LOUDSPEAKERS

recorded with great precision, joined soon afterwards by deep bass guitar, all a joy to listen to. Track two called “Perfect Darkness” again has some great intro drumming with snare drum rim knock and kick drum. Of particular note was how real the audience sound was, seemingly surrounded by some very enthusiastic clapping and cheering. Interesting as well how the acoustics vary between the different venues.

Time to give the Rubicons a good workout now, with Porcupine

Tree’s “Deadwing” album slotted into the CD player’s drawer. This album is full of rawness in the recording and it easily wrong-foots many a system, but all credit to them, the Rubicon’s managed to tread that fine line between accuracy, delicacy and smoothness, avoiding for the better part the raw edgy harshness that this album can easily output, yet not totally masking the album’s recording shortcomings. To be truthful, this is the kind of presentation I enjoy for my personal listening; excitement and dynamics without being sonically assaulted by the drawbacks of absolute accuracy and fidelity.

I then played Pink Floyd’s “The Wall” and the Rubicons really did do this album some justice. Not in a “hi-fi” thrills a minute kind of way, more that you listened to the entire double album end-to-end in one session and you could happily repeat it straight afterwards because although detailed and revealing with some truly weighty bass impact and drive, you never once felt fatigued or overwhelmed by the sound produced by them at any time.

CONCLUSION

For what is after all a fairly compact floorstanding loudspeaker, the sound they produce certainly isn’t compact from what I heard from them during the entire review. Bass is certainly prodigious and con-

trolled with it too, while I also deeply admire the way Dali have successfully paired a dome tweeter with a ribbon tweeter and got them working in perfect harmony together. As a result of good driver integration and crossover design, midrange is pretty accurate and free from perceptible colourations. Downside for me

was those flimsy and recalcitrant grilles that would have been essential had small inquisitive fingers been visiting my home. I liked the high gloss white finish much to my surprise, because

they were almost immune to fingerprints and dust and rather refreshing to look at too, having been brought up in the world of Teak/Walnut/Oak/Black Ash limit on choices, whereas my one flirtation with high gloss piano black showed up dust and fingerprints like no other.

My other sticking point is the price tag of the Rubicon 5’s so balancing out the Value For Money scale falls within a grey area where they are neither overpriced nor undervalued, so I would leave that final assessment in your capable hands dear readers, married of course to your own perceptions of these speakers during an audition, which I suggest you do if you seek a quality compact floorstanding loudspeaker.

Build quality:	8.1/10
Sound quality:	8.6/10
Value for money:	8.0/10
Overall:	8.2/10

Recommended for: The audiophile that wants a big sound from a small cabinet speaker, able to deliver real heft in the bass, a colourless midband and a sweet crisp treble performance.

Dominic Marsh

ECLIPSE TD-M1 POWERED DIGITAL SPEAKERS

Total Eclipse

The £1000 Eclipse TD-M1 can be used nearfield or in larger spaces and as well as being powered have an onboard DAC. Hifi Pig gets up close to this thoroughly modern looking loudspeaker system.



ECLIPSE TD-M1 POWERED DIGITAL SPEAKERS

Everybody familiar with the ECLIPSE brand knows it first and foremost for its passive ergonomic domed/bullet style structure and single full-range driver design. The active TD-M1s are primarily designed to be used near-field: on a desk in the office, a kitchen counter etc. but equally, they can be used to fill bigger spaces.

One of the speakers incorporates a class D amplifier and a 24-Bit/192kHz NOS DAC which feeds its counterpart with watts via a captive analogue cable

which connects to the separate speaker using a 35mm Jack.

Other connections include three methods of digital input: one via asynchronous USB-B (PC/Mac), another via USB-A for direct iDevice and the other via wi-fi – the TD-M1 is AirPlay-compatible and can be controlled using free iOS and Android remote apps.

Also available is one single analogue input via a 3.5mm Jack making connection to any analogue-based device such as a cd or DVD player, tuner or



ECLIPSE TD-M1 POWERED DIGITAL SPEAKERS

MP3 player an option via the correct designation of cable.

Cabinet construction is solid, the finish is very high end and the attention to detail right down to the touch-sensitive controls and led notification lights is very accurate and impressive.

THE SOUND

I'm well known for being someone who even though has his preferable tastes in system presentation still always appreciates many variants of sound characters. I appreciate other tastes in equipment and musical tastes and look for synergy and coherence as the most crucial area of any Hifi system rather than what I would ultimately prefer. This mantra converts to reviewing very well as the idea here is to convey to readers what a product does or doesn't do, if I like the product I will express my personal take and if I don't the same applies but the main core of the review has to consist of what the product does and what it's sound character is. If this resonates with the reader and they wish to demo the product on that basis, great, my own personal take on the product and how it sits with me is somewhat of a side issue.

Now this brings me neatly on to the ECLIPSE TD-M1. A brief overview is that fed with good-quality recordings the speakers excel in transparency, soundstage shape and form, expression of detail and musicality. Fed with compromised (compressed) material, the accuracy of the TD-M1 can highlight format limitations, as any transparent monitor would.

Let me try to explain...

I connected the TD-M1's to my modded Mac Mini via USB, I wanted to utilise the full ECLIPSE system including its in-built 24-bit/192kHz DAC rather than feed it via an analogue input from my own DACs.

My first port of call usually whilst I allow a product to warm up to full operational potential is to play some random albums from Spotify, using its compressed Ogg Vorbis format (160kbps standard, 360kbps premium). What I heard from the little

ECLIPSE had a good strong detail retrieval and a pretty strong soundstage which put across to me substantial amounts of depth. The TD-M1's admirable accuracy did highlight the shortcomings of the low-quality Spotify files, revealing the inherent distortion on the leading edges of upper bass notes, especially kick drums and male vocalists had a grain and haze to their more chesty lower notes.

Following the compressed source material, I purposely played some more music which I could then replicate with the good quality rips I had available. Playing the superior rips through Amarra Symphony on the Mac proved how revealing and transparent the TD-M1s truly were. With the better quality recordings in play the satisfying and distortion-type sound I heard on Spotify's compressed streams before was, as expected, eradicated.

Now the sound was substantially improved. Bass held fuller and firmer notes that had more presence. Midrange was overall more stable and expressive and the top end had better undertones. As these speakers are of small size bass response is understandably limited although its presence is coherent with the balance of the presentation, notes don't fall off a cliff, they decay and roll off well making for a more musical and detailed smoothness. A hard roll off point and this tensions up the overall sound and makes it more analytical, although the ECLIPSE are revealing they are not bright or harsh in any way and are very musical.

I was very surprised at how well the ECLIPSE could hold a note, as my first impressions using Spotify's low-fi files began to fade. The overall coherence of the sound produced was now very linear and the speed and transient headroom the ECLIPSE have is excellent, quick crashes of notes, plucks of strings and artists with extreme vocal ranges all conveyed drama and realistic tendencies which kept me engaged to what I was listening too.

To obtain these properties I had to ensure that the placement of the speakers was absolutely spot on. Sitting on my desk I formed an equilateral triangle

ECLIPSE TD-M1 POWERED DIGITAL SPEAKERS

between myself and the speakers having them angled slightly upwards so that the drivers focused on my forehead. The speaker can be tilted upward in three angles (0° to 20°) by simply using the control lever. Doing so give an image which is completely out of the box and a depth to the soundstage which is unmistakable. In a situation such as this I am sat at the desk in the same position each time, the speakers remain a constant and everything sounds in this sweet spot as good as it can. The TD-M1s can also be used firing out into the room, but are optimised for near-field listening for today's increasingly desktop-based listening environment.

Now knowing that the placement is absolutely crucial I reverted back to Spotify again, yes things were slightly better but I will confess that it was only when listening at low to medium volumes that the reflection of the less than perfect recordings were listenable. For most users, I'm sure these volumes and the sound would be very appealing but for me, someone who like a bit of volume I would be soon frustrated with the distortion inherent in Spotify's content.

The use of sub-CD-quality (compressed) music with

the TD-M1s, is more likely to reveal the inherent compromises in sound quality.

Most consumers would naturally appreciate the fact that good recordings are key to making the product sing. For anyone whose library comprises lots of compressed material, less revealing speakers, i.e. those that are fundamentally coloured, might gloss-over the inherent imperfections in compressed music at the expense of accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Would I want a pair of these in my system?

Yes. If I had largely good-quality or CD-quality and above rips that the ECLIPSE could utilise, they offer tremendous insight into the performance and give a highly detailed and very musical sound with incredible imaging. I love exploring Spotify's low-fi content and truly accurate speakers like the TD-M1 act like a pane of glass: they let you see directly into the recording, good or bad, which sometimes shows the limitations of poor-quality streamed music. But, if you have good-quality music to hand, then they really are worth considering.

This review has been the biggest dilemma I have had to date and I almost never wrote it.

There's so much to enjoy about the ECLIPSE TD-M1's. Their honesty with compressed material might encourage you to avoid it and yet if you understand their attributes and play to their strengths, they come recommended.

Build Quality: 8.7/10

Sound Quality: 7.3/10 with good recordings 8.6/10

Value For Money: 7.9/10

Overall: 7.96 – 8.4/10

Recommended, especially with good-quality recordings. Anything less can show up the known compromises of compressed material.

Dan Worth



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RAUMFELD STEREO L LOUDSPEAKERS

The German All-In-One

On paper this £1250 loudspeaker with in built amplifiers, DAC and wireless connectivity certainly looks excellent value, but does all this add up to a product you could live with?



Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED

We have come a very long way since 1877 when Thomas Edison invented the Phonograph. Ironical then that he was totally deaf in one ear and 80% deaf in the other ear. What would he have made of wirelessly streaming digital data direct to speakers? A wry smile from him no doubt.

So it seems that we move on to a new chapter in audio history whereby the rubicon has been crossed and where we no longer feel the need for any form of physical contact with the media we play, as in vinyl records, magnetic tape and the CD silver disc, so what we have these days is a series of 1's and 0's stored inside sealed containers that we cannot even see, much less touch. Again, the irony is that these days we still will say "X artist has sold X million RECORDS during their musical career", so when will we say "This artist has sold over 5 million terabytes of data during their career?" Sobering thought and doesn't QUITE have the same ring to it. I digress.

Raumfeld hail from Germany, was founded in 2008 and at that time concentrated their efforts towards improving the sound obtainable from digital playback, given that MP3 was the prevalent standard at the time. In 2010 they were paired with the speaker manufacturer Teufel, which then allowed them to capitalize on Teufel's 35 years of loudspeaker manufacturing experience. What we have here then is the fruits of that partnership.

CONSTRUCTION

The Raumfeld Stereo L loudspeaker as it is known, is a large floor stander with some tricks up it's sleeve. It is a reflex design speaker with a bottom port which exhausts through a gap between speaker

RAUMFELD STEREO L LOUDSPEAKERS

cabinet and plinth, with powered speaker drivers, as in the crossovers are directly linked to a pair of power amplifiers housed in the “master” speaker, while the other “slave” speaker is entirely passive with no amplification, although it does house a crossover for the drivers.

You can feed it a digital signal wirelessly, you can directly connect via USB or a pair of RCA inputs a CD player, DAC, TV, DVD player or whatever, which is then controlled by a front panel volume control on the “master” speaker. You can connect your existing amplifier’s speaker connections to the

Stereo L’s speaker input posts and treat them as an ‘conventional’ loudspeaker pair, but you must wire them with an additional single length of speaker cable via a dedicated connection betwixt master and slave speakers. Raumfeld supply 5 metres of unterminated speaker cable in the box which I didn’t use at all, but it looked to me inside the plastic bag to be of 1.5mm² section copper cable.

Setting up the wireless connection was fairly easy and straightforward with a tablet or phone, but using the PC wasn’t easy to be truthful and for me contained a paradox. The instructions called for the



RAUMFELD STEREO L LOUDSPEAKERS

master speaker to be connected to the broadband modem with the supplied length of LAN network cable. Oooops, the modem is at the other end of the house and these speakers are no lightweights to go lugging around. Because the modem is so far away, I use a Wi-Fi repeater in my listening room, so throwing caution to the wind I hooked up the speaker to that, which thankfully has a LAN port. To my surprise it worked and one press on the front panel button set the process in motion, indicated by a pair of LEDs which both illuminate when a Wi-Fi connection is established. I could now see that the Raumfeld speaker was registered as a wireless device on my home network, but there was no Windows based software to communicate with the Raumfelds. Both my phone and tablet are Android Wi-Fi enabled devices and it took only a few minutes to download the apps to make them function. The paradox for me was not being able to use my music library stored on the PC with the Raumfelds, yet the tablet and phone had no music libraries and could communicate directly with the speakers. Bother. I had then to spend ages transferring some music files across to the tablet, but then the tablet's short battery life plagued me during the listening sessions. Purchasers do get a free 3 month subscription to Tidal or you can use the Spotify mobile app for tablets, or Android/iOS Apple products, but sadly not for Microsoft Windows software bases, which also ruled out using my laptop computer. Several people I know also have their music libraries stored on laptop, so I am not alone in lamenting this.

Price at time of review is £1,249.99 plus a free 3 month Tidal subscription and free Wi-Fi repeater for a limited time only.

SOUND QUALITY

My first difficulty to overcome was how I was going to wire up the loudspeaker connections from the output terminals from my amplifier when I didn't

have a spare length to match the resident speaker cables already in my system. I wasn't going to use any of the speaker cable supplied in the box by Raumfeld, so I settled on a short length of cable from the same manufacturer of my resident cables to link the two Raumfeld speakers, but a model a lot further down in their product range, which wasn't ideal but the best compromise I could formulate without having a matching set of three identical cables. It did cause a slight imbalance in the sound quality between master and slave's sound, although if I had the speakers on a permanent basis I would no doubt have remedied that.

My first foray into the Stereo L's capabilities was via the speaker direct connections.

Given that they are a large-ish speaker, at first hearing they didn't produce a commensurately large-ish sound, which you might expect. After around 40 hours they loosened up a bit but not by a huge amount and still kept that taut sound from then onwards. There was no mention of how long break-in should be carried out for in the documentation supplied. Overall, they sounded a bit lean to me, with bass that wasn't quite as fulsome and weighty as was expected for a speaker of this size and driver array, midrange had an innate cleanliness which in isolation was pretty good but lacked warmth and tonality, while the treble was clear and clean, that simply added to the perception of a lack in body and power, even though I had no concerns at all about the treble performance in isolation. You should read that as being "controlled" in the bass registers rather than subdued though, perhaps a little too over controlled. The upside to that is treble and ambience details shone through and imaging acquired an ethereal quality which was enthralling, while transients did seem to have a very clean and fast leading edge.

Next, I connected the CD player's analogue outputs straight into the RCA line inputs on the Raumfelds. Setting the volume for this connection was passed

As for the sound, if you are plagued with overblown bass in your listening room, then the Raumfelds could be just the speaker you are looking for.

RAUMFELD STEREO L LOUDSPEAKERS

over to a rotary knob on the master speaker's front control panel. In an ideal world you would set the volume manually by that volume control, but I have some albums that have loud tracks and quieter tracks which had me up and down from the listening chair quite a few times during an evening's listening session to crank it up and turn it down accordingly. A loudspeaker and a fitness regime in one! Then I moved on to feeding the Raumfelds with some digital fodder to chew on, with a USB feed from my DAC. No source selection switch was needed, as the Stereo L has automatic sensing when a music signal was present. Once more the volume level was controlled by the front panel rotary knob and either a remote control or a long stick with a rubber tip would have been very welcome.

Finally, I fired up my tablet for using the wireless connection. Volume is controlled by a rotary disc image in the Raumfeld software so I could go back to being a couch potato once more. Creating a playlist wasn't too difficult, as all I had to do was drag and drop the tracks I wanted to hear and away we went.

The best sound I heard was from the DAC and USB connection because my DAC has a healthy bass content which the Stereo L's benefited from by sounding less taut and lean. Large scale orchestral pieces now had some scale and authority to them and what music didn't have body and depth via the CD player's analogue output, suddenly had a modicum more weight and power in the bass.

After some puffing and wheezing I took them into the lounge to hear how they coped with film soundtracks, fed via the DVD player's analogue outputs, where the clear midband of the Raumfelds helped considerably with actors that mumble or speak with too much nasality (Is there such a word?), while the previously recalcitrant bass output from my evaluation system suddenly blossomed with room filling energy from gunfire, explosions and such-like.

CONCLUSION

I was hoping for a speaker like a Swiss Army knife in the Raumfeld Stereo L's, having universal connectivity and functionality. Raumfeld have designed the Stereo L speakers to be compatible with iOS and Android devices only so my hopes were dashed on the Swiss Army knife front by excluding Windows connectivity, even though my PC recognised their presence on the Wi-Fi network. As for the sound, if you are plagued with overblown bass in your listening room, then the Raumfelds could be just the speaker you are looking for. Bass

output is very well controlled and not an ounce of surplus fat in the sound to bother or perturb you right up to the lower midband, while the midrange cleanliness may suit your tastes perfectly, whereas it was a tad too cool for me. No quibbles about treble extension and clarity, with imaging and ambience cues rendered very well.

As always, you only have my perceptions here to judge these speakers by and Raumfeld offer free

shipping, plus a staggering 8 week trial period and a 2 year warranty with their products so you have plenty of time to evaluate if they suit your musical tastes.

At ££1249.99 I still perceive them to be good value nevertheless, considering they have built in amplification of decent quality and reasonably good connectivity.

Construction: 7.9/10

Sound quality: 7.9/10

Value for money: 8.7/10

Overall: 8.1/10

Dominic Marsh



GENEVA AEROSPHERE LARGE

The Swiss Connection

The Aerospace Large is the bigger of the two streaming speakers from the company and comes with a host of features. Hifi Pig gets connected with the Swiss.



Geneva's new multi-room Wifi enabled streaming active speaker systems come in two different sizes. The 'SMALL' £349 and the 'LARGE' £649. Each of Geneva's streaming speakers will work with a range of computer based operating systems such as Windows and Mac OS along with app control from any Android or iOS handheld devices to stream network based music over DLNA, Airplay or Bluetooth, offering complete flexibility of control, choice and function.

Each wireless active speaker system has the ability to also stream music via Spotify Connect, Deezer, Internet Radio etc or Airplay'd via your favourite third party applications.

On the rear of Aero there is a 3.5mm input jack for direct stereo connection to MP3 players, phones, tablets and the like and there is also a 'BASE' £449 module which when attached will include DAB/DAB+/FM Radio and CD, along with a further 3.5mm input jack to enable Aero to become a complete all-in-one music centre, which in multi-room setups offers all the conventionality of a standard separates system with the added benefits of sharing your music throughout the home with family members or for a more intimate and personal listen.

Aero's design is unique and adventurous, on first inspection the mind

wanders, coming up with analogies of its form and shape – a micro-phone head, pin cushion, mushroom or pom-poms sprang to mind. The speaker is covered completely with acoustic cloth (red, white or black), which could

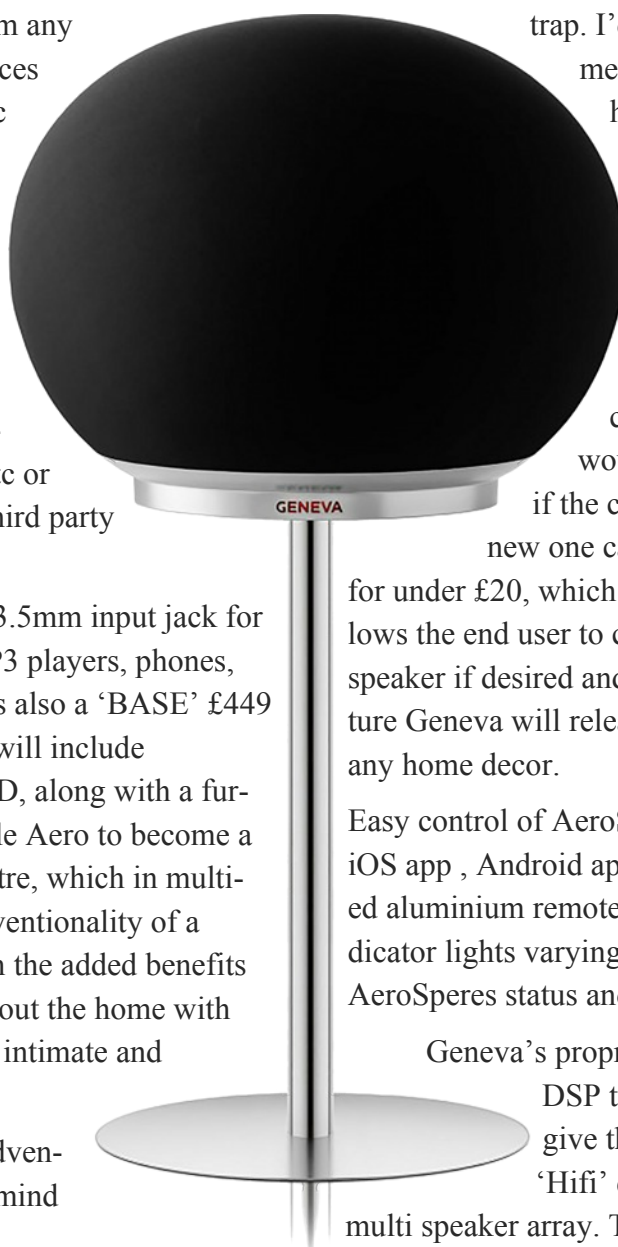
be a bit of a lure to the family cat and a dust trap. I'd suggest a vacuum attachment

which sports a soft bristle head to give it a quick clean from time to time, I would have liked to see a nice cotton cover included with elasticated mouth to pop over Aero when not in use for protection (maybe some cool retro coloured ones would be interesting?). Although

if the cloth was to be damaged a new one can be ordered from Geneva for under £20, which is great value. This also allows the end user to change the colour of the speaker if desired and maybe some time in the future Geneva will release a pallet of colours to suit any home decor.

Easy control of AeroSphere is achieved from the iOS app, Android app, or locally from the included aluminium remote control. A range of LED indicator lights varying in colours mark the AeroSpheres status and source selection.

Geneva's proprietary 'Embracing Sound' DSP technology is generated to give the listener an encapsulating 'Hifi' quality sound, produced by its multi speaker array. Two 1" tweeters, two 4" mid



GENEVA AEROSPHERE LARGE

bass drivers and an upward firing 6" subwoofer complete the Aero's driver configuration.

The drivers are housed in individual acoustic chambers within Aero and individually amplified allowing for Geneva's DSP feature to come into full effect, with control of the speakers parameters via the app for tonal balance and room placement. Whether free-standing on the matching floor stand, on a table top, or in a corner Aero has adjustable parameters to achieve the best possible sound integration.

SETUP

There is a dedicated stand to use with the AeroSpheres, I wasn't provided with one for the review, but I already had the perfect spot for which the unit would sit if owned by myself, which was on my sideboard.

In its seated position there are five small rubber feet which the speaker sits on. The power cord routes in a small channel on the underside and its connector is nicely concealed, leaving the trailing lead to run neatly behind the furniture or through the stand. A rear power button and wifi connect button sit either side of the 3.5mm input jack and with the way the sphere curves into its base each are very easily accessible.

Connecting up the AeroSphere to my network was an absolute cinch and within a minute or so I was listening to an incredibly full and rich sound which filled my room with a noticeably sub sonic bass response that more or less floored me and I sat upright in amazement wondering 'how on earth am I getting this rolling expansive bass from a 15 inch ball of understated physical weight and bling on top of my sideboard'.

The AeroSpheres does come supplied with a standard remote control and Geneva's is just so well made. A sleek, elegant fully featured and simple to use all aluminium affair with little weight and good separation between buttons. What I like so much

about it is that each mode is clearly stated, a button stating 'AirPlay' a button saying 'DLNA' and so forth.

When I initially read the press release my immediate concerns came from the indicator lights behind the Geneva badge on the Aero. It was stated in a paragraph that this mode will have the badge glowing green, this input would appear pink and that input blue. 'I have to remember all these colours to work out which input I'm using?'. No, thank goodness, the clearly labelled remote takes that hassle out of the

I've heard many AirPlay setups and many have been good and really good in fact but from a single unit I've never heard such bass.

equation and the apps for both Android and iOS have source selection clearly defined, leaving the user to simply enjoy the coloured lighting instead....even the pink?!

Connecting via iOS is an absolute breeze, Android has a couple more steps but followed step by step allows for easy control and setup of the unit on the home network.

Streaming from various services including DLNA on the local network makes listening to music easily accessible to everyone in the home and once a playlist is selected the physical remote control can be used to skip and pause tracks, as well as volume adjustments, allowing for the users phone or tablet to become free for other duties if desired.

THE SOUND

GENEVA AEROSPHERE LARGE

I've heard many AirPlay setups and many have been good and really good in fact but from a single unit I've never heard such bass. I did tweak things a little to achieve a tighter response, not that it was loose... it was just for personal preference. So, I'm sat there listening away to various genres through Spotify on my iPad and I thought 'I wonder how resonant the Aero is?' I had the levels quite high at the time, placed my hand in various places around the sphere and cabinet vibrations were extremely low.

Bass alone obviously doesn't make up the total of what you or I would expect from £649 of our hard earned cash, so how do the rest of the frequencies perform? Not too shabby, not too shabby at all...

Just because the AeroSphere is a lifestyle type product it doesn't mean that it cannot be put in the 'audiophile' bracket.

Moving about the room completing a few chores while I allowed the speaker to warm up I very quickly became drawn to the display of spaciousness which emanated from the area of the room which the Aero Large was located, rather than a distinctive point of interaction with the music.

Now I'm doing the okey kokey shuffle about the room searching out voids and areas of overload and

again was very pleased, the only point where I wasn't a fan of the sound was when stood directly over the speaker – as the Aero has an upward firing subwoofer standing over it allows for the sub to dominate and muddy the sound. Fantastic! as I cannot see anyone hankering over the unit when in use.

Listening to some Ed Sheeran I was presented with a lightly rich vocal that was clear and natural, matching Sheeran's tonality very well indeed. Guitar strings were acute on their leading edges and full into the

note, and on some of the less mainstream tracks recording venues actually cued their acoustic into playback, which I didn't expect.

This is all attributed to the Aero's great soundstaging and there's no denying that the AeroSphere Large gives an actual soundstage – singer upfront, band left, right and rear and with synthesised music the room boundaries are touched nicely with the expansiveness of Geneva's DSP integration.

Through listening to a range of female artists especially and some violin music, what really stood out to me was how well the higher frequencies were balanced and projected and never at any stage of my listening tests did I experience any

upper mid lower treble glare or hardness. The speaker doesn't give a bright, overly-detailed, hard sound at all and is very coherent.

From what Geneva say in their blurb I'm led to believe that the AeroSphere Large isn't simply a powered speaker, it's a fully active speaker. But what difference does this make? A powered speaker system will have a stereo amplifier, connected to a



GENEVA AEROSPHERE LARGE

speaker with a passive crossover, much like computer desktop speakers, the amplifier is only required to be in one of the speakers and the other speaker remains passive. A fully active setup will have in many cases a digital crossover feeding the separate frequencies to each amplifier (one per driver) and this will give a more defined and controlled sound as well as allowing for superior DSP control and manipulation of the response.

With it's striking looks, ease of use and feature rich applications, integrating a Geneva AeroSphere into the home is an easy and stress-free experience.

The combination of all these parts allows for a fantastically controlled coherent speaker system which has true air in the top end, midrange transparency and a bass response that you can really feel, driving the music with all the body and presence it deserves. Just because the AeroSphere is a lifestyle type product it doesn't mean that it cannot be put in the 'audiophile' bracket.

In fact what actually is a 'lifestyle' product these days? Long gone are the days of all-in-one Bose or B&O systems dominating an area of the market which fulfilled the needs of those who wanted quality sound from a straight forward one box solution. Today the all-in-one system has grown, evolved and its features expanded – it's now achievable to get high quality sound with a range of features that makes the previous technology ever so more primitive and with so many companies now producing systems utilising streaming I feel the term 'lifestyle' has taken on a whole new meaning. Today's lifestyle systems don't just allow the music lover to enjoy their favourite CD or Radio Station, today's lifestyle system is more utilitarian and integrates a whole

range of everyday gadgets and gizmos to make for a complete and integrated experience for the entire family to enjoy. It's no longer a lifestyle choice, it's a revolution in audio that is fast becoming the norm and a sure fire way to get young audiophiles really interested in high quality playback of their digital music utilising phones, tablets and the Internet to enrich the experience and the AeroSphere certainly bridges the gap between what can be achieved in this market and the audiophile world of Hifi.

CONCLUSION

With it's striking looks, ease of use and feature rich applications, integrating a Geneva AeroSphere into the home is an easy and stress-free experience.

With the range of music available to stream from Spotify alone the Aero is a terrific companion for everyday listening and party nights with friends, but with the options to stream network based music, phone or tablet based music, iTunes, Internet radio, Airplay and other streaming services, the AeroSphere is complete. With the addition of 'AeroBase' the options of CD/DAB/DAB+/FM make this a fully fledged home music centre, hell you can even add a turntable and phonostage or Bluray with the stereo input on the Sphere and Base.

Fair enough, It won't do the ironing, brush your teeth or change a flat tyre, but what I can say for sure is the Geneva AeroSphere is here to stay and the biggest problem I can see is families fighting over who gets to choose the next song to stream.

Build Quality – 8.3/10

Sound Quality – 8.5/10

Value For Money – 8.4/10

Overall – 8.4/10

Recommended for its feature rich options and rich expansive, detailed and coherent room filling sound.

Dan Worth

TELLURIUM Q SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT CD



Set-up and test LPs and CDs have been around for many years. Most have someone telling you which speaker is the left one and that the other one must be the right. You might also get tracks to test whether you can still hear up to 20,000Hz, which is usually quite upsetting. Some will remember those vinyl discs to help you get the best bias or weight on your stylus (*still have mine -stuart*), and the more recent CD test discs try to help all your equipment achieve their optimum mechanical, electronic and magnetic harmony. As Geoff Merrigan, a director of cable manufacturer TelluriumQ and the voice on the opening track-identifier of this 3-track test-disc, tells me on the bump for this CD that most music we listen to hardly exercises the

equipment we play it on. Just like if we just go for a short walk every night we are hardly likely to succeed in a marathon. By only playing music it could mean that your system can get into a "rut". Merrigan explains of his 'Cable and System Preparation/Refresh disc' that it "takes your system through a full workout of frequencies and tonal changes that is specifically designed to stretch your system's components and bring new life into your music". With a title that rolls off the tongue like a brick, Geoff just likes to call it their 'System CD'.

And certainly this album is no slouch for the weak system... or listener for that matter. After the track identifier the next track lasts 60 minutes and 17 seconds and includes a plethora of rhythms, frequency

TELLURIUM Q SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT CD

sweeps and even morse code. This is a serious "musique concrete" workout, but one that I have to admit I enjoyed listening to, and even playing along to with my guitar. Just like my washing machine I soon got used to turning it on and getting on with my life. The sounds, whilst working to a repeating series of musical phrases, are designed to make your speakers work for their living, even when they're not set to high volume. There are also no pure ratio intervals in the tracks, meaning that the waves of the speaker cones don't form similar patterns of motions. For example a 1kHz tone with a 500Hz and 2000Hz is less effective in waking up your equipment than a 1kHz and 701Hz duo, even if the former trio is much more musical! Putting a frequency analysis across the tracks, no single frequency is missed out. The shorter and more animated third track is designed as a yoga session to wake up the hifi and "inject a little lithe life in to your music". There are similarities with the previous track, but this one goes a whole lot further. I have tried lots of test discs, and where many might tempt you with gimmicks, this one is just plain honest. Even the durations on the box for the two important tracks are marked simply as 60 minutes and 10 minutes. I mean, does 17 seconds really matter when you have left the machine playing for an hour, and is it important that track three says it is 10'20"?

Having been brought up on wavelets and chirps from other well-known enhancing and rejuvenation discs, it was nice to hear something different. In Merrigan's disc the chirps were more musical than simply increasing sinewave frequencies that are nothing more than annoying. However, where my customary discs have some very quick transient samples (fast attacks) the Merrigan disc was more musical, and forgiving. There were no passages that for me made me worry that my system couldn't cope, and I was happy that the CD also allowed my subwoofer to have a workout. This disc covered the lot, though perhaps a few minutes shorter and perhaps further track with sweeping frequency tracks designed to remove residual magnetism could have been useful. But I wasn't complaining.

Whether or not there is a market for a CD test disc anymore is another matter. Whilst it will be many years before I do away with the shiny disc player many will ask whether a HD disc covering greater frequency bands will be with us soon. Tellurium Q have no intention of making one. Indeed, creating this disc in the first place was not intentional. Mr

Merrigan's German distributor wanted to produce a test CD to accompany the Tellurium Q cables being sold there. When they were let down by a company who didn't produce one Merrigan just thought, "why the hell don't I just do it myself". With experience of music production he got together with help from Simon Lomax, who he had worked with on a meditation CD back in 2002, to produce his own test disc. He wanted it to be different to every other test disc out there. He didn't want "an annoying set of boring test signals". He wanted something that you could sit in the same room while it was playing "and not want to rip the speaker cones out". This album is a lot more forgiving to humans, and to speaker cones for that matter. And more than that, it really works.

Most of my cables are already well run-in, after hundreds of hours of playing, but music on its own cannot ever efficiently open up your hi-fi system's range sufficiently in a mechanical, electronic and magnetic way. A set up disc such as this makes it happen a lot more quickly and more, so even my old workhorse cables seemed to open up tighter and quicker after being exercised by this album. I connected up some old QED Profile 4x4 speaker cables that I had never used, though had always loved the look of. I also tried the same with the Slee Spatia cables from GPS Audio. The latter sounded slow and unclear initially, but after time with the CD the sound opened up with quicker top and deeper bass end and became very respectable for a company better known for headphone amps and phono-stages. I wanted to run in some new headphones I have for review so decided to play a wav-copy through my Fiio X5. I fell asleep. Whilst it happily woke up the headphones it had the opposite effect on me. This CD is like a double-strength medicine, curing the audio ailments quicker than others I have used in the past, and much less gimmicky. It also plays nice music.

CONCLUSION

When I first got this CD I thought, yep, here's another gimmick, but I was very wrong. This disc might have a complicated name, but it really is a no-frills unassuming silver disc that does a whole lot more. This is first-aid for your hi-fi, and something you will keep as important as you do your medicines. What's more, the very meditative music on it is not all that bad either.

Janine Elliot

RETRO BITES

CLASSIC AND ICONIC AUDIO ...BY
JANINE ELLIOT



I love old hi-fi. I have a collection of some 36 reel to reels, cassette and DAT machines, 16 turntables and countless other gear. All has its own personality and history, and like a photo album or your favourite pop song, has a history that is personal to me, and a few other people. From my very first Fidelity reel to reel and Ferguson record deck, all have had an input in shaping my life. I am sure the same applies to you too, as we all progress through our relationship with audio.

One possession that I really hold dear is my Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference, a turntable so modern and iconic that it had its own place in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*. Sitting on the table in Alex's bedroom, alongside other hi-fi memorabilia (including a micro-cassette player) this film, based on Anthony Burgess's 1962 novella *A Clockwork Orange*, never saw light of day in the UK until 1999, not just because our politically correct totalitarianism felt we weren't capable of watching it, but also because of death threats Kubrick received if he released it. Shame, as it might

One possession that I really hold dear is my Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference, a turntable so modern and iconic that it had its own place in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*.

have brought in more sales of the turntable as *The Italian Job* did for the humble Mini. Interestingly it was the most popular film shown in France in 1972, where it was allowed. I love the film for its continual use of Beethoven's 9th Symphony (though there is actually more music from Rossini in it) and also the music of synthesizer music marvel Wendy (then known as Walter) Carlos (best known for her album *Switched on Bach*). Interestingly

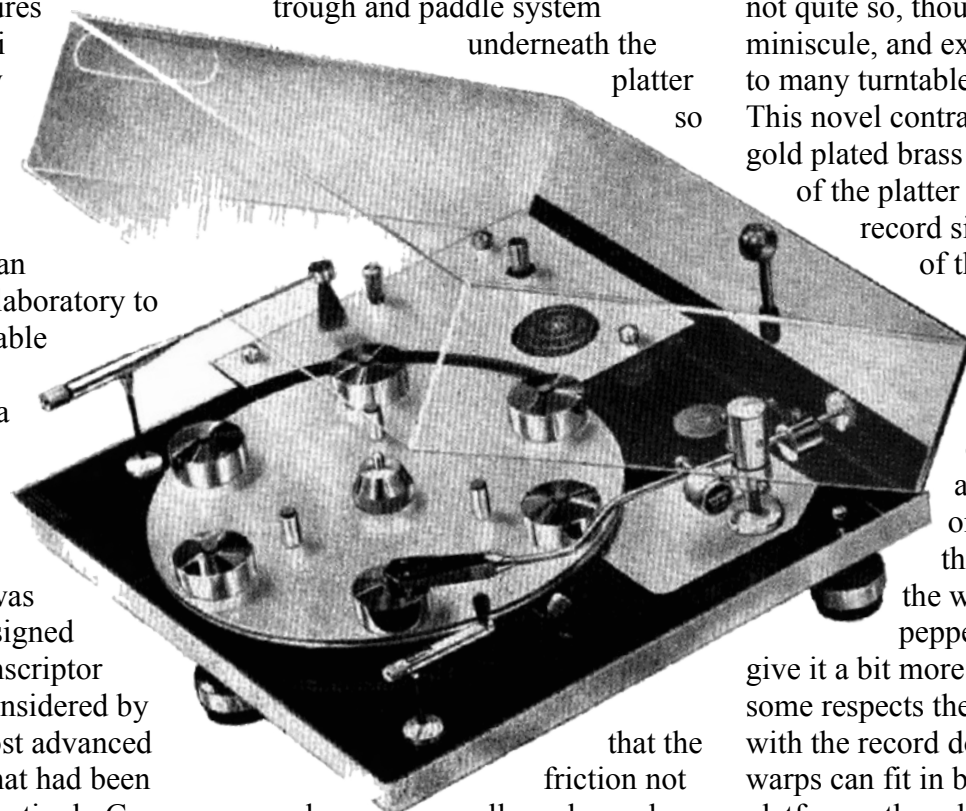
the record shop scene was actually shot in a Chelsea Drugstore, a hip London bar frequented by the Rolling Stones and other celebrities in the late '60s and '70s. Next time you watch the film look out for the LP soundtrack to 2001: *A Space Odyssey* deliberately pinned on the front of the desk; another great Kubrick film. A clever touch.

This lovely turntable was therefore chosen as a stage-prop by

Kubrick, but it was designed long before the clapperboard was ever clapped. Indeed, before any turntable left the production line David Gammon, the founder of Transcriptors, in 1963 produced the Transcriptor arm, along with the sweep arm and stylus brush, really because there was a lack of good quality designs out there. His friend, Brian Allan, suggested they took some pictures and sent to HiFi News, probably as a joke, though they printed it. In 1963 he was approached by an audio research laboratory to produce a turntable that could meet the strict criteria required for highly accurate audio testing, and as a result the Reference was born. It was designed around the Transcriptor arm and was considered by many as the most advanced turntable unit that had been produced. Interestingly Gammon also designed a turntable unit for the then British audio company, Goodmans.

Around that time most turntables were idler driven and solid structures, such as Garrard 201, 301 and later 401. The 3-point sprung mounted belt driven design appeared with the AR XA in 1961, made famous later of course by Linn LP12, and my preferred Ariston RD80 and Thorens TD150. The Transcriptors uses a synchronous motor, which became the preferred choice from the 1970s by many, pulling a belt that

fits around the outside of the platter, though recessed into it. This makes it look even more posh, unlike most other turntables where the belt is seen just as a belt. Where many manufacturers tried to ensure pitch stability and precise speed adjustment by generating its own sinusoidal waveform to power their AC motor, Gammon decided on a trough and paddle system



underneath the platter so that the friction not only allowed speed change by small degrees, but also meant that any instabilities of mains electricity was smoothed out. Nowadays manufacturers use heavy platters which have high inertia and are therefore less susceptible to small speed variations. In the next edition I review the 60kg Zontek turntable with a 35kg platter. This is enormous work expected of the motor and therefore the belt to get “up to speed”. In the days of the Transcriptors this method of propulsion and speed control was anathema. The Transcriptors ethos goes against everything today –

and even most of the opposition of its own day, too; with minimal contact with the record meaning a record-clamp would not work. The instruction book tells of rumble as “not measurable” suggesting that either they didn’t have a tool to do that or that Gammon hoped the minimal contact with life outside the LP would remove all motor noise. In reality of course this is not quite so, though motor noise is miniscule, and excellent compared to many turntables even today. This novel contraption has six gold plated brass platforms on top of the platter on which the record sits. Most platters of the day were minimal in size and weight compared with today, and the crispy pizza aluminium platter on the HR is very thin and light, so the weights (the pepperoni?) help to give it a bit more substance. In some respects the lack of contact with the record does mean any warps can fit in between the platforms, though they cannot be pressed straight, as a record clamp would do. This turntable was copied by several in the 70’s, notably the Audio Linear TD4001. This particular turntable has 5 raised platforms instead of the six. Another bit of trivia is that David Gammon went to court to prevent a rival Scottish company from using the Transcriptors bearing design.

The Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference was so called because of the hidden paddle under the platter, riding in a silicone bath, which acts as an adjustable speed

RETRO BITES

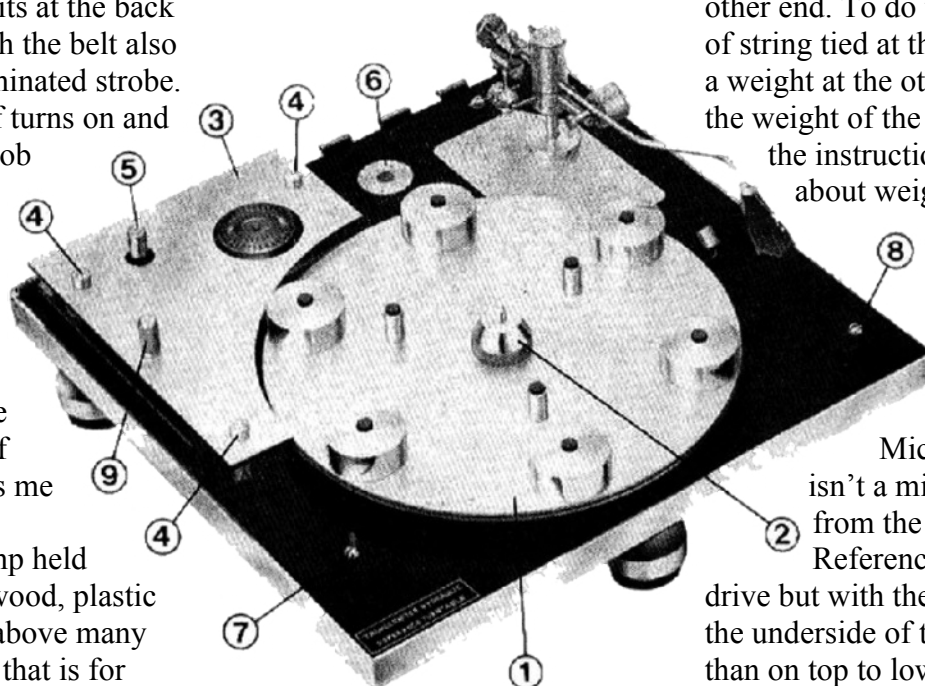
CLASSIC AND ICONIC AUDIO ...BY JANINE ELLIOT

retarder, and which actually does work, though it does need filling up every now and then. The suspended motor sits at the back left of the unit, with the belt also passing by an illuminated strobe. The turntable itself turns on and off by turning a knob which passes by a proximity sensor switch reed switch magnetically turning on and off the motor as you rotate the unit. The use of reed switches takes me back to the iconic Lecson AC1 preamp held together by balsa wood, plastic and magnets held above many reed switches. But that is for another day.

After Gammon's first foray into audio with the arm he made his first turntable with just three brass supports on the outside and three smaller ones inside. This, of course, was later modified as records became thinner (some records were so thin you could see through them!) and needed the extra support. The first turntable, the Saturn, looked similar to the Hydraulic, just without the hydraulics! He later made the Round Table Turntable with the arm in the lid at requests to make something cheaper (£25), and even the Transcriber, an amazing machine which had a non-moving 3" arm, but the record moved gradually from the left to the right. The former was an ingenious but complete flop with only 300 being made, and an idea later copied by Strathearn.

The link between Transcriptors and Michell is an interesting and

often confused one. Transcriptors designed turntables but needed



someone to manufacture them, as they didn't have all the tooling. At their Borehamwood factory J.A Michell engineering was sat next door, so they, amongst other companies, made parts for them. Interestingly Michell built the space ship 'Discovery' for the Kubrick film 2001 – Space Odyssey. When the Irish government offered Gammon a factory in Carlow he made the move, as the Borehamwood site was not big enough now. In doing this David Gammon and John Michell drew up an agreement so that Michell could continue to manufacture the Electronic and Hydraulic at their site, as they had most of the tooling already in place. In Carlow Gammon produced the Skeleton and also the famous, though controversial, Vestigal tone arm, a design he originally drew on a Bensons and Hedges cigarette pack (so, smoking perhaps isn't always bad

for you?). This arm has the weight adjustment at the headshell, rather than more conventionally at the other end. To do this it had piece of string tied at the headshell, with a weight at the other end to take up the weight of the cartridge. Even the instruction manual talks about weight adjustments down to 1/10th of a gram. This was a clever design.

Today, the Michell GiroDec isn't a million miles away from the iconic Hydraulic Reference, being belt drive but with the weights held on the underside of the platter rather than on top to lower the centre of gravity below the bearing axis. But, which would I prefer? Well, with all the history and beauty of the Transcriptors, and the fact that it made itself to films and even a Kelloggs advert, and the marque made its way to the homes of two members of Pink Floyd, Peter Noon (Herman's Hermits) Elton John and producer Mickie Most, then I think I it must be obvious which one I would have. Playing through my Slee Reflex phonostage, Proteus monoblocks and Graham LS5/9's the sound is pretty musical, too, if rather vague by today's standards of soundstage. Do I want a perfect sound with no personality? Well no, actually. But the story doesn't quite end there. In 2009 son Michael Gammon decided to rebirth the brand with three new models, something I covered in HiFi News at the time. I'm still waiting.

Janine Elliot

THE VOICE OF DOM!

**THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF
AN AUDIOPHILE AT THAT TENDER
AGE...BY DOMINIC MARSH**



I find it rather perverse that with the advances in technology we are seeing in the shape of streaming and portable digital music on a memory stick, the heyday of listening to music as a form of home entertainment and relaxation has long since passed I fear. Let me explain.

WAY BACK

Way back in the 1970's and 1980's most homes as I recall had some sort of music reproduction equipment, which might have been a stacking system of branded separates from the likes of Pioneer or Toshiba, or one that had the appearance of being a stacking system but was little more than a façade of a fancy front panel behind which was a single printed circuit board on which the amplifier, tuner and cassette mechanism were all fused together and a turntable perhaps plonked on top. With that there would be a small collection of LP's and cassette tapes, with somewhat

dubious artistes playing somewhat dubious music too, so there never was any chance of second guessing what the public would buy for their amusement, but we do see a frozen history of that

mysteriously erroneous sticky substances like jam on them, but never mind, you could always sellotape a coin onto the headshell to make the 'needle' plough through all that muck and

Many was the time I would be forcing myself into the footwell of the car on my knees peering into the blackness of the mechanism hoping a swift blow would lift the tape off whatever was gripping it.

particular musical era at car boot sales nowadays. Most of these music systems would gather dust and provide a cosy home for Arachnids and other insect life for most of their lives and it was on the rare occasion that there was "nowt on't box" that anyone would bother to insert a cassette or an LP onto the turntable and hit the power button. The records themselves usually looked like they had been left out on a motorway's fast lane for several hours and may also have some

refreshing the record's grooves at the same time.

THE BEEB'S ADVICE

I seem to remember several programmes on television over the years explaining the correct way to store, clean and handle records, with one in particular of a man wearing a pin stripe suit and speaking with a clipped BBC accent saying how one should only handle the records by the edges, the best way being to cradle the

THE VOICE OF DOM!

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF AN AUDIOPHILE AT THAT TENDER AGE...BY DOMINIC MARSH

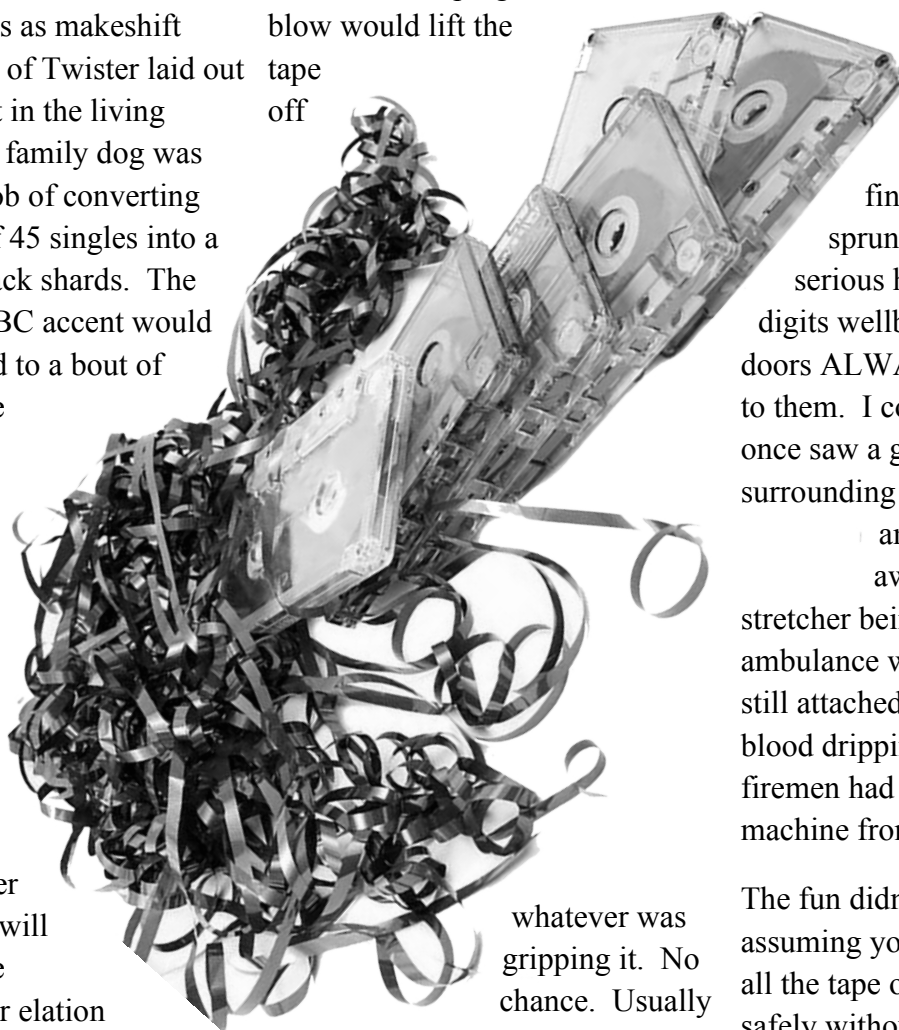
record upright with your fingers and steady/balancing it on the thumb by the label surface only, inserting and removing the record from it's paper sleeve vertically. It then came as a bit of a shock seeing my neighbour's children using his records as makeshift pads for a game of Twister laid out on a white sheet in the living room, while the family dog was doing a grand job of converting his collection of 45 singles into a pile of shiny black shards. The man with the BBC accent would have succumbed to a bout of apoplexy had he witnessed that.

TAPES OF WOE

If that wasn't enough fun, there was plenty to be had from cassette tapes.

Those of a tender age like myself will fondly recall the moment of sheer elation when you took out a cassette tape from a machine to find that the cassette tape itself had formed a close attachment to the cassette mechanism and withdrawing the cassette was being closely shadowed by two thin brown strips of tape unraveling from the cassette's reels as you pulled it out of the drawer. Car tape players were the worst of all as there was a spring loaded door to the mechanism that would clamp onto

the tape pretty firmly, causing creases in the tape as well for good measure. Many was the time I would be forcing myself into the footwell of the car on my knees peering into the blackness of the mechanism hoping a swift blow would lift the tape off



whatever was gripping it. No chance. Usually a yard and a half had wound itself around the pinch roller and the tape was playing PERFECTLY while the machine was positively embalming that small rubber roller with magnetic tape. When the blow through the door failed, it was time to get the serious tools out, so what was available to the motorist in the glove box of the average car to wield

Against this vicious brute that had hold of your tape and was

somewhat reluctant to let it go? Pencils were good – if you had one. A comb could produce mixed results. The wheel brace was far too big of course as were fingers and talking of fingers, I wish manufacturers of the time could have realised on Health and Safety grounds alone that extricating fingers from these sprung loaded doors was a serious hazard to a person's digits wellbeing and these blasted doors ALWAYS had sharp edges to them. I could have sworn I once saw a group of firefighters surrounding a car and the ambulance crew taking away a man on a stretcher being loaded into an ambulance with a cassette radio still attached to his fingers and blood dripping down the wires the firemen had to cut to release the machine from the dashboard.

The fun didn't end their either; assuming you had managed to get all the tape out of the machine safely without snapping it, you then had the enviable job of getting all that tape back onto the spools. A three to six inch loop was a doddle, anything more than that was courting disaster in grand style. A pencil (your best friend back then) could be used to ram into the drive spool and a steady rhythm on the fingers rolling the pencil could get the tape swiftly back into the case, but without that trusty pencil it was only a quarter turn at a time with the fingertips.

No matter how carefully you tried to keep it straight and fairly taut, that wretched tape would latch on to the gear stick, the handbrake, the indicator lever, the overdrive lever, the steering wheel height adjuster, you name, it the tape wanted to embrace and cling to it. At the end of all that painful struggle, you would often be bemused by the fact that on one spool the tape was right way up and the other spool had it upside down, or there was a knot that would baffle a master magician how it got there when both ends of the knot are tethered to a captive spool each end.

SINGLE SPOOL MADNESS

I have saved the best until last of course. If the humble cassette could make your life an utter misery in a heartbeat and turn you into a gibbering wreck, that was nothing compared to what an 8 track tape could do to your sanity in a mere fraction of that time. It too would disgorge many yards of magnetic tape into mechanisms and fresh air and the inevitable sprung loaded door on the player would wreak the same havoc as with a cassette machine, but and this is a huge but, how in the name of all that's holy do you wind a tape onto just one spool on it's own and that tape is endless to boot? No matter which way you twiddled the drive gear, even more

When you see a box full of cassette tapes and a tape player at a boot sale going cheap, then if you are wise you will shake your head and walk on by...

of it spilled out of the case into your lap. Grrrrrrrrrr! I always have been pretty handy with a set of hand tools and good at figuring out how things work to repair them, but I was once foolhardy enough to take one of these 8 track tapes apart and wished I never had done so. Still have nightmares about it even now and I'm sure it gave me PTSD in the process as often I wake in the middle of the night with the same recurring dream of drowning in a sea of 8 track tape unspooled and tangled. With a knot the middle.

If you are a person not of that tender age, then of course this is a mere glimpse of what things were like back in time and we can look back and laugh about it all now. When you see a box full of cassette tapes and a tape player at

a boot sale going cheap, then if you are wise you will shake your head and walk on by, safe in the knowledge that you have managed to avoid having a scar on your left buttock like I have from handbrake lever while fighting one of these infernal beasts.

YOU'RE LUCKY!

So the next time your Bluetooth or wireless broadband signal drops out, or you cannot find your memory stick full of MP3 music because it's hiding behind the settee cushions, or your earphoneds lead gets tangled up, cast your mind back to this article and be smug in the knowledge that you will certainly endure far less than we did back in the 70's and 80's in the name of audiophilia.

Dominic Marsh

FIDELITY MATTERS

A LIFETIME OF MUSIC AND AUDIO EXPERIENCE AND COMMENT...BY IAN RINGSTEAD



What is it about a 12" piece of round plastic that gets my juices flowing? Well I am a child of the 60's and started my love affair with vinyl early. My parents liked music and used to go to dances regularly when they were young during the 1940's, but they were never really bothered about seriously playing it at home. The farthest they got was buying a Pye Black Box stereogram which was a nicer piece of furniture than it was a music centre. It had a valve amp with basic tone controls and a Garrard turntable that had 33, 45 and 78 and one full range speaker per side. I listened to middle of the road music on it like film music, light classical and the Beatles.

In The Beginning

My first foray into serious music that I bought was Black Sabbath's first album, Elton John and Wishbone Ash. I then progressed literally onto prog' rock like Yes, King Crimson, Genesis, ELP etc. This fascination with records fired my enthusiasm in hi-fi so much so that it led to me working in the hifi retail business for 24 years. I still love music and hifi to this day of

I then had an epiphany moment and saw the light. Turntables were being written about again in the hifi mag's and manufacturers were making real efforts to produce better decks, arms and cartridges.

course and LP's have always been at the heart of it. It took me a long time to adopt CD when it arrived in the 80's, partly because it didn't sound very good to me at first. Yes it's more practical, doesn't have pops and clicks and better dynamic range, but it's the end result that matters and CD didn't cut the mustard for me until well into the 90's. I finally succumbed to the convenience of CD spurred on by the fact that the choice of my favourite music was getting harder to buy on vinyl.

The signs were vinyl was dying out and the digital revolution was in full swing. Was I being unfaithful to my first love? Well

no, I just went on a hiatus for a while. I'd had Linn LP12's, Pink Triangle, Fons CQ30, JBE Slate turntable, Thorens TD165, Pioneer PL12D, Revolver Rebel, Clearaudio Emotion, etc. so I had no shortage of units to play records on, or hear them to a great standard. I just got disheartened for a few years, sold quite a few of my early records to fund new equipment or ideas and got lost in the wilderness.

The Road To Damascus

A few years ago I suddenly realised what had I done. I'd left the hifi business in 2004 having got disillusioned with the internet and how it had destroyed a lot of

small businesses, and people had turned away from hi-fi to play with their mobiles, Play Stations and ipods. Having a good hifi system was no longer the cool thing to do and kids didn't know what a record was anymore. I'd kept a

core of my favourite LP's, about 200 roughly and they had gathered dust on my shelves in the living room. I then had an epiphany moment (road to Damascus experience where Paul was blinded by God and then regained his sight once he believed in him) and saw the light.

Turntables were being written about again in the hifi mag's and manufacturers were making real efforts to produce better decks, arms and cartridges.

Although vinyl sales have had a great resurgence recently they still only account for less than 3% of total music sales, so world domination is hardly on the cards. It's still a niche format and like quality hifi equipment will only be for the passionate enthusiast or people who "get it".

Numbers

Why listen to vinyl when digital formats are perfect? Well they aren't. Digital formats in all their different guises can sound great, but when I see the prices of some systems with separate DACs, clocks, transports and power

supplies costing tens of thousands to achieve a top sound I wince. Now straight away you'll all shout what about the ludicrously expensive turntables out there like the



TechDAS Air Force One at nearly £80,000...amongst many. Yes you'd be right, but you don't have to spend these lottery winning amounts in order to achieve superb sound from vinyl. I've heard many expensive CD players that are embarrassed by a

good sub £1000 turntable with a decent arm and cartridge. How is this possible? I don't really know. I suspect because vinyl is an analogue format and as humans we hear in analogue, so we prefer an analogue sound. This is simplistic I know and many may well disagree but ultimately it's all about what you as an individual like.

The same can be said of FM radio versus DAB and we all know how poor DAB sounds when bit rates are reduced compromising sound quality. If you have heard a live FM broadcast of a Radio 3 classical concert on a good system it is astounding. Reel to reel is also amazing. The common theme of course is analogue sound. There is room for all formats and I think they offer the consumer the chance to choose whatever they prefer, rather like music types.

Genesis

Now back to my vinyl affair. As records were the only real choice for good sound when I started buying good hifi and music, I bought into them with an avid

zealousness. My first decent hifi, bought with six weeks of hard earned summer holiday office work, was a Thorens TD165, Shure M75ED type 2 cartridge, Metrosound amplifier and Koss Pro 4AA headphones. I couldn't afford speakers initially and I

FIDELITY MATTERS

A LIFETIME OF MUSIC AND AUDIO
EXPERIENCE AND COMMENT...BY
IAN RINGSTEAD

suspect my parents were very thankful! This meant I could listen to my records whilst in bed at night. I remember getting Genesis's album "The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway" and listening to it again and again as I loved it and still do. Headphones meant I could hear imperfections in the records more easily, so I was very fastidious about keeping them clean and in good condition.

Once my sister moved out to go to university I wasted no time moving into the larger back bedroom and, when funds allowed for speakers, my parents and the neighbour's days of peace were ended. I left school and my brief sojourn with university away from home ended after only a few unhappy months, so full time work beckoned and so did hifi bliss, as I could now afford my dream equipment and lots of records. As I worked in Sheffield city centre my lunchtimes invariably meant I would go record shopping several times a week and I spent many happy hours thumbing through the vast choice on offer from the many shops around then. We are talking about the 70's when vinyl was king. My work colleagues as well as my mum would say "What, more records!" every time I came back with another bag with one or more new purchases, but isn't that the case with any passionate hobby.

Lamentations

I used to only buy new records but these days I am not averse to charity shop or flea market purchases. As vinyl has become scarce in high street stores, the internet or second hand are the only alternatives. It feels great

It feels great when you rediscover an old classic or favourite from yesteryear that costs a fraction of the original, or you find one in mint condition.

when you rediscover an old classic or favourite from yesteryear that costs a fraction of the original, or you find one in mint condition. Yes second hand can be a risk, but more often than not, when cleaned thoroughly, (unless they are badly scratched or worn) they can yield delightful surprises. The format of records means you can read the covers and credits far more easily than on a CD case, where a magnifying glass is de rigueur once you reach middle age. The cover art on LP sleeves is tactile and engaging and often is the first thing that attracts you to a piece of vinyl. I remember Roger Dean's artwork for many of the Yes albums which are superb and imaginative in themselves. When seen on a CD they just don't have the same impact... and on downloads none at all. The covers became an art form themselves.

Redemption

Another thing about vinyl is its tactility. Picking a sleeve out and extracting the LP is a process I enjoy, but I know many loathe it due to the dangers of damaging or

dropping the vinyl. Handled properly it's not a problem, but, like the process of putting the vinyl on the turntable platter and cueing the delicate stylus into the lead in groove, fills many with apprehension. I think it's all about confidence, but appreciate many people prefer not to have the hassle. I think, for me, vinyl was in my DNA and I was destined to enjoy it along with my passion for hifi and all types of music. I have other hobbies like photography and model making, but they don't seduce me in the same way. Two of my closest friends are as nuts about music and vinyl as me and I thank God they share my passion. Even my beloved wife likes records, although she leaves me to put on and take the records off.

I do hope vinyl does not die out with my generation, but has a long and prosperous affair with the public in general, especially the younger generation. It's plastic fantastic.

Ian Ringstead

THE VIEWS OF STU!

COMMENTS, RANTS AND THE
OCCASIONAL TEMPER
TANTRUM...BY STUART SMITH



It's not often I get all serious and what not but this really did outrage me...In October of last year in the UK, the Copyright and Performances Regulations Act made it legal to rip and make back-ups of your music files (*sensible*), but it appears that this decision has been very recently overturned by High Court Judge Mr Justice Green, who said that the Act was unlawful because musicians were not being compensated for their work. Basically what this overturning means, as I see it, is that if you want to copy a file you have legally downloaded, or want to rip a CD you have bought, you are in effect breaking the law...no, you are *actually* breaking the law!

Having Their Cake And Eating It

Now I've been in bands and for many years made my living in various sectors of the music industry and I of course believe vehemently that musicians should be paid fairly for their work, but with regards to BASCA (who are the musicians' union) and UK Music (who represent the industry), both of whom

So what, given this new ruling am I supposed to do if and when my hard-drive goes belly up and refuses to let me at my precious music files?

challenged last year's ruling allowing ripping and backing up, this smacks of the music industry wanting to have their cake and eat it too...it reeks of wanting to squeeze the music consumer for every last drop they can and this

does not a healthy customer relationship make. Let's face it, the music industry dropped the ball in the advent of MP3s and the subsequent downloading and file-sharing of music that went on, by not

reacting fast enough and wanting to push the same formats, so they could cream as much dollar as they could from music lovers... and now they are gasping at the teat.

The long and short of this is that if I have bought a CD, record, or a download I should be free to make copies of this for my own personal use, be that in my home, on my portable music player, or for use in the car. To say otherwise is utterly preposterous, not to say wholly unworkable! When anyone bought vinyl records in the past, of course they would make tape copies of their favourites so they could play it in the car or on their Walkman...yes, by the letter of the law illegal, but by its very nature engaging the music fan more with music than they otherwise would have been and surely this is a good thing.

Back Ups Are Essential

We live in a world of computers, hard-drives, NAS-drives, and who knows what other drives and these, as I found out to my utter dismay this week, have a nasty habit of crashing and losing/corrupting data that you have stored on them. So what, given this new ruling am I supposed to do if and when my hard-drive goes belly up and refuses to let me at my precious music files? The way I see it is I must now go out and buy the same files I have downloaded

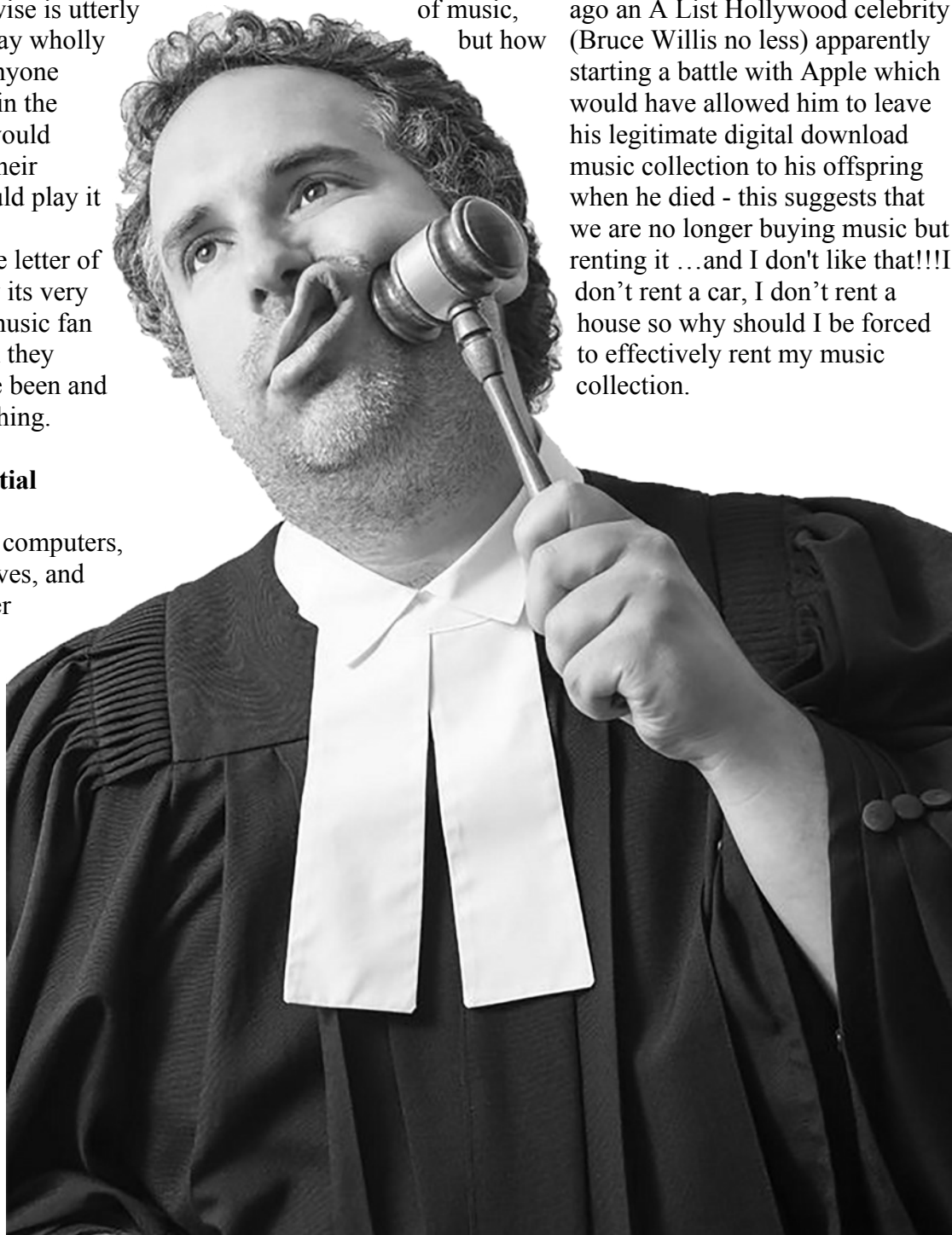
again, which is utterly stupid logic in my opinion.

I can see the (*false*) logic from a business perspective; in the past vinyl, tapes and CDs in effect had a finite life span ...unless you were very careful and kept them pristine ...and you would of course have to go out and buy a new copy eventually, or accept you could no longer listen to a particular piece of music, but how

many people would do this in reality?

Die Hard

Now downloads and rips mean that your music can indeed last you a lifetime. Perhaps what they want is to make music a throwaway commodity, but I believe music is more important than that! I remember a few years ago an A List Hollywood celebrity (Bruce Willis no less) apparently starting a battle with Apple which would have allowed him to leave his legitimate digital download music collection to his offspring when he died - this suggests that we are no longer buying music but renting it ...and I don't like that!!! I don't rent a car, I don't rent a house so why should I be forced to effectively rent my music collection.



The potential market for buying music is growing massively and the way we can access music is changing. Would the musicians and their representatives not be better served in encouraging the purchase of affordable music that people then own, rather than musicians being paid a relative pittance and people accessing their music through streaming sites where they essentially rent the music? Again this just does not make sense to me!

Let's not forget that music companies are invariably charging the same, or in some cases more for file downloads than they are for physical media ...what's all that about then?

Yes, THAT Is Naughty

Yes it is wrong to share your music files on the internet, or allow others to make copies of your CDs or vinyl records and I'm sure the vast majority of readers will agree with this, but this is not what we are talking about here and all the music industry seems to be doing with this silly overturning of a sensible law is alienating its customers.

The music buying public are not squeaky clean here either it must be said and there are cases of consumers taking the proverbial here too. I'm referring here to people selling off their CD collections as they had ripped them, backed them up and saw a fast buck ...of course any sane person can see that this is wrong, both in the legal and the moral sense of things.

Engage Your Consumers

As it is the vast majority, and I'm talking Joe Public here rather than the folk who are likely reading Hifi Pig, will continue to feel ripped off and used by the industry and will disengage from it, resorting to nefarious means to get hold of their music ...and down this road no one wins

So is this new ruling practical in any way given that most of us have access to a computer that can rip CDs, not to mention plethora of specialist machines dedicated to ripping and storing your music? I don't think it is in any way, shape or form workable in the everyday world and I think that the people representing musicians and the music industry would be better spending their time in engaging with music lovers, particularly the younger generation, who in the main see music as a free commodity, to encourage them into buying their music rather than stealing it from the internet.

Ripped Off

What I'm proposing here is that if music companies charged less for their music downloads, had them in higher quality and with the right

to back up that copy, then more people would be prepared to recognise that the music industry is not trying to milk them dry and in return may well engage with the industry more. As it is the vast majority, and I'm talking Joe Public here rather than the folk who are likely reading Hifi Pig, will continue to feel ripped off and used by the industry and will disengage from it, resorting to nefarious means to get hold of their music ...and down this road no one wins; the industry loses out because everyone steals their music and the industry shrinks because they don't have money to invest in new talent, meaning there is less musical variety for the consumer ...does anyone else see a n inevitable vicious circle forming here, or is it just me?.

Stuart Smith

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

**AUDIOPHILIA AND MORE FROM
THE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE...BY
LINETTE SMITH**



I have a confession to make. I have a bit of a girl crush on Alex Polizzi.....no, not like that, put away your filthy minds....I mean I'd like to be her friend, hang out with her a bit, I think she's really cool.

Sooo Dizappointed

A highly successful business woman and broadcaster, from a long line of Forte family hoteliers, she is generally seen on TV fixing broken businesses, picking chefs and dragging failing hotels up to scratch. Polizzi knows what she is talking about. She's a strong yet still super feminine woman, men swoon over her and women like me would like to go out for cocktails with her to chat business and Italian shoes. She genuinely cares about what she does, she has exacting standards and an eye for detail. She's up there with the character Terence Fletcher in the excellent film 'Whiplash' who won't accept a 'good job' effort....you have to do the very best you can. The general premise of one of her TV shows will be along the lines of: 'Hotel A' is failing, the staff are surly, the décor dated and the owner

uncooperative. She gradually wins the owner round using both carrot and stick and brings in her team to give 'Hotel A' a makeover. She leaves the hotel owner and staff to it for a couple of weeks, during which time they either run with it and elevate 'Hotel A' to five star level.....or it all goes to pot, the owner chucks his toys out, the menu is not adhered to and the staff slump back into a teenage sulk. Alex then returns and, if the scenario is the latter one, she fixes the owner with big, brown eyes full of upset and anger, folds her arms and utters the words 'dahling, I am sooo dizappointed'. I know how she feels.

Make Or Break

There is a make or break moment, whether you are going back to a project to see whether the people you handed it over to have created something beautiful or made a dog's dinner out of it, whether you are a kid waiting to open their Christmas presents or whether you have just taken delivery of a piece of hifi that you have saved up for ages to buy. That moment full of anticipation and excitement, just

before the point when it will go either way....elation or disappointment.

How do you feel when you are waiting for your latest hifi purchase to arrive? I'm guessing that you feel like a kid before Christmas, I know that I do. There is an unexplainable mixture of longing, excitement, trepidation and fear. Will it be right, will I like it, have I just blown all my savings on a piece of rubbish? Like that kid wondering if the box is going to contain the latest toy or gadget that they have been dreaming of....or have your parents got it totally wrong and got you exactly what you didn't want? Picture the scene. The delivery van pulls up, a large and possibly heavy box is passed over to you, it's the amplifier/DAC/loudspeakers/CD transport/turntable/headphones that you have saved up for and can't wait to get hold of, it's had great reviews, you heard it at a show...it is a true object of desire. You carefully open the outer box, inside is some random packaging, its well protected but looks a bit like you bought it second hand off ebay, not box fresh from the

dealer. You fish around and there's the instructions, crudely printed on white A4, there's the remote, nasty and plasticky, or a budget set of cables, the main event itself is in a cheap plastic bag.....you've come over all 'Polizzi', disappointment is not what you were expecting. Those first moments of connecting with your new purchase set the tone for what's to come next, no matter how great it sounds when you actually get it into your system; you have that feeling that you have been cheated out of something.

Getting It Right

Let's rewind. Here comes the delivery van, bring the box in, open it up and cue the hallelujah chorus, angels singing, cherubs flying about, golden sunbeams parting the clouds.....you get the picture. You pull out the inner box, it's beautifully designed, emblazoned, discreetly, with the manufacturers logo, it's all touchy feely and stroke-able. Opening this box reveals a bespoke bag, or crunchy fresh tissue paper, again branded, containing the product itself, nestled around that are the high quality remote, the connectors, the bound handbook etc, everything where it should be, lovingly packaged....it all just looks and feels so pleasing, so perfect, you haven't even listened to anything yet but already you are smiling. Its Christmas morning, you're the happy kid with the eagle eyed Action Man rather than the itchy knitted jumper. You're Alex Polizzi when she revisits the hotel to find her carefully thought out menu is still available in the restaurant and that the owner has not put the flock wallpaper back over her minimally painted reception area walls. You are happy and content.

You Deserve It

If you are paying a large amount of money for something (and that amount is different for different people) it should be right. If you buy a watch or jewellery or a new car, or nice clothes or a beautiful handbag, the whole unwrapping experience is part of the event. You are treating yourself and you want that Christmas morning effect, you deserve it. Why should hifi be any different, why would we accept forking out serious amounts of cash and not get that Christmas feeling? I'm not talking about dressing up a bad or low quality product with fancy wrapping and an ad'

campaign to make everyone buy it, the sound and quality of the product is key, but what goes with it is also important.

The Whole Experience

With the way the hifi market is changing, its not just old time audiophiles buying the hifi of today, there is a more discerning customer who is used to buying luxury goods and who expect their hifi, which is a luxury product, to come up to certain standards

where accessories and packaging

are concerned. The brands need to make sure they are offering the whole experience. Some of them already do.....others have a long way to catch up. 'But' you say 'that's easy for the big brands, what about the little guys?' Yes, bigger brands tend to have deeper pockets and bigger budgets but, there are a lot of smaller, newer brands that are putting the care and consideration into how their products look, feel and are presented, right from the start. Whether you are a big, established hifi brand or a smaller newcomer, give your customer that Christmas morning feeling every time they buy from you....and they will keep coming back.

Linette Smith



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MUSIC REVIEWS

Juno Reactor - The Golden Sun ...Remixed (Metropolis)



I used to hammer "Laughing Gas" by Juno Reactor on the Nova Mute label back in the day (1993 if memory serves)...I can still remember the yellow and blue cover, but the 12" is long gone sadly and since then I've not really taken much notice of his output. This may have been a mistake and a bit of an oversight on my part I must confess...

The "label" here is Psy-Trance, but I reckon Ben

Watkins (for it is he) goes far beyond what I would expect of the usual formulaic stuff churned out under this banner. Juno Reactor are apparently huge in Australia, Japan and pretty much everywhere but the UK and I can see why... the Juno Reactor live experience is by all accounts a bit of a spectacle with loads of musicians, singers, percussionists and dancers taking to the stage. This album certainly feels like a bit of an epic that would be really something at a huge festival whilst in an enhanced state!

The Golden Sun ...Remixed is, not surprisingly, a remix of the 2013 The Golden Sun Of The East album and it is really rather enjoyable...OK, I really loved it!!

You've got banging beats and pumping-fist-in-the-air basslines, but there's an intelligence here that sets Juno Reactor apart. Yes, you've got the Eastern flavours so beloved of Psy Trance, but there's a harder edge to this record. We're not talking French speedcore or Gabba as the beats are relatively moderately tempo'd and there are grand sweeping rushes that will send the crowds chicken-oriental when the beat kicks in again. There's a feeling that Juno Reactor has a bit of a punk/indie aesthetic too - samples come in many guises with Guillotine having an absolutely fabulous guitar riff that just works so well at building and pushing the beats.

There are nine tunes on this record and, had I still being DJing, I'd not hesitate to play one of them out. The productions are big, sweeping and impressive

The "label" here is Psy-Trance, but I reckon Ben Watkins (for it is he) goes far beyond what I would expect of the usual formulaic stuff churned out under this banner.

and it needs to be played loud to full appreciate it. The accompanying bump talk of cinematic this and that and I suppose this is a decent way of describing this record...sort of. If I was trying to label this album I'd go for "melodic-tribal-game soundtrack-techno that messes with your brain a bit"...I think that might catch on!!!

Out on the Metropolis Label and barely been off the main rig since it arrived! Highly recommended!!

Stuart Smith

MUSIC REVIEWS

Johnny Hallyday - Rester Vivant (Warner Music France)

JOHNNY HALLYDAY



REGARDE-NOUS

Known as the French Elvis, Johnny Hallyday is a bit of an iconic figure here in France and he still manages to draw huge audiences. Eighty or nine years ago he headlined the Vieilles Charrues festival a few minutes up the road from where we live and folk travelled from all over the country to catch a glimpse of this living legend. So beloved is Johnny that in 1997 Jacques Chirac awarded him the Legion Of Honour medal. Personally I've always seen him as a bit of a caricature, but then I'd never taken the time to listen to his music, though he's had 33 number one singles and sold over 110 Million records in his time...perhaps this was a bit remiss of me.

Rester Vivant (Staying Alive) represents Johnny's 49th album and this time he's produced by Don Was. When it arrived in the post I was a bit nervous about reviewing it as, as I say, Johnny is a bit of a figure of fun in our household....indeed youngest son was a bit incredulous that I'd agreed to review this record at all. However, it's a very, VERY good record. Great production, great musicianship, fab songs and Monsieur Hallyday's voice is really rather special.

There's twelve tunes on Rester Vivant and you would never for one moment believe that this man was in

his early seventies. The record has already topped the chart in France (his 11th so far) and it will do well elsewhere too I think.

There's a good mix of styles on here. It kicks off with the plaintive opening vocal of 'J'Ai Ce Que J'Ai Donn  ' that builds nicely until Hallyday's voice soars above the music and this is sure to be a hit in itself - the French audiences will lap it up and sing along when it's played at concerts...or campsites' dodgy P.A.s.

Regardez Nous is a ballady number and (remember we listen to a lot of French radio) is very French in its style - big vocal, big production and not a little bit heroic. It builds and builds to a crescendo and never once does Hallyday's voice sound anything other than superb!!!

When it arrived in the post I was a bit nervous about reviewing it as, as I say, Johnny is a bit of a figure of fun in our household....indeed youngest son was a bit incredulous that I'd agreed to review this record at all.

And then we go to Rester Vivant that sounds like the Stones and this is no bad thing.

Seul (Alone) is a stripped back number of piano and voice and is a welcome diversion that again

MUSIC REVIEWS

showcases Hallyday's vocal ability superbly. It's full of emotion and moves into a really superb ballad...again this will be HUGE with the French...

Au Café De L'Avenir is a bluesy rock and roll number reminiscent musically of Dire Straits perhaps.

At this point I can't help thinking that I've got it all wrong in treating this man as a comedic figure as I've simply loved every tune so far. Not my usual fare it has to be said, but then a change is as good as a rest and the records is varied enough to have something for most people...even if you may not understand all the lyrics.

Une L'Etre A L'Enfant Que J'Etais (A letter to the child I was) is another tour de force (hey I speak a bit of French) for Hallyday's voice and again he is able to communicate a great deal of emotion though the vocal....and then we're back to a bluesy number with J'Tai Meme Pas Dit Merci where Hallydays conjures a gritty and throaty vocal. He's nothing if not adaptable!

I'm not going to go into all the tracks in detail but here's the thing - THIS IS A VERY GOOD RECORD by anyone's standards. There really is something that is sure to appeal to most folk, with me finding it difficult to find one tune that really stands out...this is not to say that there is nothing great on here, it's just I'm finding it hard to pick a favourite from all the very good tunes on the record....perhaps easiest to say my least favourite was Te Voir Grandir...but then I do REALLY like the very last belter of a tune A Nos Promesses!!!

OK, I was wrong...I admit it, M. Hallyday (if this record is anything to go by) has something that appeals and this record is a brilliant example of why the man has become the legend he has in France. It's also a great example of why you should always open yourself to new music and things you think you will not like...Oh, and and I promise not to poke fun at this Gallic Elvis ever again.

Rester Vivant is out on Warner Music France in the UK on 20th July and despite all my worst fears I really do recommend it!!

Stuart Smith

Bird Radio - Oh, Happy England (Cherry Red)



Oh, Happy England is a collection of poems by Walter de la Mare, an English poet born 1873, set to music. I must confess to being completely unaware of de la Mare but you live and learn. Bird Radio (Mikey Kirkpatrick) says about de la Mare "When you enter into a poem by Walter de la Mare, you are never certain of the boundaries between reality and dreams. His poetry covers a broad spectrum of textures and emotions from moments of realisation and self recognition as in The Englishman to dark, isolated and nightmarish scenes such as Drugged and reveries such as Time Passes".

The album has been developed with the support of Aldeburgh Music where Bird Radio composed and recorded the tunes on residency with an ensemble of voice, flute, piano, cello, guitar, bass and percussion.

This is not your usual fare...much as The Boy and the Audience wasn't. It is dark, sparse, a bit unnerving (and yes, nightmarish even)... but at the same time really quite beautiful. Like his previous album I reviewed, this is a very English record and despite the material (poems) being relatively recent (ish) there is still a medieval feel overall. I suppose it will get labelled as folk and I think it is...sort of.

MUSIC REVIEWS

It could be very easy to label Oh, Happy England as a contrived, academic exercise made for those that reside in Pseuds Corner, but it is accessible and it is very enjoyable. It is clever and it is a bit nuts...I loved it!

I like Bird Radio a lot and this album is very good, if very different from The Boy. It's not the kind of thing you are going to put on as you get ready to pop down the Roxy Club to chance your arm with the opposite sex, but it is eminently listenable all the same. It conjures dark, gloomy, old houses with things potentially lurking with mal-intent in the corner.

I've just read that back and it makes Oh, Happy England appear a miserable and joyless outing...it isn't...and it is a bit too. There is a real exquisiteness in its sparseness that appeals to me. No, not everyone is going to "get" Oh, Happy England, but then I'm sure Bird Radio never meant it to have broad appeal. It could be very easy to label Oh, Happy England as a contrived, academic exercise made for those that reside in Pseuds Corner, but it is accessible and it is very enjoyable. It is clever and it is a bit nuts...I loved it!

Out now and highly recommended!

Stuart Smith

Sarah Cracknell - Red Kite (Cherry Red)



Woozy Summer days. The French TV version of Robinson Crusoe. Sky Ray ice lollies. If these things could have a sound, it would be the sound of Sarah Cracknell's new album. An album that the words "pastoral" and "sun-kissed" were made for.

Produced by Carwyn Ellis, the album's primarily acoustic ambience is at times reminiscent of Nick Drake or Marianne Faithful's early work.

Sarah Cracknell is, of course, the singer with Saint Etienne; a band that have always embraced the sounds of the sixties and seventies. These influences remain on this, her second solo album.

Produced by Carwyn Ellis, the album's primarily acoustic ambience is at times reminiscent of Nick Drake or Marianne Faithful's early work. Opening track On The Swings sounds instantly familiar without actually sounding like anything else. I Am

MUSIC REVIEWS

Not Your Enemy abandons the acoustic vibe for twangy guitars and a Vox Continental organ, like something Lee Hazelwood would have conjured up for Nancy Sinatra. Listening to final track Favourite Chair is like sinking into one and nodding off into a reverie.

This is an album for a Summer evening in the garden with a glass of chilled Sauvignon Blanc. If wet, move your deckchair inside and snuggle down in front of the stereo. Red Kite will send its own sunshine through your speakers.

John Scott

Superhand – American Teeth (Malt Barn Recordings)



Duo Inga Calstrom and Leck Fischer were discovered by producer Mike Mason in a club in the small Swedish town of Sveg. Unimpressed by the entertainment on offer, Mason was on his way out. “A monstrous bass line rabbit punched me in the back of the head and a voice made me weak at the knees” he said later. He was stopped in his tracks and witnessed “The best performance I'd seen in years”. Returning home to Oxfordshire, Mason lost no time in flying Calstrom and Fischer over to record their first album American Teeth.

Like a two year old on a sugar rush, the songs on American Teeth fidget and jitter and refuse to stay still.

Like a two year old on a sugar rush, the songs on American Teeth fidget and jitter and refuse to stay still. Opening track Bass And Guns moves from treated piano to echoed vocals to crashing drums and dirty bass. Any of these might be samples or actual instruments. They are, it transpires, actual instruments. Calstrom’s vocals emerge with a soulful, bluesy edge, simultaneously growling and whelping. A sub sonic electro bass line takes over, followed swiftly by brass stabs. The track shudders to a climax and stalls. The electro bass recovers, accompanied by a reggae beat and more brass. Bass, vocals, drums and brass fight it out to the bitter end until the track collapses in a post-climactic slump. One track gone and I am exhausted already.

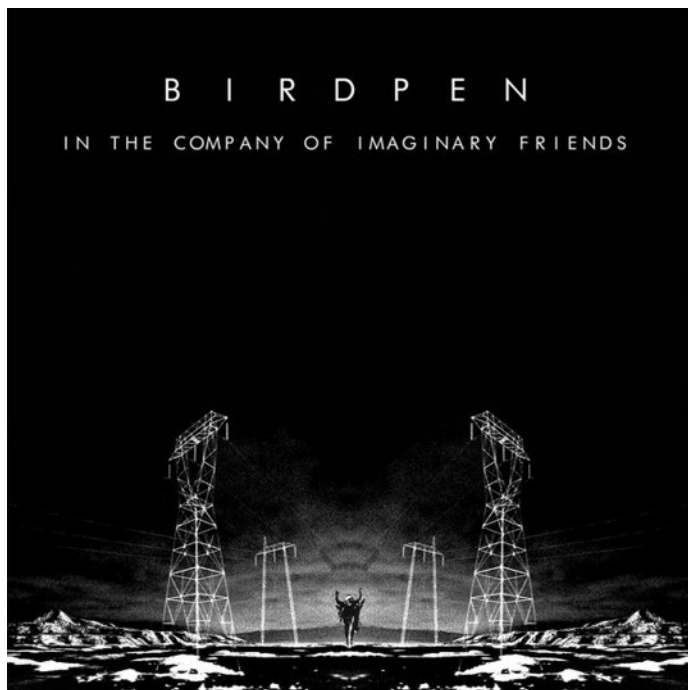
Fischer and Calstrom both handle keyboards and guitars while The Cure’s Jason Cooper covers drum duties. Jim Hunt who has worked with both Primal Scream and Amy Winehouse provides the brass and Lucy Wilkins (Florence & The Machine and Radiohead) leads the string section. Calstrom’s voice is an extraordinary thing. Much less mannered than Bjork; much more soulful than Alison Goldfrapp. “Discipline me” she purrs on the song of the same name, making it sound like a threat rather than a request. Crystal Planos starts with sampled vocals that slowly deteriorate and then disintegrate. Electro beats are replaced by drums and gospel piano chords. Bass and organ support southern fried vocals until the deteriorating samples re-emerge and take over again.

Like a David Lynch movie, American Teeth makes perfect sense but only on its own terms. What do you think of when you think of American teeth? Flawless? Even? Dazzlingly white? Superhand urge you to think again.

John Scott

MUSIC REVIEWS

BirdPen – In The Company Of Imaginary Friends (Jar Records/Fintage House)



Dave Pen and Mike Bird formed BirdPen while sharing a flat in their hometown of Southampton. Self-releasing a handful of well-received EPs, the duo went on to release their debut Album On/Off/Safety/Danger in 2009. Evolving and honing their sound, new album In The Company Of Imaginary Friends, their third, harnesses subtle melodies to evoke widescreen emotions.

Like a fine malt whisky, In The Company Of Imaginary Friends is more complex than it initially appears and is slow to reveal its true depth. You may find that the album will take a few plays before the songs really reveal themselves. There is a tightly-wound quality to the songwriting that seems to pull the music in on itself and I found that rather than try to actively analyse the album, it was better to let it soak in almost subconsciously. Once the layerings of keyboards and guitars began to bite I found myself hooked.

Good things, they say, come to those who wait. If you are prepared to wait, you'll find out how good BirdPen can be.

John Scott

Judith Owen – Ebb & Flow (Twanky Records)



Judith Owen describes her latest album, her 10th studio release, as “a love letter to Laurel Canyon”. In the late 1960s and early ‘70s, Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles was home to several members of the Californian rock music community. Joni Mitchell lived there and David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash first met in her living room. The area played host to names such as J.D. Souther, Jackson Browne, James Taylor and Carole King. The Canyon, along with LA’s Troubadour club, became a crucible for the Seventies singer-songwriter scene.

Accompanying Owen on Ebb & Flow are stellar LA session musicians Leland Sklar on bass, Russ Kunkel on drums and Waddy Wachtel on guitars which brings an added authenticity to the LA ambience.

MUSIC REVIEWS

The albums produced by that scene including Mitchell's *Ladies Of The Canyon*, Taylor's *Sweet Baby James* and King's *Tapestry* were among Judith Owen's favourites as a young girl and *Ebb & Flow* sees her pay tribute while at the same time adding her own name to the list of accomplished singer-songwriters inspired by the Canyon.

Accompanying Owen on *Ebb & Flow* are stellar LA session musicians Leland Sklar on bass, Russ Kunkel on drums and Waddy Wachtel on guitars which brings an added authenticity to the LA ambience. Snappily rhythmic opener *Train Out Of Hollywood* sets the tone for the album. When Owen sings the lines: "Look at me, I've been such a fool, Thinking fame would do what only time can do" it is impossible not to think of Joni Mitchell but this is certainly no copycat cash in; Owen brings her own voice and craft to her songs. *I Would Give Anything* and *You're Not Here Anymore* are described by Owen as the "bookends" of the album and are dedicated to her late father and mother who she says are, respectively, the reasons she sings and the reason she still can sing.

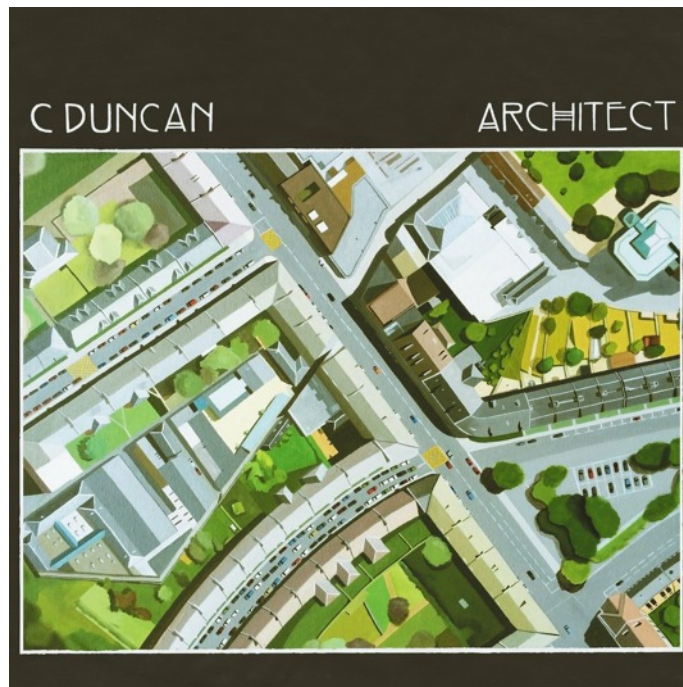
The album's two cover songs, an unlikely but highly enjoyable version of Mungo Jerry's *In The Summertime* (we can't hold Owen accountable for the dodgy drink/drive lyrics) and James Taylor's *Hey Mister, That's Me On The Jukebox* fit seamlessly alongside her own songs. *One In A Million* sounds like it was accidentally discarded from Elton John's *Captain Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy* album; it's been an ear worm in my head for the last few weeks and is a truly terrific song.

I don't usually comment on the sound quality of albums in my reviews but it is worth mentioning that *Ebb& Flow*, produced by Owen and Prince associate David Z, is a great sounding record. I wouldn't be surprised if it becomes a hifi demo staple.

Whether you are a fan of any of the artists mentioned above or you simply enjoy quality songwriting, *Ebb & Flow* comes highly recommended.

John Scott

C Duncan - 'Architect' (FatCat Records)



If I told you that this album is recorded by a 26 year old male from Glasgow, you probably wouldn't believe me. That's because – putting Chris Duncan's geographical origins to one side for a moment – 'Architect' sounds like it might have been recorded at some point during the sixties. It's so far away from what's happening in the charts that you'd have to ask Scott McKenzie for directions. This is a good thing!

Let's hope you're in the mood to relax when you sit down to listen to this – if the harmonies don't cause you to float away on a cloud, then the relaxed acoustic guitars and laid-back melodies almost certainly will.

Whilst we're waiting for new Fleet Foxes and Bon Iver records to land, this album fills the void rather nicely. In actual fact, references to Fleet Foxes are slightly off course as there's a definite British edge to Duncan's sound which you certainly wouldn't hear on 'Helplessness Blues'. It really is those harmonies which immediately grab you and pull you in. The music is never overstated – actually the

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MUSIC REVIEWS

opposite, it wraps itself around the multi-layered harmonies like a warm blanket.

‘Say’ introduces us nicely to Duncan’s debut album, which incidentally was recorded one layer and one instrument at a time at home in Glasgow on his bedroom studio setup. It’s a warm song which lays the foundations of what is an accomplished record. I also particularly like the chord changes during title track ‘Architect’. ‘Silence And Air’ builds heavily on those angelic harmonies and there’s also some lovely synths during the chorus along with some understated percussion.

If you’re a fan of lo-fi folk, sixties music, angelic harmonies, great melodies – or indeed the aforementioned Fleet Foxes – then I’m certain you’ll enjoy this album.

Several singles – released digitally – are featured across the album. Of these, ‘Garden’ is the track which initially grabbed my attention some months back. It features a double-tracked acoustic guitar, synth stabs and the most beautiful chord sequence. Like its predecessors, it has a sound representative of the mid-sixties, but at the same time sounds refreshingly contemporary. In fact, every track here feels like a different chapter in the same story and yet is different from pretty much everyone else’s sound.

If you’re a fan of lo-fi folk, sixties music, angelic harmonies, great melodies – or indeed the aforementioned Fleet Foxes – then I’m certain you’ll enjoy this album. Standout tracks include ‘Garden’, ‘Here To There’, ‘Say’ and ‘By’.

Incidentally, Duncan is also an accomplished painter. His work has been exhibited throughout his native Scotland. If you’re looking at the cover art and wondering who designed it, let me put your mind at rest – it was Duncan himself. Nice, eh?

Paul Lockett

Tami Neilson – Dynamite! (Southbound Records)



Dynamite! is dynamite indeed. There won't be a better traditional country album released this year.

What do you think of when you think of New Zealand? Sheep perhaps? - the country has 7 sheep for every human inhabitant. Hobbits maybe? - Peter Jackson’s Tolkien adaptations have made the islands practically synonymous with Middle Earth. The Haka? - The Maori war dance is famous for striking

MUSIC REVIEWS

terror in the hearts of opposing rugby teams. Country and Western singers? – Nah, not so much now you come to mention it. Tami Neilson is going to change that.

Neilson was born in Canada and grew up to perform in country group The Neilsons with her parents and brothers, going out on tour to support Johnny Cash amongst others. After her parents retired, the band continued as a trio for a while before going their own ways; Tami moving to New Zealand and getting married.

Dynamite! is Tami's third album and the one that will surely break her as a major talent. Her style veers from swampy rockabilly to pure country and she has been described as: "A red-hot honkytonker, somewhere between Patsy Cline and Wanda Jackson with perhaps just a little bit of Peggy Lee sophistication".

The deliberately retro styling of the album art sets the tone – the LP looking particularly classy. Lead off track Walk (Back To Your Arms) sees Neilson open with a wailing a cappella intro before being joined by tremolo guitar and Echo chamber backing vocals – think along the lines of Tom Waits' Jesus Gonna Be Here without the idiosyncratic vocals. Come Over keeps up the pace with another rockabilly-paced stomper.

Neilson is not all about the rockabilly beat though. Texas slows the pace and introduces steel guitar and swing fiddle into the mix. You would never guess that this was a Neilson original, co-written with producer Delaney Davidson, and not a country classic. Song after song sound like the stone cold standards that they are surely destined to become.

Tales of broken hearts and empty bottles add to the album's timeless quality. "I don't want a ring of gold, I don't want to be Mrs." Neilson sobs, "All I want is whiskey and kisses". Only the string arrangement of Running To You gives a hint of modernity, sounding like something that kd lang or Chris Isaak might have come up with.

Dynamite! is dynamite indeed. There won't be a better traditional country album released this year.

John Scott

Ezra Furman – Perpetual Motion People (Bella Union)



Aside from the music itself, one thing that popular music culture has always provided is a home for people - both artists and fans – who don't fit elsewhere in the world. Ezra Furman is a cross dressing, bisexual, depressive, observant Jew.

**Perpetual Motion
People may well
be the album of
the summer.
Give it a listen
then go
shopping for a
dress.**

MUSIC REVIEWS

If you happen not to be a cross-dressing, bisexual, depressive, observant Jew but want to know what it is like to be one, you could do a lot worse than to listen to Perpetual Motion People.

Perpetual Motion People may well be the album of the summer.

Throughout the album, Furman references some of pop history's defining elements: Doo-wop harmonies; King Curtis's yakkety sax; Phil Spector's teenage symphonies; Lou Reed's street punk attitude; Bowie's retro/space age alienation. This is pastiche with panache, but it never turns into parody.

Opening track Restless Year's taut bass and tinpot percussion collide with garage rock organ. Furman moves from hideout to hideout: "Making the rounds in my five dollar dress, I can't go home though I'm not homeless" he sings. Second song Lousy

Connection with its tale of "Your universe of blue lipstick and syringes, your bedroom door with the bugs in the hinges" could have been penned by Jarvis Cocker, had he been born in Sheffield, Alabama rather than Sheffield, England. Haunted Head details Furman's perilous mental state to the positively jaunty accompaniment of sax, bass clarinet and doo-wop vocals. Ezra wears his heart on his sleeve but this is no misery fest. Never has excoriation seemed like so much fun.

Other highlights in an album full of highlights include Tip Of A Match which comes on like Sweet Jane's trailer trash third cousin; Pot Holes, a song so knowing that it practically bends over backwards to show you how arch it is; and closing track One Day I Will Sin No More which is, conversely, an entirely irony free hymn.

Perpetual Motion People may well be the album of the summer. Give it a listen then go shopping for a dress.

John Scott

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CLASSICS

Astral Weeks – Van Morrison

In this month's edition of Classics, John Scott takes a look at that perennial favourite Astral Weeks by Van (The Man) Morrison

Whenever a list of the the greatest rock albums appears Astral Weeks is, if not right at the top, then not far off. Rock music hadn't heard anything like it when it was released, and has heard very little like it since.

How a twenty three year old Belfast boy came to create an unique fusion of acoustic jazz and stream of consciousness lyrics will remain something of a mystery. It was unlike anything Morrison had attempted previously and while echoes of the album have reappeared in later recordings, Morrison never attempted another album in exactly that style.

Morrison grew up in Belfast where his father was an electrician in a local shipyard. Morrison's father was a jazz, blues and country music fan who had an extensive record collection, said to one of the biggest in Belfast, and Morrison became a huge music fan himself, steeping himself in his father's records. His father bought him his first guitar and Morrison formed his first skiffle band at the age of twelve. Other bands and other instruments would follow, Morrison learning to play saxophone, harmonica and piano.

With an apprenticeship served in a variety of Irish showbands, Morrison found himself touring Europe with The Monarchs at the age of seventeen. The band split at the end of the tour and Morrison returned to Belfast in search of another band. That search would eventually lead him to form Them with whom he would have a run of hit singles: Baby Please Don't Go, Here Comes The Night and Mystic Eyes. Gloria, the B side of Here Comes The Night would go on to become a garage rock classic.

When Them split in 1966, Bert Berns who had written and produced Here Comes The Night,

It's an impressionistic journey, filled with splintered images of people and places, real and imagined.

offered Morrison a deal. Morrison signed to Berns' Bang label, recording eight songs that Morrison believed would be the A and B sides of four singles. Berns instead released the songs as an album, *Blowin' Your Mind*, to Morrison's displeasure. One of the songs, *Brown Eyed Girl*, was also released as a single and reached the American Top Ten. It remains a radio hit even now. Berns died shortly after the album's release and Morrison found himself still tied into a contract with Berns' widow; a contract he did not want to be in. The contract required that Morrison submit thirty six songs to Berns' publishing company within a year.

Morrison's response was to record thirty one "songs" all using pretty much the same chord sequence and near-nonexistent lyrics in one day. These include gems such as *Ringworm* ("I can see, from the look on your face, that you've got ringworm"), *Twist And Shake*, *Shake And Roll*, *stomp And Scream* and *Scream And Holler*, all of which have little more than their titles for lyrics. It is a virtually unlistenable collection of songs but in its way is a work of twisted near-genius.

CLASSICS

VAN MORRISON ASTRAL WEEKS



When Warner Brothers bought out his contract with Berns, Morrison began writing the songs that would form *Astral Weeks*. Two of these, *Beside You* and *Madame George*, had appeared on *Blowin' Your Mind* in a pop rhythm and blues style but would be reinvented for the album. Recording began on the evening of 28 September 1968. Most of the band had never played together and were not provided with any chord charts or notation; Morrison just played the song through on his guitar and told them to play how they felt. Despite this unstructured approach, four songs from the first session made it to the final album. A second session on 1 October was

unsuccessful and no usable tracks were forthcoming but a third session on 15 October provided the final four songs for the album.

It is extraordinary that a group of musicians who were unused to playing together and with next to no direction should produce such empathetic backing for Morrison's songs. Individually however, they did have an impressive pedigree. Drummer Conny Kay had recorded a score of albums as a member of The Modern Jazz Quartet and had served as a sideman with Stan Getz, Lester Young, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis amongst others. Bassist

CLASSICS

Richard Davis had played with Eric Dolphy, Kenny Burrell and Jimmy McGriff. Guitarist Jay Berliner had appeared on albums by artists as varied as Charles Mingus, Harry Belafonte and Laura Nyro.

I can still remember the first time I Heard Astral Weeks. It was 1979, I was seventeen years old and reasonably well schooled in pop, rock and punk music. Uninspired by the burgeoning New Wave Of British Heavy Metal scene I had found myself looking back to the late sixties and had begun to investigate Bob Dylan and The Band. One day a friend arrived with a copy of Astral Weeks; I put it on the turntable and we listened. I had no idea what was going on. It was all over the place. I could sense though that there was something there that needed to be got to grips with and once I did the album would fall into place. And after a few plays, it finally did.

From the opening lines of the title track: "If I ventured through the slipstream, into the viaduct of your dreams" Astral Weeks takes us on a journey. It's an impressionistic journey, filled with splintered images of people and places, real and imagined. Cyprus Avenue, one of Belfast's more affluent streets appears both as a song title and in the lyrics of Madame George but Morrison seems to be conjuring a Belfast of his own imagination rather than the city that he grew up in. There is love and death, transcendence and despair, searching and yearning. And music that pulls and pushes and teeters but never falls. Kay's drums swing, Davis' bass prods, a harpsichord cuts across the rhythms and vibraphone, flute and sax explore the edges of the songs. Where did this come from?

Perhaps Morrison had no idea either, or perhaps he was smart enough to realise that he had captured lightning in a bottle and the only thing to do next was to move on. Whatever the reason, his next album Moondance would see him exploring blue-eyed soul that owed more to Otis Redding than Huddie Leadbetter.

Astral Weeks remains unique and is all the better for it. If you haven't heard it, you really should. It's not an easy listen but greatness shouldn't come easy.

John Scott

AT A GLANCE

VITAL INFORMATION

Released - November 1968

Recorded -25 September, 1 and 15 October 1968, Century Sound Studios, New York City

Genre - Folk rock

Length - 47:10

Label - Warner Bros.

Producer - Lewis Merenstein

TRACK LISTING

Side One: In The Beginning

1. "Astral Weeks" 7:06
2. "Beside You" 5:16
3. "Sweet Thing" 4:25
4. "Cyprus Avenue" 7:00

Side Two: Afterwards

1. "The Way Young Lovers Do" 3:18
2. "Madame George" 9:45
3. "Ballerina" 7:03
4. "Slim Slow Slider" 3:17

LIVE

Fest Jazz at Chateauneuf-du-Faou

A lovely relaxed atmosphere and musicians from all around the world make this festival in the heart of the Brittany countryside one to put in your diary for 2016.

Now in its eleventh year the much loved Fest Jazz at Chateauneuf-du-Faou certainly didn't disappoint visitors this year...if only the same could be said for the weather which was excitedly moist to say the very least.

All credit must go to Trevor Stent and his team who organise the annual festival and make it such a great success.



The festival takes place in the Breton town for the full weekend but the main event is the Sunday. The sun may not have shone, but that didn't deter a good number of the people of Brittany (France) to make the effort and visit what is surely one of the most relaxed and entertaining jazz festivals there is. The organisation is superb, with everything being under cover across several marquees and so even with the heavy rain you could still enjoy some world class music.



Musically there was something for everyone, but needless to say at a festival it's impossible to catch all the acts and so our entertainment was provided by The Jack Danielle's String Band who cook up a foot-stomping Blue-Grass storm, the trad' sounds of Good Time Jazz and the Latin tinged tunes of Raphaelle Atlan. We could have seen many more but enjoyed these so much we stopped for their full sets...or most of them, before having to leave pretty early on in the day and missing the headliners Davell Crawford and the Electric Swing Orchestra.

CLASSICS

We'll definitely make the effort to see the full weekend's events next year and camp, but whether you just do the Sunday or the whole lot, the [Fest Jazz at Chateauf-neuf-du-Faou](#) is certainly one for the diary.



Full line up for the Sunday was:

Electric Swing Circus
 Davell Crawford
 Raphaele Atlan
 Remi Harris
 Major Swing
 Natascha Rogers
 Bohem Ragtime Jazz Band (who we caught a few minutes of)
 The Hippocampus Jazz Gang
 Malo Mazurié
 Jack Danielle's String Band
 Good Time Jazz
 Ginger Stompers
 Bacana
 Olod Chaps
 Les Ragamuffins
 Les Trimarantes
 Keep Why

BEHIND THE BRANDS

Garry Wise is the Managing Director of Kleio Audio Limited a UK start up manufacturer whose goal is to "reinvent high-end audio". Hifi Pig caught up with the very busy Gary to find out what makes him tick.



The K105 preamplifier and K135 integrated amplifier are the first two products from Kleio's K1 series. Both units feature relay switching along with balanced inputs and balanced outputs. The k1 references our first range and over the years this will follow further products and product ranges.

Kleio are keen to be seen as a new and exciting UK brand with strong passion for music enjoyment, whilst manufacturing outstanding products. All Kleio products are proudly manufactured in the UK from a solid aluminium billet and come with a 5 year warranty.

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

My first and only job in the industry to date has been with Kleio. I fell into it about 5 years after trying to

decide what headphone amplifier to buy on a limited budget. My wife made a comment along the lines of "can't you just make one yourself" and things have just spiralled from there. This is where the journey began.

Who or what was the biggest influence on your career?

I would have to say music primarily as it plays such a huge part in my life. Alongside this though was my personal passion for UK based manufacturing.

Proudest moment/product you're most proud of?

My proudest moment to date was when I picked up the first K135 integrated amplifier prototype on an electronics test bed to use with my home system. It was a concoction of various PCB's, mismatched LEDs, loads of resistors soldered together to fix issues, features which didn't work properly and speaker wires hard wired to some connectors. It looked a mess. However, when I first played something through it I knew that this was the start of something special. Friends and family were keen to come round and have a listen and became fascinated with how it all worked and became intrigued as to what the finished product would eventually look like.

BEHIND THE BRANDS

What was your very first system?

I was born in the 80's so by the time I got into music in the 90's, midi and mini systems were still quite popular so I had some very cheap mini system back in my teens. However, I always had a passion for hi-fi and spent a large proportion of time swotting up in magazines trying to imagine what my dream system might one day look like. Once I started working, and had saved some money, I took the plunge and went shopping. I seem to recall spending about 5 hours in the shop but I really enjoyed the buying experience.

Tell us about your system history

My first proper system is the same one I have today which I purchased about 10 years ago. I try and use it every day and it is used quite a lot to test our products. This consists of a Musical Fidelity X-80 amplifier, Inca Design Katana CD player, B&W 602 S3 speakers, Denon TU1800DAB tuner and a Rega RP1 turntable with a Rega Fono Mini phono stage and a Project Headbox SE II.

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

We moved house recently and at present the hi-fi stand has had to take on both hi-fi and AV duties. This has meant that the Rega is currently boxed in the loft. Once things get unpacked and settled, I cannot wait to get all of the hi-fi together again and start spinning some records.

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

I have heard many systems over the years varying vastly in prices. Personally, one of the best systems I have ever heard was a Primare/Elac set-up at a show about 2 years ago. It was a simple integrated amplifier, DAC with a MacBook Pro as a source, used with a set of standmount speakers.

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

When I first started the company we were initially going to create a value amplifier but the heat issues



BEHIND THE BRANDS

and high power requirements were a concern. I really like valves and would love to own some valve mono-blocks one day if I have the space. I find it frustrating when you see them appear on mass market electronics for visual appeal as opposed to any sound quality enhancement. Everybody has their preference when it comes to transistor or valves, and I think it is great that you can still by valves in today's market.

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?

Being a start-up we are obviously keen to see growth in the industry. The year on year increase of attendance at shows is encouraging though. It is difficult to predict the next five years but computer audio and streaming is here to stay so I would expect to see more products designed to support these services along with more integration with devices. With regards to prices, I don't think these will change much. Overall, I think the high-end market will carry on regardless as there will always be the enthusiast looking to seek out the finest equipment.

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

The industry has a very low profile generally and certainly deserves more credit than it receives. We need to attract more consumers to the industry and that means that we need to give potential new consumers something to get excited about.

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

Enjoyment! We understand the importance of measurements but if the result of meticulous measuring is the destruction of musical joy from a product then we would question if this is something which customers would actually want to buy.

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

A foot tapping and involving sound.

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

I have heard some amazing set-ups over the years with a small set of small monitors and a sub. One of my favourite set-ups, as mentioned previously, was using a set of small speakers. Floorstanders look great in a room though and would be my preferred choice.

What is your favourite recording?

I think this changes on a weekly basis. This week I would say the new Florence + The Machine album "How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful". Amazing.

Tell us about your 3 most trusted test recordings

Lissie's "Catching a Tiger" album is one of my all-time favourites and the little guitar licks in the song "When I'm Alone" can only really be appreciated on a good system. London Grammar's "If You Wait" album is great for testing bass response along with detail and some great atmosphere. Finally, one of my favourite testing albums is Tegan and Sara's "Heartthrob" album. It oozes energy and was the first album in about 10 years whereby I asked the staff in HMV what was playing. If the system can play the opening track "Closer" and not get itself into a mess that is the sign of a good system.

What are your most embarrassing recordings/guilty musical pleasures

Embarrassingly there are probably too many to mention here but I have to confess to being a secret McBusted fan.

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?

Probably my signed copy of Foxes 'Glorious' album and all the original vinyl David Bowie albums given to me by my mother in law.

Thanks Garry