

# Hifi Pig

## EXTRA

## & GadgetyNews

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**MARCH**  
**2017**

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**MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300ii**  
**LOUDSPEAKERS**  
**ARCAYDIS EB2S LOUDSPEAKERS**  
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**BenQ GL2706PQ 27-inch monitor**  
**TP-Link Archer VR2800 DSL modem**

**PLUS LOADS OF REAL MUSIC NEWS,  
REVIEWS AND MORE!**





# Tellurium Q®

**8 products of the year and most wanted components**  
in just 2 years by preserving relative phase relationships in a signal



"The Stereo Times Most Wanted Components 2015 Award" (USA) - **Stereo Times**



"Tellurium Q have surpassed themselves here. It is often said that all cables colour the sound of a system to some extent, but the Silver Diamonds do it to a lesser extent than any other product I've heard so far."

- Jon Myles, *HiFi World* 2015

"But perhaps their reticence is understandable when the product sounds as good as this - after all, why let others in on the secret? Used in a variety of systems the Black Diamonds consistently revealed a wider perceived bandwidth, bigger soundstage and the ability to present transient details in an effortless fashion."

- Awards Edition, *HiFi World* 2015

"The Tellurium Q company has once again proved their products belong at the top of current cabling offerings. No matter how secretive or even mystic their approach may seem, the indisputable fact is their cables show a level of reproduction quality so far unheard of."

- Mono & Stereo, 2015

Find out why Tellurium Q® cables are achieving an audio cable grand slam from the publications below. Why not contact Tellurium Q or one of our many dealers, now.



**Stereo Times**  
The Complete Audiophile Magazine

**BEST PRODUCT 2015** High Fidelity.pl

**HI-FI WORLD**





## WELCOME

Welcome to the March edition of Hifi Pig Extra and Gadgety News Magazine. This is a bumper edition which also has all the news and reviews that we ran online in January and February and were unable to get out in a PDF format.

In this edition there's a couple of Outstanding Product awards given to Volya for their Bouquet loudspeakers and to Tellurium Q for their Silver Diamond speaker cables and interconnects.

April's Edition will be out on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April and we're hoping that we can bring you some very exciting news about some new products that we have been working on over the last few months.

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## HIFI NEWS & REVIEWS

### HIFI PIG NEWS

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## MUSIC

### MUSIC NEWS AND REVIEWS



## GADGETYREVIEWS

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Buffalo MiniStation Velocity USB SSD

Toshiba Canvio Premium 3TB HDD

BenQ GL2706PQ 27-inch monitor

TP-Link Archer VR2800 DSL modem



## Mark Levinson Launch First Turntable, The N°515



**M**ark Levinson has introduced their first ever turntable, the N°515, which they say is “designed for the discriminating analogue music lover”. Created in partnership with VPI Industries, the N° 515 Turntable is the first turntable that they say is “worthy of the Mark Levinson name”.

The N° 515 is based on a highly damped vinyl-wrapped MDF and aluminium sandwich main chassis, supporting a 20-pound Aluminium platter driven by an isolated high torque AC

synchronous motor and precision-machined pulley/triple belt system.

The N° 515 includes a gimbal-mounted, 3D-printed tonearm with integral headshell, stainless steel counterweight, and discrete internal cartridge lead routing. The N° 515 turntable will be available in Summer 17 either with or without a factory installed moving coil phono cartridge.

**First indications will be that pricing will start around 10,000 US\$ or £10,000 in the UK.**

### Nordost Release Valhalla 2 USB 2.0 Cable



**F**or the first time, for the Valhalla 2 USB 2.0, Nordost is introducing a flat, twin-axial geometry to its USB cables. This layout allows the two signal wires to run parallel, compared to the standard twisted-pair configuration, shortening the signal path and, say Nordost, “drastically increasing transfer speeds”.

**SRP US\$3,499.99 for a 1 metre length, additional 1 metre increments are US\$1,200**

### TIDAL Launches New ‘Master’ Audio Feature



**G**lobal music and entertainment platform, TIDAL, has announced the availability of ‘Master’ quality recordings. A wide variety of content from labels and artists, including Warner Music Group’s music catalogue, is now available in Master audio across all of TIDAL’s available markets worldwide.

TIDAL has integrated MQA, the technology that enables this innovation, and has offered it to all TIDAL Hifi tier subscribers under a new ‘Master’ listing. Initially available on desktop, a wide range of recordings are already available and TIDAL have said that the collection will grow rapidly.

## OPPO Announces Sonica DAC Audiophile Digital-to-Analogue Converter and Network Streamer

OPPO Digital have announced that the new Sonica DAC is ready for release. The newest entry into the OPPO family of digital audio products, Sonica DAC merges audiophile-grade performance with the latest network streaming technology, says the company's recent press release.

With more and more music coming from digital sources, the DAC (Digital-to-Analog Converter) is one of the most important components in the playback chain. Sonica DAC improves upon the audio performance of previous OPPO products, such as the HA-1 headphone amplifier and BDP-105 universal player, and presents an upgraded DAC chipset, the flagship ESS ES9038PRO SABRE DAC

As a network streamer, the companion Sonica app for iOS and Android allows you to conveniently stream music from your smart phone or tablet, as well as from network shares on a computer or NAS drive. As a traditional audiophile DAC, Sonica DAC features all of the inputs and features that you expect, including the ability to handle high resolution PCM and DSD audio formats. On top of that, its ability to function as a high-resolution audio player and decode files directly from connected USB hard drives and thumb drives enhances its versatility.

**The main features of Sonica DAC include:**



**Asynchronous USB DAC for Computer Audio:** By bypassing the low fidelity, poor quality DAC of traditional computer soundcards, Sonica DAC turns any computer into a high performance multi-media source by converting digital audio to analog through the ES9038PRO chip. The asynchronous transfer mode uses the high precision clock inside Sonica DAC to drive the audio signal, not relying on the clock quality of the computer. The USB DAC input supports PCM up to 768 kHz 32-bit and DSD up to 25 MHz (DSD512).

**High Resolution Music Playback and Streaming:** Play music files of many formats from USB drives attached to Sonica DAC, or from home network computers and servers connected via Ethernet or Wi-Fi. Stream music from your smartphone and tablet via Wi-Fi using the Sonica app. Sonica DAC is a high resolution audio player and decoder capable of decoding audio files up to 24-bit / 192 kHz from formats such as

FLAC, WAV and Apple Lossless, as well as DSD files at 64x sample rate.

As a member of the OPPO Sonica product family, the AUX input of Sonica DAC enables you to connect an existing analog audio source to the Sonica multi-room network. Add some Sonica Wi-Fi speakers and enjoy your favorite tunes anywhere in your home.

Sonica DAC provides both XLR balanced and RCA single-ended connectors for its audio output. The audio path is fully balanced from the DAC chip all the way to the XLR jacks. Even the RCA output signal is converted from the balanced output. The balanced design provides better common-mode noise rejection and improves signal quality. It also ensures better channel separation by eliminating the common ground return path. A toroidal linear power supply provides a very clean and robust power source to the audio circuitry

Sonica DAC is easy to setup and convenient to use. For the network connection, it offers both wired Ethernet and built-in Wi-Fi supporting 802.11 a/b/g/n and ac standards. The free Sonica app allows you to easily navigate your music collection and control playback, and it is available for both iOS and Android smartphones or tablets. Additionally, Sonica DAC supports Apple AirPlay and Bluetooth, enabling instantaneous wireless audio. Coaxial and optical digital audio inputs provide an easy connection to additional digital audio sources, while the 12V trigger input and output make it possible to turn on and off the entire audio system with one click.

**Sonica DAC is available for \$799**





## LeCable By Triangle



As a French player in high fidelity for more than 35 years, Triangle has introduced a new collection of cables, which they say is “dedicated to optimising the performance of the loudspeakers, while guaranteeing the emblematic Triangle sound characteristics of extraordinary openness and dynamics. All LeCable products provide an excellent conductivity, ensuring a perfect and balanced transmission”.

The Opera range offers cross-section cables of 2.5mm<sup>2</sup> ensuring a true musical experience, accessible to all. The tinned OFC (Oxygen free copper, coated treated with tin) treatment and the coiling braiding of the cable allow a high purity (99.99%). Cables with “tinned” treatment offer better longevity by greatly limiting the corrosion or oxidation that normally occurs over time. Available in drums of 5, 10 and 100m, as well as in mounted cables of 2x2.5m.

Jewel of the Symphonie range, the conductors of the SYS25A cable are made of OFHC strands of very high purity (Oxygen free copper, 99.999%) benefiting from a special treatment.

In order to eliminate any distortion and electromagnetic disturbance, the conductors benefit from a double insulating jacket made of polyvinyl chloride separated from an antistatic sheet. It is completed with an outer sheath of fabric for better protection. Factory mounted, the banana plugs have a special treatment (silver plating) that minimises distortion. Anodised aluminium caps ensure signal protection. Available in a mounted cable of 2x2.5m in a cross-section of 2.5mm<sup>2</sup>.

The range also includes easy to assemble (double locking with cable screws) BP400 banana plugs. The plugs have a special treatment (silver plating) that minimises distortion. Anodised aluminium caps ensure excellent signal protection. These new BP400 accept cross-section cables of up to 3.8mm<sup>2</sup> and are available in bundles of 4 plugs.

## PMC Introduces Bryston BCD-3 CD Player To UK



Bryston distributor PMC, is introducing the Bryston BCD-3 CD player to the UK audiophile market, to bring the benefits of its “class-leading” CD transport and digital to analogue converter technology to consumers who are still loyal to the CD format.

The BCD-3 is the latest in a range of Bryston digital products that includes the BDA-3 DAC and utilises its digital technology, plus the fully discrete Bryston Class A analogue output stage and independent analogue and digital power supplies. Designed to conform to the Redbook standard for CD and CDR disc formats, its transport/laser pickup assembly is paired with two AKM 4490 384/32Bit DACs. In turn, the DAC is synchronised to the transport with a single master clock, a Bryston engineered solution that they say “eliminates one of the primary causes of jitter”.

Users have the choice of balanced XLR or unbalanced RCA stereo outputs as well as transformer coupled SPDIF/AES digital outputs. The BCD-3 is network connectable, enabling software upgrades via Ethernet and is fitted with a remote 12-volt trigger input. The front panel, available in black aluminium, with a silver option to order, has been designed to match the style of Bryston’s Cubed Series amplifiers.

Peter Thomas, PMC founder, says of the BCD-3, “There are thousands of music lovers who still want to listen to their substantial CD collections. For many it is the format of choice, and we are very pleased to see our friends at Bryston taking this market seriously and incorporating their excellent DAC technology into a new CD player. Its performance is simply superb and the audiophiles are going to be very pleased with the astonishing levels of clarity and detail it will bring to their music.”

**The BCD-3 will be available in the UK from February 2017 with an MSRP of £3,700.**

## Bowie Stamps Announced By Royal Mail

David Bowie, who died just over a year ago, is to be honoured in a set of stamps and souvenirs by the Royal Mail.

Six of the stamps will feature Bowie album covers: *Hunky Dory* (1971), *Aladdin Sane* (1973), *Heroes* (1977), *Let’s Dance* (1983), *Earthling* (1977) and *Blackstar* (2016).

The remaining four will show images of Bowie performing live during his *Ziggy Stardust Tour* (1972), *The Stage Tour* (1978), *The Serious Moonlight Tour* (1983) and his *A Reality Tour* (2004).



This Special issue will be released on 14 March 2017, pre-orders are available now from the UK’s Royal Mail website.

## TANNOY Announces GRF Legacy Will Continue



**T**ANNOY contacted to tell us that they are “delighted to announce that we will be launching a new Gold Reference GRF range to be ready for delivery in February 2017. This decision was made to meet unprecedented demand from dealers and customers to continue the GRF-90 which sold out in record time”.

They go on to explain “The new speaker will be skillfully hand-crafted in the U.K, with the same exceptional

components as the GRF-90 boasted, but this time as a permanent addition to the TANNOY offering”.

“We are above everything else a business that listens to our customers and there was an overwhelming demand for the GRF to become a permanent addition to the TANNOY range. We listened and I am happy to confirm that we will start 2017 with the GRF an addition to our Prestige product line-up.” says Vice President James Bradbury

“The coveted Prestige GRF boasts time-honoured traditional craftsmanship, evident in the timeless beauty of the oiled walnut veneers and fine cabinet detailing, complemented by intricate etched Gold anodised machined metal trims. The cabinet holds TANNOY's stunning 12" Dual Concentric Driver with signature PepperPot WaveGuide™, Alnico motor system and HF compression driver. Altogether delivering a superbly dynamic overall presentation with fast, accurate bass and a fluid and open midrange”.

The GRF is complete with an exclusive Prestige Range owner's care kit, delivering that extra special touch. The GRF will be available for purchase by the end of February.

## DALI Launch Spektr Series Loudspeakers

**D**ALI have launched their new Spektr series of speakers. Comprising the DALI Spektr 1 and 2 compact standmounts and the Spektr 6 floorstanders, DALI have also added the Spektr Vokal to work as a central speaker with the rest of the range.

DALI say; “Bringing the Spektr series to life has been a delicate balancing act of getting the optimum amount of audio performance, and optimising the production of every element of the speaker. Getting this much Hifi performance from a speaker series in this price range not only took all of our experience and know-how, but also hours and hours spent in the listening



room, improving the driver and crossover designs to create the perfect audio performance”.

They feature soft dome tweeters, wood fibre cones, low signal loss and are 'amplifier friendly',

## RDacoustic Release Euphoria Loudspeakers



**R**Dacoustic of the Czech Republic got in touch to tell us about their new loudspeakers, the Euphoria.

RDacoustic told us: “We are introducing our High End speakers Euphoria in version stereo 2.0, which have the option to be upgraded to a surround 7.1 or surround 5.1. A unique one and a quarter-band structure is using the ideal characteristics of a very high sensitivity full-range driver, which is complemented by a powerful bass woofer. This design features a great amount of detail, excellent localisation of instruments and spaciousness of music with powerful bass overtones”.

“Because of the ability to adjust the ratio of bass content to the full-range drivers, Euphoria are suitable for listening across the entire spectrum of musical genres. These speakers also allow a compensation of acoustic parameters due to the placement of the speaker in any listening space”.

“The Euphoria speakers are equipped with a unique five level sensitivity switch. This option gives the possibility to change ratio between woofer and full-range driver. This sensitivity switch helps set up the ideal listening level for different genres of music. It helps to compensate for the acoustic parameters of the listening room”

**Price 8,790€**





Pro-Ject  
AUDIO SYSTEMS

# *The Classic*



August 2016



Best Turntable 2016-2017

## *An Instant Classic*

**The Classic** was released to celebrate Pro-Ject Audio Systems' 25th Anniversary. This retro-inspired turntable has been designed from the ground-up to combine timeless aesthetics with modern technology and audiophile sound performance.

The striking frame design is available in three wood finishes, and provides clever decoupling between the acoustically treated aluminium platter and the motor.

The new motor is powered by a built-in generator, for a consistent performance, and drives a sub-platter that sits atop a precision-engineered main bearing.

The all-new 9" Classic Tonearm is made of aluminium and carbon fibre, for unrivalled rigidity while retaining a low mass. The arm benefits from a new bearing system for completely free movement and is supplied as standard with an Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge.

**Available Now for £799.00 (UK SRP)**



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## Melodika Launch BL40 MKII Loudspeaker



Melodika, one of the biggest Polish manufacturers of hifi cables, let us know that they have introduced a new version of their floorstanding Loudspeaker, the BL40 MKI. Melodika say that “the Melodika BL40 MKII offers both modified style and technical amendments while maintaining the price”.

They go on to explain; “Melodika BL40 MKII is an improved version of one of the best-selling loudspeakers in its price segment. The changes include modification both technological and visual”.

“The design project of a new BL40 MKII focuses on a new, more balanced trend in design. The MKII project combines the classic body shape known from MKI with a completely new colour compilation: elegant black matte supplemented with high gloss black accents with new membranes shimmering with many shades of graphite. With the latest modification of membranes BL40 MKII is a loudspeaker that stands out from the competition, also because it offers the ability to play loud without exponential growth of sound distortion”.

**Melodika BL40 MKII is available at just over 600€ plus delivery.**

## Karma-Av Introduces Mark Levinson № 519 Audio Player To The UK



Karma-AV has announced the availability of the Mark Levinson № 519 Audio Player. They say, “The № 519 has the ability to play virtually any digital audio format and provides a full complement of wired and wireless digital audio inputs from USB asynchronous streaming and mass storage, Gigabit Ethernet, Balanced, Optical, Coaxial, Wi-Fi, aptX® Bluetooth, and an integrated slot-loading CD player. In addition, the № 519 includes high-performance headphone connectivity and integrated digital volume control allowing it to serve as a fully integrated digital music source”.

Designed and engineered at HARMAN’s Engineering Centre of Excellence in Shelton, CT, USA, the Mark Levinson № 519 offers high-resolution digital decoding up to 32-bit/192kHz from PCM and double-speed DSD. Its Precision Link DAC, complete with three selectable filter settings, incorporates an ESS Sabre32 Reference converter for “superlative musical accuracy with exceptional resolution and dynamic range.”

The № 519 houses a complete, embedded Precision Stream Linux® computer running a custom Mark Levinson version of the operating system. It provides access to a wide range of embedded streaming music services including Spotify Connect, TIDAL, QOBUZ, Deezer®, Rhapsody® or Napster®, and a large evolving library of internet radio stations and podcasts for the virtually limitless discovery of new music. Feature and content portfolios will expand with software updates over network or via USB drive. For listeners whose libraries contain older or lower resolution content, the № 519 contains HARMAN Clari-Fi® music restoration technology, which rebuilds musicality and detail lost in the compression process. The № 519 employs a Mark Levinson Pure Path circuit design featuring a discrete, direct coupled, fully balanced, dual-monaural signal path offering balanced and single-ended analogue outputs, balanced, optical and coaxial digital outputs and a high-performance headphone output integrated with the front panel. Digital volume control enables usage as a standalone music playback device connected directly to a power amplifier or active loudspeakers, and selectable low-pass filtering enables the unbalanced outputs to be used for subwoofer integration.

The № 519 features a 6000-series aluminium housing in black with silver trim. The № 519 can be operated from its large, front-panel colour display, included remote control, Apple iOS® and Google Android™ apps, all major web browsers and also through a comprehensive range of system integration connections. Like all Mark Levinson products, the № 519 is designed and handcrafted in the USA.

**Mark Levinson No 519 Audio Player typical retail price inc VAT: £21,000. Availability: February 2017**





# Aequo Audio

*sonus completum*

## Aequo Audio presents: the Ensis loudspeaker

The Ensis was developed to fulfill one of the most cherished wishes: to fully satisfy both the ear and the eye with a stylish, compact and truly full range high end floor standing loudspeaker. The three-way cabinet design resembles a musical note. Each component is engineered to deliver exceptional clean sound and live-like precision in reproduction. Its unique qualities satisfy the most critical listeners, but most of all ensure you of long hours of listening pleasure!

[www.aequoaudio.com](http://www.aequoaudio.com)

## Mauro Grange Steps Down As McIntosh Group CEO

After leading Fine Sounds Group, renamed McIntosh Group in 2016 and the home of Sonus faber, McIntosh Audio Research and other high end brands, for almost a decade, Mauro Grange will be stepping down from his position as CEO, effective December 31, 2016, as planned at the time of the Management Buyout supported by financial sponsors LBO France and Yarpa.

## iFi Launch New iTube2 Preamplifier



The iTube2 is a tubed output stage; tube preamp; tube buffer and an impedance-matching device. Put the iTube2 before a solid-state preamp with another iTube2 after it to create the effect of tubing the whole audio chain. Or simply use the iTube2 as a preamp by itself. The iTube2 with trickle-down technology from the flagship 'Pro' series has been redesigned with new parts and new circuitry. Only the GE5670 tube remains.

iFi Audio's Head of US Sales, Sean Fowler, says, "If you are looking to put back the natural, full bodied sound of tubes into your digital system, then the iTube2 is the right piece of kit for you."

The retail price of the micro iTube2 is US\$375 (ex-tax) or Euro450/£375 (incl. VAT).

## Kroma Audio New Gilded Loudspeaker Finish



Spanish brand, Kroma Audio, has introduced a new finish available for its two models of speakers. This finish is entirely handmade by a Master Gilder, specialised in restoring the Easter procession floats, with authentic 24k gold leaf. Kroma say "This turns our speakers into true works of art with a unique aesthetic that accompanies the inimitable sound of Kroma Audio".

Kroma go on to say: "We created Kroma Audio as we felt the need to combine the highest level of High Fidelity with the naturalism and realism shown in a live interpretation".

"The HiFi market is saturated with absolute reference loudspeakers, which show resonances that lead to artificial sound colorations, discordances, discrepancies, and imperfections in the restitution of the natural timbres of each instrument. For these reasons, we came to the conclusion that another sound is possible... the sound of Kroma Audio".

Some of the main features of the Kroma Audio speakers are:

Cabinets made entirely in Krion, a non-conductive and non magnetic material that stands out for its high mass and the absence of resonances.

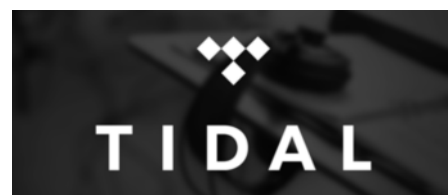
The absence of metallic elements in the manufacturing of the cabinet. Not one metal screw is used: neither in the chassis, nor in the filter, not even in the fastening of the drivers.

Selected filter components chosen for their top sound quality, such as brand name Duelund and Mundorf, combined with very special NOS components.

Use of elements made with different types of wood, used to make musical instruments, handmade and located in critical places.

The new gilded finish is available on Kroma Audio's Julieta and Carmen loudspeakers now.

## Sprint Buys 33% Stake In Tidal



Jay Z is reportedly selling a stake in his music streaming service Tidal to telecoms company, Sprint. Sprint, which is owned by Japan's Softbank, will pay an estimated \$200m (£162m) for a 33% stake in the company.

It is reported that other artist-owners of Tidal, including Beyonce, Madonna and Kanye West, will remain on the board.

Sprint want to bring more and better quality content to their mobile customers, Tidal need to win ground from both Spotify and Apple, who are much more widely used, so this should be a win-win for both companies. Sprint say their users will have access to exclusive Tidal content. Jay Z has made a return on his 56 million dollar investment in 2015, when he bought Tidal from Norwegian company Aspiro.

## Conrad-Johnson Release The Classic Sixty-Two And The Classic One-Twenty



The Conrad-Johnson design team say they are particularly excited with the introduction of two new Classic amplifiers, the Classic Sixty-Two (CL62) and Classic One-Twenty (CL120).

The CL62 uses a pair of EL34 output tubes per channel to produce 60 Watts/channel. The CL120 uses two pair of EL34s for 125 Watts/channel. Each is also available in upgraded "SE" versions featuring KT120 output tubes.

Available now from Conrad-Johnson Dealers.



# Some Follow

others

# Leedh!



## **The Sound of Science**

The Leedh E2 loudspeaker system and its dedicated subwoofer are the culmination of years of intensive research into the fundamental principles into the way the human ear perceives sound, the way that sound is generated and how the inherent problems with conventional drivers can be overcome.

We believe that Leedh E2 offers music lovers looking for the very best in sound quality the ultimate listening experience, offering a level of fidelity previously unattainable and unimaginable with conventional driver technology, which has changed little in decades.

LEEDH designers have developed a new type of electrodynamic loudspeaker, the Acoustical Beauty Speaker. This technology does not contain a soft iron pole in the motor, a foam edge, or a spider in the suspension, because these three components produce the majority of sonic imperfections found in all traditional speakers.

The purity of each wave of sound reaching the listener is the zenith of the unique and innovative way the drivers in the loudspeakers are designed, bringing the concert hall into your living room.

## **Leedh - The Sound of Science**

For more information on this exceptional loudspeaker technology [CLICK HERE](#) to visit our website

[www.leedh-acoustic.com](http://www.leedh-acoustic.com) or email [Gilles.Milot@Acoustical-Beauty.com](mailto:Gilles.Milot@Acoustical-Beauty.com)

## Totem Acoustic Launches Sky Bookshelf Speaker

Totem Acoustic provided their home country, Canada, with an early glimpse of the Sky at the TAVES show in Toronto in October 2016 but the true worldwide debut took place recently at the CES 2017 in Las Vegas.

Totem say of their new compact monitor “The Sky will make you fly to a whole new level of appreciation. A compact marvel for all types of source mediums, the Sky offers flexibility, livability and lasting acoustic quality. The Sky delivers an ultra-stable performance specifically in critical vocal and definition areas. Slim, trim and visually self-effacing the Sky truly shines with the latest innovations in speaker design. You will be amazed by the ultra-wide spatial performance coming out from such a compact package”.

The Sky is made with unique borosilicate dampening that controls energy release yet keeps the cabinet “musically alive”. They also feature a specially designed 5-inch driver, and 3-inch voice coil unit with 500W peak transient capacity. The Totem SKY was truly created for an age where value is put on a pure and honest musical rendition. Totem go on to say, “whether on a table top, in a book-shelf or on a dedicated stand, the Sky is optimised to work beautifully close to rear wall boundaries”.

**The Sky retails for \$1850 in the USA and is now shipping around the world.**

Totem Acoustics was created in 1987 by Vince Bruzzese, you can read an interview which Hifi Pig published with him [here](#).

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## Monitor Audio Launch ASB-10 Compact Active Soundbar System

Monitor Audio’s new ASB-10 compact Active Soundbar system is engineered to restore the power of an audio and video experience by re-energising HD and UHD pictures with the sound they deserve.

Equipped with a performance 2.0 audio design comprising proprietary driver/amp pairings, integrated Dolby Digital processing and Bluetooth aptX™ wire-free streaming, the slender ASB-10 will, say Monitor “generate big, immersive audio dynamics from TV, games, discs and smartphones to become the audio hub for every home”.

With a 90 x 94mm cross section and at just under a metre in length, the discreetly proportioned ASB-10



complements the look of flat screens from wall or table-top positions. Its slim moulded polymer cabinet with black grille cloth and brushed aluminium end trims houses an array of four Monitor Audio 3” C-CAM® bass drivers (assisted by a brace of passive bass radiators), and twin 25mm Gold Dome C-CAM tweeters.

## Google Chrome Bringing FLAC To Macs

Reports on the internet are suggesting that audiophiles will now be able to use Google Chrome to playback music in FLAC format on their macs.

While FLAC files are big and therefore this probably won't make much impact for the masses, this added support from Google should make it much easier for Mac using audiophiles to play the files more simply.

Third party apps have been available for some time but FLAC support has long been requested of Google Chrome. Possibly no coincidence that Firefox are releasing the same feature later this month.



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## Pro-Ject Essential III Range Expands

Since its introduction in late 2016, the Essential III from Pro-Ject Audio Systems has been, say Pro-Ject, “a revelation in the affordable turntable market”. Combining looks with performance, they say that the initial market response has been phenomenal. As a result of this impact, the Essential III is beginning 2017 by extending into a range of three turntables at various prices.

### Essential III

The standard Essential III will be introduced at £239.00 (UK SRP). It incorporates all the benefits of the Essential III that was introduced in 2016, plus it includes a new MDF platter. The new platter’s high-gloss finish provides a smooth platform for the felt mat and vinyl record to sit on.

### Essential III A

The Essential III A carries all of the features of the original Essential III, including the upgraded Acryl-IT E platter. Acrylic is an ideal playback platform for vinyl records. Coming in at £279.00 (UK SRP).

### George Harrison Record Player

The family of George Harrison has joined with USM to commemorate the iconic musician’s solo career, with a comprehensive vinyl box-set of all his solo releases. Featuring 12 studio albums, a live album and two 12” picture disc singles all re-mastered from the original analogue tapes at the legendary Capitol studios. To coincide with the launch, Pro-Ject Audio Systems have been asked to produce a special edition turntable specifically to complement the vinyl albums. The result is the George Harrison Record Player.

Boasting an entirely unique appearance, this special edition version of the Essential III A is limited to 2,500 pieces worldwide. The design was created by Studio One, and is based on an exclusive 2014 art-print lithograph designed for the Harrisons by world-famous artist Shepard Fairey. Behind the acrylic platter, you can also faintly see an image of a studio mixing desk, reflecting the re-mastering process the vinyl box-set has undergone.



Aside from the cosmetic differences and the platter change, all other characteristics of each of the Essential III models are shared.

The Essential III models retain the simple yet elegant frame of the multi-award winning Essential II. Now made from high-quality MDF for its acoustically neutral character, and wrapped in a high-gloss paint finish (available in red, white or black on standard versions). Integrated into the structure is the stainless steel main platter bearing in a bronze bushing, lined with Teflon at the bottom for smooth rotation and engineered to very fine tolerances. The plinth is then mounted on three anti-vibration feet, for effective decoupling from the surface on which the turntable is placed.

The Essential III uses the same 9V motor as its predecessor, but it’s the first to use a new integrated grounding link. The motor is a premium, synchronous AC design that’s driven by a built-in signal generator, ensuring optimal speed stability and minimal resonances. The

brand new aluminium pulley improves the performance and the appearance even further still. The Essential III is pre-fitted with an 8.6” aluminium tonearm for its lightweight, rigid characteristics. The gimbal bearing assembly uses sapphire bearings to allow for smooth tracking across a record, and the supplied counterweight allows for a variety of premium pick-up cartridges to be installed. The tonearm is supplied with an Ortofon OM 10 cartridge installed.

**Essential III SRP £239.00**

**Available in the UK now in Black High-Gloss finish (Red and White to follow)**

**Essential III A SRP £279.00**

**Available in the UK now in Black, Red and White High-Gloss finish.**

**George Harrison Record Player SRP £429.00**

**Due in the UK from February 25th (George Harrison’s birthday).**



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## Arcam rPhono Phono Pre-Amplifier

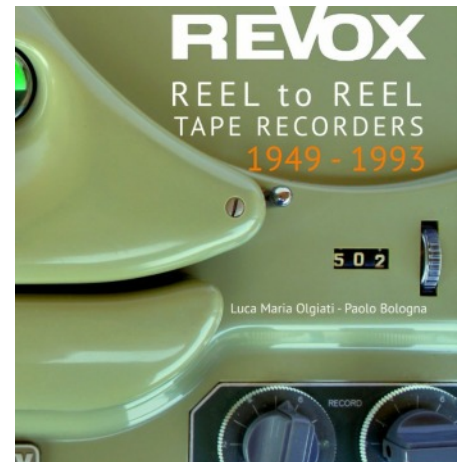
The rPhono is the latest addition to Arcam's Black Box rSeries. Previewed at CES and launching to the public at Bristol's hifi Show at the end of February, the Arcam rPhono is designed specifically to upgrade an in-built phono stage or to add a turntable input to an existing amplifier.

With more than forty years of analogue audio experience, Arcam say that they, "know how to build a phono stage, using the finest quality parts in a layout that is optimised for low noise and minimum distortion. The multi-layer PCB allows our designers to maximise the quality of the ground plane so that interference between components is further reduced. The use of multiple, low-noise, individually regulated power supplies ensures the rPhono delivers the cleanest signal to the audiophile quality output stage".

They go on to say, "a wealth of features are specifically designed for optimal matching of a turntable's cartridge. Moving coil users benefit from precision impedance matching using high-quality trimmers instead of discrete steps, while moving magnet users have a wide variety of capacitance options. An optionally selectable low frequency "rumble" filter eliminates the effects of warping or pressing irregularities, which can be present on some vinyl. Precision components give excellent RIAA response and class-leading performance figures, mean the rPhono will delight all music-lovers. The rPhono is a simple way to improve the performance regardless of turntable and brings Arcam quality sound to any system".



## Everything You Always Wanted To Know About ReVox



More than 30 years after production of the last ReVox reel to reel machine, the first book of the complete reel to reel production range has been released, with text in English and Italian.

**Available in an economical softcover, standard and luxury versions starting at just over \$82.**

## GIK Acoustics Impression Series Panels Launched

GIK Acoustics has launched the Impression Series - a line of acoustic panels and bass traps with decorative plates that also deliver a visual statement.

GIK say: "The Impression Series panels are ideal for creating an even balance of low end absorption without losing high frequency presence. The rigid plate not only gives the panel a stylish appearance but also helps reflect/scatter high frequency content in the room giving the proper balance needed".

The Impression Series panels not only perform in critical listening environments like audiophile listening rooms or studios but also work any space such as professional, household, or public places where the room acoustics interfere with enjoyment or productivity. The Impression Series panels are effective in any space where speech intelligibility is compromised or the room has too much reverberation and is too loud.

"We understand the appearance of conventional acoustic panels may not appeal to everyone," said Glenn Kuras,



President of GIK Acoustics. "That is specifically why we developed the Impression Series to have a visual as well as an aural impact. We are proud to offer a line of acoustic treatments that are not only superior at controlling the acoustics of a room, but will transform the look and aesthetic of a room as well."



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# Rothwell Announce Advanced Discrete Transistor Moving Coil



Lancashire based Rothwell Audio Products Ltd have announced the release of their Signature Two discrete transistor moving coil phonostage which is the result of over twenty-five years' experience in the design of these devices. Within the phonostage itself, there are neither transformers nor op-amps resulting in, say Rothwell, "a stunningly clear aural experience".

The four-stage unit uses discrete transistors operating in class A. Stage one is a low-noise circuit with adjustable load impedance from  $32\Omega$  to  $1100\Omega$  and variable gain from 52dB to 72dB with load and gain independently adjustable. Stage two precedes the passive RIAA network. Stage three is another gain stage and stage four buffers the output for low impedance.

The on-board linear power supply uses a toroidal transformer, generous sized capacitors and another proprietary low noise discrete transistor voltage regulator. Rothwell state that "the carefully regulated supply to the first stage delivers extremely low noise and ripple, far lower than the common off-the-shelf monolithic alternatives".

Like all Rothwell products, the Signature Two is designed and built in the UK.

## Wilson Audio Yvette Available In UK

Yvette, the latest floorstander from high end loudspeaker manufacturer, Wilson Audio of the USA, combines technologies derived from Wilson's top-end models in, say Wilson, "a more compact and affordable form".

Wilson go on to say that Yvette is "the most advanced and musically refined single-enclosure speaker in Wilson Audio's illustrious history". Yvette slots into the Wilson range between the 'entry-level' Sabrina and best-selling Sasha W/P Series 2. Developed alongside Wilson's forthcoming flagship, the WAMM Master Chronosonic, Yvette features technologies trickled down from Wilson's top-end models including the Alexx and Alexia.

The enclosure is built from well-damped and inert composites developed by Wilson, called 'X-Material' and 'S-Material' and is extensively braced and precisely shaped for fully optimised time alignment of the drive units. Each speaker incorporates three new-generation Wilson drive units: a 10-inch bass driver, a 7-inch midrange driver and the latest MkIII version of the Wilson Convergent Synergy Tweeter and features Wilson's exclusive, newly enhanced resistor tuning system located behind a rear panel. Yvette is hand-built in Utah, USA, and finished in Wilson Audio's automotive-class paint facility to each customer's specific colour requirements.

The Wilson Audio Yvette loudspeaker is now available in the UK, priced at £28,880 per pair (inc. VAT).





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## Exposure Launch New XM Series



Exposure Electronics has launched its new 'XM' series of hifi components. Responding directly to the resurgence of vinyl amid a digital age, the series offers a solution for those who seek performance across multiple media but don't want the size or cost of their system to spiral out of control. Kicking off the series, the XM5 integrated amplifier includes both a phonostage and a DAC in a compact half-width size.

There can be no doubt that the vinyl revival is alive and kicking. 2016 saw reports of turntable sales outstripping those of other home audio products, vinyl sales exceeding YouTube revenue for artists and more money being spent on vinyl albums than digital downloads in the run-up to Christmas. So are we back to 'the good old days' of vinyl? Not quite. "Back when vinyl records were the standard, all integrated amps and most preamplifiers had an on-board phonostage, since the majority of people were using a turntable," explains Tony Brady, Exposure's chief designer. "But with the arrival of CDs in the 1990s, phonostages were largely dropped from amplifier design."

Why? Cost. The signal generated by a phono cartridge is tiny when compared to that of any other medium (whether CD, tape, DAC, radio tuner, etc) and hence requires a highly sensitive additional amplification stage. It also needs to be equalised to take account of the RIAA equalization used in vinyl records. All of which made the phonostage one of the most costly parts of an amp - so the minute most people stopped needing them, manufacturers dropped them and the phonostage became a separate component aimed at only the most committed of vinyl enthusiasts. "Which means that vinyl-lovers now have to invest in, and make room for, a whole lot of kit," adds Brady.

The XM series is the first of Exposure's ranges to fit a full complement of features into a narrow half-width design. "Not every music lover or audio enthusiast wants, or has the space or budget for, a massive hifi system with multiple bulky components," says Brady. "But at the same time, quality of sound is once again becoming important to an increasing number of people. Many music lovers want to enjoy better performance but they still want convenience and value for money." While many smaller hifi components fall back on switch-mode power supplies, the XM5 features a linear power supply with a large 200VA custom-made toroidal power transformer. High quality resistors and capacitors are used in the signal path, while Toshiba bipolar output transistors have been chosen for their performance. Exposure's new XM3 phonostage adds greater flexibility. Its rear panel offers separate MM and MC inputs as well as adjustable loading and gain switches. And, like the XM5, it also sports a half-width size.

The Exposure XM5 and XM3 are available now, each with black or titanium finish and a warranty of 3 years.

**Prices (incl. VAT): XM5 integrated amplifier £1,236 XM3 phonostage £660**

## Dual Turntables Relaunch in UK



German turntable company, Dual, has relaunched in the UK. Once the largest manufacturer of turntables in Europe, the brand has had a history of producing turntables through the 1960s, 70s and 80s. For 2017 the brand is back in the UK with an initial offering of three new budget models.

Prices range from the entry-level, fully automatic MTR-15 at £124.99 to the budget audiophile MTR-75 with enhanced chassis, belt drive, USB output and Audio Technica cartridge at £249.99. The £229.99 MTR-40 is a direct-drive model with variable speed control, styled as a traditional 'prosumer' DJ deck.

The MTR-75 will lead Dual's UK relaunch for audiophiles on budget, bringing much of the brands CS-series experience to this deck. With a satin-black finished chassis on large vibration damping feet, the MTR-75 is belt driven to an aluminium platter via a DC servo motor with selectable speed. It's built-in RIAA phono stage has been developed to get the best from a wide range of Moving Magnet cartridges. The MTR-75's straight aluminium tonearm has a damped lift mechanism and comes pre-fitted with an Audio Technica MM cartridge. Fine tuning stylus tracking force is possible thanks to an adjustable counterweight marked with 0.1g gauge. Other features include USB output with software for Mac and PC, automatic stop and lift feature and an acrylic dust cover lid as standard.

The brand's relaunch in the UK comes on the back of the vinyl revival, with UK LP sales hitting more than 3.2million records through 2016. Dual's more upmarket CS series turntables, along with a Bluetooth loudspeaker, DAB radio and an AV Soundbase will launch in the UK later this year. The name Dual is a reference to the dual-mode power supplies the company pioneered in the early 1930's for its gramophones. These could be powered by either mains electricity or wind-up mechanism.





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## Arcaydis Audio Re-launch EB1 And EB2

Arcaydis Audio have re-launched their EB1 and EB2 loudspeakers after an absence of over 2 years from the market place. These popular speakers won numerous awards, but had in recent years had become unavailable when the original manufacturer ceased trading.

A new company, Arcaydis Audio Limited, has acquired the rights and commissioned production of these classic speakers, with technical assistance from the original designer to ensure they are faithful to the originals in every way. These British-made loudspeakers feature “Arcolam” multi-layer laminate construction. The new cabinets have been produced with components sourced from the original suppliers, right down to the screws, and are finished in the traditional Oak and Black Oak veneers plus an up-to-date White.



Marketing manager Mr Szemeti said: “Arcaydis has always had a superb reputation as a great British manufacturer with some astounding products, built to order. The problem in the past had been timely delivery. When we re-launched Arcaydis, our core principles were that we would only ever sell what we had in stock, and that we would stock what we sold. As we re-launch products from the range each one is being stocked in depth to ensure that our customers and dealers get what they order when they order it. We know the products are top-tier; all that was needed was top-tier fulfilment to bring this iconic brand back to life.” Arcaydis are initially stocking the EB1S and EB2S, and they have built them to the same specifications as the final batches produced some 2 years ago, with the EB1S having an introductory price of £599/pair, and the EB2S having an introductory price of £799/pair. Arcaydis are planning to re-introduce more models from the line-up over the coming months, as well as new products and packages for the home-cinema market.

## Chord Electronics Launch Three New Products At CES

Poly is a new network module which is set to introduce high-res wireless streaming, SD card and network music playback to Mojo, with both smartphone control and playback at £499.

Blu MkII, an upscaling CD transport which uses the very latest FPGA technology to implement advanced proprietary filtering and upscaling techniques at £7,995. The new Blu MkII, which will replace the original Blu, incorporates a powerful new FPGA core.

Hugo 2 is a dramatically redesigned version of Chord's portable DAC, featuring all-new casework and flexible new features at £1,800. Chord say of the Hugo 2, “Featuring a newly designed precision-machined aircraft-grade aluminium case, Hugo 2 is distinct from its predecessor with its sharper, lower profile design and four spherical control buttons. The spheres, which are top-mounted to allow for possible future expansion side-modules, illuminate with colour-coding information and control power, input, filtering and crossfeed functions. The top-mounted volume-control sphere has been



retained and made larger for more intuitive operation. The stylish new design and additional functionality has been introduced in anticipation of greater indoor use within both desktop and conventional home audio systems, despite Hugo 2's obvious portability. The inclusion of a full-function remote control adds further flexibility and the practical line-level output mode of the original has also been retained.”





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## Sonus Faber Restyles Homage Collection

Sonus faber say they 'wish to evoke Italian design and creativity at their best by restyling the Homage collection', the company's most iconic line. 'It has been completely revamped in keeping with its rich past and precious legacy. Welcome Homage Tradition!'

The collection features four elements: Amati, Guarneri, Vox and the newcomer Serafino, a 3.5 way floor-standing speaker whose name is taken from Santo Serafino (1699 - 1758), another of Italy's master violin makers who trained at Nicolò Amati's workshop. The made-in-Italy appeal and the Sonus faber tradition find their expression in a classic and slightly retro approach where the classical lute shape is still central and maintains the roots with the history but components, finishes and design have been completely renewed.

Homage Tradition collection is available in two finishes:

**RED:** Traditional walnut wood essence with black inlays combined with brushed black Aluminium and black leather (like flagships Aida, Lilium and Il Cremonese)

**WENGÈ:** Wengè wood essence – used for the first time by Sonus faber – with maple inlays (reference to the walnut finish of Olympica collection) with brushed Aluminium in Titanium finish and brown leather

Homage collection will be available at select dealers in Europe and Asia beginning February 2017 and in the US and Canada beginning March 2017.

AMATI TRADITION : €20.500

SERAFINO TRADITION: €15.500

GUARNERI TRADITION: €11.700 (stand included)



## Clarity Announces New Board And Chairman



The Clarity Alliance, the UK hifi industry's trade body, unveiled the results of the ballot for its board of directors, announced the appointment of Tom Barron as chairman and set out the Alliance's programme for 2017 at its annual conference.

Commenting on the coming year, incoming chairman, Tom Barron, observed, "We are very confident that our focus on providing support and carefully designed benefits for our members will reap rewards for the membership and wider industry. The market is facing a period of economic uncertainty and it is our responsibility as the industry's trade association to provide support functions." He continues, "Last year we were very pleased to welcome a good number of new members to Clarity, including the high-profile brands Naim, Leema and Cyrus, which is proof that our objectives resonate with the industry. With our new programme for 2017 we hope more industry members will opt to join and work together for the betterment of the whole sector."

## Filippo Fanton Named CEO Of Sonus Faber

McIntosh Group has announced that Filippo Fanton has been named the new CEO of Sonus faber effective immediately. Fanton has served as the CFO of Sonus faber for the last eight years and will continue to hold that position as well until further notice.

"Filippo has done an excellent job serving as CFO and I'm looking forward to working with him in his expanded role as CEO of Sonus faber. Sonus faber has a bright future under Filippo's leadership," said McIntosh Group CEO Charlie Randall.

"I am honoured to lead such a prestigious company as Sonus faber. I am equally eager to not only preserve but expand its prominent standing in the high-end audio industry in order to provide our customers with the very best Italian handcrafted speakers," said Fanton.





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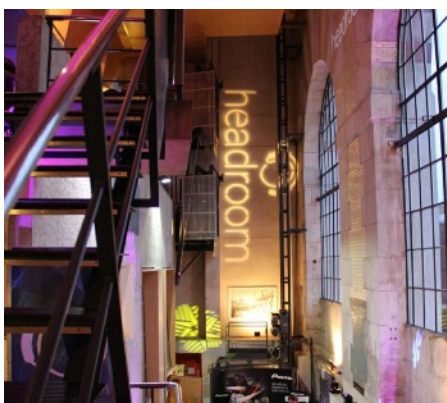
## Rega Brio Integrated Amplifier, New For 2017



**R**ega have launched a new version of their Brio integrated amplifier. They say: “The Brio has a completely new case to house its improved circuits and parts. It now sits in a fully aluminium two-part case which boosts the Brio’s heat sinking capabilities and improves on Rega’s already solid build quality and reliability”.

“The new Brio has a cleverly integrated headphone socket specially designed to avoid interference with the audio circuit when not in use and as you would expect, a very high specification moving magnet phono stage is built in as standard. Throughout the design process the Brio has been meticulously improved in every aspect, from the quality of materials to the manufacturing process, to make this new Brio a step ahead in Rega’s engineering and design for amplifiers”.

## Headroom 2017 At Metropolis Studios London



**H**eadroom, London's headphone and personal audio event, is returning to Metropolis Studios in March with new product launches, the latest audio tech, plus an enormous range of demonstrable headphones.

The event runs from Friday 24th to Saturday 25th March 2017 at Metropolis' Chiswick studios.

## Musical Fidelity Encore All-In-One System Adds Tidal



**M**usical Fidelity's recently introduced M6 Encore 225 has just received its most important updates with the integration of the Tidal service, both directly within the player and in the app, the addition of 24bit/192 audio compatibility over the USB – B input and the super fast copying of audio from USB sticks.

Musical Fidelity say “The M6 Encore is a unique complete audio solution blending the very best of British analogue audio expertise with the most up-to-date digital convenience”.

“Integrated into the attractive symmetrical design of the Encore 225 is an integrated CD player/ripper, an upgradable internal hard drive, Internet radio and high quality streaming with the integration of the Tidal service. The Encore 225 will also accept almost any conceivable digital or analogue audio source, with three analogue inputs, four digital inputs, four USB A connections (one of which has high current capacity for charging phones and tablets), a high-quality headphone amplifier, full network connectivity, fixed and variable line level outputs as well as a digital output”.

“In addition to specifying an exhaustive specification, Musical Fidelity has also taken a unique conceptual position with regards to the design philosophy for the Encore 225. First, in the interests of providing the highest possible audio reproduction the company has chosen to minimise the influence of network quality by storing and playing all music directly from the upgradeable 1TB storage. Secondly, at the heart of the Encore is a very powerful dual core 64 bit Intel CPU with 2GB of RAM. This provides superb performance with near instant access to music and information and also allows Musical Fidelity to offer continual, free upgrades of the player’s facilities - making the Encore virtually future proof.

The lack of latency in the players operation, the clear, high-resolution full-colour display, the well considered ergonomic layout and the option of free iOS and Android control apps all combine to ensure that Encore is always easy and intuitive to use. Power output is an impressive 225W per channel into 8ohm care of dual mono amplifier modules from the award-winning M6 separates range while the highest grade a 32-bit/384kHz chipset ensures the purest digital-to-analogue conversion”.

The Musical Fidelity M6 Encore 225 is available now from specialist hifi retailers UK wide and is priced at £3999





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## Amphion Release New Floorstanding Loudspeaker Argon7LS



Finnish manufacturer Amphion Loudspeakers has announced the Argon7LS floorstanding loudspeaker. The newcomer replaces the Argon7L model, incorporating the passive radiator design which is already present in Argon3S and Argon3LS. The new member of Amphion's Argon family of high-end home audio speakers is being demonstrated for the first time at the Integrated Systems Europe in Amsterdam, booth 7-W195, running currently and until February the 10th.

Amphion explained more about the Argon7LS. "Passive radiator eliminates the known problems associated with reflex cabinets, where the correct signal is always followed by an unwanted tail. The new Argon7LS design creates a more natural energy transfer, providing the listener with an improved physical connection to the music, even on lower listening levels."

Just like all Amphion loudspeaker models, Argon7LS uses the company's signature approach to crossover design. The crossover is placed at 1600 Hz, which is located outside the most sensitive human hearing range, allowing the use of the tweeter in that area, where our hearing is most perceptive. This way the speakers perform as point-sources, solving the problems we generally experience with coaxial or dual concentric designs, where the tweeter is housed in the moving "waveguide" i.e. the woofer.

Argon7LS sells for EUR 2250 / USD 2800 per piece for standard colours and EUR 2400 / USD 3000 for Walnut veneer, available at authorised Amphion dealers everywhere.

## McIntosh MB50 Network Player Now Available In The UK



McIntosh's new MB50 high-performance standalone streaming audio player is now available in the UK, following its debut at CES 2016. The new device has been designed to integrate high-quality Wi-Fi music streaming into a wide range of home audio systems. Its compact form factor also makes it ideal for McIntosh's own MXA70 integrated audio system and MHA150 headphone amp, bringing high-quality music streaming to both units.

The MB50 is available now from dealers priced at £2,750

## SVS Unveils Reference Subwoofers



SVS, USA based manufacturer of speakers, subwoofers and audio accessories, have announced their 16-Ultra Series, its largest and most powerful subwoofer line ever. SVS told us: 'The new sealed box SB16-Ultra and ported box PB16-Ultra subwoofers are the culmination of all SVS engineering advancements and loaded with innovations that establish the 16-Ultra Series as the reference standard for bass'.



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## B.M.C. Audio Launch New Amplifiers

Berlin Based B.M.C. Audio, whose slogan is "The Sound of Nature" have launched their new Stereo Amplifier, the CS3 and M3 Mono Amplifiers.

### CS3 Stereo Amplifier

B.M.C.'s CS3 is a Load-Effect Free (LEF) Amplifier with an option to upgrade it to an LEF Stereo Power Amplifier. "The crucial secret of the CS3's sound is that it avoids distortion, instead of compensating for it through a negative feedback loop".



Price: 5.998,00 EUR, 19 % VAT incl. excl. Shipping costs

### M3 Mono Amplifier

B.M.C.'s M3 is a 'distortion-free' LEF Mono Power Amplifier with adjustable gain DIGM and a balanced XLR-CI input. The AMP M3 can also be used as a classical monaural power amplifier.

Price: 11.996,00 EUR (For the pair) 19 % VAT incl. excl. Shipping costs

## Moon By Simaudio Neo MiND Network Streamer

Simaudio have launched the Moon Neo MiND (MOON intelligent Network Device) which they say "provides the perfect link between your digital music libraries and your Hifi system in the most efficient way".

The Neo MiND outputs a digital audio signal (Toslink, SPDIF, AES/EBU) intended as an input to any Digital-to-Analog converter. The addition of Bluetooth® aptX™ audio support provides easy connectivity with your wireless devices. The SimLink™ connection allows for control of any SimLink equipped MOON system, without having to use the IR remote. The MiND App can adjust the real volume



control of a MOON system rather than using the more common digital attenuation method. Finally, there are front panel LED indicators for both the current track's sampling rate and the active input type - network or bluetooth. The Neo MiND is housed in a half size chassis.

## Totaldac Create The D150 Loudspeaker



Totaldac, of France, has created its own loudspeaker to demo DACs in the Totaldac auditorium and at Hifi shows. Totaldac say that the speakers "are the result of 20 years of experimentation to give a realistic and natural sound. Now these speakers are also offered to Totaldac customers"

The d150 loudspeakers are high resolution, high efficiency loudspeakers based on a paper cone full range driver whose low mid frequencies only are loaded with a large round horn made of 100mm thick wood. The bass is also a high efficiency paper cone driver. The bass cabinet and the horn are both driven by your external amplifier, without the help of an internal amplifier.

An optional subwoofer can be provided to reinforce the sub bass from 25Hz to 50Hz. It uses an AESPEAKER TD18H+ driver with Apollo upgrade. The shape is tall with a small footprint on the floor. One single subwoofer in mono configuration or two subwoofers in mono or stereo configuration are possible.

d150 speaker, a pair, excl shipping: 38000 euros incl VAT in Europe, 34900 euros excl VAT outside Europe.

Subwoofer for d150 speaker, a piece, excl shipping: 6000 euros incl VAT in Europe, 5500 euros excl VAT outside Europe.





# Performance connections.

Our Mavros cables have gathered extensive praise and multiple awards over the last couple of years, becoming best-sellers around the world. So when it came to improving them, we thought the best thing to do was to give you a little less. In our 'Ultra' wideband RCA plugs, reduced mass means less distortion and minimal signal loss.

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the performance connection

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## Wilson Audio WAMM Master Chronosonic



Wilson Audio have released more details of their new flagship loudspeaker, the WAMM Master Chronosonic, which costs well over \$600,000.

"The WAMM Master Chronosonic is the most time-domain correct loudspeaker in Wilson's history. It plums new depth in terms of technology and execution. From drivers to cutting-edge composites, from crossover technology to perfecting geometries. Most importantly, the adjustability in the time domain is precise down to five millionths of a second for any installation—accuracy heretofore only achievable in the theoretical domain. The result is a musical experience with a level of intellectual and emotional verisimilitude only bettered by the live musical event itself. It is a loudspeaker truly worth of the term 'Magnum Opus'." say the company.

## Ballfinger Reel To Reel Tape Recorder And Tangential Turntable Unveiled

After a four-year development period, Ballfinger has introduced the first newly developed analogue tape recorder for around 25 years, the Tonbandmaschine M 063 was revealed at the Norddeutschen Hifi-Tage, in Hamburg last weekend. They also unveiled their new Schallplattenspieler PS 2 Direct-drive Turntable with active radial arm and moving coil system.



Of the M 063 Ballfinger say: "In addition to the clear appearance and the well thought-out ergonomics, this belting machine has all the necessary properties for professional use. For this purpose, the processor-controlled drive is directly driven by specially developed, brushless DC disk rotor motors".

"The remaining components are also up-to-date and technically up-to-date: from the silent servo drives to the brake, head block and pinch roller to ultralinear, low-noise audio electronics, all possibilities have been exhausted. On the other hand, the massive aluminium chassis remained consistently well-ried: the modular design is the basis for a variety of configuration options and offers a rapid expansion of Ballfinger's product portfolio. In the first set-up, the M 063 with ¼ inch tape run in 2-channel technology (stereo) will be shown. The machine can be operated with up to 38 centimetres of tape speed per second and has a high-resolution, digital counter with all the associated functions. The device has balanced as well as unbalanced inputs and outputs, can be equipped with up to 30 cm open coils and fits in every 19 inch studiorack. The M 063 is thus the beginning of a whole new generation of magneto- phones".



Ballfinger say the Schallplattenspieler PS 2 is the "first tangential disc player with a conventional rotary sound arm and the usual operation. The PS 2 is directly driven by a newly developed, ironless and electronically commutated engine and has an almost 5 Kg heavier aluminium plate. The player is equipped with an in-house MC pick-up system in open aluminium construction. With a series of configuration options, the device is built with both puristic manual operation and as a semi-automatic unit. The PS 2 is the beginning of a new design line in the high end area".





## PLATINUM B-40 SE v.2

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by incorporating significant constructional  
changes which affected the sound

[www.TAGA-AUDIO.com](http://www.TAGA-AUDIO.com)

## New Luxury French Amplifier Brand APURNA Launches



**A**PURNA is a new brand of audio amplifier from France, but above all is a brand telling the story of one couple's "passion for the purest technology and elegance". After years of work and thought, Catherine and Franck Borne today are proud to launch their analogue amplifier that, they say "delivers not only on performance, but every bit as much on refinement and design".

They go on to explain: "Every APURNA amplifier is built in France to the very highest quality, the technical choices guaranteeing premium performance while the quality of signal-to-noise ratio ensures the truest sound. Everything is designed to be intuitive and a pleasure to use, thanks to the control module beautifully sculpted from noble metals and fine crystal.

"Committed to offering a truly unique product, APURNA amplifiers can be customised using the very finest materials. This customisation makes our system not only a technological masterpiece, but a beautiful work of art you'll be proud to display. Every APURNA client has the option to make their amplifier something really special - whether finished in gold, beautifully lacquered, or studded with diamonds, each piece is carefully crafted to your wishes."

## Pro-Ject Announce The Beatles 1964 Recordplayer Limited Edition

**P**ro-Ject Audio Systems is known as the world leading producer of analogue hifi audio equipment for more than 25 years. Producing a range of products. Now they are releasing The Beatles 1964 Recordplayer Limited Edition

"It was always our aim to offer class-leading sound quality for budget and high-end turntables. This and our passion for music is driving our productivity.

We are very proud to inform everyone about the collaboration between us and the Universal Music Group. We are thrilled to announce that we will produce together six special edition turntables which will feature the greatest band of all time. The fab four - the Beatles!" says the company's press release, continuing

"We have already introduced the George Harrison record player and are now showing the world our second limited edition turntable. It features copies of original tickets and brochures from their legendary touring between 1962 and 1966 during which they captured the world's acclaim! The fab four have held 166 concerts in 15 different countries and 90 individual cities in only four years. The cultural phenomenon their touring helped create, known as "Beatlemania", was something the world has never seen before and laid the foundation for the globalisation of culture. We decided to use one of the most sold audiophile turntables ever for this unique design - the Debut Carbon Esprit SB. It features highest quality audiophile components, such as an Ortofon 2M Red, an acrylic platter, a carbon tone-arm, a top notch MDF chassis or built-in electronic speed control for easier switching between playback speeds."

The artwork for the 1964 Recordplayer shows copies of tickets and brochures from their legendary world tour beginning in June 1964. This incredibly detailed print was very hard to realise and was only possible with special techniques. Where multiple layers and surfaces are applied. After the distribution of the ink it is dried out instantly with special ultra-violet lights, to ensure perfectly displayed details and to offer ultimate durability. This was the only way to make sure that all the details are transformed without loss and smear to the turntable.

This one of a kind is limited to 2500 pieces worldwide. Price is €650







MC Step-Up Transformers  
Phono Amplifiers  
Pre Amplifiers



## Care Orchestra Release Spiritual Violet Loudspeakers

Care Orchestra Srl, an Italian brand of high-end audio and design, has announced a new product of the Spiritual Line. Care Orchestra say: “The Spiritual Violet is the natural evolution of the younger “sister” Spiritual Blue, from which it inherits its peculiarities and best features. Depth, transparency and musical performance definition reach an excellent level, giving rise to a quality of precise listening, never tiring”.



They go on to explain further: “With it’s unique technology, Hemispherical Bass Reflex, you get maximum performance even when, this loudspeaker is placed near the walls or in acoustics area that is not optimal”.

High quality components are used, “wiring made by Van den Hul silver cable, Woofer and Tweeter are Scan Speak Discovery, the filter of the 1st and 2nd order with electrical cutting frequency to 3860 Hz with Jantzen elements, extension 37 Hz - 42,000 Hz, impedance 4 Ohm, sensitivity 90 dB”. The speakers are completely handmade in Italy and are customisable to the clients taste with opaque, glossy lacquers, mica and leather.

Price from 4,900€

## TARA Labs Release The Muse Cables



TARA Labs Design Team (TLDT) has worked over a year to come up with their new cable series, The Muse, which they say is “specifically designed for audiophiles who crave “musicality” in their audio system’s sound performance”.

The construction of the Muse which begins with the precise measuring, machining, and cutting of TARA labs proprietary materials. Beginning with their 99.999999% pure rectangular solid core copper conductors that are super-annealed, oxygen-free, mono-crystal, and frequency-tuned. The conductors are then hand-polished and coated in thier proprietary liquid dielectric to prevent oxidation before inserting into PTFE Teflon lumen air tubes. Their technicians then assemble these materials into an audio cable that is hand crafted in Oregon, USA and lifetime guaranteed.

The Muse interconnects, 1m/3.3ft, XLR or RCA \$6995.00

The Muse Speaker cables, 8ft/2.4m, \$12,000.00

The Muse AC, 6ft./1.8m, US or Euro

## The Chord Company's New Sarum T Range Performance Upgrade



The Chord Company has launched Sarum T, a new cable range that directly benefits from Chord’s proprietary Taylon® insulation, which to

date, has been the preserve of its flagship ChordMusic range.

The Sarum T is a new cable range that builds on the success of the Sarum Super ARAY range and introduces Chord’s breakthrough proprietary insulation material, Taylon®, bringing say The Chord Company “a major performance upgrade”. To date, Taylon® has been exclusive to the flagship ChordMusic portfolio, but now Sarum T brings the benefits of The Chord Company’s proprietary dielectric to a new, more accessible price level. Previous generations of Sarum Super ARAY cables have featured a PTFE dielectric. Taylon® has been implemented throughout the new Sarum T range

bringing an improved dimensional accuracy and an evolved geometry, which have further improved mechanical behaviour and shielding. Sarum T also benefits from The Chord Company’s Super ARAY mechanical optimisation, factory terminations and hand-made construction. Sarum T raises the performance bar just as its stablemate ChordMusic did when Taylon® was first introduced.

Existing Sarum customers can upgrade to the new Sarum T standard with a factory rebuild service, costing around 40 per cent of Sarum T’s sale price (excludes speaker cables). Custom lengths can be made to order.



# Paint It Black

*"I felt I was listening to a more lifelike rendition of the music...good vocal projection combined with tight timing and a natural tonality make this cable extra special"*

Tony Bolton

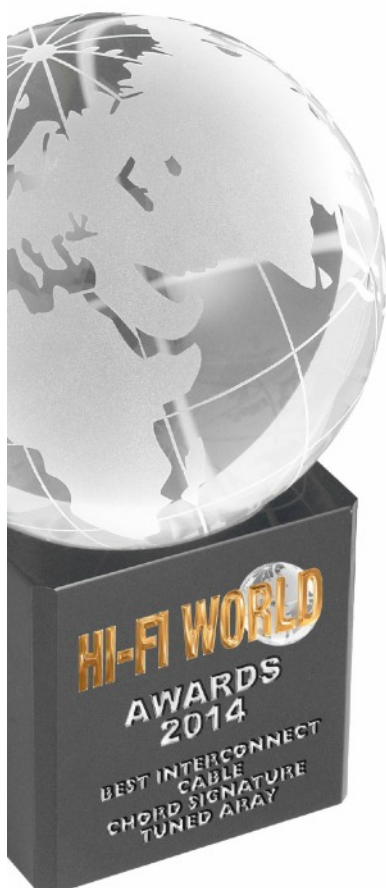


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**CHORD**<sup>TM</sup>  
COMPANY

## Bryston Announce BDP-3 Digital Music Player

Bryston has announced the introduction of the BDP-3 digital music player, "a reference quality" entertainment hub capable of reading virtually all digital file formats and resolutions including DSD 128 and high-resolution PCM up to 32-bit/384kHz files. BDP-3 users can connect to digital music libraries stored on external drives such as NAS or USB to access a nearly limitless archive of digital content.



The BDP-3 offers several critical enhancements, such as a fast and powerful Intel® processor\* along with 8 gigabytes of RAM, giving the BDP-3 impressive speed even when navigating sizable digital libraries, says the company's press release. The BDP-3 boasts three USB 3.0 ports and five USB 2.0 ports on two separate USB buses.

When connecting the BDP-3 to DACs using S/PDIF or AES/EBU outputs, users will enjoy the benefits of Bryston's proprietary, Integrated Audio Device (IAD) in place of traditional third party sound cards. The resulting jitter specs are "so low, they are barely detectable by even the most sophisticated measurement devices".

The Bryston BDP-3 is also a Roon Ready device. Roon Labs has created a software solution that delivers the ultimate user experience by merging Bryston's exceptional digital playback hardware with an intuitive, graphically rich music library management and playback software.

"We had an opportunity to leverage some exciting new technologies in order to improve our flagship music player," explained Bryston VP James Tanner. "Our objective was to bring added speed, enhanced performance and flexibility to our lineup and the BDP-3 delivers resoundingly." The Bryston BDP-3 is available for pre-order now with an expected delivery in 6-8 weeks. MSRP for the BDP-3 is \$3495 US. All Bryston digital products are covered by a 5-year warranty.

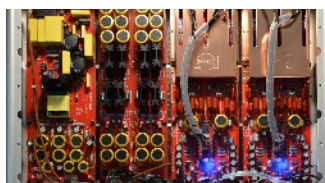
## B.M.C. Launch MCCI Signature Phono Preamplifier

At the end of 2009, B.M.C. Audio presented the MCCI Phono preamplifier, with a new concept for proceeding MC-cartridge's signals.

B.M.C. told us more: "The CI concept (Current Injection) turned the weakest point of LP playback, the amplification of voltages in the  $\mu\text{V}$  range, to an extremely low-loss section. CI uses the original current of the cartridge so the original signal is retained until the first amplified voltage. Neither usual voltage amplifiers nor typical transimpedance

amplifiers can achieve this! A passive RIAA is not associated with prior over-amplification in the CI concept, therefore combining the advantages of active and passive RIAA without their disadvantages. Cartridge levels are largely self-adjusting to similar values. For example, a high-output MC cartridge, delivering 10 times the voltage, but also having ten times the internal impedance, results in the same current amount and thus level".

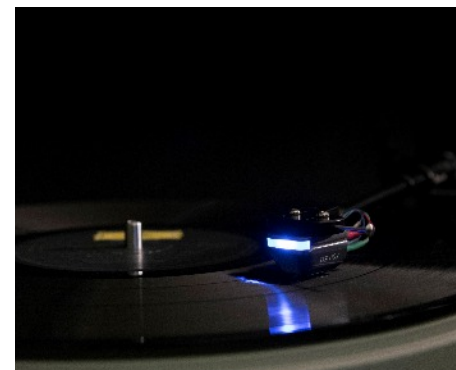
An additional "Power Conditioner" module, which fills the  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the



housing, reduces the power related disturbances and fluctuations to a minimum thanks to a complex shunt controller. The phono signal sections provide 40% more level headroom. The frequency response fluctuates only by  $\pm 0.1\text{dB}$ , with classic RIAA or Neumann corrected RIAA. The cabinet has been mechanically damped.

The retail price US\$ 4298

## DS Audio Launches Entry Level DS 002 Optical Cartridge



In 2013 DS Audio launched the world's only optical phono cartridge, the DS-W1. A further-advanced flagship model, the Master 1, followed in 2016. Now, the company is launching a new entry level design: the DS 002, drawing on innovations from the Master 1 while offering a more affordable way in to optical cartridge technology.

The new DS 002 retains this same wider compatibility as the Master 1, as well as the basis of the Master 1's technology – with its enhanced optical-mechanical system and wire-suspended cantilever, also delivering an output of 500mV and more with 25dB of separation. But to achieve its more affordable price point, the DS 002 sports an aluminium chassis, aluminium cantilever and Shibata stylus.

It also comes with a more compact and lightweight phono stage/equaliser, in which a newly-updated power supply features ten 33,000 $\mu\text{F}$  capacitors. The phono stage/equaliser uses a special shielding that both isolates internal 'noise' from the power supply while also blocking external RF and other environmental interference. The shield is 1.5mm thick and covers the entire transformer.

On the rear panel is a pair of RCA outputs with a single cut-off below 30Hz by 6dB/oct and a second RCA pair offering the same but with an additional cut off below 50Hz by 6dB/oct – along with a ground socket and a pair of inputs.

The DS Audio DS 002 optical phono cartridge with phono stage/equaliser is available now, priced at £4,800 (inc. VAT).





# Volya Bouquet Loudspeakers

By Stuart and Linette Smith

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Stuart and Linette take a listen to the unique Volya Bouquet loudspeakers costing €120 000.

# VOLYA BOUQUET LOUDSPEAKERS



The insight into the stereo mix is brilliant. It is accurate and the spatial elements within the mix and presented in a fashion that is almost reach out and touchable.

I first came across the Volya Bouquet speakers at last year's High-End show in Munich last year and was impressed enough to drag Linette away from a meeting to come and have a look/listen.

Let's not beat around the proverbial bush here, the Bouquet's are aesthetically unlike any piece of Hifi that I've ever come across and their look is not going to be to everyone's taste. The enclosures are based on the form of a traditional Ukrainian spoon (yep, you read it right) and are hand painted in traditional Petrikovskiy designs by Lyudmila Gorbulya. Because they are hand painted each speaker's paint-job is slightly different and unique – whilst completely unusual I actually really love the design.

Each of the enclosures is constructed from MDF with the walls of the speakers varying in thickness from 35mm to 50mm and with internal bracing throughout and with no parallel lines anywhere in an attempt to reduce standing waves. Inside the enclosure sheep wool is used as a dampener.

All internal wiring is "super-pure" copper and the crossover components are made by Mundorf and Goertz with the actual crossover itself being on three separate boards. German brand Accuton make the drivers used in the Bouquet with the pair of woofers being 280mm (11 inch) Kevlar/ceramic sandwich construction and are rear-ported. There is a mid-bass driver at the top of the enclosure of 220mm (8 inch), a mid



# VOLYA BOUQUET LOUDSPEAKERS

range of 50mm (2 inch) and a diamond membrane tweeter of 25mm (1 inch). Impedance is 4 Ohms and the Bouquets are 86dB sensitive.

The two bass drivers are in the “bowl” of the spoon with the lower driver pointing slightly upwards and the upper driver pointing slightly downwards. Likewise the mid-bass driver points downwards towards the listening position. These are visually an imposing speaker, not only because of the striking paint-job, but also because of their physical size – they stand nearly 2 metres in height and weigh a not inconsiderable 105 kg each!

System used for the duration of the review period was as follows: Chord DAVE DAC, Musical Fidelity CD player, Novafidelity X50, Music First Baby Reference V2 Preamplifier, Merrill Thor and Nord amplifiers with mains cables being by Atlas, interconnects by Tellurium Q and speaker cables by Chord and Tellurium Q.

## Sound

The first CD in the tray, because it was already in there from a previous listening session was Gong’s Floating

Anarchy and it being an early morning start volumes were kept at an uncharacteristically low level. What first struck was the utter lack of any kind of bass bloat...regular readers will know this is pretty much the first thing I listen for. Bass guitar really did sound like a real bass with absolutely bags of detail. On the track Allez Ali Baba Blacksheep -Have You Any Bullshit the intricate bass runs are presented really beautifully and even at these low levels there’s just bags of micro detail apparent and a really live feel to the music. The next thing to grab my attention on this album was the swirling synth that just comes out of thin air and move around the soundstage in a stunningly three dimensional and utterly believable way – the speakers do disappear in this respect! Reading my notes through I’m making it sound as though the Bouquets are separating everything up into its component parts but the reality is that whilst each individual part of the performance is clearly distinguishable, it still comes together as a whole and with a real sense that you are listening to a live band. I put this down to the way the mid-bass and mid-range drivers are angled downwards towards the listener making it feel that you are really among the crowd at the concert.

Todd Terry’s Resolutions album is a breakbeat and bass fest and I’m pretty certain that this kind of music is certainly not what Volya had in mind when designing these speakers, but my thoughts on this are that a speaker, particularly one costing as much as the Bouquets, should be able to play anything that you care to throw at it...and anyway it’s a great album and a terrific work out. This is electronic music and I know there will be people reading this that don’t think this is right or proper material for using in a review...but I disagree strongly on this; I know this music inside out and what can I say...it sounds magnificent on the Volyas! The insight into the stereo mix is brilliant. It is accurate and the spatial elements within the mix and presented in a fashion that is almost reach out and touchable. This is a complex record with deep electronic bass that some speakers can get totally lost with but the Volyas just don’t put a step wrong and feel sure footed and composed throughout, whilst at the same time keeping that edge of your seat excitement. And then there’s the detail again in the top end frequencies; hats on Blackout are fast and furious and here you are getting every hit of the drum machine. There’s also that same feeling of being enveloped by the music and the mix





# VOLYA BOUQUET LOUDSPEAKERS

which is a really addictive trait of these speakers. These are incredibly communicative and detailed loudspeakers, and despite the sound levels having crept up quite dramatically they never sound stressed or on the point of losing it; composed, calm and unflustered are words used in my notes. Track two on the album is a funky workout based around one drum sample that Terry messes about with and all the way through is a nagging cowbell which here just shines out and grabs your attention. When Terry filters the beat you hear everything that he's doing in the studio. I've noted here that I'm aware that the speakers are disappearing sonically with the soundstage extending well beyond the speakers laterally and well behind and forward too... I like that! At the end of this track there is a fade out of just one sample and today on the Volyas there is real detail and you can hear that it's actually a vocal sample that has been heavily processed...it sounds like "Ftz" and I've never heard it in quite so much detail before. Keeping with this album and track three has a brass sample that with the Bouquets just cuts through the rest of the mix with a force that makes you sit up and pay attention.

I'm making the Bouquets sound as though they are like a studio monitor and in many ways that is how they come across to me; they just allow so much detail and micro-detail to reach the listener and it comes through with pinpoint accuracy and very little colouration. I really could see these speakers being used as high-end studio's main monitors. You are really drawn into what is happening in the mix and get every effect, sample or drum hit. I really am hearing stuff on this record that, whilst I was previously aware they were there, I'm now getting a more defined and complete feel to the overall sound these little sonic clues bring to the tunes. I'm sat just listening and getting into the grooves of the tunes, but I'm also aware that I'm hearing them as you would when you really sit and try to analyse the sound in a critical manner...but without having to try...if that makes sense.

It's not long before I'm kicked out of the sweet-spot by Linette and

whilst the stereo image is no longer quite as holographic and focused as it was there is still a feeling that you are amongst the music. These are speakers you can enjoy with friends, but you are still going to want to keep the best seat in the house for yourself. I flick back to the Blackout tune and there's a sound I really thought I'd got the hang of; it's a bass sound with lots of kick drum but with the Volyas there is real insight into how the overall sound has been modulated and filtered...again monitor like definition.

Induologue's Blue Sky is an album female voice and contrabass that has been recorded in a Dutch chapel with great attention being paid to the recording space and it's a really glorious album. At the end of the first track the bass just fades out into the natural reverb of the space and here it sounds wonderful...it's little things like this that sets these speakers apart. This is perhaps the kind of album that manufacturers would use to show off how good their speakers are but with the Volyas the fine detail in the timbre of the bass is mightily impressive; you just hear everything and it sounds natural and





# VOLYA BOUQUET LOUDSPEAKERS

unforced and you just can't help but be drawn into and get lost in the sound. As to the vocal, I'm hearing every little inflection in her tone and when she hits the high notes there's not a hint of harshness or feeling that the speakers are getting stressed.

There's only so much description of listening to specific tunes that you can do in a review before you start to repeat yourself, sound like a prat and bore people to tears... suffice to say that the time I spent with the Volyas had a huge impact on me. They are a home loudspeaker that have a monitor-like accuracy and depth of detail. They are beautifully balanced with no one frequency range coming to the fore. At low levels they play wonderfully and allow you a full listening experience. However, turn up the volume and they just get louder; no stress, no hassles and just more of what you were getting at the lower volumes. Feed them with well recorded tunes and the Volyas shine, but conversely if you feed them with crap recordings you will realise just how bad it is!

## Conclusion

Let's face it, no one is going to spunk €120K on the back of a review and I see my time with the Bouquets as a bit of a perk of the job; not many people are ever going to have the opportunity to hear them with their own gear and in their own space rather than at a Hifi show.

Sonically the Volyas are simply stunning with detail, finesse and poise across the volume range. They allow you to see into a recording, the space the recording is made in and add a spatial element to the listening experience that is virtually reach out and touch tactile.

So long as the recording is good these speakers don't quibble what kind of music you throw at them and are equally happy playing Miles Davis as they are Dutch Gabba.

The looks are going to divide opinion but that's sort of to miss the point of these speakers. Not everyone is going to get the design and the artwork but the way I saw the Bouquets was as a work of terrific folk art that also play music brilliantly.

As I was finishing up my notes we had some friends pop round and they were

totally gobsmacked with every aspect of the Bouquets. As we're sat enjoying a glass of wine we're listening to Anouar Brahem and for all intents and purposes the musicians may as well be in the room.

Yep the Bouquets are that good!

## Linette's Thoughts

I first encountered these loudspeakers at High End Munich 2016. I had been at a get together with my 'Women In Hifi' facebook group, so Stuart was on his own when he went into the Volya cabin, he was so impressed that he took me back to have a listen, I think his exact words were "come and listen to these, you'll love them!". He was, of course, correct. I only had a short time to listen but came away feeling very impressed both by the looks and the sound of the Bouquet.

Fast forward six months and we are in the damp gloom of winter rather than the Bavarian sunshine and are waiting for the Volya Bouquets to arrive at Hifi Pig Towers. Luckily we have a big listening room as these are very big speakers, though, despite their size, their shape makes them very elegant...I love the way they seem to lean both forwards and back at the same time. The four strong Ukrainian team were incredibly efficient and had them inside for us in no time.

The loudspeakers have an incredibly tactile quality to them. The Lyudmila Gorbulya artwork in the traditional Petrikovskiy style is stunning. Each speaker is slightly different as they are completely hand done. There is a depth to the floral designs that is enhanced by the incredibly glossy finish. They bring an explosion of colour into the room. I know that the finish will divide people, but personally I love it and in the right interior they look breathtaking.

There was always the possibility that these could be a little gimmicky, but Volya have focused as much attention on the insides of the speakers as they have on the outside. The Accuton ceramic/kevlar and their diamond drivers are very high quality as are the Mundorf and Goertz crossover components. The sonic results are outstanding. The sounds is very pure and natural and the speakers are equally happy with female vocal and acoustic instruments as they are with electronic music. Stuart has gone into plenty of

detail previously in this review so I won't duplicate that, suffice to say these speakers do what I like best, give you a whole load of enjoyment, are totally non-fatiguing, have tight, fast bass and engaging top and mids. Of particular note for me was the presentation of the soundstage which was projected into the room in a 3D 'bubble', completely immersive! Unusually, they also had somewhat of an omnidirectional quality to them, even sat in the small lounge area we have that was behind the speakers you could appreciate the music.

In summary I would say that one word sums up the Volya Bouquet and that would be 'Joyful' They are a complete pleasure to listen to whatever your musical taste, plus you have the benefit of two incredible works of art in your home. They are expensive but if you can afford them and are looking for something just that bit different then I can heartily recommend them.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Stunning with artwork to match

**Sound Quality:** A level of detail that is highly impressive at all volume levels. Bass is as tight as can be. A real insight into the recording, the recording space and the mixing process

**Value For Money:** Beyond the reach of most but view these as a work of art...a Fabergé egg of the audio world perhaps

### Pros:

Detailed, monitor type sound that is never fatiguing and nor does it feel over analytical

Exquisite build and finish

Tight and extended bass response

An eerily three dimensional listening experience

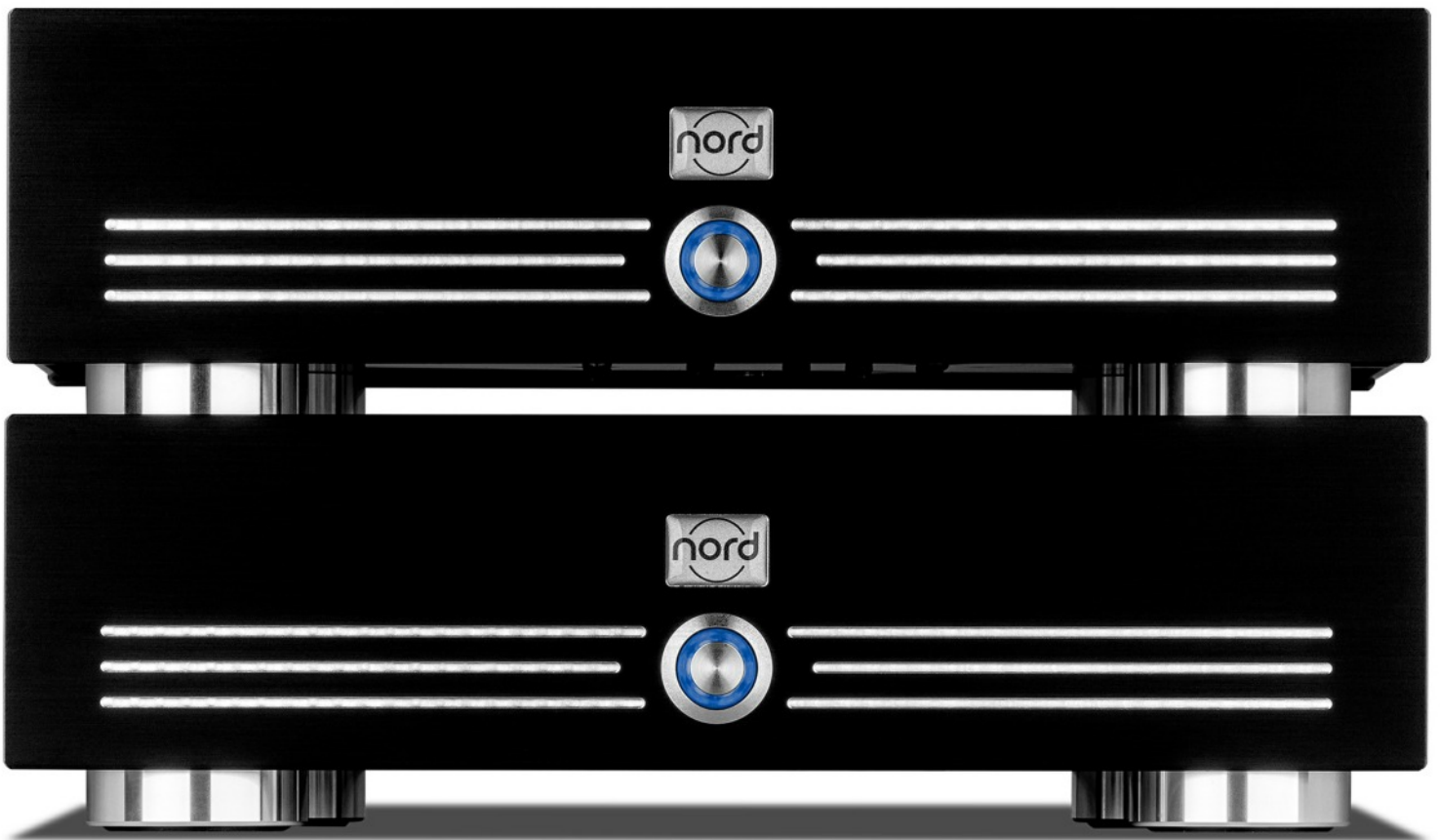
### Cons:

The artwork is not going to be to everyone's taste

I can't afford them

Price: €120 000

# **WORLD CLASS HYPEX AMPLIFIERS AT REAL WORLD PRICING! 250W Hypex NCore £749**



Operating with ultra low noise floor and exquisite bass control, revealing palpable breaths, finger plucks and decaying notes delivered by the mids and treble.

Levels and layers of detail, dynamics and sound stage are breathtaking, with the ability and current reserves (28A) to drive the most demanding speakers down to 2 ohms.

Many of our sales are coming from customers "downgrading?" from large traditional Class A and A/B powerhouses from McIntosh, Copland, Accuphase not to mention modern players like Devialet and the NAD Masters M22 etc. with very positive feedback, slightly embarrassing! In other words seasoned wealthy Audiophiles who have been playing the game for 30 odd years!

And I can assure you they are know nobody's fool!

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# Monitor Audio Platinum PL300ii Loudspeakers

By Lionel Payne

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Having recently bought Roksan Monitor Audio are certainly a brand to watch in the coming year. Here Lionel Payne takes a listen to their Platinum PL300ii loudspeakers costing £8000.

# MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300ii LOUDSPEAKERS



This careful attention to detail was something that I would continue to notice throughout my review period with them

When the Monitor Audio Platinum PL300ii floorstanding loudspeakers arrived I was immediately struck as to how big and heavy they are, particularly within their packaging. They arrived in two crates (part wood, mostly cardboard) and they immediately presented me with a problem of getting them into my house. With packaging, each weighs almost 75kg but once unwrapped they present a much more moveable 54.5kg. This is a good thing as I had to get them up two floors to my dedicated listening room (man cave). Obviously such an expensive item as these has to be packed very safely and I have to say that this was certainly the case here and I couldn't help but notice how carefully thought out the packaging

process was to make them as safe as possible without adding too much undue weight to the overall packaging. This careful attention to detail was something that I would continue to notice throughout my review period with them.

I like attention to detail !

The PL300ii's are a 4 driver 3-way loudspeaker with two 8 inch long throw bass drivers with Monitor Audio's second generation Rigid Diaphragm Technology (RDT), one 4inch midrange RDT driver and a Micro Pleated Diaphragm (MPD) high frequency transducer which you and I would simply call a ribbon tweeter. There are separate grills for the 2 bass drivers and



The clean,  
smooth  
sound and  
wide open  
soundstage  
immediately  
grabbed my  
attention

another grill for the combined midrange and tweeter. I tried listening with and without the grills in place and found no discernible difference. The grills are a strong fine metal which fit snugly and require a magnetic tool (provided) to aid removal. There are three available finishes; a piano gloss black and two real wood veneers in either Santos Rosewood or Ebony. All three finishes are completed with no fewer than eleven coats of clear gloss lacquer and then buffed up to give an exquisite finish. The front baffle is covered in the finest Inglestone black leather which allows the loudspeakers, when their grills are in place, to blend into the background quite effectively for such a large chunky loudspeaker.

The cabinets have chamfered sides and there are two rear ports per cabinet, although the midrange drivers are placed within sealed internal enclosures. The loudspeakers are attached to bases which extend the footprint and add to their stability and I loved the design of the spike system. The spikes are far different in design than your normal loudspeakers would have and they can be finely adjusted in situ through the fact that they carry a threaded allen bolt which is accessible from the top (tool provided). Even the attention to detail of the loudspeaker terminals must be applauded. These terminals are at ground level affixed to the base and face upwards which makes so much logical sense to me (am I alone in this ?) allowing the banana plugs to point



# MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300ii LOUDSPEAKERS

straight down. The terminals themselves are not round as we see so often but a softly curved triangular shape which makes for a much easier shape to grip and turn.

The cabinets seem to be totally inert when faced with the “knuckle rap test” and a lot of work has gone on beneath the surface to produce this result. The drivers have no visible front fixings as they are ingeniously fixed with a bolt-through system and tightened from the rear. Monitor Audio have also developed a material they call ARC (Anti-Resonance Composite) which is ideal for acoustic design, and is used to aid structural rigidity and vibration damping as well as preventing the

propagation of standing waves and modal resonances.

I was lucky enough to have Monitor Audio’s Technical Director, Dean Hartley, call on me soon after the arrival of the PL300ii’s. Dean’s enthusiasm and pride in being a part of this speaker’s development really shone through in our meeting and the quantifiable reduction in distortion of all the drive units came across, in particular, within our conversation.

## Sound

When a product for review first arrives and is linked into my system I tend to try not to be too concerned how it sounds immediately. Electronics tend to need at

least a couple of days to settle down and loudspeakers are often in need of some “breaking in” before sounding at their very best. As soon as I had the PL300ii’s hooked up to my upgraded Musical Fidelity Tri Vista 300 integrated amplifier I immediately recognised that here was a pair of loudspeakers with some very special attributes. I’m fairly sure that the output from the ribbon tweeters is the sweetest that I have ever heard. They seemed to be firing with all cylinders immediately and Dean did verify that the whole of the Platinum range undergo several hours of testing before being released for sale. I remember well the first CD I listened to with these speakers – it was Hard Believer by Fink.

However, without taking any notes I still remember that evening, and that first CD, and the effect they had extremely well. The clean, smooth sound and wide open soundstage immediately grabbed my attention but the track that really nailed it was track 4, a song called “Pilgrim” which starts with simple beginnings but grows through the track with a rhythm that can take over your whole being. I’ve listened to this track and indeed, the whole album many times but this presentation through the PL300ii’s transcended anything I’d previously heard. At the end of the track I appeared to be in a world of my own as the music had simply taken over my being ! Great music and great hi-fi can do this to you and make no mistake, the Monitor Audio PL300ii’s are great hi-fi ! The sound from these wonderfully attractive loudspeakers is so beguiling it is hard to fault. With those two 8 inch woofers they produce a wonderful low end which, to my ears, seems just right. The bass is quick, agile and tuneful and it can plumb the depths with the very best. I tested the bass response with several test tracks from the likes of Dead Can Dance, Prince, Erykah Badu and Leftfield which the PL300ii’s passed with flying colours.

Perhaps the standout element of the sound from these speakers is their treble. The ribbon tweeter, or Micro Pleated Diaphragm high frequency transducer if you prefer, is a wonderful addition whatever you wish to call it. When I met Dean Hartley he explained that the distortion from the MPD had been reduced dramatically from the previous incarnation’s ribbon tweeter. It is an improved version of Dr. Oskar Heil’s Air Motion Transformer design and is a





# MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300ii LOUDSPEAKERS



folded design which works almost like an accordion and gives a flat and even response right up to 100kHz. It really does sound excellent and produces highs that are crystal clear with real panache and not one iota of over emphasis which can lead to a fatiguing overall sound. In fact, during his visit, I remember playing the Fink CD – Fink Meets The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and thinking how the triangle strikes in The Infernal Machine just seemed to float in space and then decayed so naturally. Further listening to this CD proved how effectual the soundstage is as every instrument appears to have its own space and is clearly defined within a deep and wide soundscape. Another thing to notice about this ability is how well balanced this soundstage is as you are not pinned to one seated position to enjoy the benefits of stereo. I have known certain loudspeakers to have a glorious soundstage as long as you remain rooted in one position but even a turn of the head can ruin this. The PL300ii's do not suffer this curse and you can still enjoy the soundstaging of the speakers, even when you are seated directly opposite one of the pair. I found their positioning fairly easy on placement as long as you give them a metre minimum behind. I preferred them toed in so each speaker was virtually pointing directly at me but, as always, your view may vary.

It seems almost scurrilous of me to criticise these loudspeakers in any way as I found them to be a glorious addition to my system and a fabulous partner to my (JS upgraded) Tri Vista 300 amplifier, and even Dean commented on the synergy between the pair but there is one thing to mention. I found that they had the uncanny ability to smooth out the leading edge to notes which can be a double-edged sword. With some music this is actually a bonus as it can make edgy recordings more listenable and it certainly makes the loudspeakers completely fatigue-free. An example of this would be Adele's "Chasing Pavements" from her debut album 19. In my reference system I simply cannot listen to this track as it is far too strident and quite frankly sounds nasty. It became listenable with the PL300ii's in place but still far from enjoyable. I will keep listening to her live version of the song from her recording at the Hotel Café which is exquisite. However, listening to Fink's "Sort Of Versions" which is a closely miked acoustic recording of a few of his tracks from his "Sort Of Revolutions" album took a little quality away from the overall mix but it still remained a glorious listen. Another recording which highlighted this trend was The Waterboys' "In A Special Place: The Piano Demos For This Is The Sea" which I find to be a

wonderful but somewhat edgy recording. The opening track of this (Don't Bang The Drum) perfectly highlights the differences with the PL300ii's taking some of the edginess away but perhaps a little excitement with it.

I tried using other amplifiers with the PL300ii's with good results. I have a Stemsfort SF-200 class AB 100 watt amplifier here for review and the pair worked extremely well together. I also hooked up a vintage Albarry PP4 integrated which has a mere 45 watts in Class AB but had no problem driving the Monitor Audio's and surprised me as to the quality on offer.

## Conclusion

I can't praise these loudspeakers highly enough and, quite frankly, given the funds for purchase I would happily pay the asking price (not sure my wife would agree though !). Even watching television with them hooked up improved my viewing enjoyment. I have a more than adequate 5.1 system in my lounge, but the mancave is strictly stereo and the PL300ii's more than satisfy with their dynamics, fine detail and soundstage. A real tour de force !

Highly recommended !

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Beautiful cabinetry and impeccable build quality

**Sound Quality:** Awesome sound at all frequencies with seemingly perfect integration

**Value For Money :** They aren't cheap but worth every penny

**Pros :**

Smooth and sophisticated sound which never becomes fatiguing

The new ribbon tweeter is a gem

Good enough to, perhaps, be your very last loudspeaker

**Cons :**

A slight softening of the leading edge can take away from some recordings

**Price :** £8000

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# Arcaydis EB2S Loudspeakers

By Ian Ringstead

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Arcaydis are a Sheffield based manufacturer of loudspeakers that many will know the name of. The company has relaunched recently with new owners but with the same designs and here Ian Ringstead takes a listen to their £799 EB2S standmount loudspeaker.

# ARCAYDIS EB2S LOUDSPEAKERS



The  
crossovers are  
built in-house  
and rather  
than using off-  
the-shelf  
components,  
all the  
components in  
the crossovers  
are either  
hand-built or  
custom  
manufactured  
in Britain

Arcaydis was initially formed in 1997 by Richard Allen who had worked in the audio industry and spent time working for Celestion but by late 2013 the company ceased trading. Richard is not part of the new company, but the new builds are an exact replica of the first designs and the company is now totally owned by brothers Robin and James Szemeti with Robin being Technical Director of a pro-audio company and James working for a service and support operation for global customers in an industrial software company.

Arcaydis are based in Sheffield only a few miles from me, so Jim popped over with a pair of the EB2S and he also brought samples of all three available finishes (oak, black and matt white. Other finishes can be supplied at an additional cost). The EB2S's are a medium sized, infinite baffle design standmount design with a larger cabinet than more usual ported designs and are built with Arcaydis' Arcolam laminate, which the company say gives incredibly low levels of cabinet panel resonance. The speakers are 450mm tall, 225mm wide, 296mm deep.

Round the back of the speakers are a pair of bi-wireable connections and Arcaydis suggest using stands of 40cm stands; I used a pair of Atacama Nexus 500mm stands filled with kiln dried sand and Atacama isolation gel pads on the top plate. These for me provided the perfect height and platform for the EB2S. The speakers are bi-wireable but

I chose to use my single wired 4mm Van Damme cables with Van Damme 4mm jumper links. The standard pressed metal link plates don't do it for me and I feel let the speakers down a tad. Jim said he was going to probably supply links of their own based on my findings. He also suggested attaching my single wired cables diagonally on the terminals so one connection was on the top right terminal and the other was on the bottom left. Jim claimed some had preferred the EB2S wired this way. I will reserve judgement here.

The bass unit is a 170mm Visaton model and the tweeter a 25mm Monacor soft dome design. The crossovers are built in-house and rather than using off-the-shelf components, all the components in the crossovers are either hand-built or custom manufactured in Britain. Their inductors are wound in-house on their own coil-winder using "premium copper", with a high temperature varnish. Each inductor is inspected and its value checked and adjusted to meet the design values. Crossover components are mounted by hand on custom-made circuit boards which are gold plated, designed to minimise any losses due to skin effect... it also has the advantage of easing the soldering process, where lead-free solder is used. After wire terminations are added the crossovers are computer tested to ensure that they fall within the company's parameters, with the aim that what leaves the factory is a loudspeaker that is an exact replica of the Arcaydis reference unit. Each set of loudspeakers'



# ARCAYDIS EB2S LOUDSPEAKERS

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Top to bottom detail was excellent and I particularly noticed early on how clearly the tweeter could portray very realistically the sound of instruments like cymbals and tambourines

measurements are recorded and logged so that if a loudspeaker is returned for service the original data can be used to see if anything has altered. Impedance of the speakers is 8 ohms' nominal, 5.9 ohms minimum and they are 87dB sensitive (@ 2.8 volts @ 1 metre with pink noise).

## Sound

The EB2S had a fine reputation from a few years ago, but I had no pre-conceptions having never heard them before and the original designer Richard Allen was a name from the past I recognised but I had no experience of his products.

After a week or so of running in I started serious listening and I must say I was very impressed. For quite a large cabinet in my listening room they disappeared very easily sonically and provided a detailed 3D image on a large range of

music. Top to bottom detail was excellent and I particularly noticed early on how clearly the tweeter could portray very realistically the sound of instruments like cymbals and tambourines. We take for granted that these instruments are easily reproduced by a system, but believe me I have heard many systems or components that don't sound natural and not just the cheaper items. Let's face it a good system should sound natural and enjoyable, (musical if you insist, although I think that term is over used at times). Mids and bass were equally well portrayed and the bass was not over blown unless pushed too hard to a volume level the room couldn't handle; an issue of the room rather than the speakers.

Artists such as Oleta Adams, Simply Red, Boz Scaggs and Sade all tested the EB2S ability to work their magic with vocals and instrumental details. A lot of this music is from the eighties and I



# ARCAYDIS EB2S LOUDSPEAKERS

make no apologies for that. It was a great era for music and well recorded albums. I pulled out albums I hadn't listened to for ages and not one was a disappointment. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised by some I hadn't heard for many years and had thought weren't that good musically back then.

One album that particularly stood out was from a favourite artist Sting and his live album "Bring on the night". I love this style of jazz rock and as always Sting has top musicians playing alongside him. Omar Hakim on drums, Branford Marsalis on sax, Kenny Kirkland on keys, Darryl Jones on bass and Janice Pendarvis and Dolette McDonald on backing vocals this was one sublime performance. I really felt involved with the show and although not quite the same as being there it was a close second for enjoyment.

I can't really say any more about the EB2S. Coupled with good sources and amp they really shine. I used my usual Tisbury Audio passive pre, Meridian 556 power amp, Project Extension 9 turntable with Ortofon Quintet Black and Tisbury Audio Domino phono stage, Atmo Sphera turntable (more to follow on this in a later review) and Denon DCD2500NE SACD player. These aren't budget items apart from the Tisbury which are extraordinarily good

value for money, but showed what the EB2S are capable of. I am sure that on any other decent system from reputable manufacturers that the EB2S will not let you down. With an introductory offer of £799.00 a pair they are fabulous value and if you can't accommodate their size Arcaydis also do the smaller EB1S for smaller rooms which I hope to try out at a later date.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build quality:** Excellent for the money and made locally in Sheffield

**Sound Quality:** Overall a highly entertaining design that I felt really at home with and could listen to long term without any qualms

**Value For Money:** Great value at this price level

**Pros:** Sound quality, decent choice of quality finishes, with custom requests catered for if so desired at a premium of course

**Cons:** bin the pressed metal links and use decent jumper cables or bi-wire

**Price:** £799 (direct from Arcaydis as an introductory offer)

Coupled  
with  
good  
sources  
and amp  
they  
really  
shine





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# Unison Research Triode 25 Amplifier

By Dominic Marsh

---

In case you are not familiar with the name Unison Research, it is an Italian company in business for some 20 years or so at Treviso, a municipality just to the north of Venice, with a well earned reputation for producing some excellent hifi components. Dominic Marsh has a play with their Triode 25 valve amplifier.



# UNISON RESEARCH TRIODE 25 AMPLIFIER



At first glance this amplifier looks positively handsome. The sample supplied for review sported a real Cherry wood fascia which I found rather attractive and a welcome change from the ubiquitous black or silver finish. The remainder of the chassis is painted black however and as a foil to that the valve bases are inset into two polished alloy heat shields which extend from the front panel in a sweeping arc upwards, meeting the top plates of the transformer covers. A rather substantially built chrome plated valve cover cage is supplied, removed by slackening off four Allen bolts and sliding the cover along keyhole slots in the cover's base plates to quickly release the cage.

For those that don't own or know how to operate a multimeter, or have the confidence to go poking around within the internals of a valve amplifier to adjust the valve bias settings, Unison Research have thoughtfully provided a simple yet effective way of adjusting the bias current settings. Betwixt the valves on the valve base level there is a simple voltmeter and a potentiometer that makes setting the bias child's play and completely safe, even for the most novice of owners. The review sample needed no such adjustment but I took the time to read the owner's handbook and it seems simple and painless.

The end user has a choice of power output modes between Pentode and Triode. I won't go into details of how the two modes work, save that Pentode mode gives a higher wattage output with a slightly less refined sound whereas

Triode mode has a lower output wattage, but has greater detail and clarity.

Front panel controls consist of a machined alloy rotary knob to the left which is the source selector and an identical rotary knob for volume control to the right of the panel. Between the two in the centre of the front panel is a toggle on/off power switch aligned horizontally, beneath which is the remote control sensor window.

To the rear we find from left to right, an IEC power inlet socket with integral fuse holder, the fuse rating depending upon mains input voltage, the value thoughtfully printed on the transformer cover above. Then we find a set of four speaker binding posts, able to accept 4mm banana plugs, spade connections and bare wire. There is no biwire facility or catering for more than one pair of speakers. Next we see a row of single ended RCA connections, namely SUB out, TAPE out, TAPE (Input), AV input, TUNER and CD. To the right of this is a blanking plate marked "USB" which would have a USB connection if the module is fitted.

It is supplied with a remote control handset.

Retail price is £2,600.00 at the time of review.

## Sound

They say that EL34 valves have a sweet sound to them, but that has more to do with the design implementation of the circuitry, especially in the output

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

# UNISON RESEARCH TRIODE 25 AMPLIFIER

transformer quality rather than a mythical inherent sound to the valves per se, as I have been less than enamoured with some EL34 amplifiers I have listened to in the past. Unison Research really have got the recipe right with this amplifier as it sounds sublime to me and I could sit here and probably type a hundred superlatives and you would probably read it in disbelief, so I am going to have to justify in words the sounds that I heard from this amplifier.

The interesting part of this review was pairing the Unison Research amplifier with different speakers, one of which was supplied with this amplifier and a Reeloc turntable as the source, all from the same distributor as one of their recommended packages. I won't mention the Reeloc turntable in this review as that will feature in a separate review with the Unison Research Triode 25 and Opera Mezzza speakers as a complete set.

I first coupled the Unison Research Triode 25 into my resident system and immediately it was apparent just how lucid and insightful this amplifier really

is and surprisingly quiet and noise free too. Trust me when I say it took no effort at all to listen to this amplifier producing real music, bursting with tonality and dynamism in a truly effortless way. I have heard other EL34 amps produce this level of sound quality, but the Unison Research had that top level of polish and refinement that to date I have not heard elsewhere from EL34 valves. Hard to describe, but the sound had a rich liquid silkiness which you might infer as being masked or veiled, but not so. Leading edges were crisp and sharp enough to have a shave with, but not sharp or edgy either. I'm struggling with the right words here (unusual for me) but would it suffice to say that I had no cause for complaint with anything I heard, with one small exception.

Bass was extremely clean and tight, perhaps a little too tight as that swift kick in the guts power a solid state amplifier can deliver with plenty of beefy watts behind it, the Triode 25 couldn't quite muster. I bet you valve fans are muttering under your breath at reading this, but you play something like

Supertramp's "Dreamer" or Dire Straits "Private Investigations" at full chat on a valve and then a solid state rig, then come back and argue! This was no real surprise as I have yet to hear any valve amplifier compete with that, so living with a valve based power amplifier is all part of the whole package for me. Conversely, there isn't a solid state amplifier that could quite produce that sweet silkiness in the treble and midband the Unison Research Triode 25 possesses so I will settle for an even score here. You pay your money and take your choice, as they say.

Listening to Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album recorded live at various venues revealed a depth of image and soundstaging that was all enveloping, extending beyond the speaker boundaries and depth-wise not lacking by any means. My biggest bugbear with this album is Fink's diction which makes following the lyrics rather difficult, nay impossible at times despite the songs inviting you to sing along (I use the word "sing" here with some caution). The album's true forte though is the instruments, with some stunning





# UNISON RESEARCH TRIODE 25 AMPLIFIER



well recorded drum playing and bass guitar. When the drummer hits the Floor Tom in the track “Sort Of Revolution” it should penetrate to the centre of your being with it’s power and slam, but as mentioned above the Unison Research amplifier just fell short of that idea. In it’s defence though, the ambience of each venue shines clearly through and you can easily discern the size of the venue and it’s acoustics. The cymbals sounded exactly like struck cymbals should sound like, full of vibrancy and energy so you were in no doubt at all that metal was being hit. Track one on the album is called “Biscuits For Breakfast”, opening with some delicious acoustic guitar and Ride Cymbal playing, recorded with great precision, joined soon afterwards by deep bass guitar plucks, all a joy to listen to. Track two called “Perfect Darkness” again has some great intro drumming with snare drum rim knock and kick drum. Of particular note was how real the audience sound was, seemingly surrounded by some very enthusiastic clapping and cheering.

Time to give the Unison Research amplifier a good workout now, with Porcupine Tree’s “Deadwing” album slotted into the CD player’s drawer. This album is full of rawness in the recording and it easily wrong-foots many a system, but all credit to it, the Unison Research Triode 25 managed to tread that fine line between accuracy, delicacy and smoothness, avoiding for the better part the raw edgy harshness that this album can output, yet not totally mask the album’s recording shortcomings. To be truthful, this is the kind of presentation I enjoy for my personal listening; excitement and dynamics without being sonically

assaulted by the drawbacks of absolute accuracy and fidelity.

Next into the fray came a pair of Opera Mezza speakers. On my resident system they had a weird ‘beaming’ effect whereby there was a glorious sweet spot dead centre and a metre either side of that, but beyond that boundary the sound collapsed severely, losing bass and treble definition in my listening room. Paired with the Unison Research amplifier I didn’t notice that effect quite as much. That pairing was fine tonally and dynamically, but not a big bold sound by any means which I would best describe as “intimate”, best enjoyed at lower levels, which sounds rather perfect for those who live in thin walled houses with complaining neighbours.

Out with the Opera speakers and in with a pair of Roksan K2 TR-5 S2 speakers, which have a superb ribbon tweeter and larger cabinet dimensions than the Opera speakers, so I was expecting a lot more bass. Bass indeed now took a good leap forward and the ribbon tweeter coupled with the silkiness of the Unison Research amplifier was a great marriage. However, the Roksan speakers have a quite prodigious bass output and the Unison Research couldn’t keep as tight a grip on the bass registers as I would have liked, resulting in a slight overhang I am being picky here and if I didn’t have my resident system as the benchmark then I might not have been quite so critical in this respect.

Last but not least, a pair of Audiovector QR1s (Full review soon) were connected up to the Unison Research amplifier. Again, this speaker has ribbon tweeters like the Roksan’s and sure enough treble output was as sweet and mellifluous in

that respect as the Roksan speakers. Bass had a less prodigious quantity and was all the better for that when paired with the Unison Research amplifier, providing a better balanced sound. In fact, I purposely left the Audiovector speakers connected for quite some time.

## Conclusion

If I were in the market for a valve amplifier then this would probably be the one I would buy. I listened very hard for any fuzziness, harshness, noise, distortion, ringing, muffling, or veiling and I found none. Sure, the bass lacked concussion inducing power but I could live with that, as what was there was clean with no trace of bloom or boom, which does annoy the heck out of me. On the positive side it has a sweet beguiling sound that you can listen to for many hours and not once will it displease you in sound terms.

It is well specified, well built and easy to maintain too, especially the built-in bias adjustment settings. Comes with a great remote control and that pleases me too. I like the sturdy and thoughtfully designed chrome plated valve protection cage which keeps hot valves out of human harm’s way.

In summary then, if you hanker for a valve amplifier then this one HAS to be on your audition list for sure and I give it a high recommendation.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Beautifully crafted in every respect and the design is a tribute in how to make a valve amplifier not look like an ordinary run of the mill valve amplifier

**Sound Quality:** Sure footed and highly mellifluous, you owe it to yourself to audition or miss a sonic bargain

**Value For Money:** As it stands head and shoulders above the herd in sound and build quality, it has to be good value for money

**Pros:** Build, sound, ease of maintenance and a remote control. You really are being spoiled with this one.

**Cons:** None, except for a slight shortage of gut thumping bass power, to be expected though.

**Price:** £2600

# Cyrus ONE Integrated Amplifier

By Dominic Marsh

---

Dominic Marsh takes a listen to the £ 699 budget conscious Cyrus ONE integrated amplifier for Hifi Pig



# CYRUS ONE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

I found it agile  
and fleet of  
foot, full  
bodied too and  
clean  
sounding in  
the mid  
frequencies.



To be absolutely honest, I have never owned or even listened to a Cyrus product before. I suppose that means that I can happily ignore any preconceptions or rely on recalling the performance of any previous models and take what is placed before me to review at face value. That's exactly what I prefer when it comes to reviewing, by not having my judgement clouded or prejudiced.

## Construction

A simple contemporary design sits well with me and the Cyrus ONE amplifier ticks those boxes. Front panel controls consists of an on/off power switch, a 6.3mm headphone socket with it's own dedicated Class AB amplifier driving it, two large rotary controls for source selection and volume settings, matched by corresponding LEDs to show which source has been selected and a number

of the same type of LEDs surrounding the volume control to give a rough idea of where the control has been set. I say "rough idea" because the next up or down LED is lit up on every third clicked increment of the volume control. The volume setting is however accurate and those two additional 'clicks' between LED light up are of no consequence as three times as many LEDs would be required for each one-to-one volume control increment – plainly not necessary in practice.

Available sources are an APTX Bluetooth connection, a moving magnet phono input, three unassigned line inputs (Labelled 3, 4 and 5) and an AV input. There is also a pre out facility which can be used for an additional power amplifier or combined with the AV input for an AV system loop through connection. These are provide by single ended RCA connectors on the



# CYRUS ONE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

rear panel, plus a socket labelled “upgrade” which I made good use of during the evaluation. There are two full sets of binding posts for biwiring, fitted with little plastic inserts to prevent the insertion of round two pin mains plugs (Which we in the UK don’t use), which also by misfortune won’t allow 4mm banana plug insertion either, so the first job is to dig them out with a sharp knife if you wish to use banana plugs. The absurdity of the ‘nanny state’ never fails to amuse me. However, because there are four closely grouped binding posts per channel, I found it nigh on impossible to fit spade connectors that my own speaker cables are terminated with. The binding posts themselves are made with the bare minimum of metal with plastic forming most of the construction, which did let the amplifier down a tad. I would much rather have two good solid binding posts, as those folks that have a predilection for biwiring are able to buy suitable speaker cables terminated with two to four connections, the two connections fitted at the amplifier end and the four connections at the speaker end.

The front panel is made from a shiny black plastic and the outer case is made from sheet steel with a black finish. The steel is only just of a thickness that I would call adequate, which is a sign that pricing played a major part in the design decisions made by Cyrus. That doesn’t bother me personally because once installed I wouldn’t pay any more attention the thickness of the chassis provided it does what is intended of it, which it does.

Inside the amplifier we find the power amplifier section is rated as 100 watts per channel into a 6 Ohms impedance, using hybrid Class D topology which Cyrus are keeping quiet over what the “hybrid” part is. Cyrus have incorporated a speaker impedance detection (SID) circuit which does what it says on the tin – detects the impedance of the speakers connected to the amplifier and I shall mention “SID” again later in the review. At switch on, the amplifier performs a self test routine which activates the LEDs in sequence, first incrementing then decreasing, so the source LED set ends with the previous selection and the volume LEDs track all the way down to zero, although I would prefer the previous listener volume setting, although that is a minor niggle you learn to easily live with.

Cyrus provide a simple compact remote control which enables source selection, volume up/down and muting, balance control, AV direct and LED brightness adjustment, which is a useful feature if you are not enamoured by looking at bright LEDs. I didn’t find them at all intrusive at the factory default setting. The ONE can also be controlled by Cyrus's app.

## Sound Quality

During the early part of the evaluation I was a bit perturbed by a fairly loud ‘pop’ from the left hand speaker only at switch on, after the self test routine had completed. I got in touch with Cyrus who said the SID circuit was responsible and an upgrade to the latest firmware would cure this. Unplugged the Cyrus ONE from the rack, hauled it over to the PC and some digging in the cables drawer found the right USB lead and connected the two. Download a small file from the Cyrus website to your PC or MAC and within moments the firmware is updated. If a dummy like me can do it, anyone can, or your friendly Cyrus dealer should be able to help if you don’t have computer access. From a loud ‘pop’ down to a quiet brief buzz from the now upgraded firmware meant the SID circuitry goes about its business a bit more inconspicuously.

Onto the sound quality now and I was a tad afeared the Class D amplification in the ONE amplifier would produce an over lively or cold/clinical/bland kind of sound, but not so. I found it agile and fleet of foot, full bodied too and clean sounding in the mid frequencies. No peaks, no troughs, no rough edges, no glare, no harshness, no brightness, no overblown or anaemic bass, no holes at all within the audible spectrum. Should I be pleased or concerned by this? I was actually very pleased that the ONE isn’t using a “Class” of amplification that can cause some issues; it is always the

design and implementation of any amplifier class that is the key.

Into my resident system it went then and it gave a good account of itself, by having excellent control of my speakers in the bass registers and not provoking any fizz from the tweeters which are only a whisker away from with using inferior amplification. Good result.

I then paired the ONE with various other speakers to get a handle on how SID (Speaker Impedance Detection) circuit works and delivers sonic benefits. First up was a pair of Roksan K2 TR-5 Series 2 speakers which I have on loan courtesy of Roksan. The TR-5’s have a healthy bass output and a sweet top end with its fine ribbon tweeter in my resident system and the ONE amplifier maintained those traits with the bass having better control and dynamics, overall sounding cleaner in the midband, losing none of the silky sweetness in the treble registers.

Next I tried a pair of Tannoy Revolution XT6 stand mount speakers fitted with the Tannoy dual concentric drivers. In my own system the bass was a bit on the woolly side with these speakers, but the ONE amplifier gave the XT6’s a dose of adrenaline it seems because they came to life and no small measure of vitality was added, making them a very pleasant listen.

Finally a pair of Audiovector QR1 speakers was hooked up, again endowed with a superb ribbon tweeter that paired really well into my resident system and equally at home being powered by the Cyrus ONE amplifier too. This was my favourite pairing with the ONE amplifier as it gave a stunning performance that you could listen to for many hours without fatigue or becoming jaded with the sound, as each CD had new windows into the music being added. If ever I get the urge to downgrade or cease reviewing (maybe a second system perhaps?) I might be tempted to seek out





# CYRUS ONE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

this pair to be my own as neither amplifier nor speaker outclassed each other.

London Grammar's "If You Wait" CD went into the player and I pressed the play button. Track one is called "Hey Now" recorded with echo and ambience added which gives a faux 'empty cathedral' echo type effect and that should sound vast, which it did, so sounded like it was many yards deep. Bass was full and rich, kick drum had a solid powerful punch to it, female vocals clear and vibrant, treble fast and clean too. I listened to the entire album from start to finish and try as I might I couldn't find any real fault with what I was hearing. Time for something a bit more challenging then.

Next into the CD drawer was Porcupine Tree's "Deadwing" album which to me either sounds sublime, or dreadful, with not much middle ground to stay safe on. Track one is the title track 'Deadwing' and gets pretty raucous and frenetic in places that easily wrong-foots many systems. At five minutes 40 seconds the pace changes to a much slower one and it's a merciful relief at times. Then a minute or so later there is a long low bass guitar riff that must roll out of the speakers seamlessly and full of powerful energy, that I pay extra special attention to as a benchmark test.

Of course I had to let loose on the Cyrus ONE my reference recording to see where if any deficiencies in the ONE's performances lay. Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album has enough benchmarks for me to spot instantly where timing errors are, bass power and heft is lacking, any treble

resolution maladies, midband accuracy and a whole list of other benchmark tests that I subject any component to that is presented for review. Of course these are very much coupled to the price a component commands, where it sits in the market against any competitors and notwithstanding the claims made by the manufacturer, so there is a complex sliding scale involved here too and where I need to I will be critical on high price tag items and a lot more forgiving at the budget end of the scale. Nevertheless, there are specific criteria there for all to meet. One of these is the floor tom whacks the drummer metes out to the drum kit during the track "Sort of Revolution" which has to get the floor and walls thumping in my listening room. The Cyrus ONE has plenty of power and low down grunt for this task and to generally convey the driving bass and drum lines during the entire track, carried along by the audience clapping along. Imaging and soundstage were up to the mark if not to an exceptional level, with good instrument placement, good depth and height, the width only just outside of the speaker boundaries. It all has to flow in seamless harmony, in time, in tune, with no drop outs, smearing or clashing. I was though very impressed at how the Cyrus ONE managed to hold all of these in check in an insightful and unflappable way. It doesn't have that final n-th degree of fine detail and resolution though and it is only when you directly compare it to other amplifiers which come with a much higher price tag that you would notice that, so on it's own with no side-by-side comparisons you couldn't tell otherwise, which given it's modest price of £699.00 I have no right to belittle it's fine abilities.

## Conclusion

To sum up then, here we have an amplifier that has a set of competencies that you wouldn't expect at this price level. Arguably, the remote control handset could be a more substantial affair (Although I believe other Cyrus amplifier remotes will work), a thicker gauge of steel in the casework and how much more would a set of good quality single run wired speaker terminals cost in reality? Cyrus have obviously looked at those costs already and cast their die in the design specification brief, so you either live with it or not as your own conscience dictates.

Aside from those minor gripes which have no impact on the way it sounds, I think Cyrus have done a good job of producing an amplifier that sailed through all of my review listening tests and emerged with it's head held high. Sure, that final level of fine detail could be addressed, but there is always the fear that harshness could creep in via putting that right and I would sooner take the amplifier exactly as it is than the risk of adding some rough edges in there by trying to cure that. The SID circuit may or may not be contributing towards the amplifier's ability to team up with a variety of speakers that sounded just a tad lacklustre when paired with other amplifiers, as in the Tannoy Revolution XT model I tried. If that is true, then that negates an awful lot of synergy fears for prospective buyers.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Adequate is the right word here. Nothing broke or fell off during the evaluation. The speaker binding posts could certainly be improved

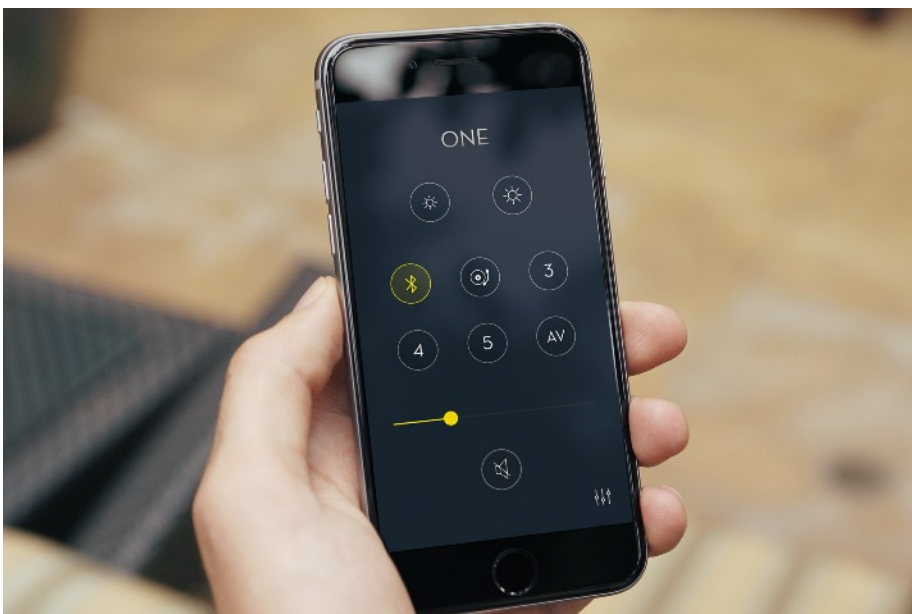
**Sound Quality:** Apart from a slight curtailing of detail at the extreme treble, it gave a full satisfying sound quality, free of harshness and fatigue. Easy to pair with most speakers via the SID circuit

**Value For Money:** Busting good value at this price level

**Pros:** Sound quality, compact size, purchase price. SID circuitry

**Cons:** Binding posts are the one blemish for me with this amplifier

**Price:** £699



# Densen B-130XS Amplifier

By Dominic Marsh

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Danish brand Densen need little introduction to audiophiles in the know. Dominic Marsh has a play with their B-130XS amplifier costing £2490.



# DENSEN B-130XS AMPLIFIER



I don't think I need to do too big an introduction to the Densen marque, or the reputation of their products that precedes this review. However, for those who are not familiar with the name Densen, I can tell you that the company has been trading for over 20 years, is located in Denmark and highly regarded for their quality products. Simplicity of their designs (especially the casework) has been the keystone of all their designs and unmistakably and uniquely Densen in the implementation.

## Construction

This amplifier, so Densen tell me, is a slimmed down version of their B-150PLUS which sounds like there has been some stripping out and compromises along that road towards this product's birth, but that is of no concern to me whatsoever as I evaluate all products purely on what is presented to me at face value.

The slim line case and simple front panel controls have always been the hallmark of a Densen product and so no surprises then that the B-130XS integrated amplifier follows in the same layout style. The review sample was supplied in a brushed black anodised finish and when it came to giving it a dusting I made the mistake of using a yellow fabric duster which left tiny particles where I had dusted, leaving it looking powdery and smeared. A lint free damp cloth did the trick.

Given that it is a rather compact unit it is surprisingly heavy, due no doubt to the large and heavy toroidal transformer contained within. The front panel controls consist of four chrome plated

round buttons which control the standby, muting and volume up/down, then we find a central LED display showing the volume level setting and the selected source, followed by another set of four round chrome buttons, two for source selection and another labelled "Proc" for an external AV loop and a status button.

To the rear from left to right we find twelve pairs of RCA sockets, labelled CD, TUNER, LINE 1, LINE 2, TAPE 1 INPUT, TAPE 1 OUTPUT, PROC IN, PROC OUT and two pairs of pre-amplifier outputs which enables the user to connect additional power amplifiers. There is also a socket labelled "EPS" so you can fit an optional extra Densen external power supply which boosts the amplifier's output capability. Below that is a "D" type male connector marked "LINK" for Denlink connections to other Densen products in multi-room installations. Finally, there is an IEC power inlet connector and integral mains on/off switch.

Above the RCA connectors is a removable blanking plate which can accommodate a Densen SB-1 and SB-2 Surround Boards for 5.1 or 7.1 surround sound. While we are discussing optional extras for the B-130XS, there is available a moving magnet RIAA phono board and to follow soon a moving coil RIAA module too. For those that require a digital to analogue convertor, a plug in Densen FabelDAC module is available, so there is no need to change models for these facilities, simply plug them in as required.

## Sound Quality

Given that it is a rather compact unit it is surprisingly heavy, due no doubt to the large and heavy toroidal transformer contained within.

# DENSEN B-130XS AMPLIFIER

I was informed that the B-130XS needed around 200 hours of running in from new so I had to oblige of course. It did sound a bit heavy and laboured at first hearing fresh out of the box, but within 25 or so hours it began to sound a lot more free and open, so at around 100 hours I began to listen with the amplifier in my system until I had clocked up the required running in period and then began the evaluation.

At switch on the amplifier goes through a brief self test routine and you can hear for about 3 seconds the tick, tick, tick in quick succession of relays being energised, which sounds not unlike an old 1940's Smiths tin plate alarm clock ticking away. At first hearing it did surprise me to say the least.

I played a large variety of music through the amplifier and it coped well with every CD that I played, ranging from large orchestral pieces, to heavy rock and acoustic music.

The acid test for me though is how well this amplifier stands up to my intimate knowledge of Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album. The intro strikes on the Ride cymbal the drummer plays on track one called "Biscuits For Breakfast" is so convincing and just so realistic, as is the pounding kick drum that features throughout the entire album. Interestingly enough, the benchmark for true high fidelity for me personally is how almost tangible and very much lifelike how the rim shots sound on the Snare drum and the rim, stick strike and shell of the drum must all be audible, the Densen amplifier not only gave a true and life-like rendition of that sound it also managed to recreate the venue's ambience of those very same rim shots. Wow, that IS impressive in my book.

This CD has been recorded in different venues throughout Europe during one of Fink's many tours so the venue ambience is different for each location and the B-130XS amplifier homes in on this like a laser guided missile and missing none of it. Each audience reacts differently too and this is one of the very few amplifiers I have installed into my system that really does make you feel you are sat in amongst the audience. No "shooshing" sounds like bacon frying in a pan during the applause, each audience member is an individual, clapping, whistling, cheering and cat calling enthusiastically all around you. The



bass guitar had a real deep biting growl to it and the floor tom whacks by the drummer really did make my listening room shake, which shows the amplifier has plenty of power in reserve despite the modest 80 watts per channel power rating. This track "Sort of Revolution" has a highly propulsive underpinning to it and will readily show up timing errors in the bass and drums, and I am pleased to report that the B-130XS amplifier is exceptional at bass timing.

When we talk about this level of fine detail, it might be crossing your mind reading this review that this amplifier is a bit explicit or somehow spot lit in its treble and midrange resolution, but be assured it isn't, as you can listen to this amplifier for hour after hour and it never fatigues, despite the high quantity of fine detail and nuances it is feeding you. If it did, I would have no hesitation at all in saying so.

Of course, speaker matching is also critical to an amplifier's performance

and I had a few pairs to hand to put the amplifier through its paces. First of these was the Opera Mezza standmount speakers and this was not a happy marriage; the speakers with their innate forwardness did not suit the B-130XS's nature so they were taken out and a pair of Roksan TR5 S2's put in their place. The Roksan speakers have a healthy bass output and a smooth silky top end from their ribbon tweeter and this pairing was a real joy to listen to with many hours of smooth detailed fatigue free listening. Then I tried a pair of Audiovector QR1 standmount speakers and the sound took on a faster pace with a more lively dynamic presentation which managed to walk that fine line between "exciting" and "fatiguing". The dynamics were spectacular, with transients coming rapidly and dying away equally as fast, which shows the amplifier has excellent control over a speaker's behaviour.

## Conclusion



# DENSEN B-130XS AMPLIFIER

Negatives? The crisp edges of the chassis coupled with the heavy weight of the amplifier left red weals on my fingers when moving the amplifier around, although for the end user once installed it will be no further problem. The remote having to be purchased separately pleases me not, as the majority of manufacturers include one in the purchase price as standard – even a cheap credit card sized one to use initially.

This is no cheap budget amplifier bought either lightly or in haste for sure and Densen acknowledge that by giving a lifetime warranty with all their products to the first owner, so that adds real value to the purchase price. It can be upgraded with additional external power supplies, a DAC board, surround sound facilities and two phono stages too if that is your desire, so you are not stuck with the one basic model or have the need to buy a better (read more expensive) model as your needs change over time. A good plus point.

It easily separates out complex musical strands and presents them as individual entities with no clashing or smearing. Imaging too is precise and three dimensional, extending way out beyond the speaker boundaries, with depth and height well portrayed.

Sound quality is refined and powerful, with seemingly unflappable power delivery. Timing is excellent, transients delivered with both speed and power, while at low level listening it is as clear and lucid as it is at high volumes.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build quality:** Heavy gauge chassis panels lend an air of solidity, beware though of the crisp edges when handling. Contemporary yet ageless styling

**Sound quality:** Surefooted and powerful, the specifications belie the raw energy this amplifier can produce

**Value for money:** Not in a budget class purchase by any standards, but this is a lifetime purchase with upgrade options available. The scarcity on the secondhand market speaks volumes

**Pros:** Sound quality, ease of use and lifetime warranty, are all included in an attractive package

**Cons:** No remote control handset as standard

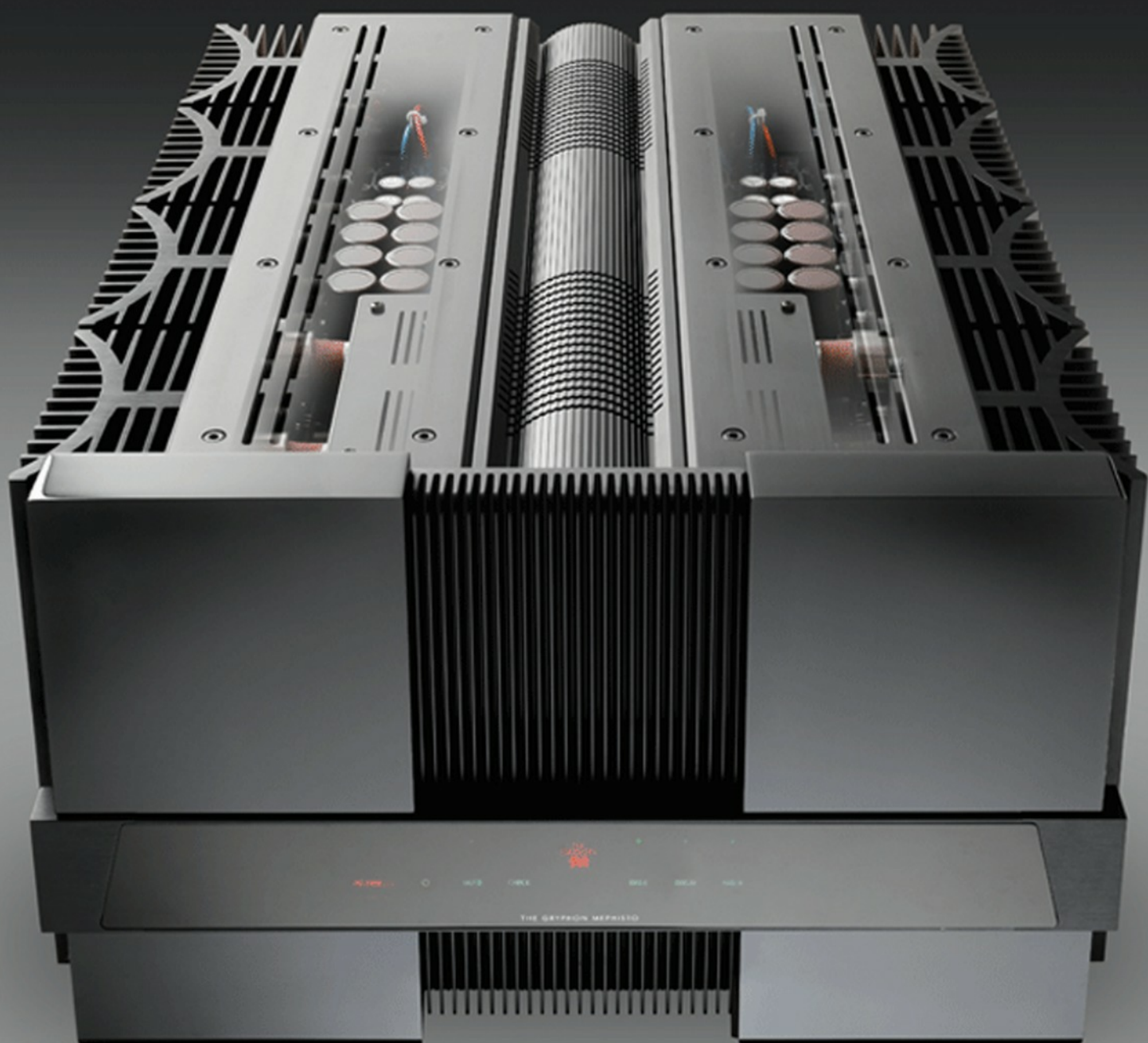
**Price:** £2490

This is no cheap budget amplifier bought either lightly or in haste for sure and Densen acknowledge that by giving a lifetime warranty with all their products to the first owner, so that adds real value to the purchase price





# THE GRYPHON



GRYPHON MEPHISTO

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# Echo Diastasis PH-79 Phonostage

By Janine Elliot

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From Greece, the Echo Diastasis PH-79 Phono Stage is a dual mono design using E-Core transformers and costs £2760. Janine Elliot gives it a whirl.

# ECHO DIASTASIS PH-79 PHONOSTAGE



Georgios Loutridis is very proud of his PH-79. This new Echo Diastasis phono-stage from Greece is the fourth product in his portfolio, all sharing the number 79, and replacing the PH-7 phono-stage before. This new model has many developments over the previous model including being a dual mono design and featuring two E-core transformers, as used in their other products, as opposed to a single toroidal in the PH-7. It also comes with better parts and materials, and a different circuit design. It maintains the active RIAA EQ of the previous model though better design and components. It is also significantly better looking though much bigger. The number 79 was very special to me; the year I started university, and the number of strands on my first serious cable. For George the number derives from his favourite numbers 7 and 9;

“I used to be a basketball player and 7 and 9 were my t-shirt numbers. Nowadays, I am still playing the guitar as a musician and composer and got 7 electric guitars and 2 acoustics...total 9!”

He refers to his four models (phono-stage, integrated, pre and power) as his ‘children’ and suggesting that as a parent he should love all his children equally, but that actually this baby up for review is really special. With pride he told me “It is to my knowledge the only phono stage on the market combining zero negative feedback with an active RIAA curve”. So much emphasis over the years has been on playing about with feedback, and whilst zero negative feedback is not a new idea, it has recently seen a lot of publicity. Zero negative feedback can, however, be

taken to mean that there is no feedback at all, and whilst in this model there is indeed no global feedback loop there are however controlled local feedback points, but not loops. George informed me that this kind of feedback is very small, and the gain stages are ultra linear. Whatever the magic in this design it certainly does contribute to some very pleasing listening I had during the few weeks of reviewing this unit. The pros and cons of feedback in a design is a complex story. In its simplest term a circuit with negative feedback aims to remove distortion by feeding back a negative sample of the signal onto itself, something that I learned about when Quad introduced their iconic 405 current dumping power-amp, though had actually been present in earlier amplifiers. Conversely Sansui’s infamous Super Feed-forward system, as seen in some of their AU- series amplifiers of the 1980’s, was more complex and had the error signal amplified in a separate error amplifier whereby its output is combined with the main-amplifier output at the point where it drives the load, the intention to reduce all distortions to zero. Different ideas, then, that aimed to have the same outcome; that of a pure, distortion free output. If not done correctly they can actually increase distortion and even oscillation. Using such systems does however mean more components and effectively two amplifiers per channel, which can have their own drawbacks and increased cost. There have been designs with no feedback at all; I do believe RCA issued such a design, though this was valve, based on a USA 7025 (a sort of ECC83 double triode). The Echo Diastasis’s low noise

Whatever the magic in this design it certainly does contribute to some very pleasing listening I had during the few weeks of reviewing this unit



# ECHO DIASTASIS PH-79 PHONOSTAGE

characteristic is largely due to a no-feedback filter circuit in the power supply. With an additional noise rejection stabiliser and a design ensuring that the low level phono cartridge signal is amplified without any unwanted noises, this is indeed a very quiet amplifier.

What is also good to see is an active RIAA EQ at a time of emphasis of things passive, claiming to be within 0.05dB between 20 Hz and 100 kHz. The design states 'separation of high and low frequency poles and matching materials'. The separation is done by two active circuits in the RIAA circuitry, with the idea of achieving a better and strictly controlled RIAA accuracy. It was an excellently flat response, working well on all types of music. The unit is also a dual-mono single ended full Class A product which for me was a welcome sight. The PH79 also has their proprietary noise-cancelling technology that practically obliterates current noise. I was surprised at how large this unit was when I opened the carton it was in; with big writing on the front 10mm thick aluminium front panel and two gorgeous large knobs for selecting cartridge type and load impedance, I had expected it to be much smaller from the initial photographs, though of course it didn't worry me. It was taller than my own

Manley Steelhead, though that has a separate power-supply. The PH79 only contains one circuit board and two transformers, so could easily be 2u high, rather than the almost 3u size (excluding feet). At 147mm (5.8 inches) total height this is a substantial machine. Those large knobs allow a choice of six different settings of loads (of 47, 100, 220, 470, 1000 and 47,000 $\Omega$ ) and 3 gain stages. The latter selects moving magnet (41 dB), high output moving coil (60dB), and low output MC (65dB), offering -90dB noise floor on MM cartridge with 5mV input, and -79dB for 0.5mV MC, both A-weighted, both very respectable levels. I initially chose to use the Audio Technica AT33sa cartridge on my Pre Audio tangential turntable at 220  $\Omega$  and low output. These rotary selectors control high quality relays, so it means the audio signal itself does not go through them. The unit also has a 5 second delay circuitry on switch-on, as seen on respectable high quality phono-stages particularly valve, and happily for me has the on/off rocker switch under the left front of the unit, rather than hidden at the back of the unit which many of you will know tends to annoy me! The high quality input and output gold-plated and Teflon-coated RCA sockets are clearly indicated at the back, including writing both normal and

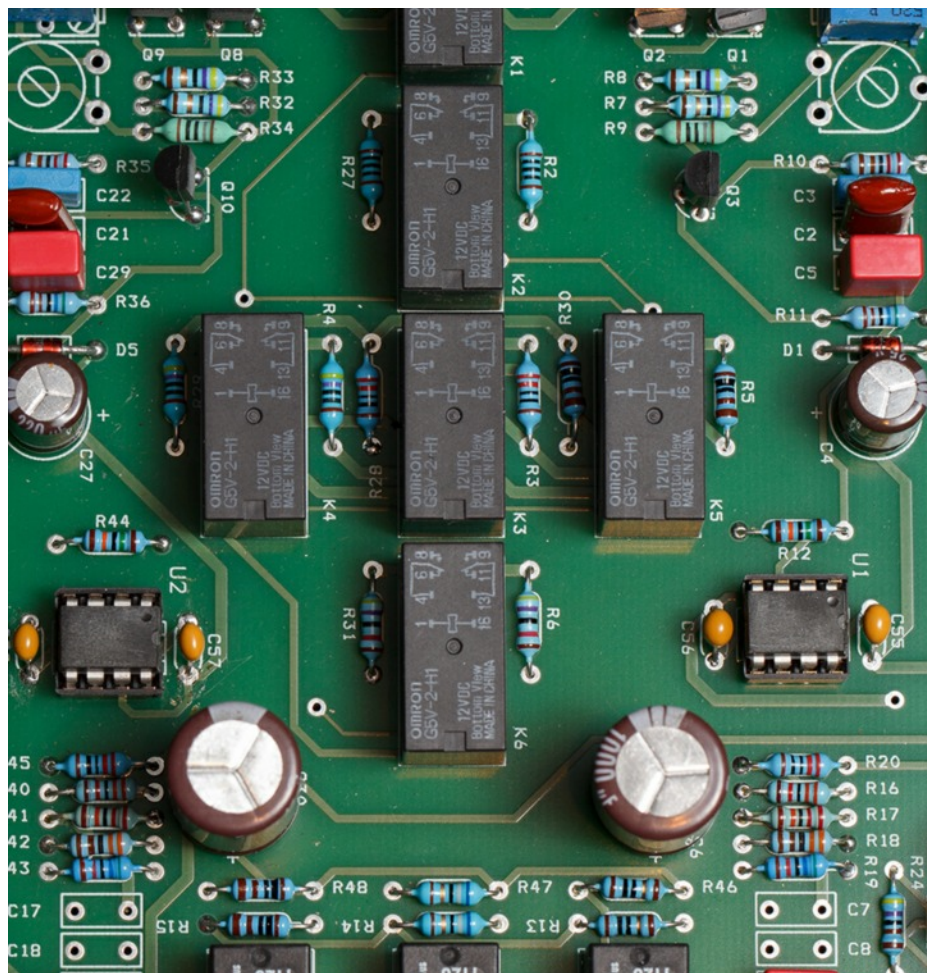
upside down, to save you cranking your head too much if wiring from the front; yet another detail from this Greek company that impressed me. I didn't expect any balanced XLR sockets by virtue of its design. Even the instruction manual, whilst printed on A4 paper, is well laid out and easy to read. At £2760 this was a well thought out package.

## Music

Crossing two continents by playing Supertramp's live 'Paris' album and their infamous "Breakfast In America track, it soon became apparent how transparent and open the sound was, being relaxed and undaunted, allowing me to easily hear a well-controlled soundstage with space enough to place each instrument clearly and the audience as well. Ride cymbals were very clean and not tizzy like some less flat designs might give. The ease of presentation allowed me to clearly experience the band's notorious speed changes between verses and choruses. Whilst it would put any professional music teacher on edge if their student played around with the speed of their Beethoven as much as Supertramp did in theirs, I wasn't actually that bothered by it all and could see just why it was important to do so here. The Echo was very open and just



# ECHO DIASTASIS PH-79 PHONOSTAGE



This is a really pleasing machine sounding almost valve-like, and whilst not as fast as some, certainly has the edge over many in terms of listenability and control

let it all happen and did so in a gentle and authoritative manner. “Bloody Well Right” had much more oomph, showing a good noise level between the quiet piano and loud ‘crashes’ from the percussion and guitars. The song title said it all.

“I’ve Got you Under my Skin”, “Begin the Beguine” and “I get a Kick out of You” from the Chasing the Dragon Grammy’s nominated Ella Fitzgerald 100th anniversary record gave a rather relaxed account of Clare teal’s vocals that seemed more in the back of the soundstage compared with some of the instruments, and the smooth performance doesn’t get me as involved as some phono-stages arriving for review, but its musicality in terms of timing and warmth made the instruments come to life, and matches his own belief that just as all the best components make up the best hand-made musical instruments, so an equal care products are used in this hand-made electrical instrument. This is a really pleasing machine sounding almost valve-like, and whilst not as fast as some, certainly has the edge over many in terms of listenability and control. Again, it was a surprisingly quiet phono-stage, and even

scratches seemed to disappear into the background.

Playing Schubert String Quartet in G major D956 (Chilingirian Quartet) has each of the upper four members of the string family playing a timely and well defined rendition, with each member placed well in front of me. This is an elderly record in my collection but it showed no signs of age though this Greek product. I was now beginning to enjoy this unit, managing to get more detail front to back when playing with 100Ω load; so good to make changes on a front panel, rather than using dip switches underneath which stop you doing a-b comparisons. Turning to Sviatoslav Richter, piano, in Schubert’s Trout Quintet D667 (The Borodin Quartet), this much louder recorded album might have the piano further back in the layout than the string members, but I still felt very much involved with the epic work; indeed the damper-pedal was clearly audible hinting that there is no subsonic filter; I could hear very low frequency damper pedals on a piano performance through my Wilson Benesch Torus subwoofer that I really enjoyed hearing, showing this was indeed a human recording. My turntable



The instruments were well positioned with them performing naturally including a good portrayal of bowing and notes

is very much in control at all frequencies so it was glad to hear it so well behaved through the phonostage. Indeed George himself also believes that “there is lot of musical information down there and there is no need to cut it”. Of course the danger of subsonic noise needs to be dealt with at the cartridge itself, and through the Townshend Rock 7/Ortofon Kontrapunkt b with its trough/paddle the same album was particularly carefully portrayed at the lower frequency end. In the quiet C –major development section, the noise floor was exceptional, and gave a good hearing of the foot pedal central stage, though the piano itself in the recording isn’t as well mic’d as I would have done myself; bass frequencies are more muffled than the higher ones, a fault of the sound engineering. The PH79 was just plain honest, something missing in a number of new phono-stages appearing these days. The instruments were well positioned with them performing naturally including a good portrayal of bowing and notes. Muse “Drones” was powerful but still modest, just slightly missing out on the energy and ‘bite’ I am used to hearing on my resident phono-stages. It was just not quite as quick as some phono-stages I know well, but in its place the sound was extremely natural, making it very real. Stereo spread is good, as it should be on a dual mono design.

## Conclusion

This was a surprisingly good product from a company I had not listened to before, and I was surprised how analogue and almost valve-like the portrayal of the music I played on it was.

For those wanting a human-like experience with their music and don’t mind the size and traditional look of the package – I liked it – then this should be well worth an audition. With good facilities and relatively low cost for such a good performer, this phono-stage could become one of your own children, too.

## AT A GLANCE

**BUILD QUALITY:** Good Basic build with thick 10mm aluminium front panel and good quality components. Well laid out inside.

**SOUND QUALITY:** Good signal to noise levels and flat frequency response. An open and honest reproduction of the music, particularly the lower bass end, due to there being no low filter in the design.

**VALUE FOR MONEY:** At £2760 this falls into the lower end of the serious section of the market and gave a good account for itself. Well worth a listen for the price.

### Pros:

Well controlled reproduction of music  
Extremely flat frequency Response  
Low noise design

### Cons:

Could lack a little energy in some performances  
The box is rather old fashioned in looks and perhaps doesn’t need to be so tall

Price: £2760





# Benchmark DAC3 HGC Digital To Analogue Converter

By Dan Worth

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DAC3 is the latest converter to be unveiled by Benchmark and features the new ESS Technology ES9028PRO chip. Dan Worth takes the £2349 American made DAC3 for a test drive.

# BENCHMARK DAC3 HGC



All three families of Benchmark digital to analogue converters are designed to directly drive power amplifiers and speakers

For the past few months during initial measuring and listening tests, which Benchmark report were extremely impressive, they decided to create a new product family building on the success of the previous DAC2 HGC (with included headphone amplifier) and DAC2 L (without headphone amplifier), the two new products fall directly in line - DAC3 HGC and DAC3 L, which are some of the very first products to include the new ESS chip.

The architecture of both the ES9018 and ES9028PRO seem very similar to the trained eye but for those of us without the more technical mindset, here are four of the main advantages to the new converter:

THD Compensation  
Improved oversampling filters  
Improved phase locked loop  
Improved power supply distribution  
Of these, Benchmark considers the THD compensation the most clever and unique feature. The improved filters deliver a slightly flatter frequency response. The improved phase locked loop allows virtually instantaneous switching between digital inputs. The improved power supply distribution contributes to the effectiveness of the THD compensation by minimising THD-inducing interactions between the various subsystems.

Benchmark say: 'This 32-bit digital processing block compensates for the THD produced by the analog outputs on the chip. It can also be adjusted to compensate for the off-chip analog components in the DAC. This system even allows independent nulling of the 2nd harmonic and 3rd harmonic distortion. The result is a conversion

system that is virtually perfect in terms of 2nd and 3rd harmonic distortion!'

In the DAC3 Benchmark use many performance enhancing techniques to maximise the potential of the ES9028PRO, including:

4:1 channel summing - improves the SNR by 6 dB  
External I-V converters - lower noise and lower distortion  
Precision differential amplifier - removes common-mode distortion  
Very low noise voltage regulator - Benchmark discrete design reduces noise and distortion  
UltraLock3™ jitter attenuation - virtually perfect jitter rejection  
211 kHz Upsampling - eliminates time-domain errors caused by the D/A conversion chip  
High-headroom DSP - eliminates clipping of intersample peaks  
6-layer circuit board with external ground planes - reduces noise and provides RF shielding  
As DAC2 and DAC3 are very similar products with DAC3 being of higher performance, much like an SE or Signature version often denoted to us Audiophiles, the real hardware and software differences must be compared with the DAC1:

The addition of Asynchronous 192kHz USB Audio 2.0 as well as 32-bit D/A conversion

The display includes Word Length and Sample Rate

Polarity Control, Direct DSD D/A Conversion, -20 dB DIM, Bi-Directional 12V Trigger

# BENCHMARK DAC3 HGC

A new Power Switch with Auto-On Function

The inclusion of a Home Theater Bypass and Digital Pass-Through

High-Headroom DSP, Dual-Domain Hybrid Gain Control and additional inputs and outputs

All inputs support DSD and the DAC3 employs no conversion from PCM to DSD or DSD to PCM keeping signal integrity in its purest form.

All three families of Benchmark digital to analogue converters are designed to directly drive power amplifiers and speakers. Benchmark converters feature adjustable low-impedance passive attenuators at the XLR outputs that can be used to optimise the interface between power amplifier or active monitors.

## Connectivity and Physical Properties

Connectivity is generous and the DAC3 sports both analogue and digital inputs, two coaxial RCA SPDIF as well as Optical TOSLINK and USB. I would have liked to see at least one AES/EBU input, a favoured choice by many. Two analogue RCA inputs prove to be of exceptional flexibility especially in the Hifi audio arena and all outputted to two RCA and one XLR pair. As well as a

12v trigger a switched IEC input completes the rear panel connectivity.

Adorning the front panel from left to right is a power button, mute, input selector button, along with various indicators for bit depth and DSD modes. Next up is two 6.3mm headphone sockets, one mutes the rear outputs and the other will play in conjunction with the analogue outputs. Lastly is the hybrid volume knob. The volume knob is motor controlled and assisted via the included ergonomic remote control handset. All digital input volume levels are attenuated by a sophisticated 32-bit digital volume controller and analogue inputs via a traditional analogue volume pot, both controlled via the single front knob or remote.

Construction wise the DAC3 is compact (249x237x44.5mm W/D/H) and it is very solidly built, the unit has a good bit of weight to it (31lb) and was easily interfaced within my system, with a clearly marked I/O and good spacing between sockets I found connecting cables of various thickness' easily.

## Sound

There's no denying that Benchmark are well known in the Hifi world for producing DACs which produce clean, uncoloured and truthful music. Conflicting reports from individuals in

the industry and the home user explain moments of true greatness and situations of an over-accurate presentation leaving the music lifeless and a little stark. The truth of the matter from my humble point of view is that if you do not have a system which has great synergy and is balanced tonally a DAC such as the Benchmark will never suit. The core characteristic of all Benchmark DACs is to extract all the detail as transparently as possible, remain flat and cohesive in its presentation and allow the listener to engage deep into the music.

My first experience with Benchmark was with their DAC1, which at the time sounded a little too heavy in an analytical sense in my system of the time, there wasn't huge blame attributed to the Benchmark, simply a combination of it within my rig didn't produce synergy, so I moved on from it.

I have worked tirelessly over the past year with the help of a couple of key individuals to really fine tune my system and recently I have been in a position where the balance has been great, fitting really, as the new Benchmark DAC3 HGC is as much a test of my own system as it is a test in itself.

One of the very first pieces of music played through the new DAC3 was 'Manvantara' by Bliss, a wondrous piece of music with a great deal of inner





details, harmonics and intricate dynamics. To describe the overall presentation as linear doesn't quite do the Benchmark justice, what I was presented with was a full bodied and uncluttered display of what the DAC3 was capable of. The slight African influence on the music transported me to a destination which left my listening room behind and took me on a journey into free space. Harmonically the DAC3 produced definitions of clarity that pushed away inner walls, giving height, depth and a feeling of surround sound.

The precision in which the DAC3 produces each note is combined with a real flow to the music. Connected to the Audio Music RT-1 and Gamut D200 Mk3, each passage had a liquidity that combined all areas of the music with the upmost insight into the recording. Bass notes were full and embodied the clarity and sparkle of upper frequencies with waves of playful midrange tones reaching forward and toward my listening space, giving a really strong amount of layering.

I currently also have a Mytek Brooklyn DAC which I have been using to run the active Focals for some time and comparing the two in the main system leaves one in a huge quandary as to the preferred DAC. Both present music very similarly indeed and the only small differences are really in the top end. The Brooklyn is more airy, where as the DAC3 has a cohesiveness that sits in place of the tiny bit of missing cues. It's a very hard task to explain, explore and decide between the two, so I'm not really going to bother, but for me it proves that these two studio/mastering orientated DACs require the rest of the system to be quiet, grain free and well constructed to achieve the best results and hear them at their full potential.

Nils Lofgren's live version of 'Keith Don't Go' showed the potential speed and precision of the DAC3, strings started and stopped on a dime, decays were never sacrificed for precision and using the DAC3 really and truly lifts a veil from the system. Combinations of full bodied undertones and crisp leading edges brings music to life, extracting far more information in all areas of the frequency range than DACs costing quite a fair bit more... and the implementation of the ES9028PRO is just superb.

The sound as a whole is just so stable and relates so well with any genre of music I have played over the past week. I heard a comment the other day from another reviewer stating a DAC he was listening to was like having no DAC in the system, I can't say I really agree with that comment, I've used the comment before to describe cables but not a DAC. I fully understand where he was going with the nature of his comment, for me it sounds as if the DAC3 is delivering music in an uncluttered, non-processed, transparent manner. Digital the sound is not, I could be so bold to say it sounds more analogue like - minus any noise, pops and clicks, un-rendered and typically free of artefacts and grain.

When a female artist such as Rachelle Farrell takes a breath, it's a breath that is heard, not a sound that resembles a breath. When Joss Stone's lips touch in-between words a moistness can be heard. When Chris Jones has a little hum while the intro is being played it's very evident and puts a smile on my face as I can then imagine him eager to get going. All these small significant moments increase the reality of a performance.

There's a lot of praise I could give to the Benchmark and some of it in all honesty is to my surprise, I am most taken aback by the sheer cohesiveness produced in conjunction with the amounts of detail available; it's all done so effortlessly. There's always those pieces of music we all love and know which really aren't the best of recordings. Previously I would have said that during my experience the first of the Benchmark DACs that these recordings were dealt with a little ruthlessly, but now, although all the nasties in the poorer recordings can be heard, the overall flow and presentation of the DAC3 delivers music so naturally and engaging that any nasties are put to one side and the pleasure of the track is appreciated for what it would normally give on a smoother more rounded-off system that can hide them.

With the fantastic balance in mind, I find through the frequency range of the DAC3 I waited until daylight again and played some new and old dance music, thankfully the neighbour's were at work as I got a little carried away to say the least, I think all I needed to top things off was a couple glow sticks and a whistle! The absolute commanding power and heft coming from my speakers raised endorphins in my blood taking me back to my late teens and

I am most  
taken aback  
by the sheer  
cohesiveness  
produced in  
conjunction  
with the  
amounts of  
detail  
available; it's  
all done so  
effortlessly

# BENCHMARK DAC3 HGC

early twenties when clubbing was a weekly occurrence. My room felt as if it was breathing. With the transducers and the combination of soaring controlled highs, a midrange that tingled the spine and bass weight and punch that just made for a rock solid foundation to the music gave my system a raw sense of power that I have only heard similarly with other pro related DACs and the way they interact with a strong amplifier base.

So after taking a couple Rennies for indigestion and doing my best to calm down a little bit, clearing up the artex that had fallen off the ceiling during my moments of madness. I went back to some more delicate acoustic type music. Norah Jones is one of my late night listening artists and although still very much day time and ears still ringing I found it really quite easy to adjust again. The sultry nature of Norah's vocals are a real draw for me. Aided by the DAC3 HGC her vocal was placed so well, with a natural dynamic projection of power, almost delicious. Norah's band 'The Handsome Band' has two fantastic guitarists Adam Levy and I forget the other guy's name, during many pieces of music from her first two albums Come Away With Me and Sunrise each guitarist is playful, rubbing strings and tapping the body of the instrument, these smaller details can be heard quite well on any good system but I felt although they hadn't increased in volume their presence was easily more discernible in a way like they created their own micro tempos off to the boundaries of the soundstage. Most obviously this is due to how low the noise floor is on the DAC3 and no doubt the inclusion of the Studio Connections Black Star cabling which is hooked too and from the DAC3 (which will feature in early 2017).

Benchmark' DAC3 is an extremely flexible unit and although not being equipped with a built in MM/MC stage such as the Mytek Brooklyn, possesses all other comparable features. Hooking it up to my active Focals again produced similarities of presence in the music as the main passive system. Precision, depth, tonal accuracy and the freedom of the music within the soundstage and for whatever genre I played. The hybrid volume control is very nice and the tactile feel of the knob itself is very good, the facility itself was used with the active setup and its implementation is very well done. Equally so was the remote control which I used generally to

adjust volume levels in this setup and also when listening to my headphones through the DAC.

The headphones in question were my Audio Technica ATH A2000X. Sonically they reach far and low, their signature teeters on the edge of just about to become bright when partnered thoughtlessly, I like this about them as perseverance allows for good synergy and the top end will then stand out to be extremely open and informative, bettering some of the more popular and expensive headphones on today's market. I expected the sound through the cans to be very clean and possibly a little explicit in the top end, but I was very pleased when I came to listen to a very smooth sound with a warmer than neutral top end. I was a little thrown off to be honest, there isn't colour in the presentation, there is a ton of control though, which makes the sound seem smooth, leaving the word smooth to be wrongly stated yet a word which still relates to the poise offered by the HGC in DAC3 that readers can relate too, I actually like my headphones listening a lot cleaner than my Hifi and although I have found other amps more to my own personal tastes I could appreciate the sophisticated nature the DAC3 gave. Again the sound was insightful and revealing, soundstaging was good for headphone listening (which has never been standout for me) and although the smoothness in the top end reached far I think I had been spoilt by how well the DAC3 had sat in my main and active systems that I may have set my expectations a little too high or maybe it's just the peculiar way I tend to listen to headphones, who knows.

## Conclusion

My system felt like a dominant force when I introduced the Benchmark DAC3 HGC to the middle shelf of my rack. With the implementation of the latest ESS9028PRO chip from Sabre, Benchmark's own team of experts, tweaking the accompanied circuitry and the feature rich design offered in this petite package, a genetically modified version of the already popular DAC2 is born.

With the outstanding capabilities of control and intricate detailed workings to render all music effortlessly, we could call the DAC3 a globalist, but then maybe due to its appreciative and cohesive mannerism and way of still

taking care admirably of poorer recording maybe it could be of the Donald Trump Camp.

However you look at it the specification and performance of the DAC3 for £2349 is simply outstanding! It's a DAC I could easily live with on a day to day basis and I can see this latest family of DAC3 from Benchmark to be the next Benchmark in monitoring and music playback.

Get your system right and the Benchmark will slot in like a foot into the correct sized shoe, get the system wrong and the Benchmark becomes the voice of reason, telling the listener that there is something incorrect that needs addressing before they go further.

I would like to see the brand more frequently offered by dealers as from what I can ascertain at the moment Audiophiles are being denied the ability to easily demo and appreciate what is a true Audiophile bargain and great tool for music playback.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality - Neat and solid**

**Sound Quality - Clean, full bodied, transparent and absolutely controlled**

**Value For Money - Terrific!**

**Pros:**

**Connection rich design**

**Strong headphone amp**

**Fantastic sound quality**

**Price**

**Cons:**

**LEDs are a bit bright**

**Not as readily available as I'd personally like**

**Price: £2349**



# Wire on Wire

**REDpurl™**



**Variable Geometry**

UK patent pending GB1602578.5

EU Registered Design No. 002544171

## Experience**680**

**Reference Audio Cable**

The **Experience680** from Wire on Wire is a reference-level audio cable. With its REDpurl™ variable geometry (UK patent pending), it uniquely permits the user to alter its wire spacing, allowing the character of the interconnect to be tuned.

### Experience**680**

The Experience**680** uses carefully chosen PTFE-insulated silver-plated copper conductors. Different diameter multi-stranded conductors add dynamic weight and timbre throughout the frequency range, whilst capacitance is kept low, thanks to our REDpurl™ geometry.

Of course, there is no need to do anything with our cable; it performs beautifully straight out of the box. However, if you think you would like to make changes, the REDpurl™ geometry allows you to alter the wire alignments, changing capacitance and inductance at individual nodes along the cable. It is up to the listener to say which they prefer, but being able to make a difference can be profoundly important when it comes to creating an involving personal experience.

**Conductors:** Silver plated copper

**Insulation:** PTFE

**Capacitance:** 69pF/m variable

**Connectors:** WBT 0114 phono plugs

**Geometry:** REDpurl™

For further information contact:

Wire on Wire 01372 800605

[info@wireonwire.com](mailto:info@wireonwire.com)

[www.wireonwire.com](http://www.wireonwire.com)

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**Designed and hand built in Britain**



# Auralic Aries Mini Streamer

By Dan Worth

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The Auralic Mini is a streamer of diminutive proportions, but does this mean it has to compromise on sound? Dan Worth attaches this £450 unassuming black box into his system to find out.

# AURALIC ARIES MINI STREAMER



Flexibility usually comes at a premium in the world of HiFi and streaming devices often have limits to the configuration of outputs and services they offer. Aurelic's Aries Mini however, is a wireless/wired streaming hub designed for connecting to your existing home audio system. Differing from the full sized Aries the Mini has both digital and analogue outputs, for connection to a standalone DAC or digital amplifier via USB, Coaxial or Optical and can also connect directly to any analogue amplifier or powered speakers via its RCA outputs.

Aries Mini will stream high-resolution music quickly and wirelessly in virtually any sampling rate, even the latest Quad-Rate DSD and DXD. It is powered by Aurelic's proprietary Tesla hardware platform which has as its brain a Quad-Core ARM Cortex-A9 processor running at 1GHz supported by 512MB of DDR3 RAM and 4GB internal storage. The Tesla platform has a calculation ability of 25,000 MIPS, more than enough to decode a vast selection of audio formats, including AAC, AIFF, ALAC, APE, DIFF, DSF, FLAC, MP3, OGG, WAV, WV and WMA.

In order to obtain music from the Aries Mini one will need to add a library or source to playback from. Options include a NAS via uPnP/DLNA, Minimserver, Twonky, Asset UPnP, JRiver or any other DLNA/uPNP compatible server software. TIDAL, Qobuz and WiMP online streaming, Internet Radio, AirPlay, Songcast and Bluetooth, USB hard drive files or Optional internal HDD/SSD all controlled via the Lightning DS App,

which is only compatible with iOS Apple devices, a big disappointment for Android customers, however, an older full sized iPad, iPad Mini, iPhone or Touch would make for a great inexpensive remote control. I use a separate device myself to control my music playback, leaving my iPad for any browsing or music investigation during playback. So be sure to factor this in when purchasing as the Aries Mini has no remote or real onboard controls, just a volume up/down button and play/pause is present for a little additional convenience.

I had a few initial issues with the Lightning DS app. I could play one track from my NAS and the app would freeze or crash out, the current song would continue to play and I would need to reload the app, play one track and the same would happen. I quickly gave up and listened to another source and contacted Auralic.

After the Xmas period had passed and I was recovered from all the treats that the festive period brings I thought I'd try the Lightning DS app again, noticing that Auralic had indeed left me a message to arrange a convenient time to have a chat over the telephone to determine where the problem may lie and to my satisfaction, whatever little bug may have been preventing normal use, whether on my network, iPad or the app itself had been resolved and I was soon using all features of Lightning DS without any issues.

Firstly I went back through many of my own personal albums on my NAS drive, as this is where I first began and was a

Differing from the full sized Aries the Mini has both digital and analogue outputs, for connection to a standalone DAC or digital amplifier via USB, Coaxial or Optical and can also connect directly to any analogue amplifier or powered speakers via its RCA outputs

# AURALIC ARIES MINI STREAMER

The perfect companion to any mid priced system and for those with more expensive tastes a truly great addition to less critical listening in other areas of the home.



I much prefer what the Aries Mini does with more upbeat and toe tapping music, the more mellow stuff is still dealt with very tastefully, but for me the Mini is an enthusiastic fun loving little fella with a big smile and a big heart, rather than a slipper touting, pipe smoking old man retired to the compost heap!

This comment had me instantly thinking of a dear friend of mine, Barrie is 87 and far from a compost heap. He always has a smile on his face and has a great sense of humour. We often sit around his house listening to his system and a wonderful arrangement of Trad Jazz, which I enjoy very much. It's usually not long before Barrie gets up and starts dancing around the room too and educating me on some of his most favourite artists. It goes to show that age is only a number and the heart and soul are a constant throughout life. The Aries

direct, allowing for even more information to come through. Soundstaging was notably more focused and had cleaner edges to the overall width, yet still retaining that great Aries Mini sound character.

Alongside the ability to play local files Auralic have given the Mini the ability to play and emulate your TIDAL and Qobuz accounts, no Spotify Connect though I'm afraid, which is a big disappointment as something such as the Aries Mini wouldn't be my first choice for critical listening in a high-end system and nor is Spotify, but both would get more use (as they have done individually) for when friends come over. The combination of the fun musical presentation and the sheer amount of playlists Spotify offers would have been a match made in heaven for me personally. On further inspection the





# AURALIC ARIES MINI STREAMER

Mini does offer the ability to play Spotify through the Airplay feature from an iOS device, adequate but not as good as having it integrated.

TIDAL however, which I also subscribe too has come along way since its release and through the Mini sounds fab, far better than Spotify Premium would, but the pre-made playlists are not as vast. Needless to say I got on with the combo extremely well and love how fast the Lightning DS app rendered, buffered and selected everything I wanted to hear.

Sat back going through many genres on TIDAL I had a chance to explore the soundstage a little further; it's not the airiest of soundstage, but it's very encapsulating giving harmonic references to notes all around my room, again its that Auralic draw you in sound that boasts musicality rather than what many refer to as a hifi sound that captivates listening.

Qobuz, another newbie to quality lossless streaming is also supported and also very easy to setup through the app. I'm not as big a fan of Qobuz as I am TIDAL, I think it still has a long way to come with its PC orientated GUI, although on the Lightning DS app it appears very nicely. Sound quality for me and also to a few other friends who had listen is not quite as good as TIDAL, but I think over time Qobuz is going to be extremely effective and build significantly on its already strong platform. Most importantly that Auralic

character shone through and did smiley things to my face...again!

I must say I was impressed with the Aries Minis via way of rendering radio stations, first of all there are options for, genre, worldwide and local stations, navigation and buffering was extremely fast and the Mini produced great flow and musicality to radio stations over the range I tried, admittedly more for background listening but I did find myself using radio more on the main system over my time with the Mini as it was just so easy and sounded very pleasing.

During the review process I had the opportunity to also use the various connections from the Aries Mini and my findings were that the coaxial RCA output provided the most consistently lovable sound. Optical is never as good, but with a glass optical cable was far better and USB was very good indeed and the USB implementation of the DAC in question (I tried a few) plays a big factor in overall performance. There were no bad ways of connecting the Aries Mini, including wired or wireless, there just happened to be slightly better configurations if you like to compare and get the best from this flexible little sprite.

Lastly in order to be thorough and for my own interest I connected the Aries Mini to my Focal CMS Actives, now this would be for me an absolutely brilliant and compact system for any other room in the house from the main

system. A simple wireless connection, internal or network hard drive and an iPad on a stand offers a fully integrated digital system that sounded fantastic. The Focal's detailed and clean approach was backed up with the Mini's flare for reproducing music. This system in an office or kitchen, even a bedroom would be a staple that the majority of people would simply fit and forget.

## Conclusion

I didn't really expect too much from Auralic's entry level streamer the Aries Mini; I had the misconception that like many other lower priced streaming devices that the sound would be somewhat flat and lack lustre. How wrong I was, the Aries Mini is the most fun I've had from my music in a non hifi sense in a while. It's a feature rich streamer that integrates the most popular lossless streaming services and radio with the families local files to produce a musical and enthusiastic sound that for the money could be called a gift from Santa at this time of year.

The perfect companion to any mid priced system and for those with more expensive tastes a truly great addition to less critical listening in other areas of the home.

## AT A GLANCE

**Sound Quality:** The most fun you will have for £450 unless you live in Amsterdam!

**Build Quality:** Simple and solid

**Value For Money:** Brilliant, you can't put a price on musicality, so if Auralic deems it at £450 then I'm convinced

### Pros:

Musical, enthusiastic, detailed and fun sound

Feature rich software

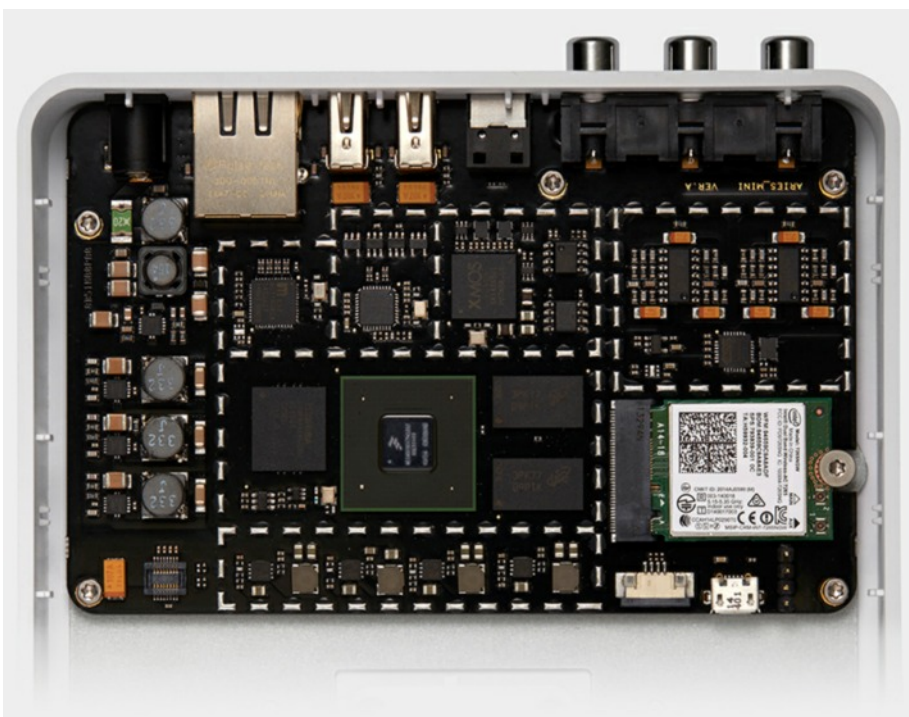
Digital and analogue outputs

Good app

### Cons:

No Spotify Connect (although Spotify can used via AirPlay)

Price: £450





# Tellurium Q Silver Diamond Speaker Cable And Interconnects

By Stuart and Linette Smith

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Tellurium Q make a wide range of speaker cables, interconnects and other audio cables at prices to suit most pockets. Here Stuart and Linette Smith take a listen to their range topping Silver Diamond speaker cables and interconnects.

That's about  
all I can tell  
you about  
what goes into  
making up  
these cables  
as, as with all  
their cables,  
Tellurium Q  
aren't  
particularly  
forthcoming  
with specifics



We don't do many cable reviews here at Hifi Pig Towers because we tend to find what we like, place it in the main system and leave it there. The last such cable to find a permanent spot in our main system was the Ultra Blacks from Tellurium Q. We've a hundred and one different cables we could have in the system, and which we do use when we put together and review more modest systems, but time and time again we always found ourselves going back to the Ultra Blacks in our reference system...until recently.

I say recently, but truth be known we had the Silver Diamond cables probably before anyone else, but I like to get a proper feel for a product before spouting lyrically, or otherwise, about it and so these cables have sat in the main system for months and months and I've no desire to take them out and substitute them for anything else. I'm going to speak about the cables as a whole; that is speaker cables and interconnects as a loom, simply because that is how I've used them.

## Construction

The interconnects are pretty straightforward affairs with a relatively modest thickness cable in black sheathing connected to very nice quality XLRs. There's little to say other than that; they look straight forward and nothing particularly flash. If you are one of those people who are looking for glitz and glam over what comes out the speakers then move along, there's nothing to see here. That said, the presentation box the interconnects arrive in is rather nice in a "I've clearly bought something that's quite lovely" kind of way, but again it's nothing overly flash or "look at me".

Likewise the speaker cables. They're a similar construction to the Ultra Blacks in that there are two, it has to be said pretty thick cables (much thicker than the Ultra Blacks), separated from each other by about an inch or so and then hidden in a black braid. Tellurium Q have added a metal block where the sheath ends which adds to the overall quality feel of these cables and they are terminated with good quality spades





There's a feeling of more of everything. More involvement, more toe tapping...more musical enjoyment.

with what looks to be a silver coating. The speaker cables are pretty heavy beasts but once locked in place they don't go anywhere.

That's about all I can tell you about what goes into making up these cables as, as with all their cables, Tellurium Q aren't particularly forthcoming with specifics...understandable given the number of copy cats out there ready to pounce and make a fast buck on the work of others.

## Sound

There's always that moment of anticlimax with cables in my experience. Truth is cables don't really excite me in the same way that a new preamplifier or pair of speakers do. What I'm trying to get across is that my expectation is that cables are much of a muchness...or this was my thinking up until a few years ago when I actually bothered to experiment and listen closely to the differences cables could have on a system....though they still don't enthuse me overly. I'm still very wary however, and treat much of what is said about the magic properties of some cables with a rather large pinch of salt and I'm well aware that when a cable rep' starts talking about their cables that I'm being

sold to. Geoff Merrigan arrived chez nous with no such bluster and little more than a "plug them in and tell me what you think in a few weeks" attitude. I've read the Tellurium Q website and all their chatter about phase distortion and what not and to be honest that all goes over my head; it doesn't interest me, something either does its job or it doesn't...end of story!

I've had conversations with Mr Merrigan over the last few years and he has a theory that all cables act as some kind of filter and the job of the cable manufacturer is to make that filtering as unobtrusive/negligible as possible. I have issues with the whole filtering concept but that's a different story and for another time.

Our system has been put together very carefully over the years and it is there to do two things: First of all it has to play music in a way that we enjoy and secondly it has to be resolving enough to be used as a review tool. Nothing gets in the system if it doesn't meet these two criteria.

Plugging the Silver Diamond loom into the system was greeted with an immediate, and somewhat surprising "Oh, this is actually better in many



# TELLURIUM Q SILVER DIAMOND SPEAKER CABLES & INTERCONNECTS

ways". Actually it was more of a "F%3k, where did that come from?"

There's a feeling of more of everything. More involvement, more toe tapping...more musical enjoyment. OK, let's back off for a while and just leave the system to play for a bit without listening too much as I don't want to get into that whole "well it's certainly different, but is it better" situation...but it is better and there is no doubt about it! There's better separation of instruments, better and bigger soundstage, more fine detail in the mix and just an overall picture that you are getting closer to the music in a very real sense. This is not subtle either! There's speed, slam and everything that makes music exciting in spades and it's quite something. Daft Punk sum this cable loom up pretty much spot on in their tune "Faster, Better, Stronger". Veils lifted, inky black backgrounds...insert audiophile reviewer babble of choice! They really are that good in this system!

OK, perhaps it's a synergy thing and so a more modest system was thrown together...and you know what, you get the same effect; more of everything. Fine detail is the thing that really comes to the fore; little clues in the mix that you knew were there but took little

notice of suddenly become more apparent. Fleetwood Mac's Songbird is a case in point; there's a real palpable feeling that you are sat about ten rows back in an empty concert hall with all the atmospherics that that conjures...the same track on the main system is a real close your eyes and you're there moment.

OK, popping the Silver Diamonds into a crap system isn't going to elevate it to the level of the upper echelons of audio nirvana, but it is like you're playing with much better kit throughout.

## Conclusion

These are the best cables I have used in my system... period... and I do not say that lightly! They have been in and out and compared with other cables we have to hand and every time they are taken out there's an immediate "nope, get them back in" comment from Linette or myself. What they do is difficult to put your finger on exactly; there's a feeling of rightness and a sense that you are getting closer to the feeling of the music in an emotional sense. There's more detail, more space...and they just sound right.

These are the best cables I have used in my system... period... and I do not say that lightly!





# TELLURIUM Q SILVER DIAMOND SPEAKER CABLES & INTERCONNECTS



There's an elephant in the room that I've not mentioned as yet. Yep, these cables cost as much and for some more than a serious electronics upgrade. The speaker cables are £895.80 a metre and the interconnects are £2292 for a 1 metre pair (XLR). That's serious money of course and I'm not going to make light of the fact that this review is going to upset a lot of people who will moan about the price of a bit of wire.

I also won't make light of the fact that these cables are a game changer in terms of what they allow our system to achieve. Yes, they are relatively expensive... there are MUCH more expensive cables out there should you care to look... but they do offer a considerable and tangible upgrade and as such could be seen as being good value for money in the context of a high-end system. In a less high-end system then you would need to be the judge, but do not dismiss these cables as being out of your league before hearing them in your own system. Mine are going nowhere and I have no hesitation in giving these cables an outstanding product award of which we have only awarded six in the last year!

## And Now Linette's Thoughts

It was Tellurium Q that first really opened my eye's to the fact that cables could make a difference to the sound of a system, with their Ultra Black speaker cable which we have had in the our hifi since we tried it back in 2013. Since then I've definitely become a 'cable

believer' (I know, in some folks eyes it's like being in a loony religious cult) and I can hear differences, not just with speaker cable but with interconnects and other cables (I'm going to stick with speaker cables and interconnects for now rather than get into a USB-cable-based-brawl with someone). I've discovered that 'different' is not always better. Some cables go into the system and then out again because I don't like the sound. I've also discovered that the cables that I like best seem to strip back rather than add anything to the sound, if that makes sense.

As I said, we have been 'Ultra Black' in the speaker cable and interconnect department for some time, they have seen off many contenders, but since then Tellurium Q have developed their cables further and their 'Top of the Pops' speaker cable is now the Silver Diamond. At just under £900 a metre it isn't cheap, but in a high end system, where thousands have been spent on the electronics and loudspeakers, it certainly isn't out of place...in fact, compared to some brands, it is quite modestly priced. The cable looks the business, not some over stuffed python of a cable (yes, we've all seen 'those' kind of cables at shows, lurking behind the gear like they swallowed a baby goat) it's very nicely finished, purposeful looking and very well made.

So, to the sound. Is there a noticeable difference? Very much so. Sometimes it is very difficult to put your finger on just what it is about what a new system

component or cable does to the music. It's like a name on the tip of your tongue that evades your brain the more you try to remember it. I could get into 'veil-lifting' type Hifi Reviewer clichés here but there really is no need. What the Silver Diamonds do is strip everything right back to the music. They don't add anything, they just seem to focus the sound so that what you hear is clarity. I'm not suggesting for one moment that you should go out and get some of these for a low or mid end system and expect angels to start singing to you, these are cables, not magic beans! (To be fair if you are in the market for something more affordable you should try out some of the TQ ranges priced below the Silver Diamond). They work their magic when you put them where they should be, with quality electronics into a quality pair of loudspeakers.

If a stealth-crew of Hifi Ninjas came and put the Silver Diamonds into your system while you were out, you would come back and listen to music and try for ages to put your finger on just what exactly had made things improve. In my mind, that's an outstanding cable.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Nicely put together cables but they're not going to impress those looking for glitz and glamour

**Sound Quality:** These cables bring you a sense of reality and excitement I've previously not experienced in our already fantastic system

**Value For Money:** In the context of a high-end system these cables offer very good value for money.

**Pros:**

**More of everything in the mix, particularly fine detail. What these cables do is difficult to put your finger on but you will know it when you hear it**

**Cons:**

**I'm genuinely struggling here but they are quite pricey when looked at out of context**

**Price:**

**Speaker cables: £895.80/metre**

**Interconnects: £2292**



# Erzetich Perfidus Headphone Amplifier

By Janine Elliot

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Erzetich make a habit of telling you their products are evil animals, and that they need to be tamed after the company cage them in the cardboard boxes ready for their new home. Even the company logo looks like a bull ready to charge at you, being a circle with two horns. Janine Elliot runs with the bulls with the Perfidus Class A headphone amp costing £999.

# ERZETECH PERFIDUS HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER



The Perfidus is basically a class-A amplifier, but one that is much different to how I expected it to be

The Perfidus has the words “class-a evil headphone amplifier” on the front panel, and actually arrived quite tame, though I needed to keep it busy house-training it for a few hundred hours until it started to behave at its very best.

This relatively new Slovenian company are proud to just stick with just designing headphone amplifiers and a cute headphone stand, and designer Blaž Erzetič has four models in the range headed by the Deimos, his latest incarnation, for serious audiophiles who can afford the €4000 price tag. The Perfidus is the second from the top, at £999, which was more in line with most of my own headphone amps and those I have reviewed over the last few years.

Blaž Erzetič has been playing with electronics since his teens; going on to study electronics and being involved in sound for almost 25 years, though actually having spent most of his professional career working in graphics as a designer, illustrator and photographer, and teaching at two Slovene universities. Like many audio manufacturers, he is also a musician having released 4 albums. Much of the monitoring in studios is done on headphones, and Blaž being unsatisfied with what was available, has been spending his time since 2012 improving personal monitoring; setting up Erzetič, a company producing headphone amplifiers which are effectively small power amplifiers.

In an age of headphones costing prices unimaginable just 10 years ago, he believes they should be fed with

amplifiers that can give them due justice. As a music professional himself he has designed a headphone amp range for “music lovers, sound studio engineers, on-stage sound engineers, musicians, DJ’s and other sound professionals”. Great credentials then for everyone who wants to listen to music, and by an artist who claims that “When I design a headphone amplifier, I intend to create a work of art”.

The Perfidus is basically a class-A amplifier, but one that is much different to how I expected it to be; the amplification is in the first stage using the OPA627 op-amp with the Class-A part as the next stage using STMicroelectronics BD139 (NPN) and BD140 (PNP) bipolar transistors. This end stage, along with four other transistors is mostly just a current buffer, acting in push-pull with gain just a bit higher than 1. As Blaž informed me, it also has another op-amp “which is a fine tuning for DC component in the output (it pushes DC towards zero)”. What it does is detect DC offset voltage and corrects it. According to him, Class-A headphone amps can have a tendency to increase DC offset drift which he suggests might be dangerous for the headphones. The main four transistors (BD139/140) are conveniently bolted to the side unit (the bolts show - on the side of the unit) acting as the heatsink, and the unit also features an Alps Blue Velvet volume potentiometer and WIMA high quality pulse input capacitors. Power is provided by a small toroidal and 4 Rubycon power stabilization capacitors totalling 40,000 uF at the rear of the shoe-box shaped unit. The box itself is of good design in

# ERZETECH PERFIDUS HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

I guess what I am saying is that if you intend to purchase the Perfidus you should try it with your choice headphones.

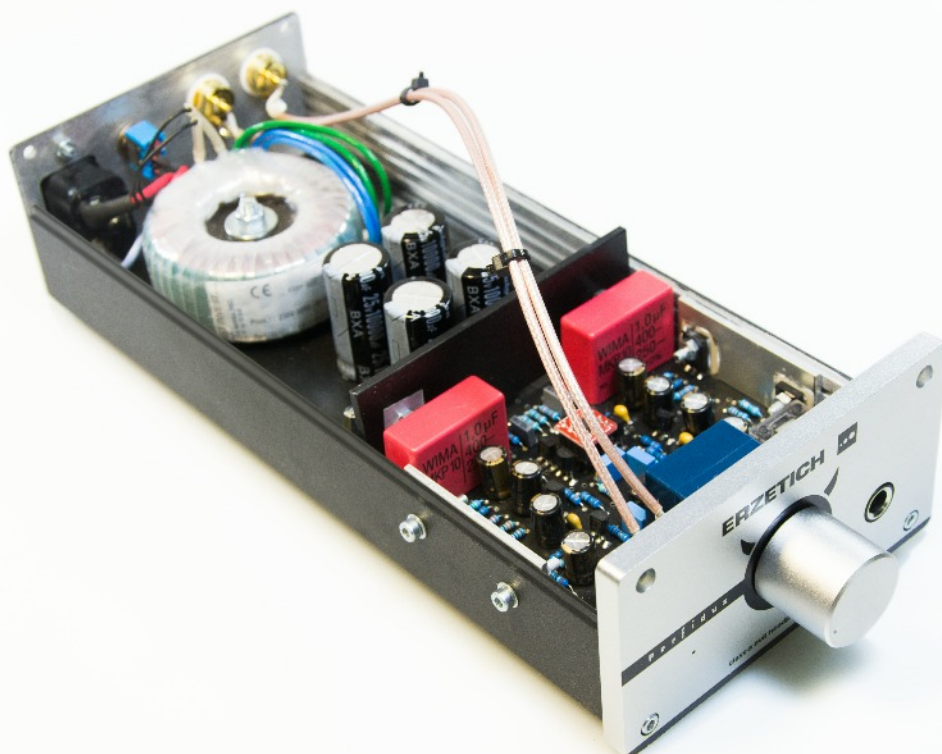
grey matt finish, and sporting a 7mm aluminium front panel which has the aluminium volume knob, headphone jack and an LED light. The rear of the unit has the RCA input sockets and IEC plug plus on-off toggle switch. The first version of this headphone amplifier had a non-detachable power cord, so I am glad that this has been amended, though I needed to ensure the IEC lead was inserted fully or it would cut out; the socket being slightly loose.

Running flat from 4Hz-40kHz this amplifier gave me a lot to think about. Where many headphones work OK with whichever cans you plug in, some, like the Perfidus, work great with certain headphones and not so good with others. Plugging in my usual Audio Technica ATH-W1000 headphones gave for an incredible top end detail and lively portrayal of the music, but the bass end was just not there enough for me to be satisfied. These headphones are not known for their bass end but having an excellent mid and treble detail and angled drivers giving a good natural soundstage, as well as their incredible comfort over long listening sessions, make them my usual first choice. They just don't work on the Perfidus. Playing Patricia Barber Café Blue gave a pin-sharp performance that was highly

addictive, especially the gentle ride-cymbals, but her voice was just too clear and sounding a touch sibilant on the top end.

However, plugging in the Sennheiser HD650 gave for a powerfully involving sound covering all frequencies with superb headroom, sounding quite better than I imagined these headphones could ever sound. These might well not be the best in today's hype over planar designs, but for professional sound engineers they, and the HD800, are a reliable source of sound reproduction. The lower impedance Audio Technica's didn't work so well, but the load wasn't the de Facto, as when trying a friend's 45Ω Hifiman HE560 they gave a very good all-round performance. These planar's are known for their lack of distortion and high speed but low output, and the Perfidus could show off these cans working well at both low and high frequencies, turning Patricia's voice into a human again, with enough gain to run these low sensitivity planars well.

I guess what I am saying is that if you intend to purchase the Perfidus you should try it with your choice headphones.





# ERZETECH PERFIDUS HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER



I also plugged in the lower-end but highly satisfying 32Ω Meze 99's which again showed how versatile the amplifier is with both cheaper and more expensive headphones, as well as a variety of other headphone designs. ELO's In the Hall of the Mountain King (based on Grieg, from the album 'On the Third Day') has so many different elements of music from close mic'd cellos and loud drums and out of tune piano, the Perfidus was able to untangle the different elements into their separate niche's and make listening both intuitive and enjoyable.

Perfidus means 'faithless' or 'treacherous', and whilst I had full faith in this machine, it really did want to argue and take risks with the music; this wasn't just going to sit down and be sweet, it wanted to show the music for what it was; identifying every nook and cranny in the music.

And I loved it.

Stravinsky's Symphony in C (Charles Dutoit, L'Orchestre de las Suisse Romande) is full of off-beat accentuated quaver bows in the string section and brass bursts and kettle-drum rolls and

then silences. This work is hard to relax to at the best of times but great to perform, and this headphone amplifier gave a very credible performance, keeping my attention from the first beats to the distant fading into silence at the end. Turning to Dave Brubeck Blue Rondo, the clarity from all musicians including space between the instruments shows a really good link between sound engineering and electrical engineering. The Meze was more laid back in the high end than is the Audio Technica, with the Sennheiser the better in terms of detail and full frequency reproduction.

Being a woman of sound waves rather than those on the sea I thought it appropriate to play Michael Franks 'Women in the Waves', a well recorded song covering tight percussive rhythms and smooth vocals, and I wasn't left drowning in confusion, rather given a performance of excellent power reserve and authority showing the Perfidus is meaty with all frequencies and sounding like I expect a fully-fledged Class A power amplifier should. Prokofiev Piano Concerto No3 (Mstislav Rostropovich and Russian National Orchestra) was forceful but precise, giving excellent

depth of sound and 'bite' that this Russian work commands. My only complaints was what I assume to be a slight earthing problem when touching the volume knob which gave buzzing sound whether or not a source was attached to the back RCA sockets. I tried this through my mains conditioners and found a similar result. Connecting mains powered sources reduced this, though not completely. I can only assume this was just an issue with the review sample.

## Conclusion

I really enjoyed playing music through this headphone amplifier. Blaž Erzetič truly understands the importance of providing enough power and a design philosophy to give a well immersed and professional listening experience. This amplifier worked well with whatever music I provided, and surprising me at just how good the now aged Sennheiser HD650 could be. The Perfidus is a responsive and dynamic performer with a clear and detailed sound.

There are so many headphone amps coming into the market-place these days, and particularly from the lesser known and Eastern countries, that it is vital you take a good listen before you buy. With the Perfidus you won't be disappointed!

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** solid construction with good electrical design that is only let down by the mains socket

**Sound quality:** Bright and quick, and with a classy bass end making listening on headphones very pleasurable

**Value For Money:** At a pound short of £1000 this is competing with a lot of other headphone amps. For a Class A poweramp in miniature this is money well spent.

### Pros:

**Devilish Class-A warmth and power**  
**Excellent bass and clean treble**  
**Bright and quick sound**

### Cons:

**Can be choosy as to which headphones work best**  
**Price: £999**

# NuForce Sport3 IEMs

By Janine Elliot

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Designed with the active music lover in mind the NuForce Sport3 In Ear Monitors cost £80. Janine Elliot gets gets physical with them.

Crafted from metal and polycarbonate, the BE Sport3 is tough and lightweight



Headphones and IEMs are quick moving and highly popular consumer items, especially sports headphones, and like I predicted would happen with the iPhone 7, WiFi IEMs are now the new must-haves. In times when wired earphones are beginning to be unplugged from the equation, wi-fi products are big news. They are imperative for the new ultra-thin phones such as iPhone 7 and Motorola Moto Z, that don't need to make space for that large 3.5mm stereo socket. Optoma, the projector and audio brand who own Nu Force have brought out a wide variety of IEMs over the years and their previous wi-fi earphone the BE6i, which I reviewed earlier this year, was so good that I bought one. With its excellent bass, long life battery and light weight though bulky design, Nu Force have now brought out a sporty little number

with a thinner waist which, annoyingly for me, is considerably cheaper. Crafted from metal and polycarbonate, the BE Sport3 is tough and lightweight. Like my BE6i it come armed with advanced Bluetooth® technology, offering both aptX® and AAC compatibility. This delivers distortion-free sound and the ability to connect to multiple sources. At £80, the Sport3 has a good supply of accessories, including a little bag to put the IEMs in, though this time it isn't a solid feel bag but rather an equally impressive soft neoprene carrying pouch, with large clip, to protect the earphones and accessories from sweat and water. As in the Optoma BE6i, this new model features handy magnets on the backs of the buds for clipping them together when not in use, acting as a designer necklace for no extra cost. There are also some significant



# NUFORCE SPORT3 IEMs

differences between this and the older model; some visual and others technical. For example the shape is angled and smaller, again partly made from aluminium. This I actually preferred as it meant it was able to fit in and around the ear more easily. Also there are no Comply tips supplied this time, rather a collection of more traditional though very colourful rubber ear tips, and a clever custom double ear-tip which, once in your ear canal, is cleverly held in place. I did try these on my BE6i, but this different design means that the ear is not so well insulated from the outside world. Similarly on the Sport3, whilst the treble was excellent the lack of 'ear-pressure' means the bass is still somewhat light. The double tips supplied for each of the two versions of Sport3 are in a different colour; on the "gun metal grey" IEMs the double tip was black, with matching silicone ear-wings, and on the "Rose Gold" IEM (gold plus white cable/remote) it was white. Similarly, both units came with a selection of small, medium and large rubber tips to match the IEMs. The black unit comes with three pink and yellow rubber ear-tips and the white version has blue and purple ones. All provide a good isolation, improving that bass end to acceptable levels, though the matching supplied ear-wings that I loved so much on the BE6i, are less clever in this new model, being a pointed solid construction (rather than corrugated as in the BE6i) which isn't so secure behind the ear anti helix unless the pointed end is tucked in. These Spock ear wings are actually quite long and it took me a while to get them affixed in my tiny ear without the whole IEMs falling out. Once I mastered this they were actually even more secure than my own BE6i. The choice between his type of fixture and those that fit behind your ear or relying on cables trailing behind your ears (such as Nu Force's own Primo8 and HEM series) mean there are lots of choices for your ears. Once the ear-wing was affixed to the nozzle this IEM looked much less clumsy than on the BE6i which some might find too big. However, I must stress that whilst I am used to the miniature Flare R2 IEMs, which are hidden within my ear, I didn't actually find size a problem with the much larger BE6i, and certainly not the Sport3. However, the added length between the ear-wing and tips is greater on the Sport3 than on the BE6i, requiring some careful wearing; the distance from wings to end of the large ear tips is 14mm as opposed to 10mm on

the BE6i using the large Comply tip. You get my point. I pride myself on having small ears, even as I get older, so at first I did find these hard to wear, but in HifiPig style I persevered until I got them to work really well. For most of the tests I chose to remove the ear-wings, and using the larger pink rubber tips which provided better isolation than the double tips and consequently gave a better bass end. With the double tip, this was even more secure though its lack of thickness of rubber gave for a brighter sound as a result of less isolation and therefore less bass.

The BE Sport3 is even better than the BE6i in terms of excellent battery life, giving as it does up to 10 hours between charging, as opposed to 8 hours on the older machine. This is a really good set of results, when so many still don't offer more than 5 or 6 hours. As in the BE6i this model is apX and AAC compatibility, and it being IP55 rated makes them rain, dust and sweat resistant, though you still won't be able to go swimming with them. The remote/microphone unit is slightly shorter than on the BE6i, and again the microphone is good with a sensitivity of -42dB. Rather than the usual musical tones to inform you of switch on and when it links with your phone, this machine more helpfully talks to you in a rather sombre female American voice; "Power off", "Power on" and "Primary device connected". The 6mm dynamic driver is much smaller than the 10mm driver on the BE6i. This affects the bass output, though the Sport3 is not lacking by any means. This IEM is not a cut-back version of the BE6i; this is a well thought-out design for the pseudo-athlete that is well priced. It doesn't look quite as robust or high-end as the BE6i or the wired IEMs in the Nu Force range, but in terms of battery life and sound quality beats most of the competition. The thin neck on the bud allows it to go further into the ear canal to help improve that bass end, though I did find it was slightly prominent in the upper bass and detail of sound is less well defined than some wired drivers at this price point. Upper mid and high was very acceptable allowing Dire Straits 'Love over Gold' to be very open and spacious between the ears showing good control. Muse 'The second Order' and the track "Survival" gave a very timely and precise piano and vocal accompaniment beat for the smooth main vocal line. Classical music was equally detailed, though not quite as

accurate and as musical as the BE6i, but still very able. Sir Charles Groves and the Bournemouth Symphony orchestra playing Arnold English Dances is a great performance, only hindered by the studio manager's nightmare of vibrations from microphone stands when the musicians and conductor get over-excited. This IEM picked it up well. At the other end of the spectrum the regular loud cymbal crashes in this set of movements gave me a real opportunity to test that upper frequency detail and neutrality. My fears of a slightly less controlled and slightly raised mid-top end were heard, though not unexpected for such a well-priced unit. To test this theory further playing Patricia Barber 'Café Blue' I was aware that some of that top frequency cymbals were slightly less controlled and a little bit more 'brittle' than the silky smooth rendition on the BE6i.

## Conclusion

The BE Sport3 is a very well thought out design, aimed at the active sports' person with its vibrant colours and sporty looks. This model might have cut back on the shape of the buds and even the cable has a thinner waist than on the BE6i, but this is not an anorexic BE6i. Whether or not you intend to take part in the Olympics this is a bargain if you like music on the move without getting tangled up in the wires. At £80 this is a very well spec'd model that should make you and your wallet very happy.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Good looking and with lots of extras in the box

**Sound Quality:** Great sound at this price

**Value For Money:** Well spec'd and good value

### Pros

Value for money  
apX and AAC compatibility  
Solid build  
Excellent battery Life  
Lots of accessories

### Cons

Not quite as silky top end as on the BE6i  
Some might find them hard to use with the ear-wings

**Price:** £80

# Optoma HEM4 In Ear Monitors

By Janine Elliot

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Janine Elliot checks out the multi-driver Optoma HEM4 In Ear Monitors costing a penny short of £250.

# OPTOMA HEM4 IN EAR MONITORS

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Designed for professionals and audio enthusiasts this model has two Knowels™ drivers; a larger and smaller diaphragm for low and high frequencies, respectively.

Normally when I am confronted with multi-driver IEMs I am rather worried that the sound will be disjointed or confusing. In an ideal world a single driver is the best option, and generally the bigger the driver the better the bass, though there are some 5mm drivers that get pretty low as well as a speedy extended top end. So, to be confronted with a new series of four IEMs with 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the successful high-resolution Knowels™ balanced armature drivers for each ear was going to be interesting for me. The HEM4 as the second model in the range is equipped with two drivers, part of the range designed to please the budding on-the-go listener right through to the professional musician and audiophile. American company Optoma really have pulled out all the stops to create a complete range of IEMs to please everybody. I have reviewed a number of Optoma IEMs in the past and this product was for me the pinnacle of my acoustic travels with the company.

The use of Knowels™ drivers is paramount to the success of this series of monitors. Their history goes back to 1946, set up by Hugh Knowles in the USA and originally making microphones, speakers for TVs, and hearing aids. Balanced armature drivers have actually been around since the 1920s primarily in headphones used

with crystal radios, though they were then much bigger with the diaphragm round-shaped, like the soundbox on a wind-up phonograph. In the simplest of terms these modern rectangular shaped balanced armature receivers have a coil inside which due to inducing a magnetic field when playing audio through it moves one end of a “U” shaped metal unit which has a magnet attached. As the end of the u-bend moves about it vibrates a diaphragm above it via a minute “pin” that joins the two. The change of air pressure inside is forced out of a little hole which then forms the music you hear. Having several of these diaphragms inside, for specific frequencies is like having a 2 – 3 ½ way loud-speaker in your lugholes. A clever idea, but what is really clever is making sure the sounds mix well together. The larger the balanced armature receiver, the larger the diaphragm is and therefore it can displace more air making it potentially louder than a smaller one.

For this review I chose the HEM4, at mid-price of £249.99 as this is the sort of price an audiophile should start serious listening at. Designed for professionals and audio enthusiasts this model has two Knowels™ drivers; a larger and smaller diaphragm for low and high frequencies, respectively. In blue this was my favourite colour; the



# OPTOMA HEM4 IN EAR MONITORS

With musicality pouring out of everything I played with both warmth and clarity, it played classical music with affection and heavy rock with grunt.

others are in red for the HEM2 and black for both the HEM6 and HEM8. What always pleases me with Optoma products is the high level of accessories and standard of presentation, and this model was no exception. Not only is there a solid carrying case for you to put the headphones in (common to all in the range), but it also has a waterproof display case, just in case you take it into the shower with you. Whilst looking superb, like the waterproof cases for sports cameras, this case isn't much use unless you remove the foam insert inside it which is to place the IEMS in when detached from the cables. Yes, you have a choice of two cables to insert, both of which are superb quality, but slightly tricky to do correctly, largely finding which is the left and which is the right lead, as only the earphones themselves have L/R, and the instruction manual isn't that helpful with colour-coding of the cables. But, once you have mastered this (yellow line is right, white is left) makes future dismantling easy. Firstly there is a basic cable with microphone and inline remote, and a better looking braided high-end cable for the best possible performance. The high-end cable is made of OFC and silver, while the 2-pin cable connectors are a proprietary mix of silver and copper with separate ground return for each channel. Both cables have 'L shaped'

3.5mm jacks, a must for the serious audiophile. Not only does it look better and less likely to be whacked but it also reduces the chances of the socket being disconnected from the PCB on your portable player if knocked. The list of accessories is equally well thought out, with a 3.5mm - 6.3mm gold plated adapter, 5 pairs of soft silicone ear tips, 2 pairs of Comply™ memory foam ear tips, a cleaning tool with brush and a very important lapel clip. I found that very useful; most manufacturers miss these out so I end up making something out of paper clips to save cables jangling about as I walk to the shops.

Putting on these IEMs can be harder than you think first time, as the cable needs to go around your ear-lobes and which then holds the earphones firmly in your ears, but as a veteran of IEM testing I have now got it sorted. As a wearer of glasses I am not in favour of this method, but that is only my personal opinion. The Optoma instructions show you how to fit them around your ears in case you do need help, so you will also need a mirror. Once secured you hardly notice you are wearing them at all; doing swift walking and bending down didn't budge them, largely explaining why this type of design is favoured by musicians and broadcasters. They are also very comfortable, especially using the



# OPTOMA HEM4 IN EAR MONITORS

Comply™ memory foam ear tips, which gave the better bass and sound isolation.

On first listening my thoughts were just how musical and exciting the sound was; they are very efficient players with 110dB sensitivity and a frequency response of 18-40,000Hz. The sound was very 'forward' showing a surprisingly excellent 3D soundstage for IEMs. Listening to Sibelius Symphony No 2 (Simon Rattle, Berliner Philharmoniker 24bit/192kHz) showed an excellent warmth and clarity, with exceptionally fast transients, something also very noticeable with the acoustic guitar in David Gilmour Rattle that Lock '5 A.M'. It might be early in the morning but the instruments were wide awake and crystalline clear. I could even detect a squeaking gate at one and a half minutes in, perhaps David leaving for his mobile recording studio on the Astoria houseboat on the Thames, something I hadn't heard before. The

earpieces themselves are manufactured using an acoustically calculated, vibration-free Lexan™ polycarbonate resin which is an amorphous engineering thermoplastic, considered to have outstanding mechanical, optical, electrical and thermal properties. They are also very lightweight at 5 grams.

Whilst the mid's and treble were exceptionally detailed and with a warmth that made you want to keep on listening, the bass was equally powerful. For those liking extreme bass clout you will not be disappointed; Pink Floyd Pulse track "Astronomy Domine" has an aggressive percussive bite particularly with kick and toms that the Optoma played with pout. If this track hadn't woken me up listening on my choice IEMs, the HEM4 certainly did now. Not that it was OTT. It was just so clear and speedy. Boy, was this so much better than the Primo 8 four-driver goliath that I reviewed last year, and that one was a

thoroughly good player at £150 more. Playing Britten's Sinfonia da Requiem (24/96kHz, Kansas Symphony Orchestra, Michael Stern) on that bicycle helmet looking IEM gave a transparency of sound that more than met its price point. Now on the HEM4 this music was even clearer. Where the Primo 8's top-end left me wanting, the new HEM 4 was superb, producing better coherence between instruments with a much tighter and clearer portrayal of the music. Dadawa 'Sister Drum' track "Crossing the Ridge" separated the drums, flute, voices and synthesiser instrument parts with ease and authority. This album is not the easiest to hear well in a crowded road, but this IEM could have been studio monitors as it kept me informed with detail even as I wandered the high street.

## Conclusion

At a penny under £250, these IEMs are a highly recommended choice for the serious music listener and professional alike. With musicality pouring out of everything I played with both warmth and clarity, it played classical music with affection and heavy rock with grunt. Once you get used to inserting in your ears you will wonder why you didn't wear earphones this way before.



## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Very comfortable and lightweight. Excellent build with lots of accessories. Detachable leads.

**Sound Quality:** Accurate, full frequency sound with excellent bass and articulation of sound

**Value For Money:** Excellent value for money package. More than £249.99 worth of quality sound.

### Pros:

Excellent full frequency response. excellent warmth and clarity, with exceptionally fast transients. Effortless musicality. Lots of accessories, and excellent cable.

### Cons:

Nothing at this price. Perhaps bass could perhaps be over enthusiastic at times.

**Price:** £249.99

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# Pensil Cabinet Kit With Pluvia Eleven Drivers

By Rob and David Stevenson

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Father and son duo Rob and Dave Stevenson get tooled up and take a bash with this interesting single driver DIY loudspeaker project costing a total of £552 including VAT.

# PENSIL CABINET KIT



To get this high quality does require application, but any IKEA flat pack DIY person could aspire to these

**I**n your room speaker boxes are the most visible and have arguably the most effect on your in-room sound, and also on your cash flow! We are always keen to hear quality kit for those on limited budgets and if you're a hobbyist wanting to glue and clamp, with a few hours available then super sonic satisfaction perhaps lies in this flat pack construction.

To get this high quality does require application, but any IKEA flat pack DIY person could aspire to these.

Before details of our construct experience here's some background info:

The high quality 18 mm birch ply kit was by Stefan Whatcott. The designer Dr. Scott Lindgren (Woden design) has matched his Pensil cabinet to the character of selected high quality

units of the Pluvia II production from manufacturer Markaudio. Together they achieve a desirable synergy of purposeful musicality.

It's a single point 'full range' source with ultra lightweight composite metal cone of special construction with a particular specification of suspension which allows for very tight tolerances and long throw through a big magnet assembly allowing fine detail addition even at pumping bass extremities.

These factors mitigate the limitations and maximise the lovely advantages of single point sources. Dramatic transient speed in macro dynamics and micro dynamics, imaging and cohesiveness in the sound of instruments that is obvious with reproduction of acoustic kit and vocals. When attack and decay harmonics distinguish top hifi –eg.

# PENSIL CABINET KIT

nails on guitar strings, when the absence of crossovers, comb effects and phase shifts allows the recorded beauty in the ear sensitive 200 Hz to 4 kHz band to manifest enchantingly in room.

Bass, when looking at the palm size cone, might be thought to be unable to balance the luxuriant mid/tops. It does.

The drivers frequency graph shows strong ability around and below 100 Hz and the cabinet design amplifies the back wave in this range with its quarter wave resonant air coupled vented tower (a modified 'mass loaded transmission line' MLMT). Being able to tune the sound balance to suit your room/ taste is a distinct advantage and easily achieved using absorbent wadding through a removable panel. It will not of course turn it into a 25 Hz bass bin. It will give the intended expressive phrasing as required for stand-up bass.

## Tools required:

We made one cabinet, allowed it to set overnight, and used same kit the next

day. The glue gains strength quickly at room temperatures and so it's possible to make both cabs in the day.

Two belt clamps (3 metre), 3 standard clamps (30 cm ish) .

Pliers (for terminals).

Scissors (for gaskets).

Damp cloth (for glue).

Kitchen scales (to weigh stuffing).

2pcs. Hex (Allen) keys 5 mm (back panel) and 3 mm (driver bolts).

## Construction hints:

The front vented box size is 100cm high, 23 cm wide and 36 cm deep. Assembly requires a well lit, work around, flat space with a clean non abrasive top with a minimum of 130 cm by 60 cm to accommodate clamping for more than 4 hours after gluing. Air Temperature should be over 10 degrees.

The tight jointing makes possible a complete dry fix. Build up on a side panel laid on the two belt clamps. This allows for the sequence of gluing the parts together to be noted and the use of clamps.

The top and bottom and back panel support frame are used to square up the box and observe the full insertion of panels into the grooves.

Metal inserts will need screwing into that frame and the base (for spikes)

The back can be inserted to help maintain squareness under clamping. Minimal glue is required, applied to the groove base and inside its inner wall. The front panel is edge clamped in three places and the glue squeezed out easily wiped off with a damp cloth.

A careful check on the top and bottom corners may reveal slight movement on clamping- so tap (using a cardboard pad to reduce bruising) and adjust for visibly perfect corners.

The gasket seal strip is fitted with no gaps avoiding bolt holes on the back





# PENSIL CABINET KIT

framing. More is added to the back of the holed divider and through the driver access hole onto the dividers front edge against which the magnet of the driver will sit.

Before bolting the Pluvia secure its colour coded wires onto the correct driver terminals and squeeze the push on spade connectors with pliers if needed to get a firm fix.

When fitting the drivers ensure the 'M' on the rim is displayed nicely. I protected the vulnerable rubber suspension and cones in case of slippage by covering with my hand as we used the hex key to drive the bolts firmly cutting their own holes. Do not over tighten but aim for evenness – the bolt heads should appear at similar heights in their 'wells'.

The high quality cable sockets are indented to fit with a careful sequence of mounting hardware.

The wadding is itch free and 400gm is supplied but we started with 200g teased out to fill the lower half of the four cavities. This gave an exciting presentation if a little ragged. Experimentation did change this to a final 370gm in the top two thirds (some behind the driver, and not near the vent). The felted pads offer further damping behind the driver if wished though we resisted possible over damping and did not use them. Tighten the backs bolts evenly. If the box is laid on its front the driver is protected from touching the surface by raised parts of its rim.

## The Testing

These basic kits are 1 metre high and in raw ply with bare drivers. Other finishes will be available from Stefan.

Positioning is possible back to the wall for 'storage' and low volumes, but for a decent listen you will have a favourite placement although they are not fussy. White noise and pink noise showed a slightly bright balance with an in-room distribution with less beaming than expected possibly due to the very shallow cone design. Frequency sweep was heard as giving a smooth top end and a (surprising) amount of sub 60 Hz- the cabinetry works well.

If you want the max then point them at you at same distance away as they are apart, or cross them at your toes for a wider sweet spot and a nice off axis balance.

The kit used included valve amps and big studio transistor amp and budget NAD /Rega from Hana moving coil and Ortofon 2M black moving magnet cartridges and similar level CD players.

Higher Quality is heard at once - these are very revealing speakers!

On the valve amp the difference between 4 and 8 ohm speaker settings was significant - 4 ohm preferred. Leads were 4mm Van Damme.

Their musical character is clean and clear with intense detailed layering and impressive dynamics (courtesy of Mark

Susanne Vega  
breathes in  
audibly and  
offers poetic  
words wet with  
saliva on the  
close miked  
solo 'Toms  
Diner'



# PENSIL CABINET KIT



Fenton's rapid reacting spider). But the word that tries to describe it is - 'coherent' and 'seamless' - meaning the individual instruments & vocals sort of hang nicely defined as fully formed separate items and make up a stage set which can extend further in all directions, up, back, left and right, out from the boxes (depending on structures adjacent). The critical comments are made after thirty plus hours of playtime - the special spider had a break in point after which time the sound was placed outside the boxes so singers manifest full height in room.

Volume capability easily filled the 5mtr rooms and that's when the cone excursions, claimed to be 8 mm, were seen in action. Of course, booming renditions of heavy bass rock concerts are not achievable by two smallish cones but they offer a satisfying rhythmic presentation with good vocals (if recorded!).

These beauties deliver a good spread of complex orchestral works. They have the accurate tonality required, and detailed presentation to illuminate the music's construction and emotion. Massive climaxes are delivered at the volume level most domiciles would consider loud, but not at 200 watt RMS speaker pressure through Berlioz 'March to the Scaffold' and 'Witches Sabbath' in his Symphony Fantastique is punched

out with full macabre venom (Bernstein/NYP).

The new Yello 'Toy' got the cones going making a creditable bass line with the threatening voice filling the room. It's when we get to complex harmonic multi layering with big spatial effects - that's when ears get pulled in by single point drivers.

These Pluvia 11 have the aerospace metal cone and so it does rasping brass very well, and it does piano well with hitting hammers, and drum skins scraped or thumped with nice cymbals attack and shimmering decays, and jazz saxes singly and en masse, and plucks of strings and Sitar!

'Land of Gold' by Anoushka Shankar and esteemed friends turned under the Hana SL coils and a heaven full of gorgeous complexity and miniscule details placed way way back in the depth of the mix to delight and beguile as the lack of comb effect or phase or timing errors is obvious in its very absence.

This is its strength.

Susanne Vega breathes in audibly and offers poetic words wet with saliva on the close miked solo 'Toms Diner'.

If the ambience of the studio or concert room has been recorded influencing the

music then you will hear as on 'Live in Amsterdam' - whilst Beth's sess's are nicely controlled even when Bonamassa's searing guitar soars shrieking over a slamming rhythm section at the same time.

The essence of music is mostly in the midrange so onto piano of course and Shostakovich's concerto 1, a favourite test (vinyl/Alexeev/ECO 1983). Emotion and its expression is what we crave and applaud. These little drivers, overall 17cm, in bigish cabs gave their hearts to this demanding dynamic drama. The speakers became absent; the performance was the music not the kit. Yes I've heard more expensive reproduction of this but there is something intimate about single point source 'full range' cabs that makes for extended listening sessions, when that 'put on another' feeling outstrips that 'pour another one' thought. So you reach for London Grammars 'Hey Now' to find that the heavy bass does not affect the voice clarity, indeed it's rendered with new nuances of inflexion and to Transvision Vamp 'If Looks Could Kill' for a successful 1990's vibe. The pitter patter of rain from a Japanese test CD pulls you in fascinated then scares with its explosive lightning - very satisfactory.



## Dearly Beloved - Admission



Can a genre ever die? Can it really simply fade into the past, confined to a coffin of retrospective reviews and nostalgia tours?

It's been noted that previous attempts at revivals of music genres failed. Very occasionally, you'll get one that results in something different; neo-psychedelia is proof of that, as is the garage rock or post-punk revival of the early 00s.

Grunge however, died a death. Many who were there to experience it firsthand, and indeed many who weren't, argue that it was the last time a generation's frustrations made the radio playlists. And in many cases, they're still there.

Most argue that grunge died with Kurt on that fateful day in April 1994. No, they hooked it up to life support, disfigured and spine-broken, and it just sort of fizzled out...

You see, after Kurt left us, grunge, which was really just a label for the sudden surge of alternative-rock that broke through into public consciousness circa 1991, became 'post-grunge.'

Creed, Puddle of Mudd, Nickelback, a watered down, cheap imitation of the real-fuckin'-deal.

Many people point to major labels having realised that a little bit o' angst and a lot of melody would appeal to a very large market of disenfranchised youth. However...

# Mudhoney wish they were this good

It was the bands. Where Nirvana, Mudhoney et al never expected to make cash doing what they do. Those aforementioned post-grunge groups formed knowing they could make serious dough playing that music.

And there is where grunge died. Like punk rock, the bandwagon became overcrowded with copycats. Eager and willing to sell their souls.

Not only was that a great disrespect paid to the original pioneers of this brand of rock n' roll, but it paved the way for this pseudo-alternative trash that passes for "indie" music in the 21st Century.

Enter Dearly Beloved. A band going where grunge should have gone, pushing boundaries and stealing hearts all over our blue-green planet.

The Canadian band make enough of a racket on Admission to wake the sleeping world. A deliciously distorted take on alt-rock that nods heads to founding fathers Pixies and Sonic Youth while also charging head up and teeth bared at the future.

The four-to-the-floor beat of These Data could be the soundtrack to some bizarre nightclub dance floor antics in the future ("like, with jetpacks."). RIP, rips through its three and a half minutes with bass-distorted riffs and howling feedback while Who Wants To Know is psych-punk at its most mind warping and furious best. Mudhoney wish they were this good.

And that's probably the most obvious but somehow unmentioned predecessor to what Dearly Beloved do. Mudhoney are SCUZZ, slouched and proud of it! Dearly Beloved have taken the Super-fuzz Bigmuff sound to its logical extreme and expertly melded it with melodious male/female vocal interplay. This, is grunge. The way it should have sounded post-1994.

There's life in rock n' roll yet. It doesn't sound like AC/DC anymore, and it doesn't sound like the Stones either. It's taking on a new shape, a noisier, louder, abstract shape.

It's becoming what it should have always been: an alternative.

And that's what a band like Dearly Beloved represent. They're another road, the one less taken. It's not the glitter and glam of the rockstars of yore, but it's a lot of fun.

And Dearly Beloved are very, very, fun. Whether you get fun out of the fact that this is a genuinely creative and innovative rock n' roll band, or you just want to rock out. Put Admission on the stereo, you'll have a great time doing it.

**James Fleming**



## The Molochs – America's Velvet Glory



A new signing to Innovative Leisure. The Molochs have picked up some great support lately from many aficionados in the music world, all noting their retro take on things, with a contemporary slant. There is a mission statement that promises to pull apart the past, rather than recreate it, and on this new album, 'America's Velvet Glory' (due out the 13th of January), their spritely garage nods to the likes of Violent Femmes, Kinks, Bob Dylan, Velvet Underground and other such artists.

Having just been confirmed for Primavera 2017, and their first UK shows in May this year, as well as having just put out a new track 'You And Me' with a video too, it was safe to say I was both excited and intrigued to see what I would be faced with when 'America's Velvet Glory' was sat in front of me. Safe to say it did not disappoint.

The first thing I noticed about this album is it their trademark garage sound straight off the bat, with the early Rolling Stones-esque guitar and unique vocals. I really loved this style simply because it gave me the comfort I'd normally get from listening to the more retro sections of my collection but with its refreshingly modern take on the style it still made the listening experience exciting. Tracks that illustrated this perfectly (to name a few) are 'Ten Thousand', 'The One I Love', 'No More Cryin' and 'You Never Learn'.

Simple in sound yet wonderfully constructed, The Molochs sure have delivered on their mission statement of wanting to pull apart the past to create something new rather than just re-hash old tunes in the aims of riding the coat tails of someone else's success. What we have here instead is an unapologetically unique band with their own take on a classic sound that isn't afraid to push some boundaries when it needs to.

Overall, a great listen that I would highly recommend to anyone who enjoys the work of the other artists mentioned above, as this album will let you settle nicely into something new and expand your listening base even more. So keep an eye out for 'America's Velvet Glory' out on the 13th Jan 'cause you'll be in for a treat.

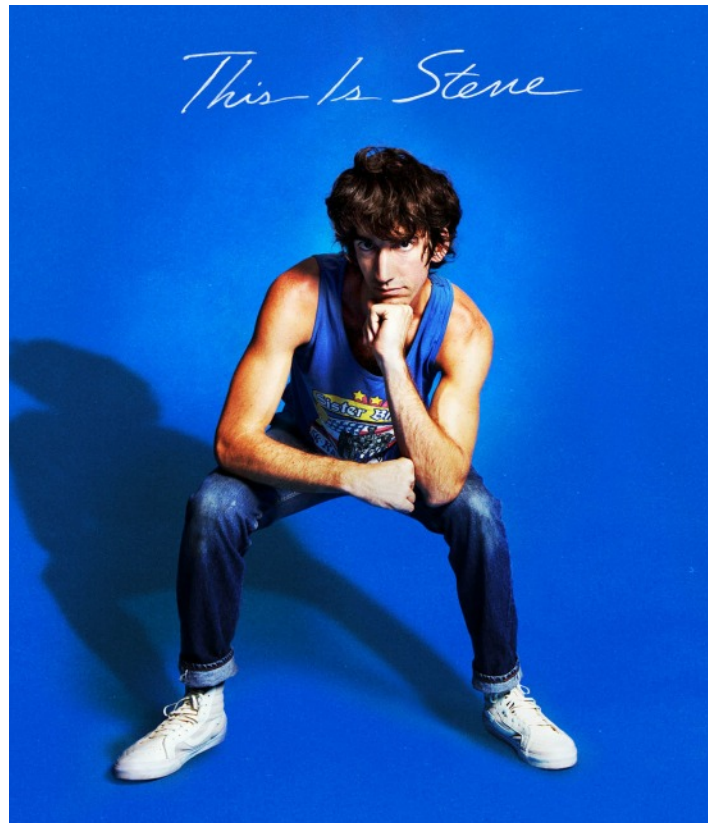
**Lauren Coombes**

Simple in  
sound yet  
wonderfully  
constructed,  
The  
Molochs  
sure have  
delivered  
on their  
mission  
statement

# With a mesh of different styles of guitar playing giving an awesome air of vibrancy and life to the music, the lack of lyrics was no issue

## Delicate Steve - This Is Steve

**T**his Is Steve" is the latest contribution by the lively, playful, imaginative and inimitable guitarist Delicate Steve. Formerly signed to David Byrne's label he's established himself as not only an exciting instrumentalist in his own right, producing and playing everything on the new album, but also a go-to figure for work with artists like Dirty Projectors, tUnE-yArDs, Mac DeMarco, Lee Ranaldo and Built to Spill.



Plus he has also put records together with Death Grips' Zach Hill, been handpicked to open a sold out North American tour for Tame Impala, and then provided guitar for Paul Simon's new record. In total, we have a pretty solid musician on our hands with his collaborative work, but what is this new album like? Luckily I got my mits on it for a listen!

For me, this album was love at first listen. With a mesh of different styles of guitar playing giving an awesome air of vibrancy and life to the music, the lack of lyrics was no issue. If anything the lack of lyrical input strengthened this album greatly as it allowed the music to shine through and really displayed the talents that Delicate Steve has to offer.

With tracks like Cartoon Rock, Help and Winners showing off Delicate Steve and his well-known talent for the vivacious and finesse, that many other critics have remarked upon throughout his career so far, it is no wonder why this album was such a joy to listen to and making for a great chilled evening of listening with a few friends.

I also want to mention the final track on this record that is also its headlining namesake, This Is Steve. The reason I wanted to do this is because when I came to this track, the record was all of a sudden given a whole new air of gravitas. When listening to it, you almost get the sense that you are sat with him as he plays, submersing yourself in an intimate and emotional sound. Its slow sombre guitar alongside the piano was a soulful reminder that what you are dealing with here is not just some guy who can churn out some great tunes that have that funky edge, but a serious talent that when handed a guitar, can sing out the most heartfelt of songs. All without ever needing words to do so.

So, if you are looking for something that's got a great soundscape to it, some killer guitar and will let you take an emotional journey that will excite and wow, then "This Is Steve" is one to watch for. I know that I will be.

**Lauren Coombes**



## On U Sound - Dread Operator produced by Adrian Sherwood

When I think of reggae coming out of the UK in the 80s and 90s my mind immediately jumps to the fabulous On-U Sounds label and producer Adrian Sherwood. Indeed, in the early 90s I had a radio show on Sony Radio Station of the Year winner Wear FM called The Midnight Train To Doomsville inspired by the Lee Perry tune of the same name. Every week we would start the show with the full version of the song taken from one of the On-U Sound Pay It All Back series of compilations. The label even inspired a group of us to form a reggae band that enjoyed reasonable success in the North East of the country...but I digress.

What we have here is a series of four albums on the Hot Milk label presented as a box set with all the albums initially being released on the On-U imprint and, of course, produced by Mr Sherwood.

First up is Leaps and Bounds initially released in '84 by the Singers & players collective and featuring names that will be familiar to most folk familiar with the genre from this period. Prince Far I who was murdered the year before, Mikey Dread, Bim Sherman who died in 2000 and Congo Ashanti Roy all make appearances. Roots Radics, another name many will be familiar with, also make an appearance. It's a good album of down tempo, organic reggae with pretty muted touches of dub effects from Sherwood.

Next up is the 1981 cut Threat To Creation by Creation Rebel and New Age Steppers and this is probably, in my opinion, THE UK dub

reggae album that defines this era and Sherwoods output...I'm a bit of a fanboy of New Age Steppers with their solid basslines and avant-garde and slightly psychedelic style of dub. Indeed, this is exactly the style of music I think of when I think of dub! There's masses of echo, reverb and odd little swirls and effects that mess with your head in a good way and whilst the songs have structure they meander and take you off in different directions.

Creation Rebel's Lows And Highs from '82 is next in the box set with what is perhaps the most accessible of the four albums here. If you like your dub reggae straight up and not too experimental then you'll love this. Vocals are by Crucial Tony and Lizard Logan with Style Scott (who died in 2014 and who was a key figure in perhaps my favourite dub band of all time (Dub Syndicate) whose Strike The Balance LP is absolutely vital for anyone interested in dub) on drums along with Eskimo Fox on vocal harmonies, electric percussion and drums. As well as the full original album you get a couple of bonus tracks from the 7" release of Read and Learn.

Last up is Wild Party Sounds Volume 1, a compilation from '81 and this is a very diverse album with straight up vocal dub in the form of the first track (Woodpecker Bird by Jah Woosh and Prince Far I and Creation



Rebel's Quanté Jubila), experimental post punk (Bed Bound Saga by Machine Gun Hogg and Co.) and if you are a fan of PiL then you'll love The Chicken Granny's Quit the Body track. Alan Pella's Parasitic Machine is a disturbing conception that hints at later tunes on the label by Mark Stewart. The Mothmen (formed out of Durutti column members Dave Rowbotham, Chris Joyce and Tony Bowers and ex-Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias singer Bob Harding. Interestingly Joyce and Bowers would form the rhythm section for Simply Red between '84 and '89) bring an interesting and sparse take on dub reggae with their Afghani Dub tune. Jeb Loy and The Oil Wells' Things That Made The US is completely nuts and sounds not unlike a bit of a Donald Trump rant over experimental, punky dub. The weirdness continues with the hauntingly beautiful and

slightly oriental feeling Yipee I Ahh by New Age Steppers and the record finishes up with Judy Nylon's The Dice, another slice of post punk dub.

All in all this collection is a good cross section of the music that Adrian Sherwood produced at this time and, for anyone interested in dub somewhat essential. The final compilation CD, Wild Party Sounds, is a stunning example of what can be achieved musically when cultures and genres come together to create a sound that is a melting pot of styles.

Now, Hot Milk need to get on with releasing the Pay It All Back series of albums as mine are long gone and the prices they are fetching on the second-hand market are out of my financial league!

**Stuart Smith**



# It sounds like, in all honesty, like he's going for the Grammy

## Jim Lauderdale - London Southern



George Jones was the king of heartbreak. But with his demise in 2013, Jim Lauderdale, the crown prince, could very well take the throne.

However, it's not as simple as a mere coronation ceremony. It's a test of mettle, of experience, and of the songs. With a solo career spanning from 1986 to 2017, Lauderdale has the experience, and as evidenced by London Southern, he has a firm grasp on the songs. However, the sceptre just about slips away.

A twisted sceptre carved from southern oak. Lauderdale is a two time Grammy winner. That may be the problem.

To truly be crowned the king of heartbreak, a certain rawness is required. Not a Stooges-esque rawness. But an emotional rawness.

Which is absent from the trash that passes for country in the 21st century. Lauderdale is far from the likes of that trash, which does put him closer to the outlaws of yore. However, an outlaw he ain't.

While the slickness of the production does take away from the rawness, and the merging of such all-American genres as soul and country mostly seems unfocused. There's a lot more to it than that.

He simply doesn't sound like he means it.

He's a country crooner. Nothing wrong with that. But if you're gonna croon, croon with feeling.

Jones could do it. Sinatra (different type of thing I know) could definitely do it. The way those people got inside their songs and made you believe them was truly a magical thing. And Lauderdale doesn't quite cut it. If you're gonna be the next "king of heartbreak," then break a few hearts.

Not far off so he isn't. But far enough.

The quality of the songs is quite high alright. But the passion's not there. It sounds like, in all honesty, like he's going for the Grammy.

Wanting awards and recognition is not a bad thing. It shows ambition and drive. But, when you base your art around those awards, when you mould it to fit what appears to be what the various committees want, you're doing yourself an injustice.

In this case, it's a very inoffensive injustice. Lauderdale is keeping it safe. We don't need safe right now. It's dangerous times. We need some dangerous tunes. A little bit of Sympathy For The Devil is called for. And that is not to be found on London Southern. If you merely want good quality songs, then it's for you. You want something more? Something with a bit of LIFE? Then look elsewhere.

**James Fleming**

## Pixies – ‘Doolittle’ (Pure Audio Blu-Ray / 4AD)

I first saw Pixies playing live nearly 30 years ago at Manchester International supporting Throwing Muses (who were promoting their second album ‘House Tornado’ – still one of my all-time favourite albums). I didn’t actually realise at the time, but it was to be one of those tours which people still talk about years later (‘You were there??!! No way!!’). I was – and still am – an avid 4AD fan, so I’d purchased Pixies’ album ‘Surfer Rosa’ on its release just over a month prior to the gig. The album’s now well-documented ‘loud-quiet-loud’ songs made for an essential listen; Pixies didn’t sound like much else at the time – and certainly nothing on the 4AD roster. I likely don’t need to tell you that bands such as Nirvana, Radiohead & David Bowie cited them as a huge influence. It still amazes me how Pixies

signed to a London-based label, despite originating from Boston, Massachusetts – and even 4AD themselves nearly passed on the opportunity had it not been for the girlfriend of then-chief Ivo Watts-Russell who managed to persuade him.

A lot of people seemed to join on board the Pixies fan bus in the U.K. only after the tour had finished and they’d returned to their native U.S. It was as if there was a delayed reaction to their music. Not really surprising as the class of 1988 consisted of bands such as Pogues, REM, Sugarcubes, My Bloody Valentine et al – not exactly making the kind of alt-rock being pumped out of Pixies’ rehearsal room. During those six months, the fan bus came close to overflowing. When Pixies returned a year later following the release of their second album ‘Doolittle’, they were hailed as all-conquering heroes.

On first hearing ‘Doolittle’ in April 1989, I remember being slightly deflated. Maybe I’d expected ‘Surfer Rosa 2.0’, but instead we actually got



Pixies v2.0. I’d initially go to play my ‘Doolittle’ album but find myself giving ‘Surfer Rosa’ another spin instead. It took me quite some time, but I finally came round to the fact that ‘Doolittle’ was good. In fact, it is very good...

First looks can often sometimes be deceiving – particularly when you’ve already had a bite of the cherry, as I had with both ‘Surfer Rosa’ and its predecessor, the mini-album ‘Come On Pilgrim’. However, I persevered with ‘Doolittle’ and it paid off. Ironically, it was ‘Wave Of Mutilation (UK Surf)’, a remake of the third track on the album (which appears as a B-side on the ‘Here Comes Your Man’ 12” single) which I recall hearing during the 80s movie ‘Pump Up The Volume’ (featuring Christian Slater) which somehow really got me into the record several months after its release.

The beauty of ‘Doolittle’ lies in its connectivity – the tracks gel just beautifully. ‘Debaser’ kicks off with its trademark bass guitar and four notes later the guitar & drums come crashing

in. The ‘vocals’ are spewed forth like venom and there’s lyrics about slicing up eyeballs and girls looking groovy. By second track, ‘Tame’, it’s clear that they’re violently angry – as if any encouragement from the success of the first album had distinctly the opposite effect and upset them to the point where they’re destroying their instruments and smashing each other to pieces in the rehearsal room.

‘Doolittle’ is one of those albums with the rare quality of not sounding like it dates from any time in particular. So, despite the fact that it’s from 1989, it could easily have come from 2017 or even 2039.

This special edition version of ‘Doolittle’ follows on from the 3-disc version from 2015 which

bundled the original album together with loads of demos, B-sides & Peel Sessions. What we have on this latest outing is a Blu-Ray which can be played in any standard Blu-Ray player. On the disc are three versions of the album including an LPCM Stereo version, a DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 version and finally a LPCM 5.1 version. The transfers are 96 khz/24 bit. Firstly – they’ve done an incredible job. For music where so much is happening, there’s an incredible clarity (particularly evident during ‘Dead’, ‘La La Love You’ and ‘There Goes My Gun’) and no sign of any audio clipping which can sometimes occur when the volume is ramped up during the remastering process.

4AD purists will either love or hate the fact that the booklet is CD-sized whereas the case is a cardboard Blu-Ray-sized digipak, but it’s the sound which you’ll be most interested in – and on that score, it’s absolutely essential – particularly if you have a 5.1 surround-sound system.

**Paul Lockett**



# Vangelis - Delectus



**K**eyboard maestro Vangelis has personally overseen the remastering of *Delectus*, a 13 disc retrospective collection comprised of a selection of his solo albums and those recorded with Jon Anderson of Yes.

Presented in a lavish box, the 13 albums are accompanied by a 64 page book. While this is a great collection for the Vangelis fan, I was disappointed to see that as the collection features the albums that he recorded for the Vertigo and Polydor labels between 1973 and 1985, some of my personal favourites – *Heaven and Hell*, *Albedo 0.39*, *Spiral* and the *Blade Runner* soundtrack – are absent as, they were released on RCA and EMI. Despite this, there is plenty to get your teeth into and it is fascinating to hear the variety of influences that Vangelis has incorporated into his music over the years.

*Earth*, from 1973, will come as bit of a surprise to anyone used to Vangelis' later electronic albums. Here, his keyboards – mostly a treated Hammond organ – largely take a back seat to

guitar, drums and bouzouki. As well as Vangelis' keyboard textures, the album features some vocals from Robert Fitoussi who would go on to have a hit single in the 1980s with *Words under the name of FR David*.

Also released in 1973, *L'Apocalypse Des Animaux* was actually recorded in 1970 while Vangelis was a member of rock band Aphrodite's Child with singer Demis Roussos. These tracks formed the soundtrack for a French natural history documentary. Considering that it is nearly forty seven years old, the album sounds remarkably fresh; almost any of these tracks could be used on a similar project today and not sound dated at all.

Next up is *China* from 1979. *China* makes much more use of synthesised sounds, its powerful pulses and chords conjuring up a vision of China's vast landscape and rich history. While not strictly a concept album, it's use of Chinese musical influences ensures that it's nine tracks have a thematic

cohesiveness that makes for a really immersive listen.

Disc 4 in the set is *See You Later* from 1980. Being of the 80s (although only just) it does suffer from a more dated production style – drum machines, fretless-styled synth basses and vocodered vocals all feature. Titles such as *I Can't Take Any More*, *Suffocation* and *See You Later* suggest that perhaps all was not quite rosy in Vangelis' world at this time; there is a definite oppressive air about this album. *Memories of Green* is a lovely listen though, reminiscent of the more ambient tracks on Eno's *Another Green World*.

*Antarctica* is from 1983 and is another soundtrack album, this time to a film by Koreyoshi Kurahara. This time the 80s production is more sympathetic to the music and Vangelis does what he does best, creating big sweeping themes that create their own images.

1985's *Mask* contains 6 tracks, titled *Movement 1* to *Movement 6*. As the titles suggest, this album has a symphonic influence, the tone is generally dark with chanting vocals reminding me of *Rosemary's Baby* or *The Omen*. It's not always an easy listen but it is a rewarding one.

Confusingly, the next disc, *Opera Sauvage*, is from 1979 and is another nature documentary soundtrack. Containing some synthesiser tones that are instantly recognisable as being by Vangelis, it is a gentle album with some celtic influences, as made plain by the track *Irlande*.

Disc 8 brings us back to the 80s (1981 to be precise) with what is arguably Vangelis' best known work, *Chariots Of Fire*. The title track (although it is actually called *Titles* rather than *Chariots Of Fire*) has become synonymous with nearly every athletic event of the last thirty years but despite that, it has lost none of its charm or power. The other five tracks that make up what would be side one of the LP are each evocative in their own way but it is the single suite *Chariots Of Fire* – side two, if you will, that really shines here.

*Soil Festivities* is from 1984 and returns to the theme of nature. This is not a documentary soundtrack this time though but a stand alone studio album. Vangelis stated that he made it because he wanted to make music, not because he wanted to sell a million records. Like



# MUSIC REVIEWS

Mask, which it precedes, its tracks are titled as Movements. Opening with a clap of thunder and a rain storm, the album's themes are given more time to develop than would be possible in a soundtrack album and although it is a slow burner, it is one of Vangelis' most rewarding albums.

Invisible Connections from 1985 (released after Mask) is often considered to be the third part of a trilogy with that album and Soil Festivities. Perhaps Vangelis disagrees and that is why the albums are not presented chronologically in this set. Perhaps not though, who knows? In any case, invisible Connections again sees a set of longer tracks – only three this time. This album is without doubt the most challenging in the set, although not in the same league as the RCA-era Beaubourg, a dissonant tone poem that was such a difficult listening experience that many people dismissed it as a throw away contractual obligation exercise.

Invisible Connections' opening track is so sparse that there may be more spaces than notes, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. Waiting to hear what happens between the spaces manages to be invigorating and relaxing at the same time. One thing is for sure, you are not going to whistle this one in the bath like you might do with Chariots Of Fire. Track 2, Atom Blaster, carries on in the same vein but with more percussive sounds this time. The final track, Thermo Vision, remains light on tunes but is a bit more dense, if someone ever does a reboot of 2001 A Space Odyssey, I could see parts of this working perfectly in the final reel.

The last three discs of the set comprise of the albums that Vangelis made with Jon Anderson of Yes: Short Stories, The Friends Of Mr Cairo and Private Collection. Short Stories mixes experimental pieces like the opening track Curious Electric, with more commercial tracks like I Hear You Now

which sounds like Steve Winwood's Arc Of A Diver on quaaludes but still managed to be a hit. The Friends Of Mr Cairo contained another couple of hits in I'll Find My Way Home and State Of Independence which Donna Summer turned into an unlikely smash. Private Collection is perhaps one more Jon and Vangelis album than anyone who is not either Jon or Vangelis really needs but it's pleasant enough and deserves its place here.

All in all, Delectus is a really enjoyable set of albums, one to be savoured over a period of time. It's a pity that we couldn't have had the RCA years as well, along with the essential Blade Runner soundtrack but if you have anything more than a casual interest in Vangelis' music, Delectus is well worth your time and money.

**John Scott**



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## New Blue Aeroplanes' Album



The Blue Aeroplanes have released a new album 'Welcome, Stranger!' Their unique amalgam of rock, folk, poetry, punk, dance and art has been an acknowledged influence on a wide range of bands including REM and Radiohead. Combining pop smarts with serious weirdness, they have released almost thirty albums on various labels, several of which have charted in the UK Top 40 and the US Alternative Top 10. Now comes the release of the band's twelfth studio album, 'Welcome, Stranger!', recorded by the longest-lasting Aeroplanes line up to date.

Download, CD, and Vinyl available.

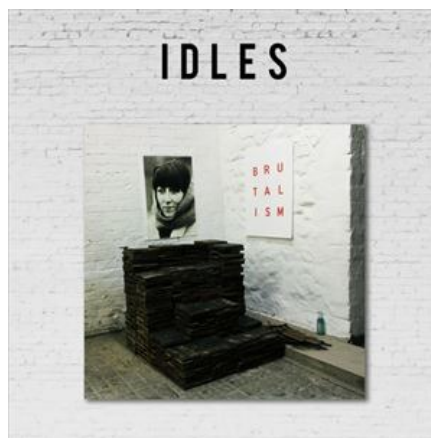
Original members Gerard Langley (poet/singer), and John Langley (drummer), sometimes with Wojtek Dmochowski (dancer), are joined by Gerard Starkie, formerly the main man of Witness and an Aeroplane since 2006, Chris Sharp (bassist and owner of The Fleece venue in Bristol), a band member since 2008, and the more recent additions Bec Jevons (guitarist and front-person of I Destroy) and guitarist Mike Youe. John and Mike also play with Bristol punk legend (and ex-Aeroplane) Rita Lynch, while Gerard is also Head Of Songwriting at BIMM Bristol, where he was responsible for guiding the early steps of George Ezra, among others.

## IDLES New Album and Tour Dates

Bristol's finest post-punk polemics IDLES have been promising to do great things for some time now, and with their debut album "Brutalism" they

absolutely fulfil that promise, and a furious promise at that, says their latest press release.

Politically charged, refreshingly confrontational and infectious volatile, IDLES are a band like no other. Bringing the unsettling reality of the world we live in into their frantic assault on the senses, they are a band that until now could only be truly understood by witnessing in a live environment - but with "Brutalism" it surely feels like they have captured the intensity of that live sound. Bottled up here are the abrasive, memorable lyrics of Joseph Talbot delivered with all of the spite and wry humour he puts across on the stage.



Dedicated in part to the loss of his mother, who adorns the record's cover, and partly to a perceived decimation of society, from the NHS to public services across Britain, "Brutalism" is a deadly serious indictment on popular culture – Mary Berry, Trevor Nelson and Rachel Khoo are just some of the names referenced here, often alongside the unpleasant, but always amongst the real.

The November release of single "Well Done" saw the band rise to no.1 on Spotify's Viral Charts & paired with intensive radio support from Huw Stephens, Annie Mac, Steve Lamacq and regular Radio 6 play has brought them to the forefront of ones to watch. NME, CRACK, DIY and more have tipped them over the festive period and the quality here suggests there will be more plaudits to come when the album reaches the shops in March.

From the propulsive opener, "Heel / Heal", and many highlights ("Well Done", "Mother", "Date Night", "1049 Gotho", "Stendahl Syndrome" just some) to the rare respite of the closer "Slow Savage", the album marks the arrival of a true British talent – and in a musical world that can seem

increasingly benign, one with so much to say.

Full tour dates below:

March 2017

Friday 24th - Dundee - Buskers

Saturday 25th - Edinburgh - Sneaky Pete's

Monday 27th - York - The Crescent

Tuesday 28th - Hull - The Adelphi

Wednesday 29th - Nottingham - The Bodega

Thursday 30th - Liverpool - O2 Academy 2

Friday 31st - Wakefield - Unity Hall

April 2017

Monday 3rd - Stoke-On-Trent - The Sugarmill

Tuesday 4th - Preston - Guildhall

Wednesday 5th - Cardiff - Clwb Ifor Bach

## James McArthur and The Head Gardeners' New Album



To celebrate the release of James McArthur and The Head Gardeners' new album; 'Burnt Moth' out on 20th January, Illuminate Productions have been showcasing songs from the album in the smallest and most intimate live music venue in the UK.

The 'In Safari, Table For Two' tour is a series of unique live musical happenings in the setting of a 70's gold caravan, where two audience members at a time

will experience the band up close and personal squeezed into a tiny vintage 2 berth caravan.

Guests got the VIP treatment, including refreshments and access all areas. McArthur's songs invite you on a journey, through rolling harmonies, shifting guitar, as changeable as British holiday weather.

Jimmy Cauty (KLF) said of the experience, "The sound in the caravan was immersive and bubble like, it felt like we were inside the music looking out!"

## Little Comets Announce New Single



**L**ittle Comets have announced the first track 'Common Things' from upcoming album, *Worhead*.

Priding themselves on their ultra DIY ethic, the band like to operate on an entirely uncensored level and their latest offering, 'Common Things' is no exception.

Offering breezy commentary on the beauty that lies within the oft-mundanity of a comfortable relationship, the song explores the enjoyment of 'common things' in the situation - even if those common things include such sensory, uncompromising delights as being regularly re-contaminated by cold sores, as is the case presented here... The concept is subverted in the upcoming video with visceral visuals presented in ordinary scenarios, a raw chicken being taken for a walk in the countryside, a spot of knitting with cured meats and a woman's hands replaced with crunchy fishfinger morsels...

Featuring sunny, syncopated beats, the song opens up into a warm, uplifting wash of golden synth before retreating back to angularity with afro-pop flashes and vocal bursts. The buoyant percussion part was fashioned after vocalist, Rob Coles played lead guitarist,

Mickey Coles a combination of a djembe, a bottle, a bike pump and a bit snapped off an old snare drum.

On the subject matter, Rob says:

"I suppose it is semi-autobiographical up to a point as I am quite a simple person and take more from the gaps than the need to fill them...Me and Mickey (as usual) wrote this one in his garage after Mickey had been playing a really obscure riff, which we adapted for the chorus melody. The verses came later as the need for a narrative became apparent.

I think what helped is that the chorus line paints a real picture of what the verses should be about. It was just a case of filling in the bits of the story; which fed from the idea of a couple being satisfied with just the simple things."

Little Comets are Rob Coles (vocals and guitar), Mickey Coles (lead guitar) and Matthew Hall (bass).

## Torgeir Waldemar No Offending Borders



**T**orgeir Waldemar took the Norwegian people and music press by surprise with his eponymous debut album in 2014. Who had thought that the black-clad, longhaired and bearded man would deliver an album that captivated and moved us as much as it did. An acoustic masterpiece that sounded like it came straight from the rehearsal room of a young troubadour from Laurel Canyon in the seventies.

While his previous album cultivated a pure, acoustic sound, we get more rock music this time, and for Torgeir Waldemar nothing is more natural. With his background as a guitar hero in various rock bands, it was only a

question of time before distorted tones would assert themselves in his solo career. *No Offending Borders* is a gloriously composite work with both dead honest acoustic laments and grandiose rock songs.

But the record is so much more than that, and for Torgeir this is a document that shows the seriousness we meet in our everyday lives. Both on the personal level, with relationships that falls apart and the loss of loved ones, but also on a national and global level, with refugee crises, suicide statistics and the weakest members of our society. You may have guessed it already, but this is a solemn record.

If you're afraid that Torgeir Waldemar has turned away from what he presented on his debut album, you can relax. Here we get acoustic folk songs like "Falling Rain (Link Wray)", "Island Bliss" and "Souls on a String", but the album also contains more intense rock songs like "Summer In Toulouse", "Sylvia (Southern People)" and "Among the Low".

Aesthetically, it's also consistent from beginning to end - nothing at all is done by chance here. The historical lines that are drawn in the cover design, are also meant to point back to ourselves and to make us conscious of our past, so that we won't make the same mistakes again. The cover of the single "Souls on a String" featured a photo of the decorated carrier pigeon from World War I, Cher Ami. It saved a whole British company during the war, when the British were caught in a battle, without any food or ammunition. Cher Ami was sent away, and taken under fire by the enemy, but finally delivered the message that saved the British troops.

The chair on the cover of *No Offending Borders* is from Kviknes Hotel in Balestrand. This is the chair that Wilhelm II, the King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany, was sitting in when he was told that World War I had started. Wilhelm II was a friend of Norway and spent much time on the west coast in the early 1900s. What would you have done if you were sitting in that chair and received that message? Sit down, think thoroughly about it, while you're listening to *No Offending Borders*.

Released on Jansen Plateproduksjon  
March 17



## The Little Kicks Shake Of Your Troubles



The Little Kicks first emerged around five years ago, a young Aberdeen band with the wind in their sails. A crisp, upbeat debut album followed, laced with off-kilter indie pop worthy of comparison to early Franz Ferdinand, The Long Blondes, or even Sparks.

The band's last album, "Put Your Love In Front Of Me" (2013) was part funded by Creative Scotland and met with critical acclaim both in the UK and further afield in Europe. Several album tracks including the lead single "Girl" and it's B-side (a cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams") have enjoyed national radio airplay on BBC 6 Music, BBC Radio 1, Radio Scotland and XFM. Sharing stages with the likes of Foals, Frightened Rabbit, Twilight Sad, Twin Maximo Park, Mystery Jets and The Maccabees, as well as appearing at many of Scotland's major music festivals - T In The Park, Belladrum, Insider, Brew At The Bog, Electric Fields, Solus, Kelburn Garden Party, Insider – their recent history has involved a re-jig in personnel, and some time off to reassess ahead of staking their return...

A relocation for some fresh perspective was called for, and in the Spring of 2015 the band packed their kit and set off for a lodge by Loch Ness in which they would pen the ten songs that would come to make up "Shake Off Your Troubles". Late night recording sessions gave birth to a collection of thoughtful, plaintive, liberating, and always melodic indie-pop songs, that were ultimately wrapped up in Edinburgh and then mastered at Abbey Road.

Lead singer Steven Milne elaborates; "This new album is a collection of songs that means a lot to me and I feel it reflects a massive increase in both my own and the band's confidence and abilities. There have been ups and downs personally since we last released music but I'm happy to say that on the whole we have grown to be more proud of what we do and to be less reticent to shout about it and our music. The themes of the record would be a feeling of happiness, gratitude and to be thankful with what you have and not take things for granted. Furthermore, not to let others get you down or let anyone put you in your place. In 2017 when the album is released I can't wait to let people hear it and I hope these sentiments carry through to those who listen to it."

Through 2016's political upheavals, and the loss of many a music icon, it was a year that many will be keen to see the back of. So it is perhaps with some foresight that The Little Kicks choose to name their 2017 album *Shake Off Your Troubles*. Join the band in their latest chapter. Tour dates to be announced shortly.

Current singles: You & Someone Like Me / Goodbye Enemies, Hello Friends / Don't Get Mad, Get Even

New album "Shake Off Your Troubles" released on March 3rd through Loosen Up Records

## Anti Sign Jade Jackson, Tour With Social Distortion To Follow

Anti say it is thrilled to announce the signing of Jade Jackson. A highly prolific and supremely talented young singer-songwriter, Jackson creates a sound that is simultaneously new and old, merging a youthful spiritedness with a weary storyteller's perspective usually reserved for veteran artists.

Stylistically the sound is unapologetically country rock. It merges the heartbreak and resilience of Lucinda Williams with the melodic confidence of Emmylou Harris, yet contains the emotional presence of a young musician who cherished albums by The Gun Club

and Smiths alongside the works of George Jones and Hank Williams.

Hailing from the tiny town of Santa Margarita in central California, Jackson began playing guitar and writing songs at 13. By the time she had entered high school she had attracted a growing fan base with local performances and estimates that she had written over 300 songs before she graduated.

Since then Jackson formed a tight knit band and together they have shared stages with such iconic artists as Merle Haggard, Rosie Flores and Dwight Yoakam. Along the way, Jade attracted the admiration of renowned Social Distortion frontman Mike Ness, who produced her debut album.

The collaboration between the two really began years back. As Jackson explains, "I went to see Social Distortion play when I was thirteen. I was really into punk. They are one of my favorites. After the show I picked up the guitar and began writing songs. That night I believe started a ripple effect inside of me that influenced my musical career. That day forward I tailored my life around wanting to be a musician."



Several years after that, Mike's son and wife caught a small show at a coffee shop and told the Social Distortion frontman about the young singer-songwriter. When Ness heard her self-recorded demo he invited her to his studio in Orange County where he told her he wanted to produce an album for her. "I remember driving up to meet him for the first time, freaking out," she says.

"It was crazy because watching him that night back when I was thirteen put the dream in my heart so I find it very serendipitous to now be working with him."

Mike Ness says of the ensuing session, "I wouldn't have done the Jade Jackson record if I didn't believe in her and her potential. The songs were amazing and came to life each week we worked on them. She is an old soul and it comes through in her songwriting and performing. She truly is one of a kind, raw and unique. She put her trust in me and I trusted she'd deliver. And she did! Here is a bad ass record delivered to you from us! Listen and enjoy."

Now Jackson has just released a video for the track "Motorcycle," a song that channels a tough girl swagger and reluctant vulnerability set to a haunting post-punk Western sound. "I was driving and it was dark and I just started singing the lyrics," Jackson says. "It's about feeling independent and capable and restless. I pulled the car over and recorded myself singing. When I got home I picked up my guitar and already knew the chords. At first it was this intricate finger picking and then Mike envisioned it more as a western ballad. He put a spin on it for sure and I think it sounds awesome."

Jade Jackson will be touring with Social Distortion in the US in March and April this year.

## Analog Candle Announce Video For Current Single Trier



Hailing from New York City via England, Chicago, New Orleans and Boston – ANALOG CANDLE is an expressionist, avant-garde dream-pop collective formed by producer and songwriter Callum Plews.

Originally from England, Callum was inspired to create ANALOG CANDLE after collaborating with an array of musicians while living in the magic and bustle of New Orleans. The project began over six years ago, after Callum realised he was more comfortable with the concept of others performing and interpreting his creations than he was embodying them completely himself. Bringing together performers from the realms of avant-garde, folk and emo, the initial group began recording at Callum's bedroom studio, and self-released a number of songs online under the moniker, ANALOG CANDLE (a reference to the Arcade Fire album 'Neon Bible').

Influenced by the early albums of Animal Collective and Broken Social Scene, experimental-pop outfit Xiu Xiu (Callum has worked with Angela Seo in the past), acts like Arcade Fire, Beach House and the surrealist and absurdist creations of literary heavyweights like Haruki Murakami, Franz Kafka and Sylvia Plath - the 'art-rock' collective is also largely dedicated to the hybridization of pop music and production technique. In this way, after settling in NYC, the Winter '15 EP became the culmination of a variety of cultural and musical viewpoints.

In terms of the EP itself, and conversely given the circumstances in which it was born, the lyrical content reflects Callum's apprehensions on personal relationships, as well as the uncertain fragility that followed him around during his first winter in NYC. Each song is intended to provide a small window into how that winter progressed, as well as mapping the chronology of a doomed relationship.

Album opener 'Scarlett's Web' features delicate female vocals that hover above shimmering electronic effects, while its lyrical themes allude to the beginning of the end of a love affair, "I see where my body is / But my heart's far away". Elsewhere, 'Trier', a wavy slice of electronic pop, explores flashes of real life pain - 'Lying aimless in bed / With all the books that stay unread' juxtaposed with buoyant electronic currents.

Themes of reminiscence and rejection sit alongside concepts of expressionism, and throughout the EP, heightened emotion is given a front seat over exact realism in the form of piercing lyrics that twist and linger like smoke-trails.

Callum says: "Living in a brand new city can grind one to dust very quickly - work, love, friendship - it all gets distilled and intensified. I sought to recruit the most talented indie musicians in NYC, and bring life to these difficult, common experiences. The Winter '15 EP lies squarely between the 'experimental' and 'pop' music genres, and is intended to be a lyrically driven 'audio' mosaic - a recorded art project of sorts."

The EP concludes with the ghostly 'Space Dreams Of You Too' and with lyrics like 'I'll see you in another life'... the next incarnation of ANALOG CANDLE promises to be just as ethereal and fluid as the present one...

## Hunter And The Bear New Album And Tour



Hailed as 'the heroes British rock needs right now' by the Huffington Post, the mighty Hunter & The Bear's raw, infectious and downright thunderous output has seen them garner extensive plays on BBC Radio 6 and 2 already, as well as spots on large stages at Reading & Leeds, T in the Park and Hard Rock Calling festivals.

A sold out UK tour already under their belts too, the band have also acquired prolific support slots, having toured with the likes of Eric Clapton, Van Morrison and Simple Minds respectively.

Brought up on a heavy diet of rock bands like Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Pink Floyd, Hunter & The Bear are equally inspired by modern bands like Biffy Clyro, War On Drugs and Royal Blood and this latest track - and accompanying video - offers a solid insight into their recording process with more than a glimpse into what you can expect from their raucous live shows.

Releasing one video a month until their album release in May, there's a lot more to come from Hunter & The Bear, the « UK's most promising rock export ».



Will (lead vocals, guitar)

Jimmy (lead guitar, vocals)

Gareth (drums, vocals)

Chris (bass, vocals)

Tour dates as follows:

25th March

March Into Pitlochry, Perthshire,  
Scotland

Debut album tour:

11th May

Electric Circus, Edinburgh

12th May

The Tolbooth, Stirling

13th May

ABC 2, Glasgow

18th May

The Ironworks, Inverness

19th May

Village Hall, Ullapool

20th May

An Lanntair, Stornoway

25th May

The Tunnels, Aberdeen

26th May

The British Legion, Shetland

## Tour Dates for Elvis Depressedly



Following on from the reissue of their cult favourite 'Holo Pleasures' EP and their incredibly successful first ever UK live shows early last year, Elvis

Depressedly have now announced a new set of UK/EU tour dates for 2017.

In May 2015 Elvis Depressedly released the well received 'New Alhambra' with Run For Cover Records and Orchid Tapes, and last year the band went on to reissue their 2013 EP 'Holo Pleasures' via Run For Cover alongside a new EP of unreleased material on the B-side, 'California Dreamin'".

Since releasing 'New Alhambra' in May 2015 the band have earned critical acclaim from the likes of NME, DIY, The Line of Best Fit, The Guardian, Pitchfork, Stereogum, Rolling Stone, SPIN, Upset, Consequence of Sound The 405 and many more for their unique blend of minimalist, lo-fi, melancholic noise-pop.

Their UK/EU dates will follow on from the band's West Coast US tour in March and will see them play the following dates with support from TV Girl:

Apr 7 - Amsterdam, NL

Apr 8 - Groningen, NL @ Vera

Apr 10 - Copenhagen, DN @ Stengade

Apr 13 - Malmo, SW @ Plan B

Apr 14 - Berlin, DE @ Urban Spree

Apr 15 - Leipzig, DE

Apr 16 - Halle, DE @ Huhnermanhattan

Apr 18 - Freiburg, AU @ Rang Teng Teng

Apr 19 - Salzburg, CH @ Rockhouse

Apr 20 - Zurich, CH @ Gonzo Club (w/LVL UP)

Apr 21 - Geneva, FR @ L'Ecurie

Apr 22 - Paris, FR @ E' Space B

Apr 23 - Brighton, UK @ The Joker

Apr 24 - Leeds, UK @ Brudenell Social Club

Apr 25 - Manchester, UK @ The Star and Garter

Apr 26 - London, UK @ Kamio

Apr 27 - Antwerp, BE @ Kavka

## The Orb's Sin In Space Remixes



German label Kompakt continue THE ORB's SIN IN SPACE remix EP series with a third volume focusing on the duo's latest full-length album, the acclaimed COW / CHILL OUT, WORLD!. The spontaneous, organic vibe and sample artistry of the album is reflected in three distinct reworks from Kompakt mainstays THE FIELD, DAVE DK and JORG BURGER - all of them informed with surprising twists and displaying a clear lineage to the source material.

THE FIELD's remix of 9 ELMS OVER RIVER ENO takes the original's percussive part and unfolds it to a swirling, tropical epic that alludes as much to The Orb's multifaceted sound collages as it does to the hypnotic, looping flow of The Field's own output. Meanwhile, DAVE DK turns in a club-friendly revamp of 4AM EXHALE with the fittingly titled ACCELERATOR MIX, indulging in exquisitely lyrical glitches and the magic of the straight bassdrum. JORG BURGER takes a shot at the beatless 5TH DIMENSIONS with the excellent DSCHUNGELOPER MIX - its loose pop jam feeling and flirty shuffle rhythm recall Burger's lush lounge core efforts under his Triola monicker. A sweeping digital bonus track comes from Pop Ambient staple LEANDRO FRESCO, whose revamp of WIRELESS MK2 rounds out this package with its sumptuous soundscapes and a keen sense for textural detail.

The Cow Remixes - Sin In Space Pt. 3 is out March 3rd,

After completing a run of US and UK Tour dates last year in celebration of COW/Chill Out, World!, the duo is back



this winter for some select gigs across Europe.

## The Weeks Announce New Album



**E**asy, the highly anticipated new album from rising Nashville-via-Mississippi band The Weeks, is set for release April 7th on Lightning Rod Records.

The new video for “Talk Like That,” the album’s first track features live footage shot entirely by the band’s own drummer, Cain Barnes.

The Weeks recorded 'Easy' over the course of two weeks at Memphis, TN's Ardent Studios with producer Paul Ebersold. The band left Nashville to record in order to disassociate themselves from their everyday routines in the city, and to find a halfway point between their two homes old and new, Mississippi and Nashville. "Memphis has always been the capitol of North Mississippi to us", says guitarist Sam Williams. "We went there to be at Ardent. We knew Paul had learned everything from John Frye and John Hammond so we figured that was the spot. It's important to keep those historic studios alive and not let them become museums."

Of the record, frontman Cyle Barnes says, "We called it Easy because every time I make music with these guys, it's easy. It feels good. But the other side of it is there's nothing easy about being in a band. There's nothing easy about staying together for ten years and still wanting to make music. We have the hardest and easiest job on the planet. But it works for us." Thematically, Easy explores new ground for the band. Bassist Damien Bone explains, "We just wanted to make a rock record. We weren't as

concerned making it a southern rock record. The southern thing is always going to part of what we do."

To celebrate the release, the band will tour North America extensively this spring. Further announcements are forthcoming. The Weeks is twin brothers Cyle (vocals) and Cain (drums), Sam Williams (guitar/vocals) and Damien Bone (bass). Formed when its members were in high school in Jackson, Mississippi, the band self-released its debut EP Dog Days in 2006. More than ten years and a handful of critically acclaimed albums later, the band has relocated to Nashville and toured extensively worldwide with Kings of Leon, The Meat Puppets, North Mississippi Allstars, Local H and many more.

## Lonely The Brave EP Announced



**A**fter a great 2016 for the band that included a no.1 album on the rock chart, a sell-out headline tour and a hugely successful European tour in support of Biffy Clyro, Lonely The Brave continue their prolific streak as songwriters by announcing a brand new EP led by album highlight, the atmospheric and emotive “Diamond Days”.

The EP features two other non-album tracks, including the immediate, melodic “Collider” and a cover of The Walkmen’s iconic “The Rat”. A band known for picking covers that perhaps people wouldn’t expect from them – Cyndi Lauper, Bjork, Pink Floyd and Antony & The Johnsons some of their previous conquests – “The Rat” is a leftfield take on an already wonderful song, one that showcases David Jakes’ peerless vocals and one that will hopefully introduce the song to a whole new audience.

Alongside the new EP, coming March 17th through Hassle Records, Lonely The Brave will be supporting British

alt-rockers Mallory Knox on their UK tour spanning March and April 2017, featuring dates in Cardiff, Edinburgh, London, Bristol and both Mallory Knox and the band’s hometown of Cambridge.

Known for their uplifting, atmospheric and anthemic songs, the band are joined on the line-up by their old friends and tour partners, the Glasgow three-piece, Fatherson.

## Patch & The Giant Release Debut Album



Acclaimed indie-folk quintet Patch & The Giant, released their long awaited debut album, ‘All That We Had, We Stole’, out 10th February 2017.

Produced by Nick Trepka, whose credits include Emmy The Great and Mercury Prize Winner Speech Debelle, ‘All That We Had, We Stole’ is a polished and accomplished debut. Showcasing Patch & The Giant’s eclectic take on folk music, the album effectively harnesses elements of indie, rock and blues and fuses them with inviting story-telling, courtesy of lead singer Luke Owen’s rich and tender vocals, and a unique instrumentation ‘Tucked somewhere between the music of Balkan enthusiasts Beirut and the rustic elegance of modern DIY folk’ says Folk Radio UK.

“As soon as we began talking to Nick about working together, he was adamant that we should record as much as we possibly could live” says the band. “So we locked ourselves into the studio and didn’t leave until we had an album. It’s quite a varied mix and we feel it says a lot about who we are, who we’ve been so far and who we’re becoming.”

Highlights include the bold aggression of opening track, ‘The Beggar’s Song’

to the more traditional shanty sounds of tracks like 'A Local Man' and 'The Sleeping Boat'. The mournful melody of 'The Day You Went To Sea' is a great contrast to upbeat songs like 'Another Day' - a conventional break up song, but with trumpets and the glorious 'America' - a song about how we measure success. But it's the album's quieter moments that are some of its best. There's the delicate 'Love And War,' about letting go of something that you hold dear, the sweet simplicity of 'Are You Listening?' and the stunning single, 'Flowers', released in September. The track made Apple Music's 'Hot Tracks' Playlist and the accompanying video hit 5-figure plays overnight helping the band to win the public vote for Amazing Radio's Audition Poll. Finally don't miss the quiet beauty of closing title track 'All That We Had We Stole', about balancing art and life and the bare but pained hidden track 'The Walk And The Weight.'

"We recorded most of this album over Easter 2015 and it's been gestating since long before then" says Angie. "A lot of musicians talk about the process of making and releasing an album as being a like nurturing a child, now we get this. It's like the longest pregnancy ever. The whole journey has been glorious, emotional and we've been able to work with so many brilliant and creative minds at every stage of the game. Even though we can't wait to get the record out there, it's also a weird and slightly reticent feeling that this process will have finally come to its end and we have to release these songs into the wild."

Patch & The Giant are a dynamic troupe of musicians who have fast become a genuine force within the UK alt-folk scene, since releasing their debut EP *The Boatswain's Refuge* on Folkroom Records in 2013 (produced by BBC Folk Award winner Ben Walker). National radio support has come from BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 6 and Amazing Radio, they've had loyal support from the blog community and have recorded live sessions for the BBC's legendary 'Whispering' Bob Harris, Bandstand Busking, Songs From The Shed, Sofar Sounds and many more.

They've also been winning over crowds on the festival circuit, playing everywhere from Green Man Festival, Secret Garden Party, Cambridge Folk Festival and Larmer Tree Festival, to Wilderness, Deershed, BoomTown

Fairand Standon Calling. They've supported artists including The Twilight Sad, Roo Panes, Matthew & The Atlas, John Spiers (Bellowhead), To Kill A King, Elephant Revival and Keston Cobblers' Club and they've played their own headline tours around the country alongside performances at some of London's most iconic venues, including Cecil Sharp House, Bush Hall and Scala.

Patch & The Giant are:

Luke Owen - lead vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin

Angie Rance - backing vocals, accordion, trumpet, flugelhorn, piano, harmonica, mandolin

Gabriel Merryfield - violin

Derek Yau - cello, double bass

Nick Harris - backing vocals, bass guitar, percussion, acoustic guitar, harmonica, banjo

## Dengue Fever Announce Re-release Of Back Catalogue



Los Angeles based Cambodian and American rock band DENGUE FEVER have announced that they are set to begin a deluxe reissue campaign to release the band's long out-of-print back catalogue via their own Tuk Tuk Records.

The first two titles to be reissued are their eponymous 2003 debut album and their 2005 sophomore follow-up *Escape From Dragon House* and can be pre-ordered.

Both critically acclaimed titles are set for release on May 26th in the UK. Each title features new bonus tracks, new liner notes, archival photos and upgraded original artwork. Both CD titles are now in housed in digipaks and feature an expanded 20-page booklet for Dengue

Fever while *Escape* features a fold out poster. Vinyl reissues will be available later this year.

"Since acquiring our back catalogue a few years back, we've always talked about doing deluxe editions of all of Dengue Fever's out-of-print titles properly on our own label," said Dengue Fever bassist and Tuk Tuk Records Co-owner Senon Williams. "Our primary goal was to get our first albums *Dengue Fever* and *Escape From Dragon House* back in print first with bonus material and other upgrades and use it as a template to upgrade the rest of our back catalogue moving forward."

Aside from these reissues, Dengue Fever will be touring extensively throughout 2017. They made their Middle East debut in the United Arab Emirates on February 17 and in March, the band head out on tour with fellow global pioneers Tinariwen in the United States and Canada.

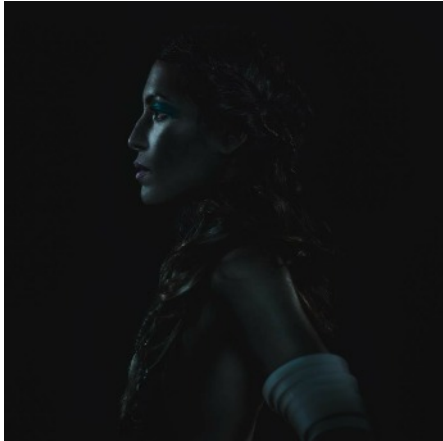
Praised by critics and fans alike, Dengue Fever are often lauded as a rare combination of garage rock, psychedelic rock, Khmer rock, world music and the almost lost rich Cambodian music from the 1960's and '70's. Their high energy live shows and musical evolution which began covering Khmer classics in 2003 and has featured original composition from that point forward, have made them a must-see act more than a decade after they began. Coverage in outlets such as NPR, New York Times, BBC, Pitchfork, Mojo, Later with Jools Holland and more, has afforded the band an opportunity to tour on nearly every continent including Brazil, Australia, Russia, Korea, Hong Kong and soon Abu Dhabi

## Vandana Wonderland EP

Fusing elements of disquieting electronica with alternative pop, Vandana's angular, intense music embraces womanhood and otherness as if from inside the mouth of a cave. Her multicultural lifestyle, from India to London to Brooklyn, has influenced her wildly eclectic and self-assured material, which arrives steeped in the knowledge of ancient Indian traditions and fables as well as in assorted vehicles of abstract art and thought.



Inspired by musical pioneers like Aphex Twin, Thom Yorke and Miles Davis as well as the vibrancy of Bollywood, the Gothicism of The Cure and the evocativeness of Fever Ray, Vandana also takes her cues from purveyors of subversion like Edgar Allan Poe, Lars Von Trier and Henry Miller. In this latest material, the naturally introverted singer brings her insular and mysterious writing process to life via slow-dripping, throbbing synths, creating an atmosphere that's arcane, exotic and brooding.



An instinctive and intimate record - and one that was created in Vandana's home studio during a period of solitary retreat - the six-track EP makes for a truly absorbing listen.

Using a journal in which she writes and draws entirely with her left hand (in esoteric thought, the left hand is associated with receiving), many of her lyrics are the result of this inward-looking process and are thus super cathartic and revealing. It's a maze of sentiments with the emphasis being on a nocturnal space and - as a result - the release is named *Nox Anima* - meaning Night Soul/Spirit. This in turn, is a nod to the psychologist Carl Jung's description of Anima: the part of the psyche that is directed inward and in touch with the subconscious.

Lead single 'Vicious' was inspired by watching a lot of nature documentaries. This song is literally dedicated to the majesty of a creature in pursuit and what it's like having an unobtainable subject of affection - a fixation over something without being able to physically or tangibly possess it. Elsewhere, 'Nearly' documents the seasonal cycles of a relationship, while 'Jaan' is a trying but exciting journey through a dense, deep, smoky forest with a loved one- about

reconnecting with the primitive animal side.

The whole EP twists about on a mixture of abstract and visceral themes, building you up before submerging you in swirls of throbbing sound that threaten to unsettle your very core.

## Van Morrison, Herbie Hancock, George Benson And More Announced For North Sea Jazz Fest



Van Morrison, Herbie Hancock, Jamiroquai, George Benson, Norah Jones, Laura Mvula and many more confirmed for North Sea Jazz Festival 2017

Music heavyweights line up once again for the world's largest indoor music festival in Rotterdam from July 7th to 9th

"This is one of the greatest events in music...in the world" George Benson

North Sea Jazz Festival, the largest indoor music festival in the world, returns in 2017 with a three-day event jam-packed with international superstars and world-class emerging talent.

The first wave of artists confirmed for 2017 include Van Morrison, George Benson, Laura Mvula, Herbie Hancock, Norah Jones, Mavis Staples and the long-awaited return of Jamiroquai. More names will be announced shortly.

Located in the bustling port town of Rotterdam, only an hour from the UK by plane, the festival brings together the very best artists from the worlds of jazz, blues, funk, soul, r&b, hip hop and pop, and is widely regarded as one of the greatest live music events in the world.

Founded in 1976 with performances from legendary artists including Ray Charles, Dizzy Gillespie and Count Basie, the North Sea Jazz Festival was an instant success, attracting over 9000 visitors in its first year. Recent years have seen performances from some of the most exciting and well respected names in music, including Adele, Kendrick Lamar, Stevie Wonder, D'angelo, and a legendary three night run from Prince in 2011.

## Sweet Gum Tree New Album Announced

Sweet Gum Tree's first and heavily supported album by the likes of Mojo, Uncut and The Line Of Best Fit, came to fruition with the help of many prestigious collaborators such as Isobel Campbell -Belle & Sebastian, Earl Harvin -Tindersticks and Marty Willson-Piper -The Church. This time, Arno Sojo has reshuffled his cards and chosen to record this new album almost entirely on his own, except for the help of Irish producer David Odum (long-time partner-in-crime of Gemma Hayes and Glen Hansard).



Both a beautiful, romantic adventure and an unnerving trip through a mind crowded with troubled creatures, Sojo's earnest vocals confirm that he is amongst those who still believe that music and words can touch the soul, by way of sincerity, constant reinvention and fine craftsmanship. Minimal drum machines and echo-laden guitars throughout create a state of grace evoking the ethereal new-wave productions of British label 4AD as well as hymns from great pop architects like Talk Talk, Prefab Sprout or Divine Comedy. The album's electronic rigidity



contrasts perfectly with the elegant strings and soaring melodies, while Sojo's gravelled vocals ensure it remains an outstandingly humane and sensitive collection of tracks.

The album's title nods to Wes Anderson's acclaimed, "The Grand Budapest Hotel", which itself was based upon Stefan Zweig's writings on the rise of Nazism in the mid-30's. Drawing a parallel with the current fiery state of the world and Anderson's tale of creating love despite all circumstances, Sojo reflects on the challenge of how one can fulfil the need to dream whilst in such a desperate context.

The soul in Sojo's voice is what really drives 'Sustain The Illusion', particularly on tracks such as 'Someday', 'Guilt Trip' and the closing lullaby, 'Keeper' that lulls you into a complete sense of security. On the other hand, 'Burn Your Icons' is both a thought provoking, sharp and ironic look at the relevant question of how we view our fallen idols that gives a truly unique perspective on our society's traditions.

Sweet Gum Tree will also be performing live on April 5th in London at The Good Ship

Sweet Gum Tree New album 'Sustain The Illusion' Out March 31st via The Orchard / Plastic Head

## Porshyne Recording New EP



**P**orshyne are an atmospheric rock five-piece hailing from Brighton. Formed in 2014, early releases from the band such as "Residue" and "Warp" have helped to cement their name within the Brighton music scene, leading to them playing shows alongside the likes of Black Peaks, Valerian Swing, Town Portal and many more. Now, after having burrowed away to record their debut EP "Environmental Music" with Mark Roberts (Black Peaks, Broker, The Physics House Band), Porshyne are set

to return with their most heavy, emotive and accomplished material to date.

The context of the EP is a sound that sits somewhere between prog, alt-rock, electronic music and post rock. "Environmental Music" is a masterfully dynamic and heavily textured collection of tracks combining melodic vocals with intricate and carefully refined guitar work, which alternates between cinematic and darker, heavier phrases that are intertwined amongst complex rhythms and subtle electronic moments.

Tracks from the EP such as 'Exit' show a understated ambient melancholy to the record, which at times calls to mind the sounds of Radiohead, meanwhile guitar sequences at times lean towards the darker end of the prog-rock spectrum conjure up the sounds of Tool, Dredg or Karnivool. Other tracks such as 'Hubris' have a more desert rock inflection with riffs akin to that of Queens of the Stone Age or Kyuss. Porshyne hold nothing back on "Environmental Music" amalgamating a multifarious set of influences, styles and genres, concentrating their individual creative forces into one cohesive body of work.

Speaking about the forthcoming EP, Fergal Lyden (Vocals/ Guitar) said, "We're really happy about how the record has turned out and excited to get it out for people to listen to. Mark (producer) did an amazing job of capturing what we were aiming towards, and how representative we feel this EP is of us as a band is testament to that."

"Environmental Music" is an intensely structured body of work, which is as meticulous as it is powerful. Albums that manage to merge such a wide variety of styles and exhibit such a multitude of musical landscapes in such an unabridged manner are rare. This debut EP from Porshyne is a statement of intent and is not one that should be ignored.

Porshyne are: Fergal Lyden, Harry Baker, Harvey Fenny, Jack Hosgood, Chris Hardwick

## Tashaki Miyaki To Release The Dream In April

**T**he Los Angeles based duo Tashaki Miyaki will release their highly

anticipated debut album, 'The Dream', on April 7th via Metropolis Records and have just shared the first taste of the upcoming release via a new single entitled 'Girls On T.V.' "This track emerged out of observing fame culture," explains vocalist Paige Stark. "Things like the emergence of reality TV stardom and social media celebrity have elevated fame culture to a new sphere. We are living in an Andy Warhol meets Orwellian vision of the future and I find it terrifying. It's all about 'likes' and numbers, and now our country is being run by a monster who was created by this very machine. The title is playing on the perspective I'm singing from a media brainwashed girl that only wants to be famous like the girls on TV."



Tashaki Miyaki have kept it mysterious since their inception. In their early days, the band's members often performed under aliases and even the roots of their moniker remain hazy (though it may or may not have first come from a mispronunciation of Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike's name).

The band was born out of a late night jam session in early 2011, when local legend Joel Jerome recorded what would become the band's first original song, 'Somethin' Is Better Than Nothin' and a cover of The Everly Brothers classic, 'All I Have To Do Is Dream'.

Within a few weeks of posting the songs on Bandcamp, the band was invited to London where they played their first ever live show to a packed crowd at the legendary 100 Club.

In the six years since, Tashaki Miyaki have released three singles and an EP on UK labels Luv Luv Luv, For Us Records (Rough Trade Imprint) and The Sounds of Sweet Nothing, as well as a single on their own label, Blonde Dog. Influential local label Burger Records also put out a collection of the band's early recordings.

These releases received international acclaim in Mojo, NME, The New York Times and Pitchfork, among other media outlets.

In a New Band Of The Day feature, the Guardian deemed the group a "female Jesus and Mary Chain, whose vocals cut like honey-coated razor blades." Others have compared the band to Mazzy Star, Spiritualized and The Velvet Underground, but Tashaki Miyaki considers film to be their closest muse.

Band members cite David Lynch and his composer Angelo Badalamenti, plus Sergio Leone's partnership with Ennio Morricone, to be as powerful an influence as music by artists like Lou Reed, Neil Young, David Bowie and My Bloody Valentine. Tashaki Miyaki's songs are esigned with visual inspiration: seeing the band perform live is a multimedia experience, where their haunting music is paired with ever-changing, curated cinematic backdrops, creating a full sensory experience. Their dream-like aesthetic has been mirrored in stark and alluring music videos created by talented filmmaker and friend, Juan Iglesias.

Tashaki Miyaki have toured and played festivals across North America, the UK and mainland Europe. The band has also performed at art museums around the world, including The Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona and MoMA, New York. Tashaki Miyaki has spent the last two years writing and recording their debut LP,

'The Dream', produced by singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Paige Stark and engineered by Dan Horne (Cass McCombs, Allah Las). As a writer for the Fader once observed of the band's hypnotic sound, "It's so pretty I'm afraid saying anything else might diminish it."

## New Album And Tour From Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

Ahead of the release of their forthcoming album "The Tourist", Clap Your Hands Say Yeah have announced a string of UK tour dates for September 2017. This will be the first time the band has toured in the UK since 2014, and the dates will follow on from

the band's huge US tour, which will take place across March, April and May 2017

They will be playing the following dates:

13th Sep 17 - Bristol - Thekla

14th Sep 17 - Manchester - Gorilla

15th Sep 17 - Dublin - Whelans

16th Sep 17 - Glasgow - CCA

18th Sep 17 - Leeds - Brudenell Social Club

19th Sep 17 - London - Village Underground

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah also recently shared their latest single "Down (Is Where I Want To Be)", speaking about the new single, Alec Ounsworth said, "It's a song about embracing a low feeling. Better to feel low than to feel nothing at all..."

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah's new album the "The Tourist" was out February 24th

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah's 2005 self-released debut album set a precedent for how bands might begin to approach making music independently. The record — which vocalist/multi-instrumentalist/songwriter Alec Ounsworth wrote entirely by himself—received widespread critical acclaim and was named one of "The 50 Most Important Recordings Of The Decade" by NPR.



In the ensuing years, Ounsworth has continued pushing himself creatively, releasing three additional Clap Your Hands Say Yeah full-lengths (for which he again wrote all of the music and lyrics) and issuing two solo projects. The group has also grown a robust international fanbase: In 2015 alone, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah toured in

Latin and South America, Japan and Europe. All of these experiences have helped Ounsworth refine his vision for Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, as the group heads into its twelfth year and the release of its fifth album, The Tourist.

Like previous Clap Your Hands Say Yeah records, The Tourist nods to Ounsworth's musical heroes—a group that includes artists such as John Cale, Robert Wyatt, Tom Waits and Nick Cave. However, this album also shows a natural progression from previous records. "Better Off" and "The Vanity Of Trying" are lush, keyboard-augmented songs, while "A Chance To Cure" and "Ambulance Chaser" are rhythmically askew, and the sighing "Loose Ends" is delicate, acoustic-based folk-rock.

No matter what the style, however, The Tourist's arrangements are laser-sharp and deliberate, without feeling labored-over. For example, "Down (Is Where I Want To Be)" combines piano flickers with anxious keyboards, gnarled electric guitars and teeth-baring drums—but yet feels cohesive, not chaotic.

The Tourist emerged from a period where Ounsworth was doing a lot of intense soul-searching, and processing personal events that irrevocably shaped his life and future. But although most of these songs came together during this time of reflection, he considers the record to be cathartic—an exhale of sorts, rather than a collection of songs where he was indulging in self-pity or letting things stagnate or fester.

"The album was a type of purge," he says. "A purge of certain emotional confusion that manifested itself in the last several years. It was not an easy album to make, by virtue of the fact that it was an emotional time for me."

Appropriately, The Tourist's lyrics reflect how complex upheaval can be ("We can beat around this bush together/Sometimes it's all I think of/Other times I can forget") and explore the imperfect nature of blame ("The car left the road and was found without its mirrors/You play the victim/And I'll play the blind man"). Other songs try to make sense of the present time ("Now that the past is on fire/How can I look around and find I can't remember who I was") or employ clever wordplay—"Black cat let's not split hairs/I'm



tethered to the weather/I assure I don't care about no lucky streak"—for effect.

"I wanted to experiment with packing lyrics," Ounsworth says. "On this album, the lyrics and vocal melody effectively carry the songs, maybe more than anything else. Elvis Costello does this really well on his song 'Beyond Belief,' as does Paul Simon on his solo albums. I wanted not to overdo it lyrically, but do try to squeeze as much as I could out of certain phrases."

Ounsworth spent about a week recording *The Tourist* at Dr. Dog's Philadelphia-based studio with a drummer and bassist. After that, he and engineer Nick Krill spent a few months "tidying things up" and recording additional embellishments: backup vocals, keyboards, guitars and more percussion. That gives *The Tourist* more of a band feel than the last album, and contributes to why the record possesses a musical lightness. The dreamy opening track "The Pilot" especially has a lilting edge, courtesy of Smiths-reminiscent acoustic guitars strums and Ounsworth's hiccupping, conspiratorial vocals.

*The Tourist* was then mixed by Dave Fridmann, who also worked on two previous Clap Your Hands Say Yeah albums, 2007's *Some Loud Thunder* and 2014's *Only Run*. Ounsworth says he and Fridmann are on the same musical wavelength, which makes their long-time working relationship an anchor of sorts. "Dave and I don't necessarily stick with what's easiest which is fine and anxiety-inducing, in a good way," he says. "He challenges me to do something a little bit different."

Having that space and freedom to explore as part of Clap Your Hands Say Yeah is crucial to Ounsworth and a vital part of the band's identity. As anyone who's seen him perform a living room show will attest, this mindset also often results in songs with dramatically different arrangements. But as a musician and leader of an independent project, Ounsworth prides himself on honesty across all aspects of the band, from live performances to the studio.

"I am a relatively solitary person and seem to work best alone," he says. "I do count on others to help the project as the process of making and releasing an album moves forward, but if it doesn't match what I have in mind, it's hard for me to really be there for it. I guess this is one reason why the project has been

independent all this time. Trust me, I understand that thinking this way is both an asset and a liability."

However, this stubborn independence also reflects Ounsworth's commitment to musical integrity. Clap Your Hands Say Yeah's career arc is all about building on previous successes while staying true to a core artistic vision. And although *The Tourist* may have emerged from challenging times, it reflects Ounsworth's uncanny ability to move forward, no matter what the circumstances.

"I'd rather not say that it was a dark time, but it was a difficult time in my life—among the most difficult," he says. "But I needed and need to try to let it go. And this is how I let things go. Though it's the same for any album—this one probably more than the others."

"But I have to try to do something each time that's new and engaging for me," he adds. "I mean, I could very well just write songs the way they were early on. But I don't think that people would appreciate listening to someone just going through the motions. We have to build something to last, rather than just build it because it looks good at the moment."

## The Black Angels Announce New Album



The Black Angels – Austin's psych rock masters – have confirmed details for their upcoming album, 'Death Song,' out April 21st. This will be the five-piece's first full-length release in four years, and their debut for Partisan Records.

Written and recorded in large part during the recent election cycle, the music on 'Death Song' serves as part protest, part emotional catharsis in a climate

dominated by division, anxiety and unease. "Currency," a strong contender for the heaviest song the band has ever put to wax, meditates on the governing role the monetary system plays in our lives, while slow-building psychedelic earworm "Half Believing" questions the nature and confusing realities of devotion.

Recorded between Seattle and Austin, 'Death Song' features production from Phil Ek (Father John Misty, Fleet Foxes, The Shins). The 11-track collection offers a sharply honed elaboration on their signature sound – menacing fuzz guitar and cutting wordplay, steeped in a murky hallucinatory dream.

The band will tour extensively behind 'Death Song', including a headline set at one of the first-ever shows at new NYC venue Brooklyn Steel on May 2nd. Full itinerary below for "The Death March Tour", which begins in Nashville. The band will be supported by A Place to Bury Strangers.

Since forming in Austin in 2004, The Black Angels have become standard-bearers for modern psych-rock, and the New York Times has said they "play psychedelic rock as if the 1960s never ended, and they are absolute masters of it". The band has toured with Queens of the Stone Age, Brian Jonestown Massacre, The Black Keys + more, and played festivals such as Glastonbury, Fuji Rock, Primavera, Coachella and Bonnaroo. Two of the band members co-founded Levitation Festival (formerly Austin Psych Fest) in 2008, which has since grown into one of the best-reviewed and expertly-curated festivals in the country (returning in 2018).

## Taking Names Announce New EP



Taking Names is a pop-punk band from Bergen, Norway, signed on Loyal Blood Records. Since 2015, the



band has released a fresh breath of 90's-inspired pop-punk with a modern variety of references from different genres, giving them a uniqueness to stand firmly on their own musical feet. With a rawness and energy on stage, Taking Names marks themselves as an act worth experiencing and paying attention to in the future.

Taking Names has had a big year in 2016 in their native country, with heavy rotation on Norway's biggest national radio station with two of their singles; "Hope It's The Last Time" and "Leave It". On top of that they played at by:Larm in Oslo in the beginning of March, and made it to the national final for unsigned artists (Årets Urørt) hosted by the biggest national Norwegian radio station NRK P3. Taking Names was also recently picked up by Alternative Press, who had the following to say about the band in their feature: "Taking Names bring young punk to a genre that has gotten overloaded in past years, and have the perfect blend of doofy personalities and earnest lyrics to stand out...get excited for new tunes coming."

With their new EP dropping in spring 2017, Taking Names takes the leap and are aiming for new heights both nationwide and abroad.

## Myles Manley Announces UK And Ireland Tour



Myles Manley makes idiosyncratic folk music on guitar with rhythms and colours snatched from various places, most recently Eric B and Rakim, Micachu and The Shapes, Moondog, The Clash's Sandinista, Jinx Lennon, Frankie Cosmos, etc. "I started listening to a lot of early hiphop for some reason

and what I loved about it was the clunkiness of the sounds, and the excitement you can hear at a whole new world of opportunities. I bought an MPC and started making idiot beats late at night that I'd write songs to. I've always had an ear for weird rhythms and I was able to make stuff that you'd never come up with rehearsing in a room with a drummer."

A batch of songs written in this way was then taken to human drummers Solamh Kelly and Oisín Trench and recorded by longtime collaborator Chris Barry, who added his own guitar parts, yielding the single you have in your very ears. "It is amazing to play with such musicians because they take a framework and make it come alive, add their voice to it. It starts to express a time and a place. And it starts to express my unbelievable talent."

Hurrying through Broadstone, Dublin for another midnight session of bopping and guitar strumming at the Mr. Barry's studio Ail Fionn, the aloof, succulent Manley has this to whistle: "these are troubling times for a reluctant narcissist. You always thought you could saunter through life, gently seeking attention, a joker in the pack, avoiding beatings, harming no-one beyond mild nuisance making. There're times you wonder, are you lord of the dance or lord of the bluebottles?"

Myles Manley was born in northern England and lived in a few places there until his family moved to Sligo, Ireland, where he became the village indie boy. "I'm in love with songs. What I am seeking in my music is naivety and deliciousness; what I find is also an escape from anxiety. And if you want to really hear it, imagine early days, running round a dead, shithole town at 4am in August, with a person you haven't kissed, want to kiss and will never kiss. No power. Night night."

"Relax; enjoy your night upon the town" is set for release on February 17th via Dublin's Little L Records, available on 7" and all major digital platforms.

Dates


Apr 8 Limerick -- Dolan's Warehouse

Apr 9 Dundalk -- The Spirit Store

"Relax; Enjoy your night upon the town!" with this utterance Myles Manley is being at once both sincere and

fatalistic. "I always knew I was the best!" says the dashing and supercilious young artist with a smile, "but at certain points I realise that that might not really be the case. It is always the case though."

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SINCE THE TUMOUR,  
SHE TRIED TO HIDE IT  
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# Self-destruct in T-Minus 5...

Self destruction and rock and roll seem to go hand in hand....or is that the myth that we want to believe?

They tend to go out with a bang rather than a whimper. The world mourned Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse, Layne Staley and John Bonham. Legends one and all. Not just for their contributions to music, for which they should all be celebrated, but for their grisly demises as well.

Even those that aren't dead (yet); Mötley Crüe, The Stones, Guns N' Roses, have had their decadence raised to legendary status. It's all become a part of the myth... And the attraction.

It's been noted that egos, drugs, money and women have ended more bands than anything else. But, they've also started more bands than anything else.

It's got a nasty habit of self-destruction, rock n' roll does. After countless rehabilitations, relapses and recoveries, rock music still carries one vital and potent drug in its system; that myth.

That poisonous myth. The "fuddy-duddy rock n' roll lifestyle," as Rotten once called it. It's made and it's broken people and careers. And, it birthed this

mad notion of rock n' roll as a lifestyle rather than just a genre. A life and death cult spawned by Elvis accidentally twitching his pelvis.

...4...

The defining pop cultural phenomenon of the 20th century is largely defined by many people by its depravity rather than its contributions to life and living. Rock n' roll, and indeed music of all sorts, is an enhancement. It enhances the pleasure of living and has done so for millennia. For religious or spiritual



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# RANTS, RAVES AND ROCK 'N ROLL

purposes, or just to Kick Out The Jams for the sheer joyous Hell of it.

It's a way of augmenting and intensifying one's existence. What it is not, is something to exist by and for. And certainly, the rock n' roll lifestyle, is hardly a healthy one.

And, more importantly, it's inaccurate!

The rock n' roll life, ie. Sex and Drugs and Rock n' Roll (ordered in decreasing importance), is ultimately, a shallow existence. It may be fun for a while, and even manageable in moderation. But, you're living as a slave. Rather than as an independent individual.

And surely that is the point. Or rather, was the point. Rock n' roll was a statement of individuality, of freedom. But now, the idea of what a rockstar is/is not has become as rigid a boundary as those that rock music originally set out to destroy. Self-destruction is unhealthy. But a little bit of demolition has its place.

...3...

You see, demolition makes room for the new and improved. And, while you can doubt whether or not that was the original intention behind the music, it certainly became a significant part of what the music was about.

Or the music was at least a fitting soundtrack. And we all know how important the soundtrack is...

But the idea of rockstars as hedonists is as detrimental to the music as it is to the people themselves. Slash noted in his biography that the drugs will fuel the creativity to a certain point, but past that point they become a hindrance, rather than a help.

Anyways, listen to Frank Zappa and Sonic Youth followed by Mötley Crüe and Poison and decide for yourself who made the better music. The pursuit of hedonism, with rock music the vehicle for that pursuit, has resulted in some piss-poor tunes.



Because, it's a shallow cause: chasing the next hit (drugs or single) and the next groupie. Whereas, striving to create something truly inventive and original, to further your own experience, and by extension someone else's, is a worthwhile crusade.

Hence, Frank Zappa. A man who through the pursuit of his musical ambitions enhanced the living experience of many a listener. But shamefully too few.

...2...

But, it's not just the problem of a handful of a few individual, ego-inflated rock n' roll types. It shows to us the true colours of what we as a consuming public want. As opposed to an enlightening and life-affirming experience, we'd prefer the junk food hit of scandal straight in the mainline.

Because it's what we crave as a collective society, we spawn misguided people who think S&D&RnR is a desirable or, worse yet, romantic way to live and die. Or they just think it looks fun. The effect is the same.

And the effect is detrimental. It's destruction, not demolition. Demolition makes way for. Destruction just flattens.

It's well documented that drugs have had an impact on the music made by rock groups. And it's even resulted in some of the best work by some of the best groups. The Beatles stand as academia-accepted proof of that. What

I'm talking about is excess. And I mean EXCESS. And the acceptance of said excess to the point where it's not only accepted, but expected as well. Because when we start to expect something, we lose the spark. That little wild flame of madness that not only fuels creativity, but is beneficial to us all.

...1...

It's sad that rock n' roll is probably more synonymous with its excess rather than its contributions to being human. Its augmentation of living has long been overshadowed by its dark side. A cheap, easily digestible thrill. But, the thrill has long since left the building...

Violence, hurt and death VS enlightenment, healing and life. Zappa himself noted humanity's penchant for destruction and said that there'd be no humans left in 1000 years just a short while before his death in 1993. Rock n' roll has brought all of these things. All of those things on both sides of that "VS".

It's sad. Like Bruce Springsteen's Born In The USA, the wrong message was taken up by many people. In Bruce's case; a message of mindless patriotism and servitude to a country. In rock music's case; the pitch black underbelly has become the accepted and expected face of the genre. A horrible mistake. One we may/may not be around to regret.

It's sad...

# Vodafone Smart Platinum 7

**Vodafone have done quite well with their own-branded smartphones. I have been living with the Smart Platinum 7 which is something different from Voda. This is pitched more at the mid-range rather than entry level devices.**

We had a look at the Smart Ultra 7 and was impressed by its design and price tag combo.

The Smart Platinum 7 gives the specs a bump but still tries to maintain its affordability.

Has Vodafone managed this tricky tightrope act?

## Smart Platinum 7 design

Unpacking the Smart Plat 7 I was impressed by its initial look and feel. I actually handed it over to a work colleague and asked him to guess the maker. His jaw dropped when I revealed its from Vodafone's own stable.

The Smart Platinum 7 is a sleek and stylish 5.5-inch screened smartphone. It certainly has a premium feel thanks to its metal and glass chassis.

The rear of the phone has a carbon-fibre effect patterning. Perhaps not as slick as the Honor 8 but it still looks good. At least it saves it from the bland, flat back of all the rest.

Whilst at the rear you'll notice the fingerprint scanner below the camera. I love this placement.

There are neat design touches such as the antenna lines merging into the metallic black edges. Also, the texture on the buttons. This just goes to prove what can be, and needs to be, done to get yourself noticed in such a packed arena.

On the right side of the phone you get the volume and power buttons.

You'll find a headphone jack on the top edge.

On the left side there's a camera shortcut button and a SIM tray that has enough space for nano and

thinner than one of the most popular 5.5-inch displayed phones, the iPhone 7 Plus which is 158 x 77.9 x 7.3.

## Smart Platinum 7 performance

### Specs

The octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 652 processor is straight out of the mid-tier cookbook.

The chipset comprises four A72 1.8GHz cores and four A53 1.2GHz cores, complemented by 3GB of RAM.

Looking at benchmark tests that have been performed, the Smart Plat 7 is around the LG G4 level. It appears to outperform the

Samsung Galaxy S6 too!

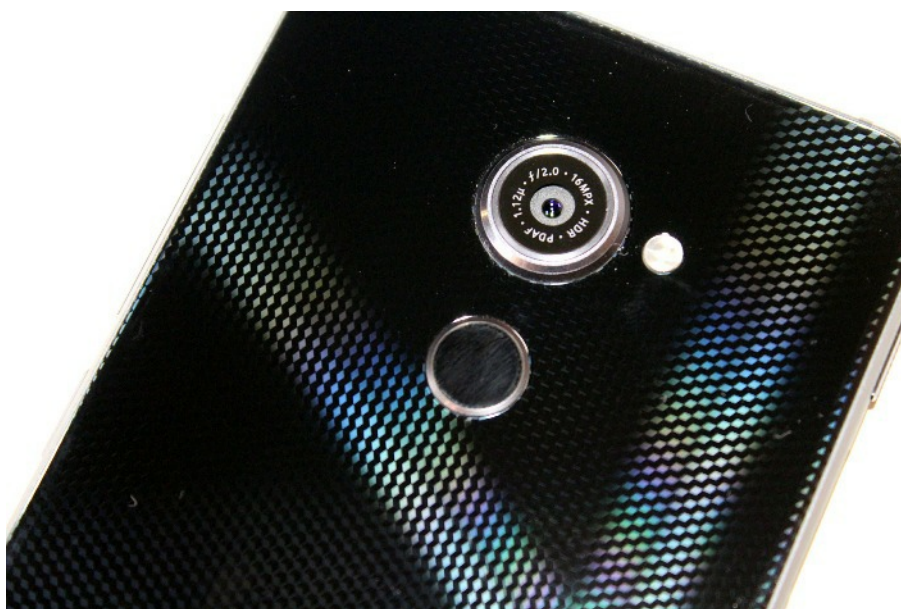
Granted, I am comparing it with 2015 handsets, but I know a number of people still rocking the S6, as well as the used prices being asked for them.

### In use

Performance is as slick as the phone looks. There is no lag when flicking between apps and screens. All transitions are nice and smooth.

Multi-tasking was also handled deftly.

Thrashing around Real Racing 3 did cause the handset to get a little



microSD cards.

A favourite feature of mine, the device is packing a pair of front-facing speakers. These are located at the top and bottom, hidden behind mesh grilles.

A USB 2.0 port also lives on the bottom.

### Size and weight

The Smart Platinum 7 tips the scales at 155g. To me this is a reassuring weight as I can tell I have a phone in my pocket and it feels sturdy.

The phone measures 154 x 76 x 6.9mm. So it is smaller and

# Vodafone Smart Platinum 7

bit toasty, but no more than my 6P. The Smart Plat 7 did come up with the goods and the game played well and looked great.

The speakers did a sterling job here.

The fingerprint scanner is on the back which I think is the ideal placement. The scanner is the same size as the Honor 8's but there's no recess. This makes aiming your finger at the pad a tad tricky for the first few times. Other than that, I had no real issues with using it to unlock the device.

The handset includes NFC, so contactless payments are possible using Vodafone's Tap & Pay. It

also made setting up a breeze as tapping my Nexus and the Smart Plat 7 together transferred most of what I needed.

## Display

The QHD (2,560×1,440 pixels) AMOLED display is vibrant and sharp (534ppi). The blacks are impressively deep. This was another feature that wowed all that saw it.

Looking at the 'Screen Mode' options, these did pang of those found on Samsung screens.

Here you get 'adaptive', 'vivid' and 'natural' display modes to choose from.

Vodafone's version of an always-on display (ambient display) lights things up when the phone's in standby mode. This means you can see notifications and the like without having to wake the phone up completely.

## Cameras

Images taken in daylight are rich and full of detail thanks to the generous 16MP f/2.0 lens. Low light is handled fairly well too in most cases, as long as you have a steady hand.

There is some noticeable lag when using HDR

but this is not really a deal breaker for me.

The dual-tone flash does help in low light and is comparable to other mid-tier phone snappers.

The lack of optical image stabilisation (OIS) is the biggest trick that the Smart Plat 7 is missing. If you're used to having this then your pics with this device can come out a bit blurry. This is sorted by taking a little more time with your photos.

The front-facing 8MP camera is pretty decent. The camera will pick out details well in decent levels of natural light, but did struggle in low or diffused light.

I do like the gesture control for selfie mode though. The shutter countdown is triggered by holding your palm towards the lens.

## Software

Vodafone has bundled a selection of its own apps and functionality, such as enhanced calling and integrated messaging.

Smart Lock is quite neat as it keeps the handset unlocked when it knows it's safe about your person.

Vodafone's Call+ and Message+ functions might be of use to some.

### Vodafone Call+

This app makes calls more interactive and personal by letting you add content as you speak.

### Call+ features

- Mark your call as important
- Notify the recipient of the reason for your call
- Add your current location
- Include photos and videos
- Switch to a video call





# Vodafone Smart Platinum 7



The Smart Platinum 7 will certainly give other sub-£300 smartphones a good run for their money.

## Smart Platinum 7 price and availability

The Vodafone Smart Platinum 7 comes in at a very affordable £295

- Send voice notes or post-call messages
- Use call logs to access any of the messages, photos and videos you've shared during previous conversations

### Message+ features

Vodafone Message+ is a hassle-free way to stay in touch with your friends through text, chat or group conversations.

If you use Whatsapp or similar then Message+ might not be *that* useful for you.

The Smart Platinum 7 boasts a very clean take on Android 6.0 Marshmallow despite the Vodafone-specific features. I actually prefer this to Sammy's TouchWiz.

### Vodafone Red Value bundle

If you grab the Vodafone Smart platinum 7 and a Vodafone Red Value Bundle – you can choose from Spotify Premium, Sky Sports Mobile TV or a NOW TV Entertainment Pass and watch some of this month's hottest entertainment at home or on the go.

With everything from the latest TV series and classic movies to live football – there's something for everyone to enjoy!

The front-firing speakers do pretty well with both movies and music.

### Battery and storage

The Vodafone Smart Platinum 7 comes with a long lasting 3,000mAh battery. This will get all but the heaviest users through a full day.

Once it does run low, the support for Quick Charge 3.0 means you'll be up-and-running in just 30 minutes by using the supplied charger.

The Smart Plat 7 has 32GB of storage which is pretty much standard. You can boost that by another 128GB via microSD if should you need more.

### Smart Platinum 7 review conclusion

Vodafone should be pretty pleased with themselves. The Smart Platinum 7 is a real jewel in the own-brand crown.

It looks and feels great and it does not skimp on the spec sheet either.

(SIM-free).

As mentioned before, the Red Value Bundle is £30 per month for 24 months with no upfront cost. That gives you 2GB of data, unlimited texts and calls including roaming. You also get 6 months at half price.

If you get the 5GB Red Value Bundle (£34 per month) then you get 6 month's subscription to Now TV, Spotify or Sky Sports, Netflix, etc. This entertainment pack is worth £9.99 per month.

**Overall score 8.3**

**Build quality 8.5/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 8/10**

**Value 8.5/10**

# Skullcandy Method Wireless earphones

Ah, January. How many of you have joined a gym or resolved to exercise more than your gaming chair this year? Well, the Skullcandy Method Wireless Sport may well help you through your promised fitness regime.

The Skullcandy Method Wireless Sport earphones are, as you have no doubt already worked out, are Bluetooth earphones designed for sporty types.

They have the now familiar collar design (remember the VerveRider+ earphones?) so that you don't lose your buds when you take them out of your lugholes.

Reading the copy on the Skullcandy site, these have been designed with getting active in mind. How do they hold up though? It's that gadgety review time again folks!

## Method Wireless Sport design

As mentioned, these earbuds come tethered to a 'FlexSport' collar. This collar lightly hugs your neck whilst also sporting all the controls and whatnot.

All the action happens on the left side of the collar. Here you have



the multifunctional Skull button. This works as power on/off, start/stop as well as call answering and hang-up.

This is flanked by + and - buttons which take care of the volume and track skipping duties.

At the end of this arm you'll find the USB charging port. There are also microphone slots for your hands-free calling.

Along the top of the collar is a recess for the earphone cables. This is a pretty neat cable tidy for when you're not using the Method earbuds. At least this should prevent any nasty tangled messes when you need to wear them again. Not only that, if you don't need all the cable for the buds to reach your ears, just take out what you need.

At the business end of the buds you get a choice of some small or medium tips. These sport

Skullcandy's 'Dual Lock' fit. This comprises of their special 'Sticky Gels', as seen on the XTfree, which are specially shaped to stay put.

The earphone housing is also sweat-resistant. In fact, the whole unit is protected by the 'Pureclean' system because who wants to smell their previous workout?

## Method Wireless performance

So, the Skullcandy Sport Method Wireless earbuds are water and sweat resistant. The earphones are attached to the 'Flexsport' collar by 3 feet of cable.

These will stay paired to your device up to 30-feet away so no need to carry your phone around the gym with you from station-to-station.

Skullcandy claim up to 9 hours playtime from a single charge and I would say I have been getting around that.

## Sound quality

Sound quality is pretty much what I have come to expect from Skullcandy now.



# Skullcandy Method Wireless earphones



Overall it's fairly balanced, albeit with that slight lean to low mids.

At first I thought the bass was distorting on more low-biased tracks but this rectified itself after a few hours of playing. This was either the buds getting settled or I had them pushed in too far.

Whatever the reason, the bass is certainly there and the Methods proved to be equally adept with any genre I threw at them.

Dave Lombardo's double-kick thumps convincingly in Slayer's 'Angel of Death' whereas the panned toms in 'Children of the Grave' by Black Sabbath really do cut through.

Electronic music is handled well too with Boris Blank, Jean-Michel Jarre and Kraftwerk being really enjoyable and immersive to listen to.

These might not be banging enough for you bass-hunters out there though. They offer a more even-handed reproduction.

## Comfort and fit

What's impressive about the Skullcandy Sport Method Wireless earbuds is the fit. Because of that, they also provide a good level of isolation.

The earbuds don't fall out of your ears and they are nice and soft.

One of the major advantages of these collar-style Bluetooth

earphones is that the weight is distributed throughout the device.

This enables them to have a much longer battery life than, say, the XTfree without compromising comfort and the buds staying put.

My only niggle with these collar-style earphones is when I have my hair down. Granted, if I was working out I'd have it tied up so this would not be an issue.

However, wearing these on the commute with a collared shirt and long hair to feed it under/around can be fiddly. Well, more fiddly than simply plonking on a headset or shoving in some buds.

## Method Wireless Sport review conclusion

Skullcandy Sport Method Wireless earbuds are great if you're after earphones to wear in the gym or

on the track. They might not satisfy the bassheads out there but they have decent reproduction.

Add in 9 hours of battery life from a 30 minute charge, and buds that won't fly out when they feel like it, that's more reasons to check these out.

## Method Wireless Sport price and availability

You can buy the Method Wireless Sport direct from Skullcandy's portal for £45.

They are available in blue (as reviewed) or black with the funky earbud tips.

**Overall score 8.2**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 8.5/10**

**Value 8/10**





# Blink wireless security cameras

**Security cameras are now fairly common. The odd thing is that most Wi-Fi cameras aren't wireless. They need to be plugged in. The Blink system is totally wireless and, in most cases, cheaper than its tethered competitors.**

As all GadgetyNews readers are good boys and girls, I am sure you got quite the tech haul over Christmas. Unfortunately, there are ne'er-do-wells out there who would happily take that stuff from you.

When I was first introduced to Blink what struck me was its apparent simplicity. This system allows for multiple smart cameras to connect via a hub and makes all of them controllable via a single mobile app.

That's all very impressive, but does it actually work?

## Blink design

Each Blink system comprises of a hub (Sync Module) and one or more cameras.

The system I was sent will probably be the most popular one. This is a two-camera set-up and they arrived in their own, individual small, square boxes.

The hub is slightly smaller than the cameras and is just a simple white square with micro USB and Ethernet ports on one edge.

Because you can connect the hub via Ethernet or Wi-Fi, you can place it anywhere in your home. Thankfully, I have a network switch behind my A/V rig so I can give the Sync Module a wired connection. I do like the option for it to be wireless though.

The micro USB port is for power, so you'll need an outlet for it to work. Don't worry though, this is the only bit that requires a cable.

Once plugged in, the hub's small blue light comes on, and eventually the green light right below it comes on as well, signalling the hub is ready to pair with a camera.

The cameras are also white squares. These have transparent front and rear cases and the edges stick out which helps them stand unaided.



Each camera does come with a small stand if you want to adjust the angle of the camera's view. You can see the fitting on the back of the camera above.

They also come with two AA batteries too!

This leads me on to how the Blink cameras are wireless. This is because they run on a pair of batteries. That does mean that you are free to place them wherever you want in your home (waterproof outdoors versions are on their way). On the other-hand, you will have to replace the batteries eventually.

Blink claims the batteries will last a couple of years before you need to change them and, considering the cameras don't continuously record (they only capture and save video when motion is detected), that could well be the case.

## Blink performance

Up until now I have had my Arlo Q camera positioned to cover *most* of the living room.

Having a pair of cameras naturally means I can cover the entire room, or have one upstairs and one downstairs. I did have one in the kitchen window, which is at the front of

my house, to cover my car and the front door but it seemed to have issues with reflections.

## Set up

This was a simple affair. All you need to do is download the companion app and plug in the Sync Module and then it's on to the cameras.

Using the slider on the base of the cameras, load in the bundled batteries. One-by-one, let the app discover the cameras, name them, and then you're away.

Positioning the cameras is also easy as the app allows you to see a live view of the video the camera

# Blink wireless security cameras

is taking so you can aim the lens perfectly.

## Control

After setup, the Blink system can be left alone to monitor your home, just like most security cameras.

You can schedule when the cameras are armed via the app. You can also just go live and see what's happening right now, either through video or a quick snap.

Apparently, Blink also works with Alexa. Unfortunately, when I have tried to add the 'Blink for Home' skill to my system, the search comes up empty. This is a USA-only skill at the moment.

## Blink app

Blink's Android and iOS apps put your camera feeds on the homepage.

You can see a recent image captured from each camera, and tapping on the video icon at the corner of any feed will bring you to a live stream of what's happening in your home.

There's also an image capture icon that takes a photo of the current happenings if you'd rather just see a still image.

When running a live feed there is a speaker on/off icon at the top left of the screen.

It is a shame that you are unable to

record video clips or snap photos while viewing the feed though.

In the top-right corner of the Blink app homepage is a folder icon. This is where you'll find all of Blink's recorded clips.

A blue dot appears on the folder when you have new videos to review, and you can watch them directly in the Blink app. Blue dots also signify which clips you have yet to view.

You can download videos to your smartphone's camera roll so they don't get deleted when you run out of space should you need to.

What really is a feather in Blink's cap is that there is no paid

subscription service. Once you run out of your allocated space the new videos push out the old ones.

That's fair enough really as why would you want to store video clips of you opening the curtains?

Your camera settings are accessed by the cogs opposite the camera's name.

Here you control retrigger times, video capture length, motion detection sensitivity and the rest.

## Scheduling

The scheduler not only allows you to set the days and times, but enables you to set multiple start times for armed and disarmed periods on as many days of the week as you want.

Each time one of those periods starts, the Blink system sends an alert to your smartphone letting you know it was "successful."

It is perhaps to best to point out that all of the cameras on your system will follow the same schedule. So, when the one in your living room comes on at night, so will the one in your bedroom.

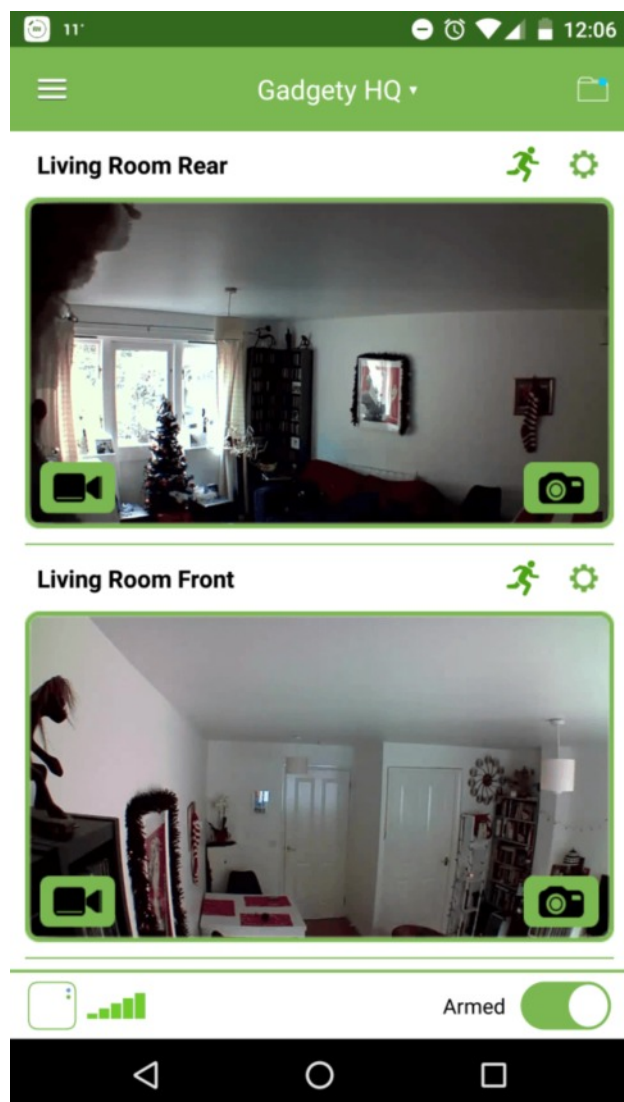
Scheduling is accessed from the drop down menu at the top centre of the app homescreen.

Here you can see the settings for other systems that you have access to.

## Recording

When a camera is triggered through motion detection, you are pinged a smartphone alert.

Blink cameras only detect and alert you to motion, not noises (like the Arlo). They do record audio though, so all your clips will have sound.



# Blink wireless security cameras

The video they record is 720, not 1080p like some of its competitors. Saying that though, both audio and video quality of recorded clips are good enough for you to see and hear what's happening in your home. Also, 1080p would take up more space too.

The camera that's capturing the moment will display a blue LED. The cameras record clips from five to 60 seconds in length, and you can watch clips in the app.

If the cause of the motion continues to move around, the cameras will record multiple clips. There is a bit of lag between clips but the point of the capture is just to a) alert you that something/someone is moving around your home and b) to snatch a glimpse of the perp to hand to the rozzers/po-po/5-0/police.

Night-vision comes by way of a very bright LED. Not the subtle combination of infrared lights and/or discrete LEDs.

Creeping in to the kitchen for a sneaky snack I was surprised by the bright, what I thought was a torch, light. If I were a burglar, I would have known instantly that someone was watching me. Hopefully this would act as a deterrent rather than simply, covertly capturing a crime.

## Notifications

You get a notification every time your system is triggered. This can be annoying if your flatmate/other half is still at home when your system goes live but you can easily disarm it remotely.

What I have found on my mobile (Nexus 6P running Android 7.1.1 Nougat) is that, upon tapping my

notification, when the Blink app opens I just get a black screen.

I am assuming this is because the camera is still capturing. However, when I go to the filed videos, I can view the stored version without issue.

## Sharing

You can easily send your captured videos via email, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

At the left of the camera icon is the Share button. I've tried sharing via Whatsapp but that wasn't having it.

Just to note, you can trash the clip via the bin icon on the right-hand side.

## Overall

The app is basic, but in all the right ways. Most people looking for such a system will be wanting 'simple yet effective', and the Blink is certainly that.

It has all the necessary bases covered. Can it capture clear video? Yes. Can you make multiple schedules throughout the day? Yes. Does it store captured footage? Yes. Are you able to view the areas live? Yes. Can you take a live snapshot? Yes.

Most importantly is that you are not constrained by where your power points are.

## Blink wireless camera review conclusion

Blink makes monitoring the rooms in your home much easier than similar systems I have tried.

I like the fact that you can keep on adding cameras to your network easily and without breaking the bank.

I would like to be able to schedule cameras to activate at different times though. If/when the external Blink cameras join the ranks, I would assume people would monitor the outside of their homes in a different way to the inside.

Also being able to 'draw' active zones would be a neat addition, especially if your camera(s) have a window in their field of view.

I guess having a separate 'System' would enable this but that would involve another hub as well as camera.

60 seconds of video capture is plenty and the fact you don't have to pay for storage is a bonus.

If you're looking for a great multi-camera security system, I can happily recommend Blink for ease and value. I look forward to Alexa integration making its way to the UK too!

## Blink wireless camera system price and availability

The systems start at £110 for a single camera kit which includes the Sync Module and batteries. Extra cameras can be added at £90 each.

The two camera system as reviewed is £190.

**Overall score: 8.3**

**Build quality** 8/10

**Design** 8.5/10

**Ease of use** 8.5/10

**Performance** 8/10

**Value** 8.5/10



# Elipson Alpha 100 RIAAT BT turntable

**Elipson launched a range of turntables last year. Recently we've been living with the Elipson Alpha 100 RIAA BT turntable.**

Up until recently I only really knew Elipson for their rather funky speakers. Then, in February last year, news came by way of our audio partners over at Hifi Pig, that they were unleashing some record players.

The lovely French folk over at Elipson have been kind enough to send over one of their Alpha 100 RIAA BT deck. This not only promises to spin your vinyl but brings things right up to date thanks to the inclusion of a phono preamp, Bluetooth transmitter and a USB port for digitising your analogue tunes.

## Elipson Alpha 100 design

The Elipson Alpha 100 does look really nice.

The overall impression is one of understated coolness.

Dressed in black there are minimalist chic flashes of silver: on the tonearm and the rather natty speed selector switch.

The tonearm is an in-house designed OTT (Orbital Torsion Tonearm)

type. It is comprised of a brushed aluminium tube and PVC headshell. These two components are fused together.

It is equipped with an antiskating system created by the torque of an internal cable. A wheel, located on top of the antiskating system, can be used to make adjustments when

changing the cartridge.

The cutely undersized platter is constructed from pressed steel with a sub-chassis made of PVC. This is driven by an MSD motor. The motor is separated from the rest of the sub-chassis by a mechanical suspension system and is regulated by an ASC (Auto Speed Control) card. The card generates a precise frequency in order to maintain a consistent rotation speed.

You select 33 and 45 rpm via the rather satisfyingly tactile switch. It is also possible to play 78 rpm records.

To do this you have to start the turntable at 45 rpm, and stop the rotation for few seconds before starting playback in 45 rpm mode once again. It is also necessary to change the cartridge.

The turntable comes loaded with an Ortofon OM10 cartridge. The cartridge is pre-installed and set-up at the factory.

All you have to do to start spinning your discs is strap on the drive belt.

## Elipson

## Alpha 100 performance

### Set-up

As just mentioned, the Alpha 100 is pretty much ready to go out of the box. Anti-skating, bias weight, tracking, the whole lot is pre-set for you.

Your main decision is how you are going to connect it to your system.

You see, you have a few options of how to integrate the turntable in to your Hi-Fi rig. You could take the RCA cables from the deck and plug it in to your amplifier.

Remember, there's no need for a phono stage. In fact, expect a highly overdriven noise-fest if you shove it in to your amp's phono input; pretty standard stuff, really.

Or, you can flick on your Bluetooth receiver (in my



# Elipson Alpha 100 RIAAT BT turntable

case the Musical Fidelity V90 Blu) and pair it with the Alpha 100. Yup – you are playing records wirelessly through your Hi-Fi!

If you are just starting out then you can, of course, link the turntable with any Bluetooth speaker. I had it running in to the Allocacoc audioCube as well as the Monitor Audio Airstream (gold version review to follow soon folks!).

## Operation

It is nice to have a switch to select the speed instead of having to lift the platter off and alter the belt (as on my Pro-ject 1 Xpression).

The trade-off though is that there is no lowering lever. This did, however, take me back to my first record players that were part of 80s and 90s Midi systems.

## Review kit

Just in case you wanted to know, this is what the Elipson Alpha 100 was connected to for this review.

### Wireless

Alpha 100 → Musical Fidelity V90 Blu → Chord C-series RCA cable → Arcam irDAC → Chord Shawline RCA → Musical Fidelity M6si → Chord Epic Twin speaker cable → Tannoy Mercury V1i speakers



### Wired

Alpha 100 → supplied phono cable → Musical Fidelity M6si → Chord Epic Twin speaker cable → Tannoy Mercury V1i speakers

## Sound quality

I kicked things off with Metallica's latest offering, 'Hardwired to Self-Destruct'. This has all the hallmark traits of what has kept me a fan even through their less... impressive moments.

Lars' kicks power through and the percussion has depth. Guitars cut through convincingly and the vocals are clear and edgy. There is no hint at the sound being over-clinical, even when streaming via

Bluetooth. In fact, the only major difference is that Bluetooth comes through a little louder when A/B-ing between channels on the M6si.

Moving on to Marillion's 'Season's End' displayed how clean and open the sound is. Details from the synthesisers, and clean guitars weave around in their own space allowing the bass line to work its magic.

Steve Hogarth's vocals come through with plenty of expression. The instruments are nicely textured with a liveliness I was not expecting from this TT.

I enjoyed the overall transparency that the Alpha presented. Even through Bluetooth there was no noticeable attempt to fake the characteristics associated with classic decks with this modern turntable. I am sure it must have been tempting to use modelling software to mimic, say, Thorens, Rega or even Michell.

The mids and bass range are handled nicely and even the top-end comes through clearly without any harshness. It is not analytical or clinical but a rather pleasantly warm sound.





# Elipson Alpha 100 RIAAT BT turntable

I was receiving a nicely balanced performance with most of my records. I did notice that some sparkle was lost from singer/songwriter performances such as Joe Gideon's 'Vice Versa'. Saying that, I am comparing this with how I heard the album played on my Pro-ject loaded with an Ortofon higher up the ladder.

## Ripping

An added bonus that the Alpha 100 RIAA BT has is its ability to digitise your records.

Simply by connecting my laptop to the turntable via USB I was able to record albums straight to MP3. The quality is good, but will ultimately depend on what software you use and rate you copy at.

I really do like having this option to archive records, especially the ones I've owned for a while. Most new LPs will come with download codes.

## Elipson Alpha 100 review conclusion

The Elipson Alpha 100 has a clean and elegant design. Let's face it,



the French do have a penchant for stylishness.

There is a little volume bump going from analogue connection to Bluetooth, but that might be down to the boxes in my chain.

It was that sense of timing and dynamics that set the AT-LP5 apart when first we heard it, and which shows up the slight weakness in the Elipson Alpha 100 RIAA.

Yes, there are cheaper Bluetooth turntables as well as those with USB ports. But I dare say that the

Elipson performs better than many as a stand-alone deck.

Add in to the mix that all you really need to get started is the Alpha and a Bluetooth speaker, that has to be a bonus for some!

I was amazed by the detailed and honest sound. The Alpha 100 looks great, is ready to use out of the box and I am sure will please anyone that buys one. I am happy to recommend the Elipson Alpha 100 RIAA BT to everyone, especially those looking to get (back) in to vinyl.

## Elipson Alpha 100 price and availability

There are a range of Alpha 100 turntables. The one reviewed here is the Alpha 100 RIAA BT which comes in at £399 from Amazon and Hi-Fi retailers.

**Overall score 8.4**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 9/10**

**Performance 8.5/10**

**Value 8/10**





# Q Acoustics M3 soundbar

**After I was told about the Q Acoustics M3 soundbar I had to see if I could check it out for you good people.**

The M3 soundbar looks to improve on the company's Media 4 unit. For all intents and purposes it certainly looks like they've managed it.

What I wanted to find out was whether or not its beauty is only skin deep.

Read on and see what I think.

## M3 soundbar design

The M3 cuts a rather more dashing silhouette, I think we can all agree on that. The Media 4 wasn't ugly but this latest model looks to have employed a stylist.

The design is sleeker and it sits on a fitted brushed aluminium stand. The stand gives the bar an almost floating appearance. More importantly, as it is part of the design, there's no construction required.

The stand also doubles as a wall mount bracket. Which is nice.

You also get extra features compared to its sibling. The M3 brings HDMI input with Audio Return Channel (ARC) support. This means that you can feed sound from the TV directly into it and sync up control so you need use only one remote.

The usual array of inputs are all present and correct too. There's Optical in (which can support up to 24-bit/96kHz music files), Aux in, RCA in and, of course,

wireless audio streaming via built in Bluetooth aptX.

There is also a user adjustable EQ option so you can choose from predefined EQ settings to tailor the sound to your needs.

Build quality feels suitably sturdy and the finish classy.

## M3 soundbar performance

The M3's svelte and slippery shape is all the more impressive when you take in to account it houses the same large elliptical subwoofer driver from the Media 4 in the back of the unit. You have probably noticed the lack of an external sub in this set-up.

Two BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) drivers handle the left and right channels.

All of that is squeezed in to a beautiful body that measures 70mm x 1000mm x 125mm (HxWxD).

For those wanting to stream songs wirelessly from their many smart

devices, aptX Bluetooth makes the process fast and painless. The button is hidden on the back of unit but in the same area as the main bank of buttons.

The LED around the bar's power button lights up with different colours depending on the input used: purple for HDMI, white for optical, blue for aptX Bluetooth, and green for line in. The top control buttons are responsive and nice to use.

The M3 comes with a tiny credit card-style remote. It's a no-frills affair but actually does everything it needs to.

## Sound quality

Kicking things off with Iron Man 3, I was impressed by just how big the sound from this single unit is. I am used to a Panasonic SC-HTB485 bar and woofer so was expecting to miss some of the low-end with the M3.

If anything, when pushed at volume, there might be too much bass for this bar.



## Q Acoustics M3 soundbar

Flicking over to Deadpool and fight-scenes, gun shots and heads-hitting-metal all ring through convincingly.

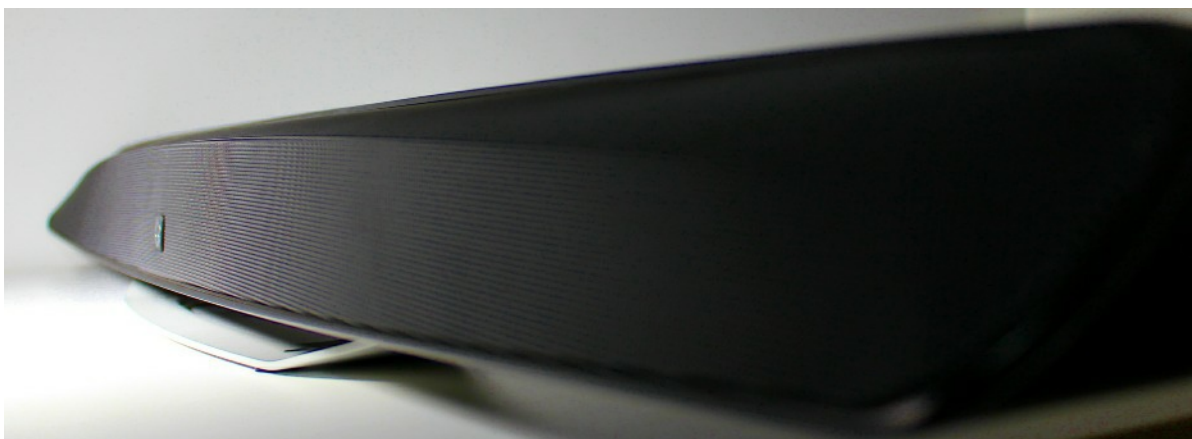
Dialogue is clear and upfront, too.

Handy when dealing with the sarcasm and dry wit of Ryan Reynolds.

Moving on to Nine Inch Nails and the 'And All That Could Have Been' DVD. The M3 handles itself admirably but its blooming bass and low-mids occasionally muddies the otherwise sharp response.

Cymbals, high synths and, thanks to aforementioned movies, breaking glass are all sharp and clear.

Am I expecting too much from an all-in-one? Perhaps, but I am aware of how well received the Media 4 was and was looking forward to the M3 building on that.



### M3 soundbar review conclusion

There is no doubt that the M3 from Q Acoustics is capable. It fires dialogue and effects powerfully and clearly. Explosions and gunshots ring through and soundtracks sound large.

To my ears though it sounds to like there needs to be some better separation between the mids and the low-end. Try to push this bar and things can get a little muddled and confused.

I do like how it looks and the one-piece design is cool. I think a little EQ tweak could make this a winner.

### M3 soundbar price and availability

You can buy the M3 now from Amazon for £300 or direct from Q Acoustics. You can also get more information at the Q Acoustics website.

**Overall score 8.3**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 9/10**

**Performance 8/10**

**Value 8/10**





# Emicro One electric scooter

**I've spent the week being a hazard to myself and others thanks to the loan of an Emicro One powered scooter.**

I've never been good at skateboarding. So, in the early 80s, I was a BMX rider. However, Micro Scooters has noticed a growing trend and has birthed a version for those who want more speed but without the extra effort. Please welcome the Emicro One powered scooter.

When I was asked to review this electric scooter I was excited. Perhaps a little too excited for a man of my years.

To be honest, I was expecting something with a throttle that would power me effortlessly through the pedestrian masses. I was wrong. The Emicro One works in a similar way to those power-assisted bikes. Basically, for the effort you put in, you get a lot more in return. This also makes hills less of an issue.

So, what did I think about it?

## Emicro One design

Chances are, you've seen kids blazing up and down the pavements on their scooters. Well, this one looks pretty much like one of those, but bigger; and more black.

Just like the kid's models the company sells, this scooter can be folded when you need to store it or

carry it on to the tube, for example.

The main difference in design between the Emicro One and the



less adult versions is the height the handle bars can go up to and the size of the foot-plate.

Folding is taken care of by pressing buttons at the base of the handlebar stem after unlocking a latch.

The handlebars are also locked in by a latch as well as a locking button.

I do like the fact that this has a little kick-stand too. Very handy when stopping off for a refreshing beverage.

The brake, just as on other scooters, is a rear mudflap that you heel down on. There's even tech here as, just like Grand Prix cars, regenerative braking helps recharge the One's battery.

So, the tech bits. As I mentioned, there is no throttle to squeeze or twist. There's actually no real evidence that this is an electric scooter until you look really closely.

The only giveaway is four LED lights on the foot-plate that tell you how much charge you've got left. This only lights up when you're using it.

The other hint is the fact that it's not as light as you'd expect a regular model to be. It only weighs 7.5kg (16lbs) but that feels hefty if you're not prepared for it. The scooter is light enough to carry on to public transport though.

The One does a decent job of looking grown-up (that's coming

from a rock musician though), whilst retaining that juvenile sense of fun.

Marked proudly with 'Swiss Engineering', the Emicro One is certainly well built.

## Emicro One performance

As previously stated, this scooter electrically assists your scooting so be prepared to scoot.

That said, the Emicro One does give you a decent boost.

To activate the power assist just tap the brake three times with your foot. Do the same again in order to deactivate.

Once you've pushed off and the electric motor kicks in your scoots can be less frequent as the distance covered in between them has been increased.

You'll soon be overtaking pedestrians with very little effort.



# Emicro One electric scooter

Kinda like cars, the One has three performance programmes to dial in from the 500W motor: Eco, Standard and Sport.

- Eco mode – 250 Watt – 15 km/h
- Standard mode – 250 Watt – 25 km/h
- Sport mode – 500 Watt – 25 km/h

As you can see, the modes limit the maximum speed of the support and the maximum power of the motor.

So, select Eco and you can cover more distance on a single charge but your assisted top speed will be lower.

Not that distance is a major problem, as this electric scooter has a range of around 12km on a single charge. Using it to commute should give you a couple of days without having to plug it in. Even if you do have to charge it, you're back up and running within 60-minutes of plugging it into the wall.

It's probably also worth remembering that, even with a flat battery, you can still scoot manually.

## Let's rock!

Once used to the addition of power assisted scooting, it gets really fun.

You see, not only does it take less effort; you don't even need to scoot all the time. Once cruising you can keep your speed up just with the occasional light push, or by simply shifting your body-weight forwards in a kind of rocking motion.

The thing is, with size 10 feet in boots, finding space on the footplate wasn't always relaxing.

Even if I kept my back foot with its heel hovering over the break space is at a premium.

Most of the time, the 25kmh (over 15mph) was plenty for me as this feels quite fast on two little wheels.

The scooter seems to recognise when you're going uphill and adjusts the power output accordingly to compensate.

## Power delivered

I did enjoy that added power boost. Once I got my skill and confidence levels up I was soon (safely) weaving my way through quiet suburban areas and pedestrian precincts.

I must declare that the use of electric scooters, since the hoverboard issues, is not entirely legal on pavements. No one will be able to really tell, apart from the whine given out by the motor. But best to give the break three little taps and disengage though.

Smooth was how I'd describe the power delivery. Smooth is also the kind of surface that works best. There is some give from the dual core wheels but a lot of shocks are still fed right up from the wheels to the handlebars and deck. Just like any other scooter, really.

## Emicro One review conclusion

This thing is fun! As you can see in the video of my first attempt, I started off quite unsure. However, it doesn't take long before you're nipping up and down confidently.



Be prepared for some quizzical looks though. Even in hipster-central, I got some odd looks. Perhaps it was because I was wearing a biker jacket whilst pushing an electric scooter around?

I did enjoy overtaking kids, as well as some cyclists – and I'm not even that competitive.

The handlebar post is only just long enough for me; I am just over 6 feet tall (1.89 meters). I would also prefer a little more room on the deck.

At the end of the day, I really had a blast. I would actually now be tempted to get one but, there's the issue of price.

## Emicro One price and availability

The Emicro One is available now direct from Micro Scooters and costs £750.

That's slightly too rich for my blood but if I was looking to buy a Brompton, for instance, it could be tempting.

**Overall score 8.2**

**Build quality 8.5/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 8/10**

**Performance 8/10**

**Value 8/10**

# Roth VA4 active speakers with phono

**British audio company, Roth, have been around for a few years now and GadgetsNews has been asked to check out their active VA4 speakers. These may be of interest to those with not much space but want a compact set-up for their new turntable.**

Having lived in London for over a decade now, I know how important space is. I have lived in some tiny flats as well as just renting a room in one.

The Roth VA4 piqued my interest as they have a range of connectivity options (including phono), a good price and look pretty cool too.

## Roth VA4 design

The speakers come in a choice of gloss red, white or black frontage. The white ones I have here look rather classy I think.

The rest of the cabinet is finished in a dark woodgrain effect.

They come loaded with a 4-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter each.

The dust covers detach to reveal the drivers. I prefer speakers this way, but covers are always handy if you have little ones with inquisitive digits.

Overall, both speakers

weight in at 5.6kg and they are 22cm high x 14cm wide x 17 cm deep apiece.

Around the back, the VA4 is equipped with a switchable phono/analogue RCA input, so that you can just simply plug in your turntable.

Also, for line-level sources, such as a CD player, the same connection is used, with the switch set to 'Line'.

Alternatively, the optical digital input or the 3.5mm stereo input can be used.

For those that require a contemporary connection, the VA4 also supports Bluetooth with aptX, enabling the streaming of music wirelessly from smartphones, tablets, computers or Bluetooth turntables such as the Elipson Alpha.

For larger rooms, the 'Sub Out' enables the connection of a sub-woofer.

The system includes a remote control that offers source-selection, volume up and down, tone adjustment and standby mode.

Bluetooth devices can also be controlled with play/pause, previous, next and pairing.

Completing the feature set, a USB charging socket is also provided, allowing users to charge their devices as they stream.

## Roth VA4 performance

The speakers dish out 2×40 Watts from its Class D amplifier. This should prove to be plenty for most rooms, especially if you live in London.

### Set up

As with most active speakers, one of them is the master and the other the slave. The master not only has all the inputs at the rear, but is fitted with the infra red receiver and status lights.

Getting everything sorted is simple. Plug the mains lead in and run the bundled speaker cable from the master to the slave.

If you have a regular MM turntable, then use your normal RCA leads to plug in to the VA4s.

As I still have the natty Elipson I have tested the speakers both wired and wirelessly. There is a line level input





# Roth VA4 active speakers with phono

dial at the back to boost the input signal to the Line in RCA if needed.

The remote isn't fancy but does everything it should. When pairing Bluetooth remember to select Bluetooth on the remote, and then pair. Something that, in my haste, confused me a little.

## Sound quality

The sound from both the Elipson Alpha and my Pro-Ject 1 Xpression are surprisingly detailed.

I am not going to compare it with my main rig but, if I had a choice between the VA4 + Elipson or my early 90s midi system, then the new kids would certainly win.

The VA4 are quite at home on stands or in a more compact scenario. To be honest, I can see them being used in the latter more – perhaps *not* that close to a record player though.

Having a USB charging point at the back of the speaker is a nice touch when streaming from your mobile.

Digital sources come through clearly, as expected. It was the addition of a phono stage though that really adds focus to where Roth are aiming these speakers.

On that score, they are plenty capable. They might not be a sure-footed as more expensive speakers, but that's only to be expected.

They handled Helloween's 'I Want Out' 12-inch

single at a volume befitting of the German happy thrashers.

Fleetwood Mac's 'Rumours' was treated with more empathy than I was expecting, to be .

The mids and highs were punchy and crisp, but the low-end seemed a little heavy-handed in places. However, this played right in to the hands of more dance and chart music.

## Roth VA4 review conclusion

I realise that there will be those out there decrying having your analogue source bounced digitally to your speakers as this negates the whole point of vinyl. The thing is, some places I have lived I've had

to run loads of speaker cable from my amp in order to get 'regular' speakers linked to my Hi-Fi. This is also an audiophile no-no. The thing is, most rooms not being designed as listening dens and if you're renting, it's just



something you have to work around.

But the analogue sound is only part of the physical experience. The album art, sleeve notes, handling the media, having to flip it over at half-time. The sound of the needle when it first touches the record surface. All these factors are still in play. Even the crackles and pops.

The Roth VA4 are compact, potent, flexible and a great way to listen to your LPs and singles if space is an issue.

I can certainly see these appearing in bedrooms and bedsits alike.

## Roth VA4 price and availability

The VA4 speakers cost £199 and are available direct from Roth as well as Amazon.

For more information, head over to the Roth site.

**Overall score 8.2**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 8/10**

**Value 8.5/10**





# SteelSeries QcK+ Limited gaming mat

Over the years I have used many mouse pads and, more recently, gaming surfaces. Those lovely people over at SteelSeries sent GadgetyNews one of their natty-looking QcK+ Limited surfaces to check out.

After covering the news about the release of the QcK Limited pads at the end of last year, we knew we just had to try one out.

Just like skimping on cheap tyres on an expensive car, ignoring the importance of a good surface for your gaming mouse after spending a fair chunk of cash on your PC and monitor is easily done.

The thing is, whilst seeming like a minor point, it's an important one. A smooth, hassle-free surface can improve your aim and help you dominate your chosen gaming arena.

Does the SteelSeries newest QcK pads perform? There's only one way to find out.

## QcK+ Limited design

As the name suggests, the QcK+ Limited is a larger version of the QcK Limited. This measures 45cm by 40cm compared to the smaller version that comes in at 32cm by 27cm.

The mat is 3mm thick and features a micro-woven cloth surface with a higher thread count than the original QcK line. This makes a more flexible surface which is suitable whether you use an optical or laser mouse.

If you're still using a ball mouse... perhaps we should have a chat



The surface sports a neat black and white geometric pattern. This ties in nicely with the design on the headband wrap of their awesome-looking SteelSeries Arctis headsets.

The bottom left corner rocks the company's logo, and the outside edge features black stitching to prevent the material from fraying. This is something that my current desk surface mat could have done with.

Flipping the mousepad over you'll see the non-slip rubber backing. This is also emblazoned with the SteelSeries logo.

## QcK+ Limited performance

I bought a pair of budget Perixx DX1000 surfaces to protect my shared office desk as well as it providing a surface for our mice. That was only three years ago. That mat has started to discolour as well as fray at the edges.

My Nova Winner II micro optic mat is still pretty good but I find I prefer the soft surfaces much more friendly. Also, I am less likely to

run the mouse off of one of these surfaces mid-game.

Using a SteelSeries Rival 700 mouse I went about seeing just how well it tracks.

I should be able to find improvements over my aging surface as SteelSeries says that the micro-woven surface of these pads was tested by the sensor manufacturer that SteelSeries uses. I am assuming they mean Pixart.

The thing is, they don't say just how they tested it.

## Testing

I started off by setting the CPIs on the Rival 700 to 1000 and 3000. It's handy having a mouse that can take these kinds of presets, especially as I can flick between them on the fly.

At all settings the mouse tracked perfectly no matter where it was placed, and no matter how small or large the movements were.

Getting a bit braver I ramped up the settings to what I call 'bonkers mode'. The DCPI is now ramped up to 16000 on the second setting.

When compared to my gaming surface as well as the gaming

# SteelSeries QcK+ Limited gaming mat



I am going to wrap this up by saying that the QcK+ certainly looks and feels like a quality gaming surface. My mouse moved effortlessly over it and I am sure some might even find it more accurate. For a relatively small outlay when compared to your other gaming kit, I would recommend the QcK+ as I am

mousepad, the results were the same.

I found that the tracking differed minimally between the surfaces, if I am totally honest. This could be more down to the extremely accurate sensor in the Rival 700 though.

Where I did find the thread count making a difference, however, was in how smoothly the mouse moved.

Going back to my original surface, the mouse actually felt heavier, and not as quick to react. The rubbery mouse pad also didn't feel as slick, or as comfortable to use either.

These findings were even more apparently when making smaller movements with the mouse in editing utilities and the like.

This all must be due to the high thread count in the SteelSeries QcK+ Limited. As there are smaller / fewer gaps between the threads this makes a much

smoother surface for the mouse to glide over.

## SteelSeries QcK+ Limited review conclusion

I cannot deny that the QcK+ Limited mouse pad did make for a more comfortable gaming surface than my other pads. Also, the ease at which the mouse glides across the surface did make for seemingly faster and smoother movements.

The stitching around the edges will surely add to the mat's longevity and I am keen to see how this pans out. I also liked the geometric design. The fact that it goes well with my mostly white kit is just a lucky coincidence.

I am not sure how much better the tracking is using the QcK+ and this might be more apparent with a mouse lesser than the Rival 700 or even my much-loved Corsair M65.

sure it will also last longer than many of its competitors.

## SteelSeries QcK+ Limited price and availability

You can log your interest and get notified when the SteelSeries QcK+ is available. It will cost £21.99.

If the 17.7- x 15.75- x 0.12-inches of the plus is too much, the QcK Limited (12.6- x 10.6- x 0.12-inches) can be yours for £14.99.

**Overall score 8.8**

**Build quality 8.5/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 10/10**

**Performance 9/10**

**Value 8/10**



# Tile Mate Bluetooth tracker

**I have had a Tile Bluetooth tracker attached to both my house keys and car keys since last year. We have now been sent the latest generation: The Tile Mate.**

In my review of the Tile trackers I did remark that it was larger than I expected it to be. Well, Tile has since then come up with the Slim and the Mate.

The Slim is designed to be slipped in to purses, wallets and the like. The Mate, however, takes over from where the original Tile left off.

Has this shrinking diminished its powers though?

## Tile Mate design

The Tile Mate is a direct successor to last year's Tile, and it refines the design rather nicely.

It's around 25% smaller and lighter than the original model.

I think it actually looks better than the original too.

The Tile logo is now in a silver circle on the front.

Instead of being all white, the rear of the Tile Mate is a pale grey.

I am still unsure of white as a colour for something that spends its time in and out of pockets and bags though.

After almost 6 months use, my original Tiles do look used.

The silver button makes it far easier to see where to press to wake up the tile, which is handy from a design point of view.

## Tile Mate performance

Even though this tiny Tile is more pocket-friendly, it still works in the same way.

For most of its time, the Tile will just sit there quietly. The white plastic tag sipping away at its 12 months, or so battery life. The battery is still non-replaceable/non-rechargeable.

The app is still just as easy to use.

## Tile app

Opening up the Tile app you are greeted by your list of Tiles and their last known locations.

It even shows you a picture of which Tile version is attached to what. As you can see, I now have the little Tile Mate looking after my car keys.

If you happen to not recall where you last had your keys, but are pretty sure they're still in the vicinity, then tap the 'Find Tile' button in the app.

This will trigger your Mate to play a jaunty and surprisingly loud jingle until you tell it to stop.

I am still amazed at how loud these little things are. They are definitely loud enough to hear throughout the home, even if buried in the laundry basket.

If the Tile is out of range, a map shows its location the last time it checked in with your phone, and when.

At that point, you can call on the community for help. Mark a Tile as lost, and everyone with the Tile app suddenly becomes your pro-bono private investigator.

As soon as someone's phone detects the missing Tile, you'll get a notification telling you exactly where to go to continue the search for yourself.

Then, as soon as you're in range, the app will tell you and you can make it sing for your attention.

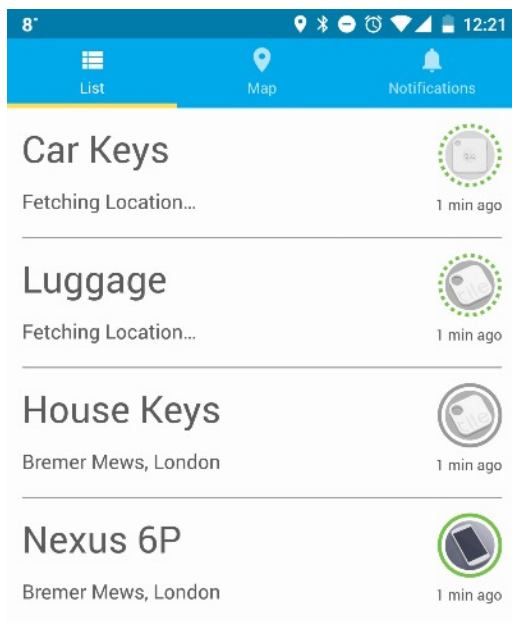
This is something my app did for someone at the start of the year.

This is a neat thing. Obviously, this is reliant on how many





# Tile Mate Bluetooth tracker



Tile app users there are in your area.

## Tile users

Here in London, even in Zone 3, it shows between 900 and 1800 users. When I'm in central London at the day job, this number really increases.

Technically, anybody can download the app and do the hunting for you, but I can't imagine many non-Tile users doing so out of the goodness of their hearts.

The company boasts that there are more than six million Tile units sold worldwide. I'll take those odds.

## Find your phone

Finally, you can also use the Tile in reverse. If you can't find your phone, double-squeeze the Tile logo and your phone will start

ringing, even when it's on silent.

That's no different from using Google's own device manager to do that on Android or the Find my iPhone facility with iOS, but it is a touch more convenient in a pinch.

## Tile Mate review conclusion

Last year the Tile got a score of 8.5 with one of the cons being its size.

The new shrunken version certainly is an improvement in that respect. Unfortunately, the price has grown. Now, this might be due to the Sterling currently swirling around the plug rather than anything to do with Tile. But, this is still a consideration, especially when the Tiles need replacing every year or so.

Tile does offer a discount through its reTile programme. This can get you up to 50% off, according to the site. But you will still have to add this annual running cost in to your budget.

Saying that, the Tile Mate is still a good buy. You just have to treat it like an insurance policy. If you factor in the hundreds or thousands of possible helpers you have at the push of a

button to help find your kit – then the price is a bit easier to swallow.

I am happy that my little Tile army is looking after my keys and stuff and am equally happy to recommend the Tile Mate.

## Tile Mate price and availability

The official Tile site has everything in US Dollars and offers free shipping within that country too.

For UK residents Amazon has the Tile Mate up at £22.95 each or £64.99 for four. The latter deal saves you almost £27, so better than a buy 3 and get the fourth free offer.

**Overall score 8.5**

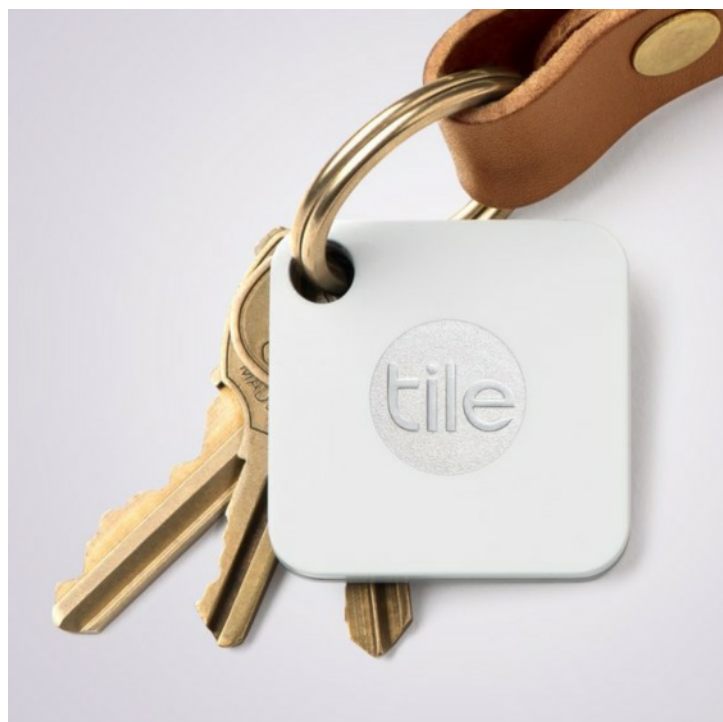
**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 9/10**

**Value 8.5/10**



# TrackR Bravo Bluetooth tracker

**Over the last few weeks my bass has been looked after by the TrackR Bravo.**

You might have seen that I have tested two types of Tile, now it's the time of the TrackR.

There is a fair range of Bluetooth tracking gadgets out there. I can see why though. Just think, for a rather modest outlay you can keep an eye on where your valuable or essential kit is.

I have them on my house and car keys and even have one in my car. As I've had a couple of gigs this month, I've attached the TrackR Bravo to my bass case.

## TrackR Bravo design

The Bravo is a neat looking thing.

The one I have been sent to review is black but there is a multitude of colours to choose from.

It is definitely fob-friendly at 31mm in diameter and just 3.5mm thick.

This tracker has an almost special power – you can replace its battery! Just flick open the side tray and there you have it.

So, unlike many other trackers, the Tile for instance, the Bravo is not a disposable device. This does mean that the Bravo is not waterproof though.

## TrackR Bravo performance

The setup process will be familiar process to most people.

### Set up with the TrackR app

Download the app and then follow the wizard.

This will take you through the step-by-step set up routine.



Once you've successfully connected your Bravo to the app you will be then taken through some tests.

The first one is a range test. Place the TrackR a few feet away and then the app will test the distance.

According to the app my Bravo enjoys a 30 foot range. Yes, there's the usual walls and tech caveat.

After this it's time to test the bleeper.

The app says the ringer on the Bravo is around 82 decibels. It certainly does cut through the background noise pretty well.

### Using the TrackR Bravo

The app is central to the Bravo.

Through this you can name the tag, which is handy if you have more than one.

It also should show you the position of said tag. This is dependant on having your Bluetooth switched on your phone.

The functions all worked as expected. I was able to ping the TrackR from my phone, as well as the other way around. Handily, your phone will ring the TrackR tune even when on silent.

The Tile's stronger signal meant its app could 'see' it from about 50 feet away when inside a house with me standing outside. With the Bravo, the connection was made only when I stepped indoors. This is not a real worry as it should still let me know where the Bravo was

last 'spotted'.

There is also the added bonus of separation alerts. There are two options: your phone can ring when it moves away from the TrackR and / or the TrackR can beep when it is separated from the phone.

I do like the option to use sounds or music from your phone as the alarm. To do this, just select 'Set Custom Alarm Sound'.

Although, the separation alarm doesn't seem to trigger.

This also brings me on to another sticking point.

### Where's my gig bag?

As I mentioned earlier. I've had a couple of gigs with my lovely band this month. I attached the Bravo to one of the external D-rings on my Gruv Gear GigBlade.

I have my Bluetooth on as I use it for hands free as well as music in my car.

# TrackR Bravo Bluetooth tracker



The bass complete with Bravo was on the back seat, so within a few feet of my phone.

I arrived at the venue at 6pm, The Horn in St Albans, set up, hung around, soundchecked and then chilled. We played and watched all the other bands (as everyone should).

Breaking down our gear and loading up the car again I decided to see where the app said my beloved bass was.

Unfortunately, over all those hours of travelling, playing and gear lugging, the app still thought my bass was in North East London.

I refreshed the app and left it for a while. When it had stopped, it was still convinced it was in Walthamstow. More concerning was that the last time it updated was that morning.

I checked Google Maps on the same phone just to check if my GPS was being daft. Well, it knew where I was.

## Crowd GPS

Just like the 'other' tracker, you can call up on other Bravo owners

to help you find your lost kit. with 'Crowd GPS'.

This allows you to employ all the other people running the TrackR app to keep tabs (anonymously) on other TrackRs.

So if you drop your keys and somehow miss the separation alerts, there's a chance another TrackR user will come within range of your Bravo.

If that happens, you'll get an alert showing its rough location.

There appears to be a decent number of users in the vicinity (whether that number is for where I am at work or at home, I'm not sure).

I live and work in London so I am guessing that these numbers may well be lower out in more rural areas.

## TrackR Bravo review conclusion

I intend to continue testing the Bravo but, on first round of testing, it seems that there may be some niggles.

Whether my Nexus 6P isn't playing nicely with the Bravo or it

just doesn't update as regularly as I expect, I hope to find out.

At this point though, I am afraid that the Bravo hasn't performed as expected, and that's a real shame.

I like the idea of the replaceable battery. It looks good and the size is handy.

I am really hoping that it suddenly kicks in to action.

## TrackR Bravo price and availability

You can buy a pair of Bravos from Amazon for £40.

There is a range of multi-buy options as well as a choice of colours: black, rose gold, blue or 'steel'.

You can also find them as single units for £25 at Argos, Very and John Lewis

**Overall score 6.6**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 5/10**

**Value 3/10**



# TASCAM MiNiSTUDIO US-32

You might have heard that I am part of the happy Tech Addicts UK podcast crew. Well, I was asked by the lovely folk at TASCAM to take their MiNiSTUDIO Personal US-32 for a spin.

The MiNiSTUDIO Personal US-32 is a natty looking USB audio interface. It actually boasts to be a complete desktop broadcast studio.

Let's see if it can live up to that very boast shall we?

## US-32 MiNiSTUDIO design

The US-32 is a very compact affair.

It actually only measures 5.11- x 5.9- x 1.57-inches (DxWxH) and tips the scales at a mere 0.84 lbs.

On the top of the unit you'll find a mic input (XLR) as well as a built-in omni mic. There's a digital meter and below those is an input selector switch, input gain and reverb level. I love the nice touch of an 'ON AIR' button which is effectively a mute button when not lit.



There is also a headphone level dial. The next three pads are for the PON (I shall freely admit to not knowing what PON stands for, if anything). These three buttons trigger sound effects. The defaults are a bell, buzzer and applause.

The final button is for voice effects.

Along the front edge are more inputs. These are for regular stereo headphones and then a minijack headphone socket. There's also another mic input (TS mini) and then an external input jack. This is to line in for a tablet or similar.

Finally, at the rear, you'll find the power switch, USB 2.0 port, the power in jack and a slot for Kensington lock. • Phew!

I have to say, even though it packs a load in, it doesn't look scary. In fact, this is the most friendly-

looking audio interface I have seen.

## US-32 MiNiSTUDIO performance Specification

Just because it looks friendly does not mean it isn't packing some serious tech. You get simultaneous I/O 4 x 4 and a sampling frequency of 44.1k/48k/88.2k/96kHz, if you like that kind of thing.

The US-32 is fitted with an excellent mic preamp and onboard sound effects.

It's ready to go straight out of the box, even if you don't own a mic yet thanks to that built-in omnidirectional microphone.

## Software

Through the software package you get access to two levels of tweakage.

You can go the easy route...

This has three dials and then the controls for your PON effects.

The SOUND, EFFECT and REVERB are all preset and it's really down to you and what you need as to how useful these are. To be honest, most podcasts or gamecasts will probably have them set as above.

The expert setting, as you would expect, goes in a bit deeper.

Here you can fiddle with a 4-band parametric EQ and mess with



# TASCAM MiNiSTUDIO US-32



The US-32 itself looks friendly enough for any beginner to approach. The fact that the software can be used in Easy or Expert modes opens the MiNiSTUDIO up to everyone.

Its compact size will not require much desk real estate and the unit seems to be well put together.

Everything is labelled clearly and pretty much self-explanatory. Having an in-built mic is a real nice touch.

I have no qualms in recommending the TASCAM MiNiSTUDIO US-32 to anyone looking to podcast or gamecast

compression as well as still having access to the reverb and mic effects. The difference being you can now trim them to suit.

Here you get a , compression, and reverb in order to make you sound like a professional.

## In use

In true Gadgety style, the instructions stayed in the box as I plugged the US-32 in to my computer. I dug out the TASCAM TM-80 mic, my boom stand, a shock mount and a pop-shield and I was good to go.

Why the rush? Well, this was a Wednesday evening and that's when we record the podcast. I only decided that I'd test the MiNiSTUDIO out a few minutes before air time. Genius.

Thankfully, everything worked intuitively.

This was without really sorting levels or EQ out either. Simply plugging in and hitting that ON AIR button.

To me this sums the US-32 up pretty well. You don't really need any experience with interfaces, soundcards and microphones to get up and started. But, as you learn and understand more, then the US-32 can grow with you.

## MiNiSTUDIO Personal US-32 review conclusion

As I said above, this is truly a plug-n-play get on air device.

## MiNiSTUDIO Personal US-32 price and availability

You can bag a US-32 for £110 on Amazon right now.

**Overall score 8.4**

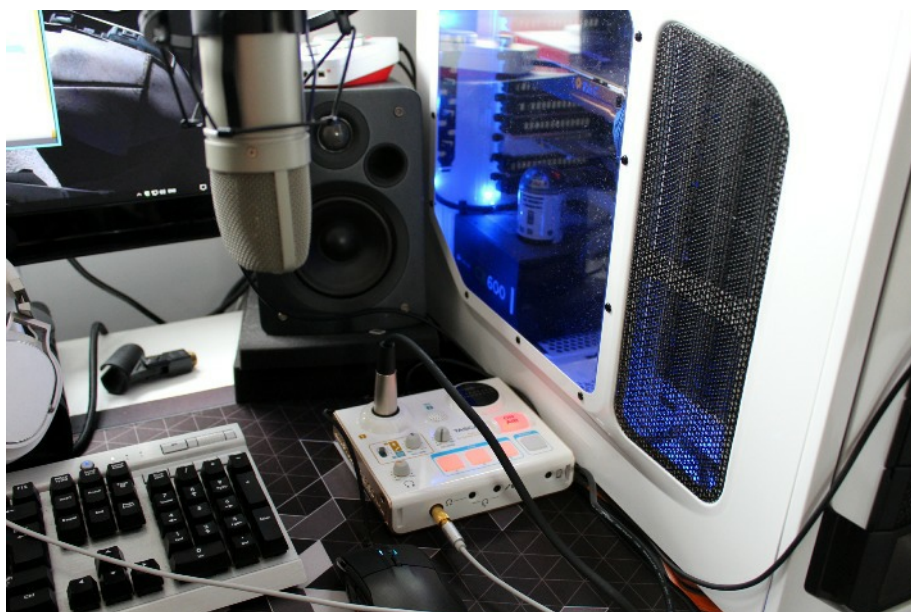
**Build quality 8.5/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 8/10**

**Performance 8.5/10**

**Value 8.5/10**





# Buffalo MiniStation Velocity USB SSD

Buffalo announced a new line of portable SSDs at the end of last year. Well, I have been sent a 240GB version of the SSD-PUSU3 to have a look at.

Having some handy portable storage is always useful. If you cast your mind back you may recall me reviewing the MiniStation Slim by Buffalo not so long ago. That certainly had the storage and size sorted, but not great for you data speed freaks.

Enter this compact drive. Not only are dealing with SSD but also USB 3.1. The SSD-PUSU3 should tick all the boxes then. But, does it?

## MiniStation SSD Velocity design

The MiniStation SSD Velocity actually comes in three different storage capacities: 240GB, 480GB and 960GB.

These compact portable SSDs are built with a durable anodized aluminium casing and are available in black and silver finishes. The one I have here is the silver flavour. Actually, it looks a lot like the MiniStation Slim.



Here they are together, side-by-side.

I don't think that I would be out of line by suggesting that Buffalo has reused the MiniStation Slim case for the SSD Velocity.

The portable SSD tips the scales at 100 grams and, like the

MiniStation, is just 8.8mm thick. The case is sturdy and looks good. It is definitely of a size that you could easily pocket or drop in a bag.

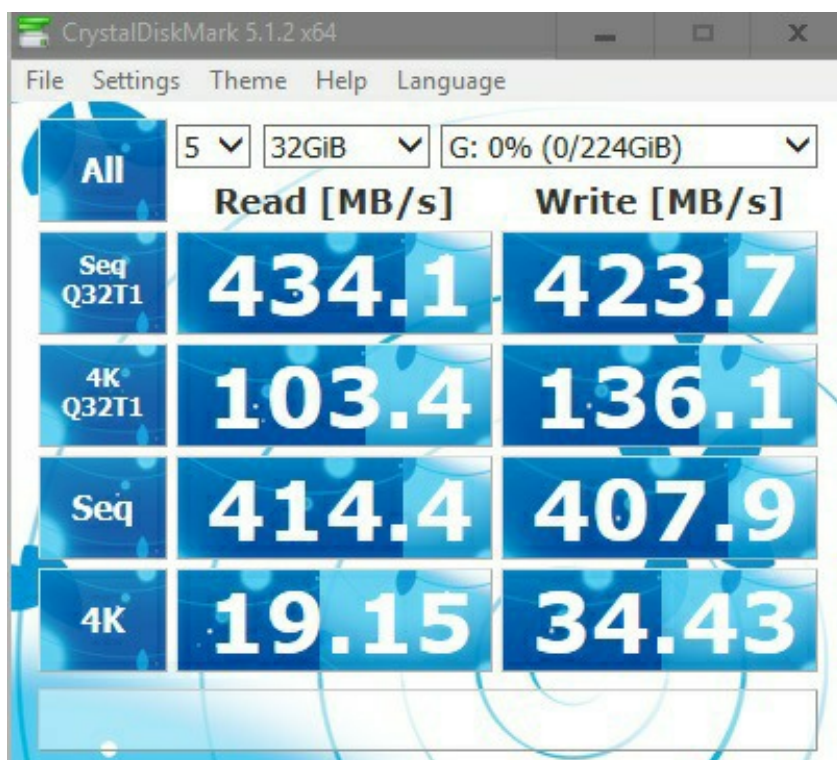
The drive comes with a micro-USB 3.1 (Gen2) connection interface (A to micro B cable & C to micro B cable included).

## MiniStation SSD Velocity performance

According to the literature the portable SSD can deliver maximum read/write speeds of up to 500MB/s and 480MB/s.

I naturally took this to task and, after watching five Radiohead albums ping across in about 2 seconds, decided to use something more scientific.

Enter the trusty CrystalDiskMark application.



This indeed confirmed Buffalo's brags.

This portable drive is really no slouch.

## Boost your phone storage

As it came with a USB C cable I just had to try it with my phone, just in case.

I am so glad I did. My Nexus 6P comes with 32GB of storage. I'm hooked up with Google Drive so my photos get sent over there after a few days. But music storage is an issue.



# Buffalo MiniStation Velocity USB SSD



being able to use it with my phone just makes me love the Buffalo portable SSD even more.

Granted, you would have to *need* rather than just want one at the price. Saying that, I am sure once you have it,

Well, I plugged in the SSD Velocity drive and waddaya know.

This enticing little screen popped up.

Before I knew it I was formatting the little thing to work with my phone.

You know when people say that they couldn't possibly ditch their iPod Classic because of all the space it has...?

Check out my Nexus 6P now

OK, so having your phone attached to a portable drive isn't ideal but if you need to store large files or simply carry a chunk of your digital music library with you as you travel, this is an awesome thing.

Yeah, the USB C also means it will play nice with Macs but, meh. I'm taking a bunch of tunes and

box sets with me to work tomorrow!

## Back up

The drive comes with Buffalo Tools such as eco manager and Secure Lock Mobile (for Windows). Buffalo's Backup Utility that automatically backs up your Windows PC, protecting your data.

It also fully supports Apple Time Machine so Apple owners can also back up multiple Macs.

## MiniStation SSD Velocity review conclusion

This drive is not only handy, but speedy. I already knew that I would like how it looks by playing with the MiniStation before. The bonus of swift data transfer and

you'll not know how you coped beforehand.

## MiniStation SSD Velocity price and availability

You can buy the drive in both colours and all sizes (240GB, 480GB and 960GB) right now.

The 240GB one, as reviewed is currently £170 on Amazon but can be grabbed for £125 inc VAT at Misco, which is an awesome deal.

**Overall score 8.5**

**Build quality 8.5/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 9/10**

**Performance 9/10**

**Value 8/10**



# GadJet Magic Cable: Android and Apple

**One cable to charge them all. Not exactly Lord of the Rings but GadJet has a cable that will charge your iPhone as well as your 'droid.**

The GadJet Magic Cable is an equal opportunities sync/charging cable. No matter if you have a micro USB or Lightning port, this cable will juice your gadge.

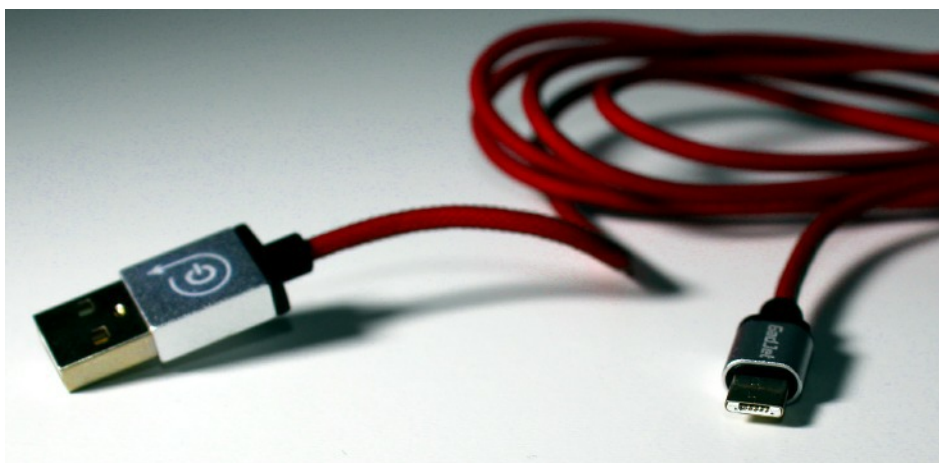
## GadJet Magic Cable design

Whether your main handset is an iPhone or an Android phone, this is something that'll be very useful.

On one end, a standard USB connector; on the other is a jack that works as both a Lightning connector *and* a micro USB connector. This clever configuration means that the tricky end of the cable will fit into an Android phone (or Bluetooth speaker, headset, a tablet, TV stick or anything else) very easily.

As with all micro USB cables, you can only really put it in one way up. It worked well for the devices I tested it with, although Samsung phones seemed to be a bit awkward for some reason.

The design and quality of the 1.2 metre cable and connectors appear to be pretty good. I was sent the red and silver variety, but there's also a black and gold version, should that be more your thing.



## GadJet Magic Cable performance

As the latest iPhones shirk the convenience of a headphone jack, chances are owners will be rocking a Bluetooth headset. This would normally mean they'd have to pack a Lightning cable for the iPhone as well as micro USB to charge their cans. This is no longer the case thanks to this natty cable.

The same goes if you have an Android phone as well as an iPad – or even an iPad and a Bluetooth speaker. Now, instead of multiple cables you just need the one. OK, if you're really unlucky and everything needs charging at the same time you'll be snookered.

### iPhone

Shoving this thing in to an iPhone felt a little wrong. I don't know if it was because it was someone else's phone or that I see iPhones

as delicate little flowers, but it did feel like I was forcing something in to the iPhone that really shouldn't have been going in.

It was all fine. There was no damage to anything and the iPhone charged without incident.

### Android

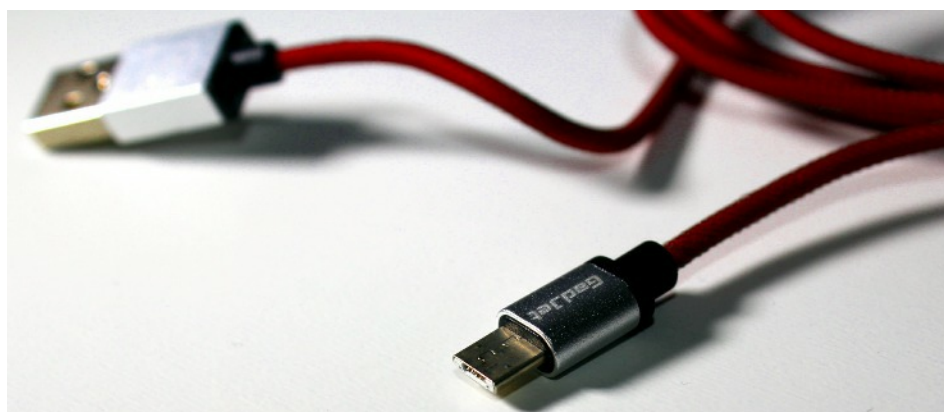
As my Nexus 6P and Honor 8 sport USB C I couldn't test the cable with those. I do, however, have plenty of Bluetooth head/earphones as well as a Shield tablet.

These were all juiced as expected.

## GadJet Magic Cable price and availability

You can pick one of these up for £9.99 with free delivery and a 6 month warranty.

The usual price is £12.99.



**Overall score 8.5**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8.5/10**

**Ease of use 10/10**

**Performance 8/10**

**Value 8/10**

# Toshiba Canvio Premium 3TB HDD

**The Toshiba Canvio Premium is a slick looking portable HDD. It comes bundled with nifty software as well as USB 3.0 and USB Type C connectivity.**

Portable storage is always handy. No matter if it's a requirement for your job or a godsend when traveling.

Of course, cloud storage is all the rage right now but, I for one love the convenience and reliability of a drive at my side.

The Toshiba Canvio Premium offers the best of both worlds. A range of 1, 2 and 3TB portable hard drives with an additional 10TB of cloud storage to boot!

With an attractive price point, as well as good looking package, can the Toshiba Canvio Premium walk the walk?

## Toshiba Canvio Premium design

You are able to choose from 1TB, 2TB, and 3TB variants. I have been kindly sent the 3TB version that also comes with another 10TB of cloud storage. That should keep most people happy.

The Canvio Premium is an attractive aluminium ingot with bevelled edges.

There is a doughnut-shaped read/write light



in one corner. This wins extra points as it's a blue LED. I love blue LEDs!

The case itself measures 109 x 78 x 13.5mm. This means it is fairly chunky but still easily stowed away in a bag. It tips the scales at 165 grams.

The drive comes with a USB 3.0 Type A cable as well as a handy USB 3.1 Type-C adapter.

As well as the cable and adapter you get a nice soft travel pouch to keep the drive safe from damage while on the go.

## Performance

### Software

NTI Backup Now EZ plays nice with both PC and Macs.

With this utility you can set automatic backups to the Canvio Premium or cloud providers.

This is really intuitive to use and could well be something you didn't realise you needed but glad you have.

Something else pre-loaded on to the Canvio is Toshiba Password Lock. Again, this will work with PCs and Macs.

This software will lock the drive, disallowing access to what's stored until a password is entered.

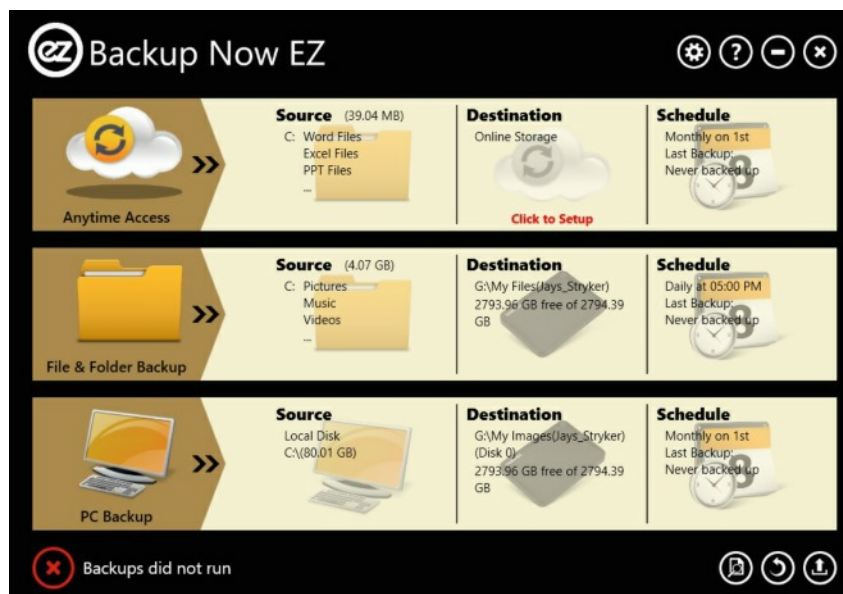
You can set a password hint as well as the self-destruct mode – basically the drive can erase itself if the password is forgotten. There are some government officials that should have had the same

protection.

It all looks dead simple but seems to do as promised.

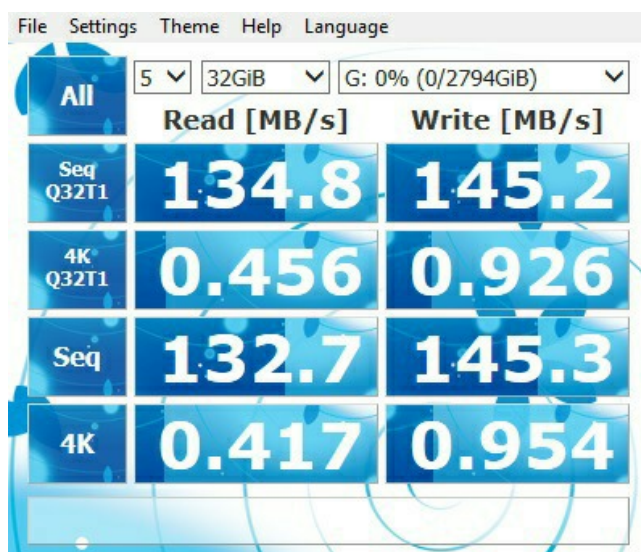
Now, Pogoplug; this is your 10TB of cloud storage that's included with the drive purchase.

I have a paid-up subscription to Dropbox as well as a nifty NAS. But, to be honest, an extra 10TB of free storage is never going to do any harm. I





# Toshiba Canvio Premium 3TB HDD



	Read [MB/s]	Write [MB/s]
Seq Q32T1	134.8	145.2
4K Q32T1	0.456	0.926
Seq	132.7	145.3
4K	0.417	0.954

## Toshiba Canvio Premium portable HDD review conclusion

The Toshiba Canvio Premium proved to be plenty fast enough in the mechanical drive drag race. True, if

you're willing to spend the money, an SSD in an enclosure will always be faster.

I liked the solid build quality and added software, including that extra 10TB of cloud storage, of the Canvio Premium.

That, with its very competitive price makes it a very attractive option.

The Canvio Premium lives up to its name.

am sure there are many people that will get the use out of this even if it's only used to back up holiday snaps.

### Speed

As with all the other portable drives, I have utilised Crystal Mark to gauge the Canvio Premium's read and write speeds.

Here are the results.

As you can imagine, it was never going to compete with the Buffalo MiniStation Velocity portable SSD. That would be silly.

However, it did do better than the Buffalo MiniStation Slim 1TB drive we had a while ago. The slim topped out at 125.2/124.7 compared with the Canvio Premium's 134.8/145.2.

### In use

I did pack it in my bag once loaded with video and music and it worked really well.

Coming with a little travel pouch no doubt saved this review sample from the scratches and scuffs oft associated with day-to-day use.

Having the adapter also meant, like the MiniStation Velocity, I was able to use it with my Nexus 6P. That will always be a bonus.

All-in-all, a well-built enclosure, multiple connectivity options and some useful added software.

The Toshiba Canvio Premium portable hard drive packs capacity, connectivity and cloud back-up.

## Toshiba Canvio Premium price and availability

The drives are available in dark grey or silver.

The 3TB model, as reviewed, is available now from Amazon for £129.

The 1TB is £74 and the 2TB is £105.

**Overall score 8.3**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 9/10**

**Performance 8.3/10**

**Value 8.3/10**



# BenQ GL2706PQ 27-inch monitor



**Lately we have been living with the BenQ GL2706PQ 27-inch LED monitor. This 2K screen has plenty of room to work with as well as ergonomic options.**

The BenQ GL2706PQ has decent resolution and could be an option for those looking to get a little bit more screen real estate.

As a casual gamer and (almost) professional writer, will this GL model tick the boxes?

## BenQ GL2706PQ design

The GL, this is the first of this range we have had, is obviously not aimed at gamers.

That was my first thought when I unboxed the 27-inch panel. The bezels are about half-an-inch wide and on the top and side edges. This lends it a more utilitarian, rather than flashy, aesthetic. Saying that, it's not a bad looking monitor though.

You do need some space on your desk. The monitor measures 533 x 623 x 230mm and weighing a tad over 6Kg unboxed. The single foot base does leave the space underneath uncluttered though.

That base also allows for the screen to rotate.

Whilst we're on the subject of ergonomics, you can adjust the screen height up to 120cm with a 90 degree pivot. You are also able

to tilt the display 5 degree forwards and up to 20 degrees in the opposite direction.

The added bonus of portrait mode will no doubt please programmers and artists alike.

Around the back of the GL2706PQ you'll find a HDMI 1.4 port, 1.2 DisplayPort, DVI-D and a headphone jack. All fairly standard stuff although it is nice to see a DisplayPort making an appearance.

## BenQ GL2706PQ performance

### Image quality

The monitor uses a TN panel with a 2560 x 1440 – this is classed as Wide Quad HD or WQHD.

The image quality is good and the colours are not washed out. The official stats state a 1000:1 contrast ratio; this is pretty average but definitely not bad for the price.

Granted, you won't be getting those inky and leathery blacks of some more expensive panels, but bright colours are crisp and vivid.





# BenQ GL2706PQ 27-inch monitor

Those brighter hues would pop more if they had chance of a darker background though.

I think, overall, the performance is most suited to office work, perhaps with some photo/video editing on the side.

BenQ are proud of their “Eye-Care” cred and this monitor is packing Flicker Free technology. It is also equipped with their blue low-light feature that helps combat eye fatigue.

Again, if you spend hours in front of a screen, like I do, then this kit will come in handy.

## Gaming

Playing games was pretty decent.

The 1ms response time is pretty standard amongst dedicated gaming screens but at this price point I still count it as a real bonus.

The GL2706PQ sports a 30Hz – 78 Hz vertical refresh rate and, as the last monitor I reviewed was the 165Hz -capable AOC AGON AG241QG, I could really feel the difference.

Project Cars and Rocket League were perhaps where I noticed it most.

However, Mortal Kombat, with its colourful comic-book style was glorious.

## BenQ GL2706PQ review conclusion

The BenQ GL2706PQ is a very capable workhorse of a 27-incher.

Eye-Care tech helps for those marathon sessions and the range of adjustments really helps to get a comfortable environment.

I would say that this monitor is ideal for an office or home user who wants/needs more than basic but keeping to a sub-£300 budget.

I’ve had a quick look for other 2K monitors available and most start at £350+, which makes the GL an even better buy.

The 1ms refresh rate also hands it some decent skills for casual gaming too!

## BenQ GL2706PQ price and availability

You can buy the GL2706PQ right now for £270 from Amazon which is down from the original £320 RRP.

**Overall score 8.1**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Image quality 8/10**

**Value 8/10**





# TP-Link Archer VR2800 DSL modem

**I have had the TP-Link VR2800 hooked up at GadgetsNews HQ. It really makes a change that someone has thought about us that connect to the internet via ADSL or VDSL.**

The TP-Link VR2800 is part of the company's Archer range.

As already alluded to, this is not only a Wi-Fi router, but a DSL modem. This means that one box, albeit a sleek one, will take the feed from your non-fibre internet provider and then sling it out Wi-Fi as well as four wired connections.

My usual system uses the Huawei modem/router supplied by TalkTalk and then, as I found the Wi-Fi range fairly poor on that unit, a separate Wi-Fi router. Most recently those duties have been covered by the Archer C9.

So, does the VR2800 do the job of two boxes or is it back to separate modem and Wi-Fi router?

Read on to find out.

## TP-Link VR2800 design

The VR2800 is quite a compact and rather unassuming unit.

It's not as flashy as the Nighthawks or EXOs of this world, neither is it as stylish as TP-Link's aforementioned C9.

Saying all that, it isn't ugly either. I'd say that it errs on the side of functional.

On the top of the VR2800 is a clear column of white status indicators, as well as a power light nearer the front edge.

Along the left side you'll find two USB 3.0 ports alongside toggle

The four removable dual-band aerials can be adjusted backwards or from side-to-side.

## TP-Link VR2800 performance

### Modem benefits

Having a built-in modem is a genuine value-add, especially as this one supports all the standard DSL services you'd expect. This means that it will play nice with VDSL2, ADSL2+, ADSL2 and ADSL.

That means you're good to go if you're on, say, BT Infinity or an equivalent

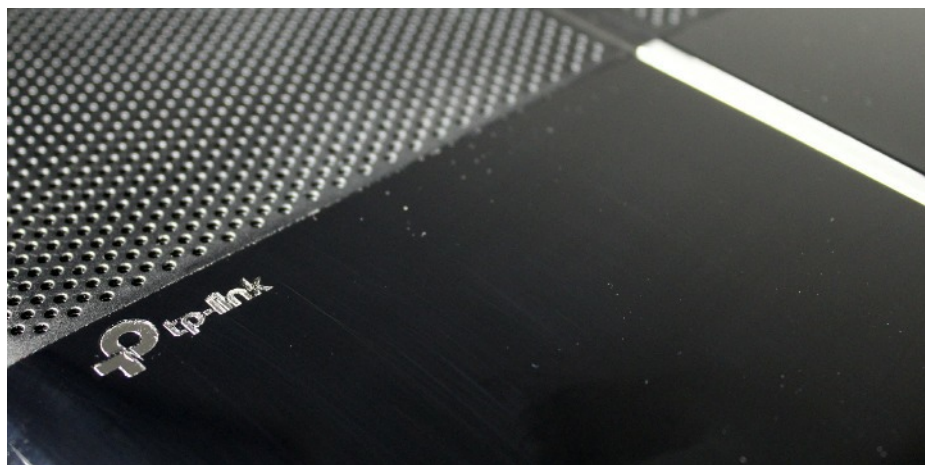
switches for each of the wireless bands and WPS.

As is the norm, the bulk of the connectivity options are tucked neatly around back.

Here's where you'll find a dedicated power switch, a connector for the mains adapter, four Gigabit Ethernet ports, Gigabit WAN and a port for the built-in modem.

fibre-optic service, and you needn't worry about compatibility with Cable – plug in your modem via the WAN port and hey presto.

What is really cool is that, should your usual provider have an outage, you can just sling in a 3G/4G dongle in to one of the USB ports. Boom, up-and-running again.



# TP-Link Archer VR2800 DSL modem

## Speeds

Versatility is without a doubt the VR2600's strong suit, and TP-Link continues that theme with support for some of the latest networking standards. Making good use of the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands, Wi-Fi performance is rated as up to 2167Mbps on the 5GHz band alone. You get 600Mbps on the 2.4 band.

That speed bump is thanks to the enhancement of NitroQAM. This boosts Wi-Fi speeds by 25%. Then there's 4-Stream tech that runs 4 data streams on the 5GHz band to increase overall speed by 33%.

## Set-up

TP-Link's admin panel is both clear and intuitive. Before getting there, you can set-up the modem by using the simple wizard.

Remember to get your ISP (internet service provider) login credentials before you get going.

The software recognised that I was using TalkTalk and everything else was easy.

The setup procedure really shouldn't take you more than 10 minutes at most.

Once it's all sorted you are able to explore the features.

You can create guest networks on both available bands, sort out file or printer sharing via the USB 3.0 ports, and add parental controls that can limit Internet access to a time schedule on a per-device basis.

For advanced users you can get to everything from port forwarding to VPN pass-through.

A dual-core 1GHz processor powers things along. That might not sound much but you have to



remember that VR2800 is also packing a dedicated processor for each band as well as that 1GHz CPU.

## VR2800 in use

The TP-Link really does knock the socks off the unit provided by my ISP.

It might not be the prettiest box out there but the VR2800 certainly performs. Wi-Fi range is good with excellent coverage throughout my home – a small 2 bedroom house.

The modem speeds are comparable to what I get from the Huawei but that's more down to TalkTalk's ADSL connection.

The Wi-Fi signal was not only strong, but consistent.

I was really impressed at the speeds and reliability when streaming large audio files, as well as video, over Wi-Fi.

## TP-Link VR2800 modem router review conclusion

It might wear the equivalent of a business suit but the VR2800 has it where it counts.

Not only is this a sure-fire upgrade to most router modems supplied

by your internet provider, but it's most likely a better Wi-Fi router than most own too.

Packing MU-MIMO, NitroQAM and other clever tech means that everyone will get the benefit of the VR2800's speed.

Add in the USB 3.0 ports that can be used for printers or even a 4G dongle, then this starts to look even more attractive.

The TP-Link VR2800 should be on any DSL connected user's upgrade list.

## TP-Link VR2800 price and availability

The VR2800 will be available soon (I hope to get a more precise date ASAP) and will have a RRP of £199.

**Overall score 8.2**

**Build quality 8/10**

**Design 8/10**

**Ease of use 8.5/10**

**Performance 8.5/10**

**Value 8/10**