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Vision, The Bristol
Show 2017**

Sound & Vision, The Bristol Show 2017

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Sound & Vision 2017 Stu's Walkaround

By Stuart Smith

The Bristol Show but it's fast becoming one of my favourites because of the sheer enthusiasm of pretty much all involved in putting it together and making it work. Signposting is excellent, the show guide is first-rate, the facilities are good, even if the bar can get pretty crowded at times, and the people that turn up to support it with their presence are an animated and passionate lot

SOUND & VISION, THE BRISTOL SHOW 2017

This is only my third visit to Sound and Vision - The Bristol Show but it's fast becoming one of my favourites because of the sheer enthusiasm of pretty much all involved in putting it together and making it work.

Signposting is excellent, the show guide is first-rate, the facilities are good, even if the bar can get pretty crowded at times and the people that turn up to support it with their presence are an animated and passionate lot. The show starts on Friday and despite this being a workday for most the show was packed...likewise Saturday and Sunday, though we sadly had a ferry to catch and so left late morning so couldn't see the show out to the end. Previous years' gripes have been that the lifts always seem to be occupied or not working properly but I'm pleased to report that this year things seemed to be running a whole lot better.

We're nothing if not resourceful here at Hifi Pig and having visited lots of Hifi shows around Europe we've learned that it's often best to start at the top and so our first stop was the fourth floor to get as much seen as we could before our first meeting of the day.

SCV Distribution

If you know pro-audio you'll probably know the name SCV but they also have a pretty comprehensive home audio part too and have brands such as Focal and Benchmark under their wing. System was made up of Benchmark and Focal but the things that grabbed my attention immediately were some weird looking "tree-type" structures. A quick quizzing of the ever helpful Matt Esau told me they were room treatment trees they were calling "Flaps" and hailed from Italy. The panels on the "trees" can be positioned to best effect and other modular pieces in the range are also available.

I use IsoAcoustics Aperta stands under my studio monitors, they work a treat, and the company were presenting for the first time in the UK their Gaia isolation feet for loudspeakers. They come in three sizes depending on the weight of your speakers and range in size from £199 to £599 for the big ones that will take 100Kg. They come, naturally, in sets of four and the demonstration, using all the same kit and a switch box, was



pretty impressive to say the least. I'm sceptical of this kind of thing in the main but these things, if the dem' was anything to go by, work a treat.



Questyle CMA400i headphone amp and DAC were also available along with the Meze 99 cans, but time pressures meant we had to forgo that particular pleasure.



Convert Technologies

Convert used to be called Entotem and they will be known to regular readers for their vinyl ripping, media streaming and amp all in one solutions. Here at Sound and Vision we got a chance to have a

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Nagra was the order of the day with Quad amps and, of course, Music First Audio preamps



sneaky peek at the new “A Plus” which builds on the previous A class unit with a bigger output, bigger PSUs, tweaks in the software and more. It will be available by the end of March. The company are now distributing German loudspeaker brand Avantgarde in the UK and had their passive Zero Ones plugged in.

They are also launching a new reference model whose name is to be confirmed, as is price, but it should be available in May/June and has a tentative pricing of around ten to twelve grand.

Music First Audio

Jonathan Billington of Music First Audio will be known to most readers I'm sure, and he always goes to great efforts to introduce attendees to shows something a little different, and today was no exception. Nagra was the order of the day with Quad amps and, of course, Music First Audio preamps.

Jonathan was playing part of the soundtrack for La La Land and it was sounding lovely...the debacle at the Oscars where the film was awarded Best Picture only to have it cruelly taken away a few minutes later didn't happen until Sunday night but I'll be off to see it if only to hear the rest of the soundtrack.



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I love it when brands go to the trouble of finding out new music and explaining what it is.

Henley Designs

Roksan, made up the first of the Henley rooms and I do like how they go to the effort of making their rooms look and feel inviting to the public. Readers will know Roksan is now owned by Monitor Audio and it's god to see this British brand remain in the country.

I'm not unfamiliar with Unison Research, who were in their second room, having owned one of their valve output stage CD players in the past and here powering Opera speakers and costing around £8K plus stands and cables. This sounded much more than acceptable for the money, despite the relatively entry level products of their range being used.

ProJect, who Henley distribute in the UK, were in the next room with nice little system that showed you don't need to have dozens of boxes or very deep pockets to get a good sounding Hifi



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really good buzz going on with plenty of folk making positive noises.

Leema Acoustics

Leema, from Wales, had a great sounding room and both Linette and I commented on the sound coming out the room...and they were playing UK Garage which was a bonus.

On show was the company's Quasar amp/DAC/streamer that is pretty much an all in one solution – just add speakers and a NAS drive or other source and you are away and playing. Since its launch I'd been wanting to hear the new Sirius streamer as it has been developed in partnership with the people at Innuos which our reviewer Dan has raved about recently. It's the flagship of the Constellation range and can rip your collection to its onboard hard drive and has a DAC built in using the ESS Sabre DAC chip and Xmos USB interface supporting up to 32 bit depth and 374 kHz and DSD to 256.

Amp for the day was the Tucana Anniversary that celebrates ten years of the original Tucana and powering a pair

of ATC floorstanders the sound was powerful and controlled.

Chord Company

We were invited along to the launch of the latest cable range from this UK based company. Sally, Alan and the team were on their usual good form but sadly Nigel Finn wasn't able to

attend...we hope you have a speedy recovery and that we see you soon.

The new cable is called Sarum T that updates the already well established Sarum range with the exclusive Tylon insulation that had previously only been available on the range topping ChordMusic cables. Alan Gibb explained that whilst Teflon (PTFE) is used most often in audio applications,



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the company thought that it had its limitations and flaws. Taylon, Alan continued has been developed primarily for precision weapons systems and “eliminates the temperature related phase instability and mechanical variation that mars the sonic and musical performance of PTFE”.

The new Sarum T combines Taylon insulated conductors with the Super ARAY geometry with owners of the original Sarum digital, interconnects and power cables being able to send them back to Chord and have them updated to Sarum T specs for around 40% the cost of the new cables. Where Sarum T differs significantly from the ChordMusic cables is in the shielding,

with T having two shields and Music having six.

Elipson/Tangent

Tangent are based in Denmark and make very affordable products that look very nice in an understated kind of way – think clean lines and natural wood highlights. Elipson on the other hand are located in France and make interesting loudspeakers, a cool circular shaped music player and now the Alpha and Omega turntable range.

Whilst these company’s products may certainly not be the costliest at the show they are designed for people that are both style conscious and want a good

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Of course many manufacturers are now waking up to this concept that Hifi Pig have been banging on about for the last five years

looking system that is unobtrusive and easy to use. Again, many “ultra orthodox” audiophiles may scoff at this as lo-fi but again I’m very much of the opinion that this is where the future lies in getting people on the Hifi ladder and buying into the more esoteric end of the music listening experience. Of course many manufacturers are now waking up to this concept that Hifi Pig have been banging on about for the last five years.

Mission

The speakers used in Mission’s room, a name people into Hifi in the eighties will be well familiar with, were the LX2 costing sub £200. These are unashamedly built in China and built to a price but they sound way better than they should for this kind of money.



Canton

Soundbars are a great solution for people looking to get a better sound out of their television, and perhaps something to play music too, without the

need to go the whole Hifi route and have boxes all over the place. They are accessible, easy to use and unobtrusive. This was the case too for the Canton DM100 soundbar on show in this room. It fits under a flat screen, has 200 watts of output, virtual sound tech’ and uses only one cable to connect to the flat screen TV. IT also comes with Bluetooth so you can stream music from your phone or Bluetooth connected device.



Canton’s second room consisted of more conventional home loudspeakers as can be seen in the picture below.



Ophidian

Ophidian presented the new P series loudspeakers at the Bristol Hifi show but sadly these weren’t playing when we were in the room so I can’t really pass judgement...but there is a review of the Ophidian P2 due imminently on Hifi Pig.

The diminutive speakers that were playing, The Mojos, were sounding

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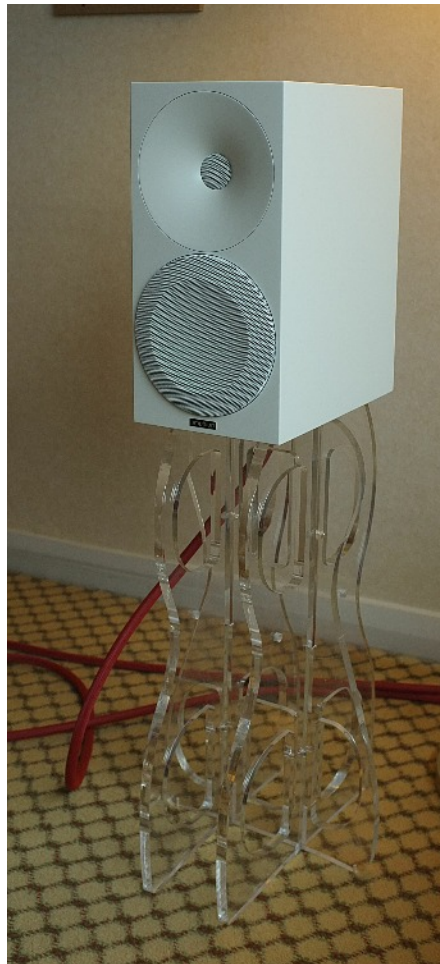
much bigger than they have any right doing being driven by Exposure electronics.



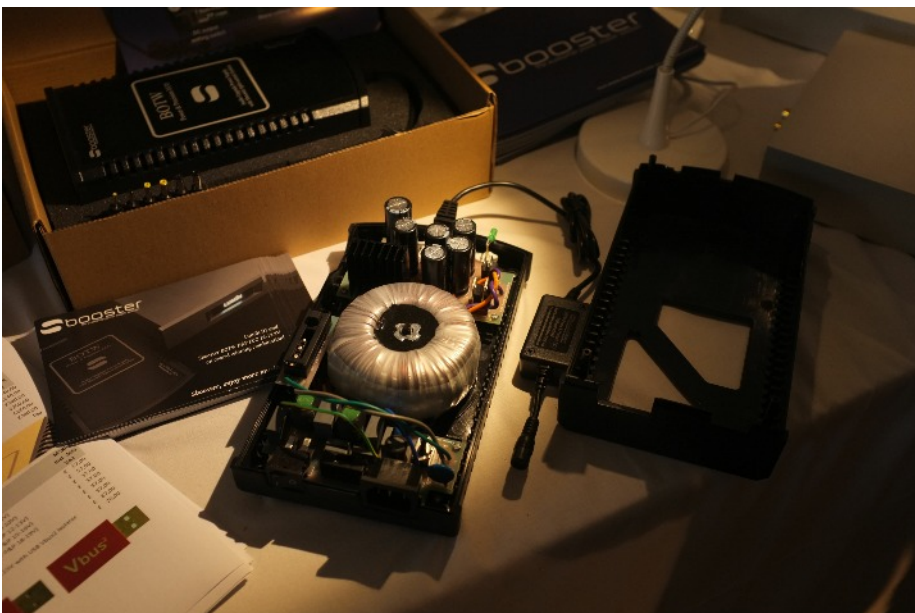
Auden Distribution

Auden distribute some really nice brands including Primare, Mark Levinson, Aria and Amphion...there are others... but at Sound and Visio, The Bristol Show 2017 their main system was the Aria ripper/streamer along with Accuphase electronics into Amphion loudspeakers...all the As then.

However what caught my eye the most in this room was a much more modest device called the SBooster. Costing between £240 and £260 these are power



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supplies that replace the horrid wall warts that many companies use to power their amps, streamers etc. They are available for a wide range of products and if they deliver what they promise should prove massively popular.

Audio Note (UK)



I'm going to stick my head above the virtual parapet now and say something that will upset a good few fanboys of the Audio Note (UK) brand of electronics and speakers – I've rarely heard them sound any good. However, today and at this show the set up sounded bloody marvellous; power and precision, detail and control were all evident. Of course the room was packed, it always is.

Icon Audio



Icon are a well known and well loved brand in some circles and I've enjoyed one of their valve amplifiers a great deal when it was sent in for review.

However, today's star of the room was a pair of horn loudspeakers with a fifteen inch bass driver. They were drawing a good deal of attention and, I confess to being a lover of all things horny, sounded pretty good on the day.

AV Tech Solution/JL Audio

Playing JL Audio loudspeakers in an AV set up that sounded mighty powerful. I tend not to linger too long in

AV rooms to be honest as they've not been on my radar as something to have at home but this year's Bristol show may



have changed my mind somewhat.

Devialet

We all know Devialet and the way that the French brand has taken the world by storm with its range of products. No one can deny that they are clever, beautifully

made and sound pretty good too. The main even at this show was the Phantom Gold loudspeakers which won the Clarity award for innovation this year. However, this speaker, in its more basic form was introduced a couple of years ago at Munich, so I'm not convinced overly this is a truly innovative product in the true sense of the word. The Gold version is a beefed up version of the Phantom and, whilst I've not been overly impressed by the Phantom previously, this sounded very good playing Daft Punk. My only concern is that Devialet always play too damned loud – I like loud, I really do, but the volumes they used at Munich and here at Bristol were just too much for the room. Turn it down just a notch guys and let us enjoy the whole of the music...it's not just "all about the bass", though there is

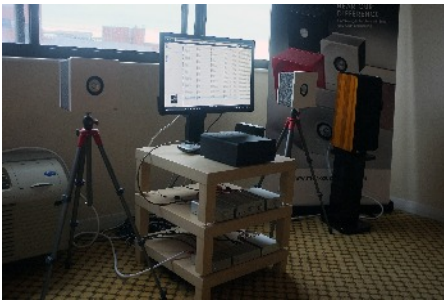


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no denying the Phantoms dig deep, deep deep!

Mark Audio SOTA

Graham Slee electronics connected to a pair of the Mark Audio Viotti speakers and sounding very nice for a relatively budget set up. Also seen were the incredibly cute looking Tozzi loudspeakers designed for small rooms and on desktops. They are made out of alloy billets with a composite core and in the room came mounted on Manfrotto tripods. I spoke to Mark the designer about these and he reckons they're a damned fine speaker...we'll have them soon so we'll find out.



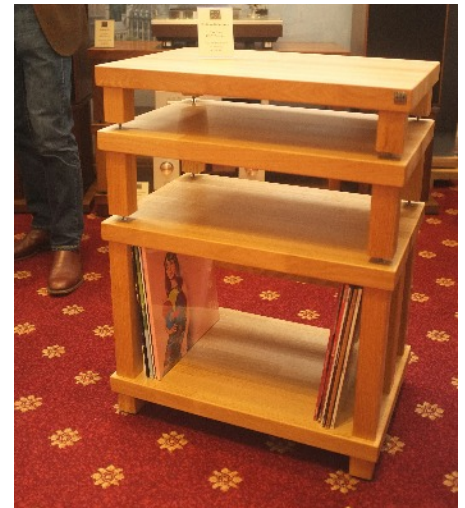
Also in the room were a pair of Frugal Horns and a display of the company's drivers that DIYers are able to buy.

As well as the large amount of actual listening rooms on offer to delight the eyes and ears of Bristol Show visitors, there are plenty of static stands lining the corridors and the huge Bristol Suite area.

It is impossible to miss **The Chord Company** in their regular spot at the main entrance to the show, as usual they were doing a roaring trade selling cables from their static stand, probably in no small part due to the friendliness and professionalism of the team.



Down the long corridor on the ground floor there was plenty to catch the eye. A great array of racks from both **Atacama** and **Hifi Racks**.



Also on show were plenty of **Grado** headphones, **QED** cables and **Goldingr** cartridges.



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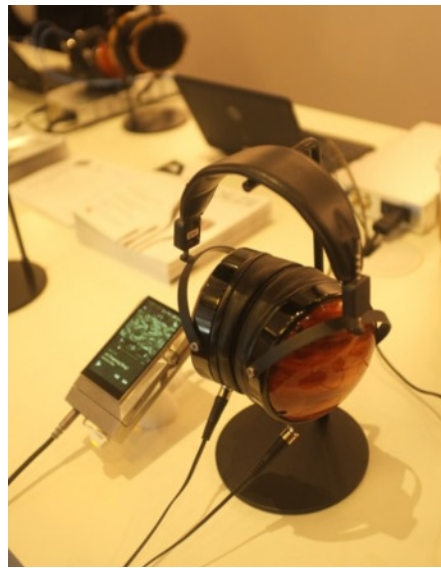
The **Vinyls Best** stand seemed crowded every time we passed it and **Timestep** were also in demand with the public with their modifications for the Technics 1210, phonostage and other goodies.



I was really wanting to have time to properly chill out in the **Arcam** High End Home Cinema Room but time

constraints meant I only got a quick listen, though what I heard and saw was impressive. I think home cinema was playing it down a bit, our local picture house could learn a thing or two from Arcam's set up. I am a bit of a sucker for the **KEF** Reference loudspeakers and used in this Atmos surround set up the effect was excellent. Unfortunately, the full on cinematic experience was a little dark for taking photo's, but it was very authentic...just add popcorn.

Next up was a sweep around the Bristol Suite. A lot of great hifi gear in here. The **Astell & Kern** and **Audeze** stand was very busy, with plenty of folk wanting a listen to the DAPs and planar headphones.



Sennheiser had a selection of their wares there. They also had the Orpheus system in another room which seemed to be impossible to get into for a listen, so I guess I will have to live with not having had over 50 grands worth of headphones on my ears for a while longer!



The **ifi** stand was (as it is at every show we go to) totally rammed. These guys are another great team and Vincent and his guys are very knowledgeable and



love explaining their products to the eager crowds.

Chord Electronics were very busy with plenty of people wanting to have a listen to the Chord Mojo and it's new partner, Poly and the Hugo 2.



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Also in this hall we checked out **Supra** and **Atlas** cables, both seemed to be having a great show.



There were also cartridges and more on offer from **Audio Technica** and **Tonar** had **Nagaoka** cartridges and a wide host of vinyl care products on offer.



Both **Melco** (launching the 1NAH60V2) and **Innuos** (with the Zen Mark 2) had stands in this hall, both companies with very interesting products that are spearheading the leaps and bounds of technology in the hifi market. Sharing space in the Melco area was **Merging Technologies** whose NADAC looks very interesting indeed.



The main news Max had to impart was that Audio Alchemy electronics had been bought by ELAC

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At the other end of the floor (handily taking us through the bar) we found show favourites **MCRU** and their **Vinyl Adventure** (who seemed to have sold all of their stock by Sunday lunch helped a little by Stuart's purchases at the stand) Plus **Townsend Audio** with their seismic platforms getting a lot of interest and also **Pristine Vinyl**.



Astintrew

Like a couple of other rooms the Astintrew room (above) was using a pair of the Pearl Acoustics loudspeakers using Mark Audio drivers. Here they were being driven by the Astintrew AT2100 amplifier costing £1895.

ELAC

Max from ELAC in the UK always makes Hifi Pig welcome in his room and he goes to a good deal of trouble to make his room representative of a normal living space. At Bristol Sound and Vision there was the new Miracord turntable celebrating its UK launch; we saw it and wrote about it after the Munich 2016 event but it's great to see

it finally making an appearance on these shores.

The main news Max had to impart was that Audio Alchemy electronics had been bought by ELAC and it all sounded rather nice. Kit was a £600 amp with a £2300 media player/DAC/amp combo feeding a pair of ELAC Uni-Fi floorstanders using a dual concentric driver for mid and tops and costing £1200. Music playing was a fab version of Wrecking Ball by Jasmine Thompson which was a really good version of a song I know but dislike.

The main demonstration in the room was of the Discovery Music Server costing £850, with a more audiophile version to come later. This server has multi-room capabilities built in and



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digital and two analogue outputs...you can play all three at once should you want/need...and they can all be playing different tunes which I thought rather clever. The unit is "Roon Ready" and the idea is that you get the "full vinyl experience". As Max talked us through the app I couldn't help think how user friendly and feature rich it was given some of the apps I've endured over the years.



This room made it onto the short, short list for the "Hifi Pig Love's You" award which will be announced in the special e-mag of our coverage.

Hegel

The name Hegel (shown below) will be familiar to many I'm sure but it is only in the last couple of year's that this Norwegian brand has come back into the mainstream consciousness. At Bristol they were using the fab Amphion speakers along with a MacBook. Nice, simple, stylish and effective.



Rega

Down the corridor from Hegel was well loved British brand Rega who were showcasing their RX5 loudspeakers when we arrived. They are part of the new RX range which includes the standmount RX1 and moves up to floorstanders with the RX3, RX5 and RX10 models. Powering the speakers was a new version of their Brio integrated amplifier.



Sound Fowndations

Sound Fowndations always put on a good room at whatever show they attend and Bristol was no exception. Here they had three rooms. Of course Sound Fowndations were showing off Clearaudio turntables and a whole host of Furutech connectors but it was their second room, put together by Alex Denyer, that really caught my ear as a rather pleasant system to listen to and all for a £40K price tag.

The system included a ClearAudio Innovation Basic turntable fitted with the DS 002 cartridge feeding a GamuT



Di150 dual mono integrated and GamuT RS3C loudspeakers.



In the third of the Sound Fowndation rooms we were shown to Isotek power conditioning units and the Larson 6 loudspeakers that at around £3K sounded damned impressive. Yes it is and unusual design but its small footprint and elegant looks will appeal to many I'm sure.

NuNu Distribution

Another team that always put a lot of effort into their shows are Tony and Anne at NuNu Distribution and like Sound Fowndations they had a couple of rooms here at Bristol. The new trees were great, Anne!!



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Room one (above) featured an Oracle turntable along with Quadral loudspeakers which always manage to impress given their relative budget pricepoints. The whole system here came in at around £5.5K

In the room over the corridor there was a much more esoteric feeling with the guise of TAD electronics and loudspeakers. Music today was supplied by the excellent Nova Fidelity ripper/streamer. I can't write down my exact notes here but "Classy as..." began the quote.



ProAc

ProAc is another well loved brand with their Tablette speakers being a firm favourite with many for a good while.

Today they were showing of their Response DB3, rear ported bass reflex standmounters at £1475 and featuring a new bass driver over previous models.



Michell Engineering

Michell are another well loved British brand that have been around for over forty years...and whose turntables I have lusted over when I was a teenager. Today their TechnoDec turntable was partnered with Trichord phonostages, Sugden Class A amplifier and ProAc D20/R loudspeakers. The TechnoDec is the company's entry level turntable but you'd hardly believe it.



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Nordost

Nordost were in the middle of a very serious looking demonstration to one particular member of the public when we popped our heads around the door and so can't really comment on the room further.



Kudos

The Kudos Titan 707 is an impressive speaker and today was powered by that classic combo of Naim amplification and a Linn Lp12 front end. A little room treatment to treat the slight bass bloom in this room would have been a welcome addition but what did come through in spades was just bags and bags of detail. I'd love to hear the speakers in a better sounding room.



AudioQuest

Again the guys in the AudioQuest room were in the middle of a demonstration showing the differences between their Dragonfly Red and Black USB DACs so we couldn't really get a proper feel for



the room as it was pretty busy. However, they always put a good deal of effort into their rooms and they are always busy so must be doing something right.

Quadraspire



Now, we've had a home demonstration of the higher-end Quadraspire racks and were very impressed indeed. However, today we were being shown a much more modest platform made of 7mm bamboo and costing £99. It's design is based on other Quadraspire racks and shelves. The idea of this is that people using standard home furniture can improve the sound of their turntables and John from Loud and Clear in Edinburgh did a sterling job at demonstrating the effect of the platform. There were clear differences/improvements to be heard when the modest turntable was placed on the new rack and whilst not night and day, this is a product that is, forgive the pun, going to fly off the shelves for Quadraspire.

Karma AV

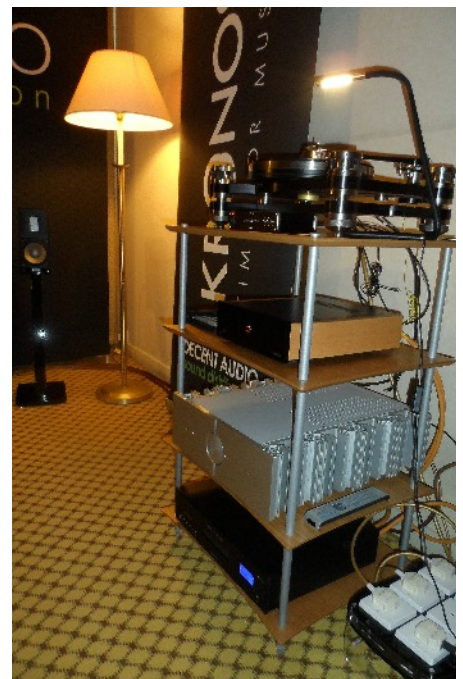
Another company with a couple of rooms was Karma AV. In the first room we were treated to a system using Primare electronics, Torus power conditioning, Straightwire cabling and Revel loudspeakers. This is not hugely expensive kit but sounded pretty controlled with good and deep bass.



Prime Towers using Primare amplifiers. I'm not usually one to get carried away with home cinema systems but I did enjoy the sound of this one.

Decent Audio

Decent are based in the North East of England and despite their modest name stock some stunning brands. Today we were treated to two rooms of their brands; the Kronos turntable, made for a very classy sound.



Their second room was absolutely packed every time we passed and we just couldn't get in...so we assume it was pretty good!

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BlueSound

BlueSound are all about wireless living and wireless music and we were given a demonstration of their speakers and streamer/amplifier playing Mp3 (how folk listen to Mp3 on a decent system I will never know), then CD and finally MQA files. It was an interesting demonstration and the overwhelming opinion with the people in the room seemed to be that the MQA file had the edge on the same Ella Fitzgerald track we were treated to.

Technics

I absolutely love the Technics 1210 in all its derivations and may well be treating myself to another (I've had about a dozen over the years) to put my Origin Live arm and GoldNote Tuscany Red cartridge on...though it's likely to be tinkered with by Dave Cawley at Timestep. However what was new to this show, and to me, was their £1299 1210 GR model in black and 1200GR in silver.



Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity are a name pretty much everyone will know and I still actually run one of their Nu-vista 3D CD Players as a transport...it's getting on a bit but I still enjoy it a great deal and have seen no need to splash out on a better CD player in the time I've had it. However, times move on and, partnered with KEF, Musical Fidelity were showing off their new range of electronics, including the new version of the Nu-Vista CD player

and amp. It's good to see that people are still investing in and producing CD players to my mind and whilst the buzz on the internet is that CD is a dying format, I just don't get that I'm afraid.



Sunday Morning arrived and we had a ferry to catch later in the day and so the final dash round Sound and Vision, The Bristol Show was a bit of a mad one.

Chord Electronics



I've got the DAVE DAC (below) from Chord plugged into my main system at the moment and I really don't want to give it back. It's a fabulously analytical tool to dig the most out of your hi-res files and whilst it splits opinion wildly in the looks department, I really love its styling. The team from Chord really are a very professional bunch indeed but not at all stuffy, whether that is on the Mojo stand or in their main room...and they are not afraid of playing real world music, which is refreshing.

Esoteric

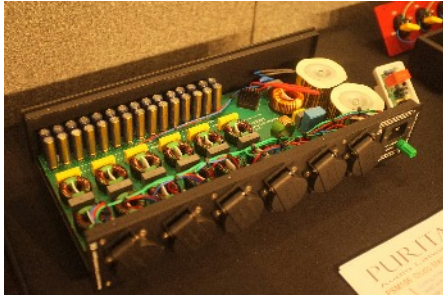
Wowzers! This system sells at nearly £72K and consists of niftily named K-01X SacD and Cd spinner, the Japanese brand's C-02 power amp, their N-05 Network player and the G-01 Master clock. All this was been fed through a



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pair of ProAc Response K6 loudspeakers.

Puritan Audio Laboratories



Mains conditioning is a bit of a buzz word at the moment and the Facebook groups are awash with folk trying all kinds of weird and wonderful combinations of regenerators, power cables, balance mains units....the list goes on. Puritan make a wide range of products from the relatively inexpensive to those more suited to people with higher end systems. Their products look well made and we hope to have them in for review soon.

Sony



Sony is a household name and have been for years...how many people of a certain age didn't own a Sony Walkman or a derivative of one. Well here is the iconic Walkman brought bang up to date!

Q Acoustics



As mentioned elsewhere Steve Reichart was retiring straight after this show and so it was an honour to get a dem' of the new Q Acoustic Concept 500 speakers which we heard a prototype of at Munich last year. These are great speakers and it was good to see GIK room treatment in the room too.

Quad



Quad is another brand that will be known to everyone even remotely interested in audio. They had a full system set up but time was fast running out for us and we didn't have time to give it a real listen...a shame as I am a fan of their electrostatic speakers for their speed and agility.

Cyrus



Cyrus are undergoing a bit of a renaissance, particularly with their new amplifier. They've always been a bit of an iconic brand with their distinctive shoebox casework and it's good to see they are still marketing towards the budget end of the audiophile spectrum.

KEF



Always popular and always a well set out room. Sadly we had time to run in and run out due to the imminent ferry. We'll catch up properly with you at Munich!

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"and the sound quality winner is Music First Audio

HiFi Critic Vol 10 April-June 2016

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AUDIO EXCELLENCE





Hifi Pig

Sound & Vision 2017 The Voice Of Dom'

By Dominic Marsh

This year I decided to leave home earlier to make the show in good time. It was all in vain as it took as long to get from the Clifton Bridge on the A4 to the show venue itself as it did to get from Cornwall to the outskirts of Bristol. I got within sight of the Marriott Hotel to find the road closed and a huge un-signposted detour through the city centre, with new pedestrianised areas, road works and new one way streets enabled since my last visit. It is getting as bad as central London, but without the congestion charge zone. Hush up Dominic, don't give the city council any more ideas to make motorist's lives even more stressful. This was confounded by a piece of a building falling on an unwitting pedestrian and a major road being closed for the whole afternoon and night

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I love and loathe the annual Bristol Show. I love it as I can put faces to names of people I correspond with as a reviewer, I get to hear the new and familiar products too, but I loathe it at the same time because one day just isn't nearly enough to get round the whole show and do it justice, and one day is all I am able to grant it due to other commitments. Instead it is mostly popping into demo rooms for a speedy listen then out again and on to the next one. If the room is already packed with people then I have no other option but to stand out in the corridor which is far from ideal, of course. And as for queuing for half an hour for an appointment for a listen, my time at the show is far too constrained for that kind of luxury.

I had the pleasure of a private hearing of **Chord's** range of cables containing a new dielectric known as "Taylon". Cables which are thus equipped with this material will have a "T" suffix in their model designation.

I had set a plan in my head not to fight trying to bag the rooms that are usually packed and instead explore areas that I had never really ventured into before, like headphones and the marques that are just a little bit "off the beaten track". Strange decision really, as I am no lover of listening through headphones and I don't relish having sweaty ears with the sound planted into the centre of my head at the best of times. The very last thing I wanted to do is go "Ooooh" and "Ahhhh" at the high end gear because I have no doubts there will be many folks who attended the show will provide plenty of that for your delectation and edification.

My first port of call on the headphones quest was the **Grado** stand. First impressions were a heavy pumping bass that obliterated most of the fine details in the recording and I knew instantly that these headphones were not for me. Off then to the **Audeze** stand and slipped a pair on. I don't know the model numbers and quite frankly it was no loss not knowing either, as the sound to me was a tad flat and lacking in dynamics after trying on two pairs. Now then, where to next? **Onkyo** and **Pioneer** provided the answer on a stand with Onkyo's DAP and Pioneer headphones. London Grammar's "Hey



now" was first on the playlist and that was very impressive, with good solid bass without bloom or boom and the treble had a slight edge to it so the added faux reverberation effects embedded into the recording seemed just a bit too lively, but by no means excessively so. Despite my lack of enthusiasm for headphone listening I stayed with the Onkyo and **Pioneer** pair for at least three or four very enjoyable tracks. Just shows that it is a brand unlikely to be in the headlines that is the pearl waiting to be found.

Another objective I had in mind was to take some of my own CDs along to see how systems sounded when fed with some real world music instead of the specially selected tracks designed to impress. There was one slight flaw in my plan though, as the day before the show I had picked out three good CDs to take with me, but this idiot picked up the wrong pile as he was departing. In my defence it was early when I left home and I am not at my best at that time of day. I had put aside a direct cut

recording called James Newton Howard and Friends which has some fearsome dynamics that really do set speaker cones a'jumping and a'leaping. Next was a compilation album called Cafe Solo by Jose Padilla, which has a couple of great tracks by Tripswitch and Felix Laband. Lastly, a Porcupine Tree effort called Signify. Instead, old numpty here picked up Fink's Wheels Beneath My Feet album which was my one saving grace on the day, plus a gospel choir album and a high resolution female vocals album that Dan Worth had given me and I was not familiar with at all. However, the drawback to taking CDs is that most demonstrations were sourced from streamers or vinyl and not too many exhibitors had a CD player to spin them up in. The first room I managed to get a playing was **Musical Fidelity's** room where they had on show their brand new all-in-one streamer, CD player and amplifier, feeding a pair of **KEF Reference 1** speakers on stands, with cables by **Nordost**. This system struggled a tad to play Fink's CD with a great deal of

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fidelity today, especially the track called "Sort of Revolution" where the drummer's floor tom whacks came out more as a whimper than a resounding peak, but then a show environment REALLY isn't the place to be getting anything more than an overall feel for the sound in far from ideal rooms.

I then ventured into **Exposure's** room to find their XM Series amplifiers driving a pair of Audiovector SR floorstanders, with cabling by Atlas. This system gave a very good account for itself today, given that the speakers were well out into the room, and what impressed me the most was the same drummer's floor tom whacks which had some real power and heft to them. I then asked the guys to play a track from the gospel choir's album and that soon emptied the seats in double quick time. My profuse apologies for that misdemeanour chaps.

My room visits became a bit random after that, bypassing all the crowded rooms with one exception, which was the **Devialet** room. I have seen countless still pictures of their famed speakers but never actually heard them play any music. The music was being played pretty loudly in the room and the speakers were at full tilt when I entered. To my dying day I will never forget the sight of these two speakers facing dead ahead with the bass cones flapping in and out together on both sides of their cabinets, the tweeters on the front of the cabinets staring at me as well so the whole ensemble looked like an angry one eyed dragon ready to take a big lungful of air and spit fire out of the



front. Within moments I felt rather queasy at this sight, so I didn't stay very long. The sound? Plenty of bass, but not a lot of fine details for my liking and the volume was turned far too high because a perceived "loudness" to the sound (as opposed to an increase in volume level alone) is in fact "distortion".

Q Acoustics' Concept 500's were being demonstrated on the ground floor and it was a refreshing change to hear a demonstration at sensible listening levels rather than ear shredding levels that I heard elsewhere. Nice refined easy to listen to sound.

I get blown away by the diminutive **Ophidian** speakers. Tiny little cabinets making a big sound. Amazing. All of the Henley Designs rooms were very well set up and glad to say no jazzy plinky plonk music was being played. It

just shows what can be achieved with inexpensive components, well set up and with real world music being played.

I did manage to sneak into the **Monitor Audio** surround demonstration on the tenth floor just a mere whisker away from closing time. I like the Platinum 2 floorstanders because none of audible spectrum leaps at you, none is missing either and it's the sort of speaker that doesn't wear you out during an extended listening session. They were playing a music DVD which isn't representative of how they would sound in a two channel stereo rig, which is my preferred set up.

Finally, I visited the **Amphion** room and was pleasantly surprised that they were playing some classical music. Yes, you read that correctly, some CLASSICAL music. Oddly enough, the seating was across the room, making the front row seats rather too close to the little white Argons perched on perspex stands, so I sat in the rear row. Driven by Accuphase amplification, I was soon captivated by the sound and I sat there with eyes closed for quite a while enjoying what I was listening to, even though I tend to avoid classical music like the plague generally. At one point I was almost converted into a new classical fan. I did say ALMOST!

On the way home it was a bee line for the Taka Taka kebab shop in the Triangle. Excellent quality food, a huge choice and very reasonable prices too. Great end to a great day for me.

See you next year!





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Hifi Pig

Sound & Vision 2017 Ian Ringstead's Thoughts

By Ian Ringstead

Hifi Pig's Ian Ringstead gives us his thoughts on Sound and Vision, The Bristol Show 2017 including Ophidian, Mission, Convert Technologies, SCV Distribution, Air Audio, Schiit, Astintrew, STS, SOTA, Russell K, Kog Audio, Tellurium Q, Exposure, Creek Audio, Epos, Harbeth, Spendor, Neat, Auralic, Dali, Wilson Benesch, PMC and more

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It certainly doesn't seem a year since the last Bristol show, but with eager anticipation at meeting old friends and seeing new kit my wife and I set off early on the Saturday morning to see what delights were on offer.

Storm Doris had caused rather a bit of chaos earlier in the week but thankfully our journey was uneventful and we arrived to a busy show with the usual queues outside. Fortunately press passes allowed us quick and easy entry. I met up with a distributor firstly to discuss an exciting new turntable I am currently reviewing, as I always like to speak face to face if possible with my product makers or suppliers to get a real feel for their wares. After a very successful chat the plan of action was to start at the top and work our way down.

The first room we visited was **Ophidian Audio** to see Gareth James the owner and designer of a rather fine range of speakers I have reviewed for this magazine and catch up with new developments. The room was very busy and Gareth was demoing the P2 floor standers I have recently had at home which should appear soon on Hifi Pig. Hotel rooms are always a compromise and having personally auditioned these impressive speakers in my home I know what they can do, but the room at Bristol didn't allow the bass to work at its best. If anyone heard them there and are considering a speaker in the £4000 price area, then put these on your shortlist to audition properly. The other speaker that Gareth demoed was the amazing little Minimo that I loved and reviewed over a year ago. You look and listen to this speaker and think that's not physically possible how such a big sound comes out of such a small box. People were



walking into the room and saying where is the subwoofer?

Mission were showing their new LX range of speakers that were just being released last year and they looked and sounded impressive. Hopefully reviews will follow from this show as Mission are a loved brand from the 1980's. I sold many a pair in my time.

Henley Audio (note the change of name now from Designs) are always an excellent group of rooms to visit and there was plenty of new products to see. I talked to Nick Fuller and Laurence Armstrong at length about new products and developments. One item that really caught my eye was the vertical Project VT-BT turntable which looks bizarre playing upright, but it really does work.

A spring is pre-set on the arm that allows the arm to maintain a constant stylus pressure; simple but clever. Other new goodies were the Perspex 6SB which will be reviewed soon. Project certainly don't let the grass grow under their feet and are constantly developing new product at great prices. The Unison Research and Roksan rooms also had some lovely items on show that have already been covered by my fellow reviewers to much acclaim.

Music First Audio (next page) were doing their usual laid back but excellent demonstrations of their beautiful pre-amps with classic kit from Nagra and Quad. Stephen is a very affable chap who quietly shows off his marvellous creations with much pride.



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Convert Technologies (Entotem originally) had new units on show in some rather nice finishes of carbon fibre and aluminium casework that looked fabulous. Also for the first time I heard the Avantgarde Zero 1 speaker at £10000 which was nice. This is the company's cheapest speaker and aims to reach a sector of the buying market where people aren't into the more unusual looks of the more expensive range or much higher price tags.

Avantgarde produce very distinctive looking products that are unique in their sound and having heard the Duo's at Munich I can say they are mightily impressive. It will be interesting to see how this range fairs over here now there is a new enthusiastic distributor.

The other room on the fourth floor that was very interesting was **SCV Distribution**, well known for the superb Benchmark digital dacs, dac/pre's, amps and speakers. What particularly caught my eye and ear were the Gaia isolation feet that were being so well demonstrated using identical Focal speakers with a quality switching unit to allow A/B comparisons between the standard and isolated speakers. It was certainly convincing and not a subtle difference like some products I have heard. Although not cheap, the isolators are beautifully made and come in three sizes dependent on the equipment's weight. A product to look out for and try.



On the third floor **Air Audio** (above) were showing the excellent Hana cartridges I so liked when I reviewed them a year ago. Also on show were some Pearl Audio speakers that sounded rather good, using a single modified SOTA driver and made from 12 year old seasoned solid oak; at £4500 they are a welcome addition to the market. Air distribute STS reel to reel tapes so naturally there was a good display of them as well as products from **Astintrew** and **Schiit**



SOTA along the corridor were demoing the Mark Audio range of speakers, particularly the Tozzi 1 which is amazing for its size and beautifully made. I chatted to Scott Lindgren whom I know well from when I reviewed the Cesti B. Mark Audio make a very interesting range of speakers and drive units that really work well in many designs from horns to conventional cabinets. A range I really like and well worth a listen.

The second floor had **Kog Audio** using The Russel K Red 150 floor standing speakers with Tellurium Q speaker cables. A very good clear presentation



was on offer which I am sure is down to both good speaker design and the excellent **TQ** cables. **Russell K** speakers are getting noticed now and I can see why. Yet another company to watch.

Exposure had their new smaller range of electronics on show the XM series which will appeal to people short of space or don't want the clutter of larger separates. Like all Exposure products they are very well made and presented in the quintessential British clean, simple styling I love so much. The whole Exposure range is based on quality design and electronic principles built up from their experience over the last three decades. Having seen and heard the units in other rooms as well at various shows they are obviously well regarded.



Creek Audio and **Epos** (next page) were making good noises and I really admire what Mike Creek has done with his range since the humble beginnings in the 80's with the CAS4040 amp. It was a best budget seller for us then in retail and now the range has grown into a quality brand like Exposure providing superb value for money. The Epos range of speakers were sounding good as well and very nicely styled with white on show. It's interesting to note that nearly all the speaker manufacturers are now supplying their units in white to suit modern trends and houses. I'm currently reviewing some speakers at home in a very smart looking piano white that

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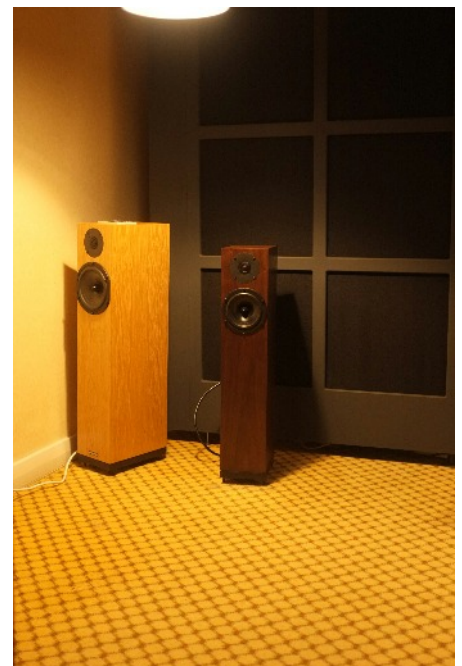


looks excellent. It makes a change from the usual wood veneers.

Harbeth have been around 40 years now and are celebrating the fact with the new HL5 Super plus, a beautifully made design like all Harbeths lovingly crafted. Harbeth are one of those brands that like Quad and Spendor have been around a long time but don't always get the recognition they deserve. With new impetus in the marketing department that should change for the better and get the name of Harbeth out there to a larger audience to appreciate. I would love to try some at home as they have a great reputation amongst audiophiles.



That leads me nicely onto **Spendor**, who like Harbeth have an enviable reputation and heritage. Phil Swift was on hand to tell me about the new A series models that were being played. The philosophy behind this updated range was a clean simple and compact range of domestically acceptable speakers to suit our modern smaller homes. They did look very smart in quality wood veneer finishes as you'd expect coming from a company who has its own manufacturing facility in Sheffield, Timberworx, for which I did an article on last year if anyone missed it. Also, being demoed were the new D1 and D9. Spendor have developed new drivers for this range. The tweeter is the LPZ, a linear pressure zone unit that uses new ideas and quality materials to produce a very accurate sound, rather like a quality camera lens does a picture by focusing accurately. The mid-range and bass units also use new materials and are housed in isolated enclosures inside the cabinet. A 5th generation linear flow port aids the great low frequency response and tight bass output. Again, I would love to try these out sometime at home. Also playing was the **Auralic** streamer that made a great partnership with the



Spendors for a very room friendly combination.

Neat had the new, cute Iota Alpha playing which sounded very good for their compact dimensions and the much larger SX51 in a smart grey paint finish. These also sounded very clear and had a good low end.

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Dali had a rather nice looking pair of their Epicon 2 standmounters in a rather fetching high gloss walnut lacquer finish. They sounded really detailed and smooth and at £3800, although not cheap, are the type of speaker you could listen to all day.



Wilson Benesch had the conservatory area as usual and this year were using **CH Precision** electronics from Switzerland, a superb looking and sounding brand. The designers originally worked at Goldmund, another legendary Swiss Hifi company. The L1 pre-amp and A1 amps were sounding sublime (at £20000 apiece) through the Endeavour speakers (£40000) from their Geometry



range in a rather cool looking red tulip glass finish. Source was their own Circle turntable with a DS Audio optical cartridge and streamed audio. Yes, this was an expensive system but boy did it sound good. Makes me proud to be a Sheffielder where Wilson Benesch are based.

The last room I went in was **PMC** and **AVM**. Audio Video Manufaktur are a German company I hadn't really heard of before but they have been around since the late 80's. They are a high-end brand that has had no real recognition over here, but PMC are about to change that. I talked at length to their Marketing Manager Johannes Kramer and was very impressed by their philosophy and superb product range which had that luxury finish of build and quality. This is a range I am keen to audition and discover. The electronics were driving various models in the PMC range and the ones I heard were the new Twenty5 22 stand mounts at £2455. Like all PMC speakers they have a great pedigree of design and use the new laminair vent to aid the

smooth and controlled bass response. PMC are constantly researching and introducing new designs and long may they do so. Their filter down technology from their professional studio designs and experience has certainly paid off in the domestic models.

Finally, I did what all analogue enthusiasts do and raided the record stalls for second hand gems from my past. I was successful and left a happy bunny.

These are just my views of the show and are by no means a comprehensive report. I couldn't get to every room due to time constraints and business matters which required my attention. Also, catching up with old friends is another joy at Bristol and reminiscing. Long may it continue!



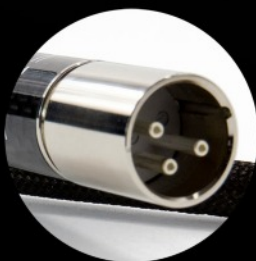
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10 Products of the year and most wanted components
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"If you're looking for a major jump in your system's performance, I'd suggest buying a pair of these instead of considering a hardware upgrade. Before you write this advice off to cable delusion, expectation bias, or the recent Mercury retrograde phase, please take note: I have never said this in TONE's 11-year history"

- Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio

"Well, I have just stumbled upon a speaker cable that I'm very tempted to put in a class of its own"

- Matej Isak, Mono and Stereo

"This is a sign that we are dealing with something exceptional in the audio world and the cables prove to be really unique."

- Wojciech Pacuła, highfidelity.pl





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Hifi Pig

Sound & Vision 2017 A GadgetyNews Perspective

By Jay Garrett

Jay Garrett of Hifi Pig's partner site GadgetyNews takes us around and gives his view on some of the key products and brands...not forgetting to stay hydrated along the way

SOUND & VISION, THE BRISTOL SHOW 2017

Well, that was my third Bristol Sound & Vision Show. The previous two I sprinted around and did them in a day – that's including being on the judging panel for the Clarity Awards last year. This year I allowed two days, it still wasn't quite enough.

For some reason the more time I spend at The Bristol Show, the more time I need. Granted, Friday was allotted to product launches and catching up with people I generally only chat to over emails but, still.

I can see Sound & Vision 2018 being a three day event next year, either that or I get more organised. Ha!

After driving over from London through the tail-end of Storm Doris, I checking in at The Bristol Hotel. It was nice to have a stroll up through the park and along the river to get to the Marriott Hotel City Centre.

Naturally, my first stop was for some refreshment(s) before heading to my first booked appointment.

Launches

Chord Company Sarum T

The Chord Company had kindly invited me over for some Sarum T and sarnies.

Those of you familiar with the brand will know Sarum as the range just below the outrageous ChordMusic line.

As with all decent brands, the kit that makes the flagship so marvellous eventually trickles down to the other ranges. In this case, the Sarum cables now benefit from the American military dielectric named Taylon.

Team America uses this tech to ensure that smart bombs are smart and satellites do what they're supposed to. The Chord Company, however, uses it for much more pleasant reasons as it eliminates the temperature related phase instability as well as the mechanical variation that mars the sonic and musical performance of PTFE.

As well as Taylon you get the Chord Super ARAY geometry. If you already own any Sarum cable you can send it back for the Taylon upgrade and save 40% of the cost of replacing your Sarum for Sarum T.

If you're wondering why the ChordMusic costs so much more than the Sarum T, it's all about the shielding. In fact, the ChordMusic has four more layers of shielding than the Sarum T's two. It is also a more specialist task to construct apparently.

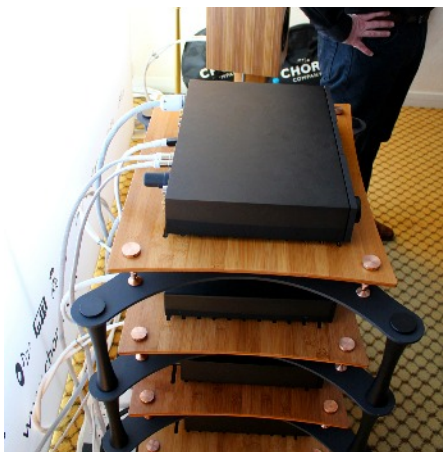
Melco

We were introduced the Melco N1 Mk2 (from £4,299). A topless model (ooooer!) of the unit was paraded around showing the audio grade SSDs.

As well as the Neutrik USB 2.0 port dedicated to your DAC connection, and then 3 USB 3.0 ports there are a pair of Ethernet ports. One of these is for your LAN whereas the other is a dedicated player port.

I always enjoy listening to Melco kit but what really grabbed my attention was the presentation given by Paul Taylor of SongKong. Melco is using this music metadata tech to identify your digital audio and it is really clever.

Where most song taggers trip up is with Classical. The Metadata demands for Classical are very different to Pop/Rock music. In Pop/Rock an album usually represents the artistic intent of the artist, i.e. the album was conceived and created as a single body of work. In Classical credit is usually given to not only the performer but also the conductor, orchestra and composer. Also, Classical composers work in terms of Symphonies or Sonatas rather than albums. These works comprise sub works or movements, and there may be additional levels. SongKong identifies Classical releases and captures this additional information in dedicated metadata fields. It can also identify other Classical information such as the Opus No and the



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AVM /PMC



After more libations it was time to head downstairs to the PMC room. I really do have a soft spot for their speakers, especially after living with some twotwo 5 active monitors.



But, for a change, PMC was not the star attraction at this event.

The charismatic owner and managing director of AVM, Udo Besser, explained that even though AVM had been developing and manufacturing electronic equipment over in Malsch, Germany, for 30 years it's still unknown over here. Until now, they have concentrated on the German-speaking market (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) just because there's a decent population in that catchment area and they don't have to translate anything. However, I am glad they have made the journey over thanks to PMC's distribution network.

AVM, which stands for Audio Video Manufactory (despite not having any video products), will launch with three ranges: Inspiration, Evolution and Ovation.

The flagship Ovation range has a mix of products with solid-state and valve amplification. The Ovation SA 8.2 (£11,495) is a power amplifier; the

Ovation SD 6.2 (£7490) is a solid-state streamer, DAC and headphone amp, while the Ovation MP 6.2 (£7490) adds a CD player. The Ovation CS 8.2 (£10,995) is a class A/B valve-powered system, with streamer, CD receiver and DAC; a "true high end system in one box", according to Udo.

At the other end of the product range is the slightly more affordable Inspiration CS 2.2 (£3995). This is an amp, streamer and phono amp, offering 130-watts of power per channel, and available with or without a CD drive. The step-up Evolution CS 5.2 (£5490) offers more power and is available as a solid-state or valve amp.



All support UPnP streaming with Tidal and Qobuz support and a bespoke control app. The fit and finish of all of the models on display was truly. They also didn't sound too shabby.

Ruark

I was then literally grabbed from talking to Udo to almost jogging upstairs for Ruark's launch of the MR1 Mk 2 active speakers.



The original MR1's were well received but Ruark has given them a refresh. In place of the 'classic' wooden design of their predecessors, the new kids look every bit in keeping with the latest

trends. Now the speakers are wrapped in walnut or a soft grey finish. The removable grille is now replaced by a fixed grille made of designer-milled fabric.

It's not just a sartorial exercise though. The controller has been refreshed and now features three LEDs that show system status and input. You can stream tunes via Bluetooth with apt-X, and plug in a Chromecast Audio streaming dongle to the optical input. There's also an aux input for connecting any device with a headphone or analogue output. At the press launch they were playing nicely with a Rega P2.

Then there's the added benefit of Ruark Audio's Backpack II power pack. With one of these slapped on the back you don't need to plug them into the mains. Disconnect a single speaker from the control unit, and it will switch to mono mode, making it ideal as a portable speaker if you have to put the kettle on midway through a podcast.

The speakers are equipped with the same neodymium motor systems as their predecessors, but improvements have been made through refinement to the loudspeaker crossover and topology of the linear Class A-B amplifiers.

The MR1 Mk2s go on sale this month, priced £330



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Day 2

I was up and at them on Saturday as I had barely scratched the surface of the show on Friday.

In my mind I had a game plan, have a swift tour of the ground and lower ground floors and then work top down. Just as I dropped my coat off at the cloakroom (the attendant informed me that he remembered it from the previous day and that my blue leather biker jacket had been his favourite so far that weekend) a friend invited me for a quick pre-show drink. How could I refuse?

After a swift pint or two and catch-up it was back to the plan – I definitely wanted to spend more time with brands I hadn't listened to before.

As usual, the ground floor packs in a microcosm of the HiFi industry. Cables, speakers, head-fi, streaming, racks, stands and isolation – you name it, it's here.

This is also where you'll find more familiar brands if this is your first foray in to this sometimes exotic world. **Sony**, **Arcam**, **Sennheiser**, **Pioneer** and **Onkyo** all had a presence; as did the Danish A/V brand, **Loewe** who was just inside the front door showing everyone its bild TV and klang speakers.



Innuos

Innuos, just like Melco, tickles my gadgety glands as they deal with the storage and playback of your digital audio library.



The little Zen Mini is their entry level device. As its name suggests, it is also the smallest in the Zen range. This little music server can be yours with a 1TB HDD for under £700.

Just like the other Zens, the Mini is powered by innuOS - Innuos' own operating system. It enables a completely computer-free method for managing CD ripping, importing digital music and editing album data and cover art.

The Zens are also Roon compatible. The next step up is the Zen (from £1500), then there's the top flight Zenith (from £2300).

The Zenith is packing a triple linear power supply using Nichicon MUSE acoustic series capacitors, medical-grade mains filter and Ultra low-noise USB Audio Output. In the case of this trio, they all each had a Chord Hugo TT to play through.

The Zenith is designed to isolate power noise from your Hi-fi. It is also equipped with in-memory playback with 4GB cache.

You can play Hi-Res music up to 32 bit/384 KHz, DSD256 as well as MQA, when connecting to compatible DACs.

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Esoteric

Esoteric is another company looking after digital sounds. Their room sounded wonderful, thanks to their Super Audio CD players and amplifiers.

If you were under the impression that CD players are built as equals, then you should really check this Japanese brand out.



Chord Electronics

I have been a fan of what Chord Electronics does since I first found their oddly attractive digital loveliness.

Their looks might not be for everyone but I love the industrial designs.

Where I could ramble on about their larger components (the Blu MKII and DAVE (£8,500) are wonderful though), it's the portable units that beckoned me over to Stand 5.

I've had the Chord Mojo to play with, which is awesome, but now it has a friend called Poly. With Poly, Mojo is handed the skills of a high-res wireless network music player and streamer. Poly also can playback from SD cards too, which is handy.

The Mojo has to be one of the best portable headphone amp/DACs currently available, with the Poly it just gets more versatile.



Dynaudio

This room was not only welcoming but there was a huge picture of David Bowie on the back wall.



The new Contour speakers made their presence felt.

Apart from the Esotar2 soft-dome tweeter, everything else is brand new – from the woofers and bass drivers (using Dynaudio's own MSP cone material) and lightweight aluminium voice-coils, to the cabinets, internal bracing, innovative high-quality crossovers and solid machined aluminium baffles.

I was also intrigued by the company's Xeo wireless range of speakers.



Q Acoustics

A UK debut at the show was thanks to Q Acoustics. They had brought their Concept 500 to Bristol. These £3,600 flagship loudspeakers take the existing Q Acoustics design principles from featured in the Concept 40 and then runs with them.

The triple layer Gelcore cabinet uses resonators and specialist bracing to provide as inert a structure as possible to allow the two newly designed low-distortion 16.5cm mid/bass drive units and 28mm soft-dome tweeter to perform unhindered. All of this is brought together by a Linkwitz-Riley crossover that's comprised of a Mundorf Supreme polypropylene capacitor in the tweeter feed paired with a large 10x10cm Mundorf air-core inductor; the latter having to be housed in the base of the speaker.



Quad

No less flexible and sounding very good indeed was Quad's Artera One all-in-one system.

The Artera has UPnP streaming, CD support, digital and analogue inputs and a very pleasant industrial design. Quad clearly has some confidence in the capabilities of the Artera as they were demonstrating it with their electrostatic speakers which are relatively demanding speakers and extremely revealing at the same time.



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Focal

After a quick drink (it is important to stay hydrated!) I had a wander over to try on some of Focal's headphones.



The rather bling-tastic gold edition Utopia cans weren't really my thing, but the moderately priced (£800) Elear sounded pretty good hooked up to a chunk of Naim gear.

Naturally, I had to loiter to get ears on with the Utopia (£3,300). I was expecting good things and I was not disappointed. The environment wasn't perfect (that's the only downside to The Bristol Show) but these open-back headphones were not only comfortable but the ultra-lightweight 40mm pure beryllium dome drivers really had me engaged.



Naim

As there seemed a lot of cross-pollination between Focal and Naim, it seemed only fair to drop in on these too.

Again, there were large, expensive show stoppers here but it was the diminutive Uniti Atom (£1,600) that I spent some quality time with.

The Naim build quality goes without saying but the sound from its 40-bit digital signal processor, Burr-Brown DAC and A/B Class amplifier was quite amazing.

The physical controls were smooth and the LCD screen is clear and vibrant, but the playback, that was so silky, wide and lively, I wanted to take it home with me right there and then.



Dali

I do love Dali speakers and I make no secret of it, so I had to drop in to Room 118 to hear their new Epicon loudspeakers, as well as checking out the more affordable Spektor series.

The Epicon 6 (£7,800) and 2 (£3,750) speakers were being driven by Meridian kit and they did sound potent. I am still begging them to let me test a pair at home but I know it will be a bitter-sweet affair. I really did get attached to the Rubicons and the Menuets when I had them.



Again, there were large, expensive show stoppers here but it was the diminutive Uniti Atom (£1,600) that I spent some quality time with

SOUND & VISION, THE BRISTOL SHOW 2017

Neat Acoustics

Neat by name, Neat by nature. When I entered this room I did not expect the sound in there to be generated by a pair of tiny, angled speakers.



The Neat Iota Alpha (£1,385) are quite unlike any other speakers at the show, or anywhere I dare bet. These floorstanders might only be 45cm tall but the soundstage they deliver is nothing short of outstanding.

They are loaded with a 50mm EMIT planar magnetic tweeter and 10cm mid/bass unit. There is also an extra 13.4cm bass driver firing downwards in the bass, errrr... base of the enclosure.

The Iota Alphas come as a mirrored pair and in the room they were set with the tweeters on the outside. I was really quite taken by them, although one of the tracks played did come across a little too clinical for my tastes – but you always have to give the set-ups at Bristol a bit of leeway.

ELAC

I headed over to ELAC as I wanted the chance to hear their Miracord turntable (£1,750). Not only would it really suit my living-room in black and white so, so well, but this is the 90th Anniversary model too so I should really pay my respects.

The deck was fitted with an Audio Technica moving magnet cartridge and not only looked the business but sounded excellent.

They were also demo'ing their new Element EA101EQ-G amplifier (£625). It might only be the size of a decent hard-back book, but it put out some great sound.

This appears to be a really friendly amplifier for those who don't want to

have to mess with things but, should you want to, it's all done through a smart device app.

When setting up you can label the Element's inputs to what makes sense to you. So, if you want one of the analogue inputs to be called 'Jay's Wheels of Steel', for instance, you can. The app also has 'Auto Blend'. If you don't have a subwoofer, the app will take you straight over to room EQ settings. If you do own a sub then you can start inputting crossover frequencies.

The app certainly works as the EA101 paired with the Uni-Fi FS speakers (£1,200) sounded clear and without the blooming bass of some other, more expensive systems. Again, some might suit the rooms they're in a bit better than others but I was impressed by what I was hearing from a system costing around £1,800.



NuNu Distribution – Quadral

Checking out one of the first rooms organised by distributor NuNu, I was very much taken by the Oracle Paris turntable. It's been around for a number of years now but I still find it striking, in a rather understated way.

On show here were the new Galan 9 desktop speakers. These are the smallest of the Aurum range and pack a 16cm woofer with a tweeter on top. Don't let their size fool you though; these can certainly still pack a very focused punch.

If you prefer floorstanders, the Chromium Style 8 are rather lovely.



NuNu Distribution – TAD

In the next room I went in search of the Micro Evolution One TAD-ME1-K bookshelf speakers.

Now, I was looking for some compact, almost desktop-sized speakers. What I discovered was something kicking out a remarkably punchy low-end on stands.

The ME1-K do look awesome and purposeful to me. I would definitely make room for them in my home for their looks alone. To be fair, I think they are 'Micro' for the huge sound that they dish out. The speakers feature a 16cm woofer and 9cm CST1 driver with beryllium tweeter. They measure 251mm (W) × 411mm (H) × 402mm (D) which isn't really micro. They also tip the scales at around 20Kg each.

The speakers are tuned to give a "natural deep bass sound" thanks in part to a bi-directional ADS2 (Aero-Dynamic Slot) port. I was really taken by these but couldn't help wonder if they'd actually be happy in my small London living room or would I find them pacing the



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Acoustic Energy

Naturally I had to pay a visit to hear the new AE1 Actives from Acoustic Energy.



The speakers feature the company's pure piston ceramic aluminium cone technology, now in its fifth generation. This offers exceptional stiffness without weighing the speakers down too much.

The new unit is designed to work in harmony with AE's Wide Dispersion Technology waveguide, for seamless integration with the mid/bass driver. The result is a wide, spacious image.

Electronically, the AE1 Active is an all-analogue design. They certainly sounded natural and effortless whilst producing a very impressive sound in the notoriously tricky environment of The Marriott.

In particular I loved the way these handled vocals and acoustic instruments in a way that allowed their expressiveness shine through.

The AE1 Actives are on sale now, priced £1,000 for the piano black or piano white finish, and £1,200 for the piano cherry veneer.

SOTA Acoustics

SOTA were demoing the Mark Audio range of speakers. It is great to still find people treading their own speaker design path. The Tozzi are really eye-catching as well as beautifully made. I handled the Tozzi Two flagship model and there was no mistaking the quality of construction. They are formed of custom machined alloy billets and feature an advanced composite core. They are loaded with a single-suspension drive unit and sound as good as they look. They really do make a statement in a room sat atop Manfrotto camera tripods – this is what happens when you allow a photographer to design speakers.

I do like the neat touches from this brand. The velvet that is beneath the grilles of the gorgeous Viotti One is another example.



Technics

The Technics SL1210GR was here to make its UK debut.

I've never been one for DJ-lead music, I do like some Hip Hop and such but I never hailed the classic wheels of steel as something to hanker for. But, meeting the GR in the flesh, so to speak, I could sense my credit card ducking for cover.

The GR does make some concessions to affordability (£1300 compared with the £4,000 GAE model), but it still looks and feels fantastic. Still not convinced that it would get me to take up mixing and matching, you'll be glad to hear.



Elipson

I was really surprised by how well the Alpha turntable preformed (check out my review on GadgetyNews) but the new Omega looks something else.

Elipson has launched a new carbon-clad version of its Omega 100 RIAA BT turntable and it is jaw-droppingly gorgeous.

Called the Omega 100 RIAA BT Carbon, it's almost identical to its predecessor, but there are a few key differences.



Starting with the most obvious, the deck is made of carbon, giving it a cool new look. The lift arm is now made of aluminium, and it features an Ortofon 2M Red cartridge.

Other than that, it's the same turntable, which is no bad thing at all considering how good the Alpha is.

Features including a phono stage, USB output and Bluetooth make it a thoroughly modern deck. All this for £700 if you go for the Carbon version. You can save £200 if you opt for the 'standard' Omega.



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Leema

The Leema room was showing off its latest and greatest.



The Quasar all-in-one system takes the company's strengths in amplification and decoding and carefully melds it with UPnP streaming to create a rather impressive one-box system.

With it you get Tidal and Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth, along with digital and analogue inputs. These are all lovingly served through a 150 watt class AB amplifier.

The company also took the opportunity to demo the Sirius music server. This is a Rip NAS can be ordered as a straight server or with a DAC board added so it can be tasked as more direct digital source. Leema has partnered with the aforementioned Innuos to provide the guts of the Sirius which, after listening to their kit, seems like a good move to me.



Leema was putting their kit through a Tucana Anniversary amp that celebrates ten years of the original Tucana. This was powering a pair of ATC floorstanders the sound was powerful and controlled. This was one of my favourite sounding rooms of the show this year.

Canton

As I could never seem to get in to Arcam's presentation of their new Reference Atmos Cinema MK2 (everyone I spoke to were singing its praises which made it even worse for me) I went on the hunt for other ways of boosting your movie audio.

My first stop was Canton. Their DM100 soundbase (£580) was on show. It kicks out 200 watts through its 10 drivers (2 x tweeters, 4 x mids, 4 x subs) and is equipped with virtual sound tech. Best of all it only uses one cable to connect to your telly – great news if you're wall mounting your flat screen. It also comes with Bluetooth so you can stream music from your phone or other similarly connected device. Of course, the soundbase has been designed to sit your telly ontop.



The output was impressive with soundtracks sounding huge whilst also keeping dialogue clear. I do like the addition of Hotel mode which cuts some of the bass so it doesn't disturb those in the next room.

Orbitsound

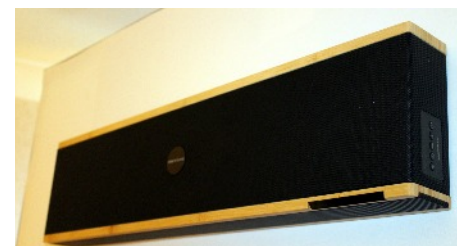
Orbitsound are also in the business of improving your televisual enjoyment.

They offer a range of soundbars that are a little more discrete than the Canton soundbase.

When I entered the room they had their airSOUND A70 (£500) soundbar playing. This sounded great and wide, especially for its size. This soundbar will easily slip underneath your television and, thanks to its wireless sub, bring better depth and immersion to your viewing.

The P70 (£300) panels are for those who need a little more oomph but all in one box. They are also more versatile as this can be wall mounted, placed on a shelf or simply under your TV. Thanks to its integrated 5.25-inch subwoofer, it really does make its presence felt.

Naturally, it has all the usual connectivity options – Bluetooth, Optical and Aux included.



SOUND & VISION, THE BRISTOL SHOW 2017

Bristol Show Round Up

I could go on and on, and mention the new speakers from Spondor, how much I was impressed by the Ophidian Mojós, how lovely the Michell turntables sounded, and so on. The thing is I am sure all of those will be covered elsewhere in this fine publication.

My intention here was to give you a glimpse of what I found particularly interesting and, perhaps I visited areas that you might have missed.

As always, The Bristol Show delivered on its promise to provide music-lovers something for every taste and budget. True, the bigger budgets were well catered for but, if you looked for them, there were items for those with a budget closer to what I have – i.e. not much after rent, food and transport. It is always nice to get to hear and enjoy those more aspirational components though, isn't it?

I am glad that I have Headroom to look forward to just around the corner as I am

already feeling like I need another fix of new shiny audio gear.



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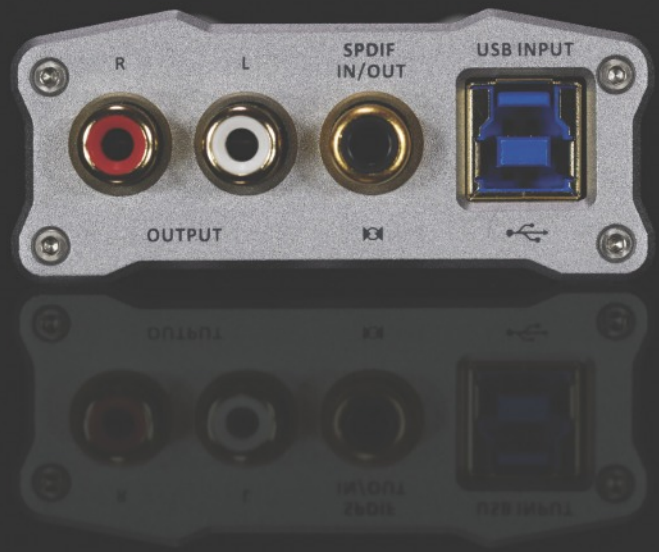
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Hifi Pig

Sound & Vision 2017 Bird's Eye View

By Linette Smith

For us here at Hifi Pig, Sound and Vision Bristol marks the start of the Hifi Show calendar. Even though we are out of the country, this is technically the closest show to Hifi Pig Towers, a mere stones throw over the channel and a nice relaxing ferry ride and pootle up by car from Plymouth. Or it usually is. We should have maybe taken it as a sign of impending doom when the Pig Mobile decided to take a hissy fit the day before departure and have to go to car hospital to await parts

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A last minute change to the Reserve Pig Mobile and we were off. We are only a hop and a skip from Roscoff so that part of the journey was fine...early boarding had us on the Armorique in time for an early dinner, a few glasses of wine and a sleep. Now once we got under-way, things were a little choppy, which were were expecting as Storm Doris was predicted to sweep over the North of England and Scotland, as we were heading for the South west we expected things not to be bad at all. We arrived on time and took the scenic route up to Brizzle, it was quite breezy but didn't seem too bad. Checked in and a speedy lunch eaten we met with the lovely people from Tannoy who were, handily, in the same hotel. They were not attending the actual show but meeting with various distributors and press. They had invited Hifi Pig for a private, world exclusive first listen to their new Legacy range of speakers. These were the prototypes and you can read more about our encounter with them here...suffice to say we were very impressed. [Link To Tannoy Article](#)

As we had arrived on set up day, before the start of the show, we had decided to meet with Grandma Hifi Pig who was getting the train down from Yorkshire. Settled in the bar to wait for her we noticed an almighty hubbub going on outside with flashing lights and screaming sirens all the way up and down the road directly outside the hotel. Storm Doris, it seemed, had got a

particular temper on her and was battering the west of the UK pretty viciously. Something had fallen off the building next to us and hit a pedestrian (who was thankfully OK in the end). This resulted in the main road being closed, traffic chaos, total gridlock and a lot of delayed hifi people trying to get to the show to set up. Exhibitors had a lot of trouble trying to get in to set up, gear deliveries were delayed and it did look like there may not be show to open on Friday. Grandma Hifi Pig was delayed by trees on the line for several hours but did eventually make it in time for dinner.

When we arrived at the Marriott the next morning there were already people queuing around the block. Despite the best efforts of the elements, the show was up and running...to make things even better, the lifts were all working, after the trouble they had caused last year, this was a bonus! We applied the 'Munich Strategy' and started from the top down, probably the best way to make sure nothing is missed. We do endeavour to visit every room and the only thing that stops this is if the room is doing closed door dems and the bouncers on the door don't want to let us in. Fortunately this only happened with a couple of rooms as most people realise that as press people we are pretty good at sneaking in to grab a listen and some pictures without disturbing things...unfortunately sometimes people on the door don't realise that not letting

Despite the best efforts of the elements, the show was up and running...to make things even better, the lifts were all working, after the trouble they had caused last year, this was a bonus



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the press in means no coverage! We were very impressed with the show over the three days. It was extremely well attended and there was a real buzz about the whole event. The exhibitors had worked super hard to make sure it was a great show and everyone was very happy about the amount of people visiting their rooms. We noticed a lot of younger people and families and the female attendance was higher than previous years (this is measured by the 'Ladies Toilet Scale' ie, if you regularly have to queue in the ladies then there are a lot of women there). It was very well organised and the facilities were excellent. Team Hifi Pig was there in force with several of our reviewers visiting over the weekend, we all had our snoofing heads on and the whole team had a great time.

You will have already read Stuart's report covering many of the rooms at the show, so I thought I would mention the ones that I really enjoyed at this year's Bristol Sound and Vision Hifi Show.

With this being a British show, it was good to see many of the British brands exhibiting really supporting fellow Brits in the industry and using their complementary kit in their displays. This was evident with cables, spotting plenty of systems wired with the likes of The Chord Company, Atlas and Tellurium Q. We spotted Quadraspire and Hifi Racks' British made products in many of the rooms and also GIK Acoustics panels

seemed popular. The 'Made in Britain' mantra was done very well in the patriotic Harbeth room, who were showing their new 40th anniversary loudspeaker updates to a packed house, proving that well made British products are more in vogue than ever.

Acoustic Energy had a very cool red, white and blue theme, their 30th birthday coinciding with that of the show's and they were celebrating with the launch of the equally cool AE1 Active standmount speakers.

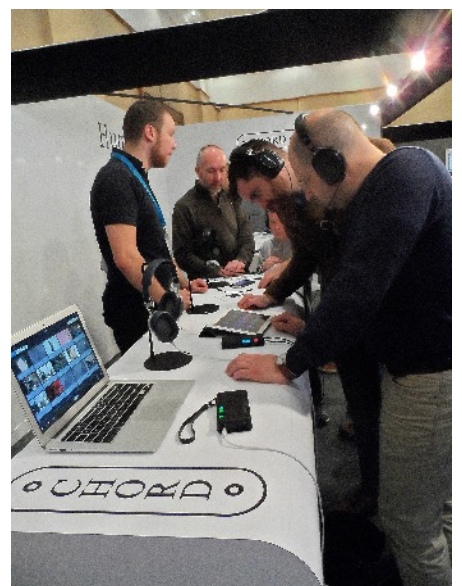
Another well known Brit Brand, **PMC**, were celebrating their distribution partnership with high end German electronics brand, **AVM**. We were treated to the new AVM all in one range with PMC's 25 series loudspeakers, this looks and sounds like a perfect partnership of German and British engineering and design.



A new partnership of two iconic British Brands was being celebrated by **Monitor Audio**, following their recent acquisition of London based **Roksan**. The Roksan Blak electronics and Monitor loudspeakers are an excellent combination as we found out in their 2nd floor room and up on the 10th floor their was a 5.1 flagship Platinum cinematic experience. Monitor are obviously sensitive to their fellow exhibitors and took their powerful sub and surround system where it would not disturb anyone else, judging by the rumbling sub-bass on some corridors, other exhibitors could perhaps take note of this considerate approach.



I can't really cover British brands without mentioning **Chord Electronics**, Colin and the team were, as ever, welcoming and knowledgeable and playing a great selection of tunes. I particularly enjoyed experiencing the new Blu MkII CD transport with the Dave DAC, these make a statement in their unconventional design and deliver on sound quality, plus are pretty compact. They also had a stand featuring their Mojo, Poly and Hugo 2 in the Headfi earlier which was swamped with punters all the time.



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The proudly Welsh **Leema Acoustics** had a great sound in their room, and it looked well styled too. They have partnered with a brand that seems to be taking the audiophile world by storm, Innuos, with whom they have developed their new Sirius music server. I like the Leema concept as they can turn their hand to audiophile grade products but also have more affordable ranges that still are great quality.

Malvern Audio Research's room was a stunning combination of black, copper and valves. Mark proudly showed me his new Legato tube phono stage, who is a coppery little beauty of a thing...Mark described her as 'evilly beautiful' which did sum her up well! This room was featuring the Pearl Acoustics Sibelius loudspeakers. I discovered Pearl Acoustics speakers in several rooms and enjoyed the sound of them very much, I think these single driver speakers will be one to watch out for in the future.



stylish and delivered on point with a clean detailed sound that was non-clinical, wish I had longer to spend in their room but we were in there on our last morning before heading home.

Q Acoustics treated us to the production model of their new Concept 500 floorstander (see next page). We had heard, and been impressed by, the prototype at last year's Munich, so it was great to experience the finished article. Q Acoustics deliver an excellent range of well performing affordable gear and the 500 could see off much more expensive speakers quite easily. Steve Reichert (below), who has been a great person to deal with over the last 5 years, told us he was retiring after the show...but would probably be back as a visitor next year. As the saying goes,

Danish brand **Dynaudio**, who are another brand that is 40 this year, had their Dynaudio Lounge open for business again with a homage to David Bowie. I love this concept that they have for shows, creating a very stylish place to hang out and experience their speakers, they were showing several lines including the Contour which was launched last year at **High End Munich**. **Wilson Benesch** pulled off a stunning system this year pairing their 'Made in Sheffield' coloured carbon fibre loudspeakers (which I love) with beautiful CH Precision Swiss electronics. Very, very high end. Very



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Writing one of these articles is actually quite tricky as you keep thinking of other rooms that were brilliant. Special mentions also have to go to Sound Foundations, who consistently give us great rooms at shows (Clearaudio and Gamut in particular). Also Elac who's sound I always enjoy and who this year had perhaps the most clever and useful, user friendly bit of tech-fi, their Discovery music server. Music First's room was, as always, a haven of great music as were the NuNu rooms, both with Quadral and TAD, it was evident that a lot of work had gone into making them a success. Bluesound deserve a special mention. We caught their MQA demonstration and they managed to make it informative, interesting and simple...people that just waffle a load of tech spec at the audience could learn a lot from these guys!

I was also very impressed by the **Spendor** rooms and their new A-Line speakers, their higher end room with the D9s and **Devialet** Expert was solid too, but the best of their rooms was with their D7 loudspeakers partnered with an **Auralic** Polaris wireless streaming amplifier (above). Richard from Auralic

whacked on some banging tunes, the sound was tight and precise but with a huge amount of energy, a contender for 'sound of the show' for me and I imagine for the group of young guys who came in for a listen just after us!

The static stands, headfi areas and home cinema exhibits were also very much in demand but time constraints meant we just got a quick whiz round, I think that it just shows how well organised the show is that there is plenty to keep all visitors entertained and engaged. Roll on next year, looking forward to it already!





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Harbeth Celebrating 40 Years

By Harbeth

This year loudspeaker UK
loudspeaker manufacturer
Harbeth celebrates forty
years of production.

Here's a potted history and
what you can expect from
the company in this anniver-
sary year

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This year, loudspeaker company, Harbeth, celebrates a significant milestone – their 40th anniversary. A truly British success story with a BBC legacy at its heart, Harbeth was founded in 1977 by a senior BBC research engineer, Dudley Harwood. With the BBC's consent Harwood was granted a patent and upon his formal retirement, the Harbeth company was created - Harwood was in business as a speaker manufacturer.

Adverts in the hi-fi press announced his 1977 debut HL Monitor (Mk1), built around his newly-patented polypropylene-coned bass-midrange woofer, the world's first. It played louder, handled more power, was more sensitive, had a far tighter bass and lower coloration than the best hand-doped first generation bextrene plastic cones of the earlier BBC monitors.

Throughout the first ten years of production, Harbeth released subsequent

In today's market, what sets Harbeth apart in a crowded market? Well firstly, Alan Shaw has developed the company and its products using exclusive in-house technology and its incredible Harbeth RADIAL™ drive units with their unparalleled musicality



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Mk2 and Mk3 Monitors, with small changes in the characteristics of the bass-midrange drive unit, and overall system balance. It was the development of the novel Mk4 Monitor that transformed the brand and had a dramatic impact on the companies fortunes — ultimately for the better.

In 1985 Harwood was introduced by a supplier to an entirely new type of plastic which could, theoretically, be moulded into a speaker cone. This new material evidently had excellent acoustic properties and just the right mass. It did not have polypropylene's rubbery molecular structure which dried out the 'presence band' of the audio range, just below the transition to the tweeter, a range from which the listener interprets the airiness and freshness in music. The extreme difficulty of vacuum forming a 3D cone shape from the new material, far less malleable than polypropylene was to prove chronic, and unaware of the looming supply problems Harwood announced his new Mk4 monitor to an eager public. The self-evident sonic transparency and natural tonality over conventional speakers led to a flood of orders. Regular supply would be unachievable.

As a youngster excited by the technology of maverick radio broadcasters bobbing about in the 1960s North sea, today's director and designer, Alan Shaw, became a Saturday assistant



the previous models. Shaw, half Harwood's age and having first-hand experience with Japanese Quality Control, supply-chain management, and product innovation suited the Harbeth commercial challenges perfectly. And so, thirty years on with Shaw at the helm, Harbeth was to steadily grow and evolve.

In today's market, what sets Harbeth apart in a crowded market? Well firstly, Alan Shaw has developed the company and its products using exclusive in-house technology and its incredible Harbeth RADIAL™ drive units with their unparalleled musicality.

After years of testing and experimenting with a variety of combinations of different plastics, all of which lacked the ability to create the correct balance of mechanical and acoustic properties for audio reproduction, Shaw concluded that a completely fresh approach was needed.

An injection moulded cone is what sets Harbeth speakers apart from the rest. Not only in looks, with its mirror finish, but in sound, creating the ultimate 'live music' experience. This technology allows Harbeth to produce identical, perfectly symmetrical diaphragms of uniform thickness, sensitivity, and above all, consistently clear tonality: impossible from conventional cones. Using a secret formula of a combination of three materials, selected for their perfect

the entire Harbeth team are 100% happy with the result.

In celebration of their 40th anniversary this year Harbeth have launched two new ultimate editions of two of their models, the SHL5plus and their flagship, the M40.2. The beautiful features of these editions include; a stunning walnut veneer, the latest WBT-nextgen binding posts, a new-look super-tweeter with protection bar on the SHL5plus and British-made audio grade poly capacitors. To celebrate the sophistication of these models, each speaker will include the Harbeth 40th Anniversary limited edition front and back badges and a new magnetic anniversary grille badge. A matching walnut stand is available from Hi-Fi Racks.

Alan Shaw, Designer and Managing Director, says - "We were keen to really make an impact with our 40th Anniversary year in 2017. We've had many requests over the years for special features from both customers and distributors. What better way to mark this milestone than with these limited edition products."

From the first HL Compact loudspeaker that Shaw created in 1987 to the largest M40.2, each lovingly crafted loudspeaker is a unique combination of tradition and technology that produces the natural sound they are famous for worldwide. Proof that after nearly 40 years, they really are the world's best-loved loudspeakers.



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Sound & Vision 2017 The Clarity Awards

By Clarity

The Clarity Alliance presented the fifth annual “Best of Show” awards at Sound & Vision, The Bristol Show, on 24 February and announced the fourth recipient of its Honorary Fellowship award

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As part of its constitution, Clarity, the UK hi-fi trade association, undertakes to recognise individuals who have made a significant contribution to the industry. The fourth annual Honorary Fellowship was awarded to one of the most respected members of the UK hi-fi industry, Naim Audio's former chairman and managing director, Paul Stephenson (above right).

Presenting the award, Clarity's chairman, Tom Barron, (above left) said, "Paul has been part of the Naim Audio family since 1981 when he joined as sales director. His illustrious career saw

him rise through the ranks to become managing director in 1999 and, following the merger with Focal, chairman in July 2015, a position he held until his retirement in December last year.

"The board of directors of Clarity felt he was the obvious choice to be the recipient of this year's Honorary Fellowship, presented in recognition, on behalf of the whole industry, of the tremendous contribution he has made to the promotion of hi-fi at home and across the world. We offer our congratulations to Paul on his hugely

successful career, which has seen Naim become the force it is today and for his well-deserved retirement."

Clarity's team of anonymous judges, who visited every room at the show, also awarded prizes in the "Best of Show" awards to five companies whose efforts in putting on the best displays and demonstrations were considered exceptional.

The awards were presented to:

"Best Sounding Hi-Fi Room" – KEF



"Best Home Cinema Room" – Arcam



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“Best Presented Room” – Dynaudio



“Best Innovation” – Devialet



“Best of Show” – Naim Audio



Clarity would like to thank the show organisers for supporting the idea of a “Best of Show” awards, Naim Audio for the use of its room for the presentations, PMC for sponsoring the bar and the UK hi-fi industry for making the effort to present hi-fi to consumers with such enthusiasm.

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Hifi Pig

Sound & Vision 2017 Hifi Pig Loves You Award

By Linette Smith

At every show we visit around the world Hifi Pig likes to give an award to the exhibitors room that we enjoyed the most. We take lots of factors into consideration when judging this and not simply the best sound of the day



SOUND & VISION, THE BRISTOL SHOW 2017

Owing to the timing of ferries in February we have to leave the show on the Sunday morning, so after a final mad dash round to make sure we have covered everything, the Bristol Sound And Vision Hifi Pig Loves You Award tends to get decided on the journey home. This is no bad thing really as it gives a chance to carefully consider who will be our winner.

The award is not one for the best sound in show, though that is of course important. We take into consideration things like the look and feel of the room, how welcoming it is, what kind of music they play etc. We have a very diverse set of winners from the various shows we have attended worldwide.

Sometimes it's high end brands that win, sometimes big names and sometimes more unknown brands. Hifi Shops and distributors have also won in the past few years.

Both Stuart and I agreed that the Bristol Show this year had a real buzz about it, right from the off it felt very positive and was very busy. The standard of the exhibits was excellent and it was great to have plenty of the Hifi Pig team there helping us to snoofle out the very best there was on offer.

Plenty of us agreed that the Wilson Benesch room was very fine indeed.

They have picked one of the best places to exhibit and I don't blame them for keeping the big Conservertory room each year. It gives plenty of room to show off the great looking and sounding gear that they have, not just from their own brand, but this year in particular with the CH Precision electronics that won the award in conjunction with Gobel High End at the Warsaw Show last November.

Sound Foundations room which Alex Denyer set up with a great sounding system and naturally chilled room made the shortlist as did the superbly presented ELAC room and the Dynaudio room too.

The Leema Acoustics room is another I mentioned in my earlier report and it seems I wasn't the only one to think it was an excellent sounding and very pleasant to be in room. They were playing a great 'non audiophile' combination of music that showed the equipment off and entertained the visitors.

I feel that Audioquest deserve a mention. They consistently have good rooms at shows though are maybe easily overlooked for more flashy rooms when they are exhibiting their affordable and tiny DragonFly DACs and JitterBug USB filters. The ambience in their room

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was great, probably the most relaxed room in the show with people chilling out and the settees and even the floor just listening to the tunes, it felt like being in a friend's lounge!

So, to the winner(s)...Spendor had three rooms in total. We were impressed with their new A-Line Speakers in the first room and with their higher end D9 speakers with Devialet and Melco in the third room. However it was the middle room, that in the word's of Goldilocks 'was juuuuust right'.

The room was a partnership of Auralic and Spendor. It immediately felt like a room that you wanted to go into and listen and was comfortable, with that 'sitting down at home' feel to it. Richard from Auralic was manning the room when we visited and, with a fantastic disregard for audiophile traditions, whacked on some banging electronic tunes. The Auralic Polaris all in one unit alongside the Spendor D7 floorstanders was an excellent system. The sound was precise and fast and most importantly great fun. There was a stream of people coming in to listen, notably a youthful crowd while we were there, just showing that more traditional manufacturers like



Spendor can move with the times and attract a younger audience. We could have stayed in their a lot longer than we did and were very impressed by what is an affordable and liveable-with real world system, a high end sound at not an astronomical price. This is, to be fair, the way hifi seems to be (and needs to be) going, a great balance between quality sound and listening experience and actually having a hifi that you don't have to let take over your whole living space. I feel that it is this approach, delivering these kind of products that

will ensure there is still a hifi industry for us all to enjoy down the line.

Auralic and Spendor, you guys make a great team, keep up the good work....Hifi Pig Loves You!

We let the team from Auralic and Spendor know that they had won our award just before publication, here's what they had to say:

'The Auralic Polaris streaming amplifier distils many of our core technologies in to one, compact component which delivers astonishing performance. Partnering Spendor's remarkable D7's produced a thoroughly engaging, lifelike, un-fatiguing sound. We're absolutely delighted to receive this award - thank you!'

Richard Bates - Auralic UK

'The Spendor D7 is an elegant, modern, medium-size, floor-standing loudspeaker, that delivers music with a fresh vibrant realism that makes it a perfect partner for the Auralic Polaris. Presenting captivating and innovative products to all generations of music lovers has long been a Spendor goal, so we are very pleased to be given this award in recognition of the demonstration at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show.'

Mike Picanza - Spendor UK

